

## **Formal Pragmatics of Non Literal Meaning**

By Daniel Vanderveken (University of Québec)

Em Daniel\_Vanderveken@uqtr.ca

In the past decades, there has been much progress in the formal Semantics of ordinary language. Logicians, linguists and philosophers have extensively used logical formalisms in order to interpret directly or after translation important fragments of actual natural languages. They have thereby contributed to the foundations of the theory of sentence meaning. In formal Semantics, speaker meaning is reduced to sentence meaning: one assumes that speakers only mean what they say. Thus, formal semantics is a theory of literal meaning. However, **in ordinary conversations, the speaker's meaning is often different from the sentence meaning. First, the primary illocutionary act that the speaker attempts to perform is different from the literal speech act expressed by the uttered sentence in the cases of metaphor, irony and indirect speech acts.** Whenever the speaker indirectly requests the hearer to pass the salt by asking "Can you pass the salt?", the primary speech act of the utterance is the indirect request and not the literal question about the hearer's abilities. **Second, the speaker means to perform secondary non literal illocutionary acts in the cases of conversational implicatures.** By saying "If you are nice, I will give you something" the speaker can imply conversationally that he will not give anything to the hearer if he is not nice. In such a case, he makes a secondary non literal assertion in addition to the primary conditional promise. The speaker's capacity to make and understand non literal speech acts is clearly part of his linguistic competence. But it exceeds the capacity of understanding the sentence meaning.

**The study of non literal speech acts and conversational implicatures is part of the task of pragmatics.** It deals with questions such as these : (1) How does a speaker succeed in getting the hearer to understand that what he means is different from what the sentence that he uses means? (2) Once the hearer has understood this, how does he succeed in identifying the intended non literal speech acts?

Until the present, there has been little progress in the development of a formal pragmatics. Grice (1975) later joined by Searle (1979), Bach and Harnish, Recanati, Dascal and others made

important remarks on non literal speaker meaning by exploring the idea that language use is governed by *conversational maxims* (like "Speak the truth!", "Be sincere!") which the speaker can exploit in order to get the hearer to understand what he means. Sperber and Wilson have studied the maxim of relevance. But these current analyses of speaker meaning are informal, partial and heuristic. They lack precise theoretical content. The main purpose of this work is to use illocutionary logic in order to contribute to the foundations of a formal pragmatics capable of building up the speakers' ability to make and understand non literal utterances.

According to Grice, hearers understand the speaker's intention to perform non literal illocutionary acts by making inferences from the hypothesis of respect of conversational maxims. Given the logical framework of speech act theory, Searle (1975) and I (1990) have reformulated as follows his inferential approach: A speaker who means to perform non literal speech acts in a context of utterance intends that the hearer understand him by relying : 1) on the hearer's knowledge of the meaning of the sentence that he uses; 2) on his ability to understand the conditions of success, non defective performance and satisfaction of the literal speech act; and 3) to recognize certain facts of the conversational background on which he wants to draw his attention; and finally 4) on the hearer's capacity to make inferences on the basis of the hypothesis that the speaker respects conversational maxims. In this view, in order to understand the primary non literal speech act of an utterance, the hearer must first identify the literal speech act and understand that the speaker cannot mean simply to perform that literal speech act if he respects the conversational maxims. **Thus, in our tripartition of semiotics, pragmatics conceived as the theory of speaker's meaning must add to semantics conceived as the theory of sentence meaning a theory of conversational maxims and an analysis of relevant facts of the conversational background of utterances.**

I will first make a few basic remarks on sentence meaning and illocutionary acts. Next, I will explicate the conversational maxims of quality and quantity. I will also analyze how hearers use and exploit conversational maxims in order to infer non literal speaker meaning. Furthermore, I will proceed to the formal analysis of irony, indirect speech acts and conversational implicatures. I will show how formal pragmatics can construct these non literal illocutionary acts. Finally, I will explain why these non literal speech acts are always cancellable but non detachable.

#### 1. **Formal semantics, sentence meaning and illocutionary acts**

As Frege and Russell pointed out, in uttering sentences speakers refer to objects and predicate of them properties or relations. They thereby express propositions which are true or false depending on how things are in the actual world. To understand a proposition is mainly to understand under which conditions it is true. So, in order to analyze the logical form of propositions, we must elaborate a theory of truth. However, most formally oriented philosophers of language from Carnap to Montague have tended to consider that the main purpose of language is to serve to describe the world. For that reason, most contributions to formal semantics have been limited to the analysis of expressions such as proper names, predicates, quantifiers, truth and modal connectives whose meaning contributes to the determination of truth conditions.

However, the primary units of meaning in the use and comprehension of natural languages are not isolated propositions but complete speech acts of the type called by Austin *illocutionary acts*. Elementary illocutionary acts are of the form F(P): they consist of a propositional content P together with an *illocutionary force* F. Some examples of these are assertions, questions, orders, promises and declarations. Whenever a speaker expresses a proposition in a meaningful utterance, he always attempts to perform an illocutionary act. This attempted performance is part of what he *means* and intend to *communicate* to his audience in the context of his utterance. Consequently, meaning, communication and illocutionary acts are logically related in the semantic structure of language. It is not possible to express a proposition in the use of language without attempting to perform an illocutionary act. Thus every complete elementary sentence contains an *illocutionary force marker*. Common examples of illocutionary force markers are verbal mood, sentence type and punctuation signs. Thus, declarative sentences serve to make assertions and interrogative sentences serve to ask questions. Imperative sentences serve to make linguistic attempts to get the hearer to do something. Performative sentences serve to make declarations and exclamatory sentences serve to express the speaker's mental states.

As is the case for other human actions, **attempts to perform illocutionary acts can succeed or fail**. In order to make an assertion or promise, we must succeed in expressing what we want to assert or promise. Moreover, the context must be appropriate for the performance of the intended illocutionary act. As Searle and I pointed out (1985), we can define the **conditions of success** of elementary illocutionary acts from the components of their force and their propositional content. Thus

a speaker **succeeds in performing an illocutionary act** of the form F(P) in a context of utterance if and only if 1) he achieves in that context the illocutionary point of force F on proposition P with the proper mode of achievement of F, and P satisfies the propositional content conditions of F, moreover 2) he also presupposes the propositions determined by the preparatory conditions of F(P) and 3) he expresses with the required degree of strength of F the psychological states determined by the sincerity conditions of F(P). For example, a speaker makes a promise in a context of utterance if and only if 1) the point of his utterance is to commit himself to doing something (illocutionary point and propositional content condition); 2) he puts himself under an obligation (mode of achievement); 3) he also presupposes that he is capable of doing what he promises and that it is good for the hearer (preparatory conditions); and finally 5) he expresses with a strong degree of strength an intention to do it (sincerity conditions). Now a speaker can presuppose a proposition which is false or express a psychological state which he does not have. So we distinguish in illocutionary logic between a successful and a non defective performance of an illocutionary act. An illocutionary act is **non defective** if and only if it is successfully performed and its preparatory and sincerity conditions obtain. Thus a promise is non defective if and only if it is successful and moreover the speaker is capable of keeping it and intends to keep it. On this account, all non defective illocutionary acts are successful, but the converse is not true.

In performing illocutionary acts speakers relate propositions to the world with the intention of achieving a success of fit between words and things from a certain direction of fit. Thus successful illocutionary acts are **satisfied** under certain conditions. For example, an assertion is satisfied if and only if it is true. A promise is satisfied if and only if it is kept. Even when they are non defective, successful illocutionary acts can still fail to be satisfied. Non defective promises can be violated. In order that a successful elementary illocutionary act be satisfied, it is not enough that its propositional content be true and fit the world. The success of fit between words and things must be achieved from the direction of fit of its force. Thus a request is granted if and only if the hearer carries out the requested action in order to comply with the request. The **satisfaction** of elementary illocutionary acts is then a function of the truth of their propositional content and of the direction of fit of their illocutionary force. So the notion of satisfaction is both an extension and a generalization of the notion of truth.

The success and satisfaction conditions of illocutionary acts are not reducible to the truth conditions of their propositional contents. So formal semantics must do more than to further develop the **theory of truth** for propositions. It must also elaborate an integrated **theory of success and satisfaction** for illocutionary acts. As I have shown (1990-91), a general semantics of success, satisfaction and truth can analyze expressions like illocutionary force markers and performative verbs whose meaning serves to determine the illocutionary forces of utterances. Thanks to illocutionary logic, formal semantics can interpret sentences of all types that express speech acts with any possible force. It can also analyze practical as well as theoretical valid inferences that speakers are able to make by virtue of linguistic competence.

However, in spite of its generality, the new semantics of success and satisfaction remains a theory of literal meaning. It uniquely tends to construct that part of linguistic competence which consists in the speaker's ability to perform and understand literal illocutionary acts. By hypothesis, the literal speech act of the context of an utterance is always taken to be the primary speech act. So when an utterance is successful in a semantic interpretation, it is by way of performing the literal speech act that the speaker performs all other illocutionary acts in the context of that utterance. However, each natural language contains illocutionarily inconsistent sentences such as "I am not myself today" expressing self defeating illocutionary acts that speakers cannot even intend to perform. So speakers using such sentences never mean what they say. They have to mean non literally something else. Furthermore, an adequate theory of speaker meaning must account for non literal performances of illocutionary acts like indirect speech acts and irony where the literal speech act is neither the strongest nor the primary speech act of the utterance.

## **Section 2. Conversational maxims**

Non literal speech acts have two important properties. First, they are *contextually cancellable*: speakers could use the same sentences in other possible contexts of utterance (with different backgrounds) without having the intention of performing these non literal speech acts. Thus an utterance of the sentence "Can you pass the salt?" can be just a question about the hearer's capacity to pass the salt. Suppose the speaker wants to test the movement abilities of the hearer. Non-literal illocutionary acts can even be explicitly cancelled. Second, non literal speech acts are also in general *not detachable*: if the speaker had uttered another sentence expressing the same literal illocutionary act in the

same context, he would also have meant to perform them.

From a theoretical point of view, these two properties of non literal speech acts are important for formal pragmatics : First, if non literal speech acts are cancellable, certain conditions must be necessary in order that a speaker can speak non literally in a context. When these conditions are not fulfilled in the conversational background, the speaker's meaning can only be literal. Furthermore, if non literal speech acts are not detachable, certain conditions relative to the form of the literal illocutionary act and the conversational background must be sufficient in order that a speaker speak non literally in the context of an utterance. When these conditions are fulfilled in the conversational background, the speaker's meaning cannot be entirely literal. The first objective of pragmatics is to state these **necessary and sufficient conditions** for non literal meaning.

## 2.1 Grice's logic of conversation

On Grice's account, any conversation is governed by a general principle of cooperation. Speakers must respect certain conversational maxims if they want to pursue with success a conversation without being liable to mislead. According to Grice, it is not without reasons that speakers respect conversational maxims in conversations. It is **rational** to respect these maxims.

Grice distinguishes different types of conversational maxims under Kant's categories of quality, quantity, manner and relation.

Maxims of quality : "Speak the truth!", "Do not say anything you believe to be false!", "Have evidence for what you say!"

Maxims of quantity : "Be as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)", "Do not be more informative than required!".

A maxim of manner : "Be perspicuous!", "Avoid obscurity of expression!", "Avoid ambiguity!", "Be Brief!", "Be orderly!"

A maxim of relation : "Be relevant!"

Unfortunately, Grice's conversational maxims are too vague. Their formulation lacks precise theoretical content. Moreover, Grice tends to consider the exchange of information as the sole aim of conversation. So his maxims only apply to assertive utterances. Unlike Kant, Grice does not provide any justification of his system of maxims.

## 2.2 A Generalization of the maxims of quality and of quantity

As I have pointed out, illocutionary logic enables pragmatics to explicate the two fundamental maxims of quality and quantity.

### *The maxim of quality*

From a logical point of view, an illocutionary act is of perfect quality if and only if it is entirely **felicitous** in Austin 's (1956) sense, that is to say **successful, non defective and satisfied**. Thus, the maxim of quality turns out to be a general principle of speech act theory: **Let the illocutionary act that you mean to perform be felicitous in the context of your utterance!** There is an inductive definition of the conditions of success, non defective performance and satisfaction of speech acts in illocutionary logic. So the new principle is both an explication and a generalization of the maxim of quality. The new maxim holds for all types of utterances and not just for assertive utterances. Thus there is the following *sub-maxim of quality for commands* : Let your command be a successful attempt to get the hearer to do something! Let it be a command that you want him to obey and that he will eventually obey! Similarly, there is the following *sub-maxim of quality for assertions* : Let your assertion represent how the things to which you refer are in the world. Let it be an assertion supported by evidence, sincere and true! On this account, Grice's formulation of the maxim of quality is just the particular case for assertions.

In order to respect the maxim of quality, speakers must select appropriately the force as well as the propositional content of the attempted illocutionary act. Suppose that you want to direct someone to give you something. Do not command him if you are not in a position of authority over him. (Such a directive force would be inappropriate. For your speech act would be defective.) You should rather make a request if all depends on the hearer's good will. Moreover, do not ask something that the hearer would not or could not do. (An exaggerated request would turn out to be unsatisfied.)

As Grice remarks, speakers can "quietly and unostentatiously violate a maxim" like the maxim of quality without meaning *eo ipso* to perform a non literal primary speech act. We can lie and make promises that we do not intend to keep. In such cases, the speaker does not want that the hearer be aware of the violation of the maxim. If so, the speaker will be liable to mislead. Nearly all cases of blatant violation of the maxim of quality are what Grice calls "exploitations" of that maxim. When the background of the utterance is such that the literal act is obviously unfelicitous, given the

conversational background, the speaker most often does not mean at all to perform the literal illocutionary act. He rather means to perform another primary illocutionary act whose felicity conditions are compatible with the context. So there is only an apparent violation of the maxim of quality in such contexts of utterance. Suppose that a speaker says "John is sober" in a context where the person to which he refers is staggering and obviously dead drunk. That speaker is exploiting the maxim of quality. He relies on the fact that his literal assertion is obviously false in order to assert ironically the opposite of what he says. And his ironical speech act is felicitous. So he respects the maxim in that context. Deliberate cases of violation of the maxim of quality without any reason are extremely rare. Most often speakers behave this way when they want to stop participating to the conversation.

### *The maxim of quantity*

Each illocutionary act is a natural kind of use of language which can serve to achieve linguistic purposes in the course of conversations. From a logical point of view, an illocutionary act is of perfect quantity in the context of an utterance if and only if it is *as strong as required* to achieve the current linguistic purposes of the speaker in that context. Given their logical forms, certain speech acts are *stronger* than others, in the sense that they have more felicity conditions. Thus a supplication to a hearer that he spare the life of all children is stronger than a simple request that he save the life of people. Stronger speech acts serve to achieve stronger linguistic purposes. A speaker who would like to supplicate the hearer to save the life of all children but who simply requested that he save the life of persons, would perform a speech act too weak to achieve his purpose.

On the basis of these considerations, the maxim of quantity turns out to be: **Let your speech act be as strong as required (i.e. neither too strong nor too weak) to achieve your current linguistic purposes in the context of each utterance!** As the relation of being a stronger illocutionary act is rigorously defined in illocutionary logic, the new principle is both an explication and a generalization of the maxim of quantity. It can be applied to all types of meaningful utterances. Thus there is the special *sub-maxim of quantity for directives*: "Let your directive be as strong as required!" As one might expect, Grice's formulation of the maxim of quantity is just the special case for assertive utterances which aim to be informative. The maxim of quantity imposes conditions on the force as well as on the propositional content of attempted illocutionary acts. Thus your directive should not be

too strong. If you just want to ask someone a glass of red wine, do not implore him (your directive force would be stronger than needed). And do not ask more than what you want. (Do not ask for a whole bottle of red wine (if you just want a glass). On the other hand, your directive should not be too weak. If you want to invoke your position of authority over the hearer, do not only tell him to do it (your directive force would be too weak). But give him a command. Furthermore, if you want him to give you red wine, do not only tell him to give you wine (you would not require enough).

As Grice notices, the speaker may be faced with a clash between two maxims. He may be unable to respect fully at the same time the maxims of quality and quantity. For example, you might really want to ask for a whole bottle of wine but refrain from making such a request (Violation of the maxim of quantity) because it would not be granted (Maxim of quality).

The conversational maxims of quality and quantity concern the logical forms of illocutionary acts. They are not relative to a particular human culture as Keenan and others have argued. On the contrary, these two maxims are *pragmatic universals of language use*. As Grice thought, they follow from the hypothesis that speakers are rational in the use of language. An illocutionary act is a means to achieving linguistic ends. Now just as rational agents should decide to use the best effective available means in each situation, rational speakers should attempt to perform in each context illocutionary acts which can be felicitous. So it is reasonable to respect the maxim of quality. Moreover, as Kasher (1982) pointed out, rational agents should respect a principle of the effective means. This is a principle of practical reason. So rational speakers should also attempt to perform in each context an illocutionary act which serves fully and most effectively their linguistic purposes. A speaker who would attempt to perform a weaker or stronger illocutionary act would not act most effectively to attain his ends. Consequently, it is also reasonable to respect the maxim of quantity.

### **2.3 Modes of inference of speaker meaning**

Grice did not attempt to analyze formally the nature of inferences that hearers make in order to understand what speakers mean. However, as I will show, we can reformulate and attempt to formalize the Gricean inferential approach within speech act theory. **In my view, there are two main ways in which a speaker can get the hearer to infer what he means on the basis of the assumption that he respects the conversational maxims. These two ways are what I call hereafter the *exploitation* and *use* of a maxim.**

### *The exploitation of a maxim*

My notion of exploitation of a maxim is related to Grice's notion. But it is more general. A speaker *exploits a conversational* maxim if and only if certain facts of the conversational background to which he wants to attract the hearer's attention are such that he intends that the hearer recognize the following data: (1) The speaker would not respect the conversational maxim if the primary speech act were the literal speech act; but (2) he is able to respect the maxim without violating another maxim (there is no clash); moreover, (3) he wants to cooperate and contribute to the conversation, so (4) he intends to perform non literally another primary illocutionary act and finally, (5) the speaker also intends that the hearer believes that they both have a mutual knowledge of all this.

Now, in the case of an *exploitation of the maxim of quality*, the speaker intends that the hearer recognize that there are in the conversational background certain facts which are incompatible with felicity conditions of the literal speech act. Moreover the speaker also wants that the recognition of his intention be part of mutual background knowledge. Whenever the hearer recognizes this, he understands that the speaker does not mean to perform the literal illocutionary act but another primary illocutionary act with felicity conditions different from those which are violated in the conversational background. Furthermore, he identifies these other non literal conditions by drawing them from facts of the conversational background that the speaker intends him to recognize. Suppose that someone tells you "I promise that you will regret all this" with the intention of drawing your attention to the fact that he is committing himself to doing something which is not good for you. That speaker would be exploiting the maxim of quality. For he obviously does not presuppose the literal preparatory condition that a promise is good for the hearer. So his literal promise is unsuccessful and defective. Moreover, that speaker presupposes a non literal preparatory condition which is the opposite of the literal one which is violated. The future action represented is, on the contrary, bad for the hearer. So you should understand that he means to threaten you ironically. For such a threat differs from the literal promise by virtue of the fact that it has the opposite preparatory condition that the action represented is bad for the hearer. In the case of *exploitation of the maxim of quantity*, the speaker intends that the hearer recognize that the literal speech act is not as strong as required to achieve his current linguistic purposes in the context of the utterance. Thus a speaker who says "That painting is not bad!" exploits the maxim of quantity to make an *understatement* when it is part of background knowledge that he is obviously very

impressed by the painting which is very good. In such a context, the hearer concludes that the speaker means to make indirectly a stronger assertion than the literal one.

As I said earlier, in the case of exploitation of a maxim, there is only an apparent violation of that maxim. The speaker blatantly fails to fulfill the maxim in saying what he says. He obviously would not respect the maxim if he were primarily meaning to perform the literal illocutionary act. But the speaker wants that the hearer recognize all this. Moreover some of the facts that prevent the speaker from meaning what he says are mental states - intentions, desires, beliefs- that the speaker has or expresses in the context of utterance. These commit him to perform another primary speech act compatible with the background. So the speaker respects the maxim (at least it is not obvious that he violates it) in attempting to perform that primary act.

#### *The use of a maxim*

A speaker *uses a conversational maxim* if and only if he intends the hearer to recognize that, given the existence of certain facts of the conversational background, he respects that maxim in performing the primary speech act only if a secondary non literal illocutionary act is felicitous. Moreover the speaker also intends that the hearer believe this to be mutually known. So he means to perform that secondary illocutionary act.

Whenever a speaker uses the maxim of quality, he intends the hearer to recognize certain facts of the conversational background and to get him to make an inference on the basis of the assumption of existence of these facts and of the hypothesis that the primary illocutionary act of his utterance is successful, non defective and satisfied. From the premises of that inference, the hearer draws the conclusion that a secondary non literal illocutionary act determined by the relevant facts of the background is also performed in the context of the utterance. For example, when the information that gay men do not have girlfriends is part of the background knowledge, a speaker who answers the question "Does Jones have a girlfriend?" by saying "He is gay", is using the maxim of quality. He means to answer that Jones has no girlfriend.

On the other hand, whenever a speaker uses the maxim of quantity, he intends that the hearer make an inference on the basis of the hypothesis that the primary speech act performed in the context of the utterance is actually as strong as required to achieve his current linguistic purposes. Usually the conversational background is such that the speaker means to perform that primary act instead of other

stronger speech acts that were also relevant at that moment in the conversation. Thus the hearer comes to the conclusion that the speaker does not intend to perform these stronger illocutionary acts because, given the background, they would be unfelicitous in that context. Thus, a speaker who answers the question "Where is Paul?" by saying "He is in France or in Belgium" is using the sub-maxim of quantity "Be as informative as required!" when he wants to attract the hearer's attention to the fact that he did not answer "Paul is in France" or "Paul is in Belgium". If so, he can mean secondarily that he lacks evidence for making any one of these two stronger assertions.

As in the case of literal speech acts, non literal attempts at performance of illocutionary acts can be misunderstood. The speaker can wrongly believe that the hearer is aware of the facts of the conversational background on which he relies in order to exploit or use a conversational maxim. In such cases, the hearer does not understand fully the speaker's meaning. He can even fail to recognize the speaker's intention to perform a non literal speech act. Sometimes, the hearer wonders whether the speaker relies on a certain relevant fact of the conversational background whose nature could commit him to exploit or use a maxim. In such cases, he can reply by asking a question. The speaker's answer will serve determine *a posteriori* how to interpret the previous utterance.

### **Section 3: Irony, indirect speech acts and conversational implicatures.**

I conjecture first that **a speaker means to perform a primary non literal speech act when he exploits conversational maxims** and second **that he implies something conversationally when he uses such maxims in the context of his utterance**. As I will show in my next book on *Discourse*, important figures of non literal meaning such as irony, indirect speech acts and conversational implicatures can be explicated in this conception of pragmatics. Illocutionary logic enables speech act theory to construct the speaker's meaning from the sentence meaning, conversational maxims and background. Contrary to what Sperber and Wilson and others believe, there is a normal form of derivations of speaker meaning in the cases of irony and indirect speech acts. So we can compute the primary ironical or indirect speech act from the literal speech act, the relevant facts of the conversational background and the respect of the two conversational maxims of quality and quantity.

#### **A) Irony**

As I have explained earlier (1990), **irony is an extreme case of exploitation of the maxim of quality**. In making an ironic utterance, the speaker always exploits the maxim of quality by relying on

facts of the conversational background whose existence commit him not to intend to perform the literal illocutionary act. In the case of irony, it is not only part of background mutual knowledge that certain literal felicity conditions are violated, but also that the speaker intends to perform a non literal illocutionary act with opposite conditions. Many felicity conditions of illocutionary acts are logically related. So the speaker's irony is often directed to several components of the literal illocutionary force and to the propositional content. When it is part of background mutual knowledge that the literal propositional content is false, it is in general also part of background knowledge that the speaker does not intend to achieve the literal illocutionary point on the literal propositional content and that he does not possess expressed psychological states. Suppose that a speaker ironically criticizes the hearer by saying "I praise you for that" in a context where what the hearer has done is obviously not good. The speaker's irony concerns both the achievement of the literal illocutionary point and the literal propositional content. He does not intend to assert that what the hearer has done is good. On the contrary, he intends to assert that it is bad. Moreover, the speaker's irony also concerns a literal sincerity condition. He does not approve but disapproves of the hearer.

In this approach, we can analyze irony as follows: The primary illocutionary act that the speaker intends to perform *ironically* only differs from the literal speech act by the fact that it has instead of literal conditions obviously violated in the background the opposites of these conditions whenever such a non literal illocutionary act is performable in the context. Otherwise, the ironic illocutionary act is just the denegation of the literal speech act. (Some conditions of success e.g. the achievement of the illocutionary point have no opposites. So when the speaker's irony concerns the literal illocutionary point, the speaker means to denegate the performance of the literal speech act.)

This analysis of irony explains why **in the case of irony the speaker's meaning is always in opposition to the meaning of the sentence that is used.** By definition, the primary speech act of an ironic utterance is **incompatible** with the literal speech act: both cannot be simultaneously performed. My analysis explicates the very notion of opposition which is part of the standard definition of irony. It also accounts for the two different kinds of irony in language use namely: 1) Irony as to the illocutionary force and 2) irony as to the propositional content of the literal speech act. (Most analysts have neglected until now the first kind of irony.) So my analysis enables me to present a reasoned classification of all the different possible elementary kinds of irony.

i) Irony as to the achievement of the literal illocutionary point

By saying "Yes, I agree to give you all that!", the speaker ironically refuses to give what he says when it is part of background knowledge that he has no intention at all of committing himself to giving anything.

ii) Irony as to the literal mode of achievement

By saying "Please, get out immediately", the speaker ironically tells the hearer to leave in a context where he does not give him any option of refusal.

iii) Irony as to a literal preparatory condition

By saying "I promise that you will regret it", the speaker can ironically threaten the hearer as I have explained earlier.

iv) Irony as to a literal sincerity condition

By saying "I praise you for that", a speaker ironically criticizes the hearer when he obviously disapproves what he has done.

iv) Irony as to the propositional content

By saying "It was a splendid feat!" the speaker ironically asserts the opposite of what he says when it is part of background knowledge that the event was a terrible defeat.

As I said earlier, there is an effective method of decision for constructing the primary ironic illocutionary act. In the simple cases, we proceed in the following way in order to infer what the speaker ironically means:

- 1) We identify from our background knowledge the various literal felicity conditions to which the speaker's irony is directed.
- 2) These felicity conditions are by definition determined from components of the literal illocutionary force or of the literal propositional content (Speech act theory).
- 3) The ironic speech act is obtained from the literal speech act by replacing such literal components by their opposites when such opposite complements exist and the obtained non literal illocutionary act is performable. Otherwise, the ironic speech act is the illocutionary denegation of the literal speech act.

**B) Indirect Speech acts**

So called indirect speech acts are performed indirectly by way of performing the literal illocutionary

act. In my account, **indirect speech acts are cases of exploitation of the maxim of quantity**. A speaker means to perform indirectly a speech act by way of performing the literal illocutionary act if and only if he exploits the maxim of quantity by intending to draw the hearer's attention to the fact that certain conditions of non defective performance other than those of the literal illocutionary act are fulfilled in the conversational background. In such contexts, the speaker intends that the hearer recognize that the literal speech act is not strong enough to achieve all his current linguistic purposes. The speaker respects the maxim of quantity in attempting to perform indirectly another illocutionary act. For that indirect speech act serves to achieve all his other non literal purposes.

In the simplest cases of exploitation of the maxim of quantity, all the non literal conditions of non defective performance to which the speaker intends to draw the hearer's attention are relative to the literal propositional content. In such cases, the indirect and literal speech acts have the same propositional content. So the speaker's indirection is only directed to the illocutionary force. Thus we can make an indirect promise by saying "I will help you" in a context where we intend that the hearer recognize that we want to commit ourselves to doing something which is good for him. When the indirect speech act has a non literal propositional content, some of its non literal felicity conditions are conditions of satisfaction of the literal speech act. The speaker can assert that these conditions obtain and exploit the maxim of quantity by relying on the fact that his literal assertion is true given the conversational background. He can also ask the hearer whether these conditions obtain and exploit the maxim of quantity by relying on the fact that his literal question has or at least could have a positive answer given the conversational background. So we can indirectly offer and sometimes also promise help by way of saying "I could help you", "Can I help you?", "Would you like me to help you?" (preparatory conditions), "I intend to help you", "Don't you see that I intend to help you?" (sincerity conditions), "I should help you", "Should I help you?" (mode of achievement). In these idiomatic uses, the propositional content of the indirect speech act is part of the literal propositional content. But it is not always the case. So we can indirectly invite the hearer to a date by saying "Are you free tonight?".

In my approach we can analyze as follows indirect speech acts. When all the non literal conditions of non defective performance to which the speaker wants to draw the hearer's attention are relative to a single proposition P on which the speaker intends to achieve a certain illocutionary point, the indirect speech act is the weakest elementary illocutionary act with that propositional content P having all these

non literal conditions as well as the literal conditions of non defective performance relative to P (if there are any).

As we will see, there always exists exactly one such non literal indirect illocutionary act. For a speaker exploiting the maxim of quantity can only rely on the existence of finitely many different facts of the conversational background. Otherwise, there would be no possible derivation of what he means. So there are only finitely many conditions of non defective performance to which the speaker intends to draw the hearer's attention. Each of them is determined by a particular literal or non literal component of illocutionary force. Moreover the force of the intended indirect speech act has all and only these components. It is obtained by adding to the primitive force with the intended illocutionary point all other components. In performing the indirect speech act, the speaker respects the maxim of quantity. For that indirect speech act is as strong as required to achieve all his other non literal linguistic purposes in the context of his utterance. Suppose that a speaker tells you "I intend to help you" with the intention of drawing your attention to the fact that he is committing himself to helping you (non literal commissive illocutionary point and non literal propositional content) so undertaking an obligation (non literal mode of achievement). Suppose that he obviously can and intend to help you and that his help is good for you (non literal preparatory and sincerity conditions). That speaker has made an indirect promise to you. And his non literal promise is the weakest commissive illocutionary act whose conditions of non defective performance are obviously fulfilled in the conversational background. For the indirect force of promise has all the non literal components (illocutionary point, mode of achievement, preparatory and sincerity conditions) which determine the conditions which are fulfilled in the conversational background.

My analysis of indirect speech acts explains why **speaker meaning is always an extension of sentence meaning in the case of indirect speech acts**. Contrary to what is the case for other non literal speech acts, the speaker cannot intend to perform an indirect speech act without also intending to perform the literal speech act. For both are required to achieve all his literal and non literal purposes in the context of utterance. My account of indirect speech acts supports Searle (1992) against Dascal, Holdcroft and others who deny the intended performance of the literal speech act. It also explicates the very notion of extension which is part of Searle's analysis. Notice that the hearer can always reply to the indirect speech act by way of replying to the literal speech act. Consider an indirect invitation made

by way of asking "Can you come?" The hearer can accept (or refuse) that indirect invitation by answering "Yes" (or "No") to the literal question. It is part of the art of a good speaker to request indirectly what he wants by way of performing the right literal speech act.

Of course, the indirect speech act is always more important than the literal one. It is indeed the **primary** speech act of utterance. When a speaker indirectly invites the hearer by asking a question, he wants much more an answer to his invitation than to his literal question. The literal speech act is only a means to performing the indirect speech act. Hence, the word "indirect" in indirect speech acts. Using the terminology of philosophy of action, we can say that there is always a generation relation holding between the literal and the indirect illocutionary acts. The first is generating and the second is generated. From a logical point of view, the primacy of the indirect speech act over the literal speech act is shown in the fact that whenever the first is felicitous the second is *eo ipso* satisfied. Thus whenever the hearer accepts the previous indirect invitation he gives a positive implicit answer to the literal question.

**The indirect speech act** that the speaker means to perform **can be categorical or conditional**. So we can indirectly promise or offer help by way of saying "I could help you", "Can I help you?", "Do you want me to help you?". An indirect offer is an indirect promise which is conditional on the hearer's acceptance. Whenever all the non literal felicity conditions on which the speaker relies are fulfilled in the conversational background, the intended indirect speech act is categorical. But, when some of them depend on the hearer's reply, the indirect speech act is rather conditional. So we only intend to indirectly offer help when we are not sure that the hearer is willing any help. In that case, we are obliged to help the hearer only if he accepts our indirect offer.

Third, my analysis of indirect speech acts accounts for all the different kinds of indirection in language use. As I have shown, the speaker's indirection can be directed to the force and to the propositional content. Furthermore, indirect speech acts can be performed by way of performing literal speech acts with any illocutionary force and not only by way of assertions. My explication in terms of exploitation of the maxim of quantity is general enough to cover all cases. So I can make a reasoned classification of many possible kinds of indirect speech acts.

i) The indirect speech act has the literal propositional content

By saying "Please, help me!" a speaker indirectly supplicates the

hearer to help him in a context where he is obviously very humble in his request (he kneels down before someone in power) and expresses a high intensity of desire.

ii) The literal propositional content is that the illocutionary point of the indirect speech act is achieved on a proposition

By saying "I am trying to get you to leave", a speaker can make an indirect attempt to get the hearer to leave.

iii) The literal propositional content represents a mode of achievement of illocutionary point of the indirect speech act.

By saying "I have witnessed all this", a speaker can indirectly testify.

iv) The literal propositional content is that a preparatory condition of the indirect speech act obtains

By saying "You should absolutely stop smoking" a speaker can indirectly urge the hearer.

v) The literal propositional content represents a sincerity condition of the indirect speech act.

By saying "I am not at all satisfied with your work", a speaker can indirectly complain.

vi) The illocutionary force of the indirect speech act has a stronger degree of strength

By saying "Reimburse me!", a speaker can make an indirect requirement when it is part of background knowledge that he strongly wants to be reimbursed.

vi) The indirect speech act has more preparatory conditions than the literal speech act

By saying "Do your home work!" a father can indirectly advise his child when he presupposes that it is very good for him or her.

vii) The indirect speech act has more sincerity conditions

By saying "I have won against all of them!" a speaker is indirectly boasting when he is obviously very proud of his victory.

viii) The indirect speech act has a non literal illocutionary point which is achieved on the literal propositional content

By saying imperatively "You will arrive on time" a speaker indirectly tells the hearer to arrive on time in

a context where he does not give him any option of refusal.

As in the case of irony, there is an effective method for constructing the indirect speech act. In the simplest cases of exploitation of the maxim of quantity, we proceed as follows in order to infer the indirect speech act:

1. First, we identify from our background knowledge the proposition P which is the propositional content of all non literal conditions of success and of non defective performance to which the speaker intends to draw the hearer's attention.
2. If there is an exploitation of the maxim of quantity, the speaker intends to achieve an illocutionary point on the proposition P. For the achievement of an illocutionary point is an essential feature of the performance of speech acts.
3. The indirect speech act of the utterance is the illocutionary act  $F(P)$  whose force F is obtained by adding to the primitive force with that illocutionary point all literal and non literal force components which determine the previous conditions of non defective performance relative to P.
4. When the speaker intends to draw the hearer's attention to the facts that he achieves several illocutionary points on several propositions, the indirect speech act is the conjunction of all the indirect illocutionary acts which can be obtained in the same way.
5. As I said earlier, such indirect speech acts are categorical when all their felicity conditions are obviously fulfilled in the conversational background of the utterance. Otherwise, they are conditional on the hearer's acceptance of these conditions.

I will analyze in detail the normal form of derivations that we make in order to understand ironic and indirect speech acts in my next book on *Discourse*. Of course the speaker and the hearer do not go consciously through all the steps of such derivations of non literal speech acts any more than they go consciously through all the steps of the construction of the literal speech acts. However, the existence of such derivations and their generation by effective methods enables pragmatics to explain the creative abilities that speakers have in making and understanding non literal utterances.

**C) Why non literal speech acts are not detachable but cancellable.**

The exploitations of the maxims of quality and quantity are generated by a conflict between facts of the conversational background and the hypothesis that the literal speech act is felicitous or as strong as needed in the context of the utterance. Thus, these exploitations occur if and only if it is part

of the background that some felicity conditions of the literal speech act are violated or that the literal speech act is not as strong as required to achieve all the linguistic purposes of the speaker. Such exploitations are totally independent of the form of the sentence which is used by the speaker to express the literal speech act. This is why these non literal speech acts are not detachable. Nevertheless they are in general cancellable. For a speaker cannot attempt to perform such non literal acts in a context of utterance where the conversational background is not in conflict with the hypothesis that the literal speech act is felicitous or as strong as required.

Most sentences of natural languages can be used in possible contexts of utterance without any exploitation of the maxims of quality or quantity. But some sentences are exceptions to that rule. As I said earlier, speakers can never mean to perform the self defeating speech acts expressed by illocutionarily inconsistent sentences such as "I am not myself today". The reason for this is that these sentences express speech acts whose felicity conditions are *a priori* known to be violated. Consequently, the converse of Searle's Principle of Expressibility is false in Pragmatics. It is not true that there exists for every sentence at least one possible context of utterance of that sentence where the speaker's meaning would be identical with the meaning of that sentence. The speaker is always obliged to exploit the maxim of quality when he utters certain sentences.

#### **D) Conversational implicatures of quality and quantity**

The content of a conversational implicature of quantity is that a non literal speech act that is stronger than the primary illocutionary act of the utterance is not felicitous. When the speaker implies conversationally that he does not perform an illocutionary act, he means to perform non literally the illocutionary denegation of that act. For example, a speaker who answers the question "Do you swear that?" by saying only "I believe it but I am not sure" usually conversationally implies that he does not want to swear and thereby non literally performs an illocutionary denegation. When the speaker implicates conversationally that a non literal illocutionary act is not satisfied, he means in general to deny non literally the propositional content of that act. For example, a speaker who answers the question "Is John's work excellent?" by saying only "It is satisfactory!" often conversationally implies and thereby asserts non literally that John's work is not excellent. Similarly, by implying conversationally that a non literal speech act would be defective, the speaker non literally denies a preparatory or sincerity condition of that act.

The content of a conversational implicature of quality is that a certain non literal speech act is felicitous in the context of the utterance. So a speaker who answers the question "Does Jones have a girlfriend?!" by saying "He is gay" can thereby non literally asserts that Julius has no girlfriend.

**E) There are different ways of performing non literal speech acts.**

First, a speaker can non literally perform a speech act by exploiting one or several conversational maxims as in the cases of indirect speech acts, metaphor or irony. The non literal speech act performed by way of exploiting a conversational maxim in an utterance is the **primary speech act** of that utterance and by way of performing it, the speaker also performs many other non literal speech acts (with weaker conditions of success). Thus a speaker who indirectly promises help by way of asserting literally that he will help also non literally commits himself to helping. Second, a speaker can also non literally perform one or several **secondary illocutionary acts** by using the conversational maxims in a context of utterance. But, in that case, these non literal speech acts do not have weaker conditions of success than the primary (literal or non literal) speech act of the utterance. Indeed, certain facts of the speaker and hearer's mutual knowledge of the conversational background which are relatively independent of the hypothesis that the speaker respects the maxims, must always be added to that hypothesis in order that there be a derivation of a conversational implicature. In a context where such facts are not part of the conversational background, the speaker can perform the same primary speech act without making any conversational implicature. For example, the assertion that Julius is gay does not strongly commit the speaker to the assertion that he has no girlfriend. That conversational implicature is cancellable. Indeed, there are conversational backgrounds where gay people are bisexual.

A speaker can both exploit and use conversational maxims in a context of utterance. In this case, he means to perform in addition to a primary non literal speech act another secondary non literal speech act. Thus by saying "I will not do it on that occasion" a speaker can exploit the maxim of quantity in order to commit himself indirectly to refraining from a certain course of action. He can also use the same maxim in order to assert secondarily (by conversational implicature) that he will carry out that action at another moment. (Suppose that he relies on the fact that he has said "on that occasion"). It is important to make a clear distinction between the primary non literal speech act that the speaker performs by exploiting maxims and the secondary non literal speech acts that he performs by using maxims. Contrary to what Grice wrongly assumes, ironical and indirect speech acts are not particular

cases of conversational implicatures. Conversational implicatures are always secondary non literal speech acts.

There is an order in the comprehension of speaker meaning in Pragmatics. In order to understand what a speaker means, we must determine first the literal speech act, next (in case the speaker exploits a maxim) the primary non literal speech act and third (in case he is also using a maxim) the conversational implicatures.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Austin J.L., 1962, *How to do things with words*, Oxford, Clarendon Press
- Bach, E. & Harnish, R., 1979, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, M.I.T. Press
- Dascal, Marcelo, 1990, "On the Pragmatic Structure of Conversation", in Searle et al. (eds)
- Grice, H.P., 1975, "Logic and Conversation", in Cole P. and Morgan J.L. eds, *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, *Speech acts*, Academic Press
- Kasher, A., 1982, "Gricean inference revisited", *Philosophica*, 29, III
- Montague, Richard, 1974, *Formal Philosophy*, Yale University Press
- Searle J.R., 1979, *Expression and Meaning* Cambridge University Press
- Searle, John R. & Vanderveken, Daniel, 1985, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, Cambridge University Press
- Searle, John R. et al. (eds), 1990, *(On) Searle on conversation*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam & Philadelphia
- Sperber D. and Wilson D., 1986, *Relevance*, Harvard University Press
- Vanderveken, Daniel, 1991, "Non literal Speech Acts and Conversational Maxims, in Lepore E. and Van Gulick, R. (eds), *John Searle and his Critics*, Blackwell
- 1990-91, *Meaning and Speech Acts*, Cambridge University Press, Vol. 1, *Principles of Language Use*, Vol. 2, *Formal Semantics of Success and Satisfaction*
- Wittgenstein, L., 1968, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell

**I am grateful to Steven Davis, François Lepage, Kenneth Mac Queen, André Leclerc, Claude Panaccio, John Searle and Dietmar Zaefferer for helpful comments on a first draft of this paper.**