Speech Acts in Discourse Context
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Abstract:
There is evidence for the existence across all known languages of three basic clause types: declarative, interrogative, and imperative (see Zanuttini et al., to appear). Though this distinction in grammatical mood may be reflected in quite different ways (syntactic, morphological, lexical, etc.) in different languages, we find a robust cross-linguistic generalization: The choice of mood in a clausal utterance is reflected in a default correlation to one of the three basic types of moves in a language game (Lewis 1969, Roberts 1996/2012): making an assertion (declarative), posing a question (interrogative), or issuing to an interlocutor a directive or desiderative (imperative). This is in striking contrast to the lack of regular correlation between the conventional content of constituents and speech act types in the tradition of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). This paper sketches an approach to speech acts in which mood is distinct from illocutionary force; but, *pace* Wilson & Sperber (1988), it is more than a "conventional indicator of force". In a clause, mood determines the conventional semantic type of the clause, and, given the nature of discourse, that type most naturally lends itself to serving as a particular type of speech act, i.e. to serving as one of the three basic types of language game moves.

Declarative clauses denote propositions, of type $\langle s,t \rangle$, and hence it is natural, all other things being equal, to take an utterance whose main clause is declarative to be an assertion of that proposition (Stalnaker 1979). Interrogatives denote semantic questions—sets of propositions (intuitively, the possible answers to the question) of type $\langle\langle s,t \rangle,t \rangle$, and these serve naturally as questions for discussion (Roberts 1996). Focusing here on imperatives, about which there is less consensus, I propose a semantics synthesizing insights from the recent literature, including Schwager (2006)/Kaufmann (2012), Portner (2007, to appear), Charlow 2010, 2011), Starr (2010), and Condoravdi & Lauer (2011): Imperative clauses denote properties (type $\langle s,\langle e,t \rangle\rangle$) which are directed, indexical and conditional. They are directed at a particular individual. They are indexical in that the target individual must always be an interlocutor—almost always the addressee, but occasionally the speaker, e.g. for Korean promissives. And they are conditional; following Kaufmann (2012), their ideal applicability is relativized to a Kratzerian modal base and ordering source. Indexically directed properties function naturally to propose goals, intentions and other ideal priorities for their targets, and these proposals, too, are reflected on the scoreboard for the language game (Lewis 1979; Roberts 2004, in press), where, as with priorities generally, these are always ranked relative to each other and to the information in the CG, so that the conditions on ideal realization of the property find a natural place in the ordering over priorities.

The functionally motivated regularities ("conventions of use") which effect the correlation between mood and speech act type are defeasible pragmatic principles of interpretation: But these tendencies can be over-ridden by more basic pragmatic principles, especially a requirement of relevance of a given move to the Question Under Discussion and to the interlocutors' other evident goals and intentions. Hence, illocutionary force is not semantic in the sense of being determined by the conventional content of the constituent uttered, but essentially pragmatic: What carries illocutionary force is an utterance (Bar-Hillel's ordered pair of a constituent and a context of utterance), not a sentence *per se*.

The resulting account of speech act types explains why we find just the three universally attested moods/clause types and why they are universally canonically correlated with the three basic moves which are universally constitutive of the language game.