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Editors: Shirô HATTORI
Kazuko INOUE

Associate Editors:
Tadao SHIMOMIYA
Yoshio NAGASHIMA

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The Semantics of Sentence Mood in Typologically Differing Languages

Dietmar Zaefferer
University of Munich

0. *Introduction*

The following is a report on a work in progress which aims at developing a formal semantics for the structural as well as lexical means natural languages dispose of in order to indicate sentence moods and illocutionary forces (or, as I shall say equivalently, illocution types). The line of research chosen, which (a) compares several typologically quite different languages, (b) concentrates on the *structural* indicators, and (c) proceeds from form-type to function-type, is diametrically opposed to the strategy adopted by John Searle and Daniel Vanderveken in their "Foundations of Illocutionary Logic", which (a) starts out from one language only (namely English), (b) concentrates on the lexical means English has for *labeling* illocutionary forces (and not on the structural means it has for *indicating* them), and (c) proceeds from function (i.e. illocutionary force) to form (i.e. primarily illocutionary verbs).

Although the research strategies are quite different, the two approaches share the common assumption that "illocutionary logic is part of a theory of meaning" (Searle/Vanderveken[1]: I-8), and their main goals are also the same, viz. (i) to explicate the logical properties of and relationships between illocutionary acts, and (ii) to construct a formal semantics for the illocutionary force indicators of natural languages and thereby to complete the 'Universal Grammar' as conceived of e.g. by Richard Montague.

1. *An inventary of the sentence moods and their indicators in six typologically differing languages*

1.0 As a starting point, I take the notion of sentence mood as it can be found in most grammars, i.e. undefined, but with a fairly good inter-grammar agreement in the central cases (declarative, interrogative, imperative), and a fairly bad one in the more marginal cases (exclamatory, optative, exhortative etc.).
Using this notion, the following overviews can be given:

1.1 *Overview of sentence moods in the six sample languages*

	English	German	Guaraní	Quechua	Chinese	Korean
1. Declarative	+	+	+	+	+	+
2. Interrogative	+	+	+	+	+	+
3. Jussive (Imperative)	+	+	+	+	+	+

4.	Exclamatory	+	+	?	+	+	+
5.	Dubitative	+	+	+	+	+	+
6.	Optative	+	+	+	+	−	+
7.	Propositive	+	+	−	−	+	+
8.	Quotative	−	+	+	+	−	+
9.	Rhetorical interrogative	−	(+)	?	−	−	+
10.	Promissive	−	−	−	−	−	+

1.2 *Overview of structural sentence mood indicators in the sample languages*

		English	German	Guaraní	Quechua	Chinese	Korean
1.	Intonation/Punctuation	+	+	+	+	+	+
2.	Interrogative words	+	+	+	+	+	+
3.	Indicators of Person deictic categories	+	+	+	+	+	+
4.	Indicators of verbal mood/Modal verbs	+	+	+	+	+	+
5.	Word order	+	+	(+)	+	+	−
6.	Affixes	−	−	+	+	−	+
7.	Particles	−	+	+	+	+	?
8.	Ellipsis of subject	+	+	−	−	+	−
9.	Exclamatory words	(+)	(+)	?	−	+	?
10.	Special constructions	*do*-prep.	−	?	?	V-*not*-V	?

2. *Towards an explication of 'sentence mood': the notion of L-sentence type*

I will now try to spell out the idea behind the traditional notion of sentence mood, namely a correspondence between syntactic structure and illocutionary force. I presuppose that for any natural language L, there is a set of L-sentence readings the elements of which are ordered pairs of an L-sentence and a structural description of it which is rich enough to exclude ambiguities; I presuppose furthermore that (a) each L-sentence reading determines uniquely the set of its syntactic features, and (b) each meaning of an L-sentence reading determines uniquely the set of its illocution type features.
The definition is then as follows:

(1) X is an *L-sentence type* iff
  (a) X is a non-empty set of syntactic features of L, and
  (b) there is a non-empty set Y of illocution type features of L such that every L-sentence reading with X has an L-sentence meaning with Y.

If X is an L-sentence type, the Y which satisfies condition (b) will be called *the common illocution type denominator* of the L-sentence readings with X.

Applying (D1) we can hypothesize that there is probably no language L such that the set of explicit performative L-sentence readings is definable as being of type X for any L-sentence type X, since there is no purely structural common denominator, the lexical meaning of the main verb being crucial.

I call the notion just defined sentence *type* and not sentence *mood,* because it is much finer grained than the latter. For instance the interrogative mood corresponds to a whole group of L-sentence types for most languages L. (Guaraní

with one uniform structural indicator, *-pa,* for all kinds of interrogatives, is one of the exceptions.) Nevertheless, it seems clear that 'L-sentence mood' can be explicated in terms of 'L-sentence type'.

3. *The notion of L-structurally indicated illocution type*

Using (D1) we are now in a position to define as follows:

(D2) Y is an *L-structurally indicated sentential*[1] *illocution type* iff there is an L-sentence type X such that Y is the common illocution type denominator of the L-sentence readings with X.

This notion allows us to cut out two small finite subsets from the probably infinite set of possible illocution types, viz. the two sets of sentential illocution types which are L-structurally indicated (a) in every, and (b) in at least one, but not every natural language L, respectively.

4. *Illocutionary universals hypothesized*

Presupposing an explication of 'L-sentence mood' in terms of 'L-sentence type', it is easy now to derive some hypotheses about illocutionary universals from the findings presented above:

(UH1) The following illocution types and only these are L-structurally indicated in all natural languages L (the corresponding sentence moods are added in parentheses):

1. *Assertive* (Declarative)
2. *Erotetic* (Interrogative)
3. *Directive* (Jussive/Imperative)
4. *Subassertive* (Dubitative)
5. *A-Expressive* (Exclamatory) (Expressing amazement)

(UH2) The following illocution types are L-structurally indicated in some, but not all natural languages L:

6. *W-Expressive* (Optative) (Expressing wish)
7. *We-Directive* (Propositive)
8. *Reporting Assertive* (Quotative)
9. *Pseudoerotetic* (Rhetorical Interrogative)
10. *Commissive* (Promissive)

(UH3) There is no natural language L such that the following illocution types are L-structurally indicated:

11. *Check-Erotetic* or Exam Question, i.e. eliciting an answer in order to check whether the addressee knows it
12. *Abraham-Directive,* i.e. eliciting a response in order to check obedience

1) I call sentential the type of illocutions performed in uttering sentences, as opposed to other phrases ("Hurrah for Porky!") and interjections ("Wow!").

13. *Declarative,* i.e. making true a proposition p by happily performing an illocutionary act with the propositional content p.

5. *The abstract predicates approach to illocutionary logic as opposed to the Searle/Vanderveken approach*

Searle/Vanderveken (henceforth S/V) claim that illocutionary forces can be represented by septuples whose first coordinate is illocutionary point. There are six basic illocutionary points which are taken as primitive notions: Assertive, Commissive, Directive, Declarative, Expressing Belief and Expressing Desire. Forces with basic point where the other coordinates (mode of achievement, different conditions and degrees of strength) are kept minimal are called primitive. The set of illocutionary forces includes the primitive ones and is closed under certain operations on the coordinates. These operations induce a partial ordering in the set of illocutionary forces and illocutionary entailment is defined as subordination with respect to this ordering.

My approach, which I call the abstract predicates approach[2] takes the L-structurally indicated illocution types as primitives, represents them by abstract predicates and characterizes the latter with the help of meaning postulates, introducing thus illocutionary entailment through another door.

Both approaches are axiomatic, but the primitive notions are different. Nevertheless it is possible that one day they turn out to be equivalent. Some aspects, however, of S/V's proposal make me doubt that this will be the case. Let me conclude by commenting on two of them: On the one hand, the definition of force is much too liberal, since if the propositional content conditions are unrestricted, they may admit of only one single proposition and thus 'illocutionary force' includes all elementary illocutionary acts. There would be e.g. the force of asking where the next ICL will take place. On the other hand, the definition seems to be too restrictive too: By separating illocutionary point and degree of strength of its achievement, S/V run into troubles when a change in the latter results in a change of the former. Consider the Guaraní suffix *-ndipo* which is described as an interrogativo-dubitative affix and can be translated with either 'perhaps' or the question mark. Here, S/V's definition forces one to classify the corresponding illocution either as low degree assertive or as answer eliciting directive, the corresponding points being strictly separated.

So in its present preliminary version, S/V's definition seems to be both too loose and too restrictive to be really adequate for a formal semantics of sentence mood and other force indicators in natural languages.

References

[1] Searle, John R./Daniel Vanderveken, Foundations of Illocutionary Logic, MS 1981.

[2] Zaefferer, Dietmar, 'On a formal treatment of illocutionary force indicators' in: H. Parret et al. (eds.), Possibilities and Limitations of Pragmatics, Amsterdam 1982.

2) It is outlined in [2], spelled out for a large fragment of German in [3], which is complemented in [4].

[3] ———, Frageausdrücke und Fragen im Deutschen. Zu ihrer Syntax, Semantik und Pragmatik, München 1983.
[4] ———, 'The Semantics of Non-Declaratives: Investigating German Exclamatories' in: R. Bäuerle et al. (eds.), Meaning, Use, and Interpretation of Language Berlin 1983.