Characterizing illocutionary content

Jessica Rett

The goal of this talk is to present a unified account of illocutionary content – the sort of meaning encoded in illocutionary mood markers, illocutionary modifiers, emotives and expressives – and, in doing so, try to derive their semantic and syntactic behavior. I argue that all illocutionary content is anaphoric to the speech event, and I formalize speech-event anaphora using insights from a number of sources, including Stalnaker (1978); Extepare (1997) and Bittner (2008). This proposal has the benefit of treating illocutionary content like all other types of content – i.e. it doesn't require any additional levels or formal apparatuses – and, among other things, it correctly predicts that some elements can be polysemous in their event-anaphoric link, and that their interpretation conditions their descriptive or illocutionary status.

Illocutionary content

Historically, many different things have been thought to encode illocutionary content: grammaticized elements like illocutionary mood markers (declarative/interrogative/imperative), as well as lexicalized elements like illocutionary modifiers (e.g. *frankly, briefly*); emotive markers (e.g. *oops, unfortunately*) and, for some, expressives (e.g. *bastard, fucking*). The underlying intuition has been that descriptive content characterizes the world, while illocutionary content characterizes the utterance (Kaplan, 1997). This distinction cross-cuts the (not-)at-issue distinction: descriptive content may or may not be not-at-issue, but all illocutionary content is not-at-issue (e.g. not targetable by truth-conditional operators). It's been observed that illocutionary content behaves differently from even descriptive not-at-issue content: denying it results in Moore's Paradox, instead of contradiction (Murray, 2010), and encoders of illocutionary content always scope locally in e.g. conditionals (Rett, 2021).

There are two families of analysis of illocutionary mood: operator-based (e.g. Krifka, 2014), and update-based (e.g. Murray and Starr, 2021). Neither can extend to encoders of non-mood illocutionary content, like illocutionary modifiers, for two reasons: 1) non-mood illocutionary markers need not range over entire utterances; and 2) they can be polysemous between descriptive and illocutionary uses.

(1) a. Kiki has gone home in case the plumber arrives early. *descriptive modifier*
b. Kiki has gone home, in case you want to know. *illocutionary modifier*

Furthermore, accounts that purport to model different types or layers of semantic content either can't model the difference between descriptive and illocutionary not-at-issue content (e.g. Potts, 2005; McCready, 2010), or require additional formal assumptions to do so (Rett, 2021) (see Table 1).

Event anaphora and the start-up update

Stalnaker (1978) argued that any account of anaphora must model discourse referents introduced non-linguistically as well as linguistically (the famous 'goat update'), including the mere fact that the speaker is speaking. In her dynamic framework, Bittner (2008) modeled this insight in the form of a start-up update: "As soon as somebody begins to speak, this very fact is noted, focusing the attention on three default topics," the speech world, speech time, and speech event. While Bittner used her start-up update to model temporal anaphora in Kalaallisut, others have proposed something like anaphora to a speech event, at least informally, to model at least some of the illocutionary data mentioned above, as well as indexicals like *hereby* (Extepare, 1997; Eckardt, 2012).

While this intuition has been used in various forms for targeted phenomena, I employ it here broadly in a compositional dynamic framework to try to explain a) what unifies illocutionary content, and b) why illocutionary content behaves the way it does. In particular, I argue that illocutionary content is just content that is anaphoric to the speech event. In the case of illocutionary modifiers like (1b), the anaphora is straightforwardly speech-event anaphora; in the case of illocutionary mood, the anaphora is to the speaker qua the agent of the speech event. I argue that this analysis explains the semantic and syntactic behavior of illocutionary content: its Moores-Paradoxicality; its locality restrictions; and its affinity for the left periphery. It also correctly predicts the descriptive/illocutionary polysemy we see in cases like (1). It has the further benefit of treating all types of content (perhaps modulo imperatives) as Common-Ground update or structuring; there is no need for multi-dimensionalism (cf. Potts, 2005) or the modeling of Discourse Commitments (cf. Rett, 2021, see Table 2).

Dynamic anaphora to the speech event

I illustrate the analysis in CDRT (Muskens, 1995), which models 1) a Stack (a list of salient entities); and 2) the Common Ground, a set of propositions mutually believed by interlocutors. In parallel to the illocutionary modifier exemplified in (1), I illustrate the analysis with the similarly polysemous event modifier *briefly*. I analyze *briefly* in (2) as modifying the most salient event, i.e. the top event on the Stack ($e_\top$).

(2) $[\![\text{briefly}]\!] = [\ |\ \text{brief}(e_\top)]$

example	*Briefly, she was president*
start-up update	$[\ e_0, x_0 \mid \text{agent}(x_0, e_0)]$
update with *briefly*	$[\ e_0, x_0 \mid \text{agent}(x_0, e_0), \text{brief}(e_0)]$
update with CP	$[\ e_0, x_0, e_1, x_1 \mid \text{agent}(x_0, e_0), \text{brief}(e_0), \text{agent}(x_1, e_1), \text{president}(e_1)]$

example	*She was the president briefly*
start-up update	$[\ e_0, x_0 \mid \text{agent}(x_0, e_0)]$
update with CP	$[\ e_0, x_0, e_1, x_1 \mid \text{agent}(x_0, e_0), \text{agent}(x_1, e_1), \text{president}(e_1)]$
update with *briefly*	$[\ e_0, x_0, e_1, x_1 \mid \text{agent}(x_0, e_0), \text{agent}(x_1, e_1), \text{president}(e_1), \text{brief}(e_1)]$

The first derivation models *briefly* ranging over the present speech event, a dref introduced by the start-up update. In the second, *briefly* ranges over the topic eventuality introduced by the clause itself. In the talk, I extend a similar approach to interrogative mood markers and emotive markers, which I model as anaphoric to the speaker x_0. In contrast to some uses of start-up updates and related accounts, I don't treat indexicality as anaphoric to the start-up update (i.e., I don't treat present-tense as anaphoric to the speech time, or first person as anaphoric to the speaker), in part because of observed differences between present tense and temporal adverbs like *currently*. (Altshuler, 2014). This avoids the conclusion that e.g. present-tense encodes illocutionary content.

Predictions and conclusions

This account makes several appealing empirical predictions: 1) there are linguistic elements that can be anaphoric to either the speech event or the topic event, and this affects their descriptive/illocutionary status; 2) the argument of an event-anaphoric modifier is conditioned by its position in the utterance, not its location on the spine; and finally 3) for a given class of meaning, like mirativity, we might be able to determine what subclass of meaning it encodes based on how it is encoded (prosodically or at the CP-level or at the VP-level).

This first prediction is easy to test: the location of *briefly* – and its status as a modifier of a speech event or a topic event – conditions the (not-)at issue status of the meaning it encodes.

(3) A: Briefly, Pia couldn't attend because she was an employee.
B: #That's not true, that wasn't a brief explanation!

(4) A: Pia couldn't attend because she was an employee briefly.
B: That's not true, she wasn't (merely) briefly an employee!

I spend the rest of the talk illustrating the usefulness of the second two predictions, using mirative evidentials as a case study. In particular, I argue that we can account for the fact that many languages encode polysemously encode aspect, evidentiality, and mirativity in a single morpheme by showing that we can treat the aspectual interpretation as modification of the topic event; the evidential interpretation as modification of the learning event (Koev, 2017, a.o.), and the mirative interpretation as modification of the speech event. I end by speculating about explanatory typologies of classes of meaning, arguing that we might be able to predict what sort of mirativity a language encodes (new information; sudden realization; counter-expectation; surprise, AnderBois 2018) based on how and where the mirativity is encoded (prosodically; as a sentence particle; as a verb particle). In particular, this proposal predicts that prosodically-encoded mirativity (Rett and Sturman, 2021) cannot be used to mark sudden realization or new information.

Tables and non-English examples

	at-issue (*entailments*)	**descriptive NAI** (*presupps, appositives*)	**illocutionary NAI** (*mood, emotives*)
multi-dimensional semantics *Potts (2005); McCready (2010)*	Tier 1 composition	Tier 2 composition	
descriptive dynamic update *Murray (2010, 2014) AnderBois et al. (2015)*	proposal to update CG	direct update to CG	N/A
illocutionary dynamic update *Farkas and Bruce (2010); Rett (2021)*	proposal to update CG	direct update to CG	update to DC

Table 1: Historically, formal treatments of content types

	at-issue (*entailments*)	**descriptive NAI** (*presupps, appositives*)	**illocutionary NAI** (*mood, emotives*)
multi-dimensional semantics *Potts (2005); McCready (2010)*	Tier 1 composition	Tier 2 composition	
descriptive dynamic update *Murray (2010, 2014) AnderBois et al. (2015)*	proposal to update CG	direct update to CG	N/A
illocutionary dynamic update *Farkas and Bruce (2010); Rett (2021)*	proposal to update CG	direct update to CG	update to DC
speech event dynamic update *present proposal*	proposal to update CG	direct update to CG (topic event)	(speech event)

Table 2: Present proposal, formal treatment of content types

Altshuler, D. (2014). Discourse transparency and the meaning of temporal locating adverbs. *Natural Language Semantics*, 22:55–88.

AnderBois, S. (2018). Illocutionary revelations: Yucatec Maya *bakáan* and the typology of miratives. *Journal of Semantics*, 35:171–206.

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Bittner, M. (2008). Aspectual universals of temporal anaphora. In Rothstein, S., editor, *Theoretical and crosslinguistic approaches to the semantics of aspect*, pages 349–385. John Benjamins.

Eckardt, R. (2012). Hereby explained: an event-based account of performative utterances. *Linguistics & Philosophy*, 35:21–55.

Extepare, R. (1997). *The grammatical representation of speech events*. PhD Thesis, University of Maryland.

Farkas, D. and Bruce, K. (2010). On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics*, 27:81–118.

Kaplan, D. (1997). The meaning of 'ouch' and 'oops'. Ms., UCLA.

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Krifka, M. (2014). Embedding illocutionary acts. In Roeper, T. and Speas, M., editors, *Recursion, complexity in cognition*, pages 125–155. Springer.

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Murray, S. (2010). *Evidentiality and the structure of speech acts*. PhD Thesis, Rutgers University.

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Stalnaker, R. (1978). Assertion. *Syntax and Semantics*, 9:315–332.