

Semantics Group 12/10
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Title: Speech acts in grammar: arguments from meta-questions

Abstract: Sentence types (declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives) are associated with various speech acts (assertions, questions, commands). Information about the speech act is standardly thought not to be represented in the grammar of natural-language expressions. However, the Performative Hypothesis (a.o. Stenius 1967, Ross 1970, Lakoff 1970, Karttunen 1977, Gazdar 1979, Krifka 2001) states that speech act information is represented in the syntax by silent material. On this hypothesis, a question like *is it raining?* posed by a speaker *s* is grammatically represented as [*s* ASK [(*whether*) *is it raining*]].

In this talk we will discuss new arguments in favour of the performative hypothesis (joint work with Danny Fox, in progress, and building on Trinh & Bassi 2023 and Trinh 2024). The arguments are based on a variety of questions we call 'meta-questions': the phenomenon where speech act information appears to be embedded under a question operator. An example of a type of meta-question is B's first utterance in (1) (Trinh 2024), whose meaning can be easily captured by the logical form in (2) where speech acts are syntactically represented.

(1) A: Are you married?

B: **Am I married?**

A: Yes (that's what I asked).

B: No, I'm not.

(2) B ASK A whether A ASK B whether B is married.

We will present other cases of meta-questions that exhibit an interesting interaction with ellipsis. We will discuss what needs to be said about this interaction with ellipsis in order to restrict the distribution of meta-questions, and we show that the system we propose derives some promising predictions.