

Modeling figuration in speech acts

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We begin our talk recalling our decades-long friendship and professional association with Antonio Barcelona, which has centered on our shared interest in how figuration interacts with language structure and use. The main thrust of our talk is to demonstrate not only the ubiquity and pervasiveness of conceptual metonymy and metaphor in producing and understanding illocutionary acts, i.e., speech acts, but also to account for this observation by explicating the roles of various folk models such as Action, Talk, and Embodiment. We maintain that folk models (i.e., cultural models / cognitive schemas intersubjectively shared by a social group) impact grammatical structures and usages and, in themselves, constitute a basis for associative and analogical reasoning; i.e., they give rise to conceptual metonymies and metaphors.

In the first part of the talk, we account for indirect speech act data with reference to scenarios we construct for three types of illocutionary acts: Directives, Commissives, and Expressives. After providing cultural and linguistic evidence of the psychological validity of the folk model of Action (vs. Talk), we derive the Action Scenario, which forms the basis of our speech act models. The conceptual structure we propose for Illocutionary Scenarios consists of components we term the Before, Core, Result, and After. All indirect speech acts, we maintain, come about by means of constructing utterances that instantiate (or refer to) non-Core components of the model, which are exploited metonymically to index a target (Core) meaning.

In the second part of the talk, we focus on the Core component of various illocutionary acts — Commissives, Declarations, and Expressives — that come about via utterances expressing bodily movements and acts of transfer and possession. Such “explicit embodied performatives” rely on a folk model of communication we term the Transfer Model of Communication. Interestingly, embodied performatives are indeed figurative; however, they are not felt to be indirect.

Finally, we close with some questions that tease, i.e., desiderata for future research, such as: How to formulate pragmatic constraints on the deployment of indirect

speech acts, and Which speech act types are realizable via explicit embodied performatives.

Keywords: conceptual metonymy; conceptual metaphor; embodied performative; folk model; Illocutionary Scenario; Transfer Model of Communication.