Book review

New Work on Speech Acts. Daniel Fogal, Daniel W. Harris, Matt Moss (Eds.). Oxford University Press, Oxford (2018). 437 pp., ISBN 9780198738831, EUR 83,75 (hardback).

This volume brings together a collection of papers that explore topics and themes from across a range of work about speech acts. It is a big volume, in more than one sense. It is big in size, containing 15 chapters and more than 400 pages. More importantly, it is big in scope, comprising research in speech acts from different perspectives and dealing with an impressive array of topics: from debates within Austinian speech act theory—e.g. the distinction between content and force—, to issues regarding speech acts widely understood—e.g. slurs, dogwhistles or hate speech.

Research in speech act theory has been, and still is, one of the most fruitful areas of research in philosophy of language and linguistics. Indeed, in these last decades interest in this area has risen significantly. The interdisciplinary nature of the research is, I believe, both behind its great success and a very welcome consequence of it. Speech act theory has greatly benefited from work in fields so diverse as law, ethics, aesthetics, gender studies and computer science and, similarly, research in speech acts has played a key role in the study of these and other disciplines. This fruitful exchange is captured and exploited in this volume, showing, first, the variety of theoretical approaches and practical applications currently being explored and developed, and, second, that speech act theory is a very lively, productive and promising line of research right now.

Of course, comprehensive as it is, it would not be possible to cover all new works on speech acts in one volume. This is a collection of research papers, not a general survey. Some papers included here could serve as a good introduction to certain topics. Most papers, however, will be difficult to follow to those not versed in the speech acts literature. This, of course, is not a bad thing *per se*. There are many aspects to outline and many more to discuss about the works contained in the volume. Saying something philosophically or linguistically interesting about all or even some of them will certainly take much longer than a book review. And the editors already do an excellent work at situating the work of each contributor within the abundant literature on speech acts. Thus, what I intend to do in this review is, first, give some general information about the volume, including some critical remarks, and, second, give some brief information about the chapters.

First, the general remarks. On the positive side, the volume includes comprehensive name and subject indexes and, as I mentioned, the introduction does a great job in situating the papers within the huge literature on this topic. Actually, the introduction does much more than that: it offers a clear and informative survey of recent developments on speech act theory and situates the main debates and new perspectives. On the negative side, however, the broadness of scope makes the book attractive to a wider audience, but it comes with some challenges, and not all of them have been met. This could have been avoided, or at least mitigated, by improving some aspects in the editing.

The volume does not include a final list of references, which is always helpful, in my opinion. Each chapter comes with its own list of references, but the format is not homogeneous. Most importantly, the volume is not thematically organized, with chapters ordered alphabetically by the authors' last names. This might respond to the editors' idea that the "volume can provide a space in which to be drawn out of one's disciplinary comfort zone" (p. vii). Their hope would be then that a person interested in, say, dogwhistles, will "stay for debates about the semantics and pragmatics of imperatives" (p.vii). Good as the intentions might have been, I find this editorial decision particularly troublesome, as it makes the reading of the book quite laborious. The chapters move from linguistic analysis or philosophical debates on speech act theory, to social or ethical implications with no transition whatsoever. I understand that dividing the volume into different parts would go against the desired blurring of boundaries among themes, and, of course, it could be argued that these kinds of volumes are not meant to be read from beginning to end. Still, it would have been easier for the readers if the chapters were organized by topic, by theoretical approach, or by any other reasonable criterion.

In what follows, I will offer very brief summaries of the contents of each paper, grouping them in three categories: those that work within the framework of discourse context or score, those that deal with the force-content distinction, and those that focus on practical applications of speech act theory.

Robert Stalnaker (chapter 14) makes a short presentation and defense of dynamic pragmatics. He develops new arguments for it, and new challenges for dynamic semantic proposals (Lepore and Stone, and Murray and Starr, this volume). Many of the papers included in this volume work under the assumption that conversations are organized around contexts: "shared and

evolving representations of the state of play in a conversation that both shape the qualities of speech acts and are in turn shaped by them" (p. 14), and most work within the framework developed by Stalnaker (1978) himself and by Lewis (1979). I found Stalnaker's paper particularly clear and insightful. Placing it first would have been reasonable and helpful.

Both Craige Roberts and Paul Portner, for instance, defend views based on Stalnaker's, according to which, first, performing a speech act is doing something with the intention of changing the attitudes shared by the participants in the conversation, and, second, the rules according to which the conversational score evolves are pragmatic. Roberts (chapter 12) offers a comprehensive account of assertions, directives and questions, while Portner (chapter 11) focuses on imperatives.

Nate Charlow (chapter 3) also discusses imperatives, and he presents a methodology for theorizing about the semantics of imperatives on which "their canonical cognitive role is treated as semantically fundamental" (p. 68). He develops a clause-type analysis of the imperative alternative to Portner's proposal (chapter 11) and Kaufmann's (2012) modal account. (Grouping Charlow's and Portner's chapter closer together and in the reversed order would have been helpful too.)

Lepore and Stone (chapter 7) defend a version of "dynamic semantics". They discuss indirect utterances, such as "Can you pass me the salt?", and they claim that the alleged indirectness can be accounted for by attending to the utterance's semantics. Indirect meaning, they argue, is encoded in grammar. Their paper is provocative, to say the least, and while it builds on previous works, it does present novel arguments and challenges for those working in the framework of dynamic pragmatics.

Elizabeth Camp (chapter 2) and Mary Kate McGowan (chapter 8) work within what is often called "conversational score" framework (making use of Lewis' terminology), and they both defend and discuss the normative aspects of the shared context or score. Camp focuses on insinuation, which, she claims, is a form of speaker meaning. Insinuation requires the acknowledgment—however nuanced—of one another's mental states: beliefs, intentions, and commitments, but enables the speaker to communicate certain attitudes without adding them to the conversational score. Communication happens then "off-record", allowing deniability. Some normative elements have to be present in the score, she says, to explain the unacknowledged commitments speakers take through insinuation. McGowan argues that some common communicative acts have "covert exercitive force" and by that she means that they can and do change the norms that dictate what is taken to be permissible in a particular society, but they do so in a way that is not acknowledged by the participants in a conversation. McGowan claims that certain speech acts, such as hate speech and pornography, validate, modify and generate some of the norms that guide social action.

In chapter 15, the last of the volume, Seth Yalcin combines the expressivist idea that normative language is distinctive in force with dynamic pragmatics, and, more specifically, with the idea of "dynamic force". His view is complex and, in my opinion, quite challenging, but Yalcin's presentation is clear and well-argued for. His paper starts with a very nice presentation of the force-content distinction and its implications. The force-content distinction is a prominent topic in this volume, and many papers discuss it directly. So, just as with Stalnaker's, I believe the reader would do well in reading Yalcin's paper early.

Sarah E. Murray and William B. Starr's proposal (chapter 9) makes use of the tools from dynamic semantics, like Lepore and Stone, to argue that the conventional meaning of a sentence determines, or at least constraints, the force of an utterance "by encoding a procedure for updating the mutual assumptions" (p. 230). Their focus is in explaining how language allows us to coordinate our actions in "the real world", something that, they claim, neo-Gricean proposals do not do and do not attempt to do. This last point, shared to a certain extent by Lepore and Stone, is one that I find particularly problematic. But they do present new challenges that neo-Griceans need to address.

On chapter 4, Mitchell Green discusses recent challenges to the force-content distinction. He presents a view according to which content need not be propositional, and force is not an aspect of what is said (although it is part of the speaker's meaning). Green dedicates a significant amount of space to defending the distinction from recent attacks by, among others, Peter Hank, in chapter 5 of this very volume. Hank begins by attacking the Fregean idea of proposition, which is at the root of the force-content distinction, and which should be, he claims, abandoned in favor of a more fine-grained distinction. Both Hank's and Green's proposals touch on and have consequences for some of the most fundamental aspects of speech act theory, and of philosophy of language in general. To better understand both papers, though, it seems clear that Hank's paper should be read first, since Green's is, in some respects, a reply to it. This is another instance where the purely alphabetical order is problematic.

The remaining three papers focus on what we might call "practical applications" of speech act theory (a label under which Camp and McGowan's paper could also be included). Jennifer Saul (chapter 13) gives an account of what she calls "overt dogwhistles". These are very particular cases, where a speaker, who communicatively intends to affect two addresses at the same time, performs, with a single utterance, two speech acts addressed to two different audiences. This is a very subtle communicative phenomena, similar to insinuation. In this respect, Saul's and Camp's accounts complement each other very nicely.

Geoff Nunberg's paper (chapter 10) is the longest of the volume, but also one of the most readable. He offers a new take on a very much-discussed topic lately: slurs. According to him, slurs are "plain vanilla descriptions" (p. 244). That is, they do not semantically convey any denigration of their referents. Nunberg argues, using many examples and discussing a great variety of cases, that using a slur is exploiting Grice's maxim of Manner and that, in doing so, one states one's belonging to a particular group (whose members do have a derogatory attitude towards the referent).

Rae Langton (chapter 6) deals with hate speech, blocking and counter-speech, and claims that the felicity conditions of speech acts are or can be partially determined by hearer and bystanders. As a consequence, counter-speech can "undo" a

speech act, and not only refute it, and a hearer might be able to block presuppositions about the speaker's authority (among others).

Summing up, the volume touches on many issues and it contains many new and challenging ideas. It does not cover all recent works on speech acts, but it does a good job a presenting some of the most discussed and original ones. Anyone interested in recent debates on semantics, pragmatics and the philosophy of language, and, particularly, in speech act theory widely understood, will find informative and stimulating work in this volume.

References

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