15 Speech Acts, Discourse, Grice’s Maxims

15.1 Speech Acts

(1) Speech acts: Utterances we use/make to accomplish things.
   a. “Performatives”

(2) Felicity Conditions: if A, then B met.
   a. Misfire: if A, then B not met.

(3) Locutionary Act: Uttering the sentence/speech act. (Comes from the person uttering the speech act.)
   a. ‘You are fired.’ Uttered by your boss.
   b. ‘I’ll give you a million bucks, if you help me.’ Uttered by your best friend.

(4) Illocutionary Act/Force: The type of act: promise, offer, statement, command, and the force that it has on the hearer.
   a. Your boss has just made a statement about your current employment.
   b. Your friend is promising or offering you something in return for a favor.

(5) Perlocutionary Effect: The change that occurs due to the speech act.
   a. You just lost your job. You got fired!
   b. Your friend is either lying or just kidding around because he really doesn’t have a million bucks.

(6) Examples
   ‘I apologize. I sentence you to 5 years in prison. There is a midterm this Thursday…’

15.2 Discourse

(7) Discourse “Old and new information”
   a. The bear was shot in the forest.
      Old information; The bear already exists.
   b. A bear was shot in the forest.
      New information about the existence of the bear.

(8) Topics “Foregrounding information”
   ‘What we are talking about.’

(9) Passive vs. Active sentences.
   a. The dog was hit (by the car), and he died.
   b. ??The dog was hit (by the car), and it killed him.
   c. The car hit our dog Spot, and it killed him.
   d. ??The car hit our dog Spot, and he died.

(10) Topic markers in Japanese: -ga and -wa (cf. pg 232 in the text.)
    a. Speaker A: Dare-ga kimasita-ka?
       Who-NOM came-QUES
    b. Speaker B: John-ga kimasita.
       John-NOM came
    c. Speaker A: John-wa dare-to kimasita-ka?
       John-TOP who-with came-QUES
    (Japanese)

(11) The topic represents old information that is to be talked about.
    Topic + Subject
    Established info. New info.
15.3 Conversational Maxims

(12) Definitions.
   b. Cooperative Principle: Contributions (new information) appropriate to the conversation.

(13) Maxim of Relevance: Utterance relevant to conversation.
   a. Speaker A: Would you like to go to lunch?
   b. Speaker B: Sure! Since I passed my exam today.
   b'. Speaker B': #I passed my exam today.

(14) Maxim of Quality: Truthfulness of utterance.
   a. Speaker A: (At 6:00pm) Are you eating dinner?
   b. Speaker B: No. We haven’t eaten yet.
   b'. Speaker B': #No. We are eating breakfast. (Duh!)

(15) Maxim of Quantity: No more or no less information is required for the conversation.
   a. Speaker A: (In Thailand) Where do you come from?
   b. Speaker B: I come from the United States.
   b'. Speaker B': #I come from 107 University Village, SLC, UT, 84108.

(16) Maxim of Manner: Avoid ambiguity and obscurity.
   a. I’m referring to Bob’s roommate.
   b. The guy who rents Bob’s other room.
   b’. #That guy over at Bob’s house.

(17) Flouting the Maxims
   Often done for jokes, sarcasm, comedy, to manipulate conversations, to be rude, etc.
   a. A: Did you cash the check?
   b. B: Well, I’m going to the bank this afternoon. (Meaning the river bank.)