

Book review

T. Ballmer & W. Brennenstuhl, *Speech Act Classification*. A study in the Lexical analysis of English speech activity verbs. Springer Series in Language and Communication, Vol.8. Springer Verlag, Berlin-Heidelberg-New York, 1981. X + 274 pp.
Price: US \$ 33.60. ISBN 3-540-10294-9.

Reviewed by: Jens Allwood
University of Göteborg
Department of Linguistics

The posthumous publication of J.L. Austin's *How to do things with word* in 1962 resulted in the creation of a new field of enquiry ~ which Austin sometimes referred to as linguistic phenomenology. i.e. the investigation of everyday phenomena through their codification in language. In *How to do things with words* Austin combined the idea of a linguistic phenomenology with the idea of speech as action. This combination has subsequently become extremely influential, especially through the publication of John Searle's contribution to the Austinian ideas in *Speech Acts* (1969). Speech Acts have become popular not only in philosophy but also in linguistics (Sadock 1974), literary criticism (Ohmann 1970), anthropology (Hymes 1974), sociology (Silverman 1976) and psychology (Clark and Clark 1977).

In linguistics, one of the first applications of Austin's thinking came through the so-called performative hypothesis, put forth within the bounds of what was then known as generative semantics by linguists such as Ross (1970) and Sadock (1974). The main idea of the performative hypothesis was that an abstract conceptual entity corresponding to a performative verb (a verb that could be used in the *hereby* formula e.g. *I hereby baptize you*) was an underlying component of the semantic structure of every sentence.

During the mid-seventies, however, a different approach to the phenomena Austin had pointed out, was developed. In Allwood (1976) and Verschueren (1979) it was claimed that the so-called 'speech act theory', the term used by Searle for the study of speech as action, primarily was a study of the semantic fields of terms designating different aspects of speech and that the most important rules and conventions involved in speech act theory were in fact lexical conventions for the use of different lexical items denoting speech. In this approach. the analysis of speech activity term. is primarily a contribution to lexicography. The analysis can, however, secondarily give us important hints about

what has proved important enough in speaking for the members of a certain speech community to codify in language

This in turn can give us hints about what the important aspects of communication are.

The work by Ballmer and Brennenstuhl very definitely also takes a lexicological/lexicographic approach, but differs from that of the two preceding authors by taking a wider range of verbs (4800) into account. The book is divided into three roughly equal parts. 1. A theoretical discussion of the lexicological and lexicographic approaches taken in the book. 2. A classification of verbs designating speech activity based on relations of synonymy, entailment and presupposition yielding a taxonomy of the larger semantic field of speech activity verbs into smaller more specified subfields. 3. A list of the verbs in alphabetical order with indications about where to find them in the taxonomy given in part 2.

In this way, the last two thirds of the book serve as a kind of thesaurus for the verbs of speaking which constitutes a part of a larger thesaurus of verbs and vocabulary in general.

Part 1 of the book contains a theoretical discussion of lexicography (the practical and empirical study of lexical items and phrases) and lexicology (the theory of lexical phenomena). According to Ballmer and Brennenstuhl there have been too many studies that are either lexicographic but not lexicological or lexicological but not lexicographic. They therefore try to steer a middle course avoiding neither theory nor a sufficiently large amount of data. It would seem, on the whole, that they have been successful in going this.

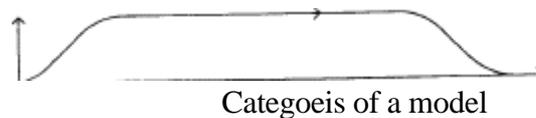
The theoretical point of departure for the authors was the hope of testing Austin's and Searle's Proposals for a taxonomy of speech acts on German verbs. In carrying out this test they found that they had to reject the previous proposals in favour of a proposal of their own. This change was partly caused by a consideration of a much larger body of verbs than had earlier been the case. The authors speak of their approach as being more holistic than the previous approaches, i.e. departing from a large number of verbs at the same time rather than departing from an analysis of one verb at a time.

The authors' work on speech activity verbs is, in fact, conceived of as a part of a larger study of German verbs and ultimately of the whole German vocabulary. This means that not only speech activity verbs in general have been taken into consideration on when proposing the taxonomy and classification of speech act verbs.

The method of analysis described by the authors is the following: First a list of verbs denoting speech activities was collected from various dictionaries, then this list was divided in two stages into subgroups on the basis of similarity in meaning. There are

600 subgroups of this type. Each subgroup is called a category and is labelled by a verb which is typical of the group, e.g. verbs like *accept*, *admit*, and *assent* belong to the category of *accepting* while verbs like *reject*, *decline*, *disagree* and *dismiss* belong to the category of rejecting. Using the notion of presupposition the categories are then grouped into 24 models and 8 model groups. The model groups are: emotion, enaction, struggle, institutional, valuation, discourse, text and theme. In this way, modelgroups in some cases contain several models. For example, the valuation model group contains the following models: valuation of an action, valuation of a person, valuation of oneself, valuation of objects. Another feature of the lexicological approach of Ballmer and Brennenstuhl is that many of the models can be given what the authors call a 'hat structure'. Intensity is low at the beginning of an action or process: then it grows in order to finally decline at the end of any process.

intensity



The various stages of this intensity curve is reflected in a great many of the models. Thus, in the struggle model we find the following stages marked by the occurrence of verbs (1) starting situation, (2) marking claims, dissent, (3) attack, (4) tactical phases, (5) making coalitions and finally, (6) victory, defeat and cooperation. The authors claim that this analysis of 'model hat structure' should enable us to throw light on problems of aspect and 'Aktionsarten'. Thus, instead of counting only the inchoative, durative and terminative as Aktionsarten, we should also count the 'preparative', the 'postparative', the 'intensifying', the 'cooling off', the 'preservative', the 'laissez faire' and the 'destructive'.

Finally, I would like to mention that Ballmer and Brennenstuhl in their book champion their own theory of meaning, i.e. what they call cognitive behaviourism, an approach to meaning which is closely linked to Thomas Ballmer's theory of context change, Ballmer (1979). The approach is an attempt to create a theory of meaning which will synthesize several different perspectives on the theory of meaning, doing justice to the natural, behavioural and humanitarian sciences.

Although one can criticize Ballmer's and Brennenstuhl's book for perhaps overestimating the role of linguistic categories for thinking and conceptualization, the final judgement is that they have produced an extremely interesting book which will surely have a place among the pioneering works of lexicography and lexicology. The book should be inspiring reading for all those who are concerned with both a descriptive and an explanatory semantic approach to the lexicon.

References

- Allwood, J., 1976: *Linguistic Communication as Action and Cooperation*. Gothenburg Monographs in Linguistics 2, Dept of Linguistics, University of Göteborg.
- Austin, J.L., 1962: *How to do things with words*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Ballmer, T., 1979 Context change, truth and competence. In: Bäuerle, Egli & von Stechow (eds.), *Semantics from different points of view*, Springer, Berlin-Heidelberg-New York, pp.21-31.
- Clark, H. & Clark, E., 1977: *Psychology and Language*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (international edition), New York.
- Hymes, D., 1974: *Foundation in Sociolinguistics - an ethnographic approach*, Tavistock Publications, London .
- Ohmann, R., 1970: Speech acts and the definition of literature. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, University Park, Pennsylvania, 4. 4.1; 1-19.
- Ross, J.R., 1970: On declarative sentences. In: R.A. Jacobs & P.S. Rosenbaum (eds.), *Readings in English Transformational Grammar* Waltham, Mass. Ginn. Pp. 222-272.
- Sadock, J., 1974: *Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts*, Academic Press, New York.
- Searle, J.R., 1969: *Speech Acts* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Silverman, D., 1976: The Text of the Master - From Locke to Austin. Unpubl. ms. Goldsmith's College, London.
- Verschueren, J, 1979: *What People say they do with Words*. University of California Press, Ph.D. dissertation.