



Katz as Katz Can

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The Journal of Philosophy, Volume 79, Issue 3 (Mar., 1982), 168-171.

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The Journal of Philosophy

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KATZ AS KATZ CAN

ONE commonplace we endorse is that sentences have meaning apart from contexts of use. Along with Jerrold Katz¹ we reject the recent criticisms of this view that stem from the "use theory of meaning." Indeed, according to the theory of language use that we have developed,² the context-independent meaning of a sentence is one, but only one, factor contributing to a speaker's communicative intention in using it and to the hearer's recognition of that intention. Both speaker and hearer take into account certain general conversational presumptions as well as mutual beliefs specific to the context. Clearly these factors must be cited if we are to explain successful communication when the sentence used is ambiguous (having more than one linguistic meaning) and when the speaker's use of it is nonliteral or indirect (he means something other than or more than what it means). We offer a detailed, systematic account of how, in all cases of successful communication, even when the utterance is univocal, literal, and direct, meaning combines with context to determine use. Meaning alone never determines use.

It is here that we depart from Katz. Although he rejects the use theory of meaning, he maintains that "sentence meaning is the information that determines use in the null context" (PSIF, 21), which he equates with "what an ideal speaker would know about a sentence when no information is available about its context" (PSIF, 14). We agree that meaning, being a property of sentence types not tokens, is independent of contextual information, but deny that it determines use in the absence of such information, hence that meaning can be identified even with that use. Moreover, this conception of meaning leads Katz to suppose that the meaning of sentences with performative prefixes, sentences like "I (hereby) apologize for not phoning you," includes a peculiarly semantic kind of performativity. Instead of distinguishing between performative and constative utterances, Katz thinks there are two such kinds of sentences, and in PSIF he develops a whole theory of performative propositions as the semantic representations of performative sentences. Here we will not examine this theory but merely

¹"Literal Meaning and Logical Theory," this JOURNAL, LXXVIII, 4 (April 1981): 203-233, hereafter LMLT; and *Propositional Structure and Illocutionary Force* (New York: Crowell, 1977), hereafter PSIF.

²*Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), hereafter LCSA.

explain why, by answering Katz's objections in LMLT to our views,³ such a theory is unnecessary.

Let us take up the issue of performatives first. Katz's theory would be unmotivated if he did not deny that sentences containing performative prefixes could be "true or false on their standard, literal uses. The falsehood of such claims is reflected in the fact that sentences like 'Bernard's apology for not phoning is true' are quite absurd" (LMLT, 211). However, we make no such claim. If Bernard utters "I apologize for not phoning you," in our view he is directly and literally stating that he is apologizing for not phoning and thereby, indirectly, performing the act of apologizing. Our claim, then, is that Bernard's *statement* that he is apologizing is true (or false), not that Bernard's apology is. Indeed, it is on the supposition that Bernard's statement is true that the addressee infers that Bernard is thereby apologizing to him.⁴

Katz proceeds to argue against this view of performative utterances by challenging one step in the hearer's inference from the speaker's utterance to his communicative intention. The inference pattern is illustrated (originally in PAST, 234) by:

- (1) He is saying, "I order you to leave."
- (2) He is stating that he is ordering me to leave.
- (3) If his statement is true, then he must be ordering me to leave.
- (4) If he is ordering me to leave, it must be his utterance that constitutes the order (what else could it be?).
- (5) Presumably, he is speaking the truth.
- (6) Therefore, in saying, "I order you to leave," he is ordering me to leave.

Katz reproduces this inference and then asks rhetorically, "How can (2) be used as an assumption of the argument?" (LMLT, 212),

³ Besides LCSA, see Kent Bach, "Performatives Are Statements Too," *Philosophical Studies*, xxviii, 4 (October 1975): 229-236, hereafter PAST; Robert M. Harnish, "Two Consequences of Transparent Subject Position," *Philosophical Studies*, xxx, 1 (July 1976): 11-18; and Harnish, "Meaning and Speech Acts," *Lingua*, II (1979): 331-354, hereafter MSA. Katz erroneously includes us among those otherwise unnamed philosophers who seek "to preserve a uniform constative treatment of all sentences" (LMLT, 211), despite our explicit acknowledgement of the fact that imperative and interrogative sentences cannot be assimilated to indicative ones (LCSA, 25).

⁴ It is no objection that the same utterance is both the statement and the apology. Still, the utterance is true (or false) only *qua* statement. Also, note that if "hereby" is included in the utterance, as in "I hereby promise to call you," it does not follow that a use of the sentence to promise is direct and literal. The speaker may be using "hereby" to refer to his utterance (meaning "in uttering these words") but still not to it *qua* promise. Or he may be using "hereby" to refer to some accompanying act, such as a handshake, which would then be part of the act of promising.

viz., that performatives are statements too, in being “a premise that is implausible on the basis of these very [Austinian] intuitions.” But (2) above does not beg the question against Katz, because the inference in which (2) occurs is not an argument against Katz’s view but an illustration of the hearer’s inference according to the theory Katz opposes. The supposedly question-begging (2) does not occur in any argument against Katz. Until Katz can demonstrate the inadequacy of inferential accounts of performativity, his appeal to performative propositions as the meanings of sentences with performative prefixes will remain otiose at best.

As for the notion of null context and its role in explicating the notion of sentence meaning, Katz thinks “there have been some unnecessary confusions” (LMLT, 217n) which need to be cleared up. He points out that a null context is not one in which “there is nothing but the sentence itself” but rather is one in which there is no “information on which to base a departure from sentence meaning” (LMLT, 217n).⁵ The relevance of null context to sentence meaning, according to Katz, is that semantic competence includes “what an ideal speaker would know about a sentence when no information is available about its context” (PSIF, 14), and, moreover, sentence “meaning is the information that determines use in the null context” (PSIF, 21). In such a context, presumably, there is no basis for a speaker to mean anything more, or anything other, than what the sentence means. In particular, an ideal speaker/hearer knows that in the null context sentences like “I apologize for not phoning you” and “I order you to leave” would be used, respectively, to make an apology and to give an order.⁶

Katz is making the unwarranted and erroneous assumption that contextual information, as opposed to semantic information, contributes to use only when there is a departure from sentence meaning. This is like supposing that, if $z = f(x, y) = x + y$, z is not a function of x and y when $y = 0$. The fact is that contextual information always contributes to use, even when the speaker means

⁵ Harnish may have described the null context as containing “nothing but the sentence itself” (MSA, 350), but that was to avoid the equally undesirable alternative for Katz of bringing in the nonsemantic, contextual information we believe necessary for the determination of any communicative intention (LCSA, 288/9).

⁶ Here we ignore the fact that in our view these sentences would be used to perform these acts not literally and directly, but indirectly. We explain the apparent fact that performativity is a matter of meaning by noting that sentences with performative prefixes are standardized for their indirect force, whereby the hearer’s inference to the speaker’s communicative intention is short-circuited. Our account of illocutionary standardization and various examples of it are set out in LCSA, 192-233.

what he says and nothing more. For if the hearer had *no* information about the context, in particular about the speaker's beliefs and desires, how could he take, or the speaker reasonably expect him to take, the speaker to be performing an act of apologizing, ordering or any illocutionary act *at all*? In the absence of such information available to make his communicative intention identifiable, including the fact that he has such an intention, a truly ideal speaker would have to communicate telepathically, in which case by speaking he would merely be wasting his breath. And Katz's ideal hearer, if he were to identify the speaker's communicative intention without relying on contextual information, would have to be a mind reader. Short of telepathy or mind reading, an utterance in an informationally impoverished ("null") context could have no identifiable force.

One source of Katz's trouble is his vacillation between a theory of speech acts and a theory of *successful* communication. In speech-act theory *speaker* attitudes play the crucial role (specifically, the kind of attitude expressed determines the kind of act being performed⁷), whereas an account of successful communication requires attention to the *hearer's* attitudes. Katz seeks a theory of (literal) illocutionary force potential, as when he says that a "semantic representation . . . will contain just the information that determines the illocutionary force of a sentence at the zero point" (PSIF, 25), but the anonymous-letter paradigm he relies on there gives conditions on successful communication in an informationally deprived context.⁸ Idealizations have dimensions along which the theorist can approximate the actual, given the ideal, but not only has Katz failed to show there to be any literal illocutionary force to an utterance made in the null context, he has provided no method for enriching a null context to produce such force without introducing nonsemantic, contextual factors. His null context is not an idealization like a frictionless plane, but a fiction akin to a surfaceless plane.

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⁷In LCSA, 39-55, we offer a detailed taxonomy of communicative illocutionary acts distinguished by type of attitude expressed. For example, requests express desires, apologies express regrets, and denials express disbeliefs.

⁸See MSA, 338/9, for further discussion of how Katz seems to conflate these two theoretical concerns.