

Commitments etc.

Bart Geurts

- Two aspects of promises

Albert to Berta: “I’ll do the dishes.”

1. Albert commits himself to doing the dishes.
2. Albert expresses his intention to do the dishes.

- Working hypotheses:

- 1 and 2 are separable.
- 1 precedes 2.

- For the time being, let's think of commitments as purely social relationships.

- We communicate in order to establish commitments.
- We make commitments in order to coordinate our actions.
- Action coordination may but need not involve a common goal.
- Commitment is a normative concept.
- Commitments persist by default.

a is committed to b to act on φ $[\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)]$

$\equiv b$ is entitled by a to act on the premiss that a will act on φ

- $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ does not imply that a believes that φ .
- Constraints on the concept of commitment:
 1. If $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ and $\varphi \models \psi$, then $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\psi)$
 2. If $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ then $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))$ [FRED]
 3. If $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ then $\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))$ [WILMA]

Albert to Berta:

1. I'll do the dishes. [*commissive*]
 \leadsto Albert is committed to the goal of doing the dishes.
2. You do the dishes. [*directive*]
 \leadsto Albert is committed to the goal that Berta do the dishes.
3. Clyde will do the dishes. [*constative*]
 \leadsto Albert is committed to the truth of "Clyde will do the dishes".

In *each* case, Albert commits himself to act on the truth of
"x will do the dishes."

 Commitment to a goal φ implies commitment to the truth of φ .

Berta to Albert:

1. I can do the dishes. [*offer*] $\rightsquigarrow \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi) \rightarrow \varphi)$
2. You can do the dishes. [*permission*] $\rightsquigarrow \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\neg \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\neg \varphi))$
3. Did you do the dishes? [*question*] $\rightsquigarrow \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{F}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi) \vee \mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\neg \varphi)))$

COMMITMENT SHARING

If $C_{a,b}(\varphi)$, then ceteris paribus $C_{b,a}(\varphi)$.

- Sharing
 - may be signalled (“Sure”, “Right”, “Okay”, ...),
 - merely implied (e.g., by answering the question or carrying out the request),
 - or just taken for granted.
- If the addressee refuses to share, the speaker is not necessarily absolved of his commitment.

Predictions:

1. If A tells B, “Napoleon was French”, B becomes committed to the truth of A’s utterance.
2. If A promises B, “I’ll walk the dog”, B becomes committed to the truth of A’s utterance.
3. If B tells A, “Walk the dog!”, A becomes committed to walk the dog.
4. If B asks A, “Are you gay?”, A becomes committed to commit himself to the truth of either “A is gay” or “A is not gay.”

- If $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ then $\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))$ [WILMA]
- If WILMA holds then shared commitment entails mutual commitment:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi) \wedge \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\varphi) \wedge \\
 & \mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\varphi)) \wedge \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)) \wedge \\
 & \mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))) \wedge \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\varphi))) \wedge \\
 & \quad \vdots
 \end{aligned}$$

- Shared commitments are ipso facto mutual (common ground).

- If $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ then $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))$ [FRED]
- If $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ then $\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))$ [WILMA]
- If FRED and WILMA hold, then $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$ entails that it is a mutual commitment between a and b that $\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)$:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)) \wedge \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)) \wedge \\
 & \mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))) \wedge \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi))) \wedge \\
 & \mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)))) \wedge \mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\mathbf{C}_{b,a}(\mathbf{C}_{a,b}(\varphi)))) \wedge \\
 & \quad \vdots
 \end{aligned}$$

- A commitment is not a commitment unless it is common ground that it is a commitment.

- If $C_{a,a}(\varphi)$, then a 's commitment is private.
 - The purpose of a private commitment is self-coordination.

 - If Berta is privately committed to the goal of doing the dishes, then she intends to do the dishes.
 - If Berta is privately committed to the truth of “Napoleon was Greek”, then she believes that Napoleon was Greek.
- ⇒ Self talk is a way of making commitments to oneself, and thus form beliefs and intentions.

SINCERITY MAXIM

Don't make a commitment to another unless you make the same commitment to yourself: if $C_{a,b}(\varphi)$, then $C_{a,a}(\varphi)$.

Predictions:

1. A tells B: "Napoleon was Greek."
 \leadsto A believes Napoleon was Greek.
2. A promises B: "I'll mow the lawn."
 \leadsto A intends to mow the lawn.
3. B tells A: "Do the dishes!"
 \leadsto B believes A will do the dishes.
4. B asks A: "Are you gay?"
 \leadsto B intends A to commit himself to the truth of either "A is gay" or "A is not gay".

- The proposed concept of commitment is quite general:
 - It covers telic and non-telic commitments.
 - It covers social and private commitments.
- This concept:
 1. applies to a fair sample of speech act types
 2. captures a regular pattern in “uptake” (sharing)
 3. yields a useful notion of common ground
 4. helps to make sense of self talk
 5. allows us to derive sincerity inferences as implicatures