



# What is a Speech Act?

*John Searle*

Advanced Topics in Information Retrieval  
and Natural Language Processing

Roxanne El Baff 115185



# Overview

- Introduction
- Rules
- Propositions
- Meaning
- How to Promise
- Rules for the Use of the Function Indicating Device

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# Introduction Illocutionary Act

Typical speech situation =

Speaker + Hearer

+ **utterance** by the speaker

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Many kinds of **acts** associated with it

Can be divided into different classes

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Illocutionary Act

# Introduction Illocutionary Act

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Speaker + Hearer

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Many kinds of **acts** associated with it

Can be divided into different classes

One of these classes is

**Illocutionary Act**

Making statements, asking questions,  
issuing commands, giving reports,  
greeting and warning

# Introduction

## Unit of Linguistic Communication

Sentence token + Certain conditions = Illocutionary Act

Minimal **unit of linguistic communication**

Has a message,  
Intentions

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# Rules

The notion of rules for the use of expressions.

There are 2 rules  $\Rightarrow$

Regulative Rules

Constitutive Rules

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## Regulative Rules

- Rules that **regulate** an existing form of behaviour
- Example: Rules of etiquette regulate interpersonal relationships but these relationships exist independently of the rules of etiquette.
- The existence of the behaviour is independent of the existence of the rules

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## Regulative Rules

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## Constitutive Rules

- Rules that **create/define new forms** of behaviours
- Example: Rules of football create the possibility of playing this game.
- The existence of the behaviour is totally dependent of the existence of the rules

# Rules

Hypothesis that lies behind the paper:

*“The semantics of a language can be regarded as a series of systems of constitutive rules and that illocutionary acts are acts performed in accordance with these sets of constitutive rules”*

- These rules are not imperative and falls under several categories

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# Propositions

Sentences	Illocutionary Act	Common feature
Will John leave the room?	Question	Same <b>content</b> : - Speaker <b>refers</b> to the same person → John - Speaker <b>predicates</b> the act of leaving the room of that person ⇒ <b>PROPOSITION</b>
John will leave the room.	Assertion about the future (Prediction)	
John, leave the room!	Request or order	
Would that John left the room.	Expression of a wish	
If John will leave the room, I will leave also.	Hypothetical expression of intention	

# Propositions

- The common content between the 5 sentences is called a “**proposition**”.
- This feature of these illocutionary acts is described as follows:
  - In the utterances of each sentence the speaker expresses the **proposition** that *John will leave the room*.
- Notes:
  - A **proposition** is not an act; assertion, questions... are considered an act; more precisely, Illocutionary act.
  - Not each Illocutionary act has a **propositional content**:
    - For example: “Ouch!” , “Hurrah!”

# Propositions

From a semantical point of view, the sentence has 2 parts:

Proposition Indicating Element

Function Indicating Device

- Indicator of illocutionary force
  - Shows how the proposition is to be taken
  - Shows what illocutionary act the speaker is performing in the utterance of the sentence
  - In english, this includes:
    - Word order, intonation contour, stress, punctuation, the mood of the verb, and set of performative verbs
- In actual speech, the context will indicate the illocutionary force of the utterance.



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# Meaning

- Sounds and marks performed during a speech = Speech acts
- $\Rightarrow$  Sounds and marks performed during a speech have a **meaning**

$\rightarrow$  “What is it for one to **mean something** by what one says, and what is it for **something** to have a **meaning**?”

# Meaning

Based on Paul Grice on *Meaning*:

*"To say that A meant something by x is to say that A intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention"*

→ 2 questions arises:

- What are the different kinds effects?
- To which extent the meaning is a matter of rules or conventions?
  - Connection between: What the speaker means & what the words he utters mean.

# Meaning

To detect the meaning, the following aspects must be captured  $\Rightarrow$

Intentional aspect + Conventional aspect + Relationship between them

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# How to Promise?

## **Illocutionary act of promise**

Given that speaker  $S$  utters a sentence  $T$  in the presence of a hearer  $H$ , then, in the utterance of  $T$ ,  $S$  sincerely promises that  $p$  to  $H$  iff the following 9 conditions exist.

# How to Promise?

## Illocutionary act of promise - The 9 conditions:

- (1) Normal input (understanding) and output (speaking) obtained:
  - Both speakers understand the language spoken, both are able to perceive that language
- (2) S expresses that **p** in the utterance of T:
  - This condition is checked by isolating the propositional content
- (3) In expressing that **p**, S predicates a future act A of S

Propositional  
content  
conditions

# How to Promise?

## Illocutionary act of promise - The 9 conditions:

- (4) H Would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A, and S believes H would prefer his doing A to his not doing A
- (5) It is not obvious for both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events
- (6) S intends to do A Sincerity condition
- (7) S intends that the utterance of T will place him under an obligation to do A Essential condition



preparatory conditions



# How to Promise?

**Illocutionary act of promise** - The 9 conditions:

- (8) S intends that the utterance of T will produce in H a belief that conditions (6) and (7) obtain by means of the recognition of the intention to produce that belief, and he intends this recognition to be achieved by means of the recognition of the sentence as one conventionally used to produce such beliefs.
- (9) The semantically rules of the dialect spoken by S and H are such that T is correctly and sincerely uttered iff conditions (1) - (8) are obtained

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# Rules for the Use of the Function Indicating Device

Task: Extract from the set of conditions a set of rules for the **use of the function indicating device**:

	Rule	Condition
Propositional Content rule	Rule 1. <b>P</b> is to be uttered only in the context of a sentence the utterance of which predicates some future act A of the speaker S	(2) S expresses that <b>p</b> in the utterance of T  (3) In expressing that <b>p</b> , S predicates a future act A of S

# Rules for the Use of the Function Indicating Device

	Rule	Condition
Preparatory rules	Rule 2. <b>P</b> is to be uttered only if H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A, and S believes H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A	(4) H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A, and S believes H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A
	Rule 3. <b>P</b> is to be uttered only if It is not obvious for both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events	(5) It is not obvious for both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events
Sincerity rule	Rule 4. <b>P</b> is to be uttered only if S intends to do A	(6) S intends to do A
essential ruel	Rule 5. The utterance of <b>p</b> counts as the undertaking of an obligation to do A	(7) S intends that the utterance of T will place him under an obligation to do A

Thank You!