

How to identify speech acts

- **Syntactic** cues: declarative (statements), interrogative (questions), imperative (orders) sentences. NB indirect speech acts!
- **Lexical** cues: performative verbs, non-performative lexical items (e.g. idiomatic expressions to make requests, as *Could you...?*, greetings such as *hello*, *good-bye*, apologies, such as *sorry*, etc.)
- **Discourse** cues: questions are generally followed by answers. Such combination was defined as **adjacency pair** by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) to indicate two conversational turns that usually occur one after another. Greetings such as 'good morning', for instance, are expected to start a conversation both from the H's and S's side

Kinds of speech acts

- There are 500/600 speech acts
- The most common are **performatives** (Austin 1962, Searle 1969). Performatives make S and H do something only because they are uttered:
 1. **Declaratives**: declaring something changing the existing state of affairs (baptising, marrying, naming, arresting, firing, etc.)
 2. **Assertives/representatives**: asserting the state of affairs as it's viewed by the speaker (claiming, hypothesising, stating a fact, etc.)
 3. **Expressives**: expressing feelings and emotions (greeting, expressing gratitude, praises, regretting, apologising, insulting, congratulating, complimenting, etc.)
 4. **Directives**: directing the hearer to perform certain actions (making someone to do something, asking s.o. to do s.t., inviting s.o. to do s.t., etc.)
 5. **Commissives**: committing speakers to certain actions (offering, promising, threatening, refusing, etc.)
- To understand speech acts, we need the linguistic context (what has been said before the utterance) and the non-linguistic context (information about the situational setting of the utterance)
- Some acts are **direct**, i.e. introduced by a performative verb (e.g. promise, claim, warn, apologise, etc.) which makes a clear relation between locution and illocution, other acts are **indirect** (Searle 1975): their linguistic form is different from their function (e.g. "Could you shut the window, please?" is an order/request to do something, but it's an indirect speech act)

Have a go with pragmatics: Kinds of speech acts

CHLOE: Lucifer Morningstar, you're under arrest.

LUCIFER: Come on, Detective. You can't seriously believe I killed that pathetic malcontent.

CHLOE: It doesn't matter what I believe.

LUCIFER: That's all that matters, Detective.

CHLOE: Put your hands in the air and surrender yourself.

(Lucifer s01e13)



Examples from history: Greetings

Greetings (expressives): e.g. goodbye. From fifteenth-century Middle English “God be with you”, according to Arnovick, then merged in the sixteenth century and ‘good’ replaced ‘God’ in the seventeenth century. Today it’s an illocutionary act, in the origin it was a blessing uttered at the beginning and ending of conversations. E.g. *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599, anon):

MASTER JAMES. An honest proper Gentleman as lives:

God be with you sir, Ile up into Presence.

YEOMAN. Y’are welcome M. James, God be with ye sir.

After disappearing in the eighteenth century, ‘God be with you’ re-appeared as a blessing in the late nineteenth century, this time as an independent speech act whose origin was not mergeable with ‘goodbye’ anymore. Arnovick calls this phenomenon **illocutionary split** (from one single speech act indicating leave-taking and blessing to two distinct speech acts). Moreover, *goodbye* is an example of **discursiation**: taking the illocutionary force of a speech act (e.g. leave-taking function of ‘God be with you’) and adopting it for discourse function.

Examples from history: Promises

- Promises (commissives). S wants to do what s/he promises (sincerity condition) and the H wants the promise to be carried out (preparatory condition). Moreover, the form must be recognisable (essential condition). The verb 'promise' as a performative verb helps a lot in this case, but there are other cases where it is not used for promises. For instance, 'promise' is sometimes used as a threaten (e.g. I promise I'll kill you).
- In Middle English medical recipes promises were carried out by the clause 'he shal be hol' (it will be healthy), meaning that if patients took the medicine, the promise was that it would improve their health.
- Promises were binding. E.g. in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (*The Franklin's Tale*) Arveragus allows her wife Dorigen to commit adultery with Aurelius because Dorigen had promised Aurelius that she would have made love to him only in case he would have managed to remove for Brittany the rocks (he manages thanks to a wizard) that prevented her husband from coming back from the sea. Finally, Aurelius renounces because Arveragus proves he's eager to maintain his promises, even if this would have cost his wife's adultery.

Have a go with pragmatics: The balcony scene

JULIET: O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.

ROMEO: [Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET: 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

(Romeo and Juliet, 2.2)



Have a go with pragmatics

I swear to God, I never fall in love
Then you showed up, and I can't get enough of it
I swear to God, I never fall in love
I never fall in love, but I can't get enough of it.

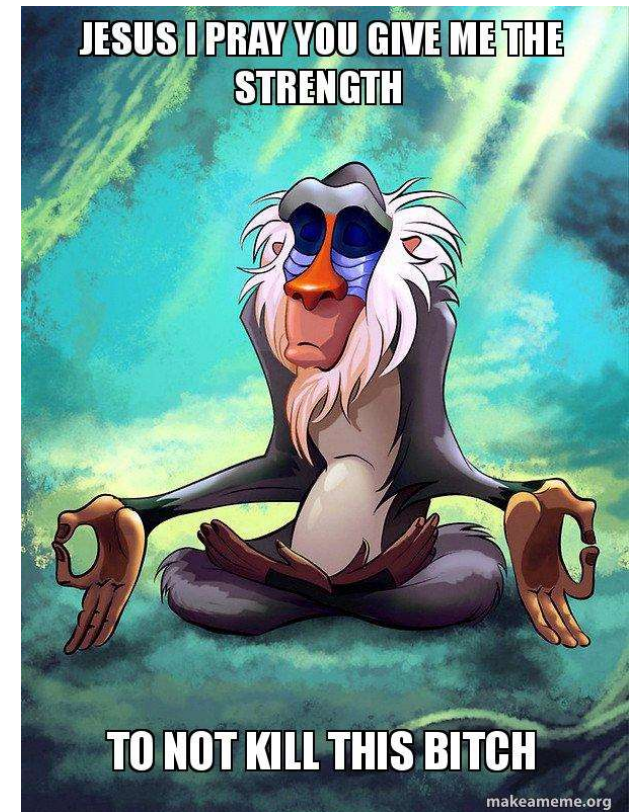
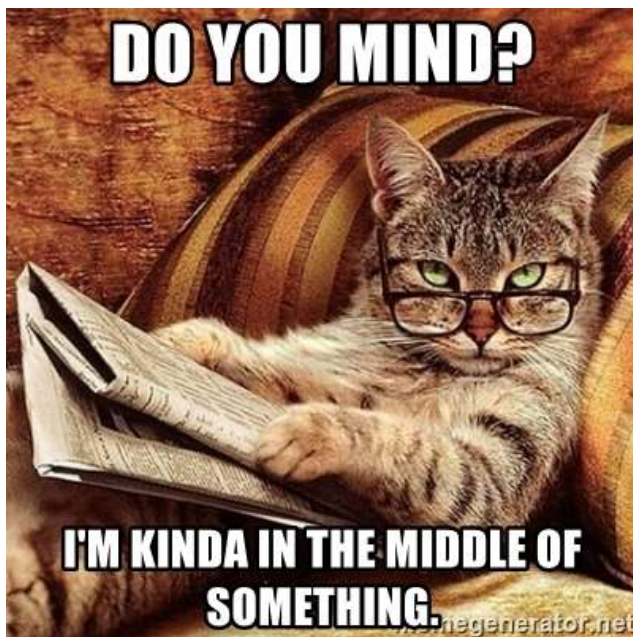


(Machine Gun Kelly ft. Blackbear, *My Ex's Best Friend*)

Examples from history: Directives

- Kohlen distinguishes 4 kinds of directives:
 1. Performative directives: direct speech-act verb, first person singular or plural (indicative active). E.g. *pray* or *beseech*
 2. Imperatives: *let us/let's*
 3. Modals: modal expressions expressing obligation, permission or possibility
 4. Indirect: hearer-based interrogatives (*could you [please]...?*), hearer-based conditionals (*if you could...*), speaker-based volition (*I would like to...*)

Have a go with pragmatics: Directives



Examples from history: Insults and compliments

- They express (expressives) the S's negative or positive evaluation of the H. Ironic compliments are insults (A: Fuck off, James! B: You're a princess, Margaret...). So, insults and compliments depend on how and whether they are perceived by the H.
- In the seventeenth-century, in courtrooms, judges and lawyers insulted defendants and witnesses in order to intimidate them (see p. 106 of the book *English Historical Pragmatics*). Defendants and witnesses were certainly not in the position of returning the insults to members of the Royal Court...

Have a go with pragmatics



JULIET: Good father, I beseech you on my knees,
Hear me with patience but to speak a word.

CAPULET: Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!
I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face:
Speak not, reply not, do not answer me;
My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest
That God had lent us but this only child;
But now I see this one is one too much,
And that we have a curse in having her:
Out on her, hilding!



(*R&J*, 3.5)

See also slide 73...