
3 Speech acts

Summary 3.1 Assertions. – 3.2 Questions. – 3.3 Commands and requests.

People use language to do many different things. For example, language is used to claim something, to insult someone, to promise something to someone, to ask something, to give a command, to express surprise or to do very specific actions, like when a judge declares someone guilty or when a civil servant declares two people married. Acts that are performed linguistically are called *speech acts*.

LIS has developed specific grammatical constructions that are typically associated to certain speech acts: declaratives are typically used to make assertions, interrogatives are typically used to ask questions, imperatives are typically used to elicit a behaviour from the addressee and exclamatives typically convey the information that something is surprising or noteworthy. However, there is no one-to-one correspondence between sentence type and speech act, as shown below.

3.1 Assertions

Although declaratives [SYNTAX 1.1] are the canonical way to make assertions, interrogatives can also be used to make a statement, i.e. ‘Who does not like chocolate?’ can be used to mean that everyone likes chocolate.

3.2 Questions

Although interrogatives [SYNTAX 1.2] are the canonical way to ask questions, also declaratives can be used to this effect. For example, the speech act associated to the declarative sentence ‘I would like to know your address’ is the same as the one associated to the interrogative sentence ‘What is your address?’.

3.3 Commands and requests

Although imperatives [SYNTAX 1.3] are the grammaticalised way to make a request or a command, declaratives (‘I would like to have some water’) and interrogatives (‘Can you give me the pepper?’) can be used to make a (polite) request.

3.4 Exclamatives

To be developed.

Authorship Information

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