

Speech Acts

Austin's Speech Acts

Locution

- The utterance
- The cat is on the mat

Illocution

The action

- naming
- requesting
- threatening
- commanding
- asserting



Austin: Gustafsson, M., Sorli, R (Ed.) (2012). "The Philosophy of John Austin". Oxford University Press. Retrieved from Amazon.com.;
Hand: Noedelhap/iStock/Thinkstock; Cat: wenchiaawang/iStock/Thinkstock; Mat: University of Waterloo

The Illocutionary Canon

Yes/No Question

A request for confirmation or disconfirmation of a proposition.

Constituent Question

a word or a phrase



Is the cat on the mat?

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The Illocutionary Canon

Yes/No Question

A request for confirmation or disconfirmation of a proposition.

Constituent Question

- A.K.A. "wh-question"
- A request for a constituent in order to complete a proposition.



Which cat is on the mat?

Which mat is the cat on?

What is on the mat?

What is the cat on?

How is the cat on the mat?

Why is the cat on the mat?

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The Illocutionary Canon

Command

- A.K.A. an imperative
- A command to perform an action that will satisfy a proposition (satisfy its truth conditions).



Get on the mat!
Get off the mat!

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Syntactic and Lexical Cues

Subject/(aux) verb inversion

Constituent question

- Question word
- Wh-phrase fronted
- Subject/(aux) verb inversion

Command

Implicit subject



subject
↓
The cat is on the mat.
↑
verb
Is the cat on the mat?

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Syntactic and Lexical Cues

Subject/(aux) verb inversion

Constituent question

- Question word
- Wh-phrase fronted
- Subject/(aux) verb inversion

Command

Implicit subject



The cat is on the mat.

Is the cat on the mat?

- Phonology (up-pitch)
- Orthography (question mark)

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Syntactic and Lexical Cues

Yes/no question

Subject/(aux) verb inversion

- Question word
- Wh-phrase fronted
- Subject/(aux) verb inversion

Command

Implicit subject



The cat is on the mat.

Which mat is the cat on?

- Phonology (up-pitch)
- Orthography (question mark)

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Syntactic and Lexical Cues

Yes/no question

Subject/(aux) verb inversion

Constituent question

- Question word
- Wh-phrase fronted
- Subject/(aux) verb inversion



Implicit subject

(You) get on the mat!

↑
implied subject

- Phonology (sharp down-pitch)
- Orthography (exclamation mark)

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Performative Verbs

Informative

ask, tell, describe, assert, ...

Obligative

promise, advise, request, ...

Constitutive

pronounce, christen, sentence, ...



I'm sorry for Horton.

vs.

I apologize for Horton.

Horton: Dr. Seuss. Horton Hatches the Egg. Wikimedia Commons.

Performative Verbs

Informative (ask, tell, describe, assert, ...)

- I ask you: is the cat on the mat?
- I'm telling you, the cat is on the mat.
- I assert: the cat is on the mat.

Obligative (promise, advise, request, ...)

- I promise you: the cat is on the mat.
- I advise you: the cat is on the mat.
- I request that you put the cat on the mat.



Cat: wenchiaawang/iStock/Thinkstock; Mat: University of Waterloo; Groom: mocoo/iStock/Thinkstock; Bride: mocoo/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Performative Verbs

Informative (ask, tell, describe, assert, ...)

- I ask you: is the cat on the mat?
- I'm telling you, the cat is on the mat.
- I assert: the cat is on the mat.

Obligative (promise, advise, request, ...)

- I promise you: the cat is on the mat.
- I advise you: the cat is on the mat.
- I request that you put the cat on the mat.

Constitutive (pronounce, christen, sentence, ...)

- I pronounce you man and wife.
- I christen this vessel *The Good Ship Lollipop*.
- I sentence you to thirty days in the hole.



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Performative Acts without Performative Verbs



I'm **warn**ing you,
the cat is on the mat.

vs.

The cat is on the mat.
(under the appropriate conditions)

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Performative Acts without Performative Verbs



I **prom**ise you,
the cat is on the mat.

vs.

The cat is on the mat.
(under the appropriate conditions)

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Performative Acts without Performative Verbs



Is the cat on the mat?

vs.

I ask you,
is the cat on the mat?

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Performative Acts without Performative Verbs

Indirect Speech Acts

- The cat is on the mat.
- Homer eats crap.
- Marge really makes the best gelatin towers.
- Patty and Selma have a secret undergarment.

Speech Act Axiom

If an utterance is not a (direct) speech act, then it is an indirect speech act.

- All utterances are speech acts.
- All language is functional.



Homer: Fox Flash (2006) "Homer Simpson". Wikimedia Commons.; Marge: Brooks, J. L., Groening, M., & Simon, S. (Executive Producers). (2012, April 17). Q: What is Marge's shoe size? A: 13AA. [Facebook, Timeline Photos] Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/TheSimpsons/photos/a.473850413696.246070.29534858696/10150696582228697>; Patty & Selma: Brooks, J. L., Groening, M., & Simon, S. (Executive Producers). (2013, September 10). Patty and Selma crash back into Springfield at Level 35 with Disco Stu burning up dance floors in their wake. Play The Simpsons: Tapped Out today! [Facebook, Timeline Photos] Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/TheSimpsons/photos/a.473850413696.246070.29534858696/10151666167153697>

Felicity Conditions

Propositions

Truth Conditions

Existence statements

Locative statements

etc.

Speech Acts

Felicity Conditions

Truth conditions presumed.

Topic relevant.

Participants share context.

For example:

There exists a cat.

There exists a mat.

The cat is located on the mat.



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Felicity Conditions

Warning

Felicity Conditions

Truth conditions presumed.

Some specific cat on some mat manifests danger.

Christening

Felicity Conditions

Truth conditions presumed.

Context is "a christening".

Speaker has authority to christen.

Rituals observed.



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Categories of Speech Acts

Constitutive	Expressive	thanking, apologizing, ...
	Declarative	sentencing, pronouncing, ...
Informative	Assertive	asserting, describing, ...
	Interrogative	asking
Obligative (Deontological)	Directive	requesting, ordering, ...
	Commissive	promising, offering, ...

*Dirven and Verspoor, *Cognitive exploration of language and linguistics*, Table 1, Chapter 7

Hand: Noedelhap/iStock/Thinkstock

Categories of Speech Acts

Obligative
Commissive
Offering



Sam I am: Dr. Seuss (1988). *Green Eggs and Ham*. Random House. p. 19; Unnamed character: Dr. Seuss (1988). *Green Eggs and Ham*. Random House. p. 25.

Categories of Speech Acts

- Obligative ✓
- Commissive ✓
- Offering ✗
- Declining ✓

Not in a box.
Not with a fox.
...
I would not eat
green eggs and ham.
I do not like them, Sam-I-am.



Sam I am: Dr. Seuss (1988). *Green Eggs and Ham*. Random House. p. 19.; Unnamed character: Dr. Seuss (1988). *Green Eggs and Ham*. Random House. p. 25.