# Illocutionary Forces and What Is Said

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**Abstract:** A psychologically plausible analysis of the way we assign illocutionary forces to utterances is formulated using a 'contextualist' analysis of what is said. The account offered makes use of J. L. Austin's distinction between phatic acts (sentence meaning), locutionary acts (contextually determined what is said), illocutionary acts, and perolocutionary acts. In order to avoid the conflation between illocutionary and perlocutionary levels, assertive, directive and commissive illocutionary forces are defined in terms of inferential potential with respect to the common ground. Illocutionary forces are conceived as automatic but optional components of the process of interpretation.

## 1. Introduction: What Is Said and Speech Acts

Most contemporary debates about the semantics/pragmatics interface have for background the Gricean project of explaining speaker's meaning in terms of a rational reconstruction of overt communicative intentions. Interestingly, ever since his foundational 'Meaning' (1957; [1989, pp. 213–23]), Grice did not limit himself to assertions: in his view—this appears most clearly in Grice, 1968; [1989, p. 121]; also 2001, pp. 50–5—whenever the speaker (S) says something, she *eo ipso* accomplishes some 'central' speech act. Saying is to be analysed, according to Grice, in terms of an intention of S's to provoke some cognitive response of the addressee's (A) by means of the recognition of this very intention; in turn, the type of the response (e.g. belief or intention) is proper to a basic category of speech acts (e.g. assertive or directive speech acts).

Grice's view on speech acts is instructive because its two main drawbacks bring to light the constraints to which any adequate theory of illocutionary forces should conform. The first problem, to be discussed later, is that Grice defines illocutionary acts in perlocutionary terms. The second problem arises from that fact that for Grice saying is a species of meaning$_{NN}$: that is, reducible to an overt communicative intention. Imagine that S ironically says that *p*, without having the intention to

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make A believe that *p*; it follows from Grice's view that S is not saying that *p* but only *making as if to say that p*. But since, as we have seen, for Grice saying is performing a speech act, it equally follows that if S does not perform any literal speech act, she does not say anything at all. Of course, this is a problem, for when S says that *p* without meaning it, she still says something, although she does not assert that *p* (for a discussion, see Neale, 1992; Carston, 2002, pp. 114–6). Therefore, it seems crucial to dissociate *what is said* by an utterance from the illocutionary act this utterance (possibly) constitutes.

The first way to do this is to equate sentence meaning with *what is said*, while locating the illocutionary force at a post-semantic stage, where the Gricean reconstruction comes into play (Bach and Harnish, 1979; Bach, 1994a, 1994b). From such a standpoint, S can say something—she can produce a well-formed sentence—without having any overt communicative intention, and hence without performing any literal speech act.

Another alternative—the one I shall follow—is to go in the opposite direction, and to analyse *what is said* as the result of a contextually driven interpretation of sentence meaning. The main advocates of this position are Recanati (e.g. 1989; 2004), Carston (e.g. 1988; 2002), and Sperber and Wilson (e.g. 1995). Recanati (e.g. 2000, pp. 241–2) gets back to Austin's distinction between *locutionary* and *illocutionary acts*, which, as we shall see below, allows one to avoid the conflation of *what is said* with the illocutionary level. In the same vein, it seems reasonable to read the Relevance Theory distinction between *explicatures* and *higher-order explicatures* as encompassing the distinction between *what is said* and the speech act performed (cf. Carston, 2002, pp. 125–33). This paper aims at contributing to such 'contextualist' theories of utterance interpretation by formulating a psychologically plausible model of illocutionary force assignments to utterances without reducing *what is said* to sentence meaning.

It is worth emphasising, from the outset, that no psychological claims as to the sequential order between the contextual determination of *what is said* and the attribution of illocutionary forces have to be made: while, for argumentative purposes, the reconstruction of speech act interpretation I shall offer treats *what is said* as given, in reality, the two processes could very well operate on-line. A second caveat concerns 'institutional' speech acts such as in baptisms, marriages, bidding five no trumps etc. It is widely agreed since Strawson (1964; also Sperber and Wilson, 1995, pp. 244–5) that such speech acts are not amenable to an analysis in terms of a general pragmatic competence but require an independent study of community specific conventions. In what follows by 'illocutionary acts' (or by 'speech acts') I shall always mean 'non-institutional speech acts'. Finally, I shall limit myself to assertive force (which includes, e.g. asserting, testifying, informing, and predicting), directive force (which includes, e.g. requesting, ordering, and suggesting), and commissive force (which includes, e.g. promising, threatening, and offering), thus leaving questions and interrogative sentences aside.

The rest of the paper is divided into two main sections, which correspond to the two essential ingredients of my account. Section 2 addresses Austin's distinction

between phatic, locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary levels. I shall claim that the locutionary act performed by the utterance of a sentence corresponds to a representation of an Intentional state.[1] Every (literal and direct) illocutionary act is, in turn, constituted by a locutionary act, from which it inherits its propositional content. I shall also argue that illocutionary acts should not be defined in perlocutionary terms. Section 3 is devoted to the idea that illocutionary force emerges from the inferential status of providing a reason to believe or a reason to act that the utterance acquires with respect to the common ground. This point of view implies that illocutionary forces are optional pragmatic components of the process of interpretation, which are automatically triggered under certain conditions.

## 2. Locutions, Illocutions and Perlocutions

### 2.1 Austin's Levels of Meaning

There is a strong connection between Davidson's (2001) semantics of action predicates, and the layers of meaning distinguished by Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1975). Davidson's ontology includes events, conceived as unrepeatable particulars: according to him, action predicates come in two kinds—either they have an event variable for sole argument or they describe two events that are connected by a causal relation. As an illustration, contrast voting with the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip. Voting can be described as a bodily movement, viz. raising your arm—both action predicates, viz. *voting* and *raising your arm*, have the same event variable for argument. By contrast, there is no such event as the assassination of the Archduke: *murder of the Archduke* thus stands for two causally linked events—the first being the movement of the finger on the trigger and the second the physical death of the Archduke. Let us say, for short, that you vote *by way of* raising your arm, while you kill someone *by means of* pulling the trigger (Searle, 2001, pp. 51–2).

Now, there are a number of things S can do *by way of* producing an utterance. First, there is the physical event which constitutes what Austin called a *phonetic* act, i.e. the production of certain sounds. Second, such a sequence of sounds may also have a linguistic meaning in the language L that S happens to share with A: then, to speakers of L the phonetic act will count as a *phatic* act (to make use of Austin's (1975, pp. 92–3) terminology). As a phatic act, the utterance is still deprived of any speaker meaning—a

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[1]    Following Searle's (1983) useful convention, I shall use 'Intentionality' and 'Intentional' with an upper case to refer to the property of consciousness of being 'about facts' of the external world. That is, everything that is intentional in the sense applicable to actions is Intentional, but not conversely.

standard example of a phatic act is the recitation of some sentence in a foreign language— but has a syntactic structure, whose components can be assigned semantic values. One finds in the literature both the view that such an interpretation can fail to deliver a complete proposition (most notably Bach, 1994a; Carston, 2002; Recanati, 1989, 2004; Soames, 2005), and 'minimalist' claims to the effect that such a semantic interpretation suffices to yield the propositional content of any well-formed sentence (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005; Soames, 2002). As far as phatic acts are concerned, which approach proves ultimately to be successful matters little for my purposes, for even semantic minimalists presuppose that the contents of speech acts performed by uttering sentence-tokens do not necessarily match the semantic interpretation of the corresponding types.

Things are a bit more complicated when it comes to Austin's *rhetic* and *locutionary* acts. The main indication Austin gives us about rhetic acts is that to produce a phatic act, that is, a pheme is:

> … generally to perform the act of using that pheme or its constituents with a certain more or less definite 'sense' and a more or less definite 'reference' (which together are equivalent to 'meaning'). This act we may call a 'rhetic' act, and the utterance which it is the act of uttering a 'rheme' (Austin, 1975, p. 93).

The first conclusion to be drawn from this quotation is that rhetic acts are performed by way of phatic acts. Second, the interpretation of Austin's talk about 'a certain more or less definite "sense" and a more or less definite "reference"' which is most in tune with his theory of truth (Austin, 1950, 1975, pp. 140-7) is that the rheme emerges from the association between the pheme and a certain situation of the world (Forguson, 1973; Recanati, 1987, pp. 238-41). In other words, the content conveyed by the rhetic act results from the contextual interpretation of sentence-meaning:

> … it is important to remember that the same pheme […] may be used on different occasions of utterance with a different sense or reference and so be a different rheme (Austin, 1975, pp. 97-8).

At first, Austin (1975, pp. 96-7) appears to hold that, by making an indirect report of the utterance of a declarative sentence, of the form 's said that *p*', one transmits the rhetic act S performed by way of her utterance. But, in the following pages, Austin seems to be worried by the fact that it is not always possible to make indirect reports without using an illocutionary verb:

> We cannot, however, always use 'said that' easily: we would say 'told to', 'advise to', &c., if [S] used the imperative mood, or such equivalent phrases as 'said I was to', 'said I should', &c. (1975, p. 97).

It is no coincidence that the notion of a *locutionary* act makes its appearance on the next page; a locutionary act is defined as what constitutes the illocutionary act:

> To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary act* … (1975, p. 98)

In other words, most locutionary acts can be described in illocutionary terms.

I shall follow Strawson (1973) in assuming that while the rhetic act constitutes a potential assertive illocutionary act, the locutionary act constitutes a potential non-assertive illocutionary act. In the rest of this paper, the term 'locutionary act' will be used for both locutionary and rhetic acts.[2]

## 2.2 Locutionary Acts and Representations of Intentional States

So far, two important hypotheses have been drawn from Austin's views: (*a*) illocutionary acts are produced by way of locutionary acts, (*b*) locutionary acts have a propositional content that results from a contextual interpretation of the corresponding phatic act, i.e. of sentence meaning. Before proceeding further on Austin's classification of levels of meaning, it is important to give a more precise definition of locutionary acts.

A good candidate for doing the locutionary job is the linguistic representation of an Intentional state (IS hereafter). First, this level is propositional and contextually determined. Second, the performance of an illocutionary act entails that an IS has been represented—allowances made for conventional speech acts, such as baptising, marrying, and, perhaps, 'social' expressives such as thanking or greeting (but see Alston, 2000, pp. 112-3). Let me develop these two points in turn.

Every IS can be conceived as consisting of a propositional content $p$ and a psychological mode of presentation $\psi$ of that content to the mind; a linguistic representation of an IS $\psi(p)$ will thus have a linguistic mode of presentation $\vartheta$ such that $\vartheta$ is associated with $\psi$.[3] The main three types of ISs—beliefs, desires and intentions—differ as to their direction of fit, to which the $\psi$ peculiar to each type can thus be assimilated. A belief has a mind-to-world direction of fit—it is satisfied if, and only if, the mind happens to fit the world; a desire has a world-to-mind direction of fit—it is satisfied if, and only if, the world happens to fit the mind: an intention has a causally constrained world-to-mind direction of fit—it is satisfied if, and only if, it causes the world to fit the mind (Searle, 1983; for a discussion,

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[2]  This conception of locutionary acts is at odds with the definition given by Bach (1994a; 1994b; 2005; also Bach and Harnish, 1979) who equates the locutionary level with the semantic interpretation of the LF. Unfortunately, a proper criticism of this view would lead us far astray from the main topic of the present paper (see Kissine, 2007b).

[3]  The discussion of the link between $\Psi$ and $\vartheta$ has to be left for another occasion. Most probably this relation should be thought of in evolutionary terms.

see Kissine, 2007a). The linguistic representation $\vartheta(p)$ of $\psi(p)$ will thus share the same propositional content $p$ and the same direction of fit—the latter being sufficient to individuate both the psychological mode of presentation $\psi$ and its linguistic counterpart $\vartheta$. While the precise mechanism by which $\vartheta$ is determined will not be investigated here (see Kissine, 2007a), it is clear that it heavily depends on the context—in fact, in many cases it proves difficult to decide on principled grounds whether it is the illocutionary force of the utterance that determines the IS represented or the converse. For instance, (1) may be taken to represent either S's belief that she will be fired at some point or her intention to leave her job:

> (1)  I won't be working here for long.

Likewise, (2) (from Stanley, 2000) may represent either S's desire to drink or her belief that there is water nearby:

> (2)  Water!

So, in what sense can we say that a speech act involves the linguistic representation of an IS? Searle and Vanderveken put forward a Principle of Illocutionary Commitment: every illocutionary act commits S to the mere expression of the IS defined by the sincerity conditions of that act (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985, pp. 32-5; Vanderveken, 1990, p. 159, 1991, pp. 74, 112). Issuing the order in (3) to close the window certainly commits S to desiring the window to be closed, which is revealed by the Moorean absurdity of (4):[4]

> (3)  Close the window, please.
> (4)  ? Close the window, please, and I want it to remain open.

But of course the expression of an IS need not be linguistic, viz. constituted by a phatic act. Yet, it is hard to see a sense in which the utterance in (3) would commit S to expressing her desire non-verbally, for instance by gesturing towards the windows. Vanderveken (1990, p. 159) claims that directive speech acts commit S to the linguistic expression of the corresponding desire through an exclamation with the same content. The absurdity of this proposal is obvious: (3) does not commit S to expressing her desire by an exclamation like (5) (Van Ecke, 1998; Franken and Dominicy, 2001).

> (5)  Oh yeah! I want this window to be closed!

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[4]  Allowances should perhaps be made for cases where S echoes (in the sense of Sperber and Wilson, 1981) an order whose outcome is not necessarily desirable from her point of view.

Therefore, it is more appropriate to say that the locutionary act boils down to a contextual interpretation of the phatic act, which endows it with a propositional content and a direction of fit. Furthermore, describing an utterance as a locutionary act of the form $\vartheta(p)$ does not imply that S actually holds the corresponding IS $\psi(p)$; it entails only that the sentence-token is contextually interpreted as having the propositional content $p$ and the mode of presentation $\vartheta$ analogous to $\psi$. In that sense, direct and literal illocutionary acts—at least all the assertive, directive and commissive ones—have the form $F(p)$, where $F$ is the illocutionary force and $p$ the propositional content of the locutionary act—of the form $\vartheta(p)$—that constitutes $F(p)$.

## 2.3 Illocutionary Acts Versus Perlocutionary Acts

There is only one level in Austin's hierarchy which is performed *by means of* the utterance (and not *by way of* it); it is the *perlocutionary act* (for a detailed discussion, see Dominicy, 2008). As Austin points out (1975, pp. 106, note), locutionary, phatic and phonetic acts can have causal, i.e. perlocutionary, effects, independently of the illocutionary act they constitute (also Bach and Harnish, 1979, p. 82). Of course, a given utterance has infinitely many potential effects on the addressee (Austin, 1975, p. 106). Following Bach and Harnish (1979, pp. 16-7), we can assume that the effects of perlocutionary intentions form a subset of all perlocutionary effects.

An illocutionary act by itself can be an effective means to achieve some perlocutionary intention: for instance, making an order is a means to make A satisfy S's desire and asserting that $p$ is a means to make A believe that $p$. However, as Recanati (1987, p. 179) points out, we can communicate without having perlocutionary intentions (for a similar point, see Green, 2003). An example will clarify this. Imagine, for instance, that a boss knows that her employee does not obey her orders very often. Imagine that the boss needs the employee to write a letter and, that, at the same time, she intends to use the fact that the employee will not write this letter as a reason for firing her. In this example, the boss has an illocutionary intention to perform successfully (and sincerely) the order to write the letter. Yet, she has no perlocutionary intention that this order should produce a causal effect on the employee. This example shows why it is misleading to include perlocutionary effects into definitions of illocutionary intentions.

## 3. Illocutionary Points

Two main claims were made in the last section: (*a*) it is a necessary condition for being a direct and literal illocutionary act that it be constituted by a locutionary act, (*b*) the definition of illocutionary forces should avoid reference to perlocutionary effects. In this section, we shall attempt to define the assertive, directive and

commissive illocutionary points by looking at the inferential status of the utterance with respect to the common ground (CG, henceforth). In what follows, the CG will be conceived as the set of the possible worlds that contain every proposition whose truth is mutually accepted by S and A (Stalnaker, 1978, 2002). A proposition $p$ is mutually accepted by S and A if, and only if, A knows that S knows that A knows, …, that both A and S accept $p$ as true, or, to use Sperber and Wilson's (1995, pp. 38-46) terminology if, and only if, $p$ is mutually manifest to S and A.

## 3.1 The Assertive Point

Les us begin with assertive speech acts. First, one should avoid defining assertive speech acts as mere representations of states of affairs. For instance, according to Searle and Vanderveken (1985, p. 94; also Vanderveken, 1990, pp. 22, 125), the assertive illocutionary point is to 'represent how the world is'. An unfortunate consequence of this definition is that it implies that a speaker S who expresses a true belief in an audienceless situation performs a successful illocutionary act. More generally, the analysis of assertions cannot include mere expressions of beliefs, depriving itself of any constraint on information sharing (McDowell, 1980). Intuitively, one is reluctant to say that I have performed a successful assertion by telling an eight–year–old child that most formal systems are incomplete (although I have represented how the world is).

However, this should not be taken as an incentive to define assertive speech acts in terms of the perlocutionary intention to make A believe that the propositional content is true (for instance, Schiffer, 1972, pp. 95-7; Stalnaker, 1978). The traditional counter-example is that of a counter-suggestible A (Grice, 1969; [1989, pp. 106-12]): S can successfully assert that $p$ even if it is mutually manifest to S and to A that A will never believe that $p$, at least not as an effect of an utterance of S's. [5]

These problems dissolve if, instead of focusing on utterance effects on A's beliefs (and hence on the CG), we take a closer look at the relation the utterance bears to the CG. I contend that a successful assertion that $p$ is a reason for A to believe that $p$. It is what Grice (2001, pp. 37-44) calls 'justificatory' reasons that are involved here. Having a justificatory reason for X does not entail the existence of X, nor does it presuppose some causal relation between this reason and X; the role of the reason is limited to allowing the inference to X with respect to some set of evidence (Grice, 2001, pp. 44-50, 73-87). According to Recanati (1987, pp. 185-6), R is a reason to believe that $p$ in a context $C$ if, and only if, $C$ contains a context $Z$ as a subset, such that $p$ can be concluded from $Z$ augmented

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[5]   A customary response to the case of the counter-suggestible A is to define the assertion that $p$ as an attempt to make A believe that S believes that $p$ (see Grice, 1969; Armstrong, 1971). The main objection to this (alleged) solution is that, as mentioned above, communication aims at sharing information about the world, and not at conveying it indirectly by revealing one's mental states (cf. McDowell, 1980; Neale, 1992; Millikan, 1984, 2004, chapters 9-11, 2005, pp. chapters 3, 7 and 8).

with R, but not from $Z$ alone. As applied to assertive speech acts, this means that an utterance will be interpreted as an assertive speech act with the content $p$ if, and only if, the CG contains at least one possible world $w$ (that is, one set of propositions) such that the occurrence of this utterance is necessary and sufficient to infer (*ceteris paribus*) $p$ in $w$. If $p$ corresponds to the content of the locutionary act constituted by this utterance, the assertive speech act will be a direct and a literal one.

   This definition disposes of the counter-suggestible A: in such a case, it is mutually accepted that A believes that $\neg p$, but the propositions $p$ and $\neg p$ themselves do not belong to the common body of knowledge. Accordingly, nothing prevents S from successfully asserting that $p$, or, for that matter, that $\neg p$. But what if at $i$-n A believes that it is mutually accepted that $\neg p$, and that S, who is rational and serious, produces at $i$ an utterance $u$ that seems to be intended by S as an assertion that $p$? In order to interpret $u$ as a successful assertion at $i$+n, A will have to modify his representation of what the CG is so as to eliminate both the proposition that S accepts that $\neg p$ and $\neg p$ itself. This interpretative process can actually be assimilated to presupposition accommodation (cf. Lewis, 1979; Stalnaker, 2002), even if this is not how the later notion is usually introduced. To be sure, accommodation cannot take place in every case; accommodations that cause minimal changes only in what A believes to be true will occur more frequently than those that would provoke a massive belief revision. For instance, unless it is mutually manifest to S and A that S believes that some human beings can grow wings, the following example will not be interpreted as a literal assertion: A will not take the utterance as a reason to believe that Mary will grow wings the day after, because every possible world of the CG is incompatible with this proposition.

   (6)  Tomorrow, Mary will grow wings.

The lack of literal illocutionary force will probably lead A to try to figure out some non-literal meaning or to opt for a symbolic interpretation (in the sense of Sperber, 1975, 1985).

   Likewise, a contradiction like (7) or a tautology such as (8) will never receive a literal assertive force.

   (7)  It is raining and it is not raining.
   (8)  Either it is raining or it is not raining.

In (7), the propositional content is incompatible with every possible world of CG, while in (8), because the propositional content $p$ is true in all possible worlds, it can be inferred that $p$ from every member of CG independently of S's utterance.

   This latter pattern can also be put to use in order to predict with precision when the conversational relevance of an utterance is unconnected with the informative status of its content. Imagine that S utters (9) when S and A are both outside in the

pouring rain; such an utterance cannot be a successful assertion, since it is already mutually manifest to A and S that it is pouring.

(9) It's pouring.

In such cases, A is likely to accord importance not to the utterance content (or to some implications that can be drawn from it) but to the fact that S uttered it—(9) thus exemplifies Jakobson's (1971) phatic function of language (see Žegarac and Clark, 1999). Yet, this does not mean that only a phatic act (in Austin's sense, this time) has been performed: S performs a locutionary act, since she represents, in the sense qualified in Section 2, the belief that it is raining.

### 3.2 The Directive Point

Towards the end of the Section 2, I have already used the secretary-employee example to illustrate the need to avoid perlocutionary definitions of directive speech acts. Employing the same strategy as with assertive speech acts, let us define a successful directive speech act with the content *p* as a reason for A to bring about *p*. As was the case in the last sub-section, the type of reasons we are talking about are not effective in any sense (see also Searle, 2001); we shall say that R is a reason to bring about *p* in a context *C* if, and only if, *C* contains a sub-set *Z*, such that the conjunction of *Z* and R allows a practical inference to the intention or the decision to bring about *p*, and that *Z* alone is insufficient to yield such a practical conclusion. To put it simply, to be a reason to act with respect to *C* means to be an effective reason to act with respect to some sub-set of *C*. Accordingly, an utterance that constitutes a locutionary act with the content *p* is a literal and direct directive speech act with the same content, if, and only if, the CG contains at least one possible world *w*, such that in *w* this utterance is necessary and sufficient for A to get (*ceteris paribus*) to the practical conclusion to bring about the truth of *p*. Since in the boss-secretary case, S intends her utterance to be a reason, but not an effective one, for A to write a letter, her utterance is a non-defective, literal and direct request.

This definition implies that not all imperative sentences have a directive illocutionary force. It is widely agreed by now that the imperative grammatical mood is not semantically associated with the directive illocutionary point, but rather encodes something like a predication of desirability and potentiality (Wilson and Sperber, 1988; Clark, 1993); in our terms, the imperative mood thus encodes the linguistic mode of presentation peculiar to desires.[6] For instance, in good wishes like (10), the imperative mood conveys that the propositional content, viz.

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[6] Wilson and Sperber (1988) point out that the imperative mood cannot be used with counterfactual contents. Accordingly, desires, whose contents must be logically and physically possible, should be contrasted—in an admittedly technical way—with wishes, whose contents are not subject to such a constraint (cf. Dominicy, 2001).

Peter's getting well soon, is desirable, but not that Mary is ordering (suggesting, requesting…) Peter to get well soon.

(10) [Mary, visiting Peter in the hospital says:]
     Get well soon. (from Wilson and Sperber, 1988)

Likewise, in (11), what is desirable from S's point of view is not that Peter does something, viz. refrains from saying something rude, but rather that some proposition is true, viz. the proposition that Peter did not say anything rude (see Wilson and Sperber, 1988; Clark, 1993).

(11) [Mary to Peter, coming back into a room full of guests:]
     Please, don't have said anything rude.

Audienceless cases, as in (12), and predetermined cases, as in (14), can be analysed in exactly the same way, i.e. as mere expressions of desirability towards the propositional content.

(12) [Mary looks at the sky and says:]
     Please, don't rain.
(13) [A child being sent to apologise to Mary, says as she reluctantly approaches her door:]
     Please, be out.

   The close association between imperative sentences and the directive force owes its existence to the systematic directive interpretation of representations of desires. The representations of states of affairs as potential and desirable—be it from S's, or A's point of view, or both—are, most of the time, reasons to bring about these states of affairs. But whenever a directive interpretation is impossible, i.e. whenever the CG is such that the represented desire cannot be a reason for A to bring about the truth of its content, what remains is the locutionary act, viz. the representation of a desire (see also Dominicy and Franken, 2002).

### 3.3 The Commissive Point

In contrast with directive and assertive points, no syntactic mood is prototypically associated with commissive force (Sadock and Zwicky, 1985). For this reason, it has often been claimed that commissive speech acts cannot be analysed with the same tools as assertive or directive forces, and are to be explained by studying intra-cultural institutions (e.g. Croft, 1994; Sperber and Wilson, 1995, pp. 244-6). Such a rationale is very implausible, though. First, the universality of deontic commitment in human societies (Cummins, 1996) makes the dependence of commissive speech acts on a specific, intra-cultural collective convention very

unlikely. Second, developmental data in preschool children suggest that the ability to understand deontic commitment and commissive speech acts owes more to innate linguistic and cognitive dispositions than to the immersion into a given social group (Astington, 1988b, 1988a; Cummins, 1996; Bernicot and Laval, 1996; Laval and Bernicot, 1999; Harris and Núñez, 1998). On the face of it, it is much more plausible to see commissive force as a species of universal, that is, trans-cultural, pragmatic processes (for a detailed discussion, see Kissine, 2008).

Structurally, a promise, as in (14), is a prediction about an intentional future action of S's.

(14) Tomorrow, I'll wash the windows.

An intention is formed against a set of beliefs with respect to which the satisfaction of this intention is certain (e.g. Anscombe, 1957, pp. 91-3; Davidson, 2001, pp. 83-102; Grice, 2001, pp. 9-10, 51-7, 101-5). This is not to say that the belief that it is possible that $\neg p$ is incompatible with the intention to bring about the truth of $p$; but no such belief can belong to the epistemic set that grounds the intention under consideration (for an experimental confirmation, see Malle and Knobe, 2001). It follows that if S is sincere, from her point of view and at the utterance time, the probability of the propositional content's being true $P(p)$ is 1 with respect to the epistemic set that grounds her intention to $p$. In some cases, this epistemic ground can be explicitly restricted to a certain set of possible worlds—typically by the antecedent of a conditional (cf. Kratzer, 1991).

(15) If it doesn't rain tomorrow, I'll wash the windows.

But in cases like (14), nothing prevents A from assuming a priori that S's intention was formed against all the beliefs that can be reasonably attributed to S at the utterance time. If A has no reason to believe that $P(p)<1$, i.e. that the epistemic ground for S's intention is mistaken, he will thus believe that $p$. Now, if this belief that $p$ has a certain degree of relevance for A's life, the responsibility for the falsity of such a belief rests with S. The evolutionary advantage of cooperation, and the ostracism of cheaters it generates (e.g. Axelrod and Hamilton, 1981; Cosmides and Tooby, 1992; Kitcher, 1993; Cummins, 1996; Ridley, 1996; Nesse, 2001; Dennett, 2003) predicts that if this is the case, S will attempt to avoid that A revises the belief he acquired because S made a prediction about a future intentional action of hers. Therefore, making such a prediction amounts, for S, to creating a further reason for herself to bring about the truth of $p$, and this is so even if, at a time posterior to the utterance time, S no longer entertains the intention she expressed by her utterance (see Kissine, 2008).

However, if the CG is such that S's utterance is not a reason for S to bring about the truth of $p$, this utterance will just be a representation of her intention to make it true that $p$. Imagine, for instance, that I tell you that tomorrow I will wear a green shirt. Since it is very unlikely that your life would be affected by the

satisfaction or non-satisfaction of the intention thus expressed, our CG contains no possible world $w$ such that my utterance is necessary and sufficient in $w$ for me to take the decision to wear a green shirt. Likewise, we do not promise things our audience knows we will anyway do.

## 4. Conclusion

Understanding the linguistic meaning of a sentence does not suffice for knowing which illocutionary act has been performed on an occasion of its utterance. However, this does not entail that what is said must be equated with sentence-meaning. It is possible to account for the fact that some cases of saying are not cases of performing a (direct and literal) speech act by acknowledging the existence of an intermediate locutionary level of meaning which has been defined as the representation of a propositional content under a certain mode of presentation, characteristic of beliefs, desires or intentions; in that sense, we can thus say that locutionary acts are linguistic representations of ISs. However, understanding the locutionary meaning of an utterance does not amount to treating this utterance as having a direct and literal illocutionary force. The representation of a belief that $p$ counts as an assertive speech act with the content $p$, if, and only if, the common ground is such that this representation constitutes a reason for A to believe that $p$. The representation of a desire that $p$ counts as a directive speech act with the content $p$, if, and only if, the common ground is such that this representation constitutes a reason for A to bring about the truth of $p$. The representation of an intention to $p$ counts as a commissive speech act with the content $p$, if, and only if, the common ground is such that this representation constitutes a reason for S to bring about the truth of $p$.

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