Chapter 2
Speech Act Theory and Instructional Texts

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Abstract In this chapter, we shall consider, systematically, the types of speech act that are likely to arise in instructional or procedural texts and the forms they take. This will be preceded by a general presentation of Speech Act Theory. Thus, the chapter can be read autonomously and may possibly allow new applications to be formulated.

2.1 Presentation

Pragmatics, as a science of inter-human communications by means of language, seems able to bring a fundamental renewal to the study of texts, and in particular texts as a support to approach the history of science. This sentiment is all the stronger if the texts primarily in question are procedural, meaning that their aim is to achieve specific directive speech acts, as is the case for this chapter. This does not mean that we should deny the existence or the importance of other dimensions or aspects of texts seen as language objects: syntax, semantics, rhetoric, and bibliology for example, nor does it mean that we should ignore the role of generic rules in the writing or reading of texts, but it means on the contrary, as we will have the opportunity to see, that we should specify these components according to the perspective brought about by placing a priority on the pragmatic dimension.

This chapter has two objectives. Firstly, we would like to introduce a presentation of pragmatics that can be used (Part I). There are many extensive presentations of the principal pragmatic theories (Cohen et al. 1990; Levinson 1983; Tsohatzidis 1994), but we shall focus on the presentation of the most important features of one of the theories that is currently active in this field of research, Speech Act Theory.

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(SAT: Bach and Harnish 1979; Hornsby 2008; Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Vanderveken and Kubo 2002). There is no sign of dogmatism in this approach, only the desire to render this domain more accessible. A presentation ‘that can be used’ will hopefully allow any readers who are not specialists of the field to fully appreciate the approach that follows and even formulate new applications for him or herself. This brings us to the second main objective of this chapter. We would like the reader to realize that this approach has a productive character by presenting text-centered analyses. These applications will be creative given that SAT was not in any way developed in the perspective of use in text analysis (Champagne et al. 2002; Lemarié et al. 2008; Tonfoni 1996; Vanderveken 2001).

In Part II, we shall present some analyses of textual phenomena which were carried out using as well as developing some aspects of SAT presented in the first part. Firstly, we shall analyze the concept of instruction and the types of text that instantiate this concept (recipes, medication dosage, DIY [Do It Yourself] instructions, game rules, itineraries, pharmaceutical instructions, etc.). The various kinds of prescription that an instruction can indicate to the user, like the various types of commitment which may establish between the user and he who produces and/or issues the instruction, are, for example, some of the questions that can be addressed in such a context.

### 2.2 Speech Act Theory

1. Natural language utterances do not only serve to describe states of the world (such as ‘It’s raining’): some allow the performance of specific types of acts, these are called illocutionary acts by Austin. Indeed, when a speaker S says ‘I kindly ask you to leave’ or ‘I promise I will come around and help you tomorrow’, he is not describing himself asking or promising something. He is literally making a demand or a promise by saying that he asks or promises. We can perceive the difference by comparing the above with a situation when S would say: ‘When I want to be alone, I ask Max to leave me’ or ‘When I am a bit drunk, I always promise to Max I’ll go around and help him’. These uses of language, which are performative, are thus different from the constative uses. This first distinction between the two was then put into perspective by Austin: describing a certain state or affirming what it is, is as much a speech act as a request or a promise, even if they are of a different type.

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1 List of symbols used: SAT = Speech Act Theory; S = speaker, author; H = hearer, reader; u = utterance, text; A = action named or described in utterance u; p = proposition; T: sentence uttered; ifid = illocutionary force indicating device; bIF = basic illocutionary force; CS = conditions of success.

In the case of procedural texts: H = consignee; A(s) = action A is done by S; A(h) = action A is done by H; CS+ = added conditions of success.

We extend our thanks to Pierre Chaigneau and Richard Kennedy who have provided insightful remarks on the English version of this text.
2. The concept of a speech act was clarified by means of a standard distinction: the same utterance allows the speaker to realize a locutionary act (the actual physical utterance), an illocutionary act (the act of communication which can be realized through the utterance such as a request, a promise, an affirmation, etc.) and a perlocutionary act which refers to the effect of the illocutionary act on the receiver (joy, relief, fear, etc.). A major difference between the last two kinds of speech acts is the following: the performance of illocutionary acts involves some conventional resources of a given language: thus, a promise can be realized by this utterance: ‘I promise I will come tomorrow’ but also by others such as ‘I will come tomorrow’, ‘See you tomorrow’, ‘You can count on me being there tomorrow’, etc. The interlocutors are familiar with these expressive resources, and they can be listed. This allows us to say that the realization of illocutionary acts is in a way conventional. By contrast, the perlocutionary effect does not depend directly on any convention, whether it bears on the meaning of the utterance or the resources of expression that were used for the performance of the illocutionary act: the utterance ‘I promise I will come tomorrow’ can provoke gratitude, worry, or fear for hearer H.2

Following this distinction between three types of speech act introduced by Austin, Searle proposed a different classification, which excludes perlocutionary acts (which would belong to the field of psychology or ethnology for instance), and distinguishes between:

a) Utterance acts (the fact of uttering the words, thus quite similar to locutionary acts)

b) Propositional acts: referring and predicating

c) Illocutionary acts (staging, questioning, commanding, promising, etc.)

3. The relationship between the illocutionary force and the propositional content is of a function-argument relationship: an illocutionary force F can be applied on a proposition p according to the formula F(p). Thus, the same proposition can be the argument for different illocutionary forces: for instance, assertion (‘You’re coming’), question (‘Are you coming?’), directive (‘Come’). These two components activate different comprehension procedures from a neuropsycholinguistic point of view. We can understand the illocutionary force of an utterance without (fully) mastering the propositional content, and conversely, not understand the force with which a proposition is uttered. Austin differentiated these two forms of comprehension by referring to ‘understanding’ as opposed to ‘uptake’.

4. One of the consequences of the notion of speech act is that communication is considered to be the product of actions. This ‘truism’ masks one of the most significant advances. On one hand, the notion of action, linked for instance to the notion of event, allowed for considerable development in the fields of logic, philosophy of language, cognitive psychology, and even Artificial Intelligence. These developments can be directly applied in research on pragmatics. On the other hand, communication is an activity with some risks which we can foresee.

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2 This led Searle to reconsider the notion of effect in Grice’s conception of meaning, where the two kinds of act are combined, and to identify a truly illocutionary effect separate from the perlocutionary effect.
only partly: the success of an illocutionary act, just like the success of any action, requires the fulfillment of conditions of success (CS). There are many types of such conditions, and we need to distinguish between them and the conditions of satisfaction. The latter deal with the relationship (corresponding or not) between the propositional content of an utterance, and the ‘state of the world’ it represents.

5. Different markers of illocutionary force indicate which illocutionary force is realized. These include elements of syntactical structure, verbal and sentence modes, intonation, sometimes punctuation marks or even typographical attributes, and above all, specific verbs which name these forces (to advise, to command, to promise, to declare, etc.):

Sam smokes habitually.
Does Sam smoke habitually?
Sam, smoke habitually!
Would that Sam smoke habitually. (Searle 1969, p. 22)
Sam, I beg you to smoke habitually.

6. Following Austin’s typology of illocutionary forces and/or verbs, many others were tested. For instance, Searle’s typology, which is presented as a typology of forces and not verbs, is based on the fundamental fact that the basic unit of communication is the act of communication and not (in contrast to descriptive linguistics or logic) the utterance (which is the means of the realization of the act).

7. We can demonstrate the content of the conditions of success of an illocutionary act by referring to the act of promising as Searle did (‘How to promise’, Searle 1969, pp. 57–61 and, in a slightly modified form, in Searle 1971, pp. 46–51). Note that S designates the Speaker and H the hearer, p what is promised and T the sentence which is uttered.

“1. Normal input and output conditions obtain” (“conditions of understanding” and “for intelligible speaking”)
“2. S expresses the proposition that p in the utterance of T”
“3. In expressing that p, S predicates a future act A of S” (“propositional content condition”)
“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” (preparatory condition)
“5. It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A.”
“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”)
“8. S intends
(i-1) to produce in H the knowledge (K) that the utterance of T is to count as placing S under the obligation to do A.”
(i-2) “S intends to produce K by means of the recognition of i-1” by H
(i-3) “and he intends i-1 to be recognized in virtue of (by means of) H’s knowledge of the meaning of T.”
“9. The semantical rules of the dialect spoken by S and H are such that T is correctly and sincerely uttered if and only if conditions 1–8 obtain.”

These conditions can be brought together into three groups according to their scope:
a. Conditions related to communication in general
1, 5, 9
Conditions 1 and 9 guarantee the existence of the conditions of effectuation of the communication (conditions of realization and completeness of the description), and condition 5 is a general condition of ‘communicational economy’ (S and/or H are not sure that the state of the world will change as they want it to change, if they do not say anything i.e. if they do not perform speech acts).

b. General conditions related to illocutionary acts (not specific to promises)
2, 8
Condition 2 is implicitly linked to the principle of expressivity (a language provides the resources necessary for expression), and condition 8 is a special interpretation of P. Grice’s ‘meaning’ in his article bearing the same name (Grice 1957).

c. Conditions specific to promises
3, 4, 6, 7
Condition 7, which is called ‘essential’, literally expresses the illocutionary point of the act of promising (we specify this notion below). Potential failure of the act should be attributed to S’s intentions (for instance S wants to lie to H or cheat him). One should note that condition 4 is only a valid preparatory condition for promising and not for commissives, that is, the most generic acts that commit H and for which the desire of H that S should do A is not necessary. Consequently, one also notes that, beyond their similarities, acts such as ‘to promise’ and ‘to commit to’) are differentiated by the existence of a condition of success of a specific preliminary type. This idea was generalized and used by (Vanderveken 1990) to create a systematic enumeration of the verbal performative lexicon of a language. Finally, one should note that condition 3 is necessary to characterize the commissives as well as the directives.

8. Searle’s typology of illocutionary forces is initially based on a study of the ‘different types of difference between different types of illocutionary acts’, which is summarized as follows: (Searle 1979, pp. 1–8)
“IT seems to me, Searle writes, there are (at least) twelve significant dimensions of variation in which illocutionary acts differ one from another”:
“1. Differences in the point (or purpose) of the (type of) act. The point or purpose of an order can be specified by saying that it is an attempt to get the hearer to do something. The point or purpose of a description is that it is a representation (true or false, accurate or inaccurate) of how something is. The point or purpose of a promise is that it is an undertaking of an obligation by the speaker to do something. These differences correspond to the essential conditions in” the “analysis of illocutionary acts” (See supra paragraph 7)
“The point or purpose of a type of” illocutionary act is called “its illocutionary point,” which is “part of but not the same as illocutionary force.”
“2. Differences in the direction of fit between words and the world. Some illocutions have” “to get the words, (more strictly, their propositional content)
to match the world” (e.g.: assertions), “others to get the world to match the words” (promises and requests). (see below for explanations)

“3. Differences in expressed psychological states” (“belief, desire, intention, regret”, “want,” etc.) “in the performance” of an illocutionary act, i.e.: “the sincerity condition of the act.”

“4. Differences in the force or strength” or commitment “with which the illocutionary point is presented.” “Along the same dimension of illocutionary point or purpose there may be varying degrees of strength or commitment” (“I suggest” in contrast to “I insist that we go to the movies”).

“5. Differences in the status or position of the speaker and the hearer as these bear on the illocutionary force of the utterance.” — “one of the preparatory conditions” (“if the general asks the private to clean up the room, that is in all likelihood a command or an order”, and not “a proposal” or a “suggestion”).

“6. Differences in the way the utterance relates to the interests of the speaker and the hearer.” For instance, from the point of view of S, boasts and laments concern S’s interests and congratulations and condolences the H’s one. “This feature is another type of preparatory condition” of the speech acts.

“7. Differences in relations to the rest of the discourse.” (“I reply,” “I deduce,” “I conclude,” and “I object”). Some conjunctions, “as “however”, “moreover”, “therefore” also perform these discourse relating functions.”

“8. Differences in the propositional content that are determined by illocutionary force indicative devices” — hereafter abridged into ifid — (i.e.: “propositional content conditions”); report (present or past) in contrast to prediction (future).

“9. Differences between” those acts “that can be, but need not be performed as speech acts,” even an internal speech act (for example, “I classify,” “I estimate,” “I diagnose,” “I conclude”) and “those acts that must always be speech acts.” (e.g.: promise).

“10. Differences between those acts that require extra-linguistic institutions for their performance” (“and generally a special position by the speaker and the hearer within that institution”) “and those that do not.” (bless; excommunicate, christen, pronounce guilty, declare war).

“11. Differences between those acts where the corresponding illocutionary verb has a performative use and those where it does not.” (One can perform acts of stating or promise by saying “I state” or “I promise”; but “one cannot perform acts of boasting or threatening by saying “I hereby boast” or “I hereby threaten”’’).

“12. Differences in the style of performance of the illocutionary act” (announcing in contrast to confiding with the same illocutionary point and propositional content).

Searle created his typology using a restrictive choice of some of the above dimensions.
9. The direction of fit allows us to describe the relationship between the propositional content of the utterance and the situation (or state of the world). Thus, we can characterize the fundamental types of illocutionary acts. In classic logic, the situation-utterance relationship only pertains to the assertions and foresees two possibilities: true or false according to whether the propositional content of the utterance represents the state of the world. More precisely, the utterance needs to adapt its content to the state of the world in order for it to be true; this is obvious in the case of a mistake; if S says it is raining while it is not, he must change his utterance and not the weather (which is logically beyond his control). Yet, this situation, though belonging to the vast group of assertive utterances, is not generally applicable. There are four possible fit relationships between an utterance (u) and a state of the world (w) and, thus, four fundamental types of illocutionary acts:

\[ u \rightarrow w: \text{assertions} \]
\[ u \leftarrow w: \text{directives, commissives} \]
\[ u \leftarrow \rightarrow w: \text{declaratives} \]
\[ u \rightarrow \theta \rightarrow w: \text{expressives} \]

In these two categories, conversely, the state of the world changes to fit the content of the utterance.

Declarations (I hereby declare this meeting open) have a double direction of fit: by changing the state of the world according to u, S realizes one act which would be simultaneously like an assertion and a directive.

In expressives, there is no direction of fit because it is assumed that the proposition which represents the propositional content of u is true.

This basic structure can be, and has been, enriched in many ways. It is useful now to distinguish between directives and commissives based on whether H’s or S’s actions change the state of the world according to the content of u. In the same way, we can track among the directives the cases where S wants to make H perform these particular acts that are speech acts—this is the case for interrogatives (questions). We will also see that it is possible to differentiate numerous types of declaratives or assertives, if the world situation in question is that of a language or the text in which the acts are realized (meta-speech acts).

10. Speakers and readers of a given language can recognize which illocutionary acts are realized by utterances because these utterances bear ‘illocutionary force indicating device’ (ifid) markers which can be:

- Syntactical
  - Get out! What time is it?
  - Or lexical
  - I (state + assure you + swear +…) it is raining
  - I (ask + order + advise + beg + invite + implore +…) you to leave
  - I (promise + guarantee +…) I will come tomorrow
  - I declare this meeting open
  - I (congratulate) you for winning
  - I am (happy + thrilled +…) (you won)
Yet, the truth about the expressive resources of a language is far more complicated. Indeed, the same ifid allows the realization of very different acts. For instance, the imperative mode can also be used to realize acts such as:

Advice: S: Excuse me, I want to go to the railway station
H: Take the number 3 bus

Conditional instructions for use:
To listen to the recorded conversations
Press the REW button
Press the MP button
Press the STOP button to stop playback

Permission: S: Can I open the window?
H: Oh, open it, then.

Insistent assertions: Note that he is often right!
Good wishes: Get well soon (visiting someone in the hospital)
Audience-less cases: Start, damn you (to a car)
Threats and dares: Go on. Throw it! (to someone who’s getting ready to through a snowball)

Conversely, an illocutionary force can be realized using different ifids which are usually indicative of other illocutionary forces:
• Could you leave?
• You can leave now.
• I would like you to leave.
• I would like to be alone.
• You’d be better off outside.
• It’s a great day (make the most of it!)

In order to explain this, we use the concept of indirect illocutionary acts (Bach 1994; Bertolet 1994; Holdcroft 1994; Searle 1979) and differentiate, following Grice (Grice 1989), between the meaning of the utterance and the speaker’s meaning (or: the meaning the speaker aims at); the coincidence of the two is certainly an important case, but special. Considering one or more utterances (u, f, etc) as the representation of the meaning intended by S, we can enumerate the following possibilities:

- **u → u** literal act: S says u and means u;
- **u → *u** irony: S says u and means the exact opposite;
- **u → -u** fiction: by saying u S means to say less than what he is saying, at least in relation to the conditions of truth of his utterances;
- **u → u+f** indirect act: S says u and means u plus another act (f) (Could you leave?);
- **u → f** metaphor, implicature (on this term see below): S says u but means something different (Sally is a dragon);
- **u → Ø** useless politeness or phatic function (Hello?) (Jakobson 1960): In saying u, S has nothing (specific) to say.
One can see in this list that sentences like ‘Could you leave?’ are interpreted as indirect illocutionary acts: by saying u S does not just want to ask H whether he can leave but also wants to ask H to leave. In other words, S realizes a directive act (‘Leave!’) by means of another act: a question about the possibility to do so. A complete analysis shows that all indirect illocutionary acts of this type consist of assertions and/or questions on the preparatory conditions, condition of sincerity or propositional content condition of the corresponding direct illocutionary acts. The table 2.1 lists these conditions for directives and commissives and offers examples of corresponding indirect illocutionary acts using these sentences (from Searle 1979, p. 44).

11. Taking the content of some of their conditions of success as a basis of other direct acts, such as assertions and questions, is not the only form of indirect realization of illocutionary acts. In effect, these conditions of success are only one type of pre-condition for an action; actions have other constituent elements such as, for example:

- Reasons or motives or causes or explanations
- Initial state of the world (to change or conserve)
- State of the world to be achieved (goal)
- Pre-conditions (conditions of success) and pre-constraints
- Elementary actions whose composition leads to A and the logic of planning the actions
- Post-conditions and post-constraints

We can prove that that all these elements can be used equally in questions and assertions to perform illocutionary acts:

> Assertions or questions on the existence of a (good) reason to (not) do A

Do you want me to come?

S can realize an indirect directive by asking if there are, or by asserting that there are, good reasons to do A. As in this particular case: one reason could be that H wants or wishes A, so S may ask whether H wants, or wishes, A.

> Assertions or questions about the reasons to do (or not do) A

You should rest.

You’d better leave.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2.1 Conditions for Directives and Commissives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directives (request)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparatory conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H is able to perform A</td>
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<tr>
<td>You can leave.</td>
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<td>Can you leave?</td>
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<tr>
<td>S is able to perform A</td>
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<tr>
<td>H wants S to perform A</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can come in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can I come in?</td>
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<tr>
<td>S wants H to do A</td>
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<tr>
<td>I want you to leave.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S intents to do A</td>
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<tr>
<td>I want to come in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S predicates a future act A of H</td>
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<tr>
<td>You will leave tomorrow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S predicates a future act A of S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will come tomorrow.</td>
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Subjective content condition

- S predicates a future act A of S

Commissives (promise)

- I want you to leave.
- I want to come in.
- I will come tomorrow.
Must you leave right now?
Wouldn’t it be better if you left now?
Why not stop here?
Why won’t you stay in one place?
There is no reason for you to stay.

> Assertions or questions about H’s desire to do A, or his agreement to do it
Would you be willing to write a reference letter for me?
Would you like to hand me that hammer over there?
Will you mind being less noisy?
Would it bother you to make it next Wednesday?
Would it be a problem for you to pay me next Wednesday?

> Assertions or questions on the content of a (good) reason to (not) do A
Is it reasonable to eat so much spaghetti?
It wouldn’t hurt you to go out!
Wouldn’t it be nice to leave town?
You’re stepping on my feet.
I can’t see the screen if you keep your hat on.
S: Let’s go to the cinema tonight.—H: I need to study for my exams.

> Assertions or questions on the content of pre-conditions
Do you know where the salt is? Can you see the salt? Do you see the salt?
(To see a target or know where it is is normally a pre-condition to picking it up)

> Assertions or questions on the content of the initial or final states of the world
You’re stepping on my feet.
I can’t see the screen if you keep your hat on.
It’s hot in here.

> Assertions or questions on the content of parts of the action
Could you grab the salt?
Can you (reach + stretch) over and (grab + pick up) the salt and (pass + put) it here?

(All of the above amount to the decomposition into more elementary actions of the global action ‘pass the salt’)

> Assertions or questions on the content of post-conditions
S: Can I come in?—H: Close the door when you do.
S: Can I get myself a beer from the fridge?—H: Just put some more in.