

Speech act classification

The five general functions of speech acts according to Searle (1979) follow:

Speech act type	Direction of fit (přizpůsobení)	S = speaker X = situation
Declarations	words change the world	S causes X
Representatives	make words fit the world	S believes X
Expressives	make words fit the world	S feels X
Directives	make the world fit the words	S wants X
Commissives	make the world fit the words	S intends X

Examples:

1. Priest: *I now pronounce you husband and wife.*
2. *Chomsky didn't write about peanuts.*
(conclusions, descriptions)
3. *I'm really sorry. Congratulations!*
(statements of pleasure, pain, joy, sorrow)
4. *Don't touch that!*
(commands, orders, requests)
5. *We will not do that.*
(promises, threats, refusals)

A different approach to distinguishing types of speech acts can be made on the basis of structure. There is an easily recognized relationship between the three basic sentence types, structural forms (declarative, interrogative, imperative) and the three general communicative functions (statement, question, command/request).

direct speech act

(a direct relationship between a structure and a function)

<i>You wear a seat belt.</i>	declarative – statement
<i>Do you wear a seat belt?</i>	interrogative – question
<i>Wear a seat belt!</i>	imperative – command/request

indirect speech act

(an indirect relationship between a structure and a function)

Example: *It's cold outside.*

1. DSA: I hereby tell you about the weather.
2. ISA: I hereby request of you that you close the door.

In the following examples, the speaker wants the addressee not to stand in front of the TV. Different structures can be used to accomplish the same basic function. However, only the imperative structure represents a direct speech act.

Move out of the way!

Do you have to stand in front of the TV?

You're standing in front of the TV.

You'd make a better door than a window.

The most common types of indirect speech acts in English have the form of an interrogative, but are understood as requests, as in:

Could you pass the salt?

Would you open the window?

Indirect speech acts are generally associated with **greater politeness** in English than direct speech acts.

We cannot assess politeness reliably out of context; it is not the linguistic form alone which renders the speech act polite or impolite.

In general it was found that the more grammatically complex or elaborate strategies speakers use, the more highly they are rated for politeness:

1. *I wonder if I might ask you to X?*
2. *Please X!*
3. *Do X!*

As soon as we put a speech act **in context**, we can see that **there is no necessary connection between the linguistic form and the perceived politeness of a speech act.**

4. A married couple are trying to decide on a restaurant.

The husband says: '*You choose.*'

5. The wife says to her husband: '*Will you be kind enough to tell me what time it is?*'
(later)
'*If you'll be kind enough to speed up a little.*'
(What's the time? Hurry up!)

Some speech acts seem almost inherently impolite.

- 6a. *I wonder if I might respectfully request you to stop picking your nose?*
- b. *Stop picking your nose!*

Locution: the actual words uttered

Illocution: the force or intention behind the words

Perlocution: the effect of the illocution on the hearer

7. *It's hot in here!* (locution)

meaning: I want some fresh air! (illocution)

perlocutionary effect: someone opens the window

8. Official: *Would the gentleman like to leave his bag here?*

Woman: *Oh no, thank you. It's not heavy.*

Official: *Only ... we have had ... we had a theft here yesterday, you see.*

(request interpreted as an offer)

The **same locution could have a different illocutionary force in different contexts.**

What time is it? could, depending on the context, mean any of the following:

9. The S wants the H to tell her the time;
The S is annoyed because the H is late;
The S thinks it is time the H went home.

Just as the same words can be used to perform different speech acts, so **different words can be used to perform the same speech act.**

10. *Shut the door!*

Could you shut the door?

Did you forget the door?

Put the wood in the hole.

Were you born in a barn?

What do big boys do when they come into a room, Johnny?

11. a controversial English murder trial:

Let him have it, Chris! (did these words mean Shoot him! or Hand over the gun!)