Exercises on Speech Acts

A. Identifying Illocutionary Acts

A friend says to another friend, “Why don’t you like to ski?”

**QUESTION**

A fathers says to his child, “Why don’t you spend less time watching TV?”

**DIRECTIVE**

A child says to her playmate, “Yippee–cookies!!.”

**EXPRESSIVE**

A doctor says to a patient, “I advise you to stop smoking.”

**DIRECTIVE**

One secretary says to another, “My daughter’s getting married in August.”

**REPRESENTATIVE**

A priest says over an infant, “I baptize you in the name of . . .”

**DECLARATION**

A mother says to her daughter, “Who washed the dishes?”

**QUESTION**

A passerby says to a motorist with a flat tire, “Let me help you with that.”

**COMMISSIVE**

A woman says to someone next to her at the grocery store, “It’s going to be a very windy day.”

**REPRESENTATIVE**

A police officer says to a young man who was speeding, “You’re under arrest”

**DECLARATION**

A coach says to a team member, “Way to go!”

**EXPRESSIVE**

A teenage boy says to another teenage boy, “Go ahead–Make me!”

**COMMISSIVE**

An umpire says, “Strike Three!”

**DECLARATION**

One friend says to another, “I swear I won’t see Martha again.”

**COMMISSIVE**

A parent says to her child, “I forbid you to leave your room.”

**DIRECTIVE**

A man says to a friend, “What time is it?”

**QUESTION**

A buyer says to a seller, “I agree with your terms”

**COMMISSIVE**

A judge says to a happy couple, “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

**DECLARATION**

B. Indirect Illocutionary Acts

when the intended meaning (illocutionary act) differs from the syntactic form of the locutionary act. It thus requires a level of verbal skill and cultural understanding to make sense of such utterances.

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| **Utterance (Locutionary Act)** | **Syntactic Form**  | **Illocutionary Act (Intention)** |
| You might give me a hand with this. | Declarative\*note: a “declarative” is different than a “declaration.” A declarative is a simple statement of fact, while a declaration is the illocutionary act of changing the status of something. | Directive |
| And you are . . . | Declarative | Directive |
| Could you keep quiet? | Yes-No Question | Directive |
| I’m sorry to hear about your loss. | Declarative | Expressive |
| If I don’t get an A in this course, I’ll lose my scholarship [said by a failing student to her teacher] | Declarative | Directive |
| Can I give you a hand with that? | Yes-No Question | Commissive |
| You can give me a hand with this | Declarative | Directive |
| Why don’t you give me a hand with this? | Question | Directive |

C. Violating the Cooperative Principle–Intentional (Indirect Speech) and Unintentional (conversational blunders)

People often intentionally flout the cooperative principle for effect (sarcasm, exaggeration, etc.) or violate it for politeness. Other times we unintentionally violate the cooperative principle with negative repercussions for the conversation. We often anticipate when our statements might be perceived as violations of the cooperative principle and make disclaimers like, “to make a long story short,” or “this might sound crazy, but . . .” See Bonvillain, page 121 for examples of how speakers signal their violation of these maxims.

1. A: “Would you like to go out with Beatrice?”

B: “Is the Pope Catholic”?

**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

2. A: “So tell me, do you like what I did to my hair?

B: “Er . . . what’s on TV tonight?”

**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

3. A: “So what color are you painting your house?”

B: “The walls are going to be off-white to contrast with the black sofa and Regency aurmchairs that I inherited from my great-aunt. (Bless her soul, she passed away last year after a long but distressing marriage to a man who really wasn’t able to appreciate her extraordinary love of the visual and performing arts.) Then the trim will be peach except near the door,which Alice said should be salmon because otherwise it will clash with the yellow, black, and red Picasso print that I brought back from Spain–I vacationed in Spain in August of, let’s see, 2002, and I bought it then. Or was it July? I forget, actually, Gosh! Time goes fast, don’t you think? Oh, never mind. And the stairway leading to the bedrooms will be a pale yellow . . .”

**Maxim of Quantity–Unintentional**

4. A: “Would you like to hear my rendition of ‘Feelings’?”

B: “Yes, of course. I’d love to.” [it’s actually the last thing you want to hear]

**Maxim of Quality–Intentional**

5. A: “Tony is one of the cheapest people I know.”

B: “Yeah, he’s someone who never parts with a dime”

**Maxim of Quality–Intentional**

6. A: “How are your son and daughter doing?”

B: “Cindy is in her second year of med school–she’s doing fine.” [silence follows]

**Maxim of Quantity**

7. A: “How can I develop a great body like yours?”

B: “Choose your parents carefully.”

**Maxim of Manner–Intentional**

8. A: “You’re soaked! It must be raining pretty hard outside”

B: “You’re a regular Sherlock Holmes.”

**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

9. A: “Hmmmm, I thought I left my watch in my desk drawer before I left for Spring Break.”

B: “Well I definitely didn’t take it. Absolutely not. There’s no way I would take someone else’s property. Besides, I already have my own watch. And I would never steal from someone, never.

**Maxim of Quantity–Unintentional**

10. A: “I wonder why Dave didn’t answer the phone. I know he’s home.”

B: “It’s Thursday night. ER is on.”

**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

11. A: “Let’s stop and get something to eat. The kids must be hungry.”

B: “Okay, but not M-C-D-O-N-A-L-D-S”

**Maxim of Manner–Intentional**

12. A: “Hey, Kenny! What are you reading?”

B: “A book.” [abrupt silence]

**Maxim of Quantity–Intentional**

13. A: “Kathy’s cooking tonight”

B: “Better stock up on Alka Seltzer.”

**Maxim of Relevance–Intentional**

14. A: “So here we are–look up. That’s the Sear’s tower.”

B: “That’s an awfully small building!”

**Maxim of Quality–Intentional**