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"Is That a Request or a Command?": Speech Act Meta Discourse and Illocutionary Indeterminacy

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In everyday conversations, speakers sometimes find it necessary to negotiate the precise speech act value of an utterance and clarify whether a particular utterance was meant as a request or a command, for instance, or whether an evaluation of another person was meant as a compliment or as an insult. Such meta discursive interactions are indicative of a general illocutionary indeterminacy. Speech acts are regularly underdetermined as to their precise illocutionary point, that is to say, speakers need not be entirely clear about the precise speech act value of their utterances. It is sufficient to be good enough for current purposes. In the case of a misjudgement as to what is good enough for current purposes, explicit negotiations might be in order. In this article, I sketch a preliminary theory of illocutionary indeterminacy and provide some empirical evidence for common ways of negotiating the illocutionary potential of an utterance. This evidence is derived from collocational patterns of selected names of speech acts in the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA)

Keywords: speech acts; illocutionary indeterminacy; collocations; metapragmatics; corpus evidence; *Corpus of Contemporary American English*

It is not uncommon in everyday interactions for uncertainties to arise about the precise illocutionary potential of an utterance. A speaker may feel the need to explicitly name the illocutions of their utterance to avoid any danger of being misunderstood, or an addressee may question how a particular utterance addressed to them was meant. The *Corpus of Contemporary American English* provides a wealth of easily retrievable examples in which speakers explicitly negotiate the speech act value of specific utterances. Extracts (1) to (7) provide some random examples.

(1) Now, this is not a warning or a threat. I am just telling you – You stay out of it (COCA, 2009, TV)
(2) Is that a request or a command, Doctor? (COCA, 2018, TV)
(3) It wasn't so much a suggestion as a request (COCA, 2013, NEWS)
(4) I'm not sure if that's a compliment or an insult. (COCA, 2001, MOV)
(5) Listen, it's not a justification. It's a condemnation (COCA, 2014, SPOK)
(6) That doesn't make me feel better. Cause it's not an apology. I'm sorry. (COCA, 2018, MOV)
(7) Look, that's a real apology, that's not giving out oh, "I'm sorry if I offended you" (COCA, 2012, WEB)

In all these extracts, the precise illocutionary point of a previous utterance, the speaker's own or by another speaker, is clarified, put into question or disputed.[1] Is it a warning or a threat? Is it a request, a command or a suggestion? A compliment or an insult, a justification or a condemnation? And is it a real apology or an apology at all?

For speech act theory, such cases beg a few important questions. Should such cases of discursively negotiated speech act values be treated as speaker or listener errors? Should we assume that the speaker of the disputed utterance failed to be sufficiently precise? Or should we assume that the addressee did not pay sufficient attention? Or that their understandings of the felicity conditions are deficient or at least do not coincide? Such assumptions are, of course, rather implausible. It seems more likely that the illocutionary point of a speech act can be indeterminate or vague. Speakers have a choice. They can encode the illocutionary point of a specific utterance as clearly and unambiguously as possible or they can leave it vague and underdetermined.

In the area of lexical semantics, we have a relatively good understanding of how words can be ambiguous, polysemous or vague (Tuggy 1993; Channell 1994; or more recently Littlemore & Fielden-Burns 2023). We also have a relatively good understanding of how vague communication can be more relevant than precise communication (Channell 1994; Jucker, Smith & Lüdge 2003; Seraku 2023), but these theoretical models have not yet been extended to include the illocutionary point of utterances.

[1] I follow Janet Holmes (1984: 346) in making a distinction between the illocutionary point, i.e. the function or purpose of a speech act, and the illocutionary force, i.e. the strength with which the illocutionary point is made. In the relevant literature, this distinction is not always made. The term "force" is often used for both aspects.

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Traditionally, speech act theory assumes – explicitly or implicitly – that utterances map to specific speech act types, and it is one of the tasks of speech act theory to explain how addressees determine the correct speech act value for each utterance addressed to them. Taxonomies and speech annotation systems which assign a specific speech act value to every utterance in a conversational exchange rely to a large extent on a direct mapping function (Weisser 2015).

In this contribution, I want to give a preliminary outline of a theory of speech acts that takes into account the indeterminate and fuzzy nature of the illocutions of a specific utterance. I will argue for two independent clines, the cline of the illocutionary point and the cline of the illocutionary force. Utterances can vary on both clines. Their illocutionary point can be clear or underdetermined, and their illocutionary force can be strong or weak. As I will show below, some illocutions are more likely to vary along these scales while others appear to have relatively fixed positions (see also Jucker 2024: ch. 3).

1. Four Waves of Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory has its history in the seminal work by the language philosophers John Austin (1962) and John Searle (1969; see also Jucker 2024: ch. 1), who considered the performative potential of utterances and analysed speech acts in terms of their "felicity conditions," i.e. the conditions that must be fulfilled for an utterance to count as a specific speech act, as, for instance, a promise, a request or a warning (Searle 1969: 66–67; see Levinson 1983 for a detailed introduction to this approach). This work, which relied entirely on philosophical tools of introspection and used invented examples as data, can be described as the first wave of speech act theory. In this approach, there was little room for indeterminate speech acts. The felicity conditions provided an unambiguous mapping function. The only exception were indirect speech acts. A speaker might use a question, for instance, to perform a request, as in the classical "Can you pass the salt?" One solution for such cases was to identify the question as a conventionalised query about one of the felicity conditions, here the addressee's ability to perform the desired act.

In the 1980s and 1990s, pragmaticists started to use empirical methods to investigate speech acts and thus initiated what I call the second wave of speech act theory. They used discourse completion tasks to elicit specific speech acts from large numbers of informants in order to compare the

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realisation of requests or apologies, for instance, in different linguacultures (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989), or they asked participants to perform carefully designed interactions in which they were expected to use specific speech acts, such as complaints or apologies (Trosborg 1995). This kind of experimental work has come under considerable criticism because of some of the inherent problems of the elicitation techniques (see, for instance, Ogiermann 2018). But since the early beginnings of experimental speech act studies, the tools have been continuously developed and modified in order to take into account some of the criticism. In one development of this approach, the researcher replaces the elicitation techniques with recordings of naturally occurring interactions in which specific speech acts are likely to occur very frequently (Staley 2018, for instance, observed restaurant service encounters in order to analyse offers of food choices and thanks responses produced by the waiters). In another development, the elicitation studies have been supplemented by perception studies in which participants are asked to evaluate various kinds of speech act prompts and to record their reactions (see, for instance, Haugh & Chang 2019).

The third wave of speech act theory took its origin in the increased availability of computers and computer-readable text corpora in the 1990s. Speech act researchers increasingly started to develop various techniques to retrieve specific speech acts from different kinds of corpora in order to empirically investigate large numbers of specific speech acts produced in "real," i.e. non-experimental situations. Early examples are Karin Aijmer's (1996) investigation of thanks, apologies and requests and Mats Deutschmann's (2003) investigation of apologies. These early approaches depended on searchable elements that are typically part of specific speech acts, usually called illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs, Levinson 1983: 238), such as *thanks* for thanking, *sorry* for apologies and *please* for requests. According to the terminological distinction used in this paper, they should be called illocutionary point indicating devices (IPIDs) because they primarily specify the function or purpose of the speech act in which they occur rather than the force with which this point is put across. Later work extended this method to computer searches for typical patterns beyond IPIDs (Jucker et al. 2008, for instance, searched the *British National Corpus* for strings that are typical for compliments, such as "NP *looks* (really) ADJ") and to the search for metacommunicative expressions (Jucker & Taavitsainen 2014, for instance, searched for the term "compliment" in the *Corpus of Historical American*

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English and the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* to find passages in which people talk about compliments; see also Schneider 2017).

These first three waves have in common that they generally assume that every actual utterance can be mapped to a specific speech act label (but see the following section for some qualifications of this rule). The fourth wave, however, questions this mapping function. It shifts the focus away from the speaker and the utterance itself to the interaction between the speaker and the addressee. It considers speech acts to be fuzzy entities that may be negotiated over several turns in an interaction. It is not enough to study a single utterance and its felicity conditions or to study experimentally elicited or corpus-retrieved examples in isolation. What is required is a study of utterances in context and how they are received by the interlocutors. This makes their automatic retrieval more difficult. Quantitative generalisations across large data sets are difficult because each and every occurrence of a speech act has to be assessed qualitatively in its context (see Félix-Brasdefer 2015; Rieger 2017). This is the starting point for this paper, which proposes some preliminary techniques to retrieve empirical evidence of the discursive nature of speech acts.

2. The Fuzziness of Speech Acts

The fuzziness of speech acts has been discussed in different contexts, both in terms of the fuzziness of the illocutionary point and in terms of the fuzziness of the illocutionary force of a speech act. Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000), for instance, invoked the concept of a multidimensional pragmatic space to account for ranges of speech acts with similar illocutionary points and how they develop diachronically. Their example was the pragmatic space of insults, which covers ritual insults in Old English heroic poetry as well as name calling in Shakespearean plays or playing the dozens by African-American adolescents. Dawn Archer (2015) suggested that this pragmatic space can be extended to speech acts expressing the speaker's evaluation of the addressee with compliments on the positive end and slurs, insults and backhanded compliments on the negative end. Within such pragmatic spaces, individual speech acts are seen as fuzzy entities with partly complementary and partly overlapping delimitations.

In addition to the work on the fuzziness of the illocutionary point, there is also some relevant work on the illocutionary force of specific speech acts. Janet Holmes (1984), for instance, discussed strategies for

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modifying the illocutionary force of utterances by either boosting or attenuating them. Thus, she extended the discussion current in the 1980s, which focused mainly on the mitigation of speech acts. Mitigation was seen as a strategy aimed at reducing anticipated negative effects of a particular speech act, or – in her terms – at attenuating a negatively affective speech act. Such discussions were often based on Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's (1978, 1987) work that analysed polite behaviour in terms of mitigating face threats. For Holmes (1984), that was only one of four possibilities. She considered both boosting and attenuating positively as well as negatively affective speech acts (347). She lists a whole range of prosodic, syntactic and lexical devices that can be used as boosters or downtoners. Contrastive stress, *quite frankly*, *certainly*, and *undoubtedly*, for instance, can be used as boosters while tag questions in the right context or a double negative (*not unproblematic* rather than *problematic*) can attenuate the force of an assertion, for instance.

Caroline Rieger (2017) discusses the issue of illocutionary force in a discursive approach. As data, she analyses a brief extract from the sitcom series *The Big Bang Theory*. In the extract, one of the characters, Sheldon, has to apologise to another character, his girlfriend Amy, for some misdemeanour that he perpetrated the previous day. However, Sheldon finds it difficult to acknowledge his responsibility in what happened and, therefore, he produces excuses and blames the circumstances rather than himself, which forces Amy to repeatedly demand not only an apology but a "real apology." What is at issue is not so much the illocutionary point but the illocutionary force. The situation requires an apology from Sheldon. Vague excuses are not good enough for Amy, and she does not relent until Sheldon produces an unmitigated "sorry."

3. The Indeterminacy of the Illocutionary Point and the Illocutionary Force

From the literature briefly reviewed above, it appears that speakers and addressees often need to discursively negotiate both the illocutionary point and the illocutionary force of their utterances, but it is also clear that this is not usually necessary. Conversations proceed smoothly without such negotiations. The participants in an interaction accept each other's contributions as unproblematic. Each contribution demonstrates a specific understanding of the previous contribution, and usually this is good enough for both participants unless one of them sees a need to problemat-

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ise their own or their interlocutor's contribution. This means that utterances may routinely underspecify both their illocutionary point and their illocutionary force. All that is required is that they are sufficiently transparent for current purposes. They can be an approximation, or a more general value that can be made more specific if and when needed. Extract (8) is an extended version of Extract (4) above.

(8) What's the matter? You look like you'd just seen a ghost.
I didn't realize you were Indian.
Why? Is that a problem?
No. Not at all. All that stuff I said, must have sounded kind of... I mean you just don't look or sound like an Indian.
I'm not sure if that's a compliment or an insult. (COCA, 2001, MOV)

The transcription given in (8) is not perfect. It is based on the extract contained in the *Corpus of Contemporary American English*, which is based on subtitles and does not provide any speaker indications for individual turns. Turns are here suggested on the basis of plausibility. But the extract shows that many of the speech acts produced in this brief exchange are difficult to classify with certainty. The sequence "Why? Is that a problem?" could be a question, but it could also be a challenge or a reproach to the speaker who brings up the Indian identity of one of the interactants. "All that stuff I have said must have sounded kind of …" could be an excuse, an explanation, an apology or just a statement. But in all these cases, the speakers proceed without any need to assign a specific illocutionary point to these speech acts. They can remain vague and underdetermined. The fact that the interlocutors continue unabated shows that their understanding of the relevant speech act values is good enough for current purposes. It is only the utterance "I mean you just don't look or sound like an Indian" which provokes a reaction about its illocutionary point. In this case, the addressee does not know how to take it and explicitly expresses his uncertainty about the illocutionary point, "I'm not sure if that's a compliment or an insult."

Jucker et al. (2003) argued that vague utterances are often more relevant than precise utterances. This was based on Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory, which assumes that there is a balance between the ease of understanding an utterance and the amount of information that can be obtained from it. According to this theory, a vague referring expression, for instance, may be more relevant than a precise one because it requires less processing effort from the addressee in cases

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in which a more precise designation would not have yielded any additional information for the addressee. In a narrative, the pronoun *they* without an antecedent may be a sufficient designator for some people who only play a minor role in the narrative. A more specific referring expression would have assigned too much weight (and invoked too much processing effort) not warranted by the significance of these characters for the story. In the same way, vague quantifiers, like *some*, may be more relevant than a precise figure even if the speaker could have given one, in cases in which a more precise figure would not have yielded any additional relevant information. Thus, vague expressions may be used because the speaker lacks more precise information, but significantly they may also be used because more precise expressions would have invoked some processing effort from the addressee that is not paid off by additional contextual effects for the addressee.

Here, I argue that these ideas can be extended to the illocutionary point as well as to the illocutionary force of utterances that are produced in a conversation. Speakers need not be very precise either about the illocutionary point or the illocutionary force of their utterances. It is sufficient if they appear to be good enough for current purposes. But as in the case of vague expressions, speakers may misjudge what is good enough for their addressees in specific situations, and this may lead to explicit negotiations. Addressees can ask, "Which one did you mean?", asking for a more precise referring expression, or they can ask, "Is that a request or a command?", in order to find out about the illocutionary point of an utterance.

4. Empirical Evidence

Some empirical evidence for the claims proposed above can be found through a corpus investigation of a few selected speech act terms. The corpus for this investigation was the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). This corpus offers a tool that displays lists of collocates (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) for the 60,000 most frequent words in the corpus. In this investigation, I focused on the adjectival collocates, and they are here ordered according to the frequency of each collocation. The noun *apology* may serve as an example. The adjective *public* occurs 356 times in the vicinity (plus/minus four words) of the noun *apology*. The collocation of *apology* with *sincere* follows with 347 instances.

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In terms of collocational strength, the top adjectival collocate of *apology* is *profuse*. This collocation is attested only 22 times in the entire COCA, but *profuse* is much rarer than *public* (0.27 versus 376.70 instances per million words in the COCA). About eight per cent of all occurrences of *profuse* in the COCA occur in the vicinity of *apology*, which indicates a high collocational strength. In the case of *public* only about 0.1 per cent of all cases in the COCA occur in the vicinity of *apology*, but this is still more than statistically expected on the basis of the individual frequencies of *public* and *apology*. In terms of its collocational strength, *public* is ranked 18th of the adjectives with the highest collocational strength to *apology*. However, for this investigation, the focus is on the frequency of the collocation not on the collocational strength because I want to retrieve those words that are used most regularly to modify the noun *apology*, as well as all the others in the list.

Table 1 (see page 112) provides an interesting insight into modifications that are most regularly used when writing or talking about these speech acts. These are not necessarily adjectives that are used when producing the relevant speech act, but adjectives that are used to describe them or to talk about them. The table also shows clear differences across the different types of speech acts. Douglas Biber et al. (1999: 508–509) distinguish between two types of adjectives: descriptors and classifiers. Descriptors are usually gradable and denote such features as colour, size or quantity, time, or evaluative and emotive judgements. Classifiers are usually not gradable. They typically delimit or restrict the referent of a particular noun in terms of relation or affiliation. In some cases, the classification as descriptor or classifier depends on the context. Biber et al. (1999) mention, for example, "modern algebra," where the adjective is a classifier and "some modern authorities," where it is a descriptor (509). In Table 1, the collocating adjectives are given without context, and therefore the classification of some adjectives in their original context may deviate from what appears to be the most natural interpretation. But even with this proviso, it is noteworthy that the majority of adjectives given in Table 1 appear to be descriptors rather than classifiers. Some exceptions are *public*, *official*, *written*, *racial*, *digital*, *future*, *additional*, *multiple*, *numerous*, *fiscal* and *congressional*, which are clearly classifiers. These classifier adjectives appear to delimit a specific subset of all possible speech acts of a given name to distinguish, for instance, public apologies from private ones, racial from non-racial insults, or written requests from requests delivered in some other form.

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	apology	compliment	greeting	insult	offer	promise	request
1	public	high	warm	personal	special	broken	written
2	sincere	backhanded	friendly	ultimate	best	empty	repeated
3	formal	nice	traditional	final	free	false	available
4	necessary	ultimate	happy	racial	better	full	special
5	deep	huge	formal	perceived	generous	future	specific
6	heartfelt	sincere	polite	verbal	final	unfulfilled	reasonable
7	official	wonderful	simple	direct	qualifying	vague	formal
8	written	genuine	usual	petty	digital	solemn	additional
9	humble	lovely	brief	gratuitous	multiple	eternal	simple
10	genuine	rare	standard	environmental	tender	divine	multiple
11	abject	left-handed	proper	veiled	initial	implicit	unusual
12	due	incredible	fellow	racist	attractive	enormous	urgent
13	insincere	unexpected	official	added	tempting	lofty	numerous
14	fake	pleased	cheerful	childish	lucrative	considerable	initial
15	profuse	friendly	dear	stupid	reasonable	implied	official
16	profound	terrific	initial	terrible	limited	bold	pending
17	immediate	constructive	cordial	deliberate	formal	tremendous	unreasonable
18	forthcoming	insincere	casual	constant	firm	sacred	fiscal
19	half-hearted	sexy	cheery	usual	occasional	explicit	congressional
20	lame	embarrassed	loud	gross	written	faithful	polite

Table 1. Adjectival collocates of selected metapragmatic communicative act terms (nouns), sorted according to frequency of the collocations.

Many of the descriptor adjectives, on the other hand, appear to be concerned with the illocutionary point and the illocutionary force of the communicative acts. Apologies, for instance, can be *sincere*, *deep*, *heartfelt*, *genuine*, *fake*, *insincere*, or *half-hearted*. All these adjectives are concerned with what Searle would have described as either the preparatory condition or the sincerity condition. Do the apologisers feel remorse for an offence? Is the apology sincere or insincere, is it heartfelt or half-hearted, is it genuine or fake? Such evaluations are linked both to the illocutionary point and to the illocutionary force of the communicative action itself. Is it really an apology or is it something else? And what is its force? Is it sufficiently sincere and heartfelt, or is it fake and insincere?

In terms of felicity conditions, a compliment requires the speaker to feel pleased about the evaluation expressed in the compliment while in the case of an insult the evaluation expressed is paired with disrespect for the addressee. The adjectival collocates in Table 1 show how the most frequent assessments differ in these cases. Compliments are described as *sincere* or *insincere*, *backhanded* or *genuine*. These are descriptions that either assert or question the illocutionary point of the compliment itself via its felicity conditions. Other adjectival collocates in the list are less concerned with the illocutionary point but more with its force and the manner in which it is presented (*nice*, *wonderful*, *lovely*, *incredible*, *unexpected*, etc.). In the case of insults, the adjectival collocates appear to be concerned with a different type of felicity conditions. It is not the feelings or sincerity of the speaker that count but whether the communicative act is direct or deliberate or only perceived or veiled.

The adjectival collocates of the remaining three terms for communicative acts appear to be less concerned with the illocutionary status of the utterance. Greetings are particularly interesting. According to Searle (1969), they do not have any sincerity conditions (67). The top twenty adjectival collocates support this analysis. Speakers do not seem to be concerned with the illocutionary point. Not surprisingly, they are even less concerned with the illocutionary force of a greeting. This dimension does not appear to play any role in this case. Instead, the adjectives are concerned with the manner in which greetings are extended (*warm*, *friendly*, *happy*, *polite* and so on).

In the case of promises, the sincerity of the promiser appears to be an important element that is regularly discussed (*broken*, *empty*, *false*, *unfulfilled*, *vague*, etc.). Offers, on the other hand, appear to be discussed in terms of their attractiveness for recipients (*special*, *generous*, *attractive*,

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tempting, *lucrative* and so on) rather than on the basis of their status as genuine offers.

Requests, finally, are a type of directive. They are distinguished from similar directives, such as commands and orders, by the relative lack of authority the speaker has (or rather exerts) over the addressee. This appears to be the reason why people often deliberate the status of utterances as either one or the other (see Extracts (2) and (3) at the beginning of this paper), but this aspect does not seem to be reflected in the top twenty adjectival collocates of the noun *request*.

This analysis is not comprehensive. I have merely picked out some of the top twenty adjectival collocates for seven randomly selected metapragmatic terms. But the analysis clearly shows that some communicative acts are regularly evaluated on the basis of their illocutionary point and of their illocutionary force while other communicative acts are discussed in different terms. While some (apologies, compliments, insults, promises) can be more determinate or less determinate and are, therefore, regularly in need of discursive negotiations by the participants, others (greetings, offers, requests) are not evaluated in the same way.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The observation that speech acts are fuzzy entities is not new. It has been made in a variety of different contexts. Here, I have taken this observation as the starting point for an outline of a theory of speech acts that is based on their fuzziness. Such a theory must reconcile the fact that speakers sometimes explicitly negotiate both the illocutionary point and the illocutionary force of an utterance but, in most cases, this does not seem to be necessary in spite of the fact that for the outside observer the precise speech act values of many utterances are not entirely clear. I have argued that speech act values are generally underdetermined. They need to be no more than good enough for current purposes. In fact, it may be more efficient – or more relevant in Relevance Theoretical terms – to be vague about the illocutionary point and the illocutionary force of an utterance. More explicitness would require more processing effort from the addressee, and such efforts might not be warranted by the additional information conveyed through a higher level of explicitness and it might shift the focus away from the main point that the speaker wants to get across.

However, people also regularly talk about the illocutionary point and the illocutionary force of specific utterances. Estimations of what is good

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enough for current purposes are no more than best guesses, which means that situations do occur from time to time in which speakers need to enter into a meta discourse about specific speech acts. The collocational analysis has shown that adjectives concerning a particular illocutionary point or a particular illocutionary force regularly figure among the top twenty adjectival collocates of a few selected speech act names. However, the analysis has also shown that such negotiations appear to be more important for some speech acts than for others. The precise pattern cannot be assessed on the basis of the data presented in this paper, but it appears that speech acts differ in their flexibility on the scale of the illocutionary point and the scale of the illocutionary force.

Speech acts in large pragmatic spaces with high stakes in terms of face maintenance and face loss (Brown & Levinson 1987), such as directives or evaluations of other people, may be more likely to require explicit negotiations. They compete with neighbouring speech acts with uncertain boundaries between them. The pragmatic space of directives, for instance, is populated by speech acts such as requesting, commanding, demanding, entreating and so on with many fuzzy boundaries between them leading to uncertainties as to who is in a position to command rather than request or even entreat and so on. And in the case of evaluations of other people, the pragmatic space is populated by speech acts such as compliments, praise, commendation, flattery and so on on the positive side, and insult, criticism, offence, name calling and so on on the negative side. Within such pragmatic spaces, uncertainties about illocutionary points and the potential for face-threats are a distinct possibility, which may lead to explicit negotiations as shown above. In the case of greetings and salutations, on the other hand, there appears to be little competition with neighbouring speech acts and relatively little danger for face threats.

This can also be said about the scale of illocutionary force. Some speech acts can convey their illocutionary point with clearly varying amounts of force. Apologies are a particularly good example. As the analysis has shown, they can be deep, heartfelt and sincere, or perfunctory, casual, and fleeting. Promises, likewise, allow for upgrading or downgrading. In such cases, speakers may regularly find occasion to discursively negotiate the force of a speech act ("I want a real apology," "I really promise," etc.). Greetings, on the other hand, do not lend themselves to similar adjustments on the scale of illocutionary force and, therefore, there appears to be little need to discursively negotiate them.

More work is clearly needed to figure out how the two scales of illocutionary point and illocutionary force apply to different types of speech

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acts, and how these scales interact with different pragmatic spaces. As yet, we do not even have a clear idea of how to delimit the entire repertoire of speech acts of a given language. Is such a repertoire limited to the linguistic expressions of this language available for naming specific speech acts, the so called "meta-illocutionary lexicon" (Schneider 2017, 2022)? Or should we assume that the repertoire also contains a large number of speech acts for which the speakers of the relevant language do not have vernacular names (see Levinson 2015)?

In this contribution, I have focused on a small set of examples of names for speech acts in English. Such names testify to the fact that speakers of English find these communicative activities sufficiently salient to require a name so that they can talk about them when needed. And on some occasions, they even explicitly negotiate their illocutionary point and their illocutionary force.

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