



# What the meta-illocutionary lexicon can tell us about speech act taxonomies

Dominik Jan Schoppa

Universität Augsburg, Universitätsstraße 10, 86159 Augsburg, Germany



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## ABSTRACT

Being firmly situated within speech act theory and language philosophy, research on speech act taxonomies (Searle, 1975) takes a second-order approach to distinguishing superordinate function types of utterances, thus largely ignoring first-order perspectives. First-order pragmatics, on the other hand, is dominated by studies on ordinary language users' conceptualizations of speech acts in isolation (Schneider, 2022; [Author, 2022]). The present study seeks to extend the scope of first-order pragmatics by exploring ordinary usage patterns of the meta-illocutionary lexicon regarding three *directive* illocutions (requesting, commanding, begging) and three *expressive* illocutions (thanking, apologizing, congratulating). While these usage patterns directly reflect first-order conceptualizations of (the felicity of) the respective illocutions, they are further argued to collectively constitute indirect evidence for first-order conceptualizations of the relevant speech act classes. Based on blogging data from the GloWbE corpus, results include that while references to *directive* illocutions tend to favor the *descriptive* use type of the meta-illocutionary lexicon, references to *expressive* illocutions are generally dominated by the *performative* use type. These and other findings are discussed against the background of speech act taxonomies, conventionalization, and the situatedness of speech acts in discourse, among other things.

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## 1. Introduction

Research on the meta-illocutionary lexicon in use is still fairly new, and previous studies have mainly explored first-order conceptualizations of individual speech acts (e.g., *requesting*, *thanking*, *apologizing*) by analyzing how ordinary language users talk about them in discourse (Schneider, 2021, 2022; Author, 2022; Diegoli, 2022). First-order perspectives on speech act classes, however, seem to be largely overlooked to date. Conceivably, this is at least in part due to the fact that – unlike individual speech acts – (most) speech act classes (e.g., *expressives*, *commissives*) are not lexically anchored in ordinary language, which eliminates direct evidence in the exploration of pertinent conceptualizations. The present study aims to compensate for this lack of research by considering indirect evidence in the form of comparing inter-categorical and intra-categorical aspects of ordinary language users' talk about three directive speech acts (i.e., *requesting*, *commanding*, *begging*) and three expressive speech acts (i.e., *thanking*, *apologizing*, *congratulating*) respectively. Based on empirical data from the

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E-mail address: [dominik.schoppa@uni-a.de](mailto:dominik.schoppa@uni-a.de).

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Global Web-based English corpus (GloWbE), both (i) distributions of communicative functions of relevant meta-illocutionary items in context and (ii) entextualization patterns (Park and Bucholtz, 2009; Jaffe, 2009) – viz. assignments of particularized values to attributes represented by contextual features of the speech acts in question (see sub-section 3.2.2) – will be juxtaposed and compared along speech-act-taxonomical boundaries (Searle, 1975). Specifically, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Which use types do meta-illocutionary items exhibit in discourse?
- 2) Which contextual features of the speech act(s) referred to by meta-illocutionary item(s) are (not) explicitly entextualized?
- 3) How do qualitative and quantitative patterns of 1) and 2) vary across references to *directive* and *expressive* speech acts?

Structurally, this paper is subdivided into six sections. Section 2 will outline Austin's (1975[1962]) and Searle's (1975) speech act taxonomies as well as previous research on the meta-illocutionary lexicon in use, and section 3 will introduce the data collection procedure as well as the analysis of the data in accordance with this study's theoretical framework. Empirical results will be presented in section 4 and discussed against the background of theoretical and methodological considerations in section 5, ultimately leading to final concluding remarks in section 6.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Speech act taxonomies

In a first attempt to establish a speech act taxonomy, Austin – influenced by Wittgenstein's (1953) notion of *family resemblance* – aims to distinguish “general families of related and overlapping speech acts” (1975[1962]:149, original emphasis) according to their illocutionary force, and assigns his five classes the following “rebarbative” (1975[1962]:150) names: *verdictives*, *exercitives*, *commissives*, *behabitives*, and *expositives*. Responding to Austin, Searle (1975:354) identifies “six related difficulties” with this classification:

In ascending order of importance, there is a persistent confusion between verbs and acts; not all the verbs are illocutionary verbs; there is too much overlap of the categories; there is too much heterogeneity within the categories; many of the verbs listed in the categories don't satisfy the definition given for the category; and, most important, there is no consistent principle of classification.

In his (questionable) attempt to compensate for the (alleged) shortcomings of Austin's classification, Searle develops his own speech act taxonomy based on distinct principles of classification, reflecting his view of language use as a rule-governed form of behavior (Searle, 1969). In introducing these principles, Searle distinguishes between three “most important” principles and nine others “that need remarking” (1975:348). The three higher-level principles, which generally serve to distinguish between speech act classes, are *illocutionary point*, *direction of fit*, and *expressed mental state*.<sup>1</sup> The nine lower-level principles encompass differences in (i) the illocutionary force or strength, (ii) the status of the speaker and the hearer, (iii) the way the utterance relates to the speaker's and the hearer's interests, (iv) the relation to the rest of the discourse, and (v) the propositional content determined by illocutionary force indicating devices, differences between (vi) acts which must or can be performed as speech acts, (vii) acts which do or do not require extra-linguistic institutions, (viii) acts whose illocutionary verb can or cannot be used performatively, and differences in (ix) the style of performance of the illocutionary act (Searle, 1975:345–350). These nine principles – in contrast to the former three – primarily serve to distinguish between speech acts within a class.

Following this pattern, Searle's class of *directives* is defined by the *illocutionary point* of its members constituting the speaker's attempts to get the hearer to do something (i.e., make *p* true), the *direction of fit* being world-to-words (i.e., the current state of affairs having to be changed in order for *p* to be made true), and the *expressed mental state* being want/wish/desire (i.e., that *p* be made true) (Searle, 1975: 355). Members of Searle's class of *directives* – e.g., requesting, commanding, begging, etc. – all meet these higher-level principles of classification, and differ from one another only in terms of lower-level principles. For example, the acts of requesting, commanding, and begging exhibit differences in the status of the speaker and the hearer: In commanding, the speaker is in a position of power over the hearer, in begging, the speaker submits themselves to the hearer, and in requesting, this power relationship is unspecified. Similarly, commanding requires an extra-linguistic institution (e.g., religion, military, etc.), whereas requesting and begging do not (Searle, 1969:66–67). In summary, members of the *directive* class display uniformity in terms of Searle's higher-level principles and variation in terms of (some of) Searle's lower-level principles.

By contrast, Searle's class of *expressives* is defined by the *illocutionary point* of its members expressing the mental states specified in the sincerity condition. The *expressed mental states*, in turn, are variable as long as they do not entail any *direction of fit* between the world and the words (Searle, 1975:356–358). Examples for relevant *expressed mental states* are gratitude (in thanking), regret (in apologizing), or pleasure (in congratulating) at *p*, where *p* is presupposed to be true rather than being explicitly presented as true or as to be made true (Searle, 1975:359). Thus, members of Searle's class of *expressives* – e.g., thanking, apologizing, congratulating, etc. – differ in terms of one of Searle's “most important” principles of classification, viz.

<sup>1</sup> Searle's (1975) *illocutionary point* and *expressed mental state* correspond to Searle's (1969) *essential condition* and *sincerity condition* respectively. Searle's (1975) *direction of fit* is an inherent feature of the *expressed mental state* with respect to the world-to-word (or world-to-mind) relationship which it entails.

their *expressed mental state*. Conversely, these members do not exhibit a change of status as a result of variation across the remaining principles of classification: For instance, an apology performed by a speaker in a position of power is still an apology, and a congratulation performed within an institutional context remains a congratulation. In other words, while members of Searle's *directive* class display stability in terms of higher-level principles of classification and variation in terms of lower-level principles of classification, members of Searle's *expressive* class already display variation in terms of the higher-level principle of *expressed mental state* (which further directly affects the *illocutionary point*). Due to this difference, the *directive* class can be conceptualized as being 'more cohesive' (encompassing contiguous and overlapping members), whereas the *expressive* class can be conceptualized as being 'more diversified' (encompassing discrete and heterogeneous members). The diversification of the *expressive* class is further (partially) reflected in Austin's definition of his *behabitives* – the approximate correspondent to Searle's *expressives* – as "a very miscellaneous group" (1975[1962]:151, original emphasis) associated with attitudes and social behavior. Nonetheless, just as many *directive* illocutions – especially those which include the speaker's exercise of authority (see also Austin's *exercitives*) – 'take effect' in the form of creating (to varying degrees) a deontic obligation for the hearer to perform the respective action, *expressive* illocutions 'take effect' in the form of satisfying the speaker's deontic necessity to express the respective mental state in response to a state of affairs (presupposed to be truthfully reflected in *p*) (Sbisà, 1984, 2013).

## 2.2. The meta-illocutionary lexicon

The meta-illocutionary lexicon is the set of lexical items explicitly and reflexively referring to the illocutionary aspect of speech acts.<sup>2</sup> It is "a subdivision of everyday vocabulary and includes verbs such as *apologize*, *threaten* and *invite*, and nouns such as *apology*, *threat* and *invitation* as well as occasional adjectives and adverbs such as *apologetic(ally)*" (Schneider, 2017:225). Consequently, it anchors second-order concepts (i.e., illocutions, speech acts, felicity conditions, etc.) in ordinary language and thus allows for first-order conceptualizations of these notions to be studied. Various aspects of first-order conceptualizations of these notions have been argued by previous studies to be reflected in the frequency of use of meta-illocutionary items (across varieties, genres, etc.) and communicative functions of utterances containing meta-illocutionary items.

Emerging research on the meta-illocutionary lexicon can be conceptualized as an extension of previous research on *speech act(ivity) verbs* (Verschuere, 1985; Wierzbicka, 1987). Despite substantial overlaps, research on *speech act(ivity) verbs* – informed by various types of ethnography of speaking (e.g., Hymes, 1962) – is, however, broadly situated within the research areas of lexical semantics, lexicology, and lexicography as evidenced, among other things, by the compilation of dictionaries of a varying number of pertinent verbs (e.g., Ballmer and Brennenstuhl, 1981; Harras et al., 2004). Going beyond lexical-semantic, lexicological, and lexicographical explorations, research on the meta-illocutionary lexicon – which also considers other word classes besides verbs – is crucially situated within pragmatics as it seeks to examine (functional) usage patterns of relevant lexical items in context. Before Schneider's (2017) pioneering study on meta-illocutionary expressions in use, functional aspects associated with lexical items referring to the illocutionary aspect of the speech act as a whole have already been investigated, most prominently, in Edmondson (1981) and Hübler and Busse (2012). Edmondson (1981) distinguishes and illustrates basic use types of illocutionary verbs in context (alongside a semantic/pragmatic-feature-based analysis of the latter) but bases his line of argument entirely on fabricated examples. Hübler and Busse (2012), who take a historical-pragmatic approach, advocate the use of empirical data but focus more broadly on the meta-communicative lexicon which besides explicit references to illocutions also encompasses explicit references to locutions, perlocutions, interlocutors, and discourse genres, to name but a few examples. Thus, while the meta-illocutionary lexicon is more restrictive in scope compared to the meta-communicative lexicon, research on the meta-illocutionary lexicon in use as established by Schneider (2017, 2021, 2022) and [Author, 2022] crucially subscribes to the methodological principle of empiricity.

Spearheading this strand of research, Schneider (2017) tentatively puts forward an initial classification of communicative functions of (utterances containing) meta-illocutionary items based on manually extracted examples from fictional literature, and distinguishes between the *performative*, the *reporting*, the *commenting*, and the *problematizing* function. In the *performative* function, "an expression naming a speech act is employed to actually perform this speech act" (2017:230). In the *reporting* function, meta-illocutionary items are used "in assertive acts to inform hearers or readers that a particular speech act was performed in the more or less distant past" (2017:232). The *commenting* function encompasses "retrospective comment[s] by a speaker on a previous act by the same speaker [...] with the comment serving the purpose of explicating the illocutionary force of the earlier utterance" (2017:233). Lastly, in the *problematizing* function, meta-illocutionary items are used "to request confirmation that the interlocutor's illocution has been correctly identified [or] to challenge this illocution or [...] the interlocutor's right to perform the speech act identified" (2017:235). While Schneider stresses the tentativeness of this classification, and while some of its aspects are certainly useful, the present study will depart from Schneider's approach in favor of a new classification based on more consistent theoretical distinctions introduced in section 3.2.1.

<sup>2</sup> For the present purposes, the term "meta-illocutionary lexicon" is adopted from previous research on ordinary talk about illocutions and speech acts (e.g., Schneider, 2017, 2021, 2022; Author, 2022)). In line with previous research, this term is used to refer to the collection of relevant lexical items in use, irrespective of their specific use type in context. The author is, however, aware that the adequacy of the modifier "meta" is dependent on the items' use types, with some (i.e., *meta-commenting*) justifying the use of this modifier much more strongly than others (i.e., *performative*, *descriptive*, see sub-section 3.2.1).

Using a slightly modified classification [Author, 2022], explores frequencies and functions of (utterances containing) meta-illocutionary references to *requests* and *apologies* across British English (BrE) and American English (AmE), thereby also contributing to the new research area of variational metapragmatics (Schneider, 2021). Based on data from the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), results regarding frequencies of use include that while references to apologies displayed quantitative similarities across BrE and AmE, references to requests were almost twice as frequent in AmE as in BrE. In terms of communicative functions, references to requests were similarly dominated by equivalents of Schneider's *reporting* function (subdivided by [Author] into *naming* and *reporting*) across both varieties, whereas references to apologies displayed varietal preferences for the *performative* function in BrE and the *commenting* function in AmE. Opting for a different focus of analysis, Schneider (2022) examines distributions of meta-illocutionary references to the speech act of apologizing across word classes as well as spoken and written genres in Irish English. Based on data from the ICE-Ireland corpus, results display a general preference for verbal forms rather than nominal forms (with no occurrences of adjectival or adverbial forms attested), higher frequencies in the spoken rather than the written section of the corpus, and a preference for legal presentations within the spoken section and for business letters in the written section. However, Schneider concedes that these results "must not be overstated, as the frequencies of [meta-illocutionary items] here were relatively low, pointing to the comparatively small size of the corpus employed" (2022:171).

Overall, there is a growing body of research exploring various aspects of ordinary language users' talk about – and first-order conceptualizations of – speech acts by means of analyzing and juxtaposing frequencies and functions of relevant meta-illocutionary items in use. First-order perspectives on speech act classes, by contrast, remain largely under-researched to date, (probably) due to the lack of lexical anchoring in ordinary language. These circumstances require researchers to rely on indirect evidence in the form of inter-categorical and intra-categorical similarities and differences across references to speech acts of different classes. In the present exploratory study, this is accounted for by comparing references to (and first-order conceptualizations of) requesting, commanding, and begging on the one hand, and references to (and first-order conceptualizations of) thanking, apologizing, and congratulating on the other.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Data collection

Being part of a larger project covering large-scale cross-varietal trends in usage patterns of the meta-illocutionary lexicon, the present study is based on empirical data extracted from the GloWbE corpus. The GloWbE is a 1.9-billion-word corpus of web-based language data (Davies and Fuchs, 2015), covering a wide variety of online genres such as online news articles, forums, and (most notably) blogs from six *inner circle* and 14 *outer circle* countries (Kachru, 1985). The main aim of compiling the GloWbE was to increase the volume of empirical, naturally occurring data commonly considered in research within the World Englishes paradigm (Schneider, 2007), which until then had mainly been based on corpus analyses of the one-million-word International Corpus of English (ICE) family. While size certainly constitutes an advantage of the GloWbE over the ICE family, disadvantages include the uncertain origin of speakers and language data (due to the compilers using top-level domains of websites as a proxy variable) as well as occasional duplicates. Since the present study and the larger research project are primarily aimed at exploring large-scale trends in usage patterns of meta-illocutionary items, the size advantage of the GloWbE can be safely said to outweigh its disadvantages. However, the ICE-family may certainly be better suited for research projects on more fine-grained patterns where 'every token counts'.

While the overall project encompasses juxtapositions of British English, Hong Kong English, and Kenyan English (based on data from the *Great Britain*, *Hong Kong*, and *Kenya* sub-corpora of the GloWbE respectively), the present study considers data from the *Great Britain* sub-corpus only. First, this sub-corpus was searched for noun and verb forms of the relevant meta-illocutionary lexemes, construing the speech acts which they refer to as THINGS and ACTIONS respectively (Langacker, 1987). Incorporating wildcard and part-of-speech search functions in order to account for the respective 'word profiles' (Jucker, 2023), the specific search terms employed were *request\*\_n/v*, *command\*\_n/v*, and *beg\*\_n/v* on the one hand, and *thank\*\_n/v*, *apolog\*\_n/v*, and *congrat\*\_n/v* on the other. Having identified absolute frequencies of all hits and excluded those which occurred less than ten times, frequencies of the remaining hits were downsized to a sample of 100 examples per speech act, retaining (as far as possible) the noun-verb-ratio as well as ratios of all inflected forms. This downsizing procedure is exemplified in Table 1. Following the resulting distribution, relevant examples were manually extracted from the GloWbE using the 'expanded context' function. During this extraction procedure, two restrictions were made: (i) Examples were extracted only from the 'Blog' section (as opposed to the 'General' section) of the respective GloWbE sub-corpus, and (ii) only one example per website (i.e., blog) was extracted. It was hypothesized that these restrictions would contribute to a diversification of topics while at the same time preserving homogeneity in terms of genre and (possibly) speaker origin corresponding to the variety under consideration. Although aspects of genre may certainly affect the way meta-illocutionary items are used (Montero-Fleta et al., 2009; Schneider, 2022), exploring this relation was not the focus of the present study. Following a final data cleansing, which encompassed individual exclusions of initially extracted but ineligible examples, the resulting dataset – encompassing 576 examples in total (282 references to *directive* illocutions, 294 references to *expressive* illocutions) – was analyzed for use types of the meta-illocutionary lexicon as well as entextualization patterns regarding contextual factors of the speech acts in question.

**Table 1**Downsizing procedure exemplified by references to thanking in the *Great Britain* sub-corpus.

BrE THANKING	Absolute frequencies			Relative frequencies					
	Absolute frequencies			Share of items (%)			Rounded and adjusted		
	Noun	Verb	Σ	Noun	Verb	Σ	Noun	Verb	Σ
Thank	0	49088	<b>49088</b>	0	42.6	42.6	0	43	<b>43</b>
Thanks	62570	908	<b>63478</b>	54.2	0.8	55.0	54	1	<b>55</b>
Thanked	0	1716	<b>1716</b>	0	1.5	1.5	0	1	<b>1</b>
Thanking	0	1029	<b>1029</b>	0	0.9	0.9	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62570</b>	<b>52741</b>	<b>115311</b>	<b>54.2</b>	<b>45.8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.2. Data analysis

#### 3.2.1. Use types of the meta-illocutionary lexicon

In distinguishing use types of the meta-illocutionary lexicon, the present study departs from previous tentative classifications introduced in [Schneider \(2017\)](#) and [\[Author, 2022\]](#), which mainly resulted from intuitive and subjective perceptions of typification. Instead, the classification put forward in this study is based on [Austin's \(1975\[1962\]\)](#) constative-performative distinction as well as (in)determinateness in the contextual anchoring of (the performance of) the relevant illocution. Combining these features, a broad distinction is made between the *performative*, the *descriptive*, and the *meta-commenting* use type. This distinction is illustrated and exemplified by empirical examples in [Table 2](#).

The *performative* use type corresponds to Austin's notion of *performatives*, which “indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (1975[1962]:6) rather than (only) the (un)truthful depiction of the world. In this use type, the utterance containing a meta-illocutionary item realizes the illocutionary act to which this item simultaneously refers. Such utterances thus exhibit “complete reflexivity” ([Verschuereen, 2021:124](#)) between the represented act and the performed act in reality. Moreover, the illocutionary act in question is presented by the speaker as a discursive process in the here-and-now and as felicitous by default, and is interpreted by the hearer as felicitous by default unless doubts arise and lead to a suspension of this interpretation ([Sbisà, 2002:425](#)).

The *descriptive* use type is (loosely) based on Austin's notion of *constatives*. It encompasses assertive acts (and pre-suppositions) presenting the respective speech act as a discursive product outside the discursive here-and-now. In this constellation, both the assertive act containing the meta-illocutionary item and the referent of this item (i.e., the relevant illocution) are presented as felicitous by the speaker and interpreted as felicitous by default by the hearer. This is because the felicity of former (encompassing the truth of *p*) entails the felicity of the latter. Importantly, the illocutionary act referred to by the meta-illocutionary item is presented as a (felicitous) discursive product and must therefore be temporally anchored in the past, either explicitly or implicitly.

The *meta-commenting* use type<sup>3</sup> is similar to the *descriptive* use type in that it also constitutes *talk about* rather than *the performance of* illocutions. However, the distinguishing feature of the *meta-commenting* use type is that the contextual anchoring of the performance of the relevant illocution remains indeterminate. This can be achieved, among other things, by expressions of conditionality (e.g., predictive, counterfactual), different types of modality (including futurity), and identification (i.e., *X is a Y*) in the sense of “suiting the action to the word” ([Austin, 1975\[1962\]:65](#)). These expressions explicate felicity conditions, norms, knowledge, and inter-speaker congruency operations associated with (the performance of) speech acts in general, which happens under the assumption that the speaker's and the hearer's understanding of these aspects may potentially be incongruous. The presented (potential) incongruity in understanding may further be amplified by features of question or negation, thus constituting challenges to the hearer's viewpoint on the respective matter ([Fetzer, 2009](#)).

**Table 2**

Use types of the meta-illocutionary lexicon in contexts.

Function of the utterance	Performance of speech act referred to by m-i item	Talk about speech act referred to by m-i item	
Use type	Performative	Descriptive	Meta-commenting
Speech act in discourse	Presented as a discursive process in the here-and-now	Presented as a discursive product outside the here-and-now	Presented as indeterminate in the discursive context
Felicity of speech act	Presented by S as given assumed by H to be given	Presented by S as given assumed by H to be given	Presented by S as (potentially) subjectively/objectively not given
Realizations			

<sup>3</sup> The internal heterogeneity of this functional category (see, e.g., [Table 2](#)) defies satisfactory labeling. In the context of the present study, this broad category serves the primary purpose of capturing all instances including a contextually/metaphysically indeterminate anchoring of (the performance of) a speech act. Future research could, however, enlarge upon more fine-grained functional distinctions and discuss the adequacy of *meta-commenting* as an overarching label.



Table 2 (continued)

Function of the utterance	Performance of speech act referred to by m-i item	Talk about speech act referred to by m-i item	
Use type	Performative	Descriptive	Meta-commenting
	Explicit and hedged performatives (full and elliptical forms)	Assertive acts or presuppositions contextualizing the (felicitous) performance of the relevant illocution in the past (explicitly or implicitly)	CONDITIONALITY MODALITY (+FUTURITY) IDENTIFICATION — QUESTION NEGATION
Examples	<i>So please, I <u>beg</u> you, keep on doing what you're good at!</i> <i><u>Thanks</u> Daniela for everything you made it all possible!</i>	<i>Many have <u>requested</u> the paper map, which is in production.</i> <i>The BBC has now made a full and handsome <u>apology</u> for what happened to [ ...].</i>	<i>Each bike [...] may be launched on manual or verbal <u>command</u>.</i> <i>Anyway if what Gavin says is anything to go by then am I suppose[d] to <u>congratulate</u> you?</i>

### 3.2.2. Entextualization patterns of contextual factors

Apart from classifying examples in the present dataset according to the different use types of the meta-illocutionary lexicon, the present study further explores entextualization patterns of contextual factors across *directive* and *expressive* speech acts. In this analysis, all contextual factors of a speech act (as a whole) are conceptualized as attributes of a frame which the speaker imports into the ongoing discourse by using the corresponding meta-illocutionary item (Fillmore, 1976). It is postulated that the use of a meta-illocutionary item co-activates the corresponding frame, viz. the structured set of encyclopedic knowledge associated with the speech act in question. The contextual factors which collectively constitute the invariant structure of a frame include speaker, hearer, place, and time, the tripartite classification of the speech act, and the relevant felicity conditions. Against this background, entextualization refers to the speaker's indexical assignation of particularized, context-specific values to the respective frame attributes. For example, in the utterance *My boss rejected my request for a day off*, the speaker indexically entextualizes themselves as the requester, their boss as the requestee, a day off as the content, and the requestee's rejection as the perlocutionary effect of the request. Since the verb entextualizing the perlocutionary effect, (*to*) *reject*, is inflected for past tense, and since perlocutionary effects are, by definition, consequential and therefore temporally successional in relation to their respective illocutionary acts, the speaker can be further said to situate the performance of the request (even further) in the past (than the following rejection). Other attributes such as place, preparatory condition, and sincerity condition, however, remain unentextualized. It is one of the main aims of this study to explore similarities and differences between entextualization patterns of frame attributes of *directive* and *expressive* speech acts and to suggest explanations for these patterns in the empirical dataset.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Directives

In terms of use type, meta-illocutionary items referring to *directive* speech acts are most often used descriptively by ordinary language users. The *descriptive* use type is mainly realized by the relevant speech act being contextually anchored in the past. In the case of meta-illocutionary verbs, this is achieved by tense inflections (1). In the case of meta-illocutionary nouns, it can either be achieved by past tense inflections of what can be called concomitant 'first-order verbs of (genre-specific) performance' (e.g., *make*, *say*, *submit*, *post*) (2) or verbs entextualizing the (more or less specific) perlocutionary effect (e.g., *respond*, *deny*, *come ashore*) of the speech act (3). The difference between (2) and (3) is that in the former, the temporal anchoring of the speech act is explicated in the past tense inflection of the 'verb of performance' (i.e., *submit*), whereas in the latter, it is both initiated by the simple past forms of the verbs broadly entextualizing part of the preparatory condition of the illocution (i.e., *splash* (*each other*), *swim*, *play*) and entailed by the temporal anchoring of its perlocutionary effect as reflected in the past tense inflection of the verb (*to*) *come* (*ashore*).

(1) We now know the Americam Ambassador [sic] talked live with the White House and State Department and begged for help. No help came. (Archbishop Cranmer Blog)

(2) Mahmoud Abbas submitted a renewed request for Palestine's full UN membership in September. (107 Cowgate)

(3) The two children in the lake splashed each other, swam, and played to their hearts' content. It was only at Mila's command that they *came ashore*. (Giraffe Corps)

Quantitatively, more than half (55 %) of the examples across all *directive* illocutions represent a *descriptive* use type of the meta-illocutionary lexicon. There is, however, some variation across individual illocutions, with references to requesting displaying the highest share of the *descriptive* use type (65 %) – possibly due to the face-threatening character of using *request* (*n./v.*) performatively (Brown and Levinson, 1987), hindering speakers from doing so – followed by references to commanding (56 %) and references to begging (44 %). Nonetheless, this use type displayed the largest share among all other use types in meta-illocutionary references to all *directive* speech acts considered in the present study.

The second most frequent use type of the meta-illocutionary lexicon in reference to *directive* speech acts is the *meta-commenting* use type. The indeterminateness of the contextual anchoring of (the performance of) the relevant illocutionary act is most often (explicitly or implicitly) signaled by features of conditionality – encompassing mainly predictive (4) forms – and modality – encompassing mainly deontic obligation (5) and dynamic ability (6) but also futurity (7), which is meta-physically indeterminate by definition (cf. Giannakidou and Mari 2018).

- (4) Mangotsfield chicks Annakatarina can be a coy sometimes, but *if* commanded to pee, she will. (Bruni's Chicks)
- (5) *It is time* for Brown *to* get on his knees and beg from whomsoever to get helicopters to our troops. (The Spectator)
- (6) Forsake Planet's Thorn Tree forum. Here you *can* request advice from folk near to the ground. (Adventure.Travel)
- (7) Hi Shannon, we schedule something in and send you a request *tomorrow*. (30ish)

The *meta-commenting* use type accounts for almost a third (29 %) of meta-illocutionary references to *directives*. It is most prevalent in references to requesting (35 %), followed by references to commanding (32 %) and references to begging (18 %), thus also displaying some intra-categorical variation. Within this use type, the feature of conditionality accounts for more than half of all strategies, whereas modality and mixed forms make up the rest. Overall, the *meta-commenting* use type is not only the second most frequent in references to all *directive* speech acts, but it also ranks second in references to every *directive* speech act individually.

The *performative* use type is by far the least frequent use type found in references to *directive* speech acts, both collectively and individually. Most realizations resemble Austin's (1975[1962]) explicit performative formula, viz. a first-person present active declarative clause containing a performative verb (8). Notably, the speaker of (8) reformulates their speech act using in turn *urge*, *command*, and *beg*, thus potentially offering multiple possibilities of uptake or exploiting the same content for three similar but distinct illocutionary acts – a strategy found very rarely overall and only in references to *directive* speech acts. Apart from that, indirect realizations such as asking for permission to perform the respective speech act, in this case begging (9), also exist, albeit only occasionally.

- (8) I urge you – beg you – command you to inform your HR department today that Attribute No. 1 in the hiring of anyone in any job, non-technical or technical, shall hereinafter and forevermore be enthusiasm, effervescence – exuberance. (Hardware Blog)
- (9) You have a right to be narked, and I will put my hand up as one of those who could do more. # BUT – can I beg you not to use terms like "spoon thief"? Or at least not in public. (Benefit Scrounging Scum)

*Performative* uses of meta-illocutionary references to *directive* speech acts account for only 6 % of the dataset, with considerable variation across references to requesting (0 %), commanding (3 %) and begging (15 %) considering the low relative frequency overall. The presented distributions of use types across speech acts and speech act classes only refer to (more or less) clear-cut examples of the relevant categories. Mixed use types also exist, but are rather infrequent and vary substantially in kind, making them better suited for detailed qualitative rather than quantitative analyses. Quantitative distributions of all use types of meta-illocutionary references to *directive* speech act are shown in Fig. 1.

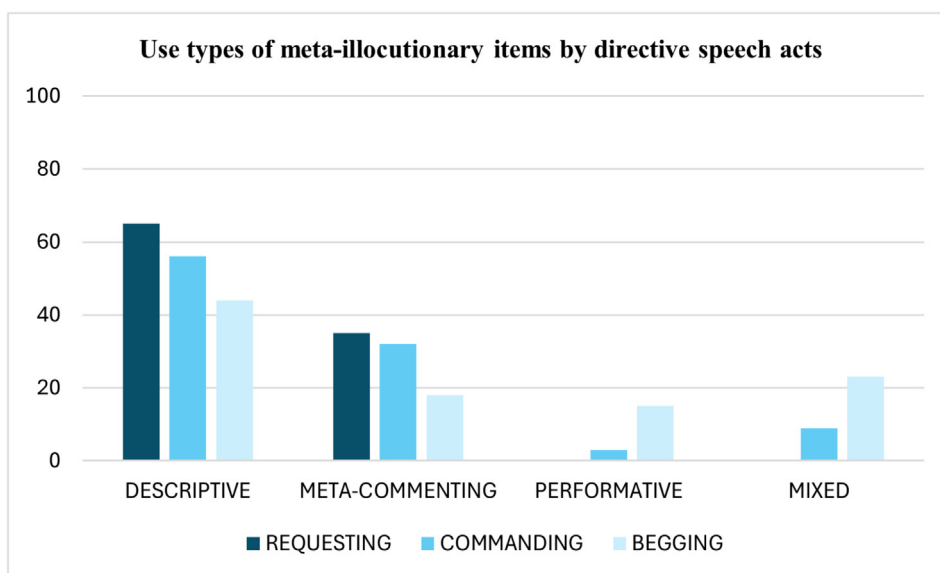


Fig. 1. Use types of meta-illocutionary items by references to *directive* speech acts (n = 282).

Entextualization patterns of contextual factors of *directive* speech acts are highly diverse in general. For instance, entextualizations of speaker and hearer roles encompass private persons (e.g., *Kolya, Patrick*) and (representatives of) groups or institutions (e.g., *the Catholic school, Sunday Herald Deputy Business Editor Steven Vass*), and contents range immensely from *user data* to *speaking the truth* and further to *removing the dead possum from the garage*. In slightly less than half of the examples, preparatory conditions were entextualized (e.g., *the speaker being the head of a committee, the hearer being able to perform the commanded action*), and in slightly more than half of the examples, a perlocutionary effect was entextualized (e.g., *obeying, complying, headlessly accepting*). Time was most frequently specified by the tense of the meta-illocutionary verb or the 'first-order verb of performance' and occasionally by temporal deictic expressions such as *last year* or *earlier this week*, and was mainly assigned the general value *past*. Space was entextualized only rarely by adverbials of place and (distal) spatial deictic expressions such as *on London's South Bank* or *there*. Finally, the locutionary act, input and output conditions, the sincerity condition and the essential condition were almost never entextualized, with notable exceptions being "*Yank the cord out of the wall!*" for the locutionary act (10), *destroyed vocal cords* for (anomalous) input and output conditions (11), and *desire* and *wish* for the sincerity condition (12). Examples (13) and (14) illustrate further selected entextualization patterns in references to directive illocutions:

- (10) The robber [...] shook his revolver at the store manager. "Yank the cord out of the wall!" he commanded. (Autonomy)
- (11) The second survivor had been the first of the group of five to start screaming. His vocal cords destroyed he was unable to beg or object to surgery, and he only reacted by shaking his head violently in disapproval when the anesthetic gas was brought near him. (Best Hoaxes and Pranks)
- (12) Open up aa00blondebaby wrapping then uncover a mystery free live webcam show babe to drive us mad zero is off limits within her free of charge porno webcam chat world. Plus she could be everything and any person you desire her to be your wish is her command [ ...]. (L&S Wards)
- (13) The victim claimed heart trouble; subjects still shocked him on command. (CiF Watch)
- (14) If you are not a driver then start requesting that people who give you lifts show the same courtesy and thought for cyclists. (42 Bikes)

In (13), the speaker entextualizes *subjects* as the commandees and *subjects (still) shocking the victim (him)* as the perlocutionary effect of the command (thus implying the corresponding content of this illocution). Moreover, *the victim claiming heart trouble* is presented as an ineffectual circumstance which did not prevent the *subjects* from *shocking the victim* (as marked by the adversative discourse connective *still*), conceivably in the context of a medical intervention or even torture. In (14), the speaker entextualizes the hearer (*you*) as the potential requester, *people who give (the hearer) lifts* as the potential requestee, *(to) show the same courtesy and thought for cyclists* as the potential content, and *the hearer not being a driver* as the potential preparatory condition of the request. Importantly, all other contextual parameters remain unentextualized and must therefore be inferred by other participants.

#### 4.2. Expressives

In contrast to *directives*, meta-illocutionary references to *expressive* speech acts are dominated by the *performative* use type. This use type encompasses Austin's (1975[1962]) explicit performative formula (15), hedged performatives entextualizing the aspect of intentionality (16), and, most frequently, explicit plural nominal references to the respective speech act (17) – a realization strategy found exclusively in *expressives*.

- (15) I congratulate the Planet Hunters for their discovery of the PH1. (Planet Hunters)
- (16) I would like to apologise to those who say that it's fans like me who are the reason Arsenal lose games like the one on Sunday. (Arsenal Mania)
- (17) Thanks for your comment Mick. (5 Against 4)

The *performative* use type accounts for 61 % of the data subset, albeit with substantial variation across individual illocutions: 94 % in references to thanking, 66 % in references to congratulating, and only 24 % in references to apologizing. In references to thanking and congratulating, this use type makes up the largest share respectively; in references to apologizing, its share is roughly on par with those of other use types.

The *descriptive* use type displays similar realization patterns across *directives* and *expressives*. Just like in references to *directives*, described *expressive* illocutions are mainly being temporally anchored in the past, which is achieved by tense inflections of respective meta-illocutionary verbs (18) or 'first-order verbs of performance' accompanying meta-illocutionary nouns (19). Additionally, *expressives* are occasionally overtly anchored in the present, which, however, realizes dramatic or narrative functions (20).

- (18) Prime Minister David Cameron congratulated President Obama on his victory [ ...]. (Ashley Theophane)
- (19) In an equally bold gesture, Mr Erdogan offered a public apology for the 1938 massacre of thousands of Alevis in the south-eastern province of Tunceli. (Atatürk Society UK)
- (20) So here is my clumsy prose rendering [ ...]. Half the workforce get on the phone, try to figure out a way round it, register complaints, send apologies to bosses and instructions to underlings, and so on, but all to no avail. (Andy XL)

This use type displays an overall share of 17 % in the subset of *expressives* and is also characterized by considerable variation across individual illocutions, with references to apologizing (29 %) displaying a much stronger presence of the *descriptive* use type than references to congratulating (18 %) and thanking (4 %). While this use type is the second most frequent in references to congratulating and thanking, it is similar (and even a bit higher) in frequency to the performative use type in references to apologizing.

The *meta-commenting* use type is also similar in realization to the *directive* subset. Conditionality (combined with requests to perform the illocution) (21) and (mainly deontic) modality (22) were the most frequent types of metaphysical indeterminacy associated with the contextualization of the respective *expressive* illocutions.



- (21) If you have beaten these odds then congratulate yourself. (Grow Your Business).  
 (22) This article is meant to fix a few mistakes. They shouldn't have happened; we must acknowledge them, apologize for them and fix them. (Tony Greenstein's Blog)

In terms of quantity, this use type accounts for 13 % of the subset, and variation across individual illocutions displays similarities to that of the *descriptive* use type: In references to apologizing, the *meta-commenting* use type makes up 28 % of the data, followed by 11 % in references to congratulating and 1 % in references to thanking. A further difference between references to *directives* and *expressives* in general is that, in *expressives*, the metaphysical indeterminacy in contextualizing the respective illocutions is much more often achieved by (deontic) modality rather than conditionality, possibly reflecting the speaker's debt with respect to their interlocutor (see also Sbisà, 1984 for the deontic-modal dynamics of Austin's *behabitives*). Finally, just as for *directives*, the distributions listed above pertain exclusively to unambiguous examples of the respective categories. Mixed use types, which do occasionally occur in the dataset (e.g., in the form of conditional performatives), are not included in the present analysis. Fig. 2 illustrates quantitative distributions of use types in meta-illocutionary references to all *expressive* speech acts.

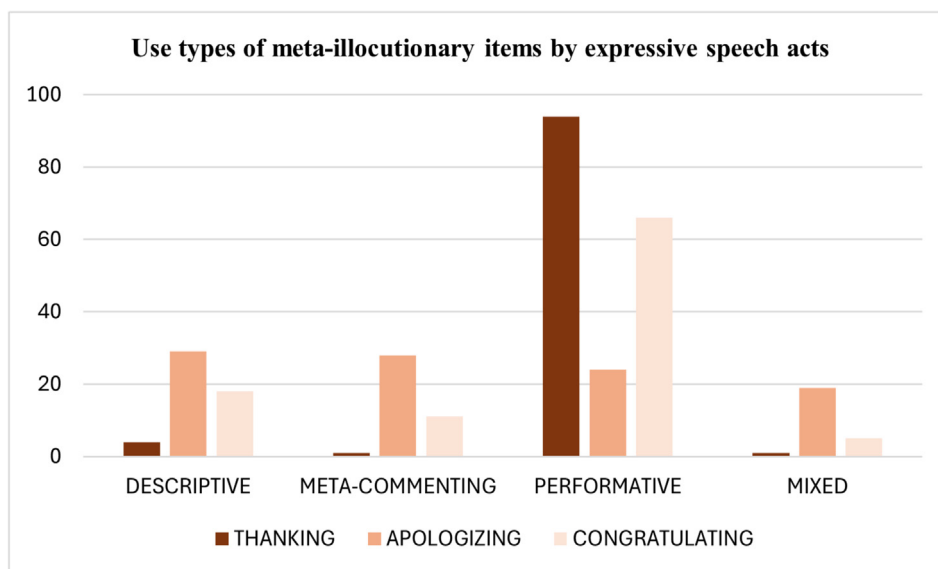


Fig. 2. Use types of meta-illocutionary items by references to *expressive* speech acts (n = 294).

Entextualization patterns of contextual features of *expressive* speech acts were generally much more homogeneous than those pertaining to *directive* speech acts. Speakers and hearers of utterances containing the meta-illocutionary item are at the same time often the speakers and hearers of the respective speech acts, and the time indicated by the meta-illocutionary verb or the 'first-order verb of performance' is mainly *present*. By contrast, the feature of place is almost never entextualized (just as in references to *directives*). Apart from that, the varying contents of *expressive* speech acts (e.g., *commenting on this post*, *the weird editing*, *the win*) are entextualized slightly less frequently than in *directives*, and the preparatory conditions (e.g., *the speaker enjoying the mini convention*, *the speaker's thoughts being slightly dashed off*, *the hearer having just become a father*) are entextualized slightly more frequently than in *directives*. Notably, perlocutionary effects, such as *not accepting* or *refusing to accept* (23), are entextualized substantially less frequently than those of *directives* – in fact, they are hardly entextualized at all, possibly because the script of the three expressive illocutions considered for the present purposes does not include an associated perlocutionary goal. In each of these three features (i.e., contents, preparatory conditions, perlocutionary effects), references to apologizing diverge most strongly from the overall entextualization patterns regarding references to *expressive* speech acts. Finally, just as in references to *directives*, the sincerity condition (alongside input and output conditions and the essential condition) is entextualized only very rarely (if at all), albeit for potentially different reasons such as entextualizations of the sincerity condition (e.g., *I am grateful*, *I am sorry*, *I am happy (for you)*, etc.) constituting realizations of thanks, apologies, and congratulations without the use of a meta-illocutionary item (thus not occurring the present dataset). Apart from that, examples (24) and (25) illustrate typical entextualization patterns found in the present data subset containing meta-illocutionary references to expressive illocutions.

- (23) [Aaron] Ramsey suffered an atrocious tackle from the Stoke City defender [Ryan Shawcross] in 2010, which could have resulted in a career threatening injury; the midfielder [i.e., Aaron Ramsey] broke his legs in six places and the Welshman [i.e., Aaron Ramsey] refused to accept his [i.e., Ryan Shawcross's] apology. (Arsenal News)
- (24) We congratulate Mr Salifu on receiving this prestigious award [ ...]. (Christian Today)
- (25) Thanks for your comments Greg! (80,000 Hours)

In (24), the speaker of the utterance entextualizes the group to which they belong (*we*) as the congratulators, *Mr Salifu* as the congratulatee, and *receiving this prestigious reward* as the content of the illocution of congratulating, which further implies that the corresponding preparatory condition (i.e., Mr Salifu having reached some achievement earning him this prestigious reward, which is in Mr Salifu's interest) obtains. In (25), the speaker of the utterance entextualizes *Greg* as the thankee and *the hearer's (your, i.e., Greg's) comments* as the content of the illocution of thanking, thus implying the obtaining of the corresponding preparatory condition (i.e., Greg having commented, Greg's comments having benefitted the speaker). By contrast, all other contextual features remain unentextualized and must therefore be inferred.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Use types, conceptualization, lexemic features and connotations

Juxtaposing distributions of use types of meta-illocutionary references to *directive* and *expressive* speech acts has revealed (i) that there are distinct inter-categorical differences in how (members of) these two speech act classes are being talked about by ordinary language users, and (ii) that intra-categorical differences are smaller in references to *directive* speech acts than in references to *expressive* speech acts, at least based on the items chosen for the present purposes. These findings can be attributed to categorial qualities of the two speech act classes as predicted by Searle's (1975) taxonomy and particularly by variation of category members across higher-level and lower-level principles of classification, construing *directives* as a 'more cohesive' category and *expressives* as a 'more diversified' category. Against this background, the patterns found in the empirical data can be broadly conceptualized as a (partial) reflection of these categorial qualities in ordinary language: Whereas usage patterns of meta-illocutionary references to *directive* speech acts are characterized by a high degree of similarity, usage patterns of references to *expressive* speech acts differ not only from references to *directive* speech acts, but also from each other. In a broader sense, this finding may further be seen as evidence that conceptual aspects of communicative phenomena are at least partially reflected in metacommunication (including reflexive references to the phenomenon in question), and that therefore the meta-level and the object-level of communication are intrinsically interconnected. But needless to say, the proposed indirect link between usage patterns of meta-illocutionary items on the one hand and the conceptualization of the classes to which these illocutions (or speech acts) belong on the other remains purely hypothetical, at least at the present stage. Future research may consider usage patterns of lexical items referring to further *directive* and *expressive* illocutions (or speech acts) or to illocutions (or speech acts) belonging to other classes (e.g., *commissives*, *representatives/assertives*) in order to reduce the hypothetical nature of this link.

A further factor contributing to the distributions reported above is argued to relate to lexemic features of some of the meta-illocutionary items considered for analysis. Specifically, references to the speech act of begging, which displayed the highest degree of divergence from the holistic pattern regarding references to *directives*, did not encompass noun forms as these exist only very rarely and were not represented at all in this study's downsized sample. Therefore, unlike requesting or commanding, instances of begging were not construed as THINGS but only as ACTIONS (Langacker, 1987) in the present dataset. A general trend that emerged in the overall dataset is that construing speech acts as THINGS tends to be associated more strongly with *talk about* speech acts (mainly in institutional contexts), whereas construing speech acts as ACTIONS tends to be associated more strongly with *performances of* speech acts (mainly in social contexts). This is also reflected in the distribution of use types of meta-illocutionary references to begging, which – compared to requesting and commanding – displays a larger share of the *performative* use type and smaller shares of the *descriptive* and the *meta-commenting* use types. To compensate for the lack of a nominal form, ordinary language users often resorted to using non-finite verb forms, which enabled *talk about* the speech act of begging, both in the *descriptive* and in the *meta-commenting* use type and resulted in an overall distribution somewhat similar to references to the other two *directive* acts.

While references to begging are the most dissimilar within the otherwise quite uniform references to *directive* speech acts, references to apologizing are the most dissimilar within the otherwise more diverse references to *expressive* speech acts. The latter, however, cannot be explained by a lack of noun or verb forms in the dataset. Instead, it is hypothesized that the comparatively large shares of the *descriptive* and the *meta-commenting* use type constitute an indirect effect of the degree of formality commonly associated with the lexeme APOLOGY in *performative* uses. Specifically, previous research has shown that apologies are most commonly realized by variants of SORRY, which is the overwhelming favorite among all realization strategies of this speech act (Meier, 1998; Lutzky and Kehoe, 2017), and that realizations taking the form of APOLOGY or APOLOGIZE tend to be associated with a higher degree of formality (Wierzbicka, 1987). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, especially in blogging, which alongside other online genres is characterized by high degrees of informality and equality (Montero-Fleta et al., 2009), these forms tend to be used more often to *talk about* apologies rather than to *perform* them. Overall, it is held that although usage patterns of the meta-illocutionary lexicon in ordinary language use can and do, to a degree, reflect categorial qualities of speech act classes, pertinent distributions are also affected by lexemic features such as word class restrictions or connotations including degrees of formality associated with meta-illocutionary items.

## 5.2. Entextualization patterns, the situatedness of speech acts, and discursive at-issueness

In terms of entextualization patterns, the main results of the present study were (i) diversity in *directives* and uniformity in *expressives* in entextualizations of speaker, hearer, place, and time, (ii) substantially more entextualizations of the perlocutionary effect in *directives* than in *expressives*, and (iii) virtually no entextualization of input and output conditions, the sincerity condition, and the essential condition across both speech act classes. The first result can be attributed to the distribution of use types across subsets. The *descriptive* use type, which is predominant in references to *directives*, permits highly diverse specifications and configurations of speaker, hearer, place, and time because the only requirement holding for *talk about* illocutions is a contextual anchoring of the speech act outside the immediate communicative situation, viz. the here-and-now. By contrast, the *performative* use type, which predominates in the *expressive* subset, anchors the relevant speech act in the immediate communicative situation by definition. Consequently, the speaker(s) and the hearer(s) of the utterance containing the meta-illocutionary item are simultaneously the speaker(s) and the hearer(s) of the respective speech act, the time is assigned the value *present*, and the place (in the present dataset) is the blog where the communication between the interlocutors takes place. Crucially, these attributes can but do not need to be explicitly entextualized as the *performative* use type itself already entails this configuration of particularized values corresponding to the deictic origo.

The second result – substantial inter-categorical differences regarding entextualizations of perlocutionary effects – is argued to reflect different kinds of situatedness in context and context change across *directive* and *expressive* speech acts. The context-changing capacity of speech acts is documented in Sbisà's (1984, 2013) explication of how an illocutionary act “‘takes effect’ in certain ways, as distinguished from producing consequences in the sense of bringing about [...] changes in the natural course of events” (Austin, 1975[1962]:116). According to Sbisà (2013:32, original emphasis), this ‘taking effect’ of illocutions encompasses “the [conventional] creation, cancellation or change of *deontic* states of affairs concerning the participants in the ongoing interaction”. While most *directive* speech acts are characterized by conventionally creating, to varying degrees, a deontic state of obligation for the hearer to perform the action specified by the speaker, *expressive* speech acts are characterized by conventionally satisfying the deontic state of obligation or necessity for the speaker to express their mental state in response to a certain state of affairs. Therefore, *directive* speech acts can be said to be more closely connected to their perlocutionary effects and thus to ‘opening up’ future courses of action, whereas *expressive* speech acts are more closely connected to the states of affairs preceding their performance and the speakers’ mental states ‘in response to’ these states of affairs. It is argued that the stronger link between *directives* and their perlocutionary effects on the one hand, and *expressives* and their preceding states of affairs (as part of their felicity conditions) on the other are reflected in substantially more frequent entextualizations of the perlocutionary effect in references to *directive* speech acts than in references to *expressive* speech acts.

Finally, the third result – that there are virtually no entextualizations of input and output conditions, the sincerity condition, and the essential condition across both subsets – is argued to indicate low degrees of discursive at-issueness (Potts, 2005) associated with these parameters. Since these parameters reflect background conditions which are generally assumed by interlocutors to hold by default, it appears that – at least under normal circumstances – (the information about) their obtaining can be contributed by implicature. Consequently, explicating the obtaining of these background conditions could be argued to violate Horn's (1989) R-principle and thus to be communicatively inefficient in terms of (an increased) processing effort for the hearer. The lack of necessity to explicate the obtaining of background conditions is argued to be reflected in the low degree of discursive at-issueness associated with the respective parameters as indicated by low frequencies of entextualization.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study has explored usage and entextualization patterns of utterances containing meta-illocutionary items in ordinary language. Based on blogging data from the GloWbE corpus, results indicated that references to *directive* speech acts are dominated by the *descriptive* use type and display diversity in entextualization patterns of contextual features, whereas references to *expressive* speech acts are dominated by the *performative* use type (despite a higher degree of intra-categorical variation) and display uniformity in entextualization patterns. These findings were discussed against the background of first-order conceptualizations of categorial qualities of the *directive* and the *expressive* speech act class, lexemic features and connotative meanings of meta-illocutionary items, the context-changing capacity of speech acts in discourse, and degrees of conventionalization of generalized and particularized felicity conditions. The present study contributes to the growing body of research on first-order pragmatics by extending its scope from first-order perspectives on individual speech acts to first-order conceptualizations of speech act classes based on indirect evidence, viz. inter-categorical and intra-categorical comparisons of references to the respective category members. Forthcoming studies could, for instance, further extend the analyses by (i) considering references to further *directive* and *expressive* speech acts, (ii) considering references to (members of) other speech act classes, or (iii) introducing cross-linguistic or cross-varietal perspectives. Each of these additions would undoubtedly enable new insights into ordinary language users’ conceptualizations of pragmatic aspects of communication and thus advance the still young research area of first-order pragmatics.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Dominik Jan Schoppa:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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**Dominik Jan Schoppa** is a lecturer and research associate at the University of Augsburg, Germany, where he is currently pursuing a PhD degree in Applied Linguistics (English) after having obtained an M.A. degree in Applied Linguistics at the University of Bonn, Germany. His research interests include pragmatics, discourse analysis, linguistic variation, meta-communication and urban (socio-)linguistics. Previous academic contributions include a paper on metacommunicative variation across L1 varieties of English as well as multiple conference talks on qualitative and quantitative approaches to speech-act-theoretical, variational, and socio-cultural aspects of metacommunication, among other things.