

# LING2006 Semantics

## Tutorial: Speech Acts

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Based on tutorial handouts by Dr. Zhuo Chen

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- Speakers who are aware that they are going to violate a maxim of conversation often use “hedges” to introduce their utterance and signal their awareness of the coming violation, as illustrated in the following example.
- *It may sound cliché* (i.e., “I’m about to violate the maxim of quantity, as you may have already known this and thus my following utterance will not be informative”), *but teamwork makes the dream work*.
- For the following hedges, determine which maxim of conversation is about to be violated



- I can't say too much about this case, it's still under police investigation...



- I can't say too much about this case, it's still under police investigation...
- The maxim of QUANTITY is about to be violated, as the speaker is not making his/her contribution as informative as is expected by the addressee.



- Normally I would not bore you with all the details, but I have to tell you...



- Normally I would not bore you with all the details, but I have to tell you...
- The maxim of QUANTITY is about to be violated, as the speaker is making his/her contribution more informative as is expected by the addressee.  
The maxim of MANNER is also about to be violated, as the speaker is not being brief.



- I might be going off the point, but it turns out that...



- I might be going off the point, but it turns out that...
- The maxim of RELEVANCE is about to be violated, as the speaker is off the topic.





- I have not fact-checked this, but do you know that...



- I have not fact-checked this, but do you know that...
- The maxim of **QUALITY** is about to be violated, as the speaker is saying things for which s/he lacks adequate evidence



- ① I request all students to eat pineapple buns for dinner.
- ② I confess that I stayed up too late to watch Netflix.
- Performative utterances **perform the action** denoted by the first verb in the sentence **by speaking**, i.e., “saying is doing” or “doing by saying”.



## Properties of **explicit performatives**:

- ❶ They frequently contain a **performative verb**
  - A performative verb can be used either to describe or to perform the intended speech act (**speech act**: an action that speakers perform by speaking)
  - When a speaker utters (3a), s/he is not just saying it, s/he is also performing the action of apologizing simultaneously.
  - An incomplete list of performative verbs:  
*accept, admit, agree, apologize, congratulate, declare, demand, deny, disagree, forbid, forgive, give up, guarantee, insist, invite, order, predict, promise, quit, resign, recommend, refuse, request, suggest, surrender, thank, warn*



- I **apologize** for making you eat pineapple buns for dinner.
- I'm not working here anymore. I **quit**.
- ❖ Performative clauses normally occur in **active voice** with a **first-person subject**
  - A caveat: passive voice with second- or third-person subject is possible with certain verbs



- The students are ordered to eat pineapple buns for dinner.
- You are recommended to have your first date at the Mandarin Oriental.
- iii Performatives can optionally be modified by the performative adverb ***hereby***; this adverb cannot be used with non-performative statements.
- iv They always occur in **simple present** tense, with a **non-habitual** interpretation, e.g., they cannot be modified by habitual adverbs like *usually, frequently, generally*.



- Consider each of the following utterances, please indicate whether it would be naturally interpreted as an instance of explicit performative, and discuss the evidence which supports your conclusion by specifically referring to at least two properties of explicit performatives



- We accept your surrender.





- We accept your surrender.
- Explicit performative: performative verb “accept”; can be modified by “hereby”; active voice with a first person subject; simple present tense with a non-habitual reading.



- Your surrender is accepted.



- Your surrender is accepted.
- Explicit performative: performative verb “accept”; can be modified by “hereby”; simple present tense with a non-habitual reading; (note that it is in passive voice with a second person subject)



- You are invited to join me for tonight's dinner at the Mandarin Oriental.



- You are invited to join me for tonight's dinner at the Mandarin Oriental.
- Explicit performative: performative verb “invite”; can be modified by “hereby”; simple present tense with a non-habitual reading; (note again that it is in passive voice with a second person subject)



- You were invited to join me for yesterday's dinner at the Mandarin Oriental.



- You were invited to join me for yesterday's dinner at the Mandarin Oriental.
- Not an explicit performative: cannot be modified by “hereby”; not in a simple present tense (i.e., past tense)



- I resign.





- I resign.
- Explicit performative: performative verb “resign”; can be modified by “hereby”; active voice with a first person subject; simple present tense with a non-habitual reading (#I usually resign).



- I resigned.



- I resigned.
- Not an explicit performative: cannot be modified by “hereby”; not in a simple present tense (i.e., past tense)



- **Final exam at 4-6pm, Tue, Apr 23, YIA LT6**
- **Homework 3 due today at 11:59pm**
- Make-up class at 9:30-11:15am, Mon, Apr 22, WMY 507
  - This is optional, i.e., we won't record your attendance, and whatever is introduced in the make-up class will not appear in the final exam
- Please scan the QR code and complete the attendance form



- You guys are amazing. Give yourself a round of applause.
- Thank you all for being my students. I had a good time learning semantics with you all.
- For those who are graduating, I wish you nothing but all the best in the future.
- For those who will be here for some more semesters, keep up your good work, and all the best!