

Direct and indirect Illocutions

An utterance may have one illocution or more than one illocution at the same time.

E.g. 1. "Pass the salt."

We have one illocutionary act in this utterance: requesting.

E.g. 2. 'Can you pass the salt?'

This examples carries out two illocutionary acts simultaneously: asking and requesting.

E.g. 3. 'That will be 10 Riyals, please.'

- This examples carries out two illocutionary acts simultaneously: informing and requesting. As we have seen from these examples, an utterance can have more than one illocution. In examples with two illocutions, one of the illocutions is called **direct** and the other is **indirect**. This leads us to introduce the distinction between direct and indirect illocutions in the next section.
- The **direct illocutionary act** (direct illocution) of an utterance is the illocution most directly indicated by a literal reading of the grammatical form and vocabulary of the sentence uttered.
- The **indirect illocutionary act** (indirect illocution) of an utterance is any further illocution the utterance may have other than what it expresses literally.
- **In example 2**, the **direct illocution** of 'Can you pass the salt?' is an enquiry about the hearer's ability to pass the salt. The **indirect illocution** is a request that the hearer pass the salt.
- Similarly, **in example 3**, the **direct illocution** of 'That will be 10 Riyals, please.' is informing the hearer of the price he needs to pay. The **indirect illocution** is a request that he pays that price.
- The difference between utterances with one direct illocution and utterances with two direct and indirect illocutions is seen through the fact that a deliberately unhelpful reply can be given to an utterance which has direct and indirect illocutions.
- For example, in reply to a speaker's utterance 'I must ask you to leave' the hearer might say, thwarting the intentions of the speaker: 'Must you?'

The previous example carried out two illocutionary acts: direct (asking) and indirect (ordering).

The hearer chose to ignore the speaker's intention (indirect illocution) :

- ordering the hearer to leave), and gave a deliberately unhelpful reply to the direct illocution (asking) made by the speaker: "Must you?". On the other hand, a helpful reply would have been: "OK, I will leave straight away." or "No, I will not leave."
- **Note:**
We will talk more about this point (speakers being helpful) in our discussion of the cooperative principle in the next lecture.
- **Classes of illocutionary acts:**
Illocutionary acts can be classified into different categories, depending on the type of interaction between the speaker and the hearer that they perform.
- **We will focus on the following two classes of illocutionary acts:**
directives and **commissives**.

A- Directive Acts :

A **directive act** is any illocutionary act which essentially involves the speaker trying to get the hearer to behave in some required way. For example, ordering and suggesting are directive acts. On the other hand apologizing and promising are not directive acts because they do not try to direct the hearer to behave in a certain way.
Directives also include: requesting, demanding, insisting, instructing, inviting, etc.

B- Commissive Acts :

A **commissive act** is any illocutionary act which essentially involves the speaker committing himself to behave in some required way. For example, promising and swearing to do something are commissive acts. On the other hand, ordering and thanking are not commissive acts.
Commissives also include: giving one's word, guaranteeing, offering, vowing, etc.

- There are other classes of illocution (e.g. expressives, representatives.. etc.) which we will not talk about in detail in this course.
- If we look at illocutions like thanking and apologizing, for example, we see that they do not belong to either of the directive or commissive acts that we have mentioned. You can refer to your reference books if you are interested to see how we classify these locutions.
- Be careful not to confuse the terms '**direct**' and '**directive**'. We use the term '**direct**' to talk about how an illocution is carried out, i.e. whether directly or indirectly. The term '**directive**' is used for the kind of act carried out, i.e. directing someone to do something. Thus, there can be **direct directives** (e.g. 'Pass the salt.') and **indirect directives** (e.g. 'Can you pass the salt?'). There can also be both **direct** and **indirect commissives**.

