

Understanding English Grammar: A Linguistic Introduction

Additional Exercises for Chapter 15: Pragmatic grounding and pragmatically marked constructions

1. Mood and Speech Acts

For the following underlined utterances, identify the grammatical mood (declarative, imperative or interrogative), and the probable speech act value (expressing information, getting someone to do something, requesting information, requesting confirmation, apologizing, promising, complaining, etc.). The context is given before the colon. The first example is done for you:

- a. At a dinner table: Can you pass the salt? Grammatical Mood: Interrogative
Speech Act Value: Getting someone to do something.
- b. Two friends meet. One says "I'm getting married." The other says: Get outta here!
- c. Sylvia is offended by Mortimer's comment. Mortimer says: My comment was out of line.
- d. Two friends leaving a restaurant. One pulls out a pack of cigarettes and lights up. The other says: When are you going to quit smoking?
- e. A couple are having an argument. One says: That's right. Misinterpret everything I say!
- f. A mother to her 14 year old son: Why is your bedroom always such a mess?
- g. Jake is carrying a large computer and comes to a door that he can't open. He calls to a colleague: Say Marilyn, can you open this door for me?

2. More direct and indirect speech acts

For each of the following expressions, identify the Grammatical Mood (declarative, imperative or interrogative), and the kind of Speech Act that is being accomplished. Brief contexts are given for each of these utterances. The last three represent a conversational exchange between a daughter and her father:

- a. "Please pick up." (Uttered by a caller while waiting for someone to answer the telephone.)
- b. "The midterm is in two weeks." (Uttered by a teacher in a university class).
- c. "Do you know what time it is?" (Uttered by someone impatient to leave for an important event that has probably already started, while waiting for someone else to get ready).
- d. "Do you know what time it is?" (Uttered by a stranger at a bus stop).
- e. "It's warm for this time of year." (Uttered by a stranger at a bus stop).
- f. "It's warm for this time of year." (Uttered by one meteorologist to another while looking at oceanic weather patterns).
- g. "Could you pass the salt?" (Uttered at a dinner table).
- h. "You're baking bread!" (Uttered by someone entering a kitchen filled with the aroma of baking bread).
- i. "You're baking bread!" (Uttered by a head chef to a subordinate while discussing assignments for the day).
- j. "You're baking bread?" (Uttered by a wife to her husband whom she knows never cooks, but who has just announced that he plans to bake some bread).
- k. "Isn't it hot in here?" (Uttered by the leader of a seminar, just before the seminar begins).
- l. (16 year old daughter standing at the kitchen sink): "Who left the eggshells in the sink!!"
- m. (Her father, reading newspaper at the kitchen table): "It's annoying when people don't clean up after themselves, isn't it?"
- n. (16 year old daughter in reply to m.): "I clean up after myself!"

3. Information structure

The following paragraph describing a conversation has been altered significantly from the original (extracted from a novel). The information structure of the paragraph has been manipulated to the point where it is almost incomprehensible. Rewrite this paragraph in such a way that the information flow is more normal. (No fair looking up the original for guidance!)

"Charles, with this I'm not going to let you get away. To the highest authority this matter is being taken by me."

In my armour the chink was spotted by him.

"It is you who already has. That you can't accept that fact is the problem."

"It's with me whom you don't be patronizing. If I have to, as for the Senate, I'll take it all the way to it."

"Look, is it a footling little first-year lecture that you really think the Senate of the University of London is going to care two hoots about? It's a mountain, Dorothy, you're making out of a molehill. I decided it was I who was going to give the Bernini lecture this year is all that's happened. If on him you've got some new material that you want to share with us, more than happy I am another lecture to arrange later in the term for you, but as the same lecture on him for the past ten years has been given by you frankly with academic freedom I can hardly be accused of interfering, can I?"

"Who told you that on earth? " (Quite true it wasn't.)

4. Identifiability

Each of the underlined constituents in the following excerpt (the first paragraph of a novel) is identifiable, or definite. For each one, determine on what basis the identifiability is grounded (possible answers: proper name, vicarious identifiability, unique referent, situational identifiability.). Briefly explain your answer for each constituent. The first two are done for you.

Kino awakened in the near dark. The stars still shone and the day had drawn
proper name situational

only a pale wash of light in the lower sky to the east. The roosters had been crowing

for some time, and the early pigs were already beginning their ceaseless turning

of twigs and bits of wood to see whether anything to eat had been overlooked.

Outside the brush house in the tuna clump, a covey of little birds chattered and

flurried with their wings.

Kino: This is obviously a name. The writer is instructing the reader to establish and identify a referent named "Kino" for deployment in the subsequent text.

the near dark: The fact that the character, Kino, is waking up creates a scene that involves morning. Every morning has a period that can be referred to as "near dark," therefore this period may be treated as identifiable in this context.

5. Tag questions and negation

The following are some tag questions from the BNC. For the first five examples, indicate the expected reply.

- a. So er they wouldn't do that in our days would they?
- b. It's the twenty-fourth of September, isn't it?
- c. You can imagine it, can't you?
- d. She'll sit there and watch, won't she.
- e. Oh dear you were pleased to get off weren't you?

For the following pairs, describe the probable difference in meaning expressed by the different intonations, as indicated in the punctuation (period/full stop = falling intonation; question mark = rising intonation; exclamation point = contrastive stress on the auxiliary):

- f. He won't be able to repair it will he?
He won't be able to repair it will he.
- g. It'd be an interesting exercise, wouldn't it?
It'd be an interesting exercise, wouldn't it.
- h. We can do it again, can't we?
We can do it again, can't we.
- i. It wouldn't do if it fell, would it!
It wouldn't do if it fell, would it.
- j. They have a serious side but they must have a lighter side as well, mustn't they?
They have a serious side but they must have a lighter side as well, mustn't they.