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## Teaching Performative Verbs and Nouns in EU Maritime Regulations

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### Abstract

This paper is concerned with performative speech acts in European Union fisheries legislation with a view to relating the semantic analysis of directive and expressive speech act verbs to politeness strategies for the management of positive and negative face. The performative verbs used in directive and expressive speech acts belong to the semantic domain of communication verbs. The directive verbs occurring in the material are: *appeal, authorize, call upon, conclude, invite, promise, request, urge* and *warn* while the expressive verbs are: *congratulate, express (gratitude), pay (tribute) and thank*. The semantic analysis of directive verbs draws on Leech's framework for illocutionary verbs analysis (Leech 1983: 218). The analysis suggests that the choice of directive and expressive speech act verbs and their co-occurrence with particular addressees are motivated by the socio-pragmatic situation. 30 Naval Engineering students from the UPM also learned how these speech act verbs are used in context in the subject *English for Professional and Academic Communication* (2011-2012).

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### Introduction. EU fisheries legislation and aims of this study

EU summaries of legislation are documents used by the European Union for stating their decisions concerning the formation of future behavior with regard to the internal administration of Fisheries and the ordering of relations between the different European countries. These summaries of legislation are typically explicit performatives (Hughes 1984: 379) and commonly express directive and expressive speech acts and declarations. As declarations "can scarcely be said to involve politeness" (Leech 1983:106), they are therefore outside the scope of the present study\*. Politeness in this EU institutional discourse is associated with the use of intentional indirectness and

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ambivalence achieved by the choice of speech act verb and of the linguistic form for performing the intended speech acts.

The theoretical framework for the study of performatives remains multidisciplinary in nature: it draws on Pragmatics (Leech, 1983; Trosborg 1995, Ng and Bradac 1993) and on a sociolinguistic approach (Blommaert 1999). EU discourse is comprised of sets of various discursive practices which constitute the society and culture of Fisheries, a specific field of action, as well as being constituted by them (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Performatives, help to constitute and shape the “frame” of Fisheries discourse.

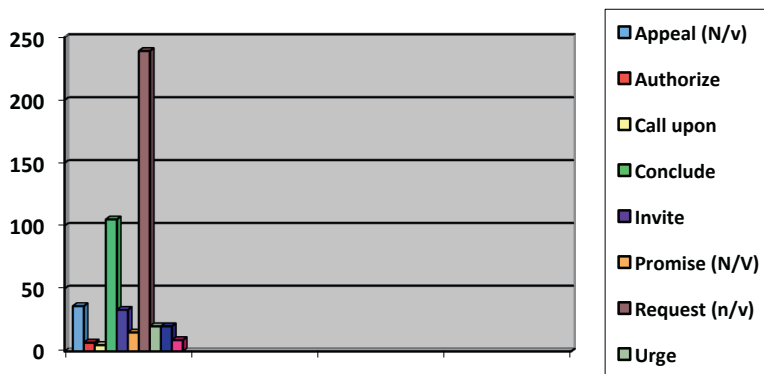
The examples of EU Fisheries legislation described below have been established by means of extensive EU web-archive search ([http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/maritime\\_affairs\\_and\\_fisheries/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/maritime_affairs_and_fisheries/index_en.htm)) using this web as corpus. The summaries of legislation corpus formed ad-hoc allowed identifying the scope of speech act verbs with the aim to discover its main qualitative features.

The organization of this paper is as follows: First, attention will be paid to directive speech acts and secondly, to expressive. Lastly, some concluding remarks will emerge and the implications of teaching these pragmatic formulas for students will be briefly sketched.

## 2. Directives in EU Fisheries

Generally speaking, directive verbs are clearly addressee-oriented and they state duties and obligations for the EU Fisheries stakeholders. The EU desires certain state of affairs to come true and uses different degrees of imposition to achieve its goals. Writers do not use direct performatives and prefer indirect performatives instead for solving problems (Searle 1975:344-350). According to Leech (1983: 36-40), the use of this intentional indirectness reflects politeness considerations.

Graph 1 shows the results for directive verbs and nouns. The profuse use of *request* outnumbering by far the rest of directives reflects that writers show a clear preference to convey a middle imposition and the addressor (the EU) desires that the addressees do the intended propositions.



Graph 1. Use of Directives. Raw tokens.

The semantic analysis of these verbs and nouns indicates different nuances of meaning. The verb *appeal* in the sense of ‘request earnestly (something from somebody); ask for aid or protection’ suggests a stronger commitment than a wish and indicates a weak imposition on the EU’s part (examples 1 and 2). The same applies for *call upon* (examples 3 and 4)

The verb *authorize* in its first sense ‘grant authorization or clearance for’ gives permission to do X in virtue of the EU’s authority in example 5:

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These performative utterances can be regarded as ‘transformative’ performatives, which create an instant change of political or environmental status, or ‘promisory’ performatives, which describe the world as it might be in the future.

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