

# Expositives in discourse<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper examines speech acts in general and the expositive illocutionary act type in particular from a discourse-anchored perspective, discussing discourse-induced modifications and reconceptualizations. We propose that expositives (Austin, [1962]1975) are a higher-level illocutionary act type which makes manifest how speech acts and their linguistic realizations are intended to be interpreted in discourse. Their interpretation in discourse may trigger a (re)contextualizing of locutionary meaning and illocutionary force, thus contributing to the structuring of discourse. Effect-based speech act theory as put forward by Austin provides bridging points between classical speech act theory and discourse. Connecting speech acts and their linguistic realization with prior and upcoming speech acts and their linguistic realization requires the explicit accommodation of the context-changing potential of speech acts and thus of perlocutionary effect. Analogously to discourse connectives in discourse analysis, expositives contribute to discursive sequencing and contextualization and can thus be assigned the status of generalized contextualization devices.

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## 1. Introduction

Speech act theory has paved the ground for an examination of natural-language communication in context. It has not only influenced theoretical pragmatics, but also applied linguistics, where the linguistic realization of speech acts is examined in and across cultures, considering in particular different degrees of (in)directness in social context. Since the focus has been on individual speech acts, the context<sup>2</sup> of the speech acts under investigation and the delimiting frame of discourse genre<sup>3</sup> have not been fully accounted for. In this paper we propose that Austinian speech act theory, in particular the notion of the speech act type of expositive (expounding a view, conducting an argument, and clarifying a usage or a reference, Austin,

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<sup>2</sup> In this article, context is conceived of as a holistic concept which is composed of linguistic context (or: co-text) as the linguistic realization of linearized speech act sequences delimited by discourse genre, social context and its subset of sociocultural context, that is the actual physical surrounds of the linearized speech-act sequences and their culture-specific specification as sociocultural context, and cognitive context (cf. Fetzer, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> In this paper discourse and discourse genre are used as functional synonyms. Discourse genre is used as an umbrella term comprising activity type (Levinson, 1979), communicative genre (Sarangi, 2000) and communicative project (Linell, 1998), to name but the most prominent ones.

1975:161), provides a tool for a speech-act-based analysis of discourse. We examine the nature of the connectedness between the constitutive parts of discourse, that is different types of speech acts and their linguistic realizations within a delimited sequence of concatenated and linearized contributions<sup>4</sup> as linguistic realizations of speech acts. The speech act type of expositive, we suggest, provides the ‘glue’ for connecting linearized speech acts in discourse, supporting the construal of local and global discourse coherence holding between adjacently positioned speech acts and between local speech acts and the discourse genre as a whole (cf. Fetzer, 2013). Expositives make manifest the speaker-intended concatenation of (i) speech acts within a discourse, and (ii) speech acts with the discourse-as-a-whole, and thus may count as requests to interpret upcoming contributions accordingly; the local interpretation may require the recontextualization of the discursive meaning of prior contributions to make the discourse-as-a-whole coherent.

The following excerpts from the discourse of Prime Minister’s Questions<sup>5</sup> (PMQs) by the leader of the opposition Edward Miliband (LO) and Prime Minister David Cameron (PM) at the April 18, 2012 session illustrate the form and function of the expositive illocutionary act type, whose linguistic realization is printed in *italics*:

**LO (Doncaster North) (Lab):** Mr Speaker, *let me join* the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Captain Rupert Bowers from 2nd Battalion the Mercian Regiment, Sergeant Luke Taylor from the Royal Marines, Lance Corporal Michael Foley from the Adjutant General’s Corps and Corporal Jack Stanley from the Queen’s Royal Hussars. *I join* the Prime Minister in saying they showed the most enormous courage and bravery and all of our thoughts are with their family and friends.

Mr Speaker, can the Prime Minister confirm that the cut in the 50p tax rate on which we will be voting tonight will be worth at least £40,000 a year to Britain’s millionaires?

**PM:** The cut in the 50p tax rate is gonna be paid five times over by the richest people in our country. But *I notice*, Mr Speaker, *I notice*, Mr Speaker, he doesn’t ask about unemployment.

In saying “Mr Speaker, *let me join* the Prime Minister in paying tribute to Captain Rupert Bowers . . .”, the LO connects his upcoming contribution with the Prime Minister’s contribution, agreeing both with its content and illocutionary force. In the discursive excerpt above, the hedged performative *let me join* (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987) does not only refer to the face-wants of the participants. It has also discourse-structuring functions by making manifest that condolence, that is, the behabitive act of reacting to other people’s misfortune (Austin, 1975:160–61), is forthcoming. As for the construal of discourse coherence, it refers anaphorically to the PM’s prior contribution while at the same time referring cataphorically to an upcoming contribution exhibiting dual referencing potential, which may be called the Janus-like nature of expositives. For these reasons, the hedged performative *let me join X* is assigned the force of an expositive illocutionary act: it makes manifest how the addresser<sup>6</sup> intends the addressee to take up his contribution and how he intends him to contextualize it (Gumperz and John, 1996) at that particular stage in the discourse. In performing the expositive act, the LO makes manifest his perlocutionary intention of taking up the initiated sequel of offering condolences and continuing it. The LO’s contribution contains another expositive of the same type realized by *I [hereby] join X*, making manifest his support of the PM’s prior contribution.

In that context the LO performs an indirectly realized request for confirmation (“can the PM confirm”). The PM responds to the request for information and indicates that he intends to introduce a new topic to the ongoing discourse. This is done with the contrastive discourse connective<sup>7</sup> *but* co-occurring with the expositive “*I notice*”. In saying “But *I notice*, Mr Speaker, *I notice*, Mr Speaker, he [the LO] doesn’t ask about unemployment”, the PM does not report his observation of what the LO didn’t do. Rather, he makes manifest to the LO – and to the audience of the exchange in the House of Commons as well as to the media audience – how he (the PM) intends the addressee (the LO) to take up his contribution, that is as the introduction of a different topic to the discourse. In that particular context, the expositive

<sup>4</sup> In this paper, *contribution* refers to a discursively contextualized speech act that is to one or more ratified utterances as linguistic realizations of that speech act. *Turn* is used as in the conversation-analytic paradigm.

<sup>5</sup> Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs) is a televised weekly 30-minute parliamentary session, in which the Prime Minister (PM) responds to questions from Members of Parliament (MPs). The Speaker presides over the House’s debate.

<sup>6</sup> This paper is based on speech act theory according to which, the person in a given case who makes an utterance is referred to as the *speaker* and distinguished from the performer of a particular illocutionary act, that is, the *addresser*. Similarly the person to whom the speaker speaks is referred to as the *hearer* and distinguished from the person to whom the illocutionary act is directed, that is, the *addressee*. The circumstances of the situation where an utterance is made are distinguished from *context* of the illocutionary act. When we discuss expositive illocutionary acts, however, we use the term “contributions” rather than “utterances”, and “the circumstances of the situation” are meant to be discursive circumstances in which speech acts are concatenated and linearized.

<sup>7</sup> In this paper *discourse connective* is used as an umbrella term comprising discourse marker and pragmatic marker, to name but the most prominent ones (e.g. Schiffrin, 1987).

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