

Bart Geurts\*

# Communication as commitment sharing: speech acts, implicatures, common ground

<https://doi.org/10.1515/tl-2019-0001>

**Abstract:** The main tenet of this paper is that human communication is first and foremost a matter of negotiating commitments, rather than one of conveying intentions, beliefs, and other mental states. Every speech act causes the speaker to become committed to the hearer to act on a propositional content. Hence, commitments are relations between speakers, hearers, and propositions. Their purpose is to enable speakers and hearers to coordinate their actions: communication is coordinated action for action coordination. To illustrate the potential of the approach, commitment-based analyses are offered for a representative sample of speech act types, conversational implicatures, as well as for common ground.

**Keywords:** commitment, speech acts, common ground, conversational implicatures

## 1 Introduction

The principal units of human communication are speech acts: promises, orders, reminders, and so on. But what *are* speech acts? Basically, there are two ways of answering that question. Consider a perfectly mundane domestic episode: by uttering the sentence “I’ll do the dishes”, Barney promises Betty to do the dishes. One way of construing Barney’s utterance is that it serves to express Barney’s intention to do the dishes. On this construal, understanding speech acts requires that one take a mentalist perspective, for their purported purpose is to convey information about what’s on the speaker’s mind. Alternatively, we can take a social perspective and say that the purpose of Barney’s promise is to undertake a commitment to Betty: as a result of saying, “I’ll do the dishes”, Barney becomes committed to Betty to do the dishes.

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# Communication As Commitment

**New York (State)**



## **Communication As Commitment:**

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