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Illocution, Speech Act Verbs and Some Aspects of Their Performative Use in Ancient Greek

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents an investigative approach to ancient Greek non-literary texts that applies tenets of functional syntax and speech act theory to a general view of ancient Greek as language of communicative use. Combining theoretical views of Austin, Searle, and Dik, and working with Wierzbicka's semantic analyses, the investigation has attempted to establish a basic classification of ancient Greek speech act verbs and test their behaviour in use in the Hippocratic texts. The analyses have yielded some unexpected results. First, the Hippocratic texts do not confirm the presence of the author in the text in the prototypical form 1st person singular indicative present. On the contrary, and secondly, the author is often present in the text in the reference to himself and his words in the form of D2 disjuncts. Third, polysemous definitions in the standard dictionaries, given that they cross boundaries between speech acts, make the classification of ancient Greek speech act verbs even more difficult. Following Wierzbicka's lead, the investigation has also focused on the syntactic features of speech act verbs at the level of illocution. The results have shown that there are many possible avenues of future research in this domain, which is both difficult to approach and rewarding despite the challenges.

Key words: speech act theory, functional syntax, illocution, illocutionary force, ancient Greek speech act verbs, disjuncts, non-literary texts, Hippocratic corpus

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on the top-most layer of sentence structure according to Simon C. Dik's functional syntax paradigm. This layer of illocution subsumes the layer of predication which designates participants in a state of affairs developed in the next layer of proposition where it is given its propositional content. This layer gives the sentence structure its illocutionary aspect and syntactically forms it into a clause.

The illocutionary level of clause is most closely related to Austin's and Searle's speech act theory, and Dik recognizes this relationship (Dik 1997, 299). It is the level on which the sentence acquires its communicative purpose and meaning through formal features of syntactical devices, such as mood, modality, person, time/aspect, or other means, such as intonation. One way of expressing the correlation between illocution, with its communicative purpose or meaning – the illocutionary force of the sentence – and its formal sentence structure is through sentence types, as, for example, it is done in the ancient Greek syntax handbook *Sintaxis del griego antiguo*,[1] which refers to "types of sentence and speech acts" (Jiménez López 2022, 51*sqq*).

Language functions as the most pertinent human means of communication for the purpose of personal and social interaction, and its communicative function is achieved through different formal features, as it conveys different communicative purposes: according to the Spanish analysis of the ancient Greek syntax, there are at least four basic types of communicative functions in ancient Greek — declarative, impressive or directive, interrogative and expressive or exclamative functions.[2] In terms of sentence syntax, these communicative functions are transferred onto declarative sentences, directive sentences and exclamative sentences.[3] Investigations of the level of illocution then follow the formal features of sentence types, interpret their communicative function and attempt to understand and interpret their behaviour in the communicative contexts in which they are used. On the level of illocution, sentences designate an illocutionary act, an act of communication.[4]

All theories dealing with language as a means of communication accept the roles of speaker and hearer in the communicative acts, and this investigation turns its attention to ways in which the level of illocution gives the speaker an opportunity to assert their presence in verbal communication. Although the speaker in most cases announces their presence through 1st person forms grammatically, this paper is

[1] Jiménez López (2022).

[2] Jiménez López (2022), 51.

[3] Jiménez López (2022) classifies wishes together with orders under communicative impressive function.

[4] Dik (1997), 291.

looking into how this can be done either lexically, or semantically and at the same time pragmatically, through illocutionary or performative verbs, that is by speech act verbs. Speech act verbs are verbs that denote speech acts, and one of their formal markers is the 1st person indicative present. Given that verbs carry predication as the basic structural element of a sentence, denote specific illocutions, and express the 1st person speaker, verbs really are the central linguistic phenomenon of this investigation.

Verbs will be approached according to Searle's and Dik's theoretical foundations of speech act theory and functional grammar (Searle 1976, Searle 1989, Dik 1997), and an attempt will be made to apply them to some tenets of discourse analysis.[5] Verbs will be selected from ancient Greek texts based on their formal and lexical features: 1st person singular indicative present will be in focus, while lexically they will belong to groups based on Wierzbicka (1987). Given that Wierzbicka (1987) divides speech act verbs into 37 classes, grouping of verbs for this investigation will be modelled more restrictively.[6]

Ancient Greek texts selected for this investigation belong to the Hippocratic corpus. Those texts of the earliest Western medical thought balance two medical aspects, theoretical and practical, in an extremely competitive environment. Theoretically, Hippocratic texts testify to ways in which medical τέχνη attempted to establish itself as an independent *bona fide* rational domain. On the other hand, it is known that to an extent ancient Greek medical doctors were itinerant practitioners who faced practical challenges of asserting their medical expertise. Thus, these precious texts are expected to emphasize the role of the author/speaker in diverse ways. This investigation thus attempts to analyse how illocutionary verbs may have helped them to do that.

By modelling selected texts as communicative acts and approaching them on the level of illocution, this paper aims to emphasize ancient Greek as a language in use. To look at ancient Greek as a "dead language" is to overlook many significant and visible indicators of how it was used in communication, in which communicative situations and contexts, with which communicative purposes and effects. Ancient Greek thus conceived shows itself as a completely different linguistic entity, a living language that presents philologists and linguists with different sets of serious challenges.

[5] Primarily, the investigation postulates that an ancient Greek text can be modelled and analysed as discourse, as language in (communicative use). *Cf.* Perdicoyianni-Paleologou (2014).

[6] Details are described in methodological description of the proceedings.

2. Theories and definitions

Dik's functional grammar (1997) created his explanation of the sentence as a hierarchical structure of layers and levels built upon the predicate (prototypically a verb) and its obligatory and non-obligatory complements. The first level, that on which an event is described or represented, is termed the representational level: it contains three layers, namely: nuclear, basic, and extended predications. The representational level encodes information relevant or internal to the represented event. The second level of sentence structure, the presentational level, allows humans to add different kinds of information to verbal communication: information about speaker's view or attitude towards what they are saying, information involving the hearer(s) or audience (interactivity), and information referring to formal aspects of what the speaker is saying. To accommodate this new load of information, Dik envisaged two presentational layers of structure: proposition and illocution. Disjuncts are non-obligatory elements of the sentence structure, optional additions to the predication, as they are neither syntactically nor semantically required by the nature of the predicate.

The disjuncts operating at the level of illocution are disjuncts 2, Dik's σ4 or disjuncts of illocution (D2). As presented in Jiménez López (2022), disjuncts of illocution take a number of different forms in ancient Greek, They are most often adverbs, prepositional phrases, particles, and subordinate clauses (2). As D2 adverbs refer to the speech act itself (1):[7]

(1) τὸ βηχίον, οὐδὲν ὡς εἰπεῖν. (Hippoc. *Epid*. 7.1.13)[8]
Slight coughing, nothing, so to say.

At the illocutionary layer, particles indicate the illocutionary force of wish (εἴθε, εἰ γάρ) or order (ἴθι and φέρε, for example); in a special type of declarations, those close to expressing a strong assertion as speaking against the misgivings of hearer(s), the particle combination ἦ μήν is interpreted as an illocutionary modifier with the meaning of "I assure you that…" (Jiménez López 2022, 522).

When subordinated clauses are used as D2, they are often described as false subordinates: this "falsity" becomes obvious because as there is no semantic and logic link to the main predicate. In false final clauses, the purpose refers to either speaker or hearer:

[7] D2 adverbs are equal to adjuncts of manner, in ancient Greek as in Croatian. It is important to follow the syntactic-semantic link with the verb: Napravio je večeru slasno. "He made dinner deliciously." (How did he do it? Adjunct of manner: Deliciously.). Napravio je večeru, slasno. "He made dinner, deliciously". (He made dinner. D2: In my view, the whole event was delicious.). *Cf.* Jiménez López (2022), 520.

[8] Smith (1996). *Cf.* Craik (2015), 63–91.

(2) Δοκέω δὲ σύνδηλον, ὡς μὴ ἐνδηλότερον εἴπω, ὅτι ἐφ' ἑνὶ ἀνδρὶ οὐ πόλις, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ ἔθνεα ἤδη ποτὲ ὤφθη ὠφεληθέντα ἐν πολεμικοῖς, καὶ ἔνθα τέχνη ἰσχύει. (Hippoc. [*Ep.*] 27)[9]

But I think it is manifest, that I do not say it more clearly, that by a single man not just city but many nations were seen to have gotten help already before, in military affairs, and there where *techne* prevails.

In this example, the subordinated final sentence ὡς μὴ ἐνδηλότερον εἴπω is not syntactically linked to any segment of the representational level, and functions as a sort of parenthesis to add the speaker's comment regarding their own words: they can't say anything about the event that would make it more obvious.

In the false comparative clauses, the comparison is established between the speaker and his words, as in this example:

(3) Τὸ γὰρ σῶμα, ὥσπερ μοι καὶ πρότερον εἴρηται, τῇ κοιλίῃ ἐπιδιδοῖ, ἐπὴν κενὴ ἔῃ, καὶ ἐπαυρίσκεται, ἐπὴν πλήρης ἔῃ, ἀπ' αὐτῆς. (Hippoc. *Morb*. 4.41)[10]

For the body, as I have said even before, adds to the belly whenever it is empty, and takes a share from it, whenever it is full.

It is worth noting that these examples, which were extracted from Hippocratic treatises, all contain the verb λέγω "say". It may also be noted that it was somewhat surprising that the search queries in *TLG* have not yielded many more D2 elements in the about 60 Hippocratic treatises. This fact merits further investigation.

To conclude, any investigations of illocutionary phenomena in a language should focus on the layer of illocution; the type of conveyed information should be analysed in terms of its syntactic and semantic links to predication. If the information refers to the speaker, hearer or how the event is presented, this is a tentative D2 element.

Austin's and Searle's speech act theory offers many interesting insights which may be of help in deeper forays into how people communicate. As Verschueren put it in his reference to Austin, speech acts are "things that people do with words" (Verschueren 1980, 3). A speech act is what happens when words are spoken.

As basic as verbs are for the predication of a sentence structure, so it is with speech acts: speech acts are verbalized through speech act verbs. For Austin, a shift from the descriptive towards performative function is especially important in order to identify a verb as a speech act verb (Austin 1975, 85).

For Searle (1976), acts of communication that he termed illocutionary acts were elementary units of human verbal communication. He established his own classifi-

[9] Smith (1990).

[10] Potter (2012). *Cf.* Craik (2015), 185–190.

cation (Searle 1976, 10–16) and looked into the links between illocutionary types and language syntax (Searle 1976, 1), an aspect which is similar to what this investigation is focused on. Given that at least one group of ancient Greek *verba dicendi* has a well-known syntactic behaviour, Searle's deep structure analyses of speech act verbs are a topic which is to be discussed in more detail separately (Searle 1976, 16–20). Wierzbicka (1987) does something similar, when she discusses the kinds of semantic and syntactic clues that a speech act verb offers.[11]

Apart from paying attention to the syntax of speech act verbs, Wierzbicka focuses much of her attention on their semantics and their current lexicographical treatment. Her discontent with the circularity of the lexical description of speech act verbs in acclaimed dictionaries (Wierzbicka 1980, 1–32) caused this investigation to look into how speech act verbs are treated in standard and renowned ancient Greek dictionaries.[12]

2. Verbs that do things

There is a slight terminological "communication noise" when one considers verbs that do things: for the most part the reason is that the terms for verbs originate from terms for types of acts. Thus, the term *performative verbs* is linked with Austin, who classified all communicative acts as constatives and performatives (Austin 1962, 3). Searle, who investigated how performative acts work, uses the same term.[13] Wierzbicka compiled a semantic dictionary of English *speech act verbs*;[14] Kristel Proost and her colleagues in a similar work dedicated to German verbs call them *Kommunikationsverben*.[15] The third volume of *Syntax and Semantics, Speech Acts*, uses terms *illocutionary verbs* and *performative verbs*.[16] Regardless of the differences stemming from their specific theoretical background, one can assume that the terms basically denote the same linguistic entity, i.e., verbs that explicitly express the type of speech act that they perform. In other words, all those terms refer to verbs that name the actions that they do when they are uttered. Their basic counterparts, which comprise the majority of verbs, are verbs that describe or narrate a fact. As Austin put it, these verbs make explicit the illocutionary force of the utterance that they establish, the very "action that is being performed by issuing of utterance" (Austin 1975, 61). Formally, speech act verbs are marked by 1st person ending, singular, indicative mood, present tense, and active voice.[17]

[11] Wierzbicka (1980), 24–26.

[12] First instance dictionaries are *LSJ* (1996) and Montanari (2015).

[13] Searle (1976), Searle (1989).

[14] Wierzbicka (1987).

[15] Proost *et al*. (2004).

[16] Cole Morgan (1975).

[17] In ancient Greek there is also the so-called tragic aorist. In Croatian there is a *historical present* tense, which

For the purposes of this investigation, these kinds of verbs are termed speech act verbs, and paradigmatic differences are noted where necessary. Furthermore, as this investigation is narrowly focused on the sentence level, and it in part aims to shed some light on the highest level of sentence structure according to the Functional Grammar-approach, the classification of speech act verbs follows that division.

3. Methodology and Corpus

For this investigation, which is preliminary in kind, a more simplified working model of speech acts and corresponding speech act verbs has been devised. It follows the classification of sentence types according to their communicative value. There are four groups of speech acts: declarative, impressive (with two subgroups, directive and desiderative), interrogative, and expressive. They correspond to the four classes of speech act verbs: declarative speech act verbs, directive speech act verbs, desiderative speech act verbs, and expressive speech act verbs.

For each group of speech act verbs, several most prototypical examples will be identified and extracted from the dictionaries to establish a "mini bank" of ancient Greek speech act verbs.

Selected speech act verbs are then verified in the Hippocratic texts by their form (1st person, singular, indicative, present tense), and by their illocutionary function at the layer of illocution. The entire Hippocratic corpus serves as the body of this investigation: using *Diogenes*' function Filter all Hippocratic treatises listed in the *Thesaurus linguae graecae*[18] are transformed into a subset of texts. This subset is subject to queries with Diogenes' search tools *Simple* and *Inflected Forms*. More sophisticated methods of digital queries are not necessary for this stage of investigation.[19]

Two types of results are expected. The first one is to be obtained through ancient Greek lexica; this will shed light on the lexicographical aspect of speech act verb description. The other group of results will come from the Hippocratic texts, where the criteria of frequency, syntactic behaviour, and D2 function will be monitored.

is defined as relative present that refers to the past; interestingly, the grammar written by Barić et al (1997) says that this type of present relates to the past but misses to point that its purpose is to equate the moment of event with the moment of utterance. A similar feature is amplified in speech act verbs, hence the formal link to their present tense exclusivity.

[18] *Thesaurus linguae graecae* contains texts from Littrés French edition of Hippocratic treatises, *cf.* Berkowitz Squitier (1986), 171–173. However, the results obtained from *Thesaurus*' searches were verified in more recent Loeb's editions of Hippocrates.

[19] Presented results belong to eight Hippocratic texts: *Epidemics VII*, *Letters* (sp.), *On Waters, Airs and Places, On Diseases IV, The Oath, On Fractures*, and *On Joints*.

4. Ancient Greek speech act verbs — fourfold classification

Based on sentence types distinguished by their illocutionary purpose, this investigation classifies ancient Greek speech act verbs into the following groups:

Group 1 — Declaration
Group 2 — Impressive speech act verbs
Group 2.1 Order
Group 2.2 Wish
Group 3 — Question
Group 4 — Expression[20]

Speech act verbs will be assigned to each of the groups according to the outline elaborated by Wierzbicka (1980), bearing in mind Searle's important conclusions in Searle (1976).[21] As a rule, compound verbs were admitted to the corpus only when no simplex form was available. Also, collected verbs are confirmed to be in use in the 5th century BCE.

4.1 Group 1 — Declaration

The basic elements of this set are three speech verbs from Wierzbicka's groups $Tell_1$ (to recount,/relate — φράζω), Assert (to claim/maintain — λέγω), and Promise (to swear — ὄμνυμι).

4.2 Group 2 — Impressive speech act verbs

4.2.1 Group 2.1 — Order

Verbs from Wierzbicka's groups Order and Ask_1 belong to this set. The Order set comprises verbs "to command/demand/$tell_2$/require/prescribe — κελεύω", and the Ask_1 set comprises verbs "to request/persuade/convince".

As for the group Ask_1, in addition to the verb πείθω "to persuade", the verbs λίσσομαι "to implore, beg" and δέομαι "to ask, demand, request" (Montanari 2015, 471) are confirmed in illocutionary use in the Hippocratic texts. The verb αἰτέω "to ask, beg" also belongs here.

[20] The model is based on Jiménez López (2022) and *CGCG* (2019).

[21] Searle (1976), 22.

4.2.2 Group 2.2 — Wish

Wierzbicka's group Thank will provide the initial set of Wish speech act verbs: "to wish".

Ancient Greek has an ample field of linguistic expressions denoting wishes in various forms of desiderative sentences.[22] However, as the focus remains on the linguistic expression of wishes through speech act verbs, the illocutionary potential of verbs ἐθέλω and βούλομαι could be looked at, with the dynamic infinitive complement carrying the propositional content of the speaker's desire, and in the absolute use, where the speaker only explicates the illocutionary force of their state of mind. In this case, 1st person is the first formal criterion to be taken into account when exploring this use.

4.3 Group 3 — Question

Speech act verbs of this group are linked to Wierzbicka's Ask_2 verb set. The verbs "to inquire/interrogate/question/query" belong to this set.

The prototypical speech act verbs in this group – ἐρωτάω "to ask, interrogate" or εἴρομαι "to ask, question, interrogate" (Montanari 2015, 609), do not have illocutionary use in the Hippocratic texts.

4.4 Group 4 — Expression

This group mirrors Wierzbicka's block of Exclaim speech act verbs: "to enthuse/exult/$swear_2$" The illocutionary point of the verb χαίρω explicates its meaning, i.e., to be happy, to rejoice, to exult.

Ancient Greek, as it seems, has a rich vocabulary to express obscenity and offensiveness,[23] but it lacks those explicit $swear\ words_2$, such as the English performative type *fuck you* — that is also frequent in Croatian. Instead, it has many formations that follow the structure "go-imperative + location/place/direction of a bad end". This is Aeschylean ἴτ' ἐς φθόρον, "go to perdition" (Aesch. *Ag*. 1267), many of Aristophanes' variations, like ἐς κόρακας ἔρρειν/βαδίζειν "go to hell",[24] or εἰς ὄλεθρον from Sophocles *Oedipus Tyrannos*.[25] *TLG* search queries of the Hippocratic collection yielded no such performative phrases.

[22] Jiménez López (2022), 55, 665–668.

[23] *Cf.* Henderson (1991) and Olson (2024).

[24] One must not consider the Homeric imperatives ἔρρε and ἔρρετε to have the same use and meaning (Hom. *Il*. 8. 164, 24. 239).

[25] Soph. *OT*. 430.

4.5. Some remarks on the sentence structure of ancient Greek speech act verbs

A few examples will suffice here. In declarative speech acts, the speech act verbs take the syntactic structure of a complex sentence, in which the main clause expresses the propositional content of the speech act (I declare) and the subordinate clause conveys its propositional content. The same applies to orders, as they are declarations of order, as Searle noted (Searle 1989, 541):

(4) I declare that the war is over.

Main clause – the propositional content is a declaration, while the subordinate expresses its own propositional content.

(5) I order that the war is over.

The declaration that I order + the propositional content of subordinate clause.

For orders, I invoke Wierzbicka's delicate thinking that aligns very well with the syntactic peculiarity of the verb λέγω. Speaking of the Order1 group, she points to the directive meaning and use of the verb *to tell to* (do something), Tell_2.[26] This is akin to constructing verbs of speaking as "verbs of commanding" that is formally expressed with the complementing dynamic infinitive and dative complement (*CGCG*, 598–599):

to tell + (dynamic infinitive) to X + (dative substantive) to Y

The speech act verb πείθω, from Wierzbicka's Ask1 group behaves in a similar way. It can also be complemented by a dynamic infinitive and with the meaning of "to persuade (to do)".[27] For either of these speech act verbs there were no matches of this form in the Hippocratic texts.

5. What do speech act verbs do in ancient Greek medical texts — some results

1. Declaration — Tell_1 — to recount/relate ῥάζω:

(6) Εἰσὶ δ' ἔνιαι φύσιες καὶ νοσεύματα, ἐς ἃ ἐπιτήδειά ἐστι τὰ τοιαῦτα ὕδατα πινόμενα, περὶ ὧν ῥάσω αὐτίκα. (Hippoc. *Aer*. 7)[28]

There are some natures and illnesses for which such waters are adapted to be drunk, of which I will recount immediately.

In this form, as the predicate of a subordinate relative clause, the verb ῥάζω is syntactically linked with the main clause, but its self-reference and reference to the speech act it announces lead to it being identified as D2.

[26] Wierzbicka (1980), 41–42.

[27] *Cf. CGCG*, 599.

[28] Potter (2022). *Cf.* Craik (2015), 7–12.

2. Declaration — to assert λέγω:

(7) Ἀλλὰ γὰρ, ὥσπερ καὶ πρότερον ἔλεξα, θεῖα μὲν καὶ ταῦτά ἐστιν ὁμοίως τοῖσιν ἄλλοισιν· (Hippoc. *Aer*. 22)[29]

But on the contrary, as I have previously asserted, they are divine and the same as the others;

In this example the speech act verb λέγω is not expressed in the present tense, but it is used in aorist as anaphoric reference to the speaker's previous words. In that sense it is auto-referential with the speaker and his words and does not communicate any information pertaining to the event. Given its form of false comparison (pseudo-comparative subordinate clause), this type of expression is a strong candidate for D2.

3. Declaration — Promise — to swear ὄμνυμι:

(8) Ὄμνυμι Ἀπόλλωνα ἰητρὸν, καὶ Ἀσκληπιὸν, καὶ Ὑγείαν, καὶ Πανάκειαν, καὶ θεοὺς πάντας τε καὶ πάσας, … (Hippoc. *Iusj*. 1)[30]

I swear by Apollo the doctor and by Asclepius, and by Hygieia, and by Panakeia, and by all gods and all goddesses, …

4. Impressive speech act verbs – Order – Order – to order κελεύω:

(9) Εἰ δ', ὡς ἐγὼ κελεύω, χεῖρα κατεαγυῖαν κατατείνοι τις, ἐπιστρέψει μὲν τὸ ὀστέον ἐς ἰθὺ, … (Hippoc. *Fract*. 3)[31]

If, as I order, someone stretches a broken arm, he will turn the bone to be straight, …

The comparative subordinate clause hosts the speech act verb κελεύω, syntactically identical to the structure of (9); in this case too, the reference is not internal to the event. The κελεύω segment clarifies the communicative purpose of the whole: the content of the event is presented as a speaker's order. Thus, specifying the illocution of the sentence, this segment can be identified as D2, similar to „pseudo-comparative clauses" of Jiménez López (2022), and similar to parenthetic additions that explicate illocutionary force of a sentence of the type "Calm down, I order." (against, for example, "Calm down, I beg").[32]

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] Potter (2022). *Cf*. Craik (2015), 145–149.

[31] Potter (2025). *Cf*. Craik (2015), 106–112.

[32] Jiménez López (2022), 958–959.

5. Impressive speech act verbs — Order —Ask_1 — to ask, beg αἰτέω:

(10) καὶ ἐγὼ αἰτεόμεθα ὑμέας, (…) ἐκ πατρίδος τῆς ὑμετέρης ὅπλα πολέμια μὴ ἄρασθαι· (Hippoc. [*Ep*.] 27)[33]

And I beg you, (…), not to raise weapons of war from your fatherland,…

In this example the speaker asks hearer(s) to act in a certain way, his words are his plea to them. In effect, two messages are conveyed: in the first one, the speaker refers to his action: "I ask you" and in the second one, he refers to hearer(s): "You don't take up weapons of war from your fatherland." The two contents are syntactically linked, but on the level of illocution, the speaker's self-reference could be seen as a D2.

6. Impressive speech act verbs — Wish — Wish — to wish βούλομαι:

(11) Περὶ μὲν τουτέων οὕτως ἔχει. Βούλομαι δὲ περὶ τῆς Ἀσίης καὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης δεῖξαι ὁκόσον διαφέρουσιν ἀλλήλων ἐς τὰ πάντα, … (Hippoc. *Aer*. 12)[34]

About that, that is the case. Now I want to give presentation on Asia and on Europe how much they differ one from another in everything, ...

The chapter concludes anaphorically and rounds off what was previously stated. Now, in difference and in addition to it, δέ, the speaker expresses what his new or next wish is. That is to present or demonstrate something. In this case, verb βούλομαι serves to express his wish, while the relative subordinate clause complements the contents of his desire, what he wishes to do: he will give presentation on a new topic.

7. Expression — Exclaim — to exult χαίρω:

(12a) Μίαν μὲν οὖν ἡμέρην, ἢ δύο, ἀγάλλεται μὲν ὁ ἰητρὸς, χαίρει δὲ ὁ ἐπιδεδεμένος· (Hippoc. *Artic*. 35)[35]

So, for one day, or two, the doctor is happy, and the patient is exulted;

(12b) … καὶ φησὶ, χαῖρε, ξένε. (Hippoc. [*Ep*.] 17)[36]

…and said, greetings, stranger.

Example (12a) demonstrates the descriptive use of the verb χαίρω, marked by third person. In (12b) the verb is used as a greeting. This communicative purpose and the explicit meaning of what the word does transform it into a speech act verb, but it is consequently moved from Wierzbicka's group Exclaim to her group Greet.

[33] Smith (1990).

[34] Potter (2022). *Cf.* Craik (2014), 7–12.

[35] Potter (2025). *Cf.* Craik (2015), 105–112.

[36] Smith (1990).

5. Conclusion

Many formal features of ancient Greek texts that would have traditionally been explained as features of style, are in fact open for a different explanation when approached from the functional paradigm of language in use and language as a means of communication. Sentence structure is built in hierarchical layers over two levels, from a predicate/verb through three tiers of predication on the representational structural plane, to the proposition and illocution on the presentational level. Each layer adds formal features necessary to equip the sentence as a primarily syntactical entity to become a unit of communication, to prepare it to be successfully uttered and used in verbal communication.

As communicative acts consist of segments (Jakobson 1960, Hymes 1964, Hymes 1972),[37] it is possible to focus on each of them and analyse their form, meaning, function, and effects. In this paper, the investigation focuses on the speaker, and his presence in the sentence structure primarily through speech act verbs. As speech act verbs denote an action performed by the explicit uttering of a word, this investigation works on the structural level of illocution, where the information on the communicative act itself and on the speaker toward hearer(s) is linguistically encoded. In terms of functional syntax, speech acts verbs may act as linguistic expressions of second-layer disjuncts.

Hippocratic texts are a corpus of what this investigation postulates as early, if not the earliest, ancient Greek professional texts. These technical, non-literary texts bear witness to efforts of medical authors to build their domain, through theoretical considerations of what ἰατρικὴ τέχνη is and by inventing adequate medical metalanguage.[38] Also, the texts combine the two sides of medicine, its theoretical existence and practical authority in a completely non-regulated ancient Greek medical context. This investigation attempts to analyse the formal presence of the author in the texts as a device with which in both aspects the ancient Greek medicine could assert its professional authority and social standing. This investigation is also an attempt to emphasize how rewarding it is to move away from the stereotype of ancient Greek as a language of beautiful literature, but otherwise a "dead" language in which there is nothing new to learn. It is a worthwhile effort to look at ancient Greek as a language in use. A language in use always encodes pieces of its extra-linguistic context, and this investigation has used linguistic analysis to uncover aspects of ancient Greek medicine and medical authors.

[37] Jakobson's six functions of language and Hymes' SPEAKING model. *Cf*. Jakobson (1960), Hymes (1964), Hymes (1972).

[38] As evidenced by numerous cases written down in the texts of *Epidemics*.

A simpler model of speech acts and speech act verbs was established for the purpose of this investigation, with four main groups of Declaration, Impressive speech act verbs (with two sub-groups, Order and Wish), Question and Expression. However, a more elaborate model should be prepared for a more extensive analysis to obtain more reliable results, especially considering Searle's relevant conclusions on features of illocutionary verbs in Searle (1976).[39]

During the investigation the syntactic environment of speech act verbs was considered to verify if the ancient Greek speech act verbs square with Searle's notion of syntactic deep structure of his five speech act types.[40] This is of syntactic interest, since ancient Greek *verba dicendi* have diverse means of syntactic complementation (ὡς/ὅτι subordinate clauses or the accusative with infinitive construction, to name just two most prominent examples).

Working with the communicative aspect of language use in a very general way and using speech act theory as the framework has proven to be interesting and at the same time very difficult avenue of research. This investigation has used a simplified model in order not to stray too far afield. Nevertheless, the analyses were vulnerable to complications: Wierzbicka's 37 speech act groups have shown how complex a speech act verb corpus is; definitions of (too) many ancient Greek speech act verbs in Montanari (2015) have shown that they have polysemous illocutionary values. For example, a verb like φράζω expresses the speech act of explanation, command, order, and counsel. In fact, other search results showed that lexical definitions of verbs in their illocutionary functions don't hesitate to cross borders of speech acts: κελεύω is "to order/command", but also "to exhort/urge/spur/rouse"; μαρτύρομαι is "to testify/bear witness" and "implore", "protest", "proclaim/solemnly declare". Of course, speech act verbs may express minute differences depending on the communicative situation they are used in, but one problematic aspect of lexical studies of ancient Greek concerns what one may term "bulk meanings" where a verb has many different semantic slots without semantic explanations. Reading Wierzbicka's meticulous semantic clarifications is a very welcome reprieve from the torrents of meanings lacking semantic substantiation.

Finally, the technical prose of Hippocratic texts did not yield easily to the analysis. Only eight Hippocratic treatises yielded results in this phase of investigation: *Epidemics VII, On Diseases IV, On Waters, Airs and Places, On Fractures, On Joints, The Oath*, and two spurious texts, *Letters*. Contrary to initial expectations, Hippocratic authors have used speech act verbs less often than one might expect in texts that are assertive to an extent, given that they are texts of a budding profession. On the other hand, the

[39] Searle (1976), 22. Also very instructing is Verschueren (1980).

[40] Searle (1976), 10–20.

examples have shown that the Hippocratic author often expresses himself through D2 expressions.

A more thorough classification of ancient Greek speech verbs is a task that remains to be undertaken. It would be worthwhile to think about the criteria to define them more clearly and thus to better understand them. Giving them a more precise or more up-the-point lexicographic definitions is yet another plausible undertaking in this field of work.

In terms of ancient Greek functional syntax, the distinction of hierarchically layered sentence structure has been a major help in understanding the syntactic dynamic of ancient Greek. The focus of language in communication that underlies it adds another clue as to what ancient Greek was as a language. Layering of divergent functions helps immensely when the linearity of a sentence sequence makes it difficult to distinguish simultaneously active linguistic devices. Still, a more comprehensive investigation and description of D2 disjuncts in ancient Greek would be another valuable effort.[41]

[41] Unfortunately, the current work on performative verbs in ancient Greek, though from a different perspective, by Ezra La Roi was not available to the author (paper "Van smeken naar 'alsjeblieft' in het Oudgrieks De historische pragmatiek van performatieve taalhandelingen" published in Lampas in 2025 and the course of his post-doctoral project *Performative Patterns in the History of Greek 500 BCE–600 CE*, https://research.flw.ugent.be/en/projects/performative-patterns-history-greek-500-bce-%E2%80%93-600-ce. Accessed: 23.08.2026.).

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