

John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from *Pragmatics and Society* 9:2
© 2018. John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way.

The author(s) of this article is/are permitted to use this PDF file to generate printed copies to be used by way of offprints, for their personal use only.

Permission is granted by the publishers to post this file on a closed server which is accessible only to members (students and faculty) of the author's/s' institute. It is not permitted to post this PDF on the internet, or to share it on sites such as Mendeley, ResearchGate, Academia.edu.

Please see our rights policy on <https://benjamins.com/content/customers/rights>

For any other use of this material prior written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

Please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website: www.benjamins.com

Why did Trump say “I hope you will let Flynn go” to Comey?

Pragmemes and socio-pragmatics (A Strawsonian analysis)

Alessandro Capone & Antonino Bucca

University of Messina

In this paper, we analyse and discuss an utterance/pragmeme/pract proffered by US President Donald Trump and addressed to FBI Director Comey: ‘I hope you will let Flynn go.’¹ We consider the explicature of this utterance (‘I hope you will drop the Russian investigation concerning Flynn’) and its illocutionary and perlocutionary effects. We argue that while Republicans opt for an Austinian or Searlean analysis, in the attempt to deny that this utterance constituted an attempt to influence Comey, there are reasons for adopting a Strawsonian analysis, casting it in the framework of pragmemes, devised by Mey (2001), that frame a socio-pragmatic analysis of utterance interpretation within context. This analysis shows, Trump illicitly tried to persuade Comey to drop the Russian investigation, and therefore attempted to interfere with the judiciary system. A reasoned case can be made for saying that Trump had the intention of interfering with America’s federal court system through this utterance.

Keywords: political discourse, pragmatics and law, speech acts, pragmemes, pragmatic underdetermination

The performance of any speech act involves at least the observance or exploitation of some linguistic conventions. (Strawson 1964: 442)

It seems clear, that is, that there are many cases in which the illocutionary force of an utterance, though not exhausted by its meaning, is not owed to any conventions other than those which help to give it its meaning. (Strawson 1964: 443–4)

1. The complete original utterance as reconstructed by Comey is ‘I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go, to letting Flynn go.’ (Camp 2017).

1. Introduction

In this paper we will focus on the controversial interpretation of an utterance by US President Donald Trump to James Comey (‘I hope you will let Flynn go’) and we will maintain that the most plausible interpretation is that this utterance is an attempt to influence then FBI director Comey. Although the focus is on this utterance, in the course of this paper various theoretical issues arise and are discussed critically. The structure of the paper is as follows. First of all we present the problem. Then we discuss the literature on Pragmemes, notably broached by Mey (2001), as we are persuaded that pragmemes offer a suitable theoretical tool for clarifying the issue and coming to some reliable conclusions. In particular, we will discuss the role played by context in the understanding of the utterance and we will focus on certain features of the conversation in which the utterance occurred, considering its formality and the role of the speaker as President and of the addressee as FBI official. We will then expatiate on the notion of cancellability and we will make a connection between lack of cancellability and the notion of agency in speaking. We will finally consider the discussion of the same utterance by Tannen and arrive at similar conclusions, even if we deny that the implications of Trump’s utterance are cancellable. In the last section, we will make a parallel between the judiciary investigation and the active search for context. At the end of the paper, we provide an alternative account, accepting that if the President spoke ambiguously or really intended to make an expressive utterance, he acted nevertheless unpresidentially.

2. The focus of this paper

How should one interpret ‘I hope you will let Flynn go?’ or ‘I hope you will let the Flynn investigation (‘that’) go?’ Much of the discussion about Trump’s utterance in this paper and in current newspaper articles focuses on the construction ‘I hope you will...’and whether this counts as a directive or as a request.

Words yield power, especially if those words are backed up by power. Who says something is of utmost importance and can radically alter the interpretation of a speech act. Words are never at liberty, but must be controlled, and have meanings which, in context, are the result of taking an irreversible interpretative path. Words can mean anything, but in certain discourses, especially in contexts presupposing norms for action, their meanings are tightly circumscribed. It would be wrong to say that given an utterance, we can understand anything whatsoever by it. We certainly have to reconstruct the authorial (or Principal’s – in the sense of Goffman 1981) intentions by choosing paths that are not arbitrary,

but are regulated by strong presuppositions about how certain discourses should proceed (and how they should not). Words (in context) can mean any number of ideas we choose them to mean (as a matter of language use), but we have to assign them certain meanings, rather than others, in certain cases where alternative interpretations are not and should not be available. There is a normative side to discourse, which cannot be ignored. Furthermore, when we speak, we take on certain roles. If we take on the role as agents, then we should forfeit the privilege of *deniability* or *cancellability* which is granted to a speaker who merely takes the role of animator (someone who utters a certain discourse without committing him/herself to taking a precise stand on its meaning). Discourses – apart from literary ones – are rarely a matter of subjective (or arbitrary) interpretation and especially formal interactions principally need rules for segmenting and orienting the path of interpretation; rules serving to exclude possible alternative theoretical paths, which, in fact, are not possible in practice (see Capone 2005 on Pragmemes), because the discourse was uttered here, by this agent, to that hearer, in this historical moment, and also with the possibility that the discourse could become available to others, outside of this speaker and hearer context. Given all these constraints, it appears improbable and implausible that an author can (be completely free to) choose what to mean, rather than accepting that his discourse is shaped by the mould of schemas, interpretative paths, norms, environmental constraints that are available.

In this article, we will address an interpretative problem created by an utterance in the context of a conversation between Comey (then CIA Director) and USA President Donald Trump. The utterance is ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’, in effect, and was proffered by the President and addressed to Comey who thought/feared, as he said to investigation committee hearings, that excessive familiarity with the President could be conducive to inappropriate requests (New York Times (June 8, 2017)). Is this utterance a request to derail the Trump-Russia investigation, as many people thought was plausible? Or would it be reasonable, instead, to think that Trump in expressing his hopes had no idea/intention of influencing Comey? (as if he uttered only a sort of thinking-aloud expressive utterance).

While, if one expresses one’s hopes with people who are not in the business of making them come true (say if one expresses one’s hope that one will get a very good mark in maths in conversation with one’s parent), the expression of the hope can legitimately count as a genuine *expressive speech act*, however, expressing such a hope with people who have the power to make the hope come true may well be seen as a request for the hearer to do something in order for the hoped for event to become true. The Comey/Trump conversation is certainly not one in which a disinterested speaker expresses a hope to someone who has no power or means to make the hoped for event come true. Thus, both the speaker and the hearer should

be alert to the possibility that the speech act may be taken as a request rather than, merely, an expressive one. (Even if the presence of a person who has the power to fulfil an expressed hope increases the likelihood that the speech act expressing the hope is not a mere expressive but a request, we are not confident enough to say that such a context is *ipso facto* decisive for the purpose of attributing the intention of request to the speaker. However, this may be one among a number of contextual clues (interpretative keys) used to combine with other clues that make the interpretation of the speech act as a request more certain).

In our opinion the crucial combination of contextual clues required to project the *requestive* force, in this case, are the following:

The speaker is speaking as President of the USA and, hence, as a powerful person, who is probably expecting to exert his power over the hearer; even if Comey should in theory be free from Trump’s influence, he knows well that the President at least has the power to sack him;

The hearer has the power to grant the request, if the speech act is a request; hence, it is probable that the expressive status of the speech act has to be put aside;

If the speaker (Trump) merely expressed a hope, intending to have no consequences for the interlocutor’s conduct, the speech act would be purposeless.² In fact, it is presupposed that anyone who is at the centre of a judiciary inquiry or who may draw negative consequences (at the level of image) from a judiciary inquiry would by far prefer the inquiry not to take place or to be aborted. The most important clue is a negative one. If the President wanted to avoid giving the impression of expressing a request, he had better avoid mentioning a hypothetical hope, given that by expressing such a hope he would give the hearer some reason to believe that he (Trump) wants the judiciary inquiry to be dropped.

Another important intimation, perhaps as important as the last one, is as follows:

An utterance is withheld where the delivery would be an ambiguous one which may be interpreted negatively. (There are close resemblances with injunctions that were studied in connection with indirectly reporting non-serious speech (Capone 2016a), as one would have to prefer avoiding an interpretatively ambiguous utterance/a non-serious utterance if there are chances that one might be reported in a literal way that is distant from the intended interpretation. The fact that this

2. Helmreich (p.c.) writes:

But consider: Admissions Director: ‘We’ll have our decision in a month,’ Applicant: ‘Well, I sure hope I’m one of the students you admit.’” According to Helmreich, the speaker expresses a hope without having an intention to influence or manage to influence the conduct of the hearer. But this is the opposite of the Trump/Comey situation, given that the student has no power over his Director. He can hardly hope to influence the outcome of the selection by saying ‘I hope.....’

theoretical apparatus was developed in 2016 and long before the interpretative problem we are confronted with in the case of Trump's utterance should tell our readers that the pragmatic machinery we are using is not 'ad hoc').

Interpreting another person's words almost amounts to producing an indirect report. In theory, therefore, we should be able to apply everything Capone (2016) thought was applicable to indirect reports (including making explicit everything which was left implicit in the utterance) to Trump's utterance to Comey. The *Principle of Prudence*, which says that one should avoid providing interpretatively ambiguous speech if there are chances that an unintended interpretation might be reported to a third party, which Capone amply discussed in his 2016 monograph on indirect reports, ought to have been taken into account by Trump in delivering the utterance, if his intentions had merely been to voice an expressive act. But the fact that he ignored the *Principle of Prudence* militates in favour of arguing that he willingly violated it, because his intention went beyond delivering a mere expressive act (in fact, any judicious reasoning would have led him to avoid the utterance (or abort it before delivering it) if it was a mere expressive, because the cost and the risk incurred were excessive. The fact that he was willing to put up with the costs of vocalizing an (interpretatively ambiguous) expressive attests to the fact that the intention went well beyond a mere expressive and that he intended to exercise his influence (we do not say 'power' because of the autonomy of the judiciary system from the President's powers) over Comey, in order to persuade him to drop the Russian inquiry.

3. Pragmemes: An alternative to Searle's speech act theory

The discussion of the Trump/Comey interaction will be cast in the framework of pragmemes, set forth by Mey (2001). We have discussed in depth the issue of Pragmemes in Capone (2005) and Capone (2016b). Here, our aim is not to advance the theory of pragmemes, as we are aware that one cannot discuss the issue at length in the context of the current focus. We will confine ourselves to briefly presenting the advantages of the theory. First of all, the theory dispenses with the notion that semantic meaning comes first and is then followed by pragmatic increments. As Mey (2001) makes clear, utterance interpretation is very much a *holistic* business and it is certainly possible that in many cases we happen to know in advance what the meaning of an utterance is or should be, even without hearing the utterance. The position of an utterance in a sequence, in fact, very often displays the function played by that utterance in the sequence. The situation as a whole may bear on utterance interpretation and our schemas may well impose *a priori* con-

straints on the understanding of what we are about to hear. The *pragmeme*, for Mey (2001) and Capone (2005) is essentially a speech act in context. The context plays an important role in shaping the meaning and function of the utterance – including the cultural context. Very often, in fact, if we are not able to translate a speech act with a corresponding one in a different language, this may be due to the fact that a speech act in context is also a speech act in a cultural context. Since cultural contexts may be different and one culture may have a certain speech act while another culture may lack the corresponding one, there need not be a one-to-one correspondence between an utterance in one language and another in a different language. Certain positions in the language may be empty, simply because a certain cultural notion may be missing in a certain language, while occurring in a different one.

Pragmemes are interpretations of speech acts for which a number of contextual clues are mobilized. It is the combination of a number of contextual clues that makes a certain interpretation compelling and hard to cancel. If a number of contextual clues militate in favour of a given interpretation, then the speaker's intentions are fixed, while trying to cancel that interpretation has too high a cost to be feasible/possible. It may be possible to distinguish between two types of pragmemes. The first being pragmemes where there can only be an interpretation because of the conventionality of the situation of speech (and the applied norms for usage). These are close to the category which Kecskes calls ‘situation-bound utterances’ (Kecskes 2013). Alternatively, there are pragmemes whose interpretations are not fixed by the situation of utterance. However, given the abundant number of contextual clues, the hearers, using rationality in reasoning, can only have access to a certain interpretation. By reasoning that a different interpretation would not be possible, one concentrates on the most plausible one. In such cases, there need not be a conventional association between a situation of use and a certain interpretation; however, given the amount of clues, the hearer cannot but reach the conclusion that only one is the legitimate interpretation of the utterance. This is not to say that in all cases we reach determinate interpretations. Take the following case. Istvan Kecskes, after many questions concerning his house in Florida (in the wake of the latest hurricane there) sent one of the authors of the present paper a picture of his swimming pool. The swimming pool was protected by glass walls and a glass ceiling. The structure was intact. Kecskes added a message to the effect that the swimming pool had not been destroyed. Given that he did not say anything about the house and that, if the house had not been destroyed either, it would have been more informative to say so, the recipient of the message may have reasoned that the house had been destroyed. However, something did not make the recipient confident enough to draw that implicature. And this was the prevalent influence of world knowledge. If a structure of glass could resist the

strength of a hurricane, then the house would have been strong enough to resist too. So the Gricean maxims and rationality led the interpretation towards a certain path, while world knowledge led towards a different path. It would be wrong to think that Kecskes had not used his language in a rational way. The occurrence of events meant that he had received the picture of the swimming pool from a neighbour, but no photo of the house, although he was waiting for one before answering exhaustively. In this context, it was not irrational to (merely) say that the swimming pool was safe, even if it was likely that the house was safe too. This is a fluid situation, which is far removed from the kind of everyday situations in which we interpret utterances in a stable way.

Summing up, it should be clear that the interpretation of speech acts crucially depends on knowledge of the context of the utterance, which includes, among other things, the co-text as well as other cues and clues that help direct interpretation (see Capone 2005). I will follow Geis (1995), who, like Strawson (1964), claims that there are only broad mappings between form and speech act interpretation, which help interpretation, but do not fully determine it. It is the power of the context, according to both Strawson and Geis to fully determine interpretation. Other authors have joined this view; according to Kissine (2013), who re-elaborates on Geis's previous ideas to offer a theory of speech act interpretation, context is crucial in the interpretation of a speech act. We cannot go into the full details of the literature on speech acts, but we confine ourselves to pointing out that the most recent developments of this approach, especially those under the influence of Mey's notion of pragmemes, are to be found in Allan, Capone, and Kecskes (2016).

4. Trump versus Comey

We start *in media re*, with the difficult and thorny interpretation of an utterance allegedly proffered by Donald Trump and addressed to James Comey, until 2017 director of the FBI. The utterance is of the form: 'I hope you will let Flynn go'.

Presumably, the context of utterance (what goes on in the immediate situation of an utterance) and the surrounding context (the events subsequent to that utterance, like the sacking of Comey) play a key role in establishing the meaning of this utterance. Issues like deniability, retractability, and cancellability arise: issues which, in general, ought to be investigated in connection with the issue of speech acts and pragmemes. It is not surprising that there should be different interpretations of this utterance, even if, in our considered opinion, only one is or should be the legitimate reading of this event. An utterance should be considered an *event*, in general, but also in particular, given that it is causally related to subsequent

events, which it may have served to trigger. If Comey had listened to or had been influenced by Trump, at least two consequences would probably have followed: (a) Comey would not have been sacked; (b) the Russian investigation would have been dropped (and further subsequent consequences of these consequences). In this particular case, being an event connected to subsequent events (whether potential or actual) is of importance for our investigation of pragmemes, as we will demonstrate that the connection between the utterance and both its current and future contexts may help us come to the (possibly sole) legitimate interpretation of it. This article may possibly be used in the investigation of Trump's obstruction of justice and constitutes a case in which pragmatics matters in practical life (which is largely the idea forwarded by Mey 2001). That pragmatics matters in practical life was also demonstrated by numerous articles and books on pragmatics and law, which illuminate the role played by pragmatics in arriving at the most plausible interpretation of a certain legislative act (see Capone and Poggi 2016; Poggi and Capone 2016). Demonstration of the fact that pragmatics is of considerable practical use is certainly ample.

In this paper, we start from a discussion of this case considered by Comey to be an instigation not to proceed in the judiciary investigation of the Russian connection, and we will deepen its discussion by the tools provided by Mey's (2001) theory of pragmemes. An outcome of this discussion will be a further analysis of the notions of cancellability, deniability and retractability. To those who are persuaded that pragmatic meanings are deniable or cancellable, this utterance by Trump is a reminder that the stronger the intentions manifested through an utterance, the more difficult it is to deny an interpretation (see Jaszczolt 2016 on entrenched meanings; see Capone 2009, 2013). Retracting an interpretation is a different matter, since for any assertion we can retract it, should we change our minds about the strength of our evidence or should we encounter conflicting evidence. To say that we can retract an interpretation, however, is not the same as saying that we can deny it. Our considered view is that although certain utterances seem to be constructed in such a way as to make it possible to deny a given interpretation, the number of contextual clues that are mobilized to convey a certain interpretation make the act of denial very difficult, if not impossible.

As already said, the issue of pragmemes can be brought to bear on the interpretation of this utterance. It is impossible to tackle the discussion of this utterance, without taking into account the cultural/environmental context in which it is uttered. If the utterance had been proffered in Italy or in Turkey, one could attach different interpretations to it, as the cultural context in the latter countries need not militate in favour of non-cancellability of the intended meaning. Anglo-American culture is dominated by the idea that one cannot request things which are not allowed, licit, permissible or acceptable from a moral point of view. To

mention an example, which is perhaps removed somewhat from the case under consideration, it would be completely illicit to ask a professor to try to influence the outcome of, say, a professorship competition by speaking to the selecting committee. One knows well that the results may be contrary to the expected aims. One certainly should not interfere with the autonomous and independent judgment of a selecting committee. Is it not reasonable to expect that the same amount of severity should apply to a judiciary inquiry? How can officials make up their minds as to what has been the case in an investigated case if other powers interfere? Autonomy of judgment and, in this particular case, autonomy in deciding what to investigate and what not to investigate is presupposed by the American political system, given the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary power from other branches of government. So, it can be safely presupposed that in this system the President should not use his presidential power to influence a judiciary investigation. The President knows that Comey recognises this, and it is only the Republicans who choose to refute any admission of it. It is surprising that at this one point in history, many American citizens have become so ignorant of their venerable traditions, and are merely opportunistic with their reasoning.

5. Denying the speech act of requesting

In this section, our analysis mainly rests on the idea that classical speech act theory with its broad correlations between form and specific speech acts fails. While in this section, we will mainly use the leverage of Strawson's ideas, the ideas of classical speech act theory have been more recently refuted by Levinson (1983). Levinson (1983) was a drastic refutation, based on empirical problems, of classical speech act theory. Although the relevant chapter could appear to be quite negative, it was intended to be completed by the following chapter on conversation analysis, where Levinson hoped to find the solutions to the problems of speech act theory in the idea that conversational structure could constrain interpretation. More or less the same route was used by Geis (1995). It is not possible, here, in the context of a short paper to delve into all of Levinson's considerations, but we will confine ourselves to considering an example, which is of great theoretical importance. Suppose that questions mainly consist of interrogative sentences. Surely there is a broad correlation between interrogative sentences and questions. However, in a certain context, it is certainly NOT the case that an interrogative sentence counts as a question. In the context of an oral university examination, a lecturer may issue a number of interrogative sentences, which surely elicit replies, much in the same way as questions would do. However, they are NOT questions, because for a speech act to count as a genuine question, the speaker must not

know the answer, be in need of an answer, etc. However, surely a university lecturer knows the answer to the question he asks, thus it is not a question, but only a way of testing the student's knowledge. The speech act in question is not questioning but examining. Many examples of this type can be cited, but surely our readers need not be reminded of all possible cases, as they are well known in the literature. It is the context of utterance that fully determines the speech act intended by the speaker. We need to have a theory of the speaker's intentions and of the contextual clues and cues that allow interpretation. Now, we can return to the issue of Trump's utterance.

One profound question concerning this case is why Trump's fellow Republicans, rather than siding with the President and denying that Comey received the alleged utterance ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’ (possibly interpretable as an order from the President to drop the Russian inquiry) have preferred to deny that a President can issue an order by saying only ‘I hope that P’ (in the sense that it is not enough to say by itself ‘I hope that P’ to issue an order to someone else). (Interestingly, one of Trump's sons (see Danner 2017) held the view, since he knew his father very well, that when his father ordered something, it was always clear that it was an order. His argument, however, is flawed, because it presupposes that his father unequivocally issues orders, rather than expresses hopes, with people who are his subordinates and who have the duty to obey him. (Also, given the separation of powers (the political and the judiciary power), this reasoning cannot apply here). Republicans have suddenly become Austinian, in the sense that they appear to hold the view that speech acts, to be successfully executed/expressed, have to rely on explicit performatives (Austin 1975). However, Strawson fiercely and correctly opposed the Austinian view, a view which was certainly interpreted by Searle (1969 and later works) and Searleans in a way that is too literal. Strawson made it clear that issuing a speech act is not to rely on explicit performatives but to use implicit levels of meaning and to rely on context and contextual clues and pragmatic reasoning (including use of the Gricean maxims). Strawson was incredibly close to Mey's (2001) and Capone (2005) notion of Pragmemes.

Strawson (1964: 459) writes the following:

Acts belonging to convention-constituted procedures of the kind I have just referred to form an important part of human communication. But they do not form the whole nor, we may think, the most fundamental part. It would be a mistake to take them as the model for understanding the notion of illocutionary force in general, as Austin perhaps shows some tendency to do when he both insists that the illocutionary act is essentially a conventional act and connects this claim with the possibility of making the act explicit by the use of the performative formula.

The proposition that one need not use an explicit performative to issue an order clearly stands. An employee's boss in her/his office can tell him/her 'You can go' and the employee will understand that s/he wants him/her to go (it would be an order to go, if it had not been mitigated on purpose in order to conceal the order by means of a (false) permission). Mitigation and the implicit resources of language and pragmatics can militate against a literal interpretation of a speech act and can strongly favour a non-literal interpretation. Strawson's view – which we accept *in toto* in this paper – is that very rarely does one use performatives, when, instead, it is clear in context what the interpretation of a speech act should be (in any case, performatives are only a small part of the speech acts which one may possibly proffer). Literal interpretation is almost never prevailing when a speech act is proffered and the hearer will always try to enrich the literal interpretation through contextual resources.

We may even go as far as to say that even literal interpretation is obtained by making use of contextual resources – there are never (in nature) literal interpretations as such, but we need to unravel the contextual influences of various clues in order to decide that, yes, in this or that case a literal interpretation is intended. Should we then arrive at the conclusion that literal interpretations are a myth? No, all we mean is that literal interpretations too have to be supported by context. They are both potential interpretations (manifested through what the words and the syntax of language wear on their sleeves) and actually intended interpretations in certain cases, provided that they are supported by contextual clues. It is not enough for an expression X (both a simple or complex one) to potentially bear a literal interpretation, and for this interpretation to be retained in context. It is not simply the case that a literal interpretation arises when there is nothing in the context that cancels it, rather, it must be positively reinforced by the context. We may even speak of a literal content language game (one which may be reinforced, for example, by adverbials (e.g. *I am speaking literally*)).

Republicans, by becoming Austinian, have preferred to become linguists rather than creating a constitutional crisis and pitch one institutional power against the other. They know well that Comey has been FBI Director for several years and the possibility of having to admit that a liar was responsible for an important judiciary branch like the FBI is to admit that something was fatally flawed in the system, including the President who decided to confirm him when he took office rather than replace him (in the Presidential transition) with someone else. However, the cost of avoiding a constitutional crisis (or the price to pay) is to embrace a linguistic theory which is very weak, and possibly false. It is of some interest that Republicans do not cite a particular linguistic theory; however, since it is reasonable to expect that at least some of them come from the branch of law, they embrace a kind of literalism, which may have application to both the

interpretation of the law and the interpretation of someone’s words (in daily conversations).

However, it is clear that literalism cannot be accepted in the field of the law, given that interpretations should be linked to changed interests and conditions in society; and it cannot be accepted either to absolve Trump from his error, which is bound to have institutional consequences, because no President can order or even suggest that an FBI Director should not pursue an investigation. Even if we were to take Trump literally, why would he have to express his hope that Comey will fail to pursue the Russian investigation if his aim were not to persuade him to do so?

At this point, we have to notice an ambiguity. When someone says ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’ meaning ‘I hope you will not pursue the Russian investigation’, the utterance might mean either that he hopes that by chance the addressee will drop the investigation or that he will voluntarily cease to pursue the investigation. In other words, on the latter interpretation, the meaning is that Comey will have to take a decision not to pursue the investigation and to take action so that the investigation will not be pursued by his subordinates (it is unthinkable that Comey does everything on his own and it is implicit that in order to drop the investigation, he would have to give orders to his subordinates to stop pursuing it). In other words, it is being presupposed that Comey will have to do something which is not only to fail to do something and do it purposefully, but he will have to induce his subordinates to stop inquiring into the matter (two illicit actions, in other words). Now, the possible but not plausible interpretation that Comey is being communicated Trump’s ‘hope’ that he will drop the investigation by chance, and not do so voluntarily and give consequential orders to do so to his subordinates, seems to me to be very likely to be discarded. One would never ask one’s friend not to cross the bridge by mere chance, because one can only ask one’s friend to do things (or not to do things) which happen because s/he is the agent, because s/he embarks on actions. One cannot communicate to Comey the hope that he will fail to pursue the Russian investigation by mere chance, because this is not something that one does by mere chance or that one can ask him to do by mere chance. One can ask someone to read a book but not to read it by mere chance. Asking or telling someone to do something is incompatible with the idea that the event will (merely) happen to the person one is asking and that he will never be the agent of such an event (I do not say action, because there can be no action without an agent; Peacocke 2014).³

3. Although we were not very explicit about this, an utterance like ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’ has the following explicature: ‘I hope you will drop the Flynn investigation’ or ‘I hope you will fail to pursue the Flynn investigation.’

We may wonder what kind of speech act should an utterance like ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’ or ‘I hope you will let the Russian investigation go’ be, given that Republicans assert that it is not to be considered a directive or a request to drop the Russian investigation (about Flynn). Presumably it would have to be taken at face value as an assertion, with an expressive purpose (i.e. to express hope). Even this is not enough, because by asserting a hope that P, the President may well express that he desires that P and that he thinks that P is preferable to non-P. ‘Hope’ is a propositional attitude verb, but once it is asserted, it is clear that (following considerations in Goldberg 2015) the President makes manifest what his preferred course of action should be and given that there is a hearer, who is a public official, the assertion counts as a commitment by Trump to P’s having to be preferred to NOT P. Given that Trump has publically asserted his commitment (addressing it) to a public official, it may be argued that his was an attempt to influence Hearer’s behaviour, and to express this tacit belief that H’s behaviour will conform with the speaker’s hopes (as Strawson says, “[i]n saying what I say, then, part of what I am doing is trying to influence your attitudes or conduct in a certain way”; Strawson 1964: 452).

The only way for Republicans to be right in believing that the linguistic argument should work and should be preferred to a constitutional conflict is to assert the point that in saying ‘I hope that you will let Flynn go’ the President intended his utterance as a *thinking aloud utterance*, a sort of expressive like ‘This is what I am thinking: I hope you will let Flynn go’. But even this thinking-aloud utterance may be interpreted as an attempt to influence conduct (it might be said that possibility does not undermine the Republican’s linguistic argument, though. But there are ways to reply to this objection, because influencing and asking someone to do something are very similar actions which may have the same result). Why should one think aloud before a public official, rather than thinking in one’s head? Presumably, if one undertakes the effort of thinking aloud, when one could very well keep that thought for oneself, this means that one wants to achieve something that offsets the effort of thinking aloud: the payoffs must lie in the modification of the relationship between Trump and Comey.⁴ Trump wants Comey to be on his side or, at least, take the point of view that it preferable that P rather than NOT P. To say the least, Trump is attempting to obtain convergence on the same point. At least (or minimally) he wants Comey to consider his point of view that

4. Objection: Why is that? What about thinking aloud to solicit another’s agreement, so as to become satisfied that they’re “in the same place” on the matter? This objection can be replied to by referring to Comey’s complaints prior to this event, addressed to one of Trump’s men, that he feared that Trump was seeking to attempt to influence him by repeated contact. These thinking aloud utterances should be seen in the context of Comey’s complaints to Trump’s collaborators.

it is preferable to drop the Flynn investigation. But now we are possibly conceding too much ground. This is not in the context of a theoretical conversation in which Trump and Comey discuss in a rational way reasons for pursuing or stopping the judiciary inquiry. Certainly Trump would have the right to say why he thinks the inquiry should stop. But for this interpretation to be adopted one would have to be in the context of a theoretical (we would say “abstract” or “disinterested”) dispute. If Trump was a professor of Law, then perhaps it would be reasonable to have a theoretical dispute. But the fact is that here we are not in the context of a theoretical dispute and, thus, this merely theoretical interpretation of the utterance as expressing a reasonable point of view should be aborted.

6. Corroborating views by Tannen (2017)

In an interesting online contribution to a newspaper, Deborah Tannen tackles the issue of this utterance by President Trump to Comey, insisting that even if the message were planned so as to make it deniable, the situation is such that the words are conferred special authority through contextual clues. Tannen compares the situation with two possible sets of circumstances. A thief may say to a person ‘I hope you will give me your money’ holding a gun in his hand aimed at the face of the person in question. Should we say that the thief was only expressing a hope or was it the case that the context enforced a certain interpretation of the words as a directive? Tannen opts for the latter interpretative possibility. Another point Tannen presses is that, in military discourse, indirect utterances are proffered with the expectation (and intention) that they cause appropriate reactions on the part of the hearers. Thus, an utterance like ‘It is too hot in this room’ has to be interpreted as a directive to the hearers to do something about the situation and go and open one of the windows (or switch the air-conditioner on, for example). Tannen (2017) is absolutely right that, despite the fact that these messages are (potentially) deniable, the context makes it hard to deny their real import. It is as if the context were freezing the message. Having agreed with Tannen (2017) in that there are elements of the situation serving to project a certain meaning, I disagree with the idea that these messages are, potentially, deniable. It is impossible to deny that Trump, by saying ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’, is trying to interfere with a course of events and is trying to use his influence⁵ and suggest that Comey conform with the Pres-

5. Theresa Catalano writes in a p.c.:

But nothing is impossible in this administration. Masha Gessen made a great point about Trump’s lying last night (and Putin’s) on The Daily Show. She said that everyone

ident's wishes. In theory, we might have a situation in which one expresses hopes knowing that the hearer will do the opposite of what s/he says. Even in such a situation, the speaker is trying (or counts as trying) to influence a certain outcome of a situation. However, it is not very plausible to think that Trump is expressing a hope while remaining neutral as to whether Comey will implement that hope or not.⁶ This would not be an efficient or productive way to conduct an engagement. There would be an expenditure of energy without any cognitive rewards. Instead, as pragmaticians like Levinson (2000), Horn (1989), Atlas (2005) and Relevance Theorists make clear, we always expect our utterances to have effects and, in particular, we expect these effects to offset the cognitive costs of processing and utterance planning. If Trump expressed his hope that Comey would let the Russian inquiry drop without hoping that his hope would modify Comey's propositional attitudes, his utterance would be otiose and useless. We exclude *a priori*, however, that people expend their time when they speak, expressing their propositional attitudes without planning to modify the hearer's propositional attitudes. Jeffrey Helmreich objects that "Again, I'm unsure about the dichotomy: the third alternative is that they're not wasting their time, but they're also not trying to modify the hearer's attitudes. Between these two options is a universe of possibilities: they may be "sounding out", or seeking reassurance about what they hope are the pre-existing propositional attitudes of the hearer, or seeking to bond with the hearer about what he thinks are their shared attitudes, or seeking to reassure the hearer that they're on the same page in anticipation of an upcoming challenger, etc." My reply to Helmreich is that, if this were not a meeting between the President of the USA and the CIA Director, these possibilities would be plausible. But they are excluded because pejorative interpretations are possible and one has a duty

knows he is lying but he lies to show there is nothing you can do about it and exert his power. She compared it to a bully that steals your lunch. When you say "Hey, you took my lunch", he holds it up and says "What lunch? I didn't take your lunch". That is, he knows you can do nothing about it and is demonstrating his power. This is similar in that you say it is impossible to deny but they did and they will continue to unless someone is able to convince a judge there is no other explanation.

Start at 13.53 to see Masha Gessen's interview. <http://www.cc.com/episodes/ia88c6/the-daily-show-with-trevor-noah-extended---july-27--2017---masha-gessen-season-22-ep-22137>

6. Objection: There is a third alternative: he is expressing hope, but he is NOT neutral, preferring in fact that Comey will do as hoped, BUT not outright directing as much. I agree this is a theoretical possibility. The most plausible reply is that, by disagreeing with someone who in his capacity as CIA director has taken a certain action, at least counts as causing embarrassment. Furthermore, this action would be interpreted as expressing criticism. Why would someone who should have no influence in judiciary proceedings express criticism, knowing that this might cause embarrassment? Is the President entitled to express criticism?

to avoid the creation of pejorative interpretations. As Helmreich admits, there are many options; but there are also the pejorative options. And thus, one should follow the Principle of Prudence and avoid multiplying interpretative options.

7. What the notion of agency has to tell us about this case

Before concluding the analysis of the Trump/Comey interaction, we would like to open up a brief section on the notion of agent (or agency) and discuss its compatibility with cancellability or deniability. The Republicans busy defending Trump have insisted on literalism and have tacitly endorsed deniability. In our opinion, the notion of (real) agency or agent is bound up with the notion of non-cancellability (basically the idea defended by Capone (2009) that explicatures are not cancellable). In fact, what kind of agent would be an agent whose meanings are deniable and cancellable? Certainly that would not be a Presidential agent. But I would even argue that such a person would not even minimally be an agent, as agency means that the agent clearly brings about an action which is identifiable. Being able to identify an action and to distinguish it from other possible actions (and helping hearers do the same) is central to the definition of the notion of agency. Someone is not an agent (in speaking, in addressing an utterance to someone else) unless s/he allows the hearer to identify her/his actions in a non-ambiguous way. This does not mean that literal meanings should be crucial. But what is of utmost importance is that s/he should utilize a number of clues and presuppositions (whether cultural, social or environmental) univocally leading towards a certain path of interpretation, which can be clearly distinguished from other paths of interpretation. Most importantly, the notion of agency is bound up with the Goffmanian role of Principal (Goffman 1981), which ought to be distinguished from the role of animator. Someone who utters an ambiguous message in the hope that such a message could be deniable or cancellable is not behaving as an agent and is not even a Principal in Goffman's sense. He is perhaps an animator. He says something or behaves as if to say something, but this is an utterance which is not his. It could be anybody else's utterance, given that it can be easily denied or cancelled. Instead, we expect of the President that he should speak in the Principal's mode (unless we are confronted with semiotically marked situations containing sufficient clues that the conversation is ironical, informal, non-literal, full of jokes, etc.). Speaking as a President in our opinion requires not only speaking as Principal in Goffman's sense, but also embracing a shift of perspective and shifting from the referential to the attributive interpretation of the notion 'The President' (Donnellan 1966). In other words, the President should speak not only as himself (Trump, in this case) but as President and should make an effort to

limit his personality (and idiosyncratic character) to take on the role as President. This is of clear significance when determining the path which the Presidential discourse wants to take. While a President (in the attributive interpretation) would by far prefer to avoid obstruction of justice, President Trump (or un-Presidential Trump) is taking a course which can potentially be defined as ‘obstruction of justice’ and he should be aware of that, otherwise he would have no reason for interfering with the course of justice (he takes a risk because he thinks the pay-offs of taking the risk are potentially greater and, because, probably, he has made too much of the fact that Comey appeared to do him a favour in the election by announcing that Hillary Clinton was under a new investigation). While Comey may have indirectly influenced the Presidential election, it is not impossible that he did so with no opportunistic intentions and out of a sense of duty towards the nation. Trump may have read too much (like everybody else) into Comey’s pre-election behaviour and may have interpreted that as a partisan move to help Republicans in the election; furthermore, he may have attributed to Comey the intention of affiliating with Republicans and of advertising such an affiliation by his unusual behaviour. We take it as a given assumption that anyone who speaks should be aware of (and should have to face responsibility for) the obvious consequences of what s/he does. This is why s/he is Principal, rather than animator. The Animator is not going to face the consequences of what s/he says (*‘Ambasciator non porta pena’*, writes Alessandro Manzoni in *I Promessi Sposi*, ‘The Betrothed’). In speaking as President, Trump should also be aware that the consequences of his action will be aggravated by the fact that he is the President. He should also be aware of the fact that the judiciary powers are separate from the Presidential powers. In other words, he should be aware of the attributive interpretation of ‘The President said that...’. Anyone in that position would be counted as obstructing justice, especially if the utterance were not appropriate and then also followed by sanctions which are not legally due (nobody can be persecuted or ill-treated or sacked because s/he pursues his duties).

Before concluding our paper, we would like to draw attention to an action by Trump which may be called ‘*clues deletion*’. We have already mentioned, if not discussed at length, that an important clue to the interpretation of Trump’s words ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’ is the fact that Comey was sacked by Trump. We presume that this occurred because Comey did not comply with the President’s request. Of course, it is not easy to attribute intentions to an action, as we need to be sure that the intention is properly allocated. If some other event had occurred to alter the relationship between Trump and Comey, we could have looked for an intention elsewhere. Suppose Comey had been found guilty of illegitimately using FBI funds for personal purposes, then it would be credible that Trump sacked him for a different reason. But when we look at the events occurring during the last six

months, we see very little happening, except for the FBI investigation into Russian ties (and possible interference with the USA Presidential election). Trump and the Department of Justice had to be aware that the media would have linked the sacking of Comey to the Russian investigation and could have provided a plausible context corroborating the interpretation of ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’ as a request by a person having authority. The fact that they provided reasons which nobody else found credible could be seen as awareness of the fact that the sacking of Comey could be considered a legitimate context for the interpretation of the utterance ‘I hope you will let Flynn go’ and that the explanations accompanying such an act of sacking could be interpreted as a voluntary act of *clues deletion*. Like a criminal who deletes clues leading to his or her imprisonment, Trump and his attorney general and deputy attorney general provided an alternative motivation, summed up in the following text:

The statements by the White House and Sessions cite two issues. The first is Comey’s unprofessional handling of the Hillary Clinton email investigation, where he first decided not to prosecute her over the mishandling of classified information and then subsequently revealed to the public that the investigation had been reopened shortly before the election, possibly influencing the outcome. This is a serious matter, as Comey broke with precedent by going public with details of bureau investigations that normally are considered confidential. One might argue that it is certainly an odd assertion for the White House to be making, as the reopening of the investigation undoubtedly helped Trump, but it perhaps should be seen as an attempt to create some kind of bipartisan consensus about Comey’s having overreached by exposing bureau activities that might well have remained secret. *(The American Conservative, May 17th 2017).*

Now, nobody was persuaded that this was the real motivation. For one thing, that Comey had behaved this way towards the Clinton investigation was known since Trump had set foot in the White House; thus, if taken seriously, these accusations should have motivated not the sacking of Comey several months after Trump took power, but should have resulted in the sacking of Comey as soon as Trump started to officially act as President. He could have sacked Comey in the first place, but did not, and instead, chose to confirm him in his position as FBI Director. People can easily see that the motivation given officially is not credible and is to be considered an attempt to destroy interpretative clues which may lead in the direction of seeing Trump being responsible for an obstruction of justice.

8. Actively looking for context

In his inquiry, to establish whether the President committed an obstruction of Justice, Mueller is trying to pursue context in an active way and wants to interview the President's collaborators, especially one he (the President) had met before the meeting between Comey and Trump where the 'hope' utterance investigated in this paper was voiced (Reince Priebus). In that meeting, Comey had expressed his reservations and embarrassment about being approached about the Russian investigation.⁷ Mueller would like to know whether this collaborator of Trump (Priebus) had made Trump aware of Comey's reservations. Of course, pursuing a context like this one is important because it amounts to providing evidence that when Trump asked Comey to let Flynn go, he (presumably) knew that Comey did not wish to talk about this subject-matter so as to preserve his independence. It is interesting that at this point we are at the intersection between a criminal and a linguistic investigation. If Trump knew that Comey was embarrassed about talking about the Russian investigation, then he also knew that his words were to be interpreted as an *insisting*, an attempt to influence Comey despite the fact that he did not want to be influenced. Furthermore, at this point one could say that the interpretation hypothesis according to which the utterance by Comey to Trump was only an *expressive*, a *thinking aloud*, can no longer be plausible, because the utterance has to be interpreted in the context in which Comey made it clear to the White House how such interactions were expected to be taken/interpreted (by him). Even assuming that Trump was not aware of the overt implications of his action (due to the social path of interpretation), he had to be aware of the individual path of interpretation taken by Comey and, we would have expected him, out of prudence, to refrain from speaking about the investigation and from expressing hopes.

7. "In his meeting with Priebus, Comey told him about a policy at the Justice Department that prohibits talks between the White House and the FBI about ongoing investigations in order to prevent any political meddling in the bureau's work, according to the Times' story. It is not clear whether Mr. Priebus ever delivered that message to Trump, the newspaper reported." <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/12/politics/mueller-trump-white-house-officials/index.html>

9. An alternative account⁸

Before closing the present paper, we should look at an alternative account, as suggested by a reviewer of the paper, who writes:

Given that a request/directive reading is the most plausible one, Trump either intended that reading or he was merely expressing his feelings or he was deliberately making an ambiguous statement. In the first case, he was acting unconstitutionally, while in the second and third case he was acting unpresidentially (because as president, he should be aware that a mere expression of his feelings would be contextually interpreted as an unconstitutional request/directive, and he should not make deliberately equivocal statements). In all cases, he was showing himself unfit for president.

The reviewer, furthermore, suggests that “if Trump merely wanted to express his feelings, the most likely form of expression would include extra markers of emotion or subjectivity, like ‘I for one certainly hope that you could let Flynn go’. It should be pointed out that the absence of such subjectivizing hedges enhances the plausibility of a reading in which Trump exploits his contextual authority”.

The reviewer is explicitly accepting that the President might be deliberately making an ambiguous statement. This option should be excluded if we accepted the Gricean account. One point of the maxim of Manner, in fact, is to avoid ambiguity. In order to accommodate the considerations above, therefore, we should accept that this is a context in which the maxim of Manner is suspended because the speaker finds it convenient to make an ambiguous statement. However, the reviewer himself accepts that the President is expected NOT to make an ambiguous statement and that this is the reason why his discourse, if ambiguous, should be taken to be unpresidential. The reviewer also accepts that, even if we accepted that Trump was genuinely uttering an expressive utterance, the fact that the utterance would be very likely be interpreted in a different way should deter the speaker from uttering a genuine expressive. This is more or less in line with, and not drastically different from, what I have been arguing so far. However, I think we should make the most of the reviewer’s comments about the lack of subjectivizing hedges. Given that the speaker has a duty to make himself understood, he should probably make it clear that he is making an expressive utterance by the use of markers. But such markers, as the referee says, are not used. This may be an indication that the speaker probably did not intend the utterance to count as a genuine expressive.

8. The anonymous reviewer quoted in this section had graciously consented to having his comments made public (The Editors).

An objection to all this, however, might be the following. Given the Searlean principle that for anything that can be said we should find a way to say it, now it appears as if an expressive, in this kind of context, could never occur. But this is contrary to the Searlean Principle of Expressibility. Is it possible that Trump, even if he wanted to, could not deliver an expressive utterance, given the context and the fact that he might be misconstrued? As the reviewer says, the Principle of Expressibility is satisfied in case the speaker makes it the case that some markers are used and, thus, the expressive utterance is expressed in a form that leaves room for no ambiguity. Thus, the potential objection can be answered in some way.

A final consideration by the referee is the following. In our paper, we reasoned that, according to the principle of Prudence, a mere expressive reading of the utterance is excluded. “However, it is not certain whether we can assume that Trump is subtle enough to adhere to the principle of Prudence. In principle, you cannot even rule out the possibility that he is so refined that he deliberately exploits the illocutionary ambiguity”. However, if he is not subtle enough to adhere to the principle of Prudence, this shows very clearly that he is acting unpresidentially. Further considerations should be made on the possibility that he is deliberately exploiting an ambiguity. True, things like this could always happen. But we ask ourselves whether it is morally acceptable to speak ambiguously in case one interpretation gives rise an action that may be deemed criminal (‘an attempt to cause an obstruction of justice’)? As the reviewer suggests, if Trump deliberately exploits the ambiguity, he behaves unpresidentially. However, he does not just do that. The deliberate ambiguity would count as a way to conceal an action that might called ‘obstruction of justice’ and, thus, it could be taken as a deliberate attempt to derail a possible criminal investigation. In the same way that a criminal who is caught in destroying clues leading to his imprisonment is liable for prosecution for this very attempt, Trump, if trying to destroy interpretative clues, would be guilty in the same way before the law, He makes a by performing criminal action with the intention of hiding the interpretative clues and of escaping responsibility. Even so, he is no less responsible for what he does with his words.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Fabrizio Macagno, Theresa Catalano, Wayne Davis, Richard Warner, and, especially, Jeffrey Helmreich for their interesting comments on our paper.

References

- Allan, Keith, Alessandro Capone, and Istvan Kecskes, eds. 2016. *Pragmemes and theories of language use*. Cham: Springer.
- Atlas, Jay. 2005. *Logic, Meaning, and Conversation: Semantical Underdeterminacy, Implicature, and their Interface*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195133004.001.0001>
- Austin, John L. 1975. *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198245537.001.0001>
- Camp, Elisabeth. 2017. The hot potato of interpretative responsibility.
<http://languageblog ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=33246>
- Capone, Alessandro. 2005. Pragmemes. *Journal of Pragmatics* 37:1355–1371.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2005.01.013>
- Capone, Alessandro. 2009. Are explicatures cancellable? Toward a theory of the speaker’s intentionality. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6 (1):55–83. <https://doi.org/10.1515/IPRG.2009.003>
- Capone, Alessandro. 2013. Explicatures are not cancellable. In Alessandro Capone, Francesco Lo Piparo, and Marco Carapezza, eds. *Perspectives on linguistic pragmatics*. Cham: Springer, 131–151. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01014-4_5
- Capone, Alessandro. 2016a. *The pragmatics of indirect reports*. Cham: Springer.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21395-8>
- Capone, Alessandro. 2016b. *Introduction to allan, Capone and Kecskes, eds. 2016. Cham: Springer.*
- Capone, Alessandro, and Francesca Poggi, eds. 2016. *Pragmatics and Law: Philosophical perspectives*. Cham: Springer.
- CNN. 2017. Report: Mueller wants to talk to current and former Trump administration officials. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/12/politics/mueller-trump-white-house-officials/index.html>
- Danner, Chas. 2017 (June 11). Donald Trump Jr. may have accidentally confirmed part of Comey’s testimony. *NYMag.com*. Retrieved July 29, 2017
<http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2017/06/donald-trump-jr-seems-to-confirm-part-of-comeys-testimony.html>
- Donnellan, Keith S. 1966. Reference and definite descriptions. *Philosophical Review* 75: 281–304. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183143>
- Editorial Board. June 8, 2017. James Comey and the fear of being alone with Donald Trump. *The New York Times*. Retrieved July 29 from
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/opinion/james-comey-donald-trump.html>
- Editorial Board. June 8, 2017. Mr. Comey and all the President’s lies. *The New York Times*. Retrieved July 29 from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/08/opinion/james-comey-senate-testimony.html?_r=0
- Geis, Michael L. 1995. *Speech acts and conversational interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554452>
- Goffman, Ervin. 1981. *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Goldberg, Sanford. 2015. *Assertion: On the philosophical significance of assertoric speech*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Helmreich, Jeffrey. 2017. Personal communication.
- Horn, Laurence R. 1989. *A natural history of negation*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

- Jaszczolt, Kasia. 2016. *Meaning in linguistic interaction: Semantics, metaseantics, philosophy of language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kecskes, Istvan. 2013. *Intercultural pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kissine, Michail. 2013. *From utterances to speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511842191>
- Levinson, Stephen C. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levinson, Stephen C. 2000. *Presumptive meanings: The theory of generalized conversational implicature*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Mey, Jacob L. 2001. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. (Second edition)
- Peacocke, Christopher. 2014. *The mirror of the world: Subjects, consciousness, and self-consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199699568.001.0001>
- Poggi, Francesca, and Alessandro Capone, eds. 2016. *Pragmatics and law: Practical and theoretical perspectives*. Cham: Springer.
- Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strawson, Peter. 1964. Intention and convention in speech acts. *The Philosophical Review* 73/4: 439–460. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2183301>
- Tannen, Deborah. 2017. Message and metamessage. <http://www.sltrib.com/opinion/5389863-155/deborah-tannen-message-and-metamessage-in>

Address for correspondence

Alessandro Capone
University of Messina
Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Education and Cultural Studies
via Concezione 6
I- 98121 Messina
Italy
acapone@unime.it

Biographical notes

Alessandro Capone is full professor of linguistics in the Department of Cognitive Science at the University of Messina. He is chief editor for Springer (Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy, Psychology), and co-editor (with Istvan Kecskes) of Pragmatics and Philosophy (Mouton De Gruyter). Alessandro Capone has authored the monograph ‘The pragmatics of indirect reports’ (Springer) and has published papers in several international journals. He sits on the editorial board of several international journals.

Antonino Bucca is a researcher in the Philosophy of Language at the Department of Cognitive Science, University of Messina, where he teaches Philosophy of Communication and Clinical Pragmatics. For several years he has been studying psychotic linguistic disorders and language

disorders related to left-handedness. He has published numerous essays in national and international specialist journals. Among his most recent books are: *La gelosia e i suoi dèmoni. Figure del delirio tra filosofia del linguaggio e psicopatologia*, Editori Riuniti University Press, Roma, 2009; *La follia nelle parole*, Fioriti Editore, Roma, 2013; *Breve viaggio nell'immaginario simbolico della follia. Il linguaggio i colori e la psicopatologia dell'espressione*, Corisco, Messina/Roma, 2015.