Studying A Parenthetical, *I Promise*
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**Question.** The parenthetical *I promise* has been given little individual attention within pragmatics research. Understanding its use, however, is important to properly understanding sentences and discourse that contain it. This paper will investigate the speaker, hearer, and contextual situations and relationships that give rise to its use, and the effect of its use on its anchor clause and the greater context in which it is found. The following is an example of the parenthetical.

> Tom has been putting off calling Sheila’s mother for weeks.
> Sheila: “Honey, will you finally call my mother tomorrow?”
> Tom: “Yes, *I promise.*”

**Methodology.** It is predicted that there are two types of the *I promise* parenthetical, comment clauses and indirect speech acts. Instances of the parenthetical’s use in speech and the context surrounding it will be collected from the Corpus of Contemporary American English and coded for which type of use it is. For each, the hearer and speaker knowledge, assumptions, and intentions, and the situation of discourse prior to and after the parentheticals use will be analyzed to determine the cause and effect of the parenthetical’s use. Further, special attention will be paid to the goal of the speaker when saying *I promise* and the change in the hearer’s beliefs and expectations after the act. If there is an instance of the parenthetical that does not fit into one of the two types, then it will be classified as a new type of its own and studied just as the others.

**Significance.** Although the parenthetical contains the verb *promise*, its use often does not entail or signify the making of or existence of an actual promise. Understanding when and why some instances of *I promise* signifies a promise and others do not may be useful in understanding when and why many other utterances have multiple meanings. Greater understanding of *I promise* may also be valuable to courtroom testimony analysis, computational linguistics, and philosophical matters addressing promising.

**Bibliography**