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PERFORMATIVE UTTERANCES: SEVEN PUZZLES

Abstract

It was John Austin who introduced the word “performative” (which he called “a new and ugly word”) into the philosophy of language and linguistics. His original idea was that there are utterances which are more correctly characterized as *doing* something rather than *stating* something. Austin wrote: “when I say ‘I do’ (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife), I am not reporting on a marriage, I am indulging in it.” As is well known, Austin went on to work out this notion of a performative utterance (and of a performative expression) in a number of directions, but in the end the attempt to isolate performatives (doings) from constatives (true or false) failed dramatically, and the idea of viewing language use in terms of the performative-constative dichotomy gave way to the study of speech acts: “The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomena which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating.” But giving up the performative-constative distinction does not mean giving up theorizing about performatives, and there is a cottage industry in the theory of language devoted to them. We identify seven puzzles for theorizing about performatives. We consider how Austin might have dealt with some of them. Finding his answers problematic, we then survey recent theories of performatives and zoom in on the major contenders, identifying one theory in particular for scrutiny and seeing how it fares with the seven puzzles. The upshot is that there is still work to be done understanding performatives.

Keywords

Austin, constatives, language philosophy, performatives, performativity puzzles.

1. Introduction: Austin and Performatives

It was John Austin who introduced the word “performative” (which he called “a new and ugly word,” (1961: 220)) into the philosophy of language and linguistics. His

original idea was that there are utterances which are more correctly characterized as *doing* something rather than *stating* something: “when I say ‘I do’ (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife), I am not reporting on a marriage, I am indulging in it.” Austin continued: “Now these kinds of utterances are the ones that we call *performative utterances*.” (1961: 222)

As is well known, Austin went on to work out this notion of a performative utterance (and of a performative expression) in a number of directions:

1. He distinguished *primary* performatives such as “I do,” “Leave,” and “When” from *explicit* performatives such as “I (hereby) promise to be there,” where the force of the utterance is explicitly indicated by words in what is uttered.
2. He generalized the “doing-stating” distinction to the *performative-constative* distinction.
3. He formulated the *doctrine of infelicities*, which were to be for performatives what truth and falsity traditionally were for constatives.
4. He identified some grammatical features of expressions that are characteristic of explicit performatives: first person, present tense, indicative, active and the option of taking “hereby”:

(1) I (hereby) promise to be there.

In the end, as we know, the attempt to isolate performatives from constatives failed dramatically, and the idea of viewing language use in terms of the performative-constative dichotomy gave way to the study of speech acts. In short, constatives became just special cases of performatives, performatives became just special cases of illocutions and illocutions became just special cases of speech acts: “The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating.” (1962: 148)

2. Seven Puzzles

However, Austin’s abandonment of the performative-constative distinction did not mean either that he was right in so abandoning it,¹ or that there were no performatives. Indeed, there is a cottage industry on performatives, almost since Austin’s original publication. What this literature has shown is that there a number of problems, or as we will call them “puzzles,” remain concerning performatives. Among them are:

¹ Both Recanati (1989) and Alston (2000) have attempted to resuscitate it in different ways.

2.1. Primary Puzzles²

1. How exactly is the utterance of a performative expression (the “utterance act”) the performance of the additional act e.g. the act mentioned in the explicit performative? How do sayings become doings? (Performativity Puzzle)³

2. How is the meaning and force of the performative sentence related to the meaning (and force?) that its constituent expressions (words and phrases) have in other sentences? (Innocent-Compositionality Puzzle)⁴

2.2. Secondary Puzzles

3. G. E. Moore (1943, 1944) noticed that conjoining a simple declarative with the denial of its sincerity conditions creates something odd to say (now called “Moore’s Paradox”), even if both conjuncts are true i.e. here is something that can be true, but cannot be said without oddity:

- (2)
a. *It’s raining, but I don’t believe it.

This “paradox” can this be extended to other moods:

- b. *When?, but I don’t want to know (when).
c. ??Leave!, but I don’t want/intend you to (leave).

What is curious is that the “paradox” seems to be mitigated in many performatives:

- d. “I am asserting that it is raining, but (even though) I don’t believe it.”
e. “I assert that it is raining, but (even though) I don’t believe it.”
f. “I am ordering you to leave, but (even though) I don’t intend/want you to leave.”
g. “I order you to leave, but (even though) I don’t intend/want you to leave.”
h. “I suggest it’s raining, but I don’t believe it.”
i. ?It’s raining, I suggest, but I don’t believe it.

How to explain these (and related) facts? (Moore’s Un-Paradox Puzzle)

² We explain later what this terminology is supposed to reflect.

³ See Ginet (1979).

⁴ We will call this formulation of semantic compositionality, “innocent compositionality,” and it rolls together two separate principles. (i) Compositionality: the meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meaning of its constituents plus their (grammatical) relations. (ii) innocence: constituents contribute the same (range of) meanings to every expression that contains them (Barwise and Perry 1983). See Harnish (2002) for further discussion.

4. Some performatives are more natural in the present progressive than others, but most are unacceptable with “hereby”.⁵

(3)

- a. I am begging you ...
- b. *I am hereby begging you ...

(4)

- a. I am asking you ...
- b. ?? I am hereby asking you ...

(5)

- a. ??I am baptizing ...
- b. *I am hereby baptizing ...

Why do performatives (i) resist the present progressive, especially with “hereby,” and (ii) favor the simple present?⁶ (Progressives Puzzle)

5. Notice that some acts require performatives and some prohibit them.

Performative Required:

(6) Priest:

- a. I (hereby) pronounce you man and wife.
- b. *You are man and wife.⁷

(7) Priest:

- a. I (hereby) baptize you Samuel, in the name of ...
- b. *You are (named) Samuel, in the name of ...

Performative Prohibited:

(8) Umpire:

- a. You’re out!

⁵ Vendler (1972: 10) denies that performatives take progressive aspect: “‘I am warning you’ is not a warning; it is a reminder of a warning.” If this were true then the quoted sentence could never initiate an act of warning, but clearly it can (think of being harassed and finally turning to the person and saying “I’m warning you (that) if you do that again I’ll call the police”)—at least as well as a simple present tense performative. This points up the fact that performatives (simple present or progressive) may require some stage setting to be completely felicitous, but this does not detract from their being usable when infelicitous—defective warnings can still be warnings.

⁶ Theories of performatives invoking special conventions may avoid this problem, but at the price of building into the special convention some sort of possibly ad hoc exemption from the progressive.

⁷ Notice that the following seems ok: “You are *now* man and wife.”

b. *I (hereby) call you out.

(9) Boss:

a. You're fired.

b. *I (hereby) fire you.

(10)

a. I'll get you for that! (threat)⁸

b. *I (hereby) threaten that I will get you for that!⁹

If performatives make explicit the illocutionary force, why don't we always have this option? (Optionality Puzzle)

6. Why is the first below a suggestion, but the second is not an adjournment? (Hedged Performatives Puzzle)¹⁰

(11)

a. May I suggest a Merlot?

b. May I adjourn this meeting?

This puzzle may be wider (and deeper) than indicated so far. One can also ask: how is it possible for (11a) to be a performative at all? How do we *suggest* in uttering it? Bach and Harnish (1979) do not consider (11a), but they did (Chapter 10.2) consider the related sentences:

(11c) I can [hereby] promise I'll be home.

(11d) I must [hereby] ask you to leave.

They also consider the embedded performative:

(11e) We regret to inform you that your policy has been [is (hereby)] canceled.

What Bach and Harnish say about (11c,d) is basically this: successful communication requires an identifiable intention behind the utterance, and the postulation of that intention is to provide the best available explanation, in the circumstances, of the utterance. In the case of (11d), Bach and Harnish (: 213) offer a 7-step inference to the conclusion that S is asking H to leave, in conformity to their general inferential theory. And Bach and Harnish suggest that similar inferences can

⁸ We also have forms such as: "I don't want to threaten you, but ...," and "I don't want this to sound like a threat, but ..."

⁹ Included in this list are also "insinuate," "imply," "suggest" etc. and perhaps "brag," "boast" etc. See Strawson (1964), Vender (1976), and Ginet (1979) for further discussion.

¹⁰ See Fraser (1975), Bach and Harnish (1979).

be given for other examples. What they did not do, however, is explicitly relate these later inferences to the earlier inference schema for canonical or “normal” performatives—what we might call the “performative strategy” (PS). And it is not obvious how to do this. The reason is that hedged and embedded performatives seem to require, in their rational reconstruction, extra inferential steps.

One position to take (see Bach and Harnish, Chapter 10) is that “normal” performatives are special—perhaps due to standardization of performative force. I.e. performatives are associated with a dedicated inference pattern (PS), and other cases are to be handled by the general inferential theory. However, this probably should be the least preferred option, on general grounds of simplicity. A *second* position is to try to generalize the PS inference pattern to hedged and embedded cases. Notice, by the way, that it is an open theoretical question whether or not this can be done, but it should be tried. How might this go? Notice that (11c-e) all have non-performative uses. So to capture the performative use *one* possibility is that the PS just looks for the performative clause in the utterance and then applies that. Let’s call this the “window of performativity” (WP). This might work for the “hereby” versions, but not for others, certainly not for:

(11f) I deny that I [hereby] authorize a job for you.

Another possibility is to allow more steps, optional steps, between the identification of what is said and the identification of what is constated:

(11d')

1. S said that S must [thereby] ask H to leave.
2. S said that S is (thereby) asking H to leave and that is necessary.
3. S constated that S is [thereby] asking H to leave.

However, (11c) is more suspect, consider:

(11c')

1. S said that S can [thereby] promise that S will be home.
2. ?? S said that S is [thereby] promising that S will be there and that is possible, permitted etc.
3. S constated that S is [thereby] promising that S will be home.

The idea would be that with “hereby” the utterance is interpreted as a kind of stylistic variant with the performative being the root clause and the remaining material a kind of “paratactic” addition to it. The same strategy would apply to (11e), i.e.:

(11e')

1. S said that S regrets informing H that S [thereby] cancels H’s policy.
2. S said that S [thereby] cancels H’s policy and regrets that.

3. S constated that S [thereby] cancels H's policy and regrets that.

The general idea behind these suggestions is that when "hereby" is present, the hearer tries to find a construal of the utterance that fits the PS, is consistent with the rest of the utterance, and with contextual and background information. If they can, they will; if not, as with the denial case, they won't. When "hereby" is absent, the sentence leaves it open whether or not the utterance is performative. In this case contextual and/or background information will have top say whether or not to subject it to the PS.¹¹

7. We have been assuming that (explicit) performative sentences have only performative uses, but that is not true. Consider the following dialogue:

- (12)
- a. What do you do every Wednesday?
 - b. I promise to be there.
 - c. And what do you do every Thursday?
 - d. I apologize for not keeping it.

Utterances of (12b,d) can be literally a promise and literally an apology, respectively. So it looks like an utterance of "I promise to be there" can literally be a promise, and literally be a statement. Is the sentence thereby ambiguous? (Ambiguity Puzzle)¹²

3. Austin and the Puzzles

The mischief that this list causes is mostly by way of how answers to one or more puzzles pose a problem for others. To see this, let's look at how Austin might have dealt with the first two puzzles.

¹¹ There are some trickier and more complicated examples:

g. Those remarks for which I [hereby] apologize are to be found on page 4, while all the others are on pages 7 to 12.

h. Nobody will believe me that I [hereby] offer you a job.

i. That I [hereby] promise you to go to Paris with you will not amuse my wife.

The first thing to notice about these examples is that given stylistic variation, the PW approach would work:

g'. I [hereby] apologize for these remarks to be found on page 4, while all the others ...

i'. I [hereby] promise to go to Paris with you, that will not amuse my wife.

We rejected the PW approach, but it does suggest that possibly stylistic variation might work here too.

¹² See Zwicky and Sadock (1975).

1. The Performativity Puzzle. The solution to this puzzle would most likely have invoked Austin's "doctrine of infelicities." According to this doctrine, performatives are governed by two sets of conditions:¹³

MISFIRES (act purported but void)

Misinocations (act disallowed)

A1. There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

A2. the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

Misexecutions (act vitiated)¹⁴

B1. The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

B2. completely.

Importantly, Austin also subscribed to two other doctrines:

(PIA)

Performatives distinctively signal illocutionary acts,

(IAC)

Illocutionary acts are conventional acts, acts performed in accordance with a convention.

We can now see how putting these together constitutes an outline of a solution to the performativity puzzle. There are conventions to utter certain forms in certain circumstances (think of "I do" in the marriage ceremony), and when a speaker does so, the convention specifies what act has been performed. In the case of explicit performatives Austin might have argued that expressions such as (1), which we will call a "performative prefix":

(13) I promise (that)

is governed by a convention to utter it under certain circumstances, and in uttering it under those circumstances a promise has been made.

There are numerous worries about this answer. As Strawson (1964) noted, it is not clear that many illocutionary acts are governed by conventions as ordinarily understood (what are the conventions for asserting or asking a question?), and if not the ordinary notion, what notion? Austin did not tell us what these conventions might

¹³ Austin also goes on to include "Abuses" where the act is "professed but hollow" (1962: 18). This sounds like the act exists, but is defective or unhappy in some way.

¹⁴ Austin does not say much about the distinction between being "disallowed" and "vitiating."

look like. But perhaps what causes the most mischief is the relation of this answer to the second puzzle, the compositionality puzzle.

2. The Compositionality Puzzle. If the performativity of a performative utterance is due to special illocutionary conventions governing the performative prefix, then how does the semantics of these sentences work? Compare:

(14)

- a. I promise to be there: promise (1st person, present tense)
- b. I promised to be there: statement (1st person, past tense)
- c. He promises to be there: statement (third person, present tense)

If, on the above story, the performative prefix is governed by conventions for promising, then how is the meaning of “promise” in (a-c) to be accounted for? The problem is that the only difference between having the force of a promise vs the force of a statement is past tense and third person. Do we really want to assign conventions of statemental illocutionary force to past tense and third person? No semantics anyone has ever heard of does that. On the other hand, if we treat these sentences compositionally as normal declaratives, then (b, c) correctly turn out to be statements, but so does (a), and that seems to conflict with its performativity—how do we get a promise from a statement?

What about the remaining five puzzles? It is hard to say with any authority how Austin would have dealt with them since he rarely wrote about such issues or data. So instead of imagining what Austin would have said, let’s look at what some theorists have said. But first, how are we to judge between such theories? One idea is to set down conditions of adequacy on a theory of performatives and then evaluate theories with respect to them. One major problem is agreeing on the conditions, since each theorist may see things differently in the light of their own theory.¹⁵ Here is a first approximation.

4. Conditions of Adequacy on a Theory of Performatives

Any adequate account of performatives should meet at least four conditions. It should explain how performatives: (i) can be normal *declaratives* from the point of view of compositional semantics, (ii) can have an interpretation as a *non-constative* doing,¹⁶ and (iii) can introspectively feel as if they mean just that non-constative doing. In addition, a theory of performatives must (iv) explain how they work

¹⁵ Searle (1989, section 3) offers eight conditions of adequacy, many of which are not neutral between theories. See Bach and Harnish (1992), Harnish (2002) for further discussion.

¹⁶ Except when the utterance is also performatively a constative, as with “I (hereby) state that p.”

communicatively—how speakers perform the acts they do, and how this is communicated to hearers.

5. Theories of Performatives

There are at least fifty papers on performatives in the literature and probably six to ten different kinds of theories.¹⁷ Unfortunately, there is no revealing taxonomy of theories in terms of their basic features. Let's first look at some of this variety, then see if we can distill out the main competitors and possibilities:¹⁸

1. Performatives are just used to *do* (illocutionary) things (Austin 1961, 1962; Searle 1965, 1969; Reimer 1995; Martinich 2002),
2. Performatives are used to *say* (locutionary) things and to *do* (illocutionary) other things (Austin 1961, 1962; Grewendorf 2002),
3. Performatives are used to *constate* (illocutionary) one thing and to *do*, by *standardized indirection*, something else (illocutionary) (Bach 1975, 1995; Bach and Harnish 1979, 1992; Harnish 1988, 1997, 2002, 2004),
4. Performatives are used to *constate* one thing (illocutionary), and by *implicature* to *do* (illocutionary) another,
5. Performatives are used to *declare* (illocutionary) one thing and to *do* (illocutionary) another (Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Recanati 1987; Searle 1989),
6. Performatives are *ambiguous* as between performative and a non-performative readings,
7. Performatives are true or false, but are not used to *constate* anything (Schiffer 1972),
8. Performatives are true or false, and are used to *constate* one thing and to *do* that thing directly (Davidson 1979).

Let's narrow this list down to those kinds of theory which are actively being pursued at present. Those seem to be the Austinian theories (1&2), indirect theories (3&4), and declarational theories (5). Here are some very general features of such theories.¹⁹

¹⁷ We leave out a type of theory that is so far not very developed, and has not yet appeared in print. This theory, perhaps inspired by some passages of Wittgenstein's, views the distinctive feature of performative utterances to be the fact that they contain not a statement of the relevant performance, but a *showing* of the relevant performance. We will have to wait to see how this "showing" theory of performatives is worked out before we can evaluate it.

¹⁸ See Harnish (1988) for a discussion of 1, 2, 6-8.

¹⁹ Each type has subtypes, which we will gloss over at present. For instance, Austinian theories can either embrace a locutionary act of saying in a performative utterance or not. Indirect theories can either subscribe to indirection as a species of conversational implicature or not. Declarational theories can view performatives as, in addition to declarations and the performative illocutionary act, as assertions as well, or not.

5.1. Austinian Theories

These are characterized by the idea that performative utterances are not true or false, they involve uttering something or perhaps saying something (locutionary),²⁰ but not constating anything, the illocutionary act is performed directly (not indirectly) via special illocutionary conventions associated with the performative prefix.

Virtues: Comport well with pretheoretic intuitions, and are consistent with conditions of adequacy (ii)-(iv).²¹

Vices: Seem to violate condition of adequacy (i), and they use the unexplained notion of a convention, as well as the notion of being governed by a convention.²²

5.2. Indirect Theories

These are characterized by the fact that they allow the performative sentence to be an ordinary declarative sentence used to constate, hence be true or false, and they postulate that the performative force of the utterance is indirect, and has become standardized for that indirection.

Virtues: Seem to satisfy all conditions of adequacy (i)-(iv).

Vices: Do not comport well with pretheoretic intuitions, and need an account of how standardization takes place with respect to performative forms.

5.3. Declarational Theories

These are characterized by the fact that performative utterances are viewed as declarations, acts which (in the right circumstances, create, directly, the act named in the performative sentence and so are “self-guaranteeing” i.e. if they are intended to be performed then they are being performed.

Virtues: Comport with some pretheoretic intuitions, and seem to satisfy conditions of adequacy (ii)-(iv).

²⁰ Austin described performative utterances both ways; at one point he describes them as not “merely” sayings, but also doings.

²¹ These conditions have not been addressed explicitly by Austinian theorists.

²² An Austinian might claim performative prefixes are idioms (like, say “kick the bucket”), hence a non-compositional constituent, but that performative sentences as a whole are compositional. To take this line, however, would require independent evidence that performative prefixes are idioms and there does not seem to be any.

Vices: Do not comport with some pretheoretic intuitions (for instance in the case of Searle that three acts are being performed in the case of a performative utterance), and may not satisfy condition of adequacy (i).

We might try to summarize these views in a table:

Table 1. Some Views on Performatives

| | T/F | P-Cs | Locution | Constating | Declaration | ISA |
|--------|-----|------|------------------|------------|-------------|-----|
| Austin | N | Y | Y ²³ | N | N | N |
| B&H | Y | N | Y | Y | N | Y |
| Searle | Y | N | N? ²⁴ | Y | Y | N |

(T/F = truth-valuable; P-Cs = special “performative-conventions” associated with the performative prefix; ISA = indirect speech acts)

There seems to be no recent work on Austinian theories, though various authors have endorsed Austinian positions. On the other hand, indirect and declarational theories continue to be developed and discussed, so at present they seem to be the main contenders. There have been numerous critical discussions of the declarational view,²⁵ so for now we will see how well the indirect theory does with our conditions of adequacy and our (remaining) puzzles.

6. Performative Utterances as Standardized Indirect Speech Acts

As noted above, this theory has been elaborated in a number of places. For present purposes all we need are the basics.

Bach and Harnish (1979, Chapter 9) proposed the standardized indirect theory of performatives in conjunction with a particular theory of illocutionary acts, and

²³ Austin sometimes comments that performatives are not *merely* sayings, but also doings. We assume he did not mean “utterings” by “sayings,” because all performatives involve utterings.

²⁴ Searle (1968) argues against Austin’s idea of locutionary acts, in favor of decomposing them into either generic illocutionary acts or his own proprietary “propositional” acts.

²⁵ See Bach and Hamish (1992), Harnish (2002, 2004), Grewendorf (2002) and Martinich (2002).

linguistic communication. However, the theory of performatives can be formulated in a way consistent with all of the major theories of illocutionary acts,²⁶ and with any broadly inferential theory of communication. On that score, we begin with two fundamental distinctions in our modes of communication: literal and nonliteral, direct versus indirect. Roughly speaking, when speaking literally we mean what we say, when speaking nonliterally we do not. Again roughly speaking, when speaking indirectly we mean more than what we say.²⁷ It is this latter mode of speaking we need for performatives.

6.1. Indirection

In some cases we communicate “indirectly” in that one communicative intention (the one associated with the indirect act) is recognized (and expected to be recognized) by means of another communicative intention (the one associated with the direct act). The two acts are performed simultaneously, though the hearer typically will reason (and will be expected to reason) from the constative (direct) act to the other (usually nonconstative) indirect act. Thus, if I say:

(15) My car has a flat tire

at a gas station I can expect to be taken as requesting a repair, whereas if said in an intersection to a policeman it will more likely be taken as an excuse. In both cases I am using the sentence to literally and directly assert that my car has a flat tire. Likewise, we can be communicating indirectly in performing an institutional act. As a constituent of communicative acts, (non locution-specific) institutional acts can also be indirect in that the speaker is performing two illocutionary acts, and expects that the indirect act will be recognized by means of the direct act: “Clear off your desk” might be used indirectly to fire someone and inform them that they have been fired.

6.2. Standardization

²⁶ See e.g. Searle (1969), Searle and Vanderveken (1985), Vanderveken (1991), Alston (2000).

²⁷ There is a complication to these slogans: when speaking indirectly there are two illocutionary forces, one direct, one indirect, and each can be evaluated as literal or not. The slogan is meant to cover the case where the direct act is literal.

Furthermore, some forms of words, such as (a) but not (b) below, become *standardized* for their indirect force in that H need not figure out what the indirect force of the utterance is, given that H knows the utterance has an indirect force.²⁸

- (16)
a. Can/could/would you VP?
b. Do you have the ability to VP?

6.3. How Performatives Work

Applied to performatives, “I (hereby) order you to leave” is directly constative and indirectly an (standardized) order. According to Bach and Harnish (1979: 208) a hearer might reason (and be expected to reason) as follows:

1. S is saying “I (hereby) order you to leave,”
2. S is stating that S is ordering me to leave,
3. If S’s statement is true, then S must be ordering me to leave,
4. If S is ordering me to leave, it must be S’s utterance that constitutes the order (what else could it be?),
5. Presumably, he is speaking the truth, [conversational presumption]
6. Therefore, in stating that S is ordering me to leave S is ordering me to leave.

On this account there is nothing semantically special about performatives.²⁹ In particular, it is not, contra Searle (1989), a part of the semantics of performatives that they refer to their own utterance.³⁰ The speaker may be e.g. ordering by performing some collateral act such as signing a paper (see step 4). In this sense performative utterances could be described as *default reflexive* in that they “refer” to themselves (and are therefore reflexive) by default, when no collateral act could plausibly be

²⁸ Bach and Harnish (1979: 195) characterize this notion as follows: *Illocutionary Standardization* (IS): expression T is standardly used to F in group G if and only if: (i) It is mutually believed in G that generally when a member of G utters T, his illocutionary intent is to F, and (ii) Generally when a member of G utters T in a context in which it would violate the conversational presumptions to utter T with (merely) its literally determined force, his illocutionary intent is to F. Typically a form becomes standardized for a use by being used that way commonly and being observed being used that way. See Reimer (1995), Bach (1997), Harnish (1997).

²⁹ Other than that the performative verb denotes an act performable, in the circumstances, by uttering that very sentence. But why call this a “semantic” property of the verb? See Ginet (1979) for further discussion.

³⁰ See Searle (1989) for a criticism of this view and Bach and Harnish (1992) and Harnish (2002) for a reply to Searle’s criticism. Harnish (2004) contains some arguments in defense of Searle against Grewendorf (2002) and Martinich (2002).

being referred to as the vehicle of the performance of the order.³¹ “Hereby” means something like:

Hereby = by this very act

where the act at issue could be, but need not be, the utterance itself and it makes explicit the fact that the utterance has the (indirect) force it has in virtue of what the speaker is now doing. Notice that the vehicle of the performance of the indirect act is not a part of the communicative intention. Consider the following case.³² I have the authority to order you to face imminent death only in writing (to minimize misunderstandings). You do not know this, so when I say (while signing) “I order you to go” I intend the signing to be the vehicle of the order, but you understand the utterance to be the vehicle. Here there has been an infelicity, but communication has still been successful because for communication to occur, the hearer need only recognize my communicative intention to order—the hearer need not identify the intended vehicle, but only believe there is one. Hence step 4 would be typical, but not necessary, so the generalized pattern of inference would be:³³

1. S is saying that S F-s that P (“I (hereby) order you to leave.”),
2. S is stating that S is F-ing that P (ordering me to leave),
3. If S’s statement is true, then S must be F-ing that P (ordering me to leave),
4. Presumably, S is speaking the truth, [conversational presumption]
5. Therefore, S is F-ing that P (ordering me to leave).³⁴

The above inferences are a reconstruction of reasoning before standardization. After standardization the performative practice short-circuits the steps of this inference pattern, both as carried through by the hearer and as expected by the speaker:

1. S has uttered “I (hereby) order you to leave.”
2. “I (hereby) order you ...” is standardly used to order,
3. It would be contextually inappropriate for S just to be constating that S is ordering,
4. So, S is ordering me to leave.

Compare this with ambiguity:

³¹ Not to be confused with Recanati’s notion with the same name (1987: 201). Scare quotes around “refer” and “reflexive” indicate that there is nothing in the sentence that denotes, designates or refers to that utterance itself. The speaker intends it to be (taken to be) the vehicle. See Bach (1984) for further discussion of such default reasoning.

³² See also Sampson’s (1971) Ruritania example.

³³ Where ‘F’ stands for some illocutionary force indicator.

³⁴ See Ginet (1979) for a discussion of the extension of performative verbs that helps legitimate steps 2 and 4.

1. S has uttered “I will meet you at the bank,”
2. “bank” means both “river or lakeside” and “finance house,”
3. It would be contextually inappropriate for us to meet at some river or lakeside,
4. so S is saying that he will meet me at a certain finance house.

The interpretation of the utterance is thus introspectively indistinguishable from disambiguation, and so feels to the communicants like a “reading” of the sentence.

6.4. Meeting the Conditions of Adequacy

It is easy to see that this account of performatives and how they work satisfies the four conditions of adequacy: (i) performative sentences are semantically ordinary declaratives, (ii) they have an interpretation that is non-Constative (the indirect act), and (iii), performative sentences feel as if they mean just the “other” doing because this use has become standardized, and so introspectively approximates being a second “reading” of the sentence. Finally (iv) the account of performatives is embedded in a general theory of speech acts and linguistic communication, and thus we have an account of how a speaker can perform the act described in uttering that sentence, and how this can be communicated to a hearer.³⁵

7. Standardized Indirect Theory and the Puzzles

3. Moore’s Un-Paradox Puzzle looks like it is related to the nature of illocutionary acts, such as assertion, and to their “sincerity” conditions.
4. The Progressives Puzzle looks like it is related to the syntax and semantics of the tense and aspect system of English, and we might expect other languages with other aspectual systems, but with performatives, not to have the same features.

³⁵ There are still a number of open questions regarding the account as it stands. One is the status of the general inference before standardization; did people really figure out performatives as they figure out paradigmatic cases of indirection? Second, how did standardization come about—by precedent, by convention?

Third, a related problem, comes from what we will call the “unrecovability” of performatives: the unwanted asymmetry between performatives and other standardized indirect forms with respect to the possibility of canceling their indirect force:

- a. Could you pass the salt—and that’s not a request, its a question
- b. ??I (hereby) order you to leave—and that’s not an order, its a statement

Perhaps standardized indirection is not a logically strong enough relation between the form and force of performatives.

5. The Optionality Puzzle looks like it might be related to the nature of certain institutional illocutionary acts.
6. The Hedged Performatives Puzzle looks like it is related to the standardization process and the nature of illocutionary acts.
7. The Ambiguity Puzzle looks like it is related to the syntax and semantics of English.

If this is correct, then an adequate theory of all the performative data will require much more than a theory of just performatives. It will require an account of their syntax and semantics, and the institutional illocutionary acts performed in their utterance. That's too much for the present, it means the cottage industry will not be out of work for a while.³⁶

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³⁶ I would like to thank the audience of my lectures "Moods and Performances" at the Graduiertenkolleg, W. Goethe Universitaet, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, and especially Andreas Runkel and Christian Plunze, for comments and discussion.

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