Toward a Null Theory of Explicit Performatives

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"The notion of a performative is one that philosophers and linguists are so comfortable with that one gets the impression that somebody must have a satisfactory theory."

(Searle 1989, p. 535)

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1   Introduction

The problem of how saying so makes it so

(1)   I (hereby) promise you to be there at five.   (is a promise)
(2)   I (hereby) order you to be there at five.   (is an order)
(3)   You are (hereby) ordered to report to jury duty.   (is an order)

- **Explicit performative** sentences look like indicatives
  ↪ Ideally, they should have the same conventional effect as other indicatives

- There is no grammatical basis for the once-popular claim that **I promise/order**, in these cases, spells out a 'performative prefix' that is silent in all other sentences.

  (4)   I promised you to be there at five.   (is not a promise)

  (5)   He promises to be there at five.   (is not a promise)

- Attractive idea, proposed time and again since Austin (1962) (Lemmon 1962, Hedenius 1963, Bach and Harnish 1979, Ginet 1979, Bierwisch 1980, Leech 1983, Bach and Harnish 1992, ...):

> Explicit performatives are **assertions**, which, somehow, make themselves true.

Searle's (1989) challenge

- STEP 1: Desiderata for a theory of explicit performatives.

  (a) performative utterances are performances of the act named by the performative verb;

  (b) performative utterances are self-guaranteeing;

  (c) performative utterances achieve (a) and (b) in virtue of their literal meaning.

- STEP 2: Speech act theory.

  – Making a promise requires the promiser to **intend** to make a promise.

  – Similarly for issuing an order, etc.

  – Generally, the speaker must intend to bring about the **essential condition** associated with the corresponding speech act.

- STEP 3: The fundamental problem with assertoric accounts of performatives: (b) fails, hence (a) and (c) fail.

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> "The intention to assert self-referentially of an utterance that it is an illocutionary act of a certain type, say a promise, is simply not sufficient to guarantee the existence of an intention in that utterance to make a promise. **Such an assertion does indeed commit the speaker to the existence of the intention, but the commitment to having the intention doesn't guarantee the actual presence of the intention**."

<div align="right">Searle (1989, p. 546)</div>

In this talk

- We present an assertoric account that meets Searle's challenge.

- In the process, we develop some independently useful analytical constructs.

Two kinds of assertoric accounts

Performativity via inference Bach and Harnish (1979)-style accounts analyze explicit performatives as assertions that give rise to their performative meaning by implicature-like inferences that the hearer may draw. Intended hearer inference (Bach and Harnish 1979):

1. He is saying "I order you to leave."
2. He is stating that he is ordering me to leave.
3. If his statement is true, then he must be ordering me to leave.
4. If he is ordering me to leave, it must be his utterance that constitutes the order. (What else could it be?)
5. Presumably, he is speaking the truth.
6. Therefore, in stating that he is ordering me to leave he is ordering me to leave.

Direct performativity The utterance **is** the promise, threat etc. No hearer inference is necessary. One **cannot but** speak the truth with an explicit performative utterance.

> "The crucial point is that an explicit performative utterance has the communicative sense specified by its utterance meaning if and only if the meaningful utterance on which it is based is true."

<div align="right">Bierwisch (1980)</div>

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2 Reportative and Performative Uses

> "Interestingly enough, researchers who find the felicity conditions of 'I promise that...' or 'I congratulate you' so complex and necessary to study closer never devote much attention to the "special truth conditions" of 'Peter is congratulating Mary' or 'Yesterday Peter promised that...', although it is inevitable that in deciding whether Peter is in the set of those who are congratulating Mary etc. one should consider the very same questions."

> Szabolcsi (1982, p. 530)

- What is the meaning of the verb **order** so that it can have both a **reportative** use, as in (6), and a **performative** use, as in (7), which brings about the fact that there is an order?

  (6) A ordered B to sign the report.

  (7) $[A$ to $B]$ I order you to sign the report now.

- An assertion of (6)

  - implies that there was an act of communication from A to B
  - takes for granted that A presumed to have authority over B.

- What kind of communicative act is required for (6) to be true?

- (7) or any of (8-a-c) would suffice:

  (8) a. Sign the report now!
       b. You must sign the report now!
       c. I want you to sign the report now!

- In the right context, all these utterances commit A to a particular kind of preference for B signing the report immediately.

- If B accepts the utterance, he takes on a commitment to act according to A's preference.

  - If the report is co-present with A and B he will sign it.
  - If the report is in his office he will leave to go there immediately.
  - . . .

- The authority mentioned above amounts to this acceptance being socially or institutionally mandated.

- Of course, B has the option to **refuse** to take on this commitment, in either of two ways:

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   (i) he can deny A's authority,

   (ii) while accepting the authority, he can refuse to abide by it, thereby violating the institutional or social mandate.

- Crucially, in either case, (6) will still be true, as witnessed by the felicity of:

(9)   a.   (6), but B refused to do it.
        b.   (6), but B questioned his authority.

- Let us distinguish three notions: **uptake**, **acceptance** and **fulfillment**.

- Not even uptake is necessary for **order** to be appropriate, as seen (10) and the naturally occurring (11):[1]

(10)   (6), but B did not hear him.

(11)   He ordered Kornilov to desist but either the message failed to reach the general or he ignored it.[2]

However, what **is** necessary is that the speaker **expected** uptake to happen. This, arguably, is a minimal requirement for something to count as a communicative event.

The three main ingredients in the previous remarks were

(a) the notion of a **preference**

(b) a particular kind of preference that **guides action**

(c) the notion of **commitment** to such preferences

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3   Representing preferences

Need for ranked preferences

- In analyses of modality following Kratzer (1981), the ordering source is used to **rank** the worlds in the modal base, by ranking more highly worlds that make more[3] propositions in the ordering source true.

- Such ordering sources may well be inconsistent.

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[1] We owe this observation to Lauri Karttunen.
[2] `https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/citd/RussianHeritage/12.NR/NR.12.html`
[3] Where 'more' is either explicated in terms of cardinality or a subset-relationship.

- Now, while plain ordering sources may be sufficient for the interpretation of modals, they are not good at modeling guidelines for action based on an agent's conflicting preferences, desires, obligations, etc.

- Suppose, for instance, I want to finish my paper.

- I also want to go to the party.

- Thus, my bouletic ordering source should include the propositions expressed by (12) and (13):

  (12)   Cleo finishes her paper.   (13)   Cleo goes to the party.

- We want to explain why, given that she knows that (12) and (13) are incompatible, Cleo *decides* to work on her paper rather than go to the party.

- Intuitively, we want a way to specify that finishing my paper is **more important** to me than going to the party.

Preference structures

- A **preference structure** relative to an information state W is a pair $\langle P, \leq \rangle$, where $P \subseteq \wp(W)$ an $\leq$ is a (weak) partial order on P.

  – You may think of a preference structure as a modal ordering source plus an 'importance' ranking.

- A preference structure $\langle P, \leq \rangle$ is **consistent** iff for any $X \subseteq P$, if $\bigcap X = \emptyset$, then there are $p, q \in X$ such that $p < q$.

  – Consistency requires that if two propositions are incompatible, they must be strictly ranked.

  – Recall that the propositions in P are subsets of an information state (typically, the agent's doxastic state).

  – Thus, the consistency requirement would force a ranking of **contextually incompatible**, as well as **logically incompatible** propositions.

  – For example, Cleo knows that she won't finish her paper if she goes to the party (even though this is not a logical necessity).

  – So, if the preference structure representing her desires is to be consistent, the two propositions in (12) and (13) must be strictly ranked.

  – An inconsistent desire structure is perfectly fine, until Cleo wants to **act** on her desires.

  – For how will she decide what to do, unless the two incompatible propositions are strictly ranked?

– More generally, the **consistent** preference structures are those that can be used as a guideline for action.

- We assume that at any given world w[4] the desires, preferences, and obligations of various kinds of an agent A a represented by a set $\mathbb{P}_w(A)$ of preference structures.

  – Not all of these need to be consistent (internally or mutually). For example, preference structures representing **desires** often will not be.

  – Other preference structures may be consistent.

- A (consistent) preference structure induces a 'lexicographic' partial ordering $\preceq$ on a set of worlds.

Consolidated preferences

- Given the multitude of preference structures influencing an agent's decisions, if an agent wants to **act**, he as to integrate all these structures into a global one, resolving any conflict.

- A rational agent A in world w will have a distinguished, consistent preference structure $\langle P_w(A), \leq_{P_w(A)} \rangle$. We call this *A's effective preference structure* in w.

  – This is intended to be consolidated preference structure that the agent uses to decide upon actions in w.

- We require that $P_w(A) \subseteq \bigcup \mathbb{P}_w(A)$ and further that if $p, q \in P_w(A)$ such that there is $\langle P, \leq_P \rangle \in \mathbb{P}_w(A)$ and $p <_P q$ and there is no $\langle P', <_{P'} \rangle \in \mathbb{P}_w(A)$ such that $q \leq_{P'} p$, then $p <_{P_w(A)} q$.

  – These requirements ensure that there are no spurious goals introduced into $P_w(A)$, and that rankings that are consistent are kept in the effective preference structure.

- In w A's induced preference order $\preceq_{P_w(A)}$ will (partially[5]) determine the agent's behavior: If the agent has the choice between w_1 and w_2 (as continuations of w differing in what action, if any, A performs) and $w_1 \prec w_2$, then A will choose w_2.

- Two desiderata for a more developed version of such a theory is:

  – If an agent a believes that he effectively prefers p, he does effectively prefer p.

  – If an agent a effectively prefers p, he believes that he effectively prefers p.

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[4]Really: at any given world and time. We drop the temporal parameter here.
[5]Only partially, as an agent may be genuinely indifferent between two possible courses of affairs.

Deriving an ordering of worlds

- How should we derive an ordering over **worlds** from the ordering over **propositions** in a(n effective) preference structure?

- We don't resolve this question here. Determining the right ordering is a complex question.

- For present purposes, we need an ordering over worlds $\prec$ that satisfies the following weak constraint:

(14) **Top-level lexicographicness:** For a given preference structure P, for any w, v: If w makes true all maximal elements of P, but v does not, then $v \not\succ w$.

- Given effective preference structures must be consistent (which ensures that there **are** worlds that make true all maximal elements), this ensures that all optimal worlds make true all maximal elements of the preference structure.

- Here is one (rather strong) ordering over worlds that satisfies **top-level lexicographicness** (on the assumption that $\leq$ is total):

  - Let $\sim_{W,\leq} = \{\langle p, q\rangle \mid p \leq q \ \& \ q \leq p\}$.
  - Then $\equiv_\sim$, the set of $\sim$-equivalence classes, is linearly ordered by $\leq$.
  - For any equivalence class $E \in \equiv_\sim$ let $\leq_E$ be the Kratzer-ordering on worlds, given the propositions in E.

$$w_1 \succ w_2 :\Leftrightarrow \qquad \text{there is } E \in \equiv_\sim \text{ such that } w_1 >_E w_2 \text{ AND}$$
$$\text{there is no } E' \in \equiv_\sim \text{ such } E' > E \text{ and } w_2 >_{E'} w_1$$

4 Commitments

Commitments as restricting future states

- Hamblin (1971), Gunlogson (2008): Utterances update **commitment slates**.

- Both authors model only **discourse commitments**, i.e. commitments with respect to the subsequent **linguistic** behavior of the speaker.

  - As a result, they can reduce their respective notion of commitment to a set of 'legal' (Hamblin) or 'expected' (Gunlogson) future states of the discourse, that is, they model commitments as constraints on what agents can **say** without being at fault.

  - But, more generally, commitments arising by linguistic means also constrain non-communicative actions, e.g. in the case of promises, orders, . . .

- In order to capture this more general notion of commitment, we can think of the taking on of a commitment as excluding **possible future states of the world**.

- What does it mean to keep a commitment?

Commitments are always **commitments to act**.

- A **commitment to a belief that** p (a generalization of the notion of a discourse commitment) is **a commitment to act as though the agent believes** p.

- An agent can also be committed to effective preferences—i.e. he can be **committed to act as though he has a certain effective preference**.

- That is, to keep a commitment is to **act** in a certain way: A commitment is kept by making the right action-choices.

- A commitment is kept, at a given time, by acting in accord with it, at that time.

- 'Not keeping a commitment' involves a choice, resulting in an action (or abstaining from action), just as keeping a commitment does—this is why it makes sense to talk of 'the time(s) the commitment was not kept'.

- We can characterize 'taking on a commitment' as excluding certain possible future courses of affairs, namely those in which

  (a) the agent does not keep his commitment AND

  (b) the commitment is not voided (rescinded or found impossible to fulfill) before the commitment was not kept AND

  (c) does not count as violated.

- This can be encoded in terms of constraints on models, on a par with result state predicates:

  – For any w, if an event e of x going to the park occurs in w, the possible futures of w at the end of e exclude worlds in which x is not in the park just after e.

  – At the final moment of an utterance with which a commitment is undertaken by an agent, the future developments of a world in which the utterance is made exclude any world in which the commitment is violated without having being rescinded and the agent is not 'at fault'.

- Construing commitments as **commitments to act** means that the features of the decision theory from the last section get 'lifted' to the respective commitments:

(15) **Positive introspection for preference commitment** If an agent is committed to an effective preference for p, he is also committed to act as though he believes he is committed to an effective preference for p.

(16) **Doxastic reduction for preference commitment** If an agent is committed to act as though he believes that he is committed to an effective preference for p, he is also committed to act as though he effectively prefers p.

(17) **Doxastic reduction for doxastic commitment** If an agent is committed to act as though he believes that he is committed to act as though he believes that p, he is committed to act as though he believes that p.

- **Notation:** We let

$$PEP(a,p) := \left\{ w \in W \mid \begin{array}{l} p \text{ is a maximal element of } a\text{'s public} \\ \text{effective preference structure in } w \end{array} \right\}$$

(Where p is a maximal element of a's public effective preference structure iff a is committed to act as though p is a maximal element of his effective preference structure.)

$$PB(a,p) := \{w \in W \mid a \text{ is committed to the belief that } p \text{ in } w\}$$

- With this, the lifted principles can be represented as:

(18) **Positive introspection for preference commitment**
$PEP(a,p) \Rightarrow PB(a, PEP(a,p))$

(19) **Doxastic reduction for preference commitment**
$PB(a, PEP(a,p)) \Rightarrow PEP(a,p)$

(20) **Doxastic reduction for doxastic commitment**
$PB(a, PB(a,p)) \Rightarrow PB(a,p)$

Assertions and public commitments

- An utterance in context c of an **indicative** ϕ (with falling intonation) adds $[\![\phi]\!]^c$ to the public beliefs of the speaker, thereby publicly committing the speaker to **act as though he believes** $[\![\phi]\!]^c$.

- This is surely a minimal requirement for any account of assertions, and we regard it as the **minimal effect** of assertions, in the sense of Zeevat (2003).

- Additional properties of assertions can arguably be explained as pragmatic inferences on the basis of this minimal effect (cf. Searle (1975) and Searle (2001) for a recent defense of this view).

    - One of these effects is that it becomes common ground that p.

- With Gunlogson (2003) and Davis (2009), we assume that an assertion becomes part of the common ground only as a secondary effect, after the hearer has accepted the assertion.

- We construe the common ground along Stalnaker's lines, rather than in terms of joint commitments.

- Some Notation:

$PB_S[u]$ The set of doxastic commitments of speaker S resulting from communicative event u.

$PEP_S[u]$ The set of preferential commitments of speaker S resulting from communicative event u.

PB_S^t The set of beliefs of S that become publicly manifest at time t

PEP_S^t The set of maximal effective preferences of S that become publicly manifest at time t.

- We do not identify $PB_S[u]$ strictly with the truth-conditional content of u. Rather, the commitment can come about as a result of the meaning of the utterance plus information available in the context in which it is made.

  - However, $PB_S[u]$ is not, in general, identical to Gricean speaker meaning: As Lauer (2012) argues on the basis of loose talk, the commitments arising from an utterance can be strictly **stronger** than what is (intended to be) communicated by the utterance.

- We assume the following principles, where t_u is the final instant of the runtime of u:

(21) $p \in PB_S[u] \Leftrightarrow (p \in PB_S^{t_u}) \in PB_S[u]$

(22) $p \in PEP_S[u] \Leftrightarrow (p \in PEP_S^{t_u}) \in PB_S[u]$

These principles simply says that agents are committed to believe the truism that if u brings about a commitment, this commitment comes into effect at the end of the u.

5 Explicit performatives as self-verifying assertions

- Performative verbs report *communicative events*.

- We conceive of these events as *concrete particulars*.

- Every communicative event u is associated with a unique context $c(u)$ whose speaker is the agent of u and whose time is the runtime of u.

- To establish self-verification we need to show:

– For any world w, if u is an utterance in w of a sentence S with an explicit performative verb, then $w \in \llbracket S \rrbracket_{c(u)}$.

Assertives: Commitment to a belief

- **Cohen's paradox** (Lycan 1999, Cohen 1964):

  (23) I claim that it is going to rain.

  – Why does 'I claim' seem 'truth-conditionally transparent'?
  – E.g. if it does not rain, the speaker cannot say 'Well, I only CLAIMED ...'
  – Why, on the other hand, does 'I claim' seem to contribute to the truth-conditions?
  – E.g. (23) entails that somebody claims that it is going to rain.

The reportative use

- What has to be the case for (24) to be true?

  (24) Peter claimed that it was going to rain.

- There must have been a communicative event u of a particular kind.

- (23) is one example, but there are many others, e.g. the bare assertion in (25):

  (25) It is going to rain.

- In general, since the commitments resulting from an utterance can go beyond its truth-conditional content, (24) can be supported by utterances of sentences that have (25) as a contextual implication.

(26) $w \vDash claim(u, a, p)$ iff
  a. u is a communicative event from a: $w \vDash CE_a(u)$
  b. in $c(u)$, u commits a to the belief that p: $w \vDash p \in PB_a[u]$.

The performative use

- The goal is to explain why, by virtue of uttering (23), a speaker is doxastically committed to (25).

- Let u^* be an utterance of (23) in context C^* and world w^*.

- (27) is the truth-conditional content of (23) in C^*.

(27) $\{w \mid w \vDash \exists u : \tau(u) = \tau(u^*) \wedge claim(u, S, Rain)\}$,
where $Rain = [\![\text{it is going to rain}]\!]_{C^*}$

- Given the semantics of **claim** in (26), (27) is equivalent to (28).

(28) $\{w \mid w \vDash \exists u : \tau(u) = \tau(u^*) \wedge CE_S(u) \wedge Rain \in PB_S[u]\}$

- u^*, as an assertion, commits the speaker to the belief in (27)/(28).

- Therefore, the speaker is committed *to the belief in the existence of a communicative event that commits him to the belief that it is going to rain*:

(29) $w^* \vDash (28) \in PB_S[u^*]$

- At the final instant t^* of $\tau(u^*)$:

(30) $w^* \vDash \{w \mid w \vDash Rain \in PB_S^{t^*}\} \in PB_S^{t^*}$

- Given doxastic reduction for doxastic commitment (30) reduces to (31):

(31) $w^* \vDash Rain \in PB_S^{t^*}$

- (29) and (31) together imply (32), which by postulate (21) reduces to (33).

(32) $w^* \vDash (Rain \in PB_S^{t^*}) \in PB_S[u^*]$ (33) $w^* \vDash Rain \in PB_S[u^*]$

- Therefore, u^* satisfies the conditions in (28) and hence $w^* \in (28)$.

Commissives: Commitment to an effective preference

The reportative use

- What has to be the case for (34) to be true?

(34) Peter promised (Mary) to get the tickets.

- Again, there has to have been a communicative event from Peter (to Mary) that creates a particular kind of commitment.

- And again, a number of utterances could serve as this event:

(35) a. I promise to get the tickets.
     b. I will get the tickets.
     c. You will have the tickets tomorrow.

(36) $w \vDash promise(u, a, b, p)$ iff

    a. u is a communicative event from a to b: $w \vDash CE_{a \to b}(u)$

    b.   in $c(u)$, u commits a to $PEP_a(p)$: $w \vDash p \in PEP_a[u]$

- Searle (1964, 1969, 1989): (34) implies that Peter is under an obligation to get the tickets.

- This proposal: (34) implies that Peter is committed to making the right action choices so as to end up getting the tickets.

- (35-b,c) will bring about the requisite commitment only if the context is right, while the explicit performative (35-a) will create it in any context in which it is sincerely uttered.

- (36) only specifies the truth-conditional part of the meaning of **promise**. There is a presuppositional part, as well, roughly, that a presumes that b has a stake in p.

The performative use

- An utterance u^* of (35-a) to addressee A in context C^* and world w^* commits the speaker S to acting as if he believes the proposition in (37).

(37) $\{w \mid w \vDash \exists u : \tau(u) = \tau(u^*) \wedge CE_{S \to A}(u) \wedge Tickets \in PEP_S[u]\}$,
    where $Tickets = [\![S \text{ will get the tickets}]\!]_{C^*}$

- Given the lexical semantics of **promise**:

(38) $w^* \vDash (37) \in PB_S[u^*]$

(39) $w^* \vDash \{w \mid w \vDash Tickets \in PEP_S^{t^*}\} \in PB_S^{t^*}$

- Given doxastic reduction for preference commitment, (39) reduces to (40):

(40) $w^* \vDash Tickets \in PEP_S^{t^*}$

- (38) and (40) together imply (41), which by postulate (22) reduces to (42).

(41) $w^* \vDash (Tickets \in PEP_S^{t^*}) \in PB_S[u^*]$ (42) $w^* \vDash Tickets \in PEP_S[u^*]$

Directives: Commitment to an effective preference for an effective preference

The reportative use

- What has to be the case for (43) to be true?

(43)   Mary ordered Peter to sign the report immediately.

- Again, there must have been a certain kind of communicative event.

- In the right context, an utterance of (44) or any of the sentences in (8) will suffice.

(44)   I order you sign the report immediately!

(8)   a.   Sign the report immediately!
   b.   I want you to sign the report immediately!
   c.   You have to sign the report immediately!

(45) $w \vDash order(u, a, b, p)$ iff
   a. u is a communicative event from a to b: $w \vDash CE_{a \to b}(u)$
   b.   in $c(u)$, u commits a to $PEP_a(PEP_b(p))$: $w \vDash \mathbb{P}_b(p) \in PEP_a[u]$,
        where $\mathbb{P}_b(p) = \{w \mid w \vDash \exists t > \tau(u) : \ p \in PEP_b^t\}$

- (45) only specifies the truth-conditional part of the meaning of **order**. There is a presuppositional part, as well, namely, that a presumes to have authority over b with respect to p, i.e. that b is socially or institutionally obligated to take on the commitment effectively preferred by a.

The performative use

- An utterance u^* of (7) to addressee A in context C^* and world w^* commits the speaker S to believing the proposition in (46):

(46) $\{w \mid w \vDash \exists u : \tau(u) = \tau(u^*) \wedge order(u, S, A, Sign)\}$,
      where $Sign = \llbracket A$ signs the report immediately$\rrbracket_{C^*}$

- The derivation of the performative effect is like that for **promise** except that, given the lexical semantics we propose for **order**, the equivalent of (38) is (48):

(47) $\{w \mid w \vDash \exists u : \tau(u) = \tau(u^*) \wedge CE_S(u) \wedge \mathbb{P}_A(Sign) \in PEP_S[u]\}$

(48) $w^* \vDash (47) \in PB_S[u^*]$

- From this, we can derive

(49) $w^* \vDash \mathbb{P}_A(Sign) \in PEP_S[u^*]$

- This means that $w^* \in \llbracket(7)\rrbracket$, i.e. (7) is self-verifying.

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6 Features of our analysis

- No illocutionary operators in the semantics.

- Verbs like *promise* and *order* express preferential attitudes of a special kind.

- Meaning (truth conditional content) is computed pointwise

  - Any given world w determines the doxastic state and the set of preference structures of an agent in that world.

  - Instead of specifying discourse information in terms of global contextual parameters, we can do so in terms of local parameters constituting possibilities (aspects of a world), something in the spirit of Stalnaker (1998) and Stalnaker (2002).

  - Updating a set of such possilities results in information gained not just about 'first-order facts' but also about agents' commitments and effective preferences.

- Although there are many points of contact with two recent, independently developed accounts by Regine Eckardt (Eckardt 2009) and Hubert Truckenbrodt (Truckenbrodt 2009), our proposal differs from those in

  - how it derives the self-verifying property of performative utterances
  - the lexical meaning it assumes for assertives, commissives and directives
  - in the explanation of how performative utterances restrict possible future states of the world.

- Although we show that the actual utterance u^* is a witness for the existential claim, we do not show that it is the unique witness.

  - If we had a self-referential account, we could get this fact easily but we'd like to connect the behavior of explicit performatives to the general behavior of eventive predicates.

- Potential problem with double channel communications?

  - A double channel communication scenario (Maribel Romero, p.c.):
    Suppose you are writing an email to A saying *I promise to marry you* and talking on the phone to A, who asks you *What are you doing (now)?* If you say *I promise to marry you*, you cannot be describing the act on the computer. You just bring about the promise with that utterance.

- Not guaranteeing uniqueness of witnesses need not be a liability. The fact that the verbal utterance constitutes a promise itself obscures any descriptive use it may have.

Our perspective on Searle's challenge

- Searle's plain assertoric analysis

    1. Indicative sentences are/have the force of statements (assertions)
    2. A statement is an intentionally undertaken commitment to the truth of the expressed propositional content.
    3. Performative statements are self-referential.
    4. An essential constitutive feature of any iliocutionary act is the intention to perform that act.
        - It is a constitutive feature of a promise, for example, that the utterance should be intended as a promise.

- Searle's challenge rests on assumptions 2 and 4.

- With those assumptions, Searle's challenge is insurmountable, i.e., there cannot be an analysis of explicit performatives that meets desiderata (a), (b) and (c) without assuming a special kind of speech act.

- We have questioned the necessity of assumption 2 by providing an alternative.

- We have also refined 4 and done away with 3.

- The fact that Searle's own account of statements (assertions) is based on a notion of public commitment shows that not any kind of public commitments would do.

Jary's (2007) challenge

- Jary (2007): Explicit performatives cannot be assertions, because their content gets added to the common ground automatically.

- The content of run-off-the-mill assertions gets added to the common ground only **after it is accepted by the addressee**.

- This step is unnecessary for performatives.

- As Jary notes, **the fact that the assertion happened** will always become part of the common ground.

- But then, our account predicts Jary's observation: Since the content of the assertion is entailed by the fact that the assertion happened, this content will become part of the common ground automatically.

Searle's full set of adequacy criteria

Features of performatives to account for:

1. Performative utterances are performances of the act named by the main verb (or other performative expression) in the sentence.

2. Performative utterances are self-guaranteeing in the sense that the speaker cannot be lying, insincere, or mistaken about the type of act being performed (even though he or she can be lying, insincere, or mistaken about the propositional content of the speech act and he or she can fail to perform the act if certain other conditions fail to obtain.)

3. Performative utterances achieve features (1) and (2) in virtue of the literal meaning of the sentence uttered.

4. They characteristically take "hereby" as in "I hereby promise that I will come and see you."

5. The verbs in question are not ambiguous between a performative and a non-performative sense, even though the verbs have both performative and non-performative literal occurrences.

6. Performative utterances are not indirect speech acts, in the sense in which an utterance of "Can you pass the salt?" can be an indirect speech act of requesting the hearer to pass the salt.

7. Performative utterances in virtue of their literal meaning are statements with truth values.

8. Performative sentences typically use an unusual tense in English, the so called "dramatic present."

- We have already derived features (1), (2), (3), (5) and (7).

- We address (4) and (8) below and we reconsider (6) toward the end of the talk.

- **Hereby** can be seen as an event predicate modifier with the meaning in (50).

  (50) $\llbracket hereby \rrbracket^u = \lambda P \lambda e \, (P(e) \wedge e = u)$

Which verbs have performative uses?

- Naïve reaction to the contrast in (51): Ordering is something 'that can be done with words', frying an egg is not.

  (51) a. I (hereby) order you to be there at noon.   (constitutes an order)
        b. I (hereby) fry an egg.   (does not constitute a frying)

- But: There are many 'things that can be done with words' that cannot be done with explicit performatives:

  (52) a. # I (hereby) insult you.
        b. # I (hereby) annoy you.
        c. # I (hereby) frighten you.

- In classical parlance, these verbs name **perlocutionary acts** rather than the **illocutionary acts** named by verbs that allow for explicit performative uses.

- But naming is no cure: an account of explicit performatives should explain why (51-a) is an order, but (52-a) is not an insult.

- On the account proposed here, the reason why (51-a) does not work is that the meaning of **insult** is not exhausted by the specification of speaker commitments.

- (51-a) is only true if the utterance has the right effect on the audience.

- But then, (51-a) cannot be self-verifying, and indeed, it is hard to imagine a context in which someone is insulted/annoyed/frightened merely by someone else saying so.

- Note that accounts which posit that a speech act only gets through if uptake happens, actually predict that **order** is like **insult**: They cannot, generally, be self-verifying.

Explicit Performatives and the Progressive

- Sentences in the progressive cannot be used performatively.

  (53) a. ?? I am ordering you to be there at noon.
        b. ?? I am promising you to be there at noon.

- (53-a,b) **can** be used, but only to comment on another event that is happening parallel to the utterance:

  (54) A: What are you doing there?
        B: [Signing a written order] I am ordering you to ...

  Crucially, in these uses, the sentence in the progressive is not what brings about the order—instead, in (54), it is the signing that brings the order into effect.

- Our account needs one additional assumptions: verbs that can be used performatively are accomplishments (or achievements).

  - Sentences in the progressive do not entail completion with accomplishments and (coerced) achievements, except possibly for the 'interpretive' use of the progressive discussed below.

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(55)   John was building a house, when a wooden beam fell on him, killing him instantly. The house was never finished.

(56)   John was reaching the summit when he fell, broke his leg, and had to be rescued by helicopter. He never got to stand on the summit.

– With the past progressive, we see that completion is not entailed:

(57)   Mary was promising John to execute his will when the bomb exploded.

* For (57) to be true, the bomb has to have exploded in the middle of Mary's utterance.
* It is quite possible that the bomb interrupted the promising, such that Mary never took on the respective commitment.

– If the verbs that can be used performatively are accomplishments, we have an explanation for why sentences in the progressive cannot be used performatively:

* The progressive sentence does not entail completion, hence (53-b) does not entail that there is an event that brings about the required commitment.
* Sentence (53-b) cannot serve as a witness of (reportative) (58):

(58)   A promised B to be there at noon.

Apparent performative uses of the progressive

- There are uses of the progressive that would appear to be performative, but these are elaborating on a previous utterance:

(59)   Go to bed. [Nothing happens . . .] I am ordering you.

(60)   A: I want you to clean up your room.
       B: Why are you saying that?
       A: I am ordering you to do it.

- These can arguably be seen as instances of the 'interpretive' use of the progressive (König 1980):

(61)   A: Do you smoke?
       B: No, thanks.
       A: Oh, I **was not offering**. I just wanted to know if you did.

(62)   a.   In explaining the lambda-calculus to them, you were insulting them.
       b.   You explained the lambda-calculus to them. You were insulting them.

- One of the main points of this use appears to be to indicate that the sentence in the progressive is not about a new event (e.g. compare (62-b) with (63)), but rather **redescribes an event already mentioned**:

(63)   You explained the lambda-calculus to them. You insulted them.

(63) strongly suggests that the explaining and the insulting were distinct events.

- A similar contrast can be observed with respect to pseudo-performative uses of the progressive: Compare (59) with (64):

(64)   Stop smoking. [...] (Okay, then) I order you.

(64) seems to be only appropriate if the imperative is understood as a suggestion (which is turned into an order when not followed).

Non-linguistic declarations

(65)   I pronounce you man and wife.
(66)   The meeting is adjourned.
(67)   The bike is yours.

- We follow Searle (1989) in appealing to extra-linguistic institutions and institutional facts.

- Given an extra-linguistic institution and certain conditions dictated by it obtaining in the world of evaluation, then the fact that, e.g., $[\![(65)]\!] \in PB_S[u^*]$ is sufficient for the requisite new fact to come about, e.g., legally recognized marriage.

- The conditions dictated by the institution may have to do with the speaker and possibly the addressee, as well as requiring a number of (linguistic or non-linguistic) acts to have taken place prior to u^*.

7   A new perspective on 'indirect speech acts'

- A consequence of our approach is that we can reconstruct the traditional distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' speech acts as one between uses of expressions that have a particular performative effect in *any context in which they are felicitous* (such as explicit performatives and clause types like imperatives do) and uses of expressions that have it only *when the context is right*.

- On such a view, it is not surprising that 'indirect orders' turn out to share one of the hallmarks of 'performative utterances' in Searle's sense:

  - They cannot be challenged as being false.
  - For example, (8-c), when it has the force of an order, cannot be challenged with **That is false!/That's a lie!** any more than (7) can.

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(8-c) I want you to sign the report now!

- This observation gives some more credence to the assumption that explicit performatives are assertions.

- For no-one would want to deny that **I want** p is an assertion, even when used as an order.

- But that means that 'explicit performatives cannot be challenged as false, so they cannot be assertions' is not a good argument.

- What about the role of Searlean speech acts? We take them to be useful descriptive labels but we accord them no analytic status.

8   Searle's analysis

Performatives as declarations

- Performative utterances constitute both assertions and declarations

- Declarations are speech acts that make their propositional content true if they succeed (by definition)

- The truth of the statement derives from the declarational character of the utterance and not conversely

Supernatural declarations

- (68), (69), if uttered by God, are declarations

- (68) makes it the case by fiat that light exists, (69) erects a tower

- Given the structure of the world, ordinary humans cannot use (68) or (69) as declarations: their utterance will not have the same causal effect on the world as God's utterances do

(68)   Let there be light!
(69)   I hereby build a tower.

Declarations based on institutional facts

- Effecting change not by physical causation but by declarations

- In order to succeed declarations require

  1. An extra-linguistic institution.

2. A special position by the speaker, and sometimes by the hearer, within the institution.

3. A special convention that certain literal sentences of natural languages count as the performances of certain declarations within the institution.

4. The intention by the speaker in the utterance of those sentences that his utterance has a declarationai status, that it creates a fact corresponding to the propositional content.

Causal effects of declarations

As a general point, the difference between pounding a nail and adjourning a meeting is that in the case of adjourning the meeting the intention to perform the action, as manifested in the appropriate bodily movement (in this case the appropriate utterances) performed by a person duly authorized, and recognized by the audience, is constitutive of bringing about the desired change. When I say in such cases that the intention is constitutive of the action, I mean that the manifestation of the intention in the utterance does not require any further causal effects of the sort we have in hammering a nail or starting a car. It simply requires recognition by the audience.

Searle (1989, p. 548)

The necessary apparatus for explicit performatives

1. There is a class of actions where the manifestation of the intention to perform the action, in an appropriate context, is sufficient for the performance of the action.

2. There is a class of verbs which contain the notion of intention as part of their meaning. Illocutionary verbs characteristically have this feature. I cannot, e.g., promise unintentionally. If I didn't intend it as a promise, then it wasn't a promise.

3. There is a class of literal utterances which are self referential in a special way, they are not only *about* themselves, but they also operate on themselves. They are both *self-referential* and *executive*.

- The sentence uttered as an assertion and uttered as a performative mean exactly the same thing.

- But when they are uttered as performatives the speaker's intention is different from when uttered as assertives.

- Performative speaker meaning includes sentence meaning but goes beyond it.

- In the case of the performative utterance, the intention is that the utterance should constitute the performance of the act named by the verb.

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- The word "hereby" makes this explicit, and with the addition of this word, sentence meaning and performative speaker meaning coincide.

- The "here" part is the self referential part. The "by" part is the executive part.

Searle's derivation of self-verification

1. S uttered the sentence "I hereby order you to leave" (or he uttered "I order you to leave" meaning "I hereby order you to leave").

2. The literal meaning of the utterance is such that by that very utterance the speaker *intends* to make it the case that he orders me to leave.

3. Therefore, in making the utterance S *manifested an intention* to make it the case by that utterance that he ordered me to leave.

4. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to *order* me to leave by that very utterance.

5. Orders are a class of actions where the manifestation of the intention to perform the action is sufficient for its performance, given that certain other conditions are satisfied.

6. We assume those other conditions are satisfied.

7. S ordered me to leave, by that utterance.

8. S both said that he ordered me to leave and made it the case that he ordered me to leave. Therefore he made a true statement.

Reconstruction of Searle's derivation

1. S uttered the sentence "I hereby order you to leave" (or he uttered "I order you to leave" meaning "I hereby order you to leave").

- If the speaker utters simply "I order you to leave", the hearer has to recognize that the speaker meant this as a declaration, that is, that it is to be understood as if it contained a "hereby".

2. The literal meaning of the utterance is such that by that very utterance the speaker *intends* to make it the case that he orders me to leave.

- Let u^* be an utterance of "I hereby order you to leave" in context C^* and world w^*.

- Given the equivalence/entailment (?) that Searle assumes, the content of the utterance is equivalent to/entails (70):

(70)

$$\{w \mid w \vDash intend(S, \{w' \mid w' \vDash Cause(u^*, \{w'' \mid w'' \vDash \exists e : order(e, S, Leave)\})\})\}$$

where $Leave = [\![\text{you leave}]\!]_{C^*}$

3. Therefore, in making the utterance S *manifested an intention* to make it the case by that utterance that he ordered me to leave.

- Let $ManifestAtt_S[u]$ be the set of attitudes speaker S manifests via utterance u. Then

  (71) $\quad w^* \vDash (70) \in ManifestAtt_S[u^*]$

4. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to *order* me to leave by that very utterance.

- Assuming that *Cause* implies *by* and that *intend* is closed under entailment, (70) entails (72) and, therefore, (73) holds:

  (72) $\quad \{w \mid w \vDash intend(S, \{w' \mid w' \vDash \exists e : order(e, S, Leave) \wedge by(e, u^*)\})\}$

  (73) $\quad w^* \vDash (72) \in ManifestAtt_S[u^*]$

5. Orders are a class of actions where the manifestation of the intention to perform the action is sufficient for its performance, given that certain other conditions are satisfied.

6. We assume those other conditions are satisfied.

7. S ordered me to leave, by that utterance.

- (73) implies (74):

  (74) $\quad w^* \vDash \exists e : order(e, S, Leave) \wedge by(e, u^*)$

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