JOHN R. SEARLE

HOW PERFORMATIVES WORK[1]

The notion of a performative is one that philosophers and linguists are so comfortable with that one gets the impression that sombody must have a satisfactory theory. But I have not seen such a theory and in this article I want to address the question: how exactly do performatives work? I believe that answering that question is not just a fussy exercise in linguistic analysis but can give us insights into the nature of language and the relation between speech acts and actions generally. Some people who have written about performatives[2] seem to think that it is just a semantic fact about certain verbs that they have performative occurrences, but the puzzle is: how could any verbs have such remarkable properties just as a matter of semantics? I can't fix the roof by saying, "I fix the roof" and I can't fry an egg by saying, "I fry an egg," but I can promise to come and see you just by saying, "I promise to come and see you" and I can order you to leave the room just by saying, "I order you to leave the room." Now why the one and not the other? And, to repeat, how exactly does it work? Perhaps the most widely accepted current view is the following: performative utterances are really just statements with truth values like any other statements, and Austin was wrong to contrast performative utterances with some other kind.[3] The only special feature of the performative statement is that the speaker can perform some other speech act indirectly by making the statement. And the task of a theory of performatives is to explain how the speaker can intend and the hearer can understand a second speech act from the making of the first speech act, the statement.

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There is now a vast literature on the subject of performatives, and I am, of course, indebted to the authors whose works I have read. Specifically, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to J. Austin, K. Bach, M. Bierwisch, C. Ginet, R. Harnish, I. Hedenius, J. Lemmon, J. McCawley, F. Récanati, J. Sadock, J. Urmson, and G. Warnock. (See bibliography).

[2] E.g., McCawley (1979).

[3] I believe the earliest version of this view is in Lemmon (1962). For another early statement see also Hedenius (1963).

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I have not seen an account of performatives that I thought was satisfactory. Therefore, in this paper I will attempt to:

1. Characterize performatives in a way that will enable us to give a (fairly) precise statement of the problem;
2. State the conditions of adequacy on any solution;
3. Show that certain analyses of performatives fail;
4. Introduce the elements of the apparatus necessary to solve the problem; and
5. Suggest a solution.

1. WHAT EXACTLY IS A PERFORMATIVE?

The word 'performative' has had a very confusing history and I need to make clear at the start how I am using it. Austin originally introduced the notion of *performatives* to contrast them with *constatives*; and his idea was that performatives were *actions*, such as making a promise or giving an order; and constatives were *sayings*, such as making a statement or giving a description. Constatives, but not performatives, could be true or false. But that distinction didn't work, because stating and describing are just as much actions as promising and ordering, and some performatives, such as warnings, can be true or false. Furthermore statements can be made with explicit performative verbs, as in "I hereby state that it is raining." So it looked for a while as if he would have to say that every utterance was a performative, and that would render the notion useless. Another distinction which didn't work is that between explicit and implicit performatives, e.g., the distinction between "I promise to come" (explicit) and "I intend to come" (implicit). This distinction doesn't work because in the sense in which the explicit performatives are performatives the implicit cases aren't performative at all. If I say, "I intend to come," I have literally just made a statement about my intention. (Though, of course, in making such a statement, I might also indirectly be making a promise.)

I believe the correct way to situate the notion of performatives within a general theory of speech acts is as follows: some illocutionary acts can be performed by uttering a sentence containing an expression that names the type of speech act, as in for example, "I order you to leave the room." These utterances, and only these, are correctly described as performative utterances. On my usage, the only performatives are what Austin called "explicit performatives." Thus, though every utterance is indeed a *performance*, only a very restricted class are *performatives*.

If we adopt this usage, it now becomes essential to distinguish between performative utterances, performative sentences, and performative verbs. As I shall use these expressions a *performative sentence* is a sentence whose literal utterance in appropriate circumstances constitutes the performance of an illocutionary act named by an expression in that very sentence in virtue of the occurrence of that expression. A *performative utterance* is an utterance of a performative sentence token, such that the utterance constitutes the performance of the act named by the performative expression in the sentence. A *performative verb* is simply a verb that can occur as the main verb in performative sentences. When such a verb occurs in such a sentence in a performative utterance I shall speak of the *performative use* of the sentence and the verb. An utterance of

(1) Leave the room!

can constitute the *performance of* making of an order, but it is not *performative*, whereas an utterance of

(2) I *order* you to leave the room.

would normally be performative.

Furthermore not every sentence containing a performative verb in the first person present indicative is a performative sentence.

(3) I *promise* to come on Wednesday.

is a performative sentence, but

(4) I *promise* too many things to too many people.

is not a performative sentence. In English most, but not all, performative utterances contain occurrences in the first person present singular indicative of the performative verb. There are also some occurrences in the present continuous, e.g.,

(5) I am *asking* you to do this for me, Henry, I am *asking* you to do it for me and Cynthia and the children.

and some performative utterances use verbs in the plural, e.g.,

(6) We *pledge* our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

Furthermore, some performative sentences are in the passive:

(7) Passengers are hereby *advised* that all flights to Phoenix have been cancelled.

Sometimes the performative expression is not a verb and it may be in a separate clause or sentence, as in

(8) I'll come to see you next week, and that's a *promise*.

Not every occurrence of a performative sentence is a performative use. Thus, e.g., (3) could be used to report a habitual practice: "Whenever I see you on Tuesday I always do the same thing: I promise to come and see you on Wednesday."[4]

2. WHAT EXACTLY IS THE PROBLEM ABOUT PERFORMATIVES?

Put at its most naive (and in a preliminary formulation we will later have to revise), the puzzle about performatives is simply this: how can there be a class of sentences whose meaning is such that we can perform the action named by the verb just by saying literally we are performing it? How can meaning determine that saying is doing? How does the saying *constitute* the doing? There are other questions related to this: why is the class of verbs restricted in the way that it seems to be? As I mentioned, I can promise by saying "I hereby promise," but I can't fry an egg, by saying "I hereby fry an egg." Furthermore, how can one and the same unambiguous sentence have both a literal performative and a literal nonperformative use?

Another crucial question is why is it that in some sense I can't lie or be mistaken or utter a falsehood with the performative part of the performative utterance, in the way that statements normally can be lies, falsehoods or mistakes. This question has to be stated precisely. When I say, "Bill promised to come and see you last week" that utterance can be a lie, a mistake, or some other form of falsehood, just as any statement can. But when I say "I promise to come and see you next week" that utterance could be insincere (if I don't intend to do the act represented by the propositional content) and it can fail to be a promise if certain of the presuppositions fail to obtain (e.g. if the person I take myself to be addressing is not a person but a fence post) but I can't be lying or mistaken about it's having the *force* of a promise, because, in some sense that we need to explain, my uttering the sentence and meaning literally what I say gives it the force of a promise. Just to have a name I will call this the "self-guaranteeing" character of performative utterances.

[4] Notice that I have restricted the definition of performatives to illocutionary acts. On my definition utterances of "I am now speaking" or "I am shouting" (said in a loud voice) are not performative utterances.

Finally, there is a problem about the semantic analysis of performative verbs. Are we to be forced to say that these verbs have two meanings, one performative and one not? Or two senses? Or what?

3. Condition of adequacy

What are the constraints that we would like to achieve on our analysis of performatives? Well first we would like the analysis to fit into an overall account of language. Ideally performatives should not just stick out as some oddity or anomaly, but it should seem necessary that these verbs, sentences, and utterances would have these properties given the rest of our account of language. In this connection we would like to preserve the intuition that performative sentences are ordinary sentences in the indicative and that as such they are used to make statements that have truth values, even when uttered performatively. Also, we would like to avoid having to postulate ambiguities; especially since we have independent linguistic evidence that performative verbs are not ambiguous between a performative and a nonperformative sense. For example, we can get something like conjunction reduction in examples of the following sort: the sentence, "John promises to come and see you next week, and I promise to come and see you next week," can be paraphrased as "John promises to come and see you next week and so do I." We need further to explain the occurrence of "hereby" in performative sentences. But the hard problem is that we need to meet these constraints in a way that accounts for the special character of performatives, especially the self-guaranteeing feature that I mentioned earlier.

Just so we can see what the problems are, I will simply list the main features that I would like to be able 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."

4. PREVIOUS ANALYSES

I am not sure that all these conditions can be met, and perhaps some of them are incorrect, but in any case none of the discussions I have read and heard of performatives meets all of them. Let me review my own earlier writings on this subject. In *Speech Acts* (Searle, 1969) and other writings I pointed out that in general, illocutionary acts have the structure F(p), where the "F" stands for the illocutionary force, and the "(p)" stands for the propositional content. If communication is to be successful, the hearer has to be able to figure out from hearing the sentence what is the illocutionary force and what is the propositional content. So there will in general be in the syntax of sentences an illocutionary force indicating device and a representation of the propositional content. In the sentence, "It's raining," the propositional content expressed is: that it is raining, and the illocutionary force of a statement is indicated by such things as word order, intonation contour, mood of the verb and punctuation.

Now on this account, I argued in *Speech Acts* that the performative prefix is just an indicator of illocutionary force like any other. In "I state that it is raining" and "I order you to leave the room" the performative prefixes "I state" and "I order" function to make explicit the illocutionary force of the utterance of the sentence. As far as it goes, I think that account is right, but incomplete in that it doesn't explain how performatives work. In particular, it doesn't so far explain how the same syntactical sequence can occur in some cases as an indicator of illocutionary force and in others as part of propositional content. So the present task can be described in part as an attempt to complete the account I began in *Speech Acts*.

In the *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, (Searle and Vanderveken,

1985) Daniel Vanderveken and I argued that performative utterances were all cases of declarations. Declarations, just to remind you, are speech acts such as for example, "The meeting is adjourned" or "War is hereby declared" where the illocutionary point of the speech act is to change the world in such a way that the propositional content matches the world, because the world has been changed to match the propositional content. In a declaration of the form F(p) the successful performance of the speech act changes the world to make it the case that p. Declarations thus have simultaneously both the word-to-world and the world-to-word directions of fit.[5] Now on this account of performative utterances, just as I can declare the meeting to be adjourned, so I can declare a promise to be made or an order to be issued, and I use a performative prefix to do these things. If we just read off the structure of the speech act from the surface structure of the sentence that account seems obviously right. The propositional content, e.g. that I order you to leave the room, is made true by the utterance of the sentence "I order you to leave the room;" and such an utterance differs from an utterance of the sentence, "Leave the room;" because though an utterance of "Leave the room" also makes it the case that I ordered you to leave the room; it does not do so by declaration. It does not do so by representing it as being the case, and thus it differs from a performative.

This analysis of performatives as declarations has the consequence that the illocutionary structure of "I order you to leave the room" is:

Declare (that I order (that you leave the room)).

The propositional content of the declaration is: that I order that you leave the room, even though the propositional content of the order is: that you leave the room.

I think it is correct to say that all performatives are declarations, but that does not really answer our original question, "How do performatives work" it only extends it into "How do declarations work?" Also it has consequences of the sort that make philosophers nervous, e.g., What about the use of "I declare" as a performative prefix for a declaration?[6] Is that used to make a declaration of a declaration? And if so how far can such a regress go?

Most recent attempts at analysing performatives have treated them as statements[7] from which some other speech act can be derived; and many,

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[5] For an explanation of all these notions see Searle (1979), Chapter one.

[6] "Declare" in English also functions as an assertive prefix, as in "I declare that the contents of this document are true and complete."

[7] E.g. Lewis (1972), Bach (1975), Ginet (1979), and Bach and Harnish (1979).

though not all of these accounts treat them as a type of indirect speech act. I said earlier that intuitively performatives did not seem to be indirect speech acts, but there is something very appealing about any approach that treats them as statements because it takes seriously the fact that a performative sentence is grammatically an ordinary sentence in the indicative mood. Typical attempts to try to make this approach work treat performative utterances as indirect speech acts on analogy with such cases as "Can you pass the salt?" used to request somebody to pass the salt or "It's hot in here" used to request somebody to open the window. The idea is that the literal speech act is a statement and then by some mechanism of Gricean implicature the hearer is supposed to infer the intent to perform some other speech act. I do not think these accounts are adequate; but just to consider the best I have seen, I will briefly review the account given by Bach and Harnish.

According to Bach and Harnish, "in the case of performative utterances, even those without the use of 'hereby,' normally the hearer could reason, and could be intended to reason, as follows:

(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.[8]

I believe this account is unsatisfactory, because it fails to meet even the most uncontroversial of our conditions of adequacy. Specifically, it fails to explain the performative character and the self-guaranteeing character of performative utterances. It fails to meet conditions (1) and (2). The phenomenon that we are trying to explain is how a statement *could* constitute an order, and on this account, it is just blandly asserted in (4) that it does constitute an order. The fact we were trying to explain is left unexplained by the Bach-Harnish account. Furthermore, we were trying to explain the self-guaranteeing character which performatives have, but other statements do not have. Now, if we are right in thinking that performatives are self-guaranteeing, then it is redundant to suppose that we need an extra presumption that the speaker is telling the truth

[8] Bach and Harnish (1979), p. 208.

(their step (5)) because as far as the illocutionary force is concerned, there is no way he could fail to speak the truth.

Their account takes it as given that the utterance can constitute an order, but if we are allowed to assume that utterances can constitute states of affairs described by the utterance, then we do not have an account that explains the differences between sentences which work as performatives and sentences which do not, such as e.g., "I am the King of Spain." They offer no explanation of why their analysis works for ordering but wouldn't work for the following:

(1) He is saying "I am the King of Spain."
(2) He is stating that he is the King of Spain.
(3) If his statement is true, then he must be the King of Spain.
(4) If he is the King of Spain, it must be his utterance that constitutes his being the King of Spain. (What else could it be?)
(5) Presumably, he is speaking the truth.
(6) Therefore, in stating that he is the King of Spain, he is being the King of Spain.

I think it is obvious that "I order you to leave" can be used performatively and "I am the King of Spain" cannot, but there is nothing in the Bach-Harnish account that explains the difference. Why does the one work and not the other? Another way to state the same objection is to point out that they are relying on our understanding of how the sentence "I order you to leave" can be used performatively and not explaining how it can be so used.

Still, there is something very appealing about the idea that performative utterances are statements from which the performative is somehow derived. We have only to look at the syntax of these sentences to feel the appeal. So let's try to make the strongest case for it that we can. What we are trying to explain in the first instance is how the literal meaning of the indicative sentence is such that its serious and literal utterance is (or can be) the performance of the very act named by the main verb.

5. Performatives as Assertives

Notice first that the "hereby" marks a self reference. Whether the "hereby" occurs explicitly or not, the performative utterance is about itself. In "I order you to leave" or "I hereby order you to leave," the speaker in some sense says that that very utterance is an order. Such

utterances are no more and no less self referential than, e.g., "This statement is being made in English."[9]

Now, if we were going to take seriously the idea that performatives work by way of being statements to the effect that one performs a certain speech act, we would have to show how the characteristics of such self-referential statements were sufficient to be constitutive of the performance of the speech act named by the performative verb. In the formal mode we could say that we need to show how (assuming certain contextual conditions are satisfied) the statement: "John made a self-referential statement to the effect that his utterance was a promise that *p*" entails, as a matter of logic, "John made a promise that *p*." Well, what are the characteristics of such statements and what are the characteristics of performatives and what are the relations between them? The characteristics in question are these:

(1) A statement is an intentionally undertaken commitment to the truth of the expressed propositional content.

(2) Performative statements are self-referential.

(3) An essential constitutive feature of any illocutionary 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.

Now our question is a little more precise. Can we show how the first two characteristics combine to guarantee the presence of the third? Can we show how the fact that one made a self-referential statement to the effect that one was making a promise that *p* is sufficient to guarantee that one had the intention to make a promise that *p*? I used to think this was possible, and in fact when I completed an earlier version of this paper I thought I had a pretty good demonstration of how it worked. I now think that it can't be made to work, but I believe its failure is instructive, so let's go through the steps. I will try to set out in some detail an argument designed to show that a self-referential statement to the effect that the utterance is a promise that *p* necessarily has the force of a promise; and then I will try to show why the argument doesn't work.

Step 1. Suppose someone makes a statement literally uttering the sentence, "I promise to come and see you next week." Well, as such it is a statement; and a statement is a commitment to the truth of the

[9] Many authors have remarked on this self-referential feature. Perhaps the first was Åqvist (1972).

proposition, so the speaker is committed to the truth of the proposition that he promises to come to see the hearer next week.

But in general, the making of a statement does not guarantee that it is true or even that the speaker intends that it be true. For even though the statement commits him to its truth, he might lie or he might be mistaken. So from the mere fact that the utterance is a statement that he promises, we cannot derive that it is a promise.

Step 2. The statement is self-referential. It isn't just *about* a promise but it says of itself that it is a promise. It might be paraphrased as "This very utterance is the making of a promise to come and see you next week."

But the addition of self-referentiality by itself is still not enough to guarantee that it is a promise or even that it is intended as a promise. If I say "This very utterance is being made in French" there is nothing in the fact that a self-referential statement has been made that guarantees that it is true or even that it is intended to be true.

Step 3. In the utterance of the sentence, the speaker has made a self-referential truth claim to the effect that his utterance is a promise. But what would make it true, in what would its truth consist? Well obviously its truth would consist in its being a promise. But in what does its being a promise consist? Given that the preparatory and other conditions are satisfied, *its being a promise consists in its being intended as a promise*. Given that everything else is all right with the speech act, if it is intended as a promise then it is a promise. So now our question narrows down to this: How do the other features guarantee the intention to make a promise?

Step 4. The main feature of its being a promise is that it is intended as a promise. But now, and this is the crucial point, if the utterance is self-referential and if the intended truth conditions are that it be a promise and if the main component in those truth conditions actually being satisfied is the intention that it be a promise, then the intention to make the self-referential statement that the utterance is a promise is sufficient to guarantee the presence of the intention that it be a promise and therefore sufficient to guarantee that it is a promise. Why?

Step 5. The intention to label the utterance as a promise is sufficient for the intention to be a promise, because the intention to label it as a promise carries a commitment. The commitment in assertives is that the proposition is true. But now, the commitment to its truth, intentionally undertaken, already carries a commitment to the intention that it be a

promise. But that intention, in the appropriate circumstances, is sufficient for its being a promise.

So on this account, though statements in general do not guarantee their own truth, performative statements are exceptions for two reasons, first they are self-referential and second the self-reference is to the other speech act being performed in that very utterance. Notice that the self-referentiality is crucial here. If I assert that I will promise or that I have promised, such assertions do not carry the commitments of the actual promise in a way that the assertion "This very speech act is a promise" does carry the commitments both of the assertion and thereby of the promise.

This, I believe, is the best argument to show that performatives are primarily statements. What is wrong with it? For a long time it seemed right to me, but it now seems to me that it contains a mistake. And any mistake, once you see it, is an obvious mistake. The mistake is that the argument confuses *being committed to having an intention* with actually *having the intention*. If I characterize my utterance as a promise. I am committed to that utterance's having been made with the intention that it be a promise, but this is not enough to guarantee that it was actually made with that intention. I thought this objection could be evaded by the self-referentiality, but it can't be. Just self-referentially describing one of my own utterances as a promise is not enough to guarantee that it is made with the intention that it be a promise, even though it is enough to commit me to having made it with that intention.

The point is a fairly subtle one, but I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that it is decisive. So, I will repeat it: 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. And that was what we needed to show. We needed to show that the assertion somehow guaranteed the presence of the performative intention, when the assertion was a self-referential assertion to the effect that it was an illocutionary act named by the performative verb.

It now turns out that the effort to show that performatives are a species of assertion fails. The performative character of an utterance cannot be derived from its literal features as an assertion. I have come to the unfortunate conclusion that any attempt to derive performatives from assertives is doomed to failure because assertives fail to produce the

self-guaranteeing feature of performatives, and in failing to account for the self-guaranteeing feature, the analysis fails to account for performativity. The failure to satisfy condition (2) automatically produces a failure to satisfy condition (1). In order to derive the performative from the assertive, we would have to show that given the statement S of certain conditions on the speech act, the conjunction of S and the proposition '*x* made the self-referential assertion that he promised that *p*' entails '*x* promised that *p*'; and this cannot be done because the assertive intention by itself does not guarantee the presence of the performative intention.

6. Performatives as declarations

Now we have to go back to the drawing board. We were trying to derive the declarational character of performatives from their assertive character and it didn't work. So let's reconsider what is implied by the view that performatives are declarations. We saw earlier that, trivially, performatives are declarations because they satisfy the definition of a declaration. The definition is that an utterance is a declaration if the successful performance of the speech act is sufficient to bring about the fit between words and world, to make the propositional content true. Declarations thus have the double direction of fit ↕ whereas assertives have the word-to-world direction of fit ↓.[10] One way to characterize our failure so far is to say that my effort to derive the double direction of fit from the assertive direction of fit was a failure. I thought I could do it with self referentiality plus the lexical meaning of some peculiar verbs, but it turned out that the apparatus was too weak.

So let us now ask "How do declarations work in general?", and we can then use the answer to that question to locate the special features of performatives.

In order intentionally to produce changes in the world through our actions, normally our bodily movements have to set off a chain of ordinary physical causation. If, for example, I am trying to hammer a nail into a board or start the car, my bodily movements – e.g., swinging my arm while holding the hammer, turning my wrist while holding the key in the ignition – will cause certain desired effects.

But there is an important class of actions where intention, bodily movement and desired effect are not related by physical causation in this

[10] See Searle (1979), Chapter 1 for further discussion of the notion of direction of fit.

way. If somebody says, "The meeting is adjourned," "I pronounce you husband and wife," "War is declared," or "You're fired," he may succeed in changing the world in the ways specified in these utterances just by performing the relevant speech acts. How is that possible? Well, notice that the literal utterance of the appropriate sentences is not enough. For two reasons; first, for many of these utterances someone might utter the same sentence speaking literally and just be making a report. If the chairman says, "The meeting is adjourned" as a way of adjourning the meeting, I might report to my neighbor at the meeting, "The meeting is adjourned" and my speaker meaning includes the same literal sentence meaning as did the speaker meaning of the chairman, but he and not I performed a declaration. Second, even if I say, "The meeting is adjourned" intending thereby to adjourn the meeting, I will not succeed because I lack the authority. How is it that the chairman succeeds and I do not? In general, these sorts of declarations require the following four features:

(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 declarational status, that it creates a fact corresponding to the propositional content.

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.

The more formal the occasion, the more condition (3) is required. The speaker must utter the right expressions or the utterance does not count as marrying you, adjourning the meeting, etc. But often on informal occasions, there is no special ritual phrase. I can give you my watch just by saying, 'It's yours," "You can have it," "I give it to you," etc.

The most prominent exceptions to the claim that declarations require an extra-linguistic institution are supernatural declarations. When God says, "Let there be light!", that I take it is a declaration. It is not a promise; it doesn't mean, "When I get around to it, I'll make light for you." And it is not an order; it doesn't mean, "Sam over there, turn on the lights." It makes it the case by fiat that light exists. Fairy stories, by the way, are full of declarations performed by witches, wizards, magicians, etc. We ordinary humans do not have the ability to perform supernatural declarations, but we do have a quasi-magical power nonetheless of bringing about changes in the world through our utterances; and we are given this power by a kind of human agreement. All of these institutions in question are social institutions, and it is only as long as the institution is recognized that it can continue to function to allow for the performance of declarations.

When we turn to performatives such as "I promise to come and see you," "I order you to leave the room," "I state that it is raining," etc., we find that these, like our earlier declarations, also create new facts, but in these cases, the facts created are linguistic facts; the fact that a promise has been made, an order given, a statement issued, etc. To mark these various distinctions, let's distinguish between *extra-linguistic* declarations – such as adjourning the meeting, pronouncing somebody man and wife, declaring war, etc. – and *linguistic* declarations – such as promising, ordering, and stating by way of declaration. Both linguistic and extra-linguistic declarations are speech acts, and in that sense they are both linguistic. In the examples we have considered, they are all performed by way of performative utterances. Naively the best way to think of the distinction is this: A declaration is a speech act whose point is to create a new fact corresponding to the propositional content. Sometimes those new facts are themselves speech acts such as promises, statements, orders, etc. These I am calling linguistic declarations. Sometimes the new facts are not further speech acts, but wars, marriages, adjournments, light, property transfers, etc. These I am calling extralinguistic declarations. When the chairman says, "The meeting is adjourned," he performs a linguistic *act*, but the *fact* he creates, that the meeting is adjourned, is not a *linguistic fact*. On the other hand, when I say, "I order you to leave the room," I create a new fact, the fact that I have ordered you to leave the room, but that fact is a linguistic fact.

Since the facts created by linguistic declarations are linguistic facts, we don't need an extralinguistic institution to perform them. Language is itself an institution, and it is sufficient to empower speakers to perform such declarations as promising to come and see someone or ordering

someone to leave the room. Of course, extralinguistic facts may also be required for the performance of the linguistic declaration. For example, I have to be in a position of power or authority in order to issue orders to you. And such facts as that I am in a position of power are not facts of language. Nonetheless, they are conditions required by the rules of linguistic acts. No non-linguistic institution is necessary for me to give an order, and the rules of ordering already specify the extralinguistic features of the world that are necessary in order to perform a successful and non-defective order.[11]

All performative utterances are declarations. Not all declarations are performatives for the trivial reason that not all declarations contain a performative expression, e.g., "Let there be light!" does not. But every declaration that is not a performative could have been one: e.g., "I hereby decree that there be light!". The important distinction is not between those declarations which are performatives and those which are not, but between those declarations which create a linguistic entity, a speech act such as an order, promise, or statement; and those which create a nonlinguistic entity such as a marriage, a war, or an adjournment. The important distinction is between, e.g., "I promise to come and see you," and "War is hereby declared."

Traditionally in speech act theory we have regarded the nonlinguistic cases as prototypical of declarations, but it is also important to see how much nonlinguistic apparatus they require. Consider "divorce." I am told that in certain Moslem countries a man can divorce his wife by uttering three times the performative sentence, "I divorce you." This is a remarkable power for a speech act, but it adds nothing to the meaning of "divorce" or its translations. The ability to create divorces through declarational speech acts derives from legal/theological powers and not from semantics.

7. Performatives and Literal Meaning

Since ordinary linguistic declarations are encoded in performative sentences such as, "I order you to leave the room" or "Leave, and that's an

[11] Suppose somebody rigs up a transducer device sensitive to acoustic signals which is such that if he stands next to his car and says, "I hereby start the car," the car will start. Has he performed a declaration? Well, obviously not. Why not? *Because the semantic properties played no role*. The acoustic properties are irrelevant except insofar as they are an expression or an encoding of the semantics. Another way to put the same point is to say that declarations can be performed in any language, and there is no set of physical properties that any given declaration has in all and only its occurrences. You can't define the declaration physically.

order," they do not require an extralinguistic institution. The literal meaning of the sentence is enough. But now the question arises: how could it be enough? How can the literal meaning of an ordinary indicative sentence encode the actual performance of an action named by the main verb? And how can the literal meaning both encode the performative and the assertive meaning without being ambiguous? It is not enough to say that in the one case the speaker intends the utterance as a performative and in the other as an assertion. The question is: how could one and the same literal meaning accommodate both intentions?

With these questions we come to the crux of the argument of this paper. I believe it is the failure to see an answer to these questions – or even to see the questions – that has lead to the currently fashionable views that performatives are some kind of indirect speech act where the supposedly non-literal performative is somehow derived from the literal assertion by Gricean mechanisms. On my view, the performative utterance is literal. The speaker utters the sentence and means it literally. If the boss says to me, "I hereby order you to leave the room," I don't have to *infer* that he has made an order, nor do I think that he hasn't quite said exactly what he meant. It is not at all like, "Would you mind leaving the room?" said as an order to leave.

The apparatus necessary for answering these questions includes at least the following three elements:

> First, we need to recognize that 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.
>
> Second, we need to recognize the existence of a class of verbs which contain the notion of intention as part of their meaning. To say that a person performed the act named by the verb implies that he or she did it intentionally, that if it wasn't intentional, then the agent didn't do it under that description. 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.
>
> Third, we need to recognize the existence of 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*.

Now if you put all these three together you can begin to see how

performative sentences can be uttered as linguistic declarations. The first step is to see that for any type of action you can perform, the question naturally arises: how do you do it? By what means do you do it? For some actions you can do it solely by manifesting the intention to do it, and in general speech acts fall within this class. Typically we perform a type of illocutionary act by uttering a type of sentence that encodes the intention to perform an act of that type, e.g., we perform directive speech acts by uttering sentences in the imperative mood. But another way to manifest the intention to perform an illocutionary act is to utter a performative sentence. Such sentences are self-referential and their meaning encodes the intention to perform the act named in the sentence by the utterance of that very sentence. Such a sentence is "I hereby order you to leave." And an utterance of such a sentence functions as a performative, and hence as a declaration because (a) the verb "order" is an intentional verb, (b) ordering is something you can do by manifesting the intention to do it, and (c) the utterance is both self-referential and executive, as indicated by the word "hereby" in a way that I will now explain.

Normally it is a bit pompous to stick in "hereby." It is sufficient to say "I order you . . ." or even "That's an order." Such sentences can be used either just to make assertions or as performatives, without being ambiguous. The sentence uttered as an assertion and uttered as a performative mean exactly the same thing. Nonetheless, 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. 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. To put it crudely, the whole expression means "by-this-here-very-utterance." Thus, if I say, "I hereby order you to leave the room," the whole thing means, "By this here very utterance I make it the case that I order you to leave the room." And it is possible to succeed in making it the case just by saying so, because, to repeat, the utterance is a manifestation (and not just a description or expression) of the intention to order you to leave the room, by making that very utterance. The whole thing implies, "This very utterance is intended as an order to you to leave the room" where that implication is to be taken not just as the description of an intention but as its manifestation. And the manifestation of that intention, as we have seen, is sufficient for its being an order.

It is perhaps important to emphasize again a point I made earlier, namely, that the self-referential *assertive* intention is not enough to do the job. Just intending to assert that the utterance is an order or even that it is intended as an order doesn't guarantee the intention to issue an order. But intending that the utterance *make it the case* that it is an order is sufficient to guarantee the intention to issue an order. *And that intention can be encoded in the meaning of a sentence when the sentence encodes executive self-referentiality over an intentional verb.*

To show how the analysis works in more detail, let us go through a derivation from the hearer's point of view. We should *en passant* be able to show how the utterance of a performative sentence constitutes both a declaration and, by derivation, an assertion.

(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.

This last step explains how the performative utterance can also be a true statement: Declarations, by definition, make their propositional content true. That's what a successful declaration is. It is an utterance that changes the world in such a way as to bring about the truth of its propositional content. If I say, "The meeting is adjourned," and succeed in my declaration, then I make it the case that what I said is true; similarly with "I order you to leave the room." But it is important to emphasize, contrary to the hypothesis that I considered earlier, that the truth of the statement derives from the declarational character of the

utterance and not conversely. In the case of performative utterances, the assertion is derived from the declaration and not the declaration from the assertion.

Now this whole analysis has a somewhat surprising result. If we ask what are the special semantic properties of performativity within the class of intentional verbs which enable a subclass of them to function as performative verbs; the answer seems to be, roughly speaking, there are none. If God decides to fry an egg by saying, "I hereby fry an egg," or to fix the roof by saying, "I hereby fix the roof," He is not misusing English. It is just a fact about how the world works, and not part of the semantics of English verbs, that we humans are unable to perform these acts by declaration. But there is nothing in the semantics of such verbs that prevents us from intending them performatively; it is just a fact of nature that it won't work. If I now say, "I hereby end all wars and produce the eternal happiness of mankind," my attempted declaration will fail, but my failure is not due to semantic limitations. It is due to the facts of nature that in real life, performatives are restricted to those verbs which name actions where the manifestation of the intention is constitutive of the action, and (religious and supernatural cases apart) those verbs are confined to linguistic and institutional declarations.

There are a number of semantic features which *block* a performative occurrence. So for example, famously, "hint," "insinuate," and "boast" cannot be used performatively, because they imply that the act was performed in a way that was not explicit and overt, and performative utterances are completely explicit and overt. But there is no special *semantic* property of performativity which attaches to verbs and thereby *enables* them to be used performatively. As far as the literal meaning of the verb is concerned, unless there is some sort of block, any verb that describes an intentional action could be used performatively. There is nothing linguistically wrong with the utterance, "I hereby make it the case that all swans are purple." The limitation, to repeat, is not in the semantics, it is in the world. Similarly with the perlocutionary verbs. What is wrong with "I hereby convince (persuade, annoy, amuse, etc.) you" is not their semantics but their presumption. The limitation on performatives is provided by the fact that only a very tiny number of changes can be brought about in the world solely by saying that one is making those changes by that very utterance. For nonsupernaturally endowed humans beings,[12] these fall into two classes: the creation of

[12] Again, I am ignoring the religious cases such as blessing, cursing, damning, etc.

purely linguistic institutional facts – such as those created by saying, "I hereby promise to come and see you," "I order you to leave the room," etc. – and extra-linguistic institutional facts – such as, "The meeting is adjourned," "I pronounce you husband and wife," etc. But the special semantic property of performativity simply dissolves. There is nothing there. What we find instead are human conventions, rules, and institutions that enable certain utterances to function to create the state of affairs represented in the propositional content of the utterance. These new facts are essentially social, and the act of creating them can succeed only if there is successful communication between speaker and hearer. Thus the connection between the literal meaning of the sentence uttered and the institutional fact created by its utterance. "I promise" creates a promise; "The meeting is adjourned" creates an adjournment.

8. Summary and conclusion

The analysis I am proposing runs dead counter to most of the current ways of thinking about this issue and counter to the view I myself held until recently, so it is perhaps useful to summarize the argument so far.

Our problem is to explain how the literal utterance of certain ordinary indicative sentences can constitute, and not merely describe, the acts named by the main verb (or some other performative expression) in that very sentence. It turns out under investigation that that question is the same question as how the literal utterance of these sentences can necessarily manifest the intention to perform those acts; since we discovered for such acts, the manifestation of the intention is constitutive of the performance. So our putzle was: how can the literal utterance of "I hereby order you to leave the room" constitute an order as much as the literal utterance of "Leave the room" constitutes a directive in general, when the first is obviously an ordinary indicative sentence, apparently purporting to describe some behavior on the part of the speaker?

We found that it was impossible to derive the performative from the assertion because the assertion by itself wasn't sufficient to guarantee the presence of the intention in question. The difference between the assertion that you promise and the making of a promise is that in the making of a promise you have to intend your utterance as a promise, and there is no way that an assertion by itself can guarantee the presence of that intention. The solution to the problem came when we saw that the self-guaranteeing character of these actions derives from the fact that not only are these utterances self-referential, but they are self-referential to a verb which contains the notion of an intention as part of its meaning, and

the acts in question can be performed by manifesting the intention to perform them. You can perform any of these acts by an utterance because the utterance can be the manifestation (and not just a commitment to the existence) of the relevant intention. But you can, furthermore, perform them by a performative utterance because the performative utterance is self-referential to a verb which contains the notion of the intention which is being manifested in that very utterance. The literal utterance of "I hereby order you to leave" is – in virtue of its literal meaning – a manifestation of the intention to order you to leave. And this in turn explains why as far as illocutionary force is concerned the speaker cannot lie or be mistaken: assuming the other conditions on the speech act are satisfied, if he intends his utterance to have the force of an order, then it has that force; because the manifested intention is constitutive of that force.

I have so far tried to give an account which will satisfy all but one of our conditions of adequacy, i.e. to show:

(1) How performative utterances can be performances of the act named by the performative verb.
(2) How they are self guaranteeing in the sense explained.
(3) How they have features (1) and (2) in virtue of their literal meaning.
(4) Why they characteristically take "hereby."
(5) How they can achieve all of this without being ambiguous between a performative and a non-performative sense.
(6) How they work without being indirect speech acts.
(7) How it is that they can be statements with truth values.

It remains only to answer:

(8) Why do they take that peculiar tense, the dramatic present?

This tense is used to mark events which are, so to speak, to be construed as instantaneous with the utterance. Thus, the chemistry professor says while giving the demonstration,

I pour the sulphuric acid into the test tube. I then add five grams of pure carbon. I heat the resulting mixture over the Bunsen burner.

In these cases, the sentence describes an event that is simultaneous with its utterance, and for that reason Julian Boyd (in conversation) calls this tense "the present present." Similarly, though less obviously, with the written text of a play. We are to think of sentences such as, "John sits" or "Sally raises the glass to her lips," not as reporting a previously occurring

set of events nor as predicting what will happen on the stage, but as providing an isomorphic model, a kind of linguistic mirror of a sequence of events. Now, because the performative utterance is both self-referential and executive, the present present is ideally suited to it. "I promise to come and see you" marks an event which is right then and there, simultaneous with the utterance, because the event is achieved by way of making the utterance.

Our analysis had two unexpected consequences, or at least consequences that run counter to the current ways of thinking about these matters. First, most contemporary analyses try to derive the performative from the assertion; but on my proposal, the performative, the declaration, is primary; the assertion is derived. Secondly, it turns out that there is no such thing as a semantic property which defines performative verbs. Unless there is some special feature of the verb which implies nonperformativity (as with "hint," "insinuate" and "boast") any verb at all which names an intentional action could be uttered performatively. The limitations on the class that determine which will succeed and which will fail derive from facts about how the world works, not from the meanings of the verbs.

If one looks at the literature on this subject, one finds two apparently absolutely inconsistent and firmly held sets of linguistic intuitions. One set, exemplified powerfully by Austin (1962), insists roundly that performatives are not statements, but rather, performances of some other kind. Another set insists, equally roundly, that all performatives are obviously statements. One of my aims has been to show the truth in both of these intuitions. Austin was surely right in thinking that the primary purpose of saying, "I promise to come and see you" is not to make a statement or a description, but to make a promise. His critics are surely right in claiming that, all the same, when one says, "I promise to come and see you," one does make a statement. What my argument attempts to show is how the statement is derivative from the promise and not conversely.

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Dept. of Philosophy
University of California – Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720, U.S.A.