Questioning Performatives

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Questioning Speech Acts

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1. Introduction
1.1. Four decades

Zum Verhältnis von Wahrheitsbedingungensemantik und Sprechakttheorie

On the relation between truth-conditional semantics and Speech-act Theory

40 years ago Irene Heim's Master's Thesis appeared in the working papers of SFB 99 (DFG Research Unit 99)

Heim (1977: 50):

"Denn propositionale Gehalte haben Äußerungen nur bezüglich bestimmter illoutionärer Rollen, und Witz hätte daher auch nur eine Semantik, die den Äußerungen beides zuweist: illokutionäre Rolle und propositionalen Gehalt."

"Utterances have propositional contents only with regard to specific illocutionary forces, and therefore a semantic theory would be worthwhile only if it assigns to utterances both: an illo-cutionary force and a propositional content."

Zaefferer (1984: 24):

"»Jede explizit performative Äußerung ist (unter anderem) eine Deklaration.«
(Heim 1977: 52)"

"»Every explicit performative utterance is (among other things) a declaration.«
(Heim 1977: 52)"

Ambiguity view: Declarative sentences can be interpreted either as
- declarations   (with success conditions) or as
- assertives   (with truth conditions).

Searle 1989:

Instead of

deriving the performative interpretation from the assertive use,

he derives the assertive interpretation from the performative use

Reason: Committing to the existence of an intention
         ≠
         Expressing an intention

Zaefferer (2006: 463) on declarations:

"Although Searle's defining characteristic of this class, "that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality" (1975:358), has been adopted, both his assumption of a double direction of fit and his claim that a successful performance results in "some alternation in the status or condition of the referred to object or objects" (1975:358) are rejected."

Both declarations (performatives) and assertives are epistemic telics, the difference is in the kind of reference.

- Truckenbrodt 2009

- Condoravdi & Lauer 2011

- Eckardt 2012

- Condoravdi 2013

  agree in trying to catch both animals with a single analytic device.

1.2. A little warm-up exercise

Please read the following slide silently

and note your reaction

on a piece of paper, on your laptop or simply in your mind.

Please do keep to the honor code

and don't cheat by peeking at your neighbor's note.

(1) *Is this the most unusual question you've ever been asked?*

2. Performatives as a touchstone for speech act theories

Performatives

- have played a crucial role in the birth of modern speech act theory.

- continue to be the topic of a controversial debate.

(Witness the current event.)

Here come some (hopefully) uncontroversial assumptions and some corollaries:

Assumption 1

In all human languages complete root sentences

must have a grammatical sentence mood marker.

Assumption 2

Sentence mood markers indicate the most basic illocutionary forces.

Corollary 1

There is no complete root sentence without a basic illocutionary force, therefore every utterance of a complete root sentence can be interpreted at both the locutionary and the illocutionary level.

Assumption 3

Explicit performative illocutions (EPIs) are distinct from implicit performative illocutions (regular illocutions, RIs) in that they contain a lexical specification of the intended force of that very illocution.

Corollary 2

EPIs refer to themselves and assign themselves a force predicate:

They are self-referential and self-labeling.

Assumption 4

Explicit performative illocutions (EPIs) are preferred over

their regular counterparts whenever the agent wants to specify

the intended force of an utterance

beyond the sentence mood meaning.

Corollary 3

EPIs that paraphrase the sentence mood meaning are redundant, therefore their effect can only be stylistic in nature.

Assumption 5

Apart from the above EPIs are completely ordinary creatures.

Corollary 4

An adequate speech act theory should be able

to deal with EPIs as what they are:

Marked, but ordinary devices of lexically indicating force.

No special apparatus should therefore be needed for dealing with them.

3. Wanted: A simple theory with a natural definition of performatives

3.1. Simplicity

A simple theory does not require a special apparatus for performatives.

3.2. Naturalness

A natural definition cuts the animal at the joints.

Searle's problems with performatives derive in part from his improper account of Assertives,

"whose point is to commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition and whose expressed state is belief, by the claim that both are dimensions and that the "degree of belief and commitment may approach or even reach zero..." (Searle 1975:355). How can a belief or commitment with degree zero be identified? This leaves the words-to-world direction of fit as the only reliable definitional criterion." (Zaefferer 2006: 454)

Many researches have spilled a lot of ink in trying to explain a property of performatives they are supposed to have by definition:

The property of being self-verifying (or self-guaranteeing in Searle's terms).

It is a widely assumed dogma that performatives are self-verifying by definition and not only in fully felicitous cases.

Here are corpus data (thanks to Mark Bowker) that undermine this dogma:

(2)   *I admit that I have not read the entire thread.*

(3)   *I will admit that I have not read the entire list of comments.*

Although (2) is clearly self-verifying, (3) cannot possibly be, due to its future tense.

Of course, this formula can and should be read as shorthand for

'If pressed I will admit ...'

and hence entails that the speaker admits,

still it does not verify itself,

but the inferred 'I admit …'.

The following data harvested from the web may be even more convincing:

(4)   *We hereby inform you that our online store requires the use of cookies.*

(5)   *We hereby inform you once more that we have a payment instrument issued in your favor awaiting processing.*

(6)   *We hereby repeat our protest mailed to you in September 2010, against the scandalous behavior of the Turkish judiciary.*

Whereas (4) is a flawless case of self-verification (with the obvious exception of mentioning and other non-standard uses),

(5) suffers from a presupposition failure if there was no earlier information with that content, and

(6) is simply false if this is the first time the protest is mailed to the pertinent addressee.

Keeping self-verification as a definitional property of performatives means that

(4) is a good case,

(5) a doubtful one, and

(6) not a performative at all.

This a possible option, however, I submit that it is more fruitful to call all three of them performatives, with

(3) being completely successful and

(4) and (5) being only partially (with decreasing degrees) successful under the indicated circumstances.

3.3. Instrumentality

Austin's view should be taken literally and seriously:

The locutionary act is the *instrument* effecting the illocutionary act

"A very common and important type of, one would think, indubitable performative has the verb in the second or third person (singular or plural) and the verb in the passive voice: so person and voice anyway are not essential. Some examples of this type are:

(I) You are hereby authorized to pay ....

(2) Passengers are warned to cross the track by the bridge only.

Indeed the verb may be 'impersonal' in such cases with the passive, for example:

(3) Notice is hereby given that trespassers will be prosecuted.

This type is usually found on formal or legal occasions; and it is characteristic of it that, in writing at least, the word 'hereby' is often and perhaps can always be inserted; this serves to indicate that the utterance (in writing) of the sentence is, as it is said, the instrument effecting the act of warning, authorizing, &c. 'Hereby' is a useful criterion that the utterance is per-formative." (Austin 1962:57)

Compare Bühler's view: Language is a tool (organon)

4. Exploring the range of performatives

4.1. Single-level and multiple-level performatives

(The first three a. sentences harvested from the internet)

(7) a. You are hereby advised to inform your employees about the new e-mail guidelines

b. Inform your employees about the new e-mail guidelines!

(8) a. I hereby let you know that I'm allowing growing medical cannabis under strict conditions.

b. I'm allowing growing medical cannabis under strict conditions.

(9) a. You are hereby offered a Fixed-Term Appointment with the United Nations Population Fund.

b. You can get a Fixed-Term Appointment with the United Nations Population Fund.

(9) a. I abbreviate explicit performative illocution with EPI.

   b. EPI is short for explicit performative illocution.

(10) a.I greet you (from Konstanz).

   b. Ø

4.2. Root and embedded performatives

(11) *I am happy*

       to have permission

        to welcome you again to the Tagesthemen.

< https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFV273j_uNI>

entails: He welcomes us.

4.3. Single-sentence and multiple-sentence performatives

(12) *Leave, and that's an order* (Searle 1989: 550f.)

(13) *Subscribe to it, that's an order.*

(14) *STAY SAFE, EVERYONE!! That's an order.*

(15) A: "Ich komme."

B: "Bestimmt?"

A: "Das war ein Versprechen." (Heim 1977: 49)

(16) *Invitation for proposals for Use and Development ...*

*The **hereby** requested proposals must include: minimum 10 years*

experience in upmarket restaurant management ...

4.4. Single-topic and multiple-topic performatives

(17) a. *We hereby announce that parking permits are available in the office.*

  b. *This is an announcement that parking permits are available in the office.*

(17') a. *We use this very utterance to announce that parking permits are …*

  b. *This very utterance is an announcement that parking permits are …*

Multiple-topic performatives are more informative than single-topic performatives insofar as they encode a means-and-end relation between the utterance they refer to and and the intended illocution.

(17") b. *By this very utterance an announcement is made that parking permits are …*

4.4. Predicative and attributive performatives

Here comes a special challenge for any theory of performatives

(not only the Davidson and Grewendorf performative prefix account):

(18) a. *I hereby state that the facts above set forth are true and correct*

    b. *By using this website, you accept the hereby stated terms and*

       conditions with no exceptions or restrictions.

(18) a. *You are hereby invited to submit proposals for Use and Development.*

  b.   *Invitation for proposals for Use and Development ... The hereby requested proposals must include: minimum 10 years experience in upmarket restaurant management; ...*

4.6. Declarative-sentence mood and other-mood performatives

The second widely accepted dogma I want to attack here derives from the self-verification dogma I tried to debunk above.

It says that performative sentences, the instruments for performing explicit performative il-locutions, have to be in the declarative sentence mood.

But:

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But:

(19) *Give yourself an self-fulfilling order!*

(20) *Give yourself this very order!*

(21) *Is this a crazy kind of exclamation!*

(22) *What a funny exclamation do I hereby make!*

5. Questioning performatives with questioning performatives

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(25) *Are you hereby asked a question you don't like?*

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(26) *Is what I ask you right now a question?*

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(25) *Are you hereby asked a question you don't like?*

(26) *Is what I ask you right now a question?*

(27) *Is this a question that probably nobody has thought about before?*

6. AbST: A semantics that accounts for performatives at no charge

6.0. Agent-based Situation Theory: Ontological prerequisites

Three major ontological categories

- situations: containers of inventities and eventities

- inventities: inventory entities such as things with spatial meronomy

- eventities: events and similar entities with temporal meronomy

6.1. Reference and topics

Agents cannot attend to everything at the same time. Their attention shifts

(a)   reactively, driven by a percept, or

(b)   actively, driven by an intention.

To *refer* is to

• direct attention to or

• keep attention on

the core of a (prospective) topic.

A **topic** consists of a **core** (the topical entity) and a **regard** (the critical feature of the entity).
Topics can be epistemic or plain.

An entity *x* is an **open topic** with respect to the feature *f* for an agent *A* in an intervall of time *t* iff
there is a propositional *p* entertained by *A* in *t* such that *f(x)* is an open feature in *p*.

An entity *x* is an **closed topic** with respect to the feature *f* for an agent *A* in an intervall of time *t* iff
there is a propositional *p* entertained by *A* in *t* such that *f(x)* is an closed feature in *p*.

An entity *x* is an ***active topic*** with respect to the feature *f* for an agent *A* in an intervall of time *t* iff

there is a propositional *p* entertained by *A* in *t* such that *f(x)* is an active feature in *p*.

An entity *x* is an ***inert topic*** with respect to the feature *f* for an agent *A* in an intervall of time *t* iff

there is a propositional *p* entertained by *A* in *t* such that *f(x)* is an inert feature in *p*.

An agent *A refers* to an entity *x* iff

(a)   *A* directs the attention of *A'* to *x* (possibly *A'* = *A*)

(b)   *A* does so in order to further elaborate on *x*

• "Explicit reference is the communicative capacity to intentionally pick out a specific obect in the environment and make that object a manifest topic for shared attention" (Leavens et al. 2008)

• "Reference is a relation that obtains between expressions and what speakers use expressions to talk about." (Reimer 2010)

6.2. A systematics of phoric relations

Phoric relations are either

  apophoric   (pointer and target disjoint) or

  idiophoric   (pointer and target non-disjoint)

Apophoric relations are either

    endophoric   (pointer and target inside the same discourse) or

    exophoric   (pointer inside a discourse, target outside)

Endophorics are either

    anaphoric   (pointer points back to target) or

    cataphoric   (pointer points forward to target) or

    amphiphoric (pointer points to both sides to target)

Exophorics are either

      anaphoric   (pointer points to previously accessible target) or

      cataphoric   (pointer points to subsequently accessible target) or

      paraphoric   (pointer points to simultaneously accessible target)

Idiophoric relations (cases of self-reference) are either

      holophoric   (pointer properly included in target) or

      merophoric   (target properly included in pointer) or

      autophoric   (pointer and target coincide)

6.3. Kinds of propositional contents and of locutionary acts

6.3.1. Proposition

A proposition is an inert closed epistemic topic.

NOTE: Depending on the distribution of core and regard, the same sentence (in written form) can code different propositions:

(28) a. *What happened?*
     b. *What did John do?*
     c. *Who rushed out?*

(29) *John rushed out.*
     a. s-topic t_0: $c(t_0)$: object situation in the past
                     $r(t_0)$: salient event in $c(t_0)$ was rushing out of John
     b. i-topic t_1: $c(t_1)$: John
                     $r(t_1)$: behavior of $c(t_1)$ was rushing out
     c. e-topic t_2: $c(t_2)$: rushing out-event in the past
                     $r(t_2)$: agent of $c(t_2)$ was John

6.3.2. Pro-position

A pro-position is an open epistemic topic.

NOTE: Pro-positions can be inert (e.g. in plain nescience), or active (in inquisitiveness)

(30) a. [I know] *what happened*.

    b. *What happened?*

    a. s-topic t_0: $c(t_0)$: object situation

                 $r(t_0)$: ^{O}salient event in $c(t_0)$

    b. s-topic t_1: $c(t_1)$: object situation

                 $r(t_1)$: $\uparrow^O$salient event in $c(t_0)$

6.3.3. Pro-positional

A pro-positional is an active closed topic.

(31) a. *Come here!*

    b. *Let me know what happened!*

    a. i-topic t_0: $c(t_0)$: addressee

                    $r(t_0)$: $\uparrow c(t_0)$ comes to speaker

    b. i-topic t_1: $c(t_1)$: addressee

                    $r(t_1)$: $\uparrow c(t_1)$ lets speaker know what happened

6.4. Mental spaces

Philipp Pfaller's PhD thesis

On top of emotion (non-)sharing and attention (non-)sharing

There are 24 (four times three times two) dynamic mental spaces

The content of *fields* is real.

The content of *grounds* may be pretend play.

Private is the unshared part of individual, private and common are disjoint

	Field			Ground		
	Private	Individual	Common	Private	Individual	Common
Epistemic	EPF	EIF	ECF	EPG	EIG	**ECG**
Inquisitive	IPF	IIF	ICF	IPG	IIG	**ICG**
Nescience	NPF	NIF	NCF	NPG	NIG	NCG
Agentive	APF	AIF	ACF	APG	AIG	**ACG**

6.5. Basic building blocks of an ontology of illocutionary acts

Atelic illocutions: No clearly distinguishable goal that can be reached or missed (*Wow!*)

Telic illocutions: Clearly distinguishable goal that can be reached or missed (*Hist!*)

Epistemic telics: The defining goal of an epistemic telic utterance is reached if its locution has produced activated knowledge of the propositional content, a proposition, in the relevant agents.

Inquisitive telics: The defining goal of an inquisitive telic utterance is reached if its locution has produced activated inquisitiveness regarding the propositional content, a pro-position, in the relevant agents.

Agentive telics:

The defining goal of an inquisitive telic utterance is reached if its locution has produced an activated agenda including the propositional content, a propositional, in the relevant agents.

7. Redefining performativity

7.1. Desiderata for a natural definition of performativity

A natural definition of performativity leaves space for performatives that are

- self-verifying (true in virtue of their felicitous utterance)

- self-falsifying (false in virtue of their felicitous utterance) and

- non-self-deciding (neither true nor false in virtue of their felicitous utterance)

as well as for performatives that are

self-veri-priming (true answer must be positive),

self-falsi-priming (true answer must be negative) and

non-self-priming (true answer can be positive or negative).

7.2. A natural definition of performativity

(D_{perf})

Performing a locutionary act L counts as

attempting to perform the explicit performative illocutionary act I

iff

there is a (closed or open) e-topic T such that

      (a) L codes T,

      (b) the core of T is L itself, and

      (c) the regard of T is its use for performing I.

Searle's defining property of self-guaranteeingness

   should be replaced by

ontological dependence:

   The effect possibly brought about by using the locution as an instrument

   is ontologically dependent on the performance of the locution:

      no instrument, no effect.

   The same holds for the locution's self-reference:

      no referring device, no referent.

The very existence of the utterance's topic (what it is about) depends on the

utterance being made.

This is the defining difference between idiophoric and apopohoric uses.

8. Applying the AbST theory and the revised definition

(2) *I admit that I have not read the entire thread.*

Basic force (sentence mood meaning of the declarative):

epistemic telic (volition regarding activated knowledge)

i-topic t_0: $c(t_0)$: agent

$r(t_0)$: $c(t_0)$ admits: $c(t_0)$ has not read the entire thread

idiophoric use

e-topic t_1: $c(t_1)$: locution t_1 **made in the utterance situation** (**metasituation**)

$r(t_1)$: is used by $c(t_0)$ for admitting that …

apophoric use

e-topic t_2: $c(t_2)$: locution t_2 **in some object situation ≠ metasituation**

$r(t_2)$: is used by $c(t_0)$ for admitting that …

(27) *Is this a question that probably nobody has thought about before?*

Basic force (sentence mood meaning of the interrogative):

inquisitive telic (volition regarding activated inquisitiveness)

idiophoric use

e-topic t_1: $c(t_1)$: locution t_1 **made in the utterance situation** (**metasituation**)

$\qquad$ $r(t_1)$: $\uparrow^O [c(t_1)$ is used for asking if $c(t_1)$ is a question ...]

apophoric use

e-topic t_2: $c(t_2)$: locution t_2 **in some object situation ≠ metasituation**

$\qquad$ $r(t_2)$: $\uparrow^O [c(t_2)$ is used for asking if $c(t_2)$ is a question ...]

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9. Conclusion

9.1. Simplicity

A simple theory does not require a special apparatus for performatives.

To account for the interpretability of some utterances as apophoric or as idiophoric (performatives), AbST does not need any special apparatus.

Its account comes at a welcome side-effect of its treatment of reference and phoricity, at no additional charge.

9.2. Naturalness

A natural definition carves nature at its joints.

Our definition does not eliminate cases that are closely related to the core canonical cases.

[According of the principle 'of dividing things again by classes, where the natural joints are, and not trying to break any part, after the manner of a bad butcher' (Plato, Phaedrus 265e)]

9.3. Instrumentality

AbST takes Austin's view literally and seriously:

The locutionary act is the *instrument* effecting the illocutionary act

I hope that he account outlined above comes closer to a proper treatment of performatives than its competitors.

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Last, but not least:

*Thank you for sharing attention on both
the cores and the regards of our active open topics:*

Do questioning performatives really question performatives?

And if so, what could be the lesson learnt?