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Performatives as Indexicals: Resolving the Performadox*

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The performative hypothesis, one of the syntactic/semantic proposals identified with generative semanticists such as Ross (1970) and Sadock (1974),¹ states that among the elements that must be represented in the deep or semantic structure of a given sentence is the intended illocutionary force of the sentence. A performative clause was posited to fill this role. Consider:

- (1) The boss is a moron.
- (2) I say that the boss is a moron.
- (3) Confidentially, the boss is a moron.
- (4) Confidentially, I say that the boss is a moron.

Under the performative hypotheses (1) and (3) have abstract performative clauses indicating their illocutionary force.

Boer and Lycan, in their "A performadox in truth conditional semantics" (1980), present a problem (hereafter the performadox) in semantics, as they say; more specifically, however, it is a problem in speech act theory as it relates to semantic theory more generally. The performadox runs as follows: suppose that the abstract clause is not semantically interpreted. It would follow, then, that the adverb in (3) is not interpreted. This is clearly wrong since "confidentially" contributes to the meaning of (3). On the other hand, suppose that the performative clause is interpreted. This predicts that (1) and (2) have the same truth conditions, which is also wrong. On either assumption, the performative hypothesis gets the wrong results. As Boer and Lycan are quick to point out, the obvious implication is that the performative hypothesis is false. But then, there would be no performadox. They accept the (otherwise uninterpretable) adverbials of sentences like (3) as good evidence for the performative hypothesis. The only surface non-performative for which Boer and Lycan accept an underlying performative clause are those such as (3).²

Sadock provides a solution by positing two distinct notions of truth. Truth₁ is a semantic notion about which we may well have no guiding intuition, since it is a theoretical notion. Truth₂ is a pragmatic notion. Truth₁ is a property of propositions, while truth₂ is a property of assertions. Thus (1) and (2) have the same truth₂ value, while they differ on the level of truth₁.³

We find much in this analysis that is attractive. We think there is something profoundly right about the bi-valent treatment of truth and we agree that pragmatic considerations play a central role, but we are reluctant to espouse two kinds of truth. Rather, we prefer the difference to hinge on two levels of truth evaluation.

Our analysis draws heavily on Kaplan's work on demonstratives and indexicals (1977).⁴ Kaplan distinguishes contexts of utterances from circumstances of evaluation because they play two different roles. Consider:

(5) I am hungry.

When you evaluate a sentence like (5) with respect to a possible world, the individual relevant to the determination of the truth value is the individual referred to in the actual context of utterance, and not whoever meets the description or satisfies the property criteria in the circumstance of evaluation. The relevant individual is the agent of the discourse context, and the sentence is true iff that individual is hungry, regardless of the state of her counterpart in w_{183} . The context has served to determine the relevant individual. The circumstance of evaluation provides a list of who has the relevant property. Thus (5) is true with respect to a circumstance of evaluation n , iff 'I' am among those individuals who have the property of being hungry in n .

For this reason, Kaplan espouses a three level semantic system, rather than the traditional two level framework. His levels consist of character, content and circumstance of evaluation. Character can be conceived of as a sort of linguistic meaning rule established by the conventions of a linguistic community; character has the role of determining a content for every context. It is a function from every context to a content. Some expressions have a "stable" character, which is to say that they pick out the same thing across contexts. Context insensitive expressions have this type of character.⁵ Indexical elements, on the other hand, typically have characters that are non-stable. For example, the character of the word "I" might informally be construed as a linguistic meaning rule roughly of the form (6).

(6) In each of its utterances, "I" refers to the person who utters it (Kaplan 1977:44).

The character of indexical expressions does not pick out the same referent across contexts. Rather, it designates different individuals in different contexts. Thus, "I" designates different individuals in contexts where the agents (utterers) differ.⁶

Character, in tandem with context of utterance (hereafter context), yields the level of content: what was said or the proposition expressed. Content is then what is evaluated at the circumstance of evaluation. Kaplan's framework provides a picture as in (7).

(7)	character		content		referents
	+	→	+	→	(individuals, etc.)
	context		circumstance		

This three-level system allows one to predict some interesting properties of indexical expressions in general. It can capture the fact that indexicals vary in content from context to context. For example, though the character of "I" is the same in every context, and thus we can understand any occurrence of it, the contents may differ, since its character functions to pick out, or refer to, different individuals in different contexts.

Consider now (8) and (9).

(8) I am here now.

(9) Cyndi Welsh is in Berkeley, CA on February 13, 1983.

On one level any utterance of these two sentences have the same truth conditions. Both are true iff the alphabetically second author of this paper is located at the place and time referred to. Clearly both are equally contingent. On the other hand, there is also some intuitive difference between them. The intuition is that, on the basis of knowing the meanings of the indexical expressions (and the verb) in (8), we know that it cannot be uttered falsely; that is, (8) is true in any context in which it is uttered.

Classical semantics, in dealing with examples such as these, fails to distinguish between them. Montague (1968) captured the difference between (8) and (9) by restricting the circumstances of evaluation so as to include only proper indices: world, agent, time and place such that the world is the world of the context, the agent is the agent of the context, who is located at the place and time of the context. This seems legitimate since improper indices would be like impossible worlds--no such contexts could exist. However, there is an unfortunate consequence of such a reform: (8) comes out logically true, and by the principle of modal generalization (10) is also logically true.

(10) Necessarily I am here now.

But not only is (10) not logically true, it is false. I might have decided to sit out the BLS meeting, or the BLS might have rejected the abstract we submitted. In either case and in a number of other eventualities, I might fail to be here now.

In Kaplan's framework, the distinction between character and content allows both the contingency and the validity of sentences such as (8) to be captured. Kaplan writes:

The bearers of logical truth and of contingency are different entities. It is the character (or the sentence if you prefer) that is logically true, producing a true content in every context. But it is the content (the proposition, if you will) that is contingent or necessary (Kaplan 1977:72).⁷

One more point must be stressed before we move on to the application of this system to the analysis of performatives.

This framework argues that character necessarily works in tandem with context to determine content, and assumes that contexts are structured entities. There are many types of things that count as contexts. Conversational history between interlocutors can serve as a context rich enough to support anaphora, as can shared contextual experience outside of a discourse context. Since there are many types of context and a rigorous definition is a task yet to be completed, we will confine our discussion to what seems to be the minimum assumption necessary for our purposes: contexts of utterance.⁸

Contexts of utterance are structured entities which are definable in terms of various features. Contexts of utterance consist of: 1) an utterance; 2) an agent of the utterance; 3) an audience; 4) such contexts are spatially located at a place; and 5) temporally located at a point or neighborhood in time; and finally 6) such contexts are embedded in a richer context, a world history, if you will.

Thus, formally such contexts consist of a set of indices that are to be distinguished from the indices of the possible circumstances of evaluation. If c , a context, is a member of the set of contexts C , then $c=x$, audience, w , p , t , u . That is to say that c is uniquely determined by these indices.⁹

Our solution to the performatadox depends on the positions we take on two crucial issues. First we maintain that the verb occurring in a performative sentence is the same verb as that which occurs in its declarative counterpart. That is, 'say' in (2) is the same verb and means the same thing as 'say' in (11).

(11) Kim said that the boss is a moron.

This commits us, in the words of Bach (1975), to the position that "performatives are statements too." Thus in uttering (2) to assert the boss is a moron, one is also stating that one thereby performs that assertion.

We follow Ginet (1979) who defines a type of verb phrase " ϕ . . . such that a person's ϕ ing entails that the person makes an utterance and means something by doing so."¹⁰ Such a ϕ he calls a "meaning verb phrase." All performative verbs are meaning verbs, but not conversely (e.g., berate you, describe the scene) (Ginet 1979:245). His attempt is to show:

that a verb phrase ' ϕ ' is performative in certain circumstances because its descriptive meaning (the nature of the act it signifies) is such as to make it possible in those circumstances to ϕ by means of stating that one thereby ϕ s: ϕ ing is the sort of thing that lends itself to being done just by saying that one, in that very act, does it (1979:246).

This position has, as a corollary, "if [performatives] are also statements, then as statements they are true or false" (Bach 1975:230).¹¹

(11) is the relevant context that serves as the circumstance of evaluation. The past tense in (11) indicates that the relevant context is some context previous to the actual context of utterance. Thus (16):

- (16) (11) is true iff (\exists : $c' \neq c$) (\exists : $t' < t$) etc. such that SAY (Kim, P, at c' , located at p, at t' , in w, to a) is true.

In order to determine the truth value of (11), $c' \neq c$ is the relevant context. We would need to locate c' that temporally preceded c .

Notice that the treatment we are proposing also excludes progressive forms from having performative status, since the progressive indicates a time span broader than that of the context of utterance. Since the context of utterance must coincide exactly with the circumstance of evaluation in order for the trivially true status to arise, the progressive form is automatically predicted not to exhibit performativity in the general case--just the desired result.

It should not be disturbing that the truth conditions given predict that sentences like (2) will be true on any utterance. We have already seen an example of this phenomenon in (8). Applying Kaplan's views to performatives is fairly straightforward. That performatives are always true is a result of the fact that the character of the indexical elements along with a verb with a certain type of meaning produces a true content in every context.

Returning now to (3), speech act adverbials are the one bit of evidence for the performative hypothesis that Boer and Lycan accept. These are the sentences for which Boer and Lycan allow an underlying performative clause. As noted above, if the adverbials do not modify the speech act, rather than the clause they co-occur with, they are semantically uninterpretable. It is also the case that these adverbials are not uninterpretable.¹⁴ There is something semantically anomalous about shouting (3) at the top of your lungs. Most proposals for dealing with this phenomenon have involved building in structure of either a semantic or pragmatic nature to provide something for the adverbial to modify (cf. Davison's (1982) thorough critique of these). Under our analysis, however, since contexts of utterance are structured entities, in and of themselves, we have no need for such structure building. Our treatment amounts to a semantic-pragmatic one since contexts of utterance can contribute semantically in the Kaplan system.¹⁵

This account seems correct in that it allows for a unified treatment of overt and adverbial instances of performativity. Our proposal is that (1) the semantics of overt performatives involves a Kaplan context of utterance, and (2) speech act adverbials are predicated of features of these contexts. These features may be made explicit as in a performative clause (performa-

tives as "lexicalizations" of contexts of utterances, if you will), or not, as in the case of the example considered. Thus, this analysis amounts to the claim that the utterance of sentences such as (3) have the same truth conditions as their fully explicit counterparts (4). That is, utterances of both are true iff the agent of the context does (17).

(17) ((adverbial SAY) (x, P))¹⁶

There is evidence for this claim. Consider (18) and (19):

(18) Since you wanted to know, I say that Kim is a fool.

(19) Since you wanted to know, Kim is a fool.

Both can take responses such as (20) and (21), which cast doubt on or call into question the truth of the proposition expressed by the performative, and not the truth of the subordinate clause in (19):

(20) I don't believe it, you always have an ulterior motive.

(21) That's not true, you know I don't give a damn.

The fact that the responses are parallel and that they cast doubt on (18) and (19) in the same way indicates that our claim that they have the same semantics is not so farfetched at all.

The question now arises as to how we avoid the disaster of having these contextual features showing up just anywhere at all. Why do they not figure in (1) giving it the same truth conditions as (2)? That is, how do we avoid the performadox? Since this analysis allows contextual features to be semantically interpreted, what prevents them from being so interpreted in (1)? An analogue to the Boer and Lycan settlement would be that contextual features are only semantically available when they are overtly represented or predicated over. Only in such cases would these features figure in such a way as to affect truth conditions. Thus (1) and (2) would have different semantics: (2) would be trivially true and (1) would be true or false depending on the mental capacity of the boss. While this may have satisfied Boer and Lycan and does seem to have something right about it, there is nothing explanatory about this--it merely declares that the contextual features are sometimes available. Further, there are facts which such a stipulative account does not address. Consider (22):

(22) That's not true, he's quite intelligent.

This, taken as a response to (1) or (2), calls into question the proposition expressed by the complement clause of (2). This fact has been taken as evidence that (1) and (2) have the same seman-

tics, namely that of the complement clause leaving the preface uninterpreted. We must reject this approach also of course.

We follow Sadock's proposal that given an explicit performative and a that S complement, there are two truth valuable propositions expressed. One, the performative, has as its semantics a Kaplan utterance context. The other is the complement. We further propose that all utterances of declarative sentences have such an utterance context, and that these contexts are semantically available. From all this it might seem to follow that for us (1) and (2) have the same truth conditions. Indeed that is what we hold, as far as the proposition that includes the contextual features. Note carefully, however, just in what this consists. We are not claiming that in (1) the boss is a moron is true iff I say it. Nor that the proposition expressed by the performative clause in (2) is true just in case the boss really is a moron. We claim that the two propositions expressed in each have their own truth conditions. This approach seems to us to allow a straightforward solution to the conflicts evidenced by (1), (2), and (22).

There is a difference between (1) and (2), however. Consider (1), (2) and (11) uttered under normal circumstances (repeated here).

- (1) The boss is a moron.
- (2) I say that the boss is a moron.
- (11) Kim said that the boss is a moron.

(1), (2) and (11) can take (23) and (24) as responses:

- (23) That's not true.
- (24) That's not true, she's the smartest person I know.

Observe that (23) as a response to (11) exhibits an ambiguity as to whether the negation refers to the proposition expressed by the whole sentence or only to the one expressed by the complement clause. In the case of (1) there seems to be no ambiguity possible with respect to response (23). This is a problem since we hold that semantically, there is another proposition available from the context of utterance. Why isn't (23) an ambiguous response to (1)? Consider (2). Note that it is well-nigh impossible to construe (23) as an ambiguous response to (2). This is so because it is nonsensical to deny that someone who has just said P, has in fact just said P--it follows from the truth conditions and the context of utterance that the speaker must have said what she said. However, there seems intuitively to be something very different about (23) as a response to (1) and as a response to (2). How do we capture this difference?

We suggest that the (real and salient) difference between utterances of (1) and (2) lies not in the realm of truth conditions (we have argued explicitly and crucially against this), but

in the realm of non-natural meaning ($\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$) (Grice 1957), or perhaps equivalently, implicatures (Grice 1975). If someone says (1), it is true trivially that she says it--but that cannot be the point of so saying, since if it were, she could say (2) wherein the ordinarily uninteresting fact of saying one's utterance is at least part of the point--perhaps as a point of emphasis. To spell it out in detail: given that (1) and (2) are truth conditionally equivalent and both available to the competent English speaker/hearer, the choice between them and the interpretation given them will fall under the relation (be relevant) or the manner (be perspicuous) maxims, or more generally, perhaps, fall out from the $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$ of the utterance. In other words there must be some reason for lexicalizing the contextually available information, but that does not make it a matter of semantics.

At this point we should clarify our position on two points in Sadock's resolution of the performadox. First, Sadock uses his two notions of truth, truth_1 and truth_2 , while we use only one truth, roughly his truth_1 . For us, $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$ plays a roughly analogous role to truth_2 . Second, Sadock observes that (25) is conventionally taken as an assertion of P by X.

(25) X say P

This might seem like an embarrassment for our approach, but we don't think it is. We hold that it is just in virtue of their truth conditions and general Gricean principles that (1) and (2) are both taken as conventionally asserting that (1)--on the one hand, in (1) we have suggested that it is the content of the expressed clause that is being meant_{nn}, and, on the other hand, more generally, it simply is pointless, qua assertion, to assert something as semantically unproblematic as the performative clause.

Recall now the question of speech act adverbials. We rejected the Boer and Lycan-like proposal that they, in effect, "trigger" semantic interpretation of the performative or contextual features. We say, instead, that the adverbials "trigger" $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$. That is, the adverbials tell the hearer that the speaker wants the hearer to attend to the (modified) semantic content of the context of utterance in understanding the utterance, since, in virtue of that very modification (that is, in virtue of the adverbial itself) the semantics of the context of utterance is no longer so trivial and uninformative.

To conclude, we have argued that the performadox can be solved if one treats performativity as a co-occurrence of indexicals and a meaning verb.¹⁷ We have maintained that performatives have truth conditions and explained why they are what they are. We have argued that any utterance of a declarative sentence has (at least) two truth valuable objects in it and that this is a greatly unifying treatment of performatives and other declaratives. Finally, we have maintained that the difference between an overt performative and its declarative counterpart is not one

of truth conditions, but of non-natural meaning. But let us be clear about what we have not done. If Gazdar (1979:18) can be taken as a fair summary of what "the strongest possible performative hypothesis requires,"¹⁸ then we have accomplished our goal by taking no position on or offering no support for virtually any of the eight subclaims Gazdar isolates. In other words, on most all of the really interesting claims made by the performative hypothesis concerning, e.g., the nature of illocutionary force, deletability, higher abstract verbs, we are silent. Whatever success we have had, then, lies in an area which is not so much a battlefield as it is merely unoccupied.

Footnotes

*Our thanks to Jerry Sadock, who first introduced us to speech acts, the Performadox and what to do about it, and discussed or encouraged as necessary; to Josef Stern, who made Kaplan an accessible world for us; John Richardson, who read and commented on an earlier version; and Carolyn Jenkins, who typed this one. Many of the good things here we owe to them; all of the bad ones are our fault.

¹But see Katz and Postal (1964:149 fn. 9). For more on the performative hypothesis, see Sadock (1974) and the references therein. It must be pointed out that the performative hypothesis developed within the linguistic research program known as Generative Semantics, which proposed, among other things, the identity of logical/semantic structure and deepest syntactic structure as a working hypothesis. Thus, the performative hypothesis was both a semantic and a syntactic proposal. We, frankly, are not all that interested in "semantic representation" as such, being more concerned with semantics as conditions for truth in a model (cf. Gazdar 1979:30). About the syntactic part of the performative hypothesis we will have exactly nothing to say, and may be characterized as friendly skeptics or agnostics. For discussion, see Anderson (1971), Fraser (1971) and Mittwoch (1977). See also the "pragmatic" approach of Leech (1980) and the discussion in Davison (1982).

²There's lots more that could be said about the performadox, and Boer and Lycan do say just about all of it, "in a paper which is much too labyrinthine to be adequately paraphrased here" (Gazdar 1979:34). Or here.

³Related ideas, which are in some ways perhaps even closer to the view we will develop, are put forward by Récanati (1980). Récanati actually has four truth valuable levels, not just two: "the propositional content of a declarative locutionary act . . . the propositional content of any locutionary act . . . the propositional content of any illocutionary act belonging to the assertive genus . . . the propositional content of any illocutionary act" (1980:216). We ignore the second and fourth, which Récanati uses in order to clarify some obscurities in the work of John Searle, and which are not relevant to our concerns here. Récanati

distinguishes "the locutionary act performed in uttering a sentence [which] is the illocutionary act indicated by this sentence, whether it is actually performed or not . . . from the illocutionary act performed in uttering this sentence, whether it is linguistically indicated or not" (1980:210). This distinction is pressed into service when Récanati declares that "the performative utterance 'I state that the earth is flat' expresses both the proposition that I state that the earth is flat and the proposition that the earth is flat"; the former proposition being at the locutionary level, and the latter at the illocutionary level (1980:215). The example would be true at the locutionary level and false at the illocutionary level. Récanati also usefully (for our purposes) distinguishes between "the (generic) illocutionary act corresponding to the illocutionary force roughly expressed by the sentence in virtue of its linguistic meaning, as opposed to the (specific) illocutionary act corresponding to the illocutionary force expressed by uttering that sentence in such and such a context (1980:207). In these terms, our approach to the performadox probably relates to generic indicated illocutionary acts, although we are quite frankly unsure about this, and about what Récanati would actually say about either the performadox or our solution to it.

⁴Spielmann (1980) might seem to be working the same side of the street as ourselves, but examination of the two papers will quickly dispel such suspicions. On the other hand, interesting remarks are made by Silverstein (1978:7-10) in a quite different context.

⁵Among these expressions with stable characters might be included proper names, if viewed with sufficient naivete. This is somewhat akin to Kripke's (1972) notion of "rigid designation."

⁶This picture is rather more Russellian (1905) than Fregean (1892), since context-sensitive terms are what Kaplan calls "directly referential" (1977:44) (DR). DR terms provide their referents without mediation of the level of sense/content. While it may seem rather unappealing to allow propositional content to include individuals as well as intensions, we remind the reader that "propositional content" is a technical, not an intuitive notion, so there should be no problem in this context.

⁷McCawley (1982b) suggests that the Kaplan (1977) account of "I am here now" and the like is not the correct one; he suggests an alternative based on the work of Erving Goffman. However, since McCawley has not, to our knowledge, fleshed out his suggestion, and since we know nothing of the Goffman work, we cannot at this time comment further.

⁸But see the discussion in Lewis (1972) and Lewis (1979).

⁹Gazdar (1979:20) notes

G. Lakoff's suggestion . . . to allow an assignment coordinate . . . to specify the value of the variables standing for speaker, addressee, etc. and not have such items listed in the n-tuple to which the semantic interpretation is

relativised. Dahl (1972:11) has argued that Lakoff's suggestion is incoherent: "It is absurd to eliminate the contextual coordinates for the assignment coordinate; the assignment coordinate is, on the contrary, determined by the contextual coordinates."

It should be obvious that we agree with Dahl as against Lakoff; further, while Lakoff's and our proposals might appear to be merely inverses of one another (the dread "notational variants"), we do not think this is the case, and, in any event, Lakoff was attempting much grander things than we are; see below.

¹⁰"Means something" is used in Grice's (1957) sense of "non-natural meaning" (Ginet 1979:260 fn. 1).

¹¹Austin (1962) seems to have held the opposing view on this matter, as does Sadock (1974). There is more discussion, most taking our side, in Kempson (1975), Harris (1978), Edmunson (1979), Bierwisch (1980), Spielmann (1980), and Browne (1982).

¹²Note that here, as elsewhere, we are directly addressing only what might be termed "limiting case" performatives, e.g. say or declare. Other performatives, e.g. promise or pronounce, will, we assume, have truth conditions that include those of the limiting case as a sub-part.

¹³In the limiting case of say, an audience is, strictly speaking, not necessary.

¹⁴Bach and Harnish (1979:225 ff.) claim that such utterances are syntactically ill-formed and semantically uninterpretable. They attempt a purely inferential/pragmatic account of their use. We tend to think that if our account, or something like it, is not right, then theirs, or something like it, probably is. *Après nous, le déluge*.

¹⁵See Gazdar (1979:164-8) for several other pragmatic incursions into truth conditional semantic territory.

¹⁶We like the semantics for adverbials provided by McConnell-Ginet (1982), in which adverbials are taken as true "modifiers" of verb meanings, rather than operators on verb phrases. See (1982:175) for speech act adverbials.

¹⁷L. Aqvist, as described by Gazdar (1979:32-33), seems to have done something not wholly unlike our work, but we cannot say for sure, not having seen the original. Note that Gazdar finds the Aqvist work unable to support a strong version of the performative hypothesis, a finding we are not unsympathetic to vis a vis our work.

¹⁸Gazdar's claims are the following (1979:18):

- (8) For \exists sentences S, in all natural languages, the deep structure of S
- (a) has a clause containing a PERFORMATIVE verb.
 - (b) the subject of this clause is I and the indirect object is you. Ross (1970:passim)
 - (c) this clause is the HIGHEST clause in the deep structure.
 - (d) this clause is DELETABLE when the verb is marked to

allow this (Ross 1970:249), and the deletion transformation is MEANING-PRESERVING (early generative semantics assumption).

- (e) the verb in the clause is the ONLY verb in the sentence which is performative.
- (f) the verb represents the ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE of the sentence.
- (g) illocutionary force is SEMANTIC.
- (h) \exists is the UNIVERSAL quantifier.

In the discussion following our presentation, G. Lakoff asked how our proposal differed from earlier versions of the performative hypothesis, in particular his own. We note again that it is largely in reference to the sorts of issues Gazdar isolates that our proposal is unlike "full-fledged" performative hypothesis proposals. That is, the performatadox is formulated to be independent of many of the issues in Gazdar's (a) - (h), e.g. whether illocutionary force is semantic, whether there is one such force per S, etc., and so is our solution to it. If a full-fledged performative hypothesis can be shown to be true, then, of course, our work is rendered otiose; on the other hand, by showing that such a strong performative hypothesis is false, one has not thereby touched our proposal. In a sense, we are offering the minimal independently motivated theory we can to solve the performatadox. Putting it still another way, we are offering clam sauce without the linguini (McCawley 1982a). Cf. also note 9 above.

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