

Speaker Alignment and Embedded Performatives

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*Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (1975), pp. 438-444

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## Speaker Alignment and Embedded Performatives<sup>1</sup>

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Numerous papers have appeared challenging Ross's formulation (Ross 1970) of the performative analysis, e.g. (Anderson 1969), (Fraser 1969), and (Sadock 1974). One of the most frequently attacked parts of this formulation has been the performative-as-highest-verb hypothesis. Although many counter-examples have been given, we know of no attempt to characterize the conditions under which performatives may embed while retaining their performative force. We believe that such conditions exist, and in this paper, we would like to examine one such condition on a class of embedding constructions in terms of the function of that embedding.

Jerry Morgan has discussed the utility of such a "functional" approach to grammar, that is, an examination of grammatical elements in terms of their function in a discourse (Morgan 1973). Explicit performatives, by their nature, do something rather than be something, and thus are uniquely suited to such a functional investigation.

The class of performative embeddings we are considering are those in which the performative is embedded in an expression of emotional state. Perhaps the most famous example of this class is given in (1):

- (1) I regret to inform you that my cobra ate your chihuahua.

A more productive form of this class is that of infinitival complementation under adjectives, exemplified by (2) - (4).

- (2) I'm pleased to announce the ascension of my only begotten son.  
 (3) I'm proud to nominate Homer T. Pettybone to be the next chairman of the Fraternal Order of Mastodons.  
 (4) I'm sorry to find you guilty of conspiracy to overpopulate, Mr. Rabbit, but the law leaves me no choice.

Although this construction is highly productive, it is constrained in a number of interesting ways. Thus, many emotional state adjectives are not suitable for embedding performatives, as in (5), and other emotional state adjectives, when embedding performative verbs, remove those verbs' performative force, as in (6).



### The Speaker Alignment Principle (SAP)

A performative utterance may be embedded under a member of one of the classes of adjectives listed above only if that adjective functions to align the speaker in a direction consistent with the alignment implicit in context of that utterance.

The SAP predicts the grammaticality judgements in (7) and (8). The unfavourable alignment associated with sorry is inconsistent with the notion of favourable reaction which congratulate functions to communicate, while that of glad is consistent; whereas in (8) a favourable alignment towards the act of objecting, which is culturally marked as rude and impolite, is clearly inappropriate.

"Implicit in context" is necessarily vague, but involves such factors as speaker-based felicity conditions on the performative act, prevailing social attitudes, and the degree of speaker control over the action itself. There is, in addition, the speaker's anticipation of the addressee's reaction. It is the diverse character of this phenomenon that motivates the appellation of "functional", because it cuts across the traditional boundaries of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in seeking an explanation for an overtly syntactic constraint, as such a condition on the permissibility of embedding might once have been considered.

On the basis of this concept of alignment in context, it is possible to distinguish four classes of performative verbs with respect to favourable and unfavourable alignments: those which are neutral, embedding freely under either type of adjective; those which strongly involve a favourable alignment, thus embedding only under positive adjectives; those which tend to involve a favourable attitude, but which may also embed under negative adjectives in contexts where the speaker is not a free agent; and finally a small class which strongly involve an unfavourable alignment, embedding only under negative adjectives. A representative sampling of each class is given below:

- I. Neutral: announce, inform, report, say, tell (In McCawley's expansion of Austin's classifications (McCawley 1973), these are all Expositives.)
- II. Favourable Alignment: apologize, baptize, bequeath, congratulate, nominate, promise, pronounce, swear, undertake, vow (McCawley - Behabitives, Operatives, Commissives)

- III. Favourable Alignment But (allowing unfavourable alignment when performed under duress): allow, recognize, resign, permit, propose, vote, declare, find
- IV. Unfavourable Alignment: complain, object, protest (McCawley - Behabitives, Expositives)

Verbs in Category I are characterized by a lack of implicit alignment, stemming from their use as emotionally neutral, informative verbs. Note that they all belong to the class of Expositives. Because of this lack of alignment a speaker is free to embed a category I verb under either a positive or a negative adjective, thereby aligning himself either favourably or unfavourably towards his speech act, as we see in (9).

- (9) I am pleased to announce that Nelson Rockefeller's  
       sorry  
 appointment has just been confirmed.

Verbs in Category II are characterized in normal circumstances by a felicity condition which requires that the speaker perform the act voluntarily. Searle has discussed this in some detail with respect to the verb promise (Searle 1969), and the rest of the verbs in this category seem to share a similar felicity condition. This in turn implies a favourable alignment on the part of the speaker, permitting embedding under positive adjectives, but precluding it under negative adjectives, as can be seen in (7) above.

Verbs in Category III differ from those in Category II in that when a speaker performs a speech act involving one of them he does not necessarily do so voluntarily. For instance, one may resign voluntarily or under pressure. Embedding these verbs under a negative adjective is thus possible only in contexts involving coercion or duress, since one does not voluntarily do what one is opposed to. The pattern for verbs of this category is exemplified in (10) - (12).

- (10) I am pleased to cast my vote for Phineas T.  
       Phogbound.
- (11) \*I am sorry to cast my vote for Manfred Malaprop,  
       considering that he is the perfect man for the  
       job.
- (12) I am sorry to cast my vote for Manfred Malaprop,  
       but he owns the mortgage on my house.

Verbs in Category IV appear to be socially marked as non-cooperative, thereby implicating that the

speaker is obliged to do as he does by force of circumstances and precluding a favourable alignment. Example (8) above belongs in this class. This class appears to be extremely limited in membership, and it is not clear to us that it does, in fact, constitute a separate class.

This classification of performatives is in terms of characteristics orthogonal to those used in previous taxonomies, and so there is no simple relationship apparent between the position of a verb in any of those taxonomies (we have examined those of Searle, Austin, Fraser, and McCawley), and its category as defined above. It does seem reasonable however that all Category I verbs will be Expositives in the Austin-McCawley sense, although the converse is probably not true. We think the phenomenon discussed in this paper exemplifies the kind of explicit metric needed to adequately classify performative verbs, where previous investigators have largely used their intuition (pace Searle's word to world/world to word work).

Fraser has shown (Fraser 1973) that it is possible to embed performatives under certain modals (e.g. must, have to, can, be able to) while retaining the performative force of the utterance. The SAP correctly predicts both which modals will combine with which verbs to create hedged performatives, and when such hedged performatives will embed under what adjectives. First we note that for have to and must the lack of voluntariness they convey implies a negative alignment, while the voluntariness associated with can and be able to implies a positive alignment. The SAP claims then that we will be able to find can and be able to forming hedged performatives with verbs from categories I, II, and III but not from IV. Likewise it predicts that have to and must will combine with verbs from categories I, III, and IV. Examples (13) - (20) below demonstrate the correctness of this claim.

- (13) I am now able to report that we can see the light at the end of the tunnel.
- (14) I am now able to bequeath the Hope diamond to you, my only remaining relative.
- (15) After considerable effort, I am now able to find in favour of the defendant.
- (16) ??After spending two nights in this dump, I am able to complain that the food is terrible.<sup>3</sup>
- (17) I have to report that the tunnel just collapsed.
- (18) \*I have to swear to love, honour and obey.<sup>3</sup>
- (19) Mr. Nice, I have to declare you guilty, despite my personal feelings in the case.



## Footnotes

1. We owe a debt of gratitude to George Lakoff, for many helpful suggestions and examples, to friends too many to mention for many hours of discussion, and to Robin Lakoff for championing the "explicit but not formal" approach. Needless to say, all errors of both omission and commission are noone's responsibility but our own.
2. Due to Robin Lakoff
3. The grammaticality judgements for these sentences are for the performative reading.

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