

The Reflexivity of Explicit Performatives*

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Received: 8.8.2008

Final Version: 25.2.2009

BIBLID [0495-4548 (2009) 24: 66; pp. 283-299]

ABSTRACT: The aim of this contribution is to propose a natural implementation of the reflexive-referential theory advanced by Perry 2001 that aims at accounting for the reflexive character of explicit performative utterances. This is accomplished by introducing a reflexive-performative constraint on explicit performatives.

Keywords: explicit performatives, reflexive-referential theory, reflexivity, speech acts, Austin, Perry.

Introduction

The reflexive-referential theory for ‘I’ has already been invoked by Jary 2007 within the framework of a theory on performatives. My aim here is to defend that it is possible to respect the intuition originally present in Austin’s work (Austin 1962, 1979) and to claim that, whenever we use a declarative sentence that embeds an explicit performative prefix, it is precisely *in* saying something that we do something with words, as something different from asserting something. This consequence can be accounted for provided that we, together with the conventional meaning of the performative sentence in Austin’s normal form, take into consideration a reflexive-performative constraint that, as I will try to argue, is present in our uses of explicit performative prefixes. In this elaboration I will be guided by analyses developed within the framework of the reflexive-referential theory, trying to extend it to the above-mentioned case. In the final part of this contribution I will try to address a possible objection.

1. Alternative accounts for performative prefixes

The intuition underlying the present proposal is that utterances that embed explicit performative prefixes, such as “I promise you that *p*”, cannot be adequately accounted for if we consider the utterance to be a direct assertive, from which the performative force would be obtained through some pragmatic inference. This account, nevertheless, has been defended with good arguments by several authors¹. According to this view, which we will term the assertive account of explicit performative utterances, the

* A previous version of this work was presented at the XVIIIth edition of the Inter-University Workshop on Philosophy and Cognitive Science (devoted to John Perry’s work) held in Madrid, 22-24th of April, 2008. I am indebted to the audience and two anonymous referees for valuable comments and suggestions. This work is part of the research projects HUM2007-30640-E/FISO and FFI2008-06421-C02-02.

¹ A prominent representative of this position, whose statement is one of the earliest of the kind in question here, is Ginet 1979.



primary meaning of these utterances is that of an assertive. (When the speaker says “I promise that *p*”, she is *asserting* to be performing the action, therefore representing or describing her own act). Only a pragmatic inferential mechanism would allow the interlocutor to derive, in conformity with the speaker’s intentions, the performative force of the utterance, i.e. the information that the speaker intends to perform, by means of uttering it, the act (a particular instance of a type of action) asserted in this very utterance. Therefore, explicit performative utterances are analysed as indirect speech acts.² This thesis can be formulated as follows:

Thesis of the assertiveness of explicit performative utterances: Performatives are indirect speech acts, whose force is pragmatically inferred by the hearer from direct assertives that embed the corresponding performative prefixes.

This position can be illustrated as follows. When a speaker declares “I recommend you to leave”, she would be asserting what she is doing, namely recommending the hearer to leave. By means of her asserting that, she would be indirectly communicating her intention to recommend to the hearer that she leave. Here, a mechanism of “inference compressed by precedent” (Bach & Harnish 1992: 98) guides the hearer to obtain, from the linguistically codified semantic meaning of the corresponding performative verb, the intended force. This reformulation of speech act theory by Bach and Harnish can be said to be highly influenced by Grice’s intention based and inferentialist view of communication³.

In contradistinction to this account and following Austin’s intuition (developed later on by Searle 1969, 1975), it can be said that an utterance of “I recommend you that *p*” has performative force, whenever it has it, in a principled and direct manner, since in the considered performative case the utterance is equivalent to the performance of a certain action, precisely *in virtue of* the utterance itself. This is so because part of the meaning of performative utterances is irreducibly pragmatic, not analysable in truth-conditional terms. This pragmatic meaning has been called the illocutionary force of the utterance. The so-called performative prefix ‘I promise’ makes this force explicit. We can express this view as follows:

Austin’s Performativity Thesis (Thesis of the irreducibility of the force): In their prototypical use, explicit performative sentences (structurally characterised by the following features: the first-person pronoun, the simple-present tense and the possibility of inserting the adverb ‘hereby’) convey an irreducibly pragmatic force

² They write, “On our account, a performative sentence when used performatively is used literally, directly to make a statement and indirectly to perform the further speech act of the type (an order, say) named by the performative verb (‘order’)” (Bach & Harnish 1992: 98)

³ Cf. Sbisà 2002: 422. Nevertheless, Grice himself seems to have held a number of different ideas concerning how to account for illocutionary forces. A reading of Grice suggests that the inferences which yield these forces are connected with further specifications of the central speech acts of asserting, asking, and commanding (Grice 1989: 121-22). Notwithstanding this, there are other passages where Grice suggests that the implied (illocutionary) meaning is derived from conventionalizations of generalised conversational implicatures or implied by presupposition.

whose effect is to perform an action, thus allowing the speaker to do something *in* saying something.

Against the thesis that attributes a direct assertive force to performatives, Austin always insisted that when a speaker performs an illocutionary act, she is not making a statement that describes her own act; rather, she is performing it⁴.

A third, intermediate position between the assertive and the performative accounts is that held by Recanati 1987, 2007 and Searle 1989. Both have proposed to interpret explicit performative utterances as declarations. Searle claims that performatives are declarations and that in declaring something, the speaker is at the same time making a true assertion.⁵ Recanati claims that, in uttering an explicit performative, the speaker performs two illocutionary acts: she declares that she is performing a certain act, and she performs it. But, whereas the declaration is performed directly, the second act, the one that the speaker declares to be performing, can be performed only indirectly. This double illocution by means of a single declaration is possible because Recanati takes the declaration (the first, direct act) to be force-neutral. What distinguishes Recanati's account from the assertive one is that he does not consider the indirect act to be conversationally implicated in a Gricean sense; as he puts it, "the indirect act is 'entailed' by the direct act of self-referential declaration" (Recanati 1987: 175).

The mechanism that makes possible the entailment from the force-neutral declaration "I order you that *p*" to the illocution (that the speaker effectively orders the hearer that *p*) appeals to an additional postulate. Recanati claims that in order to perform an illocutionary act it suffices to get the hearer to recognise the intention one has that, in virtue of the utterance, it be the case that one performs the declared action (one orders the hearer that *p*, say).⁶ And the best mechanism to convey this intention is the descriptive meaning of the performative verb.

In the declarative accounts, as in the assertive one, these authors assume that the linguistically codified, conventional meaning has to be (and only can be) analysed in terms of its contribution to the utterance truth-conditions, henceforth the illocutionary force must be obtained by some different, inferential means.

⁴ For instance, he writes, "the verbs which seem, on grounds of vocabulary, to be specially performative verbs serve the special purpose of making explicit (which is not the same as stating or describing) what precise action it is that is being performed by the issuing of the utterance" (Austin 1962: 61).

⁵ The fact that performatives, as declarations, institute new facts and so doing become true is explained by Searle in the following terms: "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." (Searle 1989: 549-50)

⁶ "As a matter of fact, it is not exactly the 'intention to order the hearer to come' that is fulfilled as soon as it is manifested; it is the intention to perform this act by means of the very utterance that expresses that intention" (Recanati 1987: 172). Also the assertive account involves reflexive intentions of a special kind. At some point Bach and Harnish 1992 write, "The statement (...) informs the hearer of the promise; it is the utterance, in virtue of the intention with which it is made (that of expressing a commitment that his utterance obligate him in a certain way to the hearer), which constitutes the promise" (Ibid., p. 100). However, in this case, it is not at all clear how the second, reflexive intention is to be fulfilled. More on that is discussed below.

Thesis of performative utterances as declarations (Recanati's version): Performatives are declarations, whose performative indicator is force-neutral; when the speaker declares to perform a certain act, her declaration at the same time entails the performance of this act. This is accomplished by means of getting the hearer to recognise the speaker's intention that, by means of her utterance, it be the case that she performs the declared action (Recanati 1987; cf. also 2007).

Getting the hearer to recognise the speaker's reflexive intention is accomplished, in its turn and in the commonest case, by means of the descriptive meaning of the performative verb. (We will come back to this idea below).

A strong argument in favour of the assertive and the declarative accounts is that they do not compel one to consider different linguistic resources to interpret an utterance, depending on whether it is assertive or performative, nor to maintain separated analyses for the two available uses of the same expression-type 'I promise', depending on whether it is an irreducibly performative use (to the effect that the speaker acquires a commitment before the hearer) or an assertive use in atemporal present (as in "Each time I arrive too late, I promise to wake up earlier next time"). In both cases, the conventional, linguistically encoded meaning would contribute to the truth conditions of the utterance. And the completion of these (by means of pragmatic inferential processes⁷) would yield the 'input' of a complete proposition from which to derive, now again through pragmatic inference (not necessarily Gricean), the performative force of the utterance at issue here.

The arguments against this assertive or declarative accounts appeal to strong intuitions and to the asymmetries that can be highlighted between the assertive and the performative uses. Following this second line of argumentation, some authors have defended an account of performatives as acts of showing. They argue that an utterance embedding an explicit performative prefix (plus, maybe, the adverb 'hereby' or other locutions) is an act of showing (Green 2000, 2007; Jary 2007). This shared view does not prevent, nevertheless, some differences between authors. Their theses can be formulated as follows:

Thesis of the force as an act of showing (two versions):

- (i) Performatives are simultaneously assertions and acts of showing. Moreover, the act of showing, that is simultaneous to the assertion, shows a commitment by the speaker before the hearer (Green 2000).

⁷ An anonymous referee raises the question whether these pragmatic processes are restricted to propositional ones. It is hard to find an explicit claim about that by the proponents of the assertive and declarative accounts. Nevertheless, it seems to me that this is how one might interpret a statement like the following, "In saying 'I promise' performatively, one obviously says that he promises, but in so doing he does not perform an illocutionary act of assertion or whatever: what he performs besides the illocutionary act of promising I shall call, following Austin, a *locutionary act* — the locutionary act of 'saying that'" (Recanati 1980: 206)

Alternatively,

- (i) Performatives are primarily acts of showing. Speakers are showing what they are doing (and thereby doing it), but they are not simultaneously asserting, and what is shown is the very act that is so performed (Jary 2007).

Jary has argued that the analysis advanced by Perry's reflexive-referential theory for the indexical 'I' can be implemented to argue in favour of the performative intuition, and against assertive accounts of explicit performatives. He states his proposal taking into account two conditions: (i) given the function fulfilled by the personal pronoun 'I' as analysed by Perry (particularly, its *reflexivity*); and (ii) given the *nature* of the act denoted by the corresponding performative verb (to promise, say), he draws the conclusion that the more accessible interpretation for the utterance must be the performative and not the assertive one. In his own words:

Thus, the association of the character of 'I' and the nature of the act denoted will make the hypothesis that the speaker does indeed intend to perform that act (and to do so by showing that he is doing so) highly accessible, so that strong contextual or linguistic clues will be needed to override this hypothesis. (Jary 2007: 225)

It seems to me that the kind of implementation proposed by Jary is insufficient to support both his criticism and his alternative proposal. I agree with his refusal to consider performative utterances as parasitic with respect to direct assertives. Nevertheless, I see two problems in his account. Firstly, his appeal to Perry's analysis on the reflexivity of 'I' does not seem to be sufficient to give priority to the performative account. For this very analysis, in identical terms, is applicable to any use of the same utterance, even if this use is the assertive, descriptive one or any other distinct from the conventionally associated one⁸. Secondly, his reference to what is "the nature of the act denoted" remains unexplained. If what is meant is that the act can be performed in virtue of the utterance itself, this 'can' is what on my view needs being elucidated. If this property of performatives is just assumed to be in force, it seems to me that we are still in need of some clarification⁹.

Sharing with Jary a similar intuition, I think it possible to extend the reflexive-referential theory in such a way as to highlight an essential trait of explicit performatives: their reflexive-performative character. It would then become possible to show that it is precisely this reflexive-performative character what constrains (allows) that the utterance prompts by itself, when it is uttered in a context of communicative interaction, an action of a certain type.

⁸ It would be different if, as Jary holds (personal communication, 27 May 2008), appropriately interpreting assertoric uses of these sentences were not reliant on representing the speaker under the mode of presentation associated with the character of 'I' (i.e. *qua* the speaker of that sentence). Nevertheless, it seems to me that in such a case it should be explained how this mode of presentation for 'I' can be somewhat suspended, and what does/does not make it to be most salient.

⁹ Jary has pointed out (personal communication, 27 May 2008) that his aim was not to give an account of what 'performativity' is. He rather took the notion of illocutionary force for granted and sought to explain both what makes the explicit-performative sentence schema apt to perform two acts (asserting and performing the act denoted), and how hearers manage to disambiguate between the two.

This idea is not new, since the peculiar reflexivity that is characteristic of performatives has been identified and taken into account by a number of scholars, some of whom we are going to mention and briefly consider in the next section. Their accounts, nevertheless, differ from each other. It seems advisable to first examine how performative reflexivity has been understood, in order to reach some conclusions concerning its nature and how to integrate it within a theoretical model.

2. *Reflexivity of explicit performatives*

According to the irreducibility of the illocutionary force thesis, when a speaker says “I recommend you that *p*”, she is not stating or describing her own act; she is performing it, and she is performing it precisely *in saying* or *in virtue of* her words. What kind of reflexivity is at work here?

2.1. Performative reflexivity can be understood, firstly, as the consequence of applying a conventional or conventionalised procedure. Austin seems to have had this in mind when he invoked the existence of underlying procedures in speech, and such that they find expression by means of linguistic conventions — or, rather, such that they incorporate saying certain words as a component part. In *How to do things with words* he writes that a speech act can be said to be “*conventional* in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula” (Austin 1975: 103). Recanati 1987, following Strawson 1964, has proposed a widening of this property that requires a conventional, explicit performative formula, by just requiring that there be a conventional marker for the illocutionary force. (This criterion would allow the inclusion, among performatives, of certain speech acts that Austin had classified as perlocutions, e.g. to insult by means of using certain words). A criterion of identity for performatives is, then, that there exist some force-marker that can be considered linguistically codified and socially recognised. Yet the capability to perform an action in virtue of the utterance is founded, according to Austin, in the effective existence of regulated procedures, to the effect that saying certain words is equivalent to doing something.

The drawback in this account has been repeatedly criticised, notably by Searle 1969. According to him, Austin uses as paradigmatic examples speech acts that obtain their force from a socially institutionalised background¹⁰. Yet it remains enigmatically unanswered what is happening in the case of speech acts that are not so institutionalised, where nevertheless the same force-reflexivity is operative, and where to say certain words is equivalent to performing a particular action¹¹.

¹⁰ Paradigmatic examples of institutionalised speech acts are judicial sentences, the *yes*-statement in a wedding ceremony, baptising, and bequeathing a legacy.

¹¹ In these cases, as argued below, the utterance of the words has a conventional effect on the interpersonal relationships of both interlocutors, accountable for in terms of the commitments that they undertake and bestow on each other. Nevertheless, it is not clear that the “accepted conventional procedure” (Austin 1962: 14) goes beyond the conventional meaning present in the performative prefix. This is what Searle 1969 tried to capture by means of constitutive rules.

2.2. Performative reflexivity has also been accounted for in terms of *self-verifiability*, a property only possessed by this type of utterances. Some authors, critical of Austin's conventionalism, have argued that performatives are self-verifying assertions. According to this view, in saying what action she is performing the speaker effectively performs that action, and her utterance is true precisely by virtue of being uttered (Heddenius 1963 and Lewis 1970 are cited, in the literature, as precursors of this position).

A strong argument against this account in what it has of 'semanticising the force' is due to Bach and Harnish. They write:

To suppose that the self-referentiality of performative utterances is a consequence of the semantics of performative sentences would be to posit a linguistic anomaly, whereby the first person present tense form 'I order' would have a semantic feature different in kind from other forms, such as 'You order' or 'I ordered', indeed one that is not compositionally determined by the meanings of the words 'I' and 'order' (Bach & Harnish 1992: 100, fn. 14).

Thus, the requirements of semantic systematicity and compositionality seem to be violated if we adopt this view.

A second argument against this understanding of performatives has been advanced by Recanati. He observes that performativity cannot be reduced to self-verifiability, since what counts for the speech act to have a particular force is not that it has the effect of bringing about the state of affairs that is its propositional content. He argues that it is an utterance's meaning, not its actual consequences, what allows to characterise it as performative or not (cf. Recanati 1987: 170).

I think that Recanati is right when he says that what determines the force is not the effect actually brought about by the words, in the sense that the so-called satisfaction conditions of the speech act be fulfilled (Searle 1969). The question at issue is what makes it the case that saying some words can be equivalent to performing an action. This remains unexplained, if we conceive reflexivity in terms of satisfaction conditions and, *a fortiori*, in terms of self-verifiability. By connecting the utterance with its effect, we do not illuminate how this effect has been achieved. The same happens if we try to remit the illocutionary force back to the semantic meaning of the corresponding performative verb. In this case, as Bach and Harnish observe, one had to explain why this property is present in some uses of the same verb and not in others; and, specially, how the performative verb contributes compositionally.

2.3. Performative reflexivity has been accounted for, thirdly, by recourse to the reflexive communicative intentions (in Grice's sense). In the framework of Grice's theory, the intention to produce a belief or other attitude by means (at least in part) of the recognition of this very intention is what has come to be called a *reflexive communicative intention*. This intention consists of performing an action with: (i) the intention to produce a belief in an audience, (ii) the intention that this effect be achieved, at least in part, by the audience's recognition of the speaker's intention, and (iii) the intention that the audience be aware of the speaker's intentions (i) and (ii).

Nevertheless, good arguments have been advanced against understanding performative reflexivity in the above suggested terms. Two of these deserve our attention, one against the sufficiency and another against the necessity of reflexive communicative intentions for the peculiar reflexivity of explicit performative utterances.

Against sufficiency, Recanati argues that the characteristic property of communicative intentions, in Grice's sense, is that they are satisfied by merely being recognised. But, as he insists, in the case of a performative that is uttered with the intention of bringing about a particular state of affairs, the state of affairs denoted by the utterance must be the performing of a certain illocutionary act by means of the utterance itself (cf. Recanati 1987: 173; cf. also Recanati 2007: 54).

Hence, according to this line of argumentation, for a speech act to be successful and to achieve a particular force, something more is needed than just the hearer's recognition of the speaker's communicative intention. The speech act must be successful *due to* the speech act itself. We can conclude, therefore, that reflexive communicative intentions are not sufficient for the utterance to count as a performative with a particular force (for it to count as a promise, an order, etc.). But notice that here, as before, it remains unexplained what makes it the case that the speech act be successful precisely due to the speech act itself. We have not said, as yet, what makes it possible that a particular act be caused by a speech act as required.

The second argument, now against the necessity of reflexive communicative intentions for performative reflexivity, is due to Green 2007. He has focused on speech acts by means of which the speaker does not intend to have any cognitive effect on the hearer. Paradigmatic examples of this are that of a person who thinks aloud, or that of a person who speaks aloud just to achieve a therapeutic effect on herself. In those cases, Green notices, reflexive communicative intentions are not necessary for speaker meaning, since the latter can occur without the intention to produce any beliefs in an audience. Therefore, "producing a cognitive effect on an audience (...) is not a necessary condition for speaker meaning (Green 2007: 60, 80).

A possible answer to Green would be that the cases he takes into consideration are marginal, or that they may be explicated away as derived from, or parasitic upon the normal communicative intentions. (Grice himself gave this answer to certain objections, arguing that his intention was just to account for the normal cases). Yet, Green's criticism is worth being considered, for it compels us to search for an alternative account that is able to explain these special cases as well.

2.4. Performative reflexivity has been accounted for, finally, in terms of the manifestation and recognition of communicative intentions, by means of descriptive conventions. This proposal, already mentioned, is the one to be found in Recanati 1987, 2007 and Searle 1989. Recanati writes:

[T]he hearer's recognition of the speaker's communicative intention is not only necessary but also sufficient for communication to take place. In other words, a speech act is performed by means of the hearer's recognition of the speaker's communicative intention. Because I can bring about this recognition by saying what speech act I am performing, it is, in a sense, sufficient to have said this in order to guarantee that I have said something true. (Recanati 1987: 88)

According to this view, then, in the case of explicit performatives, the hearer's recognition of the speaker's communicative intention is not only necessary but also sufficient for a performative to have the speaker's intended force. Moreover, only descriptive conventions would be required to achieve that.

I think, however, that in order for certain speech acts to have their force it is required, in many cases, something more than the speaker's intentions and the hearer's recognition of them (even if these intentions include a reference to the utterance itself as a means of achievement of the declared act). Immediate counterexamples are declaratives (in Searle's sense, e.g. judiciary sentences, legal formulae bringing about new legal statuses, and official nominations), where the existence of an institution is but one in a set of constitutive conditions for a speech act to possibly have a particular force. In these cases, communicative intentions are not sufficient, even once they have been recognised by the hearer. The same assessment is true, I think, in cases of communicative speech acts other than institutional declaratives. In many cases, other conditions must be fulfilled for the speech act to have a particular force, and these conditions go beyond individual intentions. (For example, a precondition for an utterance to count as a promise is that the hearer would prefer the speaker's doing whatever she promises to do; a precondition for an utterance to count as an order is that the speaker must be in a position of authority over the hearer). In the most general case, some kind of preexistent social license or intersubjective acknowledgment is required for an explicit performative to possibly count as an act of a certain type.^{12, 13}

The problem with Recanati's strict intentionalism is better evidenced if we turn our attention to Searle 1989. In his own reconstruction of the process that goes from a 'declaration' (now, in his sense) to an effective order, he says:

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*.... We assume those other conditions are satisfied. (Searle 1989: 553; m.i., CC)

The fact that the fulfilment of "certain other conditions" must be taken as given, in order for the theoretical account to explain orders (or other classes of action) solely in terms of intentions and their recognition, allows us to question the sufficiency of the

¹² This requirement of a social license is even recognised by the defenders of a strict intentionalist view. Bach and Harnish distinguish two main types of speech act: those they call *conventional* (Austin's performatives), and those they term *communicative*. In the case of conventional illocutionary acts, the utterance counts as an act of a certain sort by virtue of meeting certain socially or institutionally recognized conditions for being an act of that sort. - Recanati holds a more subtle position, in that he distinguishes what he calls illocutionary acts *in the strong sense* from illocutionary acts *in the weak sense*. In contradistinction to the latter, the former have felicity conditions in Austin's sense and "a social, quasi-institutional dimension" (Recanati 1987: 215). Interestingly enough, Recanati seems to hold that every speech act can be studied as belonging to any of those categories, apparently depending on the theoretical perspective ("if we abstract from the social license" or not) and the role assigned to the context of the utterance

¹³ My anonymous referee suggests that this need of certain other conditions might be explained away by recourse to Searle's concept of background assumptions, in a parallel way to the one in which the existence of such conditions allow one to pick out the content of an assertive sentence (cf. Searle 1980). In my view, this is not enough to yield the force of a speech act. As the proponents of an interactional view of speech acts have contended, the successful performance of an illocutionary act depends on intersubjective agreement as manifested in the hearer's response. This phenomenon of so-called 'selection by reception' is seen as a negotial feature of conversation, to the effect that it is the hearer's response that selects one illocutionary effect (among the suitable ones that the speech act could have) by implicitly recognising its achievement. (Cf. Schegloff 1992, Sbisà 2006: 169-170)

speaker's communicative intentions, together with the hearer's recognition, for the utterance to have a particular force. If this is conceded, even if just provisionally and for the sake of the argument, then it becomes evident that an alternative account is needed that can, nevertheless, to illuminate or explain all the mentioned difficulties.

3. *A possible alternative. The reflexive-referential theory expanded*

We have already advanced the suggestion that Perry's reflexive-referential theory could be expanded, in order to find a solution for the problem of accounting for the peculiar reflexivity of explicit performatives. Explicit performative prefixes have, as we have seen, this property: they establish a constraint on the type of action that the speech act may achieve. The category of reflexivity in Perry's theory seems to me to be the adequate conceptual tool to explain this. Although we have already remarked that illocutionary forces are not treated within this theory, some of his observations seem to authorise the view that certain linguistic expressions fulfil a function that is irreducibly pragmatic.¹⁴

Here I am not forgetting that, in the reflexive-referential theory, the conceptual contrast between the *reflexive* and the *referential* accomplishes a function that has to be located in the semantic level of linguistic analysis. The reflexive truth-conditions of an utterance are the conditions that are obtained when we make explicit all the constrictions that allow us to determine, for each particular context, the values for the referential content. Following a similar pattern, I would like to argue that the performativity of explicit performative prefixes derive from the rules of language; specifically, from reflexive rules of usage. The idea I would like to take into consideration is that, bound to explicit performative utterances, there is a rule of usage that provides reflexive conditions of performativity. The reflexive-referential theory incorporates the idea that there are a great variety of reflexive contents to which we can and must appeal, in order to account for the cognitive meaning of language (Perry 2001: 13-14). In the same vein, we can say that there are linguistic rules of usage that constraint the pragmatic meaning of certain utterances —and this is so, archetypically, in the cases of utterances that embed a performative prefix.

Perry has explicitly acknowledged that he has focused his attention on the utterances of declarative sentences (understood as statements). (As he claims, statements are the class of utterances that he is going to principally discuss, so that when he speaks of the conditions of success of an utterance he is having in his mind the truth and the falsity, cf. Perry 2001: 18). A statement's content is a proposition that incorporates the conditions on which the statement is true. Contents belong to particular utterances and should not be mistaken with meanings, which belong to expression-types. Meanings, according to the theory, are the rules that assign contents to expres-

¹⁴ Perry talks of 'pragmatic roles', when he says, "If something plays a pragmatic role in our lives, then we can affect it, or use it to affect other things. We can do things with it and to it. Some pragmatic roles are utterance-mediated. I can thank your mother by asking you to convey my thanks to her next time you see her." (Perry 2006: 327)

sion-types, and by this means eventually to particular utterances. In a similar manner, we can say that the pragmatic meaning of performative prefixes is the rule that assigns a performative value (an illocutionary force) to particular utterances. Here, the rule that is associated with a performative prefix confers a performative value, a force, to the whole speech act (to the sentence as uttered in a particular speech situation). This pragmatic value is given by what we could call a reflexive condition of performativity.

According to the analysis advanced for indexicals by Perry, whom I quote,

The meaning [of indexicals, CC] directs us to certain aspects of the context of the utterance, which are needed to determine the content (...) Instead of the usual twofold distinction — *sinn* and *bedeutung*, meaning and denotation, intension and extension — we have a threefold one:

The meaning provides us with a binary condition on objects and utterances, the condition of designation.

The utterance *itself* fills the utterance parameter of this condition, yielding a unary condition on objects, or a mode of presentation.

The object that meets this condition is the object designated by the indexical, or the *designatum*. (Perry 1996; cf. Perry 1979, 2001)

In this way, as Perry observes, we see that the condition of designation assigned to an utterance *u* has that very utterance as a constituent, thus it can be said to be *reflexive*. This can be put in a rule that brings out the reflexivity:

Reflexivity rule for the denotation of the personal pronoun 'I'

If *u* is an utterance of 'I', the condition of designation for *u* is *being the speaker of u*. (Ibid.)

What I would like to propose is that a similar reflexivity can be predicated of performative prefixes and can be said to be a component part of explicit performative utterances in general. Here, though, we cannot speak of conditions of designation that complete the utterance semantic contents. If we work out the conceptual distinctions introduced above for the case of performative prefixes, we could state the following:

The meaning (of explicit performative prefixes) gives us a binary condition on *actions* (of a certain type) and utterances, the *condition of performativity*.

The utterance itself occupies the utterance parameter of this condition, yielding a unary condition on actions, or *mode of performativity*.

The action that satisfies this condition is the *action performed in uttering*, or *performance*.

(In (b), notice that 'mode' is understood in a different way as that of traditional speech act theory; reflexivity is necessary, not sufficient for an utterance's mode in this traditional sense).

The specifications above entail a treatment for performative prefixes that is germane to that developed by the reflexive-referential theory for other types of expression. In principle, it can be said that just like an indexical has a meaning (rule of language) but its content is only determined when uttered in context, the pragmatic meaning of the performative prefix can be identified as a rule. The resultant effect of any application of this rule, nevertheless, is not content, as in the reflexive-referential theory, but the performance of an action. In this precise point we are departing from

the reflexive-referential theory. Similarly, it must be noticed that the rule is not applied to performative verbs taken in isolation, but to the expression type that we have called performative prefix, i.e. a linguistic structure of the type prototypically exemplified by 'I promise'.

Furthermore, we cannot postpone the issue concerning the category or 'nature' of the action performed. For performative utterances give place to an interaction between speaker and interlocutor, who in this way establish reciprocal bonds. It is possible to account for this fact in terms of a communicative score-keeping in which the performative utterance is equivalent to a commitment assumed by the speaker before her interlocutor (for instance, in the case of a promise, the speaker makes herself responsible for complying with the stated proposition), or to a commitment bestowed by the speaker upon the interlocutor (typically, in the case of a directive, the speaker bestows upon her interlocutor the responsibility of complying with the stated proposition, and commits herself to this act of bestowing a responsibility upon the other). (Notwithstanding significant differences among them, several authors can be cited here as having advanced some version of this analysis. Cf. Stalnaker 1978 for assertives; also Alston 2000, Brandom 1983, 1994, García-Carpintero 2004, Green 2000, 2007, Jary 2007 and Sbisà 2002, 2006).

One of the main arguments against the assertive account takes into consideration the asymmetry between assertives and performatives, in what concerns their different contributions to the 'common ground' or the 'conversational record' of the conversation. I would like to argue that this different import on the common conversational background should be analysed in terms of a score-keeping, relatively to the commitments (and entitlements) that speaker and interlocutor assume and bestow upon each other.

In relation to the elucidation we have been advancing, this means that the elicited performance consists of assuming or bestowing a commitment that creates an interpersonal bond. One does not promise, period. Even if the promise is addressed to oneself, the addressee is still a constitutive component in a binary relation. The reflexive-performative propriety of the performative prefix corresponds, therefore, to linguistic expressions of the type exemplified by 'I promise you'. We will assume this binary character for the performative prefix, as exemplified by "I promise you that *p*".

Now again, Perry's reflexive-referential theory provides us with a tool. In our implementation of his analysis to the explicit performative prefixes, and using for that a meta-language that should allow us to represent (in a meta-pragmatic level) what in the use of language belongs to the pragmatic domain of linguistic activity, we can propose to extend the theory in the following way.

Reflexive-performative rule for the performative prefix corresponding to the verb 'promise':

$\text{Pr}(u',u'')$ is an utterance of 'I promise you' only if:

- The indexical content of u' is the condition of identification *being the speaker of* **$\text{Pr}(u',u'')$**
- The indexical content of u'' is the condition of identification *being the interlocutor of* **$\text{Pr}(u',u'')$**

- The reflexive-performative content of Pr is the reflexive condition of performativity *establishing interrelation Pr by u' before u'' in virtue of uttering Pr(u', u'')*.

(NB: following the usual convention in the reflexive-referential theory, bold letters indicate that the utterance itself is embedded as a constituent of the respective conditions).

Here, however, we have confined ourselves to giving a reflexive rule of usage for the performative prefix. It only instructs us to introduce a reflexive condition on the performative prefix, to the effect that the corresponding description constrains the type of action possibly performed in uttering the prefix itself.

Now, assuming this formulation of the reflexive rule for the performative prefix, we can state the *reflexive condition of performativity of a promise* in uttering a complete sentence embedding an explicit performative prefix:

Given an utterance u of the form $Pr(p) (u', u'')$, where:

u' is the subutterance of the indexical I' ,

u'' is the subutterance of an indexical $'you'$

$Pr(p)$ is the subutterance of a performative verb 'promise' (1st person singular, simple-present tense, indicative mood), with propositional content component ' \dots that p ', it counts as the performance of *establishing interrelation Pr by u' before u'' in uttering Pr(p)(u', u'')* only if: there exist x, y [$(x$ is the speaker of u) & (x addresses y with u) & (x assumes a commitment before y that p)].

A similar analysis seems in principle possible for other performative prefixes corresponding to other types of force. (The reflexive conditions of performativity should be specified for each type of illocutionary force, in terms of a commitment or a commitment bestowing, as suggested above). But notice that here only reflexive conditions are given, that as such cannot be considered sufficient for the utterance to be a speech act with a determinate force.

It could seem, since we have introduced in the statement of the rule a reference to the 'reflexive-performative content' of the prefix, that we are doing nothing more than what has already been advanced by the declarative account (Recanati, 1987, 2007; Searle 1989) in terms of a descriptive convention. We are, in effect, acknowledging a content-component that describes a constraint. Notice, nevertheless, that this content is presented now as a reflexive content, associated with a rule of usage: it has the character of a meta-pragmatic instruction, constraining the type of action that the use of the performative prefix may allow to achieve. A difference with the declarative account is this: the present proposal, in terms of a reflexive rule of usage, does not need to remit the hearer's interpretation back to an inference that is completely determined by the context (something required by both the assertive and the declarative accounts). Now, there is a rule of language that guides and authorises the performative interpretation of the utterance, without determining it. And it does so respecting the thesis of the irreducibility of the force (Austin's performativity thesis). The performative interpretation that is to be obtained by means of any application of the rule is, be-

sides, a direct speech act, in agreement with basic intuitions that we would like to preserve¹⁵.

This notwithstanding, there is something that has not yet been explained, and it is the following. We do not know why the reflexive-performative rule can be suspended or remain unapplied when the speech act has only direct assertive force (typically, in embedded uses, like in the descriptive “Whenever I arrive late, I apologise for that”, vs. the performative “I apologise for that [being late]”). In the next section, I will try to briefly deal with this important objection.

4. *A possible objection: performative or descriptive?*

In attributing reflexivity to the performative prefixes, we are extending the meaning that ‘reflexive’ has in the framework of the reflexive-referential theory, where

By ‘reflexive’, we mean a way of identifying the truth-conditions of an utterance in terms of the utterance itself, and the meaning of the expressions it uses, without recourse to more facts about it. (Korta & Perry 2006: 174)

Now, when we say that performative prefixes have the propriety of reflexivity what we mean is that their associated conditions of performativity incorporate the utterance of the corresponding performative prefix itself as a constituent. But, as yet, this does not respond to the question of why in certain occasions the performative prefix has a performative value, and in others a descriptive one.

In order to account for the referential use of definite descriptions, Recanati 1993 has suggested the existence of a trait ‘ref’ which can be associated in the pragmatic level with certain terms that do not possess it as part of their meaning. If we turn now to the case of a descriptive use of the performative prefix, it could seem natural to consider that the prefix’ meaning is what has been called its descriptive content, namely a rule of language that associates the prefix with an n-ary condition on individuals, as it is the case of any n-ary predicate. The second move would be then to suppose the existence of a trait ‘per[formative]’, associated on the pragmatic level with the performative prefix, and with the effect of conferring on the utterance a particular force.

In a manner not completely distant from this suggestion, what I have argued for here is that the performative trait is a component part of the linguistic rules of usage. Now, it seems to me that we can account for the two possible uses (descriptive and directly performative), provided that we interpret the reflexive-performative rule as a rule that associates with the performative prefix something like a ‘permissive convention’, an allowance that entitles or authorises the speaker to use her utterance of the

¹⁵ The present proposal by no means should be interpreted as saying that for it to work the reflexive speech act description would have to be asserted (hence leading us back to the declarative account). Because the reflexive content given by a Perry-type rule needs not and is not asserted (cf. the discussion in Perry 2001, §9.4). In the present proposal, this rule is intended as part of the conventional procedure that allows the speech act to have a conventional effect.

prefix with a performative force.¹⁶ That it be effectively so will eventually be determined by the fulfilment of other additional constitutive conditions (as are e.g. the pre-conditions corresponding to each type of force), and by other contextual elements (including the hearer's recognition of the speaker's intentions and possibly other pragmatic inferences as based on cooperative rules.) This qualification concerning the reflexive-performative rule should be incorporated, henceforth, to the above-mentioned formulation of it, so that it becomes a rule bestowing an allowance or authorisation.

5. Conclusion

We have argued for the possibility of implementing the reflexive-referential theory, in order to account for an additional level of meaning, the pragmatic level of illocutionary forces. Our task was to explain the peculiar reflexivity of the performative prefix, i.e. the fact that, when uttering it as part of a complete speech act, the speaker performs an action precisely in virtue of using the performative prefix itself. To respond to this task, we have assumed that there is a rule of language associated with these prefixes, and such that it should be considered a rule of usage, specifically pragmatic and reflexive. This reflexive-performative rule establishes a constriction on the way in which the action can take place, a constriction whose effect is that the action be performed precisely in virtue of using the corresponding performative prefix. It follows that the self-referentiality that constitutes the performative component is part of the pragmatic meaning of the utterance, even if we accept, as we have in fact done, that the final determination of the force is subjected to a contextual contribution. For, as we have proposed, the reflexive-performative rule for performative prefixes should follow the pattern of other permissive conventions which authorise without determining. It is in this sense that the proposed rule should be seen as a kind of allowance. The final determination of the pragmatic value of the utterance in context will be given through the fulfilment of other constitutive conditions, together with possible inferences in context (as those based in general pragmatic cooperative rules in Grice's sense).

In adopting the assumption that the reflexive-performative rule is a linguistic rule of usage, we are avoiding the risk of committing what, following Barwise and Perry 1983, has been called the fallacy of misplaced information (the fallacy is the idea that all the information in an utterance must come from the proposition it expresses). Furthermore, we are avoiding what we have been reproaching to other proposals. Both in the assertive and declarative accounts, where a descriptive content is supposed to guide the pragmatic process that provides the illocutionary force of the utterance, and

¹⁶ In introducing the notion of a permissive convention, we are once more finding inspiration in the reflexive-referential theory. In relation with proper names, Perry remarks, "When a person or thing is assigned a name, a *permissive convention* is established: that name *may* be used to designate that person." (Perry 1997: 6). This can be said to work in a double sense. Firstly, the speaker has permission to use that name rather than another designating device to refer to the entity in question. Secondly, the name (*qua* expression) could still have other uses, being used to designate other entities as well. In respect to the performative prefix, both senses are in force. The same illocutionary act could be performed without the prefix, and the rule discriminates between two available uses of it.

in the showing accounts, there was something lacking. It was not completely clear how a description or an act of showing can give place to a performed action. If we assume a rule of language that accomplishes this, the mystery disappears. There is a linguistic practice in conformity with a rule of usage that authorises to institute a new institutional fact in the social world of the interlocutors, or a new interpersonal relationship as based on a commitment or responsibility (or on bestowing it). This explains also that *in* saying something our words may become our bonds.

Notwithstanding this, it remains to be explained why the performative use should be the most salient for an interpreter in minimal context. This point is in need of further refinements. Yet it should be noticed that, from an Austinian point of view (primarily viewing speech acts as actions), the interpreter recognising the speaker's intentions as conveyed by means of the performative prefix is not by itself sufficient for her speech act to have a particular force. These intentions must be seen as reliant on conventions (among which the performative-reflexive rule is intended to play a role) that must be previously in force.

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