

## ON PERFORMATIVES

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In this paper, I should like to present some general and detailed observations on the status and position of 'performatives' in linguistic description.

There are many descriptions of what performative utterances are, though the one which appeals to me most is that presented, indirectly, by Stenius (1967). He suggests that every sentence be analysed as containing a *sentence-radical* and a *modal element*, the former signifying the *descriptive* content of a given sentence, and the latter, its *mood*. The fact that he refers the notion of mood only to such distinctive variables as *Indicative*, *Imperative*, and *Interrogative* is immaterial because we know, on the other hand, that the notion in view may as well comprise and dominate such modal variables as, e.g. *necessity*, *obligation*, etc. (Fowler (1971 : Ch VI)). In fact, we might generalize that the notion of mood in this sense comprises and dominates any possible kind of modality in a given sentence.

On the basis of the above observations, it is easy to infer that it is the *main clause* in the performatives that takes the function of the previously mentioned *modal element*, and that the *sentence-radical* role is attributed to the *subordinate clause*, as in:

- (1) I declare [that you are absent-minded]
- |      |                     |
|------|---------------------|
|      |                     |
| (ME) | (SR)                |
| mood | descriptive content |

The consequence of this situation is that when we delete ME in (1), we deprive the utterance in view of its modality (except the Indicative) to preserve its solely descriptive load:

- (2) You are absent-minded

To continue, according to Austin (1962), performative utterances are not analizable from the point of their *truth value*. The analysis I am placing beneath seems to confirm this supposition at full length:

- (3) a. I *declare* [that you are absent-minded] →  
 You are absent-minded and I *declare* it.  
 |  
 [- Assertion]
- b. I *regret* [that you are absent-minded] →  
 You are absent-minded and I *regret* it.  
 |  
 [+ Assertion]

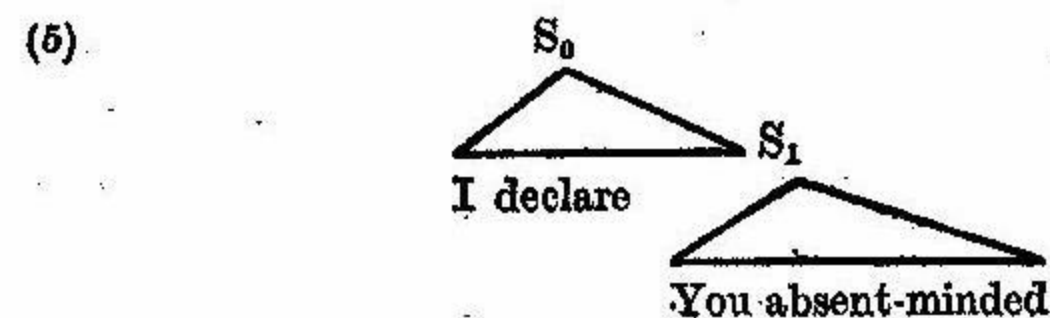
The point is that in these two utterances, the presupposition 'you are absent-minded' may be asserted only in the one with the non-performative verb — *regret* (3b). It cannot be asserted in the utterance (3a) because *declarations* cannot be *assertions* by nature. Now, if we assume that all modal elements (ME) in performative utterances share the same property of their inability of being asserted, we can generalize that our judgment on the truth value in the performatives — in general — can be referred exclusively to SR, to its descriptive/informative truth value.

The above situation determines a semantic status of the modal part of performative utterances. Strictly, the speaker is left with his optional CHOICE of *potential*, *intentional*, and *non-asserted* variables, modal in their essence, and functioning as purely semantic concepts. According to Austin (1962), these variables are used by the speaker with a certain intention to express some definite *function*, or *force*, named *illocutionary force*. In the following utterances we may observe how it is possible for the speaker to reveal *various kinds* of IF in the same SR:

- (4) I {  
 {declare} that you are absent-minded.  
 {guess}  
 {apologize} for your being absent-minded.

To follow, all these variables of IF are limited in number and their complete inventory is incoded in the minds of both — the sender of the message and its receiver. In abstraction, they constitute the concept of performative SEMANTIC FORM (Jackendoff (1972); Jaranowski (in press)). The SF in view is a potential and optional 'slot' in a conversational procedure since it is up to the speaker's choice whether to fill this slot or to delimit his utterance to its purely descriptive load (SR). Once the speaker has determined to take advantage of ME standing at his disposal, he has determined to 'neutralize' the truth value of SR because the ME is not an assertive element by nature; whenever it appears in a given performative utterance as a dominating ele-

ment, the truth value of its dominated SR gets decomposed:



— as it is in the dialog:

- (6) A. I declare sth.  
 B. What do you declare?  
 A. That you are absent-minded.  
 B. But it's only your declaration. In fact, it's not true.

As it is above, the ME neutralizes the truth-value of SR in a *linear, horizontal* dimension. However, both the truth-value analysis and the principle of linear evaluation are by no means the only and the most vital data necessary to secure a *full* linguistic insight into the corpus under discussion; much more important is the analysis based on the concept of the above mentioned SEMANTIC FORM (SF), and on the principle of ANAPHORICITY.

According to the above concept and principle, the application of ME in a given utterance means that the speaker has triggered a chain-reaction of step-by-step *choices*. The sequence of these choices is *spatially* oriented which means that each of the *sequential* choices is *anaphoric* in relation to the following, 'dominated' choice in a 'downward', spatial orientation.

In this sense, the basic, initiary *anaphoric choice* will be the choice of SF which means that the speaker has decided to use ME in his utterance. The SF directly dominates the marker of INTENTION since all the following choices will be intentional on the part of the speaker in the sense of showing his intention to the content of SR, to the listener, or to himself, e.g.:

- (7) a. I appoint you (you are) president of our club.  
 b. I affirm that you are president of our club.

The next successive slot to be filled by the speaker will be his *choice* on one of the modal variables (e.g. Mood A) indicating whether he intends to *impose* on the listener to do sth {Imp}, to *ask* him about sth {Q}, or to make a statement about sth (SR). Once he has decided on a given variable of Mood A, he must make his successive choice of Mood B, namely, whether he wants (Vendler 1972):

- a. —to give a verdict : Verdictives -e.g. accuse, charge,  
 b. —to make a decision in favour or against a certain  
 course of action : Exercitives -e.g. command, beg,

- c. —to make a decision on making something the case: Operatives -e.g. appoint, charge sb. with,
- d. —to commit the speaker to a certain course of action: Commisives -e.g. accept, agree,
- e. —to react to other people's behaviour to express his own attitudes to sb. else's past or immediate conduct: Behabitives -e.g. congratulate, curse,
- f. —to expose acts involving the expounding of views, the conducting arguments, and the classification of usages and references: Expositives -e.g. admit.

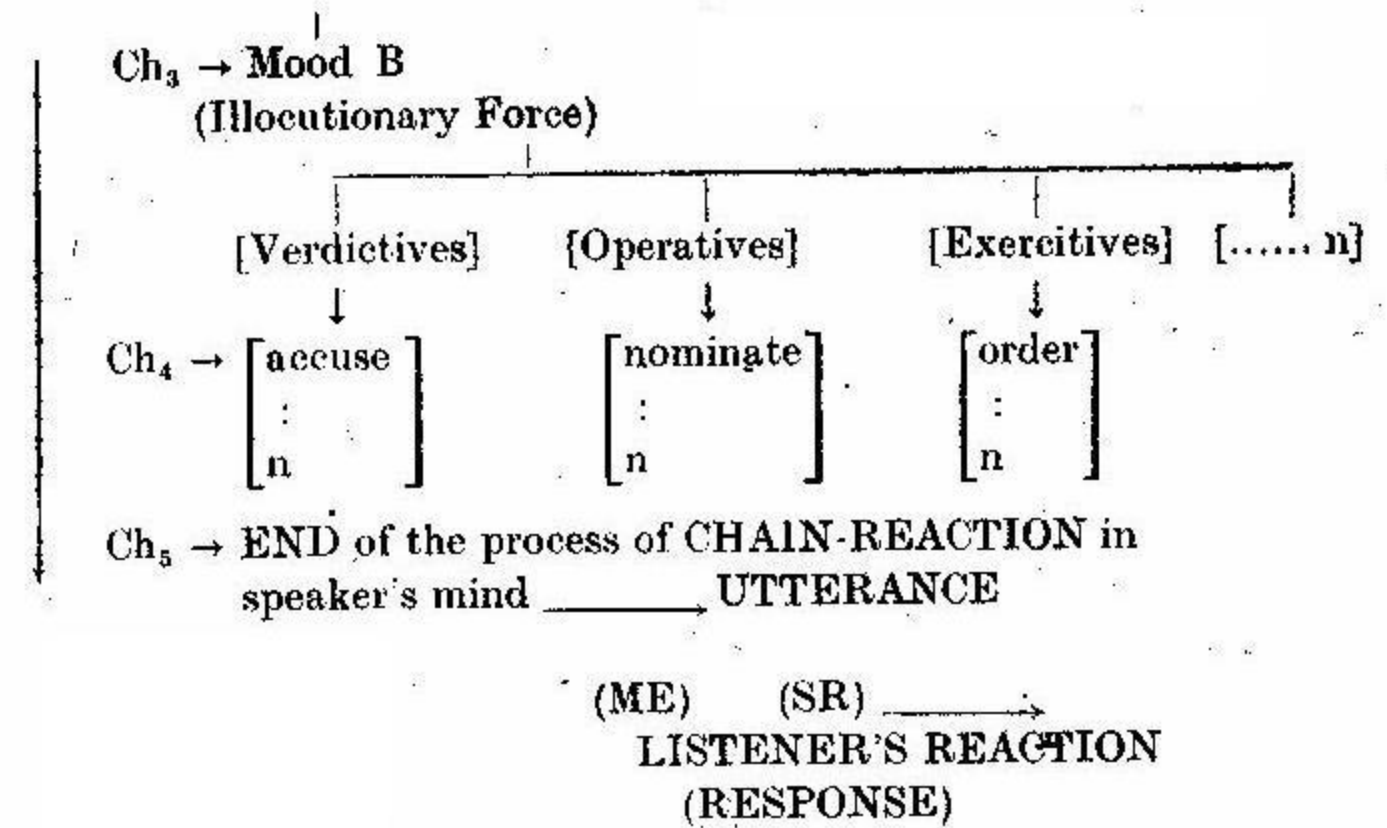
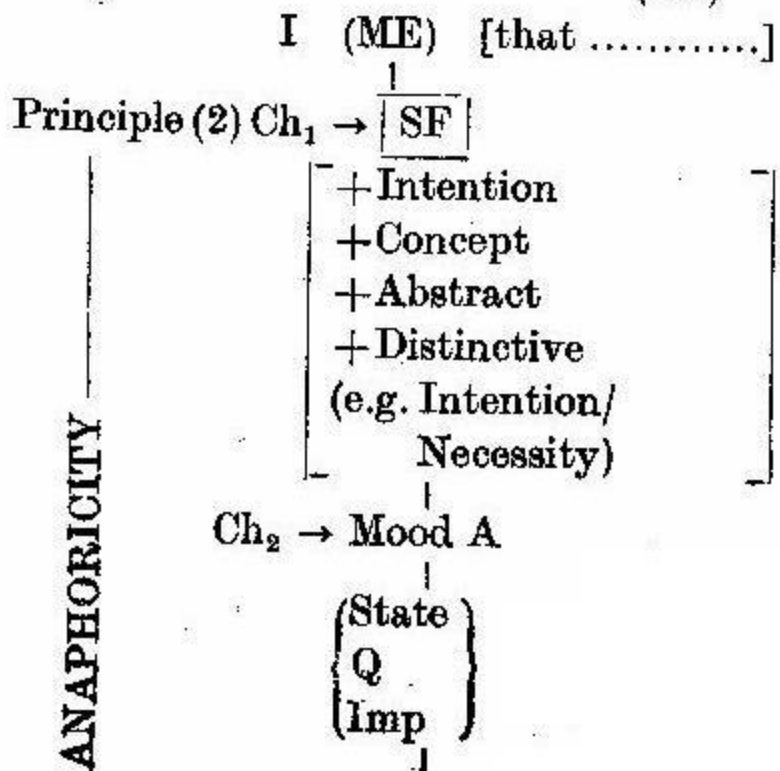
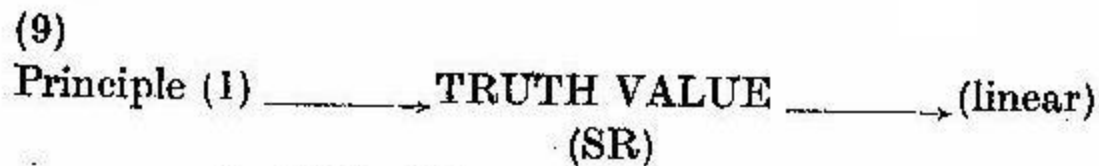
The choice of one of the above sub-types of Mood B, triggers the next choice of *one* variable belonging to the inventory of each of the sub-types, e.g.:

(8) Verdictives

- accuse
- analyse
- calculate
- :
- n

The choice of one of the variables ends the process of CHAIN-REACTIONS in the speaker's mind. As a result, the sequence consisting of ME and SR is *uttered*. The utterance triggers the listener's reaction.

The whole CHAIN-REACTION of CHOICES can be diagrammed as follows:



Now, after all these theoretical considerations have been presented, let me expose some observations referring to particular 'levels' of the above diagram.

First, let me stress that a distinctive value of SF cannot be overestimated. I have met with the arguments that the performatives are not or should not be distinguished as a separate grammatical corpus because they function in the same way as many other structures in the sense that their ME may be optionally omitted, e.g.:

- (10) a. I *declare* that you are absent-minded.
- b. *It is likely* that you are absent-minded.
- c. I *regret* that you are absent-minded.

It is obvious that in (10c), the ME does not neutralize the truth value of SR since the presupposition 'you are absent-minded' is asserted by 'regret'. However, both (10a) and (10b) are identical as to the fact that their SR has been neutralized by their ME as to their truth value. What *only* may distinguish these two utterances then, appears on the *deepest level of semantic reality* — which is the value of SF; thus, in (10a), the SF reflects the concept of *intention* on the part of the speaker when, in (10b), it is the concept of *probability*.

The second observation referring to the performatives is that, as Bolinger says — 'natural language has little or no use for pure performatives to introduce something said. It is generally deemed unnecessary when one is saying something, to say that one is saying it' (1977:513—14).

True as this opinion seems to be, let me observe, however, that the above Bolinger's statement should not be generalized too far. In fact, whenever used by the speaker, a chosen performative ME is *instrumental* in its inten-

tional sense — it has some function to take in a given utterance; the point is that the degree of *reliability* of this function and the *necessity* of its usage depend on manifold criteria. For obvious reasons, let us discuss only the most obvious of them.

We already know that SR alone has got all sufficient informational data to be directed to the listener; as a consequence, it may form a message in itself, without any, or with some ME optionally added, as e.g. in:

(11) I	{ declare find hold admit stress postulate : n       }	that	{ the earth is round (a) (SR) you are an old idiot (b) (SR) your leg has been broken (c) (SR)       }
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One should observe, however, that the placement of *identical* performatives (ME) in front of each of the above SR's, changes an instrumental function of these identical performatives according to — to which of the above SR's they have been attached. In such a case, the only logical conclusion is that the function of a given performative verb depends, to much extent, on the informative load of a given SR.

First, let us assume that the speaker has placed one of the performatives listed in (11) in front of the SR presented in (11a) — just to formalize or unnecessarily emphasize this otherwise obvious SR (the earth is round). He might have done so either to enforce his weak authoritative power, or to stress it — just to show that the fact that the earth is round is not complete without his personal declaration on it. To him, his personal evaluation of the fact is more important than the very fact (the domination of his ME over SR). So now the generalization is possible that, whenever referred to any such well-known or even, in a way, trivial SR as the one that the earth is round, the speaker's intention will meet a contradictory reaction on the part of the listener, such as e.g.:

(12) I know [that the earth is round] whether you	{ declare find hold admit stress : n       }
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it, or not; all your declarations are just rubbish, and you yourself are an old block.

As a result, one may conclude that in this contextual situation the effect of the application of one of the listed in (12) performative verbs is inversely proportional to the intention of the speaker, and that these verbs act here as an instrument of an unconscious self-stupefaction on the part of the speaker in his listener's opinion. At the same time the speaker, though again unconsciously, has blocked any felicity conditions existing between him and his listener when referred to SR alone. In this case, the listener's objective judgement on the user of (11a) would be very pejorative and the only qualitative feature which might be attributed to him by the listener might be [+stupid].

The example (11b) exposes quite a different situation. One may observe in it, at a glance, that the speaker's intention is evident in the SR alone, and that it is, at the same time, intentional to be either abusive, or provocative, or both, towards the listener. In this case, the insertion of a chosen ME may only intensify this intention and, hypothetically, will increase the intensity of the listener's reaction though the latter is, in fact, hardly predictable. However, as few people like to be called old idiots, the reaction of the listener, though it may vary as to its intensity from listener to listener, might often meet the expectations of the speaker because, probably, the SR alone might be less provocative than when supported by ME, as e.g. in:

(13) I stress that you are an old idiot!

— or, even, by some extralinguistic devices, as in:

(14) You are an old idiot, I dó stréss!

However, regardless of the intensity of the listener's reaction (from a contemptuous shrugging of his shoulders, through a counter-abusive response, up to the punch on the instigator's nose), all these reactions have one thing in common; contrary to the previous situation exemplified in (11a), the speaker blocks the felicity conditions between himself and the listener intentionally and deliberately. However, from the point of the fulfilment of his subjective intentions, any such non-agreeable reaction of the listener would, in fact, satisfy and not block the felicity conditions in view. This speciality refers to both — SR alone, and when it is accompanied by a chosen ME working as an instrument of the enforcement of the provocative value of SR.

Now, when we compare the above examples (11a, b) with (11c), we can prove that Bolinger's generalization (see p. 85 in this paper) might be too strong:

(15) I postulate that your leg has been broken. (11c)  
 ↳ [+surgeon]

The example shows that though the SR in (15) (your leg has been broken) cannot be asserted by any performative verb as the performatives are unable to assert the truth value of SR's, the insertion of a well-chosen verb of this

group may be very reasonable and well-motivated. The motivation for the application of the performative in (15) has been enforced by the application of the 'professional' selectional restriction [+surgeon]. In this situation, the felicity condition between the speaker and the listener is fully preserved as the listener usually accepts any professional postulates of this kind without any argument.

As this short and unavoidably incomplete analysis indicates, one should be very careful in one's general rejection of the applicability of the performatives or the delimitation of their usage to formalizing and intensifying purposes. In fact, they form a very special linguistic instrument the effectiveness of which depends on linguistic and mental capacities of their users.

On particular occasions, the use of some performatives is well-motivated by either *cultural* or *social* backgrounds, e.g.:

- (16) a. I pronounce you man and wife (Bolinger (1977:513))  
 b. We declare that the treaty has been officially confirmed.

In fact, both Operatives and Exercitives can be applied with sound motivations as well:

- (17) a. I appoint you leader of the party.  
 b. I charge you with a task of councillor.

The speciality of these sub-types is that the applicability of their ME is obligatory in the surface structure because their SR cannot appear alone in the form:

- (18)a. \*You leader of the party.  
 b. \*You with the task of councillor.

In point of fact, the performatives belonging to these sub-types are not uniform in their functional value as their *performative* function coexists with a *causative* one:

- (19) Owing to my {appointment  
                   {charging you with this task}, you will  
 become {leader of the party.  
           {councillor

— and this fact determines their closer (than in the other sub-types) relationship with their SR's which, in turn, makes them, as obligatory elements, influence the surface form of these SR's. Compare:

- (20)a. I declare that you are absent-minded. →  
       You are absent-minded and I declare it.  
 b. I appoint you leader of the party. →  
       \*You are leader of the party and I appoint you.

To end the present discussion on the semantic motivations for a performative usage, there remain two more general observations. First, it seems that the contrast 'general/detailed' has some influence on it. Namely, if the SR is 'less generally' and 'more detailed' oriented, the justification for the application of a given ME increases, as in:

- (21) a. I {find  
           {postulate} that the earth is round.  
       b. I {find  
           {postulate} that your leg has been broken.

(— it has already been explained under (12) why it is unwelcome on the part of the speaker to apply any performative ME's to SR's exposing *truisms* and *generalities*).

Second, it is easy to notice, that the variables belonging to the same sub-type (e.g. Verdictives) reflect different modal (emotive) intensity — from very weak to a very strong one:

- (22) a. I charge you with a crime. [Verdictives]  
       I find that you have committed a crime.  
       b. I {state  
           {stress} that you are right. [Expositives]

So, the emotive load in 'charge' is much stronger than in 'find' and, analogically, in 'stress' than in 'state'. The crux of the matter is that the stronger the modal (emotional) intensity of a given variable the stronger the speaker's motivation to express his performative reference towards SR. To confirm this inference, one may notice that it is more probable on the part of the speaker to take advantage of the syntactic or extralinguistic devices to strengthen even more — not emotionally 'weak' variables, but the 'strong' ones:

- (23) a. You are right, I do state!  
       b. You are right, I do stress!

Now, to generalize, the motivation for an overt usage of the performatives depends on:

1. the *type* a given performative verb belongs to. The most applicable are Operatives and Exercitives,
2. the *contents* of SR. The *generality* of the informative load in SR is diversely proportional to the *necessity* of using ME overtly,
3. the modal (emotive) *intensity* of ME. This intensity is directly proportional to an *overt* usage of ME,
4. the *manipulatory*, *authoritative* and *mental* powers of the speaker. The weaker his authoritative power, the more powerful motivation on his part to apply an overt ME to well-known SR's.

5. *social and conventional* background involving formalization of linguistic usage.

The next point claiming a separate treatment is the motivation for a *syntactic* analysis of the performatives. Strictly, my intention is to show why the syntactic analysis of the performatives is unavoidable if our objective is a complete linguistic description. Actually, there are two main reasons:

a. — there are syntactic constraints placed on the sequence (ME)+(SR) during its transformation to the surface-structure representation so that this representation may appear in a variety of syntactic linear arrangements (Searle 1973):

- (24) a. \*I apologize that I have come here. →  
I apologize for my coming here.  
b. \*I congratulate you that you have completed it. →  
I congratulate on your having completed it.

The examples indicate that the pattern [NP+Perf. V+that] does not work with some performative verbs for purely syntactic reasons.

b. — according to Kempson (1975:40), 'the performative use of a verb is restricted to first person and simple present'. However, one may distinguish quite a number of utterances which are not performative *formally* but, in spite of that, function as such and are used in non-formal speech on plenty of occasions (e.g. Bolinger (1977:513)):

- (25) Let's agree that...  
The fact of the matter is that...  
No kidding that...  
Too hard to believe that...  
Might as well tell you that...  
Dont' mind saying that...  
Give you my word that...

To my judgement, also the following utterances take the function of the performatives:

- (26) To tell you the truth...  
To my judgement...  
It seems to me...  
I'm sure that...  
What I mean is that..., etc.

The variety of syntactic, surface-structure 'non-formal' equivalents stimulates the next problem of importance which is the need for a *contrastive* analysis of these equivalents. Though there is no want for any contrastive evaluation on their deep-structure (semantic) level because all of them share

the same SF in any language, a surface-structure comparison shows syntactic differences of various kinds. Here are some examples:

- (27) a. The fact of the matter is...  
Faktem jest, że...  
Fakt (pozostaję) faktem, że...  
b. No kidding...  
Bez żartów...  
(Odlóżmy) żarty na bok...  
c. Too hard to believe that...  
(Zbyt) trudno (w to) uwierzyć że/ale...  
d. Might as well tell you that...  
(Z równym powodzeniem) mógłbym Ci (również) powiedzieć, że...  
e. Give you my word that...  
Daję (Ci) słowo, że... →  
Słowo (Ci daję), że...  
f. To tell you the truth...  
Jeśli mam Ci powiedzieć prawdę...  
Mówiąc prawdę...  
Prawdę powiedziawszy... →  
Powiedziawszy prawdę...  
g. To my judgement...  
Według mnie...  
Co do mnie...

As the examples indicate, the E—P contrasts appear on various levels of linguistic realization, such as *linear arrangement, deletion, lexical replacement, case, category*, etc.

As I have come to a mutual conclusion with D. Preston (private conversation), even very complicated phenomena can be disambiguated by a consistently performed contrastive procedure. To prove that this opinion works also when referred to the performatives, let me reanalyse the confrontation of the phrase *to be afraid* with *to regret* which Bolinger (1977:511) uses to prove that the latter is sometimes elliptical for *regret to say*. The point is that whenever the said *to regret* appears as elliptical for *regret to say*, its function changes from performative into non-performative. The main test Bolinger applies to prove it is:

- (28) a. *I'm afraid* I can't help you. →  
I can't help you, *I'm afraid*. →  
b. I *regret* that I can't help you. →  
\*I can't help you, I *regret*. →
- |   |            |   |
|---|------------|---|
| [ | +Disjunct. | ] |
| - | Assertive  | ] |
| + | Perform.   | ] |
| [ | -Disjunct. | ] |
| - | Assertive  | ] |
| - | Perform.   | ] |

I can't help you, I *regret to say*.

[+Disjunct.]  
[-Assertive]  
+Perform.]

I think, however, that a *contrastive* analysis of this problem can reveal subtler and deeper distinctions; compare:

- (29) a.  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \{I'm\ afraid\ I\ can't\ help\ you. \\ \{Obawiam\ się,\ że\ nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc\} \\ \{I\ can't\ help\ you,\ I'm\ afraid. \\ \{Nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc,\ obawiam\ się.\} \end{array} \right\} \rightarrow \left[ \begin{array}{l} +Disjunct. \\ -Assertive \\ +Perform. \end{array} \right]$
- b.  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \{I\ regret\ that\ I\ can't\ help\ you. \\ \{Żałuję\ że\ nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc. \\ \{I\ can't\ help\ you\ and\ I\ regret\ it. \\ \{Nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc\ i\ żałuję\ tego. \\ \{*I\ can't\ help\ you,\ I\ regret.\} \\ \{Nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc,\ żałuję.\} \end{array} \right\} \rightarrow \left[ \begin{array}{l} -Disjunct. \\ +Assertive \\ -Perform. \end{array} \right]$
- c.  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \{*I\ regret\ to\ say\ that\ I\ can't\ help\ you. \\ \{Żałuję\ to\ powiedzieć\ ale\ nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc. \rightarrow \\ \{Przykro\ (mi)\ o\ tym\ mówić\ ale\ nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc. \\ \{Niestety,\ Nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc. \\ \{I\ can't\ help\ you,\ I\ regret\ to\ say. \\ \{Nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc,\ \{przykro\ mi\ o\ tym\ mówić\} \\ \{niestety.\} \end{array} \right\} \rightarrow \left[ \begin{array}{l} +Disjunct. \\ -Assertive \\ +Perform. \end{array} \right]$

The examples in (29c) indicate that the semantic load of *regret* with *to say*, when, in its performative function, inclines, in English, to the semantic value of *to be sorry* (I am sorry: *przykro mi*), the latter being an equivalental performative phrase also when with *to say*, as in:

- (30)  $\left. \begin{array}{l} \{I\ regret\ to\ say \\ \{I'm\ sorry\ to\ say\} \\ \{Przykro\ mi\ (o\ tym\ mówić)\} \\ \{Niestety,\} \end{array} \right\} \text{but } I\ can't\ help\ you. \\ \left. \begin{array}{l} \{Przykro\ mi\ (o\ tym\ mówić)\} \\ \{Niestety,\} \end{array} \right\} \text{ale } nie\ mogę\ Ci\ pomóc.$

Now, it is needless to add that no *non-contrastive* analysis could help in coming to the above conclusions.

To sum up the present paper, let us deduce that:

- a. — any attempt to analyse the performatives without taking into account all possible semanto-syntactic dependencies must result in a non-complete description, and thus fails to be reliable,
- b. — in spite of the fact that we often evaluate this section of grammar as possessing rather pejorative and redundant quality, and that it escapes any strictly scientific testing and formulation of rules (hence my infer-

ences and regularities instead of rules in the paper), we should not neglect it in our studies as it is an integrated part of our language, no matter whether we like it or not. After all, it depends mainly on the speaker's individual abilities whether he applies a given performative with a sound motivation,

- c. — a contrastive analysis of the performatives is very desirable in a surface-structure realization as it may clarify many ambiguous problems in a very clear-cut way.

To add, judging from the fact that we live in our contemporary world of relativization of truth values, when we desperately need any self-confirmation, and when any strengthening of our statements is welcome, we may foresee a growing career for the performatives though, on the other hand, we may realize how inexact and facultative they are.

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