Promises, the present and "now." Lessons from Austin, Prior and Kamp

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss explicit performative sentences and, in particular, those containing the explicit performative verb "to promise." I argue that one of the key features of explicit performative verbs is their utterance-reflexive character. In a minimal context, an utterance like "I promise I will finish the paper" can be taken either as an explicit performative utterance, a promise, or as an assertion, which does not constitute a promise but a report of one. An utterance like "I promise now I will finish the paper", however, in a minimal context, should be taken as an explicit performative. To explain this, I use Prior and Kamp's work on "now" (Prior, 1968; Kamp, 1971) and Korta and Perry's content pluralism (Korta and Perry, 2011). I defend that the role "now" plays when embedded in a performative sentence is consistent with the role it plays when embedded in a temporal operator. In both cases, the role of "now" is to reflexively point to the time of utterance and in neither case is the "now" redundant.

Keywords

Now, promise, explicit performative, indexical, content pluralism, utterance-reflexive.

1. Introduction

Imagine the following two scenarios, both involving Bob, a chocolate-loving patient struggling with high levels of sugar in his blood and Jane, his doctor. In the first scenario, Bob is in Jane's office. Jane asks him what he does when he eats chocolate and Bob answers,

(1)   I promise I will run 10 kilometers,

to tell her about his regular but unsuccessful attempts to stay healthy. Bob is here reporting a promise he makes regularly, and not promising anything.

In the second scenario, Bob is back home after his visit to the doctor. He came out of Jane's office thoroughly convinced that he needs to do exercise whenever he eats chocolate. A couple of hours later, he finds a brownie in his fridge and eats it. Consumed by guilt, he sincerely utters (1). In this case he is clearly promising something, and not merely asserting that he is making a promise. Without the relevant information about the context of utterance, then, it would be impossible to differentiate which act the speaker intends to perform by uttering (1).

I claim that adding "now" forces the performative interpretation. That is, take,

(2)   I promise now I will run 10 kilometers

I argue that by uttering (2) Bob's speech act would have been infelicitous as assertion and felicitous as performative—assuming other circumstances are adequate.

There are different ways to make promises. One way is to enunciate whatever it is that you are promising, without naming the act you intend to perform, as in "I will go" or "I will finish the paper today." To get the intended result, however, it is often useful—or even necessary—to name the act by including the performative verb in the sentence uttered, as in "I promise I will go" or "I promise I will finish this paper today." The main verbs in the latter cases are instances of what Austin called "explicit performative verbs;" verbs which in some standard or canonical grammatical forms—verb in the first person singular present indicative active; or verb in the passive voice and second or third person—are the characteristic feature of "explicit performative utterances" (Austin, 1961: 241-244). For the purposes of this paper it is useful to further distinguish between "explicit performative sentences," i.e., sentences containing an explicit performative verb, and their utterances, because, as we shall see, not every utterance of an explicit performative sentence is an explicit performative utterance. In this paper, I focus on explicit performative sentences and, in particular, on those containing the explicit performative verb "to promise."

Explicit performative utterances are an important aspect of language. Knowing how to promise or how to issue an order is one of the basic competences required to master a

language; we learn how to do them early on and we use them on an everyday basis.[1] It has proven to be difficult to explain, however, how explicit performative utterances work and, mostly, what their defining features (if any) are. It is a hot topic, for instance, whether explicit performatives are (standardized) indirect speech acts, that is, whether the speaker first states that she is making a promise and then, as a consequence of this and given the satisfaction of certain conditions, she makes the promise (Bach 1975, Ginet, 1979, Bach and Harnish, 1979; 1992, and García-Carpintero, 2013), or whether by uttering "I promise I will finish the paper," the speaker is merely promising, and not stating that she is promising as argued by Austin and others (Searle, 1989, Pagin, 2004, and Jary, 2007):

> We must distinguish between the function of making explicit what act it is we are performing, and the quite different matter of *stating* what act it is we are performing. In issuing an explicit performative utterance we are not stating what act it is, we are showing or making explicit what act it is (Austin, 1961: 245).

In this paper, I enter this debate from a "peripheral" position, as it were. I do not offer an elaborate defense of any of these positions but the conclusions I reach should shed some light on the nature of explicit performative sentences and utterances. I believe one of their key features is their utterance-reflexive character. Explicit performative sentences are puzzling: in a minimal context, where only the meaning and grammatical rules of the sentence uttered and the fact that the utterance was made are known, it is not possible to tell whether they constitute genuine explicit performative utterances—say, promises—or whether they are statements—say, a report of a promise or promises—independently made. That is, in a minimal context an utterance of an explicit performative sentence like,

(1)   I promise I will finish the paper,

can be taken either as an explicit performative utterance (the speaker, by uttering (3) is promising that she will finish the paper) or as an assertion (the speaker, by uttering (3), is

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[1] Sure enough, we could make promises or give orders without mastering explicit performatives. But we could not master a language—with performative verbs—without knowing how to correctly use explicit performatives. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing out this difference.

reporting that she promises that she will finish the paper). Admittedly, there is a clear preference for the performative interpretation in such cases, but beyond this, there is nothing to determine which is the right interpretation.[2]

The introduction of a reflexive-pointing tool—"now"—forces the performative reading, or so I contend. Thus, an utterance like,

(2)   I promise now I will finish the paper,

in a minimal context, should be taken as an explicit performative utterance, a promise. To explain this, I use Prior and Kamp's work on "now" (Prior, 1968, Kamp, 1971) and Korta and Perry's content pluralism (Korta and Perry, 2011). I defend that the role "now" plays when embedded under the scope of a performative verb is consistent with the role it plays when embedded under a temporal operator. In both cases, the role of "now" is to reflexively point to the time of utterance and in neither case is "now" redundant.

I start by briefly introducing, in section 2, Prior and Kamp's ideas about the present and "now." I focus on the philosophical and linguistic aspects of their views, and leave aside the technical aspects. In section 3, I outline the main features of explicit performative sentences. In section 4, I introduce Korta and Perry's content pluralism and the idea of temporal indexicals and, in section 5, I use it to analyze explicit performative sentences. In section 6, I briefly go back to Prior and Kamp, to discuss the similarities and differences between my analysis and theirs.

2. Arthur Prior and the present

Arthur Prior famously defended a redundancy theory of the present, which he described as analogous to Ramsey's theory of truth (Prior, 1967: 32). According to this view, saying that

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[2] Jary (2007) explains why the performative interpretation is the most likely one in a minimal context appealing to the reflexive character of the pronoun "I" plus the presence of a performative verb. His proposal is similar to mine in that we both stress the relevance of the utterance-reflexive component to get a performative act.

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an event is present is the same as merely enunciating it. That is, for Prior, the following sentences have the same meaning:

(3)   It is cold

(4)   It is now the case that it is cold

(5)   It is presently the case that it is cold

"Being present" is merely "being." Stating that an event is present, or that it is now the case is, "apart from nuances of emphasis" (Prior, 1967: 32), the same as saying that the event is happening or that it is real.

> We can do without "now," we can do without a present-tense copula "is," we can do without even a special present-tense inflexion on the main verb. (Prior, 1967: 32)

Prior held his view on the present up until his early death, in 1969. Four weeks before his passing he gave a talk entitled "The Notion of the Present," published posthumously in 1970. He started the talk by claiming that the "real" and the "present" are "the same concept." More precisely, that

> [T]he present simply *is* the real considered in relation to two particular species of unreality, namely the past and the future. […] The pastness of an event, that is to say its having taken place, is not the same thing as the event itself; nor *is* its futurity; but the presentness of an event is just the event. (Prior, 1970: 320-322)

Past and future, i.e. the unreal, are defined in relation to the present, i.e. the real. This philosophical thesis is neatly reflected in tense logic, where Prior introduced operators for the past and the future, but not for the present. There is no need for it, because the present is "what there is," what can be asserted without the aid of any prefix. It is important to notice, though, that although he held no present tense inflection is needed, Prior did not

hold that formalized languages such as the one he developed do not have or do not need a present tense. Quite to the contrary, tense logic is fundamentally about the present.[3] Or, as Prior would put it, about what is real. The present is a "starting point" tense, "the understood tense of any proposition that has no other specific tensing" (Prior, 1968: 173). The present is the zero-tense—a necessary element in all propositions for past and future operators to operate upon.[4]

Taking this into consideration, it might be surprising to know that Prior, in various writings but particularly in his short 1968 paper "Now," insisted on the need to develop an operator for "now" in his logic. The essential point of "now," he argued, is that "however oblique the context in which it occurs, the time it indicates is the time of utterance of the whole sentence." (Prior, 1968: 174). This, he claimed, is not a role the present plays. The present is redundant, "now" is not.

Two authors were behind this change in Prior's view on "now." The first was Hector Neri Castañeda, the second, Hans Kamp. Castañeda's influence was crucial for Prior, as he himself acknowledges. In his 1967 paper "On spurious egocentricity" Prior compared "now" with "any." The latter, however obliquely it occurs, gives universality to the sentence as a whole. But after having read Castañeda's analysis of indexicals and, more precisely, his proposal to treat "now" as an adverbial analogue of the pronoun "I" (Castañeda, 1967), he modified his approach. Simply put, he came to believe that despite the redundant nature of the present, there are some cases where "now" plays an essential role and that this role is similar to that played by "I." He acknowledged, thanks to Castañeda's work on indexicals, the importance of the reflexive element common to both "now" and "I."

It was Kamp, however, who prompted Prior into thinking deeply about the role and nature of "now."[5] Kamp's ideas on "now," although published in 1971, were in circulation, more or less officially and in more or less accurate versions, since 1967, when he presented

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[3] Tense logic uses past and future operators to relate past and future information to present one. These operators are P and F for "at some point in the past/future" and H and G for "at any time in the past/future." Besides, in tense logic, every event in time, every when is, in a sense, a present event, reflecting other presents via the tense operators (Blackburn & Jorgensen, 2015).

[4] Prior defended, against Frege (1918-1919), the need for tensed propositions (or temporal propositions, as they have come to be called).

[5] See Blackburn and Jorgensen (2015) for a beautiful and detailed account of Kamp's influence on Prior and Prior's treatment of "now."

them in Richard Montague's seminar on pragmatics, at UCLA. Later that year, he sent his seminar notes to Prior, bringing about an intense correspondence between them. As a result, Prior published the paper "Now" in *Noûs*, where he states,

> He [the formalist] has to show that whatever can be said with our idiomatic "now", the "now" for which φ(p-now) is *not* necessarily equivalent to φ(p), can equally be said in his own language, which contains no such operator. I believe this can be done […] But until recently I would have gone further than this, and said that the formalist not only can do without the idiomatic "now" but *must* do without it —that our ordinary use of "now" has a certain fundamental disorderliness about it which makes it unamenable to formalization […] Recently, however, I have been convinced to the contrary by Hans Kamp […] and have now myself produced an extension of tense-logic with a symbol corresponding fairly closely to the idiomatic "now." (Prior, 1968: 174)

Why Prior was interested in Kamp's notes is understandable. To begin with, they included important advances in the formalization of temporal language but, most importantly, they seemed to question one of the central elements of the philosophical foundations of tense logic: the redundant nature of the present and, consequently, the non-introduction of an operator for the present. Kamp convinced Prior that the idiomatic "now" cannot and must not be left out of tense logic. In other words, the presentness of events, on certain occasions at least, needs to be marked. It cannot always be taken as the zero-tense, redundant and simultaneous with the very happening of the event. Consider for instance,

> (6)　　　　It will be the case that I am sitting down.
> (7)　　　　It will be the case that it is then the case that I am sitting down.
> (8)　　　　It will be the case that it is now the case that I am sitting down.
> (Prior 1968: 172. Examples renumbered)

As Prior indicates, it would be natural to understand (8) as (9) (rather than as (10)). The role "now" plays in (10) is that of pointing to the time of utterance. "Now" works here as

an essential *pointing* tool, an indexical that univocally and reflexively points to the time of the utterance. It is of course true that in many cases "now" can be eliminated from utterances in the present tense, as we saw in examples (5)-(7) above.

Kamp (1971) was well aware of this. Both Prior and Kamp argued that, on most occasions, "now" can be eliminated without loss. On these occasions the only role it plays is to emphasize the presentness of the event or its concurrence with the time of speaking. Take for instance an utterance of the sentence "It is raining." It seems that the speaker would have said the same thing had he uttered "it is raining now" instead. This, Kamp claims, would be so "if we replace the words 'it is raining' by any other English sentence in the present tense" (Kamp, 1971: 229).

What Kamp did was, first, to develop a formalization of the reflexive role "now" plays and, second, to set the requirements for the non-redundancy of "now." According to him, an occurrence of "now" can only be non-vacuous if it occurs within the scope of another temporal modifier. To argue in favor of this, he urges us to consider the following sentences:

(9)   I learned last week that there would be an earthquake
(10)   I learned last week that there would now be an earthquake

Here, as in (8) and (10), it is easy to think of circumstances in which one is true and the other false. The occurrence of "now" in (12), like that in (10), changes the truth conditions and thus the meaning of the sentence.

> The function of the word "now" in (12) is clearly to make the clause to which it applies—i.e. "there would be an earthquake"—refer to the moment of the utterance of (12), and *not* to the moment, or moments […] to which the clause would refer (as it does in (11)). […] [T]his principle correctly describes the function of the word "now" in all its occurrences. It explains in particular why the occurrence of "now" in "it is now raining" is vacuous. For there the clause to which "now" applies, viz., "it is raining," is understood in any case to refer to the moment of utterance, whether "now" be present or not […] An occurrence

of "now" can be only non-vacuous if it occurs within the scope of another temporal modifier. […] As a matter of fact the most interesting non-vacuous occurrences of "now" are in sentences which contain besides such other temporal operators also propositional modifiers of a non-temporal character, e.g., modal, epistemic, or deontic operators. (Kamp, 1971: 229. Examples renumbered)

Kamp considered only cases where "now" appears beside operators of a "purely temporal nature" and he goes on to develop a formal account of the propositional operator "now" (as embedded in temporal operators). I will not get into the formal details of his proposal here; rather, I will explore some new areas of application, beyond sentences with temporal operators. What I want to do is to stretch Kamp's and Prior's ideas, get them out of their original field of application and use them as a tools to better understand the nature of explicit performatives. The idea might seem rather far-fetched, but there are, I think, valuable lessons to learn from this.

I think explicit performatives are clear cases where "now" is non-vacuous. That is, one interesting case of non-vacuous occurrence of "now" is in utterances that contain "performative verbs," such as "I promise" or "I swear." The role of "now" in those occurrences is consistent with the function it plays in all of its occurrences: making the clause to which it applies refer to the moment of utterance. That is, "now" plays an utterance-reflexive role.

3. Explicit performatives

Explicit performative utterances are utterances where the main verb, in certain standard grammatical forms, makes explicit the act performed by the utterance. Take, for instance,

(1)   I promise I will run 10 kilometers
(11) I order you to run 10 kilometers

When uttered with the appropriate intentions, the speaker manages both to make a promise/issue an order and to name or make explicit the act being performed. Of course, naming the act is neither necessary nor sufficient to perform it. It is not necessary because there are other ways to make promises or give orders, which do not involve naming the act performed. Consider

(12)   I will run 10 kilometers

(13)   Run 10 kilometers!

These are the so-called "primary performatives," utterances where the performative verb is not included in the sentence expressed or, in other words, where the speaker performs an action and doesn't make explicit the act she is performing.

Naming the act is not sufficient to perform the act because explicit performative sentences have two readings: they can be taken as performative utterances (the performance of a certain act) or as assertions (that report the performance of some independent act).[6] Indeed, one of the best-known and more problematic features of explicit performative sentences is their relation with assertoric utterances. Performative utterances and assertoric utterances are "made of the same stuff" (Jary, 2007: 207). That is, the same sentence can be used to make an assertion or to make a promise. They employ the same linguistic resources.

Let us go back to our initial example, involving Bob, the chocolate-loving patient struggling with high levels of sugar in his blood, and Jane, his doctor. In a minimal context, i.e. cases where the only information the hearer has is the meaning of the words expressed, grammatical rules and the fact that the utterance was made, it is not clear whether, by uttering (1) Bob is promising to run 10 kilometers, or reporting that he promises to run 10 kilometers.

There are ways to break this ambiguity, even in cases of minimal context. To begin with, explicit performative utterances have been grammatically characterized by their performative verb in two standard forms and by the possibility of adding the adverb "hereby" (Austin, 1961: 241-243). Austin (1962) and Searle (1989) famously showed that

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[6] One can argue either that explicit performative sentences are semantically (structurally) ambiguous or semantically underdeterminate. Be it as it may, my point is that there are two readings available and that "now" favors one of them.

there are multiple exceptions to the first feature. Adding "hereby" to the sentence, though, forces a performative interpretation, like in,

(16) I hereby promise I will run 10 kilometers

I claim that adding "now" also forces the performative interpretation. That is, take,

(2) I promise now I will run 10 kilometers[7]

Going back to our two scenarios, it is clear that by uttering (16) or (2) Bob's speech act would have been infelicitous as assertion and felicitous as performative—assuming other circumstances are adequate. In the first scenario Bob intended to describe something to Jane, and he would not have done that with either (16) or (2). The reason for this lies in the introduction of an utterance-reflexive element, included in both "hereby" and "now"—an element that guarantees that even in a minimal context, where (1) remains ambiguous, (16) and (2) would only be felicitous as performatives.

Now, it could be claimed that there are situations where (2) could be used to describe or assert something. For instance imagine that, as part of Bob's treatment, he has a camera installed in his kitchen, programmed to record all of Bob's meals. Bob and Jane are watching the recorded material together and Bob, seeing a recorded version of himself eating a chocolate cake and anticipating what he usually does afterwards—i.e. promising, he exclaims (2): "I promise now I will run 10 kilometers." He is describing a promise he made, and not promising anything.

In this case "now" is not behaving as an indexical but as a demonstrative; like when one uses "here" to point to a location on a map, and not to the place of the utterance. The idiomatic "now" is plagued with complications, from its many and much discussed "non-indexical" uses—written notes and answering machines—to its indeterminacy—we can use

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[7] I add the "now" after the performative verb, instead of before, because it sounds more natural. Another way would be "I now promise …"or even "it is now the case that I promise…" I do not think the order of the words is relevant here. At least, not in my view, where the performative prefix gets into the content expressed. Notice also that "now" has a narrow scope with respect to the performative verb, i.e. ((I promise (now)) that P)), and not (now (I promise that P)).

"now" to refer to a very short period of time or to a huge one. I do not discuss these complications here, doing so is beyond the limits of this paper.[8] I consider "now" only in its standard indexical use, assuming that the defining feature of "now" is its "utterance-reflexive" character. In other words, here I consider "now" as it was understood by both Kamp and Prior.

"Now" introduces the reflexive element and thus determines what Korta and Perry (2011) call the "utterance-bound truth-conditions" of the utterance and it is at this level that the ambiguity disappears. Before getting into details, though, it is worth introducing first some basic notions about temporal indexicals and content pluralism (as defended by Perry (2001) and Korta and Perry (2011)).

4. Temporal indexicals and content pluralism

There are many ways to refer to moments of time. One can name them by using dates, such as "October 25, 2015," or one can establish static relations between moments of time, i.e. establish that a moment of time is earlier than, later than or simultaneous with another moment of time. Another way is by using indexicals such as "today," "yesterday," "present," "last year," "past," "future," or "now." The differences and similarities between these three ways of referring to time are well discussed in the literature and I will not discuss them here.[9] Suffice it to say that whereas all of them refer to periods of time—from nano-seconds to millennia—they do so in different ways. In the case of dates, the period of time referred to does not depend on the context of utterance, but in the case of temporal indexicals the period of time referred to depends both on the meaning of the expression and on the time of the utterance. Indexicals are linguistic expressions whose reference shifts from context to context. Temporal indexicals are linguistic expressions whose reference shifts with the time of the utterance.

The standard way of dealing with this, when analyzing natural language, is through Kaplan's logic of indexicals (Kaplan, 1989). Very roughly, Kaplan differentiated between

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[8] But see Predelli's seminal works on non-indexical uses of "now" (Predelli, 1998a, 1998b, 2011), and Perry (2003, forthcoming) for some throughout discussion on how to interpret these uses.
[9] See Markosian (2014) for a detailed discussion on these distinctions.

the character and the content of an indexical. The character is the linguistic meaning and, in the case of temporal indexicals, it gives us a set of rules:

> An utterance u of "today" refers to the day on which u occurs
> An utterance u of "tomorrow" refers to the day after the day on which u
> occurs
> An utterance u of "now" or "present" refers to the time at which u occurs
> An utterance u of "past" [future] refers to the stretch of time up until u
> [subsequent to u]

The content is the time, place, world or person referred to by the indexical in each utterance.[10] Let us consider sentence (6) above ("It is now the case that it is cold"), and let's say it is uttered at 4 p.m. on October 25, 2015. The content of "now" then would be 4 p.m., October 25, 2015, and (6) would be true if and only if it is cold at 4 p.m. on October 25, 2015.[11]

Traditionally, it is assumed that each utterance of a sentence expresses one content or proposition that coincides with its truth-conditions. In other words, that what is said by an utterance like (6) is what we get when we include the full reference of the indexical "now," i.e., that it is cold at 4 p.m. on October 25, 2015. I think this is right, but I follow Perry (2012) and Korta and Perry (2011) in defending that this need not be, and indeed it cannot be, the only content (or set of truth-conditions) of the utterance of a sentence.

According to Korta and Perry, for each utterance we can differentiate among a variety of truth-conditions, each of them getting to the different contents of the utterance. What is said by the utterance corresponds, roughly, to what has been traditionally considered the proposition expressed by the utterance, i.e. what we get when we load all the relevant facts about the context into the meaning of the sentence. This is what Korta and Perry call the "referential truth-conditions" of the utterance. On the other extreme we get the "utterance-bound truth-conditions," which only take into account the meanings of the

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[10] Notice that Kaplan uses sentences-in-contexts to model utterances in his formal theory.
[11] For simplicity's sake, throughout the paper I ignore unarticulated constituents regarding location and possible implicatures of the utterance, as well as considerations of difference in time zones and, for that matter, different calendars.

words involved in the sentence uttered, its syntax, and the fact that the utterance has been made. In between those two, we find an array of other truth-conditions, with different levels of reflexivity and incrementality. In any case, and for simplicity's sake, we shall focus here only on the fully incremental (referential) and fully reflexive (utterance-bound) truth-conditions.

Another way of putting the above, with regard to indexicals, is to say that the utterance-bound truth-conditions take into consideration their character, whereas the referential deals with their contents. Consider again (6), and let us simplify it a little bit,[12]

(6)   It is cold now

Given that (6) is an utterance in English, in which the words have their usual meaning, (6) is true if and only if,

6. u. IT BE COLD *AT THE TIME AT WHICH* **(6)** *OCCURS*

Given this, plus the fact that (6) occurred at 4 p.m. on October 25, 2015, (6) is true if,

6. r. IT BE COLD **AT 4 P.M. ON OCTOBER 25, 2015**[13]

(6.u) gives us the utterance-bound truth-conditions, and (6.r) the referential ones. Both are consistent. In (6.u.) only the character of "now" is taken into consideration, in (6.r.) its content is included. These different, but compatible truth-conditions get at different properties of the utterance (6), i.e., different contents of the utterance.

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[12] I can do so because I'm limiting my research to "standard" uses of "now," i.e. cases where "now" means "it is now the case that."

[13] I use small capitals to distinguish propositions (i.e., truth-conditions or contents) from (utterances of) natural language sentences. I write "be," instead of "is," to stress the tense neutrality of the proposition, even though Prior considered the present as a neutral tense. I do this to avoid possible confusion. Following Perry (2001), I use roman boldface to mark that it is the referent, and not any of its identifying conditions, which is the constituent of the content, and italic boldface, to indicate that it is the identifying condition that enters into the truth-conditions and not the object it designates.

The referential content (6.r.) is a singular proposition about a particular time, regardless of how one refers to it. The utterance-bound content (6.u.) is a singular proposition with the utterance itself as a constituent, but a general proposition with regard to the time of the utterance.

With this at hand, we are now in a position to analyze the role that "now" plays when included in an explicit performative utterance. I believe the analysis points to several interesting features and presents new evidence in favor of a pluralist approach to utterance content in general and explicit performatives in particular. I conclude with some considerations concerning "now" and establish a parallel between my analysis and that proposed by Prior and Kamp.

5. The present, reflexivity and explicit performatives

I take it that we normally understand the concept of present involved in the present tense to be a more or less short interval that includes the time of utterance. The length of that interval is, however, quite flexible. It might be very short, indicating the very *instant* when the utterance is being made, or much longer, indicating something like *always*—in my life, in the last years, decades, centuries, or what have you—or *regularly*—whenever something happens. There are different ways to make the interval more precise. Sometimes one needs to load more information about the context, sometimes one needs to have access to the speaker's intentions, and sometimes knowing the meaning of the words included in the sentence uttered is sufficient.

The indeterminate nature of the present is behind the ambiguity of explicit performative sentences; i.e. the fact that, in a minimal context, there is no way to tell whether they constitute explicit performative sentences or assertions.

Let us go back to Bob and Jane, ignoring for now the scenarios described above; i.e. assuming a minimal context. In this minimal context, (1) ("I promise I will run 10 kilometers") is ambiguous. The present tense used in the sentence uttered is clearly not enough to determine whether Bob intends to promise something—just when he says so—or whether he is describing some promise he generally does—whenever he eats chocolate.

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This is so, I claim, because the present tense, as well as the concept of present, is indeterminate. The ambiguity is reflected in its two possible utterance-bound contents.

The first is quite straightforward and it corresponds to the performative reading:

(1.u) **THE SPEAKER OF (1)** PROMISES **AT THE TIME OF (1)** TO BRING ABOUT THAT   HE RUNS 10 KILOMETERS **AT A TIME LATER THAN THE TIME OF (1)**[14]

On this interpretation the present tense is taken to reflexively point to the time of utterance. By the time of utterance—"the time of (1)" above—we might mean either the very moment in which the utterance is made or, perhaps more plausibly, a relatively short interval of time that includes the moment of the utterance. The notion is admittedly vague, but this should be of no consequence for our discussion. As it stands, it is determinate enough to indicate in a minimal context a performative reading.

The second interpretation needs a bit more elaboration. The utterance-bound content would be something like,

(1.u*) **THE SPEAKER OF (1)** PROMISES **REGULARLY** TO RUN 10 KILOMETERS   **AFTER HAVING EATEN CHOCOLATE**[15]

This captures the so-called "habitual" reading of the present. Habituals are generalizations from observations, and admit the introduction of "whenever" or "every Monday." Consider for instance these two examples:

(17) [Whenever it rains] I take an umbrella
(18) A: Will you visit me next Monday?
       B: I doubt it. Every Monday I go to dance.

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[14] For simplicity's sake, I assume here that future tense morphemes refer to future times, and do not quantify over them. This should not be relevant for the arguments defended here.
[15] Instead of "after having eaten chocolate" it might be more accurate to say "at a time later than eating chocolate", because it captures the temporal relation "later than". The use of "after" is more natural, and that is the reason I choose it.

One way to make this second assertoric interpretation the salient one, would be to add one of these prefixes, for instance: "whenever I eat chocolate, I promise I will run 10 kilometers." But this wouldn't be necessary if certain elements of the context are known, such that we recognize the speaker's intentions and we break the ambiguity, loading these elements and having access to the referential content of the utterance.

Let us go back to the two scenarios described above and assume further that both take place on November 2, 2015. In the first one, Bob, who has high sugar levels in his blood, is in his doctor Jane's office and the following conversation takes place:

Jane: What do you do when you eat chocolate?
Bob: (1) I promise I will run 10 kilometers

Uttering (1) here, Bob is not promising anything, but rather reporting what he usually does whenever he eats chocolate. Hence the referential content of (1), in this context, carries an assertoric force.

(1.r.a.) **BOB (REGULARLY)** PROMISES TO RUN 10 KILOMETERS **AFTER HAVING EATEN CHOCOLATE**

In the second scenario, Bob is back from Jane's office and finds a brownie. After eating it, consumed with guilt, he sincerely utters (1) (at 3 p.m. on November 2, 2015). He is making a promise now. Hence the referential content of (1), in this context, indicates that the utterance is a performative.

(1.r.p.) **BOB** PROMISES AT **3 P.M. ON NOVEMBER 2, 2015** TO BRING ABOUT THAT   HE RUNS 10 KILOMETERS **AFTER 3 P.M. NOVEMBER 2, 2015.**

It is important to notice that getting to both levels of content—the utterance-bound content and the referential content—is a necessary requirement to fully understand the utterance and, more importantly for us, to grasp whether or not the utterance is a performative. It would be impossible to register the performative character at the level of

referential content if one had not gotten first the utterance-bound content. First, because it is not possible to understand that Bob is promising something if one does not know that Bob is the speaker of the utterance, and that information is lost in (1.r.p.). Second, because it is not possible to register the required "presentness" element, i.e. the fact that Bob is making the promise as he utters the sentence, if one didn't know that 3 p.m., November 2 is the time of the utterance. Again, this information is lost in (1.r.p.)

So, (1) illustrates the case of the ambiguity of sentences including a performative verb in first person singular bare present indicative active. The sentence is ambiguous, so it is necessary to ascertain the speaker's intentions as to whether or not he intends the utterance to be a performative. Adding a temporal quantificational adverb like 'whenever,' 'usually' and the like would indicate that it is not a performative; but without those linguistic signals, and without additional contextual information, the utterance remains ambiguous.

6. Back to "now"

There are other cases, however, where the sentence is not ambiguous, and we can easily identify whether or not the utterance is a performative. These are cases where the indeterminacy of the present is reduced (if not completely eliminated), marking or pointing to what we are calling here the *presentness* of the event: the fact that it happens at the time of the utterance. Adding a pointing tool, an indexical that not only emphasizes but reflexively refers to the time of utterance, is enough to point to the performative reading. Indeed, it is enough to make it the only possible reading.

In other words, when we add "now" to,

(2) I promise now I will run 10 kilometers,

the analysis varies substantially. The introduction of "now" in (2) eliminates the ambiguity. This disambiguation is due to the utterance-reflexive element, made explicit with the introduction of "now." In (1) we need to determine whether the speaker intends to promise that he will run 10 kilometers or rather to assert that he (regularly or sometimes) promises

to do so. The hearer needs to resolve the ambiguity and correctly interpret the speaker's intentions. In contrast, just by understanding the rules that govern English and the meaning of the words contained in (2), the hearer will know that the speaker of (2) is making a promise, and not merely asserting that he is making that promise. More to the point, it is enough that she apprehends the character of the indexical "now," and not its content.

Once again, the utterance-bound content (2.u.) includes the intended relationships between the speaker and the utterance and, in particular, the relation between the speaker and the time of the utterance.

(2.u.) *THE SPEAKER OF* (2) PROMISES *AT THE TIME OF* (2) TO BRING ABOUT THAT HE RUNS 10 KILOMETERS *AT A TIME LATER THAN THE TIME OF* (2)

That is the information the hearer needs to get in order to understand the utterance correctly. Those relationships are lost at the level of referential content. The referential content of (2), when uttered at 3 p.m. on November 2, 2015, would be the same as the referential content of (1), on its performative reading, that is,

(2/1.r.p.) **BOB** PROMISES **AT 3 P.M. ON NOVEMBER 2, 2015** TO BRING ABOUT THAT HE RUNS 10 KILOMETERS **AT A TIME LATER THAN 3 P.M. NOVEMBER 2, 2015.**

But, whereas in (1) the referential content comes after disambiguating the utterance-bound one, in (2) such disambiguation is not required.

In the referential content of (1) and (2), the information that Bob is the speaker of the utterance (who is making or reporting the promise) and that 3 p.m., November 2, 2015 is the time of the utterance are lost. To get them, the hearer needs to grasp (1.u) and (2.u.).

Notice that according to this, information that is essential for language understanding is left out of the referential content, which corresponds to the "proposition expressed" or "what is said" by the speaker. Moreover, this information is key for explicit performative utterances. Following with our example, regardless of whether or not Jane knows that Bob is the speaker and that 3 p.m. November 2, 2015 is the time of utterance,

what she needs to know to take either (1) or (2) as performatives is that the speaker of the utterance is promising at the time of the utterance to do what he says he will do. That the speaker of the utterance is either making or reporting a promise is given by the use of the first person singular and the meaning of "promise". That he is making the promise at the time of the utterance cannot be inferred from the use of the present tense—due to its indeterminacy—but it can be inferred from the use of the present tense plus "now"—due to "now's" utterance-reflexive nature.

It seems then that "now" is not redundant or vacuous when embedded within the scope of performative verbs in their standard forms. There is a certain aspect of the so-called *presentness* of an event that is not always captured by the present tense. This aspect is the reflexive character, included in "now" and sometimes lost in the indeterminacy of the present tense. This agrees with Prior's and Kamp's claim that "now," on many occasions, is not vacuous.

7. Conclusions

The approach of this paper was to take a closer look at Prior's and Kamp's discussion on "now," and to contrast some of their conclusions against an analysis of explicit performative utterances based on Korta's and Perry's content pluralism. I have defended that the role "now" plays when embedded in a performative sentence is consistent with the role it plays when embedded in a temporal operator.

The role of "now" in (2) is not merely to emphasize the presentness of the act. Its role is to point reflexively and univocally to the time of the act or the time of the utterance. This is consistent with Kamp's indication: "the function of the word 'now' […] is clearly to make the clause to which it applies […] refer to the moment of utterance […] and not to the moment or moments […] to which the clause would refer." (Kamp, 1971: 229)

When embedded within the scope of an explicit performative verb, "now" does not change the meaning of the sentence, as in (8)-(10) and (11)-(12), but it does eliminate the possibility of an assertoric interpretation the utterance.

This is another take on Prior and Kamp's concerns about "now." If the redundancy of the present were universally correct, then "now" could always be eliminable without any

loss in meaning, as we claimed it could be done in (5)-(7) above. The problem they focused on is that the contribution of "now" to the meaning of the sentence varies depending on the different circumstances of the utterance.

> Let J be a "now"-operator and G the ordinary Priorean box-operator for always-in-the-future. It's a natural consequence of Kamp's idea that $\varphi \supset GJ\varphi$ should always be true *when uttered*: if you're reading this sentence, then it's always going to be the case that you're right now—*at this very moment*—reading this sentence. Moreover, $\varphi \equiv J\varphi$ should also be a validity of this kind. (Blackburn and Jorgensen, 2015: online first)

If the redundancy of the present were to be extended to "now," $\varphi \equiv J\varphi$ would be logically true. But, as (8)-(10) and (11)-(12) show, this is not the case. There are many occasions where the introduction of "now" modifies the meaning of the sentence uttered. The most we get, according to Kamp, is that $\varphi \equiv J\varphi$ is contextually true.

I have argued here that the contents or truth-conditions of an ambiguous utterance are disambiguated with the introduction of "now." Consequently, if we take φ to be "I promise," the most we get is that $\varphi \equiv J\varphi$ is true in some contexts: those where the context makes clear the performative interpretation of φ.

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