Response to I. Zatelli

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This was an excellent contribution to our meeting: it explained the scope of a branch of linguistics and its history, it emphasised the central place of „speech-act theory" in it, including the study of performative utterances, it gave some interesting examples of the application of this approach to Classical Hebrew and, at the end, there is a valuable annotated review of earlier literature on pragmalinguistics and the Semitic languages.

There is much that it would be good to discuss here. In my response I should like to comment briefly on four of the topics in the paper which I myself think deserve further discussion and exploration. I make these comments with some hesitation because I am a mere beginner in linguistics. But we have a saying in English, „Nothing ventured, nothing gained", and I think it is relevant to scholars as well as to businessmen!

1. The first topic concerns the *scope* of pragmalinguistics. It may be useful to emphasise more strongly the central place of speech, speech-acts, that is spoken language, in pragmalinguistics. Of course the boundary between spoken and written language is not always clear-cut: stories may be told as well as written, stories often include speeches and conversations, some kinds of written texts approximate, more or less, to the character of spoken language. For example letters often resemble (parts of) slowed-up conversations, political treatises may be like speeches. The penumbra of spoken language, as one might expect, is very important, as it may provide additional examples of the phenomena which are the domain of pragmalinguistics. But it does not alter the fact that much linguistic output in written form lacks these phenomena altogether. To find them in some density we need to concentrate our attention on spoken language or on those forms of written output which are, in different ways, closest to it. It is here that phenomena like performatives and deixis are mainly to be found. Stephen Levinson's book on pragmatics recognises this in the space it gives to conversation.[1]

In the case of classical Hebrew we of course have no examples of spoken language in the strict sense, all our source-material is written. But within that source-material much is presented in the form of speech – dialogue in narrative, sermons in Deuteronomy, laws there and elsewhere, prophetic speeches – and it is from these sections of the Hebrew Bible that we may chiefly hope to discover what the pragmatic features of its language were, so far as they are still discoverable. In saying this I am only, I think, formulating in theoretical terms what Zatelli has actually done, because all her examples on p. 70 come from the types of material that I have specified. But I would like in addition to identify the illocutionary force of a couple of Hebrew particles in her examples on p. 70. In the words of Abraham

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[1] S.C. Levinson, Pragmatics (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics), Cambridge 1983.

(Gen. 18:27,30), „I pray" and „Oh" both in fact represent the Hebrew precative particle *na*ʾ, which belongs to and identifies a sub-set of „exercitive" speech-acts; while in Gen. 14:23 „that ... not" stands for a special use of the conditional particle ʾ*im* which belongs to and helps to identify a type of „commissive" speech-acts, namely swearing an oath.

2. These examples have taken me into my second point, which is the *relevance* of pragmalinguistics to *lexical study*. Zatelli has rightly emphasised that pragmalinguistics has as its primary object „the linguistic act" (p. 61). A linguistic act may sometimes consist of the utterance of a single word, e.g. „Hello!" in English, but more often it will involve the use of a sentence or more than one sentence. The question then is whether this branch of linguistics has direct relevance to a lexical project such as ours, or to put it more practically, whether it is appropriate for a lexical entry to take account of it, and if so how. The question is implicit, for example, in the fact that the paper sometimes speaks of „performative utterances", but elsewhere of „performative verbs" (both on p. 65, again on pp. 69). If there is such a thing as a performative verb, that sounds like a quality attached to a lexical item which a lexicon ought to record. But I have some difficulty with the description of a *verb* as performative, as it would seem to imply that it is *always* used performatively, or at least that this is its primary character. Is this really so? With few exceptions performative utterances are limited to 1st person present (in English: perfect in Hebrew) forms, such as „I promise that...", and utterances that include other forms of the same verb are not performative, but (to use Austin's term) constative. The verb as such is therefore not performative, it is sometimes used in performative utterances.[2] At the same time one clearly cannot apportion the quality of performativeness purely to syntax, since it is by no means true that all 1st person present tense forms in English have performative force. I think the solution lies in reminding ourselves that a lexicon should record usage – „Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use", as Wittgenstein's principle has often been summarised.[3] Then it is appropriate for a lexicon to record the fact that, when it is used in the 1st person present etc., a particular verb carries or may carry performative force. The same will apply to certain particles: some, like *na*ʾ, always identify a particular kind of speech-act; others, like ʾ*im*, sometimes do, but not always. Among the latter we should certainly include *hinneh*, traditionally translated „behold", because it is several times used with 1st person singular perfect forms in what look like performative utterances; as Zatelli notes on pp. 70-71 (the point was already noted by Schneider), it often corresponds to the „hereby, hiermit" beloved of pragmaticians, and there is an example of it perhaps in Gen. 18:27.[4] I am not so

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[2] These observations elaborate what Zatelli has briefly stated in her note 12.

[3] For this formulation see, e.g., John Wisdom, Paradox and Discovery, Oxford 1965, p. 87 (cited by A.J. Ayer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Harmondsworth 1986, p. 43). Compare Wittgenstein's statement: „For a *large* class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word ‚meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Philosophical Investigations, 2nd Eng. ed., Oxford 1958, § 43).

[4] Cf. already W. Schneider, Grammatik des biblischen Hebräisch, 7th ed., Munich 1989, p. 204.

sure about the examples of „today" (*hywm*) and „and now" (*wᶜth*) which she mentions in this connection too.[5] But they obviously have a deictic force, which a dictionary should identify as a pragmalinguistic feature, and similarly with many other adverbs and adjectives. But not every word in the dictionary will have a pragmalinguistic aspect to be noted, I think.

3. My third point concerns *religion, theology and linguistics*, and here I shall be a little critical of Zatelli's paper. I am particularly thinking of what she says on pp. 69 about the power of the divine word, with the reference to Isa. 55:11: „My word (God says) ... shall accomplish that which I please". I think there is some danger of a confusion between theology and linguistics here, even though Zatelli is careful to say that she is not speaking about some special characteristic of the Hebrew language but rather of something that can be observed in many languages. At the least there seems to be something worth discussing and clarifying here. To me it seems that there is an important difference between what the prophet is talking about (which can also be paralleled in other biblical texts) and what linguists have meant by performative utterances and illocutionary force. I hope I can make the difference clear. The prophet is talking about the *effectiveness* of the word of God, he is making a theological claim that what God says, or if you like, promises, will come true. The linguist who identifies a performative utterance is, however, saying nothing at all about whether a promise, for example, will come true; he is recognising the presence of the conditions which are necessary for a promise *to be made*. Even a broken promise is (or was) still a promise when it was made. If it is true that all God's promises come true, that is a matter for theology, not linguistics. Moreover the performative utterance is identified by certain fixed linguistic features, which are only present in a few of the divine utterances which refer to the future, many of them being couched in the third person rather that the first. I am sure that there is a place for speech-act analysis of divine speech in the Bible as well as human speech,[6] and that theology is always better for linguistic clarity, but precisely for that reason I think it is vital not to mix up theological statements with linguistic analysis. One way to keep them more clearly apart, I suggest, would be if we could include more examples from intra-human speech in the survey of Hebrew usage and less specifically religious ones. For example an analysis could be made of the dialogue between Abraham and the Hittites of Hebron in Genesis 23 or the conversations in the story of Joseph. Such material is also, of course, very prominent in the growing corpus of Hebrew inscriptions.

4. This brings me the fourth point on which I should like briefly to comment. The everyday language of the *inscriptions*, especially the letters and the „judicial plea"

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[5] Cf. Schneider, ibid. In the discussion of the paper Prof. J.C. Greenfield drew attention to the occurrence of ᶜt and *kym* together at the beginning of epistolary inscriptions, after the greeting (e.g. Lachish 2:3), where they may perhaps have an „actualising" function. Note also Arad 24:18, cited below, where *hym* closely follows *hnh*.

[6] See the essay of W.J. Houston, What did the prophets think they were doing? Speech-act theory and prophetic discourse in the Old Testament, forthcoming in: Biblical Interpretation 1, 1993.

from Yavneh-Yam, contains numerous features of pragmalinguistic interest. There are, first, examples of the three particles which I mentioned earlier:

Lachish 3:9-10

As the Lord lives (I swear) that no (*'im*) man has ever tried to read me a letter.

Lachish 6:5

Read (them), I say! (*na* *')*[7]

Arad 24:18

Behold (*hinneh* – perhaps in the sense „hereby", i.e. by means of this letter) I have sent (perfect tense: the meaning could be „I am sending" in a performative sense) to warn you today.

The second kind of example, with which I shall conclude, is the fact that the letters are full of the deferential use of phrases like „your servant" and „my lord" as substitutes for the 1st and 2nd person pronouns (e.g. Lachish 2:4, 3:8; Yavneh-Yam 1:1-2), just as we find them frequently also used in the Bible when an inferior is addressing his superior. These are examples of the social deixis which Zatelli mentions on p. 000, and they would appropriately be noted in a dictionary as part of the usage of *'adon* („lord") and *'ebed* („servant") when they are combined with pronominal qualifiers.[8]

Abstract:

Four issues in Prof. Zatelli's paper require further discussion: 1. The scope of pragmalinguistics, and its particular relevance to conversation. 2. The extent to which pragmalinguistic features should be recorded in a lexicon. 3. The need for a distinction between theological statements and linguistic analysis, and the value of beginning a pragmalinguistic study of Hebrew from the intra-human discourse in the Bible. 4. The need for attention to the contribution which Hebrew inscriptions can make to pragmalinguistic research.

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[7] This is an example of *na'* with a command rather than a request, for which there are few examples in the Bible (though see Gen. 22:2, Isa. 7:3), most uses being by an inferior addressing a superior. The „social deixis" of this particle is thus not entirely uniform.

[8] They are so noted in F. Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Oxford 1907, p. 714 and, less clearly, p. 11. A further illustration of a pragmalinguistic feature in the language of the inscriptions would be the „delocutive" use of the verb *brk*, „bless", to mean „say *br(w)k*, Blessed be ..." in Arad 16:2, 21:2, 40:3 and twice in the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud: G.I. Davies, Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions, Corpus and Concordance, Cambridge 1991, p. 81 (8.17.1; 8.21.1). In Biblical Hebrew compare Ps. 118:26 (cited by Schneider, p. 204).