(More) On Performatives in Semitic

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By now the topic of performative utterances is a commonplace in linguistic discussions of the Semitic languages. Over the last several decades a number of important essays on performatives in the various (ancient) Semitic languages have appeared,[1] and the topic is now routinely surveyed in reference grammars.[2] But even with this surfeit of recent scholarly attention there remain facets – both theoretical and empirical – of the larger question of performatives in Semitic that can benefit from further scrutiny. I take up four of these in this essay. They are a diverse lot. The first part of the essay is dedicated to the question of pragmatics and the centrality of context and convention to an adequate accounting of how performative utterances mean. One of J.L. Austin's overriding concerns in propounding his theory of performativity was to oppose positivism's (scientifically informed) notion of meaning as uniform and univocal statements of fact or truth – what he calls the "descriptive fallacy."[3] That convention and context – the stuff of pragmatics – are the chief distinguishing differentia of performatives is still not fully appreciated by Semitists. Their importance for our understanding of performatives in Semitic is illustrated through consideration of various examples, including a "thick" reading of YHWH's land grant to Abram in Gen 15:16. In the second part I shift focus to the explicit performative. If performativity falls out as a consequence of the pragmatic use of language, what is it about

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1 W. Heimpel and G. Guidi, "Der Koinzidenzfall im Akkadischen" in *ZDMG* Supplementa I. (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1968) 148–52; W. Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache der babylonischen 'Gebetsbeschwörungen'* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976) 183–201; E. Talstra, "Text Grammar and Hebrew Bible. II: Syntax and Semantics," *BO* 39 (1982) 26–38; D. Pardee and R.M. Whiting, "Aspects of Epistolary Verbal Usage in Ugaritic and Akkadian," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 50 (1987) 1–31; D.R. Hillers, "Some Performative Utterances in the Bible" in D. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz (eds.) *Pomegranates and Golden Bells* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 757–66; A. Wagner, *Sprechakte und Sprechaktanalyse im Alten Testament* (BZAW 253; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997); M. Rogland, "A Note on Performative Utterances in Qumran Aramaic," *RQ* 74 (1999) 277–80; "Performative Utterances in Classical Syriac," *JSS* 46 (2001) 243–50; *Alleged Non-Past Use of* Qatal *in Classical Hebrew* (SSN; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003); S. Weninger, "On Performatives in Classical Ethiopic," *JSS* 45 (2000) 91–101; S.L. Sanders, "Performative Utterances and Divine Language in Ugaritic," *JNES* 63 (2004) 161–81.

2 E.g., B.K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) §30.5.1d; G. Buccellati, *A Structural Grammar of Babylonian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997) §74.3; T. Muraoka, *Classical Syriac* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997) 65; T. Muraoka and B.Z. Porten, *A Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic* (HdO; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 193–94; J. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2000) §76.531.

3 For this appreciation of Austin's larger philosophical project, see S. Cavell, *A Pitch of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1994) esp. 76–83.

verbs in the first person present or perfective – Austin's explicit performatives – that disposes them so happily – felicitously – toward the expression of performativity? This is a question not generally treated in the literature and is taken up here in some detail. The third part of the essay is the shortest. It problemtizes the notion of performativity and serves as a reminder of the important place of theory and philosophy in linguistic research more generally. I conclude with an extended consideration of the so-called "prostration formula" in Ugaritic and Akkadian letters. This formula features prominently in D. Pardee and R. W. Whiting's early discussion of performativity in Semitic. My own analysis has much in common with theirs, though it differs as well in significant and (hopefully) interesting ways. Rhetorically, the sustained examination of a single example allows me to draw together many of the disparate threads of discussion treated throughout the essay. This closing focus on a specific example also may be taken to highlight the empirical dimension of linguistic research and its importance. Indeed, one of the practical accomplishments of the present essay is its gathering – either explicitly or through citation – of a substantial corpus of (probable) performatives in Semitic.[4]

1 Pragmatics

How language gets used directly impacts how language means. As E. Benveniste observes,

> Many notions in linguistics ... will appear in different light if one reestablishes them within the framework of discourse. This is language in so far as it is taken over by the man who is speaking and within the condition of intersubjectivity, which alone makes linguistic communication possible.[5]

Pragmatics is the study of language usage[6] and as such is potentially pertinent to every aspect of linguistics, no matter the particular parameter of study – phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics. But insofar as pragmatics has its final upshot in meaning it is in the area of semantics where the import of context (discourse and otherwise) has been most appreciated. Linguists now routinely distinguish between

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4 An early version of the essay, focusing chiefly on the prostration formula, was presented in the Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew Section at the Annual Meeting of the SBL in San Francisco ("I Hereby Fall: A Performative Utterance in Western Peripheral Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Hebrew," 1992). I thank S. Sanders and R. Westbrook for reading through and commenting on the present manuscript. Both have sharpened the argument in significant ways.

5 "Analytic Philosophy and Language" in *Problems in General Linguistics* (trans. M.E. Meek; Coral Gables: University of Miami, 1971) 230.

6 As C. Watkins helpfully reminds us, though the notion of "pragmatics" is a relative newcomer on the linguistics scene, that which it denotes – "the study of meaning of language forms as these depend on the linkage of signs to the context in which they occur" – has long been known to historical linguists (and Semitists) as "philology" ("Language, culture, or history?" in C. S. Masek et al (eds.), *Papers from the Parasession on Language and Behavior* (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1981) 238–48.

the conventional semantic meaning that attends a given linguistic element and the pragmatic use of that element in particular conversational contexts.[7]
Performativity is centrally a factor of pragmatic use, not semantic meaning, as the title of J. L. Austin's now classic work on the subject, *How To Do Things With Words*,[8] well shows. S.L. Sanders' recent piece on performative utterances in Ugaritic helpfully reminds students of Semitic languages of the importance of keeping the distinction between semantic meaning and pragmatic implicature uppermost in mind.[9] But even Sanders sometimes loses his way, as when he appears to rule out the possibility of performatives occurring in non-verbal (e.g., nominal sentences) forms. Here Sanders shares the larger field's fascination with what Austin called "explicit performatives," performatives that in English appear in the first person singular of the present tense (and in Semitic, generally in the first person singular of perfective forms[10]). As will be seen shortly, there is indeed good reason for this fascination, and I, too, will devote a good deal of attention in the next section to the topic of explicit performatives. Still, it is worth stressing here at the outset that performative utterances, utterances where the uttering of the sentence does not describe or report an action, but itself "is, or is part of, the doing of an action,"[11] need not be, and, in fact, are not, restricted to one form or kind. That is, performatives come in varieties beside the explicit performative, as Austin, for one, well understood:

> ... it is not in the least necessary that an utterance, if it is to be performative, should be expressed in one of these so-called normal forms ... To make our utterance performative, and quite unambiguously so, we can make use, in place of the explicit formula, of a whole lot of more primitive devices such as intonation, for instance, or gesture; further, and above all, the

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7 H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversatzin" in P. Cole and J. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics; Speech Acts* (New York: Academic, 1975) 41–58. For further discussion and bibliographic references, see F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Biblical Hebrew Statives and Situation Aspect," *JSS* 45 (2000) 27 and n. 11. This distinction between pragmatics and semantics is ultimately, of course, heuristic (and *pragmatic*). Meaning, whatever its nature, is fixed through sociohistorical usage without any necessary descriptive or psychological foundation (esp. H. Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'" in *Mind, Language and Reality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975] 215–71; "A Problem about Reference" in *Reason, Truth and History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981] 22–48). K. Donnellan gets at the two aspects of meaning in view here via his non-Fregian notions of "attributive" (= semantic) and "referential" descriptions (see B. Lee, *Talking Heads: Language, Metalanguage, and the Semiotics of Subjectivity* (Durham/London: Duke University, 1997) 76–84.

8 (eds. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1962).

9 "Performative Utterances in Ugaritic"; cf. Wagner, *Sprechakte*. In fact, Sanders introduces the concepts "metalinguistic" (talking about talking) and "metapragmatic" (talking about acting) as means to a more perspicuous description and identification of performatives in Semitics (see below).

10 For the occurrence of explicit performatives in Semitic in non-perfective forms, see below.

11 Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 5.

very context in which the words are uttered can make it entirely certain how they are to be taken.[12]

In this Austin has been widely followed.[13] And while there are good reasons for the prototypicality of the explicit performative (see below), not to mention the greater ease in identifying such performatives in non-living languages (e.g., through non-standard translations of tense/aspect categories[14]), nonexplicit kinds of performatives do exist. Some typical examples of such utterances in English would include the following:

(1) a. We pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor[15]
b. The court finds the accused not guilty[16]
c. I am asking you to do this for me, Henry, I am asking you to do it for me and Cynthia and the children[17]
d. You are dismissed[18]
e. Notice is hereby given that trespassers will be prosecuted[19]
f. I'll come and see you next week, and that's a promise[20]
g. You will find in this letter my best wishes for the New Year[21]

All of these examples represent common types of nonexplicit performatives discussed in the pragmatics literature. The examples in (1a) and (1b) show that verbal performatives are not restricted to utterances containing first person singular subjects ("I") and (1c) illustrates the use of a present continuous tense form. The examples in (1d) and (1e) feature passive forms. The examples in (1f) and (1g) are more complex. (1f) shows that performative expressions may be embodied in a separate clause or sentence ("and that's a promise"), while (1g), warranted by English epistolary conventions, features the use of a nominal phrase ("my best wishes").

Now consider some examples from various Semitic languages:

(2) a. *kṯr ṣmdm. ynḥṭ.*
wyp'r. šmthm.
šmk at ygrš.
...

12 "Performative-Constative" in J.R. Searle (ed.) *The Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1971) 25; cf. *How to Do Things With Words*, 57–58.

13 E.g., Benveniste, "Analytical Philosophy," 235; J.R. Searle, "How Performatives Work" in A. Kasher (ed.) *Pragmatics: Critical Concepts*, vol. 2 (London/New York: Routledge, 1998) 220–21; J. Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics* (London/New York: Longman, 1995) 44–45; J. Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics* (London/New York: Arnold, 1999) 207–9; J. Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York/London: Routledge, 1997) 81, 175, n. 11.

14 See Hillers, "Some Performative Utterances," 756.

15 Searle, "How Performatives Work," 521.

16 Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, 45.

17 Searle, "How Performatives Work," 521.

18 Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 208.

19 Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 57.

20 Searle, "How Performatives Work," 521.

21 As cited in Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 209.

šmk. at. aymr (*CTU* 1.2.IV.11–12, 19)
Kothar took down two clubs, and he proclaimed their names: "Your name is *Ygrš*"
...
"Your name is *Aymr*"

b. *atta lā aššatī* (BE 6/2 48.13–14)
If Awiliya says to his wife Naramtum, "You are not my wife"

c. *as-salām 'alaykum* (traditional greeting in Arabic)
"Peace be upon you!" (= "Greetings!")

d. *waybārĕkēhû wayyōmēr bārûk 'abrām lĕ'ēl 'elyôn* (Gen 14:19)
He blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High!"

e. *'ḫk. ḥnnyhw. šlḥ lšlm 'lyšb. wlšlm bytk* (*Arad* 16.1–2)
Your brother Hananiah hereby greets Eliyashib and your house!

f. *kōh tō'mĕrûn la'dōnî lĕ'ēśāw kōh 'āmar 'abdĕkā ya'ăqōb 'im-lābān gartî wā'ēḥar 'ad-'āttâ* (Gen 32:5)
Thus you will say, "To to my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: 'I sojourned with Laban and remained until now'"

g. *hakkōl nātan 'ărawnâ hammelek lammelek* (2 Sam 24:23)
"All this, O King, Araunah gives to the king" (*NRSV*)

There are good reasons to take all of the examples in (2) as performative utterances. These are spelled out in what immediately follows with only enough detail as to suggest the plausibility of the posited performative reading.[22] In (2a) it is Kothar's uttering of the phrases "Your name is *Ygrš*" and "Your name is *Aymr*" that names the clubs and unleashes their magic.[23] Sanders well explains the performative nature of the situation:

> The two named weapons that he both dubs and creates are jussive forms of telic, goal-oriented verbs. Immediately after Kothar designates the weapons' names in verbless clauses, he invokes those jussive names with imperative forms grammatically shifting both the verbs and the weapons with the command to attack built into their names ... For Kothar, to unpack their verbal identity is to detonate the weapons, which proceed to defeat Yammu more or less by themselves. The self-activating verbs stored in the weapons' names are icons of self-performing actions.[24]

These examples are directly analogous to Austin's paradigmatic "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*," except that the phrases themselves are verbless clauses and their

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22 An important consequence of the fact that performativity is centrally concerned with pragmatics is that discernment of performative utterances embedded in ancient texts will always require as thick and detailed readings of these texts as possible. My discussion of Gen 15:18 and the prostration formula mean to gesture to the kind of "thick" reading I have in mind (Sander's discussion of performatives in Ugaritic moves in this direction as well). The comments here on the examples in (2) are necessarily abbreviated.

23 Cf. M. Smith, "The Magic of Kothar, the Ugaritic Craftsman God in *KTU* 1.6.VI 49–50," *RB* 91 (1984) 377–80.

24 Sanders, "Performative Utterances," 174.

performativity is authorized supernaturally, as it were, instead of from some extralinguistic human institution.[25]

The example in (2b), another verbless clause, derives its performativity from legal convention. According to Old Babylonian law a husband could dissolve the marriage relationship by declaiming the *verba solemnia* "You are not my wife."[26] That is, the uttering of this *verba solemnia* under the right circumstances itself effects the new (legal) status (i.e., the dissolution of the marriage).[27] The latter is reminiscent, in par-

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25 On this point, see Searle's discussion of God's declaration, "Let there be light!", in Genesis ("How Performatives Work," 531; cf. J. Butler, *"Excitable Speech": A Politics of the Performative* [New York/London: Routledge, 1997] 50–51). In this case, of course, there is also a more earthly site for the authorizing authority, namely: the conventional powers attributed to ancient Near Eastern monarchs to effect name changes (e.g., 2 Kgs 23:34). Again Sanders is on point: "The weapon-naming scene provides an Ugaritic mythic model of self-enacting divine language, whereby the act of *p'r*, in the mouth of an empowered divine speaker such as Kothar, causes the words framed in divine discourse to jump out of that discourse into the narrated reality" ("Performative Utterances," 174).

26 For details, see R. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law* (AfO; Beiheft 23; Horn, Austria: F. Berger, 1988) 69–71. Similar "speech acts" were used to effect divorce throughout the broader ancient Near Eastern legal tradition (see R. Westbrook, "Introduction: the Character of Ancient Near Eastern Law" in R. Westbrook [ed.], *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* [HdO; Leiden: Brill, 2003] I, 48). Indeed, at Elephantine a similar *verba solemnia* is attested for the completion (and thus creation) of the marriage relationship: "She is my wife and I am her husband from this day and forever" (*hy 'ntty w'nh b'lh mn ywm' znh w'd 'lm, TAD* B2.6.4; B3.3.3–4; B3,8.4; for details, see A. Azzoni, "The Private Lives of Women in Persian Egypt" [unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation; Johns Hopkins University, 2000] 21–40; cf. Westbrook, "Introduction," 45).

27 The dissolution of adoptive ties according to Mesopotamian legal tradition could be performatively effected by the uttering of a related kind of *verba solemnia* (e.g., *u-ul ma-ru-ni at-ta* "You are not my son!", *VS* 8, 127:17–19; cf. S. Paul, "Adoption Formulae: A Study of Cuneiform and Biblical Legal Clauses," *Maarav* 2 [1980] 180; M. David, *Die Adoption im altbabylonischen Recht* [Leipzig: Weicher, 1927] 43–48). The statement *bĕnî 'attâ* "You are my son!" in Ps 2:7 is generally held to be a positive version of this latter *verba solemnia,* presumably effecting YHWH's fictive adoption of the king (e.g., J.H. Tigay, "Adoption," *EncJud* [1971] 2.30–301; Paul, "Adoption Formulae," 177–80), and as such, Hillers contends ("Some Performative Utterances," 762), it exhibits another kind of nonexplicit performative utterance ("To illustrate a point of Austin's, that performatives are not restricted to one grammatical sentence type, note that here 'you are my son,' a verbless clause in the Hebrew, is a performative utterance."). J.J. M. Roberts ("Whose Child is This? Reflections on the Speaking Voice in Isaiah 9:5" in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002] 143–56) has recently challenged the assumption that legal adoption is the underlying idea informing Ps 2:7. In particular, he notes the following problems with such a thesis: the extreme rarity of adoption as an institution in ancient Israel, the general dearth of evidence even in Mesopotamia for the use of the positive *verba solemnia* in the creation of the adoptive relationship (e.g., *māru*^{meš}*-ú-a* "My sons!", CH 170), and the oddity of the birth imagery in the accompanying line in Ps 2:7 (*'ănî hayyôm yĕlidtîkā*), which has no parallels in the Mesopotamian legal materials concerned with adoption. Alternatively, Roberts suggests that the imagery underlying Ps 2:7 (and Isa 9:5) is indebted to Egyptian coronation rituals wherein the new pharaoh was acknowledged as the deity's child and the use of birth imagery

ticular, of Austin's (infamous) example of the performative marriage vow "I do."[28] Examples (2c) and (2d) are of a kind classified by Austin as "behabitives."[29] They derive their performativity from general social conventions, in these cases having specifically to do with customs of greeting and blessing.[30] (2c) is a "truncated" locution of the sort well described by Austin.[31] On the other hand, (2d) illustrates that performatives may occur in the passive voice.[32]

The example in (2e), while not unambiguous,[33] is likely intended to convey the greetings it inscribes and thus is to be construed as a performative utterance. Here the operative convention is epistolary in nature (cf. [1g] above). That is, it is the conventions of use associated with ancient epistolary forms that authorize the performative reading here. Of course, in the absence of stylistic manuals describing ancient Semitic epistolary conventions, such conventions must be discerned from the attested letters themselves. That greetings could be sent via third parties is certain (e.g., 2 Sam 8:10; *TAD* A2.3.11; *KAI* 224.8; ABL 554:6). More importantly, such greetings themselves are very prevalent in letters. The very common type of secondary greeting found throughout the corpus of Egyptian Aramaic letters (e.g., *šlm byt'lntn* "Greetings to Bethelnathan," *TAD* A2.1.3) is a case in point.[34] It mimes similar looking non-epistolary greetings (e.g., "When Ahimaaz approached, he said to the king,

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is explicit. Roberts's criticisms of the traditional understanding of Ps 2:7 are telling and his alternative interpretation is appealing, but this need not invalidate Hillers's contention that *bĕnî 'attâ* is a nonexplicit performative. In fact, given the following *'ănî hayyôm yĕlidtîkā* it is hard to read Ps 2:6–7 as anything but a performative utterance (see below). What would change under Roberts's new interpretation is the nature of the "appropriate circumstances" authorizing the performative usage at issues here (Egyptian coronation ceremony instead of conventions of legal adoption).

28 Infamous because the example, now a commonplace in linguistic discussions of performatives, apparently is not quite correct, at least according to the marriage ceremony of the Church of England which Austin was citing, see J. O. Urmson, "Performative Utterances" in Kasher, *Pragmatics*, 503.

29 *How to Do Things With Words*, 160.

30 Ibid., 69–70, 77; cf. Austin, "Performative-Constative," 22–23; Benveniste, "Analytic Philosophy," 234; Thomas, *Meaning and Interaction*, 48.

31 Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 58–59, 62.

32 See ibid., 57.

33 As J. Butler makes explicit, the success of performatives "is always and only provisional" (*Excitable Speech*, 51). Why? One of the characteristics of Gricean pragmatic implicatures is that they are cancelable. That is, it is as if pragmatic meaning is laid (hierarchically) over conventional semantic meaning. The latter is present no matter what, and thus linguistic elements (words, sentences) may always be interpreted in light of their explicit semantic sense, while connotations associated with pragmatic use will depend on context (and knowledge of the context, which is always incomplete in historical inquiry) and may be canceled in the absence of appropriate contextual support.

34 See J. A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography" in *A Wandering Aramean* (Missoula: Scholars, 1979) 193–94; see 191 for the sense "greeting."

"Greetings!" [*šālôm*], 2 Sam 18:28),[35] but the locution's great frequency in letters[36] establishes it as a standard epistolary convention as well.[37] And there is no question about the performativity of the phrase, since there is no other obvious function that it could achieve except to effect a greeting (which the recipient is to pass along to the persons named).[38] The primary greetings illustrated in (3) are closer in form to (2e).

(3) a. *šlm wšrrt slgy 'hwšrt lk* (*TAD* A6.3.1)
I hereby send to you abundant greetings of health and strength

b. *šlm wḥyn šlḥt lk* (*TAD* A2.4.5)[39]
I hereby send to you greetings of health and life

These again are taken from the corpus of Egyptian Aramaic letters. Their performativity has been recognized,[40] undoubtedly owing to the presence of the canonical first person verb form. However, once again it is not the verb form per se (though that is not insignificant, see below) but the context of utterance and iteration that favors the performative interpretation. Together the two types illustrated in (3) occur more than a dozen times in the Egyptian Aramaic corpus of letters.[41] That is, it seems more likely that we have here an expression of greeting itself – an utterance that performs the greeting it inscribes – rather than a straightforward (constative) statement of the writer's past greetings.

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35 Note P.K. McCarter's gloss of this phrase: "when Ahimaz drew near, he greeted the king" (*II Samuel* [AB9; New York: Doubleday, 1984] 398).

36 E.g., *TAD* A2.1.3, 11–15; 2.16–17; 3.2; 4.2–3; 7.2, 3–4; A3.4.2, 5–6; 6.1; 7.1–3; 9.6; A4.4.9; D1.1.1; 13.2; D7.2.1; 3.1; 4.1; 8.1; 10.1; 11.7; 16.1; 20.1; 28.1; 57.3; Ezra 4:17; 5:7. In Hebrew, see *papMur* 42.2; 43.3; 44.2.

37 The importance of iteration to the success of performatives was first isolated by J. Derrida in his own reading of and response to Austin. He asks rhetorically, "Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance, … if the formula … were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model …?" ("Signature, Event, Context," in *Limited Inc.* [ed. G. Graff; trans. S. Weber and J. Mehlman; Evanston: Northwestern University, 1988] 18). Butler glosses Derrida, noting that a performative works because the action it performs "echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*. It is not simply that the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice" (emphasis in the original) (*Excitable Speech*, 51).

38 As Butler observes of performatives, "one cannot reasonably ask for a 'referent,' since the effect of the act of speech is not to refer beyond itself, but to perform itself, producing a strange enactment of linguistic immannence" (*Excitable Speech,* 44).

39 This example comes from the body of the letter, though its form is clearly that of the primary greeting. I have used this for the illustration because all of the attested primary greetings of this type require partial reconstruction.

40 Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaïc*, 193–94.

41 With *hwšrt*: *TAD* A3.3.1; 4.1–2; 8.1; A6.3.1; 4.1; 5.1; 6.1; 7.1; 16.1; D1.12.1 . With *šlḥt*: *TAD* A2.4.5; 7.1–2; D1.5.1; D7.1.2; 21.2; 22.2. In Hebrew letters: *Mur* 1A.1 (*[š]lḥ. šlhlt. 't šlm bytk*) "I hereby send heartfelt greetings to your household"). This epistolary convention was operative in Mesopotamia as well, dating back at least to the OB period (e.g., *ana šulmīka ašpuram*, see Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 195; cf. *CAD* Š/3, 251a–253a).

It is against the background of these conventional epistolary greetings that the performativity of (2e) becomes most apparent. The greeting appears in two other Arad letters (*Arad* 21.1–2; 40.1–3) and differs from the examples in (3) only in terms of the number and person of the verb, which is likely to be explained by the conflation of the address and greeting formulae evident in these letters.[42] What results is a non-explicit type of performative that is akin to the nonexplicit epistolary performative exemplified in (1g).[43]

Example (2f) consists of the so-called "messenger formula." In the Bible this formula mostly appears in an abbreviated form (where perhaps it is already a convention). However, there are a number of places, such as this passage, where it is clear (here because of the quotative frame *kōh tō'mĕrûn*) that *kōh 'āmar* is part of the message to be repeated by the messenger, and thus has performative force, as recognized by W. Mayer.[44] The Hebrew particle, *kōh* "thus," mediates the self-reflexivity here, functioning like the English "hereby" (see below).[45] Furthermore, the operative convention in (2f), as with *verba dicendi* more generally,[46] is explicitly linguistic in nature.

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42 D. Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters* (SBLSBS 15; Chico: Scholars, 1982) 43.

43 That the greeting is followed in all three instances by the blessing formula (*brkt lyhwh*), which is widely acknowledged as a performative (e.g., D. Pardee, "The 'Epistolary Perfect' in Hebrew Letters," *BN* 22 [1983] 35, n. 8; E.Y. Kutscher, "The Hermopolis Papyri," *IOS* 1 [1971] 111; Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic,* 194), further supports the performative reading of (2e). M. Rogland ("The Hebrew 'Epistolary Perfect' Revisited," *ZAH* 13 [2000] 198; cf. *Alleged Non-Past Uses*, 123 and n. 45) has also raised the possibility of seeing this as a third person performative. Rogland's further characterization as "an idiomatic performative which is limited to letters" ("'Epistolary Perfect'," 198), however accurate on evidentiary grounds, fails to reckon with orally transmitted third person greetings, e.g., "I saw Henry yesterday. He sends you his love" (see also the discussion of the prostration formula below). Another possible (though again not unambiguous) example of a third person performative in epigraphic Hebrew may appear in *Arad* 3.2–3 (*wšwk ḥnnyhw* "Hananiah commands you ..."), especially if Pardee is correct in his surmise that the letter in question is itself the "immediate transmission" of the order ("Epistolary Perfect," 35 and n. 8; see esp. Rogland, "Hebrew 'Epistolary Perfect,'" 198, n. 34; cf. *COS* III, 83, n. 12; F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp. J. J. M. Roberts, C. L. Seow, and R. E. Whitaker [eds.], *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* [New Haven: Yale University, 2005] 16–17).

44 *Untersuchungen*, 189; cf. W. Schneider, *Grammatik des Biblischen Hebräisch* (Munich: Claudius Verlag, 1974) 205.

45 Talstra discounts the possibility of a performative reading of the messenger formula chiefly because "*kh* does not refer to the very moment of speaking and acting" ("Text Grammar," 28). Talstra's point is well made, but he fails to recognize that what *kh* does index, self-reflexivity, is nonetheless integral to the notion of performativity. The kinds of indexicals that tend to accompany performatives in Semitic generally tend not to be as complex as those in English and other languages (see further below).

46 Sanders ("Performative Utterances," 178) and Rogland (*Alleged Non-Past Uses*, 121) rightly question whether all such *verba dicendi* should in fact count as performatives. They should not. Still, it is surely the case that many *verba dicendi* are also performatives (Weniger, "On

The final example, (2g), like (2e) and (2f), nicely illustrates that performative utterances in Semitic may occur using third person verb forms. E. Talstra rightly calls attention to the performativity of this example, noting that "Arauna is speaking here about himself" and that the Chronicler actually glosses the phrase as an explicit performative (*r'h ntty*, 1 Chron 21:23).[47]

The significance of examples like those in (2) for the present discussion is twofold. First, they point to an area of linguistic research – nonexplicit performatives – that has gone mostly unexplored by students of Semitic languages. Second, they remind us again, and forcefully so, that performative utterances, explicit as well as nonexplicit varieties, are all about discourse pragmatic use and not about conventional semantic meaning, or at least not centrally so.[48] The distinction is a fine one and often gets lost, especially by scholars whose business is reading ancient texts, where the chief task is to discern meaning. It is mostly of little concern whether the meaning of a particular passage arises from pragmatic use or semantic convention. What is important practically is what the passage means. The point of all of this is the following: care with our linguistic descriptions will often have important consequences. The performative, I think, is a case in point. There are no "performative perfects"[49] in Biblical Hebrew (or any other Semitic language), if by that we mean that one of the semantic meanings that can be conventionally attached to the perfective form of the verb is performativity. Performativity is not a semantic fact about certain verbs used in certain (e.g., present tense, perfective aspect) morphological forms.[50] Austin

Performatives," 92), and in fact we will see shortly that linguistic conventions alone do underwrite one of the major categories of performatives (see further below).

47 "Text Grammar," 28.

48 Semantic considerations, of course, are not irrelevant to the performative problem. In one respect, semantics, like pragmatics, is always at issue in linguistic analysis. Moreover, the claim to distinguish two levels of meaning – semantic and pragmatic – is ideal; the levels are not always easily distinguishable in natural languages. Finally, lexical semantics (i.e., the meanings attached conventionally to specific lexemes) will always be relevant, at least at the level of pragmatic constraints. For example, there will always be classes of verbs in a given language that are not used (typically) as explicit performatives (see the discussion in Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 212–14). So semantics is important. My point, throughout this section, is that it is pragmatic considerations that are determinative for performativity, not semantics – or not semantics alone.

49 R. Lawton, Review of D. Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters*, *Bib* 65 (1984) 267.

50 Searle, in particular, is especially adamant on this point: "it turns out that there is no such thing as as a semantic property which defines performative verbs … The limitations on the class that determine which will succeed and which will fail derive from facts about how the world works, not from the meanings of the verbs" ("How Performatives Work," 538). This point is worth stressing as it is easy to gain the impression from discussions of performatives in Semitic that, if not a semantic property of certain verbs, performativity somehow inheres semantically in certain verb forms (e.g., perfectives, preterites, participles). I suspect that this is not, in point of fact, always the explicit intent of the various authors of these discussions, but rather falls out as a matter of course, on the one hand, because of the literature's exclusive focus on explicit performatives, and, on the other hand, because of the specific location of

himself at one point in *How to Do Things With Words* even refers to his own initial preoccupation with grammatical form (i.e., explicit performatives) as a "piece of slyness," and shortly thereafter he shows that such ("mood and tense") does not suffice as a defining criterion of performatives.[51] Rather, performativity is about a particular use of language in particular contexts. It is context and convention that are paramount.

In reflecting on his paradigm examples of the performative (i.e., marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening) in the first lecture in *How to Do Things With Words*, Austin mentions in passing the important matter of "appropriate circumstances": "Speaking generally, it is always necessary [if the performative is to succeed happily] that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*."[52] What he means by these "appropriate circumstances" are then spelled out more formally in Lectures II and III, where his main interest lies in teasing out "the doctrine of the *Infelicities*." The two rules (A.1. and A.2.) hit upon, which, as I far as I can tell from all succeeding discussion (see further below), remain crucial for any definition of the performative and performativity, are (1) "that there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances" and (2) "that the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked."[53] These defining criteria in fact quickly recede into the background for much of the argument in *How to Do Things With Words*. They are helpfully recalled and underscored by succeeding discussants. J. O. Urmson, for one, makes a strong bid for returning to the Austin of "Other Minds"[54] who privileges more obviously the notion "that in performative utterances one uses a formula or performs a ritual in appropriate circumstances."[55] The heart of the matter for Urmson lies in convention. He understands performatives as a special "subclass" of what he calls "wholly conventional" acts, acts that are "constituted by non-linguistic conventions but where these non-linguistic conventions require one to act in accordance with specified linguistic conventions" (e.g., marrying and the like).[56] He believes that Austin missteps in *How to Do Things With Words* when he admits as performatives acts such as "warning" that are governed primarily by purely linguistic conventions.[57] That is, he wants to distinguish between performatives that are constituted by non-linguistic conventions and

these discussions in the various references grammars – invariably in sections dedicated to the treatment of the given verb forms.

51 *How to Do Things With Words,* 56, 58.

52 Ibid., 8,

53 Ibid., 26; cf. 14–15, 25–38.

54 In *Philosophical Papers* (2d ed; eds. J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock; Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 76–116 – this is Austin's original treatment of performatives.

55 Ibid., 505.

56 Ibid., 507, 509.

57 Ibid., 509.

other kinds of speech acts where linguistic conventions are primary.[58] Whether one finally agrees with Urmson's radical reduction of the class of utterances that count as performatives, his privileging of context and convention (linguistic and social) is unmistakable, and, central, on most readings, to any definition of performatives.[59] Perhaps, no one puts this more succinctly than Benveniste: "In any case, a performative utterance has no reality except as it is authenticated as an *act*. Outside of the circumstances that make it performative, such an utterance is nothing at all."[60]

The centrality of context and convention to the life blood of performatives may be illustrated by considering the examples in (4):

(4) a. *bayyôm hahû' kārat yhwh 'et-'abrām bĕrît lē'mōr lĕzar'ăkā nātattî 'et-hā'āreṣ hazzō't* (Gen 15:18)
On that day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I hereby give this land"

b. *l ym. hnd 'mṯtmr bn. nqmp' mlk. ugrt ytn, bt, anndr bn*[. a]*gytn* … [*w.* y]*tnn [l. 'b*]*dmlk* [*bn.*] *amtrn* (*CTU* 3.2.1–10)
From this day Ammithtamru son of Niqmepa, king of Ugarit, gave the house of Ananidarru son of Agiyanti … and he gave it to Abdimilku son of Ammutaruna

c. *b–25 ltšry … 'mr 'nnyh br 'zryh … lnšn tmt 'ntt' l'mr 'nh yhbt lky plg try rbt' wtwnh zy byt'* (*TAD* B3.5.1–3)
On the 25th of Tishri … Ananiah son of Azariah … said to lady Tamet, his wife, saying, "I gave you half of the large room (and its chamber) of the house"

Mayer numbers (4a) among his list of performatives (or "Koinzidenzfall"), though without discussion.[61] The verb in the pertinent clause (*nātattî*) takes the expected form of the explicit performative in Biblical Hebrew (i.e., the first person of the perfective, or the suffix conjugation) and is rendered by a number of recent translations (e.g., *NRSV*, *NJPS*) with an English gloss in the present tense, both characteristic of (explicit) performatives in Biblical Hebrew. The context is demonstrably conven-

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58 Sanders ("Performative Utterances") is getting at something similar with his distinction between "metapragmatic" and "metalinguistic."

59 Even B. Lee (*Talking Heads*, 94), whose principal project is to rethink performatives from a radically altered theoretical and philosophical perspective, nonetheless understands performatives as specific kinds of speech acts that, "in the right circumstances," may "bring about the very act they describe."

60 "Analytical Philosophy," 236; cf. S. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (London/New York: Cambridge University, 1983) 230; D. Souza Filho, *Language and Action* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1984) 55–73. It is performatives' context dependency that explains Hillers's ("Some Performative Utterances," 756) opening disclaimer: "In all cases, my description of the clauses as 'performatives' is meant as an exegetical suggestion, a possibility to be considered seriously by future interpreters or translators, but without any claim to finality." That is, the identification of performatives in texts from antiquity is, above all, a function of exegesis and interpretation, readings that can always be argued and reargued.

61 *Untersuchungen*, 190.

tional in nature as well. As persuasively argued by M. Weinfeld,[62] Gen 15:7–21 is a narrative richly informed by the language and ideology of the royal grant. In the ancient Near East, rulers customarily rewarded loyal service and good deeds on the part of their subordinates with grants of land and the like, usually in perpetuity. (4b) is taken from one such royal grant. It is from ancient Ugarit (Ras Shamra) and records King Ammithtamru's grant of a house to Abdimilku. Similarly, the narrative in Genesis 15 retells YHWH's granting of the land to Abram's descendants as a reward for the latter's loyal and obedient service (e.g., as explicitly stated in Gen 26:4–5). Even the most cursory of examinations of the bequest clauses in (4a) and (4b) reveals a strong similarity in phrasing, a similarity that may be sharpened further by considering (4c). The latter is a more mundane version of the royal grant, a simple conveyance of property.[63] The two kinds of legal documents share common formulae, subject matter, and function – to convey ownership rights of a particular item from one party to another. The appearance of a tighter linguistic fit between the Elephantine conveyance (4c) and Gen 15:18 (4a) is a stylistic phenomenon. Both of these passages are styled according to the dictates of the so-called "dialogue documents" that came into vogue during the first millennium and may be contrasted with the older, more "objective" (i.e., predominant use of third person forms, as in [4b]) style of legal summaries.[64] All three passages, then, share a common function, the conveyance of property, and the same basic linguistic profile.

However, what sets (4a) apart and imbues it with performativity is the context of utterance. It is generally assumed that legal texts of the sort from which (4b) and (4c) are excerpted are evidentiary in nature, not dispositive. That is, they do not in themselves effect law (i.e., the bequest), but are summary accounts of the legally binding

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62 "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1970) esp. 196–99. For our purposes, it is sufficient to focus rather fixedly on the phrasing of the bequest clauses in (4). But Weinfeld's analysis of Genesis 15 in relation to the conventions of the royal grant go well beyond these similarities. For example, with respect to Genesis 15:7–21 itself, he observes the following: "I am the Lord who …" in v. 7, which is reminiscent of similar self introductions in royal documents (184, n. 3) and equivalent to historical introductions in royal grants in particular (185); it is God as suzerain who commits himself to Abraham as symbolized by the passing of the fire pot and torch between the divided sacrificial animals in v. 17 (196); "on that day" in v. 18 (199–200; cf. 190, n. 55); delineation of borders in vv. 18–21 (200; cf. *TAD* B3.5.7–12). Furthermore, as Gen 15:7–21 is formally a narrative and not a play-by-play transcription of an actual royal grant, it is not to be expected that it would conform in an overly determined way to actual royal grants as known from extra-biblical texts. Thus, Weinfeld, correctly in my estimation, plumbs the entire Abrahamic covenant tradition for signs of its indebtedness to the ideology of the royal grant. In sum, that it is the idealogy and language of the royal grant that inform and undergird the narrative in Gen 15:7–21 is beyond dispute.

63 See ibid., 199.

64 See S. Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia" in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (ed. J. Sasson; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995) I, 474–75; M. Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements: 7th–3rd Centuries B.C.* (AOAT 222; NeukirchenVluyn: Neukirchener, 1989) 3–4; R. Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (JSOTSS 113; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 30–32; "Introduction," 64.

act, a transaction performed orally before witnesses.[65] By contrast, Gen 15:7–21 is not a summary account of the transaction at all (no matter how indebted to that legal genre)[66] but is an imaginative – "literary" – representation of the legally binding act of granting itself. The scene is framed by references to the giving of the land (vv. 7, 18). In 15:7 – in phraseology echoing the historical introductions common to the Mesopotamian *kudurrus*[67] – it is clear that the land, though promised, has not yet been given: "I am YHWH who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to give to you this land to possess." Much of the narrative is taken up with elaborating the ritual context (vv. 9–17). This serves two purposes. First, it is the sign requested by Abram that he might "know" (v. 8) – of course what he is to "know," contrary to expectation, is that it is not he, Abram, but his descendants who will "possess" the land, albeit only in the fourth generation (vv.13–16). Second, it portrays the rites that constitute an important part of the covenant ceremony represented here (vv. 17–18). The "smoking pot" and "blazing torch" function as metonymic stand-ins for YHWH, symbolically enacting (by passing through the severed carcasses of the sacrificial animals) the self-curse should YHWH not keep the covenant that is here being made (cf. Jer 34:18–20).[68] Legal transactions in antiquity often contained the recitation of ritualized formulae and the enactment of symbolic acts.[69] One such example is in fact a land grant from Alalakh (*AT* 456): "Abbael swore the oath to Yarimlim and cut the neck of a lamb, <saying:> 'If I take back what I have given you <may I be cursed>'" (*COS* II, 370; cf. esp. n. 3).

This report of the symbolic/ritual act, narratively speaking, serves to frame the divine speech in v. 18, just as the report of descending sleep and darkness in v. 12 provides the frame for the divine speech that follows in vv. 13–16. That is, the narrative focus centers on "the proclamation of the gift of land"[70] in v. 18, the *verba solemni* – of the kind, as we saw above with reference to marriage documents, that is commonly quoted in the legal summaries[71] – by which YHWH legally effects the grant: "To

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65 The specific formulation comes from Westbrook, who is commenting on Old Babylonian marriage documents, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law*, 6. More generally, see San Nicoló, *Beiträge zur Rechtsgeschichte im Bereich der keilschriftlichen Rechtsquellen* (Oslo, 1931) 162–63; J. Renger, "Legal Aspects of Sealing in Ancient Mesopotamia" in *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East* (eds. Gibson and Biggs¡ 1977) 75–77; Roth, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements*, 24–28; Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions," 474–75.

66 Though the language here theoretically could also be indebted to the direct quotes that sometimes get inserted into the legal summaries (see Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions," 474–75), but I am not sure how one could substantiate this, nor, ultimately, do I think it necessary for understanding Gen 15:18.

67 Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant," 185, n. 9; cf. Westbrook, "Introduction," 55; K. E. Slanski, *The Babylonian Entitlement narûs (kudurrus)* (ASORB9; Boston: ASOR, 2003).

68 Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant," 196–99. As Weinfeld observes, one of the major distinctions between the covenant of grant and the suzerainty treaty is that in the former the curse is directed toward the suzerain (in this case YHWH) as a means of safeguarding the rights of the grantee (cf. 185).

69 Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions," 475.

70 Weinfeld, "Covenant of Grant," 199.

71 See Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions," 474–75; cf. Westbrook, "Introduction," 58–59.

your descendants I hereby give this land." Here, as commonly with performatives,[72] we have an accompanying ceremonial non-verbal act. The possibility of construing the perfective *nātattî* with either past or future reference can be ruled out from considerations of narrative logic and/or style. On a past reading ("I have given") – miming, as it were, the extra-biblical summary accounts of royal grants – the bequest herein reported would have had to have taken place already. But, despite the explicit expectation raised in v. 7 (viz., "I am YHWH who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans *in order to give you this land*"), nowhere else in the passage is this bequest reported, if not in v. 18. The symbolic act in v. 17, although entirely appropriate to the context as we have seen, can hardly constitute the bequest by itself. As noted, its chief purpose is to symbolize YHWH's self-curse, and besides, it is far too generic of an act, obtaining as it does in other domains, to have ever become a conventional expression for this particular legal transaction, i.e., the land grant.

A future reading ("I will give") may be ruled out chiefly from stylistic considerations.[73] Quite simply, if the intent was to represent the bequest as a future (or intended) act, surely the author/redactor would have used an imperfective form as is used throughout the divine speech in vv. 13–16 and, most interestingly, in Gen 12:7 (*wayyōmer lĕzar'ăkā 'ettēn 'et-hā'āreṣ hazzō't* "And he said, 'To your descendants I will give this land'").[74] That is, the future construal seems stylistically odd and forced.[75] One might argue that it is because the bequest is granted to the "descendants" (who presumably are not present in the narrative) and not Abram (note the fronting of *lĕzar'ăkā*) that a future reading is demanded. But this is hyper-rationalistic, missing both the legal reasoning that informs the text and the literary logic that drives the narrative. As R. Westbrook reminds us, transfer of ownership and of possession need not be simultaneous to be legally binding.[76] From the legal point of view,[77] what matters is not whether the grant will take practical effect now or in the future but that in couching the promise as a solemn oath – for which the performative is absolutely appropriate – YHWH makes the gift irrevocable. Even in the future it is

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72 Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 76.

73 It seems to me that the legal convention is against a future reading. That is, we have the summary accounts of such transactions, and thus know them to have taken place. We may further infer, I think, that these oral performances had performative aspects to them, as it is the saying of words that, by definition, effects the conveyance of property in this instance (i.e., this is not a sale of any kind). But whether there exists legal documents of this kind that pertain strictly to future bequests (except in so far as a contemporary bequest is guaranteed for the grantee's descendants) is doubtful – though, admittedly, this would be a hard thing to substantiate.

74 The use of the imperfective in Gen 12:7 follows as well from the legal fact that the declaration there (unlike that of Gen 15:18) "is not made under oath, and is therefore revocable by the donor at will" (Westbrook, personal communication, November 8, 2003).

75 Hence, Westermann (*Genesis 12–36*, 214), for example, is forced to undergird his future interpretation of *nātattî* by invoking the authority of GKC.

76 *Property and the Family*, 23, n. 3.

77 For the point made here, I am indebted to Westbrook (personal communication, November 8, 2003).

still a vested future right that the donor cannot withdraw. But even if this were not so, the line of argument would fail because it does not recognize that in Gen 15:7–21 we are dealing with an imaginative rendering (what Westermann aptly describes as a "factitious narrative"[78]) that draws on the royal grant tradition without itself being a royal grant. Therefore, we should not expect the Genesis narrative to conform tightly to the juristic documents upon which it draws. That the bequest is to be granted to the descendants is required above all by the logic of the narrative. The author/redactor knows well – because he tells us so in vv. 13–16 – that Abram cannot be granted the land (i.e., "you [Abram] shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in good old age"), and thus the descendants must take Abram's place as the grantee, even were it to defy (which it does not!) good jurisprudence.[79]

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[78] *Genesis 12–26*, 216.

[79] One of the letters in the Arsames correspondence (*TAD* A6.11) offers a striking parallel to Gen 15:18 where there is no question that the perfective verb form (*yhbt*) corresponding to *nātattî* in the biblical passage is to be understood performatively. The letter dates from the late fifth century B.C.E. It is written by the Egyptian satrap Arsames and addressed to an official, Nakhthor, and his colleagues. It is concerned with the granting of a hereditary lease to one Petosiri. In the first part of the letter, Arsames apprises Nakhthor and company that he has received a letter from Petosiri, from which he quotes (ll. 1–3). In that letter Petosiri informs Arsames that his father, Pamun, has died and requests that his father's property (*bgh*) be granted to him as heir (*ḥsn*). Then in the later portion of Arsames's own letter Arsames gives instructions to Nakhthor and his colleagues (ll. 3–6). The gist of the latter is that if things are as Petosiri has represented them and if Arsames has not already granted these hereditary rights to someone else (i.e., to himself or another servant), then he grants them to Petosiri as requested. That the operative phrase, *'nh bgh zy pmwn yhbt lptswry*, is to be construed performatively is made clear from a variety of considerations. First, the circumstances recounted in the letter are explicit. Petosiri's request is recounted from his earlier letter (*yntnw ly 'ḥḥsn* "Let it be given to me. Let me hold it as heir," l. 3) and the use of a lengthy conditional clause in the latter part of this letter (*hn knm ḥw kmly' 'lh … 'ḥr 'nh bgh zy pmwn yhbt lptswry*. "If it is thus in accordance with these words … then I hereby give the property of Pamun to Petosiri …," ll. 3–5) makes it clear that Arsames is not herein simply reporting a past action (i.e., the granting of property), but is in fact effecting the grant itself through the phrasing in the apodosis. Arsames then goes on to instruct Nakhthor and his colleagues to inform Petosiri of his, Arsames's, actions (*'ntm ḥḥwwhy* "You inform him," l. 5) and to let Petosiri be the hereditary heir (*yhḥsn*) – explicitly mirroring the language of the request (*'ḥḥsn*, l. 3) – just like his father before him (*qdmn pmwn 'bwhy*, l. 6). Indeed, the archival note, written in Demotic on the outside of the skin, underscores the force of what is accomplished by the letter itself ("About the fields of Pamun which I have given to Petosiri," B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, I [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986] 118). Furthermore, the phrasing in the apodosis itself is singular. Nowhere else in the corpus of Egyptian Aramaic is a perfective (suffix) verb form used in the apodosis of a conditional clause. The only way that such usage is comprehensible is if the apodosis is construed performatively (so Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 326). The clause also contains other (indexical) markers of performativity – the canonical form of the explicit performative (*yhbt*) and the overt presence of the first person pronoun (*'nh*), which, strictly speaking, is semantically unnecessary.

In sum, Gen 15:18 is no simple promise to be granted to Abraham's descendent at some unspecified point in the future but is itself the grant of land, plain and simple. And thus if interpreters down through the ages have rightly understood the centrality of this passage to the whole Abraham tradition, their preoccupation with "promise" has usually blinded them to the fact that the land is not here pledged but granted – perhaps a not insignificant distinction, at least theologically. But this is beside the point here. What I hope is by now plain to see, whether or not my performative reading of Gen 15:18 fully persuades, is the real difference that context and convention – the very stuff of pragmatics! – has for understanding performativity. What ultimately distinguishes the construals on offer in (4) is not morphological form or inherent lexical meaning but context of utterance. The uttering of *nātattî*, like Austin's "I give and bequeath my watch to my brother," given accepted conventions and in the appropriate circumstances (as in [4a]), itself constitutes the act of bequest and does not simply describe or report the transaction (as in [4b] and [4c]).

2 The Explicit Performative

"Well," Austin asks (rhetorically), "is the use of the first person singular and of the present indicative active, so called, essential to a performative utterance?"[80] The answer, as we have seen, is a resounding no. Performativity does not inhere in lexical meaning or verbal morphology but comes off as a result of use – the use of specific verbs with certain morphological forms under particular and appropriate circumstances. All true. And yet, the selection of verbs and the forms that they take is not accidental.[81] Let us take up initially the prototypicality of first person verbs in performative utterances, as this appears to hold cross-linguistically. The explanation for this "favourtism" has at least three facets: event structure in natural languages, self-referentiality, and economy of expression. Performatives are events, they are all about *doing* things with words, and therefore it is not surprising that verbs should factor so prominently in the expression of performatives. After all, verbs are the central domain for event structure across the world's languages,[82] and the verb, of course, is central to the system of predication in Semitic.

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80 *How to Do Things With Words*, 57.

81 The central thrust of this section – to explain why explicit performatives take the form that they do – follows the general trajectory of thought as in Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, esp. 209–15. This tack, to say again, is other than what one generally finds in the literature on performatives in Semitics. There the form and fact of the explicit performatives are mostly taken as givens, as if, to quote Searle again, "it is just a semantic fact about certain verbs that they have performative occurrences" ("How Performatives Work," 519). Rogland (*Alleged non-Past Uses*, 115–30) and Sanders ("Performative Utterances") are notable exceptions.

82 See J. Lyons, *Semantics 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977) 434–35, 481–88, 678; cf. W.L. Chafe, *Meaning and the Structure of Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).

That explicit performatives are characteristically self-referential, or reflexive, has been well noted in the literature, not the least by Sanders in his discussion of performatives in Ugaritic.[83] Self-referentiality is a kind of discourse deixis wherein the utterance itself denominates in some fashion that which it is all about. The words "in this essay" in the opening paragraph above exemplify this kind of deictic reflexivity, as does the phrase *zk byt' zy ṯḥwmwhy ktybn mn'l* "the house whose boundaries are written above" (*TAD* B2.10.8) referring to the description of the boundaries in the immediately preceding lines (ll. 4–8) of an Aramaic legal document. Further examples would include the expression "This statement is being made in English"[84] and, from Verschueren,[85] "when I say *This is what she sounded like* while imitating the voice of the person I am talking about." An explicit performative, as Benveniste explains, has this "peculiar quality" of self-referentiality, "of referring to a reality it itself constitutes by the fact that it is actually uttered in conditions that make it an act."[86] As Searle notes, the word "hereby" in English, which Austin latched onto as a "useful criterion" for identifying performatives,[87] "marks a self-reference."[88] He parses the function of "hereby" in the following manner:

> The "here" part is the self-referential part. The "by" part is the executive part. To put it crudely, the whole expression means "by-this-here-very-utterance." Thus, if I say "I hereby order you to leave the room," the whole thing means "By this here very utterance I make it the case that I order you to leave the room."[89]

And therefore, in appropriate circumstances, the presence of "hereby" (or its equivalent in other languages, e.g., *hiermit* in German) helps pragmatically signal performativity. In Austin's words, it "serves to indicate that the utterance … of the sentence is, as it is said, the instrument effecting the act."[90]

Similarly complex markers of self-reference, self-creativity (Searle's "executive"), and the like are not common in Semitic. Although simpler particles do sometimes occur. For example, Hebrew *kōh* in the nonexplicit performative in (2f) pragmatically implicates self-referentiality and self-reflexivity in a way very much akin to the

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83 Sanders, "Performative Utterances"; cf. Benveniste, "Analytic Philosophy," 236–37; Searle, "How Performatives Work," 527–29; Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 209–14; Lee, *Talking Heads*, 90–94 – Lee speaks of this, after Peirce, also in terms of "indexicality" (esp. 160–64).

84 Searle, "How Performatives Work," 527.

85 *Understanding Pragmatics*, 21.

86 "Analytic Philosophy," 236. Lee (*Talking Heads*, 57–59, 94) helpfully speaks of the "self-creativity" of performatives, i.e., "that they bring about the event they seem to refer to."

87 *How to Do Things With Words*, 57. Austin noticed, especially in formal or legal utterances, that "the word "hereby" is often and perhaps can always be inserted; this serves to indicate that the utterance (in writing) of the sentence is, as it is said, the instrument effecting the act of warning, authorizing, &c. "Hereby" is a useful criterion that the utterance is a performative."

88 "How Performatives Work," 527.

89 Ibid., 534.

90 *How to Do Things With Words*, 57.

"here" part of the English "hereby." However, this is not the lexeme's only, or indeed even its primary, function in Biblical Hebrew, which confirms a point that Urmson well makes about the English "hereby": its presence is no guarantee of performativity and not every performative utterance in English, explicit or otherwise, can use "hereby."[91]

Of course, as Benveniste understood, when verbs that denominate the act performed are used in the first person, they are, as it were, already highly reflexive. The pronoun "I" does not refer to a concept or an individual. Rather, Benveniste says, "I" refers to something very peculiar:

> *I* refers to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced, and by this it designates the speaker. It is a term that cannot be identified except in what we have called elsewhere an instance of discourse and that has only a momentary reference. The reality to which it refers is the reality of the discourse. It is in the instance of discourse in which *I* designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims himself as the "subject."[92]

That is, first person discourse is itself the epitome of self-referentiality, self-reflexivity. Through it a person appropriates to herself an entire language, deictically centers the instance of discourse on "ego." It is this implication of "subjectivity," as Benveniste calls it, that accounts for the "asymmetry" that Austin notices about explicit performatives.[93] In commenting on the utterance "I swear" (an utterance that "is a *performance*"), Benveniste explains the performativity that accompanies this utterance

> as a consequence of the fact that the instance of discourse that contains the verb establishes the act at the same time that it sets up the subject. Hence the act is performed by the instance of the utterance of its "name" (which is "swear") at the same time that the subject is established by the instance of the utterance of its indicator (which is "I").[94]

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91 "Performative Utterances," 510.
Another possible example of the explicit marking of self-referentiality comes in the final greeting commonly found in Egyptian Aramaic letters: *lšlmkn šlḥt sprh znh* (*TAD* A2.17; see also A2.1.12–13; 4.13; 5.9; 6.10; A3.4.4–5; D7.21.6; 48.9). The clause is usually glossed as "I have sent this letter for your welfare" or the like (e.g., Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography," 194). Such a construal takes the surface syntax at face value, which cannot be discounted. Moreover, here we may well have an example of Pardee's epistolary usage wherein the event of sending the letter is viewed from the receiver's temporal perspective (so D. Demsky, "The 'Epistolary Perfect' in Aramaic Letters," *BN* 54 [1990] 9). However, it is at least as likely that the clause is an abbreviated version of something akin to 2 Sam 8:10: *wayyišlaḥ tō'î 'et-yôrām bĕnô 'el-hammelek-dāwīd liš'ol-lô lĕšālôm* "Toi sent his son Joram to King David, to greet him" (*NRSV*; cf. 1 Sam 25:5). After all, greetings from the gods are similarly phrased (e.g., *TAD* A3.9.1; 10.1), and one frequently finds reports of such greeting inquiries in the body of letters (e.g., *TAD* A2.3.3; 6.7–8). In this case, a construal such as "I hereby greet you (lit. send [to ask] after your well-being) with this letter," in which *sprh znh* functions similarly to "in this letter" in (1g), is not impossible (see V. Hug, *Altaramäische Grammatik der Texte des 7. und 6. Jh.s v.Chr.* (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1993) 116–17.

92 "Subjectivity in Language" in *Problems in General Linguistics*, 226.

93 *How to do Things With Words*, 67.

94 "Subjectivity in Language," 229–30.

Therefore, like the word "hereby," first person discourse imparts reflexivity in a most explicit way.[95]

If the propensity for languages to name events with verbs and the reflexivity that inheres in first person discourse go some way towards elucidating the prototypicality of explicit performatives, it is above all H. P. Grice's "maxim of manner," "be perspicuous," and especially the sub-maxim "be brief," that most illumines this cross-linguistic pattern.[96] That is, the chief reason why the explicit performative is the "commonest" type of performative lies in its economy of expression. It is efficient. Explicit performatives "name the spoken performance as well as its performer,"[97] and they do so in a maximally efficient way; they are highly reflexive and there is complete coincidence between the verbal expression's propositional content and the linguistic act it effects. But most of all they are all of these and perspicuous as well. Very neat, very economical. Still, as Grice notes, people, though conversationally inclined toward economy, are in fact not always economical or maximally efficient in their use of language. While there are manifold reasons why speakers/writers might choose to flout Grice's maxim of manner,[98] with performatives it is often the case that what is implicit in the actual utterance is otherwise made explicit, e.g., through convention, in the surrounding context (discourse or real world). For example, in (2) though most of the actual utterances themselves are non-verbal, their actional character is otherwise indicated – in (2a) and (2d) the utterances are actionally framed; in (2b–c, e) it is convention of one sort or another that signals this intent. The same may be said about reflexivity with respect to these examples. None by themselves are highly self-referential, though again it is the case that the necessary degree of reflexivity is inferable from context or convention.[99] This suggests that

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95 R. Nozick (*Philosophical Explanations* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1981] 70), whose ideas are appropriated by Lee (*Talking Heads*, 90–94) and then applied to the latter's understanding of performatives, comes to very similar conclusions about the characteristics of the pronoun "I," i.e., it is internally self-reflexively self-referential.

96 Grice, "Logic and Conversation," 41–58.

97 Benveniste, "Analytic Philosophy," 237.

98 See Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 104–5, 109–13.

99 Lee (*Talking Heads*, 92) observes an interesting typological pattern that holds with respect to the appearance of the indexical features of reflexivity, creativity, and self-referentiality, at least, as he notes, to judge by the naturally occurring forms "I," deictics, proper names, and natural-kind terms: "there seems to be a gradual reduction of the role of the ongoing speech event plays in determining the referent of a term and a concomitant 'externalization' of the features that determine reference." That is, indexicality of the kind in focus here can be mediated, and thus, as Lee concludes, "the more such indexicality is mediated, the more a term's referential value seems fixed by some intrinsic property of the object rather than by the ongoing moment of speaking." Lee's language here is dependent on his earlier analysis, but the upshot, as I see it, for the understanding of performative utterances, is that as one moves along the gradient from explicit to nonexplicit performatives the various indexical features of interest (e.g., reflexivity, creativity, self-referentiality) become increasingly mediated, and as a consequence, knowledge of the pragmatic context becomes increasingly crucial for the happiness of the utterance. That is, following Austin (and *contra* Lee, *Talking Heads*, 58), the critical importance of convention and appropriate circumstances in nonexplicit performatives

Benveniste's insistence that "a performative utterance *must* name the spoken performance as well as its performer" (emphasis added),[100] strictly speaking, is wrong (and hence the reason for my use of a shortened version of this same quote earlier). This may be prototypically so (because of Gricean efficiency), but it is not and cannot be so always – and this is the case even on Benveniste's own analysis![101]

To summarize, if there is no linguistic reason prescribing the prototypical use of first person verbal expressions in performative utterances (e.g., they do not fall out as a result of semantic facts), the preference for such expressions can still, nevertheless, be explained with reference to the proclivity for languages to name events – actions – with verbs, the intrinsically self-referential and self-reflexive nature of first person discourse, and the overall economy of expression that such locutions afford. This leaves the typical morphological forms utilized in explicit performative expressions still unaccounted for. Here again it is not a question of semantics per se (though semantic meaning is never totally irrelevant). Neither the present indicative in English nor the perfective in Semitic semantically predicates performativity. Rather, it is a matter of explaining why certain forms are better or less well disposed toward the expression of performativity. Here we return to E. Koschmieder's initial line of inquiry – a line of inquiry in Semitics, at least, that has never really been taken up since. Koschmieder was curious as to why explicit performatives (his "Koinzidenzfall") should (typically) take one set of forms in one group of languages (e.g., the present in English, German) and another set in other languages (e.g., perfective in Semitic, Slavic).[102] Or, indeed, why some languages, such as Polish, could use more than one form (e.g., perfective and imperfective).[103] Part of the explanation, of course, is linguistic convention. Once a particular form becomes associated with a particular use it continues to be used out of the inertia of habit, convention.[104] But the more interesting question is why a given form should be used in the first place. Koschmieder frequently refers to the collision between tense and aspect in his semi-

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is precisely what one expects given Lee's gradient. And if Lee is correct in his surmise that "for nonexplicit speech acts, the possibility for failure is built into the relations between linguistic structure, use, and context" (*Talking Heads*, 58), this does not say anything against the possibility of their success. That is, context and convention, as envisioned by Austin (and others) with respect to nonexplicit performatives, is enabling but not determinative (Gricean pragmatic implicatures involve principles of language use and are always potentially cancelable, revisable, even fallible, cf. Grice, "Logic and Conversation"; Dobbs-Allsopp, "Biblical Hebrew Statives," 27).

100 Benveniste, "Analytic Philosophy," 237.

101 Recall his own list of nonexplicit performatives, "Analytic Philosophy," 235.

102 "Durchkreuzungen von Aspekt- und Tempussystem im Präsens," *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie* 7 (1935) 341–58, esp. 352–58; "Zu den Grundfragen der Aspectheorie," *IF* 53 (1935) 287–88.

103 "Aspect- und Tempussystem," 356.

104 U. Hinrichs ("Der Koinzidenzfall in den Balkansprachen (II)," *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 22 [1986] 183), cited appreciably by Rogland (*Alleged Non-Past Uses*, 125), goes too far in assuming toal arbitrariness.

nal 1930 article.[105] However, in regard to the performative what is more crucial is the collision between pragmatics and semantics. That is, there is not a natural correspondence between form and pragmatic implicature, as the forms themselves grammaticalize certain temporal notions (i.e., tense, aspect) and not performativity.[106] Thus, in every case it is a matter of determining what it is about a given form that disposes it more or less happily toward the expression of performativity, and not so much about predicting what that form might be in a particular language – although cross-linguistic typological patterns can at least provide certain broad parameters here (see below).

In languages such as English and German, where verb morphology principally grammaticalizes tense,[107] the present tense is typically used to render performatives. The explanation for this lies in the nature of tense as a linguistic phenomenon. Tense is a deictic category; it relates situation time to a deictic center, usually the time of speaking.[108] The present tense locates situations concurrently with the deictic center, the time of speaking. Insofar as performatives are utterances that are themselves the doing of an action (i.e., they are self-creative), they may be conceptualized as occurring precisely at the time of speaking. That is, the performance of the utterance is exactly commensurate with the present moment. As B. Comrie explains:

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105 E.g., "Aspect- und Tesmpussystem," 357.

106 Rogland (*Alleged Non-Past Uses*, 125), too, is aware that "there is no *inherent* connection between performative utterances and the semantics of tense, aspect and mood" (emphasis added). But he is mistaken, in my opinion, in his further surmise that there are no constraints whatsoever. What I argue below is that there are operative constraints, namely, those associated with the categories of performatives, tense (absolute or relative), and aspect, and that these crucially constrain how explicit performatives are realized in natural languages. One of those constraints, that performatives by definition cannot take place *as performatives* in the past, severely undermines Rogland's conclusion that "it would be a mistake to interpret the use of *qatal* in performative utterances as an indication of a non-past function of the verb form" (ibid.). Peformatives *by definition* are utterances that take place at the moment of speaking and therefore the linguistic forms in which they get realized must be compatible with non-past functions. For a critique of Rogland's larger project, see the review by C. Miller (forthcoming in *CBQ*).

107 For the sake of this discussion, I bracket out the question of whether English also grammaticalizes aspect, as some recent scholars contend, see L.J. Brinton, *The Development of English Aspectual Systems: Aspectualizers and Post-Verbal Particles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988); C.S. Smith, *The Parameter of Aspect* (SLAP 43; Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997).

108 B. Comrie, *Aspect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976) 1–2; *Tense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985) 1–35; Lyons, *Semantics*, 636–37, 677–78; M.B. Olsen, *A Semantic and Pragmatic Model of Lexical and Grammatical Aspect* (New York: Garland 1997) 117–52.

Although these situations [= performatives] are not strictly momentaneous, since it takes a certain period of time to utter even the shortest sentence, they can be conceptualized as momentaneous, especially in so far as the time occupied by the report is exactly the same as the time occupied by the act, i.e., at each point in the utterance of the sentence there is coincidence between the present moment with regard to the utterance and the present moment with regard to the act in question.[109]

Thus it is the momentaneous character of performatives that disposes them so well to expression with the present tense. Ironically, however, this is a marked use of the present tense cross-linguistically. As Comrie observes, "it is relatively rare for a situation to coincide exactly with the present moment."[110] Present tense more commonly in languages has a wider perspective, locating situations over much longer intervals as long as they are inclusive of the present moment (i.e., the deictic center) – hence the frequent coupling in explicit performatives of present tense morphology with other pragmatic signifiers (e.g., reflexive adverbials such as "hereby") to flag this marked usage. But, to stress once again, it is not that the morphological form itself has performativity as one of its conventional semantic meanings. It does not. Rather, the forms in view here (present tense forms) all locate a particular utterance with respect to a deictic center. The salient factor disposing present tense forms to the expression of performativity is punctuality. And note further that punctuality has heretofore not entered into my discussion of performatives. That is, it is not that momentaneousness is especially salient for an understanding of performativity. Rather, it becomes salient only in the mapping of the pragmatic notion of performativity to morphological forms that grammaticalize temporal location.

The explanation for the use of perfective forms in languages that grammaticalize aspect similarly turns on the notion of punctuality, but it does so differently, as aspect, though temporal in nature, is non-deictic. It has nothing to do with the temporal location of situations. Rather, aspect is concerned with "the internal temporal constituency of a situation."[111] Of the two major parameters of aspect that appear in the world's languages, we are here concerned principally with only one, viewpoint aspect.[112] Viewpoint aspect indicates how the speaker/writer views the internal temporal contour or character of a situation. The most common viewpoints are perfective and imperfective. The perfective viewpoint refers to the totality of the situation "without reference to its internal temporal constituency."[113] It views a situation as a single whole, with both of the endpoints in view. Imperfective viewpoint, on the other hand, entails explicit reference to the internal temporal structure of a situation,

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109 Comrie, *Tense*, 37; cf. Koschmieder, "Grundfragen," 287–88; B. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Claredon, 1990) 187–89.

110 *Tense*, 37.

111 Comrie, *Aspect*, 3.

112 Punctuality, as a semantic characteristic of the situation themselves, is generally treated under the rubric "situation aspect" (or Aktionsart). For the distinction between viewpoint and situation aspect and an extended treatment of latter as it relates to Biblical Hebrew, see Dobbs-Allsopp, "Biblical Hebrew Statives," 21–53.

113 Comrie, *Aspect*, 3.

without explicit reference to the beginning or ending of the situation.[114] Insofar as performatives are conceptualized as punctual situations, actions that are begun and completed at the moment of speech and that do not last in time, they are naturally isomorphic to perfective viewpoint, which itself is naturally hospitable to the expression of momentary situations. As Comrie explains, perfective viewpoint, "by not giving direct expression to the internal structure of a situation, irrespective of its objective complexity, has the effect of reducing it to a single point."[115] In contrast, punctuality and imperfectivity are not so isomorphically compatible, as the latter focuses by definition on internal temporal structure which, strictly speaking, is lacking in the former,[116] and thus, languages that formally mark aspect by verbal morphology, have a strong tendency to render performatives in the perfective.[117]
This tendency is not absolute, however. Imperfective viewpoint can be and is used in languages to view performatives. In the first place, the imperfective may be used to render performatives nonstandardly on an *ad hoc* basis, as it were, for a whole host of contextual reasons. Austin offers one such example when he calls attention to the performative use of the "present continuous tense," that is, the progressive (*be* + V-*ing*), which many now recognize as the form by which English encodes imperfective viewpoint:[118]

> ... I can say "Don't bother me at the moment; I will see you later; I am marrying" at any moment during the ceremony when I am not having to say other words such as "I do"; here the utterance of the performative is not the whole of the performance, which is protracted and contains diverse elements.[119]

The explanation for this kind of use is multifold, but follows mostly from the assumption that a distinction exists between actual, "real world" situations and the way these situations are presented (or represented) aspectually in a given sentence in a given language.[120] That is, scholars are now generally agreed that aspect conceptualizes the temporal contours of a given situation in terms of idealized, cognitively or psychologically based categories that do not necessarily entail a one to one correspondence with the actual situation.[121] As a consequence there is no necessary contradiction in a variety of different aspectual representations of a single situation. Indeed, speakers will frequently have available to them more than one way of talking

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[114] Ibid., 4.
[115] Ibid., 17–18.
[116] Ibid., 42.
[117] Note Koschmieder's keen crystallization of this insight, "Aspect- und Tempussystem," 352. For the cross-linguistics data, see O. Dahl, *Tense and Aspect Systems* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); cf. Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 209.
[118] For this assessment of the progressive in English, see Comrie, *Aspect*, 7; Dahl, *Tense and Aspect*, 70; Brinton, *English Aspectual Systems*, 9; Smith, *Parameter of Aspect*, 220; Olsen *Semantic and Pragmatic Model*, 163–66.
[119] Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 64.
[120] C.S. Smith, "A Theory of Aspectual Choice." *Language* 59 (1983) 480; see Comrie, *Aspect*, 4.
[121] For discussion and references, see Dobbs-Allsopp, "Biblical Hebrew Statives," 27–28.

aspectually about a situation, including nonstandard perspectives.[122] Austin's example cited above is a case in point and his own observations generally are on target. Imperfective viewpoint, with its explicit focus on the internal temporal contour of a situation, is a natural fit for a performative utterance that fixes on only a part of a larger and more protracted situation.[123]

A second set of circumstances in which the imperfective viewpoint is used to view performatives is exemplified by Koine Greek, where the salient fact apparently is the conventional use of imperfective forms for present reference. The present in Koine Greek, though traditionally understood as a tense-based form, in fact is aspectual in nature and marks imperfective viewpoint.[124] And yet explicit performatives may be rendered with present forms in Koine Greek.[125] B. Fanning offers the following explanation:

> It is the contention of this book that the performative use of the present indicative is due to an emphasis on the present (primary or deictic) time-value: there is such stress on the action occurring at *exactly the moment of speaking* that the "internal viewpoint" of the present is compressed and a possible durative or continuing sense is thus reduced. The present in this case does not denote "the present moment and a range of time on either side of it" as it usually does; instead, the occurrence is pressed into the time of "precisely now". It is the combination with present-tense meaning in the indicative which effects the present aspect in this way.[126]

Fanning's analysis is cast chiefly in terms of temporal location and generally resembles the analysis of the use of present tense in explicit performatives offered above. The difference, however, is that the "present tense" in Koine Greek grammaticalizes aspect and not tense. Apparently, then, the explanation involves conventions of use. In many languages (e.g., Navajo and Chinese) imperfective forms are used neutrally

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122 On the notion of nonstandard representation more generally, see Smith, "Aspectual Choice," 479.

123 Of course, the range of actual choices available in specific instances may vary depending on the nature of the aspectual parameters involved, their pragmatic significance, and their interaction with tense. The use of the imperfective to view performatives is a good case in point. Its availability inheres in a general asymmetry that characterizes imperfective viewpoint. As C.S. Smith well observes, "Generally, if a closed viewpoint [= perfective] is warranted by circumstances, the open viewpoint [= imperfective] will be too" (*Parameter of Aspect*, 127). And thus, one of the typical ways in which imperfective viewpoint may be augmented is by the (contextual) addition of endpoints which otherwise are not positively (i.e., semantically) in view. In fact, as Smith further explains, "if context and knowledge warrant, the receiver may infer the final point of an ongoing situation" (*Parameter of Aspect*, 128). The upshot of this asymmetry, then, is that while performatives may be typically viewed with perfective viewpoint, the imperfective viewpoint is also always potentially available, even if nonstandardly.

124 For this analysis, see S.E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) 189ff.; Olsen, *Semantic and Pragmatic Model*, 220–27.

125 See Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 187–89.

126 Ibid., 188–89.

(i.e., in the absence of information to the contrary) to refer to the present.[127] This has to do with the "ongoing convention" associated with imperfectivity: given that imperfective viewpoint views the nucleus of a situation without reference to endpoints – as ongoing at the moment of speech, its most salient interpretation is relative present tense.[128] Thus, in Koine Greek the use of the imperfective "present indicative" in explicit performatives is a consequence primarily of the form's broader conventional use to convey relative present tense and not so much a factor of the specific aspectual meaning grammaticalized by imperfectivity.[129]

It is the natural isomorphy between punctuality and perfectivity, then, that accounts for the typical use of perfective viewpoint in explicit performatives in languages that grammaticalize aspect. And yet imperfective viewpoint, though not as isomorphically compatible with performativity, can nevertheless under appropriate circumstances also be used with explicit performatives. Indeed, as Koschmieder recognized with respect to Polish,[130] it is not uncommon for languages to permit explicit performatives in both viewpoints.

That performativity is semantically compatible, to greater and lesser degrees, with either aspectual viewpoint (a strong typological preference for the use of the perfective not withstanding) is not an insignificant fact. Such promiscuity is distinctive of aspect (arising from the idealized and cognitive basis of the category). Tense, on the other hand, does not allow such flexibility. Performatives as acts accomplished through speech are precisely simultaneous with the moment of speaking, and thus must be located temporally in the present.[131] They are not acts that are about to happen or in the process of happening or have just occurred, and therefore performatives cannot be located temporally in the past or in the future. This fact potentially holds great significance, for example, for our understanding of the Biblical Hebrew verbal system, as it shows quite stunningly that the morphological distinction therein grammaticalized is aspectually based. That is, the suffix conjugation (the so-called "Perfect") cannot be said to grammaticalize past tense (absolute or relative) if it is also the form used prototypically in explicit performatives – by definition speech acts located temporally in the past are constatives (i.e., reports of speech acts) and not performatives.[132] Thus, one may add the performative use of the Perfect to the list of marginalia that point to the aspectual nature of verb morphology in Biblical Hebrew.[133]

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[127] Smith, *Parameter of Aspect*, 151; cf. 343–90, 391–436.

[128] Ibid., 127–28; Olsen, *Semantic and Pragmatic Model*, 123–25.

[129] Recall that although the imperfective does not make positive (semantic) reference to endpoints, those endpoints can be added pragmatically (see above).

[130] "Aspect- und Tempussystem," 356. Note that Koine Greek also permits explicit performatives in the Aorist (Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, §4.3.6).

[131] Cf. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 3, 12.

[132] Similarly, J. Tropper, "Althebräisches und semitisches Aspektsystem," *ZAH* 11 (1998) 183.

[133] R.S. Hendel, "In the Margins of the Hebrew Verbal System: Situation, Tense, Aspect, Mood," *ZAH* 9 (1996) 152–81, esp. 156; cf. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Ingressive *qwm* in Biblical Hebrew," *ZAH* 8 (1995) 31–54; "Situation Aspect," 24–25, n. 5; B. Peckham, "Tense and Mood in Biblical Hebrew," *ZAH* 10 (1997) 139–68. Cf. T.D. Andersen, "The Evolution of the

In apparent contrast to the general pattern (just) observed in Biblical Hebrew (and the other ancient Semitic languages) wherein perfective forms are used for explicit performatives, M. Rogland shows that two of the later Aramaic dialects, Qumran Aramaic and Classical Syriac, prefer to use the participle:[134]

(5) a. *mrym 'nh ydy ywm' dn l'l 'lywn mrh šmy' w'rṣ'* (1QGenAp 22.20–21)
I hereby swear this day by God the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth

b. *wk'n lkh 'mrm bry 'n' mpq[d]* (4QTQahat 2.9–10)
And now to you Amram my son I hereby comma[nd]

c. *mšlm 'n'* (Num 21:34)
I hereby give

d. *wl' 'mr dm'md 'n'*
And he (= the priest) does not say, "I hereby baptize"

This pattern of usage is not invariable. For example, there does appear to be at least one genuine case of an explicit performative in the Perfect at Qumran:

(6) *wk'n qbltk mry 'l pr'w ṣ'n mlk mṣrym* (1QGenAp 20.13–14)
And now I hereby lodge a complaint before you, my Lord, against Pharaoh Zoan, king of Egypt

As Rogland suggests, insofar as (6) is a legal formula, it may have become a fixed expression and thus the use of the Perfect in this instance may reflect earlier Aramaic usage.[135] In Syriac, too, the Perfect is found with performative utterances, but this appears to be restricted (mostly) to examples from the Syriac Old Testament,[136] where the usage likely reflects translation technique, as Rogland also plausibly contends.[137] Still, these exceptions not withstanding, the tendency for these dialects to use the participle for explicit performatives contrasts with the basic pattern of usage

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Hebrew Verbal system," *ZAH* 13 (2000) 1–66; J.A. Cook, "The Hebrew Verb: A Grammaticalization Approach," *ZAH* 14 (2001) 117–43. My own sense is that this holds as well for Akkadian, Ugaritic, Phoenician, and the early dialects of Aramaic (viz. Old Aramaic and into the Official Aramaic period).

134 "Note on Performative Utterances," 277–80 (the examples in [5a–b] are cited on p. 279); "Performative Utterances in Classical Syriac," 243–50 (the examples in [5c–d] are cited on p. 245); cf. Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 190.

135 "Note on Performative Utterances," 280. Rogland considers *'wmytk* "I adjure you" in 4Q560 B.5–6 as another possible example of the use of the Perfect for the expression of the performative, but the fragmentary state of the text renders any interpretation uncertain. For discussion, see the literature cited in Rogland, "Performative Utterances in Classical Syriac," 278, n. 10.

136 R. Duval, *Traité de grammaire syriaque* (Paris, 1881) §327 b, c.

137 "Performative Utterances in Classical Syriac," 245. Rogland, in fact, understands the use of the Perfect in the Syriac as a rather mechanical (formal) rendering of the Perfect in the Hebrew, i.e., a Perfect for a Perfect. Alternatively, the Syriac translator may have simply construed the Hebrew Perfect as marking past tense reference as does the Perfect in Syriac. But in either case an explanation based on translation technique is made likely by the few places where the Syriac renders a Hebrew performative that uses the Perfect (and the LXX clearly construes the Hebrew as past reference) with a participle (so [5c]) and by the exclusive practice of using the participle for explicit performatives in the non-Biblical Syriac literature (see [5d]).

exhibited in earlier Aramaic texts (especially in the epistolary documents from Egypt), which generally follows the broader (ancient) Semitic model, viz. the use of the perfective in explicit performatives (e.g., [3a–b], [6], [7a], [9a]).

Rogland's work remains intentionally descriptive in orientation, and thus he does not speculate explicitly about possible explanations for the contrasting patterns of usage that he observes with respect to the formulation of explicit performatives in Aramaic. By contrast, Sanders in a closing note to his article on performatives in Ugaritic suggests that the explanation for "the confusing situation in Qumran and later Aramaic" is diachronic in nature.[138] I believe that such an explanation is, indeed, on the right track. The verbal system in Aramaic appears to undergo a systemic shift over the course of time. It moves from a chiefly two-part, aspect based system in the earlier phases of the language in which perfective and imperfective viewpoint are grammaticalized morphologically to a three-part, tense based system in which the various verb forms mark temporal location, i.e, Perfect = past, Imperfect = future, participle = present.[139] Unfortunately, this whole question, as well as other aspects of diachronic change within the various Aramaic dialects, has been little studied[140] and thus we are not in a position currently to draw hard and fast conclusions. Still, one may observe some basic facts about the pattern of verbal usage with respect to explicit performatives in Aramaic as it bears on this hypothesis. Among the oldest possible examples of the usage of the perfective for explicit performatives are the fragmentary performative in the Assur Ostracon (7a) from 515 B.C.E. and the greeting and blessing formulae found in the Hermopolis papyri (7b–c), ca. 500 B.C.E., and the divorce formula from the slightly later legal documents (7d), ca. mid-fifth century B.C.E.:[141]

(7) a. *k' bzyt* (*KAI* 233.8)
"Thus I hereby divide"[142]

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[138] "Performative Utterances," 181.

[139] The basic trajectory of change realized in this shift is well-known typologically (J. L. Bybee, R. Perkins, and W. Pagliuca, *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect and Modality in the Languages of the World* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994] esp. 86–87, 130–31, 276–78).

[140] See now J. Huehnergard, "What is Aramaic?", *ARAM* 7 (1995) 261–82.

[141] Both S. Segert (*Altaramäische Grammatik* [Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1973] §6.6.3.2.2e) and Hug (*Altaramäische Grammatik*, 116) list *ntnt lk hqly* from the Meissner papyrus (*TAD* B1.1.2–3; cf. l, 12) as a possible performative (Segert: "hiermit gebe ich"). However, as noted above in the discussion of Gen 15:18, the evidentiary nature of this kind of legal document makes such a construal suspect. Still, the quotative frame here and throughout the Elephantine legal materials perhaps forces us in the end to leave the question open: "The performative perfect is less certain in deeds and contracts, for these latter are essentially written records of past agreements" (Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 194). To my knowledge there are no certain examples of explicit performatives from the very oldest phases of OA (ca. 10th–8th c. B.C.E.). This likely has something to do with the nature of the epigraphic remains from this period (e.g., monumental inscriptions and the like).

[142] Hug, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, 116. The line breaks off immediately after this phrase and the *aleph* and *bet* are only partially preserved. Therefore, the construal of the phrase as a performative must be considered tentative.

b. *š[lm w]ḥyn šlḥt lky* (*TAD* A2.7.1)[143]
I hereby send to you gr[eetings of health and] life
c. *brktk lpṯḥ* (*TAD* A2.4.1–2)[144]
I hereby bless you to Ptah[145]
d. *wt'mr šn't l'sḥwr b'ly* (*TAD* B 2.6.23)[146]
And if she should say, "I hereby divorce my husband Aschor"

Possible early examples of the use of the participle for explicit performatives may be attested already in Official Aramaic texts:

(8) a. *měhôdĕ'în 'ănaḥnā' lĕmalkā'* (Ezra 4:16)
"we (hereby) inform the king"[147]
b. *ḥrwṣ š'l šlmhn* (*TAD* A2.3.)[148]
Harudj greets them

However, that such examples do in fact constitute performative utterances must remain an open question. They could simply represent the use of the predicative participle to mark present progressive meaning – as C. Bache notes, the line distinguishing performatives from present progressive can be thin at times.[149] The several examples of perfective performatives in Qumran Aramaic, if not frozen forms (as implied by Rogland), may indicate that the putative shift in the Aramaic verbal system was still underway as late as these dialects – there apparently is some vacillation between perfective and participial performatives still in other later Aramaic texts as well (e.g., incantations, Geniza texts),[150] which would support this general supposition. Nevertheless, the shift appears to have been mostly completed by the time of the floriat of Syriac literature, where, as Rogland well contends, explicit performatives appear in participles.[151]

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143 Cf. *TAD* A2.4.5 (= [3b] above).

144 Cf. *TAD* A2.1.2; 2.2; 3.2; 5.1–2; 6.1.

145 Kutscher, "Hermopolis Papyri," 111; Hug, *Altaramäische Grammatik*, 116; Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 194.

146 The document dates from either 458 or 445 B.C.E. The relevant clause (*šn't l-*) occurs in two other documents as well (*TAD* B3.3.7, 9 [449 B.C.E.]; B 3.8.21, 25 [420 B.C.E.]). For the construal of these phrases as performatives, see Hillers, "Some Performative Utterances," 763.

147 F. Rosenthal, *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (6th ed.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995) §177; cf. Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 190.

148 Perhaps also *š'l 'nh šlm* (*TAD* D1.12.11), but the context is broken.

149 *Verbal Aspect: A General theory and Its Application to Present-Day English* (Odense, 1985) 235.

150 See the discussion in Rogland, "Performative Utterances in Classical Syriac," 249, n. 21. While the possibility of frozen formulae cannot be ruled out, once a tense based TMA system is firmly entrenched it surely becomes increasingly difficult for speakers to comprehend an aspectual usage of specific forms, especially as the performative usage of the Perfect-now-turned-a-past-marker is so obviously antithetical in meaning – you cannot have performatives in past tense. Cf. Hillers's discussion of Matt 6:12 as possibly reflecting an underlying Aramaic perfective form ("Some Performative Utters," 764).

151 Given the similar shift in the TMA system of Mishnaic Hebrew, one can perhaps expect the use of the participle in explicit performatives alongside fossilized uses of the Perfect.

A similar realignment of the verbal system occurs in post-classical Hebrew (generally attributed to Aramaic influence[152]), the outstanding hallmarks of which are the gradual collapse of the complex system of narrative and consecutive forms that characterized standard Biblical Hebrew prose[153] and the evolution in Mishnaic Hebrew of what may be described as "a system of tenses" (though with many usages from the earlier system still in evidence).[154] As a consequence of this change, the participle begins to be used for explicit performatives:

(9) a. *wĕʿattâ ʾĕlōhênû môdîm ʾănaḥnû lāk* (1 Chron 29:13)
And now, our God, we thank you!
b. *mʿyd ʾny … šʾny ntn tkblym brglkm* (papMur 43:3–6)
"I (hereby) swear … that I will set your feet in fetters"
c. *gwzr ʾny* (*m. Taʿan.* 3:8)
"I decree"

With regard to (9a), J. Joosten observes that "'We thank you!' performs the action of thanking," and thus is a classic candidate for a performative utterance.[155] The participial formulation attested here may be contrasted with the standard formulation of the explicit performative using a Perfect, such as occurs in Ps 75:2 (*hôdînû lĕkā ʾĕlōhî* "We thank you, O God!") and Ben Sira 51:25 (B) (*ʾl kn hwdyty* "Therefore I give thanks!").[156] Similarly, the use of the participle in the Bar Kokhba letter in (9b) is directly comparable to the use of the Perfect in Deut 8:19 (*haʿîdōtî bākem hayyôm kî ʾābōd tōʾbēdûn* "I (hereby) warn you this day that you will surely perish").[157] And

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[152] See GKC §112pp; E. Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Leiden/Jerusalem, 1982) 75, 81, 130ff. Given the close contact between the two languages from the Persian Period on, however, there is no reason not to think that the influence is mutual and moves in both directions.

[153] This is characterized, on the one hand, by a decline in use of the *wayyiqtol* form in narrative discourse (see T Givón, "The Drift from VSO to SVO in Biblical Hebrew: The Pragmatics of Tense-Aspect" in C. Li [ed.], *Mechanisms in Syntactic Change* [Austin: University of Texas, 1977] esp. 225–26; Kutscher, *Hebrew Language*, 45, 99; M. Smith, *The Origins and Development of the* waw-*Consecutive* [HSS 39; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991] esp. 31, 35–65; A. Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* [trans. J. Elwolde; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993] 120, 144; M. Eskhult, "Verbal Syntax in Late Biblical Hebrew" in T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde [eds.], *Diggers at the Well* [Leiden: Brill, 2000] 84.), and, on the other hand, by a corresponding increase in the prominence of narrative discourse featuring perfects (freestanding and unconverted) and participles (e.g., Givón, "VSO to SVO," 225–33, esp. 233; Kutscher, *Hebrew Language*, 45; Smith, *Origins and Development*, 28–30; Eskhult, "Verbal Syntax," 86–87).

[154] M. Pérez Fernández, *An Introductory Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew* (trans. J. Elwolde. Leiden: Brill, 1999) 107; cf. M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford, 1927) 150–65; Kutscher, *Hebrew Language*, 131–32.

[155] "The Predicative Participle in Biblical Hebrew," *ZAH* 2 (1989) 151. Joosten cites a number of other possible participial performatives, but none are as obvious as 1 Chron 29:13.

[156] W.Th. van Peursen, *The Verbal System in the Hebrew Text of Ben Sira* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 75.

[157] As Pardee notes, *mʿyd ʾny* might have been expected to appear as "a perfect in the earlier periods" (Epistolary Perfect," 36). Note further the innovative use of *š-* as a clausal conjunction in papMur 43:5 taking over the role filled by *kî* in standard Biblical Hebrew, see

E.Y. Kutscher, while commenting on (9c), notes that "BH could have used the perfect," and then cites Jer 44:26 (*hinnî nišba'tî bišmî haggādôl 'āmar yhwh* "'I swear by my great name,' says YHWH") to exemplify his point.[158] The examples in (9), then, are very much analogous to the development in later Aramaic observed by Rogland. The innovative use of the participle illustrated here evolves, as W.Th. van Peursen observes, "as part of the more comprehensive transition from a verbal system based on both tense and aspcet … to one primarily based on tense."[159] It is the "present tense value" of the participle in the evolving post-classical Hebrew verbal system that makes it the "most appropriate form" for expressing explicit performatives.[160]

In sum, the form of the explicit performative in Semitic, for the variety of reasons just reviewed, is inherently well-suited to the pragmatic task of doing things with words. Nonetheless, it is not unusual for these forms to be accompanied on occasion by more explicit markers of reflexivity and the like as well. For example, sometimes the inherent self-referentiality of explicit performatives will be signaled more explic-

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T. Givón, "Verb Complements and Relative Clauses: A Diachronic Case Study in Biblical Hebrew," *Afroasiatic Linguistics* 1/4 (1974) 1–22.

158 *Hebrew Language*, 131; cf. Pérez Fernández, *Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, 130.

159 *Verbal System*, 75.

160 Ibid., 76. Peursen is puzzled by the fact that Mishnaic Hebrew allows the formulation of explicit performatives with either the participle or perfect. However, this does not seem problematic to me for at least two reasons. One, as Pérez Fernández and other grammarians have noticed (*Grammar of Rabbinic Hebrew*, 107), the verbal system in Mishnaic Hebrew, while predominantly tense based, is not wholly tense based. There are, after all, some relic usages retained from the earlier system. Moreover, if M. Smith is correct in his assumption that the verbal system as a whole evolved in such a way that mirrors the broad pattern of verbal usage in direct discourse attested already in standard Biblical Hebrew (*Origins and Development*, 21–23, 28, then that the perfective based formulation of the explicit performative should be retained in Mishnaic Hebrew (and perhaps other late dialects of Hebrew and Aramaic) is not too surprising, since the Perfect was robustly used in dialogue in standard Biblical Hebrew (see A. Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* [trans. W.G.E. Watson; JSOTSupp 86; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990]), and therefore it is precisely in that environment (i.e., where explicit performatives are themselves realized) that one can expect (*a lá* Givón, "VSO to SVO") to be among the most resistant to innovation.

Sanders ("Performative Utterances," esp. 168–71) prefers to explain the typical morphology of explicit performatives in (West) Semitic in light of markedness theory as expounded by M. Silverstein (e.g., "Language Structure and Linguistic Idealogy" in P. Clyne et al. [eds.], *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979] 193–247). But the application of markedness theory to the Semitic verbal systems is not unproblematic, as Sanders knows well, and at any rate does not obviate the need to account for the interface between the semantics of tense and aspect and the pragmatics of performativity, which, on my read, is more crucial for comprehending the nature of the explicit performative – as suggested, for example, by the shift from a two-part to a three-part TMA system in the later Aramaic and Hebrew dialects.

itly by the added presence of the semantically redundant[161] independent first person pronoun:

(10) a. ***'nh*** *bgh zy pmwn yhbt lptswry* (*TAD* A6.11.5)
I hereby give the property of Pamun to Petosiri[162]

b. *wayyō'mer happĕlištî* ***'ănî*** *ḥēraptî 'et-ma'arkôt yiśrā'ēl hayyôm hazzeh* (1 Sam 17:10)
And the Philistine said, "I herewith defy the ranks of Israel this day"[163]

c. ***wa'ănî*** *nāsaktî malkî/'al-ṣiyyôn har-qodšî* (Ps 2:6)
"I, for my part, hereby appoint my king/ over Zion, my holy mountain"[164]

d. ***ank.*** *ltpn. il* [ ]*/'l. ydm. pr't* [ ]*/šmk. mdd. i*[*l*] (*CTU* 1.1.IV.18–20)
I, Beneficent El ... upon the hands do hereby proclaim ... your name, "Beloved of El ..."[165]

This syntagma (perfective plus independent pronoun) is otherwise non-normative. More commonly, the punctual nature of the performative is made explicit by the addition of an adverbial, such as *bayyôm hahû'* in (4a), *wk'n* in (6), *k'* in (7a), and *hayyôm hazzeh* in (10b), that explicitly signals simultaneity.[166] The presence of these kinds of adverbials effectively block the (more neutral) past interpretation of the utterance, thus helping to implicate the notion of performativity present in such utterances. Further examples of this kind are illustrated in (11):

(11) a. *wa-**nāhu** wahabkukāhu* (Gen 23:11; Ge'ez)
Behold, I hereby give it to you[167]

b. *wayyō'mer yhwh 'ēlay* ***hinnēh*** *nāttatî dĕbāray bĕpîkā* (Jer 1:9)
And YHWH said to me, "Now I hereby put my words in your mouth"[168]

c. *wayyō'mer par'ōh 'el-yôsēp* ***rĕ'ēh*** *nāttatî 'otkā 'al kol-'ereṣ miṣrāyim* (Gen 41:41)
And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See. I hereby set you over all of the land of Egypt"[169]

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[161] Person and number are morphologically marked on the verb form itself. Of course, the addition of such pronouns may also perform a variety of other discourse functions (e.g., topic shift), depending on context.

[162] See Muraoka and Porten, *Grammar of Egyptian Aramaic*, 326.

[163] Hillers, "Some Performative Utterances," 759.

[164] Ibid., 762. As Hillers also notes, *'ănî hayyôm yĕlidtîkā* in the following verse is also a performative (for the background of the imagery here, see n. 26 above, and in more detail, Roberts, "What Child is This?", 143–56).

[165] Even though the text is clearly broken, both J. Tropper (*Ugaritische Grammatik*, §76.531) and Sanders ("Performative Utterances," 172–74) agree on the performative reading of this passage.

[166] Talstra ("Text Grammar," 28) early on recognized the importance of adverbials such as *hnh, hywm,* and *w'th* as potential syntactic markers of performativity (Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 189–90, explicitly notes the presence of *hinnê* whenever it appears in his Hebrew examples).

[167] S. Weninger, "On Performatives in Classical Ethiopic," *JSS* 45 (2000) 93. Note that the underlying Hebrew in this passage has nothing corresponding to the Ethiopic *nāhu* "Behold."

[168] Mayer, *Untersuchungen zur Formensprache*, 190; Hillers, "Some Performative Utterances," 760.

[169] Hillers, "Some Performative Utterances," 760.

d. *kî-ha'îdōtî bākem* ***hayyôm*** (Jer 42:19)
For I hereby warn you today[170]

Interestingly, and contrary to the use of "hereby" in English, such adverbials do not appear so commonly with nonexplicit performatives, though other *ad hoc* means for marking performativity abound, e.g., quotative frames (2a, d, f), real-world or encyclopedic knowledge about various conventions (2b, c, e). In any event, the presence of the independent first person pronoun and of adverbials implicating simultaneity may (occasionally) serve as useful indicators of explicit performatives in Semitic.

3 The Problem with Performativity

I have proceeded so far (almost) as if the question of performatives and performativity were more or less straightforwardly positivistic in nature, that is, as if it were only a matter of a linguistic fact that needed to be verified. Of course nothing could be further from the truth. All linguistic inquiry (including historical linguistics!), like all disciplines of knowledge more generally, is ultimately underwritten and authorized theoretically and philosophically. Research into performative utterances is no exception. Indeed, performativity is a linguistic topic that has been entangled with philosophical issues almost from the beginning. Austin himself, of course, was a philosopher and not a linguist, and for Benveniste it was the very explicitness of the topic's engagement with philosophy that aroused his own initial interests in performatives.[171] It is worth stressing the unavoidability of philosophy for all linguistic research, and especially for the question under review in this essay, for I suspect things have not changed so very much since Benveniste's day when the latter offered the following observation with regard to linguistics and philosophy as the lead into his own treatment of the performative:

> Philosophical interpretations of language generally arouse a certain apprehension in the linguist. Since he is little informed about the movement of ideas, the linguist is prone to think that the problems belonging to language … cannot attract the philosopher and, conversely, that the philosopher is especially interested within language in notions that he, the linguist, cannot make use of.[172]

Philosophy and theory always need attending to in linguistic research and the centrality of philosophers to the discussion of performative and performativity is a helpful reminder of this fact.

More importantly, the nature of performatives remains a debated issue, both among philosophers and among linguists; indeed, the unsettledness of the performative

[170] Ibid., 761.

[171] This is made clear, above all, by the title given to the essay where Benveniste takes up the problem of performatives, "Analytical Philosophy and Language" (in *Problems in General Linguistics*, 231–38).

[172] "Analytic Philosophy," 231.

hypothesis seems to have been present from the outset.[173] Austin's operative distinction between constative and performative utterances – the verity of which my discussion to this point has tacitly assumed – is in fact abandoned halfway through his *How to Do Things With Words*. What Austin came to realize is that all utterances – constative as well as performative – have the potential to effect actions; that is, all utterances are potentially perlocutionary, capable of doing things by saying something under appropriate circumstances. This unsettledness has persisted in the literature to this day. For example, in 1989 J.R. Searle cites the unsatisfactory nature of the theory about performatives as the rationale for taking up the topic yet again,[174] and in his pragmatics textbook (1999), J. Verschueren believes that the solution to the performative problem lies in a description of how to define complete self-reference in linguistic action verbs.[175] Most of these efforts, such as those represented by Searle and Verschueren, for example, remain more or less within the Austinian tradition (as does my own analysis), but research into performatives from other theoretical/philosophic perspectives are now beginning to emerge as well. Derrida's early critical reformulation of Austin's ideas in light of his own program of deconstruction is an obvious case,[176] as is Lee's more recent and wonderfully stimulating *Talking Heads*, which uses Peircian semiotics as a basis for rethinking the nature of performatives. My intent here is not to offer a detailed review of the literature on performatives since Austin, but simply to acknowledge the reality of the ongoing discussion and to situate my own thinking on the matter. I continue to think that Austin's initial inclination to isolate performatives as a distinct kind of speech act (illocution) is useful and that his own discussion of the topic remains a serviceable means for identifying the phenomenon.[177] There is a central core of prototypical utterances that almost all theorists would count as performatives. These consist of what Searle usefully characterizes as *extralinguistic* and *linguistic* utterances.[178] Both

[173] I am aware that there is a pre-Austinian dimension to the study of what we now call performativity (Koschmieder and others), but there is no denying that it is Austin who generated widespread interest in the topic.

[174] "How Performatives Work," esp. 519.

[175] *Understanding Pragmatics*, 210–11.

[176] "Signature, Event, Context" – Butler manages to make good use of both Derrida and Austin in her *Excitable Words*.

[177] This is consistent with the thinking of the likes of Benveniste ("Analytic Philosophy," 234), Urmson ("Performative Utterances," 202–11), and Hillers ("Some Performative Utterances," 756). And no one has better revealed the larger philosophical significances of Austin's work on performatives than Cavell ("Counter-Philosophy and the Pawn of Voice," 53–127).

[178] "How Performatives Work," 531. Searle's characterization here is actually of a more encompassing kind of utterance – declarations – that is inclusive of but not restricted to performatives. One of the helpful trends in some of the more recent discussions of performatives is to recognize that not all performative utterances are of a single kind (the desire to categorize the various kinds of performatives is already present in Austin). For some recent attempts to categorize performatives, see Urmson, "Performative Utterances," 502–11; Searle, "How Performatives Work," 520–23; Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, 33–43; Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 207–9. My own approach towards categorization is cognitively based and thus privileges ideas about prototypes, fuzzy boundaries, and the like, see my discussion

classes are convention bound. The former includes the kinds of performatives (marrying, bequeathing) that factor prominently in Austin's work (especially in "Other Minds"). They are constituted explicitly by extralinguistic conventions and institutions, Austin's "utterance of obvious ritual phrases." Urmson, as noted earlier, would restrict the notion of performative to just this subset of conventional acts.[179] But he is mostly alone in this. Almost every other theorist would include in the category of prototypical performatives the class of purely linguistic (or metalinguistic[180]) performatives.[181] Here the authorizing convention is language itself. Locutions, such as "I promise to come and see you" and "I state that it is raining," are self-referential, self-verifying, and create new facts, but, as Searle notes, "in these cases the facts created are linguistic facts."[182]

Once we move beyond these two prototypical types of performatives, there is much less agreement within the literature about what else might qualify as a performative utterance. For example, Thomas proposes a third class of performatives that she labels "collaborative performative."[183] The success – the felicity – of these particular performatives depends (in part) on the uptake of another person – a bet is only successfully made when it is accepted by another person. Benveniste, for one, however, would appear to discount such examples as true performatives insofar as the defining criteria of performativity for him does not lie in "the behavior expected of the interlocutor" or that the performative "can modify the situation of an individual."[184] This disagreement suggests that the boundaries delimiting performative utterances from

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of "genre" in F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (BibOr 44; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1993) 15–22, especially noting the references to the linguistic research of G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) and J.R. Taylor, *Linguistic Categorization: Prototypes in Linguistic Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) – cognitive linguistics is by now a well-established sub-discipline of general linguistics.

179 "Performative Utterances," 502–11, esp. 509.

180 Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, 33–36. For a slightly different take on the notion of "metalinguistic," see Lee, *Talking Heads*, 41, 61.

181 For example, Benveniste, "Analytic Philosophy," 235; Searle, "How Performatives Work," 531; Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, 33–36; Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 207–9.

182 "How Performatives Work," 531. Both kinds of performatives – linguistic and extralinguistic – are well attested cross-linguistically. Nonetheless, one can expect cross-cultural differences in the range and use of performatives in both groups, as rightly stressed in recent discussions, see Thomas, *Meaning in Interaction*, 43–44; Verschueren, *Understanding Pragmatics*, 207, 21; cf. Searle, "How Performatives Work," 536. Linguists have generally been sensitive to the powerfully informing force of culture on performatives, because they know well that languages themselves vary considerably cross-linguistically.

183 *Meaning in Interaction*, 40–41. Searle would seem to be leaving room for these kinds of performatives when, in his description of the felicity requirements for extra-linguistic performatives, he lists "a special position by the speaker, *and sometimes by the hearer*, within the institution" ("How Performatives Work," 530; my emphasis).

184 "Analytic Philosophy," 237.

other kinds of speech acts will necessarily be fuzzy and malleable.[185] Still, this fuzziness has limits. For example, Searle's contention that indirect speech acts such as "Can you pass the salt?" where the utterance is intended as a request for the hearer to pass the salt (and not as a true question) do not count as performatives would garner wide assent.[186] And despite the fact that performatives are all about doing things with language, the major factor limiting what counts as a performative and what does not is ultimately not semantics or any other linguistic feature but how the world works. As Searle observes, "The limitation on performatives is provided by the fact that only a very tiny number of changes can be brought about in the world solely by saying that one is making those changes by that very utterance."[187]

4 The Prostration Formula

In this final section, I take up the question of performativity in relation to the so-called "prostration formula" found in letters in Ugaritic and in various of the peripheral Akkadian dialects (Amarna, Ugarit, Emar, Alalakh):

(12) a. *l.p'n. adty. šb'd. w.šb'id. mr̲ḫqtm. qlt* (*CTU* 2.12.6–11)
b. *a-na GÌR.MEŠ LUGAL EN-ia 7-šu ù 7-šu am-qut* (*EA* 60.4–5)
c. *a-na GÌR.MEŠ EN-ia iš-tu ru-qiš 2-šú (!) 7-šú am-qut* (*Ugaritica* V RS 20.16.4–5)
d. *a-na GÌR.MEŠ EN-ia iš-tu ru-qiš 2-šú 7-šú am-qut*[188]
e. *ana šēpē abīya … uš-ké-en*[189]

The possibility of construing the prostration formula as a performative utterance was raised initially by Mayer, as he included it among his list of performatives in Semitic ("zu Füssen meines Herrn falle ich hiermit nieder").[190] Since then Pardee and Whiting have subjected the thesis to a thorough discussion, concluding that, while the prostration formula does indeed represent a performative utterance, it is not a per-

[185] Similarly, Butler (*Excitable Speech*, 44) notes that the distinction "between actions that are performed by virtue of words, and those that are performed as a consequence of words" is "tricky, and not always stable."

[186] "How Performatives Work," 523. This constitutes a typical example of what Austin came to call a "perlocutionary utterance," an utterance that does something *by* (instead of *in*) saying something.

[187] "How Performatives Work," 536; cf. Urmson, "Performative Utterances," 211. This, of course, forcefully reinforces the notion central to my argument that performatives are not about semantic facts or meaning. Cf. Cavell, "Counter-Philosophy and the Pawn of Voice," 87–88, 117–18.

[188] D. Arnaud, *Recherches au pays d'Aštata Emar VI.3 Textes sumériens et accadiens* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986) #258 (*MSK* 7454).4–5.

[189] D.J. Wiseman, *The Alalakh Tablets* (London: British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara, 1953) #115.6.

[190] *Untersuchungen*, 191, 195–96. Ugaritic *mr̲ḫqtm* and Akkadian *ištu rūqiš*, which appear routinely as a part of these formulae, most likely refer to the social distance separating the two parties (i.e., *not* spatial or temporal distance), so S.E. Loewenstamm, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (AOAT 204; Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1980) 246–48; cf. Pardee in *COS* III, p. 90, n. 11.

formative "in the strict sense of the term" but is more accurately understood as an "epistolary-performative," a special kind of a "performative that, because of social realities, could only exist in a letter."[191] While there is much to admire in Pardee and Whiting's article, not the least of which is their very fine synthesis of the theoretical discussion of performativity, and especially their appreciation of Koschmieder's early (and often overlooked) contribution to this discussion, in the end their notion of an "epistolary-performative" proves problematic from a number of perspectives, and thus, in my opinion, should be abandoned. If the prostration formula is rightly construed as a performative, it is a "pure performative," plain and simple.

The chief interest of Pardee and Whiting, in fact, does not lie with performatives or performativity *per se*, but with elaborating and characterizing their understanding of epistolary verbal usage in Ugaritic and Akkadian, and it is this wider interest that ultimately prompts these scholars to reconsider the nature of the prostration formula as a performative. In brief, Pardee and Whiting contend, following Pardee's earlier statement with regard to Hebrew epistolary conventions,[192] that there exists in Ugaritic and Akkadian the kind of epistolary convention well-known from classical Greek and Latin wherein letters are written temporally from the point of view of the recipient. That is, acts contemporaneous with the dictating and sending of the letter – acts that from the perspective of the writer/sender would naturally be framed in the present – are framed temporally as if in the past (since they will be part of the past by the time the recipient hears about them) and thus in Ugaritic (and in Hebrew) are conveyed in the perfect ("epistolary perfect") and in Akkadian either in the preterite ("epistolary preterite") or perfect. There, of course, is nothing odd about the proposed usage as perfective forms in Semitic are used customarily to frame acts in the past. The problem arises when translating from Semitic to languages such as English where, on Pardee and Whiting's read, the epistolary conventions in place require the present tense.[193]

The authors take up the question of performativity because, as they say, "some have argued the identity of performatives and epistolary usages" and this, in their estimation, is "a mistake."[194] Epistolary perfects and the like generally report acts, they do not perform them.[195] The point is well made.[196] The question arises, then, as to the

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191 "Aspects of Epistolary Verbal Usage in Ugaritic and Akkadian," *BSOAS* 50 (1987) 1–31, esp. 23–31. The article builds on Pardee's earlier study of epistolary verbal usage in Hebrew letters ("The 'Epistolary Perfect' in Hebrew Letters," *BN* 22 [1983] 34–40), and the basic interpretation offered in both articles has been reaffirmed by Pardee very recently in *COS* III (e.g., 79, n. 13; 90, n. 11).

192 "Epistolary Perfect."

193 This summary is intended only for purposes of situating Pardee and Whiting's more specific discussion of the prostration formula. In the end, my understanding of the performativity of the formula is compatible with their larger thesis about epistolary conventions, though it does not require it or presume it.

194 "Epistolary Verbal Usage," 23.

195 Ibid., 26.

196 See also Rogland, "Hebrew 'Epistolary Perfect,'" 195–96, for reasons to keep the two categories distinct.

proper identification of the prostration formula – should it be classified among the various epistolary acts (writing, sending, and the like) or does it constitute a performative utterance? Pardee and Whiting offer an interpretation that tries to embrace both solutions. On the one hand, they note most emphatically that the prostration formula constitutes the "clearest example" of epistolary usage in the corpus of Ugaritic and Akkadian letters.[197] On the other hand, they recognize that the writer's self-representation as bowing is a fiction and that "the *saying* of the formula" itself is intended to produce "the reality of obeisance on the part of the writer."[198] And thus Pardee and Whiting conclude that "the prostration formula is, then, if such a beast may be allowed to exist, an 'epistolary-performative', a performative that, because of social realities, could only exist in a letter."[199]

I do not think that "such a beast" can exist, at least not as Pardee and Whiting imagine it. If the prostration formula is to be counted among the various epistolary acts found in Ugaritic and Akkadian letters, as Pardee and Whiting contend, then the formula cannot also be a performative utterance. The two are mutually exclusive phenomena. The essence of the convention described by Pardee and Whiting is to frame epistolary acts in the past as a courtesy to the letter's recipient, but performative utterances, as noted above, by definition cannot be effected in the past but only in the present. The perfective verb forms may be used legitimately for either reason but not for both simultaneously – contradictory propositions cannot both be true at the same time. That both phenomena get rendered into English using the present tense gives the illusion of identity whereas in reality there is none. The present tense used by Pardee and Whiting to render Semitic epistolary acts is an accommodation to (supposed) English epistolary conventions and has nothing whatsoever to do with Semitic usage itself.[200]

Pardee and Whiting's assumption that the prostration formula is governed in the first place by the epistolary convention they describe ("we find it unlikely that the epistolary perspective allows the falling to take place during the reading of the letter"[201]) may be disputed as well. That "Akkadian uses preterites and perfects to express acts

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[197] Pardee and Whiting, "Epistolary Verbal Usage," 6; cf. 28–29.

[198] Ibid., 29.

[199] Ibid.

[200] Recall that Pardee and Whiting describe their efforts to involve exploring "a 'translational' category of grammar" ("Epistolary Verbal Usage," 1). However, it is not clear that English epistolary conventions are as hard and fast as they describe them. It is the case that epistolary acts (as Pardee and Whiting define them) can be (perhaps even most of the time) framed in the present tense according to English epistolary conventions, but this is surely not absolute. The deictic center can be switched – out of concern for politeness or deference – and framed in the past ("Dear Mr. Smith, I have enclosed a copy of the draft you requested ..."; cf. Levinson, *Pragmatics,* 74, ## 51–52; see also the reservations expressed by Rogland, "Hebrew 'Epistolary Perfect,'" 196–97, especially note his references to R. Binnick, *Time and the Verb* [Oxford: Oxford University, 1991] 250 and by M. Streck, *Zahl und Zeit: Grammatik der Numeralia und des Verbalsystems im Spätbabylonischen* [Groningen, 1995] 155ff.).

[201] Ibid., 28–29.

accomplished in conjunction with the sending" of letters is not sufficient warrant to rule other potential construals out of bounds. After all, perfective verb forms in Semitic have a host of uses. Besides, epistolary conventions in other languages are rather loose and easily overridden or suspended according to the needs of the discourse and always susceptible to lapses back into the usual deictic orientation of the "here and now" of the writer.[202] There is no reason to expect things to be greatly different in Semitic. And, as Comrie reminds us, the nature of language is such that conventions about shifts in the deictic center do not "impinge upon the grammar of the language" itself, nor do they alter the assumption operative in all languages "that there is only one deictic centre common to speaker and hearer."[203] Pardee and Whiting themselves recognize that the normative rules of grammar are otherwise in place in Semitic letters. As they observe, "in the Hebrew letters," for example, "the use of the perfect, imperfect, and participial forms generally follows regular prose rules" and in Ugaritic epistolary usage has no impact on jussive forms.[204] And that explicit performatives (using perfective forms) in fact appear in letters has been exemplified repeatedly above ([1g], [2e], and [3a–b]), the leading example of which is the blessing formula (15a; cf. 6b, 15b–c), which Pardee and Whiting themselves count as a performative "in the strict sense of the term."[205] This suggests, one, that the kind of switch in deictic center described by Pardee and Whiting does not *necessarily* proscribe the expression of explicit performatives in letters, and, two, that explicit performatives will take whatever grammatical form they normally take regardless of their literary or epistolary context, and thus, if the prostration formula is properly identified as a performative utterance, then the question of epistolary usage may well be quite beside the point.

Furthermore, it remains unclear on what basis one might urge a performative construal of the writer's bowing during the dictation of the letter. Phenomenologically, the letter is a complex event designed to extend the act of communication through time and space beyond the moment of speaking.[206] As such it is comprised of at least two principal speech acts: the act of dictation and the act of reception.[207] That such was in fact a perspective shared by the ancients is shown by the Ugaritic mythological texts, where the literary representation of an exchange of messages between two parties routinely consists of precisely these two speech acts. In the first scene, the sender gives instructions to the messengers and dictates the content of the message. In the next scene the messengers are (usually) shown carrying out these instructions and delivering the message verbatim. On this view, to insist that the "respectful fic-

202 Comrie, *Tense*, 16.

203 Ibid.

204 Pardee and Whiting, "Epistolary Verbal Usage," 4, 7.

205 Ibid., 30.

206 Cf. J.T. Greene, *The Role of the Messenger and Message in the Ancient Near East* (BJS 169; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989) 41, 42, 58, 75.

207 Compare Levinson's notions of "coding time" (CT), the moment of utterance or inscription, and "receiving time" (RT), the moment of reception (*Pragmatics*, 73). In the canonical situation of (face to face) utterance CT and RT are identical, whereas in letters CT and RT are separate moments.

tion" of bowing occurs at the time of dictation makes no sense. In Austinian terms, the "appropriate circumstances" warranting the performative are not satisfactorily fulfilled until the letter itself is read before the king. That is, in order for the complex communicative event that is a letter to come off felicitously both of its components – dictation and reception – must be completed. The point may be illustrated by the example of a letter in which a man confesses to murdering his maid cited by Thomas in her own discussion of performatives:

(13) I Thomas Benjamin Swift, now on this day of Sunday in the year of our Lord, 1901, do hereby confess to the murder of Molly Brown, maid of this establishment.[208]

Normally, this would be a fairly straightforward example of a performative utterance. However, there are a number of considerations that greatly complicate the final assessment of the utterance's performativity, the most outstanding of which are that the letter was only recovered ninety-three years after the act was committed (apparently hidden under some floorboards), that the maid was never reported missing nor was her body ever found, and that Mr. Swift was never charged with the crime. Given such circumstances, Thomas is right to question whether the confession can come off happily; without the successful reception of the letter it is difficult to see how the performative could be effected. In other words, both parts of the communicative event that is a letter – composition and reception – must come off happily if the whole is in fact to come off happily.

Moreover, the custom on which the prostration formula itself is predicated specifies that the bowing take place precisely in the king's presence, which corresponds most naturally to the second speech act, viz. as the letter is read before the king. And, indeed, this is expressly the impression given in the Ugaritic texts themselves. The messengers are never shown prostrating during dictation but only upon actual delivery of the message. Therefore, if one is to insist on choosing at which point we are to imagine the bowing as being effected, then the second act seems the most natural and logical, and not the first as Pardee and Whiting contend.

But the need to press for such a distinction may well be unnecessary. Insofar as the prostration formula is part of the letter's quoted content (i.e., it comes after the messenger formula and thus is represented as a part of the sender's quoted words), one wonders whether to distinguish between bowing during dictation and bowing as the letter is read before the king makes any real sense. The originary ideological conceit of the letter is precisely that the sender's words are not altered during transmission; that the authorizing messenger formula ("Message of so and so") guarantees the accuracy of the words quoted – as if the sender were in fact present (indeed the letter and the messenger serve as the stand-ins for the sender). This conceit is represented literarily in the Ugaritic texts through the trope of verbatim repetition: the quoted content of the message gets repeated twice; once during dictation and again during actual delivery. An abbreviated version of this typical sequence may be offered by way of illustration. Late in the Baal Cycle (tablet 5) Baal and Mot exchange messages. Here is Baal's response to Mot's threats:

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[208] *Meaning in Interaction*, 42.

(14) Go say (*rgm*) to Môtu, son of 'Ilu,
Repeat to the beloved warrior of 'Ilu:
Message (*ṯḥm*) of Mighty Balu,
word of the mighteous of heroes:
Salutations (*bht*), Môtu, son of 'Ilu!
Your servant am I, and forever (will be)!
Be off and do not tarry, O gods.

So they head off
toward Môtu, son of 'Ilu,
to his city Hamray,
to Mukku where <his> throne is established,
to Ḫoḫu, the land of his own possession.
They raise their voices and say aloud:
Message (*ṯḥm*) of Mighty Balu,
word of the mighteous of heroes:
Salutations (*bht*), Môtu, son of 'Ilu!
Your servant am I, and forever (will be)![209]

To ask here whether Baal's greeting to Mot was effected during the dictation of the message or once it was delivered does not make sense. The whole point is that the message dictated and delivered is of a piece; the greeting itself does not change even though its actual transmission presumably involves a gap in time and space. By extension, to maintain that the "respectful fiction" of bowing in the prostration formula is imagined as being operative at only one point or another flies in the face of the basic conceit of epistolary discourse. The quoted content of a letter remains the same even though its dictation/composition and reception are separated in time and space.

Lastly, one may disagree with the way in which Pardee and Whiting try to distinguish the natures of the blessing (15) and prostration formulae as performatives.

(15) a. *brktk lyhwh* (*Arad* 16.2–3; cf. 21.2–3; 40.3)
b. *brktk lpṯḥ* (*TAD* A2.4.1–2; etc.)
c. *brktk. lb ʿlṣpn* (*KAI* 50.2–3)

There is neither a qualitative nor a descriptive difference in the two performatives. Qualitatively, all performative utterances are of a kind, they perform the actions that they inscribe. There are not performatives "in the strict sense of the term" and then other, less "strict" kinds of performatives.[210] By the same token, there is no descrip-

209 *CTU* 1.5.II.8–20. The translation is Pardee's as given in *COS* I.86.

210 Pardee and Whiting's description of the blessing formula as a performative "in the strict sense of the term" ("Epistolary Verbal Usage," 30; cf. Pardee, "Epistolary Perfect," 35, n. 8) is reminiscent of Austin's "pure performative," except that Austin uses the latter to identify performative utterances that are unaided by the explicit accompaniment of some (physical) ritual action. In fact, he tends to use the characterization when discussing those performatives, such as "I salute you" (*How to Do Things With Words*, 81, 85) that originated in contexts where they were accompanied by (or themselves were the accompaniment of) some other ritual action but eventually evolved to where they could be used performatively even without the accompanying act (see further below).

tive difference between the two formulae, or at least, none where the distinction between epistolary and non-epistolary makes any sense. In point of fact, both formulae, as they appear in letters (n.b. [15a–c] are taken from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Phoenician letters), represent epistolary conventions, a fact indicated most tellingly in the consistency of the phrasing of the formulae and by the sheer number of times that each appears in letters. That is, as with examples ([1g], [2e], and [3a–b]) discussed above, it is the conventions associated with epistolary discourse that provide the extralinguistic institutional basis that most immediately authorizes the performativity of these formulae – that allows them in these particular contexts to be construed performatively.[211]

Having said this, however, I do not mean to imply that the two formulae are identical. They obviously are not. The blessing formula by its nature appears to be the more portable of the two, potentially productive in a multiplicity of contexts, whereas the prostration formula is far more circumscribed. And to be sure, it is an evidentiary fact that the blessing formula is attested as a performative outside of epistolary contexts (e.g., Gen 17:20), clearly bolstering our confidence in positing a performative construal of the formula when it appears in letters. But more confidence in our interpretative decisions does not change the fact that there remains no substantial or descriptive difference between the two formulae *as* performatives.[212]

In the end, then, it would seem that the proper identity of the prostration formula turns not on the question of Semitic epistolary usage but on how one construes the nature of the act that the formula itself inscribes: does the formula report an actual event (i.e., that the writer really fell) or is it what Pardee and Whiting term a "respectful fiction." If it is the latter, as most in fact have assumed, the chief implication, as rightly noted by Pardee and Whiting, is that the formula is a "prime candidate" for a performative, "for it is the *saying* of the formula that produces the reality of obeisance on the part of the writer." And if the formula is a performative utterance, then it is most prudent to take it straightforwardly so, as implied originally by Mayer. And indeed nothing seems to stand in the way of such a construal. The verb forms involved, first person common singular perfectives (Ug. *qlt*, Akk. *amqut* and *ušḫeḫin* or *uštaḫaḫin*[213]), are as expected for explicit performatives in (ancient) Semitic and the action putatively performed by the formula is demonstrably conventional, even ceremonial in nature – it was customary in the ancient Near East for inferiors to physically fall down in obeisance when entering before their social

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[211] Recall that for both Derrida ("Signature, Event, Context," 18) and Butler (*Excitable Speech*, 51, 147) "a performative, to the extent that it is convenitonal, must be repeated in order to work" (Butle, *Excitable speech*, 147). Hence, the iteration of these formulae itself becomes a telling (and perhaps even nencessary) marker of their performativity.

[212] Rogland's "idiomatic formula limited to letters" ("Hebrew 'Epistolary Perfect,'" 198, n. 33) is scarcely any better.

[213] These are mixed formations derived from a corrupted version of Akk. *šukēnu* "to prostrate oneself, do obeisance" (*CAD* Š/III, 214–18, esp. 218a) and West Semitic forms of *ḥwy* (in the Št stem, e.g., Heb., Ug.) "to bow down, do obeisance" (cf. *GaG* §109m).

superiors.[214] And though the formula itself as encountered in various Akkadian and Ugaritic letters is not a direct or literal representation of this act of obeisance but a secondarily derived epistolary convention based on that act, even this proves not to be exceptional.

Consider two scenarios. Both offer plausible explanations of the evolution of the formula as it is currently known in letters. On one view, it might be assumed that words not unlike the phrasing of the formula as we now have it were actually uttered as the individual was physically prostrating before a superior[215] and that, once the situation was such where the physical act of prostration itself was no longer possible or appropriate (e.g., letters, third party greetings), these words which had originally only accompanied the physical act could themselves pass over into a "pure performative" and function on their own to effect the requisite act of obeisance. Austin himself notes that "phrases are especially liable to pass over into pure performatives where the action which is suited to the word is itself a purely ritual action."[216] He offers as an example the nonverbal act of saluting accompanied by the performative utterance "I salute you." "Here," writes Austin, "'I salute you' may become a substitute for the salute and thus a pure performative utterance."[217]

The kind of scenario just sketched may in fact be reflected in 2 Sam 16:4:

(16) *wayyō'mer hammelek lĕṣībā' hinnēh lĕkā kōl 'ăšer limpî-bōšet wayyō'mer ṣîbā' hištaḥăwêtî 'emṣā'-ḥēn bĕ'êneykā 'ădōnî hammelek* (2 Sam 16:4)
And the king said to Ziba, "All that belongs to Mephibosheth is now yours." And Ziba said, "I bow down; may I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king"

The issue at stake in 2 Sam 15:13–16:14 is loyalty to David.[218] Ziba, Mephibosheth's steward, presents David with gifts of asses, summer fruit, and skins of wine, and David rewards the steward's loyalty by giving to him all of his master's possessions. Ziba replies, *hištaḥăwêtî 'emsā'-ḥēn bĕ'êneykā 'ădōnî hammelek.* Here it is unlikely that *hištaḥăwêtî* is intended descriptively in reference to a past act (i.e., "I have bowed down"), as speech in such a situation would be superfluous and simple past narrative (e.g., Gen 33:8; Exod 34:8; Ruth 2:16; 2 Sam 14:22) would suffice. Rather, surely the (narrative) aim is to show Ziba paying homage to David, in which

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214 See B.F. Knutson, "Literary Phrases and Formulae" in *Ras Shamra Parallels*, II (L. K. Fisher, ed.; Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1975) 421–22. For iconographic representations, see *ANEP*, pl. 5; O. Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (New York: Crossroads, 1985) pl. 23.

215 Pardee and Whiting ("Epistolary Verbal Usage," 29) rightly stress that in real life the verbal performative alone would never suffice, but actual prostration would have to take place. This does not, however, discount the possibility that a verbal utterance may have accompanied the physical act.

216 *How to Do Things With Words*, 85.

217 Ibid., 81. Butler (following Derrida and others) emphasizes the role played by iteration in explaining the capacity of this and other performative utterances to move from one set of conventional contexts to another and the efficacy that may accompany even non-conventional, novel uses of performatives (*Excitable Speech*, 51, 146–47).

218 So, for example, P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984) 375.

case *hištaḥăwêtî* is to be construed either as what Waltke and O'Connor label an "instantaneous perfective," which "represents a situation occurring at the very instant the expression is being uttered" (i.e., I *am* bowing down")[219] or as a performative like Austin's "I salute you" that here accompanies the non-verbal act of prostration (i.e., "I *hereby* bow down").[220] In either case, such an utterance (if not already a performative that is part and parcel of the act of obeisance) would be well poised to pass over into a "pure performative" given the appropriate circumstances (such as in a letter).

An alternative way of accounting for the evolution of the prostration formula as a "pure performative" is to assume that the formula as we now have it emerged through a process of metonymic extension whereby the saying of the non-verbal act of prostration itself, because, again, circumstances are such – as in a letter – that actual prostration is impossible or nonsensical,[221] becomes a substitute for and thus tantamount to performing the act. A good example of the kind of metonymically derived performative I have in mind is found in the novel *Palace of Desire* by Naguib Mahfouz. Though fictional, Mahfouz's novel affords a penetrating glimpse at a traditional Muslim family in the early decades of the twentieth century in Cairo. One of the many customs that one meets throughout the novel is that of the traditional greeting. People routinely greet one another, and especially their social superiors, by uttering one of a variety of conventional greetings. The greeting is usually accompanied by the ritual kissing of the hand of the person greeted. In the novel these actions are most often described by the narrator. However, at one point al-Sayyid Ahmad, the main character of the story, is talking with his eldest son Yasin. Yasin conveys the greeting of a friend to his father via a performative utterance. Yasin says to his father: "I visited Ridwan at his grandfather's house yesterday. He sends you his greetings and kisses your hand."[222] Here the ritual act of "kissing the hand" has clearly passed over into a pure performative (in Austin's sense of the term). As with the prostration formula in ancient letters, it is spatial and temporal remove – Ridwan is not physically present during the conversation between Yasin and his father – that enables the simple saying of the act of kissing to pragmatically effect the greeting, a

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219 *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §30.5.1d (example #28). For the comparable notion in English – the "instantaneous present" – see R. Quirk et al, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the english Language* (London/New York: Longman, 1985) 180–81.

220 Mayer, *Untersuchungen*, 189; cf. C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956), 40 ("den Zusammenfall [Koinzidenz] zwischen Aussage und Vollzug der Handlung"). As Waltke and O'Connor correctly note, the performative is a species of the "instantaneous perfective" (*Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §30.5.1d; cf. Quirk et al, *Comprehensive Grammar*, 180).

221 As Pardee and Whiting observe ("Epistolary Verbal Usage," 29), the writer's spatial and temporal remove makes it impossible to "know when to 'speak' and when to 'bow'" and, indeed, it is supercilious to even posit such a scene.

222 N. Mahfouz, *Palace of Desire* (trans. W.M. Hutchins, L.M. Kenny, and O.E. Kenn; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 20. The relevant verbs appear in the prefix conjugation in the Arabic (*yqr … '-slām* and *wyqbl ydkm*). Note al-Sayyid Ahmad's formulaic response: "May our Lord preserve him and watch over him."

situation that surely could not have arisen had Ridwan been present, for in that case social convention would have required the non-verbal act itself.[223]

In both scenarios, it is the spatial and/or temporal remove of the primary actors involved that is the (primary) pragmatic trigger that would allow the saying "I fall" to evolve into a "pure performative" and to effect the obeisance that otherwise would have required actual, physical prostration.

At one point in one of Austin's discussions of performative utterances he asks, "How can we be sure ... whether any utterance is to be classed as a performative or not?"[224] His answer: "Well, it is complicated ..."[225] When we put the same question to the linguistic remains from antiquity, the complications would appear to multiply substantially, and, in fact, we must confess that we will likely never be fully confident of our performative construals of particular utterances. For the one thing on which performatives depend most, knowledge of appropriate circumstances and "specific *conventions* linking the words to institutional procedures,"[226] is precisely what we usually do not know. Therefore, our performative construals of ancient utterances will normally need to be content with being more and less likely and only rarely will our knowledge about the ancient context enable us to aspire to certainty.[227] The prostration formula is no exception. One can always insist on a constative interpretation, i.e., as a declarative statement describing the writer's past act of obeisance. And yet, like others, the stereotyped repetition of such a declaration in letter after letter seems inherently odd to me. It "makes better sense" and certainly is "more picturesque," as S. E. Loewenstamm observes, "if we assume that the sender figuratively represents himself as entering into the presence of his lord and doing homage to him."[228] In other words, the formula does appear (contextually) well disposed to a performative construal. The verb forms used, the stereotyped and highly conventional nature of the phrasing and its placement within letters, and the particular and ceremonial convention that appears to lie behind the formula and to animate it are all very much consistent with such a thesis. Does this mean that we can be absolutely sure of our performative analysis of this particular formula? Well, it is complicated.

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223 Note further that while the greeting was passed on from Ridwan to Yasin at a point in the past (CT), the speech act itself is not accomplished until Yasin speaks to his father (RT). That is, Ridwan is fictively portrayed as kissing the hand of al-Sayyid Ahmad at the moment of Yasin's speaking. The parallel with the prostration formula is striking.

224 "Performative Utterances" in *Philosophical Papers* (2d ed.; eds. J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnoc; Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 241.

225 Ibid., 252.

226 Levinson, *Pragmatics*, 230.

227 Such provisionality is inherent in the very nature of the performative, cf. Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 51.

228 Loewenstamm, *Comparative Studies*, 247; cf. D.O. Edzard, Review of AOAT 8, *ZA* 62 (1972) 123–25.

Abstract

Though the topic of performative utterances ist now routinely covered in reference grammars and other linguistic studies of Semitic languages, there remain any number of outstanding issues still do be scrutinized. Four of these are taken up here. The first part of the essay is dedicated to the question of pragmatics and the centrality of context and convention to an adequate accounting of how performatives mean. In the second part focus is shifted to the explicit performative, and most particularly to an exploration of what disposes verbs in the first person perfective in Semitic so felicitously toward the expression of performativity. The third and briefest part of the essay problematizes the notion of performativity and serves as a reminder of the important place of theory and philosophy in linguistic research more generally. The essay concludes with an extended consideration of the so-called "prostration formula" in Ugaritic and Akkadian letters.