

The Performative Clause *I Tell You*, Interpersonal Relationship, and Informational Superiority*

Keita Ikarashi

1. Introduction

Performative clauses have been studied extensively in linguistics since Austin (1962) proposed the theory of speech acts. As an early seminal work, Ross (1970) developed the *Performative Analysis*, according to which every sentence has a performative clause in its deep structure. For example:

- (1) a. It's cold here.
b. I'll come tomorrow.
- (2) a. I TELL YOU THAT it's cold here.
b. I PROMISE YOU THAT I'll come tomorrow.

The sentences in (1) are assumed to have deep structures with performative clauses like I TELL YOU or I PROMISE YOU in (2).

The existence of a performative clause in deep structure is supported by a number of evidence. One well-known argument bears on adverbs and adverbial clauses that modify implicit performative clauses as in (3) and (4) (Rutherford (1970), Schreiber (1972)). For simplicity of exposition, in this paper, I will limit my observations to cases in which the most basic performative clause *I tell you* (cf. Nakau (1980), Wierzbicka (1987)) is used.^{1, 2}


- (3) a. Honestly, I can't remember a thing about last night. (OALD⁷)
b. Honestly [I TELL YOU [I can't remember a thing about last night]]
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* I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Yukio Hirose, Nobuhiro Kaga, Masaharu Shimada, Naoaki Wada, Masaru Kanetani, and Kevin Moore for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article. My thanks also go to the following people: Tatsuhiro Okubo, Shotaro Namiki, Souma Mori, and Takahito Nobe. Needless to say, remaining errors are my own.

¹ Furthermore, in order to discuss the central function of the performative clause *I tell you*, this paper will deal with sentences like (i) in which the illocutionary force indicator (*I tell you*) and the propositional content (*it's cold here*) in the sense of Searle (1969) are separable, but not with sentences like (ii) in which the illocutionary force indicator is constitutive part of a propositional content.

(i) I tell you that it's cold here.
(ii) I tell you to put your toys away.

² I will touch on another type of performative clause in section 5.2.

- (4) a. If you want to know, I haven't seen him. (Palmer (1988:154))
 b. If you want to know, [I TELL YOU [I haven't seen him]]
- 

The natural interpretations of (3a) and (4a) are as follows: in (3a), the adverb *honestly* modifies not the propositional content but the implicit performative clause *I tell you* as in (3b), and similarly, in (4a), the conditional clause *if you want to know* modifies the implicit performative clause *I tell you* as in (4b).

Apart from its validity as a syntactic theory, the Performative Analysis suggests in effect that English sentences include illocutionary forces which can be optionally made explicit with performative clauses.³ However, Lakoff (1972) points out that performative clauses are normally left implicit in English (see also Leech (1980:69)). In fact, as Brown and Levinson (1987:190) note, if performative clauses are made explicit, the sentences are conversationally unusual, as illustrated in (5).⁴ Furthermore, even the examples in (3a) and (4a), which serve to indicate the existence of implicit performative clauses, also become unnatural if the explicit performative clauses are used as in (6) and (7) (cf. Shizawa (2011)).

- (5) *I tell you that it is so.
 (Brown and Levinson (1987:190), the asterisk is mine)
- (6) *Honestly, I tell you I can't remember a thing about last night.
- (7) *If you want to know, I tell you I haven't seen him.
 (Shizawa (2011:71), the asterisk is mine)

As shown in (5)-(7), the use of the performative clause *I tell you* normally yields unnatural or unacceptable sentences. In actual texts, however, we can find sentences with the performative clause *I tell you*.⁵ The italicized sentence in (8) is

³ A number of arguments against the Performative Analysis were offered in subsequent works (cf. Lyons (1977), Levinson (1983), Leech (1983)) and this analysis ended up being abandoned. However, for the sake of convenience, I will continue to use as a syntactic theory employed in the Performative Analysis (e.g. *implicit performative clauses*).

⁴ The asterisk denotes unnaturalness.

⁵ Lakoff (1973, 1977) explains in what context performative clauses are licensed in terms of politeness. However, the examples that she provides are, strictly speaking, not performative sentences. For example, she gives the followings:

- (i) a. I am telling you that Sweeny is a conscious dupe of the Communist conspiracy.
 b. I am asking you why you voted for that idiot Sweeny.
 (Lakoff (1977:103))

It is generally accepted that performatives are first person indicative active sentences in the simple present tense. The verbs *tell* and *ask* in (i) take progressive present forms, and thus, they are not

one such example.⁶

- (8) Lightyear: They are a terillium-carbonic alloy, and I *can* fly.
 Woody: No, you can't.
 Lightyear: Yes, I can.
 Woody: You can't.
 Lightyear: Can.
 Woody: Can't. Can't. Can't!
 Lightyear: *I tell you, I could fly around this room with my eyes closed!*
 Woody: Okay, then, Mr. Light Beer, prove it.

(*Toy Story*)

Lightyear's last sentence starts with *I tell you*, but unlike the examples in (5)-(7), it is fully acceptable.

The above observations indicate that the performative clause *I tell you* shows more complicated behavior than expected. It is thus necessary to clarify the mechanism to license or rule out its explicit use. Although considerable attention has been devoted to performative clauses, there are, as far as I know, no studies which seriously address the issue just mentioned.⁷ I will attempt to find a possible solution to it in terms of *the three-tier model of language use*, proposed by Hirose (this volume). More specifically, I will argue that *I tell you* serves to affect interpersonal relationship between speaker and hearer. If such a function is taken into account on the basis of the three-tier model, the phenomena associated with *I tell you* will become explicable in a principled and systematic way.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 explicates the central part of the three-tier model of language use, on which the proposal of this paper

used performatively. According to Mori (1980), the illocutionary force of sentences like (i) is 'explanation'; these sentences are employed when the speaker explains what speech act he performed in the previous utterance. Accordingly, Lakoff discusses the illocutionary force EXPLAIN, but not the illocutionary force TELL or ASK in (i).

⁶ Masaru Kanetani (p.c.) has suggested to me that the *I tell you* in (8) is parenthetical because the complementizer *that* is omitted (see Thompson and Mulac (1991) for omission of the complementizer *that*). However, whether the *I tell you* in (8) is parenthetical or not, it describes the situation in which the speaker conveys information to the hearer. Thus, the grammatical status of *I tell you* does not affect the functional analysis developed below. I will not discuss it here.

⁷ The function of *I tell you* has been sporadically pointed out in the literature. For instance, Fraser (1980:345) notes that explicit performative clauses make "unequivocal what speech act the speaker intends to perform" (see also Leech (1980:69)). This function, however, is not a crucial factor which determines the acceptability of *I tell you*. In (8), for example, we can omit *I tell you* from Lightyear's italicized utterance without rendering the sentence unacceptable. This means that the illocutionary force of this utterance is not equivocal; there should be another reason for using *I tell you*. Accordingly, it is difficult to account for the acceptability of the use of *I tell you* if we just focus on the function that Fraser proposes.

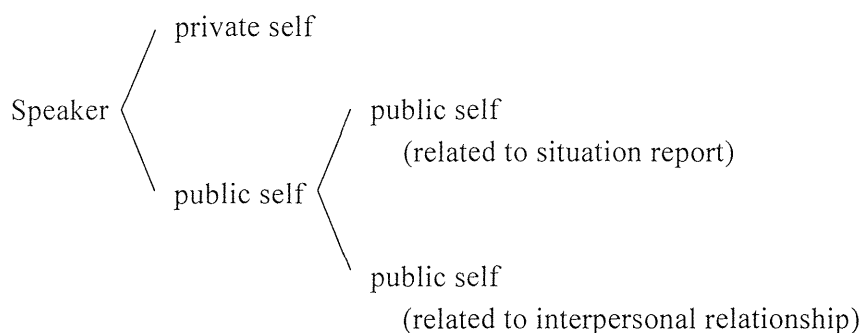
heavily depends. Section 3 proposes the function of the performative clause *I tell you* in terms of the three-tier model. Section 4 provides evidence in support of the proposal given in section 3. Section 5 discusses a consequence of the proposal in section 3. I will point out that the use of *I tell you* in some cases reflects the principle of politeness proposed in previous studies. Section 6 investigates the applicability of the analysis made in section 3 to another type of performative clause, namely, *I ask you*. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. Hirose's Theoretical Framework

In a series of studies (Hirose (1995, 1997, 2000, 2002); Hirose and Hasegawa (2010)), Hirose has maintained that there are two aspects in the notion of speaker: the 'public self' and the 'private self'. The public self is the subject of communicating and the 'private self' the subject of thinking or consciousness. Hirose (this volume) aims to develop and elaborate on the theory in his previous studies, and proposes *the three-tier model of language use*.

What is remarkable in this new model is that the public self is further divided into two aspects, as depicted in (9): one is the public self who exclusively communicates his construed situation to the addressee, and the other is the public self who considers his interpersonal relationship with the addressee.

(9)



Based on this trichotomy of the notion of speaker, Hirose argues that language use consists of three tiers, as shown in (10).

- (10) a. The situation construal tier:
The speaker as private self construes a situation, forming a thought about it.
- b. The situation report tier:
The speaker as public self reports or communicates his construed

situation to the addressee.

c. The interpersonal relationship tier:

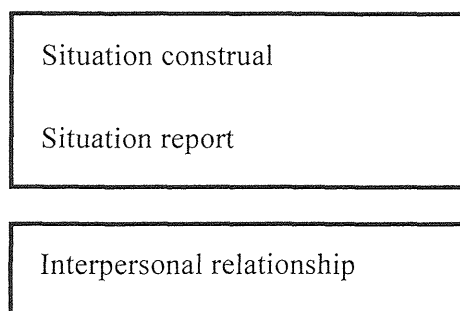
The speaker as public self construes or considers his interpersonal relationship with the addressee.

(Hirose (this volume:5), with modifications)

Languages differ as to how the three tiers are combined and how they are related to linguistic forms. Since this paper is focusing on English performative sentences, let me show here how the three-tier model is applied to English.

Under the three-tier model, Hirose hypothesizes that in English, the situation construal tier and the situation report tier are normally grouped together, and the interpersonal relationship tier is independent of the other two tiers, as diagramed in (11).⁸

(11)



The combination of the three tiers (English)

This combination of three tiers in (11) indicates that (i) expressions for situation construal and situation report are identical, and (ii) additional elements are required to express interpersonal relationship. For example, sentences without expressions encoding interpersonal relationship like (12) are forms for the situation construal tier and the situation report tier. For the interpersonal relationship tier, it is necessary to add expressions encoding interpersonal relationship like address terms as in (13).

(12) Today is Saturday.

(13) Today is Saturday, {madam/ma'am/Mrs. Brown/Jane/darling/honey/etc.}.

(Hirose (this volume:13))

The contrast between these examples shows that expressions encoding interpersonal

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the combination of the three tiers in English, see Hirose (this volume:sections 2 and 3).

relationship like address terms are marked because they are not necessary in communication unless there is a special reason to modify interpersonal relationship, due to the separation of the situation report tier from interpersonal relationship tier. To put it differently, in (12), forms without expressions like address terms are unmarked in communication. Under the three-tier model, we may say that unmarked forms enable us to convey our construed information without paying attention to the relative social status of speaker and hearer, or to the difference in the state of knowledge at the speech time between speaker and hearer.

In the next section, I will propose the function of the performative clause *I tell you* and clarify the mechanism to license the explicit use of *I tell you* on the basis of the observations about the three-tier model.

3. Proposal

3.1. *The Function of I Tell You*

As its very nature, the performative clause *I tell you* serves to linguistically make explicit the situation in which the speaker is conveying the information in question to the hearer at the speech time. It thus emphasizes the roles of the speaker and the hearer as information giver and information receiver, respectively. This relationship defined in terms of information giver and receiver can be captured from the different perspective, namely, *informational superiority*. We can say, for example, that person A is informationally superior to person B when person A has a fuller grasp of the information in question than person B. It is natural to assume that the information giver is in an informationally superior position to the information receiver. Thus, *I tell you* has the function stated in (14).

- (14) The performative clause *I tell you* indicates that the speaker is informationally superior to the hearer.⁹

I tell you serves to specify the relationship between speaker and hearer in terms of informational superiority.

This function of *I tell you* leads us to consider that this expression is related to interpersonal relationship (see also Holmes (1984), and Ikarashi et al. (2012)), because it expresses the difference in the state of knowledge between speaker and hearer at the speech time. If this is the case, the three-tier model immediately explains why *I tell you* is normally left implicit: according to the three-tier model,

⁹ Nakau (1980) notes that some performative verbs conceptually include *tell* in their lexical meaning. If this is the case, these performative verbs also indicate the speaker's informational superiority over the hearer. Since I am focusing on *I tell you*, I will investigate this possibility in future research.

overt realization of expressions encoding information on interpersonal relationship is marked in English; thus, *I tell you* should be implicit in normal and unmarked cases.

3.2. Contexts where *I Tell You* is Used

The three-tier model and the proposal in (14) enables us to specify the contexts that license the use of *I tell you*. Remember that in the three-tier model, the situation report tier is separated from the interpersonal relationship tier in English (see (11)). This means that in normal situations, we convey information without contrasting the speaker's and the hearer's state of knowledge at the speech time. In fact, the difference in the state of knowledge between speaker and hearer is not reflected in linguistic forms in English as follows:

- (15) a. Hanako is ill. [known only to speaker]
 b. It's a beautiful day. [known to both speaker and hearer]
 (Hirose (this volume:25))

The information in (15a) is known only to speaker, whereas that in (15b) is known to both speaker and hearer. In languages such as Japanese, these sentences in (15a) and (15b) are distinguished with certain linguistic devices.¹⁰ By contrast, English does not linguistically distinguish these two sentences, as illustrated in (15). To put it differently, informational superiority is not normally expressed linguistically in the English language system. This fact leads Hirose to conclude that the speaker and the hearer, by default, are informationally in a symmetrical or equal position in the English language system. This linguistic equality between speaker and hearer is reflected in the manner of information giving. Hirose claims that information giving in the default case in English is about "reciprocal information sharing" (see Hirose (this volume:25) for details). As proposed in (14), on the other hand, *I tell*

¹⁰ As shown in (i), the Japanese sentences corresponding to the English sentences in (15) are linguistically distinguished with the sentence final particle *ne*, which indicates that the information in question are shared between speaker and hearer.

- (i) a. *Hanako-wa byooki desu.* [known only to speaker]
 Hanako-TOP ill COP.POL
 'Hanako is ill.'
 b. *Iti tenki desu ne.* [known to both speaker and addressee]
 good weather COP.POL SFP
 'It's a beautiful day.'
 (TOP = topic, COP = copula, POL = polite, and SFP = sentence final particle)

For a detailed discussion about the difference between English and Japanese as in (15) and (i), see Hirose (this volume).

you servers to linguistically indicate the speaker's informational superiority over the hearer. It is thus reasonable to say that the use of *I tell you* changes a linguistically symmetrical relationship in default case to a linguistically asymmetrical one. As a consequence, the manner of information giving also changes from reciprocal information sharing to "one-sided information giving".¹¹ When information is one-sidedly given to the hearer, he is compelled to accept it. The analysis just developed here is summarized in the diagram in (16).

(16)

Unmarked	Marked (<i>I tell you ...</i>)
linguistically <i>symmetrical</i> relationship	linguistically <i>asymmetrical</i> relationship
↓	↓
reciprocal information sharing	one-sided information giving

Given this analysis, it will become possible to predict the context that licenses the explicit use of *I tell you*. That is, the use of *I tell you* is allowed in a context in which (i) the speaker cannot maintain reciprocal information sharing with the hearer for some reason and (ii) he believes that his communicative goal is achieved by one-sidedly giving the information in question.¹² In the next section, I will illustrate the validity of this licensing condition of the explicit use of *I tell you*.

4. Supporting Evidence

From the licensing condition of the explicit use of *I tell you* given above, we can predict that *I tell you* is not allowed in a context in which information is conveyed in a default fashion, i.e. a context in which the speaker and the hearer reciprocally share the information in question. The following examples confirm this prediction:

(17) *I tell you that it is so. (= (5))

¹¹ The analysis here is supported by the general pragmatic hypothesis proposed by Levinson (2000); that is, marked expressions indicate abnormal situations and they contrast with unmarked expressions which are used to describe the corresponding normal situations (see also Horn (1984)). Because *I tell you* is a marked expression, it creates the marked situation as diagramed in (16).

¹² Note that the situation expressed by *I tell you* may or may not correspond to the actual situation normally assumed by both speaker and hearer. The speaker can use *I tell you* even when the hearer is more familiar with the information in question than the speaker.

- (18) *Honestly, I tell you I can't remember a thing about last night. (= (6))
 (19) *If you want to know, I tell you I haven't seen him. (= (7))

Because these examples are presented without specific contexts, we may consider that the information is conveyed in a default manner, i.e. in the manner of reciprocal information sharing. In other words, there is no contextual factor that leads the speaker to abandon achieving the reciprocal information sharing with the hearer. Therefore, the use of *I tell you*, which changes reciprocal information sharing into one-sided information giving, is conversationally unusual in these examples.

Next, I will demonstrate that when *I tell you* is correctly used, the licensing condition of its explicit use proposed in the previous section is fulfilled. Let us consider the following example:

- (20) Lightyear: They are a terillium-carbonic alloy, and I *can* fly.
 Woody: No, you can't.
 Lightyear: Yes, I can.
 Woody: You can't.
 Lightyear: Can.
 Woody: Can't. Can't. Can't!
 Lightyear: *I tell you, I could fly around this room with my eyes closed!*
 Woody: Okay, then, Mr. Light Beer, prove it.
 (= (8))

Lightyear insists that he can fly, but Woody refuses to believe it; Lightyer is not in a position in which he can reciprocally share with Woody the information that he can fly. We can say that in order to make Woody accept that information, Lightyear needs to impose it on Woody. *I tell you* is a linguistic device which enables Lightyear to achieve his communicative goal because the information in question is one-sidedly given to and thus imposed on Woody by using *I tell you*. Because the context fulfills the licensing condition of the use of *I tell you*, the sentence containing *I tell you* is acceptable.

The sentence with the performative clause *I tell you* modified by an adverbial can be analyzed along similar lines. As noted in section 1, although certain type of adverbials is used to show the existence of implicit performative clauses, sentences become unnatural when the performative clauses modified by the adverbials are made explicit, as shown in (18) and (19). The italicized sentence in (21), however, is fully acceptable even if it includes the explicit performative clause *I tell you*.

(21) Daniel: [...] But now it's different. He [= Percy]'s realized that he must work, same as other folks, and he's doin' it. He works for some magazine or other, doin' what he calls literary work.

Barney: Humph! What magazine is it?

Daniel: I don't know. I never asked.

Barney: Well, all right. *I tell you, honestly, Dan, there's a feeling that he is working you and the family for easy marks.* You give him a good home and plenty to eat and smoke and it's a pretty soft thing for him. As to work — Humph!

(C. L. Joseph, *Cap'n Dan's Daughter*, the italics are mine)

Barney has confidence that Percy deceives Daniel and his family. However, it is hard to reciprocally share the information that Barney thinks to be true with Daniel because Daniel strongly believes that Percy mended his ways. Thus, it is reasonable to say that Barney employs *I tell you*, which expresses that the information in question is one-sidedly given to the hearer, to impose on Daniel the information that Percy deceives Daniel and his family. As illustrated by this example, *I tell you* as modified by adverbs like *honestly* is acceptable if there is a contextual motivation to change the manner of information giving from reciprocal information sharing to one-sided information giving.¹³

So far, I have illustrated that *I tell you* expresses one-sided information giving. As noted in section 3.2, the interpretation of one-sided information giving is attributed to informational superiority which *I tell you* indicates. Lastly, let us confirm the proposal that *I tell you* indicates the speaker's informational superiority over the hearer. Because the speaker insists with *I tell you* that he has a fuller grasp of the information at issue than the hearer, the use of *I tell you* should imply that the speaker has the strong confidence that what he is informing is true. We can thus predict that sentences with *I tell you* are incompatible with expressions that deny such confidence. This prediction is borne out by the following examples:

(22) [The following sentences are uttered by Lightyear in the same context

¹³ I have also found several examples in which *I tell you* is modified by a conditional clause like (i). All these examples, however, sounds old-fashioned at least to the native speakers I have checked with. This means that *I tell you* as modified by a conditional clause is not usually used in contemporary English. I leave an explanation of this fact for future research.

(i) [The speaker is speaking with a knife on the hearer's neck.]
My brother, Zeb, was at Frenchtown when your native allies massacred our men. Yes, we remember the Raisin River, too. *If you want to send your natives here, then I tell you that you had better look after your own scalp because I will hunt you down.*
(D. E. Butters, *The Insolent Enemy*)

as (20).]

- a. I tell you, I could fly around this room with my eyes closed, **but I'm not sure.*
- b. I could fly around this room with my eyes closed, *??but I'm not sure.*

The italicized sentence *I'm not sure* expresses that Lightyear does not have confidence that he could fly around the room with his eyes closed. The sentence *I'm not sure* is not allowed to follow the sentence with *I tell you* as in (22a). On the other hand, if *I tell you* is omitted as in (22b), the sentence *I'm not sure* becomes more acceptable than that in (22a) (although it still remains unnatural because the context indicates that Lightyear is sure to be able to fly). This contrast suggests that *I tell you* has the implication that the speaker has the strong confidence that what he is informing is true.

In sum, I have demonstrated that the proposal in this paper clarifies the mechanism to license the explicit use of *I tell you* on the basis of the three-tier model. More specifically, the use of *I tell you* is allowed in a context in which (i) the speaker cannot maintain reciprocal information sharing with the hearer for some reason and (ii) he believes that his communicative goal is achieved by one-sidedly giving the information in question.¹⁴

5. Consequence

The analysis developed in section 3 makes it clear that a certain principle of politeness is reflected in the use of *I tell you* and enables us to explain why *I tell you* is in some cases exploited for politeness strategies.

First, let us begin by considering the relationship between *I tell you* and

¹⁴ Note that informational superiority should be distinguished from social superiority. Consider the following:

- (i) Commander: Lord Vader, this is an unexpected pleasure. We're honored by your presence.
 - Vader: You may dispense with the pleasantries, Commander. I'm here to put you back on schedule.
 - [The commander turns ashen and begins to shake.]
 - Commander: I assure you, Lord Vader, my men are working as fast as they can.
 - Vader: Perhaps I can find new ways to motivate them.
 - Commander: *I tell you, this station will be operational as planned.*
 - Vader: The Emperor does not share your optimistic appraisal of the situation.
 - Commander: But he asks the impossible. I need more men.
- (Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi)*

The context shows that the commander is socially inferior to Vader. Nevertheless, the commander expresses his informational superiority over Vader with *I tell you*. This fact suggests that informational superiority is conceptually independent of social superiority.

politeness in normal situations. Given the function of *I tell you* proposed in this paper, it is predicted that its use normally causes rudeness. *I tell you* expresses that the speaker one-sidedly gives information to the hearer, and as a result, the information in question is imposed on the hearer. This imposition of information violates the politeness principle *Don't impose*, hypothesized by Lakoff (1973). Therefore, the use of *I tell you* normally leads to rudeness. In fact, the examples I have provided so far are more or less interpreted to be rude.

However, there are cases in which the performative clause *I tell you* functions as a device for politeness strategy. Let us consider the example in (23).

- (23) The four of them (Wolfgang on violin) played through Mozart's three new string quartets — the last of the "Haydn" set. When they had finished, Haydn turned to Leopold and said: "*As God is my witness, and as a man of honour, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me, either personally or by reputation. He has taste and, what is more, the most complete knowledge of composition.*" (BNC)

Impressed by Mozart's quartets, Haydn extols Leopold's son Mozart. In this case, *I tell you* serves to strengthen the force of praise and is not fraught with rudeness. This fact suggests that a certain principle of politeness operates in the example in (23). I assume that *I tell you* is exploited for politeness strategy for just the same reasons that the imperative is.

The imperative form implies that the speaker compels the hearer to carry out the action in question. Thus, it is not usually used politely. However, when the action that the speaker orders to perform is beneficial to the hearer, the use of the imperative is construed as polite (cf. Lakoff (1972), Leech (1983)). The cost-benefit scale in (24) given in Leech (1983) illustrates this point:

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| (24) | a. Peel these potatoes. | ↑ | ↑ |
| | b. Hand me the newspaper. | ↓ | ↓ |
| | c. Sit down. | | |
| | d. Look at that. | | |
| | e. Enjoy your holiday. | | |
| | f. Have another sandwich. | | |
| | | benefit to the hearer | more polite |
- (Leech (1983:107))

The value of the imperative in (24a) at the one end of the scale is ‘cost to the hearer’ because to peel potatoes absorbs the hearer’s time and energy. Hence, this imperative is impolite. On the other hand, the value of the imperative in (24f) at the other end of the scale is ‘benefit to the hearer’ because to have another sandwich satisfies the hearer’s appetite. Hence, this imperative is polite.

The same principle of politeness operates on the performative clause *I tell you* in (23). The speaker Haydn one-sidedly gives Leopold the information that Mozart is the greatest composer, and as a result, Leopold is compelled to accept that information. Notice that the acceptance of this information is beneficial to Leopold since Haydn praises Leopold’s son Mozart. Thus, the *I tell you* here is exploited for politeness strategy. Given the function of *I tell you* proposed above, it will become clear that the principle of politeness operating on the imperative is also reflected in some use of *I tell you*.

6. Informational Superiority and Another Type of Performative Clause

This section discusses the possibility that the notion of informational superiority, used in defining the function of *I tell you*, is applicable to other performative clauses. Here, let us take the performative clause *I ask you* (e.g. *I ask you, did we hear from him?* (Birner (2013:181))) as an example.

I ask you emphasizes the roles of the speaker and the hearer as information requester and requestee, respectively. Notice that this relationship between speaker and hearer is nearly opposite to the relation indicated by *I tell you* in that the information requester and requestee are prospective information receiver and giver, respectively. Thus, we can say that *I ask you* has the function to signal that the hearer is informationally superior to the speaker. Here is one example in which *I ask you* is used:

(25) Marsha: [...] And you know what he says to me?

Ethel: Nothing?

Marsha: Oh, no. Not nothing. Absolutely not. I wish you could have *heard* what he said, I only wish you could. He starts in with me about how I’ll just shut them again. He starts yelling about ‘Too much darkness! Too many curtains all over the house!’ Now I ask you, what are curtains for? What are curtains *for*? You *close* them for your *privacy*! [...]

(E. Berg, *Never Change*, the underline is mine)

Looking at the utterance after the underlined part, Marsha answers her question by

herself. The underlined question thus is interpreted as a rhetorical question. In rhetorical questions, the speaker already knows the answer to the question but calls the hearer's attention to information expressed by the question. *I ask you* here can be interpreted to serve to attract the hearer's attention strongly as in the following way. *I ask you* provisionally establishes a situation in which the hearer is informationally superior to the speaker. By admitting hearer's informational superiority over the speaker, the speaker puts the hearer in a position where the hearer as informational superior cannot choose but provide an answer to the question at issue. Thus, the hearer is required to search for the answer with great attention. That is why *I ask you* in (25) strengthens the force of attraction of the hearer's attention. In this way, the notion of informational superiority can capture the function of *I ask you*.

7. Conclusion

Although performative sentences have attracted enormous attention since Austin (1962), there has been no study dealing with the question as to what determines the acceptability of the use of *I tell you* in a principled way. In this paper, from the perspective of the three-tier model of language use, proposed by Hirose (this volume), I have argued that the performative clause *I tell you* affects interpersonal relationship. More specifically, it changes an informationally symmetrical relationship between speaker and hearer to an asymmetrical one. As a result, the manner of information giving also changes from reciprocal information sharing to one-sided information giving. This interpersonal function is crucial in accounting for the acceptability of the use of *I tell you*.

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Doctoral Program in Literature and Linguistics

University of Tsukuba

ikarashi.k61@gmail.com