From performatives to performances

Intro Some demonstration-based content (in the broad sense of Davidson 2015) can be compositionally integrated into larger utterances in a straight-forward way, as properties of individuals or events of the form 'such that it resembles "DEMONSTRATION"'. I propose that, in addition, we regularly make use of a general mechanism of turning performative expression of (affective, social, ritualistic, etc.) non-truth-conditional meaning into demonstrations of such expression within pieces of truth-conditional content of the general form 'such that it would make me/one go "DEMONSTRATION"', which we can then combine as modifiers or supplements with other truth-conditional content. I show that this mechanism of going "from performatives to performances" emerges for meaning–form mappings of varied conventionalization status and for various types of forms (lexicalized spoken morphemes, gesture, prosody, etc.).

Affective degree modification First, I show how this mechanism works for affective degree modification via fully lexicalized spoken segmental morphemes and via gesture (+ prosody). Cross-linguistically, lexicalized spoken expressives routinely re-lexicalize as degree intensifiers:
(1) a. She is {fucking, damn, bloody} smart. $\approx$ 'She is very smart + I'm expressing feelings.'
  b. Ona {pizdec / zaebis'} (kakaja)　umnaja. (Russian)
    she {EXPR / EXPR}　(what.ADJ) smart
    $\approx$ 'She is the "Pizdec / Zaebis!" degree of smart.'
    Pizdec: N 'bad situation'; obscene; can be a standalone utterance ($\approx$ 'Fuck!')
    Zaebis': IMP of *zaebat'sja* 'get tired'; obscene; often a standalone utterance ($\approx$ 'Great!')
The relevant Russian items cannot possibly be a noun and an imperative, respectively, in their syntactic context in (1b), but, notably, both can be used as standalone utterances expressing one's immediate heightened emotions performatively (i.e., the goal of expressing said emotions is achieved by virtue of uttering the expression), which provides the key insight for the demonstration-based analysis. I adopt a version of Potts 2007 for performative meaning contributions, modeling them as direct altering of some parameter of the context of utterance; in the case of expressive meanings, it is the expressive index c_ε. I furthermore completely separate such performative context-altering effects of uttering a given expression (which are non-truth-conditional) from its compositional meaning contribution (which is non-performative and truth-conditional); each expression has both specified as part of its lexical meaning. Purely expressive uses of the relevant items in (1) only make performative contributions as in (2a); they either don't compose with anything, or their compositional contribution is vacuous (they pass on their input unchanged). But in (1b), we build additional compositional structure around these expressive utterances, turning them into pieces of truth-conditional content, namely, degree modifiers of the form 'such that it would make me/one go "Pizdec / Zaebis'!"' ((2b) would need to be adjusted for expressives like *fucking* that cannot be used as standalone utterances, e.g., 'd meets the α-specific standard for reacting to it with affect normally expressed by *expr*'):
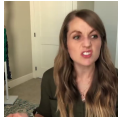(2) Expressive degree intensifiers within a version of Potts 2007
  a. Performative context-altering effect of uttering $expr_{\text{deg}}$:
    $c \to c'$, where c' is just like c, except $\text{feels}(c'_s, c'_\varepsilon)$, i.e., c'_ε has been altered to reflect that the speaker c'_s is experiencing the relevant feeling in c'
  b. Truth-conditional effect of composing $expr_{\text{deg}}$ with its sister:
    $[\![expr_{\text{deg}}]\!]^c([\![\alpha_{\langle d,\langle \tau_1...\tau_n,t\rangle\rangle}]\!]^c) = \lambda d\lambda X^1_{\tau_1}...X^n_{\tau_n}.[\![\alpha]\!]^c(d)(X^1)...(X^n) \wedge \text{"expr"}_{[\![\alpha]\!]^c}(d)$,
    where "expr"$_{[\![\alpha]\!]^c}(d)$ means d meets the α-specific standard for reacting to it with *expr*
Note that at least the relevant items in (1) preserve their performative potential when used as degree intensifiers, i.e., the act of uttering the "strong" word/root can still serve as an outlet for one's immediate affect there, in which case the items in (1) are both mentioned (in the description of the degree) and used (performatively).

This analysis extends straight-forwardly to cases of affective degree modification via (facial, manual, etc.) gesture and prosody. E.g., the eyes-wide-open facial expression (*OO*), discussed in Esipova 2019a,b, starts out as a performative expression of immediate surprise as a reaction to something, but can also be used as a degree intensifier. Similarly, the gestural complex that I will call *MEH* can be used, e.g., as a reactive expression of uncertainty or lukewarm attitude, but can also be used as a degree attenuator. *OO* and *MEH* are accompanied by converging prosody when co-occurring with spoken material, but can make the same contributions on their own, e.g., when co-occurring with silent gesture. For illustration, in (3), the first two *OO* and the only *MEH* are degree modifiers separating "OO"-worthy contractions from "MEH"-worthy ones (following Esipova 2019b, I assume that *contraction* is coerced into a scalar reading there), while the third *OO* is a performative expression of shock (within a larger role shift to the speaker's past self).

(3) *Context: The speaker is reminiscing about giving birth to their fourth child.*

And then I have like a contraction^{OO}. If you've ever had a baby, you know, like,

 there's contractions^{MEH}, and then there are contractions^{OO}. I knew it was

real, I was like, "Oh. My. God. That. Is a. Contraction.^{OO}".

('Mama Doctor Jones' YouTube channel, https://youtu.be/dMeiPyuV_Y4?t=222)

Supplement *OO* As noted in Esipova 2019a,b, *OO* can also be used as a sentence-level supplement, akin to the adverb *surprisingly* (which can also be used as a degree modifier), conveying one's non-immediate, non-reactive surprised attitude towards some propositional content, e.g.:

(4) Yesterday, there was a party, and $\overline{\text{Mia got drunk}}^{OO}$.

≈ Yesterday, there was a party, and, surprisingly, Mia got drunk.

I extend the demonstration-based analysis to this case, too, i.e., in addition to a purely expressive use ((2a) + no or vacuous truth-conditional contribution) and a degree intensifier use (truth-conditional contribution in (2b)), *OO* can also make the following (supplemental) truth-conditional contribution (I'm agnostic about the specific implementation of the "sidelined" status of supplements, as well as whether this use of *OO* has any remnant performative potential):

(5) Truth-conditional effect of OO_{sup} combining with its anchor proposition:

$[\![OO_{\text{sup}}(p)]\!]^c$ = "OO"$([\![p]\!]^c)$, where "OO"$([\![p]\!]^c)$ means $[\![p]\!]^c$ warrants reacting to it with *OO*

Other cases I also discuss how the proposed analysis extends to, a.o., performative expression of immediate negative affect via gesture and/or prosody turned into demonstration-based truth-conditional conveyance of non-immediate negative attitude, as in (6); embedding interjections, as in (7); performative ritualistic actions turned into spoken and/or gestural supplements (e.g., English *knock on wood* or *fingers crossed*, Russian *t'fu-t'fu-t'fu*, etc.); sarcastic coughing; etc.

(6) I don't have friends$^{\text{DISGUST-face/prosody}}$. ('Sherlock', BBC, S2E2)

→ The speaker finds the notion of friendship disgusting.

(7) Cool that you have deer, yuck that they poop. (cited from Zyman 2018)

References Davidson. 2015. doi.org/10.1007/s10988-015-9180-1 Esipova. 2019a. ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004676 Esipova. 2019b. ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/004905 Potts. 2007. doi.org/10.1515/TL.2007.011 Zyman. 2018. doi.org/10.7358/snip-2017-032-zymb