

License to declare and enforce? Historical sociolinguistics meets historical discourse analysis

Explicit performatives are speech acts that both describe and change the social situation in which they are uttered (Austin 1962). In this presentation, we show how the performative power, the exercise of power, and the linguistic meaning all change when performative utterances are used and re-used, *re-contextualized*, in new contexts. The data of the study consists of an *intertextual chain* or, more specifically, *genre chains*, which are linked together and involve systematic transformation (Fairclough 1992, 2003; see also Nordlund & Pallaskallio 2017). These text and discourse chains consist of decrees of the emperor, the central administration, and local priests, as well as decrees, notices, advertisements and news texts published in newspapers.

We will demonstrate that the intertextual chains under study are not random, but strictly controlled by the communicative practices dictated by the imperial government in 19th-century Finland. The explicit performatives only carry their performative and reality-changing meaning when used by a person who holds the right position in society, and who is thus granted the right power. In new contexts, the underlying meaning or connotations of the explicit performatives remain, but change. When re-contextualized, these utterances can carry, for example, another type of identity-building function (see Laitinen & Nordlund 2012), or they can add to the power or authority of the message itself.

In some contexts, in particular, official decrees have a close relationship with newspaper texts. In our presentation, we will propose that the idea of an explicit performative can also be used in digital and quantitative analysis, data-mining, genre analysis, or the analysis of evolving new genres, a process that in Finnish took place not before the late 19th century.

References

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