

## LEXICAL DEFINITIONS OF SOME PERFORMATIVE VERBS<sup>1</sup>

BORIS HLEBEC\*

*University of Belgrade*

### ABSTRACT

The author upholds Anna Wierzbicka's opinion that unless strict scientific definitions of performatives are reached, no successful classification of these verbs can be made. The article compares definitions of the verb *elect* and four performative verbs (*appoint*, *declare*, *excommunicate* and *pronounce*) as presented in four English dictionaries, as well as in the form of Wierzbicka's explicatives and the author's formulations reached by means of the collocational method. This method seeks to gain a realistic insight into the semantic structure of lexemes because most metalinguistic elements are drawn from facts offered by the language itself. The definitions of the performative verbs, like of any other verb, can be marshalled by combining and incorporating semantic definitions of the collocating grammar words and constructions. The latter task is done by extracting the common content of the grammar words and constructions in the relevant meanings as appearing in collocations of their own. The same procedure is carried out for the noun collocates occurring in the subject and object slots of the verbs in question. The performative force within this small lexical field manifests gradation, depending on the presence of a person in authority.

Keywords: collocation, performative verbs, lexical definitions, semantics, collocational method

### 1. Introduction

Research into speech acts belongs in pragmatics, text-linguistics, and conversational analysis. Owing to their nature, speech act verbs cannot be thoroughly

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\* Corresponding author: Boris Hlebec (boris.jesensek@gmail.com), 11. krajske divizije 67, 11090 Beograd, Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> In this article "performative verbs" will be treated as lexical items from the semantic aspect which captures their invariant meanings. The important pragmatic side of the issue will be put aside for this occasion. For further elucidation see section 1 of the article.

analyzed without inspecting their pragmatic use. This holds good to a lesser degree for the entire lexis, but since there are performative verbs used exclusively or typically to perform speech acts, their investigation comes within the scope of semantics as well. There must be a common core to their usage in speech, which can be revealed from a semantic point of view yielding diagnostic, lexical definitions. Although the mainstream approach to performative verbs in linguistics has been pragmatic (with the exception of important studies by Anna Wierzbicka), we shall concentrate solely on the semantic side, with the aim to show that the company these verbs keep (paraphrasing Firth's famous saying), is a good guide to their essence.

## 2. Aims

The purpose of this investigation is (1) to find scientific lexicological definitions for four performative verbs and one approximating them, and (2) to compare them (2a) mutually and (2b) to definitions in four modern English monolingual dictionaries: *Collins COBUILD English language dictionary* (Sinclair 1987; hereafter abbreviated to C), Hornby's *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary* (Hornby, Ashby & Wehmeier 2000; hereafter H), *Webster's II new college dictionary* 2005 (2005; hereafter W II), and *Macmillans English dictionary for advanced learners* (Rundell 2007; hereafter M), as well as to Anna Wierzbicka's explicatives. Wierzbicka has elaborated a method of creating explicatives, a kind of definitions derived from simple ordinary language, which are meant to highlight the most important, invariant meaningful elements of particular words (e.g., Wierzbicka 1972, 1980, 1985, 1987, 1988). Occasionally, she resorts to collocations, well aware that "[t]he meaning of a word can often be illuminated by the other words which it tends to co-occur with" (Wierzbicka 1987: 210).

We are going to work our way through semantic definitions of the verbs *appoint*, *declare*, *pronounce*, and *excommunicate*. These verbs are related to "[s]peech acts that bring about the state of affairs they name [...]: bids, blessings, firings, baptisms, arrests, marrying, declaring a mistrial. [...] The verbs include *bet*, *declare*, *baptize*, *name*, *nominate*, *pronounce*" (Kreidler 1998: 185, who calls them "performative" in a narrower sense than usual). These speech act verbs belong in the "exercitive" group of Austin's performative verbs, with the exception of *declare* in one meaning, which was classified as "commissive" (Austin 1962), while Searle (1969, 1976) classified them as "declarations". Wierzbicka assigns *appoint* to the *permit* group, *excommunicate* to the *baptize* group, and the rest to the *declare* group. For the sake of a more graphic comparison the verb *elect* has been added to the group although it is not on the list of Austin's and Wierzbicka's speech act verbs.

Since we have decided to analyze only sememes with a performative function or verging thereon, other meanings of *appoint* ('decide on a time/place'), *declare* ('tell that one owns taxable property'), and *pronounce* ('utter') will not be treated here.

### 3. The collocational method

In this study we shall proceed from the collocational approach. A systematic investigation into collocation as a means to produce semantic definitions was presented in Hlebec (2008 a, b, c, 2011 a, b, 2012, 2013). The customary collocational-method procedure that we are going to follow is this: (1) determine polysemy when present and concentrate on each sememe separately, (2) identify grammar words and content words as the collocators of the particular verb sememe, and (3) provide the content of the collocators that agree with the chosen sememe in order to use it as a source for definitions. Unacceptable collocations also serve as clues to defining (cf. Wierzbicka 1987: 20).

Relevant content words in this case are nouns that function in the subject and object slots (i.e. as so called "directives"<sup>2</sup> in definitions), as well as the adverb *seriously*. The grammar words that have emerged as collocators are the following prepositions and conjunctions: *against* (collocating with *declare*, *pronounce* 2), *among* (collocating with *elect*), *as* (in agreement with *appoint* and *elect*), *between* (with *elect*), *by* (with all), *for* (with *declare* and *pronounce* 1), *from* (two meanings, with *excommunicate* and *elect*), *on* (*declare* and *pronounce* 2), *that* (*declare* 2, *pronounce* 2), *to* (*appoint* and *elect*), *wh-word* (*declare*). *To be* can be used as part of the complement with *declare* 1 and *pronounce* 2, and has to be used with *declare* 2. The patterns that occur are the non-finite clause (for *appoint*, *declare*, *pronounce* 2) and the formula *I hereby* + Present Simple Tense V (for *appoint*, *declare*, *excommunicate* and *pronounce*). A category that came up is *to*-infinitive (as a complement to *appoint* and *elect*). The demarcation within polysemy has been made by consulting dictionaries and by using the zeugma test (cf. Cruse 1986). The metalanguage of definitions is simple and monosemic. Each of these grammar words and patterns was previously defined as follows, by capturing the invariant meaning recurrent in a number of their own collocations and restricted to the meaning relevant to this lexical field.

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<sup>2</sup> The notion and the term "directive" has been adopted from Wiggins (1971: 26).

## 4. Definitions of the collocators

*against* <in order to make «sth<sub>1</sub>» weak – non-existent because sth<sub>1</sub> is viewed as bad><sup>3</sup> e.g. *appeal a. maltreatment; fight a. the Persians; case a. death penalty; action a. a criminal* = ‘action in order to make a criminal weak because criminal is viewed as bad’

*among* <having to do with «more than two sth» in the same way> *They discussed the matter a. themselves. The land was divided equally a. the heirs.*

*as* <sb<sub>x</sub> (makes sb<sub>indef</sub> experience mental state<sup>4</sup> that sth is «sth») > *I acknowledge myself as an offender.* = ‘I make sb<sub>indef</sub> think that I am an offender’; *The bomb was disguised as a package. They were all dressed as clowns.*

*between* <having to do with «two sth» in the same way> *the match b. Italy and Spain; a link b. diet and diabetes*

*by* <using «event done by use of language»> “Verbs from sets (i) [*insult, slander, curse, abuse, scold, blame, rebuke, forgive, pardon, praise, thank, congratulate, compliment; tell NP off, pick on NP*] - (ii) [*accuse, excuse*] and (iv) [*cheer, applaud, apologise*] may add specification of the way in which the attitude was revealed or the greeting affected, using *by* plus an NP or ING clause,

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<sup>3</sup> Explanation of the symbols used:  
 sb<sub>sp</sub> the speaker of the utterance  
 sb<sub>strong</sub> person with social power  
 sb<sub>indef</sub> indefinite persons (see Hlebec 2013)  
 sb<sub>weak</sub> person in a weak social position  
 x, y, z sth different with the same designation  
 sth something (including things, beings and phenomena)  
 # # “directive”, semantic content of a noun in subject and object functions  
 <> semantic definition  
 [ ] content proper of an adverb  
 « » content of the prepositional object  
 \_\_ \_ content proper of a conjunction within its definition  
 ! ! content proper of an infinitive within its definition  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (a) part of a preposition definition meant to replace the preposition or (b) a non-finite clause  
 - alternative semes, with one metalinguistic unit exchanged for another  
 / alternative semes exchanging elements with more than one metalinguistic unit  
 { } typically

<sup>4</sup> In this article the following implications (redundancy rules) are applicable: ‘mental state’ ⊃ ‘thought’, ‘sb more than one’ ⊃ ‘group’, ‘living thing’ ⊃ ‘sb’, ‘experience’ ⊃ ‘know’, ‘experience mental phenomenon’ ⊃ ‘come to know’, ‘phenomenon’ ⊃ ‘state’ and ⊃ ‘state’ ⊃ ‘position’. The feature ‘being not a member’ in *excommunicate* is a kind of ‘state’.

e.g. *He insulted me by mispronouncing my name. She thanked me by making a very sweet speech.*” (Dixon 2005: 159).

for <concerning «sth» wanted> *He was concerned f. the boy’s happiness. ask f. money* = ‘ask concerning money, which is wanted’

from 1 <not | being with – like/experiencing «sth»> *absolve/abstain/clip/detach/disappear/divorce /switch f. sth; exempt f. paying* ‘make sb not experience payment’; *separated f. brother; free/safe f. attack; absent f. lecture; different f. the rest* 2 <the source being «sth»> *develop/emerge f. an egg*

on <sb<sub>strong</sub>’s mental phenomenon concerning «sth»> *question on the subject; comment on it; book on philosophy; ideas on how films should be made; work on the problem*

that <← this thought: → (= <← thought concerning phenomenon →) *I believe t. she’s happy. Did you know t. Jim had graduated?*

to <position working for «sb<sub>(strong)</sub>»> *For ten years he was butler to Mike Johnson. He is an actor to a theatre company. Peter had acted as an interpreter to the president. She is a personal assistant to the Managing Director.*

*to be* Some verbs in non-finite clauses may drop the complementiser *to* plus the following copula *be* (Dixon 2005: 53, 251- 254). The tendency to leave or drop *to be* is ruled by the relationship between the person in the subject and the person in the object. (1) When the influence of the subject is considerable, as in official decisions and judgements, *to be* is omitted, as in *They voted him (\*to be) president*, where ‘sb<sub>strong</sub>’ is realized as ‘sb<sub>more than one</sub>’, *prove sb (\*to be) wrong or find sb (\*to be) guilty. Meat exports must be certified free of disease.<sup>5</sup>* (2) When there is no influence *to be* is obligatory, as in: *He saw her to be honest. \*He saw her as honest; I know/assume Mark to be happy. \*I know/assume Mark happy. We found him to be very unsure of himself; It was thought to be a fraud. They declared Fred to be insane.<sup>6</sup> (3) If the connection is equivocal*

<sup>5</sup> Some examples have been taken from Dixon 2005. His conditions for the use of *to be* partly coincide with ours, as in his statement that “[d]eclare and proclaim may omit *to be* when they are used in a performative sense” (Dixon 2005: 253) and “[T]o *be* can be omitted from a Judgement TO clause when the main clause verb and the adjective from the predicate of the complement clause typically belong together (e.g. declare X dead, proclaim X King, find X guilty) (254). The first of Dixon’s statement is closer to pinpointing the essence of the phenomenon: when ‘sb<sub>strong</sub>’ is in the subject slot, in an act of creation the power of sb<sub>strong</sub>’s words is fused with the state expressed by the adjective.

<sup>6</sup> “Note [...] that *to be* could scarcely be omitted from non-prototypical sentences involving

between (1) and (2), *to be* is optional: if the speaker wants the subject to figure as an authoritative person, *to be* will be left out. Otherwise *to be* will be used. (*I consider Mary (to be) cleverer than Fred. They believe him (to be) dead. He seems (to be) good/an idiot. I deem him (to be) an honest man. I want the house (to be) clean when I return; I want Mary (to be) doing her homework when her father comes home; She ordered the floor (to be) cleaned); I made Mary (be) interested in the project.*

**to-infinitive** <(do – experience) phenomenon !wanting/tending towards! being – doing – experiencing sth> *I'm in a hurry to catch a train. I'm afraid to cross the street.* (= 'I experience the phenomenon of fright wanting my crossing the street'). *He wants to sell his car.*

**wh-word** (*what, which, when, where, who, why, how*) – know – *I want to tell you why she left* (= 'I want to tell you what I know about the reason of her leaving'). *What happened?* (≈ 'I want to know about the event that happened.')

**non-finite clause** <living thing {sb} experiences mental state concerning phenomenon> *Peter is difficult to please* (= 'sb<sub>indef</sub> thinks, i.e. experiences mental state, that there is difficulty concerning the phenomenon of pleasing Peter'), *He hates James to be late. Tom seems to be dissatisfied* ('sb<sub>indef</sub> experiences the mental state of believing concerning the phenomenon of Tom's dissatisfaction'). *I heard the train whistling. The dog saw Jane cross the street* (= 'The dog experienced the mental state of seeing concerning the phenomenon of Jane's crossing the street'), *They dislike the house being left empty. Do you mind him borrowing your bicycle? The boss wants these letters typed. They saw the home team beaten.*

*I hereby* + Present Simple Tense V <sb<sub>sp</sub> uses sb<sub>sp</sub>'s social - moral power (illocutionary act) to make what sb<sub>sp</sub> says about a phenomenon (locutionary act) be taken as true (perlocutionary act)> *H. I confirm that the signature is authentic. I h. declare a holiday. I h. promise to come.*

**seriously** <do – experience {mental} phenomenon [as important – true and strong]> *argue/believe/damage s.; s. ill/concerned* (cf. Hlebec 2012: 9). Its antonym is *jokingly*.

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these verbs, e.g. not from 'They proclaimed/declared him to be clever' (Dixon 2005: 253). "In summary, to be can be omitted from a Judgement TO clause when the main clause verb and the adjective from the predicate of the complement clause typically belong together (e.g. declare X dead, proclaim X King, find X guilty)" (Dixon 2005: 254).

## 5. Portraits of the verbs

*appoint*

**Examples:** *They have appointed a new head teacher at my son's school. They appointed him (as) captain of the English team. A lawyer was appointed to represent the child. Caligula even appointed his horse consul. The newly appointed editor of the magazine; a. ambassador/attorney/committee/director/governor /manager/secretary; appointed to the board by the manager's decision; ??The director appointed the head of the department with only two persons informed about the appointment.*

**Clues:** *as, by, to* (prep.), *to*-infinitive, *I hereby*, non-finite clause, \**a. silently*, \**to be*, ??*seriously*

**Semantic definition:** <#sb<sub>x</sub> strong with administrative – political power# using language makes #sb<sub>y</sub># come to be in a position of #sb strong with administrative – political power# because sb<sub>x</sub> wants sb<sub>y</sub>'s position to be used working for sb<sub>x/y</sub> strong, and makes sb<sub>indef</sub> experience mental state concerning sb<sub>y</sub> in the position of sb<sub>y</sub> strong as true and strong><sup>3</sup>

**C's definition:** If you appoint someone to a particular post or to do a particular job, you formally choose them for it or ask them to do it.

**H's definition:** choose sb for a job or position of responsibility

**W II's definition:** to select for an office or position

**M's definition:** to choose someone to do a particular job or have a particular position

**Wierzbicka's explication:**

- (a) I assume that someone should do, for some time, things of a certain kind (Y)
- (b) I think of these things (Y) as things that are good for people
- (c) I assume that I am someone who should say who should do these things
- (d) I say: I want person(/persons) X to do these things
- (e) I say this because I want to cause it to happen
- (f) I assume that by saying this I will cause it to happen
- (g) I want people to know this and to think of X as a person who should do things of this kind (Y)

The adverb *seriously* with the semes 'important - true and strong' tautologically repeats the information that *appoint* conveys invariantly by the semes 'true' and/or 'strong(ly)'. H's and M's definitions employ 'choose' as a defining hyponym for *appoint*.

H defines *choose* as <to decide which person you want out of the ones that are available>, as in *We have to c. a new manager from a shortlist of five candidates. We chose Paul Stubbs as/for chairperson.* Dixon (2005: 144) does a similar thing by classifying *appoint* among the CHOOSE subtype of deciding verbs, in which one person (said to be in the Course role) is preferred out of a number of alternatives. As Wierzbicka (1987: 124) reports, Hayakawa (1969: 18) says that *appoint* “refers to a situation “in which a person is being chosen [by someone else] to fulfil a given function” and implies “an official situation – in an office, club or government – in which the choice is made by means other than an elective process [...] by someone officially charged with this duty”. In Wierzbicka’s explication there is no suggestion of making choice. One of the illustrative sentences above suggests that choosing is not necessarily implied by *appoint* since Caligula’s act mentioned therein was a sheer whim rather than a considered decision as a result of selecting among candidates. At the same time, this example indicates that sb is ‘sb’ canonically, and that in perverse situations ‘sb’ can become an ‘animal’. Neither does the collocational method indicate ‘choose’, because the grammatical collocations \**appoint among/from* are ill-formed, while *choose, pick (out)* and *select* can be followed by the prepositions *among* and *from*.

Line (a) of Wierzbicka’s explication corresponds to ‘want sb’s position to be used’ in our definition. The social role that is mentioned in our definition is implied by (b) since doing things [by sb] that are good for people [in a community] implies sb’s social role, (c) refers to sb with power, (d) is implied and perhaps redundant, (e) amounts to ‘make’, (f) mentions use of language in addition to ‘make’, while (g) echoes ‘makes sb<sub>indef</sub> experience mental state concerning sb<sub>y</sub> in the position of sb<sub>strong</sub> as true’. Wierzbicka comments that components (e), (f) and (g) of her explication spell out the ‘performativeness’, or the effectiveness of the speech act, and also the public nature of the act.

The feature ‘using language to sb<sub>indef</sub>’ is submerged in all the dictionaries by *choose/select*. ‘Be in a position’ corresponds to C’s “to a particular post or to do a particular job”, to H’s “for a job or position of responsibility”, W II’s “for an office or position”, and M’s “to do a particular job or have a particular position”.

*declare*

## 1

**Examples:** *d. war/state of emergency by issuing a government’s decree; d. the election invalid; They declared war on them. The President declared a holiday. The court declared the law (to be) unconstitutional. The mayor is going to d. the meeting/bridge open; d. the area the national park. The judge declared Mary (to be) the winner. The psychiatrist declared him (to be) insane. They declared*

*him (to be) dead/innocent. He was declared (to be) innocent. Mike declared his innocence. The commission declared him to be clever. He declared when the restrictions have been violated. (Here when the restrictions have been violated is the object referring to a state, not an adverbial complement.)*

**Clues:** *by, on, non-finite clause, (to be), wh-word, I hereby, \*seriously, \*jokingly*

**Semantic definition:** <#sb<sub>x</sub> strong# using language makes sb<sub>indef</sub> come to know sb<sub>x</sub>'s thought concerning #state# as true and strong> Both *d. jokingly* and *d. seriously* are anomalous, producing different effects: the former is paradoxical while the latter is tautological. The feature 'using language' could probably be expanded by 'strongly', but the combined effect of 'sb with power' and 'as strong' would make it redundant.

**C's definition:** If you declare something, you state officially that it exists or is the case.

**H's definition:** to say sth officially or publicly

**W II's definition:** to state formally or officially

**M's definition:** to announce officially that something is true or happening

**Wierzbicka's explication:**

- (a) I say: I want people to know that they should think X
- (b) I say this because I want to cause people to know what they should think (about Y)
- (c) I assume that I am someone who can cause people to think X by saying this in this way
- (d) I assume that nothing anyone could say could change this
- (e) I assume it is important that I have said this
- (f) I assume that after I have said this, in this way, people have to do some things because of that

C's and W II's "to state officially", H's 'to say sth publicly' and M's 'to announce' fail to highlight the causative element 'make', and in contrast with Wierzbicka's explicit "cause", in dictionaries it is only implied. M's 'that something is true' and C's "exists or is the case" equal our 'as true'. Wierzbicka's 'X' is too vague to cover 'be in a state', while her 'I say this because I want to cause people to know' corresponds to 'using language makes sb<sub>strong</sub> come to know'.

## 2

**Examples:** *He declared that he would not surrender. It was the first newspaper to d. for the senator. She declared herself hurt. John declared his love and his intention of marrying Jane by opening his heart in front of her parents. They could not d. where they stand on that matter. d. for freedom; d. against slavery;*

*d. their opposition to regime*

**Clues:** *by, for, against, that, to be, wh-word, non-finite clause; \*I hereby, \*jokingly*

**Semantic definition:** <#sb<sub>x</sub># using language strongly makes sb<sub>indef</sub> come to know (#)sb<sub>x</sub>'s thought(#) concerning (#)sb<sub>x/y</sub>'s mental state(#) as true - wanted/in order to make sth<sub>x</sub> weak because sth<sub>x</sub> is viewed as bad> The constructions *their opposition to regime* (a noun phrase) and *herself hurt* (a truncated non-finite clause) refer to 'state', while the hashes are bracketed because only one object can be activated at a time, and even both can be suspended, as in *d. against/for.... \*John declared his love jokingly* shows that *declare* includes "strong", i.e. earnest and important, use of language.

**C's definition:** **1** if you declare, you say something firmly and in a way that shows that you believe it is true. **2** If you declare an attitude or intention, you make it known to other people by expressing it clearly. **3** If you declare yourself as having a particular attitude or intention, you state clearly that you have that attitude or intention.

**H's definition:** to state sth firmly and clearly

**W II's definition:** to state emphatically: affirm

**M's definition:** to say something, especially in a formal or impressive way; *declare against sb/sth* to say publicly that you oppose someone or something; *d. for sb/sth* to say publicly that you support someone or something

**Wierzbicka's explication:**

- (a) I say: I want people to know that they should think X
- (b) I say this because I want to cause people to know what they should think (about Y)
- (c) I assume that I am someone who can cause people to think X by saying this in this way
- (d) I assume that nothing anyone could say could change this
- (e) I assume it is important that I have said this

In this meaning, according to Dixon (2005: 276), *declare* belongs in the REPORT subtype of the verbs of speaking. Austin (1971: 155 -157) also makes a difference between an exercitive (= *declare 1*, as in *declare closed/open*) and a commissive *declare* (= *declare 2* in *declare my intention* and *declare for*). Wierzbicka (1987: 349) states that *declare 1* differs from *declare 2* in having one extra component (f), which accounts for the performative use of *declare 1*, but also that even the speakers of *declare 2* conduct themselves "as if they had the authority to formulate a view which would bind everyone. [... T]he speaker who *declares* something feels quite confident that by saying what he wants to be the case (or what he wants to be accepted) he can cause it to be the case (he

can cause it to be accepted) [...] The illocutionary force of *declaring* is [(b)]” (Wierzbicka 1987: 348). She notices that *declare 2* takes *that*-clause and has a truth value unlike *declare 1*. The verb *declare* in *I declare my intention of marrying Jane* is, according to Wierzbicka, *declare 1*, while in *I declare that I intend to marry Jane* it belongs to *declare 2*, although the difference between *declare 1* and *declare 2* is slight (350). For the comment on *declare* and other “declaratives” see Ross 1970.

Wierzbicka’s feature (a) is matched by ‘make sb<sub>indef</sub> come to know’. C’s 2 and Wierzbicka’s definitions for *declare 2* do justice to ‘#sb<sub>x</sub># using language makes sb come to know’. The importance of what is declared 2, which is explicitly stated in Wierzbicka’s (e), corresponds to our ‘strongly’. Dictionaries present the ‘strongly’ as “firmly”, “clearly”, “emphatically” or “especially in an impressive way”.

*elect*

**Examples:** *They elected him Pope/mayor. The congress/voters elected members. She was elected to Parliament. He was elected president. We elected Jim chairman. You could be elected as a member of Parliament. They elected him to represent them. e. among several candidates; e. from a weak field of candidates; e. party/politician; e. executive/leader/judge; e. assembly/government/chamber/council/legislature; They elected Mike (the function recoverable in context) by a unanimous agreement*

**Clues:** *among, as, between, by, from, to* (prep.), *to*-infinitive, *\*to be, \*I/we hereby, ??seriously*

**Semantic definition:** <#sb<sub>x</sub> more than one# using symbols make #sb<sub>y</sub># come to be in a position of #sb strong with social - religious power# working for sb<sub>x/y</sub> more than one having social - religious power, when the source of making sb<sub>y</sub> be in a position is sb<sub>z</sub> more than one, because (most) sb<sub>x</sub>’s want so, and make sb<sub>indef</sub> experience mental state concerning sb<sub>y</sub>’s position as strong>

Unlike *appoint*, the verb *elect* can be followed by *among* or *from*, and has *choose* as its hyperonym. One may *fight/win/lose elections* because there are a number of candidates among which a choice is made. Since electing is done collectively by individual voting, *I/We hereby elect* is not possible. The phrase *elect seriously* is tautological.

**C’s definition:** When people elect someone to represent them, they choose him or her to act as their representative, by voting.

**H’s definition:** *to chose sb to do a particular job by voting for them*

**W II’s definition:** to choose by vote, as for an office

**M's definition:** to choose someone by voting so that they represent you or hold an official position

C and M stress the representative role of the person elected, but this role may be typical rather than an invariant feature. It does not correspond to our 'position working for sb<sub>x/y</sub> more than one having social - religious power'. To be elected to Parliament is not 'to be elected to represent Parliament' but to work for Parliament, with members representing particular groupings of people.

*excommunicate*

**Examples:** *e. from the church/religious community* (by saying a formula)

**Clues:** *by, from; I hereby; \*to be, \*seriously, \*jokingly, \*non-finite clause; ??e. without words, \*e. without anybody knowing about the excommunication*

**Semantic definition:** <#sb<sub>x</sub> strong with religious power# using language strongly makes #sb<sub>y</sub># be not a member of religious group any longer because sb<sub>y</sub> did sth bad, and makes sb<sub>indef</sub> take state concerning sb<sub>y</sub> as true>

**C's definition:** if a Roman Catholic is excommunicated, it is publicly and officially stated that the person is no longer allowed to be a member of the Roman Catholic Church. This is punishment for some very great wrong that they have done.

**H's definition:** to punish sb by officially stating that they can no longer be a member of a Christian Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church

**W II's definition:** To deprive of the right of church membership by ecclesiastical authority

**M's definition:** to officially say that someone can no longer be a member of the Roman Catholic Church because they have done something that breaks the rules of the Church

**Wierzbicka's explication:**

- (a) I assume you know that you are doing something that the Church says is bad
- (b) I assume that you don't want to stop doing it
- (c) I want people to understand that the Church can't say that people who are part of the Church can do it
- (d) I say: I want people not to think of you as someone who is a part of the Church
- (e) I want you not to be able to do things that people who are part of the Church can do
- (f) I assume I can cause these things to happen by saying this because the Church wants me to be able to cause this to happen
- (g) I say this because I want to cause it to happen

- (h) I assume that it will happen because of that  
 (i) I assume you understand that it will be bad for you (I assume people will understand that after I have said this in this way you can't do things as if I hadn't said it)

In various ways C's, H's and M's definitions can be understood to imply causation as a match for 'make' in our definition (by "not allow", "punish(ment)", "can no longer be a member"). Wierzbicka leaves no doubt about the causal character of these speech acts, while W II makes use of the causative verb *deprive*. The feature 'strong with power' has been indirectly covered by means of "officially" in three dictionaries, and directly by "authority" (W II), while "church" corresponds to 'religious'.

*pronounce*

### 1

**Examples:** *The judge/jury pronounced against/for the defendant; The court pronounced against my claim to the land. p. sb dead by an official medical statement; They pronounced the country to be in a state of war. The government pronounced that they are no longer a nuclear state by issuing an official statement. p. sb innocent; p. them husband and wife*

**Clues:** *against, by, for; I hereby; non-finite clause; \*seriously, \*jokingly, \*to be, \*p. without words, \*p. without informing anybody*

**Semantic definition:** <#sb<sub>x</sub> strong with legal - medical power# using language makes sb<sub>indef</sub> experience (#)sb<sub>x</sub>'s mental state(#) concerning phenomenon experienced by sb<sub>y/2</sub> as true and strong>

**C's definition:** **2** if you pronounce something to be true, you state that it is true definitely or officially. **4** If someone pronounces a verdict or decision, they give that verdict or decision formally and officially.

The other sources offer fused definitions, which cover both, *pronounce* 1 and 2, and they are given below.

### 2

**Examples:** *p. opinion, p. on all kinds of subjects; She pronounced herself too tired to go on working. He pronounced himself satisfied. I cannot p. that he is out of danger. I cannot p. him out of danger. Everyone pronounced the dinner to be very good. I remember you pronounced the man a fool. The dessert was tried and pronounced delicious.*

**Clue:** *by, on; that, (to be), non-finite clause, ?I hereby; \*jokingly*

**Semantic definition:** <#sb<sub>x</sub># using language strongly makes sb<sub>indef</sub> experience (#)sb<sub>x</sub>'s mental phenomenon {thought}(#) concerning state> Zeugma in *\*She pronounced the sentence and her opinion* proves that *pronounce 1* and *2* are different, whereas we can construct a sentence which shows that examples of *pronounce 1* belong in one sememe, such as: *John Smith lived in a small town where he was the only doctor and the registrar, so that he pronounced people dead and married*. The phrase *p. the sentence* has been rightly treated as a special case, an idiom in M's because *\*The minister pronounced them man and wife and the judge the sentence* sound wrong, and also because it would require a special definition: <#sb<sub>strong having legal power</sub># using language<sub>x</sub> makes sb<sub>indef</sub> hear #sth<sub>x</sub> done by use of language<sub>x</sub> that is very short about sb<sub>weak</sub># in order to make sb weak because sb<sub>weak</sub> did sth<sub>y</sub> bad>. What is important, *sentence* in the collocation *p. sentence* makes no paradigm and therefore is not subject to the collocational method.

**C's definition:** **3** to pronounce also means to say something in a way which shows that you feel sure about what you are saying. **4** If you pronounce on something, you give your opinion on it, usually because you are an expert on it.

**H's definition:** to say or give sth formally, officially or publicly

**W II's definition:** to declare officially, formally, or as an opinion

**M's definition:** to formally state an official opinion or decision

**Wierzbicka's explication:**

- (a) I assume that people want me to say something about X that will cause them to know what they should think of X
- (b) I assume people understand that I am someone who knows much about such things and who can say what people should think about them
- (c) I say: Y
- (d) I say this, in this way, because I want to cause people to know what they should think about X
- (e) I assume that after I have said this, in this way, people will have to do some things because of that

The patterns for the definitions of *pronounce 1* and *2* are basically the same: 'sb# using language makes sb<sub>indef</sub> experience (#)sb<sub>x</sub>'s mental phenomenon<sub>x</sub>(#) concerning phenomenon<sub>y</sub>'. How much is the difference between 'phenomenon' and 'state' in *pronounce 1* and *2* warranted is a matter of further investigation requiring a larger corpus. The only striking difference is 'sb<sub>x</sub> strong with legal - medical power' together with 'experienced by sb<sub>y/2</sub> as true and strong' of *pronounce 1*, which is slightly echoed by 'strongly using language' in *pronounce 2*. So there do seem to be some grounds for justifying lumping the two meanings into one lexicographic definition.

Pronouncing involves saying something in an authoritative way. "Prototypically, a judge *pronounces* a judgment or a sentence about a person" (Wierzbicka

1987: 350). “Rather than splitting *pronounce* into two meanings [...], it might be justified to formulate the idea of ‘judgment’ more vaguely: perhaps we should say that the speaker wants to say something about X which will cause people to know what they should think about X, i.e. that he wants to enable them to form a ‘correct’ and binding view about X. In practice, this will frequently mean a vague judgment, but not necessarily so” (Wierzbicka 1987: 351). When distinguishing between the meaning of *pronounce* and that of *declare*, she says that *declare* refers to certain states of affairs (= our ‘#state#’), not to certain entities, while *pronounce* always refers to a person or an entity (= our ‘#sb<sub>x</sub>’s#’), not to a state of affairs. “Even when one *declares* a man dead, or a food contaminated, one is implying the whole proposition (‘this man is dead’, ‘this food is contaminated’) [...] For this reason, one can’t *pronounce* war, and one can’t pronounce a meeting closed [...] Presumably this is the reason why one usually doesn’t *pronounce that*, as one can *declare that*: *that* introduces a proposition and allows almost any proposition, whereas *pronounce* usually requires an entity (a direct object) and a predicative which represents a verdict upon that entity (as in “They pronounced him guilty”). Furthermore, *pronounce* implies an element of voluntary and somewhat arbitrary decision [...] If a man is *pronounced* dead rather than *declared* dead, an element of judgment seems to be more ‘pronounced’ than it is the case of *declare*. ” (351). In continuation Wierzbicka draws attention to the fact that *pronounce* can be followed by *on*, which in one of its meanings implies an area of expertise (*She lectured on linguistics/\*on Mary*).

Again, in C’s, H’s, W II’s and M’s definitions causation is only implied, while Wierzbicka is quite explicit in this respect. The speaker’s mental state featuring in our definition of *pronounce* is also vaguely suggested by H’s and M’s, and explicitly treated in Wierzbicka’s explication.

## 6. Conclusion

Stated in definitional terms, the common meaning of all the meanings of our four speech act verbs is ‘#sb<sub>x</sub># using language makes sb<sub>y/indef</sub> be in/experience a state’. In other words, they mean ‘do something by using words’, which echoes Austin’s famous title. Their semantic definitions show that performativeness is a matter of degree. For one thing, definitions that contain sb<sub>strong</sub> in the subject position should be separated from those that have ‘sb’ without <sub>strong</sub>. *Appoint* is a performative of the first degree, having ‘sb<sub>strong</sub>’ both in the subject and in one object. *Excommunicate*, *pronounce 1* and *declare 1* are with ‘sb<sub>strong</sub>’ in the subject position. *Elect* is lower on the scale as it has ‘sb<sub>more than one</sub>’ instead of ‘sb<sub>strong</sub>’ in the subject, but the latter feature appears as the object. However, this amounts almost to the same thing because a group of people in a body is endowed with power. What makes *elect* less performative is the feature ‘because

most  $sb_x$ 's want so'. All the verbs except *elect* and *excommunicate* take 'phenomenon' rather than 'sb' in the object slot. The feature 'phenomenon' includes 'sb's mental phenomenon' and 'sb's mental state'. *Declare 2* and *pronounce 2* are with 'sb' without 'strong' in the subject slot. Therefore it can be concluded that strength of performativeness in these sememes goes in a diminishing order, depending on the type of 'sb' ('sb<sub>strong</sub>', 'sb<sub>{strong}</sub>' or 'sb' without 'strong').

Another classification can be made by tracing 'true', which occurs in the definitions of all the verbs above except in *elect* and *pronounce<sub>2</sub>*. Like the previous one, this parameter also places the two verbs low on the scale of performativeness. This is probably the reason why Wierzbicka has not included *elect* in her list of speech act verbs. The feature 'true' is accompanied by 'strong' in the definitions of *appoint*, *declare 1* and *pronounce 1*, while *excommunicate* has 'true' joined to 'strongly'. The fact that 'true' is always in company with 'strong' indicates that 'strong' is strictly speaking redundant in such definitions. If this observation could be generalized to include all semantic definitions in English, it would be inferred that by a redundancy rule 'true' implies 'strong'.

Speech act verbs have been classified into classes by various authors, notably by Austin (1962, 1971) and Searle (1969, 1976). Complaints of the speech acts analysis for understanding discourse and conversation have been voiced by a lot of authors (e.g. Cerf 1969: 356; Harnish 2004), but as expounded in the introduction, we have observed only the possibilities of the semantic classification. Wierzbicka (1987: 9) has warned that "classifications which are not based on serious analysis are unlikely to be very helpful; for all that they may incorporate certain casual insights. To be able to compare and to classify speech acts on a principled basis we must first discover the structure of the individual speech acts (codified in separate lexical items). Classes have to be distinguished in terms of precise semantic components". Even then "there is no way [the whole vocabulary of speech act verbs] can be neatly divided into non-arbitrary classes" (Wierzbicka 1987: 28). Our results also reveal that the members of this small sub-field cannot be strictly demarcated one from another. For example a basis for a different classification can be made if sub-types of  $sb_{strong}$  are distinguished: i.e. sb with administrative – political power (*appoint*), with religious power (*excommunicate*), with legal – medical power (*pronounce 1*), with power in general (*declare 1*) or sb more than one (*elect*).

Our semantic definitions contain referential subscripts, tautological repetitions of semantic features and atomization which are necessary in scientific research. But such characteristics are not fit for ordinary dictionaries to be used by non-linguists. Therefore we propose the following popular definitions based on the semantic definitions:

*appoint* to make a person hold a post of responsibility by announcing the decision officially and publicly

*declare 1* (person in authority) create a state by addressing the public, who have to accept the state seriously

*declare 2* to say in order to make people know what one seriously thinks about something

*elect* (the majority of a group of competent people) chose someone among others to be a member of an authoritative group

*excommunicate* to make someone be no longer a member of a Church by saying that officially

*pronounce 1* (person in authority) create an important state by saying publicly

*pronounce 2* to say in order to make people know what one seriously thinks about a state

Of course, such definitions would also have to be furnished with data on transitivity and the patterns these verbs enter into.

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