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TERMINOLOGY MATTERS

# Performative in a nutshell [1]

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*Contributors to this new rubric draw attention to terms that are frequently used when we speak or write about our pedagogical practices. The idea is to engage Scenario readers in a discussion of key terminology in the area of performative teaching and learning.*

Through Scenario Journal and various Scenario Forum initiatives, including conferences, symposia, colloquia, the term *performative* has become a key term in the modern languages debate.[2] Many readers will remember the 2014 conference entitled *Performative Teaching, Learning, Research*, the 2017 conference on *Performative Spaces in Language, Literature and Culture Education*; and the 2020 conference, which carried the title *Going Performative in Education*, had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 related lockdown.

Like with any other term the meaning of the term *performative* very much depends on how it is used in a specific *context*. The photograph below draws our attention to a context that is particularly noteworthy against the background of the recent worldwide *Black Lives Matter* protests.

Why is the streetname crossed out with a red line?

From medieval times the German word *Mohr* was often used when reference was made to people with dark skin. Similary, in the English language reference was made to so-called blackamoors, or black Moors. However, in recent decades the use of the word has become very controversial due to its historical association with slavery and racism.

The photograph was taken on a *Performative City Tour*.

In 2015 actors and actresses of the theatre ensemble Label Noir and the political scientist and activist Joshua Kwesi Aikins, in collaboration with the Berlin Ballhaus Naunynstraße, came up with the idea of an unconventional city tour under the title *Dauerkolonie Berlin* (Permanent Colony Berlin). The aim of the project organisers was to create a greater awareness of Germany's colonial past, by focusing on traces that can still be found in Berlin – for example, in the form of streetnames, public sculptures or (stolen) art exhibits. A bus took the participants to different parts of the city, including the *Afrikanisches Viertel* (African Quarter), where scenes focusing on black resistance in Berlin were

[2] In this context note issue 62/2020 of the journal Fremdsprache Deutsch with a special focus on 'Performative Didaktik'. The issue is available online at: https://www.fremdsprachedeutschdigital.de [last accessed: July 19, 2020]

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Figure 1: Underground station *Mohrenstraße* in Berlin

acted out and became a reference point for discussions with the audience. The integration of these short theatrical *performances* seems to have been the main reason for giving the city tour the label *performative*.[3]

The reasoning of the project organisers makes sense in that the term performative is closely linked to the art form of theatre and its related art forms (for example, opera, dance). Theatre scholar Fischer-Lichte (2004/2008) has analysed in great detail how the term is used and understood in theatre(-related) contexts, and in doing so she has highlighted elements of the performative, including presence[4], spatiality, embodiment, voice and rhythm.[5] However, in the context of our discussions revolving around *performative teaching and learning* there are also other theoretical perspectives that are potentially of interest, including Judith Butler's (1990) Gender Studies perspective that 'culture' or 'identity' are not stable phenomena, but are performatively constituted, and Austin's Language Philosophy perspective (1962) that through performative speech acts we actually create a reality.[6]

[3] http://www.ballhausnaunynstrasse.de/veranstaltung/dauerkoloni_berli_23.05.2015; the project with its performative approach to the teaching of history was repeated in 2018: http://lernen-aus-der-geschichte.de/Teilnehmen-und-Vernetzen/content/14162 [last accessed: July 19, 2020].

[4] Note the article on *Presence and Unpredictability* by Susanne Even (2020) in this issue.

[5] In this context see my reflections (Schewe 2011) on how Fischer-Lichte's theoretical perspectives could be a source of inspiration for teachers of foreign languages.

[6] Fleming (2016) refers to theoretical perspectives in more detail in his exploration of the concept of performative teaching and learning.

The philosophical perspectives of Austin and Searle (1969) contributed significantly to the communicative-pragmatic turn in the modern languages. Teachers worldwide began to embrace the idea that speech is a form of action and that the classroom should become a place of (communicative) action.

While the communicative concept of language teaching is still very popular in many parts of the world, the performative turn in the cultural sciences (Bachmann-Medick 2010) continues to have a strong impact on the modern languages and has created the space for an innovative performative teaching and learning concept to emerge. This concept goes beyond the notion of *Handlungsorientierung* (action orientation) by explicitly emphasising forms of *creative doing*, embodied learning (Piazzoli 2018) and aesthetic experience (Hensel 2020); in this concept the performative arts, which in the past were rather neglected in the field of foreign language education, become a source of great inspiration for language teachers who are encouraged to develop an *artistic competence*.[7]

Several years ago I proposed that *performative* be used as an umbrella term to describe forms of foreign language teaching that derive from the performative arts and their corresponding culturally-specific pedagogical practices (2013: 26). Let me take the opportunity to clarify a bit more what I meant with 'performative arts' and 'culturally-specific pedagogical practices'.

What do we understand by 'art', and what is implied in the word combination 'performative arts'?

The following extract from *the Roadmap of Arts Education,* that was published by UNESCO (2006), reminds us that terminology is nothing fixed, but rather something fluid (and in that sense could in fact be regarded as a performative phenomenon):

> People in all cultures have always, and will always, seek answers to questions related to their existence. Every culture develops means through which the insights obtained through the search for understanding are shared and communicated. Basic elements of communication are words, movements, touch, sounds, rhythms and images. In many cultures, the expressions which communicate insights and open up room for reflection in people's minds are called "art". Throughout history labels have been put on various types of art expressions. It is important to acknowledge the fact that even if terms such as "dance", "music", "drama" and "poetry" are used world-wide, the deeper meanings of such words differ between cultures. Thus, any list of arts fields must be seen as a pragmatic categorization, ever evolving and never exclusive.[8]

In the medieval Western world the following counted among the respected *septem artes liberales*: rhetorics, grammar, dialectics, arithmetics, geometry, astronomy and music.

[7] In this context see Dunn & Stinson (2007) who interrogate the notion of artistry in relation to drama pedagogy and second/additional language learning.

[8] http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Art_Ed_RoadMa_en.pdf [last accessed June 22, 2020]




Figure 2: Septem Artes – © The Trustees of the British Museum

However, what at the time was considered to constitute the 'canonical arts' underwent changes in the centuries that followed. New arts fields emerged such as music, for example, which joined other art forms to constitute the *performing arts*. According to Wikipedia the performing arts are commonly understood as: "forms of art in which artists use their voices, bodies or inanimate objects to convey artistic expression ...".[9]

The term *performing arts* tends to refer to art forms (including theatre, dance, music, opera) that focus on performance in front of an audience. However, in recent years increasing reference has been made to the term *performative arts*.[10] The distinction between these two concepts still needs to be teased out further, but for anyone who aims to go performative in education the concept of *performative arts* might be the more useful one. It focuses on artistic processes that can, but do not necessarily result in performance in front of an audience,[11] and highly values collaboration between different disciplines, including disciplines from outside the established arts spectrum. This could mean, for example, that a theatre or music artist who is intrigued by specific language phenomena, decides to collaborate with representatives of language disciplines and involves language teachers and students in devising a multilingual collage of scenes. The more a language discipline integrates performative experiences of this kind into its core curriculum, the more it can claim to be both, a language and performative arts discipline.

What is understood by culturally-specific pedagogical practices?

Let us take the educational landscape in the United Kingdom as an example and look at terms that are used to describe pedagogical practices. In a group

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performin_arts [last accessed June 22, 2020]

[10] See, for example, the conference Performative Arts Today at Trinity College Dublin (2.2.2018): https://www.tcd.ie/trinitylongroomhub/assets/documents/art2018.pdf [last accessed June 22, 2020]

[11] In this context note an extract from the description of the MA Programme in Contemporary Performative Arts at Gothenburg University: "For two years you have the opportunity to focus on the process of an investigative project without a theatrical production as a centrepiece." – https://hsm.gu.se/english/education/ma-contemporary-performative-arts [last accessed June, 22 2020]

discussion on *Performative arts and pedagogy: Towards the development of an international glossary* Fleming made the point:

> if you just take a few terms in the UK, for example, process drama, theatre in education, drama for understanding, drama for learning, applied theatre, theatre in education, there's a proliferation of terms that do cause confusion.[12] (Fleming 2016: 68)

However, what all these different terms have in common is a distinctly performative orientation, hence *performative* could serve as a useful umbrella term in the following sense:

A teacher could, for example, say: "I teach performatively. This means that I mainly apply *Process Drama* and also selected approaches from *Applied Theatre*, including Augusto Boal's *Forum Theatre*". However, we can also imagine a teacher who is confidently moving between different cultural traditions and might say: "In my performative teaching practice I combine elements from *Theaterpädagogik*, *Drama in Education* and *Psychodramaturgie Linguistique (PDL)*."[13]

It is also noteworthy that the term seems to work well in other languages. I contacted some colleagues in different countries who offered the following translations:

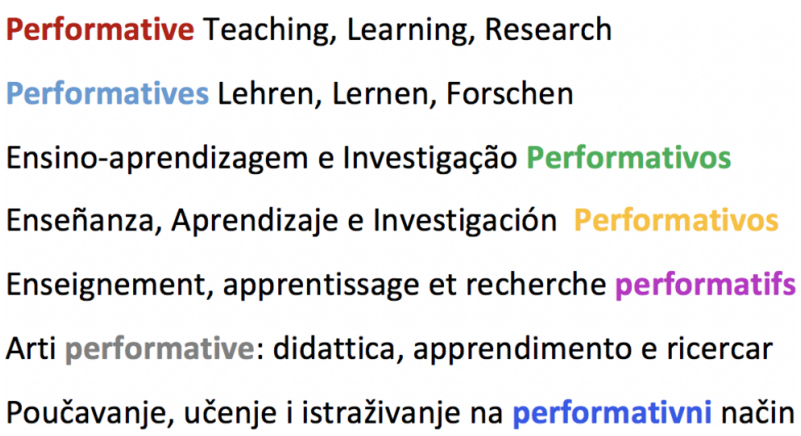



Figure 3: Using the term performative on the international stage

According to Fleming the use of the term performative,

> has a valuable role in the field of modern language teaching, not just in describing innovative forms of teaching, but also widening the areas of practice beyond classroom drama to include such activities as dance, singing, movement, puppetry and large-scale theatre performances. Widening the field in this way brings rich cross-fertilisation ... (ibid. 190).

[12] 4th Scenario Forum Symposium Participants (2016): What exactly is an apple pie? Performative arts and pedagogy: Towards the development of an international glossary. In: Scenario X/2, 65-81 – http://research.ucc.ie/scenario/2016/02 [last accessed June, 22 2020]

[13] Note Dufeu's presentation of the Psychodramaturgie Linguistique (PDL) concept in the issue.

I agree that widening the field in this way, and especially by opening it up to different culturally-specific disciplines that aim to build bridges between the performative arts and education (for example, *Theaterpädagogik*, *Drama in Education*)[14], makes great sense. In doing so we should begin to develop key terminology for the field of performative teaching and learning.[15] I have made a start by focusing on the key term *performative* and listing some 'associated terms' in the acrostic below.

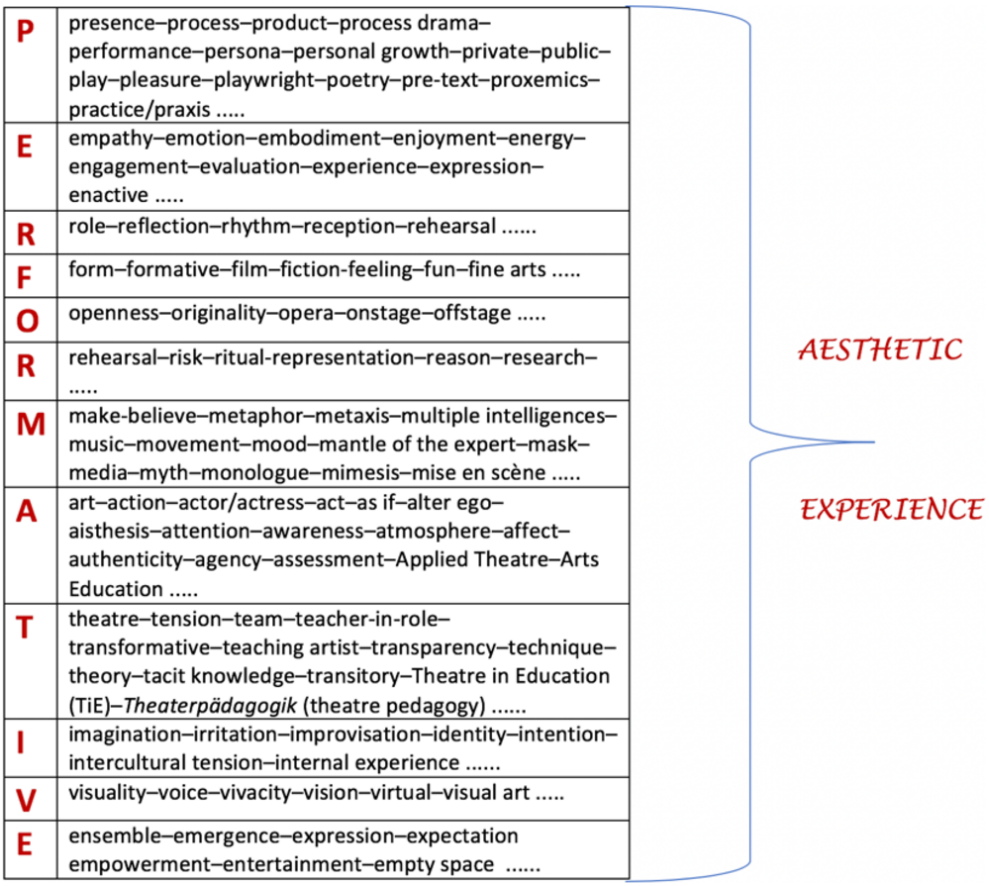



Figure 4: 'Performative in a nutshell'

At the start I made the point that like the meaning of the term *performative* very much depends on how it is used in a specific *context*. If you were asked to give a short description of typical features of your performative teaching practice in context X, which of the 'associated terms' from the list above would you refer to?

[14] In this context also note an innovative Masters Programme at the Université Paris-Est Créteil: https://www.u-pec.fr/fr/formation/master-meef-parcours-art-enact-pratiques-artistiques-dans-une-e-cologie-enactive-des-apprentissages [last accessed June 22, 2020]

[15] In this context also see the Recommendations for the Promotion of a Performative Teaching and Learning Culture (Jogschies, Schewe & Blahak 2018)

And perhaps you wish to add a term to the list, analyse its layers of meaning and present your reflections in this new *Terminology Matters* rubric soon?[16]

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[16] At the beginning of the article I referred to the controversy around *Mohrenstraße* in Berlin. At the time of the editorial deadline for this issue the Berlin *Tagesspiegel* reports that the underground station will be renamed *Glinkastraße*: https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/nach-rassismus-debatte-bvg-will-u-bahnhof-mohrenstrasse-umbenennen/25974908.html [last accessed 4 July 2020]

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