Abstract

Almost all verbs in Slovenian have two aspectually different forms, a perfective (PF) and an imperfective (IF) one. But in institutional settings or settings strongly marked with social hierarchy only the first one, i.e. the imperfective form is used by Slovenian speakers in performative sense. Why is that? And what, in fact, have we said if we used the imperfective verb in “performative circumstances”? No doubt that we may be in the process of accomplishing such an act. But at the same time, we have also indicated that this act hasn’t been accomplished (yet): as long as we are only promising (IF), we haven’t promised anything, and if we aren’t but promising (IF), we can’t take anything as having been promised. The question therefore arises: how to accomplish an act of promise (or any other performative act) in Slovenian? That dilemma may seem more than artificial at first sight, but it was very much alive among Slovenian linguists at the end of the XIX. century. And it was that very dilemma – how to use aspects in Slovenian - that gave rise to the foundations of performativity in Slovenian, half a century before Austin!

In the present paper the author tries to shed some light on this controversy that opposed different Slovenian scholars for about thirty years, and proposes delocutive hypothesis as a solution for the performative dilemma this controversy unveiled.

1. Introduction

Almost all verbs in Slovenian have two aspectually different forms, a perfective and an imperfective one, that difference being morphologically marked as well. Actually, there are perfective and imperfective verbs for almost every act: while the perfective form focuses on that act as something (already) accomplished, the imperfective one focuses on the process, the internal dynamics of accomplishing that act. So a Slovenian speaker (and in principle that goes for speakers of many other Slavic languages; it is the (interdependent) system of tenses and aspects that is different (and allows/prohibits certain usages)) can, for example, say I promise in two different ways: Obljubljam (the imperfective form (IF)), and/or Obljubim (the perfective form (PF)).

But in institutional settings (swearing in of the judges, swearing in in the National Assembly …) or settings strongly marked with social hierarchy (speaking in public, in front of a large audience) only the first one, i.e. the imperfective form is used by a Slovenian speaker in a performative sense (i.e. as performing and accomplishing an act of promise. In this very case, the case of promising, in everyday conversation the perfective form is used, too but, on the other hand, it is absolutely impossible to use perfective form in most
of the other performative usages, not even in everyday conversation. For example, we can only say:

(1) Ukazujem vam, da zaprete okno
   ‘I am ordering you (IF) to close the window’.

and under no circumstance:

(2) *Ukažem vam, da zaprete okno
   ‘I order you (PF) to close the window’.

This latter usage is not only non-performative, but even (almost) non-grammatical, unless we want to indicate (somehow implicitly) that we may issue that order some time in the future (but even this usage is, at least nowadays, problematic).

Why is that (that in Slovenian we use imperfective verbs in “performative circumstances”)? And what, in fact, did we say if we use(d) the imperfective verb in “performative circumstances”? No doubt that we are promising, and that we are (probably) in the process of promising. But, if we are to take the distinction between PF and IF seriously (and I will try to show that we have to; why else would language create PF on one side and IF on the other?), we have also (at least) indicated that the promise hasn’t been given yet, i.e. that the act of promise hasn’t been accomplished (yet). As long as we are only promising(IF), we haven’t promised anything (yet), and if we aren’t but promising(IF), we can’t take anything as having been promised. The question therefore arises (maybe not as much for a linguist as it does for a philosopher, and I plead guilty to be one): how to promise, or more precisely, how to accomplish an act of promise in Slovenian? Or to put it even more radically: is it at all possible to promise in Slovenian, can we ever take anything as having been promised?

That dilemma may seem more than artificial at first sight, but it was very much alive among Slovenian linguists at the end of the XIX. century. And it was that very dilemma that - as a kind of a coincidental by-product - gave rise to the foundations of performativity in Slovenian, half a century before Austin. In this paper, I will try to remove some dust from one part of the controversy that opposed different Slovenian scholars for about thirty years.

2. Perfective present as perfective future?

In 1892, on the covers [1] of a religious journal Cvetje z vrtov sv. Franciska (The Flowers from the Garden of St. Francis), a franciscan friar, and the editor of the journal, Stanislav Skrabec (1844 -1918), started a polemic on the difference of use between the perfective present and the imperfective present in Slovenian. The stake of the controversy was the following: is it justifiable to use the prefective present (for example obljubim(PF)) in the place of the perfective future or not? The question was raised because in certain regions where Slovenian was spoken, especially those close to the Italian and the Hungarian linguistic border, the population already used the perfective present in the place of the perfective future.

The first thing that Skrabec did in addressing that problem was to divide the Slovenian verbs according to aspects, not according to tenses. According to Skrabec the
Slovenian language has perfective verbs (as obljubiti, 'to promise'(PF)), and imperfective verbs (as obljubljati, 'to promise'(PF)), and it is these two aspects that govern the use of tenses, says he, never the other way around. In his classification, the imperfective aspect allows for three tenses:

- praesens (obljubljam, 'I am promising'(IF)),
- imperfectum (obljubljal sem, 'I was promising'(IF)),
- futurum (obljubljal bom, 'I will be promising'(IF)),

while the perfective aspect allows for four tenses:

- perfectum (obljubil sem, 'I have promised'(PF)),
- plusquamperfectum (obljubil sem bil, 'I had promised'(PF)),
- futurum exactum (obljubil bom 'I will promise'(PF)),
- aorist (obljubim, 'I promise'(PF)).

One thing is certain for Skrabec (1887:VII/2), namely that according to this classification, the aorist form obljubim (used in certain regions in place of the perfective future), can not denote an act in the present, because it is "praesens" only by the form, and not by the content. The real "praesens" can only denote what is going on as we speak, claims Skrabec, whereas the aorist announces only the accomplishment of the mentioned act, regardless of the tense. Which (also) means that it is aorist in the real sense of the term, namely "unlimited", "boundless", i.e. not giving indication of any precise moment in time. And since the aorist is an unlimited, boundless tense, it could be used either for an act that has already been accomplished, either for an act that is going to be accomplished in the future - if the meaning of the utterance is sufficiently explained by the context. If the context isn't explicative enough, than a Slovenian speaker should use more definite forms, namely perfectum (obljubil sem) for the past or the futurum exactum (obljubil bom) for the future.

His colleague Luka Pintar (1857 - 1915), a historian of literature and a philologist, is much more precise and restrictive in his definitions. He claims that perfective verbs denote a fact, i.e. accomplishment of a fact, while the imperfective verbs denote its duration. That is why he thinks that the division between a real present, a present that denotes the going-on of the fact (its accomplishing, its making), and an unlimited, boundless present, an aorist that only denotes its accomplishment, isn't justifiable.

A real present, he claims, denotes what is really present, and not what was - for the sake of a more vivid narration, for example - only transposed to the present. And what is really present is not only the going-on in the present, the process, but also what is being accomplished. Dajem, 'I am giving'(IF), or posojujem [2], 'I am borrowing'(IF), are thus real present tenses (they denote that I am giving or borrowing something as I speak), but dam, 'I give'(PF), or posodim, 'I borrow'(PF), in this respect, are real presents too, if - by uttering them - I also verbally accompany the accomplishment of the act described by them (Pintar 1890: 686).

2. Factual present vs. durative present
The "real present" must therefore be divided into a **durative present**, using imperfective verbs, and a **factual present**, using perfective verbs. But what does **factual present** really mean?

According to Pintar, we are dealing with a factual present when we conceive of an act in itself and as itself, i.e. undivided into its beginning, development and the end. When we conceive of it, as he says, "in one indivisible thought" - not taking into account its duration or its outcome -, in other words, when we state a fact.

The methodological and epistemological importance of this delimitation between the durative and the factual present is Pintar's sudden change of levels when he discusses the examples for his factual present. He is saying that a factual present is a present in which I **state** a certain fact when I accompany the accomplishment of this fact also verbally. The example he discusses in detail is the use of the verb to recommend (oneself), which in Slovenian comes in (aspectual) pair: priporocati se(IF) and priporociti se(PF).

**Priporocam se**(IF), says Pintar, when I enumerate to the person to whom I recommend myself my references, my advantages and my capacities. But when I am, for example, bidding farewell, taking leave or when(ever) I state my desire that the person in question would remember me, then I use **priporocim se**(PF) (ibid).

The point that Pintar misses is the fact that the verbs priporociti se/priporocati se ('to recommend oneself') have different conditions of use than the verbs dati/dajati ('to give') or posoditi/posojevati ('to borrow'), the verbs he used for explaining his factual present. The difference is that with the verbs priporociti se/priporocati se one can not accompany or state any fact that was (supposed to be) accomplished independently of the uttering of the verb denoting the very act, which is not the case with the verbs dati/dajati or posoditi/posojevati. The verbs priporociti se/priporocati se can only state (affirm) **themselves**, their own use and uttering: they are their own fact and their own act. One can **not say** I give or I borrow without actually giving or borrowing (something) at the same time, but one can **say** I recommend myself (at least in Slovenian) without actually doing anything else: saying the word is accomplishing the act!

That was in 1890. It will take Pintar 20 years of polemicizing to be able to see the difference. But, before we come to that, let us first take a quick look at the echoes that followed his definition of the factual present in linguistic circles.

### 3. Present as a limit

His most severe critic was Viktor Bezek (1860-1920), a pedagogue and a philologist. For him, the present is only a limit that moves between the past and the future, something without dimensions, just like a mathematical point. To stop or to fix that limit is impossible, because in the very moment when we open our mouth to state it, it is already in the past.

To catch the present, claims Bezek, would be the same as stopping the time (Bezek 1891: 632).

In 1892 Skrabec still agrees with Bezek on the concept of the present and the impossibility of using the perfective present for the act that takes place in the present, though his main interest is the impossibility of using the perfective present for the acts in the future:

"The perfective present announces the beginning of an act, without taking into
account the actual tense. But we can not conceive of the beginning neither in the past nor in any other tense, unless that is clear from the other expressions of the utterance. But on the other hand, we can not conceive of the beginning as comprising all the time of the discourse either, because every discourse, even the shortest one, is something lasting; the beginning, though, is only a moment that has either already passed even before we announce it, or is being expected in the discourse to come, which place it in the future, no matter how close it is" (Skrabec 1892 : XI/2).

It is true, says Skrabec, that the perfective present in Slovenian makes you think about the future, but it isn't the same when you say:

(3) *To kravo prodam*

'I sell(PF) this cow'

or

(4) *To kravo bom prodal*

'I will sell(PF) this cow'.

With the first utterance I (only) announce my willingness to sell, if there are any buyers, with the second one my determination to close the bargain. Nevertheless, Skrabec already feels the dead-end of such a definition of use of perfective present, especially in regard to performatives:

"To praise somebody by saying *I praise you* ('Pohvalim te'(PF)) isn't Slovenian; where I come from we praise by saying *good, you are good*, etc. To say *I recommend myself* ('Priporocim se'(PF)), *I bow* ('Priklonim se'(PF)) is a barbarism. And so is *I am recommending myself* ('Priporocam se'(IF)), *I am bowing* ('Klanjam se'(IF)). If somebody is bowing a Slovenian sees it if he is not blind, why say it? If one is saying that he is recommending himself, but doesn't say anything that could be taken as recommendation, I think that that is the same as if one would be saying *I am working*, but would be resting in the shade at the same time ... The same goes for the expressions as: *I promise* ('Obljubim'(PF)), *I thank s.o.* ('Zahvalim se'(PF)), *I guarantee* ('Zagotovim'(PF)), *I command* ('Zapovem'(PF)), *I cancel* ('Preklicem'(PF)), *I order* ('Ukazem'(PF)), *I conclude* ('Sklenem'(PF)), *I commit m.* ('Zavezem se'(PF)), *I implore you* ('Zarotim te'(PF)), *I renounce* ('Odpovem se'(PF)), *I confess* ('Izpovem se'(PF)), etc. In relation to the real present, all these expressions are German or Latin calques. But, we can not use the imperfective forms instead, because *the accomplishment of an act must be expressed*" (Skrabec 1892 : XI/3).

And that is the very problem that will, as in a vicious circle, continue to pose, re-pose and impose itself in the following ten years: how to accomplish an act that can only be accomplished by uttering the verb mentioning that act, if:
1) the perfective present can not denote the acts that are accomplished in the present;
2) the imperfective present can only denote the acts that are going on, but are not accomplished in the present?

4. Praesens effectivum and praesens instans

In 1910, Luka Pintar even found a "logico-linguistic" answer to the above dilemma:

"Can we still call unlimited something that is excluded from the present? Because an exclusion from the present is a limitation as well. And if something is in fact unlimited - which is supposed to be the case with perfective or aorist present - than it should be possible to use it non only in the past and in the future, but also in the present" (Pintar 1910: 500).

And starting with that definition, Pintar re-examines his arguments from 1890 in which he attributed to the verbs like *I give* ('Dam'(PF)), *I borrow* ('Posodim'(PF)), the possibility of accomplishing the acts they were referring to (1. person singular present indicative active). And he introduces a new distinction, a distinction between the praesens effectivum and the praesens instans:

"*Dam* ('I give'(PF)) is, according to his modality, a potential, according to his tense, a present, but if it isn't a factual present or praesens effectivum, we could call it a praesens instans (immediate present) ... We will label as immediate present everything that could be accomplished any moment, will be accomplished in a very near future, is being accomplished as we speak, even everything that has just been accomplished" (Pintar 1910: 502).

With that distinction between praesens effectivum and praesens instans Pintar brought about a very important distinction within the category of perfective present, a distinction supported by two "external" (external to the effect that they delimit the perfective present in relation to the imperfective present) distinctions:

1) a modal distinction (perfective present being "problematic" and "potential", imperfective present being "assertive" and "indicative");
2) a genealogico-taxonomical distinction (perfective present being "particular", imperfective present being "general").

According to these new definitions, we use perfective verbs to express problematic judgements, i.e. judgements that are by their modality potential and subjective, and the imperfective verbs to express the assertive, instantly valid judgements, by their modality therefore indicative.

The difference between the perfective present and the imperfective present lies therefore in the possibility to show the attitude of the person that thinks or judges, with regard to the uttered thought or judgement. The perfective present would therefore be an instantiation of the imperfective present, a particularisation of the general form which is, as such, subordinated to the generality, but can not - precisely on account of its
particularity, **because a particular utterer uses that particular (and particularized) form to express his particular attitude with regard to the general propositional content** - be reduced to that general form.

And it is precisely by this particularity of utterance that Pintar motivated the necessity to use the 1. person singular present present indicative active to accomplish an act that can only be accomplished by uttering the verb that denotes it:

“We could easily find, says Pintar, the argument for that limitation to the 1. person singular. Namely, only I am in the position to know what I have decided, determined, etc. As to the others, I don't have that knowledge, and if I don't have it, I can't express it” (Pintar 1910: 567).

5. Present as a moment

Skrabec tried to reconcile the theory and the practice in another way, i.e. by delimiting the use of the perfective present and the use of the perfective future. We could resume his claims in two points:

1) Slovenians never saw the perfective present as a future tense;
2) they use the perfective present to denote the accomplishment of an act in an indefinite tense, i.e. as historic present or gnomic aorist.

But before the controversy between Bezek and Pintar in the years 1890-91, Skrabec always defined the perfective present in relation to the perfective future, never in relation to the imperfective present. That controversy gives him the chance to catch up.

As for an act that is (still) going on when we mention it, in 1897 he agrees with Bezek: we can not use a perfective verb, only an imperfective one. The imperfective present (only) indicates a duration, which, as a matter of fact, can also include a moment of real present, **but not necessarily**. What does this "not necessarily" mean?

The present tense, claims Skrabec (1897: XVI/8), is basically only a moment between the past and the future. The accomplishment of an act is itself only a moment. And if the act is accomplished by uttering the verb that denotes that act, we have to admit that both of them occur in the same moment, since the announcement and the accomplishment of the act are, in that case, one and the same thing.

In short, if there are acts that can be accomplished by the very uttering of the verbs that denote them - something Skrabec still refused in 1887 - than these verbs have to be uttered in the perfective form, **because the imperfective aspect gives a too vivid impression that the act denoted by the verb hasn't been accomplished at the same time**.

6. Present as a series of moments

That kind of theorizing was severely attacked. Even an act, accomplished by one and only one word, takes at least that much time as one needs to utter it, affirms Rajko Perusek, the most virulent critic of Skrabec. That (kind of) act starts with the beginning of the word and is accomplished by the end of the word, and even the uttering of the shortest word takes
certain time.

In fact, more the controversy develops, more it is becoming evident that it isn't about the (concept of) language, but about the (concept of) time and, consequently, reality. Perusek, for example, is claiming that in everyday life we can't conceive of the present as of a point without dimensions, but rather as of a series, sometimes longer sometimes shorter, of succeeding temporal moments. Therefore, the present can not be represented as a point in which the beginning and the end coincide, that would be even logically impossible, he claims:

“Every discourse lasts at least some moments; such a discourse would therefore go beyond that point without dimension: for the speaker such a point would be in the past. Or else, he would have to hurry up with his discourse to catch that point: for the speaker such a point would therefore be in the future” (Perusek 1910: 15-16).

Perusek's conclusion is the following: since the present obviously stretches a bit into the past and a bit into the future, the acts that can be accomplished by uttering the verbs that denote them must take the imperfective aspect.

Unfortunately for Perusek and fortunately for the performative theory, he didn't choose his example very well: *dati odvezo* ('to absolve s.o. of sin'(PF)), and his comment upon it was even less fortunate: is it possible, Perusek asks, that the salvation of the soul would depend on those few characters more that the imperfective form *dajem odvezo* ('I am absolving s.o. of sin'(IF)) does have, and the perfective form *dam odvezo* ('I absolve s.o. of sin'(PF)) doesn't? (ibid.)

7. Present as intention and grammar

Skrabec, who was a holy man, violently - but as far as theory was concerned very productively - reacted to that "blasphemy": “The accomplishment of an act of confession doesn't depend only on the correct form of the verb, but also on the intention of the authorized confessor” (Skrabec 1911: XXVIII/5).

So in 1911, for Skrabec, the accomplishment of a performative act doesn't depend only on the correct form of the verb anymore, i.e. the form that expresses the accomplishment of the act, as he postulated 15 years ago. He already knows about the self-reference (which in speech-act theory wasn't explicitly postulated until Benveniste in 1963), now he postulates two additional conditions for the "happiness" of performatives:

1) the condition postulating that the utterer of the (given) performative utterance must have an intention to accomplish the act denoted by the verb (and the acts related to it as consequences);
2) the condition postulating that the act denoted by the performative verb can only be accomplished by an authorized person (in determined circumstances).

What he is still lacking (in relation to the performative theory we know today), is the condition postulating that the performative verb must be uttered in the 1. person singular present indicative active, a condition that has - as we have seen - already been postulated by Pintar. But only two months after his attack on Perusek, concerning the act of
confession and the conditions of its accomplishment, Skrabec writes:

“And since the act is accomplished by the person that utters the word, the verb must be in the 1. person present, usually in singular; only in the songs, where there are several persons singing as one, in plural. In rare cases the 3. person can take the place of the 1. one” (Skrabec 1911: XXVIII/7)

As we have seen, Skrabec had formulated almost all of the conditions for the happiness of performatives, postulated by Austin almost half a century later, and elaborated by Benveniste and Searle at an even later date. Nevertheless, his performative theory is a kind of a fortuitous by-product of a purely grammatical controversy concerning the interdependence of time, tense, and aspect. But, as soon as the concept of performativity started to take shape - no matter how imperfect it was at that time - it was the theory of performativity that controlled the grammatical controversy, not the other way round! What does this mean? It means that the concepts belonging to the theory that was at the origin of the controversy, the theory of aspect(s), were constructed and reconstructed, defined and redefined in view of the performative meta-theory, and not in view of the “basic” theory. We are therefore confronted with a rather paradoxical situation; we have to deal with two theories: the "basic" theory (theory of aspects) and the meta-theory (theory of performativity), the latter being a kind of a by-product of the discussions concerning the former (the use of aspects in Slovenian).

But, longer the controversy concerning the “basic” theory lasts, more powerful the meta-theory grows, even up to the point that it starts to control the controversy about the “basic” theory. In return, the solution of the controversy about the “basic” theory renders the meta-theory inoperative. Namely, on the one hand, we have the theory postulating that the verbs whose uttering can accomplish the act they denote, must be expressed in the perfective, because the imperfective gives a too vivid impression that the denoted act hasn't been accomplished yet. On the other hand, we are facing the reality that contradicts the theory by using the imperfective in the performative sense (i.e. for accomplishing the performative acts).

If we take all of that into consideration - and, as Skrabec used to say, contra factum non datur logica - we are forced to conclude that in Slovenian we can't promise or accomplish any performative act ... but by mistake. Is there any way to avoid such a radical (and improbable) conclusion?

8. Delocutive hypothesis

There is an outline of the solution to that problem in the writings of Skrabec himself, but he didn't elaborate on it. One of the arguments he used in 1897 to justify the use of verbs that can accomplish the acts they denote, was a historical fact (so he says) that Slovenians weren't always accomplishing those facts by simply uttering the verbs that denoted them. According to Skrabec that became possible with the acceptance of Christianity, more precisely, after the Bible and the liturgical texts were translated into Slovenian, because those liturgical texts provided the formulae - for accomplishment of acts that can only be accomplished by uttering the verbs that denote them - that could be used as models in everyday life.
So, in a certain moment (hard to say exactly when, but exact dates aren’t really important for our analysis) a conversational form(ula) obljubljam (‘I am promising’) appeared that was used by the speaker to promise something to the addressee by (simply) saying obljubljam (‘I am promising’). It is very likely, claimed Skrabec, that for a certain time two rival forms coexisted, obljubim (‘I promise’), and obljubljam (‘I am promising’). But since some Slovenian dialects have already adopted the perfective form to express the (perfective) future, the imperfective form started to serve to express the praesens effectivum!

What Skrabec (implicitly) proposed was a delocutive hypothesis of performativity in Slovenian. When I speak of delocutive hypothesis of performativity, I don’t refer to the benvenistian delocutivity (proposed in 1958), but to the generalized delocutivity developed by the French linguist Jean-Claude Anscombre (mostly in 1979 and 1980). He defines it in the following way: “The generalized delocutivity is a process intended to explain the cases (situations) where a form F1 with the semantic value S1 gives rise to a morpheme F2 whose semantic value S2 uses the uttering value of F1” (Anscombe 1980: 115).

Anscombe proposes an elaborated scheme in five stages, though the Slovenian obljubljam only arrived to the stage 3. I will try to apply this scheme to the Slovenian obljubljam (‘I am promising’) in order to corroborate the idea of Skrabec (and at the same time explain in more detail Anscombe’s somehow abstract definition). The application will, of course, be a schematic one.

1. At a certain moment in time, the Slovenian language disposes with the noun form obljuba (‘promise’), with the meaning, ‘engagement to (do) something’. In the first dictionary of the Slovenian literary language (Glonar 1936: 247), we can even find the following entry under obljuba: obljubo dati+ : obljubiti (‘to give a promise+ : to promise’). The little cross indicates that the expression to the left of the colon is obsolete, and that the expression to the right took its place. Which proves that at a certain moment in time Slovenians didn’t use performatives, but periphrastic (compound) forms instead.

2. A form F1 = obljubljam 1 (‘I am promising’(IF)) appears, used by the speaker to engage himself to (do) something, applying some discourse law as: ‘If X is saying to Y that he is promising(IF) to do something, that means that he is binding himself to do something’. According to Skrabec, such a form (obljubljam 1) appeared after the acceptance of Christianity.

3. During some time two competitive forms coexisted, obljubim(PF) and obljubljam(IF). But since the perfective form had already been adopted to express the (perfective) future, a new form is constructed, F2 = obljubljam 2, with the semantic value S2 = ‘to accomplish what I am saying I am doing by saying obljubljam’.

9. Conclusion

This (possible) derivation shows that the accomplishment of an act of promise (or, in principle, any performative act) in Slovenian doesn’t depend on the intention of the speaker, neither on the correct form of the verb, but on a rather trivial fact that it gradually became customary to promise (and thereby accomplish an act of promise) by saying
obljubljam(IF), and not (or at least, not only) obljubim(PF).
The question however remains, why is that? Even more so if we take into account that J. L. Austin excluded the (English) Present Continuous Tense as possible tense for performatives on the ground that an act described in such a tense is unfinished (or seems to be unfinished).
My tentative answer would be that in institutional settings, in the settings strongly marked with social hierarchy, it is sometimes even more important to emphasize what one is doing (promising, ordering, commanding, …) than just indicating (by the perfective form of the verb) that the act in question has been successfully completed. When an officer is giving an order, for example, it is sometimes more (or equally) important - for the order to be carried out - that the soldiers’ attention is being drawn to the act the officer is performing as he speaks then to the fact that officer has just performed a certain act of ordering. When a deputy in the National Assembly is sworn in it is, of course, important (for him/her, for his/her future duty) that he/she indicates the completion of his/her oath. But it is probably equally important for the audience, for those he/she will represent, that he/she draws their attention to the act he/she is performing: swearing in as their representative. And using the imperfective form (Obljubljam (‘I am promising’), right now, as I speak) is the only explicit way to do it.
This imperfective use of performative verbs was initially probably confined to institutional settings or settings strongly marked with social hierarchy, but then gradually, by delocutive derivation, shifted to (more and more) general use. A case in point to corroborate this hypothesis is again the verb Obljubiti (‘to promise’): in institutional settings only the imperfective form is used, while in everyday life both forms can be used, the imperfective and the perfective one. However, if Slovenians want their promise to leave no doubt about its seriousness and future fulfilment, they use the imperfective form even in everyday life. Which may be a good sign that some time in the future the imperfective form will prevail over the perfective one. Namely, such a transition already happened to Ukazati (‘to order’): if we consult the corpus of Slovenian language Nova beseda (‘New Word’) [3], we will find three performative uses of ukazati (‘to order’) in perfective form [4]. But all three are found in literary works, dating from the first half of the 20th century. In contemporary Slovene, be it literary or spoken, there are none.
Notes

[1] And you have to take "on the covers" literally, because that was the only place Skrabec could use for publishing his linguistic writings.


[4] In two of them the speaker is issuing an order to himself and don’t really count as performatives.
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