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From acts of communication to assertions.

Expressive norms and conventional patterns in the evolution of speech *

In this paper, I provide a critical discussion of Mitchell S. Green's (2009) explanation of the *expressive dimension* and *score-changing function* of speech acts. Using concepts from the evolutionary biology of communication, Green argues that expressive illocutionary acts — e.g., assertions, orders, promises and other types of speech act for which Moorean absurdity is possible — are reliable expressions of the psychological states that constitute their sincerity conditions. According to him, expressive speech acts in general and assertions in particular are *handicaps*: signals difficult to fake because of being costly to produce. In particular, Green argues that insincere assertions are difficult to make because of limitations put on by the so-called *expressive norms*: in performing an assertive speech act, the speaker incurs the cost of being exposed to the risk of a loss of credibility. To account for the score-changing function of assertions, in turn, Green assumes that one's credibility is a score component that determines the *weight* of one's conversational contributions and, by the same token, plays a key role in distributing the burden of proof or rebuttal among the participants in a dialogue.

My paper is organised into two parts. In the first one, I briefly discuss key tenets of Green's model of speech acts as handicaps. In the second part, I develop an alternative approach to explaining the expressive dimension and dynamics of speech acts. Following Green (2009, 2017), I distinguish between acts of communication and speech acts, i.e., between "acts in which information is conveyed from one system to another" and "acts of the sort that can be performed by saying that one is doing so" (Green 2009: 147). I assume that the function of the former is to contribute new propositions to the common ground among the interacting *individual* agents, whereas speech acts affect the conversational score understood as an abstract data structure whose job is to register

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publicly recognizable contributions of conversational moves (Lewis 1979). I also argue that acts of communication are best understood as elements of second-person social interactions coordinated by the system of joint intentionality in Michael Tomasello's (2014) sense, and as such can be regarded as evolutionary and developmental precursors of assertive speech acts – pronouncements, assumptions, presumptions, guesses, suppositions, and so on – that function as elements of collectively known cultural practices. Finally, I put forth a hypothesis according to which the normative aspect of acts of communication can be explained along the Millikanian lines (Millikan 1984, 2004, 2005; cf. Witek 2015a, forthcoming b), whereas the expressive dimension and score-keeping function of assertive speech acts can be best understood with the help of the Austinian theory of illocutionary dynamics (Austin 1975; Sbisà 2002, 2009, forthcoming; Langton 2015; Witek 2015b, 2018, forthcoming a).

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