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From acts of communication to assertions.

Expressive norms and conventional patterns in the evolution of speech *

The Origins of Meaning and the Nature of Speech Acts. A workshop with Mitchell Green

March 15th—16th, 2018, University of Szczecin, Szczecin

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AIM:

- a critical discussion of Green's (2009) account of the *expressive dimension* and *score-changing function* of speech acts;
- an alternative approach to explaining these properties of speech acts.

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PROPOSAL:

- to adopt a Millikanian perspective on *acts of communication* and an Austinian approach to *assertion* and its kin.

PLAN:

1. Green's (2009) proposal:
 - 1.1. problem and its solution;
 - 1.2. critical discussion:
 - discourse-independent vs discourse-constituted thoughts,
 - veracity and its two aspects: externalist and internalist,
 - varieties of credibility.

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1. Green's (2009) proposal:
 - 1.1. problem and its solution;
 - 1.2. critical discussion:
 - discourse-independent vs discourse-constituted thoughts,
 - veracity and its two aspects: externalist and internalist,
 - varieties of credibility.

2. Alternative approach:
 - 2.1. acts of communication / assertive SAs,
 - 2.2. norms, veracity, and score-keeping in acts of communication,
 - 2.3. credibility and score-keeping in assertive speech acts,
 - 2.4. norms and veracity in assertive speech acts.

1.1. Green's proposal: the problem and its solution

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 - (b) and the *score-changing function* of SAs?

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- insincere assertions are difficult to make because of limitations put on by the so-called *expressive norms*;
in performing an expressive SA, the speaker incurs the cost of being exposed to the risk of a loss of credibility;

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- insincere assertions are difficult to make because of limitations put on by the so-called *expressive norms*;
in performing an expressive SA, the speaker incurs the cost of being exposed to the risk of a loss of credibility;
- that's why expressive SAs are reliable indicators of what is within.

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First solution to (b) [→ solution in terms of expressive norms]:

Holding fixed what is said, expressive norms enable us to *indicate* [1] how what is said is to be taken and [2] what would count as an appropriate reply. Such norms enable us to do that by enabling us to show the psychological state (belief, acceptance, belief as justified, etc.) *from which the conversational contribution flows*. (Green 2009: 160; the italics is mine – MW)

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In short, the job of expressive norms is to *indicate*:

[1] the force of a speech act, and

[2] how the performance of the act affects the state of the conversation.

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First solution to (b) [→ solution in terms of expressive norms]:

According to Austin (1975: 117), a successful illocutionary act:

- secures uptake,
- takes effect,
- invites, by convention, a response or sequel.

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Speech act	What it shows	How it affects the state of conversation
an expert's pronouncement that p	belief that p formed by an expert	H has the burden of proof
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Second solution to (b) [→ solution in terms of credibility]:

Finding someone credible is a matter of believing what they say to be reliable; it is also a matter of believing them to be sincere if their utterance admits of sincerity. (Green 2009: 152)

A natural refinement of [the score-keeping model] would keep tabs on which interlocutors are credible and to what extent, and that will in turn determine the *weight*—as one might call it—of their conversational contributions. (*Ibid*: 153)

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In short:

- one's credibility determines the weight of one's contributions, which, in turn, determines the range of allowable subsequent moves.

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- Discourse-constituted thoughts – thoughts whose key aspects are constituted within the progressing discourse (Jaszczolt and Witek 2018).

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'[t]here is nothing wrong, in general, with (...) expressing a belief that one would not have if one did not express it'. (Stalnaker 2002: 711)

(1) I have to pick up my sister from the airport.

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In sum:

- The idea of *acts-flowing-from-mental-states* seems to be problematic;
- only a discourse-independent thought can be regarded as a „state (...) from which the conversational contribution flows” (Green 2009: 160).

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Comment #2:

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- credibility comes in different forms;
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 - ‘perlocutionary’ credibility,
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- each form of credibility deserves a separate treatment.

2.1. Alternative approach: acts of communication / assertive SAs

Acts of speech are acts in which words are uttered; acts of communication are acts in which information is conveyed from one system to another. Neither of these is a speech act. Speech acts are acts of the sort that can be performed by saying that one is doing so. (Green 2009: 147)

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Acts of communication:

- they convey information about the world;
- i.e., their *function* is to contribute new propositions to the common ground among the interacting *individual* agents.

Speech acts:

- they 'take effect' (Austin: 1975: 117) by putting constraints on the range of appropriate conversational moves that can be subsequently made;
- i.e., their *function* is to affect the state or score of conversation (→ *score-changing function*).

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Acts of communication:

- function in *second-person* or *dyadic interactions* based on skills and motivations of *joint intentionality* (Tomasello 2014);
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- have a normative aspect: normative tendencies to *sincerity* and *trust*.

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- function in a cultural group-oriented environment constituted by collectively known cultural practices (Tomasello 2014);
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- function against the background of cultural *group* common ground; contribute new propositions to the score or record of conversation;
- have a normative aspect: *social* or *cultural norms*.

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A HYPOTHETICAL *EVOLUTIONARY* AND *DEVELOPMENTAL* SCENARIO

- STAGE₁**
- acts of communication;
 - conventional patterns;
 - expression₁ → the *mind-to-words* direction of influence.
 - personal common ground;

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- assertive speech acts;
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- assertive speech acts;
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- STAGE₃**
- discourse-constituted thoughts;
 - expression₂ → the *words-to-mind* direction of influence.

2.2. Alternative approach:

norms, veracity, and score-keeping in acts of communication (STAGE₁)

Comment #2:

- veracity has two aspects:
the externalist one (\rightarrow truth, rightness),
the internalist one (\rightarrow sincerity);
- in most cases we expect our interlocutors to be veracious in the light of the externalist standards.

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Question:

- Why does sincerity matter?

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Question:

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Hypothesis (Witek forthcoming b):

- the proper function of an act of communication is to induce a belief and thereby to contribute to the achievement of *mental coordination*;
- the sincerity of an act is a Normal condition (\rightarrow Millikan 1984, 1998, 2005) for its proper functioning.

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S-H conventional patterns:

- S's utterance of a sentence,
- H's cooperative response.

(Millikan 1998, 2005)

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interactional effect of S's act (Witek 2015a, forthcoming b)

≈ a response the act “invites by convention” (Austin 1975: 117)

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Indicative acts of communication:

- S's utterance of an indicative sentence;
- H's believing what he is told.

Imperative acts of communication:

- S's utterance of an imperative sentence;
- H's complying with what he is told.

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Witek forthcoming b:

- sincere speakers and trustful hearers co-evolved;
- the sincerity of an act is a Normal condition for the proper functioning of the hearer's trust;
- therefore, sincerity is a norm (sincere acts → mental coordination).

2.3. Alternative approach:

credibility and score-keeping in assertive SAs (STAGE₂)

Comment #3:

- credibility comes in different forms;
- we can distinguish between:
 - ‘perlocutionary’ credibility,
 - ‘illocutionary’ credibility (i.e., authority or deontic power).

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Proposal:

- ‘perlocutionary’ credibility is tracked by the ‘personal’ common ground among the interacting individual agents;

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Proposal:

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- ‘illocutionary’ credibility is tracked by the score or record of conversation → what can be recognized and registered by any competent member of our group, by “anyone who would be one of us” (Tomasello 2016: 63);

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- illocutionary score dynamics is a ruled-governed process (→ Witek 2015b); rules of appropriateness, rules of kinematics, and accommodation.

2.4. Alternative approach:

norms and veracity in assertive SAs (STAGE₃)

Comment #1:

- discourse-independent vs discourse-constituted thoughts;
- the idea of *acts-flowing-from-mental-states* seems to be problematic.

2.4. Alternative approach:

norms and veracity in assertive SAs (STAGE₃)

Proposal:

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Hypothesis:

- it is difficult to perform insincere speech acts with the *m-t-w* direction of influence *because of* the limits put on by expressive norms;
→ expression₁
- it is even more difficult to perform insincere speech acts with the *w-t-m* direction of influence, since they express discourse-constituted thoughts.
→ expression₂

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THANK YOU

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