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Situatedness, Self-Expression, and Norms in Assertive Acts

Speech Acts, Self-Expression, and Music. A Workshop with Mitch Green
Szczecin, 25th October 2024

Aims

- To use the idea of *situatedness* (Austin 1975; Mey 2002; Sbisà 2002, 2023) to differentiate between different speech act types belonging to the *assertive family* (Green 2009, 2023a, 2023b),
- and explore their *expressive function* and *normative dimension*.

Key ideas

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- “[T]he receiver may infer what belongs to the context of a speech act from the speech act itself”, and “the context pertinent to a speech act is limited, because felicity rules single out those aspects of the situation against which the felicity of the speech act is to be evaluated.” (Sbisà 2002: 426)

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In sum

- Every speech act and the context of its performance are internally related: one cannot characterise one without considering the specifics of the other;
- the specific way in which a given speech act is situated has normative implications; that is to say, it can be described in terms of the norms that apply to that act.

Content

1. Green (2009, 2023a, 2023b) on *assertion* and their ilk, its expressive function and normative dimension
2. Austin's (1953/1979) typology of assertive acts. A view from the QUD model (Beaver et. al. 2017)
3. Self-expression and norms in situated assertions

1. Green on assertion and their ilk

The *assertive family* comprises

- *assertions*,
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- and their more distant cousins (*sheer guesses, opinions, and suppositions*).

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Speech act types that form the assertive family:

- differentiated based on the different *expressive norms* that apply to them; they can be characterized in terms of their *sincerity conditions* (Green 2009);
- characterized by reference to the *liability, frankness, and fidelity norms* to which they are subject (Green 2023a, 2023b).

1. Green on assertion and their ilk

Green 2009 (cf. Witek 2021b): *Expressive speech acts are handicaps.*

Speech act	Expressed mental state
Assertion that <i>P</i>	Belief that <i>P as</i> justified in a way appropriate for knowledge
Conjecture that <i>P</i>	Belief that <i>P as</i> backed with some justification
Educated guess that <i>P</i>	Acceptance or belief that <i>P as</i> backed with some justification
Guess that <i>P</i>	Acceptance that <i>P</i> (no “ <i>as</i> ”-condition)
Presumption of <i>P</i>	Acceptance of <i>P as</i> justified for current conversational purposes
Supposition of <i>P</i>	Acceptance of <i>P as</i> aimed at the production of justification for some related content <i>R</i>

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→ **situatedness**

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Green 2023a, 2023b: *Liability, frankness, and fidelity norms*

Speech act	Liability	Frankness	Fidelity
Assertion	+	Belief	Provide strong justification if challenged
Conjecture	+	Some reason to think content is true; perhaps intention to investigate	Provide some justification if challenged
Presumption	+	Intention to treat content as true	Treat content as true
Educated guess	+	Some reason to think content is true	Provide some justification if challenged
Sheer guess	+	—	—
Opining	+	Belief	—
Supposition	—	Intention to investigate what follows from content	Reason with content to determine what follows

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1. Green on assertion and their ilk

My general hypothesis

- Each member of the assertive family is characteristically situated, and its situatedness affects its expressive function and normative aspect.

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This eagle is large.

This leopard is small.

This snake is near.

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that are deemed to be *standard patterns*; they determine their *senses*.

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[!] There are items of types which do not exactly match any of the standard patterns, though they may be more or less similar to one or to more than one of those patterns.

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Two criteria:

'difference in direction of fit'

fitting a *T*-word to an item

or

fitting an item to a *T*-word

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assimilating the sense of a *T*-word
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sense → item-type

item-type → sense

T-word → item

calling

describing

item → *T*-word

exemplifying

classing

2. Austin's typology of assertive acts

One aspect of situatedness: addressing the current QUD

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(1) This insect is [a beetle].

(1_{FM}) {This insect is an F | F is a species of insect}

(1_Q) What is this insect?

(2) [This insect] is a beetle.

(2_{FM}) { x is a beetle | x is an individual}

(2_Q) What is a beetle?

2. Austin's typology of assertive acts

RC₁

calling

A₁: This insect is [a beetle].

QUD₁: [*What*] *is this insect?*

OR: *What can we call this insect?*

→ To answer QUD₁ is to find a pattern to assimilate to this particular insect.

RC₂

describing

A₂: This insect is a [beetle].

QUD₂: *What is [this insect]?*

OR: *How can we describe this insect?*

→ To answer QUD₂ is to find a pattern to assimilate this insect to.

RC₃

exemplifying

A₃: [This insect] is a beetle.

QUD₃: *What is [a beetle]?*

OR: *What is an example of a beetle?*

→ To answer QUD₃ is to find a sample to assimilate this pattern to.

RC₄

classing

A₄: [This insect] is a beetle.

QUD₄: [*What*] *is a beetle?*

OR: *Which of these insects is a beetle?*

→ To answer QUD₄ is to find a sample to assimilate to this pattern.

2. Austin's typology of assertive acts

Hypothesis

- We can distinguish between *concept-changing* assertions (*calling, exemplifying*) and *theory-changing* assertions (*describing, classing*);
i.e., there are four types of moves contributing to the growth of knowledge.

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- We can distinguish between *concept-changing* assertions (*calling, exemplifying*) and *theory-changing* assertions (*describing, classing*);
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Digression

- The standing questions that the *Vevish* signals address are “What is this predator”, “What is this eagle/leopard/snake?”, and, consequently, “What type of escape reaction should be produced?”

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Specific hypotheses

***H*₁** Every assertion is situated, meaning that it addresses a contextually salient QUD.

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Specific hypotheses

H₁ Every assertion is situated, meaning that it addresses a contextually salient QUD.

H₂ Every assertion expresses an appropriate discourse-constituted belief.

→ Witek 2021b

expressing
discourse-independent thoughts

versus

expressing
discourse-constituted thoughts

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Specific hypotheses

- H₁** Every assertion is situated, meaning that it addresses a contextually salient QUD.
- H₂** Every assertion expresses an appropriate discourse-constituted belief.
- H₃** To be effective, speech acts belonging to the assertive family must be situated.
- H₄** Green's typology of act belonging to the assertive family intersects with the Austinian typology.

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Green 2009 (cf. Witek 2021b): *Expressive speech acts are handicaps.*

Speech act	Expressed mental state
Assertion that <i>P</i>	Belief that <i>P as (i)</i> formed in response to QUD <i>and (ii)</i> justified in a way appropriate for this situated move in the process of knowledge-making
Conjecture that <i>P</i>	Belief that <i>P as (i)</i> formed in response to QUD <i>and (ii)</i> backed by some justification that meets the relevant standards for making conjectures.
Educated guess that <i>P</i>	Belief that <i>P as (i)</i> formed in response to QUD <i>and (ii)</i> backed with some justification that meets the relevant standards for expert opinions.
Presumption of <i>P</i>	Acceptance of <i>P as (i)</i> formed in response to QUD, <i>(ii)</i> expressed to enable the ongoing argument to proceed despite the absence of conclusive or sufficient evidence, <i>and (iii)</i> warranted by virtue of <i>S'</i> current epistemic and conversational situation (Witek 2021a).

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- H*₃** To be effective, speech acts belonging to the assertive family must be situated.
- H*₄** Green's typology of act belonging to the assertive family intersects with the Austinian typology.
- H*₅** At least some norms governing these *acts* require that *they* be adequately situated.

Literature

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