

Why truth is not the aim of assertives?

The case of explanation

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The paper investigates the nature of assertives, i.e., speech acts having word-to-world direction of fit. Contrary to what is now commonly assumed, it argues that truth is not the aim of all assertives. I claim that each assertive has a unique aim and function.

The speech act debate is focused on analyzing the illocutionary act of assertion. The most widespread answer to the question “What is the constitutive norm of assertion?” is the knowledge norm (e.g., Williamson 1996). However, there is not much discussion concerning the question “What are the aims and functions of assertives?”. For instance, Marsili (2018) argues that truth is the aim of all assertives. However, if truth is the aim of all assertives, then only the constitutive norm allows us to distinguish between particular assertives. I argue against this claim.

Consider an illocutionary act of explanation. Turri (2015) proposes that understanding is the norm of explanation. Understanding, according to him, is a factive notion, i.e., one who understands that *p*, knows that *p*. However, it is not necessary to make a true statement in order to explain something. One can make the following simplification to a child in order to explain the theory of evolution:

(SIM) Man comes from chimpanzee.

In appropriate contexts, SIM is a proper terminological simplification, although it is strictly speaking a false statement. According to my proposal, in order to make a felicitous act of explanation one does not need to aim at truth or believe that *p*.

This proposal has implications in several debates. For instance, according to many theories of lying, such cases as SIM would be incorrectly classified as lies (e.g., Stokke 2018). I will argue, however, that lies and explanations have different aims and communicative intentions.

References: • Marsili, N. 2018. Truth and assertion: rules versus aims. *Analysis*. • Stokke, A. 2018. *Lying and insincerity*. Oxford: OUP. • Turri, J. 2015. Understanding and the norm of explanation. *Philosophia* 43(4). 1171–1175. • Williamson, T. 1996. Knowing and asserting. *Philosophical Review* 105. 489–523.