

ASSERTION, COMPLEXITY AND SINCERITY

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Abstract The target of this paper is the ‘simple’ knowledge account of assertion, according to which assertion is constituted by a single epistemic rule of the form ‘One must: assert p only if one knows p ’ (where p is a proposition). My aim is to argue that those who are attracted to a knowledge account of assertion should prefer what I call the ‘complex’ knowledge account, according to which assertion is constituted by a system of rules all of which are, taken together, constitutive of assertion. One of those rules - which, following John Searle, I call the ‘preparatory condition’ - is of the form ‘One must: assert p only if one knows p .’ All else being equal, simple accounts are preferable to complex accounts. I argue in this paper that all else isn’t equal. While the simple knowledge account provides an elegant explanation of certain data, it is hard to see how to integrate the simple knowledge account into a more general theory of illocutionary acts. Because the complex knowledge account avoids this objection while explaining the same data as the simple knowledge account, I conclude that the complex knowledge account is superior to the simple knowledge account.

Keywords Assertion; Epistemic Norms; Epistemology; Philosophy of Language; Speech Acts

0. Introductory Remarks

When I utter a meaningful sentence I express a proposition. For example, when I utter the sentence ‘XX will write a paper about assertion’ I express the proposition *XX will write a paper about assertion*. Following J.L. Austin, I will call this a ‘locutionary act’ [1962: 94]. But I can express the proposition *XX will write a paper about assertion* in many ways. I can question whether XX will write a paper about assertion, or I can promise that XX will write a paper about assertion. Again following Austin, I will call these different ways ‘illocutionary acts’ [1962: 98]. Just as I can promise that XX will write a paper about assertion, I can assert that XX will write a paper about assertion. But what is assertion? According to one popular view, assertion is an illocutionary act that is constituted by a single epistemic rule:

SIMPLE ACCOUNT: Assertion is an illocutionary act A that is constituted by the epistemic rule ‘One must: perform A with the content p only if p has C’, where ‘C’ is some epistemic property (see, for example, Gerken [2012]; Lackey [2007]; McKinnon [2013]; Weiner [2005]; Williamson [2000: Ch. 11]).

Different versions of the simple account propose different epistemic rules. Here are some examples (there are others):

KNOWLEDGE RULE: One must: assert p only if one knows p [Williamson 2000: Ch. 11].

REASONABLENESS RULE: One must: assert p only if (i) it is reasonable for one to believe p and (ii) one believes p in part because it is reasonable for one to believe p [Lackey 2007].

WARRANT RULE: One must: assert p (in one's conversational context C) only if one's assertion is appropriately based on a degree of warrant for believing p that is adequate relative to C [Gerken 2012].

SUPPORTIVE REASONS RULE: One must: assert p only if (i) one has supportive reasons for p and (ii) the relevant conventional and pragmatic elements of the context are present [McKinnon 2013].

TRUTH RULE: One must: assert p only if p is true [Weiner 2005].

One could accept one of these rules yet reject the simple account. But if one does so then one has to give some other account of what assertion is (I develop such an account in §3).

While simple accounts are popular, there are other possible accounts of assertion. Here are three prominent examples (again, there are others):

THE 'BELIEF-EXPRESSION' ACCOUNT: Assertions are expressions of beliefs. If a speaker asserts p she expresses the belief that p . A speaker expresses the belief that p just in case she intends her audience to take her assertion as a reason to think she believes that p , and she intends to bring this about via the recognition of that intention [Bach and Harnish 1979].

THE 'COMMON GROUND' ACCOUNT: Assertions are attempts to update the conversational common ground. If a speaker asserts p in a conversation C , and her conversational partners accept her assertion, p becomes part of the common ground in C . In contrast, if her partners reject her assertion, p doesn't become part of the common ground [Stalnaker 1978].¹

¹ Stalnaker is explicit that this isn't a definition of assertion [see 1978: 87]. Speech acts other than assertion can add propositions to the common ground, e.g. supposing, and a proposition can be added to the common ground without a speech act being performed, e.g. if it is made salient to the participants by other means. Further, Stalnaker doubts that one can make sense of 'accepting' or 'rejecting' an assertion without making reference to assertion.

THE 'COMMITMENT' ACCOUNT: Asserting involves undertaking commitments, e.g. to defend what you have asserted against appropriate challenges [Brandom 1994].²

My target in this paper is the simple knowledge account of assertion, which I'll often just refer to as 'the simple account'. I start by arguing that the simple knowledge account is an attractive account of assertion because it gives us an elegant explanation of a range of relevant data (§1). But I then argue that, while the simple account has certain theoretical virtues, it faces a serious objection (§2). Put briefly, the objection is that it is unclear how to integrate the simple account into a more general theory of illocutionary acts. In response to this objection I propose what I call the 'complex' knowledge account of assertion, which I'll often just refer to as the 'complex account' (§3). According to the complex account assertion is constituted by a system of rules all of which are, taken together, constitutive of assertion. One of those rules - which, following John Searle [1969], I call the 'preparatory condition' - is of the form 'One must: assert *p* only if one knows *p*.' The complex account avoids the objections while explaining the same data as the simple account. I conclude that one should prefer the complex knowledge account to the simple knowledge account.

Before continuing, I'd like to comment on the aims and scope of this paper. First, why do I focus on the simple knowledge account rather than other simple accounts? I do so because I think it is the most plausible simple account available. This is largely because I regard Williamson's [2000] 'knowledge first' programme in epistemology as promising, and am therefore inclined to think that, if there is an epistemic requirement on asserting, knowledge is the most likely candidate. But, for those who aren't already on board with the knowledge first programme, I offer some further reasons in §1.

Second, why do I focus on simple accounts rather than other accounts? I do so in part because I find the motivating idea behind simple accounts - that we can best understand assertion, like other speech acts, in terms of the rules or norms that govern it - compelling. As I argue in §2-3, this motivating idea is better worked out within the framework for doing speech act theory developed by Searle, and this requires adopting my complex knowledge account rather than the simple knowledge account. Thus, my aim is to salvage the spirit of the simple

² This account is consistent with thinking of assertion in terms of rules or norms [see Rescorla 2009]. But a crucial difference between Brandom and someone like Williamson is that for Brandom the locutionary content of the asserted sentence is defined in terms of the relevant commitments whereas for someone like Williamson the content is determined independently.

knowledge account by showing we can incorporate the KNOWLEDGE RULE into Searle's framework.

Because Searle, unlike someone like Brandom, thinks we can give a theory of meaning independently of a theory of assertion, in working out my complex knowledge account I will make free use of representative idioms. But I don't claim that this is the only way of salvaging the spirit of simple knowledge accounts, and I suspect one could work out a knowledge account within other broad frameworks for doing speech act theory, such as Brandom's. While I am inclined to prefer Searle's framework to Brandom's - I think that we can give a theory of meaning independently of a theory of assertion - arguing this point is a paper in its own right, and can't be done in a paper with the primary aim of working out a substantive account of assertion. So you can read this paper as showing how to take one sort of broad framework for doing speech act theory and develop a knowledge account of assertion within it. If you are inclined towards another broad framework for doing speech act theory, I invite you to see if you can also develop a knowledge account within your chosen framework.

Third, while my argument for the complex knowledge account is primarily based on the deficiencies of the simple knowledge account, my aim in this paper is positive. I think the complex account is an independently attractive way to develop the idea that assertion is governed by something like the KNOWLEDGE RULE and, accordingly, I spend most of my time developing the view. Those unconvinced by the case against the simple account should consider the additional benefits of the complex account.

1. The Simple Account

Why think that the simple knowledge account is right? The standard argument is abductive, and based on the following three data points (see Turri [2011]; Williamson [2000: Ch. 11]. For criticism see Brown [2008]; Gerken [2012]; Lackey [2007]; Weiner [2005]).

1. Assertions of sentences of the form '*p* but I don't believe/know *p*' are always improper.
2. One can never properly assert that one's lottery ticket has lost just based on knowing the odds.
3. A wide range of conversational phenomena. For example, if I assert *p* I invite the challenge 'How do you know *p*?'

The simple account explains these data points as follows. First, assertions of sentences of the form '*p* but I don't believe/know *p*' are always improper because one can't simultaneously know both conjuncts (if one knows *p*, then one can't know that one doesn't believe/know *p*, and if one

knows that one doesn't believe/know p , then one doesn't know p).³ Second, conjoined with the assumption that one can never know that one's lottery ticket has lost just based on knowing the odds, the simple account straightforwardly entails that one can never properly assert that one's lottery ticket has lost just based on knowing the odds. Third, if assertion requires knowledge it is only to be expected that asserting p invites the challenge 'How do you know p ?' In contrast, if assertion requires something weaker than knowledge, this is rather surprising. All else being equal, we should prefer a simpler explanation of this data to a more complex explanation, and even all else not being equal we should prefer an explanation of this data to no explanation at all. Defenders of the simple knowledge account argue that other simple accounts fail to explain the data, and it's hard to see how one could give a simpler account of assertion (for this argument see Benton [2011]; Turri [2010a]. For criticism see Gerken [2012]; Weiner [2005]). The conclusion is that the simple knowledge account is right.

While my aim in §2 is to criticise the simple account, I'll make two quick clarifications, and deal with an objection.

First, assertion is also governed by moral, prudential and conversational rules. An assertion can be criticised for being immoral (think of someone telling the enemy soldiers that the fugitives are in the basement), imprudent (think of someone telling the police that they are on drugs) or conversationally inappropriate, for instance because irrelevant (think of someone telling their audience that it's raining when it is obvious to everyone that it is raining). The thought is that the KNOWLEDGE RULE differs from these other rules in that it is constitutive of assertion.

Second, let's say that a rule is (partly) constitutive of X just in case things are X (partly) in virtue of being governed by the rule. Thus, each individual chess rule is partly constitutive of chess because something is a game of chess partly in virtue of being governed by that rule, and the set of all chess rules is constitutive of chess because something is a game of chess in virtue of being governed by those rules. The idea is that assertions are assertions in virtue of being governed by the KNOWLEDGE RULE. While more needs to be said about constitutivity, these brief remarks will suffice for my purposes.

Finally, we often say things that we believe but don't know and, while we sometimes acknowledge this by prefacing our remarks with hedges such as 'I think' or 'I believe', we don't always do so. Further, we don't always feel any pressure to do so, nor do we always exert any pressure on others to do so. There are two worries here. First, our practice of asserting is at odds

³ I'm assuming here that knowledge entails belief.

with the simple account. Second, the way in which we regulate assertions is also at odds with the simple account.⁴

Starting with the first worry, the simple account tells us the conditions that an assertion must meet to in order to satisfy a constitutive rule. From the fact that a particular illocutionary act violates that rule it does not follow that the relevant act is not an assertion. For instance, if I say that the bus leaves at 3pm because I believe yet don't know the bus leaves at 3pm, it does not follow that I don't assert that the bus leaves at 3pm. An act is an assertion just in case it is governed by the KNOWLEDGE RULE. As above, the act of asserting p invites the question 'How do you know p ?', and if I don't know I am thereby open to criticism. So long as my act of saying that the bus leaves at 3pm invites the question 'How do you know the bus leaves at 3pm?', and so long as I am subject to criticism if I don't know, my act qualifies as an assertion.

In general, if a speaker utters a sentence in the declarative form, the default assumption is that in doing so she is performing an assertion, and so is subject to the KNOWLEDGE RULE. This assumption is, of course, defeasible (for instance, charity might require us to interpret the speaker as performing another illocutionary act, such as conjecturing) and whether it is in play in a given case depends on the context. Further, there are ways of signalling that one doesn't wish one's illocutionary act to be subject to the KNOWLEDGE RULE, for instance by using a hedge such as 'I think the bus leaves at 3pm.' But, as long as the assumption isn't defeated, my act of saying that the bus leaves at 3pm counts as an assertion, even if I am aware that I don't know the bus leaves at 3pm.

Turning to the second worry, recall, first, that the simple account allows that there are other, non-epistemic rules governing assertion. For instance, asserting is an act, and in general acts are subject to various moral and prudential rules. While I may know the fugitive is in the basement, and so satisfy the epistemic rule required to properly assert that the fugitive is in the basement, it would violate a moral rule if I asserted this to the enemy soldiers. That an act may be proper as evaluated along one normative dimension yet improper as evaluated along another normative dimension is a familiar point, and it certainly doesn't show that the act isn't to be evaluated along both dimensions. One would expect the various normative dimensions along which we can assess assertions to be reflected in the way in which we regulate assertions, so it should be no surprise that we don't always criticise assertions that aren't known, or refrain from criticising assertions that are.

⁴ What follows summarises Williamson's [2000: Ch. 11] response to these worries.

Second, we need to distinguish between violations of a rule that are blameworthy and violations of the rule that aren't. For example, one can violate a rule unwittingly, such as when I capitalise all nouns because I think this is a rule of English grammar. Or one can violate a rule knowingly but for a good reason, such as when I violate a rule of French grammar because I need to write a message and lack the time to check it is grammatically correct. One isn't blameworthy for violating the relevant rules in either case, but that doesn't mean one didn't violate the relevant rules. Similarly, many violations of the KNOWLEDGE RULE will be blameless. Because many violations will be blameless it will often be inappropriate to hold the violator to account. So it is no surprise that we don't always regulate assertion in a way that fits with the KNOWLEDGE RULE (I return to this point in fn. 11).

I conclude that neither our practice nor our regulation of assertion give us reason to reject the simple account.

2. Problems for the Simple Account

What do we want from a theory of assertion? Here are Jessica Brown and Herman Cappelen:

One question that arises for those interested in assertion is this: how do we single out that subset of sayings that are assertions? Only some locutionary acts are assertions, and we are looking for a theory to tell us which ones [2011: 3].

There are other questions that arise for those interested in assertion. For example, one could ask how to go about making an assertion. To answer that question one would have to *inter alia* explain how to open one's mouth, make sounds, etc. But it seems fair to think of simple accounts, along with other theories of assertion, as trying to answer Brown and Cappelen's question. *Prima facie*, it might look like the simple account has a nice, straightforward answer to this question. Assertion differs from other illocutionary acts in that it alone is constituted by a particular epistemic rule, viz. the KNOWLEDGE RULE. But I think this answer is ultimately unsatisfying. Or so I will argue in the rest of this section.

To start, it will be helpful to have a list of some illocutionary act types on the table. I'll put these acts under four headings.⁵

1. Assertives: e.g. conjecturing, hypothesising, concluding, asserting, guaranteeing.

⁵ This taxonomy is taken from Searle [1975], although I have used 'assertive' rather than 'representative' for what Austin [1962] called 'constative' illocutionary acts.

2. Directives: e.g. ordering, commanding, advising, asking, begging, permitting.
3. Commissives: e.g. promising, swearing, vowing, agreeing, giving one's word.
4. Expressives: e.g. thanking, congratulating, apologising, condoling, welcoming.

Assertion belongs in the broader class of 'assertive' illocutionary acts. What unites these sorts of acts is that their performance involves some sort of undertaking to the effect that the content of the act represents an actual state of affairs (or, in other words, is true). Thus, whether I conjecture, hypothesise, conclude, assert or guarantee that it is raining outside, doing so involves an undertaking to the effect that it is raining outside. Where these acts differ is in their epistemic requirements. At one end, we have acts such as conjecturing and hypothesising, both of which require little more than the absence of counter-evidence. At the other end, we have acts such as guaranteeing, which seem to require quite a bit more than knowledge. Between these two extremes we have assertion, which perhaps requires knowledge. We want a theory of assertion to say something about how assertion fits into this broader class of assertive illocutionary acts. In what ways is it different from other assertives, and in what ways is it similar? While the simple account says something about how assertion differs (it alone is governed by the KNOWLEDGE RULE) it says nothing about the respects in which it is similar. In this regard, the simple account is rather uninformative, and it is hard to see how it fits into a more general account of assertive illocutionary acts.

Further, it is hard to see how the simple account fits into a more general account of all illocutionary acts. Take the class of 'commissive' illocutionary acts. What unites these sorts of acts is that their performance involves the undertaking of an obligation to perform some action or course of action. Thus, whether I promise, swear, vow, agree or give my word to be at the party, I undertake an obligation to be at the party. Where these acts differ is in the strength of the obligation. If I vow to be at the party I undertake a stronger obligation to be at the party than if I just promise to be at the party. A reasonable working assumption is that there will be at least structural similarities between the accounts of the various different illocutionary acts. The simple account of assertion posits a single constitutive epistemic rule, so it's natural to expect that structurally similar accounts of other illocutionary acts will posit single constitutive rules. But, *prima facie*, it is extremely hard to see how one could develop an account of commissives in terms of single constitutive rules. One might be able appeal to a single constitutive rule to explain how promising differs from, for example, vowing. Perhaps promising to ϕ just requires intending to ϕ , whereas vowing to ϕ requires being sure that one will ϕ . However, it is entirely unclear how a

single constitutive rule can do that job as well as explaining why both promising and vowing are types of commissive illocutionary acts.⁶

One might wonder whether any of the competitors to the simple account can be integrated into a more general theory. If they can't, it is unclear why any of this poses much of a problem for the defender of the simple account. However, I will argue in the next section that my preferred account of assertion, the complex knowledge account, can easily be integrated into a more general theory of illocutionary acts. Further, I will show that the complex account can accommodate the same data as the simple account. When evaluating competing accounts of data one must take a number of theoretical virtues into account. It will turn out that, when we evaluate the simple and complex accounts, what the complex account lacks in simplicity it more than makes up in other virtues.

3. The Complex Knowledge Account

My aim in this section is to sketch what I call the 'complex' knowledge account of assertion. I start by outlining a broadly Searlian framework for the analysis of illocutionary acts (§3.1). To do so I focus on Searle's analysis of the act of promising. My aim in this sub-section is purely to illustrate the general structure of the framework, so objections to the details of the analysis do not concern me (I will however say something about why the analysis takes the form that it does). I then show how to develop a knowledge account within this framework, viz. the complex knowledge account (§3.2). Finally, I argue that the complex account explains the same data as the simple account but, unlike the simple account, can be easily integrated into a more general theory of illocutionary acts (§3.3).

3.1. Searle on Illocutionary Acts

For each illocutionary act type Searle's aim is to provide a set of conditions that are necessary and jointly sufficient for the successful performance of an act of that type [see 1969: Ch. 3]. So, for promising, the aim is a set of conditions that are necessary and jointly sufficient for successful promising. Say that a speaker R utters the sentence S, thereby expressing the

⁶ While I have focused on commissives in this paragraph, it should be clear that much the same could be said about directives or expressives.

proposition p . Under what conditions does R successfully promise to ϕ to a hearer H?⁷ Searle's conditions are as follows [see 1969: 63]:

PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT CONDITION: R must: promise to ϕ only if R's utterance of S predicates some future act (ϕ) of R.

PREPARATORY CONDITION ONE: R must: promise to ϕ only if H would prefer R's ϕ -ing to R's not ϕ -ing, and R believes H would prefer R's ϕ -ing to R's not ϕ -ing.

PREPARATORY CONDITION TWO: R must: promise to ϕ only if it is not obvious to R and H and R will ϕ in the normal course of events.

SINCERITY CONDITION: R must: promise to ϕ only if R intends to ϕ .

ESSENTIAL CONDITION: R's utterance of S counts as the undertaking of an obligation to ϕ .

The point of the propositional content condition is that a promise must predicate a future act of the speaker. One can't promise to do something in the past. The point of the two preparatory conditions is that a promise must take place against a certain background. The hearer must have certain preferences, the speaker must have certain beliefs about those preferences, and it must be obvious to both that the speaker wasn't going to do what she is promising to do regardless (but see below). The point of the sincerity condition is that a promise requires that the speaker has a certain intention, viz. to do what she is promising to do. The point of the essential condition is to single out a certain class of illocutionary acts, viz. commissives. Recall that, just as in promising to ϕ one undertakes an obligation to ϕ , in vowing to ϕ one undertakes a (stronger) obligation to ϕ . What promising and vowing have in common is that both count as the undertaking of an obligation to do something. Where promising and vowing differ is in the strength of the obligation. That the essential condition singles out a broader class of illocutionary acts is a general feature of the Searlian analysis (I return to this feature below).

While I have outlined Searle's analysis of promising for illustrative purposes, I will register that I find preparatory condition one problematic. I agree that it is a condition on successful promising that R believes H would prefer R's ϕ -ing to R's not ϕ -ing, but it is not at all

⁷ I henceforth omit the qualification 'successfully'. Searle holds that illocutionary acts can fail to be successful in a number of different ways, some of which vitiate the performance of the act entirely, others of which don't [see 1969: Ch. 3]. I say a little more about these different ways below.

clear that it is a condition that H would actually prefer R's ϕ -ing to R's not ϕ -ing. To take a concrete example, imagine that Ailsa promises Catriona that she will go to her party, believing that Catriona wants her to come, but in actual fact Catriona would really rather Ailsa not come. While there is some sort of unfortunate misunderstanding between Ailsa and Catriona, it isn't clear that Ailsa's promise is unsuccessful. It is perhaps unfortunate that Ailsa has undertaken an obligation to come to the party when she isn't wanted, but that doesn't seem to be a defect with her promise. So I propose an amendment to preparatory condition one, viz.:

PREPARATORY CONDITION ONE*: R must: promise to ϕ only if R believes H would prefer R's ϕ -ing to R's not ϕ -ing.

But, while I find this amended condition more plausible than Searle's original condition, nothing of any importance should turn on this.

Before moving on to assertion, four further remarks about the analysis, and in particular about its structure. First, while the essential condition has a different syntax to the other conditions, this isn't indicative of any difference in status. For Searle all of these conditions are jointly constitutive of promising [see 1969: 36-7]. The essential condition makes reference to R's 'undertaking an obligation' in uttering the sentence S. This is ambiguous between a reading on which whether R manages to perform the act doesn't depend on whether the obligation is undertaken and a reading on which R fails to perform the act unless the obligation is undertaken. Searle clearly intends the latter reading [see 1969: 60].

Second, while all of these conditions must be met in order for R to successfully promise to ϕ , only some of these conditions must be met in order for R to actually issue a promise. For instance, if R promises to ϕ but lacks the intention to ϕ , then R still issues a promise, albeit a defective one. In contrast, if R says 'I promise to ϕ ', where ϕ predicates some past act of R, R fails to issue a promise at all. One way of distinguishing between conditions violations of which vitiate the performance of an act and conditions violations of which don't vitiate the performance of that act is by drawing a distinction between different types of constitutive conditions or rules. Take a game such as chess. We can distinguish between 'constraining' rules, which specify constraints on how one should go about playing chess (move bishops diagonally, each player must move in turn, etc.) and 'purposive' rules, which specify what those playing the

game should try and do (take pieces, get one's opponent in checkmate, etc.).⁸ Both sorts of rules are constitutive of chess because a game counts as a game of chess in virtue of being governed by various constraining and purposive rules. But the rules differ in that, if a player makes a move that violates a constraining rule, that move doesn't count as a chess move, whereas if a player makes a move that violates a purposive rule the move still counts as a chess move, albeit a defective one. For instance, consider a player who tries to move a bishop horizontally. While the player has performed an action, that action doesn't count as a move in chess. In contrast, consider a player who repeatedly fails to take her opponent's pieces when the opportunity arises. This player is making defective chess moves, but she is still playing chess.

Similarly, we can distinguish between rules or conditions which specify constraints on how one can go about performing illocutionary acts (constraining rules) and rules or conditions which specify what those performing those acts should try to do (purposive rules). It is plausible that the propositional content condition and essential condition fall into the first category, whereas the two preparatory conditions and the sincerity condition fall into the second category. The propositional content and essential conditions specify constraints that one has to meet in order to even issue a promise. In contrast, the preparatory conditions and the sincerity condition specify what one has to do in order to issue a promise non-defectively. Illocutionary acts which violate the propositional content or essential conditions aren't promises. Illocutionary acts which violate the preparatory conditions or sincerity condition are promises, but defective ones.

Third, Searle holds that the two preparatory conditions tell us what a speaker implies in the performance of an illocutionary act. So, in promising to ϕ , R implies that she believes H would prefer R's ϕ -ing to R's not ϕ -ing, and that it isn't obvious to both R and H that R will ϕ anyway [see 1969: 65]. The general principle is as follows:

IMPLIES: If a speaker R performs the illocutionary act A, she thereby implies that the preparatory conditions for the performance of A are met.

What does 'imply' mean here? A natural suggestion is to interpret it in terms of speaker communicative intentions. I will adopt an account of communicative intentions from Kent Bach

⁸ This distinction is similar to Ishani Maitra's [2011] distinction between 'constitutive' and 'purposive' rules. I have used 'constraining' rather than 'constitutive' to avoid confusion (Maitra's discussion of purposive rules suggests that they are supposed to be constitutive in the sense in which I am using the word here).

and Robert Harnish [1979].⁹ On this account, a speaker who performs an illocutionary act A implies that a condition is met just in case she intends her audience to take her performance of the act as a reason to think that the condition is met, and she intends to bring this about via the recognition of that intention. For example, if I promise you that I will come to the party then I imply that I believe you would prefer my coming to my not coming. This involves my intending my audience (you) to take my performance of this act as a reason to think that I believe you would prefer my coming to my not coming, and I intend to bring this about via the recognition of this very intention. Note that I may have these intentions even though I lack the belief that you would prefer my coming to my not coming. So Searle's account allows for deception.

Finally, Searle holds that the sincerity condition tells us what a speaker expresses in the performance of an illocutionary act. So, in promising to ϕ , R expresses the intention to ϕ [see 1969: 65]. The general principle is as follows:

EXPRESSION: If a speaker R performs the illocutionary act A, she thereby expresses the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition for the performance of A.

What does 'express' mean here? Again, a natural suggestion is to interpret it in terms of communicative intentions. On this account, a speaker who performs an illocutionary act A expresses the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition for A just in case she intends her audience to take her performance of the act as a reason to think that the condition is met, and she intends to bring this about via the recognition of that intention. So, to use our example, if I promise you that I will come to the party then I express my intention to come to the party. This involves my intending my audience (you) to take my performance of this act as a reason to think that I intend to come, and I intend to bring this about via the recognition of this very intention. Again, note that I may have these intentions even though I have no intention of actually coming to the party. So Searle's account allows for insincere promising.

3.2. The Complex Account

The target is a set of conditions that are necessary and jointly sufficient for successful assertion. Say that a speaker R utters the sentence S, thereby expressing the proposition p . Under what

⁹ I acknowledge that this account is controversial. For discussion see Bach [1987] and Davis [2003: 85-96].

conditions does R successfully assert p to a hearer H? (I henceforth omit the qualification ‘successfully’). As a first pass I suggest the following:

PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT CONDITION: R must: assert p only if R’s utterance of S expresses the proposition p .

PREPARATORY CONDITION ONE: R must: assert p only if R knows p .

PREPARATORY CONDITION TWO: R must: assert p only if it is not obvious to R and H that H knows p .

SINCERITY CONDITION: R must: assert p only if R believes p .

ESSENTIAL CONDITION: R’s utterance of S counts as an undertaking to the effect that p represents an actual state of affairs.

I am going to suggest a number of refinements and improvements to this analysis, but I will pause to deal with a worry one might have about the essential condition. Given that my aim is to defend a complex ‘knowledge’ account, one might wonder why the essential condition isn’t ‘R’s utterance of S counts as an undertaking to the effect that S *knows* p .’ But recall that the point of the essential condition is to single out a certain class of illocutionary acts, and in the case of asserting that class will contain conjecturing, hypothesising, concluding, asserting, guaranteeing, etc. (what I called ‘assertives’). What all assertives have in common is that they all count as an undertaking to the effect that the proposition expressed represents an actual state of affairs. Where the various assertives differ is in what that undertaking requires. As I’ll argue in the next sub-section, for some assertives (e.g. conjecturing) it requires something less than knowledge, whereas for others (e.g. guaranteeing) it requires something more. Because the point of the essential condition is to single out a broader class of illocutionary acts (here, assertives), the essential condition for assertion can’t make reference to knowledge.

Turning to the refinements, first, the idea behind preparatory condition two is that, in general, one must perform an illocutionary act only if doing so would be relevant given one’s purposes, and the purposes of one’s audience. Because this is a condition that holds for all illocutionary acts, it is unlikely that it is constitutive of any particular illocutionary act. Second, in the case of assertion the propositional content condition is superfluous because, unlike in the case of promising, there is no restriction on what one may assert other than that one may only assert propositions. Consequently, I omit both conditions from my analysis of assertion.

Third, as with the essential condition, one might wonder why the sincerity condition isn’t ‘R must: assert p only if R *knows* p .’ But it just seems wrong to say that an assertion is sincere just

in case the asserter knows that what she asserts is true.¹⁰ To take a concrete example, imagine that Catriona looks outside her window and sees a lot of white stuff. She says ‘There is snow outside.’ But, unbeknownst to Catriona, she is being fooled, as the white stuff is fake snow. While the complex knowledge account acknowledges a sense in which Catriona’s assertion is defective - because she doesn’t know that there’s snow outside, it violates the preparatory condition - it seems wrong to say that it is insincere. Sincerity requires the absence of deceit or dishonesty, not getting things right. One can be entirely sincere yet wrong about most things. Of course, one might want to work with a stipulative notion of sincerity, on which sincere assertion does require knowledge. But I won’t do so here.¹¹

A more reasonable suggestion would be that the sincerity condition should be ‘R must: assert *p* only if R *believes* that R knows *p*.’ In support of this suggestion, consider that it is appropriate to blame someone for flat-out asserting something that they don’t take themselves to know. To take another example, imagine Catriona thought she heard rain during the night, but didn’t check. Catriona comes to believe that it rained during the night, although she wouldn’t claim to know it rained. It would be somewhat dishonest of Catriona to flat-out assert that it rained during the night, and it would be reasonable to blame her for doing so once it becomes clear that she hadn’t actually checked. While I will work with this modification of the sincerity condition in what follows, I want to emphasise that nothing of importance turns on this. If one prefers the original condition, one can substitute it where appropriate.

We now have this simplified analysis:

PREPARATORY CONDITION: R must: assert *p* only if R knows *p*.

SINCERITY CONDITION: R must: assert *p* only if R believes that R knows *p*.

ESSENTIAL CONDITION: R’s utterance of *S* counts as the undertaking to the effect that *p* represents an actual state of affairs.

Recall that, if a speaker R performs the illocutionary act A, she thereby implies that the preparatory condition is met and she thereby expresses the psychological state specified in the

¹⁰ While some have denied that sincere assertion just requires belief [see Currie 2000; Stokke 2014], I am not aware of anyone who has proposed that sincere assertion requires knowledge.

¹¹ One might have the further worry that the sincerity condition is redundant because any assertion that satisfies preparatory condition one will thereby satisfy the sincerity condition (that is, if we assume that knowledge entails belief). But there are purposes for which it is useful to identify the precise way in which an assertion is defective. Consider the sort of censure that is due to me if I assert defectively. If I assert sincerely but in the absence of knowledge, I am plausibly not thereby deserving of blame. If I assert insincerely and in the absence of knowledge, I am clearly thereby deserving of blame.

sincerity condition for the performance of A. So, in asserting p , R implies that she knows p and expresses her belief that she knows p . I'll call this the 'complex' knowledge account of assertion. I'm going to argue that the complex account can both explain the same data as the simple account and be easily integrated into a more general theory of illocutionary acts. On this basis I conclude that, if one is attracted towards a knowledge account of assertion, one should prefer the complex account to the simple account.

3.3. *The Data and Integration*

I start by arguing that, just like the simple account, the complex account can explain the data (§3.3.1). I then argue that, unlike the simple account, it can be integrated into a more general theory of illocutionary acts (§3.3.2).

3.3.1. *The Data*

Prima facie, one would expect the complex account to explain the same data as the simple account. The simple account has it that assertion is constituted by a single rule, and that rule is part of the complex account. Nevertheless, it will be instructive to see how the complex account handles the data.

The first datum is that assertions of sentences of the form ' p but I don't believe/know p ' - for example, 'it's raining but I don't believe/know it's raining' - are always improper. The simple account has a straightforward explanation of this datum: I can't simultaneously know both conjuncts. The complex account has a similarly straightforward explanation: if one asserts ' p but I don't believe/know p ' then one implies that one knows p (and therefore believes p) while explicitly saying that one doesn't believe/know p .¹²

The second datum is that one can't properly assert that one won't win the lottery just based on knowing the odds involved. The simple account has a straightforward explanation of this datum: proper assertion requires knowledge, and one can't know that one won't win the lottery just based on knowing the odds. The complex account gives a similar explanation: if one asserts that one won't win the lottery just based on the odds, then one violates the preparatory condition for assertion.

¹² Note that the modified sincerity condition can also explain this. If one asserts ' p but I don't believe/know p ' one expresses one's belief that one knows p while explicitly saying that one doesn't believe/know p . But it is incoherent to intend one's audience to think one believes that one knows p while at the same time saying one doesn't believe/know p (again, assuming knowledge entails belief).

Third, we have a range of conversational phenomena:

1. If one asserts p one invites the challenge ‘How do you know that p ?’
2. If someone asks you whether p , and you don’t know p , it is usually appropriate to respond by saying ‘I don’t know’ [Turri 2011].
3. If one asserts p , and it turns out that one doesn’t know p , one is thereby open to criticism. One could voice this criticism as follows: ‘Why did you say that p ? You didn’t know’ [Turri 2011].

Just like the simple account, the complex account gives a straightforward explanation of all the phenomena. If knowledge is one of the conditions for non-defective assertion then it is always appropriate to challenge an assertion by asking how the asserter knows. Further, when one doesn’t know p it is always appropriate to respond to the question of whether p by saying ‘I don’t know.’ Finally, it is always appropriate to criticise someone for asserting something that they don’t know. The comparison with promising is instructive here. Recall that, if R promises H that she will ϕ , her promise is defective if R doesn’t believe that H would prefer R’s ϕ -ing to R’s not ϕ -ing. Consequently, it is always appropriate to challenge R’s promise by asking whether R believes that what she is promising to do is what H would prefer her to do. Further, if R doesn’t believe that H would prefer R’s ϕ -ing to R’s not ϕ -ing, it is always appropriate for her to respond to the question of whether she promises to ϕ by saying ‘H doesn’t want me to ϕ .’ Finally, it is always appropriate to criticise R for promising to ϕ when she doesn’t believe that H would prefer her ϕ -ing to her not ϕ -ing.¹³

I conclude that the complex account can explain anything that the simple account can explain.

3.3.2. *Easily Integrated*

A theory of assertion needs to say something about how, as theorists, we can situate assertion within a broader theory of illocutionary acts. Doing so requires not just explaining how assertion differs from other illocutionary acts, but also explaining how it is similar to other assertive illocutionary acts. The problem with the simple account is that it doesn’t do this. As I put it, it isn’t easily integrated into a more general theory of illocutionary acts. The complex account

¹³ Of course, all this may well be rude or otherwise ill-advised. Similarly, it may well be rude or otherwise ill advised to challenge every assertion by asking how the asserter knows, only ever assert p when you know p and criticise every assertion made in the absence of knowledge.

avoids this objection as follows. Recall that the complex account puts three conditions on successful assertion, one of which is the essential condition:

ESSENTIAL CONDITION: R's utterance of S counts as the undertaking to the effect that *p* represents an actual state of affairs.

The essential condition is what unifies all assertive illocutionary acts (conjecturing, hypothesising, asserting, guaranteeing, etc.). Whether one conjectures *p*, hypothesises *p*, asserts *p*, or guarantees *p*, in doing so one undertakes to represent an actual state of affairs. But, while all assertives have a common essential condition, they certainly have different preparatory conditions, and they perhaps also have different sincerity conditions.¹⁴ For example, the following preparatory conditions for conjecturing and guaranteeing seem plausible:

PREPARATORY CONDITION: One must conjecture *p* only if one has at least as much evidence in favour of *p* as one has in favour of not-*p*.¹⁵

PREPARATORY CONDITION: One must guarantee *p* only if one knows that one knows *p* [see Turri 2010b].

Why think these are the preparatory conditions for conjecturing and guaranteeing? Consider the following data points.

1. It is improper to say 'My conjecture is that *p*, but the evidence speaks in favour of not-*p*.'

¹⁴ I say 'perhaps' because it is plausible that performances of some assertive illocutionary act types are sincere just in case the speaker believes that she knows the content of those acts (for example, guaranteeing) whereas performances of other assertives are sincere if the speaker doesn't even believe the content (for example, conjecturing). This is something that will need to be worked out more fully in a general theory of assertives, but I am not attempting to do this here.

¹⁵ What about the insightful detective who conjectures that the suspect is guilty despite all the evidence to the contrary? Consider the familiar sort of case, in which the detective lacks 'hard' evidence (fingerprints, a witness), but possesses some sort of reliable insight into the criminal mind that has allowed her to correctly identify the guilty party. It is pretty clear that the detective's conjecture in this case is proper. This case shows two things. First, there are tricky issues about how to compare evidence from different sources. In virtue of possessing this special sort of insight, the detective has access to a special sort of evidence that isn't available to most people. While her conjecture runs contrary to the 'hard' evidence, it is fully supported by this special sort of evidence. Second, it is important that, in the familiar sort of case, the detective's conjecture is correct. Contrast the less familiar sort of case, in which the detective's usually reliable insight goes terribly wrong. It is far less clear that an incorrect conjecture that runs contrary to the hard evidence is proper. A fully adequate statement of the preparatory condition for conjecturing would have to address both issues, but I lack the space for this here.

2. A variety of conversational phenomena. For instance, if I were to conjecture p even though I had more evidence in favour of not- p than in favour of p I would thereby be subject to criticism. One could voice this criticism as follows: ‘Why did you conjecture that p ? You had more evidence in favour of not- p than in favour of p .’
3. It is improper to say ‘I guarantee that p , although I’m not sure that I know that p ’ or ‘I guarantee that p , but I’m not absolutely certain that p .’
4. A variety of conversational phenomena. For instance, if I were to guarantee p while not knowing that I know p I would thereby be subject to criticism. One could voice this criticism as follows: ‘Why did you guarantee p ? You weren’t sure that you knew’ [for further discussion see Turri 2010b].

Regardless of the plausibility of the suggested preparatory conditions for conjecturing and guaranteeing, the point is that the complex account allows us to say both what all assertives have in common (the essential condition) and what distinguishes them (the preparatory condition, and perhaps the sincerity condition). The resulting picture is one on which the class of assertive illocutionary acts have a common essential condition but different preparatory conditions. Thus, the complex account fits nicely within an account of assertive illocutionary acts.

Finally, it’s a reasonable working assumption is that there will be at least structural similarities between the accounts of the various classes of illocutionary acts (assertives, commissives, directives, expressives). But recall that it was hard to see how the simple account fits into a more general account of all illocutionary acts. Given the way in which I arrived at the complex account - via Searle’s analysis of promising, and the general Searlian framework which that analysis illustrates - it should be clear that the complex account avoids this objection. The complex account is just an instance of the general Searlian framework, and has the same structure as the analysis of other illocutionary act types, such as promising. Consequently, it is hard to see how an account of assertion could be better integrated than the complex account.

4. Concluding Remarks

When weighing up rival accounts of data one has to take a range of theoretical virtues into account. One wants an account that explains the data, preferably as simply as possible, but without sacrificing too much by way of informativeness and generality. My aim has been to argue that, once we weigh up the simple and complex accounts of assertion, it becomes clear that what the complex account lacks in simplicity it more than gains in informativeness and generality. The

moral is that, if one is inclined toward a knowledge account of assertion, one should prefer the complex account to the simple account.¹⁶

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