

Illocutionary Performance and Objective Assessment in The Speech Act of Arguing

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Abstract: This paper endorses a view of argumentation and arguments that relates both to a special type of speech action, namely, the performance of speech acts of arguing. Its aim is to advance an analysis of those acts that takes into account two kinds of norms related to their correct performance, namely, felicity conditions and objective requirements related to the “correspondence with the facts.” It assumes that the requirement that certain objective conditions be satisfied is among the set of felicity conditions of speech acts of arguing. Taking this into account helps clarify the position and role of warrants in the performance and assessment of these acts.

Résumé: Cet article approuve une conception de l'argumentation et des arguments qui se rapportent à la fois à un type particulier d'action de parole, à savoir l'exécution d'actes de parole d'argumentation. Son objectif est de faire avancer une analyse de ces actes qui prend en compte deux types de normes liées à leur exécution correcte, à savoir les conditions de félicité et les exigences objectives liées à la « correspondance avec les faits ». Elle suppose que l'exigence que certaines conditions objectives soient satisfaites fait partie de l'ensemble des conditions de félicité des actes de discours d'argumentation. Cette prise en compte permet de clarifier la place et le rôle des licences inférentielles dans l'exécution et l'évaluation de ces actes.

Keywords: acts of arguing, illocutionary, objective assessment, warrant, Austin, Toulmin

1. Introduction

Argumentation is a communicative and interactional activity that paradigmatically fulfills an epistemic function. It is performed through speech acts of arguing, which consist of adducing reasons to justify a claim and, when required, assessing those very acts.

Arguing can, therefore, be seen as a complex speech act, embracing two internally related acts: the act of adducing reasons and the act of concluding a claim. Moreover, and following Toulmin's (1958) influential view, the internal connection between reason and claim can be represented by means of warrants, which are inference-licenses that can be reconstructed in the form of hypothetical statements.

All the above is sketchy and in need of justification. In the discussion that follows, I will try to provide some support for this view. Notwithstanding this, I will be endorsing the thesis that argumentation is a discursive activity, and that it is paradigmatically performed through the speech act of arguing.¹ Moreover, argumentation is a normative activity. It is normative on two grounds. Its intrinsic aim is to justify our claims, and it is self-justificatory. By arguing, we give support and criticize claims, thus making it rational to accept or reject them. Also, it is by means of the activity of arguing itself that we assess the correctness of its outcome and of its performance.² From a logical perspective (Wenzel 1990), the outcome of argumentation are arguments, seen as products. The assessment then can be focused, just to mention an outstanding framework, on the acceptability, relevance, and inferential sufficiency of the reasons given for the

¹ There is a lively debate among argumentation scholars concerning the existence and characteristics of non-verbal argumentation. Although I will not address this issue here, the following can be taken into account. First, speech act theoreticians usually have acknowledged that some speech acts can be performed without phonation (something already noticed by Austin [1962]); second, even under the premise that some speech acts of arguing might be performed with the support of, or fully by means of images (and other audio-visual materials), the defendant of non-verbal argumentation still has to prove that it is not an interpretation of the images (and other materials) that can be taken to constitute the argument, the interpretation being propositional and expressible by verbal means. My own position is skeptical as to the possibility that this can be done.

² It is due to this that argumentation can be seen as self-justificatory. An anonymous reviewer objects, with good reason, that the notion of self-justification is highly controversial in philosophy. Within the framework of argumentation theory, this notion amounts to understanding meta-argumentation as the activity of critically assessing arguments. Here, I am endorsing the view that meta-argumentation is preeminently an argumentative activity.

raised claim; this is what informal logicians have called the cogency of the argument (Johnson and Blair 1977).

Yet here, my interest lies also and particularly on the assessment of the performance. If argumentation is to be understood and analyzed using the terminology of speech acts, the performance of the speech act of arguing should be seen as subjected to certain felicity conditions. These constitute the normative requirements that have to be fulfilled in order for the performance to be (pragmatically) correct. Only in this way can it be said that a speaker was arguing or that a text is argumentative. Thus, the conditions of correct performance become criteria for the pragmatic assessment of the performed action.³ Furthermore, only after a speech action has been recognized as an instance of argumentation can the outcome be critically assessed as a cogent or not cogent argument. In a first approach, then, it seems safe to conclude that cogency depends on the locutionary dimension of the speech act and the internal connection among its components. Performance, on the other side, would be a question of respecting certain procedural conditions, of a kind that can be seen as conventional and necessary for the correctness of what is done.

But the above approach is too hasty and in need of a more detailed examination. For one thing, among the conditions of correct performance of illocutionary acts⁴ in general, some objective requirements (I am borrowing the felicitous expression introduced

³ An anonymous reviewer offered the critique that this idea would not be endorsed by all pragmatist accounts of speech acts and mentioned Sperber and Wilson (1995) as an outstanding example. Certainly, Sperber and Wilson have contended that some types of speech act do not need to be recognized as belonging to a certain type in order for them to be performed successfully since they can be identified out of some condition on their contents or implicatures. Among these communicative acts, these authors include asserting and claiming (p. 245). In the Austinian approach I am going to present below, what needs to be recognized is not the type of speech act as such, but the changes that the utterance has introduced in the interpersonal or social context of the interlocutors. As I am going to argue, these changes affect certain dialectical obligations and rights, including the entitlement to critically assess the speech act.

⁴ The notion of speech act is broader than that of illocutionary act (or illocution). Notwithstanding this, since this precision does not have a significant impact on my discussion, in what follows I will ignore it and use these terms interchangeably.

by Marina Sbisà [2018]) are usually in place, requirements that are related to how the locutionary dimension of the act relates to certain facts. According to Austin, in cases in which we judge, assess or appraise, for example, a statement, and granting that the illocution has been felicitously performed, we still have to face “the question of whether the statement ‘corresponds with the facts.’”⁵ He describes this move as an “objective assessment of the accomplished utterance” (Austin 1962, p. 140).

We can assess whether a verdict is correct in correspondence with the facts, depending on whether the acquitted person did or did not do the deed that prompted the accusation, and this is irrespective of the correctness both in the procedure followed and in the interpretation of the law. A recommendation can be felicitous and nevertheless wrong in its merits (since it is not the best course of action for the addressee to take). A new law can be legitimate from the point of view of its approval and felicitously enter into force but fail to meet the necessities and interests of those affected by its implementation, thus being prone to being judged as unfair. The criteria of assessment in these examples (and many others) seem to refer to two different dimensions. On the one hand, there is the issue of the felicitous performance of the (type of) illocutionary act; on the other, an additional dimension of assessment has to do with how the speech act is related to certain facts that, together with the general situation of speech, determine our assessment.

Now, we can ask whether a similar diagnosis is available in the case of argumentation. There is a sense in which the answer is straightforwardly in the positive, and this in a somewhat inconsequential way. A speech act of arguing can be assessed to have been felicitously performed even if the resulting argument is not

⁵ It should be kept in mind that Austin’s is not a plain one-to-one correspondence theory of truth. As Sbisà has put it, his position is subtler and was left unfinished, but there is enough textual evidence providing support for the view that he understood this “correspondence with the facts” as non-literal. It meant that “the pertinent situation in the world, demonstratively identified, is as the assertion says it is,” and thus it would be correct to say what the speaker has said, given the facts and certain elements of the context like the speaker’s goals (Sbisà 2018a, p. 7.)

cogent. But my concern is related to establishing, in a form as clear and accurate as possible, the conditions that belong to the illocutionary dimension of the act of arguing and those that should be seen as objective requirements, having to do with its “correspondence with the facts.” Also, in this respect it is not clear whether all objective requirements should be referred to the argument as product or whether these requirements also enter into play in the performance of the act itself. These issues are the ones I would like to address in what follows.

2. The speech act of arguing. Two theoretical approaches

If argumentation is seen as a communicative and interactional activity, it is but natural to think of it as taking place through speech acts. To my knowledge, there have been two theoretical models which have dealt with argumentation in the terminology of speech acts, namely, pragma-dialectics (as originally set forth by Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, 2004, and afterwards further developed by the Amsterdam school of argumentation) and the linguistic-normative model of argumentation (LNMA) put forward by Lilian Bermejo-Luque (2011). Many other scholars working in argumentation theory have made use of the notion of speech act, and it is commonly applied to the analysis and evaluation of arguments and argumentation.⁶ But the two models here mentioned must be credited with having made of the notion of speech act a core element in their accounts. In both cases, the models deal with acts of arguing as complex speech acts and resort to and revise some version of speech act theory (Searle’s (1969) in the case of pragma-dialectics, Bach and Harnish’s (1979) in LNMA). In this section, I am going to present the fundamental speech-act theoretic characteristics of pragma-dialectics, a very influential model broadly adopted and discussed within the field of argumentation theory, and briefly those of the LMNA model, before suggesting some conclusions.

⁶ See, for example, Kauffeld (1998) for an application of the notion in the particular case of the acts of presuming and accusing and Snoeck Henkemans (2014) for an outline of a general treatment of argumentation in the terminology of speech act theory.

2.1. Pragma-dialectics

Pragma-dialectics sees argumentation as a speech act that shares with other speech acts similar pragmatic properties. Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) put forward the following definition:

Argumentation is a speech act consisting of a constellation of statements designed to justify or refute an expressed opinion and calculated in a regimented discussion to convince a rational judge of a particular standpoint in respect of the acceptability or unacceptability of that expressed opinion. (p. 18).

From the definition, it should already be manifest that Eemeren and Grootendorst identify arguing with adducing reasons. Single argumentation consists of only one explicit reason for or against a standpoint, whereas in argumentation with a more complex structure, several reasons are advanced to jointly argue for or against the same standpoint (Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 4). The reference to a “constellation of statements” takes a more precise form by means of the notion of *illocutionary act complex*, understood as a constellation of utterances that jointly contribute to the above stated function. Afterwards, these authors have reformulated their definition in a more general form, by saying that argumentation is a “complex speech act aimed at justifying or refuting a proposition and getting a reasonable critic to accept the standpoint involved as a result” (Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 10). The leading idea underlying these definitions is that, as they explain, argumentation can be described as a constellation of illocutionary speech acts at the sentence level, such that they combine at a higher textual level to bring forth the complex speech act of argumentation (2004, p. 63, n. 45; 1984, pp. 34-35).

Pragma-dialectics applies Searle’s typology to give a detailed account of the roles that these five types of act can play in each of the stages of a critical discussion. Thus, assertives serve to express the standpoint under discussion, and also to advance the argumentation (reasons) that allows the arguer to defend or refute it, as well as to establish the result of the discussion. Directives can serve to challenge a participant to defend their standpoint, to request argumentation (reasons) for the standpoint, or to request a definition or

an explanation from a participant. Commisives serve the participants to accept or not accept a standpoint, accept the challenge to defend a standpoint, agree to the discussion rules, accept or not accept argumentation (reasons), and other possible moves in the discussion (accepting the assumption of a role, accepting the commencement of a new discussion). Expressives are not taken to be directly relevant in resolving a difference of opinion. Finally, among declaratives, generally only what they call *usage declaratives* (definitions, explanations, specifications, and amplifications) play a direct role in the discussion (2004, pp. 62-68; 1984, pp. 104-108).

Eemeren and Grootendorst interpret Searle's speech act theory as dealing only with the communicative aspect of argumentation, which is related to expressing propositions with a certain aim (what Searle called "illocutionary point"). But their concern is that this theory does not take into account what they characterize as the interactional aspect of argumentation, to wit, the perlocutionary effect of convincing. As they put it,

Our hypothesis is that in the communicative sense argumentation is a form of language use corresponding to the forms of language use characterized in the speech act theory as illocutionary acts and that as regards its interactional aspects argumentation is linked with the perlocutionary act of convincing. (Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, p. 29).

For these authors, and following Searle, the illocutionary effect is achieved whenever the addressee understands the speaker's illocutionary point (e.g., they understand the advice, the request, or the argumentation). But in the particular case of argumentation, the "inherent perlocutionary effect" (1984, p. 25) is that the opponent accepts the argumentation and is thus convinced by it. The significance of the perlocutionary act of convincing for pragmatics is explicit in Eemeren and Grootendorst's formulation of the essential condition for the illocutionary act complex argumentation, which in the case of pro-argumentation says, "*Advancing the constellation of statements S1, S2, (..., Sn) counts as an attempt by S to justify O to L's satisfaction, i.e. to convince L of the acceptability of O.*" (1984 p. 43, the authors' italics; a correspond-

ing formulation is offered for contra-argumentation). This means that attempting a certain perlocutionary effect, namely, that of convincing, is a determinant for a statement to count as argumentation.

The set of conditions that constitute the speech act complex of argumentation is developed in two groups, namely, identity and responsibility conditions. The first group, identity conditions, consists of propositional, content, and essential conditions (see above). The second group of conditions impinges on the correctness of the speech act; here, together with the preparatory, these authors include a subset of responsibility conditions, stated in the following terms:

- a. The speaker believes that his standpoint with respect to p is acceptable.
- b. The speaker believes that the propositions expressed in the elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n are acceptable.
- c. The speaker believes that the constellation of the elementary speech acts 1, 2, ..., n is an acceptable justification of p. (Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, pp. 100-101)

Their account would seem to amount to a fully internal psychological explanation. However, in pragma-dialectics, argumentation is externalized by means of conventions. The ‘counts as an attempt’ is identified with the help of certain *language conventions* (e.g., the function indicator device) and *usage conventions* (regularities which are expected and preferred by the users, due to its *rationale* in solving a problem) (Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, pp. 58-63.) Their tentative hypothesis is, then, that the perlocution “convincing” is conventional. And this conventional character is due to its accomplishment by means of argumentative schemata. As they say,

These argumentation schemata do, after all, constitute regularities in the usage of language users trying together to resolve a dispute, the language users expect these argumentation schemata to be used and they would prefer to resolve disputes with their help. (1984, pp. 66-67)

From this we can safely conclude that, for Eemerem and Grootendorst, what constitutes the speech act complex of arguing, *qua* illocution, is the attempt by the speaker to achieve a certain perlocutionary effect, namely, that of convincing their listener. Illocutionary success is achieved whenever the speaker's attempt is grasped as such by the listener. Externalization, as accomplished by means of conventions, is instrumental: both language and usage conventions help the speaker to communicate their attempt, beliefs, etc. Correspondingly, and coherently, interaction is circumscribed to the perlocutionary effect of success in communication.

In my view, there are two aspects in the account that may be prone to objection. The first one concerns the very idea of a constellation of speech acts. The second one refers to the identification of the interactional aspect of argumentation with the perlocutionary goal of convincing. The first aspect is connected with the notion of warrant and will be discussed in the next section. The second objectionable aspect is related to identifying the interactional with the perlocutionary.

It is legitimate to see convincing as a perlocutionary effect, and it is also the preferred response for an arguer. But, for pragmadiagnostics, a complex speech act is an act of arguing provided that, and to the extent that, the listener grasps the attempt by the speaker to convince them (of the acceptability of a viewpoint). I do not share the underlying intuition that the communicative (illocutionary) dimension of argumentation consists of the listener's understanding the speaker's attempt, and that the interactional aspect is constrained to the perlocutionary effects. It seems that the pragmadiagnostic account amounts to a peculiar disconnection between its account of the speech act of arguing, on the one hand, and on the other, the procedure and process of argumentative interaction as based on externalized conventions in the form of argumentative schemata. Instead, an alternative concept of interaction can be taken into account.

It might be said, in Austin's terminology, that an act of arguing invites adhesion. Nevertheless, identifying the illocutionary effect of a speech act with understanding amounts to taking uptake (of the meaning and force of the utterance) to be the only necessary

condition for its being a felicitous act. However, in his original formulation of speech act theory, Austin pointed out three types of effect that an illocutionary act should bring about as necessary conditions for it to be a felicitous, correctly performed act. These conditions included “securing uptake, taking effect, and inviting responses” (1962, p. 120), the latter being but a possibility and not applicable to all speech acts. Interestingly, the “taking effect” of illocutionary acts is characteristically a conventional effect, “as distinguished from producing consequences, in the sense of (...) changes in the normal course of events” (p. 116). These ideas have given support to a view of speech acts according to which they (i) bring about changes on the interpersonal or social context of the interlocutors and (ii) these changes can be analyzed in terms of the normative positions that the interlocutors recognize and assign each other (Sbisà 2006, 2009, 2018; Witek 2015, 2019; see also Corredor 2020, 2020a). Within this framework that I endorse, the interactional aspect of speech is mainly deployed in virtue of its illocutionary dimension and is not perlocutionary. The conventional is not reduced to certain instrumental means that help to succeed in convincing an addressee. Instead, the interlocutors’ agreement or social acceptance that certain normative changes have taken place, which can be seen as conventional, contribute to make of the speech act the speech act it is. This view entails that the communicative and interactional aspects of speech cannot be separated from each other in that interaction is constitutive of the speech act performed.

2.2. The linguistic-normative model of argumentation

The linguistic-normative model of argumentation (LNMA) put forward by Bermejo-Luque (2011) presents argumentation as a particular type of linguistic practice whose constitutive aim is to show a target claim to be correct. The model characterizes then good argumentation as argumentation able to justify its target claim. Acts of arguing are conceptualized as second-order speech-act complexes, as they are composed of two further acts, namely, the speech act of adducing (a reason) and the speech act of concluding (a target claim). Adducing and concluding are taken to be second-order because they are both performed by means of a first

order speech act, namely, a constative (although this need not always be the case for the target claim, the corresponding first-order speech act being possibly of other types). Furthermore, the two second-order speech acts are related to each other by means of what is presented as “an implicit inference-claim whose propositional content is ‘if r , then c ’” (Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 60), where r stands for the reason (its propositional content) and c for the target claim (its propositional content also). LMNA adopts Bach and Harnish’s (1979) Speech Act Schema and further develops it to characterize the second-order speech act complex of arguing.

In Bach and Harnish’s (1979) version of speech act theory, constative speech acts are characterized and defined by being the expression of a belief as held by the speaker, together with the expression of the speaker’s intention that the hearer forms the same belief. In general, communicative speech acts (the category to which constatives belong), as opposed to conventional speech acts, are performed with certain intentions whose recognition by the hearer is necessary for the act to be successful. Consequently, the Speech Act Schema takes the form of the required reasoning by the hearer to fully grasp the speaker’s communicative intentions and thus the utterance’s meaning. To reconstruct this process, the authors take into account, together with the linguistic information, a system of communicative and conversational presumptions and contextual mutual beliefs.

My main concern with LNMA is that it embeds, in coherence with Bach and Harnish’s framework, an intentionalist conception of illocutionary acts. In my view, this approach cannot satisfactorily account for the interactional aspects of speech in general nor in particular in the case of argumentative dialogues.⁷ As outlined above, my own view is that illocutionary acts can be accounted for by saying how they change the social context and/or the interpersonal context of the interlocutors, and this in turn can be explained by describing the changes in the interlocutors’ normative positions (obligations, commitments, and responsibilities, as well as rights, authorizations and entitlements, and the like). In the particular case of argumentation, my suggestion is that these normative positions

⁷ I cannot develop this consideration here, but see Corredor (2020).

are internally related to certain dialectical (and dialogical) obligations and rights, as these can be deployed in the course of an argumentative dialogue.

3. Outline of an interactional account of argumentation

In this section, I am going to outline and argue for an interactional account of argumentation, and, in order to make it clearer, I will introduce an example. Following the classic characterization by Toulmin, Rieke, and Janik (1984), argumentation can be seen as “the whole activity of making claims, challenging them, backing them up by producing reasons, criticizing those reasons, rebutting those criticisms, and so on” (p. 14). I think this approach is right. However, an analytic stance on argumentation can isolate the basic unit of acts of arguing as complexes consisting of adducing a reason and concluding a claim. Other argumentative moves (like the ones mentioned in the quotation) can in their turn be analyzed in terms of these complexes, provided that their insertion in and contribution to the total argumentative text or discourse is also taken into account. It is in virtue of this activity of adducing reasons in support of a claim, and of criticizing those reasons (both in themselves and with respect to the grounding they yield), that acts of arguing provide an epistemic basis for the rational acceptance of the claim purported to be true or otherwise correct. Moreover, and for the sake of simplicity, it is usually assumed that the argumentative dialogue takes part between two participants. Although in many real instances of argumentation this is obviously not the case,⁸ I will proceed with this methodological assumption.

3.1. *Outline*

What makes an approach to speech acts interactional is that it seeks to explain the illocutionary meaning of utterances by taking into account not only (nor primarily) the speaker’s communicative aims and intentions in issuing an utterance, but also the hearer’s recognition and interpretation in response to it. This response does

⁸ For an insightful proposal dealing with argumentative polylogues, see, for example, Lewinski and Aakhus (2014) and Aakhus and Lewinski (2017).

not need to be linguistically explicit, and often will remain tacit or implicit; but without both the speaker's and the hearer's recognition that the speech act has produced certain effects in their interpersonal and/or social context, the utterance cannot be conceptualized as a felicitous illocutionary act. In an interactional approach to speech acts, understanding (the "securing of uptake") is not seen as a matter of grasping contents, but of recognizing that certain changes have taken effect in the social and/or interpersonal context, changes of a kind that affects the interlocutors' normative positions (their obligations and rights, commitments and entitlements, etc.).

In the case of acts of arguing, I follow other scholars (Toulmin, Rieke and Janik 1984; Bermejo-Luque 2011) in considering that the acts of adducing a reason and of concluding a claim are both components of it. Moreover, my contention is that the illocutionary effect of acts of arguing can be made explicit by indicating the dialectical rights and obligations (and also commitments and entitlements, etc.) that the interlocutors assign and recognize each other in the course of their exchange. By dialectical rights and obligations, I mean normative stances that are discharged and exercised as new moves in the argumentative dialogue. These dialectical obligations and rights constitute, based on my position, the illocutionary effects of acts of arguing. In general, in the Austinian approach to speech acts I endorse, illocutionary effects can be said to be conventional in that they are brought about in virtue of the recognition by the interlocutors that they have taken place in the sense that the corresponding changes to their normative positions have been introduced. In the particular case of argumentation, whenever an act of arguing is felicitous, the recognition by the interlocutors that certain dialectical obligations and rights have entered into force is a necessary condition for the act of arguing to be accepted as correctly performed.

In order to lend plausibility to my contention, in what follows an analysis is outlined for both the acts of adducing a reason and concluding a claim. The initial analysis, however, will be incomplete until two additional issues have been addressed. The first one is related to the need that certain objective conditions be fulfilled in order for the act of arguing to qualify as correctly performed.

The second one concerns the internal connection of grounding between reason and claim—a connection that Toulmin tried to capture by means of his notion of warrant. I will address the first one in this section and the second one in the next.

Adducing a reason can be seen as a speech act belonging to the assertive family;⁹ these acts belong to the category of verdictive speech acts.¹⁰ According to the Austinian approach I endorse, (i) verdictives presuppose that the speaker occupies a certain epistemic position or that they are epistemically competent in relation to the subject matter of what is adduced; (ii) the speech act commits the speaker to giving justification or support for it whenever this is asked for by the interlocutors;¹¹ and (iii.a) in the particular case of adducing, I suggest adding a third condition, namely, that the speech act also entitles the interlocutors to critically examine the adduced reason, for example, its acceptability and its relevance for the claim at issue.

Still, in certain cases, the adduced reason seems to have the explicit form of an act of a different type. For instance, the speaker can say, “I promise you I will come so don’t worry.” Here, in a first approach, the adduced reason would seem to be a commissive speech act. However, the obligations and rights instituted by a promise are different from the dialectical changes that adducing a reason brings about. Commissives consist of committing to a certain course of action, of assuming an obligation or declaring an intention (Austin 1962, pp. 156, 162); they presuppose that the speaker is capable of carrying out their commitment to an action and entitle the addressees to a corresponding legitimate expectancy (Sbisà 2006, p. 166). But these are not the same conditions (i)-

⁹ The concept “assertive family” comes from Green (2013), who defines it in Gricean terms. In Sbisà (2018a) a reformulation is given in Austinian terminology.

¹⁰ Verdictives are exercises of judgment and consist of producing a finding based upon evidence or reasons as to value or fact (Austin 1962, pp. 152, 162). For Austin, verdictives were judgments about which it was difficult to be sure. Nevertheless, I take it that the essential trait of a verdictive is that it is established and thus can be assessed by taking into account the evidence or reasons that justify it.

¹¹ These first two conditions are associated with verdictives in the characterization offered by Sbisà (2006).

(iii.a) that can be seen as necessary for the correct performance of an act of adducing a reason. Based on my position, the linguistic form should not mislead us here. My suggestion is to see examples like those presented above as cases in which the two mentioned speech acts are performed by means of the same utterance; once the promise is performed, the fact that it is so recognized becomes a datum to be adduced as a reason. The possibility to perform different speech acts as brought about by the same utterance is in general possible due to the interlocutors' recognition (or social acceptance) that it has been so, in that the utterance has introduced the corresponding changes in the participants' normative positions. The responsibilities and duties, entitlements and rights, etc. are not the same in each case. The same line of analysis is available whenever the adduced reason takes the form of a speech act different from a verdictive.¹²

Concluding a claim can also be seen as a verdictive, even if the utterance can also perform an act of a different type. Whenever they take the form of a theoretical statement, acts of concluding should be typified as verdictives; but notice that also practical statements (norms of action, recommendations, warnings, etc.) can be put forward as conclusions of an act of arguing. In the latter case, my suggestion is that the corresponding speech acts should also be characterized as verdictives.¹³ If the act of arguing is accepted as felicitously, correctly performed, the concluded claim, *qua* practical statement, can and will also achieve a different pragmatic force; for instance, that of enacting a norm of action, recommending, warning, etc. This achievement can be seen as a

¹² This explanation avoids the peculiar disconnection that takes place in pragma-dialectics between complex speech acts of arguing at the communicative level and argumentation at a discourse level. It also avoids the need to presuppose that there are second-order speech actions—an idea that seems modelled on a logical-semantic view.

¹³ This suggestion seems to go against other, relevant theoretical models of argument and argumentation. For example, Hitchcock (2006), by resorting to Searle's well-known taxonomy, takes it that conclusions can not only be constative speech acts but also directives, commissives, declaratives, and expressives. Putting aside the latter (I do think that giving reasons for Searle's expressive speech acts should more properly be seen as an act of explaining), the other cases smoothly fit in with my account.

conventional effect of argumentation, inasmuch as it depends on the recognition of the interlocutors that an act of arguing has taken place and their acceptance that the concluded claim is therefore justified.

A reason to see the act of concluding a claim as a verdictive, even if the concluded claim has the form of a practical statement, is the following: the changes that the act of concluding a claim introduces in the normative positions of the interlocutors are different from those brought about by enacting a norm of action, recommending, warning, etc. The latter are exercitive speech acts, which consist of exercising some kind of authority or influence, or advocating for it (Austin 1962, pp. 154, 162). Exercitives also create obligations and rights on the part of the interlocutors, but these are not primarily dialectical. Enacting a norm of action, if the speaker has the required authority, institutes an obligation to be fulfilled by the addressees of the norm; recommending exerts an influence on the addressee whenever they acknowledge the speaker's moral authority; warning assigns a responsibility to the addressee whenever they recognize that the speaker is cognizant of the potential risk, etc. In all these cases, it is possible for the interlocutors to critically examine the statement and decide on their acceptance as an exercitive; but once accepted (and if afterwards nothing causes the interlocutors to consider the act as null or void; e.g., the speaker lacked the required authority to enact the norm, or the respect and recognition to issue the recommendation, or was not cognizant enough to appreciate the risk), the speech act can be said to have been felicitously performed. Here, critical examination precedes the acceptance of the act as an act of the type it is (enactment of a norm, recommendation, warning, etc.). In concluding a claim, however, the normative changes introduced are of a different, distinctly dialectical type, in the sense introduced above.

Regarding the act of concluding, conditions (i)-(iii.a) put forward above for the act of adducing a reason are in need of some modifications. Both pre-condition (i) that presupposes the cognitive competence of the speaker and condition (ii) that commits the arguer to provide justification are redeemed in the very act of arguing. But condition (iii.a) should be elaborated upon to form a

new condition (iii.c) that grants the interlocutors certain dialectical rights and assigns them certain dialectical obligations. For instance, they become entitled to raise doubts and objections and to oppose rebuttals and counter-arguments. Moreover, whenever they accept a conclusion, they become entitled to take it as a justificatory reason providing support for other claims.

Here also, the same utterance could be performing two different illocutionary acts. For instance, in the particular case of a deliberative dialogue, once the conclusion *qua* verdictive has been agreed upon by the participants, their endorsement of the conclusion becomes an exercitive speech act (just as making a decision and assuming a position are).

Yet, the recognition by the interlocutors of the changes to their dialectical positions is not a sufficient condition by itself. In order for an act of arguing to be felicitous, certain conditions of objective assessment have to be met as well. The adduced reason should be acceptable as true or otherwise correct in the dimension of its “correspondence to the facts,” with this expression understood in a broad sense. For instance, and depending on the particular field of knowledge or practice to which the speech act belongs, the adduced reason should be acceptable as true, or otherwise plausible, appropriate, legitimate, fair, legal, etc. Also, its relevance to the concluded claim is a matter of objective assessment and not merely of subjective appreciation from the perspectives of the interlocutors.

Similar considerations apply to the act of concluding a claim. Even if the claim is to be seen as justified on the basis of the support lent by the adduced reason, it still can be assessed as false, or otherwise not in correspondence with the relevant facts (e.g., a verdict can turn out not to be in accord with the law, a political decision not to be fair or legitimate, and a domestic arrangement not appropriate after all). But here, it seems that the dimensions of objective assessment are constrained; it is in the course of the act of arguing that a claim can be shown to be, for example, truthlike or plausible. A positive epistemic assessment of a claim can be achieved by means of the support lent to it through argumentation, whereas this is not the case for other dimensions of objective assessment. I take this as a confirmation that arguing is an epis-

temic activity, yielding justification as its result (as something different from truth, or otherwise practical correctness).

In order to make the interactional approach to argumentation clearer, in the next subsection a real example is presented and analyzed in the terms outlined above.

3.2. *An example*

The following piece of news was recently published in a generalist Spanish newspaper:

The spokesperson of the government of Madrid, Enrique Ossorio, has urged the citizenry of the autonomous community to “trust the vaccines”, which are “safe” and whose benefits “are much more than the few risks” they might present (Agencia EFE 2021).¹⁴

Implementing Toulmin’s (1958) scheme, the following rough analysis can be advanced:

The claim the speaker wants to justify is,

(C) Vaccines are to be trusted

The reasons he adduces are,

(R1) Vaccines are safe.

(R2) Vaccines’ benefits are much more than their few risks.

Reasons R1 and R2 can be considered a subordinated argument so that R2 is justifying (giving a reason in support of) R1. For the sake of simplicity, and since this complication does not have an impact on the main traits of the interaction, it will be ignored. Still, within the framework of Toulmin’s scheme, what makes the speech act an act of arguing is that claim (C) and reasons (R1 and R2) are internally connected by a warrant: an inferential license authorising the step from R1 and R2 to C. This warrant can be

¹⁴ Agencia EFE, 11 April 2021; my translation.

paraphrased by adding that reasons such as R1 and R2 authorize one to claim C (Toulmin 1958, p. 134).

My contention is that together with the above structural, logical-semantic conditions, in order for us to say that the act of arguing has been correctly performed, that is, that it has been a felicitous act of arguing, it is a necessary condition that it has had the illocutionary effect (not perlocutionary) of instituting certain normative relations between speaker and audience.

Adducing R1 and R2 is a verdictive speech act; as such, it brings about certain changes in the normative positions of the speaker and the audience. In particular:

- (i) The speaker presents himself as epistemically competent in relation to the subject matter, namely, the vaccines' effectiveness.
- (ii) His public statement commits him to provide justification for his statement (e.g., he could further adduce that the expert committee of the autonomous community of Madrid supports this declaration).
- (iii.a) His audience acquires a right to critically examine the statement and raise doubts and objections.

Moreover, the speaker's claim C on the basis of adducing R1 and R2 entitles his audience in different ways:

- (iii.c) The audience can object to C because they have doubts concerning R1 or R2 or both; they can request the findings of the supporting research, including methodology and data. Also, they can doubt that R1 and R2 warrant C; they could, for example, argue that even minimal risk would be unacceptable, etc. Also, if and when the audience accepts C, they become entitled to adduce it as a reason providing support for new claims.

If the above analysis is correct, then it should clarify how speech acts of arguing institute certain dialectical duties and rights, as mutually assigned by the interlocutors or socially recognized, that cannot be seen as a perlocutionary effect. My contention has

been that these dialectical duties and rights are necessary conditions for the correct performance of acts of arguing, without which we could not say that the speaker has adduced a reason or has drawn a conclusion. Hence, these conditions belong to the illocutionary dimension of argumentation.

Still, as already pointed out, a further dimension of assessment of arguments is related to the grounding that the adduced reason lends to the concluded claim. This connection was captured by Toulmin by means of the concept of a warrant. We may ask, first, whether warrants should be considered speech acts of a certain type and second, whether warrants are evaluable in virtue of certain objective requirements. These issues will be addressed in the following section.

4. Warrants

According to Toulmin (1958), warrants are inference-licenses, and also practical standards or canons of argument, such that they “authorise the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us” (p. 91). Namely, they authorise the step from the data adduced as reasons (D) to the concluded claim (C). Warrants are to be made explicit by means of hypothetical statements (“if D, then C,” and also “Data such as D entitle one to draw conclusions, or make claims, such as C,” or “Given data D, one may take it that C”), even if they usually remain tacit or implicit. Based on my position, making an inference-license explicit in the form of a warrant presupposes the adoption of an analytic standpoint; but no piece of speech or written text can be seen as argumentative without this supporting connection being established as a component part of the performed act of arguing. This means that the notion of warrant, and not only those of adducing a reason and drawing a conclusion, has to be integrated within the framework of speech act theory. But this is not a straightforward task. As Hitchcock (2003, p. 70) notices, Toulmin’s wording does not make clear whether warrants should be conceptualized as practical statements or as rules. Thus, warrants are said to be general, hypothetical statements that can act as bridges (between datum and claim) and

authorize the sort of step to which our particular argument commits us. (Toulmin 1958, p. 91)

Furthermore, in analyzing a particular example, he writes,

Though the facts about the statute may provide all the backing required by this warrant, the explicit statement of the warrant itself is more than a repetition of these facts: it is a general moral of a practical character, about the ways in which we can safely argue in view of these facts. (Toulmin 1958, p. 98).

My own intuition is that making warrants explicit would be to perform an expositive speech act (according to Austin's 1962 original classification). Yet, expositives are a somewhat indeterminate type in that they usually also perform another type of act.¹⁵ To the extent that warrants act as reconstructions or representations of inference-licenses when explicitated in the form of general, practical statements of authorization or entitlement, they should be accorded the pragmatic force of an exercitive. But two different concepts seem to be mixing here, and it seems to me that some theoretical precision is required. On the one hand, warrants are abstract, theoretical representations of the step performed from reason to claim, and as such, they belong to the logical dimension of argumentation. But on a pragmatic level, warrants can be taken to reconstruct and thus to capture the performance of an action as it is accomplished in acts of arguing, namely, that of licensing the performance of an act of concluding in virtue of having performed an act of adducing. This does not mean, however, that this reconstruction (nor the underlying inferential step) constitutes, in itself, a full-fledged speech act.

Before I try to lend some plausibility to the above suggestion, it is worth considering some theories that have adopted a pragmatic understanding of this notion. In particular, warrants have been understood as general rule-like statements (Hitchcock 2003; Pinto

¹⁵ Expositives are illocutionary acts that expose and clarify how language is being used; they are "used in acts of exposition involving the expounding of views, the conducting of arguments, and the clarifying of usages and of references" (Austin 1962, p. 160). The hybrid or mixed character of expositives, which usually also perform a speech act of a different type, was already noticed by Austin himself.

2006), as implicit assertions (Bermejo-Luque 2011), and as Gricean conversational implicatures (Labinaz and Sbisà 2018). Also, pragma-dialectics can be regarded as taking a pragmatic approach to the notion, although in this latter case with some proviso.

4.1. Some conceptions of warrants

Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) interpret Toulmin's model as a rhetorical approach to argumentation,¹⁶ thus aligning pragma-dialectics with a pragmatic reading. At the same time, however, they accord warrants a rule-like character, equating this notion with that of an argument schema to be used in argumentation. Argument schemes are described as abstract frames by means of which the relationship between argumentation and standpoint is made explicit in order to affect a "transfer of acceptability from the explicit premise to the standpoint" (2004, p. 4, n. 10). They add that argumentation schemes are "more or less conventionalized ways of achieving this transfer" (2004, p. 4, n. 10). From that, it follows that for pragma-dialectics, warrants can be seen as a decisive criterion of assessment if the articulation between argumentation and standpoint is at issue. Interestingly, they also observe that in ordinary argumentation it is difficult to distinguish which part belongs to the data and thus has a factual character, and which one is rule-like and should be regarded as warrant (implicitness being in both cases a result of the degree of familiarity with which the part is regarded; p. 46 and n. 27, 48, 50).

If this view is considered together with their thesis that argumentation can be analyzed as a constellation of speech acts, the question arises as to whether warrants should be seen as a type of speech act. Although this is not explicitly thematized, a possible interpretation is the following: from the distribution of speech acts in a critical discussion developed by these authors, it seems that in both the opening and argumentation stages, rule-like statements can appear and in both cases, they do so by means of assertive

¹⁶ In order to provide support for their interpretation, Eemeren and Grootendorst point out that Toulmin's schema presents arguments from the standpoint of the arguer, and therefore the acceptability of the claim does not depend on a dialectical weighing up of arguments (2004, p. 47).

speech acts. In the opening stage, this happens when the participants agree on the discussion rules since these rules then need to be made explicit. In the argumentation stage, when advancing argumentation, some of the rules can be and are explicated (when it is difficult to tell the data apart from warrants.)

But notice that there is an ambiguity here between the concept of abstract frame, which strongly suggests an abstract representation or reconstruction of the connection established between reason and claim and the idea that there are conventionalized ways of transferring acceptability. The latter I understand as a conventionalized pattern of action, allowing the acceptance of the standpoint on the basis of the acceptance of the argumentation (the reason adduced). This in turn suggests that such schemes are actually guiding the performance, or available to do so. Yet, according to the pragma-dialectical reading of the illocutionary, the speech act of warranting should achieve its illocutionary effect in virtue of being understood. If my interpretation above stands, then warrants are felicitous whenever understood as an act of asserting, thus committing the arguer to the acceptability of the asserted content (Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 63.) Yet it is not clear how this commitment to the acceptability of a transfer of acceptability should be accomplished. In my view, and similarly to the case of the acts of adducing reasons and concluding a claim, in order for the warranting act to qualify as a felicitous one, certain objective conditions should be taken into account.

In the Linguistic Normative Model of Argumentation, warrants are re-interpreted as implicit assertions of the form “if *r* (the content of *R*), then *c* (the content of *C*)” (Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 61), where *R* stands for the speech act of adducing a reason (a constative speech act) and *C* for the speech act of concluding a claim (also a constative). On the semantic level, the content of this implicit assertion is understood as a material conditional having the content of the adduced reason as its antecedent and the content of the concluded claim as its consequent. As inference-claims, warrants represent the inferential step underlying every act of arguing. But Bermejo-Luque opposes the idea that they are to be understood as having a rule-like character and also Toulmin’s own suggestion that (at least in some cases) warrants could be made

explicit. She takes these moves to have the effect of adding the warrant as a premise to the argument. But this, in her view, would generate a new argument in need of another warrant, and so on leading to an infinite regress (Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 107).

Another idea worth considering is related to the original treatment of modal qualifiers embedded in LNMA. According to this model, the conclusion of an argument is always under the scope of an epistemic qualifier, which depends (and only depends) on the “ontological” modal qualifying the inference-claim as a whole. The idea that there are “ontological” modals (like ‘is true,’ ‘is more (or less) probable,’ ‘is more (or less) acceptable,’ ‘is necessary/possible,’ etc.) qualifying the inference-claim “if r, then c” is made plausible on account of the fact that “claims are speech acts meant to communicate *how the world is*.” In contrast, the conclusion reached is qualified by means of an epistemic modal which communicates “our credentials for concluding, i.e., the type and degree of support that our reasons are supposed to confer on our target-claims.” Epistemic qualifiers are “a function of the ontological qualifier by means of which the implicit inference-claim of the act of arguing has been put forward.” (Bermejo-Luque 2011, p. 62). A consequence of this tenet is the contention that an act of arguing is good or bad depending on the semantic level, on the correctness of the modal qualifiers it embeds, together with some pragmatic conditions that make of it a good act of showing that a target claim is correct.

The thesis that warrants are qualified by means of “ontological” modals seems close to the speech-act theoretic standpoint that certain conditions of objective assessment are necessary for the felicitous, correct performance of speech acts. Nevertheless, this tenet is applicable to every speech act not only to those of a certain type and form. Above, I suggested that the acts of adducing a reason and concluding a claim also have to fulfil certain objective requirements if they are to count as correctly performed. I share the view that acts of arguing lend epistemic support to the conclusion drawn and sympathize with the suggestion that warrants are subjected to conditions of objective assessment. But in my view, the kind of action that the corresponding inference-licenses perform is closely related to acts of authorizing, licensing, entitling,

and the like. This is something that the analysis of LNMA tends to blur.

Hitchcock (2003) has contended that warrants are general rules of inference, which he terms “covering generalizations” not to be equated with data or general premises. What distinguishes both components in an argument is, according to him, their functional role. Drawing from Hitchcock, Pinto (2006, 2011) interprets warrants as having the form “Data such as R *entitle* one to draw conclusions, or make claims, such as c,” where this entitlement is understood in terms of reasonableness. The core idea in this form is that if it is reasonable to hold that R, then it is reasonable to hold that C. Warrants are thus, when made explicit, entitlement-preserving rule-like statements laying down what the arguer is entitled to hold given certain data; these entitlements are epistemic.

In my view, Pinto’s position nicely accounts for a core intuition in Toulmin’s model, namely, the fact that warrants license the inference bridging data and claim. Nevertheless, a presentation of warrants in the terminology of rule-like statements misrepresents the fact that these statements are available whenever a reconstruction of the inferential step made in acts of arguing is made explicit. My suggestion, however, is that such statements are not a component element in the argumentation, but the representation or reconstruction of a performed action that exhibits the legitimacy of that action.

Labinaz and Sbisà (2018) have defended a view of warrants as conversational implicatures. They understand argumentation not merely as a type of discourse activity but also as a cognitively based dimension of discourse. Drawing from Werlich’s view that the cognitive function of argumentation is “judging in answer to a problem,” (Werlich 1983, p. 40; quoted in Labinaz and Sbisà 2018, p. 603), they also take into account Grice’s understanding of rationality and declare that “we can thus call discourse *rational* when it displays some (warranted) data-claim relationship” (p. 608). Following Toulmin, the authors note that warrants are usually not explicitly asserted; nevertheless, they contend that warrants are retrievable “mainly by particularized conversational implicature” (p. 613; also p. 622), and this happens when the hearer or

reader is interested in identifying underlying argumentative structures. It is worth highlighting that, in their view, it is thus the receiver who can and does retrieve warrants (often in the form of conversational implicature) when they judge that there is some argumentative structure in the discourse, in essence, some information playing the role of data supporting a certain claim. This makes Labinaz and Sbisà's account an interactional one.

Even if I very much sympathize with this account and its interactional approach, it seems to me that the concept of conversational implicature does not fully capture the core intuition underlying Toulmin's notion of warrant. According to Grice (1975), conversational implicatures should be calculable (it must be possible to explicitly reconstruct the inferential route leading from what is said to the implicature) and cancellable (by the speaker themselves to whom the intention to mean these implicatures should be attributed) without bringing about a semantic anomaly. In a sense, this would be the case in discourse since no semantic contradiction arises if a speaker denies that their statements were put forward as an argument. Nevertheless, in many cases this would give rise to some pragmatic weirdness since the speech acts would turn out to not be those adducing reasons and concluding a claim. And this should have an effect on the illocutionary normative positions of the interlocutors.

Imagine that the speaker says (1) "Harry was born in Bermuda, Harry is a British subject" and then adds, "But I do not mean that the latter follows from the former, I just happen to know both facts." Even if there is no semantic contradiction here, from the point of view of an informed audience, it would seem that the speaker is not cognizant of the internal connection between their own assertions and ignored that the resulting discourse subsumes, after all, an argumentative step. The speaker's intentions would not be determinant for the argumentative value of the assertion nor would this speaker have a complete capacity to cancel the implicature that the audience has captured. This is in line with Labinaz and Sbisà's account but raises some doubts as to the nature of the inference. In contrast, if the speaker says (2) "He is an Englishman; he is therefore brave," in this case, 'therefore' would indicate that they mean their utterance to be an act of arguing, and it is

possible that some reconstruction of the purported inference can be deployed. However, it would be legitimate for the audience to take the utterance as embedding an incorrect use of the argumentative connective, judging that it was not a warranted act of arguing.

4.2. A suggestion

In my view, what makes a complex utterance an act of arguing is, first, that both the acts of adducing a reason and concluding a claim are correctly, felicitously performed, and this subsumes the fulfillment of certain conditions of objective assessment. These conditions were determined to be satisfied in example (1) but not in (2) above, and this is what concerns the inferential step from reason to claim: in (1) there is an objective, legal connection between being born in Bermuda and being a British citizen, whereas no similar “correspondence to the facts” is accorded to the intended connection between being an Englishman and being brave. Only the correct, felicitous performance of both the acts of adducing and concluding allows the reader or hearer to assess whether the act of arguing is warranted, and as suggested above, a correct performance of the act of concluding entitles the interlocutors to ask for the corresponding inferential step. But also, the inference-license between both acts is subjected to objective requirements. If an act of arguing is correctly, felicitously performed, then these conditions of objective assessment relative to the inferential connection between reason and claim should be fulfilled as well.

This requires a further act on the part of the receiver, namely, that of assessing whether the step performed from reason to claim was also correct, in particular in relation to the appropriate conditions of objective assessment. But this act is not, nor does need to be, seen as an additional component speech act of the act of arguing. Adducing a reason and concluding a claim are interrelated acts, in the minimal sense that either of them cannot be accomplished and do not make sense without presupposing the other one. This is in line with some other inter-related types of speech act, for example, raising a question and giving an answer, proposing and accepting or rejecting a proposal, making an assertion and amend-

ing or retracting it.¹⁷ What is characteristic of acts of adducing and concluding is that the step from one act to another is subjected to certain conditions of objective assessment on which the legitimacy of the step depends. In my view, to the extent that these objective requirements affect the interrelation of adducing and concluding, they can and should be included among the conditions for the correct performance of both of these acts. A possible suggestion is to add to the list of conditions (i)-(iii.a) and (iii.c) of correct performance an additional condition on the dialectical obligations and rights of the interlocutors: (iv) the speaker's act of concluding a claim creates their obligation to adduce the reason (or reasons) that in their view provides support for it, and authorizes the receiver to ask for the inference-license that allows the step from reason to claim ("How do you get there?" in Toulmin's words) and also to critically examine whether the inter-relation between reason and claim "correspond[s] to the facts" (in the sense, for example, in which we have already examined in examples (1) and (2)).

Whenever the inferential step performed is made explicit in the form of a warrant (in Toulmin's sense), this should be seen, in my view, as a reconstruction of what has been performed through the acts of adducing and concluding. In so doing, the interlocutors are producing a new act, on the (meta)level of assessment, which should have its own conditions of felicitous performance.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have put forward an outline of an interactional account of the speech act of arguing. In so doing, I have drawn from Sbisà's (2018) insightful elaboration of Austin's (1962) idea that the conditions of felicitous performance of a speech act include certain conditions of objective assessment in "correspondence to the facts." Together with the acts of adducing reasons and concluding a claim, I have taken into consideration Toulmin's (1958) concept of a warrant and asked, first, whether warrants should be considered speech acts of a certain type and second, whether warrants are also assessable in virtue of certain objective

¹⁷ In linguistic pragmatics, the notion of *adjacency pair* tries to capture this relational units of sequence construction (Schegloff 2007).

requirements. My answer to the first of these questions has been in the negative, with the proviso that an explicit reconstruction of a warrant should lead the arguers to further acts of assessment. My answer to the second question has been in the positive. In this latter case, however, I do not see the conditions of objective assessment that impinge on the inference-license bridging reason and claim as conditions for the felicitous performance of another speech act; my suggestion is that these objective conditions be given as additional requirements for the correct performance of the acts of adducing a reason and concluding from this reason.

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