Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model and the assertive family

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A B S T R A C T

This paper deals with what, from a speech-act theoretical point of view, can be considered to be the "illocutionary" side of Robert Brandom's pragmatist framework, which regards the pragmatic significance of linguistic performances (specifically, assertional performances) characterized in terms of their effects on the normative statuses of the participants in a discursive practice. In Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model of discursive practice (which consists of ascribing, undertaking and acknowledging commitments and entitlements), all speech acts are alleged to have pragmatic significance because of their relationship with the act of asserting: here, I investigate whether the same model can be used to account for the pragmatic significance of other assertive speech acts which differ from assertion in terms of their varying degrees and modes of commitment, and I argue that it simply lacks the resources to do so. I conclude by making some general suggestions (with examples) of how an Austin-inspired conception of illocutionary force (to some extent compatible with Brandom's analysis) could be used as a basis to account for the varying degrees and modes of commitment of assertive speech acts in terms of variations in their force.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with what, from a speech-act theoretical point of view, can be considered to be the "illocutionary" side of Robert Brandom's pragmatist framework, which concerns (to use his own terminology) the pragmatic significance of linguistic performances, and assertional performances in particular (see Brandom, 1994, 2000). According to him, the pragmatic significance of a linguistic performance is characterized in terms of its potential to change the normative statuses of the participants in a discursive practice, especially those in which participants give and ask for reasons. These practices, which he refers to as "the game of giving and asking for reasons", are considered as the core of language use, since the conferral of propositional content to linguistic expressions depends on them. The speakers and interlocutors involved in this game are represented as engaged in a scorekeeping activity (see also Lewis, 1979), consisting of ascribing, undertaking and acknowledging commitments and entitlements.[1] Brandom holds that the most basic move here is the speech act of asserting, which expresses the speaker's doxastic commitment, lending her authority to the content asserted and licensing others to undertake the same commitment. By making, withdrawing and challenging assertions, participants in this activity keep track of one another's commitments and entitlements to those commitments.

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[1] As Brandom (1994: 142) points out, "[t]he job of pragmatic theory is to explain the *significance* of various sorts of speech acts in terms of practical proprieties governing the keeping of deontic score — what moves are appropriate given a certain score, and what difference those moves make to that score".

In recent years, Brandom's pragmatist framework has become increasingly influential among scholars interested in speech acts, especially with regard to his social analysis of assertion. Indeed, his way of conceiving assertion is seen as a useful starting point for scholars aiming at describing illocutionary force in terms of entitlements (or rights) and commitments (or obligations) (see, for example, Peregrin, 2012: 220–224).[2] Moreover, because of its similarities (though superficial) with Austin's (and in part, Searle's) view of illocution, specifically as to how it describes the (normative) effects of speech acts, which we will see in Section 5,[3] Brandom's pragmatist framework can be seen as a potential rival to the traditional way of conceiving illocutionary force. My aim here, then, is to examine whether and, if so, to what extent Brandom's pragmatist framework may be taken as effectively contributing to the analysis of illocution. Although Brandom (1994: 158–159) openly acknowledges that his model of discursive practice is an "artificial idealization", it is still an open question whether it can be used to account for the pragmatic significance of speech acts that are not directly involved in the game of giving and asking for reasons, at least as conceived by him. In particular, in light of the privileged role assigned to assertion in Brandom's account of discursive practice, I will consider whether his deontic scorekeeping model can account for the performance of assertive speech acts that are not straightforward assertions (which are in fact ubiquitous in our discursive practices) and their effects.[4] Indeed, while asserting can be held to be the main way of undertaking (and so overtly acknowledging) a doxastic commitment,[5] there are other speech acts that, while intimately related to asserting, are characterized by varying degrees and modes of commitment on the part of the speaker to what she says. For example, when reading a newspaper, one can easily come across sentences such as the following

(1) Perhaps there is now a chance to achieve a so-called soft Brexit (TIM_BREX)
(2) Our Government has absolutely no idea how many EU citizens live in the UK (IND_GOV)
(3) Well, I guess the Saudis are killing a lot of [Yemenis] right now (IND_GUAN)
(4) In my view, on the facts as reported, a limited use of force, necessary to address the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, and proportionate to the humanitarian objective of forestalling any further use of chemical weapons, would be lawful under international law (GUARD_VIEW)
(5) I firmly believe that across Australia an even broader acceptance for marriage equality will come sooner than we think (GUARD_MAK)

which can be described as performing various kinds of assertive speech acts with their commitments weakened or reinforced in different ways.[6] While in speech act theory, such differences have traditionally been accounted for in terms of the "degree of strength" of illocutionary force (see, in particular, Searle and Vanderveken, 1985), in the case of Brandom's scorekeeping model we need to examine whether it has the resources to analyze how assertive speech acts such as those performed when uttering (1)–(5) differ from each another and from straightforward assertions.

The paper is organized as follows: the following section presents an outline of Brandom's pragmatist framework, focusing mainly on its illocutionary side, which is part of what he calls "normative pragmatics" (Section 2). In Section 3, some examples of assertive speech acts are given, and their similarities and differences highlighted: then follows an explanation of how such differences have been described in speech act theory. Section 4 looks at what resources Brandom's scorekeeping model has available to account for the performance of assertive speech acts that are not straightforward assertions, and the effects of these; I contend that its resources are too limited for that task. In Section 5, I introduce an Austin-inspired conception of illocutionary force (compatible to some extent with Brandom's pragmatist framework) and then describe the resources it has available to account for the various ways of attenuating, fine-tuning or disowning assertive commitments. Finally, I discuss the examples of actual language use presented above in order to show how and why the Austin-inspired conception of illocutionary force does a better job of accounting for the performance of assertive speech acts besides straightforward assertions and their effects than Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model (Section 6).

2. Brandom's pragmatist framework

The central claim of Brandom's pragmatist framework is that propositional content is conferred upon linguistic expressions by how they are used in discursive practices, and specifically those practices in which participants give and ask for

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[2] For example, Rebecca Kukla and Mark Lance (2009), while criticizing Brandom's exclusive focus on assertion, have proposed a general, normative theory of speech acts, which modifies and elaborates upon some central aspects of his pragmatist framework.

[3] Note, however, that Brandom's inferential semantics is compatible neither with Austin's meaning-force distinction nor with Searle's notion of propositional act.

[4] What I am doing here is probably not directly relevant to Brandom's philosophical project, which is aimed at developing an inferentialist semantics grounded on a normative pragmatics. But since his deontic scorekeeping model can allegedly account for the basic dynamics involved in any discursive practice, this paper can be seen as a way of critically testing its applicability to a wider range of linguistic performances.

[5] According to Brandom (1994: 162), "for someone to *undertake* a commitment […] is to do something that makes it appropriate to *attribute* the commitment to that individual". As MacFarlane has also pointed out (2010: 90–91), this means that being committed to p corresponds to being committed to doing something, but it is not clear "what kind of action commitment to p could be a commitment to perform". In this paper, I will rely on Brandom's explicit claims about this, without attempting to further interpret or exemplify.

[6] These examples are collected from a selection of newspapers articles, mostly comprising interviews and opinion pieces (editorials and comments). Their sources are listed in the *Appendix*.

reasons. According to him, however, propositional content is not determined by the way people actually use linguistic expressions, but by the norms governing linguistic practices. These norms cannot be reduced to current linguistic practices, nor are they independent of them: they are "[…] instituted by the practical normative attitudes and assessments of [linguistic] community members" (Brandom, 1994: 55).

Brandom's pragmatist framework is divided into two "intricately interrelated" parts (Brandom, 1994: 133), which he calls "inferential semantics" and "normative pragmatics", respectively. Since according to him, "semantics must answer to pragmatics" (Brandom, 1994: 83), it seems reasonable to first present the pragmatist component of his pragmatist framework, and then subsequently the semantic component. In this paper, however, only his "normative pragmatics" is directly at issue.

2.1. Normative pragmatics

According to Brandom, social practices which make us "rational, indeed, logical, concept-mongering creatures [...]" (1994: vi) are discursive practices in which participants treat "[...] some performances as having the pragmatic significance of *assertions*" (Brandom, 1994: xxi). In other words, discursive practices differ from every other social practice because they include the speech act of asserting. Assertion has a dual function in what Brandom calls "the game of giving and asking for reasons"[7]: it consists of giving reasons and demands reasons. From a normative point of view, participants in discursive practices treat one another as possessing certain normative statuses comprised of commitments and entitlements, and in doing so, they consider one another's linguistic performances as appropriate or inappropriate. Consequently, considering someone's linguistic performances as appropriate amounts to taking her as committed and/or entitled to certain claims.[8]

Consider the paradigmatic case of assertion (see Brandom, 1994: 167−180). On the one hand, when asserting p, we are overtly undertaking a special kind of commitment, that is, a doxastic commitment to p.[9] However, when we assert p, we are treated as committed not only to p, but also to its "committive consequences", meaning those claims that can be derived from it inferentially, together with some suitable collateral premises. According to this view, by asserting p we are (implicitly) committing ourselves to many other claims such as q, r, t and so on, that follow from it inferentially. Obviously, a distinction has to be made between acknowledged commitments, that is, those commitments that the addressee thinks the asserter would acknowledge, and commitments that the addressee thinks the asserter should acknowledge, regardless of whether or not she would endorse them. As Jeremy Wanderer (2008: 43) has pointed out, "[i]n undertaking a commitment, unlike in *acknowledging* a commitment, one is binding oneself beyond that which one currently recognizes as the committive consequences of the undertaking". On the other hand, since, when asserting p, we present ourselves as entitled to assert it, entitlement to p (and to its inferential consequences) is attributed to us *by default*, so long as no one challenges our assertion.[10] In such a case, it is taken for granted that the asserter is able to provide further claims in support of her assertion if she is appropriately challenged. Moreover, when treated by our addressees as entitled to p, we are also acknowledged as being entitled to assert many other claims, and our addressees inherit these entitlements in turn: thus, for example, if no one challenges our assertion "The red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen", we (together with our addressees) are also entitled to assert things like "There is a table in the kitchen", "A colored pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen" and so on. These "other" entitlements are what Brandom calls "permissive consequences" (Brandom, 1994: 168). However, given that any assertion can be questioned in principle, our addressees may also challenge our entitlement to assert p. In such cases, we need to provide other claims that serve as reasons for our initial assertion, undertaking further commitments that we must be capable of justifying, or we must vindicate our entitlement by deferral or by appealing to reliable perceptual reports (Brandom, 1994: 172−174). Inability to vindicate our entitlement to the commitment to p "renders void its authority as an inferential warrant for further commitments" (Brandom, 1994: 179). In other words, our linguistic performance loses its capacity to transmit entitlement, in the sense that no one involved in the conversation is entitled to reassert that p, unless one of them can "vindicate the commitment by demonstrating entitlement to it" (Brandom, 1994: 178).

In order to account for the commitments and entitlements that are recognized as occurring in discursive practices, specifically in the game of giving and asking for reasons, Brandom (1994: 180−186) develops an "artificial idealization" of this game based on David Lewis's scorekeeping model (Lewis, 1979). Both Lewis and Brandom consider conversation as being governed by implicit rules, represented in the form of a score function, which defines the appropriate moves available to each participant at a given stage in the conversation. However, while Lewis's conversational score, which includes things such as "sets of presupposed propositions, boundaries between permissible and impermissible course of actions, or the like" (Lewis, 1979: 345), is unique to any given conversation (like scorekeeping in a baseball match), in Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model, all the participants keep track of one another's deontic scores, meaning their respective commitments and entitlements to those commitments. Brandom's deontic scorekeeping is thus perspectival in nature, in the sense that participants assign scores to one another from multiple perspectives (see Brandom, 1994: 185−186). At any stage in the conversation, participants can alter each other's scores

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[7] Brandom attributes this idea of the logical space of reasons to Wilfrid Sellars (see Sellars, 1956).

[8] As specified by Brandom (1994: 159), "[d]oing what one is committed to do is appropriate in one sense, while doing what one is entitled to do is appropriate in another".

[9] Brandom (1994: 233−243) divides discursive commitments between doxastic and practical ones, that is, commitments to believe something and commitments to act in some way. Here I am concerned only with doxastic commitments.

[10] This is what Brandom (1994: 176−178) calls "the default and challenge structure of entitlement".

by making new moves, specifically by making assertions, by withdrawing assertions previously made, or by challenging those made by other participants. Whenever a new move is made, every participant must keep track of it by adding or subtracting commitments and entitlements of her own and of her interlocutors, thereby altering the scoreboards.

Against this background, the pragmatic significance of a speech act is defined by reference to the changes it produces in the participants' deontic scores. According to Brandom (1994: 183), "[…] the significance of a speech act consists in the way it interacts with the deontic score: how the current score affects the propriety of performing the speech act in question, and how performing that speech act in turn affects the score". In other words, the deontic score determines the propriety of performing a speech act, that is, which speech act one is entitled to make at a certain stage of the conversation, and is altered by the performing of that speech act, which amounts to its normative effects or consequences. Consider again the case of assertion. In keeping score of a speaker's asserting that *p*, a scorekeeper will (a) add *p* to the list of commitments the scorekeeper attributes to the speaker; (b) attribute to the speaker any commitment that is a committive consequence of *p*, together with the other commitments attributed to her; (c) examine whether the speaker's new commitment to *p* precludes any of the entitlements the scorekeeper previously attributed to her; (d) attribute "[...] entitlements to any claims that are [permissive] consequences of commitments to which [the speaker] is already taken to be entitled" (Brandom, 1994: 191); and (e) assess the speaker's entitlement to *p* "[...] by looking at good inferences having [*p*] as a conclusion and premises to which [the speaker] is committed and entitled" (Brandom, 1994: 191). Beyond assertion, the other moves available in the game of giving and asking for reasons are deferrals, disavowals, queries and challenges, which are however "auxiliary" to it (Brandom, 1994: 192): such auxiliary speech acts have the same propositional content expressed by the assertion to which they refer and differ from it in the changes that their performance produces in the deontic scores of the participants in the conversation.

2.2. Inferential semantics

According to Brandom (1994: 167–175), linguistic performances have inferential and hence propositional contents in virtue of their relation with the act of asserting. Indeed, in undertaking, attributing and acknowledging commitments and entitlements to these commitments, participants in the game of giving and asking for reasons implicitly establish normative relations between linguistic performances that can be represented as inferential relations between their contents. As explained above, when someone is committed to a claim she is also committed implicitly to many others that follow inferentially from it. Since one assertion may be the consequence of many others, and can also be a reason for other assertions, it plays the dual role of premise and conclusion in material inferences,[11] and that is what determines its propositional content. Therefore, according to Brandom (1994: 132–140), the propositional content of a sentence consists in its inferential role, and grasping it amounts to mastering the inferential relations involved in the sentence.

Given this inferentialist picture, when we give reasons in support of our prior assertions, or derive other claims from them, we are making explicit their inferential consequences and antecedents, and namely, their inferential roles. According to Brandom (1994: 168–172, 2000: 194–195), there are three different types of inferential relations: commitment-preserving, entitlement-preserving and incompatibility relations:

- commitment-preserving (or committive) inferential relations are such that if *q* follows inferentially from *p* and one is committed to *p*, then she must also treated as being committed to *q* ("If Milan is to the East of Turin [*p*], Turin is to the West of Milan [*q*]"), which can be taken to be "[…] a generalization (to the material case) of *deductive* inferential relations" (Brandom, 2008: 121);
- entitlement-preserving (or permissive) inferential relations are such that if *q* follows inferentially from *p* and one is entitled to *p*, then she must also be treated as entitled to *q*. According to Brandom (1994: 169), this kind of relation is exploited in inductive inferences such as the following: "the claim that this is a dry, well-made match [*p*] can serve as a justification entitling someone to the claim that it will light if struck [*q*]";
- incompatibility relations, which Brandom (2008: 121) characterizes as "counterfactual-supporting, *modally* robust inferential relations", occur between commitments and entitlements to commitments, i.e. one's commitment to *p* precludes her being entitled to *q*. For example, commitment to "The red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen" [*p*] precludes entitlement to "There is no wooden table in the kitchen" [*q*].[12]

As mentioned in Section 2.1, if the pragmatic significance of assertion consists in the effects it has on the participants' deontic scores, these effects depend in turn on the inferential articulation of the commitment expressed by the assertion. On the one hand, then, the conferral of propositional content to utterances depends globally on their pragmatic significance,

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[11] When speaking of "inferences", Brandom is not referring to formal ones, whose validity is independent of their contents, because it rests solely on their conforming to explicitly formulated rules of inference, but to the Sellars-inspired notion of material inference. In Brandom's view, the goodness of material inferences depends on the conceptual contents involved in their premises and conclusions. For example, in inferring "Milan is to the East of Turin" from "Turin is to the West of Milan" it is the content of the "*non-logical vocabulary*" of the two sentences, specifically the concepts of "East" and "West", that makes the inference correct (see Brandom, 1994: 97–104, 2000: 52–55; Sellars, 1953).

[12] For a critical examination of Brandom's three inferential relations and their relationships, see Andrade-Lotero and Dutilh Novaes, 2012.

while on the other, their pragmatic significance is to be taken as locally determined by the inferential articulation of their assertible contents (Brandom, 1994: 133).[13]

3. The assertive family

Brandom's model of discursive practice — "the game of giving and asking for reasons" — is centred on assertion. This is mainly because this model abstracts away from any linguistic performance which in Brandom's view, does not serve to explain the conferral of propositional contents on utterances. In fact, since assertions can play the dual role of premises and conclusions in inferences — "[…] assertions are fundamentally fodder for inferences" (Brandom, 1994: 168) —, they are the most basic move in discursive practices, that is, the move whose presence makes a social practice into a linguistic one.[14] This means that we can make assertions even if we are unable to perform other speech acts. Indeed, according to Brandom (1994: 172), every other type of speech act depends on the act of asserting. In his view, to give an order such as "Open the window", we have to be able to assert that the window is open or closed. In this sense, any speech act has to be connected to an act of asserting in order to have content, so that all speech acts possess pragmatic significance in virtue of their relation with that of asserting. It follows from this that the deontic scorekeeping model should be able to account for the illocutionary force of any kind of speech act. However, Brandom makes no systematic attempt to apply his model to any other speech acts apart from assertion, except for those he regards as speech acts auxiliary to it, and namely (as stated above) deferrals, disavowals, queries and challenges (see Brandom, 1994: 191—193).[15] Without questioning the presumed priority of assertion in linguistic practices (but see Kukla and Lance, 2009), a good way to test Brandom's pragmatist framework is to examine whether his deontic scorekeeping model has the potential to account for the pragmatic significance of a subset of speech acts which are closely connected to the act of asserting, but not necessarily auxiliary to it, namely assertive speech acts (see, for example, Searle, 1979: 12—13; Bach and Harnish, 1979: 42).[16] While making an assertion, that is, uttering a declarative sentence in the plain, non-modalized indicative mood, such as

   (6) The red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen

can be considered as the main way of expressing one's doxastic commitment, so that uttering it is the best and most straightforward way for a speaker to be treated as being committed to its content, in the case of the following utterances

   (7) The red pen is probably on the wooden table in the kitchen
   (8) I suppose that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen
   (9) I am certain that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen
   (10) The red pen might be on the wooden table in the kitchen
   (11) The red pen is, I think, on the wooden table in the kitchen
   (12) I guess that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen

the speaker is committed to the red pen's being on the wooden table in the kitchen to varying degrees and in varying modes. Regardless of the peculiarity of each, all of these utterances are in some way connected to the act of asserting, in the sense that all of them involve commitment to a propositional content but at the same time, all of them differ from one another in various ways. Given their common core, they can be treated as members of what Mitchell Green (2013: 403—405) calls "the assertive family".[17] Some of our examples, such as (8) and (12), can be said to be prototypical members of that family, since the kind of

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[13] Brandom's way of accounting for the relationship between the conferral of propositional content to linguistic expressions and the determination of their pragmatic significance has been criticized for various reasons by, among others, Habermas (2000), Rosen (2001), Shapiro (2004), Loeffler (2005), Fodor and Lepore (2007), Laurier (2008), and MacFarlane (2010).

[14] Some commentators have argued that even if we accept that assertion is the most fundamental linguistic move, it cannot be regarded as a self-sufficient move within the game of giving and asking for reasons. According to them, more speech acts need to be included within it. While Catharina Dutilh Novaes (2009) has proposed including the act of doubting, which expresses our not being sure of having sufficient grounds to assert something, according to Jared Millson (2014) what is lacking is the act of asking questions or querying. Furthermore, Jeremy Wanderer (2010) has argued that, while Brandom considers challenges as speech acts auxiliary to assertion, they have a more important role to play in a complete Brandomian account of discursive practices.

[15] Indeed, according to Brandom (1994: 173), "[a] crucial measure according to which a theory of speech acts ought to be assessed […] is its treatment of what one is doing in producing an assertion".

[16] According to Brandom (1997: 136—138), one's ability to use sentences of the type "X looks F", which can be described as performing a certain kind of assertion-like act, is parasitic on one's mastering the act of asserting, by means of which one can claim that X is F. He does not specify, however, whether in his opinion, this "parasitic" dependence only applies to assertive speech acts performed in uttering sentences of that type, or to any kind of assertive speech act.

[17] As is well known, in John Searle's speech act theory, assertive speech acts are grouped together under the label "assertives" (Searle, 1979: 12—13). While Searle speaks of assertives as a class including well-defined types of assertive speech acts, reference to Green's assertive family seems to be more apt in order to highlight the nuances and complexities displayed by its members, as the examples just presented show. However, I adopt no stance here on Green's account of the relation between assertion and the other members of the assertive family (for a detailed presentation of this, see Green, 2007: 69—75, 2013).

assertive speech act they are designed to accomplish is made explicit ("I suppose...", "I guess..."), while others, such as (7), (9), (10), and (11), can be considered to be non-prototypical members, not corresponding to clear-cut cases of illocutionary act-type.

As to the difference that performances of one or another member of the assertive family may make to a conversation, let us consider the following conversational patterns involving (6)–(12) (see Austin, 1979: 76–85; Williamson, 2000: 251–252). If a speaker utters (7), (10) or (11), an addressee will not challenge these utterances by asking "How do you know?" since no claim to knowledge has been made. Indeed, when they are uttered, an appropriate challenge might be raised by asking "What makes you think so?". The same can be said for prototypical cases of assertive speech acts such as (8), which can be appropriately challenged by asking a question such as "What makes you suppose so?" or (12), which does not carry any epistemic requirement. Instead, when an assertion such as (6) is made, the addressee seems to be entitled to challenge it by asking the speaker "How do you know?". In other words, when making a straightforward assertion, the speaker is liable to be challenged to provide good reasons for vindicating entitlement to it. The speaker's inability to vindicate entitlement to (6), namely, to respond to the challenge adequately, will prompt her to withdraw it. However, when a sentence such as (9) is uttered, a legitimate challenge would be "Why are you certain?", and not "How do you know?". In fact, in this case, the speaker is highlighting her psychological state of confident belief in the content of the sentence "The red pen is on the wooden table", and the addressee will focus on her reasons to feel certain. Similar differences arise in the permissible re-use by other participants of the content conveyed by the utterance of a member of the assertive family. When a speaker utters (7), (10) or (11), her addressee will not thereby be entitled to squarely assert the same content, since the former has displayed to the latter that she herself is not entitled to make an assertion with that content; however, the speaker can be regarded as entitled to make some other linguistic move with that content, such as expressing the content as merely possibly true ("Perhaps…") or together with the indication of its source ("According to Mark…"). In the case of (6), on the other hand, and in most circumstances (albeit on different grounds) also in the case of (9), an addressee can consider herself entitled to reassert the content. Looking at these simple conversational patterns, it becomes apparent that the performance of one or another member of the assertive family makes some difference in a conversation, determining how, and to what extent, the speaker is committed to the content she has conveyed, what challenges can be legitimately raised against her, and whether the addressee is thereby entitled to perform other speech acts with the same content.

Such differences among speech acts have been noticed in speech act theory and described in terms of the "degree of strength" of illocutionary force. The expression "degree of strength" was first used by John Searle (1979). More specifically, in reference to assertive speech acts, Searle claimed that their illocutionary point is "[…] to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition" (Searle, 1979: 12).[18] The difference between assertive speech acts such as assuring and suggesting, for example, is described by Searle and Vanderveken (1985:182–192) as a difference in the degree of strength in presenting the assertive illocutionary point. While Searle and Vanderveken (1985) have used this notion in their analysis of English illocutionary verbs, which name prototypical members of one or another class of illocutionary acts,[19] other authors, such as Janet Holmes (1984), have focused their analyses on how the presence of specific linguistic devices may modify the illocutionary force of any kind of utterance, thereby weakening or strengthening it. Indeed, as often happens in conversation, a speaker can indicate and adjust the force of the illocutionary act she is performing by using linguistic devices such as force indicators, epistemic modal operators,[20] and different kinds of mitigators or boosters (for these, see Holmes, 1984; Fraser, 1996; Caffi, 1999, 2013). In our examples, while (8) and (12) contain the most specific type of force indicator and namely, a performative verb, which makes explicit what kind of speech act their utterance is designed to accomplish, examples (7) and (10) contain two different kinds of epistemic modal operators, respectively an adverb ("probably") and a modal verb ("might"). Moving on to (9) and (11), the linguistic indicators "I am certain..." and "I think" act as a booster and a mitigator, respectively.

Given these differences among speech acts of the assertive family, already described in terms of differences in the strength of their illocutionary forces, it might be interesting to examine whether Brandom's scorekeeping model has the resources to account for them, thereby admitting of degrees within the pragmatic significance of utterances such as (7)–(12).

4. Testing Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model: the case of the assertive family

We can now put Brandom's pragmatist framework into practice and see if it can account for the speech acts which belong to the assertive family but are not straightforward assertions, and the effects of those speech acts. As said above, since

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[18] More generally, in Searle and Vanderveken's framework of illocutionary logic, any illocutionary force can be identified as the combination of the values attributed to the following seven parameters: (i) the speech act's illocutionary point, (ii) the degree of strength of its illocutionary point, (iii) its mode of achievement, (iv) its propositional content conditions, (v) its preparatory conditions, (vi) its sincerity conditions, (vii) the degree of strength of its sincerity conditions (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985: 12–20).

[19] An attempt to apply Searle and Vanderveken's framework of illocutionary logic to cases of mitigation has been made by Verena Thaler (2012).

[20] According to a received view in pragmatics, epistemic modal operators such as modal verbs, adverbs and discourse markers, are not considered to be part of the propositional content of the sentence in which they appear. In this sense, they are regarded as not affecting its truth conditions, but as expressing the speaker's attitude towards the propositional content embedded in the sentence (see, e.g., Halliday, 1970; Palmer, 1986; Fraser, 1996). This position conflicts with semantic treatments of modality, which focus instead upon how epistemic modal operators contribute to the propositional content of the sentences in which they appear, and so to the truth conditions of these sentences (see, e.g., Kratzer, 1991; Papafragou, 2006; MacFarlane, 2014).

Brandom believes his deontic scorekeeping model is able to account for the basic dynamics internal to any discursive practice,[21] testing its applicability to a subset of linguistic performances intimately related to the act of asserting seems a legitimate challenge to his philosophical project. In particular, considering also the conversational patterns considered above, I shall investigate whether Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model really is able to explain what speakers may be doing when they utter sentences such as (7)–(12).

Before tackling this question, we must first remind ourselves that, in introducing the deontic scorekeeping model, Brandom is assuming that there is a standard normative structure in conversation and that it is within this structure that linguistic performances have normative effects, involving addition or subtraction of commitments and/or entitlements to the participants' deontic scoreboards. As pointed out in Section 2.1, the ways in which deontic scoreboards are updated depend on the normative relations between linguistic performances that participants recognize as holding in discursive practices. These normative relations are represented as three inferential relations: commitment-preserving, entitlement-preserving and incompatibility relations. Every linguistic performance, then, is embedded in a network of normative relations that determines its inferential significance. In Brandom's pragmatist framework, as has been clearly explained by Daniel Laurier (2008: 130), "a given performance counts as an assertion in virtue of the fact that its inferential significance exhibits a certain characteristic pattern, and it counts as having a given propositional content in virtue of its specific inferential relations to other possible assertions". On the side of inferential semantics, propositional contents are conferred to linguistic expressions in virtue of their being assertible, that is, in virtue of their potential of being expressed in the form of a (freestanding) declarative sentence that "[…] can play the role of premise and conclusion in *inferences*" (Brandom, 1994: 335). On the side of normative pragmatics, given the characteristic inferential pattern of the speech act the speaker is performing, its pragmatic significance (that is, the significance that the performing of it has for deontic scorekeeping in terms of commitments and entitlements) is determined by associating its assertible content with this pattern.

Given these main features of Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model, let us now see how useful it is in accounting for the pragmatic significance of speech acts of the assertive family such as those performed in sentences (7)–(12). Although they all involve commitment to the same propositional content — that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen — (in Brandomian terms, their "assertible content"), as we have seen in Section 3, these assertive speech acts differ from the assertion performed in uttering (6) ("The red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen") in the degrees and modes of this commitment, as well as in the speaker's entitlement and in the entitlement of the addressee to further speech acts. If the determination of the pragmatic significance of a speech act depends on how its assertible content combines with the speech act's characteristic inferential pattern, then how the pragmatic significance of assertive speech acts like those performed in the utterance of sentences (7)–(12) differs from that of the corresponding assertion can only be explained in terms of inferential relations (and namely commitment-preserving, entitlement-preserving and incompatibility relations), since there is no difference in their "assertible" content. However, in uttering a sentence such as (7)–(8) or (10)–(12) (leaving aside (9) for now), the speaker is not fully committing herself to its assertible content, so it is unclear what committive consequences her speech act might have (if any). The only thing we can say about these possible committive consequences is that they do not include (6).[22] Indeed, following a line of reasoning proposed in Brandom (2000: 198–200), it can be shown that a downgraded sentence such as (11) for example, bears an incompatibility relation to (6). This can be made explicit by embedding it in the following conditional

(13) If I think that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen, then the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen.

As Brandom might point out, the inference made explicit by (13) is not one that can be accepted as correct. Indeed, there are sentences, such as "I do not exist" or "Rational beings never evolved" (these examples are borrowed from Brandom, 2000: 199), that are incompatible with the antecedent of the conditional, but are compatible with the consequent. This means that (6) and (11) are not "incompatibility-equivalent" because there is something that is not incompatible with (6) (e.g., "I do not exist" and "Rational beings never evolved") but is incompatible with (11).

Similarly, if an utterance expresses the speaker's lack of full entitlement to the content conveyed, it is not clear how any entitlement to its content could be inherited by the addressee. Indeed, a speaker who utters a sentence such as (7), (8) or (10)–(12) does not need to be entitled to assert the content of the (freestanding) declarative sentence "The red pen is on the wooden table", and fails to give license to her addressees to reassert its content.

As to sentences containing boosters, such as (9), it is to be noted that in Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model too, they are not commitment-preserving with respect to the corresponding assertion (in the case of (9), the assertion of (6)). Indeed,

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[21] According to Brandom (1994: 158), although the game of giving and asking for reasons is a simplified and schematic model of our discursive practices, "it should nonetheless be recognizable as a version of what we do".

[22] This seems to be confirmed by what Brandom holds in Part III of his commentary to Sellars's *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (see Brandom, 1997: 134–147). Here, in discussing Sellars's account of observational knowledge, Brandom examines the differences between "looks" talk, amounting to the utterance of sentences of the form "*X* looks *F*", and straightforward assertions ("*X* is *F*"). In particular, he points out that in asserting something like "The pen is red" one undertakes a propositionally contentful commitment, that is, one commits oneself to the pen's being red, while in asserting "The pen looks red" one is not undertaking a commitment, but holding back from making one. Indeed, according to Brandom (1997: 142), in the second case one "[…] is merely evincing a disposition to do something that for other reasons (e.g. suspicion that the circumstances of observation lead to systematic error) he is unwilling to do — namely, endorse a claim". My thanks to a referee for suggesting this reference.

(14) If I am certain that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen, then the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen

expresses an inferential relation that is not correct as to commitment preservation: also in this case, sentences such as "I do not exist" or "Rational beings never evolved" are incompatible with the antecedent of the conditional, but are compatible with the consequent. Insofar as the focus of Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model is on the inferential relations of consequence and incompatibility between sentences, this example shows that there would seem to be no room for modes of commitment that are not strictly speaking assertional. While according to this model, the normative effects of the utterance of (9) are accounted for in terms of relations of incompatibility, in actual conversation an addressee can assume to be entitled to reassert its content on good grounds, even if not on the grounds of its content being asserted.

Indeed, if we adopt a straightforward application of Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model, given one and the same assertible content, there would seem to be no room for degrees between the two extremes (namely, full commitment and entitlement to it and null commitment and entitlement to it): the relevant inferential relations either hold or they do not. Moreover, the only mode of commitment or entitlement that Brandom's model appears to take into consideration, and therefore the only kind of normative effects his normative pragmatics can account for are those connected with inferential relations such as commitment-preserving, entitlement-preserving and incompatibility relation: however, these do not seem to satisfy the descriptive needs required as regards the normative effects of speech acts in the assertive family. While Brandom (1994: 191–193) sketchily describes the inferential pattern and normative effects of a number of speech acts that are auxiliary to assertion, such as deferrals, disavowals, queries and challenges, no analogous description of speech acts belonging to the assertive family (not auxiliary, but alternative to assertion, albeit very close to it) appears to be derivable from his normative pragmatics. As seen in Section 3, however, it is a fact that we make regular use of linguistic devices such as force indicators, epistemic modal operators, and different kinds of mitigators or boosters, whose presence makes a great deal of graded difference to the normative effects of our utterances. Just as the making of an assertion alters the normative statuses of the participants in a conversation, so too does the uttering of any other member of the assertive family have its own specific effects on those statuses. If we are interested, then, in accounting for what speakers may be doing when they perform other assertive speech acts besides assertion, Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model is not much use: his analysis of pragmatic significance is simply insufficient to give an exhaustive account of the effects of such speech acts.

Against this argument, one might contend that after all, Brandom does have the resources to account for the differences between straightforward assertions and other members of the assertive family. Indeed, insofar as we assume that the crucial commitment undertaken in making an assertion is the commitment to justify it when challenged appropriately, one may account for these differences in terms of the legitimate response expected of one when defending one or another assertive speech act. Thus, if one asserts (6), one commits oneself to showing one's entitlement to the commitment to the red pen's being on the wooden table in the kitchen, while if one asserts something like (10), one commits oneself to showing one's entitlement to the commitment to the red pen's possibly being on the wooden table in the kitchen. It might therefore be argued that showing one's entitlement to the commitment to the red pen's being on the wooden table in the kitchen involves showing one's entitlement to the commitment to the red pen's possibly being on the wooden table in the kitchen, plus something more: if so, in order to account for the difference between (6) and (10), it would be enough to compare what it takes to provide the respective justifications.[23] Although suggestive, this argument is not conclusive. Firstly, it has a limited scope of application, because it applies only to members of the assertive family such as (7) and (10), which do not include performative verbs (such as guess and suppose). Indeed, only the utterance of these sentences could be taken as acting as an (not straightforward) assertion. Secondly, if we follow Brandom's reasoning, in uttering a sentence such as (7) or (10) one expresses one's lack of (assertive) commitment to the red pen's being on the wooden table in the kitchen (as seen above): in so doing, one is not undertaking a commitment, but holding back from making one (see also footnote 22). So if one holds (in line with Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model) that in asserting (10) a speaker is committing herself to showing her entitlement to the commitment to the red pen's possibly being on the wooden table in the kitchen, one should explain what the nature of this commitment is and how conversational participants should update their deontic scoreboards when (10) is asserted. All that Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model suggests is that uttering (10) (and as seen above, this can be generalized to other kinds of assertive speech act) rules out entitlement to the commitment that would be undertaken by asserting (6), and nothing more. Thirdly, according to Brandom, asserting (6) commits the speaker not only to defending that commitment, but also to its committive consequences: but what exactly are the committive consequences of the commitment undertaken when asserting a sentence such as (7) or (10)? Here the burden of the proof must rest on Brandom and his supporters. More generally, not all the performances of the members of the assertive family can be described simply in reference to the justification one is expected to provide in defending them from a legitimate challenge. When (9) or (11) are uttered, for example, what is foregrounded is not the speaker's entitlement to the commitment to the red pen's being on the wooden table in the kitchen, but her involvement in the belief that the red pen is there. Accordingly, there are other aspects characterizing the performance of the members of the assertive family, such as one's involvement in the belief expressed, that need to be taken into account when accounting for their differences.

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[23] My thanks are due to a referee for pressing me on this point.

5. Variations of strength in assertive force

A more promising way of accounting for speech acts of the assertive family such as those performed by uttering sentences (7)–(12), and particularly for the degrees and modes of the commitment to their content that their speakers undertake, is offered by J.L. Austin's way of conceiving of illocutionary acts and their effects. Indeed, there are interesting similarities between the way Brandom conceives of the normative effects due to the performance of a certain speech act and Austin's focus on the conventionality of the effects of illocutionary acts (Austin, 1975: 26–28, 116–118; Sbisà, 2007), which can be described in "deontic" (Sbisà, 1984) or "normative" terms (Witek, 2013, 2015).[24] Accordingly, if we now try using a framework based on Austin's conception of illocutionary force with which to tackle the same problem approached till now using Brandom's normative pragmatics (the one regarding the deontic or normative dimension of assertive speech acts other than assertion), we may find a viable solution to it.

According to this Austin-based conception of illocutionary force, in order for a speaker to perform a certain illocutionary act, she has to execute a procedure fixed by socially accepted norms and designed to produce a conventional effect.[25] More specifically, this procedure, which can be conceived as a script or a pattern that is repeatable and recognizable from one occasion to another (Witek, 2015; Sbisà, forthcoming), establishes:

(i) the features of the initial state to which the act applies; for example, the procedure for asserting requires the speaker's being in an appropriate epistemic position (involving knowledge);

(ii) the steps to be carried out in order to be recognized as executing that act, which amount to using a linguistic form that makes it recognizable (in the case of assertion, the use of the plain indicative mood and of a descriptive lexicon);

(iii) the possession of an appropriate psychological state, which in the case of assertion, is the speaker's belief that the content asserted is true.

When at least (i) and (ii) occur, the execution of the procedure leads to the production of its conventional effect, which constitutes the core illocutionary effect (Sbisà, 2007: 463–466, 2017).[26] This effect is not the only effect pertaining to the illocutionary act: Austin suggests other two effects needed for a speech act to be performed successfully: (A) the speaker has to secure her audience's uptake and (B) the procedure may also invite a certain kind of subsequent behavior (Austin, 1975: 116–118; see Sbisà, 2007: 463–464, 2009). In particular, bringing about the conventional effect of any illocutionary act presupposes (A), namely that the speaker should carry out the procedure for performing that illocutionary act correctly and completely enough to be understood as executing it (see Sbisà, 2009). Indeed, if speaker and hearer disagree on the act being performed, it cannot obtain its conventional effect: the core illocutionary effect then comes into being by virtue of inter-subjective (and therefore social) agreement, which may in turn be explicit or (as most often happens) tacit (Sbisà, 2007, 2009). For example, in uttering a sentence such as (6), unless special conditions obtain, a speaker will be expected to be in the appropriate epistemic position to successfully make an assertion by means of it, so that the characteristic effect of assertion will take place, because she has used a linguistic form that makes the act she purports to perform recognizable. As in the case of Brandom's analysis, the bringing about of the assertion's illocutionary effect can be described in terms of commitments and entitlements. On the one hand, in making an assertion a speaker commits herself to the truth of the asserted content: this means that, unless non-default conditions obtain, she is acknowledged to have the right or be entitled to make that assertion: in other words, she is acknowledged as knowing how things are with respect to the assertion's topic. At the same time, a successful assertion authorizes the hearer to consider herself entitled to reassert it. In this sense, assertion connects two interlocutors, a speaker and a hearer, binding them to certain courses of action. Clearly, the expectations associated with carrying out the procedure for asserting differ from the expectations involved in the procedure for successfully performing other members of the assertive family (such as conjectures or suppositions).

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[24] I will henceforth use the expression "deontic effects" to refer to the conventional effects of illocutionary acts.

[25] On the question of how social norms regulate occurrences of speech act types in a linguistic community, see Fricker, 2017.

[26] Kukla and Lance's speech act theory, which modifies and elaborates Brandom's normative pragmatics with the aim of extending it to speech acts other than assertion, has things in common with the Austin-based conception of illocutionary force illustrated here. In fact, in their theory, speech acts are identified both by their conditions of appropriateness and by their normative outcomes, which can be either "agent-neutral" or "agent-relative" (see Kukla and Lance, 2009: 16–18). In the case of what Kukla and Lance call "declaratives", amounting to straightforward assertions, both the conditions of appropriateness and the normative outcomes are "agent-neutral": the conditions of appropriateness are so because a declarative is regarded as "[…] a speech act that finds grounding in the world in a way that is not specific to who is asserting", whereas their outcomes are agent-neutral because any declarative "seeks to impute the entitlement to assert this claim to the discursive community in general, and demands that others allow it to constrain their inferences and beliefs regardless of their personal normative positions" (Kukla and Lance, 2009: 18–19). In contrast to declaratives, Kukla and Lance propose a class termed "observatives" (such as "Lo, a pig"!), which, while being assertives, have "agent-relative" conditions of appropriateness (meaning that not everybody is entitled to make them) and "agent-neutral" normative outcomes, since they entitle anyone to make use of their content (Kukla and Lance, 2009: 45–53). If we are to rely only on these two criteria, however, every assertive speech act that is not a straightforward assertion would have to be classified as an observative, since (using Kukla and Lance's own terminology) it can be described as having "agent-relative" conditions of appropriateness, but "agent-neutral" outcomes (think, for example, of (8), (9) and (11)). Therefore, although Kukla and Lance's speech act theory does highlight what it is that distinguishes straightforward assertions from any other kind of assertive speech act, it fails to provide the tools needed to account for differences among those assertive speech acts that are not straightforward assertions.

While Searle's speech act theory (Searle, 1969: 47) conceives of the core illocutionary effect as bringing about the addressee's recognition that the speaker intends to perform a certain illocutionary act roughly corresponding to (A), in the Austin-based conception, the addressee's uptake does not exhaust the effects of the illocutionary act, but is instead a condition for its deontic effects to take place. In Searle's speech act theory, then, the production of deontic effects (such as attributing or canceling commitments and entitlements) is not so central to his analysis of speech acts as it is in Austin and Brandom. As seen in Section 4, however, while Brandom considers deontic effects only insofar as they can be accounted for in terms of inferential relations, that is, commitment-preserving, entitlement-preserving and incompatibility relations, in the Austin-based conception of illocutionary force, deontic effects are seen as being involved in a wide range of communicative and relational activities, such as the imposition of obligations (be they legal or moral) or freedom from them, the assignment (or cancellation) of rights, the acknowledgement of capacities or authorities, the exertion of influence, the dissemination of knowledge (or supposed knowledge), the ratification or approbation of desires, the raising of legitimate expectations, and so on. Moreover, the initial conditions for executing a procedure often involve the speaker or addressee possessing specific deontic states. If, as suggested above, we describe the force of the members of the assertive family in terms of socially accepted procedures, differences in the degree and mode of commitment can be explained in terms of variations in one or more aspects of the assertive speech act procedure (see Sbisà, 2001) which produce differences in the overall strength of the assertive illocutionary force. More specifically, these variations correspond to differences (a) in the initial state of the procedure, that is, one's entitlement can be downgraded or upgraded by appealing to one's competence, credibility, or the kind of evidence one has; (b) in the degree and mode of commitment to the propositional content conveyed (the core illocutionary effect of the procedure); and/or (c) in the involvement in the belief expressed (which can be foregrounded or backgrounded) (see Labinaz and Sbisà, 2014: 41–42). For example, an assertive speech act downgraded as to the speaker's entitlement will act as a conjecture or a guess, while one that is downgraded as to commitment will act as a supposition or a hypothesis. When involvement in the belief expressed is emphasized, on the other hand, the assertive speech act may be taken as an expression of opinion or conviction. None of the illocutionary forces of the assertive speech acts cited above corresponds to that of a straightforward assertion because they do not satisfy (at least) one of the conditions imposed by its illocutionary procedure.

Consider now how the performance of speech acts of the assertive family such as those performed in sentences (7)–(12) can be accounted for in terms of these variations.[27] As we shall see, what is at issue here is which aspects of the assertive speech act procedure are highlighted or backgrounded when these sentences are uttered. Consider

(7) The red pen is probably on the wooden table in the kitchen

and

(10) The red pen might be on the wooden table in the kitchen,

which both include an epistemic modal operator. In uttering both (7) and (10), the speaker highlights a possibility she takes to be open as to where the red pen is, presenting herself as committed (to a certain degree) to the truth of their content ("the red pen is on the wooden table"), despite being based on limited evidence. When (10) is uttered, the speaker makes manifest that she does not fully commit herself to the truth of its content, since her epistemic position is not strong enough to make an assertion with that content. In the case of (7), the speaker presents herself as having some epistemic justification for believing true the content of the utterance, but not as being in a position to claim knowledge of it, meaning that the speaker's commitment to that content is correspondingly downgraded. Examples (7) and (10) differ in turn from

(8) I suppose that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen,

the utterance of which is presented as a supposition. Here, the speaker presents herself as not being fully committed to the content or having any specific kind of evidence for it, but as deeming it worth considering what the consequences would be if its content were true.[28]

(12) I guess that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen

differs from the previous examples because, when uttering it, the speaker presents herself as not possessing any epistemic justification for the content of the utterance (or at most an extremely weak one) but as committing herself nevertheless to the truth of that content. If we take into account

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[27] For an application of this Austinian framework to examples of assertive speech acts collected from online newspapers, scientific journal and websites, see Labinaz and Sbisà, 2014.

[28] The analysis of (8) is inspired by Bach and Harnish's treatment of the group of constative verbs, such as suppose, hypothesize, postulate and the like, which they put together under the label "suppositives" (Bach and Harnish, 1979: 44, 46).

(9) I am certain that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen

and

(11) The red pen is, I think, on the wooden table in the kitchen,

we move on to consider another aspect of the assertive speech act procedure, which is the speaker's involvement in the belief expressed. As to

(9) I am certain that the red pen is on the wooden table in the kitchen,

the speaker's psychological state of confident belief is foregrounded, no matter what kind or degree of epistemic entitlement she actually possesses. In this case, the aspect of the procedure that is highlighted is the speaker's involvement, which also indirectly reinforces her commitment to the content of the utterance. Moving on to (11), the speaker's commitment appears to be relativized to her subjective perspective, and is to this extent displayed as downgraded.

6. Discussion of some examples of actual language use

My aim in this section is to show that the Austin-based conception of illocutionary force illustrated in the previous section can be used to account not only for constructed examples such as (6)–(12), but also for instances of actual language use like those presented in Section 1. Although I would not go so far as to claim that the discussion of these instances provides incontrovertible evidence in support of the Austin-based conception of illocutionary force, I do hope to show that such a conception does a better job of accounting for our ordinary ways of attenuating, fine-tuning or disowning assertive commitments than Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model — and the reason is that the former has a descriptive potential that the latter lacks.

The examples I intend to discuss are drawn from a selection of UK newspapers articles. In particular, my focus is on interviews and opinion pieces (including columns and editorials): while cases of straightforward assertions are more common in news articles, interviewees, editorialists and opinionists usually rely on different kinds of assertive speech acts in order to do things like downgrade or reinforce their commitments to what they are saying and/or their entitlements to those commitments, or relativize what they are saying to their own perspectives. I have therefore tried to single out examples of actual language use which can be described as performing assertive speech acts that are not straightforward assertions, so as to test the explanatory power of the Austin-based conception of illocutionary force and at the same time show how limited Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model is when applied to them.

The first example comes from an article about Germany's proposal for a soft Brexit, which quotes Sigmar Gabriel (the German Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time) as saying

(1) *Perhaps* there is now a chance to achieve a so-called soft Brexit. (TIM_BREX)

In (1), Sigmar Gabriel is very cautious: he merely suggests that there may be a possibility to achieve a soft Brexit (although the use of "now" indicates that it is a possibility that was previously unavailable). Gabriel is likely to have some evidence for believing that this possibility exists (after all, as German Minister for Foreign Affairs, he has been involved in the Brexit negotiations), but he does not make any claim to knowledge, and actually expresses some uncertainty by using "perhaps" and implies that he is in no position to make an assertion about the matter. He thus downgrades his commitment: in so doing, he also lowers the cost of the speech act performed in uttering (1), thereby making it more easily defensible. For example, any journalist interested in the kind of evidence Gabriel has in support of his claim would be entitled to ask him "What makes you think so?", but would not be entitled to ask more demanding questions. Indeed, the expectations raised by the utterance of (1) differ significantly from those associated with the utterance of a sentence such as "There is now a chance to achieve a so-called soft Brexit", both in terms of what challenges can be legitimately raised against them, and of what other speech acts the addressees (think of a journalist reporting on this news, for example) are thereby entitled to perform. As seen in Section 5, according to the Austin-based conception of illocutionary force, these differences depend on variations in the assertive speech act procedure associated with the utterance being made: specifically, what we have here is a variation both in the speaker's entitlement (corresponding to the initial state of the procedure) and in his commitment (which amounts to the core illocutionary effect of the procedure): that is, Gabriel downgrades his commitment to there being a chance to achieve a soft Brexit, undertaking a weakened conversational obligation which only requires a downgraded level of entitlement. As to the third aspect that can vary in the assertive speech act procedure, which is the speaker's involvement in the belief expressed, this appears to be slightly downgraded by the attitude of uncertainty towards that belief implied by the use of "perhaps". Turning now to Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model and applying it to (1), all that can be said is that in uttering (1) Gabriel is expressing his lack of commitment. Indeed, according to Brandom's model, Gabriel is not actually undertaking a commitment here, but holding back from making one. But should we want to understand what Gabriel is doing in uttering (1) and what effects his utterance may have on his addressees, this is clearly insufficient.

As to sentences with boosters, I have chosen the following utterance drawn from an opinion piece against the current UK government by Denis MacShane, who was UK Minister for Europe from 2002 to 2005.

(2) Our Government has *absolutely* no idea how many EU citizens live in the UK. (IND_GOV)

Here, in using "absolutely" MacShane is not focusing on his psychological state of confident belief that the current UK government has no idea how many EU citizens live in the UK (in that case, he would have used an expression such as "I feel certain" or "I firmly believe"), but is implying that he knows that it is precisely so. (2) is a risky statement, since it can be easily questioned: indeed, showing that the UK government has even the slightest idea how many EU citizens live in the UK would be enough to make what he says false. In making such a risky statement, he implies that the evidence available to him is so conclusive that there can be no other truth to the matter. Variations in the aspects of the assertive speech act procedure here concern both the speaker's commitment, which is reinforced by the use of "absolutely", and his entitlement, which is expected to be very high. Instead, the speaker's involvement in the belief expressed is not made salient. As to the applicability of Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model to this case, although the utterance of (2) can be taken as acting as a straightforward assertion, it is unclear how his model is able to account for the reinforcing effect due to the use of "absolutely" on the overall strength of its illocutionary force.

Moving on now to a prototypical case of assertive speech act, let's consider this example from an article by Robert Fisk, the Middle East correspondent of *The Independent*

(3) Well, *I guess* the Saudis are killing a lot of [Yemenis] right now. (IND_GUAN)

Here, the illocutionary force of (3) is made explicit due to the presence of the performative verb "to guess" in the first person singular of the present indicative active, and so we can easily understand what kind of assertive speech act (3) is designed to accomplish. More specifically, Robert Fisk does not make it clear whether he has evidence for the claim made, but since he uses the verb "to guess" we can suppose that he has no evidence, or perhaps what he has is extremely weak (such as not completely reliable second-hand information): nonetheless, in uttering it he is committing himself to the truth of what he is saying, which is that the Saudis are killing a lot of Yemenis right now. In fact, guesses are associated with a well-defined speech act procedure, that of guessing, which has specific expectations and effects.[29] In particular, the initial state to which the act applies does not require the speaker to have a definite epistemic position: there is no specific requirement on this. In making a guess, however, the speaker presents himself as committed to the truth of what he is saying, and this is what distinguishes guesses from mere expressions of opinion.

Let us now move straight to expressions of opinion and conviction and consider my last two examples

(4) *In my view*, on the facts as reported, a limited use of force, necessary to address the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government, and proportionate to the humanitarian objective of forestalling any further use of chemical weapons, would be lawful under international law. (GUARD_VIEW)

(5) I *firmly believe* that across Australia an even broader acceptance for marriage equality will come sooner than we think. (GUARD_MAK)

(4) is taken from an opinion piece by Joshua Rozenberg, who is a British legal commentator and journalist. Here, with the use of "in my view" he presents himself as giving his opinion about the lawfulness of using force against Syria. In issuing this opinion, he also specifies the conditions in which it would hold (namely, that the facts have to be "as reported" and the use of force has to be (i) "necessary to address the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government", and (ii) "proportionate" to a specific humanitarian objective), thus showing his expertise on the matter in hand. However, by using "in my view", Rozenberg is also stressing the potentially controversial character of the judgment issued, implying that there may be more than one expert view on the issue. Therefore, Rozenberg does not present his judgment as final, but as relativized to his own expert perspective. In the case of (5), Naaman Zhou, who is a reporter for the Australian edition of *The Guardian*, is highlighting his involvement in the belief expressed by explicitly declaring his psychological state of confident belief, emphasized by the use of "firmly". No matter what kind or degree of epistemic entitlement he actually possesses (he might also have evidence in support of what he is saying), this is not made salient by his utterance: on the contrary, his very use of "believe" implies that he is not making a claim to knowledge. Indeed, the explicit expression of belief ("I […] *believe* that") works as a mitigation of the assertive force of the utterance, specifically as to the speaker's epistemic entitlement, while "firmly" indicates the high degree of intensity of this belief, the expression of which is therefore upgraded. So (5) can be described as performing an expression of conviction which licenses the addressee to assign to Zhou a belief with a high degree of intensity. Note that the performance of this act is quite different from a straightforward assertion, and requires weaker epistemic entitlement. Indeed, a legitimate challenge to the

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[29] Note that although the utterance of a sentence such as (3) might be taken as ironic, an ironic reading would exploit the specific expectations and effects associated with the speech act procedure for guessing.

utterance of (5) would be "Why do you firmly believe this is the case?" or "What makes you firmly believe this is the case?", but no one would challenge it by asking Zhou how he knows that it is so. Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model has no resources to account for the relativizing and downgrading effects of expressions such as "in my view" and "firmly believe": according to his model, there is no room for these effects, since the pragmatic significance of any linguistic performance can only be described in terms of inferential relations of consequence and incompatibility between sentences.

7. Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have examined whether Brandom's deontic scorekeeping model has the resources to account for the performance of members of the assertive family that are not straightforward assertions, and their effects. I have tried to show that in speech act theory, differences among speech acts of the assertive family have been described in terms of differences in the strength of their illocutionary forces, whereas Brandom's scorekeeping model seems to lack the resources to account for them, since it cannot admit of degrees within the analysis of the pragmatic significance of assertive speech acts, such as those performed in the utterance of (1)—(12). As argued in Section 5, a more promising route opens up if we turn to an Austin-based conception of illocutionary force, which not only has in common with Brandom's analysis the deontic or normative nature of illocutionary effects, but also seems to be able to account for the bringing about of varying degrees and modes of commitment or entitlement in the case of assertive speech acts other than straightforward assertion, in terms of those variations in one or more aspects of the assertive speech act procedure that produce differences in the overall strength of the assertive illocutionary force.

Appendix. Example Sources

Acronym	Title of the newspaper article (and Author)	Source
GUARD_MAK	Making the no vote about migrants ignores a fundamental thing (Naaman Zhou)	https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/20/making-the-no-vote-about-migrants-ignores-a-fundamental-thing (last visited: 26/01/2017)
GUARD_VIEW	Syria intervention: it may not be wise, but using force may be lawful (Joshua Rozenberg)	https://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/aug/28/syria-intervention-force-lawful (last visited: 26/01/2017)
IND_GOV	Our Government has absolutely no idea how many EU citizens live in the UK − but it's a different story for British expats (Denis MacShane)	http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/eu-citizens-house-of-lords-theresa-may-angela-merkel-a7609126.html (last visited: 26/01/2017)
IND_GUAN	Guantanamo is being emptied - but its legacy of making the guilty innocent and the innocent guilty will continue (Robert Fisk)	http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/guantanamo-inmates-are-being-transferred-but-its-legacy-of-making-the-guilty-innocent-and-the-a6962166.html (last visited: 26/01/2017)
TIM_BREX	Germany proposes soft Brexit deal to keep Theresa May in Downing Street (Bruno Waterfield)	https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/germany-proposes-soft-brexit-deal-to-keep-theresa-may-in-downing-street-g0wl9pv8l (last visited: 26/01/2017)

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