

Conversational Norms and Racial Injustice

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Suppose that Juana, a Latina, is conversing with William, a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant man, about the history of US intervention in Latin America. During the course of the conversation, Juana makes true claims regarding these interventions. But as the conversation continues, Juana (i) provides more information than she should and (ii) she unclearly explains the relation between this US history of intervention and, say, the current surge of Central American asylees. As a result, William perceives Juana as less credible than he initially did at the conversation's outset and as a result he disbelieves the true claims made by Juana.

Suppose that Juana provided more information than she should have and that she unclearly conveyed her claims, as the conversation progressed, *because* she was self-monitoring *not only the content* of what she said, but also the *style* in which she *expressed* what she said (Bayrums Garcia, 2019). Juana tends to self-monitor how she expresses her claims because she knows that if she employs an expression style or way of speaking that is associated with her identity qua Latina, then her audience likely will take her as less credible than she actually is.

Juana at first acts in conformity with conversational norms such that William believes her true claims (Grice, 1989). Then, during the same conversation she does not act in accordance with conversational norms. This mal-accordance with the conversational norms is explained by the extra cognitive effort Juana must expend self-monitoring. She knows that if uses expression styles associated with Latinas, then she likely will be taken as less credible than she is. I will call this phenomenon racial-conversational discounting.

I defend the claim that (C1) racial prejudice can make non-dominant racial group speakers more likely to violate Grice's conversational maxims. I argue that a consequence of this is that (C2) even if a hearer believes a non-dominant speaker during the initial stages of a conversation, the hearer will likely disbelieve these initial claims by the conversation's end. I assume that I render (C1) and (C2) plausible, then it should be plausible that this phenomenon, racial-conversational discounting, obtains.

These two arguments contribute to and expand on the current analyses of how social injustice can affect whether (i) a speaker successfully gets off a speech act and (ii) a speaker can convey information to hearers (Alcoff, 1999; Dotson, 2011; Fricker, 2007; Hookway, 2010; Kukla, 2014; Langton, 1993; Mills, 2007; Peet, 2017). In the first argument, I expand on the analyses of how social injustice affects whether speakers can get off speech acts. This argument's contribution to the

literature is that that non-dominant speakers are likely to expend more cognitive effort than dominant-group speakers to perform the same, or very similar, speech acts. I widen the target of analysis in comparison to the epistemology literature because it focuses on the moment a speaker attempts to convey information to a hearer. I broaden the target of analysis because I focus on the series of information conveyance attempts that constitute a conversation.

References

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