

## **Assertion, Pattern Recognition and Epistemic Vigilance**

This paper addresses the question of how assertion actually supports reliable information transmission. On the one hand, assertion most certainly lies at the core of those social processes which regard the circulation of information and knowledge. On the other, the exchange and sharing of information and knowledge is a highly complex affair, which requires (at the very least) trust and vigilance. More specifically, as Dan Sperber and colleagues have suggested recently (2010), being able to trust and rely upon our interlocutors in the course of communication depends on “a suite of cognitive mechanisms for epistemic vigilance”.

My aim here is to explore the role that assertion may play in relation to the monitoring activity carried out by these “epistemic vigilance mechanisms”, examining the relationship between the requirements posed by those mechanisms and the felicity conditions proper to assertion. To do so, I shall be using an Austin-based speech-act theoretical framework (Austin 1975; Sbisà in press), according to which every type of illocutionary act is associated with a socially accepted procedure, which can be conceived as a script or a pattern comprising a certain kind of linguistic utterance, and designed to produce its characteristic conventional effect (Sbisà 2009). In the case of assertion, this effect can be described as consisting of the production and transfer of knowledge. As I will try to show, while on the one hand, invoking the procedure for asserting really is for a speaker an effective, inexpensive way to overcome the monitoring activity carried out by the epistemic vigilance mechanisms of her audience, at the same time, this procedure must be handled with great care. Indeed, contrary to appearances, assertion is costly to perform (Green 2009), due to the risk of the speaker’s losing credibility if she should be discovered not to be in the epistemic position required by its procedure.

## **References**

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