

Review of: "The Ethics of Retraction"

Cristina Corredor¹

¹ Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is an excellent piece of research, very clearly and professionally written by a prominent expert in the pragmatics of language. The paper deals with an already classical topic, namely, the speech act of retraction, from a novel viewpoint and with original proposed outcomes. It asks and answers the questions of what retraction is, and when it is possible, ethically permissible, and advisable or obligatory. The analysis assumes a social and normative approach, considering the normative changes that retraction can and should accomplish in the social statuses of the interlocutors. Moreover, not only assertions but other types of speech act (promises, invitations, etc.) are analyzed and accounted for.

Just two points of possible improvement:

1. In p. 5, the author explains that the normative statuses instituted by speech acts, in particular by retraction, are successful only if (i) uptake is secured, i.e., it is "heard and practically recognized", and (ii) the speech act is "accepted by its audience as legitimate and allowable". To my knowledge, within the framework of speech act theory, Marina Sbisa (2006, 2009, among other works) was the first author to propose an account in line with this idea. It would be nice if proper credit were granted to her.

2. Closely related to the above is the following point of clarification. The central distinction between uptake and acceptability of the retraction, even if it is intuitive from a pre-theoretical stance, doesn't seem to be clear enough. In the passages quoted above, the author seems to present both conditions as necessary of the speech act of retraction to be successful. Afterwards, they write, "people may reject a retraction even if they have heard it, and even if it was felicitous" (p. 9). This strongly suggests that uptake might be the only necessary condition required for the speech act to be successfully performed. This suggestion is nevertheless questioned when the author distinguishes the level of felicity conditions and the level of securing uptake and acceptance (pp. 7, 8).

Notice that, if securing uptake is not counted among the felicity conditions of retraction, then succeeding at it should be seen as a perlocutionary act. Similarly, if (following Austin) securing uptake is a necessary condition for the successful performance of retraction, but the illocution can be felicitously performed (it can secure uptake) without achieving social acceptance, then social acceptance becomes a perlocutionary effect. The potential problem here is that perlocutionary effects are very doubtfully to be seen as normative requirements capable of instituting normative positions. (Just to hint at a possible way out of the difficulty, Austin's original distinction between misfires and abuses might be of help.)

Notwithstanding the above, I would like to emphasize that this is an extraordinary valuable contribution to the present debate on the topic and to the pragmatics of language in general.

References:

Sbisà, Marina. 2006. Communicating citizenship in verbal interaction: principles of a speech act oriented discourse analysis. In H. Hausendorf and A. Bora (eds.), *Analysing Citizenship Talk*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006, pp. 151-180.

Sbisà, Marina (2009). Uptake and Conventionality in Illocution. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* 5 (1):33-52.