Review of: "The Ethics of Retraction"

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One of the most exciting points of the paper is the idea of mixing two unrelated kinds of literature on retraction: "a literature on journal retractions, [and] a separate literature on retraction taken as a speech act" (Kukla, 2023, p. 2). The first is focused on retractions of academic articles and, because of this, considers some of the ethical aspects of retraction. The second focuses on retraction as a speech act and, more specifically, on the retraction of assertions. When theorizing about retraction, considering these two dimensions is vital, as emphasized at the end because retraction "is a pragmatically and ethically complex speech act". (Kukla, 2023, p. 16). I believe that conceiving retraction as a speech act with an ethical dimension is key for the philosophy of language because this aspect has gone totally unnoticed. The debate has centered on whether retraction supports a contextualist or relativist theory (MacFarlane, 2014; Knobe & Yalcin, 2014; Marques, 2018; Dinges & Zakkou, 2020; Kneer, 2021) and the ethical aspects of retraction have been overlooked, for example, the fact that retraction is a tool for social repair.

However, the development of the article contains some ideas that cause inevitable tensions with other available data. For example, the author establishes three criteria that must be met for a retraction to be possible, the first being that it should not be too late. One of the examples is assertions including slurs; statements of this type may be impossible to retract because "their impact is typically immediate, and it is hard to see how they can be materially undone" (Kukla, 2023, p. 8). On this point, I fully agree with the author. In fact, in a paper on retraction, we have defended the idea that some evaluative uses of language may not be retractable because they inflict harm that we cannot permanently alleviate (see Bordonaba-Plou & Villanueva, 2022). However, in the same work, through a corpus search on retraction cases in Spanish, we could attest that there is an asymmetry between evaluative and descriptive cases when the audience demands a retraction. In short, cases where the audience demands a retraction, for example, using terms like *exige* "demand", *pedir* "request", *debe* "must" o *exigió* "demanded", are systematic cases where evaluative predicates are involved (many being slurs).

In sum, evaluative uses of language are characterized, concerning retraction, as being particularly resistant to retraction and, simultaneously, as part of contexts in which the audience strongly demands a retraction. Each of these traits is reasonable, taken in isolation. However, when they go together, they create tension in our language use. How can retraction be so highly complicated simultaneously that we demand it with particular intensity? How can there be cases in which it is too late to retract but, at the same time, be precisely those in which we are most virulently required to do so?

So, according to the author, it seems that we should say people demand others to retract impossible retractions. However, if they are impossible to retract, why would people demand them so powerfully? The question I think we should be asking

ourselves at this point is, do people demand that others retract impossible retractions, or, given this demand for retraction in cases where retraction is very difficult, should we consider that the criterion is too strong? Be that as it may, a felicitous theory on retractions should account for this tension.

References

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