

Original Paper

The Knowledge Norm of Assertion: Debates and Criticisms

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Abstract

Both in philosophy of science and philosophy of language, there exists a long-time debate on the knowledge norm of assertion. Recently, the focus of the discussion has been shifted from the necessity claim to the sufficiency claim. People who hold the view of “Isolated second-hand knowledge” challenge the sufficiency claim based on several counterexamples. They contend that a speaker’s assertion based solely on second-hand knowledge is epistemically inappropriate. This perspective has ignited a more profound debate between advocates and critics of the knowledge norm of assertion. What factors actually determine the appropriateness of an assertion? Aiming at the question, the present study puts forward an idea that the appropriateness of an assertion is influenced by hearer’s conceptual saturation of the speaker rather than the isolated second-hand knowledge.

Keywords

Assertion, The knowledge norm, Second-hand knowledge, Conceptual saturation

1. Introduction

The norm of assertion has been a topic of intense debate within academic circles, with different theoretical schools offering varying perspectives on whether assertions should be made in accordance with particular norms and which norms ought to be followed. Of these perspectives, the *Knowledge Norm of Assertion* (KNA) has garnered significant attention (Pagin, 2021). Discussions surrounding KNA have centered around two primary issues: the necessity of knowledge for making assertions, and the sufficiency thereof. The debate over necessity concerns whether a speaker must possess knowledge in order to assert something, while the sufficiency discussion centers on whether knowledge alone can ensure the appropriateness of assertions. Jennifer Lackey challenges sufficiency by introducing “isolated second-hand knowledge (ISHK)” as a counterargument, arguing that even if a speaker possesses sufficient knowledge when making an assertion, it does not necessarily guarantee its appropriateness. According to ISHK, while the speaker may possess a knowledge base when making

assertions, it does not necessarily ensure the appropriateness of their assertions in terms of cognition. Therefore, knowledge alone cannot suffice as a condition for making valid assertions (Lackey, 2011, p. 251). This article employs the standard of “conceptual saturation” and uses conceptual analysis, with a focus on conceptual property theory to analyze isolated second-hand knowledge. The aim of this article is to explore the attribution of assertion appropriateness.

2. Isolated Second-Hand Knowledge: Features and Case Studies

Norms are rules and standards that govern behaviors. Therefore, as a speech act, assertion is necessarily governed by norms. Embracing the principle of “knowledge first” (Williamson, 2000, p. v), Timothy Williamson proposed that knowledge should be considered the fundamental concept that does not require much interpretation. And this concept can be used to explain, illustrate, and analyze cognitive phenomena such as assertions. As a result, knowledge is the constitutive norm of assertion. According to the KNA, if someone (S) is warranted in asserting p only if S know that p (Williamson, 2000, p. 17). In other words, knowledge serves as a necessary condition for assertion, and one can only assert what he truly knows. This norm explicitly prohibits individuals from asserting propositions they do not have knowledge of. To be more precise, we can formulate the KNA as follows:

KNA: S can assert p only if S knows that p.

As a constitutive norm for assertion, knowledge must not only be necessary but also sufficient to support assertions. Contextualists provide further justification for this requirement (DeRose, 2002, p. 180). They argued that if S knows p, then S is able to assert p. Although one may choose not to do so for moral or prudential reasons, this does not alter the fact that S possesses knowledge of p and has the capacity to assert it. Therefore, knowledge is a sufficient condition for the norm of assertion (KNA-S):

KNA-S₁: S is properly positioned to assert that p only if S knows that p.

The contextualist appears to suggest that if S knows p, then it is epistemically correct for S to assert that p (Brown, 2010, p. 550):

KNA-S₂: S is in a good enough epistemic position to assert p only if S knows that p.

In addition, “be in a good enough epistemic position to assert p” entails that S possessed both knowledge of p and the appropriate epistemic authority or credentials to make such an assertion (Lackey, 2011, p. 251):

KNA-S₃: S is properly epistemically positioned to assert that p only if S knows that p.

However, this is not always the case. For instance, it would be impolite or irrelevant for A to mention what B did at the weekend dinner during a Monday meeting. This illustrates Lackey’s notion of “isolated second-hand knowledge”, where speaker S knows p well enough to assert it, but lacks proper epistemic authority. Therefore, mere possession of knowledge does not guarantee epistemically appropriate assertions (Lackey, 2011, p. 257).

What is the precise definition of “isolated second-hand knowledge” (ISHK)? What are the flaws in the assertion based on it? Lackey clarifies that it is called “isolated” because the subject under discussion

knows little or nothing beyond p. And it is considered “second-hand” because the subject’s knowledge about p is derived solely from the testimony of other speakers regarding p (Lackey, 2011, p. 256). Knowledge possessing these two properties is not inherently problematic. However, the problem arises when the speaker’s assertion is predicated on a combination of these two properties and the listener expect more than just ISHK. Consequently, the listener becomes frustrated by the speaker’s inability to provide further pertinent information or feel epistemically cheated. As a result, even if S knows p, they may lack proper epistemic situation to assert it.

We can conclude that the assertion grounded on ISHK exhibits the following features:

- 1) The speaker’s knowledge of p is exclusively based on the testimony provide by another speaker (testimony provider), rendering it a “second-hand knowledge”;
- 2) The testimony provider is duly identified and reliable, rendering the testimony itself is trustworthy;
- 3) Apart from p, the speaker possesses limited knowledge or no knowledge at all about it, rendering it an “isolated knowledge”.

Here is Lackey’s counter example:

DOCTOR: Matilda is an oncologist at a teaching hospital who has been diagnosing and treating various kinds of cancer for the past fifteen years. One of her patients, Derek, was recently referred to her office because he has been experiencing intense abdominal pain for a couple of weeks. Matilda requested an ultrasound and MRI, but the results of the tests arrived on her day off; consequently, all the relevant data were reviewed by Nancy, a very competent colleague in oncology. Being able to confer for only a very brief period of time prior to Derek’s appointment today, Nancy communicated to Matilda simply that her diagnosis is pancreatic cancer, without offering any of the details of the test results or the reasons underlying her conclusion. Shortly thereafter, Matilda had her appointment with Derek, where she truly asserts to him purely on the basis of Nancy’s reliable testimony, ‘I am very sorry to tell you this, but you have pancreatic cancer’ (Lackey, 2016, p. 510)

The DOCTOR case clearly satisfies the features outlined by ISHK: First, Matilda’s knowledge is entirely dependent on Nancy’s testimony (feature 1); Second, as an oncologist, Nancy is a trustworthy source and her testimony can be relied upon (feature 2); Third, Matilda has no other information pertaining to “Derek has pancreatic cancer” (feature 3). If Derek were to question Matilda about how she knows that or ask for further details about the location and size of the tumor, Matilda would be unable to defend her assertion. Upon learning that Matilda had not read the diagnosis report and instead relied on Nancy’s testimony to conclude it was pancreatic cancer, Derek would feel both indignant and epistemologically deceived. Therefore, Matilda’s assertion was unwarranted, and she did not have the epistemic authority to assert that “Derek had pancreatic cancer”. Stated differently:

- 1) If knowledge is sufficient for assertion, then a speaker S who knows p has the epistemic authority to assert that p;

- 2) In the DOCTOR case, although S knows about p, he lacks the epistemic authority to assert that p;
- 3) Therefore, KNA-S is invalid, in other words, knowledge alone does not suffice for assertion.

3. The Main Points of the Debates on ISHK and the Corresponding Analysis

The emergence of ISHK challenges the sufficiency of KNA, prompting advocates of KNA to reconsider whether knowledge is sufficient for the norm of assertion. While ISHK has gained support from numerous scholars who believe it offers a fresh perspective on the ongoing debate surrounding “what are the norms of assertion”, its argument has also faced opposition from various schools. Proponents of KNA have reaffirmed its sufficiency and argue that ISHK does not pose a significant threat to KNA-S.

3.1 “Quantity” View or “Quality” View?

What is the norm of assertion? The “quantity” view holds that this question is equivalent to “how much epistemic support is required to warrant assertion” (Carter & Gordon, 2011, p. 619). For example, the *Truth Norm of Assertion* (TNA) does not require any epistemic support. It only requires a true belief for assertion. On the other hand, the KNA requires sufficient epistemic support in order to consider a true belief as knowledge to warrant an assertion. What ISHK offers is a “quality” view that addresses the question “what kind of epistemic support is required to warrant the appropriateness of assertion” (Carter & Gordon, 2011, p. 627). According to Lackey and her supporters, ISHK emphasizes an atomistic understanding, which means “I understand why/when/where/what X is” in order to achieve epistemic sufficiency of the assertion (Carter & Gordon, 2011, p. 626). In DOCTOR, Matilda’s assertion was deemed inappropriate as she lacked “the specific knowledge required” for it due to not having read the report herself.

The proponents of KNA remain unconvinced by the “quality” view, citing Lackey’s unsuccessful attempt to refute KNA-S with this approach (Simion, 2016, p. 3049). Whether Matilda has read the report herself or Nancy has provided a detailed the basis of the diagnosis, their assertions are supported “quantitatively” and therefore epistemically appropriate when sufficient knowledge is present.

Both the arguments for “quality” and “quantity” appear compelling, yet they both have inherent flaws. The “quality” view suggests that Matilda lacks “the specific knowledge required” to make such an assertion. However, how can we determine what exactly constitutes this “specific knowledge”? Matilda undeniably has knowledge of pancreatic cancer, and Derek indeed has pancreatic cancer. Therefore, does Matilda’s existing knowledge qualify as “the specific knowledge required”? Furthermore, instead of addressing the location and size of Derek’s tumor, Matilda is discussing potential causes of the disease. While this may offer a sufficient “quantity” of knowledge to support her assertion, it remains uncertain whether Derek will be satisfied with such an answer.

3.2 “Knowing” or “Not Knowing”?

The KNA implies that the speaker’s knowledge of the content is crucial to making an assertion. In

response, ISHK argues that although the speaker “knows p clearly”, they lack the proper epistemological situation to assert that p. However, if speaker lacks the appropriate knowledge, i.e., Matilda actually “does not know” (Anderson, 2020), then ISHK’s theoretical premise falls apart.

First, Matilda only knows is the truth value of the proposition “Derek has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer”, meaning that she knows whether or not the proposition is true”. However, in order to say that she “knows p clearly”, she must also have an understanding of the diagnostic process and the reasons behind Derek’s diagnosis with pancreatic cancer. Without such crucial information, Matilda cannot be claimed that she “knows p clearly”, that is, Matilda “does not know”.

Second, Nancy’s testimony merely formed a belief in Matilda’s mind, and beliefs do not equate to knowledge. Derek felt deceived in his comprehension as he expected to be provided with knowledge instead of belief. When confronted with Derek’s questioning, Matilda would likely respond with “I don’t know”.

Third, according to virtue epistemology, S knows p if and only if S has formed a true belief through his own stable intellectual abilities. Matilda’s intellectual abilities such as hearing, language comprehension, etc. are not relevant in the causal chain of forming true beliefs. Her belief is solely based on Nancy’s testimony, while the relevant abilities such as perception, reasoning, rationality, etc. do not contribute to her assertion. Therefore, it is Nancy who knows that “Derek has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer”, while Matilda “does not know”.

Fourth, as the recipient of the information, Derek has reason to construe Matilda’s assertion in such a way: Matilda lacks knowledge of my cancer diagnosis while her colleague possesses it. Furthermore, knowledge entails actionable outcomes and Matilda’s assertion fails to provide guidance or relevant information for Derek to act upon. Once again, this indicates that Matilda actually “does not know”.

In general, when one claims that the speaker “knows that p clearly” or “does not know that p”, they are adopting an extremes stance. As Socrates famously stated, “The only thing I know is that I don’t know”. Naturally, it is implausible to suggest that Socrates possessed omniscience or complete lack of knowledge. The essence lies in distinguishing between what the speaker knows and what he does not know. However, this distinction remains ambiguous within the current debate.

3.3 “Appropriate” or “Inappropriate”

Due to physical and epistemological limitations, it is impossible for us to acquire all knowledge through personal experience. Testimonial knowledge constitutes the majority of our understanding, with assertions serving as a means of conveying such knowledge (Simion, 2016, p. 3042). However, relying solely on testimony exposes the limitations of this approach: without additional support or evidence, speakers cannot defend their assertions nor guarantee their appropriateness (Lackey, 2013, p. 36). Counterarguments contend that testimony provided by experts in the same domain have sufficient epistemological reliability to be considered as knowledge. Matilda and Nancy, both proficient in the aforementioned domain, possess equal capabilities for making assertions, thereby ensuring the epistemically proper assertions (McKinnon, 2017, p. 188).

Contextualists also present a rebuttal, stating that in a “high-stakes” context such as cancer diagnosis, the doctor must have substantial evidence to support her diagnosis. However, in a “low-stakes” context like pollen allergy, even if Matilda’s assertion is still based on ISHK, it remains appropriate (Montminy, 2017, p. 288). Therefore, the KNA-S should be described as follows:

KNA-S₄: S is positioned to make an epistemically proper assertion that p in context C if and only if ‘S knows that p’ is true in C.

Even if we accept the “expert domain”, the contextualist interpretation can still lead to confusion. For example, a patient who only knows that his allergy to peanuts and has no prior history of pollen allergies may question why he is experiencing an allergic reaction to pollen instead of peanuts. Although the same low-risk context remains constant, the patient’s need for an answer may vary. Therefore, assertions based on ISHK are still inappropriate and the contextualist defense does not address whether ISHK is relevant to the appropriateness of the assertion.

3.4 “Epistemic” or “Non-epistemic”

The transmission of testimony is an epistemic activity that involves the transfer of knowledge. Epistemic activities are subject to corresponding epistemic norms, which represent widely accepted consensuses. If it is deemed that knowledge represents a normative requirement for epistemic activities, any violation of regulations by ISHK’s assertion would be considered an infraction against epistemic standers. Hence, in order to provide the necessary evidence for the assertion, it is imperative that the speaker possesses familiarity with either the assertion itself or an adequate amount of supporting details.

Judging from the behavior of personally reviewing the inspection results and requesting further details, it is indicative of a strong commitment to upholding professional ethics. This aligns with a code of conduct proposed by “social roles” for relevant practitioners (McGlynn, 2014, p. 129). The inappropriateness of Matilda’s assertion arose from her “unprofessional conduct”, as she was unprepared to engage in a discussion about the patient’s condition. This is a matter of professional ethics for doctors (Coffman, 2011, p. 296). Additionally, epistemic norms establish people’s epistemic obligations and standards for epistemic accountability. When epistemic norms are violated, people’s epistemic trust in the subject is decreased. Therefore, it is important to distinguish epistemic accountability from moral, social and legal norms as it does not involve blame, avoidance or punishment. In ISHK, listeners may feel resentful and deceived, which are typical reactions to the accountability that follows a violation of moral norms (Kauppinen, 2018, p. 13). From this perspective, Matilda’s violation was not related to an epistemic norm, but rather a moral or prudential norm. As a result, ISHK is not an issue of epistemology and the so-called epistemic authority is even more irrelevant.

Since ISHK is not an epistemic problem, it can be disambiguated from a pragmatic perspective. Derek is seeking expert opinions, so two cases can be distinguished: one is “Any-Expert” while the other is “Specific-Expert” (Benton, 2016). If the context refers to “Any-Expert”, then ISHK is perfectly

acceptable. Even if in a “Specific-Expert” context, ISHK does not suffer from perception issues but rather Gricean misleading. This type of misleading language can be avoided by adding additional conditions such as “Nancy was also present”. The combinations are captured by the following diagram:

	Any-Expert	Specific-Expert
	a diagnostic opinion provided by any doctor with relevant expertise	Matilda’s diagnostic opinion
Nancy: oncologist	pragmatically acceptable	pragmatically misleading: Derek seeks Matilda’s diagnostic opinion

Norm violations often entail overlapping forms of accountability. For instance, theft is subject to legal norms (punishment) and to moral norms (blame or resentment). As such, could this assertion potentially violate both epistemic and non-epistemic norms? Moreover, are there alternative pragmatic interpretations of this assertion?

In summary, Lackey refutes the *Knowledge Norm of Assertion* by arguing that assertions based on isolated second-hand knowledge are inappropriate. The critics have challenged ISHK from four perspectives: the quality and quantity of knowledge, whether the speaker knows the content of the assertion, whether the assertion is appropriate, and whether ISHK is an epistemic problem. Nonetheless, we have doubts about their arguments, particularly given the absence of any discussion on whether appropriateness is linked to assertions or what relevance it holds for them. Consequently, we shall conduct a conceptual analysis of ISHK’s assertions in order to clarify and resolve the residual problems.

4. The Conceptual Analysis of ISHK

Assertion, as a speech act, is the primary form of daily communication. The issue of the norm of assertion has always been a contentious topic in the debate between philosophy of science and philosophy of language. Ludwig Wittgenstein believes that many philosophical problems arise from language misuse and confounding (Wittgenstein, 1968). Conceptual analysis, the adequate language analysis and detailed conceptual investigation are practical methods to clarify, treat or resolve philosophical problems. Conceptual analysis does not merely question the meaning of the concept itself but seeks the conditions for its correct usage (Balaguer, 2021). The controversy surrounding ISHK arises from imprecise concepts, resulting in confusion. To resolve ongoing debates, it is necessary to scrutinize relevant concepts and conduct a comprehensive analysis.

4.1 Concept and Conceptual Saturation

In order to conduct conceptual analysis, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the term “concept”. There are five different interpretations associated with this term: definitions, mental representations, abilities, abstract objects, and functions (Margolis & Laurence, 2021). All five interpretations share a common understanding: concepts possess properties. In other words, concepts

are combinatorial and consist of a set of properties. Having a concept X is equivalent to having a set of statements about the properties of that concept. We can name it as the Conceptual Property Theory, while a set of statements about the properties of the discussed concept is called conceptual saturation. The term “conceptual saturation” is derived from Gottlob Frege’s work (Frege, 1960). Frege made a distinction between the notions of concept and object. While objects are denoted by proper names, concepts are expressed through predicates, which consist of words and phrases. However, predicates are incomplete and unsaturated. To comprehend a concept means to render the linguistic expressions complete and saturated. Therefore, the degree of conceptual understanding can be measured by the level of conceptual saturation. Conceptual analysis involves investigating the properties of a concept, particularly its degree of saturation. The level of conceptual saturation can vary among individuals, with experts typically exhibiting higher levels than laypeople. For example, people with different levels of conceptual saturation may express differently about the concept of “water”:

Children: we can drink water.

Students: water is a colorless, tasteless, and drinkable liquid with the chemical formula H_2O .

Experts: water is a substance composed of the chemical elements’ hydrogen and oxygen and existing in gaseous, liquid, and solid states.

Assuming that concept X has properties X_1 - X_n . Speaker A has properties X_1 and X_2 , whereas speaker B has properties X_3 and X_4 . On the other hand, expert C may have all the properties of concept X. Speakers with a conceptual saturation level of zero would respond by stating “I don’t know this concept”. However, even though the conceptual saturation is zero, we can still mention the concept. For example, a toddler may utter the term “quantum mechanics”, yet his conceptual saturation remains at level zero. In other words, he does not hold this concept and likely perceive “quantum mechanics” as merely a name. Therefore, the evaluation of an individual’s comprehension of a specific concept entail assessing the extent to which they have achieved complete understanding of said concept, i.e., conceptual saturation.

4.2 The Conceptual Analysis of ISHK

The proposition “Derek has pancreatic cancer” differs from the proposition “ $1 + 1 = 2$ ”. The latter conveys straightforward knowledge that requires minimal judgment on the part of the listener, who simply receives and acquires relevant information.

The former proposition is different. The property of “Derek” does not pertain to “pancreatic cancer”, and likewise, the property of “pancreatic cancer” does not encompass “Derek”. Within this proposition, two concepts can be discerned: pancreatic cancer and Derek’s pancreatic cancer. The speaker needs to provide a series of relevant statements concerning both concepts in order to be considered as having relevant knowledge.

It should be noted that both concepts require a prior understanding of “pancreatic cancer” in order to comprehend the concept of “Derek’s pancreatic cancer”. Without knowledge of what “pancreatic cancer” is, even if one has read the report, he may not be able to understand the presented data.

Obviously, there is no doubt that Matilda and Nancy have the knowledge of “pancreatic cancer”, and we can even assume that Matilda has a higher level of conceptual saturation. If we consider “pancreatic cancer” as Concept A, then it can be inferred that both Matilda and Nancy possess Concept A.

However, Matilda and Nancy exhibit varying degrees of conceptual saturation with respect to the concept of “Derek’s pancreatic cancer”. Nancy has read Derek’s report, while Matilda hasn’t. Matilda only knew that “Derek had been suffering from abdominal pain for several weeks”, which was insufficient to infer the conclusion of “pancreatic cancer”. “Abdominal pain” is a symptomatic property that encompasses various associated concepts, such as gallstones or food poisoning. Additionally, the concept of “pancreatic cancer” extends beyond the symptom of abdominal pain. Based on the report and the previously Concept A, Nancy can derive the concept “Derek’s pancreatic cancer”, which we can call Concept B. Therefore, Nancy’s statement about concept B may be:

S₁: Derek has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

S₂: His CT scan reveals an ill-defined, irregularly shaped pancreatic mass. There are rich color flow signals on the circumference.

S₃: His ultrasound reveals the presence of a pancreatic mass.

S₄: His tumor size was X.

S₅:

Meanwhile, Matilda’s statement about Concept B could be:

S₁: Derek has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer.

Due to the fact that Concept A serves as the premise of Concept B, Matilda was able to comprehensively grasp S₁ of Concept B and infer the following statements based on her clinical experience and the knowledge of Concept A:

S₂*: His CT scan *might* reveal an ill-defined, irregularly shaped pancreatic mass. There are rich color flow signals on the circumference.

S₃*: His ultrasound *might* reveal the presence of a pancreatic mass.

It is important to note that S₂* and S₃* are merely conjectures put forth by Matilda and should not be considered as the definitive statements.

For Derek, Concept A, “pancreatic cancer”, is simply a medical term denoting a type of cancer, which means his conceptual saturation about this concept is nearly zero. Therefore, his statement about Concept A and Concept B could be: The doctor has informed me that I (Derek) have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer”. As illustrated in the diagram below:

	Matilda	Nancy	Derek
Concept A	$M_A (M_A > 0)$	$M_A \geq N_A$	$D_A \approx 0$
Concept B	$M_B (M_B > 0)$	$N_A > M_A > 0$	$D_B \approx 0$

Based on the diagram above, we can understand the problem faced by DOCTOR in the following way:

1) Concept A is previously possessed by both Matilda and Nancy, meaning that they both have

Concept A.

- 2) Based on the report and Concept A, Nancy has deduced Concept B. It can be concluded that Nancy has both Concept A and Concept B. Whereafter, she conveys S_1 about Concept B to Matilda through testimony.
- 3) Nancy is reliable and Matilda trusts her. Additionally, Nancy has S_1 of Concept B. Moreover, since Matilda has a solid understanding of Concept A, which serves as a prerequisite for Concept B. Along with her previous clinical experience, Matilda can infer S_2^* and S_3^* of Concept B. Thus, Matilda has Concept A, S_2^* and S_3^* about Concept B. By assertion, Matilda conveys S_1 about Concept B to Derek.
- 4) Derek owns S_1 about Concept B, but lacks a comprehensive understanding of it. He needs additional information related to Concept B to challenge Matilda's assertion.

We can summarize as follows:

Nancy: Concept A + Concept B

Matilda: Concept A + S_1 about Concept B + S_2^* about Concept B + S_3^* about Concept B

Derek: S_1 about Concept B

In summary, Matilda has a partial understanding of the relevant concepts. The key determinant of her ability to answer Derek's question lies in the specific scope of concept to which his question pertains.

Assumption 1: Derek's question belongs to the scope of Concept A, such as asking information on pancreatic cancer symptoms. Matilda is capable of providing the corresponding responses based on her knowledge of Concept A.

Assumption 2: Derek's question pertains to the scope of Concept B, such as the size of the tumor. Due to the limited conceptual saturation of Concept B, Matilda could only offer relevant conjectures rather than conclusive evidence.

Assumption 3: Derek's question falls outside the scope of Concept A and Concept B, such as the timing of the operation. Even if Matilda has the comprehensive understanding of Concept B, she is unable to provide an answer.

In either scenario, Matilda's primary task is to dispel any doubt. The underlying factor contributing to these issues lies in her assertion leading Derek to believe that she possesses knowledge of the answer. In order to ensure the appropriateness of her assertion, Matilda must have a precise comprehension of the relevant concepts (Assumption 1) or rectify this misinformation (Assumption 2 and 3). In this way, we can see the speaker's dilemma in ISHK: Matilda possesses the exact S_1 and two presumptions for Concept B, but her answers fail to adhere to Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1989). Although the inference is an educated guess based on Concept A and extensive clinical experience, using it as direct evidence would contravene The Maxim of Quality: Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. If the Matilda opts not to respond, she would breach The Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange). If the Matilda chooses to discuss something unrelated, she would violate The Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

Does the same dilemma arise when the speaker and the testifier do not belong to the same expert domain, or when the speaker is not an expert in the relevant domain?

Let's consider another case:

BREAKFAST: The news was being broadcast on the bus, and as A got off, he overheard the famous expert Dr. B recommended that "eating eggs for breakfast is a more nutritious option". Upon arriving at the company, A's colleague C was deciding whether to have porridge or eggs for breakfast. So, A advised C that "Eggs are a more nutritious option".

In **BREAKFAST**, A's assertion was also based on **ISHK**. Moreover, similar to C, A only received a statement of the concept in question. However, when A was challenged, he would answer "the Dr. B said so". Unless C feels that the source is unreliable, for example when A says "I heard it from a passerby", there is no reason to doubt the testimony of a recognized expert from an authoritative source in general. A can guarantee the appropriateness of this assertion based on reliable testimony, and C does not feel any angry or deceived. Testimony from relevant expert is considered trustworthy.

Comparing the **DOCTOR** case and the **BREAKFAST** case, it is evident that assertions in both cases are grounded on **ISHK**. When the speaker takes on an expert role, the listener requires a high degree of conceptual saturation from them. The Speaker cannot guarantee the appropriateness of his assertions based solely on testimony. Therefore, he lacks epistemic authority to make assertions. However, when the speaker is in a non-expert role, the listener's demand for conceptual saturation is reduced. Through testimony, the speaker can ensure the appropriateness of his assertion. In this context, the speaker has epistemic authority to make assertions. We can summarize it in the following diagram:

	DOCTOR	BREAKFAST
The Role of the Speaker	expert	non-expert
Basis of Assertion	ISHK	ISHK
Conceptual Saturation Requirement	high	low
Assertion of Appropriateness	inappropriate	appropriate
The Epistemic Authority	none	all
The Cooperative Principle	violate	obey
Pragmatic Interpretations	pragmatically misleading	pragmatically acceptable

It can be inferred that the appropriateness of the assertion is not contingent upon the speaker's reliance on **ISHK**, but rather on the listener's requirement for the speaker's conceptual saturation about the related concepts.

5. Reflections on Residual Problems of **ISHK**

The sufficiency of the **KNA** has been extensively debated around the issue of whether knowledge can warrant the appropriateness of assertions. In order to clarify the key points in these debates, we have identified flaws in existing arguments and highlighted the unresolved problem: the appropriateness of

assertions. Through an examination and analysis of relevant concepts, we aim to elucidate remaining problems in terms of conceptual saturation.

5.1 “Quantity” and “Quality”: The Impact of Conceptual Saturation on Integrality

The dichotomy between “quantity” and “quality” is not applicable in this context. The problem with ISHK lies in the incomplete conceptual saturation of all concepts encompassed within the assertion, which makes it inappropriate to judge only based on the dichotomy of “quantity” and “quality”. For an analytic proposition such as “ $1+1=2$ ” that conveys direct information, the “quality” view is sufficient. However, for an empirical proposition that requires more details to enrich the conceptual saturation of the proposed concepts, the “quantity” view cannot be dismissed.

5.2 “Knowing” and “Not Knowing”: The Distinction Regarding the Level of Conceptual Saturation

As previously analyzed, comprehension of “Derek’s pancreatic cancer” necessitates an understanding of what “pancreatic cancer” is. Therefore, “knowing” encompasses not only the content and information of a given proposition but also entails cognitive ability and action initiation. It should be a combination of experiences as well. In ISHK, the speaker does have knowledge regarding the proposition p being asserted, where “knowing” means that the speaker has something to say about the concept in question. People from different knowledge backgrounds have varying degrees of conceptual saturation towards a given concept, and as long as the degree of conceptual saturation is non-zero, the speaker has a range of statements to make about the given concept. Within a specific domain, experts tend to have higher levels of conceptual saturation than non-experts.

5.3 “Appropriate” and “Inappropriate”: Conceptual Saturation as a Criterion for Appropriateness

When the testimony provider and speaker share the same epistemic background, i.e., they belong to the same expert domain, there is an overlap in their statements regarding relevant concepts. However, their levels of conceptual saturation differ: the testimony provider has a higher degree of conceptual saturation than the speaker. Conceptual saturation also explains the contextualist perspective that listeners may demand a higher level of conceptual saturation from speakers, regardless of the context. Therefore, the appropriateness of an assertion is determined by a listener’s need for the conceptual saturation from the speaker. If a listener requires high levels of conceptual saturation, then the assertion would be deemed inappropriate; whereas if they require low levels, the assertion would be appropriate.

5.4 “Epistemic” and “Non-epistemic”: The Overlap of Epistemic and Non-epistemic Norms

The speaker’s social role affects the listener’s demand for conceptual saturation. When the speaker is an expert, a higher level of conceptual saturation is expected. The social role places constrain on the speaker’s assertions in ISHK, and the listener’s expectation of the speaker’s conceptual saturation represents a social and moral normative requirement for a specific professional role. If the problem of ISHK is resolved in a Gricean way, it not only violates the Maxim of Quality, but also the Maxim of Quantity and the Maxim of Relation. Moreover, if speakers are held accountable by epistemic norm for reducing epistemic trust in their assertion, then ISHK violates more than just moral or prudential norms. ISHK also violates the epistemic norm, as the listeners’ corresponding epistemic trust is reduced when

they pursue a question that the speaker cannot answer due to insufficient conceptual saturation,

6. Conclusion

The acquisition of knowledge is based on rational understanding, which relies on the use of concepts. Assertions are manifestations of the use of concepts. Therefore, in the study of assertions and norms of assertions related to them, we can scrutinize the relevant concepts through conceptual analysis. Through conceptual analysis, we have determined that the appropriateness of assertions in the debate surrounding the *Knowledge Norm of Assertion* (KNA) is not contingent upon whether or not the speaker's knowledge is isolated second-hand knowledge (ISHK), but rather on the listener's requirement for the level of conceptual saturation from the speaker. When the listener demands a high level of conceptual saturation, ISHK does not provide a warrant for the speaker's assertion defense, rendering the assertion is inappropriate.

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