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Brandom and the Second Person

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Abstract

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Brandom and the Second Person

Against a communitarian-consensual perspective that reduces meaning to what the relevant community as a whole thinks is correct, Brandom, following Davidson¹, has complained that in order to develop such an elucidation of linguistic practices, the relation between language users and meaning must be approached starting with the point of view of an interpreter, that is, that it is not only necessary to take into account the relation between human practices and semantic interpretants but also that we cannot make sense of this idea without acknowledging the perspectival character of meaning-attribution within those practices. This is what Brandom calls the I-Thou relation, claimed to be more fundamental than the I-We relationship that constitutes the communitarian-consensual construal of social linguistic practices². It is only through the eyes of the interpreter that we can make sense of language as a game or practice in which human beings are engaged. The I-We relation can only be understood as deriving from the I-Thou one and characteristic of the latter is that it is an interpretative stance that can be thought of as equivalent to an external, observational standpoint:

“[...]this sort of external interpretive stance —what one must do, how one must treat an alien community in order thereby to count as taking them to be making *assertions* and *inferences*—is seen to be equivalent to an internal scorekeeping stance *within* a discursive community. That is, one must adopt toward the practitioners [...] the same sort of attitude one both takes them to adopt towards each other and adopts towards one’s

¹ Brandom 2010: 33-34, where he acknowledges this debt.

² See Brandom 1994: 37-42, especially p.39

own discursive fellows. [...] In short, the stance in question is a translational-interpretive stance that evidently belongs in a box with the orthodox Davidsonian variety”³

In this manner, Brandom rejects the idea that there is a distinction between being in conversation (an internal scorekeeping stance within a discursive community) and an external interpretational stance (the one someone undertakes when observing a conversation from a distance). Nevertheless, I will argue that collapsing both dimensions commits this theory to ignore the relevance of a different understanding of second personal interaction, one that may seem to be essential for making sense of the possibility of linguistic practices altogether.

Different authors have underlined the need of a second-personal dimension in Brandom’s account of normative linguistic practices⁴. Habermas (2000) has claimed against Brandom’s picture that if we think of the interpreter stance in a third-personal way, we lose the idea of a language as being a way in which individuals engage in the pursuit of common goals and values. Brandom responds that according to a third-personal point of view of meaning attribution like his, one can actually engage in social linguistic practices without pursuing common goals or sharing values⁵. According to Brandom, a second-personal kind of interaction among language users is needed only to make sense of common goals shared by them, but not to make sense of the possibility of there being linguistic practices altogether.

On the other hand, Kukla & Lance (2009) and Wanderer (2010) have argued that *being addressed* is an essential dimension of speech acts in the game of giving and asking for reasons. According to Kukla & Lance (2009: 163) this addressive, second-

³ Brandom 2010: 33-4. See also Brandom 1994: 659, n.50.

⁴ Habermas 2000; Kukla & Lance 2009 and Wanderer 2010.

⁵ Brandom 2000a: 362, acknowledges Habermas’ account of his theory as a ‘fair characterization’.

personal character of speech acts - mostly clear in imperatives, invitations, promises and so forth - is characteristic to every speech act, even if implicitly, and necessary for them in order to perform their normative function. In Wanderer's opinion, this is an essential feature of certain speech acts – challenges in Brandom's terms - and absolutely essential for those to be such. They all agree in that the addressive second personal aspect can be thought to be implicit in Brandom's theory and that the person targeted will be failing to give an appropriate response only if ignores the address, and will be acknowledging it no matter how she responds to it (compliance, refusal, or anything in between)⁶. But this line of argument does not put into question the essentially interpretational observational picture that is the basis of the dynamics of scorekeeping practice, but rather complements it. Contrary to this framework, I will claim that an understanding of the practice of giving and asking for reasons as a second-personal interaction is in tension with the interpretational understanding of it that Brandom subscribes to. If that picture is not abandoned, normative practices cannot be described as second-personal in a full-blooded sense. While thinking of exchanges among participants in the practice in this way is essential for Brandom's model to work, as I will claim, a second person understanding of the practice of giving and asking for reasons is both necessary for his framework to work and at the same time in tension with the essential interpretational stance that Brandom undertakes in *Making it Explicit* (MIE)⁷.

My aim in this paper is to present an argument, distinct from all of the above, that purports to show that a framework that understands the institution of meaning

⁶ Kukla & Lance 2009: 162.

⁷ Throughout this paper I will be focusing on Brandom's MIE, which still counts as his systematic account of the minimal sufficient conditions for a practice to be linguistic. Since MIE, Brandom has worked intensively on Hegel's notion of recognition, a notion that also plays an important role in this paper. The question remains as to whether his later work could be said to be compatible with it. If so, the issues raised in this paper still apply to his later work.

through an essential interpersonal practical dynamics of exchanges, in order to account for meaning and the normative import of content in the individual's practice, cannot be understood as an interpretational observational scorekeeping stance. Accordingly, I will argue here that contrary to Brandom's response to Habermas, a second-personal kind of interaction is absolutely necessary to give an account of linguistic practices in terms of the interaction of linguistic users. But it is necessary for very different reasons to those invoked by Habermas, Lance & Kukla and Wanderer. I will claim that interpersonal exchanges must be rather modeled in terms of a second-personal recognitional dynamics. This means that some essential and basic features of the minimal conditions for a practice to be deploying propositional content need to be rethought through a different picture in which the core of the practice is the recognition of the others' assessments towards one moves in the game, one that is only intelligible as a practice *within* a linguistic community, and not, as in Brandom's picture, incompatibilities and scorekeeping of entitlements and commitments. Without the introduction of such a way of understanding linguistic practices, normativity is lost and, with it, the possibility of meaning altogether.

The contrast between a second-personal dynamics in my terms and a third-personal one can be characterized by the way in which we take into account a different person's perspective. Only in the former case it is implied that the other person's perspective *matters* to their interlocutor. Becoming sensitive to norms, as will be shown in this paper, implies acknowledging the other person's assessment of our actions. This acknowledgment must be understood as involving two dimensions: (1) acknowledging the attributions the other person makes to me by taking myself to be committed and (2) withdrawing previous commitments in the light of the challenge that this person addresses to me. In order for the practice to be normative, it is required to be sensitive in

just this way which, as will be argued, requires the interaction of the two perspectives to have the form of a *conversation*, *within* a discursive community, where the criticisms and differences between the two are acknowledged. This is the contrast between a third person interpretative standpoint, in which the interpreter could remain completely external to the perspective of the interpretee and does not need to ‘interact’ with her except by interpreting, and the kind of practice that involves second person stances among practitioners.

The structure of this article is as follows: in the first section I present the conditions of adequacy on semantic normativity raised by Wittgenstein and Sellars and the general strategy to meet them designed by Brandom. In the second section, I criticize Brandom’s view by giving an example of interaction between two people using Brandom’s account of interaction. I show that in a practice like that no norms are in place and no meaning has been assigned to linguistic sounds and marks. Thirdly, I present a positive account of interaction, a second-personal model, that incorporates a set of distinctive elements that characterize conversations and allow us to meet the conditions of adequacy presented in the first section. Finally, I make some concluding remarks regarding the allegedly essential role of this second-personal sort of interaction in basic linguistic practices (hereafter BLP).

1. Brandom’s Answer to the Wittgensteinian Conditions of Adequacy

We can think of a language as “a system of expressions the use of which is subject to certain rules” (Sellars 1954: 204). Becoming a language user would then be conceived as learning to obey the rules for the use of its expressions. Nevertheless, as Sellars remarked, this would immediately imply a vicious regress, for the rules that

formulate the correct use of the expressions are themselves expressed in a language, so we would need to know a language in order to learn it; the postulation of an open-ended sequence of meta-languages that have to be learned is then unavoidable⁸.

According to Sellars, the strategy for solving this problem is to distinguish between the ability to formulate, to say, to state the rules that codify the correct use of an expression and the ability to act *conforming to norms*. The idea is that this last ability involves *acting in the light* of the demands that norms enjoin in actions, i.e. becoming able to respect the norm, without presupposing “being aware” or “having before one’s mind” the very content that one is acknowledging and respecting in acting that way, on pain of restating the aforementioned regress.

Accordingly, regarding the possibility of giving an account of normativity, two conditions of adequacy emerge. On the one hand, accounting for the possibility of becoming a rule follower in the sense of *being able* to perform normative actions implies that the subject becomes *sensitive* to the requirements of a norm in a stronger sense that just acting according to a regularity, thus acting in the light of the demands of the norms and not coinciding with them ‘by chance’. On the other, accounting for this possibility requires rejecting the idea that what one does when following a rule is to follow explicit contents that one has in mind.

To conceive this *coming into language* through the picture constituted solely by an individual coping with her environment will prove equally wrong headed. As Wittgenstein remarks in PI, 258: ‘One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can’t talk about “right”’. The important point here is that a person cannot become a language user in isolation. The problem seems to be that a basic trait of a language, and the main reason why we are

⁸ There is another alternative, i.e. to postulate a language of thought that is fundamentally different from

talking about rules in the first place, is that using a language is something that can be done correctly or incorrectly. We can make mistakes, and learn how to act in the future from those mistakes. But, if the correctness in the use of expressions and the acknowledgement of mistakes were completely left to the point of view of the individual, then what is correct and what seems correct would coincide. And this would mean that there would not be a distinction between right and wrong available to the speaker, i.e. no space for the distinction between being right and wrong, and hence we would lose the possibility of having meant anything at all. The act of meaning something by the use of an expression would turn out to be completely illusory.

The conclusion that some readers of Wittgenstein draw from this argument is that what is needed in order to fulfill the conditions of adequacy aforementioned implies a shift from an individual to a social model of meaning (Cfr. PI 202). What this amounts to is to think of meaning and normativity from the point of view of socially structured linguistic practices.

This is precisely Brandom's strategy to account for meaning. According to him, to get out of the Wittgenstein-Sellars' puzzle, semantic norms should be thought of as instituted by those who *acknowledge* them in practice. Only the assessing attitudes implicit in the practice of treating performances as correct or incorrect - not thought of as propositionally contentful states, but as *practical doings*- can do the required job. This would prevent the regress of interpretations, on the one hand, and avoid a regularity account with no normative statuses in place, on the other. Accordingly, when we think of normative linguistic practices, what these attitudes institute are linguistic norms: semantically contentful norms.

learned languages. See Fodor 1975. I won't discuss the prospects of this move here.

Brandom describes what these attitudes or doings should be like in order to be sufficient for the practice that involves them to be a normative linguistic practice. In the third chapter of *MIE*, he points out that there are some *doings* that suffice for a practice being a *linguistic* practice. Inferring and asserting are the basic doings that someone engaged in a linguistic practice has to be able to perform, and they are constitutive of what Brandom calls the game of giving and asking for reasons. An assertion is something that is a reason and something for which we can demand reasons, and hence assertions are inferentially articulated. The following points characterize Brandom's understanding of the game of giving and asking for reasons:

1. Assertions can exhibit two normative statuses: *commitments and entitlements*.
2. Making an assertion is in the first instance undertaking a commitment which in turn involves further commitments given the inferential articulation among commitments. Such are what Brandom calls *committive inferences*.
3. Commitments are not only something that can be given as a reason but also something reasons can be asked for. So, there are *permissive inferences* that articulate *entitlement preserving* relations among assertions.
4. The relations between commitments and entitlements must be underwritten by incompatibility relations. A participant in the game must recognise incompatibility relations among commitments which can be described in the following way: p is incompatible with q if commitment to p precludes entitlement to q.
5. Relations among commitments are not only intrapersonally inferentially articulated but also interpersonally articulated. Other practitioners of the game of giving and asking for reasons can use an assertion just made and undertake it. Thought of in this way, making an assertion is also putting it forward as a

commitment that anyone can undertake hence attributing entitlement to it. This is what may be called interpersonal inheritances of commitment.

6. Vindicating entitlement to one's claims can be achieved either through intrapersonal intercontent justifications or through interpersonal intracontent inheritance of commitments and entitlements.

7. The role that assertions have in a linguistic practice depends on *authority*, and this in turn is only intelligible against the background of the corresponding *responsibility* to vindicate the entitlements to the commitments that the assertion represents.

Judging is committing oneself, taking responsibility.

8. The way to ask for justification is to *challenge* an assertion; that is done in the basic case by making incompatible assertions. Characteristic of the game is a *default challenge structure*: giving reasons is only mandatory when they are properly asked for⁹. The authority gained in the first place by default and vindicated by fulfilling the responsibility of justifying it is central to the game. It is also possible for the practitioners to *defer* their justifying responsibility to another asserter.

To sum up, asserting is undertaking a commitment, making a claim for entitlement; in doing so one becomes *responsible*, undertaking the responsibility to give justification, when properly asked for. There are two different ways to show entitlement to one's claims: justifying by asserting, and deferring to another that is entitled to it¹⁰.

⁹ The reason is that taking the asserter to be *prima facie* entitled is just what is for an interpreter to take her as a competent deployer of the concept, that is what one does when one undertakes a commitment that has been asserted by another (i.e. interpersonal inheritance of commitment) Cf. Brandom 2010: 26.

¹⁰ There is in fact a third way to show entitlement, by invoking authority as a reliable non-inferential reporter. There are also two sorts of inferences that we did not discuss: practical and empirical. I will not discuss any of them here since they are not central to my argument.

Thought of in this way the game itself depends on the structure of authority and responsibility that links the individual's doings in a social, intersubjective way, linking the intracontent interpersonal and the intercontent intrapersonal dimensions of justification. The cost of the failure to answer a challenge is the loss of authority in the eyes of the scorekeeper and so, in his eyes, the loss of the authority to pass it on to others. On the other hand, while the reassertion license is in place (not yet challenged or satisfactorily responded to in the eyes of the scorekeeper) the entitlement can be bequeathed to others who can defer justification to the original assertor. According to Brandom (2010: 26-7), it is this authority and corresponding responsibility together with the notion of challenge what gives its characteristic dynamics to the inferential practice.

At the same time, making an assertion implies the *acknowledgment* on the part of the asserter of the commitment he is overtly undertaking – even if this does not imply that she acknowledges all the commitments that she is thereby undertaking. This acknowledgement is thought of as a status that is (properly) attributed to someone when she overtly asserts a claim and not as any kind of internal or (conscious) act of recognition, this acknowledgement is thus thought of exclusively as an attribution on the part of the interpreter, the scorekeeper. The crucial social aspect of the activity of inferring lies in the way in which each participant of the practice keeps score of the other's entitlements and commitments. Being an interpreter is being a scorekeeper.

Given this framework, how can we account for the sensitivity to norms that the interpreter himself must exhibit in his practices in order for these to be semantically normative? The very same question is presented by Brandom by asking what one has to be doing in order to be an *interpreter*, that is, a language user, the participant in a normative linguistic practice. His answer is that in order to be a language user one has

to be interpretable as such, as taking and attributing all those normative attitudes: undertaking commitments, attributing entitlements, responding to challenges intrapersonally and interpersonally and taking others to be doing so.

Brandom, as noted above, argues that the perspectival character of meaning attributions has to be thought of as an external, third-personal stance. This perspective is equivalent to the one speakers adopt towards each other within a linguistic community. In the following section I show this perspective to be insufficient to account for the normativity of linguistic practices. Next, I describe what else is needed on the part of the practitioners in order for them to be engaged in a normative linguistic practice; this will show a contrast between the attitudes that practitioners must adopt towards each other when engaged in linguistic exchanges *within* a linguistic community (what I will call a second person perspective) and those involved in interpreting a community from an external point of view, i.e. the third-personal interpretational stance.

2. *A community of interpreters.*

As described above, according to Brandom there are two ways to respond to a challenge: either by justifying intrapersonally the claim challenged or by deferring the responsibility to justify it to the original assertor. Moreover, if one fails to fulfill the justificatory responsibility demanded by the challenge one loses the authority that was originally claimed when issuing the assertion in the first place.

Nevertheless, an argument will be presented in this section for the idea that a third kind of response to a challenge (essentially second-personal) is absolutely fundamental in the model in question and that without it the practice would lack the appropriate friction and could not be normative. This second-personal kind of response

could be basically described as the withdrawal of the original claim: though it needs not be an explicit disavowal, it needs to be a change in the assertor's box and one that is sufficiently known by the challenger. In the context of MIE, Brandom refers to a response of such a kind and mentions that it would be useful to have in the basic linguistic practice special speech acts for queries, disavowals and challenges, but claims that such a response does not need to be in place in every possible linguistic practice¹¹. I will not argue for the idea of any special speech act of disavowal. What I will show is that, even if it does not always involve an explicit speech act of disavowal, this third kind of response - essentially thought of as a change in the original assertor's box¹² - is absolutely fundamental to make the model at stake work and, moreover, that its inclusion implies shifting from a third-personal understanding of the role of the interpreter to a second-personal one.

The strategy of my argument will be to present a practice with no second-personal recognition of incompatible claims by withdrawing claims previously held. This will show that this practice is not normative for the individuals involved and that their claims cannot be thought as contentful.

There are these three possible kinds of responses to a challenge¹³:

¹¹ Brandom 1994: 192-3.

¹² Brandom uses the term "box" to refer to the set of commitments, entitlements and incompatibility relations that a speaker attributes to herself and to others.

¹³ At this point it is worth noting a crucial difference between Wanderer 2010 argument and mine. He argues in favor of the idea that the recognition of challenges must be implicit in MIE. The claim is that challenges need to be register per se, independently of the responses - 1, 2, or 3 above- that the assertor gives. For him this means that these acts are *addressed* and that they are *recognized as addressed*. As it will be clear from the argument to follow, this move is insufficient for responding to my challenge. My argument is that challenges need to be recognized as such *by being fundamentally undertaken as authoritative by the assertor in the act of changing her commitments*, and that if this were not the central way in which we respond to challenges, the practice would dissolved.

1. By deferring the justification to someone else.
2. By an intercontent intrapersonal justification.
3. By acknowledging the incompatibility in our own box and thus withdrawing the commitment (second personal interaction).¹⁴

We will suppose for the sake of the argument, that

- (a) the practice does not involve (3) – since BLP are possible without (3).
- (b) the practitioners do not share any commitments.
- (c) the practitioners do not have any incompatible claims in their own boxes.

Both (b) and (c) will be drop later in the argument.

Given three players P1, P2 and P3: P1 says p (asserts, gets committed and asks for entitlement, claims for authority, and assumes responsibility). P2 makes a claim incompatible in his view with p: q. P1 may then act in the first (1) or the second (2) ways mentioned above. Let us suppose she does (2), an intercontent intrapersonal justification. She offers r, which is, in her box, a commitment which *entitlement-preserves* p. Now, P2 would not recognize it as entitlement-preserving in his own box since r does not entitlement-preserves p in the light of q since q is incompatible with p according to P2's own box. This is to be expected as different participants in the practice attach different contents to the utterances they use to specify each other's commitments. What is shared is the scorekeeping practice but not the contents of the claims exchanged. Might the sharing of the practice suffice for P2 to recognize r as entitlement-preserving of p even if P2 attaches a different content to r? That is, might P2 recognize the pragmatic move that P1 is making, thus that P1 takes p to be justified in the light of r? Indeed. P2 will attribute to P1 a commitment to r and a commitment to an entitlement preserving inference from r to p, but P2 needs not and would not take this

to be a good answer to his challenge since he is committed to q, and r does not entitlement-preserve p in the light of q. So in the eyes of P2, P1 loses authority as an assertor even if he acknowledges the move that P1 is making from a pragmatic point of view.

Might P1 reply to P2's challenge in any other way? P1 cannot offer r as a claim incompatible with q since in that case *ex hypothesi* the commitments of P2 would not include r or any other incompatible commitments to q. By hypothesis, P1 cannot show P2 that he must recognize r as a justification for p through an incompatibility, as it must be in order for r to be a justification for p in the light of q, since in order to do that r has to be incompatible with q and hence, by hypothesis, would not be in P2's box. Thus, P2 has no reasons to recognize p as justified (since she would not have in her own box nor r nor any claim from which r would follow). Hence, P1 can only effectively respond to P2 by (1), a deferral to P3.

But exactly the same situation would take place between P3 and P2.

Having exhausted the possible responses P1 could provide, P1 seems to be unable to properly respond to the challenge by showing to P2 what her reasons are or by agreeing with P2 that she is not entitled to p. The problem seems to be that in this practice the reasons of each practitioner do not count as reasons for the others unless they counted as already justified commitments in the box of each one of them. The only way in which the practitioners could get others to recognize what they take themselves to be entitled to (i.e. the only way in which they could come to share commitments) would be by previously having the same claims in their boxes. It is only by removing from the setting the assumption that they do not hold incompatible claims in their own boxes (c above) that they can come to share a view about what they are entitled to. If

¹⁴ This is the second dimension of second personal interaction; cfr. (2), p. 5 above. I will refer to the first

that were the case, P1 may find for example that she was already committed to q by holding s and that s is incompatible with p, the claim she asserted. In this case she would agree with P2, the challenger, and withdraw p, but this would occur absolutely independently of the interlocutor and her justifications. So this is not a way in which P2's commitments could count as challenges for P1 since it is simply a case in which P1 was previously holding incompatible claims. What is lost in a scenario like this one is the possibility of interlocutors addressing incompatible claims to each other in a way in which they can *get* their interlocutor to recognize their challenges when there was not previous reason for the interlocutor to change their commitments.

According to Brandom's model, what this situation amounts to is that in the eyes of each scorekeeper the others will lose authority. The only remaining authority would then be the one that each individual scorekeeper has on herself. Thus, even if this may come as a surprise in a model such as Brandom's where the social structure of the practice is essential, such a practice without second-personal interaction (i.e. responses 3 above), would be *individual* and not *social*. Each person's reasons would not be inherited intersubjectively, on the contrary, each participant would only have individual sources of justification and she would only attribute entitlement to those assertions of others that were in her eyes indistinguishable from her own. Furthermore, if the practitioners only had individual sources of justification it would be always possible for them not to recognize incompatible claims addressed to them by others as criticisms since they would not recognize any normative-status-modifying sanctions by others unless they had already thought that they were wrong. This means that they would be reluctant to accept any challenge raised by others, not willing to change or revise their commitments in the light of other practitioners' reasons.

So, in this individual practice each of the practitioners would lose their grip on any criteria of correction (any notion of being wrong), they would simply refuse to recognize any authority but their own. To put it in a Wittgensteinian way, in such cases, whatever seemed correct to them would be correct; and hence what they were doing would not be subject to any norms. This is Wittgenstein's argument against the possibility of a private language, one that Brandom accepts when he claims that a practice to be normative has to be social.¹⁵ In fact, they would lose the possibility of recognizing incompatibilities altogether, losing sensitivity to any cognitive friction and with it the possibility of having meant anything at all.

One may think that this line of reasoning can be contested by stressing the role of agreement in the practice, something that plays a key role in Davidson's account of normative linguistic practices¹⁶. This will amount to removing condition (b) above, i.e. that the practitioners do not share any commitments. This would give substance to the idea that the interlocutors need to come to realize incompatibilities against a background of shared commitments, one that already makes sense of the implicit incompatibilities in their own boxes that the other participants could be pointing to when raising a challenge (as it is apparent, this will also amount to dropping condition (c) above). It is true that Brandom, as opposed to Davidson¹⁷, does not include a condition of 'agreement in background beliefs' among the minimal conditions to make sense of BLP (see MIE, ch. 3). This is important as he takes the dynamics of scorekeeping and the exchange of incompatibilities to be the basis of BLP, being what possibilitates agreement. Nevertheless, as Brandom describes his view as "belonging in a box with the orthodox Davidsonian variety", one might think that this sort of agreement is somewhat implicit

¹⁵ This is pervasive in Brandom's work, see e.g. Brandom 1994: 52-5.

¹⁶ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this point.

¹⁷ Davidson's account itself is not immune to a similar line of criticism; see my Satne 2014.

in the framework. But this will not make any difference to the argument here for the content of the claims in each participant's boxes are still subject to the individual's interpretation. Since the framework does not require of the interlocutors to share the interpretation of every claim they exchange, even if there are some utterances they do share (say they both have s, j, and t in their own boxes¹⁸), the differences in how they interpret the relations of those to q, r and p, will influence the content of the ones in the exchange (and those they "agree upon") leading them to have different interpretations of the content of the claims at issue. Because of this, the claims they agree upon would not make any difference as to the dynamics of posing challenges and responding to them, thus leaving the situation exactly as it was portrayed at the beginning.

A different possible response to this argument is to be found in Brandom and Wanderer. According to them¹⁹, the relevant traits of this sort of second-personal interaction might be thought to be already implicit in the interpretationist framework of MIE. The argument will run as follows: since the interpreter needs to be able to distinguish between content and attitude for her own commitments, something that is then explicitated by the *de dicto* and *de re* locutions when those are in place²⁰, then a practical and *implicit way* of treating claims as objective conceptual contents is at play

¹⁸ As the game is characterized by a default challenge structure an important number of utterances will be shared by the interlocutors, even if they might be interpreting them differently.

¹⁹ They argue in favor of this idea when they describe the second-personal dynamics of exchange as being possibly implicit in MIE framework. See Wanderer 2010 and Brandom 2010: 315. Brandom seems to recognize that it is not implicit when he says, in response to Wanderer, that the inclusion of a second-personal aspect to every assertion "seems (to him) as a promising variant and development of the MIE apparatus" (ibid.)

²⁰ See Brandom 1994, chapter 8 and Brandom 2000b, chapter 6. It is important to note that this is what Brandom understands as meeting the objectivity condition on meaning, i.e. that what is correct is different from what one –anyone– takes to be correct. Brandom thinks he shows that his theory meets this condition when the interpretational structure of attributing and acknowledging commitments is explicitated in attitude locutions. If my argument is right, Brandom cannot meet this condition, see below.

in MIE. The very ability of *attributing commitments* but not *acknowledging* them *in practice* will be the way in which the model accounts for the individual being sensitive to the normativity of contents. This can also be thought as the individual taking an interpretative stance towards himself, where two time slices of the same individual will fulfill the roles of the challenger and the addressee of the challenge, one attributing but not acknowledging the commitment²¹. In this case it seems, *prima facie*, that since the two perspectives are different time-slices of the same individual, they necessarily matter for the one keeping score (namely, the present time-slice). This would seem to make room for what my argument required, namely, for other's perspective to matter for the individual's scorekeeping.

But this strategy just defers the problem without solving it. The point is for a subject to be capable of distinguishing between being-correct to say *p* and being-committed to *p*. Describing an individual as being capable of that presupposes her being able to distinguish them as two different perspectives *on the same thing*. The mere fact that it is the same individual as psycho-biological unit does not provide for this relation between the two perspectives since change may occur without acknowledging that the content is the same. Someone who were not sensitive to cognitive friction could not even apply the distinction to herself.

Hence, as I argued before, the theory lacks the resources to account for the individuals being sensitive to each other's conceptions of right and wrong, even as applicable to themselves. The individual will conceive of herself as "the ultimate judge"

²¹ So Brandom (2010: 299): "*if creatures can take up the different perspective to time slices of themselves, then the relation among those time-slices is social in my sense. For I am only claiming that intentionality must be social in the sense that it must admit of the distinction of perspectives between the attitude of attributing commitment (or other normative status) and the attitude of acknowledging it*".

and this means that the notions of authority and responsibility would lose their import on the practice.

Thus, for the practice to be normative it is essential for the participants to have second-personal interactions; acknowledging the friction of other individual's assertions by changing their commitments when they are challenged. This is the ground for the possibility of them having justifications and reasons that could be publicly inherited and also individually held. If this kind of interaction was not the essential dynamics of the practice, what they will be doing would not be characterizable in terms of the notions of authority and responsibility that according to Brandom articulate the very structure of a social normative linguistic practice.

The moral of this section is that the commitments of each individual cannot be made sense of independently of the agreement with others as to whether they are justified or not. This means that the stances of the individuals in a mutual I-Thou exchange cannot be thought of as interpretative, scorekeeping stances, where what the other is committed to is independent of the justification the other individuals have for what they take her to be committed to. Participants need to reach agreement on the role of the claims they exchange - whether they see them holding incompatible, entitlement or commitment relations - in a manner in which they assign largely the same inferential significance to them. Otherwise, individuals would be left isolated to their own individual viewpoints and all cognitive friction would be lost.

An essential shift in the way the dynamics of rational exchange is understood seems to be needed if we are going to make sense of socially articulated practices that could count as BLP, a theoretical model in which meaning can come to be shared and the same norms govern the way in which individuals make sense of their own commitments. To anticipate, what seems to be needed is a way of understanding the

dynamics of BLP where participants mutually recognize their assessments of the claims in their exchanges. Along these lines, an alternative characterization of BLP will be given in the next section.

3. The Dynamics of Second-personal Interaction.

Overcoming the interpretational picture just discussed involves accounting for the responsiveness of each individual to the assessments of others in a more substantial way than what is involved in the scorekeeping picture of interaction.

According to the conclusion of the previous section, the notion of interpreter as a scorekeeper appears to be derivative of a more basic and distinct conception of what one needs to be doing in order to be involved in a normative linguistic practice. So the question is then what someone needs to be doing in order to be a participant of a normative linguistic practice.

In the previous section I argued that challenges of others need to matter for the individual conception of her own commitments. This implied that the individual needs to withdraw claims that are challenged. Is it sufficient for someone to do that in order to count as participant of a socially structured linguistic practice? In this section, I will argue in favor of a second sort of activity also necessary for someone to be such a participant. By the end of the section a non-interpretational picture of what participation in BLP requires in terms of second-personal interaction will be offered. Assuming a third-personal interpretative stance will prove to be dependent on first being able to engage in a second-personal interaction with others.²²

²² At this point, the readers may be thinking that Davidson's triangulation might be the right tool to provide sufficient conditions for participants in BLP, especially his later notion of a second person (Davidson 1992). Nevertheless, one might doubt this as Davidson never abandons the interpretational

In MIE's picture, the minimum conditions sufficient on the part of the participants in a linguistic practice for them to count as interpreters are that they keep score of their commitments and entitlements. This means that each participant must have two boxes: one for his commitments and at least one for other person's commitments and entitlements. Granted that if we think of this activity as the basis of the exchange there are not any meanings in place for them to be dealing with, the key question to be asked is what makes it possible for someone to keep score on others and on himself. The conclusion of the previous section is that further characterizations that account for the sensitivity to correction are needed.

In the framework of MIE, what is necessary and sufficient for an interpreter to be entitled to attribute a commitment is just that the interpreted one does something that makes it appropriate for the interpreter to attribute the commitment. This is what counts as *undertaking* a commitment, which is different from *acknowledging* a commitment. The latter notion implies not only undertaking the commitment but *accepting* the commitment that one had undertaken by *overtly doing something* that in the eyes of the scorekeeper counts as committing herself in that way. Is the notion of *acknowledgment* just described sufficient to account for the subject to be engaged in second-personal sort of interaction with another person of the kind described in the previous section where each other's assessments necessarily matter for the individual's point of view?

Brandom presents an example that can be taken as paradigmatic of how he understands acknowledging a commitment.

The example is inspired by an Eighteenth-Century British practice. According to this practice, taking "the Queen's shilling" from a recruiting officer counted as committing the recipient to military service. This practice actually functioned by

stance characteristic of radical interpretation even when he refers to it as "second person". See also n. 17

making people in taverns take the Queen's shilling from these officers without them realizing the commitment they were by that act undertaking. As Brandom analyses the case, the *mere taking* the shilling counts as an *acknowledgment* of the commitment undertaken. The conclusion is that the significance of the acknowledgment of commitment must be understood in terms of the practical attitudes of the participants in the eyes of those attributing it and not by some special act of recognition of the commitment attributed on the part attributee.

But, is making it appropriate for others to attribute a commitment sufficient to count as a participant of the practice (*undertake* commitments, as we may say)? The obvious answer is no. The reason why this is not sufficient is that one has to be *attributing* commitments also. Here lies the crucial difference between other animals, for example, and humans. And more in general between communities to which commitments can be attributed (that is: the doings of their members can count for others as undertakings of commitments) and communities whose members can *attribute* commitments. This shows that the Queen's shilling example cannot be generalized.²³ There must be something else in place in order to make sense of which doings are necessary in order to be a language user other than it just being appropriate for us to attribute a commitment to them, in the absence of any recognition of an attribution. Moreover, there is an important closely related issue pointed out by Pippin (2006),

above.

²³ As a reviewer remarked, the specific recruitment practice of the Queen's shilling depends on a wider up-and-running practice- the drunkard's commitment is dependent on him previously being a loyal servant to the Queen- and thus depends on the dynamics of acknowledgment and attribution of commitments that make such practice possible. This may speak against the possibility of generalizing the shilling case to characterize acknowledgment. But the notion of acknowledgment Brandom deploys to understand the background practice is the same: making for others appropriate to attribute a commitment, and hence the problem lies at the heart of Brandom's account. For an analysis of the shilling example along the same lines, see Pippin (2006): 395-6.

namely, that because of the way Brandom characterizes acknowledgement- as making it appropriate by doing something to be attributed a commitment- he cannot make sense of the idea of commitments being freely undertaken by the subjects, having the character of self-imposed norms, something that Brandom himself wants to account for, especially when emphasizing his Kantian lineage (See MIE: ch.1, and TMD: 219)

What is exactly the difference in the most basic case between participants of linguistic practices and beings to which commitments are only attributed? The difference, I want to suggest, is that the interpreter has to *recognize* commitments, that is, it is not only necessary to *undertake* commitments but also to *acknowledge some* of them oneself in a different sense than just making it appropriate for others to attribute them to us. That is what we have been calling *recognition* of commitments.²⁴ Promises and marriages are typical examples of this kind of recognition. In such acts it is essential for their felicity that those involved *know* and *acknowledge* their commitment to fulfilling the promises thereby undertaken. If e.g. the promisee were only interpreting that a promise is being made to her, then no commitment would hold for the other part no matter how misleading were her acts.

We can agree with Brandom that the notion of acknowledgement is a normative one. By acknowledging something -p - we respond to that as something that is appropriate for us to be attributed commitment to. It is thus a notion that needs to be modeled taking into account the ways in which our action is assessed as correct or incorrect. But, as it was argued before, if we take into account only the individual's doings - seen in the eyes of others but insulated from to any influence of those assessments in how the individual keeps her score on herself- we cannot make sense of

²⁴ As it will be apparent, there is a strong tie between recognition and freedom. Only free subjects can be part of such a recognitional practice, since each participant must be in a position to endorse the attribution (or reject it). I will come back to this at the end of this section.

the individuals becoming *sensitive to normativity*. The notion of being correct collapses in this view since it is unintelligible that a proper criterion of correction is in place. In the basic case this counts as lacking the criteria for *sameness* of commitment as a normative notion to be applied to herself and others. If, in a social model of normativity, acknowledgement is a notion that needs to be modeled taking into account the ways in which our action is assessed as correct or incorrect and these have to impact the conception the individual has of what she is doing, *acknowledging a commitment* should not be thought of as “making appropriate for others to attribute a commitment”. Rather it is to be understood as a way of (correctly or incorrectly) *recognizing* an assessment of correction by others (i.e. recognizing a commitment that is attributed to us). It appears, thus, as the way in which we are *sensitive* to those assessments²⁵.

It is in the framework of making sense of this sensitivity where the interaction of a second-personal sort (as opposed to a third-personal one) comes into view. Becoming an interpreter has to be done in the first instance by acknowledging, in the sense of recognizing, the assessments of someone else (in the basic case it can be the *recognition* of another person’s reactions towards our doings).

The order of explanation cannot account for a third personal way of assessing others commitments without making sense of this notion in a manner that necessarily matters for the individual- i.e. as part of a second personal sort of exchange. The individual has to *recognize* the assessments of others in the first place and only thereby

²⁵ As will be shown, at least in some cases acknowledgment is of commitments attributed (by someone else), i.e. recognizing them by changing your score. This is particularly important to be a participant of the practice, although it is not a general constraint on acknowledgments nor on the things we are committed to. We can be committed to things we do not know we are (ignorance) or be mistaken about our commitments (error). Moreover, the content of the claim acknowledged might, and usually will, outrun our grasping of it. The point is rather that the individuals need to recognize the appropriateness of the attribution – and all what follows from it.

would it be possible for her to take the stance of an external interpreter. This recognizing of the assessment is in the first instance the *recognition* of the commitment attributed to her by someone else; it is the act of recognition by which the attributee includes the commitment attributed in her own box. This is one of the sides of what counts as having a second-personal sort of interaction with someone else. Nevertheless, this cannot be the whole story since it could still be the case that one participant could not recognize the criticisms that other participants may address to her (the very trait that in the previous section showed itself as necessary to be in place in any linguistic practice). Lacking this trait, she would not be in the position to take herself to be wrong, and hence she would not be sensitive to assessments of correction, and to normativity at all.

So, in order to make sense of the notion of a participant of a normative linguistic practice there are two attitudes that must be in place.

The first one is for the individual to recognize the commitment attributed to her by others. We can think of this recognition as one side of the constitution of the authority that a practitioner must inherit from the reactions of another person regarding her individual doings. But, second, the sensitivity to correction must at the same time account for the possibility of being wrong, for the possibility to be corrected by others. The special way in which this recognition is effective is again by recognizing the other person's claim, but this time as a challenge. This is the other side of the coin and different in character from the recognizing-acknowledging of an attributed commitment just described.

So, if, on the one hand, the *recognition by acknowledging commitments* is needed in order to make sense of one's *taking oneself to be committed*, on the other hand, what is needed in order to make sense of one's being *entitled* to that commitment,

i.e. of the possibility of being wrong, is the recognition of another person's challenges by acknowledging her criticisms as determining what one is not entitled to when one is committed to something. This is what has been argued for as necessary in the previous section.

In sum, a second-personal sort of interaction involves the presence of two dimensions of social exchange: on the one hand, there must be an acknowledging of the other person's attributions of commitments in the loaded sense of *recognizing* such attribution and not merely doing so in 'the eyes of the interpreter' (one side of the recognition of the authority of the attributor); on the other, the sensitivity to correction implies one recognizing the incompatibilities attributed - the challenges made by others, i.e. the recognition of other person's criticism by changing one's own box, by withdrawing commitments previously held (this is the side of authority that is strictly linked with responsibility). If this second activity were not in place, we would lose the possibility of correcting each other and hence the possibility of self-correcting ourselves.

This second-personal interaction can be thought of as describing the proper dynamics of the mutual recognition of authority and responsibility. It is the activity that takes place when two interlocutors acknowledge each other's claims by changing their commitments, either by undertaking a commitment attributed or by withdrawing a commitment previously held. And this activity is the one needed to make sense of a normative linguistic practice in the first place.

This speaks against Brandom's claim that there is no significant difference between the point of view *from within* the practice and an *external stance towards* it. The second-personal dynamics I have described can only make sense *within* a practice and is not reducible to an external stance on it. It properly exhibits the form of a

conversation, where each person's contribution matters for the individuals involved, and not of interpretation, where individuals can remain ignorant about each other's assessments.

To think of the BLP as a form of conversation not equivalent to two interpreters keeping score of each other "from the outside" (i.e. the collapse of the internal and external perspectives) brings to the fore another important structural difference between the second personal understanding of the fine structure of rationality and an interpretational understanding of it.

As said before one key aspect of the notion of recognition as opposed to the idea of "making appropriate to others to attribute commitments", is that recognition speaks to freedom, Pippin's worry mentioned above. It speaks to it because to recognize a commitment is to endorse it. Something that an individual might freely decide not to do. Importantly if the individual rejects the attribution then the stage of shared norms is not reached. There is conflict, not a shared norm in place. For there to be a shared norm there has to be agreement: both individuals, the attributer and the addressee, need to endorse the commitment and share its interpretation. This is to think of content in terms of one box and not two. The content of p is to be assessed in the light of all the individual doings in a coherent manner. This is compatible with there being material disagreements in practice as to what the meaning of a claim is but those are to be seen as in need of being resolved. Because these are to be thought as belonging to just one shared semantic interpretation there is cognitive friction that is in need of being resolved by reaching agreement. Agreement is then a normative matter, a regulative principle of the practice, that gives unity to the structure of semantic contents. This is in striking contrast with the idea that interpretations and incompatibilities lie at the heart of BLP, for a principle of agreement in conversation outruns individual interpretations

exercising normative pressure towards common understanding and against potential conflict and incompatibilities.

4. Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to show that Brandom's account of normative linguistic practices is problematic and needs to be reshaped in terms of a second-personal sort of interaction. If these arguments are sound, then it is simply not true that the fundamental form of our engagement with others is interpretational. Rather, second personal interaction implies a form of sharing reasons that is first-personally accessible for each of those involved in a way that is irreducibly inaccessible to an interpretational external stance from where we are only observable or interpretable as doing something but not experiencing it together. Brandom talks about the fundamental collapse between the internal perspective and the external one. Such a collapse is an illusion. The internal, second-personal point of view shapes our sense of authority and responsibility as rational beings in a way that cannot be made intelligible from a merely external perspective. The external, observational stance is of a fundamental distinct type as compared to an internal, participant or second-person perspective. The latter implies that a fundamental agreement is built upon the actual exchanges and mutual responsiveness of the practitioners. We can observe communities and attribute entitlements and commitments to them; perhaps we can do this with other animals or computers, but what is at stake in the case of the internal, participatory interaction, is the acquiring and occupying of a place in a shared space that is shaped by our responsiveness to each other.

Acknowledgments

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