Categories Involved in the Justification of Knowledge Claims

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When speakers claim that something is a fact, that fact is supported. The support may be implicit or explicit. Furthermore, these claimed facts, that I call *knowledge claims*, are aimed at an idealised epistemological community. The speaker will spend more effort justifying knowledge claims that are believed to lie outside of the shared knowledge of the group and less effort justifying knowledge claims that are seen as being shared information within the group. This article will discuss my research to date into the strategies speakers use to justify their knowledge claims. The data upon which this analysis is based is the transcription of three focus groups.

This article describes the categories I have identified relating to the strategies used to justify knowledge claims (KCs). Within this justification strategy I have identified three branches: unjustified, evidentiality, and legitimization. These three branches are used by the speaker to guide the listener in understanding why the speaker believes their KC is reasonable, and/or why they are reliable disseminators of information (see Figure 1). The data used for the analysis is the transcription of three focus groups. There were three focus groups, each looking at a different topic; *Why is Kobe a popular place for tourists?*, *What is learner autonomy?*, and *What does it mean to be moral?*. This article will discuss these three categories with examples. First, I will explain the difference between evidentiality and legitimization. Then I will explain each category of unjustified, evidentiality, and legitimization in turn.

The categories of evidentiality and legitimization are in need of explanation. The differences can be best shown through an analysis of an example that uses both types of justification in the same utterance, thus allowing a side-by-side comparison. In excerpt 1, Carol L2 supports the KC Ben makes in L1.

Figure 1
Categories of justification
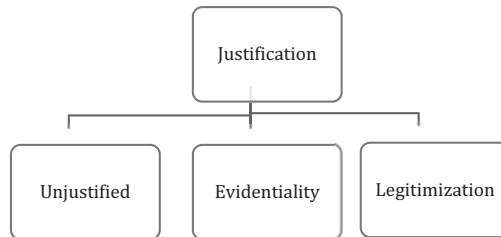
(Excerpt 1) [I never really felt comfortable in Tokyo]

1	Ben: Um, but aah, I never really felt comfortable in Tokyo.
2	Carol: I've heard that.
3	Ben: It was just too much.
4	Carol: **I've heard that, a lot of people have said that.**

However, L4 shows a difference between the source of a KC and the legitimacy of a KC. In L4 Carol gives the evidence for her support of Ben's claim but adds to it. L4 is best seen as two separate KCs, both attempting to support Ben's KC that Tokyo was unpleasant. The first, "I've heard that", is a repetition of ex1 L2, and the second is "a lot of people have said that". For ease of reference I have labelled these two parts;

L4i   I've heard that
L4ii   a lot of people have said that

I believe that the repetition in ex.1 L2 and 4 is an important consideration in the analysis. In ex.1 L4ii, Carol redesigns her utterance to become one of legitimization. The key phrase in the legitimizing strategy of normalization is "a lot of." This phrase does not add anything in terms of evidential support, as it does not make any difference to the source whether it was one person, two people or many people. As "a lot of people have said that," the KC is a widely held KC and therefore a reasonable KC to hold. Carol is not speaking to the truth content of her KC; she is saying that because a lot of people hold this opinion it is a reasonable stance. This is legitimizing her stance by appealing to the normalizing nature of a widely held KC by other people towards this stance.

UNJUSTIFIED

The unjustified category is averrals. Averrals (see Hunston, 2000; Hunston & Thomson, 2000) are statements of fact or opinion (see ex.2) in which the speaker does not seek to attribute the KC to another source (this is an attribution), nor does the speaker abdicate responsibility for the veracity of the KC (which is the case with an attribution). In the data, averrals are extremely commonplace. The commonality of averrals suggests that speakers are efficient judges of what information lies within the domain of general knowledge within the epistemic community. I am proposing that averrals are used by the speaker to make KCs that are deemed so obvious, or so unquestionably subjective, that no justification is needed.

This suggests that speakers are efficient in their judgement of what constitutes necessary detail. The fact that speakers do not choose to justify every KC with evidence is, in keeping with the Gricean maxims, a deliberate choice made in order to speed conversations along to what is deemed to be the main point and to avoid becoming bogged down in unnecessary details. The data has shown that occasionally participants will challenge averrals, but, more often than not, the averral remains unchallenged.

Averrals can be divided into two categories; averrals of fact and averrals of opinion. This difference can be seen in (ex.2) taken from the data. Averrals of fact are to be seen in ex.2 L3, 4, 7, and 8, as they are all statements of fact that can easily be verified whereas ex.2 L1, 2, and 6 are unsupported statements of opinion. This example shows that averrals, be they fact or opinion, are permitted by the epistemic community as they address commonly shared facts or opinions. Any attempt by any of the speakers in this passage to support their averrals would have been unnecessary and have represented an infringement upon Gricean maxims advocating brevity. What is of most importance in this passage is the fact that all the speakers were in agreement with each other as evidenced by the fact that no challenges to the unsupported nature of the averrals was made.
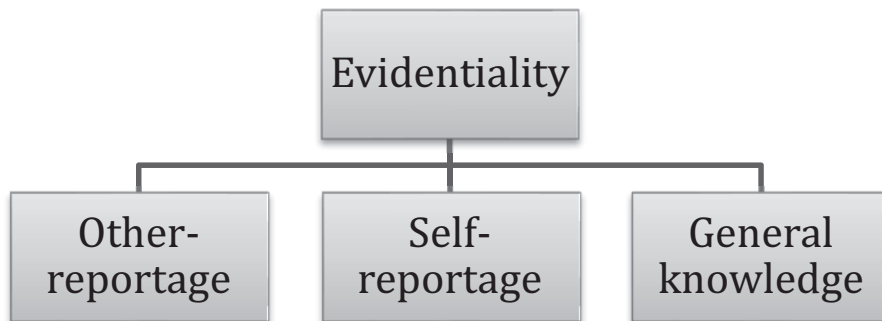
(ex.2) [Kobe has a lot to offer]
1	Ben: Kobe has a lot to offer.
2	Carol: I think so, food, people, comfort, yeah, accessibility.
3	Alan: You've got the Chinatown, India town.
4	Carol: And we've got the Shin Kobe Shinkansen.
5	Alan: Yeah, oh the Shinkansen station.
6	Carol: which is also nice.
7	Alan: Nowadays nearly every train stops at Kobe whereas.
8	Carol: and we have Kobe airport.
9	Alan: Yeah.
10	Carol: Right? We have the airport.

EVIDENTIALITY

Evidentiality is the category of justification that uses the source of the KC as justification. This category has three sub-categories; other-reportage, self-reportage, and general knowledge.

Figure 2.
Categories of evidentiality.

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              ┌─────────────────┐
              │  Evidentiality  │
              └─────────────────┘
        ┌───────────┼───────────┐
┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐
│  Other-  │  │  Self-   │  │ General  │
│ reportage│  │ reportage│  │knowledge │
└──────────┘  └──────────┘  └──────────┘
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General Knowledge

General knowledge refers to the knowledge that individual members of a group perceive to be the shared knowledge amongst the group. The data suggests that groups orient towards themselves as being epistemic communities. This orientation is observable in the language used to justify their KCs. These epistemic communities (i.e., the participants of the focus groups) use language that suggests the KC being made is accessible to the other individual members of the epistemic community through their being a member of the epistemic community. This is in contrast to the category unjustified (see above). The contrast is that unjustified KCs are deemed to be of such obviousness that they do not require indication of the source of the knowledge, whereas the general knowledge category is a more limited category, being limited to the epistemic community under discussion. It can be seen in the data that speakers take care to establish the epistemic community under discussion before making any KCs perceived to be shared amongst the members. Two strategies were observed within the general knowledge category; collective categorisation and the use of key words and phrases.

Collective categorisation

The category of collective categorisation is a two-step process using general knowledge to support a KC. Firstly, the KC is shown to be general knowledge within a group having epistemic authority to establish this KC. Secondly, membership of this privileged category is claimed and established by the participants.

The four types of collective categorisation found in the data are;
  a. the impersonal *you*
  b. we
  c. compound pronouns, e.g., everybody
  d. the word *people*

When the impersonal *you* is used by a speaker they are suggesting that this represents a KC that exists within the shared framework of the epistemic community being referenced. It represents epistemological positioning (EP) strategy because, "the appeal to shared perceptions, rather than just one's own experience or observation, shows [the speaker] takes this issue to be potentially arguable, and their perception potentially in need of support" (Myers and Lampropoulou, 2012, p. 1216).

In Excerpt 3, Dave states that members of the teachers' category would be able to see which students are following his instructions. First, he establishes the collective category to be discussed by referencing himself as the teacher by establishing that he has authority to give opportunity, an authority only a teacher would have, and, therefore, the *everybody* must be the students. Having established the initial collective category, he begins to use those collectives to justify his second KC. This pattern of establishing the collective category and then using the collective for justification of a KC was very common when using the impersonal you. One possible conclusion for the recurrence of this pattern is that speakers are aware of the possibility of confusion presented by the impersonal you and pre-empt it by taking extra care to establish the context of you.

(ex.3) [you can see which ones are doing it]

Dave: I give, like, everybody the opportunity and **you** can see which ones are doing it.

Excerpt 4 builds upon the category of teacher, which is the epistemic community in the focus group. The KC uses collective general knowledge to

establish the existence of expertise in the classroom, i.e., the area within which the expertise is expected/required.

(ex.4) [when you give directions you can see two types]
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1      Alan    But (0.6) especially when you start giving directions
2              and you see that the
3              two types of student the ones that shake their heads
4              like uh huh uh huh and
5              they just wanna look like they know what you are
6              doing or what you're saying and then there's the
7              one that they get what you're saying.
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In ex.5, the central KC (L7 - Kobe is a big city with a village atmosphere) is an averral of opinion. However, the participants work to support this KC through showing that an epistemic community exists that has access to this knowledge and that they are all members of this category and thus have epistemic authority to make such a KC. The epistemic community, the category of the Kobe ex-pat community, is refined using words acting as synonyms. In L1, the category under discussion is a loose epistemic community, sharing only their *overseasness*. There is no real communal nature available to this category as it is a category defined by not being Japanese whilst being in Kobe, reinforced by L5. L7 and L8 begin to refine the category, affording members of this category qualities based on what they do, rather than what they are not. Carol provides an important pivot in the development of the category, in which the category is transformed into a community (L10-13) by stating that all the present participants are members of the category. This is reinforced by Alan and then Carol giving examples from their own personal experience (self-reportage). Thus, having established that ex-pats all know or know of each other, the credentials for the KC (a big city with a village atmosphere) have been established.

(ex.5) [a big city with a village atmosphere,]
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1      M:      What features of Kobe attract so many
2               people from overseas to settle down
3              long-term in Kobe?
4              (4.0)
5      Alan:   Are you specifically talking about foreigners then?
6      M:      Yes.
7      Alan:   Safety, a big city with a village atmosphere, people
8               knows each other.
9      All:    Hmmm.
10     M:      Do you think, I mean, everybody does know each
11             other.
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12	Carol:	If **we** don't know each other then **we** know of each
13		other.
14	M:	Yeah.
15	Carol:	I mean I don't know **you** (looking at M) but **I** know of 16
		you from **Ben** and from **Alan.**
17	M:	Yeah.
18	Carol:	But I…
19	Alan:	But it's amazing just walking around about Sannomiya,
20		the amount of
21		f**oreigners** and **you**'re in a city of 4 and a half
22		million, supposedly, and it's
23		like (waves) "hello", (waves) "Hello",
24	Carol:	When I leave my apartment, I do often bump into 1, 2, 25
		3 **people.**

The use of key words and phrases

Key words and phrases modify averrals by suggesting that the averral is accessible through general knowledge but without referencing the epistemic community through which access to the general knowledge is to be gained.

In ex.6, the KC is accessible through its obviousness.

 (ex.6) [it's a lot of money]
 1. E: I agree that the top 1%, that level of wealth
 2. M: That level of wealth, yeah.
 3. D: **Clearly,** it's a lot of money.

In excerpt 7 the KC is supported by being described as a widespread belief.

(ex.7) [Bill Gates was famously despised]

1	Dave:	No, but Bill Gates was quite immoral in his acquisition 2
		of wealth. Bill Gates is a particularly fascinating
3		example because he basically stole from everybody.
4	Ed:	Uhhmm.
5	Dave:	And made himself rich off of the backs.
6	Ed:	Right.
7	Dave:	Of the hard work of others
8		and was **famously** one of the most despised people
9		back in the uh, the 1990s. But people have forgotten
10		because we didn't have the Internet so widely then.

Self-reportage

Self-reportage supports a KC by stating that the KC falls within the epistemic territory of the speaker as primary knower. The KCs reported on are the subjective KCs of the speaker or KCs regarding a change in the state of the speaker's knowledge. Self-reportage supports KCs that are designed to justify subsequent action.

Excerpt 8 is a report on a personal desire. This type of KC support is designed to open up a discussion on a related issue. In ex.8, Alan makes a KC that he wants to visit China. As this is a report on a personal desire it does not require any further support beyond self-reportage. However, self-reportage, in this example, asserts the speaker's epistemic authority to make a KC, which, in turn, justifies subsequent action resulting from the KC, in this case looking up cheap flights on the internet.

(ex.8) [I'd like to visit the Terracotta Warriors]

1	Alan:	But I was reading an article about the Terracotta
2		Warriors and I said "You know, I'd like to go and
3		visit them" and I looked up cheap flights from Japan.

Dressing a KC as a subjective opinion through change-of-state self-reportage represents less of a conversational risk than a bare averral but, nevertheless, places a KC into the conversational domain. Carol makes a KC in excerpt.9 that she has had a change-in-state of knowing. Carol is able to claim that she did not know everything was so compact, which implies everything is compact. This is a subjective evaluation of the KC and stands in opposition to a bare averral.

(ex.9) [I didn't know that everything was so compact]

1	Alan:	You don't have to, like Osaka, to go to a different area
2		miles away. It's quite a compact city.
3	Carol:	But I don't think the foreigners know that when they
4		come here. I don't think.
5		I didn't know that everything was so compact when I
6		arrived. It took me a while to learn that.

Other-reportage

Other-reportage has two variations; specified other-reportage and unspecified other-reportage.

Specified other-reportage

Specified other-reportage is an uncomplicated, explicit mentioning of the source that has made the KC. Specified other-reportage establishes the authority upon which the other source rests before the KC is made. In Excerpt

10 Ben uses specified other-reportage to justify moving from Tokyo to Kobe (L3-6). The specified nature of the other-reportage is important. Ben first establishes the credentials of the person making the KC (you will love Kobe…you'll love it) as being someone who he has a close friendship with and therefore is in a position how best to advise Ben and as someone who has made the move. This suggests that with a specified other-reportage, care is taken in the selection of the source.

(ex.10) [You'll love Kobe]
1	Ben:	When I first came to Japan I lived in Tokyo for a year
2		and a half and then aah my best friend at the time …
3		he got married the first year … in
4		Japan … he came to Kobe, he calls me up a month later
5		and says "Get out of Tokyo, move to Kobe, you're
6		going to love it",
7		within a month of being here he's telling me
8		Get a transfer … to Osaka or Kobe, you'll love it.
9		I did.

In Excerpt 11, Alan takes care to establish the credentials of the source used in the other-reportage. The source has two relevant qualities; they are friends and therefore have his best interest at heart, and they are Japanese and therefore have an epistemic authority on the subject greater than that of Alan and Belinda.

(ex.11) [We'd move to Kobe in a minute]
1	Alan:	Belinda and I at the time were single and we had lots
2		of Japanese friends and it was night life good and
3		life was fine but after the earthquake my boss in
4		Kobe says, "Right, we want you to come up here
5		because you can travel here, there, Kobe Steel,
6	Ben:	After the earthquake?
7	Alan:	Yeah, uh, we didn't come here until '96. We were
8		in Kyushu at the time of the earthquake and
9		we were like "Well", we had a lot of nice
10		friends, we didn't want to move but all our
11		Japanese friends were saying "You've got a
12		chance to move to Kobe, oh, we would move
13		in a minute". They were "Oh I would move to Kobe", 14 so we didn't feel so bad then.

Unspecified other-reportage

        Unspecified other-reportage is much more problematic as a category. There are three possible reasons to use support a KC using unspecified other-reportage. Firstly, using unspecified other-reportage as support for a KC could be due to an inability to correctly remember the specifics of the source, as in Excerpt 12. The source referenced is 'a study'.

(ex 12) [there was a study about people posting on Facebook]
1   Dave: That's why I mentioned Facebook …It's a good
2   first step but if you're never taking a step beyond that.
3   Ed: For quantitative studies it's a predictor, it could be a
4   predictor of action.
5   Dave: Yeah, I think there was **a study** where people who
6   posted on Facebook were generally quite good,
7   I think. But I might be misremembering that.

        Secondly, using unspecified other-reportage could be due to a desire to be brief and not give unnecessary detail, as in Excerpt 13. The speaker suggests a technical term is used by an unspecified group, and this unspecified group is the source for the term. Yet, in this example, it was known to every participant that Charles was working on a PhD specifically exploring autonomy in the second language classroom, therefore there would be no reason to doubt that he is familiar with the sources and has not specified the source in order to remain brief.

(ex 13) [I believe the term used is semi-autonomous]
1   Charles: But it's the perception of choice because
2   they've only got limited semi-autonomous
3   **I believe is the term used**.

        A third possible reason for using unspecified other-reportage is that the speaker has no source and is bluffing. The only way this could be discovered is if a speaker were to refer to an unspecified source, then be challenged by another participant and admit that there was no source. This did not happen in the data.

        What did happen in the data is that a speaker made a KC using unspecified other-reportage and was challenged on the KC, not on the source. In Excerpt 14 the KC, (they say Kobe is fashionable) on L1 is immediately challenged on L2. The discussion continues until L11 when the originator of the KC modifies her KC (L11) so the focus is not on the content of the KC but specifies the source (a lot of people who aren't from Kobe). Other participants meet this specification of the source with agreement. This episode suggests that when a KC supported by an unspecified source proves problematic, then

challenging that KC is not seen as problematic, and therefore is within the scope of conversational etiquette.

(ex.14) [Kobe is fashionable]
1   Carol: They always say Kobe is a fashion, fashionable.
2   M: Do you think that's true? Kobe is a fashionable place?
3   Ben: More fashionable than Osaka?
4   M: Yeah, I mean, what's different
5   Alan: They have a fashion museum in Kobe
6   Carol: Yeah, on Rokko Island
7   Alan: But I mean, I don't … mmmh.
8   M: But it doesn't leap out at you, I mean,
9   I don't go around Kobe and go,
10   Alan: Personally, I've never been in it
11   Carol: But a lot of people who aren't from Kobe they do
12   come to Kobe because they do say that people in Kobe 13
              do kind of present themselves differently
14   Ben: I've heard that. Absolutely
15   Alan: Yeah
16   Ben: That is true

LEGITIMIZATION

While evidentiality is a well-discussed topic, legitimization has not received the same amount of attention. Van Leeuwen discusses the "discursive construction of legitimation" (2008, pp. 105-123) but the focus is primarily upon the relationship between power and authority and not knowledge. Legitimizing sources do not justify the KC by addressing the source of the KC. Rather, they justify the KC by adding some extra information that explains why it is reasonable for the speaker to make the KC. Participants were observed using two strategies to legitimize their KCs; logical reasoning and statement of normativity. Based on the limited data collected in this pilot study, legitimizing strategies justify KC that are either based on subjectivity or are questions of morality.

Figure 3
Categories of legitimization
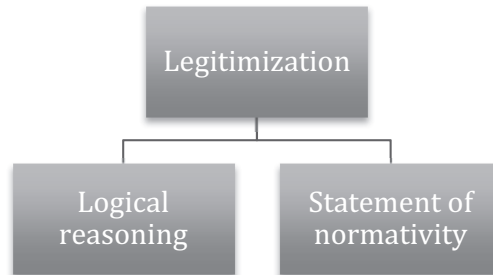
Logical Reasoning

Logical reasoning, as I intend to use it, is more akin to inference to the best explanation than the hard, mathematical logical reasoning to be found in works on philosophical logic. In other words, "[b]eginning with the evidence available to us, we infer what would, if true, provide the best explanation" (Lipton, 2004, p. 1). Both Chafe (1986) and Bednarek (2006) cited logical reasoning as a form of evidentiality. Whilst logical reasoning does justify a KC, and therefore does the same job as evidentiality, I believe that logical reasoning works as justification in a different set of circumstances.

Edward (Excerpt 15) suggests that it is obvious that morality is socially constructed because no other possibilities exist, and hence, the KC is presented as justifiable.

(ex.15) [Morality is socially constructed]
1   M: So, it's, you would say morality is normative.
2   David: I reckon different people are going to have
3   different social norms, so it's all relevant.
4   Ed: Yeah, I would say so, it could be a socially
5   constructed thing. Well, it has to be a
6   socially constructed thing. What else could it be?

In Excerpt 16, Edward makes a KC in L3 that is self-reportage and legitimizes this KC through logical deduction. L3-4, Edward makes a logical deduction and it clearly contradicts ex.16 L1. An examination of the language itself shows nothing explicit. Indeed, I would suggest that many of the logical steps remain implicit.

(ex.16) [A lynching is not a moral act]
1   M: A moral act is any act which leads to the greatest happiness 2 of the greatest possible number.
3   E: I kinda disagree with that, I'm thinking of a lynching.
4   You have one person stop the lynching, two people
5   are happy but most people aren't happy.

An interesting point is that after his KC (*I kinda disagree with that*) Edward continues his turn rather than ending it. It was a grammatically complete utterance and therefore is a perfectly acceptable ending for a turn. I see two observable phenomenon taking place. Firstly, Edward makes a KC in L3 (I kinda disagree with that) that is self-reportage and it is therefore impossible to avoid taking responsibility. Secondly, the subjective nature of morality means that a source is not always available to justify a KC so a justification based on logical reasoning was proffered instead. This may be an example of a pattern that takes place in similar KCs; highly subjective opinions that cannot be justified through evidentiality will require justification through legitimization if the speaker wishes to continue to take responsibility for the KC.

Statement of normativity

Citing frequency, or the widespread nature of events, transforms the information from an anecdote into evidence. When a speaker makes a KC, and suggests that this KC is believed by many people or frequently occurs, then they are appealing to the listener through the normative nature of the KC. In effect, the speaker is suggesting that if many people believe it or if it happens often then it is not unreasonable for the speaker to put forward their KC.

In Excerpt 17, Carol cites the frequency of her action as additional justification for her KC. Carol is agreeing with a KC made earlier that the ex-pat community in Kobe is a close-knit community. Carol uses self-reportage for her KC, and, as primary knower, there is no apparent need to further justify the KC. The frequency of the event, and the reoccurring nature add to the veracity of the KC; it was not a one-time occurrence. Compare this with the hypothetical KC;

Once, when I left my apartment, I bumped into 1,2,3 people.

This hypothetical example would refer to a single occurrence, which would be an insufficient sample-size upon which to draw when making inferences of normative behaviour.

Ex.17 [I often bump into 1,2,3 people]

Carol: When I leave my apartment, I do **often** bump into 1, 2, 3 people.

In Excerpt 18, the word large is used to suggest the practice under discussion is a widespread practice, rather than a one-time occurrence. The claim is strengthened by taking place across a larger area, and therefore being a more common, and therefore normal, practice. This KC has two components; the source of the KC and the KC itself. The source is a study recently read by Dave. The KC is that in parts of the world, violence is considered normal. The decision to use large to enlarge the afflicted area of the world would presumably rest with the author of the reading material and not Dave. The author could avoid criticisms of using anecdotal evidence by showing the widespread nature of the phenomenon.

Ex.18 [In parts of the world, violence is considered to be OK]

Dave: I was just reading that in **large** parts of the world, violence is considered to be just ok.

CONCLUSIONS

Knowledge claims require justification. This justification can come in three types and the low incidence of participants questioning the type of justification given suggests that participants are skilled judges of either
a) the type of KC to make with the information they have, or
b) the type of justification needed to make the KC they want to make.
Given the small amount of data collected in the pilot study, these findings will need to be further tested.

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