Normative pragmatics and the social world

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Language is an integral part of our social worlds, but at the same time it has served, and continues to serve, as our main tool for shaping those worlds. We use language to create and allocate social roles ("mother", "friend", "content manager") and to create and manage social institutions ("family", "webshop", "ethics committee"), all of which involve specific ways of using language, if only because roles and institutions tend to be named, so that they can be talked and written about.

Despite the fact that, arguably, institutions are fictional entities, we take them to be real, and not only that: we treat many of them as *agents*. It is generally accepted that business corporations, for example, have goals, rights, and duties that guide their actions, and that they interact with us and with other institutions: trade unions, courts of law, ministries, etc. And yet, the corporations we purportedly interact with have been made by us, and language plays a key role in their creation.

Thus language is instrumental in creating our social reality, seemingly *ex nihilo*. This is only possible, or so I argue, because both are inherently normative. We treat each other as having normative statuses (commitments, permissions, etc.), and the chief purpose of our linguistic exchanges is to manage our normative statuses. If I promise you to mow the lawn, I become committed to mowing the lawn; if I tell you I mowed the lawn, I become committed to the truth of proposition that I mowed the lawn; and so on. The main objective of my talk is to explain how such normative pragmatic practices could have bred such strange and diverse social creatures as families, football, and France.

References: • Geurts, B. (2019). Communication as commitment sharing: speech acts, implicatures, common ground. *Theoretical linguistics* 45: 1-30. • Geurts, B. (2022). Evolutionary pragmatics: from chimp-style communication to human discourse. *Journal of pragmatics* 200: 24-34.