Call for Abstracts

Words That Move Us: The Normative Reach of Speech

24–25 May 2027

School of Philosophy, University College Dublin, Ireland

Keynote speaker

- Teresa Marques (University of Barcelona, LOGOS)

Invited speakers

- Leda Berio (University College Dublin)
- Justina Berškytė (University of Manchester)

Workshop Description

Consider a manosphere forum in which members repeatedly state that "women should be less sensitive" or a political discussion forum in which participants insist that immigrants should adapt to the culture of the country they have moved to. Such exchanges may reinforce participants' existing beliefs and attitudes. They may also establish or reinforce social norms that govern how members judge or treat the people being discussed. Still, a norm governing how members treat outsiders differs from a norm purporting to govern the outsiders themselves. What norms, if any, do such conversations establish, and whom do those norms govern?

Various explanations have been proposed as to how speech can enact norms. One explanation is that utterances such as racist or sexist jokes and the use of slurs can enact changes in *permissibility facts* through what McGowan (2019) calls *conversational exercitives*; such changes may contribute to oppressive social norms. Other accounts explain how speech can enact norms through *accommodated authority* (Caponetto, 2022; Langton, 2015) or *licensing* (Maitra, 2012). Barnes (2023) offers a *collective* account of subordinating speech acts in online communities. Further work uses game-theoretic approaches to investigate how utterances contribute to social norm change (Popa-Wyatt & Wyatt, 2024), and examines how taboo language can establish ideological roles and normalise misogyny within online communities (Popa-Wyatt & Berškytė, 2026).

Certain types of speech acts can reinforce or challenge existing norms. For example, praise may entrench a group's values, for better or worse (Holroyd, 2025), while call-outs and call-ins can encourage adherence to norms (Herbison & Podosky, 2024). Counterspeech strategies such as *blocking* (Langton, 2018) and *bending* (Caponetto & Cepollaro, 2023) offer ways of resisting oppressive speech.

The involvement of listeners also raises questions about moral responsibility and resistance. Horisk (2024) argues that conversational participants may be morally responsible for allowing belittling content into the common ground. Under some conditions, silence can constitute moral complicity (Donohue, 2024), and it can sometimes be interpreted as non-rejection, although its significance depends on the conversational context (Goldberg, 2020; cf. Klieber, 2024).

Echo chambers provide a particularly revealing setting in which to examine the relationship between speech and social norms. Members of an echo chamber may systematically distrust voices from outside (Nguyen, 2020), which can make established norms more resistant to challenge and, in some cases, contribute to discursive injustice. However, even within echo chambers, conversations may also reinforce norms that protect vulnerable groups and sustain valuable forms of solidarity.

This workshop brings together different perspectives on how ordinary speech acts establish or sustain social norms, whom those norms govern, and how they can be challenged. We are particularly interested in the cumulative effects of ordinary speech acts within ongoing social groups, including cases where no participant explicitly intends to establish a norm.

We welcome contributions addressing questions such as, but not limited to:

- How do ordinary speech acts establish or sustain social norms within social groups?
- What roles do accommodated authority and hearers' responses play in norm enactment?
- How does speech in echo chambers create or reinforce social norms or make them resistant to change?
- Under what conditions, if any, can speech within a group establish norms governing interactions with outsiders, and whom do those norms govern?
- When can counterspeech change a group's norms rather than merely contesting a particular utterance?
- What moral responsibilities, if any, do speakers and/or listeners bear towards outsiders disadvantaged by norms that their conversations establish?

The workshop welcomes contributions from philosophy of language, social and political philosophy, social epistemology, ethics, and related fields. We are particularly interested in ordinary speech within ongoing social groups, both online and offline. Contributions on hate speech and oppressive discourse are welcome, but the workshop is not limited to these topics.

Call for abstracts

We invite abstracts of up to 500 words (excluding references). Four talks will be selected through this open call. Abstracts will be reviewed anonymously, so the PDF must not include any identifying details. The accompanying email should list the submitter's name, affiliation (if any), career stage, and contact details. Please send abstracts to jiwon.kim@ucd.ie by the

deadline of Friday, 29 January 2027 (23:59 GMT). We particularly encourage submissions from doctoral students, early-career researchers, and those from groups underrepresented in philosophy.

Notification of acceptance: Monday, 15 February 2027

Workshop details

Format: The workshop has eight 80-minute sessions, each with approx. a 40-minute presentation and 40 minutes for Q&A.

Attendance: Attendance is free and open to all, subject to venue capacity. Registered participants will also be able to join the event online via Zoom. Programme details and registration information will be announced in March 2027.

Funding and Support: Subject to funding, a limited number of accommodation bursaries may be available for early-career speakers selected through this call. Priority will be given to those without sufficient institutional support. Meals and refreshments will be provided for speakers.

Accessibility: The workshop will take place at a UCD venue with step-free access and accessible toilets nearby. Further details about the venue will be available before registration opens. Participants with access requirements or dietary needs are welcome to contact the organiser in advance. Prospective speakers who need childcare to attend are encouraged to contact the organiser early to discuss possible support.

Organiser and contact: Jiwon Kim (she/they), Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow, School of Philosophy, University College Dublin. jiwon.kim@ucd.ie

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