

Bad Evidence

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Assertion is an act of presenting information to an interlocutor, who then has the choice to believe or disbelieve the content of the assertion, which in turn depends in part on their trust in the speaker. When should we believe the content of an assertion; when should we trust? One answer to this question is: we should evaluate the reliability of the speaker. McCready (2015) spells out this answer in terms of a combination of judgements about reliability based on characteristics of the speaker and the examination of the reliability of their prior communications, ie. the history of communicative interaction with that individual. But this method fails completely to account for certain kinds of trust. Why, for instance, do (some) people believe what Donald Trump says, despite his assertions having been shown to be false over and over? (Note: there are many examples from various corners of politics; DT is just a prominent case.) This talk aims to provide an answer by considering social meaning, specifically speaker ideologies and consequent interlocutor judgements about similarity of values. This and related metrics can be incorporated to the analysis of reliability using a method also used by Henderson and McCready (2018, in prep) in the analysis of dogwhistles.