

## ‘Truth Predicates’ in Natural Language

In this talk, I would like to take a closer look at the way truth is in fact expressed in natural language, to see what notion of truth and corresponding ontology of facts may be reflected in it. In English (as well as other languages such as German and French), there appear to be three different types of apparent ‘truth predicates’:

- (1) a. That S is true.                      b. That S is the case.                      c. That S is a fact.

It is a common view that these constructions are equivalent, all stating the truth of the proposition that S. Deflationist and identity theorist like to appeal to the apparent equivalence between (1a) and (1b), and the correspondence theorist may like the apparent equivalence between (1a) and (1c). I will argue that these three constructions are fundamentally different both in construction type and in content, and in particular that (1a) and (1b) reflected fundamentally different notions of truth. *Is true* serves to state the status of a representational entity of some kind, *is the case* reflects an Austinian notion of truth, and *is a fact* (1c) serves to state the existence of a Strawsonian fact, obtained from a true proposition.

*Is true* in natural language clearly acts as a predicate, expressing a property of some sort (even if it is formal property, allowing a deflationist account): it applies to statements, beliefs, sentences and even in (1a) appears to imply anaphoric reference to a previous statement made in the discourse context. Furthermore, the nominalization *truth* as in *the truth of John’s belief* clearly makes reference to a particularized property (a trope). As a truth predicate, *is true* allows for modifiers clarifying the way the representational entity is to be understood, such as *in a certain respect, in a certain sense*.

*Is the case* never acts as a predicate, neither syntactically nor semantically. *Is the case* allows only *that*-clauses in subject position, not proper referential terms (*\*John’s belief is the case, \*That sentence is the case*). Moreover, it cannot occur in small clauses, an important linguistic diagnostic for predicates (*\*I consider it the case that S*).

A range of data indicate a fundamental difference between *is true*-sentences and *is the case*-sentences. Only *is the case*-sentences naturally allow for location modifiers and adverbs of quantification:

- (2) a. In many European countries it is still the case that women can wear a burka.  
    b. ?? In many European countries it is still true that women can wear a burka.  
(3) a. In our firm it is never the case that someone gets fired without explanation.  
    b. ??? In our firm it is never true that someone gets fired without explanation.  
(4) a. ?? It is sometimes true that someone is absent.  
    b. It is sometimes the case that someone is absent.  
(5) a. ??? It was twice true that someone was absent.  
    b. It was twice the case that someone was absent.

Moreover, only *is the case*-sentences naturally allow for temporal quantifiers as well as past and future tense:

- (6) a. It will often be the case that I forget something.  
    b. ?? It will often be true that I forget something.  
(7) a. It was once the case that no one knew of Michael Jackson.  
    b. ?? It was once true that no one knew of Michael Jackson.

Moreover, the *that*-clause in *is the case*-sentences may be ‘indexically incomplete’: a number of context-dependent features (quantifier restrictions, spatio-temporal location) will not act as ‘unarticulated constituents’ of the proposition, expressed, but rather are provided by the situation referred to.

All this supports an Austinian account of the *is the case*-construction: *is the case*-sentences involve reference to a situation and the *that*-clause is asserted relative to that situation. That is, with an *is the case*-sentence, the speaker asserts that the situation he is referring to falls under

the situation-type described by the *that*-clause. *The case* itself appears to be the term with which the speaker refers to the relevant situation, a situation that may be delimited by location modifiers in sentence-initial position. The *is the case*-construction also has the purpose of facilitating quantification over truthmaking situations, as with adverbs of quantification.

In a sense, this account is entirely deflationary regarding *is the case*: the *is the case*-construction involves no truth predicate, but only helps to refer to a particular situation relative to which the *that*-clause is asserted.

The Austinian account of *is the case*-sentences raises the question of the semantics of nominal *case*-constructions, as below:

(8) a. In case it rains, we won't go. In that case, we will stay home.

b. We discussed the case that he will return.

'Cases' when referred to in that way are neither events nor facts (and thus not part of the world): they neither 'take place' (like events) nor 'obtain' (like facts) (but may just 'present themselves'). They are best viewed as the obtaining of a propositional content relative to a possible situation (or set of possible situations), that is, as merely possible facts.

The *is a fact*-construction shares with *is true*-sentences their resistance of location modifiers, adverbs of quantification, as well as past and future tense:

(9) a. ?? In many European countries it is still a fact that women can wear a burka.

b. ??? In our firm it is never a fact that someone gets fired without explanation.

c. ?? It is sometimes a fact that someone is absent.

d. ??? It was twice a fact that someone was absent.

e. ??? It will often be a fact that I forget something.

f. ?? It was once a fact that no one knew of Michael Jackson.

The *that*-clause in a *is a fact*-construction is in fact treated as indexically complete: if a fact obtains, it is regardless of circumstances. I think the semantics of *is a fact*-sentences is best illuminated by considering first the construction *the fact that S*. *The fact that S* clearly refers to fact in the Strawsonian sense, according to which facts correspond to true propositions. (Note that *S* in *the fact that S* can be disjunctive, negative, or quantificational.) I will assume that *that S* in *the fact that S* occurs quasi-quotationally, parallel to *ach* in the German word *ach*. Moreover, *fact* will have a reifying function, mapping the mentioning of *S* onto a fact. Both noun phrases (which share a range of linguistic peculiarities) alternate with subject-predicate sentences (*Ach is a German word, that S is a fact*). The special use of the *that*-clause is reflected in its inability to be replaced by *what John said*:

(10) a. ?? What John said is a fact.

By contrast such a replacement is allowed in *is the case*-sentences, as Austin had noted:

(10) b. What John said is the case.

How does Wittgenstein's dictum then far on this analysis?

(11) The world is everything that is the case.

Not too well, actually. While *everything that S* in predicate position can very well act as a description of a totality (*This is everything he gave me*), the world could not possibly be identical to a totality of propositions or situation types. I think this may not actually be a problem for the analysis. Wittgenstein's sentence may simply not be entirely correct semantically. One indication for that is a sentence like (12) below does not sound right:

(12) ?? That situation is what was the case then.

Another indication is that French translators generally use *se passer*, an existence predicate for events, rather than *est le cas*, to translate the Wittgensteinian sentence:

(13) Le monde est tout ce qui se passe.

To conclude, natural language expressions of truth appear to reflect several notions, not just a property or quasi-property of truth, but also an Austinian notion of truth relative to a situation as well as a Strawsonian notion of a fact based on a true proposition.