

Propositional Content without Propositions

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Handout 1

General issues and Overview

1. Attitude reports

Propositional attitudes:

- examples: believing, hoping desiring, remembering
- have 'propositional content'

Crucial questions:

- What is a propositional content: is it an object or something else?
- What role does a propositional content play in a propositional attitude?

Attitude reports :

- involve psychological verbs, but also verbs of saying: *think, believe, say, demand...*
- generally involve *that*-clauses as complement

The standard form of an attitude report:

Subject – attitude verb – that-clause

(1) John thinks that Mary is happy.

The standard, relational view of attitude reports

- The attitude verb expresses a two place-relation between agents and propositions.
- The *that*-clause acts as a term providing an argument for the relation expressed by the attitude verb.
- The *that*-clause denotes or expresses a proposition.
- Sentences express (or perhaps denote) propositions.

The notion of a proposition:

The roles of propositions:

- act as the content of attitudes
- act as truth bearer
- act as the meaning of sentences.

Characteristic properties of propositions:

- are abstract (not in space and time, not causally efficacious)
 - are agent-independent: two agents can share the same content of their attitudes
 - are language-independent:
 - Sentences from different language may express the same propositions.
 - Agents speaking different language may share the same content of their propositional Attitude.
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2. Other forms of attitude reportsInfinitival complements:

(2) a. John hopes to return.

b. John intends to return.

differences in meaning?

- Infinitival clauses may have specific action-oriented interpretation. ? (Portner)
- Difference in interpretation of (empty) subject: obligatory *de se* interpretation of infinitival clauses

Interrogative complements:

(3) a. John knows who committed the murder. (correct answer)

b. John wonders who committed the murder. (question)

particular readings of clausal complements:

- factive interpretation:

(4) a. John remembers that he left the door open.

- speech act-related interpretation:

demand:

(4) b. John asked Bill to leave.

promise:

(4) c. John promised to return.

speechact-neutral:

(4) d. John said that he would return.

e. John wrote that the door was left open.

Other complements: object-related attitudes:

intentional objects:

(5) a. John imagined the golden mountain (which does not exist)

b. John described a courageous hero.

object vs content distinction

A different phenomenon:

intensional verbs taking quantifiers as arguments:

(5) c. John needs at least two assistants.

implicit clausal complements?

(5) d. John wants a car tomorrow.

Predicates taking only explicit proposition-referring terms, but on a content-related reading:

(6) a. John defended / attacked / evaluated / endorsed / embraced the proposition that S.

b. * John defended / attacked / evaluated / endorsed / embraced that S.

3. Apparent evidence for propositions

3.1. explicit proposition-referring terms may occupy the same position with the same predicate, on the same reading of the entire sentence

(7) a. John believes that S.

b. John believes the proposition that S.

(8) a. John proved / inferred / accepted / assumed / established that S.

b. John proved / inferred / accepted / assumed / established the proposition that S.

3.2. Nonattitudinal predicates understood as predicates of propositions

(9) a. That S is true.

b. The proposition that S is true.

(10) a. That S implies that S'.

b. The proposition that S implies the proposition that S'.

(11) a. That S and that S' contradict each other. (?)

b. The proposition that S and the proposition that S contradict each other.

3.3. quantification over and anaphoric reference to propositions

valid inferences:

(11) a. John thinks that S.

Bill thinks that S.

John and Bill think the same thing.

(11) b. John thinks whatever Bill thinks.

Bill thinks that S.

John thinks that S.

(11) c. John believes everything that Bill believes.

Bill thinks that S.

John thinks that S.

propositional anaphora:

(11) d. John thinks that S. Bill thinks the same thing.

typical proposition predicates can apply to the values of such pronouns or quantifiers:

(12) a. John believes something that is true.

b. John believes something that implies that S.

3.4. apparent identity statements

(13) a. That it is raining is a proposition that I believe.

b. That it is raining is what John believes.

(14) a. The proposition that I believe is that it is raining.

b. What John believes is that it is raining.

related:

apparent appositive constructions:

- (15) a. the proposition that it is raining
 b. the belief that it is raining
- (16) a. the poet Goethe
 b. the color orange

other identity statements:

- (17) a. That it is raining is a fact.
 b. That he will win is John's greatest hope.
 c. That John may lose is a serious possibility.
 d. That everyone should leave the room is John's command.
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4. Problems for the standard relational view of attitude reports

4.1. the Substitution Problem

- (18) a. John thought that S.
 b. * John thought the proposition that S.
- (19) a. John wishes that he will win.
 b. * John wishes the proposition that he will win.
- (20) a. John claims / pretends / hopes / whispers that S.
 b. * John claims / pretends / hopes / whispers the proposition that S.
 c. * John claimed the content of the sentence S / the object that is also the object of
 Mary's claim / some entity.
- (11) a. John knows that he lost the game.
 b. ?? John knows the fact that he lost the game / the proposition that he lost the
 game / some entity.
- ‘special quantifiers’ and ‘special pronouns’ not subject to the Substitution Problem:
- (12) a. John thinks / claims / pretends / hopes / whispers something / that.
 b. John knows something / that.

4.2. the Objectivization Effect

(13) a. John expects that Mary will win.

John expects the proposition that Mary will win.

b. John imagined that Mary was alive.

John imagined the proposition that Mary was alive.

c. John remembers that Mary won.

John remembers the proposition that Mary won.

(14) a. John expects Mary.

b. John imagined Mary.

c. John remembers Mary.

(15) a. John expects (imagined / observed / heard / recognized) something.

b. John expects (imagined / observed / heard / recognized) that.

A different phenomenon:

Predicates only taking clausal complements

(16) a. John complains / cares / remarked / reasoned that S.

b. * John complains / cares / remarked / reasoned the proposition that S.

c. * John complains / cares / remarked / reasoned something / that.

The reason must be syntactic!

4.3. differences in other contexts than attitude contexts

Nonattitudinal predicates taking clausal arguments that cannot take explicit proposition-referring terms:

(17) a. That Mary will return is possible.

b. ?? The proposition that Mary will return is possible. (means 'possibly exists'!)

(18) a. That Mary will return is probable / likely.

b. ??? The proposition that Mary will return is probable / likely.

Nonattitudinal predicates taking proposition-referring terms, but not *that*-clauses

(19) a. The proposition that two plus two is four is complex.

b. * That two plus two is four is complex.

(20) a. The proposition that two plus two is four exists.

b. * That two plus two is four exists.

Constructions specific to clauses:

extraposition:

expletive in subject position:

(21) a. It is true / likely / possible that Mary will return.

Expletive in object position:

(21) b. John believes it that Mary will return.

Constructions excluding clausal complements

Complements of prepositions

(22) a. * John talks about that it might rain.

b. John talks about it that it might rain.

Syntactic phenomenon!

Identity statements:

(23) a. That Mary will return is that John's wife will return.

But:

(23) b. To live is to work.

Syntactic or semantic ??

5. Sketch of a new view

- *That*-clauses (and infinitival clauses) never act as terms providing an argument for a relation expressed by the embedding predicate
- *That*-clauses only provide propositional constituents as arguments of predicates
- > Russell's 'Multiple Relations Analysis'
- There are no propositions that are *objects* of an attitude; there are only entities that correspond to the attitude as a whole ('*products*' of the propositional attitude).
- Such entities are precisely what we make reference to with the corresponding

nominalization:

John's thought that S

The thought that S

John's thought that S: an *attitudinal object*

The thought that S: a *kind of attitudinal object*

- Unlike propositions, attitudinal objects are concrete objects and mind-dependent objects.

Role of attitudinal objects:

- bear all the properties typical of propositions: truth, inferential relations ...
- account of certain kind of context-dependencies of propositions

Advantage of attitudinal objects:

- are concrete, intentional
- are needed independently, as semantic values of nominalizations

Further exploration of attitudinal objects:

Take attitudinal objects to be composed of 'small acts': reference acts, predication acts, presentations of expressions ('quotation')