

Propositional Content without Propositions

Course ENS /DEC spring 2010

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Handout 3

Problems for Propositions

1. The problem of *that*-clauses providing propositions as arguments of attitude verbs

What allows attitude verbs to take propositions as arguments, with a clausal complement:

- *that* as proposition term-forming operator?
- the function of CP in general
- attitude verbs as intensional verbs , taking the intension of the clausal complement as argument?

How can clausal complements denote what they are supposed to denote?

- possible worlds: easy
- structured propositions:
difficult:
- how to include modes of presentation?
- how to account for relevant structural finegrainedness?

2. The Substitution problem and the Objectivization Effect

No ‘easy’ syntactic solution available, since special quantifiers are syntactically NPs, never CPs.

Some proposals:

King:

Attitude verbs displaying the Objectivization Effect are polysemous, one meaning triggered by CP complement, the other by NP complement

Forbes:

Thematic relation triggered by presence of CP vs NP complement ('theme' vs.

Some problems:

- Special quantifiers are of category NP only, not CP or IP
- empirical problems:

(1) a. That it will rain is something that John fears.

b. The proposition that it will rain is something that John fears.

(2) a. That it will rain is John's fear.

b. The proposition that it will rain is John's fear.

No compositional analysis of the difference available

Rosefeldt:

type-theoretic approach

CP-taking verbs do not express relations, of type $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$,

But rather take arguments of type $\langle s, t \rangle$ in object position, that is they are of type $\langle e, \langle e, t \rangle \rangle$.

Special quantifiers are of either type

The problem: interpreting type theory

type e : allows for any kind of entity whatsoever

type $\langle s, t \rangle$:

functions from worlds to truth values, provided they have been denoted by an expression of a particular category

types can only be understood in relation to syntactic categories

3. Nonpropositional approaches

Prior

Attitude verbs as sentential operators,

Special quantifiers: quantification into sentential position, not further to be explained

(quantification sui generis)

Hintikka:

attitude verbs as modal operators

- limitation to possible worlds approach
- incompatibility with structured propositions view

Davidson

(3) a. John said that Mary was happy.

b. John said something equivalent to this utterance: 'Mary is happy'.

Problems:

- linguistic plausibility
- extension to other attitude verbs

4. Special quantifiers as nominalizing quantifiers

Special quantifiers do not function like ordinary quantifiers:

They do not range over entities that are to be arguments of the predicate, but rather they introduce a 'new' domain of entities on the basis of a replacing expression or concept as well as the content of the attitude verb.

The 'new domain of entities': what corresponding nominalizations stand for:

attitudinal objects or kinds of them

examples:

John's thought that Mary likes Bill.

John suspicion / claim / denial / ... that Mary likes Bill

kinds of attitudinal objects:

the thought that Mary likes Bill

the claim that Mary likes Bill

properties of attitudinal objects:

- mind- and / or linguistic-act-dependent, agent-dependent

(4) a. *John's thought that S also occurred to Mary.

b. * John's thought that S would exist even if John never thought that S.

- attitude / speech act type-specific:

(5) a. *John's thought that S is also his remark that S.

b. * John's claim that it will rain is his hope that it will rain.

- have truth conditions or fulfillment conditions (more generally: *satisfaction conditions*):

(6) a. John's belief that S is true.

b. John's desire to become a king was fulfilled.

- truth (satisfaction) conditions also for counterfactual circumstances, in which the attitudinal object does not exist:

(7) John's thought that S would be true even if John had never thought it.

Attitudinal objects involve truth *at* a world, not truth *in* a world.

Attitudinal objects have properties of concrete objects:

- perceptual properties:

(8) John heard Mary's remark that S.

- causal properties:

(9) John's claim that S caused astonishment.

- evaluative predicates: evaluate also attitudinal / illocutionary mode, not just an abstract propositional content:

(10) a. John's thought that S is unusual.

b. That S is unusual.

c. The proposition that S is unusual.

- Attitudinal objects are generally more specific than the content of their description, as opposed to facts, states, which are entirely constituted by the content of their canonical description:

(11) a. John's belief that it will rain is stronger than Mary's belief that it won't.

b. * John's believing that it will rain is stronger than Mary's believing that it won't.

c. * John's belief state is stronger than Mary's.

The Fregean issue:

how to account for the sharing of propositional content by different agents?

using intuitions about attitudinal objects:

1. (exact) similarity of attitudinal objects:

(12) a. John's thought is the same as Mary's. (the same as = is exactly similar to)

2. sharing of *kinds* of attitudinal objects

kinds of attitudinal objects:

John's thought that S: an instance of the thought that S, a kind of attitudinal object

(12) b. John and Mary share the thought that S

Attitudinal objects without propositions:

an older view of truth-bearing content:

content constituted not only by objects and concepts, but also by intentional acts

→ pre-Fregean views of propositional content

attitudinal or illocutionary mode ensures aim for truth / fulfillment / correctness

→ attitudinal / illocutionary modes as intentional predication relations aiming for truth / satisfaction, make up the 'glue' among the propositional constituents (Jubien, Moltmann, Hanks)

belief: involves predicating properties in the belief-way of objects

assertion: involves predicating properties in the assertion-way of objects

5. The Neo-Russellian view of attitude reports

attitudes as intentional predication relations:

think as a multigrade predicate in its second *place*, allows for unlimited number of *positions* in that place:

(13) a. John thinks that Mary likes Bill

b. think(John; the property of liking, John, Mary)

The multigrade attitudinal relation:

- allows dispensing with propositions in the analysis of simple attitude reports
- provides the link, 'glue' among propositional constituents
- is responsible for the truth-directedness of attitudinal content

why are attitudinal objects still needed?:

- as truth bearers, the ‘objects’ of attitudes, what can be shared, what prosentential quantifiers range over ...
- also for an account of embedded clauses (coordination, subordination) within the neo-Russellian account

John’s thought that Mary likes Bill: constituted by the multigrade think-relation and its arguments

Russell’s original motivations were quite different:

Doing away with any representational object whatsoever (propositions in particular

6. Attitudinal objects and the semantics of attitude reports

Attitudinal objects (and kinds of them) provide exactly the semantic values of special quantifiers and pronouns and free relative clauses like *what John thought*; they underlie our intuitions about valid inferences involving special quantifiers that appeared to require propositions.

Observations about special quantifiers, pronouns, free relative clauses in sentential position:

- not substitutional:

(14) a. John imagined something I never thought about.

b. John promised everything I ever dreamed of (namely that S, that S', that S'', ...).

- evaluative predicates understood as with attitudinal objects:

(15) a. John said something nice (namely that S).

b. John thought something very daring (namely that S).

c. John imagined something exciting.

- causal predicates applicable as with attitudinal objects:

(16) John said something that made Mary very upset.

- sharing of the objects of attitudes: same constraints as on the corresponding attitudinal objects:

(17) a. # John mentioned what Mary believes, namely that Bill was elected president.

b. # John expects what Mary believes, namely that Sue will study harder.

c. # John said what Mary believes, namely that it will rain.

- (18) a. #John's mention was Mary's belief.
 b. # John's expectation is Mary's belief.
 c. # John's claim is Mary's belief.

Nominalizing quantifiers take scope and a 'nominalization domain':

- (19) a. [something interesting]_{ik} [_jJohn [_k claimed t_k]].
 b. $\exists x \exists C_1 \dots C_n (x = f(\text{John}; \lambda x[\textit{claim}(x, C_1, \dots, C_n)]) \ \& \ \textit{interesting}(x) \ \& \ \textit{claim}(\text{John}; C_1, \dots, C_n))$
- (20) a. John claimed what Mary claimed.
 b. $\exists x \exists C_1 \dots C_n (x = (f_{\textit{kind}}(\lambda x[\textit{claim}(x; C_1, \dots, C_n)])) \ \& \ x = [\textit{what Mary claimed}] \ \& \ \textit{claim}(\text{John}; C_1, \dots, C_n))$

refinement

decomposing attitudinal objects into a more general attitude and a 'modifier' of the attitude
 e.g. separating beliefs into a part that is a 'judgment' (an acceptance) and a 'belief mode'

- (21) a. John has often suggested what Mary now claims, namely that Bill is a spy.
 b. John demanded what Mary was going to request, that the door be opened.
- (22) a. John's suggestion is Mary's claim.
 b. John's demand is Mary's request.

what is shared: the (positive) acceptance) that S, the request that S, ...