*Language and Ontology*

Friederike Moltmann

University of Padua

March 10, 2016

Handout 4

**Davidsonian Event Semantics**

**1. The motivations for Davidson’s event semantics**

Ontological assumptions concerning events

Events are concrete, in space-time (generally), causally efficacious,

involve change, may have participants

Davidson

Events can be described in different ways.

E.g. the same event can be described in mentalistic terms and in physicalistic terms.

A previous analysis

adverbials as predicate modifiers

(1) a. John walked with a stick.

b. with a stick(walked) (John)

Davidson

Valid inferences with adverbials require events as arguments of verbs.

(2) *Adverb drop*

John walked with a stick.

John walked.

b. *Adverb permutation* (Landman)

John walked slowly with a stick.

John walked with a stick slowly.

The Davidsonian analysis

(2) c. ∃e(with a stick(e) & walk(e, John))

Further motivations for the Davidsonian analysis from nominalizations

(3) a. John laughed.

b. John’s laughter

(4) a. John jumped.

b. John’s jump

(5) a. John walked.

b. John’s walk

In general, the same predicates can act as adverbials modifying the verb and as predicates predicated of what the nominalization stands for and as adjectival modifiers of the nominalization:

(6) a. John laughed intensely.

b. John’s laughter was intense.

c. John’s intense laughter

(7) a. John jumped quickly.

b. John’s jump was quick.

c. John’s quick jump

(8) a. John walked slowly.

b. John’s walk was slow.

c. John’s slow walk

Davidsonian semantic analysis

(9) a. [*John's walk*] = e[walk(e, John)]

b. [*John's slow walk*] = e[walk(e, John) & slow(e)]

c. [*John’s walk was slow*] = [*slow*](e[walk(e, John)])

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**2. An alternative: Kim’s account of events**

Davidson: events as primitives, concrete, allow for various descriptions

By contrast:

Kim’s account of events

Events are obtained from properties, individuals, and times

(10) a. An event f(P, o, t) exists if P holds of o at t.

b. Two events f(P, o, t) and f(P’, o’, t’) are identical iff P = P’, o = o’, t = t’.

(11) [*John’s walk*] = ιe[e = f(John, [*walk*], t)]

Event- vs fact-descriptions

(12) a. John’s slow walk was John’s walk.

b. ??? The fact that John walked slowly is the fact that John walked.

Event-characterizing and event-constitutive modifiers

(13) John’s slow walk

(14) a. ιe[e = f(John, [*walk*], t]) & slow(f(John, [*walk*], t]))] (*slow* as event-characterizing)

b. f(John, [*slowly walk*], t]) (*slow* as event-constitutive)

The problem with Kim’s account

Assimilates events to facts (or abstract states), but events and facts have very different properties.

Part structure:

(15) a. Mary noticed part of the event.

b. ??? Mary noticed part of the fact.

Spatial location:

(16) a. The meeting was in the room.

b. ??? The fact that they met was in the room.

Causal efficaciousness:

(17) a. John’s jump caused the table to break.

b. ??? The fact that John jumped caused the table to break.

Object of perception

(18) a. John saw Bill’s jump.

b. ??? John saw the fact that Bill jumped.

Measurability:

(19) a. John’s jump was high.

b. ??? The fact that John jumped was high.

(20) a. John’s laughter was intense.

b. ??? The fact that John laughed was intense.

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**3. Other semantic applications of Davidsonian event semantics**

**3. 1. Adverbs of quantification**

(21) a. John often walked with a stick.

b. Often e (walk(e, John) & with a stick(e))

**3.2. The Davidsonian semantics of tense (Higginbotham)**

(22) a. John walked.

b. ∃e (e < u & walk(e, John)), u: utterance event

(23) a. John has now solved the problem.

b. ∃s∃e(result-state(e)(s) & solve(e, John, the problem)) & now(s))

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**4. Tropes and the semantics of adjectives**

(24) a. Mary is visibly / profoundly happy.

b. Mary is extremely / frighteningly / shockingly pale.

(25) a. Mary’s happiness is visible / profound.

b. Mary’s paleness is extreme / frightening / shocking.

Tropes as Davidsonian arguments of adjectives

(26) a. ∃e(happy(e, Mary), & visibly(e))

b. visible(max e[happiness(e, Mary)])

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**5. Difficulties for the Davidsonian semantics of events**

Stacked adverbials:

(27) Mary danced slowly elegantly.

b. Mary danced elegantly slowly

Adverbials with quantificational scope:

(28) a. John quickly ate all the crisps.

b. John rarely practices frequently.

Additional event arguments for adverbials and quantifiers?

‘Frame adverbials’ (Maienborn)

(29) At school John is often nervous

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