Workshop *Imagination*

ESSLLI 33

August 20, 2022

**Objects of Imagination**

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**1. Introduction**

The approach

Pay close attention to natural language. Uncover the ontology that is implicit in natural language – the ontology of natural language.

Objects of imagination

Does natural language involve reference to objects of imagination?

How should we understand them, given the linguistic facts?

Where do objects of imagination play a role?

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**2. Intentional objects in the semantics of natural language**

Intentional objects

Nonexistent objects of imagining, conceiving, thinking about, referring to, describing, mentioning, intending.

Intentional ‘nonexistent’ objects in the semantic structure of natural language

- Intentional objects of various sorts play a role in semantics.

- But they do not come for free, but require the presence of mental or linguistic acts in the semantic structure of the sentence

- This supports the view that intentional objects are ontologically dependent on such acts:

as *abstract artifacts intentionally produced by such acts* or

as *entities non-intentionally generated by such acts*.

- Intentional objects in the second sense need to be distinguished from *fictional characters*, as creations: the predicate *exist* can deny existence of the former, but not the later.

Intentional objects in natural language semantics

Intentional objects act as semantic values and are needed for the compositional semantics of sentences with intentional verbs (*imagine, conceive, think about, refer to, mention, intend*).

Standard cases in the literature: indefinites / definites describing intentional objects

(1) a. John imagined a castle / a round circle.

b. John imagined something.

Without intentional objects:

Indefinite NPs contributing higher-order values or parts of complex predicates;

*something* as a higher-order quantifier.

Constructions requiring intentional objects in the semantics of natural language

- Compositionally complex subjects with intentional predicates

- Anaphora

(2) a. The castle John is imagining is small, but nice. It is definitely not grand

b. The mathematical object that John imagined is impossible. It is both round and square.

(3) a. The castle that John is imagining does not exist.

b. The mathematical object that John is imagining cannot possibly exist.

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**3. Constraints on intentional objects in the semantics of natural language**

Intentional objects do not come for free

They depend on the description of a quasi-referential act in the sentence, or at least an implicit reference to such an act. Not every non-referring description ‘generates’ an intentional object.

(4) a. ?? The church in the village does not exist.

b. The church *mentioned* in the guide does not exist.

(5) a. ?? There is a house that does not exist.

b. There is a house John *described* that does not exist.

(6) a. ??? Mary talked to a man that does not exist.

b. Mary *described* a man that does not exist.

Intentional adjectives:

(7) a. The *imagined* church does not exist.

b. The *described* man does not exist.

Implicit reference to a referential act in subject position:

ok with implicit reference to a quasireferential chain:

(8) a. ??? The blue apples in this room do not exist

b. The golden mountain / Pegasus does not exist.

Intentional objects as entities ‘generated by’ unsuccessful or pretend referential mental or linguistic acts (or states)

Quasi-referential acts (property attributions)

- unsuccessful mental or linguistic acts of reference (or property attribution)

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Intentional objects as entities *ontologically dependent* on quasi-referential acts

Like *abstract artifacts* in general, they involve ontological dependence as a generating relation, not a causal relation.

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**4. The importance of coordination as a relation among referential acts**

Relation of coordination of quasi-referential acts - in roughly Fine’s (2007) sense of coordination, but applied to linguistic or mental acts

(9) John imagined *a castle* and then he imagined that *it* was near another castle.

Quasireferential act that is part of the first imagination is coordinated with quasireferential act associated with second reported imagination.

Coordination of acts also relevant for the semantics of anaphora in *intentional identity cases*.

Coordination of mental or linguistic acts may be indirect:

Beliefs can be coordinated if they are directed toward a common source (Hob-Nob sentences)

Intentional object are generated by coordinated quasi-referential acts.

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**5. The challenge of nonexistence**

How to make sense of ‘nonexistence’ of intentional objects as entities generated by coordinated quasi-referential acts?

Fictional characters as existing entities.

(10) a. The fictional character Anna Karenina exists.

b. ??? Anna Karenina exists.

Objects of imagination thought etc always treated as non-existing entities, not as existing fictional characters:

(11) a. The castle John imagined / mentioned / referred to / described does not exist.

b. The castle John imagined / mentioned / referred to / described exists as an object of

his imagination …

What makes something be a fictional character?

Two possible answers:

1. Part of a creation (artifact) that is intended to last

2. Reference to fictional characters through the use of reifying terms of the *sort the fictional character* N

Given answer 1:

A piece of fiction about a single entity generates two nonexistent objects.

- Entity generated by mental acts of pretend referring and predicating 🡪 intentional object

- Entity generated also by *mental state of intending* a fictional character as part of a story 🡪 fictional character

Two kinds of ontological dependence.

1. Non-intended products, generated by coordinated quasi-referential acts and associated property attributions

Compare the singleton set containing a musical work, the non-intended product generated by acts of musical composition

2. Part of an intended artifact (fiction)

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**6. Imagination**

Imagination as an attitudinal object

Attitudinal objects

beliefs, claims, speculations, requests, decisions, intentions, hopes, fears

- Agent-dependent concrete mental or illocutionary objects

- Have satisfaction conditions of various sorts

Imaginations

- Concrete: agent-dependent, in time

- Have no satisfaction conditions!

(12) ??? Mary’s imagination was true / satisfied / was carried out / was satisfied.

Reason:

Imaginations have no purpose, unlike claims, requests, decisions, hopes, …

Exception:

Reality-directed imaginations

Two types of objects of imagination

[1] *Pure imaginations*

(13) John imagined the kind of country he wants to live in.

[2] *Reality-directed imaginations*

(14) Mary imagined the country she was going to visit.

Reality-directed imaginations

Involve combination of successful or unsuccessful referential act and pretend property attributions

Reality-directed imaginations have accuracy conditions

(15) Mary’s imagination of that country was accurate / correct.

Objects generated by successful or unsuccessful referential act and pretend property attributions need to be distinguished from the object actually being referred to:

(16) The country Mary had been imagining was quite different from the country she actually

experienced.

Importance of imagination for attitude with fulfillment, realization, correctness, or appropriateness conditions:

Objects of imagination can trigger or be presupposed by desires (satisfaction conditions), plans and decisions (realization conditions), emotions (appropriateness conditions)

Connection between intentional and intensional transitive verbs:

Compatbility of content with sufficiently unspecific imagination:

(17) a. John imagined a castle.

b. John wants a castle.

(18) a. John wants what he imagined.

b. John imagined what he wants.

But intensional transitives generally describe objects (searches, desires, needs, debts etc) with satisfaction conditions.

This permits the ‘object’ of a search being identical to an actual object:

(19) This is the house John was looking for.

Not so for imaginations:

(20) ??? This is the house John imagined.

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**Some References**

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