

THE PRAGMATICS OF PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDE REPORTS

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The Pragmatics of Propositional Attitude Reports

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The aim of this series is to focus upon the relationship between semantic and pragmatic theories for a variety of natural language constructions. The boundary between semantics and pragmatics can be drawn in many various ways, the relative benefits of each gave rise to a vivid theoretical dispute in the literature in the last two decades. As a side-effect, this variety has given rise to a certain amount of confusion and lack of purpose in the extant publications on the topic.

This series provides a forum where the confusion within existing literature can be removed and the issues raised by different positions can be discussed with a renewed sense of purpose. The editors intend the contributions to this series to take further strides towards clarity and cautious consensus.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction **Belief Reports and Pragmatic Theory:** **The State of the Art**

K.M. Jaszczolt

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1. Propositional content and substitutivity

Reporting on people's beliefs gives rise to many problems for philosophers, linguists, and average language users. First, the reporter may not be in a position to assess the extent of the believer's knowledge about the object of the belief and hence be unable to decide how to phrase the report. *A fortiori*, the reporter may misconstrue the evidence. For example, when the believer says (1), the reporter has to assess whether the believer knows what he is talking about or rather repeats a half-digested proposition (see Sperber (1985, 1996) on semi-propositional beliefs).

- (1) Red giants become white dwarfs.

A belief can easily be ascribed in the presence of evidence that the believer knows who he is talking about, but it can also be ascribed in spite of the reporter's doubt as to this familiarity, and even in spite of the evidence that the believer does not know what/who he is talking about. Belief ascription can also be based on non-linguistic evidence, e.g., (2) can be reported about somebody arriving at a Spanish holiday resort with winter coats in his luggage.

- (2) He believes that it is cold in southern Spain.

Finally, the believer may be referentially mistaken and use an incorrect name or description of the individual. For instance, the believer may announce (3), having Bernard J. Smith in mind.

- (3) Bernard J. Orcutt is an honest citizen.

The reporter has to assess the validity of all this contextual information before constructing her report in order to make the report communicative in a conversation.

Traditionally, propositional attitude sentences have been regarded as ambiguous between the transparent and the opaque reading. Sentence (4) acquires two semantic interpretations that correspond to the wide and narrow scope of the existential quantifier, as in (4a) and (4b).

- (4) Max believes that the king of France is bald.

- (4a) $\exists x (\text{KoF}(x) \ \& \ \forall y (\text{KoF}(y) \supset y = x) \ \& \ \text{Bel}_M \text{ Bald } (x))$

- (4b) $\text{Bel}_M \exists x (\text{KoF}(x) \ \& \ \forall y (\text{KoF}(y) \supset y = x) \ \& \ \text{Bald } (x))$

By using (4a), the reporter ascribes to Max a belief about a particular, known individual (*de re*) and by using (4b) she states that Max believes in the existence of such an individual (*de dicto*). However, there is more to this ambiguity than the logical forms capture. If Max is referentially mistaken, the reporter may use (4c), substituting the correct description (or name) for the object of the belief.

(4c) $\exists x (\text{KoS}(x) \ \& \ \forall y (\text{KoS}(y) \supset y = x) \ \& \ \text{Bel}_M \text{Bald}(x))$

Bel_M stands for ‘Max believes that’, ‘KoF’ for ‘the king of France’ and ‘KoS’ for ‘the king of Sweden’ (see also Neale, 1990; Larson and Segal, 1995; Russell, 1905, 1919). Leaving the development of this tri-partite distinction aside, we can observe that the strict ambiguity does not hold. A prediction can be drawn that the two readings of belief reports, *de re* and *de dicto*, do not correspond directly to the two scopes taken by the existential quantifier. There is more to the distinction than the logical forms of (4) reveal. The interpretations of (4) are, to a certain extent, pragmatic, and this pragmatic information has to be acknowledged in the adequate theory of propositional attitudes. Perhaps the *de re/de dicto* distinction is itself pragmatic, just as Donnellan’s (1966) referential/attributional distinction of definite descriptions proved to be a duality of their use and so, at most, a pragmatic ambiguity (see Jaszczołt, forthcoming).

Semantic problems with attitude ascription begin with the content of the expression used to refer in non-extensional contexts. In order to preserve compositional semantics, it has been suggested, among others, that one has to establish under what mode of presentation (sense, guise, way of givenness) the object referred to is known to the believer. For instance, (3) may or may not be regarded as equal to (5) in its semantic (or wider informational) content, depending on the mode of presentation.

(5) The man in the brown hat is an honest citizen.

The speaker of (3) may not consent to believing (5) because he may not know the individual under the guise expressed in (5). So, the core problem with belief ascription amounts to what we take reference to be in non-extensional contexts, and in particular to the use of the notion of reference in the semantics of propositional attitude sentences of the form in (6).

(6) A believes that $B \phi$ s.

Substitutivity of coreferential expressions does not hold in these contexts, at least according to common-sense judgement. This failure of the principle of substitutivity suggests that we have to either abandon compositional semantics or incorporate contextual information in our semantic theory. Various solutions have been suggested. First, the role of reference in intensional contexts is taken by sense (Frege, 1892, 1918-19). Next, the *that*-clause can be said to refer to a sentence rather than a proposition (see Bach (1997, this volume) for a discussion). Quine (1956) postulated degrees of intensions for quantifying into such contexts. More recently, there have been various proposals that use the idea of mode of presentation and contextually determined type of mode of presentation, stemming out of the hidden-indexical theory (Schiffer, 1977, 1987, 1992, 1996, this volume; see also Ludlow, 1995, 1996), developed also in the idea of Crimmins and Perry’s (1989) and Crimmins’s (1992) ‘notion’, which is an unarticulated constituent of

the proposition (see also Bach, 1993, this volume; Reimer, 1995). There is also ample literature that focuses on constructive criticism of these dominant solutions (Clapp, 1995, this volume; Salmon, 1986; Donnellan, 1990; Soames, 1987; Recanati, 1993, 1996). For example, the neo-Russellian approaches (e.g., Salmon, 1986; Soames, 1987, 1995) deny the contribution of the mode of presentation to the semantics of attitude reports: the semantic content of a sentence is a singular proposition (see also Bach, 1997, this volume). In addition, Richard (1990, 1995) suggests the indexicality of the verb 'believe', making the verb contextually sensitive. Larson and Ludlow (1993) and Ludlow (this volume) propose 'interpreted logical forms' or composites of linguistic forms and extralinguistic objects. Finally, for indirect speech with the predicate 'say' there is Davidson's (1968-9) paratactic account where a demonstrative refers to an utterance (for a discussion see Cresswell, this volume). But some form of the mode of presentation, however finely-grained it eventually turns out to be, seems to be acknowledged by all parties to the debate, either on the semantic or the pragmatic level. The question that remains to be answered is the degree of contribution of the mode of presentation to the proposition expressed (see, e.g., Bezuidenhout, 1996, this volume vs. Recanati, 1993, 1996).

2. Semantics and pragmatics of propositional attitude reports

Propositional attitudes, represented most prominently by belief reports, have been the object of inner-theoretical disputes for several decades. It is only recently that these theories are beginning to form a coherent and diaphanous paradigm. This has been engendered by the current discussion on contextualism and the various forms and strengths contextualism can take. To put it crudely, more and more responsibility for the puzzles with belief ascription has been shifted from semantics to pragmatics, only to return, in one form or other, to the semantics as 'extras' that contribute to the semantic representation of the proposition. The tendency can be observed both in philosophy and in linguistics and is in line with the ongoing trend to see the study of language use as an important component of the study of sentence meaning. This tendency is not completely new; it can be traced to Strawson (1950), some scattered remarks in Grice (1978, see Levinson, 1988, 1995) and even to continental phenomenologists (Brentano, 1874; Husserl, 1900-01) whose ideas permeated through Frege (1892, 1918-19) to the plethora of British analytical accounts of sense (or the more personalised mode of presentation) and its contribution to the proposition (see Dummett, 1991; Jaszczolt, 1996, 1997).

In addition to the philosophical approaches listed here, linguistic considerations produced a number of solutions concerning the form in which pragmatic information can play a role in the semantic content of an utterance. Gricean original views have evolved into several trends such as the neo-Gricean approach (Levinson, 1988, 1995; Horn, 1988, 1989), broadly, relevance-theoretic (Sperber and

Wilson, 1986; Carston, 1988; Kempson, 1986) and its more radical partner of *implicature* as implicit constituents of what is said (Bach, 1987a, 1994a, 1994b, this volume), as well as the semanticization of the output of some inferences in Discourse Representation Theory (Kamp, 1990, in progress; Kamp and Reyle, 1993; Jaszczolt, 1998, forthcoming). This progress from inner-theoretic concerns about intensional contexts and truth-preserving substitutivity to a more global concern with the role of context in semantic theory requires a new type of paradigm which emphasises the compatibility of these concerns and their common aim. This collection has been prepared with this objective in mind. First, it presents the extent to which semantic representation requires supplementing by pragmatics; next, it offers several suggestions on how this interface is supposed to work.

It is in the debate over the way the proposition is taken by the holder of the attitude that the practical and theoretical problems with attitude ascription meet. The exact informational (and semantic) contribution of the believer's knowledge of the referent to the proposition expressed is a condensed formulation of the main pre-occupation of propositional-attitude theorists. Naturally, the standpoints vary from endorsing singular propositions through denying that the proposition expressed specifies the content of the belief (see Bach, this volume), to allocating semantic status to some aspects of this knowledge. For example, for this purpose, Schiffer proposed a hidden-indexical theory which is based on the premise that believing is a three-place relation among the believer, the structured proposition, and the mode of presentation under which x believes p . The mode of presentation of the proposition is determined by the modes of presentation of the objects and properties and their position in the structure of the sentence, in agreement with Frege and the principle of compositionality. Sentence (7) acquires the logical form as in (8), where Φ^*m is a type of mode of presentation, i.e. a property of modes of presentation determined by the context (Schiffer, 1992, p. 503, this volume; see also defence by Ludlow, 1995, 1996, this volume).

(7) Ralph believes that Fido is a dog.

(8) $(\exists m) (\Phi^*m \ \& \ B(\text{Ralph}, \langle \text{Fido}, \text{doghood} \rangle, m))$

Postulating a device such as types of modes of presentation is only the tip of an iceberg. It has to be determined next what information falls under Φ^*m , whether there are any formal constraints on the context-dependence of Φ^*m , and in what sense is Φ^*m semantic and in what pragmatic.

A more global rephrasing of the problem takes the form of the contextualism/anti-contextualism debate. Contextualism allows for the contextual information to contribute to the propositional form of an utterance. Anti-contextualism regards contextual information as implicatures that function in addition to the propositional form in the process of utterance interpretation (see Recanati, 1994). Now, the assignment of reference in attitude ascription, and the resolution of reference in the interpretation of belief reports, may require this contextual information. The core

of the issue is whether this information is also required for the truth-conditional representation of propositional attitude sentences. One dominant standpoint seems to be that the truth-conditional representation requires some context-dependent resolution of reference in belief reports, although it does not require fully spelled-out modes of presentation. Modes of presentation are overly fine-grained for semantic purposes. Naturally, this representation requires indexical resolution, lexical and syntactic disambiguation, and, generally, may require other completion and expansion of the proposition expressed (see Bach, 1987a; Levinson, 1988; Recanati, 1981, 1993, 1996).

All in all, this collection aims at answering two questions that follow from this state-of-the-art:

- (i) What is the type and extent of pragmatic information that contributes to specifying what the speaker believes?

and

- (ii) What is the relation between the pragmatic information and the semantic (propositional) representation of attitude expressions?

Answers to these questions are attempted in all the contributions to this collection, on the level of truth-conditional semantics, linguistic semantics (Carston, 1988, 1998), and macropragmatics (Mey, 1993), including intentions and goals of actions. Since Grice's seminal work on implicature, it has been widely acknowledged that there are two types of semantics: linguistic semantics which is an output of grammar, and truth-conditional semantics which incorporates some degree of pragmatic analysis of utterances (Grice, 1989; Levinson, 1988; Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 256; Carston, 1988, p. 178). It is this degree that is subject to debate.

Various problems engendered by attitude ascription cannot be clearly separated. This collection corroborates the claim that the semantics/pragmatics interface in propositional attitude research has to be approached from these three levels in order to result in a comprehensive picture. The aspects of pragmatic information that contribute to the propositional form have to be exhausted in order to render an adequate, coherent and diaphanous overview.

Now, if attitude contexts are at all ambiguous, they are either semantically or pragmatically ambiguous. Semantic ambiguity is the duality of logical form strengthened by a requirement of the logical independence of these forms (Kempson, 1979), whereas pragmatic ambiguity is a built-in ambiguity of use. Both approaches are discussed in this collection. However, the ambiguity itself can be denied altogether. It is viable to hold that there is one semantic representation which is either general, underspecified (here the literature is ample, see, e.g., Atlas, 1989; Carston, 1988; van Deemter and Peters, 1996) or takes the form of the default interpretation (Levinson, 1995; Jaszczolt, 1992, 1993, 1997, 1998, 1999, forthcoming).

As Levinson (1995, p. 109–110) claims, there is a level of utterance-type meaning, default interpretation, which should be placed between sentence meaning and speaker's intentions. General expectations concerning the world give rise to default inferences (Levinson, 1995, p. 93). The contextually appropriate interpretation is arrived at through the process of pragmatic inference from the underspecified semantic form or the default semantic representation respectively.

The postulate of speaker's background knowledge (see, e.g., Smith, this volume) comes in handy at this point. Modes of presentation, for example, are not always known to the hearer and not always relevant. However, some aspects of the way in which the referent is known to the speaker may prove to function as constituents of the proposition expressed. Now, to quote Richard,

“What counts as faithful representation varies from context to context with our interests and expectations. Context places certain restrictions on what can represent what.”
Richard (1990, p. 3).

Intentions belong to these relevant contextual factors. Richard leaves the problem without proposing a theory of intentions. This is where other parties to the debate come in (Bach, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1992; Smith, 1989, this volume; Jaszczolt, 1997, this volume), developing, in various not unrelated ways, the idea of communicative-informative intention. This is one of the macropragmatic aspects discussed above.

3. Summary of the papers

All the contributions have been invited especially for this collection and, save for one exception, have not been previously published. Kent Bach's 'Do Belief Reports Report Beliefs?' appeared in *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 78 (1997) and is reprinted here with permission from Blackwell Publishers. It is included because it originated as a contribution to this volume and constitutes a sequel to his other contribution, 'A Puzzle about Belief Reports'.

The content of the volume is as follows. Stephen Schiffer discusses modes of presentation and types of modes of presentation in the hidden-indexical theory and compares the problems of this theory with those facing Recanati's proposal of the availability hypothesis and quasi-singular propositions. In particular, he points out the logical-form problem, the difficulty with applying the theory to propositional speech acts and with attributing intentions to speakers that would pertain to however coarsely defined modes of presentation. He stresses the advantages of Recanati's approach (which he calls the indexical theory) over the hidden-indexical one. Peter Ludlow defends the applicability of so-called Interpreted Logical Forms to the Paderewski-type puzzle, i.e. to the instances where sentences of the form 'A believes that $B \phi$ s' and 'A believes that B doesn't ϕ ' are both true descriptions of A's beliefs. The theory assumes that semantic values are attached to the

components of the *that*-clause. The advantage of this move is joining together the linguistic expression and its semantic value so as to avoid postulating intensional objects. By rejecting claims to psychological reality of ILFs, Ludlow establishes the status of the theories of ILFs as explanatory of how the reporter copes with the acquired information about the holder of the belief, for the benefit of the hearer. This processing of the original belief is taken to involve a tacit theory of belief, a tacit theory of the goals of belief ascription, and a tacit theory of the logistics of belief ascription. Lenny Clapp argues against sentential compositionality and proposes instead a so-called discourse holistic approach to attitude ascription. He finds it on his criticism of the use of the concept of ‘ways of thinking’ of an individual and stresses the role of the discourse environment, which he illustrates in the framework of Discourse Representation Theory. Max Cresswell sheds some new light on Davidson’s paratactic account of *that*-clauses. He analyses the relation of ‘samesaying’ and poses a question as to whether samesaying is determined by the semantic theories of the language(s) involved in the original expression and its report in *oratio obliqua*. The problem leads to an attempt to classify the phenomenon of samesaying as semantic or pragmatic. If it is semantic, then a serious difficulty ensues for Davidson’s account. He discusses Davidson’s claim that samesaying is an unanalysed notion rather than part of the theory of meaning for a language and concludes that samesaying is a pragmatic phenomenon. Kent Bach sets off to reject the idea that *that*-clauses specify the content of a belief, which he calls a Specification Assumption. Instead, the *that*-clause in a belief report merely characterizes something a person believes. As a result, a belief report can be true even if the holder of the belief does not believe the proposition expressed by the *that*-clause. The problem, however, is to specify the relation between the proposition expressed by the *that*-clause and the various beliefs to which it corresponds. In the follow-up to this paper, Bach further develops the thesis that belief reports merely describe (or characterize) rather than report (or specify) beliefs. He points out the weaknesses of some dominant accounts of attitude contexts and develops a descriptivist view introduced in the previous paper according to which what we believe is not a proposition expressed by a *that*-clause. What exactly the belief would have to be for the report to be true can only be said having taken context into consideration. Belief sentences are said to be semantically incomplete: their truth conditions are context-dependent. Hence, the substitution of coreferential expressions can sometimes make a difference to the truth conditions, while on other occasions it does not. Similarly, one and the same referring expression may be completed differently in different contexts, which explains the illusion of contradictory beliefs. Anne Bezuidenhout focuses on the pragmatic aspects of attitude reports, i.e. on the components of meaning that are not semantically encoded. She endorses the relevance-theoretic approach of Sperber and Wilson and utilizes their ideas of (1) the interpretive resemblance between the content of a belief and the proposition expressed by the *that*-clause, and (2) the conceptual-procedural distinction, in order to account for the pragmatics of attitude reports. She suggests

that *that*-clauses encode procedural information, i.e. they encode procedures, instructions as to how the expression is to be processed. She proposes to deal with the problem of different modes of presentation of a referent through the concept of pragmatic adjustment such as loosening, enrichment and transfer. Finally, she compares and contrasts this account with Recanati's proposal of some cognitive processes involved in entertaining attitude reports. Kasia Jaszczolt distinguishes three readings of belief reports which she calls *de re*, *de dicto*₁ and *de dicto proper* and argues for the default status of the *de re* interpretation. This reading is supported by the Default Semantics that allows for the contribution of intentions (and in particular the referential intention) to the semantic representation. The default reading, as well as the departures from the default, are independently supported by the intentionality of mental states. She proposes a mild, default-based version of contextualism whereby the departures from the default interpretation are guided by the context and in particular by the 'degree' to which the referential intention is present. The three readings make up a scale of degrees of intentionality which can also be interpreted as degrees of fineness of grain of the referent's mode of presentation. Last but not least, David Woodruff Smith discusses the role of a background of basic beliefs and practices that underlie our intentional activities, including reports on attitudes. He emphasizes the role of intentionality of mental acts for the analysis of propositional attitudes, as well as speech acts of reporting on them and sentences expressing these acts. Since attitude reports are the public-language renderings of our private attitudes, the semantics and pragmatics of attitude reports are, by analogy, founded on phenomenological reflection. The background that contributes to the speaker's meaning turns out to include assumptions about our psychology and culture, and even varying degrees of metaphysical commitments. All these constituents of the background have to be accounted for in the pragmatics of propositional attitude reports.

The papers have one common objective, which is the division of labour between semantics and pragmatics in accounting for propositional attitude reports. The different angles and levels of analysis from which the problem is approached by the contributors constitute the main strength of the collection. Although no clearly superior theory or paradigm emerges, the volume makes public some new ideas on the form and degree of contribution of pragmatic processes to the meaning of propositional attitude reports. Grice once observed about presupposition:

"In recent years, linguists have made it increasingly difficult for philosophers to continue to keep their eyes glued to a handful of stock examples of (alleged) presupposition, such as the king of France's baldness and the inquiry whether you have left off beating your wife."
Grice (1981, p. 195).

A similar phenomenon is happening with propositional attitude research, as far as the type and scope of relevant problems are concerned. Progress in pragmatic research necessitates redrawing the boundaries between semantics and pragmatics in propositional attitude research. This volume gives evidence of this progress.