*Philosophy of Language: Revisiting Events Semantics*

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**Handout 2**

**Events, States, and Facts**

**1. Event classifications**

Standard classification:

Verbs describing activities, accomplishments, achievements, states

Linguistic criteria for the distinctions

Activities and states take *for*-adverbials, but not achievements and accomplishments

(7) a. John walked / stood / was satisfied for an hour.

b. ??? John built the box / fell down for an hour.

Accomplishments take *in*-adverbials, but not so achievements:

(8) a. John built the box in an hour.

b. ??? John fell down in an hour.

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**2. States**

A linguistic criterion (more later):

Stative verbs do not permit the progressive, unlike activities and accomplishments:

(9) a. ??? Mary is owning a house.

b. ??? Mary is resembling her mother.

c. John is walking.

d. John is building a box.

(10) a. Mary is very engaged in the project.

b. ?? Mary is being very engaged in the project.

(11) a. ??? Joe is knowing French

b. Joe speaks French (dispositional)

c. Joe is speaking French. (episodic)

Verbs of bodily posture:

(12) a. John is sleeping / standing / sitting.

b. ??? John is being asleep / is being upright.

Another intuition about states: states are ‘non-dynamic’

States do not involve changes, but may be based on changes, that is, may obtain in virtue of something dynamic:

(13) a. the state of war, the state of Mary’s training

b. Joe’s very being active / engaged / attentive

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**3. The distinction between events and facts**

**3.1. Fact descriptions**

Explicit fact descriptions: *the fact that* S

Clausal fact descriptions: *that* S (sometimes), clausal gerunds (‘imperfect nominals’ (Vendler 1967)): NP’s V-*ing* (*John’s kissing Mary*)

Not every factive verb allows for explicit fact descriptions:

(14) a. John knows that it is raining

b. ?? John knows the fact that it is raining.

(15) a. John saw that it was raining.

b. ?? John saw the fact it was raining.

Language-particular differences!

**3.2. Properties distinguishing facts and events**

Predicates of location and time

(16) a. the rain / event yesterday

b. ??? the fact yesterday

(17) a. the rain in Munich

b. ??? the fact in Munich

(18) a. The meeting was in the room / was yesterday.

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

Predicates of causation (vs. of causal explanation, cf. Vendler 1967)

(19) a. The rain caused flooding.

b. ?? The fact that it rained caused the fact that the square was flooded.

(20) a. John’s jump broke the table / made the table break.

b. The fact that John jumped ??? broke the table / ok made the table break.

Predicates of (direct) perception

(21) a. John observed Bill’s jump.

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

Predicates of speed, movement, shape, manner, intensity, manifestation

(22) a. John’s speech was slow / strange / loud.

b. ??? The fact that John spoke was slow / strange / loud.

(23) a. John’s jump was high.

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

(24) a. John’s laughter was intense.

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

Verbs of description

(25) a. Mary described John laughter / John’s jump.

b. ?? John described the fact that John laughed / the fact that John jumped.

A puzzle about verbs of description

(26) a. John described the object: he said it was a book.

b. ??? John described the book: he said it was a book.

**3.3. Conceptions of facts**

Two views of facts

1. Facts as non-worldly (Strawson1950)

Facts as the obtaining of conditions of objects

Linguistic correlate: *the fact that* S

2. Facts as worldly, as part of the world (Austin1979)

Facts as actual situations, actual situations = events?

Linguistic correlate: *the facts*, as in *The sentence corresponds to the facts.*

Non-worldly facts as true propositions

Most recent defence: A. Betti *Against Facts*, CUP, 2015

Facts are propositions that happen to be true. Hence facts are not needed as a separate category in the ontology.

Problems:

Propositions exhibits opacity (involve mode of presentation), but not so facts.

Propositions and facts have different properties, e.g., truth:

(27) a. The true proposition that S is true.

b. ??? The fact that S is true.

(28) a. Joe proved / believed the true proposition that 2+2=4.

b. ??? Joe proved / believed the fact that 2+2=4.

Facts as ‘propositions qua being true’

(29) a. John qua being a teacher is nice / makes little money / is highly respected.

b. John qua being a business man is ruthless / makes lots of money / is despised.

Problem:

(30) a. John noticed a fact.

b. ??? John noticed a proposition qua being true.

Facts as Kimian ‘events’

(31) Kim’s theory of events

For individuals d, d’, properties P, P’, and times t, t’,

[1] [d, P, t] exists iff P holds of d at t.

[2] [d, P, t] = [d', P', t'] iff d = d', P = P', t = t'.

The nature of the proposal

Object introduced by abstraction (or by implicit definition)

The so introduced object has just those properties that come with the method of introduction:

Thus, properties of existence at a time and identity conditions, but nothing else.

Besides acting as objects of mental attitudes, as any object can!

Kim’s definition of events is best considered an (implicit) definition of (simple) facts.

Result of the implicit definition

Facts have no properties of concreteness, location, manifestation, shape, extension etc.

Facts have no parts.

Potentially problematic:

Predicates of part structure are applicable to the denotation of factive clauses

(32) John knows *in part* that the collection was sold.

Parts of facts are ‘partial contents’

Facts as modal objects (Moltmann *Objects and Attitudes*, OUP in press)

Modal objects: obligations, permissions, needs, offers

Characteristic properties of modal objects:

* have satisfaction conditions (a content)
* have situations as satisfiers (realizers)

Facts modal objects whose satisfiers are actual situations (and that do not have violators)

Part relation for facts

A set of actual situations *X* is a part of a fact *m* if any situation in *X* is part of a satisfier of *m* and every satisfier of *m* contains a situation in *X* as part.

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**4. The notion of an abstract state**

**4.1. Terminology and examples**

Kimian and Davidsonian states (Maienborn 2007)

Abstract and concrete states (Moltmann 2013)

Abstract state verbs

*Know, own, owe, weigh, resemble, be*

Concrete state verbs

*Sit, stand, lie, sleep*

**4.2. The Stative Adverb Gap**

Most adverbial modifiers are unacceptable with abstract state verbs

Location modifiers:

(33) a. ??? John weighs 100 kilos in Germany.

b. ??? John owns the plane in Germany.

c. ??? John knows French in Munich.

(34) a. John was walking in Munich.

b. John slept in the house.

Manner modifiers:

(35) a. ??? John weighs 100 kilos with difficulty.

b. ??? John owns the horse with effort.

(36) a. John was walking in an unusual way.

b. John stood at the table with difficulty.

Instrumentals, comitatives:

(37) a. ?? John knows French with Mary.

b. ?? John owns the house with a pencil.

c. John slept with a pillow.

Naked infinitival complements:

(38) a. ??? John saw Bill weigh 100 kilos.

b. ??? John saw Bill own the house.

c. Mary saw John seep on the floor.

An ontological account of the Stative Adverb Gap

Abstract state verbs take abstract states as implicit (Davidsonian) arguments.

**4.3. Kim’s (1976) account of events as an account of abstract states**

(39) Kimian semantics of event nominalizations

For a time t, [*John’s walk*]t = ιe[e = [John, [*walk*], t]]

A common objection to the Kimean account: not every part of an event description is constitutive of the event.

Kim’s response: event-characterising and event constitutive modifiers:

(40) a. John’s slow walk

b. ιe[e = [John, [*walk*], t] & slow([John, [*walk*], t])]

c. [John, [*slowly walk*], t]

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

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

(42) Kimian definition of abstract states

For individuals d, d’ and properties P, P’:

[1] [d, P] exists at a time t iff P holds of d at t.

[2] [d, P] = [d', P'] iff d = d' and P = P'.

Result

Abstract states have no spatial location, manifestation, extension, shape etc.

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**5. Abstract states and tropes and the semantic status of abstract states**

**5.1. Nominalizations of stative verbs**

Stative verbs may permit two types of nominalizations

Abstract state nominalizations

(43) a. ??? John’s resembling Bill is striking / unusual.

b. ??? John knowing French is profound / superficial.

Trope nominalizations

(44) a. John’s resemblance to Bill is striking / unusual.

b. John knowledge of French is profound / superficial.

Spatial modifiers do not show a difference between abstract states and tropes:

Reason: tropes by nature do not allow for spatial modifiers:

(45) a. ??? John’s wisdom / nervousness / happiness was in France.

b. ??? the cake’s deliciousness on the table

But abstract states do not have parts nor can they be measured, unlike tropes:

(46) a. Part of John and Bill’s resemblance is due to their genes.

b. ??? Part of John and Bill’s resembling each other is due to their genes.

(47) a. Part of John’s knowledge of French is due to his year as an exchange student.

b. ??? Part of John’s knowing French is due to his year as an exchange student.

(48) a. There is more resemblance to Bill than resemblance to Mary.

b. ??? There is more resembling Bill than resembling Mary

(49) a. ??? part of John’s being wise / nervous / intelligent

b. part of John’s wisdom / nervousness / intelligence

(46) a. ??? There is more being wise in this book.

b. There is more wisdom in this book.

The Davidsonian argument of *be*

*Be* takes abstract states as implicit arguments.

*Being happy*: abstract state (of being a bearer of a mode)

*Happiness*: mode (trope) or kind of mode (trope)

(47) a. Mary is happy

b. [*be happy*] = {<e, x> |∃t(e = s(‘BEING BEARER OF’, x, t) & happy(x, t))}

Likewise for *have.*

Accounting for the two nominalizations

*Resemble* = have resemblance

underlyingly: *be similar to* or *have* RESEMBL (abstract nominal root)

*Know*  = underlyingly: *have* KNOWL (abstract nominal root)

*Resemble*: nominalize either *be* or *similar* (or either *have* or RESEMBL)

*Know*: nominalize either *have* or *KNOWL*

That is, a nominalization can refer either to the (implicit) argument of *be / have* (abstract state) or to the (implicit) argument of *similar* / *RESEMBL* or *KNOWL*

**5.2. The semantic status of abstract state verbs**

The semantic challenge for the Kimian account of abstract states

The Kimian account requires two meanings of abstract state verbs:

Underived meaning: no Davidsonian argument

Derived meaning: state argument introduced on the basis of the property / relation expressed by the underived verb.

(48) a. *own*(John, the house)

b. *own’*(s(‘own’, John, the house), John, the house) iff *own*(John, the house).

Neo-Davidsonian event semantics with abstract states on a Kimian account:

Unavailable: own(e): e would have to be defined in terms of a relation expressed by *own*.

Alternative proposal within the Neodavidsonian approach

Abstract states are underlyingly light verbs – nominal constructions,

Light verbs (*have, be, make, give* …): are special in taking no Davidsonian event argument: they are truly relational, unlike ordinary verbs (which are predicates of events)

Decompositional analysis of attitude verbs and modal verbs (Arsijenevic 2009, , Harves/Kayne 2012, Moltmann 2021, 2024…): (*that*-)clauses as special relative clauses

(49) a. John believes that p - John has the belief that p

b. John needs to work - John has need to work.

(50) a. John knows that p - John has knowledge that p.

b. John owns a house - John has ownership of a house

c. John owes money – John has debt of money.

Decomposition of verbs involving tropes (on a standard understanding):

(51) a. John resembles Joe.

b. John has resemblance to Joe.

(52) a. John’s close / strong resemblance to Mary

b. John closely / strongly resembles Mary.

(53) a. John’s resemblance of Mary is strong / close.

b. ??? John’s resembling of Mary is close / strong.

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