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**Twardowski's Distinction between Actions and Products. Clarifications, Applications, and Inspirations**

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1. **Aims of the talk**
2. Twardowski’s distinction between actions and products and its philosophical importance
3. How is the distinction to be understood: as an ontological or a perspectival distinction?
4. Extending Twardowski’s notion of a product to the category of satisfiables
5. Clarifying the relation between actions and their associated products
6. Outline of a new semantics of attitude reports and modal sentences on the basis of a

revision/extension of Twardowski’s notion of a product (a satisfiable)

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**2. Twardowski’s distinction between actions and products**

## **2.1. The standard view of propositional attitudes**

Two sorts of entities are associated with propositional attitudes:

1. Mental acts or states or illocutionary acts
2. Propositions

# The standard view of nominalizations of attitude verbs

Are ambiguous between standing for acts or states and for propositions (e.g., Searle 1983, Pustejovsky 1995):

1. a. John’s thought that Mary is happy.

b. John’s claim that Mary likes Bill

Apparent properties of acts:

1. a. John’s claim caused astonishment.

b. John’s claim yesterday was astonishing.

Properties of propositions:

1. a. John’s claim is true.

b. John’s claim implies that S.

Propositions:

Frege (1918/9), Bolzano, most contemporary philosophers of language (e.g., Stalnaker 1984)

## **1.2. Twardwski’s action-product distinction**

Twardowski’s linguistic arguments

Semantic behavior of two sorts of nominalizations in Polish, German, and French

And English:

Gerunds as terms for actions and other nominalizations as terms for products: thinking – thought; judging – judgment; believing – belief; claiming – claim; deciding – decision; screaming – scream

Psychological actions – psychological products

Psychophysical actions – psychophysical products

Enduring products – nonenduring products

Enduring products: writing – writing, drawing – drawing

Physical actions – physical products?

walking – walk, jumping – jump, dancing – dance

# Distinguishing characteristics of actions and products (for Twardowski)

1. Products, but not actions, have truth or satisfaction conditions and enter inferential relations:

(4) a. John’s claim / John’s belief is true

1. ?? John’s claiming / John’s act of claiming / John’s speech act is true.
2. John’s believing / John’s belief state is true.
3. The belief that A and B implies the belief that B.

2. Products but not actions enter similarity relations based on shared content only:

Products of the same type are exactly similar iff they are the same in content.

Exact similarity is conveyed by ‘is the same as’ (as opposed to ‘is’, which conveys numerical identity)

(5) a. John’s claim / John’s belief is the same as Mary’s.

b. John’s claiming / John’s belief state is the same as Mary’s.

# Similarity between products and actions for Twardowksi

1. Actions and products are concrete mind-dependent particulars. (unproblematic)
2. Products share their temporal duration with the action producing them. (problematic)

# Sharing the same propositional content for Twardowksi

Engaging in actions with similar products

Understanding a product p (e.g., a claim):

producing a product similar to p, as a causal result of p

# The importance of products for Twardowski

* serve as truth bearers
* cognitive particulars, yet account for the appearance of a stable content, through the production of similar products
* make up the subject matter of logic
* make up the subject matter of all humanities

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**3. Making sense of Twardowski’s notion of a product**

**3.1. Products as aspects of acts?**

The Aspectual Theory of the Action-Product Distinction (Schaar 2006, Bronzo 2020)

When discussing the distinction between a physical action and its apparent non-enduring products, Twardowski (1911, p. 80) appears to take the distinction to be one between two different aspects of the same entity:

- Product nouns such as *jump* and *race* ‘do not bring into relief the aspect of action’… instead ‘they bring to the force a different aspect, one that might be termed the ‘phenomenal or ‘static’aspect’.

- ‘When we speak of the shout, we abstract from [the activity of shouting] treating the shout as an acoustical phenomenon on a par with a roar, a rustle etc.’

- In the case of fighting and fight, ‘terms for actions and for products may even pose as merely two ways of grasping the same thing. In the case of to err and error and bending and bend, the distinction in meaning between verb and noun is quite pronounced, these nouns being entirely free of the functional aspect.’ (Twardowski (1911, p. 81).

- ‘There is a continuum from those cases in which the product virtually coalesces with the action that produces I, through instances in which the distinctness of action and product becomes increasingly sharp.’ (Twardowski 1911, p. 83).

At the same time, Twardowski takes non-enduring products to be on a par with material, enduring products and points out sharp differences in their properties (1911, 91):

- Concepts can be ‘defined’, but not the activity of conceiving.

- Saying that a question is ‘unintelligible ‘is not saying that the act of posing questions is unintelligible

- ‘Overlooking ‘an error is not overlooking the action of committing the error

- Expectations can be ‘fulfilled’ and resolutions I’mplemented’, but not ‘actions’ of expecting or resolving.

- Thoughts being ‘inspiring’ is not the same acts of thinking being inspiring.

Twardowski clearly recognizes similarity between material products and non-enduring mental or psychophysical products:

- share ability of having satisfaction conditions and other content-based properties.

Another issue for the Aspectual Theory:

requires that the product coincide temporally with the act.

- Products may exist only at the end of the act (claims).

- Illocutionary and mental products may come a validity and thus endurance beyond the act that produced them.

- Aspectual Theory makes the action-product distinction inapplicable to modal objects and the actions that may have produced them.

**3.2. Products as artifacts**

Abstract artifacts (Thomasson 1999):

Artifacts that lack a physical realization.

# The ontology of artifacts (Ingarden, Thomasson1999) :

Artifacts are agent / mind-dependent, have a limited lifespan, may or may not come with a physical realization, and have the ability to represent. They are neither actions nor material objects nor abstract objects, but belong to a category of its own.

# Further action-product pairs, with products possibly lacking physical realization

Law – act of declaring / passing it

Objects of art – act of creation

Objects of art possibly lacking physical realization: poetic, musical compositions

Objects of art with multiple realizations: books, uncast statues

# Cognitive and illocutionary products as artifacts

With physical realization: claims, screams

With material realization: writings

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## **4. Towards a larger category than products: attitudinal and modal objects as satifiables**

Attitudinal objects properly include cognitive and illocutionary products

1. Attitudinal objects that are state-related and are not necessarily the product of an act: beliefs, intentions, desires

display different sorts of properties.

Belief -- belief state, believing, desire – state of desiring, intention -- intending

2. Attitudinal objects that are prior to their related act, as occurrences or results defining acts, but not products of acts: conclusions, recognitions, judgments

3. Modal objects: obligations, permissions, needs, dispositions, abilities

Modal objects share the relevant content-related properties of attitudinal objects.

Content-related properties

Having satisfaction conditions, standing in similarity relations based on shared content only, having a part structure strictly based on partial content.

One major difference between modal and attitudinal objects

Modal objects may last beyond the act that created them: permission, obligation, offer

## Modal objects may be, but need not be products of acts

‘Strong’ (or explicit) obligations and permissions are generally products of acts (of demanding or permitting), but not ‘weak’ (or implicit) permissions and obligations, nor are various sorts of needs and abilities.

## Some attitudinal objects may have a modal component

Claims, promises, requests may last beyond the acts that produced them.

Linguistic indication:

Present tense in specificational sentences with attitudinal objects created in the past:

(5’) John’s claim / promise / request is that S.

This would go along with more recent commitment-based views of assertions.

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## **5. Further elaboration and extension of the characteristics of actions / states and attitudinal objects**

**5. 1. Truth- and satisfaction conditions**

Truth predicates:

1. a. John’s claim that that S is true / false.

b. ?? John’s claiming that S is true / false.

c. ?? John’s speech act (of claiming) is true.

Predicates of fulfillment (noted also in Ulrich 1976)

1. a. John’s request to be promoted was fulfilled / satisfied/.

b. ?? John’s act of requesting was fulfilled / satisfied.

1. a. Mary accepted the offer.

b. ??? Mary accepted the act of offering.

Predicates of realization

1. a. John’s decision to postpone the meeting was implemented.

b. ?? John’s act of deciding was implemented.

1. a. John realized his intention.

b. ?? John realized his (state of) intending.

# Action-related predicates of satisfaction

1. a. John followed Mary’s advice.

b. ? John followed Mary’s activity of advising.

1. a. John complied with the instruction.

b. ? John complied with the act of instructing.

1. a. John ignored the command.

b. John ignored the act of commanding.

## **5. 3. Similarity relations**

Attitudinal objects of the same type enter similarity relations strictly based on being the same in content

(14) a. John’s thought is the same as Mary’s thought.

1. ?? John’s thinking is the same as Mary’s thinking.
2. ??? John’s thought was also his remark.

## **5. 4. Properties of understanding and content-based causation and evaluation**

1. a. John’s speaking delighted Mary.

b. John’s speech delighted Mary.

1. a. John’s answer caused surprise.

b. John’s giving an answer caused surprise.

1. a. John’s utterance inspired many comments.

b. John’s act of uttering inspired many comments.

**5. 5. Properties of part-whole structure**

# Parts of cognitive and illocutionary products

‘Part of John’s decision’: partial content

‘Part of the action of deciding’.: temporal part of an action

‘Part of John’s claim’: partial content

‘Part of John’s act of claiming’: temporal part of an act

# Parts of materially realized products

‘Describing a part of the book’: either partial content or physical part

## **5. 6. Correctness: normativity and attitudinal objects**

Correctness as truth vs correctness of an action

1. a. John’s claim is correct. (claim is true)

b. John’s act of claiming that S is correct. (act follows instruction)

1. a. John’s belief is correct. (belief is true)

b. John’s believing is correct. (maintaining a state fulfilling an instruction)

Truth as a non-action-guiding norm imposed on representational objects (Jarvis 2012):

associated with attitudinal objects, but not with actions or states (or propositions)

## **5.7. Properties of mental states and of state-related attitudinal objects**

* A mental state (of believing, hoping, desiring, intending) intuitively is not true or false, unlike a belief; cannot be fulfilled, unlike a hope or desire; and cannot be realized, unlike an intention.
* Part of a mental state is not a partial content, unlike part of a belief, desire, or hope. Part of a mental state is a temporal part, or perhaps better, a condition partly constitutive of the state (a condition that, together with others, obtains while the state endures).
* Two mental states (of the same type) are not (just) the same if they are the same in content.

Rather constitutive features (including strength of the attitude) need to be the same.

* Mental states are not correct in the sense of being true, unlike beliefs

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**6. The semantic role of attitudinal objects in attitude reports**

## The role of propositions in philosophy of language and semantics

* Primary bearers of truth values
* The meanings of sentences / embedded sentences
* The contents or ‘objects’ of propositional attitudes

## The semantic roles of propositions

1. Figure in the Relational Analysis of attitude reports:

(21) a. John believes that Mary is happy.

b. believe(John, [*that Mary is happy*])

2. Form the range of special quantifiers in sentential position (Schiffer 2003):

(22) a. John thinks that Mary is happy.

John thinks something.

b. Mary believes everything Bill believes.

Bill believes that it is raining.

Mary believes that it is raining.

## Special quantifiers as nominalizing quantifiers

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

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

c. John imagined something exciting.

1. John said something that made Mary very upset.

## Restrictions on reports of shared content of different attitudes

1. a. ?? John screamed what Mary believes, namely that Bill was elected president.

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

c. ?? John claimed what Mary believes, namely that it will rain.

1. a. ?? John’s scream was Mary’s belief.

b. ?? John’s expectation is Mary’s belief.

c. ?? John’s claim was Mary’s belief.

New analysis of attitude reports

Focus on complex attitude predicates of the form light verb – noun (for an attitudinal object)

(28) a. John claims that S.

b. John makes the claim that S.

c. ∃d(make(John, d) & claim(d) & [*that* S](d))

Derive the syntactic structure of ‘simple’ attitude reports from attitude reports with complex predicates (Arsijeneviç 2009):

(29) a. John claims [that he is French]

b. John claim-make [DP ~~claim~~ [that [FP ~~claim~~ (+assert)]] [F+assert] [he is French]

Semantics of special quantifiers/pronouns

Special quantifiers and pronouns stand for attitudinal objects or kinds of them:

(30) John claimed *something* shocking.

Restrictions on reports of a shared content of different attitudes

(31) a. ?? John expects *what* Mary claims, namely that Sue will study harder.

b. ?? John’s expectation is Mary’s claim.

The analysis

(32) a. John made some [thing claim shocking].

b. John has expectation that ~~claims~~ Mary has ~~claims~~

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**7. Adding to the Importance of Twardowski’s action-product distinction**

1. Products (attitudinal objects) as content bearers are reflected in language itself and thus clearly form part of the ontology of language, unlike propositions.

2. Products (attitudinal objects) are reflected not just in nominalizations, but also the semantics of special quantifiers and pronouns

3. Products (attitudinal objects) can semantically dispense with propositions and the problems associated with that notion, without making actions content bearers (Soames, 2010, Hanks 2015)

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**8. Critical Conclusion**

Twardowski’s notion of a product is part of larger category of satisfiable objects (attitudinal and modal objects), which cannot generally be understood in terms of the notion of an abstract artifact and which cannot in any way be identified with events and states.

Some events or states instead are individuated in terms of certain types of attitudinal object.

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