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**Comments on Scott Soames: ‘Propositions as Cognitive Acts’ and**

**Peter Hanks: ‘Three Pictures of Propositional Content’**

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**1. On the notion of a proposition**

The roles of propositions

- Primary bearers of truth values

- The meanings of sentences / embedded sentences

- The contents or ‘objects’ of propositional attitudes

The role of propositions in the semantic structure of sentences

The apparent relational logical form of attitude reports

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

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

‘Special’ quantifiers and pronouns in sentential position:

(2) 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.

c. John claimed that it was raining. Mary claimed *that* too.

d. John said that it is raining. *What John said* is true.

The common view

Propositions are the semantic values of *that*-clauses and special quantifiers and pronouns

Abstract conceptions of propositions

- Sets of circumstances

- Structured propositions, e.g. <HAPPY, Mary>

Recent criticisms of abstract conceptions of propositions:

Jubien (2001), Soames (2010), Hanks (2007), Moore (1999), Moltmann (2003b, 2013, Ch 4)

- The problem of cognitive accessibility

- The problem of truth-directedness

- The problem of the unity of propositions

- The problem of arbitrary identification

Making use of acts of predication instead of abstract propositions:

Jubien (2001), Soames (2010, 2013), Hanks (2007), Moltmann (2003b, 2013, Ch 4)

Acts of predication are

- constitutive of the unity of the proposition and the truth-directedness of propositions

- ensure cognitive accessibility

- avoid the problem of arbitrary identification

Propositions **as** types of acts of predication:

S. Soames, P. Hanks

A historical predecessor: Husserl: *Logical investigations*

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**2. Comments on Scott Soames ‘Propositions as Cognitive Acts’**

**2.1. Summary of the view**

Agent represent a being P 🡪 act of predicating P of a represents a being P

Primary truth bearers: particular acts of predication in the entertaining way

Derivative truth bearers: types of acts of predication in the entertaining way

Other attitudes (judgment, belief, knowledge): relations to types of acts of predication in the entertaining way

Further derivative truth bearers (?): beliefs, judgments, claims

**2.2. Problems with the presupposed relational analysis of attitude reports**

[1] Substitution problems with *that*-clauses

Except with a few verbs (*believe, assert, prove*), *that* S does not permit substitution by *the proposition that* S and thus do not act like a proposition-referring term (Prior 1971, Bach 1997, Moltmann 2003b etc):

(3) a. John thought that S / \* the proposition that S.

b. John hoped that S / \* the proposition that S.

[2] Problems with the view that special quantifiers and pronouns stand for propositions:

‘What is believed may be doubted, denied, disproved, or merely imagined’ (Soames)

Not obvious: data from Moltmann (2003b, 2013, Ch 4):

(4) a.. ?? John imagined what Mary believes, that he would become king.

b. ?? John thought what Bill denied, that Mary is happy.

c. ?? John hopes what Mary mentioned, namely that Bill will win the election.

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

e. ?? John said what Mary observed, namely that it will rain.

f. Mary firmly believes what Bill only suspects, namely that Joe is guilty.

g. Mary finally said what so many people believe, namely that Joe is guilty.

h. Bill demanded what Mary asked for, that everyone be treated equal.

Alternative analyses of attitude reports

[1] The neo-Russellian analysis of attitude reports (Jubien 2001, Moltmann 2003b, 2013 C4):

(5) John thinks that Mary likes Bill

(6) think(John; LIKE, Mary, Bill))

An attitude report describes an act of predication, rather than a relation to a type of act predication.

[2] *That*-clauses as predicates of speech acts or mental states of acts (Devitt, to appear)

(7) ∃e(think(e, John) & [*that Mary likes Bill*](e))

The attitude report partially describes an act – possibly of predication.

Open issue: What are the semantic values of special quantifiers and pronouns?

Need for entertainment as the neutral predicative act type involved in all attitudes?

**2.3. Problems for propositions as types of cognitive acts**

Counterintuitive, but not parallel to set-theoretic construction of numbers

The problem of arbitrary identification for propositions (Moore 1999) concerns abstract conception of proposition.

The problem: Propositions are meant to be the semantic values of *that*-clauses and special quantifiers and pronouns such as *something, that, what John claimed.*

Actions certainly are the semantic values of action terms such as *John’s thinking*, *John’s act of claiming*, *John’s claiming that* S.

Acts (and kinds of acts) and propositions display radically different properties, in the context of natural language -- and as such.

[1] Acts as truth bearers?

(8) a. ??? John’s mental act / speech act was true.

b. ??? John’s act of thinking was true.

c. ??? John’s act of claiming that he would win turned out to be true.

d. ??? John’s believing that S/ John’s belief state is true.

Are acts the only cognitive alternative to abstract propositions?

Terms for ‘natural’ truth bearers in natural language:

(9) a. John’s claim that S is true

b. John’s belief that S is true.

Claims and beliefs are not (abstract) propositions: they also bear properties of concrete entities (without the nouns *claim* and *belief* being ambiguous cf. Ulrich 1976)

(10) a. John heard Mary’s true claim that S.

b. Mary’s false belief made her act foolishly.

Twardowski’s (1912) distinction between actions and their (nonenduring) products

Actions: thinking, an act of thinking, an act of judging, a belief state, a state of desire

Products: John’s thought that S, Mary’s judgment, Mary’s belief, Mary’s desire

Products of mental acts and states and of speech acts are nonenduring products and as such spatio-temporally coincident with their actions.

Only products have truth or satisfaction conditions.

Only products (involving the same force) are exactly similar just in case they are the same in content, actions require more for exact similarity.

(11) a. ??? John’s state of hoping was fulfilled

b. John hope was fulfilled

(12) a. John’s followed Mary’s advice.

b. John followed Mary’s activity of advising.

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

b. John’s (activity of) thinking is the same as Mary’s.

Further properties distinguishing actions and products (Moltmann, to appear):

[2] Normative properties: different understanding of *correct* with actions and products

(14) a. John’s assertion is correct.

b. What John asserted is correct.

c. John’s act of asserting was correct.

Products (truth bearers) come with their own norm -- the norm of truth in case of beliefs and assertions; actions are subject to externally imposed norms.

[3] Part-whole structure

(16) a. part of John’s claim

b. part of what John claimed

c. part of John’s act of claiming

d. part of John’s speech act

(17) a. part of John’s thought

b. part of what John thought

c. part of John’s thinking / of John’s activity of thinking.

Parts of actions are temporal parts, parts of (non-material) products are entirely driven by partial content.

Products, not actions, act as semantic values of non-gerundive nominalizations and special quantifiers and pronouns (Moltmann 2003, 2013, to appear).

**2.4. Propositions as types of acts and ‘modes of presentation’**

Propositions may be composed both of acts of predication and acts of cognizing objects.

Different acts of cognizing individuate different propositions, though those propositions may be representationally identical.

Alternative:

Make acts of cognizing not part of the semantic value of the *that*-clause, but part of the described event and have *that-*clause partially characterizes that event (cf. Devitt, to appear).

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**3. Comments on Peter Hanks**

**3.1. Summary of differences wrt Soames**

Like Soames: Propositions identified with types of acts of predication

Differences:

No neutral predication; predication is always truth- or satisfaction-directed

No content-force distinction

Common issues

Relational view of attitude reports

Issues with acts / types of acts being truth bearers

**3.2. Evidence from natural language for non-neutral predication**

[1] Data about sharing of contents (4a-h)

[2] ‘Neutral’ attitude verbs with *that-*clauses and with questions:

*That*-clauses appear to set up a positive force with verbs that are candidates for expressing neutral predication, in contrast to interrogatives.

Example from German:

(18) a. Ich habe mir ueberlegt, ob es besser ist, ob wir zu Hause bleiben.

I thought about whether it is better we stay home.

b. Ich habe mir ueberlegt, dass es besser ist, wenn wir zu Hause bleiben.

I thought that it is better if we stay home.

c. Ich habe mir ueberlegt dass wir besser zuhause bleiben sollten.

I thought that we should better stay home.

Hypothesis: There is no verb ‘to entertain’ in natural languages triggering neutral predication with a non-interrogative complement.

**3.3. Suspension of predication in conditionals and disjunctions**

[1] How can suspension be understood?

Antecedent and consequent of conditionals need to be truth-evaluable in order to contribute to the truth conditions of the conditional. How is this possible if truth-directed predication is suspended? Only truth-directed predication sets up truth bearers.

[2] How to characterize contexts triggering suspension?

*If, or,* negation

Other conditional constructions with *in that case, provided that*, conditional mood / *would*:

(19) a. Mary might come. In that case, John would come too.

b. John will come provided Mary comes.

[3] Other readings of suspension-triggering expressions

The function of *or* in interrogatives: reinforces interrogative force, rather than suspending it:

(20) a. John knows whether or not he will come.

b. Will John come or not?

Conditional speech acts:

(21) a. In case you do not know, John won the race.

b. In case you hear me, please help!

[4] Constituent coordination

(22) Almost every man or woman had to leave.

Alternative:

Predication in conditional, disjunctive, and negative contexts involves weaker force than assertion: weak acceptance

**3.4. What types of acts of predication does the interpretation of sentences involve?**

Independent sentences:

Direction of fit: word to world, world to word, questions

Assertions: truth conditions; directives: satisfaction conditions; questions: answerhood conditions

Three main types of independent sentences across languages acknowledged in linguistics: declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives

The problem of embedded sentence:

*That*-clauses, infinitives, embedded interrogatives?

Hard to apply the same distinction to propositional attitudes:

Desire: satisfaction condition

Intention, decisions: realization or implementation conditions

Hope, expectation, prediction: fulfillment conditions

*That-*clauses: can be complements of *desire* and *believe*

Infinitival clauses: can be complements of *claim, intend* and *decide*

Distinguish as many types of acts of predication as there are attitude verbs?

How to account for sharing of ‘propositions’ and inferences among propositions?

**3.5. Challenges for directive acts and questions as types of predication**

Connections between acts of different types that need to be accounted for:

[1] Connection of imperatives to modals in declarative sentences:

(23) a. Clean the kitchen!

b. Mary must clean the kitchen.

(24) a. Take an apple!

b. Mary may take an apple.

[2] Connection of questions to answers:

(25) a. John knows whether Mary won the race.

Mary won the race.

John knows that Mary won the race.

b. John knows who won the race.

Mary won the race.

John knows that Mary won the race.

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