

Puzzles of attitude ascriptions

PHIL 43916
October 31, 2012

1. The problem of deduction.....	1
2. Frege's puzzle.....	2
3. Kripke's puzzle	3
4. Substitution failures outside of attitude ascriptions?.....	4

1. THE PROBLEM OF DEDUCTION

Last time we discussed a theory of attitude ascriptions according to which the semantic value of a that-clause is the intension of the embedded sentence.

Given that the intension of a sentence is the set of worlds in which it is true, it follows from this theory that the following principle is true:

The closure of belief under necessary equivalence

If S and S^* are true in exactly the same worlds, then $\ulcorner A$ believes that $S \urcorner$ is true iff $\ulcorner A$ believes that $S^* \urcorner$ is.

Further, the following principle appears plausible:

The distribution of belief over conjunction

If $\ulcorner A$ believes that S and $S^* \urcorner$ is true, then so is $\ulcorner A$ believes that $S \urcorner$ and $\ulcorner A$ believes that $S^* \urcorner$.

But now suppose that we have a pair of sentences, S and S^* , and suppose that S entails S^* . Then the following two sentences will have the same intension:

S
 S and S^*

Put all of this together, and what you get is:

The closure of belief under necessary consequence

If S entails S^* , then if $\ulcorner A$ believes that $S \urcorner$ is true, so is $\ulcorner A$ believes that $S^* \urcorner$.

This is not good. The problem here (which, in this form, is due to Scott Soames) can be brought out in two ways:

(1) Necessary truths are necessary consequences of everything. So, anyone who has any beliefs at all believes all necessary truths. (So, for example, everyone believes every mathematical truth.)

(2) Every proposition is a necessary consequence of a necessary falsehood. So, if anyone believed a necessary falsehood, they would believe every proposition. But no one believes every proposition. So no one believes any necessary falsehoods. (So, for example, no one has ever had any false mathematical beliefs.)

One sort of response to this problem is to revise our view of that-clauses. Perhaps they should not have as their semantic value the intension of the embedded sentence, but rather a *structured intension*, which we could perhaps think of as something like an ordered n-tuple.

How could we state the truth conditions of belief ascriptions using this sort of theory?

2. FREGE'S PUZZLE

But a problem remains, which Frege emphasized. The problem is that very similar attitude ascriptions, like

Bob believes that Hesperus is visible in the morning.
Bob believes that Phosphorus is visible in the morning.

or

Lois believes that Superman can fly.
Lois believes that Clark Kent can fly.

seem as though they can differ in truth-value. This is often called 'Frege's puzzle' (though other, related problems also go by that name).

Is this a problem for our attempt to explain that-clauses in terms of structured intensions? It is if two names which refer to the same object have the same intension; and, in the semantic theory we've been using, they will.

Could we revise that theory so that such names differ in intension? What would this involve?

Frege tried to solve this problem by distinguishing between sense and reference, and explained this distinction as follows:

“The reference of a proper name is the object itself which we designate by its means; the idea, which we have in that case, is wholly subjective; in between lies the sense, which is indeed no longer subjective like the idea, but is yet not the object itself. The following analogy will perhaps clarify these relationships. Somebody observes the Moon through a telescope. I compare the Moon itself to the reference; it is the object of the observation, mediated by the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope, and by the retinal image of the observer. The former I compare to the sense, the latter is like the idea or experience. The optical image in the telescope is indeed one-sided and dependent upon the standpoint of observation; but it is still objective, inasmuch as it can be used by several observers. At any rate it could be arranged for several to use it simultaneously. But each one would have his own retinal image.” (“On sense and reference,” 30)

How might we incorporate this distinction into our semantics? One idea, which is close to what Frege thought, is that we can think of the semantic values of that-clauses as structured entities (as the proponent of structured intensions thought) but ones whose constituents are, not intensions, but Fregean senses.

It is reasonable to ask for more information about what Fregean senses are, and about when two expressions have the same sense. Frege answered the latter question using (roughly) the following two principles:

Frege’s criterion

If it is possible to understand two sentences S and S^* while (after reflection) taking different attitudes toward their truth-values, then S and S^* differ in sense.

e and e^* differ in sense iff there are two sentences S and S^* , which differ only in the substitution of e and e^* , and differ in sense.

A problem: Frege’s theory might explain ‘substitution failures’ while failing to explain much more common cases of ‘substitution success.’

3. KRIPKE’S PUZZLE

However, even if we make use of Fregean senses, and these are otherwise unproblematic, a puzzle — presented by Kripke in the reading for today — remains. We can think of the puzzle as based on the following four plausible principles:

1. *Weak disquotation*: If a competent speaker on reflection sincerely assents to S , then that speaker believes ‘that S ’.

2. *Reverse disquotation*: If a speaker believes ‘that S’ then, on reflection, that speaker will (if given the chance) sincerely assent to S.

3. *Translation*: if a sentence expresses a truth in one language, then its translation into another language also expresses a truth (in that language).

4. *Contradiction*: if you have a pair of contradictory beliefs, it is always possible to discover this on the basis of reflection on those beliefs.

Using the example of puzzling Pierre, Kripke argues, in effect, that (2)-(4) are inconsistent, and that (1)-(3) are inconsistent.

One might think that this is problem to do with translation, and hence that we can solve the problem by rejecting (3). But (3) is quite plausible, and Kripke’s example of Peter and Paderewski shows that we can generate the puzzle without (3).

Kripke does not himself take a stand on how to resolve these paradoxes.

One plausible reply to the puzzles is to reject (2) and (4).

But if we do this, that weakens the case for a Fregean approach to that-clauses for two reasons: (a) it seems that the examples which we used to argue against the structured intensions approach, and for the Fregean approach, relied implicitly on principles like (2) and (4); and (b) it seems that Frege’s criterion is going to lead to the implausible result that ‘London is pretty’ and ‘Londres est jolie’ differ in meaning.

4. SUBSTITUTION FAILURES OUTSIDE OF ATTITUDE ASCRIPTIONS?

Richard’s example of the phone booth and the steamroller. The relevant utterances are:

Suppose that Sally accepts “He is in danger” but rejects “You are in danger.” Then, by Fregean lights, (i) is true and (ii) false out of Sally’s mouth, despite ‘he’ and ‘you’ both being Bill:

- (i) I believe that he is in danger.
- (ii) I believe that you are in danger.

But suppose that Bill tells Sally that someone is looking at him gesturing wildly (unbeknownst to him, this is Sally). Then the following seems true out of Sally’s mouth:

- (iii) The person waving at you believes that you are in danger.

But this contradicts our view that (ii) is false out of Sally’s mouth.