

## Singular Propositions and Singular Thoughts

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**Abstract** The core of the debate between Fregeans and Russellians in the philosophy of language concerns the content of object-dependent propositions, or how we ought to individuate and semantically represent the content of propositions that are about specific individuals. This essay is an investigation of the contemporary status of this debate. My aim is to show how the causal theorists' picture of reference determination entails the need for both Fregean and Russellian conceptions of propositional content in the study of mind and language, and to investigate some of the consequences of this position.

**1 Introduction** After Russell communicated his paradox to Frege, the two corresponded frequently, discussing proposed solutions to it. At one point, Frege discerned what he took to be a confusion or conflation concerning Russell's conception of a proposition. Frege wrote (10/20/1902):

What is a proposition? German logicians understand by it the expression of a thought, a group of audible or visible signs expressing a thought. But you evidently mean the thought itself. . . . I distinguish between the sense and the meaning of a sign, and I call the sense of a proposition a thought and its meaning a truth-value. ([7], p. 149)

Russell replied (12/12/1902):

I understand by a *proposition* its sense, not its truth-value. I cannot bring myself to believe that the true or the false is the meaning of a proposition in the same sense as, e.g., a certain person is the meaning of the name Julius Caesar [sic]. ([7], pp. 150–51)

Frege subsequently came back to this issue (11/11/1904), insisting that:

Truth is not a component part of the thought, just as Mont Blanc with its snowfields is not itself a component part of the thought that Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high. ([7], p. 163)

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Russell's response (12/12/1904) surprised Frege, and sparked a controversy about propositional content:

I believe that in spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc is itself a component of what is actually asserted in the proposition 'Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high'. We do not assert the thought, for that is a private psychological matter: we assert the object of the thought, and that is, to my mind, a certain complex (an objective proposition, one might say) in which Mont Blanc itself is a component part. If we do not admit this, then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc. ([7], p. 169)

This essay is an investigation of contemporary status of this controversy. More specifically, my aim is to tie some of the lessons of the causal theory of reference to this famous debate over the content of object dependent propositions.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout most of this century, philosophers consistently adhered to one or the other of these two approaches to propositional content. Thus, on one hand, Church and later Carnap, for example, individuated object-dependent propositions in terms of senses or intensions; and, on the other hand, there was a more orthodox extensional approach to propositional content. My thesis is that one moral of the considerations raised by the causal theorists (which is almost explicitly drawn out in Kripke [11], Chapter 3 of Evans [4], a collected series of papers by Perry [17], and Part 1 of Recanati [19]) is that if we accept the arguments of the causal theorists about reference determination, then we need both Fregean and Russellian conceptions of propositional content in a comprehensive semantic account. The view that causal-historical chains of transmission, rather than the beliefs and intentions of individual speakers, are criterial in determining the reference of certain types of terms fits with a Russellian conception of propositional content.<sup>2</sup> But that conception is inadequate when our aim is to represent the objects of the propositional attitudes. The desiderata, which do not figure in the content of Russellian propositions but are integral to the content of objects of the attitudes, are, however, among the constituents of a proposition for Frege. In short, Frege and Russell both accommodate important concerns about propositional content, but the concerns accommodated by each are importantly different.

The dispute between Frege and Russell concerns how we ought to individuate propositional content. I argue first that we must disambiguate the notion of propositional content into linguistic content (*content expressed*, or the truth-conditional content conveyed with a statement) on the one hand and mental content (*content grasped*, or the complete content of a propositional attitude) on the other. Then I defend the claims that the Russellian conception of propositional content is appropriate for representing the content expressed with a statement, but that something more akin to Frege's conception is required for representing the content of the objects of the attitudes. Hence, both conceptions of propositional content are required in the study of mind and language.

The current orthodox position in the philosophy of language is that we should retain a broadly Russellian view of the content of propositions expressed while conceding that the objects of propositional attitudes are, in important respects, more similar to Frege's conception of a proposition than to Russell's.<sup>3</sup> My aim is to unpack this position, to show how it relates to some of the points raised by the causal theorists, and to investigate some of its consequences.

**2 Frege and Russell on propositional content** The core of the dispute between Frege and Russell concerns the content of object-dependent propositions, or how we ought to semantically represent the information expressed with statements that are about specific individuals. Precisely what constitutes the proposition expressed with a statement such as ‘Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high’?

Frege holds that all thought is conceptually mediated, that Mont Blanc is not the sort of thing that humans can cognize ([6], p. 187, 225; [7], p. 163). Such mind-independent objects are not themselves constituents of the thoughts we entertain about them. Rather, the constituents of thoughts are conceptual, intentional entities, not extended objects. We think about objects under conceptual modes of presentation, as ‘that mountain right there’ or ‘the highest peak in France’. Those competent with the term ‘Mont Blanc’ associate with it a mode of presentation which is uniquely satisfied by Mont Blanc.

According to Frege [6], the content of the proposition expressed by a sentence is the thought it communicates (cf. e.g., [5]); therefore propositional content is also conceptual or intentional in nature.<sup>4</sup> A proposition is object-dependent if the speaker intends to express information about a specific individual, and if the mode of presentation which the speaker associates with the subject expression singles out that individual. The sentence ‘Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high’ expresses that that which is specified by the mode of presentation associated with the term ‘Mont Blanc’ falls under the concept ‘. . . is more than 4000 meters high’, and is true if and only if that object has that property. Conceptual modes of presentation—intentional representations of the ways in which mind-independent entities are present to the minds of agents—play the primary role in the communication of information. They are constituents of propositions for Frege.<sup>5</sup>

Notoriously, Russell [21] rejects Frege’s bifurcation of semantic entities. Russell talks of object-dependent propositions as containing mind-independent objects as constituents. The argument place in a Russellian proposition is occupied by an object, not by a conceptual or intentional entity; and the mode in which the object is present to the mind of the speaker does not affect the content of the proposition expressed. Since Mont Blanc, the mountain, occurs in the argument place of the Russellian proposition, one must be acquainted with the mountain in order to understand the proposition, and the proposition could not exist if Mont Blanc did not.<sup>6</sup>

For his part, Frege found the idea of objects, unmediated, smack up against one’s mind, quite bizarre. Nor did he see how extended physical objects could figure as parts of the sort of thing that can be true or false, or as constituents of the objects of the attitudes. Russell replies that positing a semantic role for conceptual modes of presentation creates rather than solves problems. Mind-independent extended entities are objectively accessible in a way that modes of presentation are not; therefore the propositions communicated among speakers should be individuated in terms of the entities they are about. Both agree that propositional content is intentional, that propositions are about mind-independent entities. The question which divides them concerns whether propositional content can be individuated simply in terms of these mind-independent entities, or is composed of more finely-grained conceptual, intentional entities which determine them.

I shall refer to Frege’s conception of an object-dependent proposition as a singu-

lar thought, and to Russell's as a singular proposition. The singular thought that  $A$  is  $F$  is a semantic composite which includes the modes of presentation associated with ' $A$ ' and ' $F$ '; the singular proposition that  $A$  is  $F$  is individuated solely with reference to the object  $A$  and the property  $F$ . Singular thoughts are individuated via the inference: if ' $A$  is  $F$ ' and ' $B$  is  $F$ ' can differ in cognitive significance even though  $A = B$ , then they express distinct singular thoughts. Singular propositions are individuated via the inference: if ' $A$ ' and ' $B$ ' are coextensive referring expressions, then ' $A$  is  $F$ ' and ' $B$  is  $F$ ' express the same singular proposition.<sup>7</sup>

Frege and Russell each consider his conception of an object-dependent proposition adequate for several tasks in the philosophy of language and of thought. Both singular thoughts and singular propositions were intended to play all of the following roles:

- (a) the bearer of truth and falsity;
- (b) the content expressed with a statement;
- (c) the content grasped by an agent in understanding a statement;
- (d) the object of the propositional attitudes.

One interesting upshot of the points raised by the causal theorists is that no one semantic entity is suited for all four of these roles. It is a consequence that, in different respects, Frege and Russell are both right about object-dependent propositions. Quite generally, and perhaps not surprisingly, singular propositions are well suited to play roles (a) and (b), whereas something more akin to a singular thought is needed for tasks (c) and (d).

The notion of a proposition needed to represent the content of a mental state must be similar to a singular thought because propositional attitudes are attitudes toward composites which, in some way or other, include conceptual modes of presentation. But singular propositions are better suited to represent the content expressed with a statement. Whereas conceptual modes of presentation are truth-conditionally irrelevant in extensional contexts, they are ineliminable when our task is to characterize the objects of the attitudes.

**3 *What is a proposition?*** In this section I will outline the two central roles propositions are introduced to play and argue that no one semantic entity can adequately play both. There are, quite generally, at least two sorts of reasons why we seek to characterize propositional content—one for purposes in the philosophy of language, the other primarily for the philosophy of thought. For several reasons in the philosophy of language, we attempt to isolate systematically the truth-conditional content expressed with a statement. Fundamentally, what we seek to isolate is that which is communicated among speakers with statements. In general, the truth-conditions and inferential properties of a proposition remain constant among the many utterances which express it. The truth-conditions of a proposition depend on the state of affairs which the proposition is about; and, in order for communication to succeed, that state of affairs must be accessible to interlocutors. According to Perry, for instance:

One reason why we need . . . propositions is to get at what we seek to preserve when we communicate with others in different contexts. [Subjective] thoughts will not do, and neither will mere truth values. ([16], p. 231)

For this sort of task, propositional content can be individuated with reference to a mind-independent  $n$ -tuple or state of affairs. And insofar as we are interested in how it is that speakers communicate information using language, this conception of propositional content is integral.

The second reason why we seek to isolate the information conveyed by sentences has to do with the study of thought, with individuals' processing of information rather than with the intersubjective communication of information. Propositions, as defined by this sort of psychological enquiry, are primarily of use in characterizing the objects of the attitudes, in explaining and predicting behavior. Lewis describes the motivation for this task as follows:

Our attitudes fit into a causal network. In combination, they cause much of our behavior. . . . In attempting to systematize what we know about the causal role of the attitudes, we find it necessary to refer to logical relations among the objects of the attitudes. . . . [P]ropositional objects . . . facilitate commonsense psychology. ([12], p. 134)

Mental content, like linguistic content, is intentional—thought is essentially thought about individuals, kinds, and phenomena. It seems appropriate, and is useful theoretically, to characterize the objects of this intentional relation as propositional.

Propositions as defined by the first sort of task represent the content expressed with a statement; propositions as defined by the second represent the content grasped by an agent who believes a statement to be true. Obviously, there is a connection between these two notions. An agent can cause another to form a new belief by asserting a sentence, and the content of this newly caused mental state seems to consist of, or at least to contain, the very information that is expressed by the assertion. Prima facie, content expressed and content grasped seem to be propositional in exactly the same sense. In both cases, we need propositions in order to represent entities as having properties and standing in relations. Intuitively, one type of semantic entity ought to be sufficient to characterize both the truth-conditional content expressed with a statement and the content constitutive of a mental state.

However, the identification of the content expressed with a statement and the content of the belief we would use the very same sentence to describe gives rise to problems. Even if the content expressed with a statement can be individuated extensionally, if we individuate mental content extensionally, the result is, frequently, intuitively incorrect descriptions of the mental state of an agent. If ' $A$ ' and ' $B$ ' are coextensive referring expressions, then the statements ' $A$  is  $F$ ' and ' $B$  is  $F$ ' are truth-conditionally identical, and express the same singular proposition; but a competent agent can believe that one of these sentences expresses a truth while not believing that the other does. Because the inferential properties of a particular token of a belief, for an agent, can be distinct from the inferential properties of the many statements which express the same truth-conditional content of that belief, the content of a belief cannot be identified with the content expressed by a statement. As Lewis observes, ". . . beliefs are ill-characterized by the meanings of the sentences that express them" ([12], p. 143).<sup>8</sup> Russellians maintain that the content expressed with a statement can be adequately characterized by another sentence with the same truth-conditions, but nobody maintains that the content of a belief can be adequately so characterized. Individuating the content of beliefs would undermine the link between beliefs and motivations

to act, yielding an ineffective means of explaining and predicting behavior.

Since, in some form or other, this point is familiar, I will just briefly sketch an argument for it. Suppose that Mont Blanc is called ‘Monte Bianco’ in Italy. Consider two competent speakers of English—Pierre, who lives in France, and Paolo, an Italian. The proposition Pierre expresses when he says:

- (1) Mont Blanc is more than 4000 meters high.

is identical to that expressed by Paolo when he says:

- (2) Monte Bianco is more than 4000 meters high.

Both (1) and (2) attribute the same property to the same object. Their truth-conditions are identical, they have the same inferential properties, and so on. A singular proposition adequately represents the bit of information which (1) and (2) commonly express.

However, while Pierre assents to (1), he would not assent to (2). Monte Bianco was pointed out to him once while traveling in Italy, but from a vantage point from which it did not appear very large. He thought to himself (with a surge of Gallic pride) “Monte Bianco is not nearly as high as our Mont Blanc.” Paolo, on the other hand, has never been to France, and has never encountered the expression ‘Mont Blanc’. While Paolo believes that (2) expresses a truth, he is, quite reasonably, agnostic as to whether or not (1) does. Now, if one and the same bit of information is expressed by these sentences, how can this be? How can a reasonable agent both believe and not believe the very same thing?

The answer, of course, is that they do not. For the purposes of the philosophy of thought, it is necessary to distinguish that which Pierre believes from that which Paolo believes. Singular propositions cannot serve as the objects of the attitudes, even though the information they represent is partly constitutive of those objects. They are adequate representations of what is common to assertions of (1) and (2), but, perhaps as a consequence, they provide no means by which to distinguish assent to (1) from assent to (2). The only difference between (1) and (2) lies in the interchange of coextensive referring expressions; therefore no purely extensional approach to propositional content will capture the difference between them. However they ought to be precisely characterized, conceptual modes of presentation are ineliminable parts of the content of beliefs. These intentional representations of the way in which mind-independent entities are present to the minds of agents are incorporated into the content of a singular thought, and that is why singular thoughts are better suited to represent the objects of the attitudes. The singular thought expressed by (1) is distinct from the singular thought expressed by (2); thus, if thoughts are the objects of the attitudes, then belief that (1) is distinct from belief that (2).

In short, there are two roles for which we need to isolate the information conveyed by a statement, two tasks for the purposes of which the notion of propositional content is defined, and no one semantic entity is appropriately suited to play both of these roles. Individuating content extensionally (i.e., singular propositions) does not yield an adequate characterization of the objects of the attitudes; and the content of the objects of the attitudes (i.e., singular thoughts) irreducibly includes information that is truth-conditionally irrelevant in extensional contexts. The information represented by a singular proposition is often the object or target of our thinking about the

world, but our cognitive access to this information is mediated by conceptual modes of presentation. Mental content irreducibly includes modes of presentation, linguistic content does not; and thus, propositions expressed can be individuated simply with reference to what they are about, but propositions grasped cannot.

**4 *The causal theory, Fregeans, and Russellians*** In this section I establish that both Fregeans and Russellians recognize the need for two conceptions of propositional content, and show how this position relates to the causal theorists' picture of reference determination. Frege did not deny that 'Hesperus is Hesperus' is truth-conditionally identical to 'Hesperus is Phosphorus'. He did not claim that coreferential names have distinct inferential properties in extensional contexts. Modes of presentation were introduced to answer queries about cognitive significance, not about truth-conditions. Fregeans do not deny that singular propositions have a role to play in the study of entailment relations, or as representations of that which is communicated among agents who associate distinct senses with constituent terms. Frege acknowledges this in the following passage:

The different thoughts which thus result from the same sentence [when interlocutors associate different senses with the constituent terms] correspond in their truth-value, of course; that is to say, if one is true then all are true, and if one is false then all are false. ([6], p. 524)

As the following excerpt from Richard [20] illustrates, Russellians posit some sort of Fregean mediator between singular propositions and agents who have attitudes toward them:

Although Russellians take attitudes such as belief to be relations to Russellian propositions, they allow that such relations are *mediated* relations. For example, Kaplan [8] uses the notion of believing a proposition under a particular character, or sentence meaning. Salmon [22] invokes ways of apprehending Russellian propositions . . . Perry [17] and Soames [24] speak of different belief states that, for some proposition, may all be states in virtue of which one believes the proposition. (p. 120)

Hence, Fregeans concede the usefulness of singular propositions, and Russellians concede the need for singular thoughts.

The causal theorists argue that modes of presentation do not, in general, determine the reference of terms. At least two points follow which are central to this discussion. First, individual speakers are not authoritative as to the referents of the terms which they utter, and hence not authoritative as to the content of the propositions expressed by their statements. There is thus the possibility of a gap between what individuals believe their words to mean and the semantic values which those words in fact have. The causal theorists deny that there is a criterial relation between message intended and message sent, that the former determines the latter. In principle, there is on their view a lacuna between content grasped and content expressed.<sup>9</sup>

The second important point which follows from the claim that modes of presentation do not, in general, determine reference is that modes of presentation are truth-conditionally irrelevant in extensional contexts. If modes of presentation are not criterial in determining the referent of an utterance of a referring expression, then it is difficult to see how or why modes of presentation should affect the content of

the proposition expressed: hence, the causal theorists' broadly Russellian view of propositional content. However, the causal theorists run into some difficult problems concerning ascriptions of attitudes. It is not clear how coextensive referring expressions can make distinct contributions to propositional content; it is clear that substituting coreferential terms can affect the truth-conditions of belief ascriptions. Subsequent work by Russellians dedicated to solving these problems makes it starkly evident that, however they ought to be precisely characterized, modes of presentation are irreducibly relevant to the content of propositional attitudes (cf. the above citation from [20]). An extensionally individuated proposition simply does not capture the complete content of a mental state. Therefore, insofar as the arguments of the causal theorists imply a Russellian conception of the content of propositions expressed, the causal theory entails the need for two conceptions of propositional content.

Note the relation between these two points. The first, in effect, forces a distinction between linguistic and mental content, between the content expressed by means of a sentence and the content of the mental state of a speaker who sincerely assents to that sentence. The second suggests that modes of presentation are the key to understanding this distinction.

**5 *The difference between content expressed and content grasped*** Why is it that no one conception of propositional content is adequate both to isolate only that which is relevant to truth-conditions and entailment relations, and, on the other hand, to capture the complete content of the objects of the attitudes? Fundamentally, the difference between singular propositions and singular thoughts is that singular propositions obey the principles of extensional logic—principally, the identification of semantic value with extension—whereas singular thoughts do not. This is what renders them suited to these diverse ends. Ultimately, the reason we need both conceptions of propositional content in a comprehensive semantic picture is that there are important differences between linguistic and mental content, between expressing information and describing the mental state of an agent who entertains that information.

The root of this difference between linguistic and mental content lies in the epistemology of language use, in fleshing out the truistic reading of the maxim that semantics is concerned with what is in the head. My point is not that semantic content must be individualistically or epistemically individuated; just that each individual competent speaker must have certain conceptual resources in order to participate in the communication of information. And less is required to be operative in the head of individuals in order that they may express a proposition than is required in order that they may understand it. Some sort of intimate causal or epistemic (i.e., *en rapport*) connection to the constituents of a proposition is required in order to grasp or to truly apprehend it; but this connection is not required merely in order to utter a sentence which expresses the proposition. Modes of presentation are essential constituents of content grasped, but not of content expressed, because they are required to truly apprehend propositional content, but not required merely in order to express propositional content. I will illustrate this point with a couple of considerations.

Kripke [10] points out that the content of an assertion is often underdetermined by the speaker's mental state (by his/her beliefs about the semantic values of words, referential intentions, and so on). One can express a proposition (e.g., about Feyn-

man) without having beliefs which effectively specify its content. There is thus, in principle, a gap between the ability to use a referring expression and the ability to grasp or understand the content expressed with statements in which the expression occurs. That which must be operative in the head of speaker in order that he or she truly apprehends a proposition, in addition to the minimal resources required in order to utter a sentence which expresses the proposition, are modes of presentation of its constituents. Modes of presentation are hence integral constituents of content grasped, and that is why mental content, but not linguistic content, cannot be extensionally individuated.

Evans [4] and Kaplan [9] explore this distinction between the ability to express information and the *en rapport* causal or epistemic connection which is necessary in order to grasp or entertain information. Evans, for instance, states that:

. . . it is in general a necessary condition for understanding a sentence containing a . . . referring expression, say ‘*A is F*’, that one have a thought, or make a judgement, about the referent. . . . This is not a necessary condition for asserting of the referent that it is *F*. The divergence arises because of the possibility that a subject may exploit a linguistic device which he does not himself properly understand. ([4], p. 92)

Kaplan also investigates cases in which “we have direct reference and expressibility, but no apprehension” ([9], p. 606). Modes of presentation (functionally defined with respect to cognitive significance) are well suited to provide the *en rapport* causal or epistemic connection which is missing in these cases. That the entities which the proposition is about be present to the mind of the agent is a necessary condition for apprehension but not for expressibility. Modes of presentation are hence essential to content grasped but irrelevant to the truth-conditions of content expressed.

One final way to approach this point concerns the issue of communication-based *de re* thought. Acquiring, through the medium of language, the ability to use an expression to refer is commonplace—(given an appropriately knowledgeable audience) it just requires exposure to a token of a term and the deferential intention to use the term with its conventional semantic value. But transmission of the ability to entertain *de re* thoughts about unfamiliar individuals through the medium of language, though undeniably prevalent, is not obviously the same thing. To entertain a *de re* thought about the referent of a term, one needs *some* information about that referent, in addition to mere exposure to a term which refers to it.<sup>10</sup> To use a word to refer, one needs only a connection to a *word* (and the appropriate deferential intention). But a more robust epistemic connection to the word’s *referent* is required in order to entertain a thought that is unequivocally about it, as opposed to any other thing. An *en rapport* connection is necessary in order to entertain a *de re* thought about some entity, but not necessary merely in order to refer to that entity. Given the similarities between this required *en rapport* causal or epistemic connection and that which plays the mode of presentation role in belief ascriptions, this consideration too supports both the irrelevance of modes of presentation to content expressed and their irreducible relevance to content grasped.

**6 Justifying the regimentation** At least implicitly, I am recommending a departure from our ordinary usage of the locutions ‘. . . said that—’ and ‘. . . believes that—’.

It is well known that both of these locutions are open to both a direct and an indirect reading. Hence, our ordinary usage is somewhat sloppy, and this sloppiness can engender confusion. Suppose *N* says to me “I think you should leave now,” crosses her arms, and turns away from me. I am allowed much leeway in reporting her utterance indirectly; and thus, depending on the context, anything from “*N* said that she does not wish to see me anymore” to “*N* said that I should bugger off” might be entirely appropriate and accurate. In a context where a direct report is required, though (e.g., I am a witness on the stand at a trial), these loose paraphrases are not acceptable. If I report anything other than that she said that I should leave now, then I at least mislead and, arguably, commit perjury. Belief reports also admit of these two types of reading—in the direct sense, the mode under which the content of the belief is present to the mind of the speaker is integral to the truth-conditions of a belief ascription, whereas in the indirect sense, only the truth-conditional content of that which is believed is relevant. For instance, in the indirect sense, we could use either (1) ‘Mont Blanc is over 4000 meters high’ or (2) ‘Monte Bianco is over 4000 meters high’ in reporting Pierre’s belief, but in the direct sense, we can only attribute to him the belief that (1).

The considerations about propositional content advanced in this essay make it reasonable to allow more leeway in reporting the content expressed by an utterance than in reporting the content constitutive of a mental state. Propositions, functionally defined as representations of that which we seek to communicate when we communicate with others in diverse contexts, fit with the indirect sense of ‘. . . said (or believes) that—’. But unless we are prepared to divorce beliefs from motivations to act, we must individuate the content of the objects of the attitudes in terms of the direct sense of ‘. . . said (or believes) that—’.

The difference between the direct and indirect senses of these locutions, like the difference between content grasped and content expressed, is that specific modes of presentation are essential to the former but not to the latter. Corresponding to the loosely-grained criteria of adequacy associated with the indirect sense of ‘. . . said (or believes) that—’, modes of presentation are too much baggage to carry when translating discourse from one language into another, or in studying the entailment relations among propositions. Corresponding to the stricter criteria of adequacy associated with the direct sense of ‘. . . said (or believes) that—’, the result of neglecting modes of presentation in characterizing the objects of the attitudes is an ineffective means of explaining and predicting behavior. Thus, I am recommending a sharpening of our ordinary usage for the purpose of precision in semantics.

In general, indirect reports are adequate for reporting what it is in the world about which speakers express information, while direct reports are required for reporting the way in which these mind-independent states of affairs are present to the minds of agents. So the indirect sense is appropriate for the ‘. . . said that—’ locution but we should restrict the ‘. . . believes that—’ locution to its direct sense. Hence, for instance, according to the position advanced in this paper, had Pierre said out loud “Monte Bianco is not nearly as tall as our Mont Blanc,” we could report him as having *said* that Mont Blanc is not as tall as Mont Blanc, but we would not be justified in reporting that he *believes* that Mont Blanc is not as tall as Mont Blanc. There is a sense in which he said something contradictory, and a sense in which he did not.

An indirect report of what he said can capture the sense in which his utterance cannot possibly be true. We capture the respect in which Pierre is rational by respecting the way in which things seem to him when reporting his beliefs. So the objection that we do not do justice to Pierre in reporting him as having uttered something analytically false, though well motivated, is not compelling. The standard of rationality is the intensionally individuated content of an agent's attitudes, not the extensionally individuated content expressed by an agent's utterances.

Admittedly, such regimentations have little to recommend them outside of the philosophy of language—there are contexts in which the direct sense of ‘. . . said that—’ is appropriate (e.g., the courtroom), and contexts in which the indirect sense of ‘. . . believes that—’ is appropriate (e.g., attributing a belief to a monolingual French speaker while speaking English); and competent speakers seem to be pretty good at discerning which sense is intended in particular cases. However, this move has much to recommend it for the purpose of precision in semantics: considering the two distinct roles that propositions are introduced to play, and that two distinct types of semantic entity are required to play these roles, adhering to this convention in the study of mind and language can only minimize confusion concerning the notion of propositional content.

**7 Conclusion** In general, in these distinctions I see an account of why content expressed can be extensionally individuated while content grasped cannot, of why mental content irreducibly includes modes of presentation while linguistic content does not. The conditions under which one grasps or understands something are more stringent than the conditions under which one is able to assert something. An *en rapport* connection is necessary for apprehension, but not necessary for expressibility; and that which plays the mode of presentation role in belief ascriptions provides this *en rapport* connection which is constitutive of mental content in general.

There are two central roles for which propositions are introduced—one in the philosophy of language, one in the philosophy of thought. For the purposes of representing the content expressed with a statement, propositional content can be individuated in terms of what the proposition is about; for the purposes of the philosophy of thought, it cannot. The reason it cannot is that mental content irreducibly includes conceptual, intentional modes of presentation. Interestingly, modes of presentation also provide the key to the distinction between the ability to express a proposition and the ability to understand a proposition. These intentional representations of the ways in which mind-independent entities are present to the minds of agents are *en rapport* connections between agents and mind-independent entities. This is why modes of presentation are integral to mental content but not to linguistic content.

Therefore, singular Russellian propositions are adequate representations of the content expressed by an utterance, singular Fregean thoughts are required for representing the content constitutive of a mental state, and both conceptions of object-dependent propositions are essential to the study of mind and language.

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### NOTES

1. By ‘object-dependent’ I mean propositions which are about specific individuals, the paradigmatic case of which are those expressed by sentences whose subject expression is a proper name. ‘Object-dependent’ is intended herein to cover one species of both Fregean and Russellian propositions, so the question of precisely how such propositions should be individuated is left open.
2. For the arguments of the causal theorists, cf. Donnellan [3], Kripke [10], Putnam [18], Kaplan [8]. Kaplan ([8], preface) argues that the view that an expression is directly referential and the view that sentences in which they so function express Russellian singular propositions are, in effect, one and the same doctrine. But since neither Donnellan, Kripke, nor Putnam explicitly follow him in this, I am here content with the weaker assertion: the causal theory strongly suggests, but does not necessarily entail, a Russellian conception of propositional content.
3. This claim is further substantiated in Sections 3 and 4. I have in mind here the wide range of two-factor semantic theories—for example, those of Kaplan [8] and Perry [17], and of those who have built on their work (e.g., Salmon [22], Soames [24], Richard [20], Recanati [19]). This description also applies to theories which distinguish conceptual role from truth-conditional content.
4. Cf. Coffa’s discussion of Frege’s discovery of sense ([2], pp. 76ff). Frege holds that propositional content is neither psychological nor physical, but is constituted by conceptual, intentional entities. (Propositional content cannot be identified with psychological content in that it is intersubjective, and because it is essentially *relational*—that is, it is partly individuated in terms of what it is about; propositional content cannot be identified with that in the world which it is about because it is more finely-grained than the physically extended entities about which we talk.) By ‘conceptual’ I mean that the entity is neither psychological nor physical; by ‘intentional’ I mean that its *modus essendi* is to be of or about something.
5. More will be said in Section 5 about what exactly a mode of presentation is. In general, I follow Frege in holding that modes of presentation are conceptual, intentional entities (cf. n. 4); and I follow Schiffer [23] in holding that modes of presentation should be functionally defined with respect to cognitive significance (i.e., modes of presentation are whatever it is that distinguishes the propositions expressed by ‘*A* is *F*’ and ‘*B* is *F*’, where  $A = B$ , such that one can have contrastive attitudes toward them despite their identity of truth-conditional content).
6. Because of the rigorous restrictions Russell imposed on the notion of acquaintance, he was soon led to the view that we cannot truly understand or express propositions about physical objects such as Mont Blanc. Contemporary Russellians relax this epistemic restriction somewhat, but it is still the case for them that an agent must be sufficiently *en rapport* with an object in order to grasp the content of propositions about it. More on this in Section 5.

Another important point concerns Russell’s talk of singular propositions as containing objects as constituents. He himself was not consistent about this point, and several philosophers have argued that the notion of constituency is inessential to Russell’s underlying point. (Cf. Neale [15], pp. 49–50 and the citations listed therein.) I shall henceforth

avoid the notion of constituency. An ordered  $n$ -tuple consisting of mind-independent entities is a truth-maker, not a truth-bearer; and it gives rise to a raft of worries, orthogonal to those in which I am interested in this paper, about correspondence and the ontological status of such logical atoms.

Primarily, Russell used constituency as a means to distinguish his conception of a proposition from Frege's. Regardless of whether we take that notion metaphorically, the crux of the issue which divides the two is whether propositional content can be individuated solely in terms of the entities which the proposition is about. For Russell it can, for Frege it cannot.

7. Russell, of course, employs both of these criteria. On his view, the characteristic inference for singular propositions is valid for statements containing logically proper names, while the antecedent of the conditional I identify here as Frege's criterion for the individuation of propositional content is a conclusive test for the presence of a disguised or truncated description. In general, all other participants in this debate consistently adhere to one or the other criterion.
8. Cf. Loar's [13] discussion of the looseness of fit between the content of mental states and the content expressed by the 'that . . .' clauses we employ in ascribing mental states.
9. As Lewis argues, the moral of these arguments for the semantics of belief is not that ". . . beliefs are not in the head. The proper moral is that beliefs are ill-characterized by the sentences that express them" ([12], p. 143). Cf. [13].
10. This conflicts with Bach's [1] position, who holds that exposure to a token of a term transmits to hearers the ability to entertain *de re* thoughts about its referent. I find Bach's account of how this occurs less than explanatory. Cf. Mercier [14] for a discussion of some of the problems with Bach's account.

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