Mind & Language: Dorr on Transparency

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1 Kripke's insight

Kripke's argument that names are *rigid designators* can be regimented as the claim that the following schema is valid:

Definition 1.1. *Modal Transparency*:
For all x, if $x = N$, then $\Box\varphi(x)$ iff $\Box\varphi(N)$.

N here ranges over proper names and $\Box$ stands for 'it is necessary that'. A different thought about how to syntactify Kripke's claims would be with a claim about scopelessness: $\Box(\lambda x.\varphi(x)(N))$ iff $(\lambda x.\Box\varphi(x))(N)$.

(1) A: There is one person who is necessarily a philosopher
B: Really? Who?
A: Aristotle.
B: So it is necessary that Aristotle is a philosopher?
A: No.
B: What? Didn't you just tell me that the person you mentioned earlier, who is necessarily a philosopher, was Aristotle?
A: Yes. But I don't think it's necessary that Aristotle is a philosopher. I only think that there is some x who is identical to Aristotle, such that it's necessary that x is a philosopher.

Compare this to definite descriptions:

(2) A: There is a person who is necessarily Cian Dorr.
B: Really? Who?
A: The senior instructor of Mind and Language.
B: So it is necessary that the senior instructor of Mind and Language is Cian Dorr?
A: No.

Now consider the corresponding schema:

Definition 1.2. *Attitude Transparency*:
For all x and y, if $x = N$, then y *As* that $\varphi(x)$ iff y *As* that $\varphi(N)$.

A here ranges over attitude verbs.

It looks like you can motivate this in a similar way:

(3) A: There is a famous world leader whom Joe believes to have a black belt in judo.
B: Really? Who?
A: Vladimir Putin.
B: And why does Joe believe that Putin has a black belt in judo?

A: No—Joe doesn't believe that Putin has a black belt in judo.
B: What? I thought you just said he did!
A: No, all I said was is that there is a famous world leader, identical to Putin, whom Joe believes to have a black belt in judo.
B: I'm lost! Who is this famous world leader believed by Joe to have a black belt in judo, if not Putin himself?
A: No, it is Putin, that's what I'm telling you.
B: So Joe does believe that Putin has a black belt in judo?
A: No. All that's true is that Putin is someone Joe believes to have a black belt in judo.

Compare:

(4) A: There is a spy who Joe believes is not a spy.
B: Really? Who?
A: The shortest spy.
B: And why does Joe think that the shortest spy is not a spy?
A: No—Joe doesn't believe that. Rather, the shortest spy, whoever that is, is believed by Joe not to be a spy.

Our ordinary competence just does not equip us to keep careful track of distinctions between sentences such as the following:

(5) Joe believes that Putin has a black belt.

(6) Putin is believed by Joe to have a black belt.

Compare:

(7) Joe believes that the leader of Russia has a black belt.

(8) The leader of Russia is believed by Joe to have a black belt.

2 The standard argument

1. For all x and y, if x = Superman, then y believes that x flies iff y believes that Superman flies. — Attitude Transparency
2. For all x and y, if x = Clark Kent, then y believes that x flies iff y believes that Clark Kent flies. — Attitude Transparency
3. So, for all x and y, if x = Superman and x = Clark Kent, then y believes that x flies iff y believes that Superman flies, and y believes that x flies iff y believes that Clark Kent flies. — logic
4. So, if Superman = Clark Kent, then for all y, y believes that Superman flies iff y believes that Clark Kent flies. — logic

But this conclusion seems obviously false, as it runs contrary to the apparently true:

5. Even though Superman is Clark Kent, lots of people believe that Superman flies without believing that Clark Kent flies.

Standard responses:

- reject *Attitude Transparency*
- *Pragmatic Millianism*: 5 is always strictly speaking false but can communicate something true
- *Error-Theoretic Millianism*: 5 is always strictly speaking false and people are just confused in thinking otherwise

3 Context-sensitivity

We can accept that a sentence with the form of 5 is never true on a *uniform resolution* of context-sensitivity, while accepting that it can be true on non-uniform resolutions. We already know that attitude ascriptions are context-sensitive:

> A purse-snatcher, Shorty, snatches Thelma's purse; she sees him limping away. Later, she is at a lineup in which the purse-snatcher is present, but fails to pick him out. Talking to one of his associates before the lineup, Shorty utters
>
> (6) She knows that I limp.
>
> He follows up this utterance by saying: 'So, I will make sure to show up early to the lineup, so she doesn't see me walking in.' Whispering to another associate during the lineup, Shorty utters
>
> (7) She doesn't know that I limp.
>
> He goes on: 'I made sure of that by showing up early to the lineup, so that she wouldn't be able to figure out that I am the one who stole her purse.'

Schiffer

4 Uniform and non-uniform interpretations

We can sometimes make a useful distinction within the class of admissible interpretations of a given context-sensitive sentence, between those which are uniform interpretations of the sentence, and those which are not. Consider for example the sentence

(8) Every superhero is strong, but he is not strong.

(8) is context-sensitive: there is no single proposition asserted by all those who utter it literally. For example, one could use (8) to assert, concerning Batman, something roughly to the following effect: whereas every

superhero is stronger than typical human beings, he is not stronger than typical human beings. This is an example of a uniform utterance of (8). A hallmark of such utterances is that they invite the conclusion that the person in question is not a superhero. There are other uses of (8) which do not invite such a conclusion. For example, one could use (8) to assert, concerning Batman, that while every superhero is stronger than typical human beings, he is not stronger than typical superheroes. This is an example of a non-uniform interpretation of (8). Non-uniform interpretations of (8) are easier to access when the fact that the person being discussed is a superhero is uncontroversial common knowledge; it also helps if the speaker emphasises the second occurrence of 'strong'.

- Non-uniform interpretation does not require repeated words:

  (9) Every superhero is strong, but he is weak.

- Their accessibility can vary, even for equivalent sentences:

  (10) a. Batman is strong, but Batman is not strong.
  b. Bruce Wayne is strong, but Batman is not strong.

- The source of context-sensitivity is not always obvious:

  (11) There are exactly seven rooms in Frank's house.

- (Non-)uniformity is also a feature of multi-sentence discourses.
- Validity and inconsistency for sentences has to do with uniformity.

5 The resolution

4 is valid, so that all of its uniform interpretations are true. However, 4 also admits non-uniform interpretations, many of which are false. Moreover, some false non-uniform interpretations of 4 are more salient, easier to access, than any of its uniform interpretations. The predicates 'believes that Superman flies' and 'believes that Clark Kent flies' have exactly the same range of admissible interpretations. But the use of the name 'Clark Kent' tends to favour some of these interpretations—properties which are instantiated only by those who have penetrated Superman's secret identity—whereas the use of the name 'Superman' tends to favour other interpretations—properties instantiated by ordinary folk who see Superman flying around in his Superman suit.

So the idea is that all of these have the same range(s) of possible interpretations:

(12) a. Lois believes that Superman flies but does not believe that Clark Kent flies.

b. Lois believes that Clark Kent flies but does not believe that Superman flies.
c. Superman is believed by Lois to fly, but Clark Kent is not believed by Lois to fly.
d. Clark Kent is believed by Lois to fly, but Superman is not believed by Lois to fly.

Are non-uniform resolutions really so accessible? CD thinks yes:

(13) Everyone is asleep and being monitored by a research assistant.

6 Theorizing (non-)uniformity

A theoretical possibility: the uniform/non-uniform distinction is a distinction between sentences, not interpretations.

(14) a. He is tall and he isn't.
b. He$_7$ is tall and he$_7$ isn't.
c. He$_7$ is tall and he$_8$ isn't.

One reason to think uniformity is "syntactically realized" is that there seem to be systematic syntactic restrictions on co-indexing.

(15) a. *He$_7$ loves him$_7$.
b. He$_7$ loves him$_8$.
c. He$_7$ loves himself$_7$.
d. *He$_7$ loves himself$_8$.

This is also convenient as far as compositionality goes, since we can then let $[\![he_i]\!]^c = g_c(i)$.

- However, all the syntactic evidence really suggests is that *uniformity* is syntactically realized; there is no evidence for indexing. And the syntactic arguments are pretty limited, to pronouns; it's really not obvious there's any motivation for treating (non-)uniformity as syntactically realized otherwise.

  Cf. 'the autonomy of syntax'

- This kind of radical homonymy view also undermines the case for context-sensitivity. Why think 'I' is context-sensitive as opposed to just realized with a different index every time it's used?

  > Running together the phenomena of syntactic disambiguation and semantic interpretation in this way seems bizarre.

  Not sure how convincing this is though.

A more moderate homonymy theory would distinguish just two syntactic options for any pair of context-sensitive words of the same

type, namely, coordination and uncoordination. It's not clear how to capture that idea compositionally.

6.1 Kaplanian approaches

In a Kaplanian framework, the most obvious way to make sense of non-uniform readings is by treating different parts of a sentence as belonging to different contexts. But how do we divide up the contexts?

> The hegemony of the Kaplanian framework helps to explain philosophers' unwillingness to rely on the idea that certain sentences are naturally interpreted non-uniformly as a tool for resolving paradoxes like our paradox of transparency. The fact that it is hard to give a natural, general description of non-uniform utterances of single sentences within the framework encourages the assumption that such utterances must be special, marginal phenomena which philosophers would do best to ignore.
>
> One simple way to modify the framework is simply to [allow] a sentence to express many propositions relative to a single Context. The thought is that the set of propositions semantically expressed by a sentence relative to a Context are those available to be asserted by a literal speech in that Context; in general, only some of them will in fact be asserted... for many context-sensitive sentences, such as 'Obama is tall', we can take the set of propositions semantically expressed to be the same relative to any Context: there is no conventional constraint on what these sentences can be used to assert on a given occasion.

We can distinguish, among the propositions expressed, between uniform and non-uniform ones.

How do we draw that distinction in a general way?

7 Locating the context-sensitivity

Sometimes a uniform reading can be *forced* by using elision:

(16) a. I gave him an A but I didn't give him an A.
b. I gave him an A but not him.
c. #I gave him an A but I didn't.

(17) a. Superman is strong but he isn't strong.
b. Superman is strong but isn't strong.
c. #Superman is strong but isn't.

This suggests that context-sensitivity has specific constituent *sources*:

Against this, certain anti-Kaplanian approaches to context-sensitivity, e.g. 'ready'.

Definition 7.1. *Constituency:*
Every context-sensitive sentence must have at least one context-sensitive elementary constituent.

And that we can search these out with the principle:

Definition 7.2. *Multiple Occurrences Generalization*:
When a context-sensitive item is uttered only once, it can have only one reading even if it's interpreted more than once.

Three obvious hypotheses about the source of context-sensitivity:

- *Verbalism*: the attitude verb
- *Clausalism*: an overt element in the complement clause
- *Hidden indexicalism*: a covert element, either in the complement clause or between the attitude verb and complement clause

We can try to use elision to assess these options.

(18) Thelma believes that I limp but not that I_F limp.

(19) ??Thelma believes that I limp but doesn't believe that.

However, we quickly run into a problem:

(20) a. Shorty believes that I limp, and doesn't.
b. Superman is widely believed to fly, but Clark Kent isn't.

And on reflection it's not clear the elision test is very good at all:

(21) a. Is Superman strong? He is and he isn't.
b. This car is mine, and it isn't.
c. People who are anxious get to be that way because of their upbringing, but people who are depressed do not [get to be that way because of their upbringing].

7.1 A worry

Whatever gives rise to the context-sensitivity that accounts for apparent failures of Attitude Transparency, why doesn't it give rise to apparent failures of Modal Transparency?

In other words, the puzzle that Frege and Kripke together give us is accounting for the *contrast* between Transparency and Modal Transparency. Adverting to context-sensitivity per se doesn't yet do *anything* towards that goal.

As far as I can tell, only Verbalism, together with the denial of the corresponding principle for circumstantial modals, has the resources to account for the contrasts.