

Intentional Identity and the Edelberg Asymmetry

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Abstract

This thesis is about the Edelberg asymmetry, the phenomenon that shows up in sentences containing attitude ascriptions. It concentrates on explaining anaphoric relations in asymmetric conjunctions and the possibility of interpreting a sentence, which is false, under certain circumstances as true. On the rather strong semantic assumption that our thinking has a certain logical structure, in the analysis of complex sentences we permit commutation. However, this affects the interpretation of sentences in particular contexts. By noticing the importance of the role that a context plays in a sentence's interpretation, we suppose that Edelberg's asymmetry should be accounted for not only in semantic terms like Edelberg and van Rooy suggest, but also in pragmatic terms. We explain anaphoric relations in asymmetric conjunctions by using a more pragmatic notion of interpretation instead of a more autonomous semantic notion of content, a context, and an extended E-type approach. The extended E-type approach suggests that the way in which the speaker conceives of an intended individual in an asymmetric conjunction is indicated by the information material of the first attitude attribution, and sometimes by an immediately preceding context. A pragmatic account of asymmetric conjunctions suits well with the idea of overriding contexts, and it helps to explain how an intuitively false sentence in a certain context can be taken to be true. Our approach to the Edelberg asymmetry and the truth-falsity puzzle of asymmetric conjunctions suggests that in the analysis of natural language sentences the notion of context, in the process of a sentence's evaluation, deserves more attention than it receives in Edelberg's and van Rooy's theories.

Overview

Chapter 1 introduces the problem of intentional identity and the puzzle of asymmetry and discusses some possible semantic solutions.

Chapter 2 presents a pragmatic approach to the Edelberg asymmetry and its effect: the possibility of interpreting an intuitively false sentence as true, under certain conditions. In this chapter we concentrate on the explanation of anaphoric relations in asymmetric conjunctions by using the notion of context, and what we call an extended E-type account. We develop an approach to anaphora according to which the way in which the speaker conceives of an intended individual, is linguistically coded in the information material of the first belief attribution if it is not explicitly suggested that the individual should be interpreted in some other way. Our approach says that by using certain linguistic means, the speaker shows the direction in which she wants the hearer to interpret her utterances. Unlike Grice's pragmatic theory of a cooperative conversation, which predicts the interpretation according to which a sentence turns out to be true, our approach predicts the interpretation that is close to a sentence's intuitive understanding. In the analysis of asymmetric conjunctions we make use of the notion of context and use the notion of overriding contexts to explain why an intuitively false sentence may turn out to be true, under certain circumstances.

Chapter 3 contains a comparison of our understanding of anaphora with other conceptions. It also says that semantic puzzles, like the Edelberg asymmetry, can be explained pragmatically in order to synchronize them with the pragmatic solutions of other problems that semantics alone is not able to account for.