

THE MEANING OF 'LOOK'  
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1. My aim is to clarify what we mean by *VA sentences*:
  - a. Patch looks that way.
  - b. He looks the way Mary looks.
  - c. John looks American.
  - d. Someone looks a character.
  - e. Those women look in love.
  - f. John looks like a duck.
  - g. John's mum looks how she always looks.
  - h. The top line looks longer than the bottom line.
  - i. They look to be tired.
  - j. It looks as if these tomatoes are ripe.
  - k. There looks to be a unicorn approaching.
  - l. It looks windy.
  
2. Why? One main reason is that certain issues in the philosophy of perception can, I think, be resolved by better understanding what we mean by *VA sentences*. Here are two:
  - a. Is the relation expressed by 'looks the same as' transitive?
  
  - b. The problem of perception: When Patch looks red to me, I seem to be experiencing redness in Patch. If Patch is not red (the illusory case) then I can't be. But if Patch is red (the veridical case), then I can't be either, since I'm in the same state in each case. Four leading accounts:
    - The sense-datum theory
    - The adverbial theory
    - The representational theory
    - The disjunctive theory
  
3. How does one clarify what we mean by a sentence? One good way is to translate it into a formal language (e.g. first-order predicate calculus), and that's a good way to think of my aim.
  
4. One immediate issue: do we use 'look' with more than one meaning in *VA sentences*? It is commonly claimed that we do (H. H. Price, Anthony Quinton, George Vesey, Roderick Chisholm, Frank Jackson, A. J. Ayer, Stephen Leeds, Fred Dretske, Mike Martin, Philip Pettit, Charles Travis). There are senses of 'look', it is claimed, such that:
  - a. Uttering 'Patch looks red' is a way of tentatively asserting that Patch is red.
  - b. 'Patch looks red to Mary' means that Mary is inclined to believe, on the basis of her visual experience of Patch, that Patch is red.
  - c. 'It looks as if Patch is red' means that certain visually acquired evidence is evidence that Patch is red.
  - d. 'Patch looks red' means that Patch looks the way red things look, to normal observers in standard conditions.
  - e. 'Patch looks red' means that Patch looks the way it would look if it were red.
  - f. 'Patch looks red to Mary' means that were Mary to judge, on the basis of her visual experience of Patch, with no reason to think otherwise, she would judge that Patch is red.
  - g. 'Patch looks red to Mary' means that Mary's visual experience of Patch represents that Patch is red.
  - h. 'Patch looks red' means that Patch presents an appearance (sense datum) that is red.
  
5. I argue:

- a. There are *no* such senses of ‘look’.
- b. Even if there were they need not all be distinct.
- c. ‘Look’ does not behave in any of the ways typical of ambiguous verbs (‘pick’, ‘grow’, ‘bear’).

So I adopt the working hypothesis that we use ‘look’ with just a *single* meaning.

6. What is the meaning of ‘look’? There are three approaches that we might take to verb meaning. They would have us formalize ‘John hit Mary’ as follows:

- a. Hit(John, Mary)
- b.  $\exists e$ Hit(*e*, John, Mary)
- c.  $\exists e$ (Hit(*e*) & Agent(*e*, John) & Patient(*e*, Mary))

I take the third approach: by a verb we mean a property of events, and by the subject and complement of the verb (if any) we mean participants of the underlying event.

So, by ‘look’ in VA sentences we mean a property of events. Events of which ‘look’ is true I shall call *looking events*.

7. **Consequence.** The disjunctive theory is false.
8. **Metaphysical proposals.** Looking events typically have three participants – a *stimulus*, an *experiencer*, and a *way*. The *stimulus* is the thing (if any) that looks a certain way; the *experiencer* is the person to whom it looks that way; the *way* is the way it looks.

I take there to be such things as *ways*. I am interested in *ways of looking*, but there are all kinds of ways: ways of walking, ways of talking, ways of driving, and so on. I take it that these are all the same kind of thing. I take it that we refer to and quantify over ways in a great deal of our ordinary talk.

What are ways? I take them to be *properties of events* (there is some precedent for this – Stalnaker, Stanley and Williamson, Leeds). Ways of walking are properties of walking events, ways of talking are properties of talking events, and so on. So too, ways of looking are properties of looking events.

Looking events need not have a stimulus (there is no stimulus when it looks windy). But they always have a way and an experiencer. They are perhaps mental events of the experiencer.

9. **Semantic proposals.** In VA sentences we *optionally* use the subject of ‘look’ to specify the stimulus of the underlying looking event, we *obligatorily* use the complement of ‘look’ to specify the way, and we *optionally* use modifiers of the form ‘to S’ to specify the experiencer.

So, by ‘Patch looks that way to John’ we mean that there is a looking event whose stimulus is Patch, whose way is that way, and whose experiencer is John.

In general, by ‘♣ looks ♥ to ♠’ we mean:

$\exists e$ (Look(*e*) & Stimulus(*e*, ♣) & Way(*e*, ♥) & Experiencer(*e*, ♠))

10. **Consequence.** This all leads to something like the *adverbial* theory of perception. When Patch looks red to John, John is the experiencer of a looking event whose stimulus is Patch and which has a certain way – the way that we mean by ‘red’. If the looking event is a mental event of the observer, then we might say: Patch looks the way it does to John because John is modified in a certain way, and we use ‘red’ to specify how he is modified.

11. My hardest task is to justify the claim that in every case we use the complement of ‘look’ to specify a way – this is not at all obvious. I will consider here what is perhaps the hardest case, the ‘XP looks Adj’ construction: ‘Patch looks red’, ‘John looks American’.

12. I propose the following:

- a. By Adj we mean  $f$ , where  $f$  is the property that we mean by Adj in the ‘XP is Adj’ construction. So by ‘red’ in ‘Patch looks red’ we mean the property of being red. Evidence: ‘Patch looks red, and it is.’
- b. By Adj we *also* mean [the  $w$ : things look  $w$  if  $f$ ], a quantifier over ways. We mean *both*. We mean  $f$  and thereby mean [the  $w$ : things look  $w$  if  $f$ ]. This is a general phenomenon: ‘Table six left without paying’.

So we can say: **by ‘Patch looks red’ we mean that Patch looks the way things look if red;** by ‘John looks American’ we mean that John looks the way things look if American. In general: If by XP a speaker means  $o$ , an object, and by Adj she means  $f$ , a property, then by ‘XP looks Adj’ she means that  $o$  looks the way things look if  $f$ :

$\exists e(\text{Look}(e) \ \& \ \text{Stimulus}(e, o) \ \& \ \text{Way}(e, [\text{the } w: \text{things look } w \text{ if } f]))$

- c. Wait: red things look all kinds of ways, depending, for example, on lighting conditions, so there can be no such thing as *the* way things look if red, so that can’t be what we mean.

I respond: ‘Things look  $w$  if red’ is a *characterizing sentence*, like ‘cats are good pets’, ‘Mary jogs in the park’, and ‘turtles are long-lived’. It expresses a generalization that is weaker than a universal generalization, so the proposition it expresses can be true, even if some red things do not look  $w$ . I think, in fact, it *is* true for a certain  $w$ , even though in many cases red things do *not* look  $w$ .

By ‘Things look  $w$  if red’ I mean the following quantification over events:

- Events in which red things look some way are generally events in which red things look  $w$ .
- [gen  $e$ :  $e$  is an event in which red things look some way]( $e$  is an event in which red things look  $w$ ).

Putting this together, by ‘Patch looks red’ we mean:

**$\exists e(\text{Look}(e) \ \& \ \text{Stimulus}(e, \text{Patch}) \ \& \ \text{Way}(e, [\text{the } w: [\text{gen } e': e' \text{ is an event in which red things look some way}](e' \text{ is an event in which red things look } w)]))$**

- d. We use Adj to mean [the  $w$ : things look  $w$  if  $f$ ], which involves *quantifying over events*. So, as always when we quantify, we would expect to find that sometimes we quantify over a *restricted domain*. Indeed we do:

If Patch is white but illuminated by red light, then there is a sense in which it looks red, but also a sense in which it looks white. It looks red, in the sense that it looks the way things look if red; it looks white, in the sense that it looks the way things look *in these conditions* if white.

If the rim of a cup is viewed at an angle, there is a sense in which the rim looks circular, and a sense in which it looks oval. It looks circular, in the sense that it looks the way things look *when viewed at an angle* if circular; it looks oval, in the sense that it looks the way things look *when viewed square-on* if oval.