

Lecture 9.5
Indirect Discourse
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Pre-lecture reading:

Segal, Gabriel (1998), 'Indirect Discourse', in E. Craig (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge).

1. In this lecture we consider sentences of the form 'A said that s', where 'A' is replaced by an expression that refers to a person, and 's' is replaced by a declarative sentence. These pose a particular problem for the development of compositional semantics.
2. What's the problem? The problem is that the following two sentences intuitively have different truth conditions, even though (i) they have the same syntactic structure, and (ii) their corresponding constituents have the same meaning (at least the same *truth conditional* meaning):

- (2.1) Lois said that Superman is infantilizing her baby.
- (2.2) Lois said that Clark Kent is infantilizing her baby.

Why is that a problem for compositionality?
How should we respond?

3. One way: accept this as a counterexample to compositionality. I don't know of anybody who does.
4. Another way: deny that they have the same structure. I don't know of anybody who does.
5. Another way: deny that they have different truth conditions, and explain away our intuitions to the contrary. Nathan Salmon would do this.
6. Another way: claim that they have more structure than is apparent, and that they have corresponding constituents that refer to different things. Something like this:

- (6.1) Lois said that Superman *under guise*₁ is infantilizing her baby.
- (6.2) Lois said that Clark Kent *under guise*₂ is infantilizing her baby.

This is the approach of Crimmins and Perry.

7. Another way: deny that 'Superman' and 'Clark Kent' have the same truth-conditional meaning, at least in sentences of indirect discourse. Frege did this.

Frege said that in the context of (2.1) 'Superman' refers not to its ordinary referent but to its ordinary sense, and in the context of (2.2) 'Clark Kent' does likewise. The difference in truth conditions between (2.1) and (2.2) is accounted for by the difference in ordinary sense between 'Clark Kent' and 'Superman', and hence by the difference in thought expressed by (2.1) and (2.2). No need to deny compositionality.

Problems?

- General problems for Fregean sense.
- Is Frege appealing to ambiguity that isn't there?
- Indexicals: Lois said that Superman is infantilizing **her** baby.

8. Another way, and this is Davidson's suggestion. He suggests that (2.1) is a notational abbreviation for the following sequence of two sentences:

(8.1) Lois said that. Superman is strong.

He suggests that 'said' denotes a 2-place relation between a speaker and an utterance. 'That', in the first sentence in (8.1), is a demonstrative that refers to the utterance of the sentence that follows. 'Lois said that' is true iff the speaker denoted by 'Lois' stands in the relation denoted by 'said' to the utterance denoted by 'that'.

Davidson does *not* claim that for Lois to stand in this relation is for Lois to have uttered the same sentence (that would be silly).

Rather, he claims that it is for Lois to have uttered a sentence *with the same meaning*. That is, in Davidson's terminology, it is for some utterance of Lois' to make her and the utterer of 'Superman is strong' *samesayers*.

Putting this together, we might paraphrase (2.1) (and (8.1)) this way:

(8.2) There was some utterance, *u*, of Lois', such that *u* and my next utterance make us samesayers. Superman is strong.

Note: This avoids the problem of apparent compositionality failure.

Note: Davidson does not deny that in some sense 'Superman is strong' and 'Clark Kent is strong' have different meanings.

Problems for Davidson?

- A: Superman is strong.
- B: Lois said that.
- C: Superman is strong.
- B: Lois said that too.

John said that someone heard the shooting of the hunters.

John said that. Someone heard the shooting of the hunters.

Additional reading:

Rumfitt, Ian (1993), 'Content and Context: The Paratactic Theory Revisited and Revised', *Mind* **102**, pp. 429-54.

Salmon, Nathan (1986), *Frege's Puzzle* (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview).