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Unenriched Subsential Assertions*

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Abstract

In this paper I challenge the common wisdom (see Dummett and Davidson) that sentences are the minimal units with which one can perform a speech act or make a move in the language game. I thus sit with Perry and Stainton in arguing that subsentences can be used to perform full-fledged speech acts. In my discussion I assume the traditional (direct reference) framework which distinguishes between the proposition expressed and the thought or mental state (possibly a sentence in Mentalese) one comes to grasp when using/understanding an utterance (or sentence-in-a-context) expressing a proposition. Unlike Stainton, I will argue that the proposition expressed by a subsential assertion and its corresponding thought are not the end product of a pragmatic process of free enrichment. In exploiting Perry's (1986) distinction between *aboutness* and *concern*, I shall defend the view that a thought may concern something without the thinker having to represent that very thing. This should help us to resist the view that with the utterance of a subsentence enrichment is mandatory. I will further argue that subsentences and their corresponding thoughts are situated. Because of that we can successfully interact and engage in joint ventures using subsentences and be guided by thoughts without having to enrich them. The fact that the actors' unenriched thoughts are co-situated may suffice to explain the positive outcome of their joint project. Last but not least, I will also show how the picture I propose gains further support by taking on board Perry's distinction between reflexive and incremental truth conditions. Since competent speakers can grasp an utterance's reflexive truth conditions without having to grasp its incremental truth conditions (roughly, the proposition expressed) they can successfully interact without their thoughts having to undergo a process of free enrichment. Moreover, if I'm right in arguing that an utterance's reflexive truth conditions are the best tools to classify the semantic features of one's mental state (or sentence in Mentalese), we can further explain mental causation and linguistic communication without appealing to free enrichment.

1. Introduction

Prevailing philosophical wisdom has it that one cannot perform a speech act without using a sentence:

A sentence is ... the smallest unit of language with which a linguistic act can be accomplished, with which a 'move can be made in the language-game': so you cannot *do* anything with a word—cannot effect any conventional (linguistic) act by uttering it—save by uttering some sentence containing that word (save for the case in which, as in the answering to some questions, the remainder of the sentence is understood from the context). (Dummett 1973: 194)

We have been told that when a single word (or a subsentence) is used to perform a speech act it is short for a sentence.¹ It is, as is sometimes claimed, a one-word sentence. For:

[A]n expression with which we can make a move in the language-game (or 'perform a linguistic act') is precisely what a sentence is. (Dummett 1973: 3)

Along this line Davidson argues that the connection between language and behavior can be made only at a sentential level, for words taken in isolation would be helpless:

There are two approaches to the theory of meaning, the building-block method, which starts with the simple and builds up, and the holistic method, which starts with the complex (sentences at any rate) and abstracts out the parts. The first method would be fine if we could give a non-sentential characterization of reference, but of this there seems no chance. The second begins at the point (sentences) where we can hope to connect language with behavior described in non-linguistic terms. (Davidson 1977: 221)

Accordingly, the thought goes, when a single word is used to perform a speech act, it can but be a case of ellipsis, i.e. the use of a truncated linguistic expression missing some constituents. The latter, as Dummett points out, must be recovered from the context. "Mary", when uttered in answer to "Who broke the Chinese vase?", is short for "Mary *broke the Chinese vase*". The missing parts are recovered from the question. When the coach screams to his forward "Shoot", what he says is short for "You must shoot now". The "you must" and "now" are contextually recovered.

¹ In this paper I do not distinguish between speech acts and linguistic acts or acts of speech (see Green 2007 for an accurate distinction among them). In particular, I do not subscribe to any particular theory or other about speech acts and I use the terminology in a loose way. By 'speech act' I merely mean the occurrence of a sentence or subsentence that can be successfully used to communicate something, give an order, make an assertion, ask a question, etc. The utterance of a declarative sentence/subsentence is either true or false.

The prevailing wisdom has recently come under attack. Perry (1994) and Stainton (2006) convincingly argue that a single word can be used to make a full-fledged speech act. And, most importantly, one can perform a speech act without the word being an abbreviation of a full-fledged sentence. In general, subsentences such as “Shoot when ready”, “On top of the hill”, “Great player”, “Nice dinner”, “John again”, etc. can be used to perform speech acts without their being shortcuts for sentences. I think that this view is basically correct. I will not, however, endorse some of the consequences and explanations proposed by Stainton. In particular, I will argue that thoughts accompanying subsentences need not be enriched. I will thus propose a more economical and straightforward explanation regarding speech acts made by subsentences and their corresponding thoughts. My explanation relies on two important distinctions put forward by Perry, *viz.* the distinctions between (i) aboutness *vs.* concern and (ii) reflexive truth conditions *vs.* incremental truth conditions.

2. Some Distinctions

To begin with, it is worth making a couple of terminological clarifications. In uttering the sentence “Jane smokes cigars” one expresses the proposition *that Jane smokes cigars* and comes to entertain a thought. I take the proposition expressed to be a singular proposition; i.e., a structured entity containing Jane and the property of smoking cigars as constituents.² I consider thoughts to be mental representations containing both syntax and content. Hence, if Jane and John both utter “I’m fine” they express different propositions and entertain/grasp two thoughts of the same type. If Jane, addressing John, says “You are fine” and John utters “I’m fine” they express the same proposition but entertain a different thought. In terms of Mentalese we can say that John and Jane entertain mental sentences they would translate by “I’m fine” and “You’re fine” respectively.

The most important distinction I am relying on is the reflexive truth conditions *vs.* incremental truth conditions one (see Perry 2001). If we consider:

- (1) Jane smokes cigars

the reflexive truth conditions are:

² Propositions expressed by the utterances of a sentences containing singular terms (e.g.: indexicals and proper names) are singular or Russellian propositions, i.e. propositions whose constituents are the objects/referents of the singular terms that appear in the utterance. The argument I am putting forward, though, should be independent of whether one accepts singular propositions or not. It should also be independent of whether one commits oneself to the existence of propositions.

- (1) a. There is an individual x and a convention C such that
 (i) C is exploited by (1)
 (ii) C permits one to designate x with ‘Jane’
 (iii) x smokes cigars

while the incremental truth conditions are

- (1) b. That Jane smokes cigars

The reflexive truth conditions of an indexical utterance like:

- (2) I smoke cigars [said by Jane]

are:

- (2) a. There is an x such that
 (i) x is the agent of (2)
 (ii) x smokes cigars

and the incremental truth conditions are:

- (2) b. That Jane smokes cigars

As I understand it, one grasps an utterance’s reflexive truth conditions by being *linguistically* competent.³ That is to say, an utterance’s reflexive truth conditions do not depend on one having to engage in a process of free enrichment. One grasps them by merely being competent with the language of the utterance.

Finally, I assume Perry’s (1986) distinction between *aboutness* and *concern*.⁴ As a first approximation we can say that an utterance and the corresponding thought are about something insofar as the utterance contains an element (e.g. either a spoken or an unspoken element) in the utterance which is about the relevant object/ individual/ event/ property/... and which enters the proposition asserted. In short, the propositional constituents must be represented by element(s) either at the surface level or at the

³ As Korta & Perry put it: “Suppose you get an email from Gretchen that says, ‘David has made an amazing discovery.’ There are a lot of Davids. You don’t know which one Gretchen is referring to with her use of ‘David’: David Kaplan, David Hills, David Israel? You respond, ‘David who?’ Your response can be understood precisely because you *do* grasp utterance-bound truth conditions of the email:

This email is true if the author it was referring to with ‘David’ has made a great discovery.” (Korta & Perry 2007: 101)

⁴ This distinction may not capture the letter of what Perry said in his 1986 “Thought without Representation” paper. It should, however, capture the spirit of Perry’s view.

underpinning logical form of the sentence uttered. To illustrate this, consider the following example. John planned to go out fishing. He wakes up early in the morning. He looks out of the window. Addressing Frenchie who is still in bed, John can utter both:

- (3) It's storming [uttered in Palo Alto]
- (4) It's storming here [uttered in Palo Alto]

It is likely that in uttering (3) and (4), John conveys the message that he cannot go out fishing. John does so by stating that it is storming in the location where they are. In uttering (4), John *explicitly* picks up the relevant location by the use of the indexical 'here'. In uttering (3), though, John does not pick up, let alone refer to, the relevant location in using an indexical.⁵ A way to understand the difference between these utterances is to claim that (4) is about the relevant location because it contains the indexical 'here' singling out the location where it is uttered. On the other hand, (3) is not about the relevant location insofar as it contains no expression referring to it. Yet it *concerns* the relevant location.⁶ At the very minimum we can recognize that (3) and (4) do not relate to the relevant location in the same way. The distinction between aboutness and concern should capture this difference. In other words, (3) concerns the relevant location insofar as the utterance (and the accompanying thought) is situated in that specific location. It goes without saying, though, that the utterance could be situated in a location differing from the location of the utterance. In such a case the relevant location must be raised to salience (e.g.: the speaker pointing toward a place on a map, or toward the television broadcasting the weather report about a location differing from the one the speaker and his audience are)⁷ In terms of propositions expressed, (*viz.* the incremental truth conditions of the utterance) Perry would say that (3) and (4) express the proposition *that it is storming in Palo Alto*. But they express it in a different way. This is highlighted by the different reflexive truth conditions of (3) and (4).

The reflexive truth conditions of (4) would be:

⁵ This does not prevent, though, that in some cases (as we shall see) one can refer to something without using a word. If one were to utter "Reserved" pointing toward a table in a bar one would refer to the relevant table without uttering a word for that table. More on this in section 4.

⁶ I am here assuming that there is no argument place or hidden indexical for a location in the logical form of the utterance. My argument, though, is neutral on whether or not one accepts a form of Indexicalism (cf. for instance Stanley 2000) concerning meteorological terms. In that case (3), like (4), would be about the relevant location. As we shall see, the concerning/ aboutness distinction is particularly relevant when it comes to explaining subsentences and subthoughts.

⁷ This simple story nicely expands to various cases. Think of "Jane is ready". Jane may be ready for the party but not for the exam. "Jane is ready" may thus be true in one case (situation) and false in the other. For a detailed discussion of this position, which has been labeled "situationalism", and how it differs from contextualism (Recanati, Carston, Sperber & Wilson, Bezuidenhout, etc.) and minimalism (Cappelen & Lepore) see Corazza (2007) and Corazza & Dokic (2007).

- (4) a. There is a location x such that
 - (i) the agent of (4) refers to x with ‘here’
 - (ii) it is storming in x

while the incremental truth conditions, given that ‘here’ refers to Palo Alto would be:

- (4) b. That it is storming in Palo Alto

The reflexive truth conditions of (3) would be:

- (3) a. There is a location x such that
 - (i) (3) concerns x
 - (ii) it is storming in x

As for the incremental truth conditions we have two options here. One option is favored by Perry who claims that the location in (3), Palo Alto, is an unarticulated constituent of the proposition expressed (the incremental truth conditions). We would thus have:

- (3) b. That it is storming in Palo Alto

On the other hand, if one were to argue that the location is not an unarticulated constituent of the proposition expressed, the incremental truth conditions would be:

- (3) c. That it is storming

If we accept the latter as the incremental truth conditions of (3), though, we embrace a form of relativism insofar as we assume that (3c) is not, *pace* Frege and the tradition, true/false eternally, but true/false only relative to the situation in which it will be evaluated. In this interpretation the relevant location concerned by (3) would not enter the proposition expressed.⁸

It may be worth mentioning that according to Perry’s original distinction a thought can concern something without being about this very thing inasmuch as all the relevant parameters granting the success of the linguistic interaction are *fully* provided by the structure of the situation in which the exchange occurs. Since the situation fixes all that needs to be fixed, the speaker and her audience need not represent what their discourse

⁸ An interpretation along these lines may be more appealing when considering scalar adjectives: “Jane is too tall”, “John is strong”. What Jane is too tall for and John strong for need not enter the incremental truth conditions. The proposition expressed, though, must be evaluated *vis-à-vis* the situation in which Jane is considered to be too tall: she may be too tall for a five year old child but not if compared to the class of basketball players. For an analysis along these lines see Corazza 2007 and Corazza & Dokic 2007.

concerns.⁹ In a nutshell, what is fixed by a situation need not be fixed by the agent's representational system. If, for instance, a group of people living on a small island never travel and never have contact with the outside world (e.g. they do not observe reports coming from abroad and their telephone line does not extend outside their small island), they need not have representations for time zones. The situation in which they utter, say, "It's 3:00 p.m." fixes all that is needed for them to get the time right and their actions are automatically attuned to it. Yet their time-utterances (and thoughts) concern a given time zone. These islanders, though, do not need any mental effort to distinguish various time-zones. They are simply unaware of the existence of time zones. Since we are often aware of time zones and since we sometimes communicate with people in other parts of the world and thus in different time zones we need some cognitive capacity to keep track of various time zones. If Jeff from San Francisco calls Mary in New York and tells her "I'll call you back tomorrow at 3:00 p.m." Mary ought *to know* whether Jeff will call at 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time or 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time. There are different ways, though, in which Mary can know about the relevant time that Jeff will call. It may be the case that when calling Mary, Jeff always refers to Mary's time zone, i.e. the Eastern Time zone. In that case, based on past practice, Mary need not think about the relevant time zone. She takes it for granted that Jeff will call at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time. This kind of knowledge need not be articulated in Mary's and Jeff's cognitive system. It may be stored in their practice (and thus in the situation in which their time-utterances and thoughts occur). As I understand it this sort of knowledge belongs to the situation in which Jeff's utterance occurs and it is for this very reason that it need not enter Mary's and Jeff's thoughts during their telephone exchange.

In short, I will say that a thought is *about* a given item when that very thought *contains* a singular mental representation of the relevant item. The thought is thus a *de re* thought about that item. By contrast, I will say that a thought *concerns* a given item when it does not contain a singular mental representation (e.g. an indexical or a proper name in the language of thought) of the item. In that case we do not have a *de re* thought insofar as there is any representation for the relevant *res*. Such a thought can be either a general thought that contains a quantified term ranging over the relevant item or simply a thought missing any kind of representation, like in Perry's Z-land case.

In the "It's storming" case, what is important to notice is that we can explain John and his partner's likely action (e.g. they abandon their plan to go out fishing) triggered by John's utterance "It's storming" because the latter concerns, is situated in, the relevant location. The same story can be told at the level of thought. John's and his partner's thoughts (or mental sentences) concern the relevant location. And they concern the relevant location without John and his partner having to entertain a mental representation (a mental indexical or pointer, or what you will) of that specific location. The important

⁹ See Perry (1996)'s Z-land story.

point here is that their thoughts need not be anchored to the relevant location by a mental indexical. The fact that their thoughts are situated in that location suffices.

These thoughts, being situated, help explain John's and Frenchie's action. Since John and Frenchie are *co-situated*, they can successfully engage in a cooperative activity or in a joint activity without having to represent the location in which their actions occur. Communication understood as plan-execution is thus successful.

With these distinctions in hand we can now turn to the discussion of subsentential speech.

3. Subsential Assertions

It is uncontroversial that speakers genuinely can utter ordinary words and phrases in isolation and, in so doing, perform full-fledged speech acts. The examples are limitless (see Stainton 2006). A philosophically famous and well known example of a one-word speech act is found in Wittgenstein's four-word builders'-language game in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out;—B brings the stones that he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—Conceive this as a complete primitive language. (Wittgenstein *PI*: § 2)

In this primitive language game all we have are the words 'slab', 'beam', 'pillar', and 'block'. They are never used as part of a sentence. Each word is uttered in isolation and in so doing the builder performs a specific linguistic act in passing an order to his assistant. These four words have a particular, defined use in a specific situation and in a well-organized joint activity. Because of that they can be used successfully without having to be short for a sentence. They need not be one-word sentences. 'Slab', for instance, is not short for "Bring me a slab". When the builder utters 'slab' his assistant brings him a slab. When he utters 'pillar' he brings him a pillar. The word 'slab' is automatically related to a slab *and* the corresponding action of carrying it to the builder. If 'slab' were not related to a slab, i.e. it did not stand for slab, it could not be successfully linked to the action of bringing a slab when the word is called. These words uttered in isolation are automatically linked, *pace* Davidson, to the builder's and his assistant's behavior. Thus, the connection between language and behavior can be made at a subsentential level. The word 'slab' and the corresponding thought are situated. When the builder utters 'slab' he does not need to entertain a thought one would express using

the sentence “I order you to bring me a slab!”. When the assistant hears the word ‘slab’ he does not need to entertain the thought expressed by “I’ve been ordered to bring him a slab”. Furthermore the word ‘slab’ is not used to express a full-fledged proposition. The builder’s and his assistant’s joint activity is successful without their having to assert and/or grasp a proposition—i.e. something that is eternally true/false—let alone entertain a thought corresponding to the alleged proposition. The fact that ‘slab’ stands for slab and that the assistant brings a slab when hearing that word suffices for the success of their joint venture. To borrow Wittgenstein’s terminology, the connection between the words and the objects they stand for is granted by the builder’s and his assistant’s *praxis*. The important point is that this connection need not be mediated by sentences. As Perry puts it:

To say that the semantic facts about words derive from the semantic facts about the commands of which they are part is not to say that these facts derive from semantic facts about sentences of which they are part. Words can play a role in the articulation of commands without being parts of sentences, and so can be connected with human goals and intentions without the mediation of sentences. (Perry 1994: 277)

Following the interpretation proposed here we can claim, *pace* Dummett and Davidson, that the meaning of the words ‘slab’, ‘beam’, ‘pillar’, and ‘block’ is not derivative from their occurrence in a sentence. In this language game we simply have no sentence to begin with.¹⁰

The reflexive truth conditions of “slab”, for instance, as it appears in Wittgenstein’s language game could be cashed out as:

- (5) There is a practice *P* such that
- (i) in *P* “slab” stands for slab
 - (ii) in *P* the audience brings the speaker a slab when she hears “slab”

It goes without saying that the builders’ language game proposed by Wittgenstein is rather simple. As Wittgenstein claims, it is “a primitive language”. Yet it is embedded in a complex cognitive joint activity. As such it helps us illustrate how subsentences can be

¹⁰ We can thus dismiss the following statements: “[S]entences have a primacy within language over other linguistic expressions: a sentence is determined as true under certain conditions, which conditions are derivable from the way in which the sentence is construed out of its constituents words; and the senses of the words relate solely to this determination of the truth-conditions of the sentence in which the words may occur. Of course, looked at it in one way, the word has a sense independently of any particular sentence in which it occurs: but its sense is something relating entirely to the occurrence of the word in a sentence” (Dummett 1973: 194-5). Davidson adds: “Frege said that only in the context of a sentence does a word have meaning; in the same vein he might have added that only in the context of the language does a sentence (and therefore a word) have meaning” (Davidson 1967: 22).

successfully used in a joint activity without the players having to assert full-fledged propositions and entertain full-fledged thoughts.

Stainton (2007) has suggested that the words involved in Wittgenstein's builders' language game are not, properly speaking, words. For, they do not get embedded the way ordinary words do. In this primitive language game, 'slab', for instance, has never been associated with a verb phrase to form a sentence.¹¹ To circumvent this objection we can assume that the language game under consideration is a kind of pidgin used by the builder and his assistant because they do not speak English. They end up using these four English words because their British contractor has banned them from using their native language, say, or because they speak very different languages and the only common words they have are the words 'brick', 'beam', 'pillar', and 'slab'. In this scenario our workers can easily translate these four words into their native language and thus entertain complex and articulated thoughts involving these words (or a translation of them). Our builders have the cognitive capacity to form complex thoughts, inferences, reasoning, etc. involving them (or their translation). Yet, when the builder utters 'slab' and his assistant brings him a slab, neither need to entertain a full-fledged thought. The assistant does not need to entertain the thought that in his own language he would express by a translation of "I've been ordered to bring a slab". I argue that a similar story can also be told about more complex language games.

More common, close-to-home examples of subsentential speech acts would include:

- Situation 1:

John, a well known anti-Fregean, has been told that Jane is desperately looking for Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language*. Jane walks into John's office. John suddenly utters:

(6) Hidden on top of the shelf

Jane reaches to the top of the shelf and grabs Dummett's book.

- Situation 2:

Jane and John have the habit of hiding in John's office to smoke Cuban cigars during the midday pause. At 12:15 Jane walks into John's office and locks the door. John suddenly utters:

(7) Hidden on top of the shelf

Jane reaches to the top of the shelf and grabs the cigars.

¹¹ For a criticism of Perry's argument along this line see also Dresner (2002).

In both situations John utters the same subsentence. Yet it does not seem that he says the same thing, let alone conveys the same message. Whereas with (6) John informs Jane of the whereabouts of Dummett's book, with (7) he informs her of the cigars' location. How are we to capture this intuition?

If one follows the prevailing wisdom (see, for instance, Dummett) in assuming that only sentences can be used to perform speech acts or to make moves in the language game, then one is likely to embrace (i) and (ii):

- (i) (6) and (7) are shortcuts for a sentence
- (ii) (6) and (7) are shortcuts for *different* sentences.¹²

This amounts to claiming that (6) and (7) are abbreviations of something like:

- (6) a. Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language* is hidden on top of the shelf
- (7) a. The Cuban cigars are hidden on top of the shelf¹³

Along these lines, one is also committed to the view that if what is *expressed /said /communicated* is a proposition, (6) and (7) do not express the same proposition. (6a) and (7a) make this clear.

The question that now comes to mind runs as follows: Can (6) and (7) express different propositions without being shortcuts for sentences? That is, can the utterance of a subsentence express a fully truth-evaluable proposition?

It goes without saying that Dummett's answer is negative. Were Davidson to accept propositions in his framework his answer would be negative as well. For both Dummett and Davidson are committed to the view that only sentences can be used to make a move in the language game, to perform a speech act and to assert something true or false:

Words have no function save as they play a role in sentences: their semantic features are abstracted from the semantic features of sentences, just as the semantic features of sentences are abstracted from their part in helping people achieve goals or realize intentions.

If the name 'Kilimanjaro' refers to Kilimanjaro, then no doubt there is some relation between English—(or Swahili—) speakers, the word, and the mountain. But it is inconceivable that one should be able to explain this relation without first explaining the role

¹² If the relevant sentence were to contain an indexical expression we could have two utterances of the same sentence (e.g.: two utterances of "That/this is ...") having different incremental truth conditions, i.e. expressing different propositions.

¹³ Since we do not have ellipsis at work here, the relevant sentences should be the end product of some free enrichment. As such we could have sentences like: "The book you're searching is on top of the shelf" and "I put the cigars on top of the shelf".

of the word in sentences; and if this is so, there is no chance of explaining reference directly in nonlinguistic terms. (Davidson 1977: 220)

Stainton, on the other hand, claims that subsentences can be used to express full-fledged propositions, i.e. propositions that can be judged to be either true or false. To be precise, Stainton does not commit himself to the view that an utterance of (6) expresses a proposition, for subsentential expressions are subpropositional. Yet Stainton claims that what is *asserted* with an utterance of (6) is a proposition. Stainton distinguishes between asserted and unasserted content:

To my mind, what is asserted when a subsentence is used communicatively is that proposition which results from minimally adding to the content of the bare phrase actually uttered so as to arrive at a proposition. (Stainton 2006: 60)

The relevant addition, i.e. what completes the subpropositional content, though, is not linguistically triggered. There is nothing in the literal meaning of the sentence pointing toward the missing element. On this Stainton sits with the free enrichment proponents (e.g. Sperber & Wilson 1986, Carston 2002, Bezuidenhout 2002, Recanati 2004, etc.—the list is almost endless). For Stainton, like the proponents of free enrichment, propositional constituents need not be linguistically triggered.

Summing up: according to the traditional, Dummett-Davidson inspired view, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* and John's Cuban cigars end up in the proposition asserted because of some elliptical or indexical phenomenon at work. If one rejects the received wisdom, as Stainton does, Dummett's book and John's Cuban cigars enter the proposition asserted in a pragmatic way *via* a process of free enrichment. That is, the missing content is pragmatically captured.

4. Subsentences and Thoughts

For argument's sake we can follow Stainton in assuming the language-of-thought hypothesis or *Mentalese*: our thoughts are structured in a sentence-like way. When subsentences are at work, Stainton has mental indexicals entering the picture. The latter should be understood along the lines of Pylyshyn's mental pointers or FINSTs (FINGers of INSTantiation; see Pylyshyn 2003, 2007). These mental indexicals anchor the representation to the relevant unspoken propositional constituents which enter the proposition asserted. This amounts to saying that at the level of thought the unspoken elements entering the proposition asserted are represented by mental indexicals. It is basically for these reasons that our thoughts can be *de re*. They are *de re* insofar as the proposition asserted contains unspoken objects and/or properties picked out by mental

indexicals. If, for instance, in a bar one utters “Reserved” looking at a specific table, the speaker and the audience represent the relevant table entering the proposition asserted by a mental indexical.¹⁴

Before going further, it may be worth mentioning that I am not fully convinced by Stainton’s analogy between mental indexicals and Pylyshyn’s FINSTs. For the latter, as I understand them, are devices enabling us to keep track of perceptual (visual) objects. Since these indexes “are the most primitive preconceptual contact that the mind has with things in the world, then the visual system is not in a position to decide what to index” (Pylyshyn 2007: 42). Hence FINSTs cannot be invoked to elucidate what goes on in Jane’s mind when she hears John’s “Hidden on top of the shelf”. Dummett’s book and John’s Cuban cigars are not perceived. Yet according to a Stainton-inspired story they enter the propositions asserted. But Jane is not tracking the book or the cigars by perceiving them: the book and cigars do not rise to salience because John and/or Jane perceive them. Stainton seems to recognize this kind of worry when he claims that the relevant unspoken objects/properties enriching the subproposition and thus making their way into the proposition asserted may not be determined linguistically:

[T]he non-linguistic context cannot determine a linguistic item. In contrast, manifest Mentalese expressions, unlike the spoken word, are *precisely* the right “currency” to exchange for a non-linguistic context. So whereas a non-linguistic something cannot generally be mapped onto a public language structure (elliptical, indexical, or otherwise), a perceptible (but not necessarily perceived) non-linguistic something *will* always make a Mentalese expression manifest. (Stainton 2006: 169)

Let us consider our scenario involving John, Jane and Dummett’s *Frege: Philosophy of Language*. Jane does not have Dummett’s book in mind when she walks into John’s office. She may even have forgotten that she needs it. She cannot perceive it. How can then she come to have a mental expression representing it? How can she entertain a *de re* thought about it, let alone have a mental indexical about it? To be sure, she may come to think that *something* of some interest or other is hidden on top of the shelf. This, though, is far from being an indexical thought about Dummett’s book. In a word, Jane cannot entertain a mental indexical or pointer about Dummett’s book. Even if we assume with Stainton that “this something” contributes in making a Mentalese expression manifest,

¹⁴ “By now we have ample reason to believe that Mentalese contains indexicals (see, e.g., Pylyshyn 2003). Given this, we can and should treat the grasping of objects and properties as involving the deployment of such Mentalese indexicals. Once we do so, however, the worry about losing the *de re* nature of the propositions asserted evaporates: it is a feature of indexicals that they (can) afford *de re* propositions” (Stainton 2006: 166).

the latter cannot be a *singular* expression in Mentalese and, therefore, help Jane to entertain a *de re* thought.¹⁵

If we take on board Perry's distinction between the incremental truth conditions and the reflexive truth conditions of an utterance we can easily account for what is going on in our cases. And we can do so without having to posit mental indexicals. If we consider "Hidden on top of the shelf" as it appears in our situation 1 involving John, Jane and Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, the reflexive truth conditions of John's subsentence utterance would be:

- (6) c. There is an x such that
 - (i) (6) concerns x
 - (ii) x is hidden of top of the shelf

In virtue of exploiting (6c) John can easily reach his goal, i.e. pass Jane Dummett's book. For, by grasping (6c) Jane can easily reach the top of the shelf and grab Dummett's book. The linguistic interaction understood as a joint activity is positive. Yet Jane and John's thoughts need not be enriched. In particular, Jane's thought need not entertain a hidden indexical, or a FINST representing Dummett's book. The mere fact that John and Jane are competent speakers of English and, as such, can exploit an utterance's reflexive truth conditions help us understand linguistic interchanges involving subsentential utterances.

Of course utterances of some subsentences could be explained invoking mental indexicals. If one utters "Reserved" while pointing or looking at a table in a restaurant or one utters "Versace" while holding a jacket, it may be that the speaker and the hearer have a *de re* thought about the relevant table and jacket and that they represent them with a mental indexical understood along Pylyshyn pointers.

The intuitive understanding of what goes on when one comes to entertain a *de re* thought using or hearing a subsentence without a specific word for the relevant *res* as in the "Reserved" and "Versace" examples is that they are sort of short for "That (table) is reserved" and "This is a Versace jacket". In these examples we have a hidden indexical at

¹⁵ Elugardo & Stainton deal with situations like these in positing mental indexicals working as temporal file-names: "For such cases, one would need Mentalese indexicals whose content is not determined demonstratively. They would be multi-purpose, usable for any contextually salient thing however it is grasped. Demonstration of a percept would apply only in the specific case of presently perceived objects, For instance, Mentalese indexicals would need to serve as temporary file-names for contextually determined referents, and be maintained even when the referents are not perceptually available. Information about the object could then be appended to the symbol as a way of keeping a track history of the object" (Elugardo & Stainton 2003: 296-7). To my mind the appeal to mental indexicals as a generalized phenomenon which allegedly captures the mental enrichment of a thought when one uses/hears a subsentence sounds like an *ad hoc* move dictated by one already made commitment to free enrichment. Furthermore, even if one accepts free enrichment, while should one posit mental indexicals? Why not have file-names working like quantified terms instead of indexicals? This position, as we will see, is more plausible if one takes on board Perry's notion of reflexive truth conditions.

work. This view can be substantiated in assuming, along with Kaplan (1977), that the referent of a demonstrative like ‘this/that’ is secured by the accompanying demonstration (or directing intention; Kaplan 1989). If one were to say “That is reserved”, demonstrating the relevant table, the latter is referred to because of the accompanying demonstration. Demonstrations should be understood as technical term, i.e. along the contextual parameters which enable one to secure an indexical reference. With ‘I’ the relevant contextual parameter is the agent; with ‘here’ it is the location, while with ‘this/that’ it is the demonstration. One could claim that although in the “Reserved” and “Versace” cases we don’t have a linguistic expression (i.e., we don’t have ‘this/that’) we nonetheless have a demonstration raising to salience the relevant objects. One can go on to argue that just as a demonstrative never comes without a demonstration, a demonstration never comes without a demonstrative. They are just two sides of the same coin. One could say, echoing Kant’s famous dictum, that *demonstratives without demonstrations are empty, demonstrations without demonstratives are blind*.¹⁶ When the demonstration is evident enough (as in our examples) its linguistic counterpart can be omitted. The important point to bring home is that our examples are explained without appealing to free enrichment. The utterances and thoughts are about the relevant table and jacket because of a demonstration selecting them and, thus, because of a hidden demonstrative at work. In short, examples like “Reserved” and “Versace” do not campaign in favor of free enrichment. The reflexive truth conditions of an utterance like

(8) Reserved

would be:

- (8) a. There is an x such that
 (i) x is demonstrated by the agent of (8)
 (ii) x is reserved

A further question springs to mind. We may also wonder whether the proposition asserted is the one the hearer comes to grasp or the one the speaker “intends” (whatever this means) to express. In our “Reserved” example it is likely that the speaker and the hearer grasp the same proposition. In principle, though, one could assume either the speaker-oriented or the audience-oriented view. To illustrate this, let us recall again the scenario involving John, Jane and Dummett’s *Frege: Philosophy of Language*. From the audience-oriented perspective, Jane may have no idea of what is supposedly on top of the shelf. For all she knows John may be making fun of her: he may have placed a mouse trap with the

¹⁶ “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (Kant 1929 [1787]: A51, B75).

hope that she will get her fingers trapped; he may have hidden a bottle of Cognac, some dirty socks, or what have you. All she can infer is that there may be *something* or other on top of the shelf. Thus she cannot have a *de re* thought about Dummett's book. From the speaker-oriented viewpoint the story may be totally different. John may have Dummett's book in mind and thus entertain a *de re* thought about it. Thus, if we analyze the proposition asserted from the hearer's perspective, i.e. as the proposition the hearer allegedly grasps when she comes to understanding the subsentence used, then Jane cannot grasp a singular (*de re*) proposition, i.e. a proposition having Dummett's book as a constituent. At best she grasps the general proposition *that something or other is on top of the shelf*. Hence, if one accepts free enrichment at the level of the proposition asserted, it may thus be that the speaker asserts a singular (*de re*) proposition, while the audience grasps a general proposition.

The general moral seems to be that if we attempt to explain the success of communication *via* the grasping of the proposition asserted we face the problem that the speaker and the hearer may end up grasping very different propositions. Yet communication can be successful, e.g. Jane can end up picking up Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language*. On the other hand, if we explain the success of communication *via* the alleged enriched thoughts (Mental sentences) grasped by the speaker and the audience, again, they can well be very different thoughts. While John comes to entertain a *de re* thought, Jane may grasp a general one.

Given these problems it may be worth exploring another avenue (see Korta & Perry forthcoming). If we consider language as an action and communication as a plan that the speaker and the hearer engage in, then communication can be said to be successful inasmuch as the speaker and her audience judged their joint activity output in a positive way. In our example John aims to pass Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language* to Jane. John's communicative act is successful if Jane finds Dummett's book, unsuccessful if she does not. Whether in her finding the book Jane entertains a *de re* or merely a general thought does not matter. What counts is the output. And the latter can be caused/ directed/ guided by either a *de re* or a merely general thought Jane entertains.

It should be clear that the position I am defending need not deny that some thoughts are more structured than the utterance expressing them. Actually, when one engages in inferential reasoning (see Dokic 2006), the thoughts at work which may lead to some actions (given the relevant desires, beliefs, and motivations) are likely to be structured. For a thought to interact with other thoughts in some processes of decision-making it must be structured. Yet, as I have attempted to explain, these thoughts need not present mental indexicals for the objects/properties they concern. One's actions may well be guided by general thoughts and yet be successful. Jane may find Dummett's book because she is guided by reasoning of the form: *there's something on top of the shelf, I desire to get what's on top of the shelf, ...* Guided by these general thoughts, Jane reaches up to the top of the shelf and grabs Dummett's book. John and Jane's communicative

interaction, given John's plan to give Dummett's book to Jane, is successful. Jane succeeds in grabbing Dummett's book without entertaining mental indexicals about it and, thus, without having *de re* thoughts about it. The fact that Jane's thoughts merely concern Dummett's book suffices. This can easily be explained by Jane's grasping the reflexive truth conditions of "Hidden on top of the shelf".

The picture I am putting forward should also explain misunderstanding in a straightforward way. Two people may easily engage in what they take to be a joint activity and yet place themselves, or have their thought placed, in slightly different situations. Since a joint action, like a discourse, is an ongoing activity, two people can easily readjust their behavior and harmonize the situation they are working in.

5. Conclusion

In discussing subsentences and in dismissing Davidson's (and Dummett's) sentential primacy thesis I followed a slightly different route than Perry. I think Perry is right in rejecting Davidson's (and by the same token Dummett's) view that the meaning of individual words derives from their role in sentences which express complete thoughts. In more general terms, I think that Perry is right in rejecting Frege's context principle, i.e. that a word has a meaning only in the context of a sentence. The general moral one should thus bring home is that subsentences and their corresponding thoughts are situated. And it is for this very reason that they need not be enriched.

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