

Communicative Success

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A broad conception would include animal communication and machine communication. A narrow conception would include only linguistic human communication.

The problem with the narrow alternative is the danger of prejudging the issues, i.e. of smuggling in theory in the definition.

Broad or narrow conception, II

A typical example would be to characterize human communication as Gricean, i.e. as involving *higher-order communicative intentions*, on the part of the speaker, and *recognition* of such intentions, on the part of the hearer.

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If you reply “But then it is not COMMUNICATION in the strict sense.”, you have ruled by your definition would should be an empirical issue.

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The initial state causes the signal, which in turn causes the final state.

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Without purpose, there is no basis for attributing success or failure.

Matching

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For instance, a state of *eagle awareness* may cause an alarm call by a vervet monkey, which triggers an eagle awareness in a conspecific. Additional perception (no alarm call having been made, or an alarm call having been made) contributes to triggering behavior.

In this case, we can characterize the initial and final states as dispositions to behavior. Communication succeeds if dispositions are the same.

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Maybe the speaker believes that the fire is dangerous and the hearer that it is not. They will react differently to the fire, but intuitively, communication succeeds if the hearer starts believing that there is a fire.

Content and mode

It is therefore better to define conditions of success in terms of what is believed, in the example considered: the speaker believes there is fire, wishes to inform the hearer by means of shouting 'Fire!', which results in the hearer thinking, and perhaps also believing, that there is a fire. A paradigm of success. How do we generalize?

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Second, the *content* of the final state should be the same, or sufficiently similar, to the content of the initial state.

Both of these ingredients are problematic, however.

Models of content

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A standard modern model of content is that of a possible worlds proposition. This is an entity that is completely characterized by saying which possible worlds it is *true* at (describes correctly). If it is partial, we may also have to add a specification of which worlds it is false at, but in the simple cases these are just the worlds where it is not true.

With this model, and a requirement of sameness for communicative success, communication succeeds just in case the content of the final state is true at exactly the same worlds as the content of the initial state.

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With this division, it is perfectly possible for a hearer to understand the sentence uttered by a speaker without knowing what the content is in the context of utterance. For instance, you text me 'I am here', but I still don't know where you are.

Frege on 'I'

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So far there is no suggestion of an inherent problem with the thought contents themselves. But such a problem was pointed out by Gottlob Frege.

According to Frege, contents are determined according to how entities are *presented*. And, each person is present to *himself*, or *herself*, in a way that is different from how that person is presented to anyone else.

Then, if I think that I am tired, the *content* of my thought is different from the content of any thought any of you can have.

Frege on 'I', II

Frege's view (in 'Der Gedanke') was that such a thought cannot be communicated. Instead, for communication to succeed, the speaker must entertain a different but related thought.

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It is natural to dismiss this view of Frege, by appealing to the character of 'I': all the speaker needs to grasp is that whenever Peter utters 'I am tired', that is true just in case *Peter* is tired, at the time of utterance. How Peter is presented to himself is irrelevant.

How Peter is presented to himself also goes beyond the possible-worlds proposition: for truth and falsity at a world all that matter is who is tired when.

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An amnesiac, Rudolf Lingens, is lost in the Stanford Library. At the same time another amnesiac, Gustav Lauben, is lost in the Harvard Library. Both have access to a complete encyclopedic information about the world: they can get to know the truth of every proposition.

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They just don't know which of them they are. Lingens does not know he is Lingens. He might, for all he knows, be Lauben.

Self-locating beliefs, II

Lingens might believe that he is Lingens, and he might believe that he is Lauben. But he already knows the truth of every proposition.

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If there is no more to the content you get from 'I' than that picking out a particular person, then it should be the same regardless of how that person is picked out.

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So there seems to be something more. How should we understand that?

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The basic idea is that beliefs that are essentially indexical, or self-locating, are belief that essentially concern the center of a centered world.

So if I believe that *I* am tired *now*, my belief is characterized by the fact all centered worlds where my belief is true are worlds where the subject of the center is tired at the time of the center.

Centered worlds, II

But just characterizing the set of possible worlds is not enough to make the content concern *me*, and *now*. If you think that *you* are tired *now*, you also have a thought content characterized by being true of centered worlds where the subject of the center is tired at the time of the center. But our beliefs are different.

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On Lewis's view, what I do is to *ascribe* to *me*, *now*, the property of being the center of such a centered world.

Believing in general is not a relation between a believer and a possible-worlds proposition (set of possible worlds), but a relation between a believer and a *property* that the believe *ascribes* to herself at a time, or herself *and* a time.

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For self-locating beliefs, the center matters, for others it does not.

Centered worlds and communication, I

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(1) I am tired

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Now, suppose that the hearer, Paul, understands the utterance and therefore thinks a thought with the same content. But having a belief, on this model, is self-ascribing a property. If Paul therefore self-ascribes the property with the same *content*, what he believes is that *he*, Paul, is tired, not that Peter is tired.

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Or, we try to retain the model, but change our model of communicative success. For instance, we would get success if the hearer doesn't just transfer the content to himself, but performs some *operation* on the content to get a new content that he/she can ascribe to himself/herself.

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In this case, the new content would be something like that *the interlocutor* of the subject of the center at time of the center is tired. Is this a reasonable alternative? Remains to be seen.

