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# *De Se* Assertion\*

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## **abstract**

It has been long known (Perry (1977, 1979), Lewis (1981)) that *de se* attitudes, such as beliefs and desires that one has *about oneself*, call for a special treatment in theories of attitudinal content. The aim of this paper is to raise similar concerns for theories of assertoric content. The received view, inherited from Kaplan (1989), has it that if Aisha says “I am hungry,” the asserted content, or *what is said*, is the proposition that Aisha is hungry (at a given time). I argue that the received view has a hard time to account for *de se* assertion, i.e. for a contents that a person expresses using the first person pronoun to assert something about herself or himself. I start from the observation that when two speakers say “I am hungry,” one may truly report them as having said the same thing. It has often been held that the possibility of such reports comes from the fact that the two speakers are, after all, uttering the same words, and are in this sense “saying the same thing”. I argue that this approach fails, and that it is neither necessary nor sufficient to use the same words, or words endowed with the same meaning, in order to be truly reported as same-saying. I also argue that reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion differ significantly from such reports in situations in which the speakers are merely implicating the same thing. Finally, I outline a new account of the content of assertion, similar to Lewis's account of *de se* attitudes. The proposal is, roughly, that when Aisha says “I am hungry”, the asserted content just the property of being hungry, and it is a property that Aisha asserts *of herself*. I then propose to generalize the account to the other cases in a way that departs from Lewis's account, and I close by showing how my proposal handles the cases discussed in the first part of the paper.

## **§1. The received wisdom on *what is said***

In philosophy of language, the dominant view regarding indexicals' contribution to content, inherited from the work of David Kaplan (1989), has it that *what is said* by a speaker using a sentence that contains an indexical pronoun (or the 'content', in Kaplan's terms) differs from the stable linguistic meaning of the sentence (or its 'character') in that, on the one hand, it includes the specification of the pronoun's referent (as determined in the context of utterance), but, on the other, does not include the lexically encoded conditions that help determining the

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referent, such as the condition of being female in the case of 'she', or of the condition of being a speaker in the case of 'I'. Suppose that on Friday May 15, 2012, at noon, Aisha says:

(1) I am hungry.

According to the Kaplanian view, the meaning of the sentence in (1) is a function from contexts to contents which, given a context, returns the proposition that the speaker of that context is hungry at the time of the context, while *what is said* by (1), or, equivalently, its content, is the output of that function as applied to the context of (1), hence the proposition that Aisha is hungry on May 15, 2012, at noon.

Let me clarify from the outset that my target in this paper is the Kaplanian account of what is said, rather than Kaplan's account of the *semantics* of indexicals. There is some unclarity in Kaplan's writings as to the status of his notion of *what is said*, since he seems to move back and forth between a stronger view, on which his notion of content (*qua* something that, when evaluated at a circumstance, gives a truth value) is meant to account for our pre-theoretical, intuitive notion of *what is said*, and a weaker view, on which 'what is said' is merely another "technical" term for the notion of (semantic) content. I am interested in the stronger view; that is to say, I am interested in the question of whether the Kaplanian notion of content is able to account for the content of assertion and for *what is said*, where the latter is taken to be what calls for analysis, rather than just another technical notion. Since I would also like to leave it open what Kaplan's own view was, I shall speak of the *Kaplanian* account, whether or not he himself would have ascribed to it.<sup>1</sup>

There are two intertwined motivations for the Kaplanian account. Suppose that at the time at which Aisha utters (1), Byeong, pointing at her, says:

(2) She is hungry.

Then we can truly report Byeong as having said in (2) what Aisha said in (1). Indeed, they

<sup>1</sup> While some of Kaplan's remarks suggest that he might have had the weaker view in mind, and while some of Kaplan's followers take the expression 'what is said' to be synonymous with 'content' and view both of these as technical terms, it is still true that the force of Kaplan's arguments often draws on our intuitive notion of what is said.

both said that Aisha was hungry. Or, suppose that on Saturday May 16, Carlos says:

(3) Aisha was hungry yesterday at noon.

Again, it seems that one may truly report Aisha and Carlos as having said the same thing on the grounds of their utterances of (1) and (3).

The previous example involves speakers who same-say using sentences whose meanings are not the same. The second motivation for the Kaplanian view concerns speakers who use sentences with the same meaning, yet fail to same-say. Suppose that now it's Carlos who says:

(4) I am hungry.

Those who share Kaplan's intuitions would insist that what is said by Aisha in (1) and what is said by Carlos in (4) are different things:

What is said in using a given indexical in different contexts may be different. Thus if I say, today, "I was insulted yesterday," and you utter the same words tomorrow, what is said is different [...] There are possible circumstances in which what I said would be true but what you said would be false. Thus we say different things (Kaplan 1989: 500).<sup>2</sup>

## §2. *De se* assertion

It has been pointed out a number of times (e.g. Feldman 1980: 80, Lewis 1980: 97) that cases such as (1)-(4), in which the sentence "I am hungry" is uttered by different speakers, are as much of a problem for the Kaplanian view as they are a motivation for it. On the one hand, a proponent of the Kaplanian view is arguably right to say that, *in some sense*, what Aisha says in (1) is different from what Carlos says in (4). As we have seen, Aisha's utterance of (1) says,

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<sup>2</sup> Although Kaplan was arguably the first to systematically distinguish between lexically encoded meaning and what is said, both insights go back at least to Frege, who wrote: "The sentence 'I am cold' expresses a different thought in the mouth of one person from what it expresses in the mouth of another. [...] It is not necessary that the person who feels cold should himself give utterance to the thought that he feels cold. Another person can do this by using a name to designate the one who feels cold" (1899: 236).

*in some sense*, the same thing as (2) or (3), but there seems to be no sense in which Carlos's utterance of (4) says the same thing as either (2) or (3). But on the other hand, there is, to use Lewis's words, an "equally legitimate" sense in which Aisha in (1) and Carlos in (4) do say the same thing. Indeed, each says that he or she is hungry.

The intuition that Aisha in (1) and Carlos in (4) same-say is further supported by our linguistic practices of reporting what is said. Consider the following dialogue:

(5) Carlos: I am hungry.

(6) Byeong: Aisha said that, too.

Byeong's report in (6) is ambiguous. It can be understood as reporting Aisha to have said that *Carlos* was hungry, or that *she herself* was hungry.<sup>3</sup> This ambiguity is very similar to the well-known syntactic ambiguity with VP-ellipsis. Suppose that Byeong says:

(7) I love my wife, and so does Carlos.

On its "strict" reading, (7) says that Carlos loves Byeong's wife, while on its "sloppy" reading, it says that Carlos loves *his own* wife. Given this apparent similarity, I will use the 'strict' vs. 'sloppy' terminology for the ambiguity that we find with reports of same-saying such as (6).

### §3. Saying the same thing vs. using the same words

In the previous section, we saw that when different people say "I am hungry," there is a sense in which they are saying the same thing, for each is saying that he or she is hungry. A response readily available to the Kaplanian is to point out that the same sentence is being uttered, and that this could explain why we are inclined to hear the two speakers as saying the

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<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, the report in (6) is four-ways ambiguous because of the contribution of the present tense: it can report Aisha as having said that Carlos was hungry at the time when she said it, or that he is hungry at the time of (5), or that she was hungry at the time when she said it, or that she is hungry at the time of (5). For the sake of simplicity, I will leave aside all the issues raised by the contribution of tense.

same thing – for, after all, they are uttering the same words. In this section, I want to argue that this is not a correct approach to the problem of *de se* assertion. Although the use of one and the same sentence may partly account for the intuition that the same thing has been said, that cannot be the end of the story, since, as I will show, it is neither *necessary* nor *sufficient* to use the same sentence in order to be reported, literally and truly, as same-saying. I will first provide cases in which two speakers are using sentences that have different meanings as well as different propositional contents (relative to their respective contexts), yet there is a sense in which they are saying the same thing, as robust as in the case of (1)-(4). Then I will provide cases in which two speakers are using the same sentence, but when we report them as same-saying, the report comes out false.

### *§3.1. Different meanings, different contents, same thing said*

Imagine a situation in which Aisha, Byeong and Carlos have attended Prof. Zwirnsky's lecture on Montague on Monday evening. During the lecture, Byeong tells Carlos:

(8) I really like this lecture.

Several days later, in a conversation with Carlos about recent lectures that they have attended, Aisha says:

(9) I really liked Prof. Zwirnsky's lecture on Montague last Monday.

Carlos may then truly reply to Aisha:

(10) That's what Byeong said, too.

The sentences used by Aisha and Byeong are different, and so are their lexical meanings. What is more, the differences at stake are significant: where (8) contains a demonstrative, (9) contains a complex definite description, and where (8) contains the present tense, (9) contains the past tense. The Kaplanian contents associated with (8) and (9) are also different, since the former involves Byeong and the latter Aisha. Despite all this, the report in (10) is ambiguous and has a true, sloppy reading, reporting Byeong to have said that *he* liked Zwirnsky's lecture.

This reading will be dominant if, for instance, it is common knowledge in the context of (10) that Byeong has no idea who Aisha is and could not have said anything explicitly about her.

§3.2. *Same meanings, different things said*

Just as using the same sentence is not required for same-saying, it is not enough either.

Consider the following pair of dialogues:

(i) *de se* assertion

(11) I am a fool. (Aisha talking to Carlos)

(12) I am a fool. (Byeong talking to Carlos)

(13) That's what Aisha said, too. (Carlos's reply to Byeong)

(ii) *de te* assertion

(14) You are a fool. (Prof. Zwirnisky talking to Aisha, overheard by Carlos)

(15) You are a fool. (Carlos talking to Byeong)

(16) That's what Prof. Zwirnisky said, too. (Carlos talking to Byeong again)

There is an interesting asymmetry between the 1<sup>st</sup> person and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun in how they behave in reported speech. Consider (13). As it stands, it has two readings: a strict reading, which reports Aisha to have said that *Byeong* was a fool, and a sloppy reading, which reports her as having said that *she herself* was a fool. If it is, say, common knowledge in the context of (13) that Aisha would have never said such a thing about Byeong, the immediately available reading of (13) will be its sloppy reading, and (13) will be true in virtue of Aisha's having uttered (11). However, if we try the same sort of sloppy report by simply replacing 'I' by 'you', such a report will be normally unavailable. Unless there is something special about

the context of the same-saying report (more on which will be said below), (16) will not be perceived as ambiguous, but as downright false (assuming that Prof. Zwirnsky never said that *Byeong* was a fool).

The asymmetry between the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun is even more striking. Consider the following case, minimally different from (i) or (ii):

(iii) *de re* assertion

(17) She is a fool. (Prof. Zwirnsky, talking of Aisha)

(18) She is a fool. (Carlos, pointing at Deeti)

(19) That's what Professor Zwirnsky said, too. (in reply to Carlos)

Again, in an ordinary context, (19), as it stands, is not ambiguous. Only one reading seems to be available, namely, the one on which Zwirnsky said that Deeti was a fool.

To forestall a possible misunderstanding, I am not claiming that there is no sense whatsoever in which Zwirnsky in (14) and Carlos in (15) could be taken to have said the same thing. For instance, we may take them to be same-saying insofar as they are both saying *of their addressee* that he or she is a fool. But if this should serve as grounds for reporting what they said as being the same, the mere report in (16) won't do. In general, what is further required is that the reporter should make it explicit that the addressee was someone else, as in:

(20) That's what Professor Zwirnsky said, too, *to Aisha*. (Carlos talking to Byeong)

The report in (20) is, again, ambiguous between a sloppy reading, on which Zwirnsky said to Aisha that *she* was a fool, and a strict reading, on which Zwirnsky is reported as having said to Aisha that *Byeong* was a fool.

With the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun, one can similarly report that the same thing has been said if one makes it explicit that it was said *about* different people. Thus the following report, based on Zwirnsky's utterance of (17), becomes correct:



(21) That's what Professor Zwirnisky said, too, about Aisha.

There is, then, a significant asymmetry between *de se* assertion and the other cases, since the former, unlike the latter, is such that the reporter does not have to make it explicit that the reportee was talking about herself or himself.<sup>4</sup> This asymmetry raises the following problem. Suppose that Kaplanian contents play the role of what is said. Now, (11) and (12) have different contents, and still, in an important sense, they say the same thing: in both cases, the speaker is saying of herself or himself that she or he is a fool. This sense of same-saying is further reflected in the fact that, properly disambiguated, the report in (13) is true. Now, a Kaplanian might think that this is because the sentences uttered in (11) and (12) are the same. However, this explanation won't work. Take (14)-(15) and (17)-(18). There, too, the sentences uttered are the same, but we do not get a sloppy reading for either (16) or (19). Those reports are not perceived as ambiguous, but as false. This shows that something was missing in the account that the Kaplanian approach gave us for the *de se* cases in the first place.

#### §4. *De se* assertion vs. the other senses of 'what is said'

It is possible that what I have described as a received view may well no longer be one. There is a growing number of Kaplan's followers who, while fully endorsing his *semantics*, do not want to identify semantic content with what is said. Among such semi-Kaplanians one finds e.g. Salmon (1986), Soames (2002), Predelli (2005), Cappelen and Lepore (2005), to mention only a few. What their views have in common is the idea that the notion of what is said is too versatile and too heavily context-dependent to be possible to capture by means of the notion

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<sup>4</sup> Note that it is sometimes possible to have sloppy same-saying reports even with the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person, without making it explicit that the person talked to or about was someone else. Here is a tentative example. Suppose that Byeong and Carlos had a blind date each on Saturday evening. On Sunday, when Aisha asks him how the date went, Byeong tells her, "She was obnoxious." Later, Carlos, talking about his own date, tells Aisha, "She was obnoxious." Aisha may then truly reply "Byeong said that, too." The report is acceptable because the context makes it sufficiently clear that Byeong must have been talking *of his own* date. My point is not that sloppy same-saying reports with the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person are impossible, but rather, that they are unavailable in ordinary contexts.

of content.

One of the first to have pointed out that Kaplan's identification of semantic content with what is said was unwarranted was David Lewis:

“Unless we give it some special technical meaning, the locution ‘what is said’ is very far from univocal. It can mean the propositional content, in Stalnaker's sense (horizontal or diagonal). It can mean the exact words. I suspect that it can mean almost anything in between” (1980: 97):

In addition to the senses mentioned by Lewis, there is also was Ziff (1972) called the *implication sense* of what is said. Suppose that Byeong is thinking of enrolling in Prof. Blanchet's logic class and asks Aisha what she thought about it. She says:

(22) I don't think I've ever been in such a boring class in my whole life.

Then he asks Deeti, and she says:

(23) That class is a sheer waste of time!

It is easy to imagine Byeong replying to Deeti:

(24) That's what Aisha said, too.

Reports such as (24) are very natural and ubiquitous, but the relevant sense of same-saying cannot be captured by either lexical meaning or Kaplanian content, or even any combination of the two. This presses even further the worry whether one could ever account for the notion of what is said by pinning it down to something as stiff as the notion of semantic content.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of the present discussion, the plurality of senses connected with the locution 'what is said' raises the following worry: the sort of cases that I brought up in section 3.1. against the Kaplanian view, aren't they just another garden-variety of the many senses of 'what is said'? In the remainder of this section, my goal will be to show that there is a significant

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<sup>5</sup> Note that for radical contextualists such as Recanati (2004), the context-dependence of what is said serves as evidence to argue that pragmatics intrudes into semantics. As for those who, against such objections, defend a purely semantic notion of what is said, see e.g. Bach (2001), (2002).

difference between reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion and reports such as (24), which rely on a much looser sense of "saying the same thing".

Reconsider (24). Even if we take this report to be true in the context at stake, someone well-informed about Aisha's utterance of (21) may justifiably challenge Byeong (the reporter) as follows:

(25) No, Aisha didn't quite say that. She only said that she had never been in such a boring class. That need not mean that the class is a waste of time.

Presented with such a challenge, Byeong will normally either retract or somehow qualify his report, for instance as follows:

(26) OK, she didn't quite say that, but that's what she meant.

This retraction doesn't necessarily show that the report in (24) was false.<sup>6</sup> But what it does show is that the sense of same-saying relevant to the truth of such reports is not its most literal sense, but rather, a looser sense. Now, compare this with the case of *de se* assertion:

(27) *Aisha*: I am hungry.

(28) *Carlos*: I am hungry.

(29) *Byeong*: Aisha said that, too.

(30) *Deeti*: ?No, she didn't quite say that. She only said that *she* was hungry.

Faced with Deeti's challenge, Byeong will not retract his report in (29) – rather, he will point out that he was precisely reporting Aisha as saying that *she* was hungry, and that Deeti simply failed to disambiguate his report properly. Once again, there is a striking similarity with VP-ellipsis:

(31) *Carlos*: I love my wife.

(32) *Aisha*: So does Byeong.

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<sup>6</sup> Some will be tempted to see the challenge in (24) and Byeong's retraction in (25) as evidence that the report in (24) had been false all along. If so, this would make my point even more straightforward, since, as we will shortly see, reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion cannot be challenged by "she didn't quite say that" and remain literally true, unlike reports such as (24).

(33) *Deeti*: ?No, he doesn't. He only loves his own wife.

Deeti's objection in (33) is off the target, just as it was in (30). In both cases, her attempt at denying her interlocutor's report merely emphasizes the fact that the report was ambiguous – she is denying the reading not intended by the reporter so as precisely to assert the intended reading, which is why (30) and (33) sound infelicitous.

The lesson to be drawn from these examples is that reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion pattern differently from such reports in the other cases known from the literature. In those other cases, there is evidence that the locution 'what is said' is used *loosely* rather than *literally*.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the sense of same-saying deployed in reports of *de se* assertion belongs squarely among literal uses.<sup>8</sup>

## §5. Towards a solution

My aim in this paper has been to point out some problems for the received view regarding indexicals' contribution to the asserted content, on which regardless of whether we use the first, second or third person pronoun, the content, or *what is said*, will be the same provided that the referent is the same. I have argued that the received view can only handle a limited range of cases, and that there is no straightforward amendment that would allow it to handle the rest. In particular, the idea that speakers who say “I am hungry” may be truly reported to have said the same thing because they have used the same sentence is unsatisfactory, as I

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<sup>7</sup> There need not be a *sharp* distinction between loose and literal uses – it is enough for my argument that there be uses that are more literal than others. Also, let me stress once again that a report in which 'what is said' is used loosely need not be *ipso facto* false. All that matters is that, if challenged, the reporter feels the need of qualifying or retracting his or her report.

<sup>8</sup> Let me acknowledge that the range of patterns that one would need to look at in order to provide a thorough account of same-saying reports goes far beyond the sorts of case that I have considered here. For instance, suppose that Aisha says “The logic class is terribly boring” and that Byeong tells Prof. Blanchet “Your class is terribly boring. That's what Aisha said, too.” One should be able to challenge Byeong by pointing out that Aisha never said to Prof. Blanchet that her class was boring, or even that Prof. Blanchet's class is boring. While such cases involving definite descriptions seem to fall on the 'literal' side of what is said, they also exhibit certain features of looseness. Although it would be interesting and worthwhile to compare same-saying report patterns in the *de se* cases and the cases involving definite descriptions, that would be a separate issue with only indirect bearings on the more basic distinction on which I have been focusing in this paper.

argued in section 3. On the one hand, speakers who say “She is hungry” may be truly reported to have said the same thing only if their uses of 'she' refer to the same individual (or else, if the reporter makes it explicit that the speakers were talking *about* different individuals). On the other hand, there are cases of *de se* assertion in which speakers are truly reported as same-saying even though they are using sentences whose lexical meanings may be very different. In section 4, I looked at another approach to the notion of what is said, which holds that this notion, as well as the relation of same-saying, are just too heavily context-dependent to be analyzable by means of the notion of semantic content. While acknowledging that we may often report same-saying in cases in which neither the Kaplanian contents nor the *de se* contents are the same, I showed that there was nevertheless a significant difference between these reports, which are easy to challenge and thus suggest that the relevant sense of 'what is said' is a loose one, and reports of same-saying in the cases of *de se* assertion, which, when challenged, reveal that there was genuine ambiguity in the report and thus line up with the (more) literal uses of the locution 'what is said'.<sup>9</sup>

In the remainder of the paper, I would like to propose a novel account of what is said, and of the content of assertion, motivated, on the one hand, by Lewis's account of *de se* attitudes and, on the other, by certain independent motivations regarding the notion of semantic content (cf. Stojanovic (2009)). My proposal, in a nutshell, is to model the asserted content, in the sort of cases discussed in this paper, as a property; or, more precisely, a function from sequences containing individual, times, worlds, and other parameters needed, into truth values. However, what is crucial is that speakers do not assert such properties (or functions) *simpliciter*: rather, they assert them *about*, or *with respect to*, or *of* various objects, places, events, people – and sometimes, of course, of themselves. In other words, the relations of *saying* and of *asserting*

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<sup>9</sup> Let me note that the data that I have presented, and the related problems for the Kaplanian view that I have raised, need not be seen as insuperable obstacles. Perhaps there are amendments to the view that would enable it to handle the data. However, the most straightforward ones fall short of accounting for the cases discussed, and for what seems to be a privileged status that the first person pronoun has not only in the realm of thought (as has been long known from the literature on *de se* attitudes and on the essential indexical), but also in language.

are not to be viewed as binary relations (between the speaker and that which is said/asserted), but rather, as (at least) ternary relations among the speaker, that which is said/asserted, and that about which it is said or asserted.

Let me first illustrate the idea with some examples, before discussing it in greater detail. Suppose that, pointing at a work of art, I simply say “Impressive!” Then I will be saying something *about* that work of art, and what I will be saying of it is that it is impressive. In other words, the property of being impressive is what I assert *of* the work of art at stake. Similarly, if, talking of that same work, I now say “This work is impressive,” what I have said is, I suggest, again simply the property of impressiveness, and it is again asserted *about* that work of art.<sup>10</sup>

Just as speakers may say something about various things or people, they may say things *about themselves*. For instance, if Deeti says “I am hungry”, I suggest that we consider what is said to be the property of being hungry, and it is this property that Deeti asserts *of herself*. Although assertion *de se* is correlated with the use of the first person pronoun, I would like to leave it open, at least as a theoretical possibility, that using the first person pronoun is neither necessary nor sufficient in order to *self*-assert a property.

As a third example, suppose that, pointing at Byeong, I say “He is late”. I will be talking about Byeong, and saying *of* him that he is late. What I assert, I suggest, is the property of being late, and I assert it of, or with respect to, Byeong. Importantly, however, the property of being late is itself a *relational* property: people are not late *simpliciter*, but are late *for* some thing or another. Thus when I say “He is late”, not only will I be talking about Byeong, but I may – and typically will – be also talking about some event, for which I claim Byeong to be late. If I am talking about tonight's concert, and Byeong is late to the concert, what I say is true, but if I am talking about the deadline for a project submission, and Byeong meets it,

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<sup>10</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I ignore here the issue of whether in saying that something is impressive, one is also saying something about oneself, viz. that the thing at stake is impressive from *their* point of view. This idea, briefly defended in Stojanovic (2007), has been further pursued in Pearson (2012).

what I say is false. In either case, though, I assert the same content (or so I suggest). It is the property or, if you prefer, the relation, of being late, which, in the one case, I assert of Byeong and of the concert, and in the other, of Byeong and of the project submission.<sup>11</sup>

As may already be seen from these examples, there is an important difference between Lewis's account of attitudes and the present account of assertion. For Lewis, attitudes like beliefs remain binary relations between the attitude holder and the content of the attitude (which is property), because the content is *always* self-ascribed. For example, the belief that Aisha expresses by saying, in reference to Carlos, "He is hungry", would presumably have for its content the property of attending (perceptually or otherwise) to a male individual who is hungry, and Aisha would self-ascribe that property. (Alternatively, the property that Aisha would self-ascribe is that of inhabiting a world in which Carlos is hungry.) Regardless of whether this is indeed a plausible way of generalizing the Lewisian account of (genuine) *de se* attitudes to *de re* attitudes, it strikes me as not the most promising proposal when it comes to assertion. Rather, the option that I will explore fully acknowledges the distinction between *self-asserting* a content vs. asserting it about something or someone else.

My proposal will combine the following ingredients, all of which I believe to be motivated by further independent considerations:

(i) a notion of *content* (and even, arguably, of *semantic* content) that is not propositional but is, rather, to be modeled by functions that take sequences that contain not only a possible world, and a time, but other parameters as well, to truth values. In full generality, it will be

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, the more complex the expressions we start looking at, the more difficult it will be to decide what belongs to the asserted content, and what to that about which the content is asserted. To give you a hint of the complexities that may start arising, suppose that at a conference, I say "Most people are philosophers." What is the content asserted, and what is it asserted of? One option would be to say that in such cases, the content is a function invariant in the argument of the individual(s) at which it is evaluated (or, in other words, a proposition). But another plausible option would be to say that it is still a property, though not the property of being a philosopher that would have been said "of most people." Rather, it is the property satisfied by an object (such as an event or a situation) when most people *at it* are philosophers; a property that, in our example, I would be asserting of the conference about which I am talking. This suggestion is, of course, to be argued for. For the sake of simplicity, I will focus in this paper on the simpler cases, acknowledging the complexities to which quantifier phrases may well lead us.

functions that take a sequence (or a pair) of worlds, a sequence of times, and an assignment of values to variables, to truth values; but for our purposes, simpler functions that, in addition to a world and a time, take an individual, or a pair of individuals, will most often suffice.<sup>12</sup>

(ii) a notion of '*what is talked about*', which, as illustrated with the previous example, I take to be an intuitive notion. I also believe that this notion underlies an important tradition in theory of direct reference, namely, the one that can be found in Keith Donnellan's work,<sup>13</sup> which itself follows the line of Peter Strawson's thought that words don't refer, speakers do.

(iii) a notion of *self*-asserting, in addition to the notion of asserting; although the two are, of course, correlated, neither is reducible to the other. (On the other hand, the distinction itself could be an instance of a more general one, between an action directed at some object vs. the same action directed at the agent himself or herself.)

(iv) a notion of *same-saying*, which is relational and will serve, in turn, as a guide to the notion of what is said. The idea is that the notion of what is said emerges from an equivalence class over utterances, viz. those whose speakers same-say. The primacy of the relation of same-saying over the unary notion of what is said has been defended, for instance, by Everett (2000). For our purposes, it does not matter whether the one is more basic than the other. What matters, though, is that when it comes to canvassing for speakers' intuitions, it is those regarding same-saying that are crucial, the "direct" intuitions on what is said being, upon scrutiny, only indirect.

(v)

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<sup>12</sup> I have argued elsewhere (e.g. Stojanovic (2009), (forthcoming) that the reference of indexicals, though relevant to truth value, is not part of semantic content. In certain respects, that was also Lewis's own take on semantic content: see Lewis (1980) (though he takes it to be, rather, a function from context-index pairs to truth values). Several other people have argued, albeit to different degrees, that semantic content is not fully propositional (cf. e.g. Carston (2007)). As for the idea that this is also the kind of content that may be prove fruitful in accounting for *de re* attitudes, see e.g. Ninan (ms.).

<sup>13</sup> The vast literature on Donnellan (1966) tends to focus exclusively on the referential/ attributive distinction, neglecting the fact that the notion of referential use crucially involves the idea that the speaker can say something true *about* a thing or a person, even when the latter is not singled out by the description itself.



## §6. The proposal, and its application to the cases discussed

Before going back to the cases discussed in sections 1 through 3, it may help to flesh out my proposal somewhat more formally. I will do it by laying down two definitions, one concerning semantic content, and the other, the same-saying relation and the truth conditions for same-saying reports.

**Def. 1.** The **semantic content** of an expression  $\phi$ , noted  $sc(\phi)$ , is a function from sequences of the form  $(w_1, w_2, t_1, t_2, i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n, \dots)$  to truth values (where the  $w$ 's are possible world parameters, the  $t$ 's, time parameters, and the  $i$ 's, individual parameters), defined as follows:

1.  $sc(R(x_1, \dots, x_n))(w_1, w_2, t_1, t_2, i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n, \dots) = 1$  iff  $(i_1, \dots, i_n) \in Int('R')(w_1, t_1)$   
where  $Int$  is the interpretation function, which maps  $n$ -place relation 'R' to a function from world-time pairs to sets of  $n$ -tuples of individuals
2.  $sc(\phi \wedge \psi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff  $sc(\phi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = sc(\psi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = 1$ ;  
 $sc(\diamond \phi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff there is  $w_1'$  accessible from  $w_1$  s.t.  $sc(\phi)(w_1', \text{etc.}) = 1$ ;  
 $sc(@\phi)(w_1, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff  $sc(\phi)(w_2, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$ ;  
similarly for other connectives, intensional and indexical operators
3.  $sc(\phi(\alpha))(w_1, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff  $(\phi(x_i))(w_1, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$   
where  $\alpha$  is a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> p. pronoun, and  $x_i$  a newly introduced variable

Although the definition may look complicated, the underlying ideas are extremely simple, so let me make two or three remarks to explain what is going on here. First, the inclusion of two possible world parameters and, similarly, two time parameters, is a standard move known as 'double-indexing', and is required for dealing with embedded occurrences of modal and temporal indexicals (in particular, 'actually', noted '@', and 'now'; cf. Kamp (1971)); though we are not concerned in this paper with modal and temporal indexicals, let me still note that different utterances of a sentence containing 'actually' or 'now', even if made in different worlds and at different times, will be associated with the same semantic content. This also shows that the notion of semantic content as defined here comes much closer to Kaplan's notion of *character* than his notion of *content*. But there are interesting differences. Recall

that Kaplanian characters are functions from context-world-time triples to truth values, and that special requirements are placed upon the context parameter (viz. that the agent be located at the context location at the time and in the world of the context). Semantic content (as defined above) does not deploy any context parameter, and no agent parameter either. Rather, when it comes to indexicals, all that they do is contribute a variable-like slot that requires evaluating the content *at an individual* before being able to assign it a truth value. In other words, the semantic content defined above is pretty much what one would get if one took a Kaplanian content and merely abstracted over all referential values contributed by indexicals.

Relatedly, note that whether we have a first, second or third person pronoun, and whether it is a feminine or a masculine pronoun, none of this has any impact on semantic content. The idea is not to eliminate altogether such lexically encoded constraints (such as being a speaker in the case of 'I', an addressee in the case of 'you', female or male in the case of 'she' and 'he'); but it is to remove them from the level of semantics (or, more precisely, from the level of *truth-conditional* semantics) to another level; for discussion, see Stojanovic (forthcoming). With this in mind, let me turn to the second definition:

**Def. 2.** The **same-saying** relation obtains between any two utterances whose expressions' semantic contents are the same. However, the truth conditions for **reporting** same-saying are defined as follows. Let  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  be two utterances. Then  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  may be truly reported as saying the same thing if and only if they same-say (in the sense defined above) and for every parameter to which their semantic content is sensitive in truth value, one of the following obtains:

- (a) the speakers of  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  self-assert the content (with respect to the parameter at stake);
- (b) one of the speakers self-asserts it, while the other asserts it about the other speaker

(w.r. to the parameter at stake);

(c) the two speakers assert the content (w.r. to the that parameter) about

one and the same thing or individual (and this is known to the reporter);

(d) the reporter makes it explicit, or else the context makes it sufficiently clear, that the

two speakers assert the content (w.r. to that parameter) about different things or

individuals; or else, the context makes it irrelevant whether or not they assert it about

the same thing/individual.

This, too, may look a bit complicated, but again, the idea is simple. What the definition does is describe the conditions under which we would truly report two people as having said the same thing. A necessary condition is that the semantic contents associated with the sentences that the speakers were using should be the same; but that does not suffice. What is further required is that they either both self-assert this content, or else that they assert it about the same thing or individual, or in case they don't, that this is either irrelevant, or explicit, or made sufficiently clear in the context of the report.<sup>14</sup>

Before moving on to explaining how this proposal handles the cases discussed in the first half of the paper, let me pause for a second on the irrelevance clause, because it will not show up again later in discussion, yet it is important for the proposal to work in full generality. Suppose that I see Byeong rushing by, and he tells me “I am late”. A short time afterwards, I witness a conversation between Aisha and Carlos, with Aisha saying “Byeong is late”. I may reply “That's what he said, too.” Will I be speaking truly or not? It will depend on the context.

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<sup>14</sup> Note that the conditions specifying when we can truly report two people as having *said* the same thing might eventually fall out of the more general conditions for reporting two people as having *done* the same thing. Suppose that Aisha scratches her head, and that Carlos scratches his head. We may report them as having done the same thing (viz. scratching one's head). Now suppose that that Aisha scratches her head, and that Carlos scratches *Aisha's* head. We may report them, again, as having done the same thing (viz. scratching Aisha's head). To be sure, at this point, this is merely an analogy. It remains an open issue whether the two are really an instance of the same phenomenon. (I am grateful to Ruth Millikan for pressing on this analogy at a talk that I once gave.)

If all that is at stake is, say, why Byeong was in rush, then the issue what he was late for may well be irrelevant; thus if Byeong, in saying “I am late”, was talking about catching a bus that will take him to the train station, and if Aisha was talking about the departure of the train itself, that need not make my report false. However, suppose that what matters is whether Byeong will make it to his train, and that it is known that, were Byeong to miss the bus, he would still have plenty of time to catch a taxi and make it to his train. In such a context, if Byeong says “I am late” talking about *catching the bus*, and Aisha says “He is late” talking about *catching the train*, we will be perhaps more reluctant to consider the same-saying report as a true one. One great feature of my proposal is that it accounts equally well for both cases.

In the remainder of this section, let me, then, go back to the cases discussed in sections 2 and 3, and show how my proposal handles them. Recall the kind of example that motivated the Kaplanian view:

(34) *Aisha*: I am hungry.

(35) *Carlos (pointing at Aisha)*: She is hungry.

(36) *Deeti*: That's what she said, too.

What needs to be accounted for is, on the one hand, the intuition that what is said in (34) is the same as what is said in (35), and, on the other, the related intuition that the report in (36) is true. On the account that I am proposing, the content associated with (34) is a function that takes an individual (and a time, a world, and other things) and returns value True iff that individual is hungry (at that time and in that world). What is more, Aisha is not asserting this content *simpliciter*, but rather, she is asserting it of herself. Now, the content associated with (35) is that very same function, and Carlos is asserting this content *about Aisha*. The contents asserted in (34) and in (35) are, then, the same: it is one and the same function, viz. the one that corresponds to the property of being hungry. Furthermore, this content is self-asserted by Aisha, and asserted about Aisha by Carlos, hence the conditions for truly reporting same-

saying are met. The report in (36) is true, and this is what, in turn, grounds the intuition that (34) and (35) “say the same thing”.

My account relies on the idea that it is hard to disentangle intuitions about what is said from intuitions about truth values of same-saying reports. To see this, consider a case of utterances that same-say in the sense of the definition proposed (viz. are associated with the same semantic content), yet fail to trigger the intuition of same-saying; a case, in other words, that may appear to pose a problem for my view. Compare (34) and (35) with the following pair (where (38) is the same as (35)):

(37) *Aisha (pointing at Byeong)*: He is hungry.

(38) *Carlos (pointing at Aisha)*: She is hungry.

(39) *Deeti*: That's what she said, too.

According to the Kaplanian view, the content asserted in (37) is different from the one asserted in (38), the first being the proposition that Byeong is hungry (at a given time), and the second, the proposition that Aisha is hungry. On my view, on the other hand, the semantic contents associated with (37) and (38) are the same: it is one and the same function (roughly, the property of being hungry). However, the report in (39) is false as it stands, and intuitively, (37) and (38) are not perceived as same-saying. *Prima facie*, this is a problem for my account – but only *prima facie*. My proposal predicts that the intuition that (37) and (38) say “different things” derives from the intuition of falsehood of reports such as (39). The proposal further predicts that the report in (39) is false for the following reason. Since the reporter in (39) does not explicitly say about whom Aisha was talking when she said what she said, the default interpretation is that she must have been talking about the same person as Carlos, hence about herself. Since (by assumption) she did not say that she was hungry, the report comes out false.

It is important to realize that the falsehood of the report in (39) does not entail that Aisha and Carlos asserted different contents. They asserted the same content (or so I submit), but they asserted it *about* different people: Aisha asserted it about Byeong, and Carlos, about

Aisha. Since the reporter does not make it explicit that different people were talked about, the report in (39) is implicitly taken to report Aisha to have said about the person that Carlos was talking about, i.e. Aisha herself, that she was hungry. This explanation is further supported by the fact that if the reporter explicitly indicates the person about whom Aisha said what she said, the report becomes true:

(40) *Deeti*: That's what she said, too, about Byeong.

The account of the falsehood of the report in (39) applies immediately to the cases from section 3.2., in which the sentence "she is hungry" is used in reference to different people, and which were problematic for those who wished to handle *de se* assertion by appealing to the sameness of the sentences uttered.

As for *de se* assertion itself, what needs to be accounted for is the ambiguity of reports such as (42) below:

(41) *Aisha*: I am hungry.

(42) *Byeong*: Carlos said that, too.

Given that Aisha in (41) asserts *of herself* the property of being hungry, there are two ways (namely, clauses (a) and (b) in Def. 2) for the report in (42) to come out true: Carlos should have either self-asserted that same property, or he should have asserted it about Aisha herself. The former corresponds to the sloppy reading, the latter, to the strict reading.

The same explanation applies to the cases from section 3.1., which were also problematic for those who wished to handle *de se* assertion by the sameness of the sentences uttered:

(43) *Byeong (on Monday)*: I really like this lecture.

(44) *Aisha*: I really liked Prof. Zwirnsky's lecture on Montague last Monday.

(45) *Carlos*: That's what Byeong said, too.

What we want to account for is the ambiguity in (45) between reporting Byeong to have said that Aisha liked the lecture at stake (= the "strict" reading) vs. that he himself liked it (=

the “sloppy” reading). The ambiguity falls out again from the fact that the target-utterance of (45), viz. Aisha's utterance of (44), is a case of self-assertion, hence both clause (a) and clause (b) of Def. 2 may apply. In particular, the fact that Byeong is self-asserting the property that Aisha, too, is self-asserting (viz. the property of liking Zwirnsky's lecture) makes (45) true (under this disambiguation).

Now, this case is more subtle than the straightforward case of *de se* assertion that we had in (41)-(42). There is the issue of time-sensitivity that I said I would set aside in his paper (cf. fn. 3). Even more importantly, the sentences used by Byeong and Aisha are different, as one contains a complex demonstrative while the other contains a definite description. Given that I did not say anything about the way that either contributes to semantic content, how can we be sure that (43) and (44) express the same content, so as to satisfy the first clause in Def. 2 and to qualify as same-saying? It is beyond the scope of my paper to give a thorough reply (since that would require saying much more about demonstratives and definite descriptions), so let me merely outline an explanation. It is plausible to think that, on some occurrences at least, complex demonstratives and definite descriptions work merely as devices that help the speaker make it clear to the hearer what he or she is talking about.<sup>15</sup> Thus Aisha, for instance, might have simply said “I really liked it” in a situation in which Zwirnsky's lecture is already singled out as the topic of a conversation, but in a situation in which there are a number of salient events that she might be talking about, she needs to raise in salience Zwirnsky's lecture over those other events, and one easy way to do that is by using a description like “Zwirnsky's lecture”. If we follow this line of thought, then both (43) and (44) may be associated with the same semantic content, viz. the one also associated with “I really like it”, or, for that matter, “she really likes it.” This content will be modeled by a function whose input is a sequence of worlds, times and, crucially, *pairs* of individuals, a function that returns value True when the first individual really likes the second individual (in the world and at the time of evaluation).

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<sup>15</sup> This assumption is fairly uncontroversial for complex demonstratives, though perhaps less so for definite descriptions.

So there are, then, two individual parameters to which the truth value of the semantic content associated with (43) and (44) is sensitive, and we need to make sure that one of the clauses (a) to (d) from Def. 2 applies to the second parameter as well. And indeed, clause (c) applies, since both Byeong and Aisha are asserting the content about one and the same event, viz. the lecture on Montague that Zwirnisky gave on Monday.

To conclude, in this last section I have put forward a novel account of what is said that incorporates a number of independently motivated insights: (i) a notion of semantic content that keeps very close to the lexically encoded content (thus by not including referential values of indexicals, the content associated with a sentence that contains an indexical remains nevertheless stable across contexts; on the other hand, content sometimes does not include certain lexically encoded constraints either, such as the constraint of speakerhood associated with 'I', the gender constraints associated with 'he' or 'she', etc.); (ii) a Donnellanian notion of what the speaker is talking about; (iii) a notion of *de se* assertion, or of the action of self-asserting, which is arguably just another instance of the well-known *de se* phenomena as they arise in the realm of belief and action; (iv) a grounding of the notion of 'what is said', and of our intuitions on what is said, in our practices of *reporting* people to have said the same thing.

Of course, each of these insights could be discussed at a much greater length – but doing so would amount to a much more ambitious project. In particular, when it comes to reports of what is said, there is work to be done regarding both the collection of the data and the account of those data. Issues such as how one disambiguates a report, or what distinguishes a loose report from a literal one (briefly discussed in sect. 4), remain important open issues, to which I hope to return some time in future.

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