

The Language Revolution
Russell Marcus
Fall 2011

Class 5
Frege's Intensionalism



Overview

Intensionalism and Extensionalism

- ‘Intension’ is another word for ‘meaning’.
- The extension of a term is the things to which it refers
 - ▶ names, singular terms: the things named
 - ▶ predicates: the objects which have those properties
 - Creature with a heart
 - Creature with a kidney
 - same extensions
 - different intensions
- An intensionalist believes in the existence of meanings.
- Extensionalists deny that there are meanings.
 - ▶ Quine we can have meaningfulness without meanings.
- Frege’s “The Thought” is a classic statement of intensionalism.

Thoughts

- Frege uses the unfortunate term 'thought' to refer to meanings of assertions.
 - senses (or meanings) of sentences
- Sentences can be used to express thoughts.
- The common contemporary term for the meanings of sentences is 'propositions'.
- But, we know that Frege is no idealist.
 - Distinguish be psychological from the objective
 - Thoughts, in Frege's sense, are not psychological
- According to Frege's Context Principle, the basic unit of meaning is the assertion.
- The proposition, then, is the most fundamental unit of meaning, of language itself.

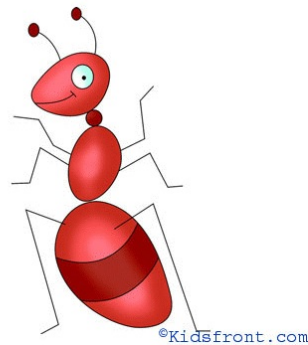
The Third Realm

- Frege's central claim in "The Thought" is that propositions are neither concrete, material objects nor psychological objects.
- "A third realm must be recognized. What belongs to this corresponds with ideas, in that it cannot be perceived by the senses, but with things, in that it needs no bearer to the contents of whose consciousness to belong" (302).

Frege's Arguments

Meanings Are Not Concrete

- Meanings are not to be identified with concrete objects (“things”).
- Meanings of sentences can be either true or false.
- Objects can’t be true or false.
 - ▶ “Is a picture, then, as a mere visible and tangible thing, really true, and a stone, a leaf, not true? Obviously one would not call a picture true unless there were an intention behind it” (290).



Meanings Are Not Psychological

- Meanings might be ideas in our minds.
- But Frege wants to distinguish the psychological from the objective.
 - “One might come to believe that logic deals with the mental process of thinking and the psychological laws in accordance with which it takes place. This would be a misunderstanding of the task of logic... In order to avoid this misunderstanding and to prevent the blurring of the boundary between psychology and logic, I assign to logic the task of discovering the laws of truth, not of assertion or thought” (289-90).
- Propositions are identified by their truth conditions.
- Still, we need reasons (arguments) to show that propositions are not psychological.

Four Characteristics of Ideas

- I1. Ideas are not available to the senses.
- I2. Ideas are available to consciousness.
- I3. Ideas are mind-dependent.
- I4. Ideas are private.
 - ▶ Frege shows that propositions ('thoughts') are not ideas.

I1. Ideas are not available to the senses

- Propositions share I1 with ideas, which is mainly why people tend to confuse them with mental objects.
- We shouldn't think that everything that is unavailable to our senses is psychological.
 - ▶ “Outside one's inner world one would have to distinguish the proper outer world of sensible, perceptible things from the realm of the non-sensibly perceptible” (309).
- Mathematical objects are also ordinarily taken to be immaterial but non-mental objects.
- Propositions, like circles or sets or numbers, now tend to be called abstract objects.
 - ▶ not located in space or time
 - ▶ lack causal powers
 - ▶ have essential characteristics

12. Ideas are available to consciousness

- We can be aware of a proposition.
- But it is the idea, not the proposition, that is available to consciousness.
 - “What is a content of my consciousness, my idea, should be sharply distinguished from what is an object of my thought” (306).
- Indeed, we can not apprehend the proposition directly.
 - “The thought, in itself immaterial, clothes itself in the material garment of a sentence and thereby becomes comprehensible to us” (292).
- Propositions are the contents of my thoughts (ideas), but they are not the thoughts (ideas) themselves.

13. Ideas are mind-dependent

14. Ideas are private

- Propositions are mind-independent.
- People have different ideas concerning the same propositions.
- Ideas, being the contents of independent consciousness, can not be shared.
- But, we can all think about the same theorem.
 - ▶ “If the thought I express in the Pythagorean theorem can be recognized by others just as much as by me then it does not belong to the content of my consciousness, I am not its bearer; yet I can, nevertheless, recognize it to be true. However, if it is not the same thought at all which is taken to be the content of the Pythagorean theorem by me and by another person, one should not really say “the Pythagorean theorem” but “my Pythagorean theorem”, “his Pythagorean theorem” and these would be different... Could the sense of my Pythagorean theorem be true while that of his was false?” (301).

Lauben/Peter/Lingens



- Lauben: “I have been wounded.”
- Peter: “Dr. Lauben has been wounded.”
- Lauben and Peter express the same proposition.
- They do so with different sentences.
- The ideas they have in their minds of the content of the sentence are different.
 - ▶ When Lauben expresses the proposition, he does so about himself.
 - ▶ When Peter expresses the proposition, he does so about another person.

Modes of Presentation

“Everyone is presented to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no-one else. So, when Dr. Lauben thinks that he has been wounded, he will probably take as a basis this primitive way in which he is presented to himself. And only Dr. Lauben himself can grasp thoughts determined in this way. But now he may want to communicate with others. He cannot communicate a thought which he alone can grasp. Therefore, if he now says, “I have been wounded”, he must use the “I” in a sense which can be grasped by others, perhaps in the sense of “he who is speaking to you at this moment”, by doing which he makes the associated conditions of his utterance serve for the expression of his thought” (298).

Ideas and Modes of Presentation

- Lauben's ideas about the proposition differ from those of Peter.
 - They have different modes of presentation of the proposition.
- The same proposition is communicated.
 - The claims have the same truth conditions.
- Different people can think about and express the same proposition.

Abstracta and Access

- Frege takes propositions (thoughts) to be abstract objects.
 - objective
 - not psychological
 - like mathematical objects
- The standard objection to the Fregean conception of mathematical and linguistic objects as abstract has to do with access.
- If mathematical objects and propositions are neither mental objects nor accessible to our senses, then it seems that we could never get to know them.
 - How can my idea be of an abstract proposition?
- Frege: apprehension
 - “One sees a thing, one has an idea, one apprehends or thinks a thought. When one apprehends or thinks a thought, one does not create it but only comes to stand in a certain relation...to what already existed beforehand” (302).

Language Independence

- Propositions, according to Frege, are mind-independent.
- They are also language-independent.
 - ‘Snow is white’
 - ‘La nieve es blanca’
- Propositions, as meanings (or senses) of sentences, aren’t essentially part of any given language.
- Propositions, remember, are the bearers of truth-values.
 - “When we call a sentence true, we really mean its sense is” (292).
- Despite the fact that propositions are independent of language, we express them in language.

Propositions, Meaning Theories, and That- Clauses

- Meaning theories contain a series of meaning clauses
 - ▶ 'snow is white' means-in-English that snow is white
- The right side of theorems like MC contains a proposition.
- Propositions are neatly expressed as that-clauses.
 - ▶ not complete sentences
 - that snow is white
 - that $2+2=4$
 - that the door is closed
 - that I am in Clinton NY
- That-clauses are names of propositions.
- They can be used as subordinate clauses in a variety of other complex sentences.

Propositions in Non-Assertive Sentences

- Is it the case that snow is white?
 - Is snow white?
- Make it the case that the door is closed.
 - Close the door.
- I believe that $2+2=4$.
- Would that I were in Puerto Rico.
 - Writing these complex sentences using that-clauses can make them more awkward.
 - But, it reveals their logical structure.

Propositions in Assertions

- Even assertions of fact are analyzable into parts.
 - ▶ “Two things must be distinguished in an indicative sentence: the content, which it has in common with the corresponding sentence-question, and the assertion. The former is the thought, or at least contains the thought” (294).
- We are considering two things:
 - ▶ The content is the sense, or the proposition.
 - ▶ The use we make of it contains other, pragmatic factors.

Frege on Pragmatics

- Pragmatics is what is left over after semantic and truth theories are settled.
 - ▶ how we use language
 - ▶ what we communicate
 - ▶ “It makes no difference to the thought whether I use the word ‘horse’, or ‘steed’ or ‘carthorse’ or ‘mare’. The assertive force does not extend over that in which these words differ. What is called mood, fragrance, illumination in a poem, what is portrayed by cadence and rhythm, does not belong to the thought” (295).
- Questions about the use of pronouns and time may belong to pragmatics as well.
 - ▶ ‘I am typing’.
 - ▶ We need a person and a time to evaluate the truth of the sentence.
 - ▶ There is a question whether the time-stamp is part of the proposition itself, or whether it is part of the pragmatics.

Frege on Time

- Frege seems to relegate questions about time to pragmatics, rather than semantics.
 - ▶ “The time of utterance is part of the expression of the thought. If someone wants to say the same today as he expressed yesterday using the word “today”, he must replace this word with “yesterday”. Although the thought is the same, its verbal expression must be different so that the sense, which would otherwise be affected by the differing times of utterance, is readjusted” (296).
- Later, Frege says that the time-stamp is essential for the expression of a complete thought, which makes it seem as if the completeness of the proposition requires the time index.
 - ▶ “The words ‘this tree is covered with green leaves’ are not sufficient by themselves for the utterance, the time of the utterance is involved as well. Without the time-indication this gives, we have no complete thought, *i.e.* no thought at all. Only a sentence supplemented by a time-indication and complete in every respect expresses a thought” (309).
- The line between semantics and pragmatics may thus look a little fuzzy.

More on Pragmatics

‘and’ and ‘but’

- ‘I am going to the movie and you are going to the concert.’
- ‘I am going to the movie but you are going to the concert.’
 - ▶ Is the difference between ‘and’ and ‘but’ one of meaning or of pragmatics?
 - ▶ Are time-stamps semantic or pragmatic?
 - ▶ For Frege, the factors which determine meaning will be only those that affect truth value.

Frege on Truth

- Frege calls truth a unique and undefinable property.
 - a misleading rhetorical flourish
- In places, Frege claims that truth is just a redundant device for asserting a sentence.
 - “It is also worthy of notice that the sentence “I smell the scent of violets” has just the same content as the sentence “it is true that I smell the scent of violets”. So it seems, then, that nothing is added to the thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth” (293).
- Frege was not a deflationist, though.
 - “And yet is it not a great result when the scientist after much hesitation and careful inquiry, can finally say, “What I supposed is true”?” (293).
- Frege does present Berkeleyan worries about correspondence.
 - “It would only be possible to compare an idea with a thing if the thing were an idea too. And then, if the first did correspond perfectly with the second, they would coincide. But this is not at all what is wanted when truth is defined as the correspondence of an idea with something real. For it absolutely essential that the reality be distinct from the idea. But then there can be no complete correspondence, no complete truth” (291).
- But the point of Frege’s worries about correspondence is to support his claim that truth is not the correspondence between ideas and the world.
- The important correspondence is between propositions and the world.

Summary:

The Nature of Propositions

- Propositions, for Frege, are the basic units of language.
- They are abstract objects, located outside of space and time.
- They are not psychological objects, but may be the contents of our ideas: we apprehend them.
- Propositions are public; they may be shared among people.
- They are mind-independent.
- They are language-independent.
- Propositions have truth conditions, and have them essentially.