

# Making sense of sense

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# plan

- ① sense in the traditional sense
- ② pros and cons of sense as intension
- ③ a different sense of sense
- ④ some examples of sense
  - ① proper names
  - ② predicate expressions
  - ③ syntactic combination

- Frege (1892): *sense* is denoting potential
- “indirect” (meta-linguistic) use of expressions: sense rather than reference matters  
e.g., *Copernicus believed that the planetary orbits are circles*  
(intended referent is not a non-existent state of affairs, but a proposition attributed to Copernicus’ beliefs)
- model of denoting potential: *intension*, i.e., function from possible worlds to referents

## observations that can be dealt with (indirect uses)

- matrix verbs expressing “propositional attitudes”
- sentences expressing identification
- conditional sentences

## counter-arguments

- mostly foundational, linguists are not excited about them
- e.g., the intensions of all tautologies are identical
- solutions: intentional logic, hyperintensional logic, property theory, structured meanings, transparent intensional logic
- features: sense is a procedure to produce intensions; structure of expressions can be viewed as part of “sense”
- price: higher-order logic, awkward models, no real linguistic applications

## my own criticism

- intension captures nothing about the “essence” of sense (hopeless to retrieve anything “meaningful” from an intension function)
- what is common in people called *Bill* in all possible worlds? — that they are all called *Bill*...

## sense as method

- an appropriate model of sense must be a **method** or **procedure** applied by the speaker for encoding a message
- the model must contain **meta-linguistic** information such as who is called *Bill*
- **interpretation is not translation** — to arrive from a sense to anything similar to, say, a proposition, a sort of **reverse engineering** is needed

## proper names

- the speaker presupposes that a convention to the effect that a label *A* is suitable for identifying the referent is part of the common ground
- *A (certain) Smith called*: we do not want to duplicate proper names as predicates
- *a guy called Bill*: names must be present in the model, anyway

## predicates: mainstream approach

- problem analogous with that of intension: model does not directly represent regularities (only meaning postulates do)
- traditional view: predicates are “properties” (abstractions)
- essential difference between proper names and predicate expressions not captured (as if predicate expressions were proper names of extensions)
- individuals (and  $n$ -tuples of individuals): metaphysically weird

- 1 sharp boundaries, pure abstractions [▶ Explain](#)
- 2 category differences — why nouns, adjectives, intransitive verbs, and where do overlaps occur? [▶ Explain](#)
- 3 arity — no flexibility in the model, much flexibility in language [▶ Explain](#)



# sharp boundaries

- the existence of the word *lady* does not compel us to posit a property “lady-ness”
- ladies need not have anything in common (**family resemblance**), model must encode relevant similarities/differences, and their associations with linguistic expressions
- accordingly, extensions can be “stretched”, model must make this possible

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# category differences

- what can be expressed by different categories is not arbitrary, this calls for explanation
- adjective/verb: *afraid* ~ *fear*, *sleepy* ~ *avoir sommeil*
- adjective/noun: *anglais* (adjective), *un Anglais* (noun); *malade* (adjective), *un malade* (noun)
- adjectives come closer to encode what could be called “property/abstraction” (and are more versatile as a consequence)
- nominality involves more arbitrary/institutionalized restrictions: the other end of the “property” vs. heterogeneous collection scale

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- as opposed to simplex expressions, predicate/argument structures are methods for encoding **analyses** of configurations
- as such, they are associated with senses, with “stretchable” extensions and family resemblances between analyses
- for example, a configuration corresponding to *marriage* can be analysed as *[sy] get married*, *[sy] marry [sy]* or even *[sy] marry [sy] to [sy]* – the sense of syntactic roles **emerge** from such constructs, and are used for analysing other configurations by virtue of them

## traditional approach

- in the unmarked case, extensions are combined; combining intensions (senses) is the marked case (“intensional contexts”) — Frege’s “indirect” uses
- the distinction is categorical, a decision has to be made in each particular case
- *Bill thinks he saw Dracula* “does not **entail**” *Bill thinks he saw Vlad Țepeș*,
- but *I saw Dracula* “**entails**” *I saw Vlad Țepeș*

# syntactic combination

## problems

- note that the argument is based on a **bottom-up, translation-based** view of interpretation
- intuitions are not this clear, and there are no empirical results supporting this

## under the “sense as method” view

- configurations that we analyse using *think, believe, see* etc. are very abstract (have meagre empirical evidence, except maybe when we deduce them from somebody’s utterances)
- therefore, encodings will be hard to “undo”
- and, yes, this is even more so when models other than the actual world are involved