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
sense in the traditional sense

- 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
pros and cons of sense as intension

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
a different sense of sense

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
some examples of sense: proper names

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
three simplifications

1. sharp boundaries, pure abstractions

2. category differences — why nouns, adjectives, intransitive verbs, and where do overlaps occur?

3. arity — no flexibility in the model, much flexibility in language
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
three simplifications

1. sharp boundaries, pure abstractions  

2. category differences — why nouns, adjectives, intransitive verbs, and where do overlaps occur?  

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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
three simplifications

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
• 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
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