Subjective Meanings

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ตายอด
คลำช้าง

The elephant is like a pot.

The elephant is like a pillar.

The elephant is like a ploughshare.

The elephant is like a plough.

etc.

Insulation via subjective operators:

The elephant is partially like a pillar.

The elephant seems like a pillar to me.

If what I am touching is representative,
the elephant is like a pillar.

Hidden subjective insulation?

A: This cake tastes great.

B: This cake tastes awful.

DE GUSTIBUS NON
EST DISPUTANDUM

A: This cake tastes great to me.

B: This cake tastes awful to me.

A: I’m in Boston.

B: I’m in New York.

A: This cake tastes great.

B: No, it tastes awful.

A: This cake tastes great.

B: No, you're wrong. It tastes awful.

TASTES GREAT!
LESS FILLING!!

Error?

Fact: tastes differ and cannot be reconciled.

But: people talk as if one can dispute facts about tastes.

Two kinds of error theories:

- people make a cognitive mistake
- grammar presents a straightjacket

This cake tastes great:

= would taste great to everyone

= on aggregate, would taste great

to any competent taster

= should taste great to anybody

She finds him handsome.

#She finds him under 45.

Relativism

“Super-subjective”:

Not only is the speaker making a claim about her perspective, the hearer is working with a claim about *his* perspective.

A: I’m in Boston.

B: No, I’m not.

Distinguish

- dependence on utterance context (*I*, *here*, *now*, ...)
- dependence on assessment/judge context (*yummy*, *might*, *if*, ...)

Basically stipulates that speaker and hearer can count as disagreeing even though all that underwrites their assertions is their own state of evidence.

Our solution:

von Fintel, Kai & Anthony S. Gillies. 2008. *Might* made right. To appear in a volume on epistemic modality, edited by Andy Egan and Brian Weatherson, Oxford University Press.

http://mit.edu/fintel/fintel-gillies-2008-mmr.pdf.

Ambiguity by Design

"This cake tastes great."

{
This cake tastes great to me
This cake tastes great to you
This cake tastes great to us
This cake tastes great to them
}

Replace

one super-subjective proposition

with

a “cloud” of standard propositions

Rule of assertion:

You can assert a cloud of propositions only if you could standardly assert at least one of them.

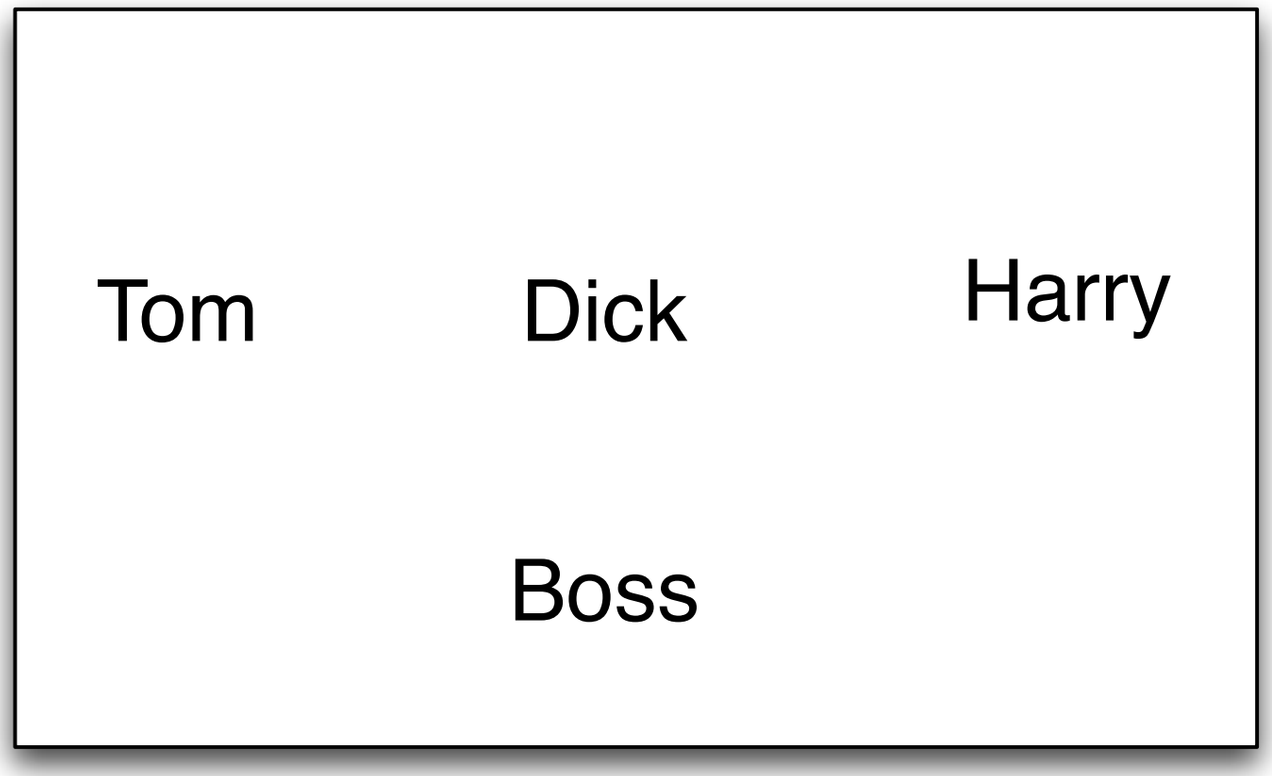
Rule for the hearer:

Respond to whatever proposition in the cloud you have business responding to.

(plus be relevant and further the common goal)

We can have our subjective cake and eat it objectively too.

Sly Pete and Mr. Stone are playing poker on a Mississippi riverboat. It is now up to Pete to call or fold. My henchman Zack sees Stone's hand, which is quite good, and signals its content to Pete. My henchman Jack sees both hands, and sees that Pete's hand is rather low, so that Stone's is the winning hand. At this point, the room is cleared. A few minutes later, Zack slips me a note which says "If Pete called, he won," and Jack slips me a note which says "If Pete called, he lost".


Tom
Dick
Harry
Boss

If he didn't tell Dick,
he told Harry

A

Tom

Dick

Harry

Boss

If he didn't tell Dick,
he told Harry

If he didn't tell Dick,
he told Tom

A

B

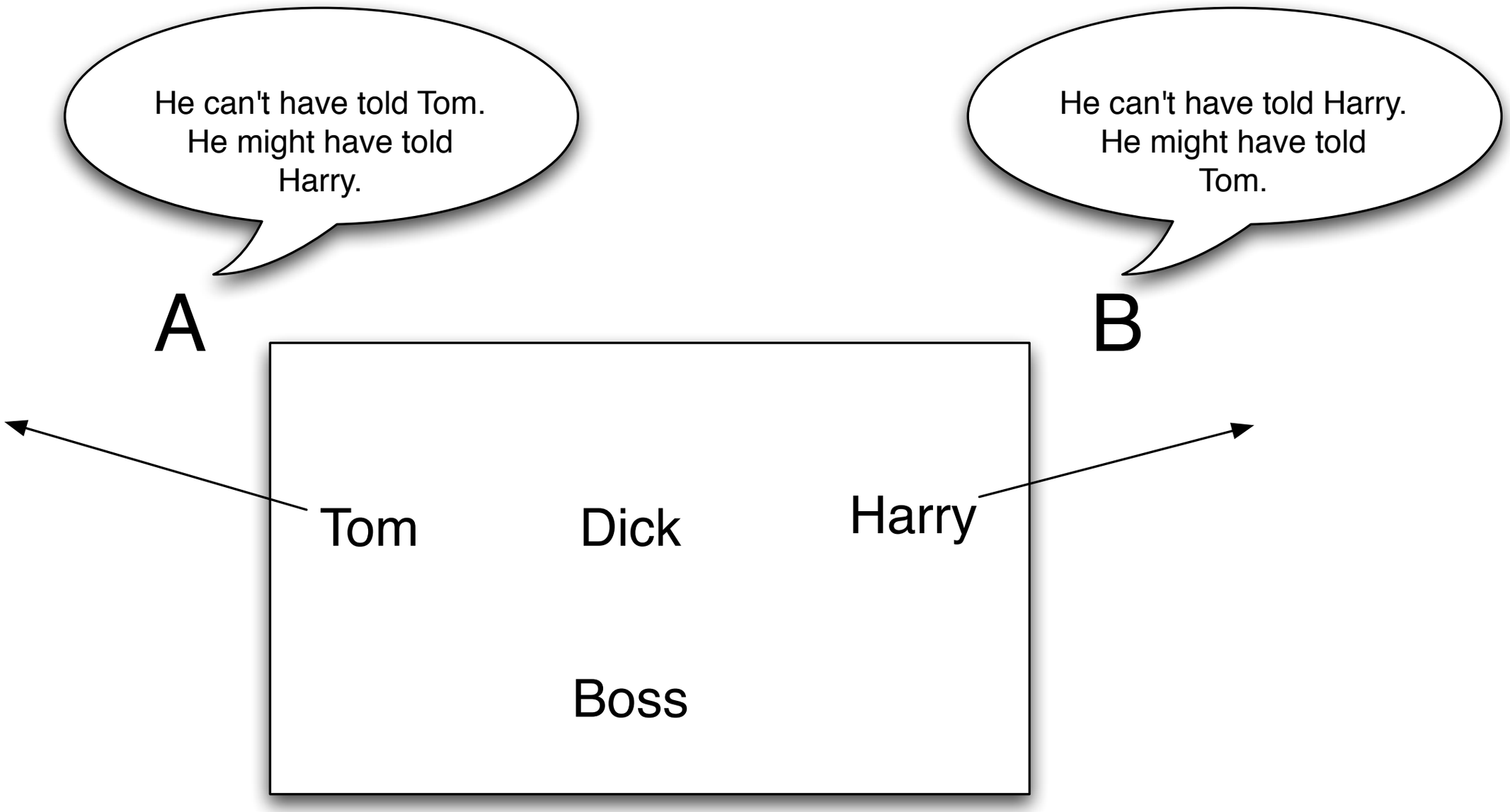
Tom

Dick

Harry

Boss

Might


He can't have told Tom.
He might have told
Harry.
He can't have told Harry.
He might have told
Tom.
A
B
Tom
Dick
Harry
Boss

Subjectivity (Rock)

?????

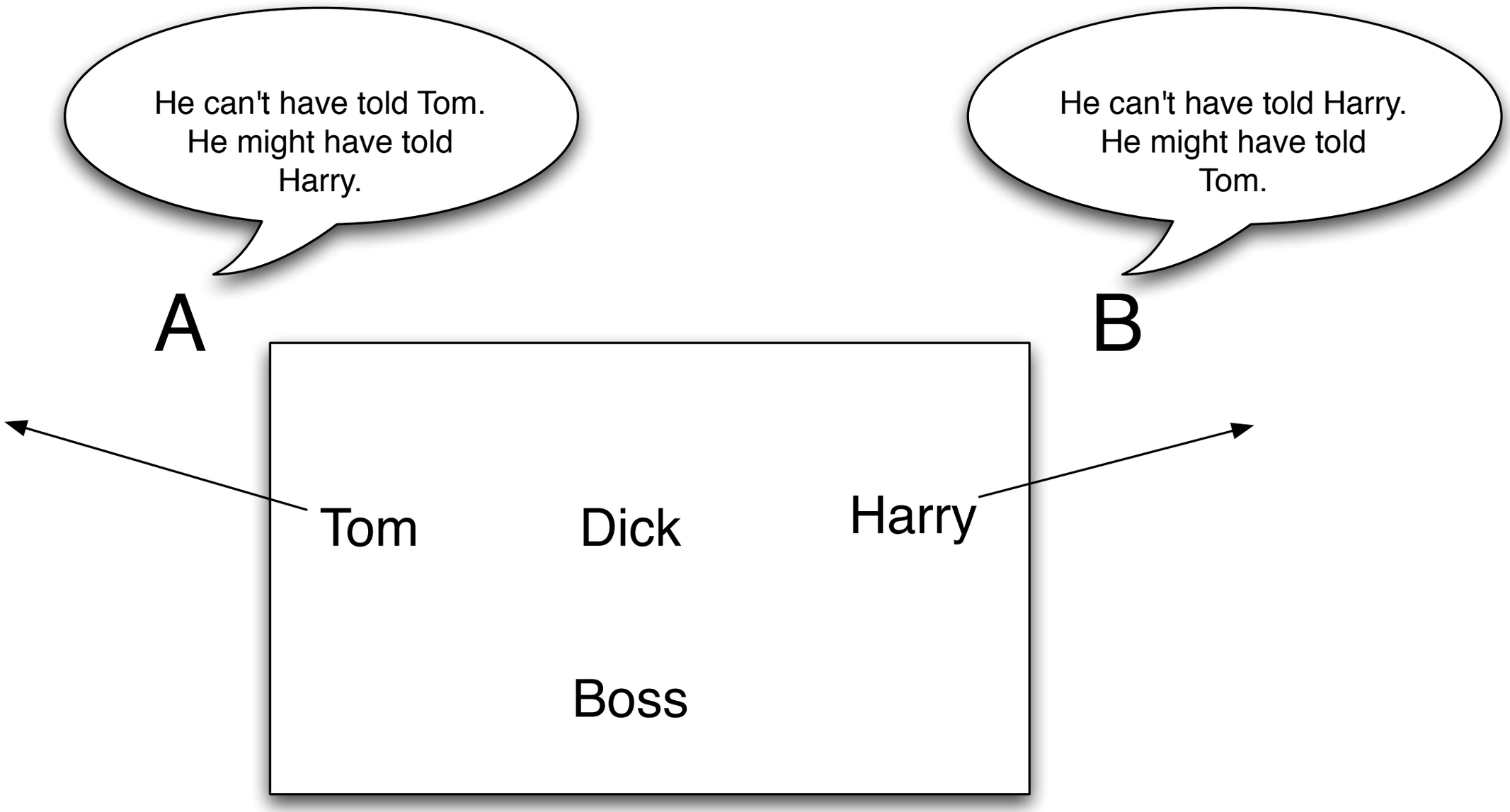
Objectivity (Hard Place)

nihilism

relativism

To a first approximation, saying *might p* expresses three propositions simultaneously:

p is compatible with <u>my</u> evidence
p is compatible with <u>your</u> evidence
p is compatible with <u>our</u> evidence


He can't have told Tom.
He might have told
Harry.
He can't have told Harry.
He might have told
Tom.
A
B
Tom
Dick
Harry
Boss

How would this work with conditionals?

if$_X$ *p*, *q*

presupposes that *p* is compatible with *X*'s evidence

asserts that all *p*-worlds compatible with *X*'s evidence are *q*-worlds

A speaker who claims *if p, q* is putting into play a cloud of conditional propositions:

$if_{speaker}$ *p, q*

if_{hearer} *p, q*

if_{group} *p, q*

felicity of assertion based on speaker reading

acceptance/rejection based on hearer/group reading

If he didn't tell Dick,
he told Harry

If he didn't tell Dick,
he told Tom

A

B

Tom

Dick

Harry

Boss