

Towards a Theory of Subjective Meaning

by

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Abstract

This dissertation develops a form of relativism in which propositions are treated as sets of world-time-individual triples, in contrast to standard views that treat them as sets of worlds or world-time pairs. This builds on existing proposals for predicates of personal taste such as *fun* and *tasty*, and has ties to approaches to *de se* attitudes involving centered worlds. I develop an accompanying pragmatic view in which the context set is similarly construed as a set of world-time-individual triples. The semantic and pragmatic systems together are used to account for the behavior of predicates of personal taste, epistemic modals, indicative conditionals, and a variety of attitude reports, including control constructions. I also explore ways that this account can help solve puzzles related to Moore's paradox.

To give one concrete example, I propose that the proposition expressed by the sentence *it might be raining* is the set of world-time-individual triples $\langle w, t, x \rangle$ such that it's compatible with x 's knowledge in w at t that it's raining. On the pragmatic side, a speaker is justified in asserting this sentence in a conversation if it is compatible with the speaker's own knowledge that it's raining; by asserting it, though, the speaker is making the stronger proposal to make it common ground that it is compatible with the knowledge of the entire group of conversational participants that it's raining. If this proposal is accepted by the other participants, then the group will have established that their knowledge states are aligned in a particular way.

I introduce the core semantic and pragmatic proposals in Chapter 2, focusing on epistemic modals, predicates of personal taste, and belief reports. In Chapter 3, I extend the analysis to indicative conditionals, showing that this solves longstanding puzzles involving the relationship between conditionals and disjunction. In Chapter 4, I extend the approach to certain control constructions, with a special emphasis on capturing their *de se* interpretation. In Chapter 5, I look at two puzzles related to Moore's paradox, with special attention to the meaning of *imagine*.

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