

Evidence that speech acts can embed and ways to model it

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1 Introduction

Kratzer (2016) observes that a German *dass* clause can force a speech report interpretation of verbs that are not strictly speech report verbs:

- (1) ... alle jammern, dass sie zuviel Steuern bezahlen müssen.
... all whine that they too much taxes pay must
- (2) ... die Menschen, die stöhnen, dass sie zuviel Arbeit haben.
... the people who moan that they too much work have

She asks how this can come about and concludes that it must be possible for *that* clauses to contain a source for speech interpretations.

Krifka (2014) notes that German root (V2) clauses, commonly considered to express speech acts, can be embedded under a variety of verbs of saying.

- (3) ... verlangte er mehr Geld und drohte, er würde schießen.
... demanded he more money and threatened he would shoot
- (4) Klienten klagen, sie haben so wenige gemeinsame Interessen.
clients complain they have so few common interests

He concludes that verbs of saying can indeed embed illocutionary acts, and that different verbs come with different restrictions on the embedded acts.

As we will see, Krifka (2014) and Kratzer (2016) adopt different strategies to model embedded (il)locutionary acts.

2 The krifkaesque way

According to Krifka (2014), speech acts are **world changers**: a speech act potential is modelled as a function from one world-time index to another.

For instance, the generic assertion that *p* is defined as the function that maps an index *i* to the index *j* that only differs from *i* (i) in immediately succeeding it and (ii) in that at *j*, the speaker is liable to the hearer for the truth of *p*.

- (5) $\llbracket \text{assert} \llbracket \text{I did not have sexual relations with that woman} \rrbracket \rrbracket^c =$
 $\lambda i \iota j i \circ \bullet j \llbracket \text{at } j, c_s \text{ is liable to } c_a \text{ for the truth of the proposition}$
 $\text{that he did not have sexual relations with the distal woman in } c \rrbracket$

A (token) speech act is a transition from one point of evaluation to another, not truly an event; however, the transition “spawns an event”.

A speech report verb like *assert* can embed a (generic) speech act clause by (simplifying slightly) taking a meaning like that in (5) as an argument:

- (6) $\llbracket \text{assert} \rrbracket^c = \lambda j \lambda x \lambda y \lambda a : \text{assertion}(a) . j = a_c(i) \text{ for some } i$
where $c' = c \llbracket c_a/x, c_s/y \rrbracket$

So a sentence like (7) will presuppose that the embedded ForceP *that* clause expresses neither a proposition nor another speech act type but an assertion, the type of index operation that introduces a commitment to truth.

- (7) He asserts that he did not have sexual relations with ‘that woman’.

The report verbs restrict their arguments to assertions – and not much else. In a sense, the illocution is checked upstairs but **interpreted downstairs**.

It is not fully clear how cases like the complement clauses in (3) or (4) would be treated, as embedded threats and complaints or as embedded assertions.

On the one hand, it may seem unrealistic to restrict embedded speech acts to differentiated ‘flavors’ of representatives, or to commissives or exclamatives, not to mention indirect illocutions –

- for one thing, these differentiations involve pragmatic reasoning,
- secondly, they pose a potential compositionality problem –

but on the other, the framework offers no evident alternative, and the not-at-issue status of the type of illocution may in fact prove to be a virtue.

3 The kratzerian way

Recall that in sentences like (1), (2) or (8), a *that* clause can evidently all by itself create a speech report. But how?

Kratzer’s (2016) proposal: the left periphery can contain a [say] head – (9).

(8) ...die ...seufzen, dass sie wieder nicht genug Geld haben?
 ...who...sigh that they again not enough money have

(9) [seufzen, _{CP} [say] _{MoodP} dass sie wieder nicht genug Geld haben]]

These CPs are **verbal modifiers**: basically, they denote sets of speech events which intersect with sets of events of groaning, raging, sighing, wailing, etc. These verbs are thus coerced into speech verbs.

The modification analysis generalizes to speech report verbs like *say* as well as to speech verbs that are not strictly speech report verbs (see below).

More generally: the **locution** is interpreted **downstairs** but the **illocution** is interpreted **upstairs**.

The semantics proposed by Kratzer (2016) as carrying over to (8) or (3) is represented in (10)/(11) (simplifying slightly):

(10) $\lambda e \lambda w \exists x [\text{say}(x)(e) \wedge \text{sigh}(e) \wedge e \leq w \wedge \text{thing}(x)(w) \wedge \forall w' [w' \in \text{content}(x) \rightarrow \text{poor}(\text{agent}(e))(w')]]$

(11) $\lambda e \lambda w \exists x [\text{say}(x)(e) \wedge \text{threat}(e) \wedge e \leq w \wedge \text{thing}(x)(w) \wedge \forall w' [w' \in \text{content}(x) \rightarrow \exists e' > e [\text{shoot}(e)(w') \wedge \text{ag}(e) = \text{ag}(e')]]]$

Note that the token speech act is an event; the generic act is a type of events. One event is both a saying (something) and a sighing, or a threatening.

Note that the kratzerian way can account for the ‘metonymic’ cases like (8): positing a [say] in the CP LP will be the only way to avoid a type clash in composition. The krifkaesque way, by contrast, offers no easy account.

The German reportative subjunctive can facilitate a [say] interpretation:

(12) Er meinte..., dass er betrogen worden wäre ...
 he meant ..., that he deceived become was.SUBJ...

Kratzer, cued by Fabricius-Hansen & Sæbø (2004a), offers thoughts on this, but makes no mention of embedded V2, or root clauses more generally.

4 New evidence: oscillatory illocutionary act reports

So far, the evidence that it must be possible to embed speech acts may not come across as very strong. But (over and above some more evidence, from speech act adverbs like *frankly* and from biscuit conditionals) there is more. Specifically, it is interesting to see what new light the new theories can shed on the facts about certain verbs that can be used for reporting speech acts:

(13) *anprangern, bemängeln, sich beschweren, kritisieren, monieren, ...*

(Fabricius-Hansen and Sæbø 2004b, 2011, Fabricius-Hansen 2017)

In Austin’s terms (1962: 160), these verbs describe expressive speech acts, more specifically, **behabitives**:

“Behabitives include the notion of reaction to other people’s behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else’s past conduct or imminent conduct. [...] For attitudes we have... ‘criticize’, ...”

“The essential condition for the performance of an act of criticizing is that the speaker’s utterance count as an expression of disapproval of the addressee’s involvement in a certain situation.” (Karttunen and Peters 1979: 10)

A verb like *kritisieren* can occur in a variety of environments:

- a referential expression complement, a nominalization complement,
- a complement predicative, a prepositional phrase,
- a *dass* clause (\pm a correlate *es*),
- an embedded V2 clause.

Let us concentrate on the last two contexts. As embedding a ‘that’ or a V2 clause, these speech act predicates have six problematic properties.

3.1 Property 1: the object/content oscillation

They oscillate between **describing** a speech act, reporting an **illocution**, and **reporting** a speech act, reporting a **locution** as well. A *dass* clause can play the role of the **object** or the role of the **content** of criticism:

(14) Ich verbiete jedem zu kritisieren, dass ich Frau bin.
 I forbid everyone to criticize that I woman am
 ‘I defy anyone to criticize me for being a woman.’

- (15) Meine Lehrerin kritisiert immer, dass ich zu viele Legatos spiele.
 my teacher criticizes always that I too many legatos play
 ‘My teacher always criticizes me for playing too many legatos.’

In (14), the verb would seem to be factive, in (15), it is definitely not factive. Call the former case the **object** case and the latter case the **content** case.

So there is some ambiguity somewhere.

Both Fillmore (1971) and the comprehensive Duden dictionary (1993) only consider the object case.

3.2 Property 2: the content case needs an evaluative element

Whenever the embedded clause lacks an evaluative element, only the object case can obtain. This can be demonstrated for English too:

- (16) It is preposterous for anyone to criticize us for building a wall, ...
 (i) $\not\Rightarrow$... to say: they are building a wall, ...
 (ii) \Leftrightarrow ... to say: they should not be building a wall, ...

What was said cannot be an objective statement; the mere mention of a fact cannot be relied on to convey disapproval of one.

But the boundary is both blurred and bendable.

3.3 Property 3: V2 selects the content case

A V2 clause can only act as the content of judging. This can in fact be shown by negative evidence, since, as we saw above, the content case depends on some evaluative element, and in (17b) there is none.

- (17) a. Der Anwalt hatte kritisiert, dass sein Mandant von der Polizei
 the counsel had criticized that his client by the police
 in Gewahrsam genommen worden war.
 in custody taken been was
 ‘The defense criticized police for taking the man into custody.’
 b. Der Anwalt hatte kritisiert, sein Mandant war von der Polizei
 the counsel had criticized his client had by the police
 #(grundlos / ...) in Gewahrsam genommen worden.
 groundlessly in custody taken been

Note that V2 clauses below or beside behaviorative verbs typically cooccur with the reportative subjunctive mood (glossed as .RS).

- (18) Die Linke kritisiert, es sei ein Fehler gewesen, die ... zu kürzen.
 the left criticizes it is.RS an error been the ... to reduce
 ‘The Left voices the criticism that it is a mistake to reduce ...’
 (19) Herder kritisiert, der Götz wäre von Goethe verdorben.
 Herder criticizes the Götz was.RS by Goethe ruined
 ‘Herder criticized Goethe for ruining the play.’

3.4 Property 4: Indefinite content in the object case

When the object case obtains, as in (17a) or (20), the interpretation is that the agent said something conveying disapproval of the object fact.

- (20) Grüne beschwerten sich, dass die Beratungen vertagt worden sind.
 greens complain that the discussions delayed been are
 ‘The Greens complain about the delay of discussions.’

In other words, the content, what was said, is existentially quantified over. It receives an indefinite interpretation.

3.5 Property 5: Definite object in the content case

By contrast, when the content case obtains, as in (18), (19) and (21), the interpretation is that the object is a specific fact retrievable in the context.

- (21) Er kritisierte, der Autor gefährde nicht nur sich selbst, ...
 he criticized the author endangers.RS not only him self ...

In other words, the object fact receives a definite interpretation.

3.6 Property 6: No cooccurrence object case / content case

The possibilities of combining the two cases in one sentence are very limited.

- (22) ??Meine Eltern kritisieren, dass ich meinen Freund heiraten will,
 my parents criticize that I my boyfriend marry will
 es wäre unverantwortlich.
 it was.RS irresponsible

It seems impossible to embed a *dass* clause expressing the object **and** a V2 clause expressing the content; a *dass* clause expressing the object and a *dass* or V2 clause expressing the content are in complementary distribution.

Yet there are ways to express both object and content in one construction:

- (23) Meine Eltern kritisieren es als unverantwortlich, dass
 my parents criticize it as irresponsible that
 ich meinen Freund heiraten will.
 I my boyfriend marry will
- (24) Meine Eltern kritisieren an meinem Vorhaben, meinen Freund
 my parents criticize at my intention my boyfriend
 zu heiraten, es wäre unverantwortlich.
 to marry it was.RS irresponsible

We may also note that this verb needs some complement or adjunct:

- (22') ??Meine Eltern kritisieren.
 my parents criticize

4 Behabitives in a Kratzer (2016) theory

It turns out that a theory of verbs of saying, *dass* clauses and V2 clauses based on the suggestions by Kratzer (2016) can cope with almost all the puzzling properties of behabitive verbs like *kritisieren*. Let us see how.

4.1 Oscillation predicted

The oscillation between object and content as such is directly accounted for under Kratzer's proposal: the factive O embedded clause and the non-factive C embedded clause are built differently, they have different logical types:

- (25) [[_{DP} [the] [_{NP} [thing] [_{CP} dass ich Frau bin]]] kritisieren]
- (26) [[_{CP} [say] [_{CP} dass ich zu viele Legatos spiele]]] kritisieren]

In the object case, (25), the CP denotes a proposition and modifies a noun, whereas in the content case, (26), it denotes something else because it has a [say] head. This something else may be, for example, a property of events. In the object case, the DP thus built saturates the verb's argument position, whereas in the content case, the CP modifies the verb.

4.2 Need for evaluative element

The necessity of some evaluative element for the content case to obtain could be explained on the basis of a semantics as schematically represented here:

$$(27) \quad \lambda w \lambda e \text{ agent}_w(e) = a \wedge \text{say}_w(e) \wedge \text{criticism}_w(\phi)(e) \wedge \text{content}_w(e) = \lambda w' \dots \text{ in } w'$$

(Note that the contextually determined object fact ϕ is represented here.)

We can now say that an e cannot be a criticism of a fact ϕ if it is a saying but its content is unsuitable for conveying disapproval of ϕ .¹

4.3 V2 → content case

The fact that embedded V2 forces the content case can also be accounted for, on the not uncommon assumption (recall section 1) that, loosely, V2 clauses contain speech acts – here [say].

(19), say, could **unambiguously** have a meaning as represented in (14'):

$$(19') \quad \lambda w \lambda e \text{ agent}_w(e) = \text{Herder} \wedge \text{say}_w(e) \wedge \text{criticism}_w(\phi)(e) \wedge \text{content}_w(e) = \lambda w' \text{ Goethe ruined Götze in } w'$$

A problem: in the content case the $\text{criticism}_w(\phi)(e)$ part is not at-issue.

4.4 Indefinite content in object case predicted

The fact that when the content of the behabitive speech act is not specified, it gets an indefinite interpretation is also directly accounted for because the clause that would specify it is a modifier so the specification is a conjunct: when it is missing, we are told that there is this saying, a criticism of ϕ , but what its content is is left out, though there will be **some** content.

The case is parallel to the case of the missing agent in the passive voice.

4.5 Definite object in content case predicted

The definite interpretation of a missing object fact may not be accounted for in a Kratzer (2016) theory, but it follows from the theorem (Sæbø 1996) that a zero argument involved in a presupposition gets a zero anaphoric reading.

¹Cf. Bary and Maier (2017) on the notion of the content of an event.

4.6 Complementarity object/content mysterious

But the complementary distribution of an object (*dass*) clause and a content (*dass* or V2) clause is not accounted for. On the contrary, one would expect the two to cooccur, even as two *dass* clauses, since they are ambiguous:

- “As verbal modifiers (that is, with [say]), *that* clauses
 - do not relate to an argument position of the embedding verb,
 - are predicted to behave like adjuncts.” (Kratzer 2016)
- “Factive *that* clauses saturate the direct object position.”

A possible way out would be to regard the verb as ambiguous, and in fact,

- “Non-factive *that* clauses have [say] and relate to **the unergative variant of the verb.**”

Note, however, that although Kratzer lists *kritisieren* as a relevant verb, an unergative variant of this verb **needs** an embedded clause adjunct; cf. (22').

5 Conclusions, outlook

On balance, a Kratzer (2016) theory fares well in the face of behabitives – so well that they can be considered to provide strong evidence in its favor.² Add to that that it offers a neat way to treat pseudo-say verbs like *whine*. But there are some concerns.

Specifically, recall the issue that in the content case, the condition that the saying event is a criticism seems to regularly form not-at-issue content. Here the krifkaesque way fares better than the kratzerian way: that condition is (probably) not a conjunct, as in (28), but a selectional restriction.

$$(28) \quad \dots \wedge \text{say}_w(e) \wedge \text{criticism}_w(\phi)(e) \wedge \text{content}_w(e) = \lambda w' \dots \text{ in } w'$$

On the other hand, it is hard to see how we can avoid positing an ambiguity in behabitive verbs if we go that way.

A further point to note is that the content of criticism etc. is not confined to finding expression in an embedded clause – pace Kratzer (2016):

- “When verbs like *criticize*, *disclose*, *regret* have DP objects, those objects refer to facts.”

In fact, in the one authentic example in the comprehensive Duden dictionary, a DP object expresses the content of criticism – and in English,

- (29) His friends . . . criticized the too strong hold his new partner Marlene had on him, . . .
- (30) The principal addressed the student body over the PA system and criticized the immoral content of that morning's show.

This would seem to show that an (il)locution can be contained in an NP, or even that a ForceP or a CP containing a covert [say] can be **nominalized**. While it is commonly assumed that nominalization can target different levels (see, e.g., Abney 1987), a target as high as that would constitute a novum.

²Or in favor of a Krifka (2014) theory or any theory of embedded (il)locutionary acts.

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