

Perception Verbs*

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The semantics of a sentence containing a perception verb such as *see* or *hear* depends to a high degree on the exact syntactic form of the perception verb's complement. Let us compare sentence (1), where the complement is tenseless, with (2), where the complement is a tensed clause.

(1) Joe heard the red-haired girl telling a lie

(2) Joe heard that the red-haired girl was telling a lie

The truth-conditions of these two sentences are different. Each can be true without the other being true. Joe may have heard the red-haired girl lie thinking that she was speaking the truth and in that case (1) is true but (2) is false. On the other hand, (1) can be false and (2) true in a situation where Joe did not actually witness the girl telling a lie but where somebody told him that she did.

So for (1) to be true, Joe must have been in direct perceptual contact with the lying, while the contact may have been indirect in the second case. On the other hand, the truth of (2) requires that Joe is aware of the epistemic content of the embedded sentence, while the first sentence may be true without such an awareness. Perception reports with a tenseless (gerundive or naked infinitive) complement of the verb are thus called *epistemically neutral* and reports which have a tensed verbal complement are *epistemically positive*.

It is well known that verbs of propositional attitude like *believe*, *know* and *hope* may create opaque contexts. Replacing one noun phrase by another in the scope of such a verb may alter the truth value of the whole sentence, even if the two noun phrases refer to the same object (see COREFERENCE). The

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same phenomenon can be observed with epistemically positive perception reports. The invalidity of (3), for example, shows that we cannot replace identicals by identicals in the scope of *sees that*.

- (3) The sailor sees that the red-haired girl is xeroxing a document
 The red-haired girl is the most beautiful spy

The sailor sees that the most beautiful spy is xeroxing a document

Epistemically neutral reports behave completely differently, for in general we may replace a noun phrase by a coreferential one in a tenseless complement of a perception verb as the validity of (4) illustrates. For a careful account of the logic of neutral perception see Barwise (1981).

- (4) The sailor sees the red-haired girl xerox a document
 The red-haired girl is the most beautiful spy

The sailor sees the most beautiful spy xerox a document

See also: COREFERENCE; PARTIAL INFORMATION; PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDES.

References

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