

Speech acts embed: evidence from verba dicendi

Speech Acts: Meanings, Uses, Syntactic Realizations

ZAS workshop, Berlin

May 29–31, 2017

Kjell Johan Sæbø

1 Kratzer 2016

observes that a *that* clause can force a speech report interpretation of verbs that are not strictly speech report verbs:

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

She concludes that it must be possible for *that* clauses to contain a source for speech interpretations: How can *that* clauses all by themselves create speech reports? Her proposal: the left periphery can contain a [say] head.

- (3) [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).

The German reportative subjunctive can facilitate a [say] interpretation. No mention is made of V2 clauses, though, or root clauses more generally.

2 Flavored representatives and directives

How to model the meaning of speech act verbs like *drohen* or *warnen* when they are used as speech report verbs?

- (4) ... verlangte er mehr Geld und drohte, er würde schießen.
... demanded he more money and threatened he would shoot
- (5) Die Polizei hat gewarnt, sie werde Falschparker abschleppen.
the police has warned it will wrongparkers awaytow

Threats and warnings can be direct representatives but indirect directives. They are often conditional: in (4), there is an understood antecedent ‘unless he got more money’, in (5), the antecedent is ‘if you violate the parking ban’. The point is to get the hearer to (not) do the action in the antecedent.

Now a threat or a warning can also be a direct directive:

- (6) ... ein Gott ... habe ihn ... bedroht, er möge beileibe mit Jaakob nicht anders als freundlich reden. (Thomas Mann, *Joseph und seine Brüder*)
‘a god ... had ... , threatening him if he dared speak with Jacob in any but friendly terms.’ (translation by John E. Woods)

Here and in (7), the embedded clauses may seem to be embedded directives, embedded imperatives even:

- (7) Die Leute fuhren sie an, sie sollten still sein. (Matthäus 20:31)
‘The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, ...’ (ESV)

According to Kratzer (2016), *sollten* is here, and by analogue *möge* is in (6), a **harmonic deontic modal**.

One might in fact consider it an uninterpretable version of the imperative.

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

The semantics proposed by Kratzer (2016) carrying over to a case like (4):¹

- (8) $\lambda e \lambda w \exists x [\text{say}(x)(e) \wedge \text{threat}(e) \wedge e \leq w \wedge \text{thing}(x)(w) \wedge \forall w' [w' \in C_{\text{ontent}}(x) \rightarrow \text{shoot}(\text{agent}(e))(w')]]$

¹Not including Aspect and tense.

3 Oscillatory speech act report verbs

It is interesting now to see what new light this approach can shed on the facts about certain verbs that can be used for reporting speech acts:

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

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

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

Austin's Behabitives

(How to do things with words; 1962: 160)

“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. There are obvious connexions with both stating or describing what our feelings are and expressing, in the sense of venting our feelings, though behabitives are distinct from both of these.

[...] **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 environments. As occurring in one of these, these speech act predicates have 5 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. As it appears, a *dass* clause can play the role of the **object** or the role of the **content**:

(10) 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.'

(11) 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 to many legatos.'

In (10), the verb would seem to be factive, in (11), 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)² and the comprehensive Duden dictionary (1993) only consider the object case.

DUDEN: Das große Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache (1993)

kri|ti|sie|ren < sw. V.; hat > [nach gleichbed. frz. critiquer] 1. [...] 2. *mit jmdm., etw. nicht einverstanden sein, weil die betreffende Person, Sache bestimmten Maßstäben nicht entspricht, u. dies in tadelnden Worten zum Ausdruck bringen:* jmdn., jmds. Handlungsweise ohne Rücksicht, heftig, öffentlich k.; er hat an allem etwas zu k.; die Regierung in der Presse k.; [...] Trainer Buchmann kritisierte außerdem das zu lasche Deckungsverhalten seiner Truppe (Kicker 82, 1981, 51); **Kri|ti|zis|mus**, der; -: 1. (Philos.)

²a similar ambiivalence can be observed in the English *criticize someone for* locution

3.2 Property 2: V2 selects the content case

A V2 embedded clause can only act as the content of criticism. This can in fact be shown by negative evidence, as the content case seems to depend on some (here negative) evaluative element, and in (12b) there is none.

- (12) 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 was criticized his client had by the police
#(grundlos /...) in Gewahrsam genommen worden.
groundlessly in custody taken been

The mere mention of a fact cannot be relied on to convey disapproval of one; clearly objective statements select the object case.

But the boundary is blurred and bendable.

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

- (13) 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...'
- (14) Herder kritisiert, der Götze wäre von Goethe verdorben.
Herder criticizes the Götze was.RS by Goethe ruined
'Herder criticized Goethe for ruining the play.'

3.3 Property 3: Indefinite content in the object case

When the object case obtains, as in (12a) or (15), the interpretation is that the agent said something conveying disapproval of the object fact.

- (15) 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.

3.4 Property 4: Definite object in the content case

By contrast, when the content case obtains, as in (13), (14) and (16), the interpretation is that the object is a specific fact retrievable in the context.

- (16) 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 (although sometimes, as in (14), it can be difficult to spell out).

3.5 Property 5: No cooccurrence object case / content case

The possibilities of combining the two cases in one sentence are very limited. It seems impossible to embed a *dass* clause expressing the object and a V2 clause expressing the content:

- (17) ??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
- (18) Meine Eltern kritisieren es als unverantwortlich, dass
my parents criticize it as irresponsible that
ich meinen Freund heiraten will.
I my boyfriend marry will
- (19) 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

A *dass* clause expressing the object and a *dass* or V2 clause expressing the content are in complementary distribution.

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

- (17') ??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 the first four puzzling properties of behabitive verbs like *kritisieren*. Let us see how.

4.1 Oscillation predicted

Property 1, the object/content oscillation 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:

(20) [[_{DP} [the] [_{NP} [thing] [_{CP} dass ich Frau bin]]] kritisieren]

(21) [[_{CP} [say] [_{CP} dass ich zu viele Legatos spiele]]] kritisieren]

In the object case, (20), the CP denotes a proposition and modifies a noun, whereas in the content case, (21), 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 V2 → content case predicted

The fact that embedded V2 selects the content case is also directly accounted for on the not uncommon assumption (cf. Krifka 2014 and references therein) that, loosely, V2 clauses contain speech acts, – here [say].

(14), say, could unambiguously have a meaning as represented in (14’):³

(14’) $\lambda w \lambda e \text{ agent}_w(e) = \text{Herder} \wedge \text{say}_w(e) \wedge \text{criticism}_w(\phi)(e) \wedge$
 $\text{content}_w(e) = \lambda w' \text{Goethe ruined Götzt in } w'$

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

How explain the necessity of some (negative/positive) evaluative element? Well, an e cannot be a criticism of a fact ϕ if it is a saying but its content (cf. Bary and Maier 2017) is unsuitable for conveying disapproval of ϕ .

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

³Not including Aspect and tense.

4.3 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.

4.4 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.

4.5 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 **requires** an embedded clause adjunct:

(17’) ??Meine Eltern kritisieren.
my parents criticize

But as *kritisieren* contrasts with *sich beschweren* ‘complain’ in this regard, there may be reason to consider this requirement idiosyncratic.

5 Loose ends, outlook

On balance, a Kratzer (2016) theory fares well in the face of behabitive verbs – so well that they can be considered to provide strong evidence in its favor. Add to this that it offers a neat way to treat pseudo-say verbs like *jammern*.

- (22) Ehrlich wie ich bin, hab ich’s meiner Freundin am nächsten Tag
honest as I am hav I’t my.DAT girlfriend on next day
erzählt, sie regt sich auf, ich hätte sie betrogen und so.
told she works herself up I had.RS her deceived and so

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.

Generally, there is a need to spell out what it means for a saying event to be a complaint, a criticism, a warning, etc., in terms of its object, its agent, its recipient, and its content, in a world.

A 3rd worry: 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 the one authentic example given by the comprehensive Duden dictionary, (23), a DP object serves to express the content of criticism (cf. 3.1 above):

- (23) Trainer Buchmann kritisierte außerdem das zu lasche
coach Buchmann criticized besides the too lax
Deckungsverhalten seiner Truppe. (Kicker 82, 1981, 51)
defenseconduct his.GEN team

This is not confined to German:

- (24) 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 a covert [say] can be contained in an NP – that a clause containing a covert [say] can be nominalized.

Alternatively, we might conceive of the evaluative adjectives in (23) and (24) as pieces of concealed quotation (Geurts and Maier 2005, Anand 2007).

References

- Anand, Pranav (2007)** Re-expressing judgment. *Theoretical Linguistics* 33, 199–208.
- Austin, John L. (1962)** *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: OUP.
- Bary, Corien and Emar Maier (2017)** At-issue events and non-at-issue evidence in the semantics of speech reports. Presentation, Non-at-issue meaning and information structure, Oslo, May 2017.
- Fabricius-Hansen, Cathrine (2017)** *Loben* und *kritisieren* unter der linguistischen Lupe. In Arne Krause et al. (eds.), *Form und Funktion: Festschrift für Angelika Redder zum 65. Geburtstag*, Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 149–166.
- Fabricius-Hansen, Cathrine and Kjell Johan Sæbø (2004)** Reporting (il-)locutionary acts: The Janus case of German criticism. Presentation at the ZAS workshop Mood and (In-)Subordination.
- Fabricius-Hansen, Cathrine and Kjell Johan Sæbø (2011)** Behabitive reports. In Elke Brendel, Jörg Meibauer and Markus Steinbach (eds.), *Understanding Quotation*, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 85–106.
- Fillmore, Charles (1971)** Verbs of judging: An exercise in semantic description. In Charles Fillmore and Terence Langendoen (eds.), *Studies in Linguistic Semantics*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 273–289.
- Geurts, Bart and Emar Maier (2005)** Quotation in Context. In Philippe De Brabanter (ed.), *Hybrid Quotations* (= *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 17), Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 109–128.
- Karttunen, Lauri and Stanley Peters (1979)** Conventional Implicature. In Choon-Kyu Oh and David Dinneen (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 11: Pre-supposition*, New York: Academic Press, 1–56.
- Krifka, Manfred (2014)** Embedding illocutionary acts. In Tom Roeper and Margaret Speas (eds.), *Recursion: Complexity in Cognition*, Berlin: Springer, 59–87.
- Kratzer, Angelika (2016)** Evidential moods in attitude and speech reports. Presentation, 1st SynCart Workshop, Chiusi. July 2016.
- Sæbø, Kjell Johan (1996)** Anaphoric presuppositions and zero anaphora. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 19, 187–209.