

# Understanding Proper Names

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**Question:** What are the sufficient conditions to understand an utterance of a name?

**Understanding:** If a hearer  $H$  understands an utterance of a name 'n' by a speaker  $S$ , then  $H$  is in a position to achieve the goal of the communicative event.

**Millianism:** the semantic content of a name is only its referent & Standard Compositionality.

## 1 N $\grave{a}$ ive View: Knowledge of Semantic Content

**SC:** If  $H$  knows the semantic content of  $S$ 's utterance of 'n', then  $H$  understands the utterance.

Problem for Millianism:

**Hospital Case** Brent is involved in a car crash and is brought unconscious and without identification to the hospital. Alex and Tony work there. While Alex examines Brent, she realizes that he is her long-time patient. She turns to Tony and sincerely asserts (1) 'Brent is sick.' Tony knows that Alex has a long-time patient called 'Brent'. But she does not think that the patient in room 202 is him because at the hospital they make up names for patients who are admitted unconscious and without identification, and she falsely believes this is one of these cases. [As a result, Tony forms the belief that *Brent, the patient in room 202, is sick.*]

- Tony knows the semantic content of Alex's utterance of 'Brent' because she knows that 'Brent' refers to *Brent*;
- But Tony does not understand the utterance because she is not in a position to come to believe or know that *Brent, Alex's long time patient, is sick*.

## 2 Soames: Knowledge of Assertoric Content

**AC:** If  $H$  knows the assertoric content of  $S$ 's utterance of 'n', then  $H$  understands the utterance.

**Assertoric Content:** semantic content + way of thinking of the referent.

Problem: Betrayer! Millianism is not a theory about what ordinary speakers say in ordinary circumstances with ordinary sentences.

## 3 Salmon: Knowledge of Semantic Content + Recognition

**Recog:** If  $H$  knows the semantic content of  $S$ 's utterance of 'n' and recognizes the referent, then  $H$  understands the utterance.

Problem:

**Interview Case** Louise just started working at the Daily Planet with Lois and Clark Kent. While wearing his regular clothes, Clark Kent confesses to Louise that he is Superman. Louise has never heard of Superman before. So, upon Clark's confession, she thinks that 'Superman' is a Clark's nickname at work. Shortly after Louise hears Clark's confession, Lois asks her if she knows Superman. Louise says that she does. Surprised, Lois says (2) 'Bring Superman for an interview.' Louise goes to Clark's desk, (who is wearing regular clothes) and ask him to go with her to Lois's office. When they get to Lois's office, Lois looks obviously confused.

- Louise knows the semantic content of Lois's utterance of 'Superman' because she knows that 'Superman' refers to *Superman*;
- Louise recognizes the referent of Lois's utterance of 'Superman';
- Yet Louise does not understand the utterance because she is not in a position

to comply with Lois's request of bringing the guy who wears red underwear over blue tights.

#### 4 Me: Knowledge of Semantic Content + Knowledge of Practical Aspect

**PA:** If  $H$  knows the semantic content of  $S$ 's utterance of 'n' and the relevant practical aspect, then  $H$  understands the utterance.

**Practical Aspect:** non-semantic facts about names that speakers can exploit to guide hearers to think of the referent in a particular way;

**Hospital Case:** PA = utterance of a name already in Tony's vocabulary;

**Interview Case:** PA = utterance of a name typically associated with the description *the guy who wears red underwear over blue pants*.

Thank you!