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Uli and our generation: some reminiscences

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Uli and our generation: some reminiscences

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The early 1990s. Uli gives his first talk. Mary told me afterwards how impressed she was with the brilliant final speaker. (She had no idea that it was that same shy young man she had passed so often in the corridor.) I leaned over to my neighbor and reported:

(1) Mary thinks that Uli has many qualities.

What I said was true because Mary situated herself in a world where *the final speaker* had many qualities. Percus and Sauerland (2003) explain this as follows: (1) has a structure where a silent element attaches to the name and creates a concept out of it – like the FINAL SPEAKER concept. In the embedded clause, this expression combines with a world variable as in (2). (2) then describes worlds in which *the value of that concept* has many qualities, and this is what we use to characterize Mary’s doxastic alternatives.

(2) ... [1 w_1 [**G-Uli** w_1] has many qualities]

In a case like (2), **G-Uli** combines with a world variable and thereby creates an individual-denoting expression. But if this proposal is right, it is natural to expect concept-denoting expressions like **G-Uli** to show up in other configurations as well. Does this happen? Fast forward to ...

The early 2000s. Uli and I give a joint talk. I delivered the first half, Uli delivered the second. John was apparently neither watching nor thinking very carefully. When I heard him expressing his amazement at the speaker’s metamorphic skills, I came to this astonishing realization:

(3) John thinks that Uli and I are the same person.

(3) was true because John situated himself in a world where *the closing presenter* and *the opening presenter* were the same person. Now, the predicate *are the same person* plausibly applies to a plurality of concepts: it means *have the same person as their value*. (See Barker 2007 for the contribution of adjectival *same*.) Here, the part of the embedded clause that we use to characterize John’s doxastic alternatives could well be as in (4), then. In (4), no world variable combines with the concept-denoting expressions, and the two coordinate yielding a plurality of concepts.

(4) ... [1 w_1 [**G-Uli** and **H-I**] are the same person]

(4’) is a possibility too if “concept-generators” can yield pluralities of concepts all by themselves – if they can sum together concepts for disjoint parts of a plural argument. The literature doesn’t assume this. Should it? Cut to ...

(4’) ... [1 w_1 **G-[Uli and I]** are the same person]

A few days later. Uli smiled at my description of John’s confusion. No wonder. Those were his phi-feature days, and what I said was:

(5) John thinks that we are the same person.

Sauerland (2003, 2008) argues that features like number and person are interpreted at the DP level. That has implications. Suppose concept-generators *can't* yield pluralities of concepts. In that case, the structure of (5) would have to contain a piece like (4) – the pronoun *we* would realize a complex coordinate structure just like the one there. But this would mean that the features responsible for the pronunciation *we* are interpreted in very different places. The plural feature could only concern the subject as a whole, which denotes a plurality (of concepts). On the other hand, the first person feature would have to be interpreted down below, within the coordination, as it is only there that we have an element whose denotation includes the speaker. If instead concept-generators can yield pluralities of concepts, then the structure of (5) could contain a piece like (4'), for example, and a neater picture emerges. We can maintain that both features are interpreted on the same DP, the concept-generator's sister.

Today. These sentences still attract attention (Zhang 2016). The last word will surely belong to Uli.

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