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# De Se Assertion

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## abstract

David Lewis (1981) famously proposed an account of *de se* beliefs in terms of self-ascription of properties. The gist of his proposal was that the content of, for example, Mirka's belief that she is hungry, which she might express by saying "I am hungry," is simply the property of being hungry, and it is a property that Mirka ascribes to herself. Lewis never held, though, that the content of *assertion* should be analyzed along the same lines, and the received view today is that if Mirka says "I am hungry," the asserted content, or *what is said*, is the proposition that Mirka is hungry (at a given time). In this paper, I argue, against this view, that Lewis's proposal for *de se* attitudes plausibly holds for assertion as well. The content of Mirka's utterance of "I am hungry" is, I suggest, the property of being hungry, and it is a property that Mirka asserts *of herself*. My primary motivation comes from the fact that when two speakers say "I am hungry," it is correct to report them as having said the same thing. It has often been held that the possibility of such reports comes from the fact that the two speakers are, after all, uttering the same words, and are in this sense "saying the same thing". I will show that this approach fails, and that it is neither necessary nor sufficient to use the same words, or words endowed with the same meaning, in order to be correctly reported as samesaying. I will also show that reports of samesaying in the case of *de se* assertion differ significantly from such reports in cases in which the two speakers are merely implicating the same thing.

## §1. The received wisdom on *what is said*

The dominant view in philosophy of language, inherited from David Kaplan, is that *what is said* by a speaker using a sentence that contains an indexical pronoun differs from the lexical meaning of the sentence in that, on the one hand, it includes the specification of the pronoun's referent (as determined in the context of utterance), and, on the other, does not include the lexically encoded conditions that help determining the referent, such as the condition of being female in the case of 'she', or of speakerhood in the case of 'I'.

Suppose that on Friday May 16, 2008, at noon, Mirka says:

(1) I am hungry.

According to the Kaplanian view, the meaning of the sentence in (1) is, a function that takes a speaker and a the time of utterance and returns the proposition that he or she is hungry at that time, while *what is said* by (1) is the output of that function when applied to the context of (1), viz. the proposition that Mirka is hungry on 5/16/2008 at noon.

There are two intertwined motivations for this view. Suppose that at the time that Mirka utters (1), Sergeï, pointing at her, says:

(2) She is hungry.

Then we can correctly report Sergeï as having said, in (2), the same thing as that which Mirka said in (1). Indeed, they both said that Mirka was hungry.

Or, suppose that on Saturday May 17, 2008, Alex says:

(3) Mirka was hungry yesterday at noon.

Then again, one may correctly report Mirka and Alex as having said the same

thing on the basis of their utterances of (1) and (3).<sup>1</sup>

The previous example involves speakers who samesay using sentences whose meanings are not the same. The second motivation for the Kaplanian view concerns speakers who use sentences with the same meaning, yet fail to samesay. Suppose that on Saturday, May 17, 2008, Alex says:

(4) I am hungry.

Those who share Kaplan's intuitions would insist that what is said by Mirka in (1) and what is said by Alex in (4) are different things:

What is said in using a given indexical in different contexts may be different. Thus if I say, today, "I was insulted yesterday," and you utter the same words tomorrow, what is said is different [...] There are possible circumstances in which what I said would be true but what you said would be false. Thus we say different things. (Kaplan (1989: 500))<sup>2</sup>

## §2. *De se* assertion

It has been pointed out many times (e.g. Feldman (1980: 80), Lewis (1980: 97)) that cases such as (1)-(4), in which the sentence "I am hungry" is uttered by different speakers, are as much of a problem for the Kaplanian view as they may serve as a motivation for it. On the one hand, Kaplan is arguably right to

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<sup>1</sup> A note on the methodology is in order. The intuitions on what is said and the intuitions on the truth values of the reports of samesaying on which the present paper relies (especially in sections 2 and 3) have been tested on a modest sample of native, theoretically unbiased speakers. Of course, that will not meet the standards of experimental psycholinguistics, but there is at least some empirical grounding to it.

<sup>2</sup> Although Kaplan was arguably the first to systematically distinguish between lexical meaning and what is said, both insights go back at least to Frege, who wrote: "The sentence 'I am cold' expresses a different thought in the mouth of one person from what it expresses in the mouth of another" and "It is not necessary that the person who feels cold should himself give utterance to the thought that he feels cold. Another person can do this by using a name to designate the one who feels cold" (1899: 236).

say that, *in some sense*, what Mirka says in (1) is different from what Alex says in (4). As we have seen, Mirka's utterance of (1) says, *in some sense*, the same thing as (2) or (3), but there seems to be no sense in which Alex's utterance of (4) says the same thing as either (2) or (3). But on the other hand, there is, to use Lewis's words, an "equally legitimate" sense in which Mirka in (1) and Alex in (4) do say the same thing. Indeed, each says that he or she is hungry.

The intuition that Mirka in (1) and Alex in (4) samesay is further supported by our linguistic practices of reporting what is said. Consider the following dialogue:

(5) Alex: I am hungry.

(6) Sergei: Mirka said that, too.

Sergei's report in (6) is ambiguous. It can be understood as reporting Mirka to have said that *Alex* was hungry, or that *she herself* was hungry.<sup>3</sup> This ambiguity is very similar to the well-known syntactic ambiguity with VP-ellipsis.

Suppose that Sergei says:

(7) I love my wife, and so does Alex.

On its "strict" reading, (7) says that Alex loves Sergei's wife, while on its "sloppy" reading, it says that Alex loves *his own* wife. Given this apparent similarity, I will use the "strict/sloppy" terminology for the ambiguity that we find with reports of samesaying such as (6).

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<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, the report in (6) is four-ways ambiguous because of the contribution of the present tense: it can report Mirka as having said that Alex was hungry at the time when she said it, or that he is hungry at the time of (5), or that she was hungry at the time when she said it, or that she is hungry at the time of (5). For the sake of concision, I will leave aside any issues raised by the contribution of tense. (But see my (2007: 111-117; 133-135) for discussion.)

### §3. Saying the same thing vs. using the same words

In the previous section, we saw that when different people say “I am hungry,” there is a sense in which they are saying the same thing, for each is saying that he or she is hungry. A readily available response on Kaplan’s behalf is to point out that the same sentence is being uttered, and that this could explain why we are inclined to hear the two speakers as saying the same thing – for, after all, they are uttering the same words. I will now argue that this is not the right response to the problem of *de se* assertion. Although the use of one and the same sentence may partly account for the intuition that the same thing has been said, that cannot be the end of the story, since, as I shall show, it is neither *necessary* nor *sufficient* to use the same sentence in order to be reported, literally and correctly, as samesaying. I will first provide cases in which two speakers are using sentences that have different meanings as well as different propositional contents (relative to their respective contexts), yet there is a sense in which they are saying the same thing – indeed, as strong as in the case of (1)-(4). Then I will provide cases in which two speakers are using the same sentence, but cannot be correctly reported as having said the same thing (unless the reporter makes it explicit what each speaker was referring to).

#### §3.1. *Different meanings, different contents, same thing said*

Suppose that Alex and Sergeï are talking about the classes that they like or dislike, and Sergeï says:

(8) I really like Prof. Cheng's class on Montague.

On a different occasion, during Prof. Cheng's class on Montague, Mirka tells Alex:

(9) I really like this class.

Alex may then correctly reply to Mirka:

(10) That's what Sergeï said, too.

The sentences used by Mirka and Sergeï are different, and so are their lexical meanings. But the (Kaplanian) contents associated with (8) and (9) are also different, the one involving Sergeï, and the other, Mirka. Despite all this, the report in (10) is ambiguous and has a true, sloppy reading, on which Sergeï is reported as having said that *he* liked Cheng's class. This reading will be dominant if it is, for instance, common knowledge in the context of (10) that Sergeï has no idea who Mirka is and could not have said anything explicitly about her.

### §3.2. *Same meanings, different things said*

Just as using the same sentence is not required for samesaying, it is not enough either. Consider the following pair of dialogues:

(i) *de se* assertion

(11) I am a fool. (Mirka talking to Alex)

(12) I am a fool. (Sergeï talking to Alex)

(13) That's what Mirka said, too. (Alex's reply to Sergeï)

(ii) *de te* assertion

(14) You are a fool. (Prof. Cheng talking to Mirka, overheard by Alex)

(15) You are a fool. (Alex talking to Sergei)

(16) (?) That's what Prof. Cheng said, too. (Alex talking to Sergei again)

There is a striking asymmetry between the 1<sup>st</sup> person and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun in how they behave in reported speech. Consider (13). As it stands, it has two readings: the strict reading, which reports Mirka to have said that *Sergei* was a fool, and the sloppy reading, which reports her as having said that *she* was a fool. If it is, say, common knowledge in the context of (13) that Mirka would have never said such a thing about Sergei, the dominant reading of (13) is its sloppy reading, and (13) will be true in virtue of Mirka's having uttered (11). However, if we try the same sort of sloppy report by simply replacing 'I' by 'you', no such report seems to be available. For, there is a strong intuition that (16) is not ambiguous, but downright false (assuming that Prof. Cheng never said that *Sergei* was a fool).

The difference between the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun is even more striking. Consider the following case, minimally different from (i) or (ii):

(iii) *de re* assertion

(17) She is a fool. (Prof. Cheng, talking of Mirka)

(18) She is a fool. (Alex, pointing at Miranda)

(19) (?) That's what Professor Cheng said, too. (in reply to Alex)

Again, as it stands, (19) is not ambiguous. Only one reading seems to be available, namely, the one on which Cheng said that Miranda was a fool.

To forestall a possible misunderstanding, I am not claiming that there is no



sense whatsoever in which Cheng in (14) and Alex in (15) could be taken to have said the same thing. For instance, we may take them to be samesaying insofar as they both say *of their addressee* that he or she is a fool. But if this should serve as a ground for reporting what they said as being the same, the mere report in (16) won't do. What is further required is that the reporter should make it explicit that the addressee was someone else. For instance, Alex may reply to Sergeï: "That's what Prof. Cheng said, too, *to Mirka*," and this report will now be ambiguous between a sloppy reading, on which Cheng said to Mirka that *she* was a fool, and a strict reading, on which Cheng is reported as having said that *Sergeï* was a fool.

With the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun, one can similarly report that the same thing has been said, provided that one makes it explicit that it was said *about* different people. Thus the following report, based on Cheng's utterance of (17), becomes correct:

(20) That's what Professor Cheng said, too, about Mirka.

There is, then, a significant asymmetry between reports of *de se* assertion and other cases, since in the former, unlike the latter, the reporter does not have to make it explicit that the reportee was talking about herself or himself. This asymmetry raises the following problem. Suppose that Kaplanian contents play the role of what is said. Now, (11) and (12) have different contents, and still, in an important sense, they say the same thing: in both cases, the speaker is saying of herself or himself that she or he is a fool. This sense of samesaying is further reflected in the fact that, properly disambiguated, the report in (13) comes out true. Now, a Kaplanian might

think that this is because the sentences uttered in (11) and (12) are the same. However, this explanation won't work. Take (14)-(15) and (17)-(18). There, too, the sentences uttered are the same, but we do not get a sloppy reading for either (16) or (19). Those reports are not ambiguous, but false. This shows that something was missing in the account that the Kaplanian view gave us for the *de se* cases in the first place.

#### §4. *De se* assertion vs. the other senses of 'what is said'

It is possible that what I have described as a received view may well no longer be one. There is a growing number of Kaplan's followers who, while fully endorsing his *semantics*, are reluctant to identify semantic content with what is said. Among such semi-Kaplanians one finds e.g. Salmon (1986), Predelli (2005), or Cappelen and Lepore (2005), to mention only a few. What their views have in common is the idea that the notion of 'what is said' is too versatile and too heavily context-dependent to be possible to capture by semantic means.

One of the first to have pointed out that Kaplan's identification of semantic content with what is said was unwarranted was actually David Lewis:

"Unless we give it some special technical meaning, the locution 'what is said' is very far from univocal. It can mean the propositional content, in Stalnaker's sense (horizontal or diagonal). It can mean the exact words. I suspect that it can mean almost anything in between" (1980: 97).

In addition to the senses mentioned by Lewis, there is also was Ziff (1972)

called the *implication sense* of what is said. Suppose that Sergei is thinking of enrolling in Prof. Blanchet's logic class and asks Mirka what she thought about it. She says:

(21) I don't think I've ever been in such a boring class in my whole life.

Then he asks Miranda, and she says:

(22) It's such a bad class – what a sheer waste of time!

It is easy to imagine Sergei replying to Miranda:

(23) That's what Mirka said, too.

Reports such as (23) are very natural and ubiquitous, but the relevant sense of samesaying cannot be captured by either lexical meaning or Kaplanian content, or even any combination of the two. This presses even further the worry that one will never be able to account for the (non-technical) notion of what is said by trying to pin it down to something as narrow as semantic content.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of the present discussion, the multitude of senses connected with the locution 'what is said' raises the worry that the sort of cases that I brought up in section 3.1. against the Kaplanian view are, after all, just another garden-variety of the many senses of 'what is said'. In the remainder of this section, my goal will be, then, to show that there is a significant difference between reports of samesaying in the case of *de se* assertion and reports such as (23), which rely on the implication sense of what is said.

Reconsider (23). Even if we take this report to be true in the context at

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<sup>4</sup> Note that for radical contextualists such as Recanati (2004), the context-dependence of what is said serves as evidence to argue that pragmatics intrudes into semantics. As for those who, against such objections, defend a purely semantic notion of what is said, see e.g. Bach (2001).

stake, it is still possible for someone who witnessed Mirka's utterance of (21) to challenge Sergeï (the reporter) as follows:

(24) No, Mirka didn't quite say that. She only said that she has never been in such a boring class. That need not mean that the class was bad.

Presented with such a challenge, Sergeï will normally retract or at least somehow qualify his report, for instance as follows:

(25) OK, she didn't quite say that, but that's what she meant.

This retraction doesn't necessarily show that the report in (23) was false.<sup>5</sup> But what it shows, or at least strongly suggests, is that the sense of samesaying relevant to the truth of such reports is not its primary and most literal sense, but rather, a looser secondary sense. Now, compare this with the case of *de se* assertion:

(26) *Mirka*: I am hungry.

(27) *Alex*: I am hungry.

(28) *Sergeï*: Mirka said that, too.

(29) *Miranda*: (?) No, she didn't quite say that. She only said that *she* was hungry.

Faced with Miranda's challenge, Sergeï will not retract his report in (28) – rather, he might point out that he was precisely reporting Mirka as saying that *she* was hungry, and that Miranda simply failed to disambiguate his report properly. Once again, there is a striking similarity with VP-ellipsis:

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<sup>5</sup> Some will be tempted to see the challenge in (24) and Sergeï's retraction in (25) as evidence that the report in (23) has been false all along. If so, this would make my point even more straightforward, since, as we will shortly see, reports of samesaying in the case of *de se* assertion cannot be challenged by "she didn't quite say that" and remain literally true, unlike reports such as (23).

(30) *Alex*: I love my wife.

(31) *Mirka*: Sergeï does, too.

(32) *Miranda*: (?) No, he doesn't. He only loves his own wife.

Miranda's objection in (32) is simply inappropriate, just as it was in (29). In both cases, her attempt at denying her interlocutor's report merely emphasizes the fact that the report is truly ambiguous – she is denying the reading not intended by the reporter to precisely assert the intended reading, which is why (29) and (32) sound so odd.

At any rate, what matters for our purposes is that reports of samesaying in the case of *de se* assertion pattern differently from such reports in the other cases known from the literature. In those other cases, there is evidence that the locution 'what is said' is being used *loosely* rather than *literally*.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the sense of samesaying deployed in reports of *de se* assertion belongs squarely among literal uses.

## §5. Asserting properties

In this and the following section, I will adapt Lewis's theory of *de se* attitudes to the case of assertion (*de se* or not). In a nutshell, I am proposing to model the content of assertion as a property – or, more precisely, as a function from sequences containing an individual, a time, a world, and perhaps other parameters, into truth values – , rather than a proposition. However, a crucial

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<sup>6</sup> There need not be a *sharp* distinction between loose and literal uses – it is enough for my argument that there be uses that are more literal than others. Also, let me stress once again that a report in which 'what is said' is used loosely need not be *ipso facto* false. All that matters is that, if challenged, the reporter feels the need of qualifying or retracting his report.

point is that people do not assert such functions *simpliciter*: they only assert them *about*, or *with respect to*, or *of* objects, places, events, people – and sometimes, of course, of themselves. In other words, the relations of *saying* and of *asserting* are not to be seen as binary relations (between the speaker and that which is said / asserted), but rather, as ternary relations among the speaker, that which is said / asserted, and that about which it is said or asserted.<sup>7</sup>

Let me illustrate the idea with some examples. Suppose that, pointing at a work of art, I simply say “Impressive!” Then I will be saying something *about* that work of art, and what I will be saying of it is that it is impressive. In other words, the property of being impressive is what I assert *of* the work of art at stake. Similarly, if, talking of that same work, I now say “It is impressive,” what I have said is, I suggest, again simply the property of impressiveness, and it is again asserted *about* that work of art.<sup>8</sup>

Just as speakers may say something about various things or people, they may say things *about themselves*. For instance, if I say “I am hungry”, what is said will be the property of being hungry, and it is a property that I assert *of myself*. Assertion *de se* is, of course, correlated with the use of the first person

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<sup>7</sup> There is thus an important difference between Lewis’s account of attitudes and the present account of assertion. For Lewis, attitudes like beliefs remain binary relations, between the attitude holder and the content of the attitude (which is property), and that is because the content is always *self*-ascribed. For example, the belief that Mirka might express by saying, in reference to Alex, “He is hungry” will presumably have for its content the property of attending, perceptually or otherwise, to a male individual who is hungry, and Mirka will self-ascribe that property. (Alternatively, Lewis might say that the property that Mirka self-ascribes in this case is that of inhabiting a possible world in which Alex is hungry.)

<sup>8</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I ignore here the issue of whether in saying that something is impressive, one is also saying something about oneself, viz. that the thing at stake impressive from *their* point of view. For a discussion of this idea, and of evaluative predicates more generally, see my (2008).

pronoun.

In the simple sort of case in which the sentence uttered consists of a pronoun followed by a verb phrase, what is said is, then, the property denoted by the verb phrase, and it is said of that thing or person which is being referred to with the help of the pronoun. But there may be cases in which the pair <what is said, that of which it is said> does not map so neatly onto the pair <what is denoted by the verb phrase, what is referred to using the noun phrase>. For instance, suppose that at a conference, I say “Most people are philosophers.” I would suggest that what is said is still a property, but not the property of being a philosopher that would be said “of most people.” Rather, it is the property satisfied by an object (such as an event or a situation) when most people *at it* are philosophers, and I assert this property of the conference that I am talking about. This proposal concerning quantifiers is, of course, to be argued for, but for the sake of simplicity, I will focus in this paper on the simpler cases, acknowledging the complexities to which one is led as soon as one starts looking at constructions that involve more than a pronoun and a verb phrase.

Before going back to the cases discussed in sections 1 through 3, it will help to flesh out my proposal somewhat more formally. Let  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  be any two utterances of the form <pronoun – verb phrase>. Then:

- (i)  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  say the same thing (or assert the same content) if and only if the respective verb phrases of  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  predicate the same property;
- (ii)  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  may be correctly reported as saying the same thing if and only if:

- (a) they say the same thing in the sense of (i), and:
- (b) the asserted content is self-asserted by the speakers of  $u_1$  and  $u_2$ , or:
- (b') it is asserted *de facto* about one and the same thing or individual,  
or else:
- (b'') the reporter makes it explicit, or the context makes it sufficiently clear,  
about what (or whom) the asserted content is asserted.

## §6. How it works

Recall the kind of example that motivated Kaplan's view:

- (33) *Mirka*: I am hungry.
- (34) *Alex* (*pointing at Mirka*): She is hungry.
- (35) *Sergei*: That's what she said, too.

What needs to be accounted for is, on the one hand, the intuition that, at least in some sense, what is said in (33) is the same as what is said in (34), and, on the other, the corresponding intuition that the report in (35) is true. On the account that I am proposing, what is said in (33) is a function that takes an individual (and a time and a world) and returns value True iff that individual is hungry (at that time and in that world). What is more, *Mirka* is not asserting this function *simpliciter*, but rather, she is asserting it of herself (and of the present time and the actual world). Now, what is said in (34) is that very same function, though *Alex* is asserting it not about himself, but *about Mirka*. What is said in (33) and in (34) is, then, the same thing: it is one and the same function, viz. the one that corresponds to the property of being hungry.



Furthermore, this function is *de facto* asserted about one and the same person, namely Mirka, hence both conditions for correctly reporting samesaying are met. The report in (35) is, then, true, and this is what, in turn, grounds the intuition that (33) and (34) say the same thing.

In my proposal, intuitions about what is said and intuitions about true reports of samesaying are tightly entangled.<sup>9</sup> To see this clearly, consider a case of utterances that samesay in the sense of (i) (proposed in the previous section), yet fail to trigger the intuition of samesaying – that is, a case that may appear to pose a problem for my view. Compare (33) and (34) with the following pair (where (37) is the same as (34)):

(36) *Miranda (pointing at Sergeï):* He is hungry.

(37) *Alex (pointing at Miranda):* She is hungry.

(38) *Mirka: (?)* That's what she said, too.

According to the Kaplanian view, what is said in (36) is different from what is said in (37), the first being the proposition that Sergeï is hungry (at a given time), and the second, the proposition that Miranda is hungry. In my view, what is said in (36) is the same as what is said in (37): it is one and the same function, viz. the property of being hungry. However, the report in (38) is false as it stands, and (36) and (37) are not immediately judged as saying the same thing. *Prima facie*, this is a problem, but here is how my account handles it. It predicts that the intuition that (36) and (37) say different things results from the intuition of falsehood of reports such as (38). Second, it predicts that the

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<sup>9</sup> The idea that the notion of what is said derives from the relation of samesaying has been defended e.g. in Everett (2000).

report in (38) is false for the following reason. Since the reporter in (38) does not explicitly say of whom Miranda said the same thing, the default interpretation is that she would have said it about the same person as Alex did, hence about herself. Since (by assumption) she did not say that she was hungry, the report comes out false.

It is important to realize is that the falsity of the report in (38) does not entail that Miranda and Alex have said different things. They said the same thing, I hold, but they said it about different people: Miranda said it about Sergeï, and Alex, about Miranda. Since the reporter does not make it explicit that different people were talked about, the report in (38) is implicitly taken to report Miranda to have said about the person that Alex was talking about, i.e. Miranda herself, that she was hungry. This account is further supported by the fact that if the reporter makes explicit reference to the person about whom Miranda said what she said, the report becomes correct:<sup>10</sup>

(39) *Mirka*: That's what she said, too, about Sergeï.

The account of the falsehood of the report in (38) applies immediately to the cases from section 3.2., in which the sentence "she is hungry" is used in reference to different people, and which were problematic for those who wished to handle *de se* assertion by appealing to the sameness of the sentences uttered.

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<sup>10</sup> My account allows for cases in which the report can be correct even if the person talked about is not explicitly specified, provided that the context makes it clear enough that a different person was talked about. Here is a tentative example. Suppose that Sergeï and Alex had a blind date each on Saturday evening. On Sunday, when Mirka asks him how it went, Sergeï tells her, "She was obnoxious." Later, Alex, talking about his own date, tells Mirka, "She was obnoxious." Mirka may then correctly reply "Sergeï said that, too." The reason why, unlike (6), the report is perceived as correct, is that the context makes it sufficiently clear that Sergeï must have been talking *of his own date* when he said that she was obnoxious.

As for *de se* assertion itself, what needs to be accounted for is the ambiguity of reports such as (41) below:

(40) *Mirka*: I am hungry.

(41) *Sergeï*: Alex said that, too.

Given that Mirka in (40) asserts the property of being hungry *of herself*, there are two ways (namely, (ii)-(b) and (ii)-(b')) for the report in (41) to come out correct: Alex should have either self-asserted that same property, or he should have asserted it of the same individual as Mirka did, hence of Mirka herself. The former corresponds to the sloppy reading, the latter, to the strict reading. The very same account applies to the cases from section 3.1., which were also problematic for those who wished to handle *de se* assertion by the sameness of the sentences uttered:

(42) *Mirka*: I like Prof. Cheng's class.

(43) *Sergeï*: Alex said that, too.

Mirka in (42) self-asserts a certain property, viz. that of liking Cheng's class, hence for the report in (43) to come out correct, Alex should have either self-asserted that same property (sloppy reading) or asserted it about Mirka (strict reading) – in either case, the words with which Alex referred to Cheng's class need not be the same as those that Mirka used, and are left underspecified.

## §7. Conclusion

I have defended the idea that what is said, or the asserted content, is not propositional, but rather, a function that returns a truth value depending not

only on what the world is like, but also on the person, thing or event to which it is applied.<sup>11</sup> To make this account work, it is crucial to observe that speakers do not assert such contents *simpliciter*, but rather, they assert them *of*, or *about*, people, things or events to which they are referring. The view that saying is essentially a saying *about* has been advanced e.g. in Donnellan (1966),<sup>12</sup> and I take it to be motivated independently of the considerations brought up in this paper. The arguments on which I have been focusing here rely on observations regarding intuitions on samesaying and our practices of reporting what is said. I have argued that the received, Kaplanian view can only handle a limited range of cases, and that there is no straightforward amendment that would allow it to handle the rest. In particular, the idea that speakers who say “I am hungry” can be correctly reported to have said the same thing because they have used the same words is unsatisfactory, as we saw in section 3. In section 4, I considered another widespread, presumably Lewis’s own view, which takes the notion of what is said, and the question of whether two utterances say the same thing, to be so heavily context-dependent that they cannot be tracked by semantic means. While acknowledging that we often report samesaying in cases in which neither Kaplan’s nor my

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<sup>11</sup> Kent Bach has defended the view that what is said need not be fully propositional, but may be what he calls a *propositional radical* – i.e. something that can be *expanded* into a proposition. He writes e.g. “Why must what is said be a complete proposition? [...] It may be true that a speaker, in using a sentence to *communicate* something, must communicate a complete proposition, but it hardly follows that any sentence used to communicate a complete proposition must itself express one” (2002: 30). Note, however, that Bach’s proposal is primarily designed to handle sentences like “Bonnie is ready,” which are syntactically complete but require specifying what one is ready *for* in order to be evaluated for truth.

<sup>12</sup> The vast literature on Donnellan (1966) tends to focus exclusively on the referential/attributive distinction, neglecting the fact that the notion of referential use crucially involves the idea that the speaker can say something true *about* a thing or a person, even when the latter is not singled out by the description itself.

account predicts that what is said is the same, I showed that there is a significant difference between those reports and reports of samesaying in the case of *de se* assertion. In section 5, I proposed a notion of what is said that is semantic rather than pragmatic.<sup>13</sup> What is said, I suggested, boils down to what is *predicated*, hence to a property. That of which such a property is predicated is not part of what is said, but rather, it is that about which we are talking when we are saying things. Once we divorce what is said from that about which it is said, the issue arises of how to understand one's report that X and Y said the same thing *simpliciter*. I proposed to view such reports as correct either if X and Y said it *de facto* about the same individual, or else said it *about themselves* – the latter case is what I have been calling *de se* assertion, to echo Lewis's phrase of *de se* attitudes. Finally, in section 6, I explained how my account handles both the cases that motivated the Kaplanian account and those that turn out to be a problem for it.\*

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<sup>13</sup> Semantic content itself is often less than propositional, which is fairly uncontroversial for sentences like "Bonnie is ready," but recently, e.g. Carston (2007) has argued that the values of indexical pronouns are not part of semantic content. (I have also argued at length, e.g. in my (2007), that reference, though relevant to truth value, is not part of semantic content.)

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