

Non-Existence, Implicature and Semantic Transfer

The following three assumptions not only constitute an inconsistent triad, they constitute a so-called *trilemma*, because every pair of assumptions implies the negation of the remaining third assumption:

- (1) Some sentences of the grammatical form 'a does not exist' are true.
- (2) Every sentence of the grammatical form 'a does not exist' is a sentence of the logical form $\neg Fa$ and has the classical truth-conditions of such a sentence.
- (3) Every instance of the schema $\exists x(n \text{ refers to } x) \rightarrow n \text{ exists}$ is true.

There are several different accounts to provide a solution to this trilemma. I want to focus on a specific solution that (mainly) rejects (1) to dissolve the trilemma.

The pragmatic solution: (1) is ambiguous and has a false (*) and a true (#) reading:

- (1*) Some sentences of the grammatical form 'a does not exist' are literally true.
- (1#) Some sentences of the grammatical form 'a does not exist' are not literally true, but pragmatically convey true propositions.

According to this solution we *erroneously* conflate (1*) with (1#).

In the first part of my paper I will present two variants of the pragmatic solution. The first account is due to Adams et al. According to this account sentences of the form 'a does not exist' create specific conversational implicatures. These implied propositions are singular descriptive contents and therefore have different truth-conditions than the propositions that are literally expressed by sentences of grammatical form 'a does not exist'. The second account is due to Taylor. He introduces the same kind of descriptive propositions like Adams et al. to explain the desired difference between the literally expressed and the pragmatically conveyed contents of singular negative existentials. But according to him these propositions are not conversationally implied contents; they are rather the result of a so-called pragmatic process of pseudo-saturation. I will confront both accounts with three problems, which in my opinion justify a rejection of these accounts.

In the second part of my paper I will present a new variant of the pragmatic solution. This variant makes use of the so-called primary pragmatic process of semantic transfer to account for the distinction between a literally expressed and a pragmatically conveyed contents of sentences of grammatical form 'a does not exist'. This account also conceives of the nature of

these pragmatically conveyed contents in a different way than Adams et al. and Taylor. (These contents are more tightly connected to the literally contents of negative existential than the descriptive contents provides by Adams et al. and Taylor).

- Adams, F. and Stecker, R. (1994): "Vacuous Singular Terms", in: *Mind and Language*, 9, 387-401.
- Adams, F. and Dietrich, L. (2004): "What's in a(n Empty) Name?", in: *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 85, 125-148.
- Adams, F. and Fuller, G. (2007): "Empty Names and Pragmatic Implicatures", in: *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 37, 449-462.
- Everett, A. (2003): "Empty Names and 'Gappy' Propositions", in: *Philosophical Studies*, 116, 1-36.
- Green, M. (2007): "Direct Reference, Empty Names and Implicature", in: *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 37, 419-447.
- Recanati, F. (2004): *Literal Meaning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, K. A. (2000): "Emptiness without Compromise", in: Everett, A. and Hofweber, T. (eds.): *Empty Names, Fiction and the Puzzles of Non-Existence*, Stanford: CSLI Publications.