1. The notion of roles

- **Intuition:** “roles/functions/capacities” (see Sowa 1984, Steimann 2000)
  - social constructs connected to particular obligatory and possible actions
  - independent of the individuals that bear them
  - for an individual to bear a role, it must stand in certain relationships to other individuals
- **Standard view on individuals:**
  - individuals are “atomic” (→ classical conception in logic)
  - all properties are ascribed to the individual “as a whole”
- **Role view on individuals:**
  - use the roles/functions/capacities of a person to “divide” an individual into its different aspects
  - The role view enables us to reinterpret seemingly inconsistent ascriptions as consistent ascriptions in different roles.

**Central claim:** Language provides the means to express the role view. This role-sensitivity manifests itself in morpho-syntactic and interpretative effects connected to a specific class of nominal expressions.

**Model the role view** via world- and time-relative role structures $R_{x,t}^w$ of an individual $x$.

2. Distinguish role nouns vs. class nouns

- **Add to types:** new type $r$ and corresponding domain $D_r$.
- **Class nouns** denote properties of individuals (type $e, st$): e.g. man, woman, dog, cat, tree, animal, plant
- **Role nouns** denote properties of roles (type $r, st$): e.g. judge, student, janitor, patient, customer, pet
- **Artifactual nouns:** dual status – object and role/function; e.g. peeler, paddle

**Modification of a role noun:**

1. a. judge → talented judge, young judge (not roles)
   b. judge → regional judge, military judge (roles)

**Role nouns can be used as class nouns** (⇒ type shift); they then denote the property of being a bearer of that role.

**A role use of a class noun** or a proper name requires coercion.

3. Effect 1: predicative bare singular nouns

- In some languages, **predicative bare singular nouns** occur in nominal copular clauses that express role ascription (e.g., Dutch and German)
  a. Paul is a doctor
  b. Fifi is a dog
- De Swart et al. (2007): bare nouns denote “capacities” (i.e., “professions, religions, nationalities or other roles in society”)
- But: “capacities” too restricted to capture all potential roles/functions

4. Effect 2: ‘as’-phrases in their role use

- **Role as-phrases** are used to ascribe the property denoted by the main predicate to the associated individual in the role given by the as-phrase.
  a. As a judge, Paul earns 3,000 euros.
  $⇔$ Paul earns 3,000 euros in his judge-role
  $⇌$ Paul earns 3,000 euros in his judge-role
  $⇌$ Paul earns 3,000 euros in his judge-role
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5. The role structure $R_{x,t}^w$

- A role structure $R_{x,t}^w$ is world-, time-, and individual-dependent. It is a set of pairs containing a role and an eventuality (→ a state or event).
  a. $(r, e) \in R_{x,t}^w \iff x$ bears the role $r$ at $w$ and $x$’s participation in $e$ is/was in his role $r$.
  b. $\exists \{ e | (r, e) \in R_{x,t}^w \}$ iff $x$ bears the role $r$ at $w$. and $x$’s participation in $e$ is/was in the role of $x$.

6. The irreducibility of roles

- Roles cannot be reduced to temporal stages of individuals. An individual $x$ bears all its roles simultaneously and has all properties connected to a role $r$ even if $x$ does not act in $r$.
- Roles cannot be reduced to the associated obligations and permissions. An individual $x$ may have properties in a role $r$ independent of these obligations/permissions.
- Roles cannot be reduced to sequences of eventualities. Eventualities can be performed in more than one role simultaneously.
  ⇒ independent ontological objects

7. Analysis of role ‘as’-phrases using $R_{x,t}^w$

- **Syntax:** The -phrase adjoins directly below its associated constituent. Sentence-initial as-phrases are topicalized.
  a. Paul as a judge is corrupt.

8. Accounting for the “rescue property”

- The rescue property: role as-phrases can make otherwise contradictory sentences non-contradictory (see e.g., Landmann 1989, Jäger 2003, Szabo 2003, Asher 2011; see Box 1).
- a. Paul is corrupt, but he is not corrupt.
  b. As a judge, Paul is corrupt, but as a janitor, he is not corrupt.

Captured by the analysis: Paul is corrupt is not inferable from Paul as a judge is corrupt

- **In standard view:**
  a. $\exists x \exists t \exists r \{ \text{Paul earns } 3,000 \text{ euro in his role } r \}\}$
  b. $\forall x \exists t \exists r \{ \text{Paul earns } 3,000 \text{ euro in his role } r \}\}$

- **In role view:**
  a. $\exists x \exists t \exists r \{ \text{Paul earns } 3,000 \text{ euro in his role } r \}\}$
  b. $\forall x \exists t \exists r \{ \text{Paul earns } 3,000 \text{ euro in his role } r \}\}$

References


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