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Propositional content. By PETER HANKS. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. x, 227. ISBN 9780199684892. \$50 (Hb).

Reviewed by PETER PAGIN, *Stockholm University**

Peter Hanks has written an immensely thought-provoking book, of great originality and vast ambition. At the heart lies a novel conception of content, based on rejecting one of the most deeply entrenched distinctions in analytic philosophy: the content-force distinction. Much space will be needed here for presenting and discussing the basic ideas due to their originality. Their application to outstanding problems in the philosophy of language can therefore be mentioned only briefly. H himself sums them up as follows:

Over the course of this book I have advanced an account of the semantic contents of proper names, a solution to Frege's puzzle about identity sentences, a theory of empty names and true negative existentials, a semantic analysis of propositional attitude reports, a solution to Kripke's puzzle about belief, an approach to the semantic contents of indexicals and demonstratives, a solution to the problem of *de se* belief, a proposal about the contents of interrogatives and imperatives, and, in outline, a new taxonomy of speech acts. This is rather a lot. It is a testament to the power of the general conception of content in which these views are framed that it lends itself so easily to solving these problems. But none of these views is as important to me as this general conception of content. (205)

It is indeed a lot, but we shall focus on what is indicated as most important.

H adamantly rejects the content-force distinction, overwhelmingly accepted in analytic philosophy since Frege 1918. Frege argued as follows: when you assert a conditional $p \rightarrow q$, you do not assert the antecedent, p . If the assertive force is part of the content of an asserted proposition, then it is part of p as it is asserted on its own, but not part of p as antecedent in the conditional. Consider the modus ponens inference: $p; p \rightarrow q$; hence, q . On the assumption that force is part of content, the content of p in the minor premise and in the major premise are not the same, so there is equivocation, and the inference is not valid. But modus ponens is valid. Hence force is separate from content.

That we must separate force from content has practically been an axiom in speech-act theory ever since, and in the philosophy of language generally. H correctly distinguishes between two content-force distinctions (18–19). The CONSTITUTIVE distinction says that there is nothing assertive in the content of an assertion, nothing interrogative in the content of a question, and nothing imperative in the content of an order. The TAXONOMIC distinction says that utterances with different forces share the same truth-conditional content: the contents of an assertion that p and of a question whether p are the same.

H rejects both versions. His main argument against the former is that the classical conception of mind-independent propositions runs into problems. More precisely, it runs into the problem of 'the unity of the proposition', a problem with a history going back to Plato. The major issue here is explaining how propositions have truth conditions (42–43). According to H, we need such an explanation since we need to understand why JUDGMENTS have truth conditions, and on the classical picture, they do thanks to having propositional content. Therefore, saying that it is just a primitive fact about propositions that they have truth conditions is unsatisfactory. Bertrand Russell's conception of a proposition as an ordered pair does not work, since an ordered pair does not say anything (a common objection). Frege's conception of how the sense of a name saturates the sense of a predicate does not explain why the result has truth conditions (a less common objection; 49).

According to H, we must REVERSE the order of explanation: propositions get their truth conditions from OUR ACTS (mental and linguistic) of joining, for example, a name reference and a property expression in an act of PREDICATION. A similar line has been taken by Scott Soames (e.g. in 2014), and H (33–41) emphasizes the difference between himself and Soames in this respect: unlike in Soames's theory, in H's theory propositions CONTAIN force elements as components.

* Thanks for comments to Peter Hanks and Kathrin Glüer-Pagin. The final version of this review, except for this sentence, was submitted in March 2016.

Propositions are TYPES of acts: that is, types of assertive acts, types of interrogative acts, or types of imperative acts. The first type has TRUTH CONDITIONS, the second ANSWER-HOOD CONDITIONS, and the third FULFILLMENT CONDITIONS (24). These three types are distinct kinds of proposition, which shows H's rejection of the taxonomic content-force distinction. The types themselves are mind-independent, however, as their existence does not require the existence of any tokens (20).

What do assertive propositions look like, then? Obama's assertive utterance of 1 is the type of act depicted in 2 (p. 25).

- (1) Clinton is eloquent.
- (2) $\vdash \langle \text{Clinton}, \text{ELOQUENT} \rangle$

Three acts are depicted in 2: (i) the act of REFERRING to Clinton by means of the name 'Clinton', (ii) the act of EXPRESSING the property of being eloquent, and (iii) the act of PREDICATING the property of the referent. Predication is an assertive element. It corresponds to what H calls 'asking' in the interrogative case and 'ordering' in the imperative case (24). These are three distinct ways of combining reference and property expression.

It is the last of the three, PREDICATION, that creates truth conditions (26) and thereby assertive propositional unity. Obama's assertion is TRUE iff the referent has the property predicated of her, that is, iff Clinton is eloquent. The TYPE of that predication, which is the proposition *that Clinton is eloquent*, therefore is true iff Clinton is eloquent.

What about Frege's argument? According to H, predication is NOT the same as assertion. By default, a speaker who predicates eloquence of Clinton also ASSERTS that Clinton is eloquent, but there are contexts when that step is blocked. These are the 'cancellation' contexts (28). In cases of 'canceled predication', the assertion does not take place. One such kind of cancellation context is that of acting in a play (93–94). The actor who pretends to assert 1 performs the predication but not the assertion, which is depicted as in 3.

- (3) $\sim \vdash \langle \text{Clinton}, \text{ELOQUENT} \rangle$

Here the tilde marks the cancellation context. Other kinds of such contexts are created in the course of asserting COMPLEX propositions. Consider first 'it is true that' contexts, exemplified by 4 (p. 99).

- (4) $\vdash \uparrow \langle \vdash \langle \text{Clinton}, \text{ELOQUENT} \rangle, \text{TRUE} \rangle$

The up-arrow after the first turnstile indicates 'target-shifting': the predication concerns not a referent but a type of act instead, in this case the type of predicating eloquence of Clinton. This shift also occurs in negation, that is, in asserting that it is NOT TRUE that Clinton is eloquent.

- (5) $\vdash \uparrow \langle \sim \vdash \langle \text{Clinton}, \text{ELOQUENT} \rangle, \text{NOT-TRUE} \rangle$

In this case, by contrast, the predication of eloquence to Clinton occurs in a cancellation context (100), and so no assertion that Clinton is eloquent takes place. The cancellation context is induced by the use of negation (not so well represented in the formalism). Cancellation is also induced by the use of DISJUNCTION and the CONDITIONAL (i.e. if-then constructions); the use of 'if' induces cancellation (92). Applied to Frege's argument, we get the following answer. The content of *p* includes predication both in the minor and in the major premise of modus ponens, and so the inference does not suffer from equivocation, and because of the cancellation, *p* is not asserted as an antecedent.

As we see from the last two examples, the notion of PREDICATION is not limited to simple subject-predicate constructions. H also applies it to more complex constructions, for instance, involving quantifiers and relational predicates. The assertive utterance of 6 has the content depicted in 7 (p. 89).

- (6) Every politician admires Clinton.
- (7) $\vdash_2 \langle \langle \text{EVERY}, \text{POLITICIAN} \rangle, \langle \langle \emptyset, \text{Clinton} \rangle, \text{ADMIRE} \rangle \rangle$

Here the subscript on the turnstile indicates a second-order predication, roughly in accordance with standard quantifier theory, and is described as follows: 'The subject expresses and applies the function $F_\forall$ to the property of being a politician to yield the second-level property of being a property that applies to every politician, and then predicates this property of the property of admiring Clinton' (89).

These are the basics of H's account. It is elegantly extended in Ch. 9 to questions and commands. In Chs. 5–8 it is applied to issues in semantics, as described in the initial quote. The main method there is to distinguish between different TYPES of reference acts, more and less coarse-grained. These accounts are interesting, but because of space limitations, I focus on discussing the basics.

Has H really produced an account of propositions and speech acts that does eliminate the content-force distinction? As concerns the taxonomic version, the answer is clearly yes. But that is in a sense old news. All it takes is to assign different types of meanings for declarative sentences, interrogative sentences, and imperative sentences. That has been done before. As H notes, interrogatives have been given alternative semantics since Karttunen 1977. There is also a rich literature on the semantics of imperatives, not taken up by H (see, for example, Charlow 2014).

What about this claim to have eliminated the constitutive content-force distinction? Let us set aside the fact that H still distinguishes between assertive force and predication, and that only the latter is part of content. There remains a problem concerning the nature of predication: on the one hand, H claims that predication includes some kind of assertive element—over and above the exact contents of the assertions themselves—and on the other hand this idea does not seem to do any real work. We can imagine another philosopher, Banks, who uses the very same formalism as H, but thinks that predication is fully neutral. Like H, Banks holds that predication BY DEFAULT triggers assertive force, and that exactly this triggering is blocked in cancellation contexts, but that when the trigger is blocked, there is nothing inherently assertive about what is left. Banks fully retains the constitutive content-force distinction. Couldn't H join him?

H does have an argument that pure ENTERTAINING of propositions is impossible, an argument used against Soames (37). It runs as follows:

Begin by supposing that S performs a pure act of predicating F of *a* and that *a* is not F. It follows that:

1. S's act of predication is false.
2. S's act of predication is incorrect.
3. S made a mistake.
4. S must have taken a position about whether *a* is F.
5. S's act of predication was not neutral.

However, it has been argued in the literature (for instance, in Glüer & Wikforss 2009), convincingly to my mind, that arguments of this kind involve equivocating on INCORRECT, for what supports the step from 1 to 2 is a sense different from what supports the step from 2 to 3.

Over and above the problem with this argument, there is an *ad hominem* problem, for in another context H does allow neutral thinking:

I am drawing a distinction between grasping the proposition a speaker asserted and the Fregean concept of entertainment. Grasping, as I will henceforth use the term, is something hearers do in the course of interpreting the utterances of others. Entertainment is something a speaker is supposed to do prior to, or in the course of, judging or asserting a proposition. (180)

What about cases when you believe what you are told? The grasping is then prior to judging, and one wonders why it is still different from entertaining.

Another difficulty with the basic account is that H seems to allow for any number of nonassertive conceptual combinations, as exemplified in 7. Combining EVERY with POLITICIAN seems entirely forceless, as does combining ADMIRES with $\langle \emptyset, \text{Clinton} \rangle$. The assertive element seems to be needed for the combining to work exactly when a full proposition results, but not otherwise. One wonders how it works in the other cases, and why that method does not apply in the predication case.

There is much more I would have wanted to present and discuss, had space allowed. H's book is food for thought, written with clarity in style and an impressive overall coherence, with richness in detail and skill in tackling problems. It is an admirable book.

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Micro-change and macro-change in diachronic syntax. Ed. by ÉRIC MATHIEU and ROBERT TRUSWELL. (Oxford studies in diachronic and historical linguistics 23.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xxiii, 319. ISBN 9780198747840. \$84 (Hb).

Reviewed by CHRIS H. REINTGES, *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris*

The question of how and why languages change has intrigued linguists for a long time. One of the earliest attempts to address the issue scientifically was made by the Neogrammarians, who, in the 1870s, influentially argued that phonological changes, insofar as they apply mechanically, hold exceptionless ('*Aller lautwandel, soweit er mechanisch vor sich geht, vollzieht sich nach ausnahmslosen gesetzen*'; Osthoff & Brugmann 1878:xiii). No such regularity and thoroughgoingness were credited to syntactic change, which was rather seen as an indicator of system-internal weaknesses. As Hermann Paul (1920 [1880]:251, §173), one of the foremost Neogrammarian authorities, put it boldly, 'there is in language no precaution at all against the imperfections [*Übelstände*] that penetrate it, but only a reaction against those already present' (my translation from the German). Paul's statement sounds surprisingly controversial in the wake of the MINIMALIST PROGRAM and its foundational hypothesis that the human language faculty is 'an optimal solution to minimal design specifications' (Chomsky 2001:1). If the STRONG MINIMALIST THESIS were correct and sentence structures are built incrementally for effective use at the interfaces, why is it that the syntax itself is prone to change, at times with drastic consequences for the grammatical system at large?

Over the past decades, much headway has been made in further understanding the logical problem of language change by integrating the conceptual and analytical tools of generative grammar into historical syntax research. Bridging synchrony and diachrony has been the *raison d'être* of the Diachronic Generative Syntax (DiGS) conference, which is widely recognized as the main international platform for the formal linguistic study of historical grammar change. The chapters of the volume under review here were first presented at the fifteenth meeting of DiGS at the University of Ottawa, August 2013—four years before their publication in the 'Oxford studies in diachronic and historical linguistics' series. The book's title, *Micro-change and macro-change in diachronic syntax (MiCMacDS)*, is a tad misleading, as the ongoing debate on micro- vs. macro-parametric variation does not play a prominent role, even though questions about diachronic parametric differences between language stages are dealt with.

In the introductory chapter, the editors ÉRIC MATHIEU and ROBERT TRUSWELL bring up some interesting conceptual and methodological issues. While one may agree with the observation that 'modern syntactic theory gives us so little to work with', it does not follow from it that 'all syntactic change must ultimately reduce to lexical change' (1). The version of diachronic minimalism presented here raises a concern about its aptness to capture the complexity of syntax change