

# What Thoughts do We Ascribe for "This" or "That"

---

**Pećnjak, Davor**

*Source / Izvornik:* **Language, Mind and Society / Jutronić, Dunja; Borstner, Bojan; Mišćević, Nenad; Šabec, Nada, 1997, 152 - 156**

**Conference paper / Rad u zborniku**

*Publication status / Verzija rada:* **Published version / Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:261:233395>

*Rights / Prava:* [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-11-22**



*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Repository of the Institute of Philosophy](#)

## Davor Pečnjak

Ministry of Science and Technology, Zagreb, Croatia

### WHAT THOUGHTS DO WE ASCRIBE FOR "THIS" OR "THAT"?

#### Abstract

There is old problem about sense, reference, meaning and the demonstratives. The other part of the problem is also how do we ascribe thoughts to others. McCulloch in his book *The Game of the Name* (1989) describes the following case: A girl whose name is Mercedes arrives at the railway station and sees the two ends of the same composition, but middle portions are hidden from her by a building. She muttered the following sentence: "That train is not the same as that train" pointing first to the left end of the train and then to the right end of the train. What is the meaning of the first use of "that" and what of the second? I tried to show that we can describe her thoughts by stipulating some tacit beliefs to her and that we can differentiate her uses of "that" involving only internalistic explanations.

*Key words: Language, sense, meaning, demonstratives, propositional attitudes, mentality, visual perceptions, mental states.*

#### Povzetek

Obstaja star problem o razumu, referenci, pomenu, kazalnih zaimkih in o načinu pripisovanja misli drugim. McCulloch v svoji knjigi *The Game of the Name* (1989) opisuje naslednji primer: dekle z imenom Mercedes pride na železniško postajo, kjer vidi dva konca istega vlaka, njegov srednji del pa dekletu zakriva zgradba. Mercedes izreče naslednji stavek: »Tisti vlak ni isti kot tisti vlak«, pri čemer pokaže najprej na levi in potem še na desni konec vlaka. Kaj je pomen prve uporabe besede »tisti« in kaj druge? Avtor poskuša pokazati, da lahko dekletove misli opišemo tako, da se dogovorimo o nekaterih njenih molčečih prepričanjih, in da lahko njeno uporabo besede »tisti« razlikujemo samo z vključevanjem internalističnih razlag.

*Ključne besede: jezik, pomen, smisel, kazalni zaimki, propozicionalna stališča, mentalnost, vizualne percepcije, mentalna stranja.*

There are the old problems about sense, reference, meaning and mind. People communicate very efficiently but still there are puzzling expressions and unusual situations in which we utter words and sentences that are sometimes hard to interpret properly though they are common everyday expressions. It is no doubt that language itself is very complex with many interacting levels, but it is only one part of our mentality, so our mentality is still more complex. Language is not sepa-

rated from other parts of mentality, and the most obvious connection is between language and thought. From elementary textbooks we know that we can interpret the meaning of the "thought" at least in two ways: as expressing certain content in the form of proposition - and some would say that thought as such is an abstract entity which has its independent existence; and, in the other way the thought is psychological entity, realized psychologically in the mind - primarily consciously, but also there are thoughts which are non-conscious or are stored in some form in our memory. We would not dispute here how exactly we think or make our memories - whether we can reduce these processes to processes in the brain or not etc. Literature about these problems is very extensive, so there is no need to touch upon it here.

From this short introduction it could seem that I attempt to resolve some big problems; but my attempt will be much more moderate. I will take only one special aspect of that complex matter. I will take and analyze the following case from Gregory McCulloch's book *The Game of the Name* (1989).

The girl whose name is Mercedes arrives at the railway station and sees the two ends of what happens to be one exceptionally long train whose middle portions are hidden from her by a building. But she does not realize that she sees the two ends of the same train: on the contrary, she has excellent reasons for supposing that what she sees are the protruding ends of two trains. For, contrary to the usual practice - the passenger gobbler is exceptionally long. What is more, Mercedes knows nothing of the possibility of providing a train with two locomotives, one to pull and the other to push; and it is anyway common for the operator to allow trains going in opposite directions to stand back at the same platform. So, she ... expresses herself thus: this train (pointing at the end nearest her) is not the same as that train (pointing at the other end).

McCulloch then says that one and the same object is presented in two different manners in a such a way that someone like Mercedes can labour on under the illusion that there are in fact two objects. So, these demonstratives have to have different senses. Frege - Strawsonian theorist would try to explain Mercedes' utterance as a difference in demonstrative used - a difference between "this" and "that". In the course of overall learning of language we learn to use demonstrative "this" for objects or things that are closer to us and "that" for things which are further away. So, making sense of Frege's expression "manner of presentation" - "this" presents the nearer end of the train and "that" presents the farer end of the train. Because middle portions of the train are hidden from her, Mercedes has an illusion that she speaks/thinks about two trains; hence, she is not irrational - she is not in a position to recognize that she speaks/thinks just about one object. McCulloch (1989) says also that thinking of the sense or significance of an expression as an entity is an oddity, but something which we seem to need if significance or sense is to be made a component of the statement or thought expressed in a sentence. But it could be a useful manner of speaking. We do not have to

take it seriously. But, if sense is not an object (possibly abstract object) what is it then? I will suggest the answer a little bit later.

We can imagine a slightly changed situation in comparison with one that was described above. Everything is the same as before but a girl named Mercedes stands equally distant from both ends of the train which is going to Maribor. Now, she is in a position to say: That train (pointing, or just looking to her left) is not the same as that train (pointing to her right). Now, we have a harder problem. In other words we have only one manner of presentation and some would claim that two utterances of the same demonstrative have the same sense. Now, we cannot distinguish this case from cases of extreme irrationality in which someone both accepts and refuses to accept one and the same statement.

But is it such a hard problem? It would be if we would restrict it to explanations only within language itself or its abstract (semantic) counterpart which consists of propositional attitudes. Under the propositions or propositional attitudes, we understand contents of sentences, phrases etc. These particular sentences and other linguistic units are parts of any natural language - i. e. the same content could be expressed in a vast number of languages in different ways. The matter which is expressed - the content - is always the same - so it has to be abstracted from any particular language and we get propositions. I am aware that it is oversimplification because the theory of propositions and propositional attitudes can have book-length form but I think that it is enough for our purposes. The main point is that we always express propositions in some language or other and we add quotation marks. We cannot get at the propositions directly as well as we cannot get at numbers directly - we always use numerals to represent them. What I would like to say is that language expressions (like demonstratives) we try to explain by other language expressions or language - like entities. But we do not have an infinite number of language expressions we cannot admit *regressus ad infinitum*. We must stop somewhere. Also, we could fall in circularities - one kind of expressions we would explain by another kind and sometimes *vice versa*. I do not attempt to say that this method doesn't function at all, but it could not be, methodologically speaking, fully correct. But, perhaps it is not even empirically correct.

Let's look little bit more closely at Mercedes and her situation. She perceives two ends of one and the same train. This is exactly of what is she aware. Her perceptual - her visual situation is following: She sees a locomotive and a few wagons on the left of the building and another locomotive and a few wagons on the right of the building. Remember that the middle parts are hidden from her. In fact she only sees parts of the train composition. From previous experience and from visual awareness of present situation she tacitly (and quickly, non-consciously) infers that that ends or parts which she sees are not connected and it leads her to assume that they are two separate trains. When she says aforemen-

tioned sentences: "That train is not the same as that train" - first use of "that" is associated with the visual perception and awareness of the left part of the train and the second is associated with the visual perception of the right part of the train. Indexical demonstrative "that" is in fact most closely associated or connected with visual perception and not with the train itself. Since she differentiates two different visual awarenesses (one is of the left part of the train that is visually different from perception of the right part of the train) and tacitly assumes that they are not connected she has two different senses of "that". So, "that" is in her inner psychology connected to two different conscious visual awarenesses, which give parts of the senses of her utterances. Because visual awarenesses are different, these demonstratives get different senses or even different manners of presentation. It is certain that her tacit inference from previous experience (or tacit belief) that parts of the train which she sees are not connected is false, but from her situation she could not know whether or not they are such because middle portions are hidden from her. But in many situations, like this one, you have to decide something or infer (perhaps very quickly) something and in this case Mercedes said what she said. She is not irrational and she has two different uses of the same demonstrative in spite of the fact that only one train is before her. "That" in her case get its different senses from other parts of her mentality, from visual representations with which they are connected. Surely, tacit belief or tacit inference about non-connectedness of the parts of the train which is also a product of overall visual situation, also plays its role.

Perhaps it could be a promising programme to interconnect various parts of our mentality in characterizing single mental states or perhaps contents of single mental states. These further suggest that modern connectionism could be of help for concrete particular problems.

I do not mean to say only that various mental states are simultaneous - that is too obvious - we can think something and in the same time we can be aware of the beautiful sunset and hear glorious final tacts of Mahler's first symphony. I would like to suggest that some mental states could be composite mental states which means that various parts of mentality contribute to the wholeness of one complete mental state which is about single objects or single event or situation, etc.

I would like to add just a few remarks before end. Perhaps we could have difficulty if we introduce a person who is blind and judge about the presence of the trains with the help of sounds. So, another girl, Maria, who is blind, is also present in our situation at the railway station. She hears two whistles from two directions and utters the same sentence: That train is not the same as that train (perhaps nodding with her head in two different directions). Then her thoughts would not be the same as the thoughts Mercedes has because Mercedes connects those words with visual perception and Maria connects them with aural

perception. And indeed they are not the same thoughts - but they can understand each other in spite of that. Mercedes would interpret the words uttered by Maria in her own way - connecting them to her visual perception and representation. The entire subjectivities of these two girls are different and neither can penetrate fully into each other's subjectivity, though Mercedes could perhaps more easily imagine how it is like to be blind. But to discuss details of subjectivities of their personal worlds is another matter, for another occasion.

#### References:

McCulloch, G.: *The Game of the Name*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

Boran Berić

Brooklyn College of City University of New York

## HOW TO EXPLAIN CONSCIOUSNESS?

### Abstract

In the last couple of years, the problem of consciousness has become one of the central issues in contemporary philosophy of mind. As a result, a number of different approaches in tackling the problem has appeared. In the focus of author's attention are two especially promising ones: Daniel Dennett's and David Rosenthal's. Although these approaches are largely compatible, the author argues that Rosenthal's approach deserves to be preferred.

*Key words: consciousness, philosophy of mind, reductionism.*

### Povzetek

V zadnjih letih je postal problem zavesti centralna tema v sodobni filozofiji duha in kot rezultat tega so se pojavili številni pristopi reševanja. V središču avtorjeve pozornosti sta dva, ki posebno veliko obetata: D. Dennettov in D. Rosenthalov. Čeprav sta v veliki meri kompatibilna, avtor trdi, da Rosenthalov pristop vseeno zasluži prednost.

*Ključne besede: zavest, filozofija duha, redukcionizem.*

In recent years a number of interesting philosophical theories of consciousness has emerged. Two of them certainly deserve the place among the most promising ones: the first has been offered by Daniel Dennett, and the most comprehensive account of it can be found in his 1991 book slightly pretentiously titled 'CONSCIOUSNESS EXPLAINED' [1], and the second one has been offered by David Rosenthal in the series of papers published in the last decade [2]. In this paper, I shall compare these two approaches to the problem of explaining the nature of consciousness and argue that, although these two approaches are often in agreement, there are good reasons for preferring Rosenthal's solution to the problem.

Analyzing Dennett's and Rosenthal's respective approaches, it is fair to say that it is much easier to find agreements than disagreements. Besides the agreement about the importance of the language system in understanding of consciousness or about the lack of authority in the sense of the first-person authority, both Dennett and Rosenthal agree that acceptance of Cartesian model of mind, no matter whether explicit (in the form of dualism) or implicit (in the form of Cartesian materialism, which rejects Descartes' dualism, but retains the idea of, what Dennett calls, "Cartesian Theater" model of consciousness, namely the model of consciousness which requires a place in the brain serving as a locus for cerebral