

Peter Smith, *Introduction to Formal Logic* (CUP, 2nd edition)

Exercises 7: Propositions

Consider the following exchange:

Jack: Mary took her picnic to the bank,

Jill: Mary took her picnic to the bank,

and assume that context makes it clear that Jack means bank in the sense of the river side, and Jill means bank in the sense of a financial institution.

In this particular exchange, then, we have instances of one sentence type (as identified by its surface form). These instances have two different senses (different truth-relevant literal meanings). And these instances are used to express two different messages or thoughts (or propositions, in one sense of that overused word).

There are potentially eight different kinds of exchanges between Jack and Jill with one utterance each as in our example; they can involve instances of one or two different sentence types, having one or two different senses (literal meanings), expressing one or two different messages or thoughts or propositions.

Give an example of each combination which is in fact possible.

Two cases are entirely trivial.

1. Same sentence, same sense, same message:

Jack: Socrates was snub-nosed.

Jill: Socrates was snub-nosed.

2. Different sentences, different senses, different messages:

Jack: Socrates was snub-nosed.

Jill: Aristotle tutored Alexander.

Two more cases are very straightforward, including the one already given.

3. Same sentence, different senses, different messages:

Jack: Mary took her picnic to the bank.

Jill: Mary took her picnic to the bank.

4. Different sentences, same sense, same message:

Jack: Socrates was snub-nosed.

Jill: Socrate avait un nez retroussé.

What about cases where sentences have the same sense but express different messages? These will be have to be cases where it takes more to determine the content of a message than the sense (as given by the truth-relevant literal meaning) of the sentence used to express it. They will have to cases where the message varies with context, as in

5. Same sentence, same sense, different messages:

Jack: You forgot to lock the door.

Jill: You forgot to lock the door.

6. Different sentences, same sense, different messages:

Jack: You forgot to lock the door.

Jill: Vous avez oublié de verrouiller la porte.

So that leaves cases where sentences have different senses but express the same messages. Again allowing context-varying cases, we might suggest examples like this, when Jack and Jill are indicating the same thing ('this' and 'that' don't have the same dictionary meaning, remember):

7. Different sentences, different senses, same message:

Jack: This is Mary's book.

Jill: That is Mary's book.

Here Jill and Jack ascribe the same property to the same thing: arguably, then, there's a shared message.

What about the remaining case? Is it possible for Jack and Jill to utter instances of the same sentence (as far as surface form is concerned), where these instances have different senses, yet convey the same message? What about this sort of contorted case? –

8. Different sentences, different senses, same message:

Jack: The bank and the bank are adjacent.

Jill: The bank and the bank are adjacent.

where context makes it clear that Jack is speaking first of a financial institution and then of a riverside, and Jill is speaking the other way about (so their sentences would translate into French differently). But plausibly *X and Y are adjacent* and *Y and X are adjacent* say the same thing, express the very same message about the relative location of things.

(If you don't like these last examples, maybe this is grist to our mill: the notions of 'same sense' and 'same message' just are not transparently clear in advance of some clearer accounts of these notions. However, we certainly don't want to get bogged down in the philosophy of language here. That's why from now on in we are going to be side-stepping these issues.)