

Attitude reports: From modal logic to event semantics

Day 1: Puzzles with attitude

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Focus of the course

This course centers around **two questions**:

1. How should we represent the meanings of attitudes in a formal semantic system?
2. How does this meaning interact with other parts of grammar?

Slides and readings on course website:

`https://rotom.github.io/ova2026`

Roadmap

- ❖ **Day 1:** Background: Some major semantic and syntactic puzzles in attitudes
- ❖ **Day 2:** Addressing the semantic questions: Hintikka semantics
- ❖ **Day 3:** Addressing the syntactic questions: Event semantics
- ❖ **Day 4:** What do these approaches miss?
- ❖ **Day 5:** Horizons: What are possible attitudes?

Semantics of attitude reports

Formal semantics abridged abridged

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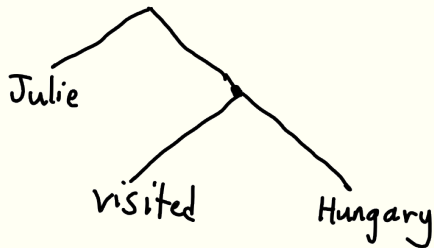
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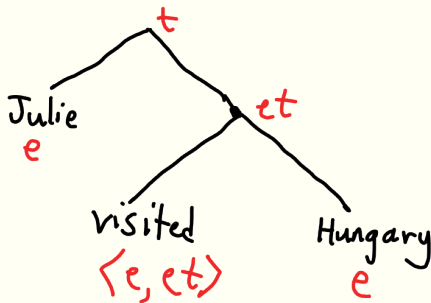
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- ✦ Composition occurs via **Function Application** of two sisters in a tree (requires binary branching)

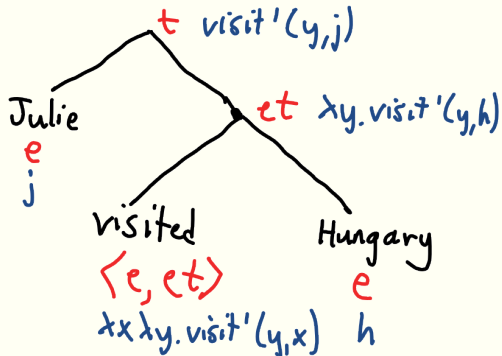
Compositionality example



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Attitude reports contain clauses as proper subparts.

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- ★ How to combine **clausal meanings** with **attitude meanings**?

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- b. $\llbracket (2a) \rrbracket = 1$ iff Boris is a fluffy kitten
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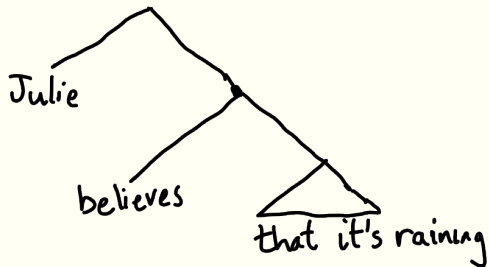
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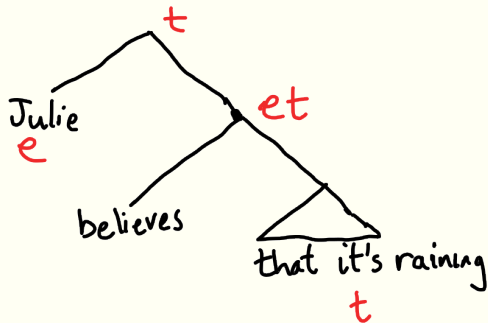
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- Deniz thinks that Boris is a fluffy kitten.
 - ✗ Boris is a fluffy kitten.
 - Deniz has some mental relation to the sentence 'Boris is a fluffy kitten'
 - ✗ Deniz has some mental relation to the truth value 'true'

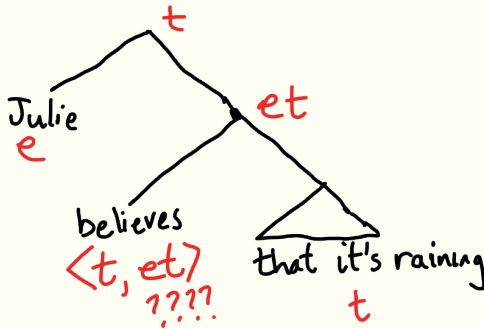
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Upshot: The meaning of embedded clauses in attitude reports is not straightforwardly of type t .

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There is some additional evidence that *embedded* clauses have some special meaning properties that unembedded clauses lack....

Substitution ('Frege's puzzle')

Do these two sentences mean the same thing?

- (4) a. Péter Magyar is riding a unicycle on the roof.
- b. The Prime Minister of Hungary is riding a unicycle on the roof.

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What about these two?

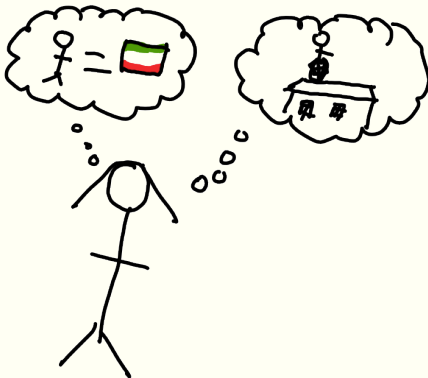
- (5) a. Mafalda believes that Péter Magyar is riding a unicycle on the roof.
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Depicting the difference

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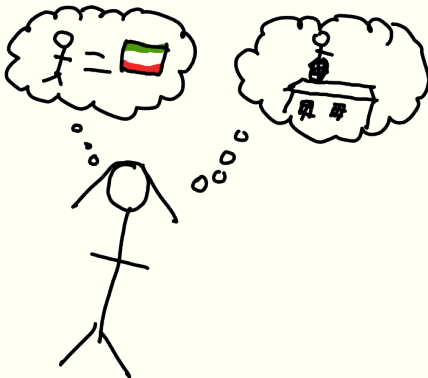
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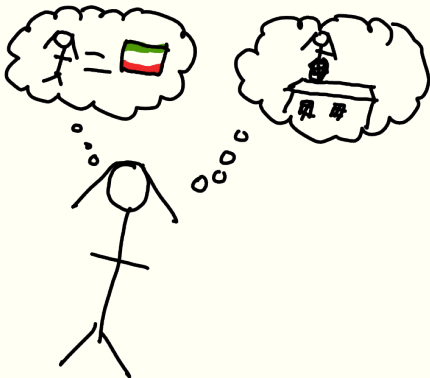
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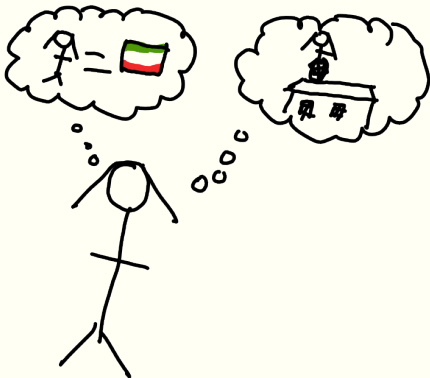
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(6b)/(6c): Commits Mafalda **(but not me)** to the existence of jackalopes

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Tomorrow: A theory for the semantics of attitudes that accounts for these facts—and are all attitudes the same?

Turning to syntax: Attitudes in grammar

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 - b. John remembered to take the trash out.
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 - c. John didn't remember to take the trash out.
✗ John took the the trash out.

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(12) **Basque** (Strauß 2026; glosses simplified)

- a. Bk A konbentzitu du [zerua berdea dela].
B.ERG A.ABS convinced AUX sky.ABS green.ABS is.
'B convinced A that the sky is green.'
- b. Bk A konbentzitu du [hizkuntzalaritza uzteko].
B.ERG A.ABS convinced AUX linguistics.ABS leave.NMLZ
'B convinced A to give up linguistics.'

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 - b. I believe [the rumor that Mary will win a Fields medal].
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- (14) a. I know the rumor.
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- ❖ Some predicates can also combine with nominals (DPs)–which predicates, which nominals, and why?
- ❖ On the agenda for the week: modeling attitude meaning, modeling clausal meaning, and figuring out how the two are put together