

# Pragmatics in Optimality Theory: a case study

Maria Aloni

The article discusses pragmatic aspects of our interpretation of intensional constructions like propositional attitude reports, (embedded) questions and epistemic sentences.

- (1) Ralph believes of someone that (s)he is a spy.
- (2) Al knows who the president of Mali is.
- (3) Anyone might be the culprit.

First I show that our evaluation of these constructions may vary relative to the ways in which the relevant objects are identified in the context of use. I then give this insight a precise formalization in the framework of a possible world semantics (see Aloni, PhD, 2001). Identification methods are formalized as sets of *separated* concepts and variables are taken to range over such sets. Different sets of concepts can be selected on different occasions. The question arises of how people arrive to select the intended domain of quantification in actual interpretations of intensional sentences in a given context. The second part of the article addresses this question in the framework of O(ptimality) T(heory).

In OT, interpretation is ruled by a relatively small number of violable principles ranked according to their relative strength (see de Hoop and Hendriks, L&P, 2001). The goal is the formulation of these principles and their ranking in such a way that the actual interpretation of a sentence in a context is the optimal interpretation according to these constraints. I will propose a set of ranked constraints and I will motivate the adoption of a *bi-dimensional* notion of optimality (see Blutner, JoS, 2002), in which optimal solutions are searched along two dimensions, rather than one: the one of the addressee and the one of the speaker. I will follow Dekker and van Rooy (JoS, 2002) and recast bi-dimensional OT interpretation processes using notions from game theory. The pragmatics of the selection of an identification method is formalized in terms of *optimization games* in which speaker and addressee – whose preferences are determined by OT preferences in combination with particular goal-directed preferences– coordinate their choice towards optimal form-meaning pairs. I will show how a number of classical problematic examples of *de re* belief attributions and identification questions find a natural explanation in this framework.