
SYMPOSIUM

Précis of *Seeing and Saying*

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In *Seeing and Saying* (2018), I make a case for a representational conception of (visual) perceptual experience (and against a relational, or naïve realist, conception), partly on the basis of reflections on language we use to describe how things look (or visually appear) in experience.

I will have more to say about appearance talk shortly, but first let me briefly sketch some key differences between a representational and a relational conception of experience. This will also help explain how the two conceptions bring the way a thing looks or appears to bear on perceptual experience.

Both sides in this debate can agree that perceptual experience presents objects as being a certain way, for instance, your experience of Lucy may present her as being pale. However, the representational and relational views disagree about what it is for an experience to present an object as being a certain way. On the representational conception, presenting Lucy as being pale is a matter of making Lucy look pale to the perceiver and representing her as being pale. Here, the way experience makes Lucy look is determined by the way it represents her as being, or vice versa. To represent Lucy as being pale is to ascribe the property of being pale to Lucy. Ascriptions of this sort make up at least part of the representational content of the experience. If Lucy is in fact pale, the ascription of paleness to her is true. If Lucy is not in fact pale but has been made to look pale by a makeup artist, then the ascription of paleness to her is false.

Let's move onto the relational (or naïve realist) conception of experience. On this conception, presenting Lucy as pale is not a matter of representing her as being pale or making her look that way to the perceiver. Rather, presenting Lucy as pale is a matter of being directly perceptually related to Lucy and her paleness, or in the terminology preferred by some naïve realists, presenting Lucy as pale is a matter of Lucy and her paleness being made *manifest* in experience. If, however, Lucy is not in fact pale but has been made to look pale by a makeup artist, her paleness cannot be manifest in experience. In the envisaged case, it's not her paleness but her pale look that is manifest in experience, where looks are to be understood as objective states of objects (e.g., Martin, 2010). The same can be said in the case of veridical experience; it's just that in veridical experience, objects look the way they in fact are.

Let's turn now to appearance talk, focusing on appearance verbs like “look,” “seem,” and “appear.” I follow Roderick Chisholm (1957) and Frank Jackson (1977) in taking appearance verbs

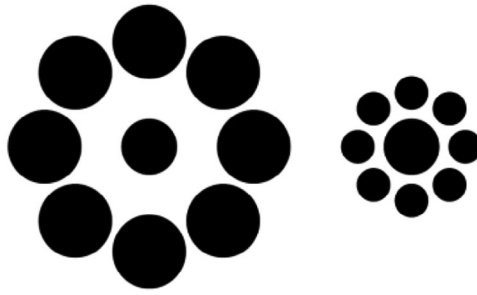


FIGURE 1 The Ebbinghaus illusion

to have epistemic and non-epistemic uses, along with comparative and noncomparative uses. However, my account of the uses of appearance verbs differs from Chisholm's and Jackson's in at least two respects. First, Chisholm and Jackson seem to think that appearance verbs have only three uses, viz., comparative, epistemic, and noncomparative non-epistemic. Jackson dubs the latter the "phenomenal use." However, I argue that appearance verbs have four uses, viz., comparative epistemic, comparative non-epistemic, noncomparative epistemic, and noncomparative non-epistemic (or phenomenal). Second, Chisholm and Jackson seem to think that one can tell how an appearance verb is used by looking at the syntax of the sentence. By contrast, I argue that the syntax of a look-statement need not reflect which of the four readings is correct in the context.

Let's look at the epistemic/non-epistemic and the comparative/noncomparative distinctions, beginning with the former. If you assert how things look to you, your use of "look" is epistemic provided it would be rational for you to retract your assertion, were you to come to possess sufficiently strong evidence that things are not in fact the way they look. Suppose you read an email from the department chair stating that the department meeting is canceled. You turn to your colleague and say:

- 1a. It looks like the department meeting is canceled.

A minute later, the chair sends out a correction, telling you that she made a mistake and that today's department meeting is still on. If you are rational, you will no longer be committed to the truth of (1a). Suppose instead that you encounter the Ebbinghaus illusion for the first time (Figure 1). After looking at the illusion, you say:

- 1b. The inner circle on the right looks larger than the inner circle on the left.

A moment later you learn that the inner circles in the two figures have the same size. Despite possessing strong evidence that things are not in fact the way they look, you are not rationally required to retract your prior assertion. Indeed, most of us would be disinclined to do so.

Let's turn to the comparative/noncomparative distinction. Whereas the epistemic/non-epistemic distinction also applies to the looks designated by "look," this is not so for the comparative/noncomparative distinction. The latter is a purely linguistic distinction. But, pace Chisholm (1957) and Jackson (1977), it is not a purely *syntactic* distinction. Consider (cf., *Seeing and Saying*, 2018, pp. 26, 56, 121, 138–139):

- 2a. Anna looks like her sister. (syntactically comparative)
 2b. Vicks looks unwell but ready to go. (non-syntactically comparative)

(2a) is syntactically comparative, whereas (2b) is non-syntactically comparative. As I argue in my reply to Alex Byrne (*this volume*), non-syntactically comparative look-statements may be semantically and not merely practically comparative.

The appearance verbs “seem” and “appear” uncontroversially belong to a class of verbs known as “subject-to-subject raising verbs” (“subject-raising verbs”/“raising verbs” for short) (see e.g., Santorini, & Kroch, 2007). This means that sentences of the form “o appears F” differ from subject-predicate sentences at the level of logical form. To see this, consider (3a).

- 3a. That car [pointing] is black.
3b. Black(that car). (Predicative)

(3a) is a subject-predicate sentence predicating *being black* of the demonstrated car, as shown in (3b). At first glance, the appear-sentence in (4a) may seem to have the same underlying structure as (3a), except that where (3a) is predicating *being black* of the demonstrated car, (4a) predicates *appearing black* of the demonstrated car, as shown in (4b).

- 4a. That car appears black. (Subject raised)
4b. Appearing-black(that car). (Predicative)
4c. Appears(that car is black). (Underlying form of 4a)

Initial appearances to the contrary, however, the underlying form of (4a) is not a subject-predicate structure. Indeed, one of the advantages of Chomskyan generative grammar was that it offered a way to distinguish between the different underlying forms of sentences like (3a) and (4a) (Chomsky, 1981). Since it is uncontroversial that “appear” is a subject-raising verb, “appears black” in (4a) does not ascribe *appearing black* to the demonstrated car. Rather, “appear” moves out of the subordinate clause and takes scope over it. “Appear” is thus a sentential operator that operates on propositional content.

Like “appear” (and “seem”), I argue that “look” also functions (exclusively) as a subject-raising verb. If “look” functions (exclusively) as a subject-raising verb, (5a) is to be read as having the underlying form in (5c) rather than the subject-predicate form in (5b).

- 5a. That car looks black. (Subject Raised)
5b. Looking-black(that car). (Predicative)
5c. Looks(that car is black). (Underlying form of 5a)

Given these preliminary remarks, let’s turn now to the main argument in *Seeing and Saying* for a representational conception of experience (and against a relational (or naïve realist) conception). The main argument can be formulated as follows:

- P1. “Look” is a hyperintensional mental-state operator.
P2. Hyperintensional mental-state operators operate on representational content.
C1. So, “look” operates on representational content.
P3. If “look” operates on representational content, then experience is representational.

Hence:

- C2. Experience is representational.

I will discuss the arguments for the premises (P1-P3) in my replies to my critics (Brogaard, 2024). Here, I will merely stress that my argument for P3 depends on the idea that the content of visual experience can be specified by noncomparative non-epistemic (or phenomenal) uses of look-statements. This idea can be articulated as follows:

Reflection: For a true, noncomparative non-epistemic look-report of the form “o looks F” to specify (or reflect) a content of the corresponding experience is for the experience to have the proposition that o is F as part of its content.

To illustrate, suppose I have a visual experience that presents my car, o, as appearing black to me. Using “look” noncomparatively and non-epistemically, I utter (6a) to report on my experience.

- 6a. o looks black to me.
6b. Looks-to-me(o is black). (Logical form of 6a)

As my report in (6a) is true, it specifies a representational content of my experience, viz., the propositional content that o is black. So, my experience of my car has the propositional content that o is black. As all (visual) perceptual experiences have representational content if any does, perceptual experience has representational content. This is the gist of my main argument in *Seeing and Saying* for a representational conception of experience, and thus against a relational (or naïve realist) conception. I discuss this argument in further detail in my replies to my commentators (Brogaard, 2024).

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