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► **To cite this version:**

Shahid Rahman, Adjoua Bernadette Dango. Talking about Someone's Objects of Belief Dialogical Language Games, Epistemic Acquisition and Intentional Identity . 2015. halshs-01228570

HAL Id: halshs-01228570

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01228570v1>

Preprint submitted on 19 Nov 2015

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Talking about Someone's Objects of Belief Dialogical Language Games, Epistemic Acquisition and Intentional Identity

Contribution to the meeting fourth meeting of the Réseau LACTO (Langage, Argumentation et Cognition dans les Traditions Orales)

JEU ET ORALITE DANS LES SOCIETES A TRADITION ORALE

Fostered by CELHTO, bureau de l'Union Africaine, Niamey, Niger, du 22 au 25 septembre 2015 Centre d'Etudes Linguistiques et Historiques par Tradition Orale (CELHTO)



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According to the main stream approaches to epistemic notions, knowledge and belief are understood as propositional operators. Thus,

- *Gildas believes that there is a witch in his village*

is understood as expressing a proposition. Moreover,

- *Gildas knows that Gödel proved the completeness of first-order logic,*

expresses a proposition too. The difference between both is that a belief-proposition can be true if it is “factually” false: in our case the proposition can be true in relation to Gildas's belief, that is, despite the fact that there is no witch in his village. Furthermore, assuming that there is not witch in his village, the following proposition is false

- *Gildas knows that there is a witch in his village.*

If the latter is false, from the point of view of the mainstream, there was not knowledge at all, rather it was from the start a belief that has not been verified.

Now, against this recent way of analyzing such kind of phenomena there is an older tradition – from Plato and Aristotle up to Kant, that sees knowledge and belief as the product of certain acts. Indeed, from the point of view of this tradition knowledge and belief are the result of acts of judgement, made public by suitable assertions. Thus, a proposition that expresses the

¹ The present paper is part of an ongoing project in the context of the research-program *Argumentation, Decision, Action (ADA)* and the project *Logique, Argumentation et Cognition dans les Traditions Orales (LACTO)* both supported by the *Maison Européenne des Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société - USR 318* and by the laboratory UMR 8163: STL and it also is a contribution to the ANR Project SÊMAINÔ.

knowledge/belief of an agent is rooted in acts of judgement. More precisely, knowledge and belief are dispositions or states, whereas judgements are acts. Assertions are acts by which the acquisition of knowledge is made public. What we know/believe is what we have judged. However, our judgements may turn out to be wrong, they might, for instance be incompatible with other of our judgements and we might then withdraw them. Thus, the dynamics involved when passing from belief to knowledge or vice versa is not really about changing the epistemic operator, but rather about changing our assertions because of changes on the grounds brought forward to support them.

This suggests that our story is still incomplete: acts of judgements, are not performed in isolation, acts of judgment are the product of social interaction. When I make my judgement public by means of an assertion I engage myself in *a game*, to make use of Brandom-Searle's terminology, *of giving and asking for reasons*. Interaction is the basis on which knowledge and belief are rooted. Knowledge and belief are, as stressed by Hegel, product of social interaction. In fact, the interaction in question is an interaction by means of which I am said to have knowledge if I am able, not only to understand what counts as supporting my assertion (the reason that grounds it); but also be able to produce this reason when asked for it and to defend in the context of further assertions to which my first assertion commits me and in the context of other previous assertions.

As stressed in the text that motivates the present LACTO meeting, oral traditions offer a striking case for the study of this view on epistemic acquisition. Indeed, as pointed out by N. Agblemagnon (1969), and M. Diagne (2005), within the context of the oral traditions of Africa, the initiation to epistemic acquisition is deployed by games of make-belief such as tales telling, legends, epopees, proverbs and riddles. In this context it is also worth mentioning G. Nzokou's work (2013) that provides the first logical analysis of the dynamics of epistemic acquisition and justification involved in debates within the frame of traditional law based on proverbs.

Now let us delve deeper into the matter: An epistemic state by the means of which we are able to bring forward that could count as a ground for asserting a proposition, say A , does not constitute the knowledge sufficient to assert that proposition A is true. In order to be able to assert that A is true, I must be able to produce the ground that justifies A .

If Gildas believes, that there is a witch in his village, it is sufficient for the truth- of the belief-assertion, him being able to bring forward (when asked) that what *could count* as a witch.

Gildas *has knowledge* only in the case, that *there is* some ground, say, a , that justifies A , and that he can identify his objects of belief with a . In other words, as pointed out by A. B. Dango (2014, and 2015) – based on the work of Ranta (1994, 1991) and Primiero (2008; 2012) – while an object of belief involves some kind of variable such as x , knowledge involves being able to produce the identity between x and a . This can be expressed by the difference between hypothetical and categorical assertions. So, whereas

- $c(x) : C(x : A)$

expresses that C is justified provided the hypothesis A . Or better that the justification of A is dependent upon the hypothesis A (the function $c(x)$ indicates such a dependence),

- $c(a) : C$, given that $a : A$,

expresses that C is justified, given that we know that A is justified.

In the first case we have belief: C is true under the hypothesis of A . We do not know if either A or C are justified, we make the hypothesis that they are. In the second case, *we know* that A is justified, and a is the ground on which we build our justification, and so we know C is justified.

Now the passage from belief to knowledge involves recognizing the object of belief x (the hypothetical object x) *as being* indeed nothing else than the ground a . In other words the passage from belief to knowledge involves being able to bring forward the following identity

- $c(a) : C$, given that $x = a : A$,

Now in the contribution to the meeting of Dakar (2015, Rahman showed that such kind of identity statements are based on dialogical interaction. Hence, those expressions of identity that signalise the passage from belief to knowledge are also based on games of asking and giving reasons.

The main aims of our present contribution is to provide a dialogical study of the development of identity assertions in the context of epistemic attributions (including the case of anaphora as initiated by Dango(2015)). For short we would like to deal with the distinction between epistemic attributions *de re*, *de dicto* and *de objecto* for assertions attributing belief involving anaphora such as

- *Gildas believes that there is a witch in the village, but there is no witch in that village*
- *Gildas believe that there is a witch in the village and Sebastian believes that she (Gilda's witch) is beautiful*

In order to develop our study we will make use of examples extracted of existing oral practices in the African tradition. The point is to stress that not only it is the case that epistemic acquisition is result of a specific form language games involving social interaction. We claim that also identity of the objects of believe are the product of dialogical interaction. This relates to a more general tenet of us: knowledge and belief are the result of the interface between action and propositions. Oral traditions deployed this interface since the times of yore.

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