Deference and Semantics of Belief Reports I: Deferential Beliefs

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Abstract

Agents often have mental representations involving notions and ideas which are acquired by deferential appeal to epistemic authorities and which the agents cannot interpret. One of the questions I will answer in this paper is whether these mental representations in which deferential items are involved constitute beliefs the agents have. To this question my answer will be affirmative, pace Sperber, who considers these representations to be semantically undetermined. In this sense, following Recanati, I will consider that deferential beliefs, while epistemically undetermined, are determined from a semantic point of view. This is the first part of a two-part paper.

Keywords: Deferece; semantic content; indexicals; beliefs; metarepresentations.

1. Introduction

A speaker succeeds in making a true belief report only if the agent referred to in the report has the belief the speaker is ascribing to him. In the same vein, a report of a deferential belief will be true only if the agent the report is about has the belief in question, that is, a belief involving notions or ideas that he does not understand. It has been suggested, however, that a mental representation involving notions or ideas not fully understood by the agent does not constitute a belief (Sperber, 1997). If things were like that, then it seems that we can't provide the truth-
conditions of a deferential belief report. But our daily linguistic practice confirms that we can truthfully report the deferential beliefs of others, thus offering support to our intuition that a mental representation involving items not understood is, after all, a belief. In the first part of this two-part study, I will try to secure, following Recanati, the truth-conditions of a deferential belief report. On this background, I will offer, in the second part of the present study, a semantic treatment of deferential belief reports using the format of the semantics of belief reports put forth by Crimmins and Perry.

2. Metarepresentations

In what follows, I will proceed assuming that in the cognitive architecture of an agent $a$ there is a doxastic module $M_d$ in which all of $a$’s beliefs are stocked. With this perspective in mind, we can say that a belief $a$ has is a mental representation made up of ideas and notions which is present in the doxastic module of $a$’s cognitive architecture. Thus, $a$ believes that the Dalai Lama is a Buddhist only if he has a belief $b$ whose content is the proposition that the Dalai Lama is a Buddhist, that is only if in the doxastic module $M_d$ of $a$’s cognitive architecture there is a representation involving an idea about what it is to be a Buddhist and a notion which he has about the Dalai Lama. In other words, $a$ believes $p$ only if $a$ has a representation $r$ in $M_d$ whose content is $p$.

Nevertheless, an agent $a$ can generally have a representation $r$ which involves a notion or an idea that he does not fully understand, more precisely, a deferential notion or idea. In this case, is the representation $r$ still present in $a$’s doxastic module, does $r$ still constitute a belief? To this question Dan Sperber gives a negative answer. Considering that the doxastic module of an agent $a$ includes only representations made up of items (i.e., ideas and notions) which the agent $a$ completely understands, Sperber’s diagnosis is that if a representation $r$ involves a deferential notion or idea, $r$ is a quasi-belief and therefore $a$ cannot believe what he does not understand (1997: 71). In what follows I will show that Sperber is not right and that every agent has deferential beliefs, beliefs which involve deferential notions and ideas. In other words, I will argue that an agent $a$ can believe something which he does not understand. In this respect, I will adopt the approach which Recanati uses in his critique of Sperber’s ideas (Recanati, 2000).

Every representation $r_1$, be it mental or linguistic, can constitute the object of a higher-order representation $r_2$. The higher-order representation $r_2$ by means of which the representation $r_1$ is represented is called a metarepresentation. Since a representation which constitutes the object of a higher-order representation, that is an object-representation, can be either mental or linguistic and since the higher-order representation can also be either mental or linguistic, Sperber identifies four types of metarepresentations (2000a: 3). Thus, let us consider that an agent $a$, having in his doxastic module the beliefs (1) and (2), utters the sentences (3) and (4):

1. < Irina believes that Mihai loves her. >
2. < Irina says that Mihai loves her. >
3. Irina believes that Mihai loves her.
4. Irina says that Mihai loves her.

If the belief illustrated by (1) is a mental representation whose object is another mental representation, the belief illustrated by (2) is a mental representation whose object is a linguistic representation. Similarly, if the sentence (3) uttered by $a$ in a context is a linguistic representation whose object is a mental representation, the sentence (4) uttered by $a$ is a linguistic representation whose object is another linguistic representation.

Metarepresentations (1)-(4) share the characteristic of being representations whose object is another representation. In this regard, all metarepresentations essentially have this feature. However, not every representation whose object is another representation will constitute, in its turn, a metarepresentation (Sperber, 2000b: 117). For instance, the sentence:

5. Irina has a belief.

is a linguistic representation whose object is a mental representation which Irina has, but the content of the belief mentioned in the surface syntax of sentence (5) is not represented. In this case, the linguistic representation does not constitute an example of metarepresentation.

Given a representation $r$ which an agent $a$ has, $r$ can be present in two ways in his doxastic module $M_d$. The representation $r$ can be present in $M_d$ directly or indirectly (Sperber, 1985: 55). In the former case, having an inferential impact on other beliefs in $M_d$, as well as a causal impact on $a$’s behaviours, the representation $r$ will be a full belief. For example, if the representation $r$ is the representation “It is raining in Bucharest”, $r$ can have logical
relations with a representation $r'$ “Bucharest is the capital of Romania” and with a representation $r''$ “It is raining in the capital of Romania”, as well as with specific behaviours which $a$ performs based on this representation. In the second case, the representation $r$ is retained indirectly by means of a complex representation in which it is encapsulated (Sperber, 1997: 69-71). This time, $r$ is an object-representation which, as an internal representation of a metarepresentation present in $a$’s doxastic module, has neither inferential impact, nor causal impact. Being logically insulated from the other beliefs in $a$’s doxastic module, $r$ will be a quasi-belief (Recanati, 2000: 264). For example, $a$ can have in his $M_d$ the belief “Irina believes that the square circle is a real mathematical object”, without believing himself that that the square circle is a real mathematical object. In this case, the metarepresentation is retained as a belief in $a$’s doxastic module, while the object-representation “The square circle is a real mathematical object” constitutes only a quasi-belief inferentially insulated from the other beliefs in $M_d$.

In Sperber’s conception, a quasi-belief $r$ cannot be directly present in the doxastic module $M_d$ of an agent $a$. If a quasi-belief $r$ were directly present in $M_d$, then $r$ would no longer be a part of a complex representation which encompasses it. Since it would be an autonomous representation and not just an object-representation internal of a metarepresentation, $r$ would no longer be an insulated representation in $M_d$. Not being insulated, $r$ could have logical relations with other representations in $M_d$. Other things being equal, this can generate inconsistency at the level of $M_d$. In this case, the presence of the quasi-belief $r$ in $M_d$ leads, from a logical point of view, to inconsistency between $r$ and the other beliefs which $a$ retains in $M_d$ (Sperber, 1985: 54-55). I will illustrate this idea in the following example. Let us suppose that $a$ has in $M_d$ a belief, more precisely a metarepresentation which he linguistically expresses by uttering the sentence:

(6) Irina believes that the rose has wings.

If $a$’s doxastic module were to directly include his quasi-belief, that is the object-representation $r$ to which the sentence:

(7) The rose has wings

corresponds at the level of the natural language, it is obvious that, at the level of $M_d$, a contradictory relationship would be established between $r$ and the representations $r'$ and $r''$ which correspond to the sentences:

(8) The rose is a flower.

and

(9) Flowers do not have wings.

In the example above, the presence of the quasi-belief $r$ in $M_d$ does not constitute an inferential utility for the agent $a$. However, there are cases when a quasi-belief of $a$ can be directly present in $M_d$. In these cases, the object-representation $r$ insulated in $M_d$ is emancipated, thus being able to participate in inferences and to constitute a valid reason for $a$’s behaviours. With regard to this Recanati writes:

An insulated representation can be emancipated, if the metarepresentational frame within which it is embedded is a validating frame: a frame such as ‘It is true that...’. If we believe that it is true that turtles lay eggs, we are automatically justified in believing that turtles lay eggs. (Recanati, 2000: 265).

To Sperber, if an object-representation $r$ involves a notion or an idea that the agent $a$ cannot interpret, $r$ cannot be emancipated. Since the agent $a$ is not capable of determining uniquely the content of the notion or the idea involved in the representation $r$, Sperber considers that $r$ is not semantically well-formed (1985: 51). According to Sperber, in cases like these, the representation $r$ will not have for the agent $a$ a complete semantic content. Thus, if the object-representation $r$ which is internal to the metarepresentation agent $a$ linguistically expresses by uttering the sentence:

(10) The doctor said that Irina had arthritis.

involves a notion that $a$ does not understand, for example the deferential notion $a^{\text{arthritis}}$, then the representation $r$ cannot be emancipated because $a$ cannot interpret the notion, therefore he cannot uniquely determine its content. Given the fact that the deferential notion involved in the object-representation $r$ is semantically defective, $r$ remains insulated from the representations in $M_d$ which $a$ can interpret, thus constituting a quasi-belief.

To Sperber, the semantic status of a mental representation is the fundamental criterion based on which he establishes the differences between beliefs and quasi-beliefs (Recanati, 2000: 270). Thus, the belief is seen as being a semantically determined mental representation $r$ involving notions and ideas that an agent $a$ who has $r$ can
understand and interpret and that uniquely express a complete semantic content (i.e., a proposition). Since the object-representation \( r \) which constitutes a quasi-belief involves ideas and notions that the agent \( a \) does not understand, \( r \) is semantically undetermined (Recanati, 2000: 270).

Adopting the semantic analysis of the indexical and demonstrative terms offered by Kaplan, it can be argued that beliefs, as mental representations, as well as the items which make them up (i.e., notions and ideas), can be analysed as having a character and a content (Kaplan, 1989: 505). In this sense, Recanati considers that given a mental representation \( r \), \( r \) can be semantically undetermined in two ways (2000: 270). Consequently, a representation \( r \) can be semantically undetermined at content level or at character level. When the representation \( r \) is undetermined at the level of the content, \( r \) has a determined character, but \( r \)'s character does not determine the content \( r \) expresses (i.e., the proposition). On the other hand, if the representation \( r \) is semantically undetermined at the level of the character, \( r \) does not have a determined character.

To Sperber, a quasi-belief is semantically undetermined at both character and content level (Recanati, 2000: 270). Since a quasi-belief is a mental representation \( r \) which involves notions or ideas that the agent \( a \) does not understand, it follows that \( r \) does not have a determined character for \( a \). As it is semantically undetermined at character level, \( r \) cannot have the complete semantic content of a belief which the agent \( a \) is capable to uniquely determine, therefore \( r \) has a different content from the content expressed by a belief. Since a belief is semantically determined at content level, it follows that a quasi-belief will be semantically undetermined at content level as well.

3. Cases of deference

In what follows, I will argue, against Sperber, that a deferential representation is not semantically undetermined at character level and that it can appear in the doxastic module \( M_d \) of an agent \( a \). To Sperber, a deferential representation is a quasi-belief, that is a mental representation which, as an object-representation internal to a metarepresentation, has the property of being semantically undetermined at the level of its kaplanian character. At this point of the presentation, a difference should be drawn between two types of cases: cases in which an item (i.e., a notion or an idea) which renders a representation \( r \) deferential does not have a public character and cases in which the deferential item involved in a representation has a public character, but this character is not accessible to the agent of \( r \). Using Recanati’s terminology, I will name the former cases spébertian cases and the latter ones burgean cases. Thus, if in the spébertian cases, the item involved in an object-representation \( r \) internal to a metarepresentation present in \( M_d \) can be interpreted neither at subjective level by the agent of \( r \), nor at public level, in the burgean cases, the item from \( r \) can be interpreted at public level by other agents, but cannot be interpreted at subjective level by the agent of \( r \) (Recanati, 2000: 267).

In what follows, I will provide an example for each separate case. The specificity of the spébertian cases consists in the fact that, given a deferential representation \( r \) which an agent \( a \) has, \( r \) cannot be interpreted at personal level by \( a \), nor at public level by other agents. Let us consider the case in which the belief a student \( a \) has in his doxastic module \( M_d \) is a metarepresentation which he linguistically expresses by uttering the sentence:

(11) The professor has said during the lecture that

the retentional fold of self-awareness is a nonphenomenal trace.

It is obvious that both student \( a \) and the other students who heard the lecture, import the professor’s belief by an act of epistemic deference. Neither \( a \), nor his colleagues are able to uniquely determine the semantic content expressed by the utterance the professor makes by using in the context of his lecture the that-clause of the report (11). Unable to agree on the adequate interpretation of the professor’s words, the students will retain a deferential representation made up of items which do not have a public character. Since the deferential representation acquired as such by the students can be interpreted neither at subjective level, nor at public level, it follows that it is a representation semantically undetermined at content level. As we have seen above, a representation \( r \) which is semantically undetermined at content level can be semantically determined at the level of the kaplanian character if \( r \) has a determined character. Since to Sperber the object-representation internal to the metarepresentation expressed by (11) does not have any character accessible to \( a \), nor any public character, it follows that the deferential representation is semantically undetermined at character level as well.

Unlike the spébertian cases, the burgean cases are cases of deference in which an object-representation \( r \) internal to a metarepresentation present in \( M_d \) involves an item which only \( r \)'s agent cannot interpret at subjective level
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question – that which a mental sentence (i.e., the inflammation of the joints), but she does not understand to what exactly this notion refers. With respect to
content of her deferential notion. In this case, Irina has a deferential notion about arthritis, her notion has a content
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(Recanati, 2000: 267). Thus, let us suppose that an agent $a$ has in his doxastic module $M_d$ the metarepresentation which he linguistically expresses by uttering the above mentioned sentence (10):

(10) The doctor said that Irina had arthritis.

The object-representation $r$ internal to the metarepresentation of $a$ involves a notion that $a$ does not understand and which he cannot interpret, more precisely the deferential notion $n_d^{\text{arthritis}}$. In this case, the deferential notion from $r$ has a kaplanian character which, though inaccessible to $a$, is a public character. Since the deferential notion involved in $r$ has a public character and since the character of a representation determines its content in a situation, it follows that the deferential representation $r$ is semantically determined, therefore $r$ has a determined content even if $a$ does not know what this content is. In cases like this, the deferential representation is epistemically undetermined while, with regard to its kaplanian character, as well as to the semantic content it expresses, the representation is semantically determined (Recanati, 2000: 274).

We notice that what distinguishes the sperberian cases is the fact that a deferential representation $r$ is semantically undetermined, at least on the level of its character. However, is there any justification to Sperber’s idea according to which if a deferential representation does not express a definite semantic content, it is semantically undetermined at character level? In other words, can an agent have a deferential representation when this very same representation does not have a determined character which is accessible to him? The answer Recanati gives to these questions is negative. In this sense, he writes:

In order to be entertained, a mental representation must be endowed with a character. Now the character in question – that which a mental sentence must possess in order to be entertained – must be accessible to the thinker: it must be a character which the subject herself grasps. The public character of the sentence is not sufficient if the subject does not grasp it. (Recanati, 2000: 272).

To consider that an agent can have a mental representation whose character remains inaccessible to him raises a problem for the sperberian cases of deference. In order to deal with this problem, I will resort to a solution proposed by Recanati. Recanati puts forth the hypothesis of the existence of a deferential operator $R_d()$ at the level of an agent’s mental representations, operator which has the feature of being directly referential (2000: 279). By applying the deferential operator to a notion $n$, respectively to an idea $i$, involved in a representation $r$ an agent $a$ has, the result is a deferential notion $R_d(n)$, respectively a deferential idea $R_d(i)$. Since this operation generates changes only at the level of kaplanian character of the item involved in a mental representation, it follows that the deferential notion $R_d(n)$ which is available to $a$, has an identical content to the content the notion $n$ has for the individual $x$ to whom $a$ defers (Recanati, 2000: 281). In the same vein, the deferential idea $R_d(i)$ which $a$ has acquired will have an identical content to the content the idea $i$ has for $x$. In order to make it easier to understand, let us consider the following example. Irina has the mental representation:

(12) \[<\text{I was diagnosed with } R_{\text{doctor}}(\text{arthritis}).>\]
at the level of which a deferential operator is present. In this case, the character of her deferential notion is a function from the situation in which Irina refers to the doctor who used the term ‘arthritis’ to linguistically express her diagnosis to the content of the term (notion) the doctor has about arthritis. The content of the doctor’s notion is determined by a character which is public and accessible to him. In this case, the content of Irina’s deferential notion is identical to the referential content the doctor assigns to his notion. Since the content of the notion to which the deferential operator applies is not different from the content of the notion which the person to whom Irina defers has, it follows that the only difference between Irina’s deferential representation and the doctor’s representation concerns the characters of the notions involved in her representation. Thus, the deferential representation involving the notion Irina has about arthritis is, like any other deferential representation, metarepresentational at character level and not at the level of the content which it expresses (Recanati, 2000: 278).

Even though the notion Irina acquires by deference to the epistemic authority of the doctor and the notion the doctor has about arthritis both refer to the same thing, it does not mean that Irina succeeds in determining the content of her deferential notion. In this case, Irina has a deferential notion about arthritis, her notion has a content (i.e., the inflammation of the joints), but she does not understand to what exactly this notion refers. With respect to the referential content of the notion Irina has acquired by deference, she is not in a good epistemic position, that is,
she doesn’t know what the content her deferential representation expresses is. In this case, her deferential representation is epistemically undetermined even though it is semantically determined at both content level (the referent of the deferential notion is fixed independently of Irina’s knowledge) and character level.

At this point of the presentation, it is obvious that Recanati’s solution has the merit of showing how to reconcile two apparently opposite theoretical directions. Let us consider that an agent \( a \) has a deferential representation \( r \) and that the representation \( r \) has a public character. According to the *internalism*, given that the agent \( a \) could not grasp the public character of the representation \( r \), it follows that what is relevant for \( a \) is not \( r \)’s public character, but the character that \( r \) has for \( a \). Consider now the case in which the agent \( a \) has a deferential representation \( r \) and that the representation \( r \) has a referential content. According to the *externalism*, the fact that the representation \( r \) has a referential content does not imply that \( a \) has the necessary cognitive resources to know what the content of \( r \) is. Thus, with respect to the deferential representation \( r \) of the agent \( a \), the internalist intuitions are justified at the level of \( r \)’s character while the externalist intuitions are well-founded at the level of the referential content that \( r \) expresses. Since the notion involved in a deferential representation \( r \) has a public character inaccessible to \( a \), and since the agent \( a \) can have a representation only if \( a \) has access to the representation’s character, it follows that, unlike \( r \)’s content which depends on facts extrinsic to \( a \), \( r \)’s character depends on \( a \) (i.e., \( r \)’s character is in the mind of the agent who has \( r \)) (Woodfield, 2000: 446).

Recanati’s solution allows to distinguish between the character of a notion \( n \), respectively of an idea \( i \), and the character of the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \), respectively of a deferential idea \( R_a(i) \). We have seen above that, while in burgean cases, the notion an agent \( a \) acquires by deference to an epistemic authority has a public character inaccessible to \( a \), in sperberian cases, the notion \( a \) acquires by deference does not have a public character. The same goes for the case in which \( a \) acquires by deference an idea \( i \). Nevertheless, the two cases of deference have something in common: the agent \( a \) has access to the character of the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \) involved in the representation \( a \) has and not to the public character of the notion \( n \), which is absent in the sperberian cases and inaccessible to \( a \) in the burgean cases (Recanati, 2000: 273).

Since the character of a notion \( n \) contextually determines \( n \)’s content, and since the \( n \)’s content is identical to the content of the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \), it follows that, in both sperberian and burgean cases, the content of the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \) which an agent \( a \) has, depends on the character of the notion \( n \) available to the agent \( x \) to whom \( a \) defers (Recanati, 2000: 273). Thus, in burgean cases, given that the notion \( a \) acquires by deference to \( x \) has a public character, it can be concluded that his deferential notion has a determined content. As the content \( x \) assigns to \( n \) is identical to the content of the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \), it follows that \( R_a(n) \) has a determined content even though, with respect to this referential content, \( a \) is not in a good epistemic position. As the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \) has a determined character and content, it is obvious that the deferential representation \( r \) in which \( R_a(n) \) is involved will also have a determined character and content. Consequently, a deferential representation \( r \) is semantically determined at both character and content level (Recanati, 2000: 273-274). On the other hand, in the sperberian cases of deference, the notion \( a \) acquires by deference to \( x \) does not have a public character, which means that \( x \) does not assign to this notion a definite content. Since \( x \) cannot uniquely determine the content of the notion \( n \), it follows that the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \) does not have a definite content. Since the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \) has a character accessible to \( a \), it follows, as Recanati rightly showed, that the deferential representation \( r \) in which \( R_a(n) \) is involved will also have a character (2000: 274). Therefore, given the fact that the deferential representation \( r \) is semantically determined at character level, it is clear that Sperber’s thesis, according to which \( r \) is semantically undetermined, is not correct.

As we have seen above, according to Sperber, a deferential representation \( r \) cannot be directly present in the doxastic module \( M_d \) of an agent \( a \). Sperber justifies this idea as follows: as it is deferential, the representation \( r \) involves a notion \( n \) or an idea \( i \) which the agent of \( r \) does not understand and which he cannot interpret. Since \( a \) is not in a good epistemic position regarding the referential content \( n \) or \( i \) expresses, it follows that \( a \) will not know the content expressed by the representation \( r \). In this case, the deferential representation \( r \) is included in \( M_d \) as an object-representation internal to a metarepresentation the agent \( a \) has, a representation which is insulated from the other representations in \( M_d \) (Sperber, 1997: 69-71). Given that the metarepresentation in \( M_d \) constitutes a belief itself, it follows that the deferential representation \( r \) cannot be a belief, but only a quasi-belief. Therefore, an agent \( a \) cannot believe something he does not understand. However, given the fact that a notion \( n \) involved in a representation \( q \) of an agent \( x \) has the same content as the deferential notion \( R_a(n) \) involved in a representation \( r \) of an agent \( a \), where \( q \)
differs from \( r \) only regarding the notion \( n \), can Sperber’s conclusion that deferential representations are not beliefs still be justified? Can we still embrace the idea that a deferential representation \( r \) cannot be directly present in the doxastic module \( M_d \) of an agent \( a \)?

Let us consider the case in which the agent \( m \) is Irina’s father and accompanies her to a doctor’s office. After having done all the necessary investigations, the doctor conveys to \( m \) the information that Irina has an inflamed larynx. Let us suppose that \( m \) accomplishes an act of epistemic deference to the authority of the person who established Irina’s diagnosis and that he does not understand what the term used by the doctor about the diagnosed organ refers to. In this situation, what will be the representation \( m \) will have in his doxastic module? In Sperber’s conception, only the metarepresentation:

\[
(13) \quad \langle \text{The doctor said that Irina’s } R_{\text{doctor}}(\text{larynx}) \text{ is inflamed.} \rangle
\]

has the privilege of appearing in the doxastic module \( M_d \) of \( m \). Given the fact that the object-representation internal to the metarepresentation (13) involves a notion which \( m \) does not understand, it follows that the representation in which his deferential notion is involved is not emancipated, which makes it impossible for the representation

\[
(14) \quad \langle \text{Irina’s larynx is inflamed.} \rangle
\]

to be present in \( m \)’s doxastic module.

In the established scenario, according to Sperber, only the doctor can have this representation. Unlike \( m \), the doctor, being an epistemic authority, does not have a deferential notion about the first segment of the airways, but a scientific notion.

As previously shown, even though the public character of the notion the agent \( a \) acquires by deference is inaccessible to \( a \), as it happens in the burgean cases, or absent as the sperberian cases show, the character of the deferential notion is accessible to the agent \( a \). Therefore, the character of \( m \)’s notion about the organ of phonation is accessible to him, even if this character is not its public character which, in this scenario, is accessible only to the doctor. At the same time, the content of the deferential notion involved in the object-representation internal to the metarepresentation (13) is identical to the content of the notion the doctor has about the larynx, notion involved in the representation mentioned above. Since the only difference between the object-representation of the metarepresentation (13) and the representation (14) is the one between their kaplanian characters, it follows that the deferential representation:

\[
(15) \quad \langle \text{Irina’s } R_{\text{doctor}}(\text{larynx}) \text{ is inflamed.} \rangle
\]

is semantically determined at both character and content level. As it is metarepresentational at character level, the deferential representation (15) satisfies all the conditions to be present in \( m \)’s doxastic module. Therefore, \( m \) will have in his doxastic module both the metarepresentation (13) and the deferential representation (15). Given the fact that \( m \)’s doxastic module contains a deferential representation, it follows that Sperber’s thesis, according to which \( m \) cannot believe something he does not understand cannot be sustained.

4. Conclusion

We have seen above that when we have to do with burgean cases of deference, our representations are epistemically undetermined. In cases like these, even though we are not in a good epistemic position regarding the contents of our deferential representations, these are determined, from a semantic point of view, at character and content level. As they are semantically determined, our deferential representations have the same referential content as the representations exploited by those to whom we defer. As in both the sperberian and burgean cases of deference the character of the deferential item is available to us, it follows that a representation involving a deferential notion or idea is, after all, a belief. Therefore, the truth-conditions of the belief reports which inform us about the agents’ deferential representations and which will be semantically treated in the second part of the present study, are now secured.

References