

Seminar on Context-Sensitivity

Week Four

1 Ways to argue for context-sensitivity in attitude reports

- (i) Arguments that involve different uses of a single sentence.
- (ii) Arguments that don't involve the logic of identity at all.
 - Schiffer's Thelma: 'She knows that I limp'; 'She doesn't know that I limp'.
 - 'In 1739, my favourite philosopher was believed by hundreds of readers to be an atheist'; 'In 1739, my favourite philosopher was successful in remaining anonymous that only a handful of people realised he had written a book'; [Each reader who believed my favourite philosopher to be an atheist realised he had written a book.]
(Tricky issue: controlling for putative structural ambiguity.)
- (iii) Arguments that involve relatively uncontroversial applications of Leibniz's Law.
 - 'Superman is such that everyone knows he flies'; 'Clark Kent is such that no-one knows he flies'; 'Clark Kent is Superman'.
 - Possible variants: 'Superman is known/believed by everyone to fly'? 'Everyone believes Superman to fly'? 'Everyone believes, of Superman, that he flies'?
 - Richard's phonebooth.
- (iv) Arguments that involve contentious applications of Leibniz's Law.
 - 'Lois believes that Superman flies'; 'Lois doesn't believe that Clark Kent flies'; 'Superman is Clark Kent'.
 - Sosa's Metropolis Pyromaniac: 'There is someone that the detective suspects to have set this fire'; 'No-one suspects that I set this fire'; ['There is no-one distinct from me that the detective suspects to have set this fire'].
 - Crimmins and Perry's prince case.

2 Transparency

- (1) N is strong and tall. Therefore N is strong.
- (2) N is strong. $N = M$. Therefore M is strong.
- (3) For all x , if $x = N$, a ϕ s that N is F iff a ϕ s that x is F .
- (4) If $N = M$, a ϕ s that N is F iff a ϕ s that M is F .
- (5) a ϕ s that N is F .
 $N = M$
Therefore, a ϕ s that M is F

3 "Russellian" versus "Fregean" versions of contextualism

Compositionality The propositions semantically expressible by any sentence are determined according to invariant structural rules by assignments of admissible semantic values to its syntactically atomic constituents.

3.1 Context-sensitivity in 'believes'

3.2 Intensional context-sensitivity in simple sentences: Soames

- (6a) Peter Hempel is not Carl Hempel.
- (6b) $\langle \text{Neg} \langle \text{Identity}, \langle \langle _ , \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle , \langle _ , \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$
- (6c) $\langle \text{Neg} \langle \text{Identity}, \langle \langle \text{Man standing over there}, \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle , \langle \text{Famous philosopher}, \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$
- (7a) Mary doesn't know that Peter Hempel is Carl Hempel
- (7b) $\langle \text{Neg} \langle \text{Knowledge}, \text{Mary}, \langle \langle _ , \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle , \langle _ , \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$
- (7c) $\langle \text{Neg} \langle \text{Knowledge}, \text{Mary}, \langle \langle \text{Man standing over there}, \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle , \langle \text{Famous philosopher}, \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$
- (8a) It isn't necessary that Peter Hempel is Carl Hempel
- (8b) $\langle \text{Neg} \langle \text{Necessity}, \langle \langle _ , \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle , \langle _ , \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$
- (8c) $\langle \text{Neg} \langle \text{Necessity}, \langle \langle \text{Man standing over there}, \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle , \langle \text{Famous philosopher}, \text{Mr Hempel} \rangle \rangle \rangle \rangle$

3.3 Non-intensional context-sensitivity in simple sentences

Where does the context-sensitivity come from?

- (9) Lois knows that I flies.
- (10) For some x , Lois knows that x flies.
- (11) I am believed by Lois **PRO** to fly.

3.4 Losing Innocence?

A proposal sometimes taken seriously: there is context-sensitivity in “that” clauses when they occur as part of attitude reports, but not in simple sentences.

Q: is there context-sensitivity in expressions of the form ‘the proposition that P ’? If not, that’s bad. If so: Does this context-sensitivity occur *only* in sentences where these expressions are used as arguments to ‘believes’ etc.? If so, what will we say about sentences like

- (12) The proposition that Superman flies is contingent. It is also believed by Lois.

If not: shouldn’t it turn out that sentences of the form

- (13) The proposition that P is semantically expressible by ‘ P ’
express only true propositions? But then the several admissible *referents* for ‘the proposition that P ’ are all semantically expressible by ‘ P ’, so ‘ P ’ is context-sensitive after all.

3.5 Giving up compositionality

4 Arguments

4.1 One report, two names

- (14) Lois doesn’t realise that Clark Kent is just as strong as Superman.

4.2 Nested attitude verbs

- (15) Lois doesn’t know that everyone knows I am the strongest superhero.
- (16) Lois doesn’t realise that she knows I can fly.

4.3 “Too few propositions”

Joe: Superman flies!

A speech (by Superman) which any kind of contextualist must allow to be capable of expressing true propositions:

Thanks to my cunning disguise, no-one believes that I fly. In fact, few people have even heard of me, so few people are even in a *position* to believe that I fly. Likewise, few people are in a position to bear any other propositional attitude to the proposition that I fly. And this goes for assertion too: few people are in a position to assert that I fly. For example, Joe didn’t assert that I fly just now.

Fregean continuation:

... What he asserted was a different proposition: one necessarily equivalent, and structurally isomorphic, to the proposition that I fly, but differing from it in that the conditions for bearing attitudes to it are less demanding.

Russellian continuation:

... In fact he didn’t assert anything at all!?

Another strange speech by the Russellian Superman:

‘Superman flies’ is context-insensitive in English, and semantically expresses the proposition that I fly, despite the fact that few English speakers who utter it thereby assert that I fly. (So it is not generally used literally?)