Seminar on Context-Sensitivity
Week Seven

1 Disquotational reporting

1.1 Data for 'says'

Suppose A, a normal English speaker, uttered the words 'Today is Monday'. Then it is. . .

- **Hard** to speak truly by saying 'A said that today is Monday'. Conditions have to be right: your speech must take place on the same day as A's.

- **Easy** to speak falsely by saying 'A said that today is Monday'. You could inadvertently do this if you mistakenly thought A's speech occurred on the same day as yours.

- **Easy** to speak truly by saying 'A didn't say that today is Monday'. All that has to be the case is that A's speech took place on a different day.

- **Hard** to speak falsely by saying 'A didn't say that today is Monday'. You could inadvertently do this if you mistakenly thought A's speech occurred on a different day from yours.

By contrast, if S were context-insensitive, and A spoke literally (in the semanticist's technical sense), it would be. . .

- **Very easy** to speak truly by saying ⌜A said that S⌝.
- **Impossible** to speak falsely by saying ⌜A said that S⌝
- **Impossible** to speak truly by saying ⌜A didn't say that S⌝.
- **Easy** to speak falsely by saying ⌜A didn't say that S⌝.

How do things look when we turn to a controversial case, like 'Mary is ready' or 'Mary is tall' or 'the apple is red' or 'Mary might be in the pub' or 'Mary couldn't have made it to work in time' or 'Mary knows who John is' or 'Mary knows John will be spending the summer in Oxford' or 'If Mary had been at the meeting she would have read all the papers beforehand' or 'Thelma knows I limp' or. . . ?

- To judge by our intuitions, it is pretty easy to speak truly by

saying ⌜A said that S⌝. This is pretty much always an OK thing to say "out of the blue", *even if you know very little about what A was up to in uttering S*. And there are also many circumstances in which it would sound acceptable as part of a larger discourse that involved many other uses of the putatively context-sensitive vocabulary. Call this fact *Easiness*. There's a striking contrast here between the controversial cases on the one hand and at least some of the uncontroversial ones ('I', 'today', 'that car'. . .): it cries out for a contextualist explanation.

- On the other hand, it doesn't seem obviously impossible to speak falsely by saying ⌜A said that S⌝. EG: If we've just been debating what colour Pink Lady apples are on the inside, saying things like 'they are pink' and 'they aren't pink', and you try to appeal to A's authority by saying 'A said that they are not pink', unaware that A's speech occurred as part of a discussion of the colour of their skin, there seems to be *something* inappropriate about your speech. It's not obvious that the inappropriateness is due to your having *asserted something false*; but it's also not obvious that it isn't.

- The data are complicated for utterances of ⌜A didn't say that S⌝. Suppose during the lineup I uttered the words 'Thelma doesn't know Gimpy limps'. A later conversation: 'Thelma knows Gimpy limps'. 'Hang on, doesn't that contradict what you told me earlier?' 'I never said that Thelma doesn't know Gimpy limps.' 'Remember, it was during the lineup, we were relieved at the fact that Thelma didn't get to watch Gimpy walk into the room, and you said "Thelma doesn't know Gimpy limps".' How do we continue the conversation? We want to say 'No, you've completely misunderstood, all I meant was. . . '. But it's not entirely obvious that the remark 'I never said that Thelma doesn't know Gimpy limps' emerges unscathed.

- It's clear at least that 'A didn't say that S' would be a strange and misleading thing to assert out of the blue: it takes a lot of scene-setting to get such a remark to sound even remotely OK. Call this pattern of facts *Hardness*. Again, there is a striking contrast here between the controversial cases and at least some

of the uncontroversial ones; it cries out for explanation.

1.2 Cappelen and Lepore's take

Objection 1 (The Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Report Test): = Easiness.

Objection 2: Come back to this later.

Objection 3: Utterances of ⌜There are true utterances of '*S*' even though not-*S*⌝ sound unacceptable, even with extensive priming in the form of a "Real Context-shifting Argument". Presumably if we could get ourselves into a mood where it sounds OK to say Not everyone who utters '*S*' says that *S*, we could get ourselves into a mood where this is OK too. So the challenge boils down to that of explaining Hardness.

1.3 'Believes' and 'knows'

Claim: the pattern of intuitions is pretty much the same for "believes" and "knows", except that we have fewer qualms about utterances of ⌜*A* doesn't believe that *S*⌝ and ⌜*A* doesn't know that *S*⌝, and it takes less priming to make them seem acceptable.

1.4 Where would we end up if we followed C&L argument where it seems to lead?

2 Contextualist explanations of Easiness

2.1 Unconstrained versus constrained context-sensitive expressions

If *p* is one of the propositions expressible by *S*, and *A* asserted *p* in uttering *S*, then the proposition that *A* asserted *p* in uttering *S* is (i) true and (ii) among those expressible by '*A* asserted that *S*'. If the context-sensitivity of *S* is unconstrained, this means that *anyone* (who can form the appropriate communicative intention) can assert a truth by uttering '*A* asserted that *S*'.

What remains to be explained: (i) Why is it so easy to learn a truth that one can assert by uttering that? (ii) Relatedly, why can we so often rely on our audience to interpret us as having asserted something that is in fact true, rather than any of the falsehoods that are equally expressible by the sentence we chose? (iii) Why is it not equally easy to assert a truth by uttering '*A* never said that *S*' out of the blue?

2.2 Semantic blindness

2.3 Mixed quotation

2.4 Weaker propositions asserted along with stronger ones

For many sentences, the following is plausible: (*) if *p* and *q* are expressible by *S*, then some proposition trivially entailed by both *p* and *q* is expressible by *S*.

Suppose that typically, if *p* and *q* are expressible by *S*, and *p* trivially entails *q*, then if one asserts *p* by uttering *S* one also asserts *q*. Then the fact that it's OK to assert '*A* said that *S*'

Sentences for which (*) fails (if they are context-sensitive): 'The tall boys comprised the back row of the photo'; 'The fastest slow train is the best one to take'; 'Mary just learned that Gimpy limps'; 'There are bars nearby'. . . .

What are the Easiness data like for these sentences?

2.5 Parasitism

A: The tall boys will stand behind all the others.

B: I just overheard *A* telling the class that the tall boys will stand behind all the others. And *A* should know what he's talking about, since he's the teacher. So *A* knows that the tall boys will stand behind all the others. And I also know this, since I've heard it from *A*. But I don't know whether Joel will be in the back row. So I don't know whether Joel is tall. For me to find out whether Joel is tall, it wouldn't help to measure him more carefully or know more about the statistics of boys his age; what I'd have to do is find out more about *A*'s plans.

Fregean picture: For each proposition *A* asserted, she asserted many

others truth-conditionally equivalent to it but differing in what it takes to have propositional attitudes towards them. In particular, she asserted some propositions belief in which requires thinking of the property playing the "tallness" role under a mode of presentation along the lines of 'property A was using the word "tall" to refer to'. Since B knows so little of A's plans, the only propositions B is in a position to know that A asserted are of this sort. Thus it was one of these that B asserted A asserted.

How would this work on a Russellian picture of the context-sensitivity of the attitudes? It would turn out that it's only if we interpret 'assert' in a very specific way that B counts as having 'asserted that A asserted that the tall boys will stand behind all the others'; indeed, it would turn out that it's only if we interpret 'assert' in a very specific way that B counts as having 'asserted' *anything at all*!

2.6 Bach: what is said is not a proposition

3 Collective disquotational reports

For many sentences S for which the claim of context-sensitivity is controversial, it is surprisingly easy (to judge by our intuitions) to speak truly by saying ⌜A and B both said that S⌝ under circumstances where both A and B uttered S. In many cases this seems to require no special priming, and seems acceptable even when the speaker has no idea what the circumstances which prompted A and B's utterances were like.

4 Contextualist responses

We have the same range of explanations as with the non-collective data. The main difference is that the idea of *parasitism* doesn't help much (if it's taken all on its own, rather than combined with the idea that weak propositions are asserted when stronger ones are).

A new move to help with some of these cases: *hidden variables bound by lambda abstractors*.

- A and B both say/believe/know that there are good bars nearby.

- A and B $\lambda x\, x$ say/believe/know that there are good bars nearby$_x$.
- There is one thing A and B both believe, namely that there are good bars nearby.
- There is one woman every man fears, namely his mother.
- * The proposition that there are good bars nearby is such that A and B both believe it.

5 Collective descriptions