Seminar on Context-Sensitivity
Week Eight

1 Bound and deictic uses of pronouns

A putative source of *ambiguity* in sentences containing pronouns: they admit of bound and free readings.

(1) Every philosopher thinks that he is smart.

(2) Every philosopher thinks that every linguist thinks that he is smart.

Standard Tarskian unified semantic treatment: at least when they contain free pronouns, sentences semantically express functions from *assignment functions* to propositions. Similarly for other expressions with free pronouns

(i) $|\text{he}_i \text{ is smart}|(a) = |\text{is smart}|(a(i))$

(ii) $|\text{he}_i|(a) = a(i)$

2 The argument for hidden variables in 'local'

"Local" too has bound and free readings:

(3) Every reporter was sponsored by a local bar.

(4) Bill Clinton has been to every local bar.

Accounting for this in the Tarskian framework:

(i) *Simple approach:* $|\text{local}_i|(\text{a})$ = the property of being local to $a(i)$. (Assuming we're working in a framework where adjectives express properties; otherwise, plug in your favourite surrogate.)

(ii) *Fancy approach:* Whenever 'local' occurs in the surface form of a sentence, the LF of the sentence contains an unpronounced variable that occurs as a sister of 'local'. |local| = the function that takes each thing to the property of being local to that thing.

(iii) *Mysterious (to me) approach*: As in the fancy approach, except that the variable is not a sister of 'local' but a co-occupant of its terminal node.

Since this isn't a course on syntax we can afford to ignore the differences between the approaches.

Note that providing a value to the relevant variable i doesn't plausibly exhaust the context-sensitivity of "local": we also have context-sensitivity as regards, e.g., how near something has to be to x_i to be in the extension of 'local_i'.

3 Domain restriction and binding: good arguments

(5) Everyone answered every question.

(6) Whenever John teaches a class, he fails a Frenchman.

4 Bad arguments using prepositional phrases

(7) In each of John's classes, he fails exactly three Frenchmen.

(8) In *Topics in 'Pataphysics*, John failed exactly three Frenchmen.

5 Blaming the noun versus blaming the quantifier

Stanley's arguments: anaphora, superlatives, comparative adjectives.

(9) John has only been a philosopher for the last few years.

(10) John has only been identical to a philosopher for the last few years.

One idea for discriminating the proposals: look at intensional adjectives like *former, alleged, putative, fake. . .* :

(11) One former philosopher now teaches philosophy in NYU.

(See Elbourne, 'The Binding Argument' for another idea.)

Note: many ordinary nouns seem to be context-sensitive in ways that go beyond the domain restriction mechanism:

(12) Noam Chomsky is a philosopher.

6 The bold proposal

Except for a short list of special cases like 'I', *every context-sensitive expression is (or contains) a variable*.

- If this is right, then we should be able to find bound readings for every context-sensitive expression.
- More than that: we should be able to find readings in which *every* variable associated with a given expression is bound, so that there is no longer any role for context to influence the interpretation of the expression.

Forces would-be positers of context-sensitivity to jump over a high bar.

One *might* think it's easy to find bound readings by looking at the disquotational "says" reports:

(13) Everyone said that his horse was fast.

But this is too fast: if the right explanation of this phenomenon was binding, you'd expect bound readings also to be possible in many contexts where they don't seem to be:

(14) Everyone cheered whenever his horse gained the lead.

7 Is the function variable bindable?

(15) What$_i$ is John proud to belong to t_i? The Marines.

(16) What$_i$ is every person$_{\text{who is a member of } i}$ proud to belong to t_i? The Marines.

(17) What$_f$ does every author$_i$ like $f(i)$? Her first book.

(18) In every country$_c$, what$_f$ is every person$_{f(c)}$ proud to belong to $f(c)$? Its Progressive Party.

(19) In every country$_c$, what$_f$ is every person$_{\text{who lives in } f(c)}$ proud to live in? Its capital.

8 Multiple binding (Breheny, Jacobson)

(20) Between every recruit and each of his objectives, the

(21) Every doting grandparent told each granddaughter that a present would arrive at her house before Christmas.

Stanley's fallback position: the (non-function) variables are *adjuncts* rather than *arguments*. Each sentence of the relevant type has infinitely many different LF representations which differ in the number of variables.

- If we said this, why would we ever want to posit the variables in sentences where they are not going to get bound?