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The pervasiveness of context sensitivity

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A context sensitive word

▶ Consider the sentence:

(1)   I am hungry.

▶ *The word "I" in (1) refers to different individuals depending on who utters the sentence.* If Leo utters (1), "I" refers to Leo, if Lea utters (1), "I" refers to Lea, and so on.

▶ As a consequence, *when different individuals utter (1), they say different things.* When Leo utters (1), he is saying that Leo is hungry, when Lea utters (1), she is saying that Lea is hungry, and so on.

▶ As a consequence, *when different individuals utter (1), one individual may say something true and another individual may say something false.* If Leo is lying when he utters (1), he has said something false; on the other hand if Lea is sincere when she utters (1), she has said something true.

▶ We may sum up these properties of the word "I" by saying that "I" is sensitive to the context in which it is uttered.

More context sensitive words

▶ The word "I" is not the only word which is sensitive to the context in which it is uttered. Consider sentences (2)-(4):

(2)   Leo is happy now.

(3)   Lea is here.

(4)   This is new.

▶ The word "now" in (2) refers to different times depending on the time at which sentence (2) is uttered. As a consequence, (2) says different things when uttered at different times, and (2) may be true when uttered at certain times and false when uttered at other times.

▶ The word "here" in (3) refers to different places depending on the place where sentence (3) is uttered. As consequence, (3) says different things when uttered in different places, and (3) may be true when uttered in certain places and false when uttered in other places.

▶ The word "this" in (4) refers to different things depending on the thing the speaker indicates when they utter (4). As a consequence, (4) says different things when uttered by speakers that indicate different things, and (4) may be true when uttered by a speaker that indicates one thing and false when uttered by a speaker that indicates another thing.

The basic set of context sensitive expressions

▶ The words in blue all share the property of being *context sensitive*:

today, yesterday, tomorrow, now, here, there, that, this, I, you, we, she, he, us, it, . . .

▶ Namely these words all have these features:

1. their referents vary depending on the context in which they are uttered;
2. a sentence containing one of these words may say different things when uttered in different contexts;
3. a sentence containing one of these words may say something true when uttered in a context and may say something false when uttered in a different context.

▶ Cappelen and Dever call the set of words in blue *the basic set of context sensitive expressions*.

Which expressions are context sensitive exactly?

- ► The expressions in the basic set wear their context-sensitivity on their sleeve: their referents clearly depend on the context in which they are uttered.
- ► Notice however that, in listing the expressions belonging to the basic set, I have put some dots at the end, thus allowing for the possibility that other words can be added to the basic set.
- ► Moreover, there can be some expressions whose context sensitivity is not so evident at first blush (in this sense they do not belong to the basic set), which nonetheless we may come to regard as context-sensitive upon further reflection.
- ► So which expressions are context sensitive exactly? Context sensitivity seems to be pervasive in natural languages. Let's see why.

Smith vs. United states

- ► In 1993, the US Supreme Court debated the case of Smith vs. United States.
- ► John Angus Smith offered to trade an automatic weapon, a MAC-10, for two ounces of cocaine.
- ► Smith was convicted for drug trafficking and was also sentenced to extra years *because he used a firearm* in the course of committing the crime of drug trafficking.
- ► The additional penalty was based on this article of law:

  any person who, during and in relation to any crime of violence or drug trafficking crime ... uses or carries a firearm, ... in addition to the punishment provided for such crime of violence or drug trafficking crime, [must] be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of not less than 5 years...

The opinions

- ► The Supreme Court ruled that Smith had to serve more years for using a firearm while committing the crime of drug trafficking.
- ► Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who delivered the opinion of the Court, wrote that "it is both reasonable and normal to say that petitioner 'used' his MAC-10 in his drug trafficking offense by trading it for cocaine".
- ► Justice Antonin Scalia, who delivered the dissenting opinion, argued that "using a firearm" should be given a more restrictive interpretation:

  To use an instrumentality ordinarily means to use it for its intended purpose. When someone asks "Do you use a cane?" he is not inquiring whether you have your grandfather's silver-handled walking stick on display in the hall; he wants to know whether you walk with a cane. Similarly, to speak of "using a firearm" is to speak of using it for its distinctive purpose, i.e., as a weapon. To be sure, "one can use a firearm in a number of ways", ... including as an article of exchange, just as one can "use" a cane as a hall decoration...

Using firearms

- ► Notice: both O'Connor and Scalia agree that the expression "using a firearm" can describe the action of using it to trade and can also describe the action of using it as a weapon.
- ► However, the judges differ on what action "using a firearm" describes *in a legal context* such as Smith vs. United States.
- ► Whether one agrees with O'Connor or with Scalia, the discussion suggests that the expression "using a firearm" is also a context sensitive expression: it can refer to different actions depending on the context in which it is used.

What is love

- Consider sentence (5):

  (5)   I love you.

- Lea utters (5) truthfully while talking to her friend Jack. In another occasion, Lea utters (5) truthfully when talking to her lover Zac. When Zac asks Lea whether she loves Jack, she replies truthfully: "No, I don't love Jack, he is just a friend."

- So, in a context Lea may say truthfully that she loves Jack, but in a different context, although her feelings for Jack are unchanged, she may truthfully deny that she loves Jack.

- *Prima facie*, this indicates that the world "love" is context sensitive: it can refer to different feelings depending on the context in which it is used. A sentence like (5) may express different contents in different contexts.

Context sensitivity or ambiguity?

- One might wonder whether the verb "love" is *ambiguous* rather than *context sensitive*.

- A context dependent word has only one meaning, but its contribution to what is said, and consequently the truth value of the sentences in which it occurs, depends on the context in which is uttered.

- For example, the world "I" only has one meaning, but depending on the context in which it is uttered, refers to different individuals.

- An ambiguous word has more than one meaning: the same sequence of phonemes corresponds to more than one meaning.

- For example, the word "bank" has two meanings: it may mean the land alongside a river or it may mean a financial institution where customers deposit money and can withdraw it when needed.

- One might suggest that the world "love" has different meanings: it may mean the kind of affection that we have for a friend, or the kind of affection that we have for a lover, or the kind of affection that we have for a parent, etc.

How can one tell?

- How can we tell when a word is ambiguous or when it is context sensitive?

- On the face of it, a word like "I" may be used to refer to different individuals and a word like "bank" may be used to refer to different objects. So what's the difference?

- The fact "I" may be used to refer to different individuals may be traced back to a single meaning of "I" which is clearly stable across contexts: "I" is used by the speakers to refer to themselves. Once you learn this, you know what "I" refers to in any given context in which it is uttered.

- The fact "bank" may be used to refer to different objects may not be traced back to a single meaning which is stable across contexts. In the case of "bank", you have to learn that it can be used to refer to the land alongside a river *and you have to learn separately* that it can be used to refer to a financial institution.

- This is why it is plausible to regard "bank", but not "I", as ambiguous.

Back to love

- The word "love" may be used to refer to different kinds of affections, as (6) shows:

  (6)   a.   I love my child.
         b.   I love my fiancé.
         c.   I love my friend.
         d.   I love Buenos Aires.
         e.   I love philosophy.
         f.   I love that actor.

- Yet, unlike for "bank", it seems that these uses are semantically related: even if it may be difficult to say exactly what it is, it seems that there is a core meaning of "love" which is stable across the uses of "love" in (6).

- It does not seem that we have to learn separately that "love" may refer to the affection we feel for our child, the affection we feel for our lover, the affection we feel for a friend, etc.

- So, the variability in reference of "love" seems to be more a case of context sensitivity than a case of ambiguity.

Friends and enemies

▶ Now consider sentence (7):

(7)   Leo is an enemy.

▶ If I utter it, (7) is likely to mean that Leo is an *enemy of mine*. If Jack utters it, (7) is likely to mean that Leo is an *enemy of Jack*.

▶ So, the word "enemy" picks out different properties (enemy of mine, enemy of Jack, . . .) depending on the context in which it is uttered. As a consequence (7) may say different things when uttered in different contexts, so it may say something true when uttered in a context and it may say something false when uttered in a different context. In short, "enemy" is a context sensitive expression.

▶ Notice that, by a similar reasoning, we may also conclude that "friend" is a context sensitive expression (exercise for the reader).

(8)   Leo is a friend.

More on enemies and friends

▶ There is another dimension to the context sensitivity of words like "enemy" and "friend".

▶ What kind of relationships do these words refer to? What counts as a friend or as an enemy varies from one context to another.

▶ Here is an illustration by Cappelen and Dever:

Consider the following two contexts, Low-Standard Friend Context and High-Standard Friend Context:

Low-Standard Context for Friend: *Consider a four-year old, Nora, in a playground. She meets another kid, Alex, and they play for a while. In this context, it is perfectly fine to say "Nora and Alex are friends", and it could be followed up by saying "Say goodbye to your friend" while leaving.*

High-Standard Context for Friend: *Suppose while Nora plays with Alex, we are planning a small birthday party for her and making a list of her friends. It wouldn't be appropriate to list Alex and other playground acquaintances. In these contexts our standards go up, and more is required to count as a friend. To put it loosely, how close and of what kind the relationship needs to be for A and B to count as friends will vary between contexts–closely analogously to how love varies across contexts.*(Cappelen and Dever 2016, pp. 14-15).

Context sensitivity and vagueness

▶ Words like "friend" and "enemy" are vague. In some case, it may simply be unclear whether someone is a friend or not, or someone is an enemy or not.

▶ (Now and then I have a drink with one of my colleagues. Is he a friend or not? I could not say).

▶ However, context sensitivity should not be confused with vagueness.

▶ Typically, vague terms are also context sensitive, since different contexts may determine different cut-off points for the term to apply (as we have seen in the case of Nora, different contexts may determine different cut-off points for being a friend).

▶ However, a word may be context sensitive without being vague: for example, the word "I" is not vague, yet it is context sensitive.

Being fast

▶ Mark Rowlands is a philosopher. Among other things, he has written on topics like consciousness and animal rights. To the general public he is mostly known for his memoir *The Philosopher and the Wolf*.

▶ In 2011 he ran the Miami marathon in 5 hours and 15 minutes. He probably runs faster than anyone in this room (certainly faster than me). So, I can truthfully say:

(9)   Mark is fast.

▶ However, consider this: the top athletes running the marathon do it in less that 2 hours and 30 minutes. So, compared to them, Mark is not fast. So, in a context in which I am considering the top athletes (9) is false.

▶ Thus, "fast" is another context sensitive word.

Gradable adjectives

- ▶ The word "fast" is a *gradable adjective*, namely an adjective that can be used comparatively, as in (10):

  (10)   Mark is faster than Leo.

- ▶ Typically, gradable adjectives (like, "fast", "smart", "rich", "good", etc.) are context sensitive.
- ▶ Presumably, the reason why they are context sensitive is that different contexts may set different degrees of fastness, smartness, richness, goodness as a condition for regarding someone as fast, smart, rich, or good.
- ▶ When we are considering running philosophers, a certain degree of fastness is sufficient for regarding someone as fast. When we are considering top athletes, the same degree of fastness is not enough to regard the same person as fast.

The context sensitivity of "good"

- ▶ Leo often plays the piano at parties. For a dilettante, he is good. So, in commenting on his piano playing skills I can truthfully say:

  (11)   Leo is good.

- ▶ Leo also plays chess, but he is a mediocre player. So, in commenting on his chess playing skills, I can truthfully say:

  (12)   Leo is not good.

- ▶ Thus, the adjective "good" is context sensitive in this sense: (11) may say different things depending on the context in which it is uttered, since the context may determine the respect relative to which someone is good.
- ▶ But there is also another dimension to the context sensitivity of "good". Even if we restrict our attention to contexts in which "good" is understood as good at playing the piano, (11) may be true in some contexts and false in other contexts.
- ▶ For example, (11) may be true in a context in which the comparison class is the class of the amateur piano players and false in a context in which the comparison class is that of professional piano players.

Counterfactual conditionals

- ▶ Counterfactual conditionals make suppositions which are presupposed to be false.
- ▶ For example, although we all know that the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) lost World War II, we may (truly) utter (13):

  (13)   If the Axis Powers had won World War II, the fascists would still rule over Italy.

- ▶ Typically, counterfactual conditionals are expressed by using the subjunctive mood, so they are also called *subjunctive conditionals*.
- ▶ The standard view is that counterfactual statements are context sensitive. Let's see why.

If Caesar were in command

- ▶ W. v. O Quine (1960) makes the following observation concerning counterfactual conditionals:

  The subjunctive conditional depends, like indirect quotation and more so, on a dramatic projection: we feign belief in the antecedent and see how convincing we then find the consequent. What traits of the real world to suppose preserved in the feigned world of the contrary-to-fact antecedent can be guessed only from a sympathetic sense of the fabulist's likely purpose in spinning his fable. Thus consider the pair (Goodman's, nearly enough):
  If Caesar were in command, he would use the atom bomb;
  If Caesar were in command, he would use catapults.
  We are likelier to hear the former, but only because that one is likelier to fit a lesson that a speaker would try to dramatize.

Quine's point

- Quine's point (which he attributes to Goodman 1947) is that sentence (14) may be true in a context and false in another:

  (14)   If Caesar were in command, he would use the atom bomb.

- A speaker, might assert (14) truthfully, for example, in a context in which the Korean war is being discussed, and it is taken for granted that, were Caesar in command, modern weaponry would be available and his ruthlessness would be the same.
- On the other hand, in a context in which it is taken for granted that, were Caesar in command in the Korean war, only the weaponry used in the antiquity would be available, (14) would be false, and (15) would be true:

  (15)   If Caesar were in command, he would use catapults.

- If this is correct, it seems that counterfactuals are context-sensitive: the truth of a counterfactual statement may vary from one context to another.

Causal claims

- Schaffer (2013) observes:

  . . . if the engineer finds that the poor road conditions contributed to the accident, then it would be acceptable for her to say:

  1.   The poor road conditions caused the accident.

  Yet if the detective wants to focus on the drunk driver, then it would seem acceptable for him to deny 1 and instead say:

  2.   The poor road conditions didn't cause the accident, it was the drunk driver.

  So much is commonplace.. . .

Causal claims (cont)

. . . To provide one more illustration, the forest rangers would presumably promote the lightning strike to the status of cause for the forest fire, and would demote the presence of oxygen to the status of background condition. But now consider Putnam's visiting Venusians: "Imagine that Venusians land on earth and observe a forest fire. One of them says, 'I know what caused that–the atmosphere of the darned planet is saturated with oxygen'". (1982, 150). So in particular, we can imagine a conversation among the Venusians in which the following claim was acceptable:

3.   The presence of oxygen caused there to be a forest fire.

Yet if we imagine a conversation among the forest rangers, 3 will surely be unacceptable in such a context. The forest rangers will deny that the presence of oxygen caused the fire.

The context sensitivity of causal claims

- Schaffer takes these observations to support the conclusion that causal claims are context sensitive:

  A single causal claim can bear different truth values relative to different contexts, where this difference is traceable to the occurrence of 'causes,' and concerns a distinctively causal factor.

MacFarlane on epistemic modals

If I say, "Goldbach's conjecture might be true, and it might be false," I am not making a claim about what could have been the case, had things gone differently. Nor am I expressing a belief in the metaphysical contingency of mathematics. Rather, I am expressing my uncertainty–or perhaps our collective uncertainty–about the truth or falsity of Goldbach's conjecture. Similarly, if I say "Joe can't be running," I am not saying that Joe's constitution prohibits him from running, or that Joe is essentially a non-runner, or that Joe isn't allowed to run. My basis for making the claim may be nothing more than that I see Joe's running shoes hanging on a hook. Here I am expressing certainty. Modal adjectives and adverbs whose primary use is to express states of certainty or uncertainty are called epistemic modals. *To add a few more examples:*

(1)   *P is probably equal to NP.*

(2)   *There's a ten percent chance of rain tonight.*

(3)   *It must be Tuesday.*

(4)   *He could be coming in on Wednesday.*

(5)   *It is possible that she didn't pass the exam.*

It is uncontroversial that such sentences are commonly used to express a state of certainty or uncertainty, and to indicate to the audience what possibilities the speaker takes to be open. But there is little agreement about their truth conditions, or even whether they have truth conditions. (MacFarlane 2014 p. 238)

The context sensitivity of epistemic modals

► Now that we know what epistemic modals are, we are ready to see why they are context sensitive.

► Kratzer (1991) describes the following case:

Suppose a man is approaching both of us. You are standing over there. I am further away. I can only see the bare outlines of the man. In view of my evidence, the person approaching may be Fred. You know better. In view of your evidence, it cannot possibly be Fred, it must be Martin. If this is so, my utterance of (1) and your utterance of (2) are both true.

(1)   *The person approaching might be Fred.*

(2)   *The person approaching cannot be Fred.*

Had I uttered (2) and you (1), both our utterances would have been false.

► If Kratzer is right, the truth of a statement containing an epistemic modal like (1) depends on the context in which it is uttered: it may be true if uttered by a speaker possessing certain evidence and false if uttered by another speaker lacking that evidence.

DeRose (1992) on knowledge attribution

► Now, consider the following cases described by DeRose (1992):

Bank Case A. *My wife and I are driving home on a Friday afternoon. We plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit our paychecks. But as we drive past the bank, we notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Although we generally like to deposit our paychecks as soon as possible, it is not especially important in this case that they be deposited right away, so I suggest that we drive straight home and deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning. My wife says, "Maybe the bank won't be open tomorrow. Lots of banks are closed on Saturdays." I reply, "No, I know it'll be open. I was just there two weeks ago on Saturday. It's open until noon."*

DeRose (1992) on knowledge attribution (cont.)

Bank Case B. *My wife and I drive past the bank on a Friday afternoon, as in Case A, and notice the long lines. I again suggest that we deposit our paychecks on Saturday morning, explaining that I was at the bank on Saturday morning only two weeks ago and discovered that it was open until noon. But in this case, we have just written a very large and very important check. If our paychecks are not deposited into our checking account before Monday morning, the important check we wrote will bounce, leaving us in a very bad situation. And, of course, the bank is not open on Sunday. My wife reminds me of these facts. She then says, "Banks do change their hours. Do you know the bank will be open tomorrow?" Remaining as confident as I was before that the bank will be open then, still, I reply, "Well, no. I'd better go in and make sure."*

Contextualism in epistemology

▶ On the basis of these cases, DeRose observes:

Assume that in both cases the bank will be open on Saturday and that there is nothing unusual about either case that has not been included in my description of it. It seems to me that (1) when I claim to know that the bank will be open on Saturday in case A, I am saying something true. But it also seems that (2) I am saying something true in Case B when I concede that I don't know that the bank will be open on Saturday. Yet I seem to be in no better position to know in Case A than in Case B. . . .

We may . . . call the view I want to investigate [and defend] a "contextual" theory of knowledge attributions: it is a theory according to which the truth conditions of sentences of the form "S knows that p" or "S does not know that p" vary in certain ways according to the context in which the sentences are uttered.

It is raining

▶ John Perry (1986) describes the following case:

It is a rainy Saturday morning in Palo Alto. I have plans for tennis. But my younger son looks out the window and says, "It is raining." I go back to sleep.

What my son said was true, because it was raining in Palo Alto. There were all sorts of places where it was not raining: it does not just rain or not, it rains in some places while not raining in others. In order to assign a truth-value to my son's statement, as I just did, I needed a place. But no component of his statement stood for a place. The verb "raining" supplied the relation rains(t,p)–a dyadic relation between times and places, as we have just noted. The tensed auxiliary "is" supplies a time, the time at which the statement was made. "It" does not supply anything, but is just syntactic filler. So Palo Alto is a constituent of the content of my son's remark, which no component of his statement designated; it is an unarticulated constituent.

The context sensitivity of "rain"

▶ As Perry points out, sentence (16) may be true when uttered in a certain place and false when uttered in another place:

(16)   It is raining.

▶ This has to do somehow with the meaning of the verb "rain": "it does not just rain or not, it rains in some places while not raining in others".

▶ So, one might suggest that the verb "rain", when it occurs without a locative adverb as in (16), is context sensitive: as a consequence sentence (16) may be true when uttered in a place and false when uttered in another place.

Being ready

▶ A similar problem is posed by expressions like "being ready". Sentence (17) may express different contents when uttered in different contexts:

(17)   Leo is ready.

▶ I may utter (17) to say that Leo is ready to leave, or to say that Leo is ready to take an exam, or that Leo is ready start a game.

▶ The context sensitivity of (17) is clearly related to the occurrence of the word "ready". Notice that there is no overt constituent of sentence (17) which refers to leaving, taking an exam, or starting a game.

Being red

Consider the adjective 'red'. What it is for a bird to count as red is not the same as what it is for other kinds of objects to count as red. For a bird to be red (in the normal case), it should have most of the surface of its body red, though not its beak, legs, eyes, and of course its inner organs. Furthermore, the red color should be the bird's natural color, since we normally regard a bird as being 'really' red even if it is painted white all over. A kitchen table, on the other hand, is red even if it is only painted red, and even if its 'natural' color underneath the paint is, say, white. Moreover, for a table to be red only its upper surface needs to be red, but not necessarily its legs and its bottom surface. Similarly, a red apple, as Quine pointed out, needs to be red only on the outside, but a red hat needs to be red only in its external upper surface, a red crystal is red both inside and outside, and a red watermelon is red only inside. For a book to be red is for its cover but not necessarily for its inner pages to be mostly red, while for a newspaper to be red is for all of its pages to be red. For a house to be red is for its outside walls, but not necessarily its roof (and windows and door) to be mostly red, while a red car must be red in its external surface including its roof (but not its windows, wheels, bumper, etc.). A red star only needs to appear red from the earth, a red glaze needs to be red only after it is fired, and a red mist or a red powder are red not simply inside or outside. A red pen need not even have any red part (the ink may turn red only when in contact with the paper). In short, what counts for one type of thing to be red is not what counts for another. (Lahav 1989).

Why is it relevant?

▶ The fact that what counts for one type of thing to be red is not what counts for another shows that the word "red" is polysemous, namely it seems to have different related meanings.

▶ But this does not by itself show that "red" is context sensitive (although it may raise a problem for the principle of compositionality).

▶ To show that "red" is context sensitive we have to show that different utterances *of the same sentence* which contains the word "red" may say different things because of the occurrence of the world "red" in them.

Red apples

We're at a county fair picking through a barrel of assorted apples. My son says 'Here's a red one', and what he says is true if the apple is indeed red. But what counts as being red in this context? For apples, being red generally means having a red skin, which is different from what we normally mean by calling a watermelon, or a leaf, or a star, or hair, red. But even when it is an apple that is in question, other understandings of what it is to call it 'red' are possible, given suitable circumstances. For instance, suppose now that we're sorting through a barrel of apples to find those that have been afflicted with a horrible fungal disease. This fungus grows out from the core and stains the flesh of the apple red. My son slices each apple open and puts the good ones in a cooking pot. The bad ones he hands to me. Cutting open an apple he remarks: 'Here's a red one'. What he says is true if the apple has red flesh, even if it also happens to be a Granny Smith apple. (This example is loosely inspired by (Lahav, 1989, 1993)). (Bezuidenhout 2002).

The context sensitivity of "red"

▶ In the above passage, Bezuidenhout (2002) makes a case for the context sensitivity of the word "red".

▶ In a normal context, sentence (18), uttered by looking at an apple, says that the apple has a red skin:

(18)   Here's a red one.

▶ However, in the context described by Bezuidenhout, in which the son is looking for apples with the fungal disease, the son's utterance of (18) says that the apple's flesh is red.

The proud dieter

Travis 85

Story I: *Smith is quite proud of the results of the rigorous diet he has followed. He has lost easily 15 kg. Stepping on the scales one morning, he notes with satisfaction that they register a thick hair or two below 80 kilos. At the office, he proudly announces, 'I now weigh 80 kilos!'.*

*(**Contrasting**) Story II: Smith, dressed [in a heavy tweed suit], is about to step into a crowded elevator. 'Wait a minute', someone says, 'This elevator is really very delicate. We can only take 80 more kilos'. 'Coincidentally, that's exactly what I weigh', replies Smith. In he steps, and down they plummet. So it appears that what Smith said this time is false.*

The context sensitivity of "weigh"

► In the first context described by Travis, (19) says that Smith weighs 80 kilos without clothes:

    (19)   I weigh 80 kilos.

► In the second context described by Travis, (19) says that Smith weighs 80 kilos with the heavy tweed suit on.

► Smith's utterance in the first context is true, while Smith's utterance in the second context is false.

► This suggests that the word "weigh" is context sensitive.

Quantifiers

► Lewis (1996, p. 225) observes:

If I say that every glass is empty, so it's time for another round, doubtless I and my audience are ignoring most of all the glasses there are in the whole wide world throughout all of time. They are outside the domain. They are irrelevant to the truth of what was said.

► If Lewis is right, when Leo utters (20) in the Davy Byrnes pub and Stephen utters (20) at Finnegan's, they say different things:

    (20)   every glass is empty.

► Leo is saying that every glass at his table at Davy Byrnes's is empty, Stephen is saying that every glass at his table at Finnegan's is empty.

► This suggests that quantifier phrases like ⌜every N⌝ are context sensitive. (Exercise for the reader: argue that other quantifier phrases like ⌜no N⌝, ⌜some N⌝, etc. are also context sensitive).

A temptation

► Faced with the seeming pervasiveness of context sensitivity in natural languages, one may be tempted to reach a radical conclusion:

    every word is context sensitive.

► This is indeed the conclusion that radical contextualists like John Searle and Charles Travis seem to reach.

Searle and Travis on the meaning of words

What words mean plays a role in fixing when they would be true; but not an exhaustive one. Meaning leaves room for variation in truth conditions from one speaking to another. (Travis 1996: 451)

The literal meaning of a sentence only determines a set of truth conditions given a set of background practices and assumptions. Relative to one set of practices and assumption, a sentence may determine one set of truth conditions; relative to another set of practices and assumptions, another set; and if some sets of assumptions and practices are given, the literal meaning of a sentence may not determine a definite set of truth conditions at all. (Searle 1980: 227)

The debate on context sensitivity

► Many philosophers do not agree with radical contextualism, they think that context sensitivity is a more restricted phenomenon than the radical contextualists claim to be.

► An extreme version of this view is semantic minimalism, the view that the set of genuine context sensitive expressions coincides with the basic set (no dots):

> *today, yesterday, tomorrow, now, here, there, that, this, I, you, she, he, it, her, him, we, us, they, them, his, her, your, tense, ago, henceforth, present, actual.*

► Most philosophers occupy a middle ground between radical contextualists and semantic minimalists.

► The arguments in favour of these different views and the objections against them make up the debate on context sensitivity.

► This is what we turn to next.