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Contextualism, minimalism, and situationalism*

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After discussing some difficulties that contextualism and minimalism face, this paper presents a new account of the linguistic exploitation of context, situationalism. Unlike the former accounts, situationalism captures the idea that the main intuitions underlying the debate concern not the identity of propositions expressed but rather how truth-values are situation-dependent. The truth-value of an utterance depends on the situation in which the proposition expressed is evaluated. Hence, like in minimalism, the proposition expressed can be truth-evaluable without being enriched or expanded. Along with contextualism, it is argued that an utterance's truth-value is context dependent. But, unlike contextualism and minimalism, situationalism embraces a form of relativism in so far as it maintains that semantic content must be evaluated vis-à-vis a given situation and, therefore, that a proposition cannot be said to be true/false eternally.

1. Language and context

When one indicates a red ink pen in front of someone and asks *Please pass me that pen*, one succeeds in drawing the audience's attention toward the relevant pen. If we change the context and replace the red ink pen with a blue ink one, the audience's attention would be directed toward the blue ink pen and our subject would end up writing with a blue ink pen instead of a red ink one. In short, if we change the context in which one uses one's words, we may end up changing the objects one thinks and talks about. When I call home and ask my partner whether there is some chardonnay in the fridge, I am asking about the presence or absence of chardonnay in *our* fridge: I am not concerned about the chardonnay in, say, Jane's fridge nor the chardonnay in my colleague's fridge. The identity of the fridge is never called into question.

So far so good: no one — or at least no one I know — objects to the view that when people linguistically interact, their communicative success depends on the context in which their utterances and thought episodes occur. But disagreement

occurs about the way in which the context of utterance enters the scene. In particular, people disagree about the way in which context affects the semantics of what is said. What is said is usually taken to be a proposition (see Kaplan 1977). When singular terms are involved (e.g., proper names and indexicals) the proposition expressed is a singular (or Russellian) proposition whose constituents are the referents of the singular terms appearing in the utterance expressing it. In short, I shall assume that what is said by an utterance u corresponds to the proposition p . The latter is either true or false. Following Kaplan I also assume the distinction between the context of utterance and the circumstance of evaluation. We need context to fix the reference of context-sensitive expressions (indexicals for instance) while we need circumstances of evaluation to determine the truth-value of propositions. Although the context of utterance and the circumstance of evaluation often coincide they may differ.¹ This is particularly clear when we consider utterances such as *I do not exist*. The context of utterance gives the agent (usually the speaker or writer) as the referent of 'I'. The agent is thus a constituent of the proposition expressed. This proposition is false when the circumstance of evaluation corresponds to the context of utterance. The same proposition is true in circumstances (possible worlds) where the agent does not exist. In other words, an utterance gives us the content, i.e., the proposition expressed, while the circumstance of evaluation gives us the truth-value of the proposition and, indirectly, the truth-value of the utterance. If we assume that an utterance expresses a proposition, then, the contextualism *vs.* minimalism debate can be reformulated as a disagreement over the very nature of the proposition expressed (i.e. a disagreement about what counts as what is said).²

Before going further, it should be noted that everyone accepts that natural language presents expressions (so-called indexicals) that succeed in selecting an object of discourse and thought only relative to the context of utterance. No one disagrees, to take but one example, that if we change the context (the agent) the first-person pronoun 'I' changes reference.³ Everyone tends to agree that the linguistic meaning of an indexical is invariant and operates on some contextual aspects to select an item of discourse. A similar story can be told about ambiguity, ellipsis, polysemy and vagueness: to detect, for instance, whether an utterance of 'bank' refers to the financial institution or the riverside, the audience must rely on some contextual clues.

As the terminological characterization suggests, members of the contextualist camp tend to sympathize with the view that each utterance is contextually underdetermined and that the success of the communication rests on the way the utterance gets semantically enriched or expanded and ends up expressing a truth-evaluable proposition.⁴ In other words, the very same utterance of a non-indexical sentence may express different propositions depending on the context in which it

occurs.⁵ Furthermore, one proposition may be true while the other is false. The relevant intuitions run as follows. In characterizing Jane, who is 175 cm tall, one can say: *Jane is tall*. If the circumstance in which this utterance occurs concerns the class of people registered to enter the gymnastic competition, this utterance may well express something true, while if it concerns the women enrolled in the university basketball team it is probably false. So, the contextualist story goes, an utterance like this is incomplete or underdetermined and, as it stands, fails to express a truth-evaluable proposition. In order to express a truth-evaluable proposition, this utterance must somehow specify the relevant comparative class. In one context it may end up expressing, say, the proposition ‘that Jane is tall to register for the gym competition’, while in another context it may express the proposition ‘that Jane is tall to play basketball in the university team’. Furthermore, imagine a boxer who, naked, in the morning, after the sauna, and before breakfast, tips the scales at 74 kg at the official weighing-in session. He then proceeds to eat a copious breakfast; he washes it down with several orange juices and, to recuperate the liquid lost during the sauna, drinks a few pints of water. Consider now the boxer’s reply — *I’m 74 kg* — to the question *What’s your weight?* in two later situations — one while he is registering for the match, and the other as he is about to enter an elevator. In the situation of registering for the match, the reply is correct and what the boxer says is true regardless of the fact that he is now well fed, fully dressed, carrying his gym bag, and well in excess of 74 kg. For, to compete in the relevant category, the weight that matters is the one recorded at the official weighing-in session. In the elevator situation, though, the boxer’s reply may well be inappropriate: what he says can be taken to be false and he may even be considered a liar. If the elevator has a capacity of 220 kg and already contains two people whose combined weight is 146 kg, the weight that matters is not the one officially recorded in the morning but the one he would actually carry into the lift. Hence, since the actual weight of the boxer (well fed, fully dressed and carrying the gym bag) exceeds 74 kg, his reply is not only false, it is dangerous insofar as his presence in the elevator would make the total weight exceed the 220 kg security limit. Thus the very same utterance uttered regarding the very same state of the world (i.e. the boxer’s actual weight) may be either true or false. Its truth-value depends on the discourse situation in which it occurs.

Before going further it may be worth mentioning that I distinguish between context and situation. Context, as I take it, is what is needed for indexical resolution. As such it can be characterized, following Kaplan (1977) by its indexes: agent, time, and location.⁶ Situations, on the other hand, are considered to be partial possible worlds. Situations thus encapsulate a lot of information surrounding a speech act. In a situation we can find, for instance, presuppositions or common beliefs about the way the world is that the speaker and the audience assume or

take for granted when they engage in a linguistic exchange. From a semantic viewpoint context can be strictly defined, whereas situations remain vague and can be defined only in a pragmatic way.

As far as I can see, there are two ways in which a given utterance can turn out to be true/false. An utterance *u* of *Jane is too tall*, for example, can be true in two main ways: (i) if it expresses the proposition ‘that Jane is too tall *to be part of the gymnastic team*’ or (ii) if it expresses the proposition ‘that Jane is too tall’ but the latter’s truth-value depends on the discourse situation (or circumstance) in which it occurs. If one follows the first path, one accepts the traditional (semantic) view (cf. Frege 1918: 53) that a proposition is true/false objectively and eternally. Thus, for a proposition to be true/false eternally it must be completed or enriched — captured here by the italics.

If one follows the second path, by contrast, a given proposition can change truth-value with a change of the situation in which it occurs. Truth becomes, *pace* the traditional semantic position, a relativized notion. The contextualists I have in mind tend to follow the first branch of the dilemma. They thus bring on board notions such as enrichment, expansion, etc. The position I shall defend takes the second horn of the dilemma and holds that a proposition’s truth-value can be relativized. I shall say more about this issue in the last section.

The friends of minimalism, on the other hand, hold that an utterance can express a proposition that is true or false regardless of the context in which it occurs. To be sure, they do not deny that some utterances (the ones with indexical expressions) express a proposition only relative to a given context. The class of these utterances, though, is rather limited; it includes only utterances containing indexicals. According to the minimalists, the truth-conditions of our boxer’s utterance *I’m 74 kg* do not change with the change of circumstances. It does not express two different propositions in the two different circumstances. The boxer’s utterance is true if and only if the boxer weighs 74 kg, regardless of whether he utters it in the match-registration circumstance or in the elevator one.

In what follows I shall expose the merits and defects of both camps before going on to propose a third way that, for lack of a better term, I label *situationalism*.

2. Contextualism

According to Carston (2002: 30), each utterance is intrinsically underdetermined. Since an utterance can be underdetermined in two main ways, there are two different kinds of underdeterminacy. As we have seen, an utterance can be underdetermined insofar as its truth-value may vary according to different discourse situations (this could be the case in our boxer’s utterance discussed in the previous section).

The contextualists I have in mind, however, hold that in both situations the utterance's truth-value varies because it expresses *different* propositions. An example should further help us to highlight the underdeterminacy involved here. Consider that there are a few drops of beer spilled in the fridge and that Jane utters:

- (1) There is some beer in the fridge.

Situation 1. Jon is thirsty and asks for some beer and Jane utters (1). Competent speaker intuition: Jane says something false.

Situation 2. Jon just finished cleaning the fridge and Jane utters (1). Competent speaker intuition: Jane says something true.

The state of the world in both situations is exactly the same: the very same fridge with the very same drops of beer in its corner. The moral seems to be that an utterance like (1) is intrinsically or essentially context-sensitive. Further examples underlining how an utterance can be intrinsically underdetermined (or incomplete) can be furnished by:

- (2) Igor is not tall enough.
 (3) Jane is late.
 (4) Jon is too old.⁷

In principle, each of these utterances can be completed or enriched in infinitely many ways.⁸ Yet nothing in the utterance itself suggests how the completion, expansion or enrichment should occur. In other words, no element in the utterance directs us toward one particular completion or another, for nothing seems to direct us toward a particular aspect of context.

One can argue that 'tall', 'late', and 'old' trigger a completion. One can also claim (e.g., Stanley 2000; Stanley and Szabo 2000) that comparative adjectives involve an implicit comparison class and, as such, must be understood as involving an argument place at the level of logical form (thus 'small', 'late' and 'too old' get represented at the logical form (LF) level as 'small *relative to x*', 'late *relative to x*', 'too old *relative to x*'). This position is labeled 'indexicalism'. The important fact here is that the truth-conditions of utterances involving these expressions would also depend on the value of this implicit argument working like a kind of hidden indexical. If this is the case, the proposition expressed would contain as constituents the comparative class selected by the hidden indexical. If one rejects this move (like, e.g., Bach 2000, Carston 2002, Recanati 2002, to name only a few), one is likely to endorse the view that when context-sensitive expressions that do not fall under the class of indexicals are involved we face a case of *free enrichment* or *expansion*. The latter is not triggered by a syntactic element present either at the

surface or logical form level of the utterance. Be that as it may, the result is that the truth-evaluable propositions that are expressed by underdetermined utterances like (2)–(4) contain the enriched content. They are thus full-fledged propositions that are eternally true/false.

One of the main questions the friends of free enrichment face is the following: how do we explain successful communication if the latter amounts to the grasping of an enriched proposition? One could claim that the success of communication merely rests on an available enriched proposition without the speaker and/or hearer having to grasp it. But I have problems understanding this position. For if what one says corresponds to an enriched proposition one needs, some way or other, to be capable of conceptualizing it, i.e. if asked one must be able to spell out the enriched content. I find it as difficult to accept the view that one could express a proposition one is not aware of expressing as the view that one could understand a proposition without being aware of (grasping) it. In a nutshell, it is hard to see how the grasping of a proposition could be a non-conceptual activity.⁹ The friends of contextualism owe us an explanation here. Otherwise put, one grasps a proposition if one entertains a mode of presentation (the latter may be non-conceptual) of the constituents entering the proposition. If this is correct, then one should entertain modes of presentation of all the constituents entering the enriched proposition. The difficulty I have is that of understanding how one can entertain modes of presentations of unspoken/unheard/unmentioned constituents.

Furthermore, even if we accept the view that successful communication rests on the transmission of an enriched proposition, the proposition one expresses with an underdetermined utterance may well differ from the one the audience ends up grasping. It is possible — and even probable — that two persons never come to attach the very same proposition to a given underdetermined utterance. A way out of this problem would be to recognize that, although the utterer and the audience do not grasp the very same (enriched) proposition, they nonetheless understand each other insofar as the propositions they end up associating to the underdetermined utterance are *similar*.¹⁰ One can defend the view that the understanding of an underdetermined utterance does not rest on the grasping of a specific proposition and that the success of communication does not require the transmission of specific propositions and/or thoughts. Simply stated, contextual exploitation need not result in the formation and/or grasping of a specific proposition. People understand each other to the extent that they grasp *similar* propositions. This position may have the advantage of explaining why communication can break down: two people do not understand each other insofar as they come to grasp rather different propositions. But the question remains: how different must the (enriched) propositions be for communication to be unsuccessful? It seems to me that if one embraces this position one is likely to assume that communication is a question

of degree. One *more or less* understands what is said by an underdetermined utterance. I do not know whether this is a good model of communication. As we shall see, the model of communication that I favor does not rest on the existence of enriched propositions and, as such, is neutral on whether understanding is a matter of degree.

Moreover, a speaker may not be aware of the very (enriched) proposition she ends up expressing/grasping. If the speaker is asked what she meant in uttering an underdetermined utterance, she may end up replying: *I mean that Igor is too old to play for the Arsenal junior team, I mean that Igor is too old to play in this year junior team, I mean that Igor is too old to play for the under-15 team*, etc. It is worth stressing that all the potential enriched propositions have the same minimal proposition in common, i.e. 'that Igor is too old'. In a word, the contextualist who appeals to the notion of free enrichment is committed to the view that understanding rests on the grasping of the minimal proposition and some extra (unspecified) content coming to enrich it (a process that may well operate at the unconscious level). The latter is likely to vary between the proposition (if any) intended by the speaker and the one (if any) grasped by the audience. Yet for understanding and communication to succeed, the enrichment must be similar enough. How similar it must be remains unspecified. This is the price the friends of free enrichment must pay. Even if we fix the discourse situation, an utterance like *Igor is too old* can still be understood in infinitely many ways and express infinitely many enriched propositions.

One could reply that since our capacity to interpret other people's utterances rests on our general ability to attribute intentions to others, all that matters for communication to succeed is that both the speaker and the audience end up drawing the same, or similar enough, conclusions. As Carston would say, our interpretative ability rests on our "capacity for forming hypotheses about the thoughts and intentions of others on the basis of their behaviour" (Carston 2002: 30). In other words, one understands the message insofar as one comes out with the right hypothesis concerning the speaker's intentions. The speaker's behaviour plays a role in helping the audience to make the right inferences.¹¹

Even so, I do not think that we have to posit enriched propositions to understand successful communication. Why not simply say that people successfully communicate inasmuch as they entertain the same minimal propositions? Other factors may come into the picture to help explain the outcome of their joint venture without communicators having to entertain similar enriched propositions. In particular, the contextual elements that, according to the contextualist, contribute to enriching the minimal proposition need not be encapsulated into a proposition: they may flow free in the discourse situation without the speaker and her audience having to cognize them. If an explanation along these lines is possible, enriched propositions would lose one of their main *raison d'être*.

When indexicals are involved, the story is different. This is because context must contribute in the expression of a specific proposition to the extent that an indexical's linguistic meaning directs us to some specific aspect of context. The latter ends up in the proposition expressed. If Igor utters *I'm 27*, Igor himself ends up in the proposition expressed, for the meaning of 'I' directly directs to the relevant contextual feature, in this case Igor.

The general lesson we can take home so far is that the motivation for contextualism is furnished by concrete examples (like the boxer's weight or Igor being too old/tall). Furthermore, these concrete, everyday situations cannot be explained away by appealing to ambiguity, polysemy, nonliterality, etc. If one adopts the contextualist standpoint, it is quite easy to figure out distinct situations in which with a given utterance one ends up saying different things and (assuming that what is said corresponds to a proposition) expressing different propositions. Yet it has been argued that, contrary to appearance, the contextualist position is empirically inadequate (see Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 87).

3. Minimalism

Minimalism can be characterized, roughly, as the view that the constituents of the proposition expressed must be triggered by syntactic elements present at the surface level of the utterance and directly conveyed by the meaning of the expressions appearing in the utterance. Semantic minimalism defends, among others, the following theses (see Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 144):

- a. That there is a proposition semantically expressed is presupposed by any coherent account of linguistic communication.
- b. All semantic context sensitivity is grammatically (either syntactically or morphemically) triggered, i.e., articulated by a sentential component.
- c. There are only a few context sensitive expressions in natural language and they all pass the *Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Report* test (ICD for short).

The ICD test is, ultimately, what should help to determine both whether an expression is context sensitive and what ends up in the proposition *semantically* expressed, i.e., the minimal proposition. The ICD test can be characterized as follows (see Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 88):

ICD: Take an utterance u of a sentence S by a speaker A in context C . An Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Report of u is an utterance u^* in a context C^* (where $C^* \neq C$) of 'A said that S '.

If the occurrence of an expression *e* in an utterance blocks the disquotational indirect report (i.e., it makes the report of the relevant utterance false) then we have evidence that *e* is context sensitive (i.e., it is an indexical expression). On the other hand, if *e* does not block the disquotational indirect report it is context *insensitive*. To illustrate, take ‘I’ and ‘this’ in (5) and (6):

- (5) Jane: “I am rich”.
- (6) Jane: “This [pointing to a vase] is cute”.

The ICD test gives us:

- (7) Jane said that I am rich.
- (8) Jane said that this [pointing to a picture] is cute.

Since (7) and (8) do *not* capture what Jane said (i.e., as reports of what Jane said they are false), ‘I’ and ‘this’ are context sensitive (indexical) expressions and, therefore, Jane’s utterances are context sensitive insofar as context helps to determine what ends up in the proposition expressed (i.e., what is said). Consider now:

- (9) Jane: “Igor is too old”.
- (10) Jane: “Igor weighs 74 kg”.

The ICD test would give:

- (11) Jane said that Igor is too old.
- (12) Jane said that Igor weighs 74 kg.

‘Too old’ and ‘weighs 74 kg’ need not be changed when going from direct discourse to indirect discourse, i.e., reports (11) and (12) are accurate, or so Cappelen and Lepore claim. Hence, the minimalist story goes, ‘too old’ and ‘weighs 74 kg’ do not belong to the class of context sensitive expressions, and utterances involving these expressions are not, *pace* contextualism, context sensitive. These expressions are context insensitive.

A further criticism of contextualism can also be formulated as follows (see Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 91). If in two distinct situations, say in context C1 talking about an exam preparation and in context C2 talking about going out to a party, Jane utters *Igor is ready*, the accurate reports, following ICD, would be:

- (13) Jane said that Igor is ready [said concerning C1].
- (14) Jane said that Igor is ready [said concerning C2].
- (15) In both C1 and C2 Jane said that Igor is ready.

Since all three reports are true (even if they occur in a radically different context from the one in which Jane's original utterances occurred), in the two contexts C1 and C2 Jane cannot have expressed different propositions as the contextualist holds. If the contextualists were right in holding that in C1 and C2 Jane expresses distinct propositions, reports (13)–(15) would not, contrary to appearance, be true. For they would not capture what Jane said, i.e., the proposition she expressed in C1 and C2. Cappelen and Lepore's moral is that since contextualism cannot account for this basic feature of linguistic communication it must be empirically incoherent.

Further examples undermining contextualism can be given by reports involving distinct agents. If Jane and Pia, in radically distinct contexts, utter the same sentence, say *Igor is ready*, a report could be:

(16) Both Jane and Pia said that Igor is ready.

Yet, if Jane and Pia expressed different propositions, a report like (16) would be false. Thus, no matter what the context of Jane's and Pia's utterance, they end up saying the same thing. Since the *that*-clause 'that Igor is ready' in (16) cannot express more than one proposition, it could not capture the allegedly two distinct propositions the contextualist claims that Jane and Pia originally expressed.

To be honest, I am not sure that reports like (16) contribute to the undermining of the contextualist's picture. Consider, for instance, a telephone conversation between Jane in London and Pia in Rome in which they both utter the sentence *It is raining* concerning London and Rome respectively. Would a report like *Both Jane and Pia said that it is raining* be appropriate? My intuition is that this report is, at best, incomplete. I guess that the layperson would not subscribe to the view that both Jane and Pia said the same thing, since Jane was talking about London while Pia about Rome.¹² Furthermore, what about Jane's utterance *Tully is Roman* and Pia's *Cicero is Roman*? Would we say that both Jane and Pia said the same thing? Would a report like *Both Jane and Pia said that Tully is Roman* be accurate? Examples like these seem to suggest that attitude reports are more structured than the surface grammar suggests. Hence, insofar as Cappelen and Lepore's ICD test rests on the surface grammar, it may not be as trustworthy as it first appears. In particular, since attitude reports also aim to capture the attributees' mental states, a report like *A said that p* (at least in its *de dicto* reading) conveys both what A said, i.e., *p*, and A's mental state when he expressed *p*.¹³

It is amazing, to say the least, to claim that contextualism falls under the minimalist's attack on the ground that it proposes an empirically inadequate theory. My puzzlement or amazement is amplified if we keep in mind how the contextualist viewpoint is dictated by intuitions concerning the truth-values of some utterances. The intuitions supporting the underdeterminacy thesis proposed by the friends of

contextualism concern the way these utterances should be evaluated.¹⁴ Take our example involving the few drops of beer in the fridge. If one utters *There is some beer in the fridge*, it seems perfectly appropriate to say that what is said is true in the cleaning situation, while it is false in the drinking situation. At least, it seems hard to hold that what one says is either true or false regardless of the situation in which the utterance occurs. The contextualist intuitions, as I understand them, do not concern the nature of the proposition expressed. They merely concern the truth-value of the utterance. If my interpretation of the contextualist intuition is on the right track, the minimalist charge loses its bite.

Before going further, it is also worth mentioning that the minimalist position put forward by Cappelen and Lepore dismisses the intuition concerning the difference in truth-value that a given utterance can have in different situations. This, it seems to me, not only undermines our intuitions; it also turns out to be empirically unconvincing insofar as every competent speaker would undeniably claim that in the drinking situation, unlike the cleaning one, Jane said something false and could be accused of lying (unless, of course, she was being ironic) in uttering *There is some beer in the fridge*.¹⁵ If we adopt the ICD minimalist test the report of what Jane said fails to discriminate between the cleaning situation and the drinking one. For in both cases the report would be:

(17) Jane said that there is some beer in the fridge.

To undermine the power of the ICD test we can further consider the following case involving Igor, who is 20. Jim, the manager of the under-17 football team, asks Igor to play for them in the next game. Jane, without knowing that the relevant team is the under-17, hears Igor replying *I am too old*. Tim, the manager of the under-21 football team, asks Jane whether Igor could play in his team. Jane, who happens to be a minimalist and a fan of Cappelen and Lepore's ICD test, replies *Igor said that he is too old*. Jane's reply wrongly suggests that Igor is not allowed to play for the under-21 team. This example highlights the apparent fact that when a report is sensitive to the report's situation and not to the situation where the original utterance occurred, the ICD test does not work. We thus have situations where reports that pass the ICD test are inappropriate and, therefore, the ICD test cannot be applied. The general moral is that ICD may not be, *pace* Cappelen and Lepore, dependable.¹⁶

It goes without saying, however, that although the ICD test may not be as reliable as Cappelen and Lepore suggest, the other arguments against contextualism remain unaffected. In particular, a minimalist may focus both on the difficulties that a contextualist faces when trying to explain communication and on the plausible view that any coherent account of linguistic communication must presuppose that there is a proposition semantically expressed. Be that as it may, I now

turn to discuss an alternative view, which should accommodate the contextualist intuitions without crumbling under the minimalist charge.

4. Situationalism

As we have seen, the main question we face concerns the way in which context enters the picture to determine the truth-value of a given utterance. In considering this question, we can begin by adopting the classical Tarskian framework where a sentence's truth-conditions can be represented by means of Tarski's T-sentences ('S' is true *iff* S), as follows:

(18) *Jane is not tall enough* is true *iff* Jane is not tall enough.

(19) *Jane is late* is true *iff* Jane is late.

(20) *Jon is too old* is true *iff* Jon is too old.

When the sentence on the left hand of the bi-conditional is context sensitive, e.g., *I am tired*, we end up with either (i) *I am tired* is true *iff* EC is tired or (ii) *I am tired* is true *iff* I am tired. If (i), the T-sentence is false for the majority of the occurrences of the object sentence (e.g., when *I am tired* is uttered by, say Lepore or Cappelen). If (ii), then the T-sentence is itself context-sensitive since the object sentence contains the indexical 'I'. In order to accommodate context-sensitivity within the T-schema, the natural strategy is to quantify over utterances and contextual features:¹⁷

(21) If *u* is an utterance of *Jane is not tall enough*, then [*u* is true *iff* Jane is not tall enough].

(22) If *u* is an utterance of *Jane is late*, then [*u* is true *iff* Jane is late].

(23) If *u* is an utterance of *Jon is too old*, then [*u* is true *iff* Jon is too old].

An utterance containing context-sensitive expressions, say indexicals, should be evaluated following a T-schema of the form:

(24) If *u* is an utterance of "I am too old" and *x* is the agent of *u*, then [*u* is true *iff* *x* is too old].

(25) If *u* is an utterance of "He/she is too old", and the agent of *u* refers to *x* with 'he/she', then [*u* is true *iff* *x* is too old].

This representation allows us to capture the context-sensitivity of an utterance. The T-schema appears in the consequent (it is represented within the square

brackets).¹⁸ But the T-schema is contextualized inasmuch as it is conditional on the various contextual parameters appearing in the antecedent of the conditional.

If this is the right picture, the reason why the agent of *u* in (24) and the referent of 'he' in (25) are too old does not enter the T-schema. As such, they do not seem to affect the truth-conditions of underdetermined utterances. For utterances like *I am too old* or *He is too old* do not state what the specified individual is too old for. As I understand it, we face the following three possibilities:

1. *Minimalism*: We endorse the view that (24) represents the truth-conditions of an underdetermined utterance like *He* [designating Igor] *is too old* and that *I am too old* [said by Igor] expresses the (minimal) proposition 'that Igor is too old'.
2. *Contextualism*: We reject the view that (24) can represent the truth-conditions of an underdetermined utterance like *I am too old* and endorse the view that *I am too old* [said by Igor] expresses the enriched proposition 'that Igor is too old for *such and such*' [where 'such and such' stands for some pragmatic information enriching the minimal proposition].
3. *Situationalism*: Like contextualism we reject the view that (24) can represent the truth-conditions of an underdetermined utterance like *I am too old*. Like minimalism we accept the view that *I am too old* [said by Igor] expresses the (minimal) proposition 'that Igor is too old'. Yet, unlike minimalism and contextualism, we commit ourselves to the view that the truth-value of an utterance is itself context-sensitive.

These three possibilities correspond to the various stances one can take *vis-à-vis* the nature and extent of contextual intrusion into semantics. If one chooses the first possibility, one ends up defending the view that there is no contextual intrusion. If one endorses the second possibility, one is likely to hold the view that the utterance (or the proposition it expresses) undergoes a process of completion or enrichment and that it is only once such a process is fulfilled that the utterance's truth-value can be established since context affects the proposition expressed. Both of these strategies are unsatisfactory.

As I have already suggested, the minimalist position fails to capture ordinary speakers' intuitions concerning the truth-value of an utterance. For, *pace* Cappelen and Lepore's ICD test, speakers' intuitions do not concern what is said or the proposition expressed. As the boxer's weight and the drops of beer in the fridge examples made it clear, speakers' intuitions concern the truth-value of what is said. Every competent speaker ends up saying that in one situation the utterer said something true while in the other she said something false. When questioned, a competent speaker does not reply that the utterer said different things in different

situations. She merely says that what is said changes truth-value with the change of situation.

By opting for contextualism, one finds oneself in the difficult position of having to determine how much extra information should enter the truth-evaluable proposition, i.e., how much should enter what is said. Furthermore, like the minimalist, the contextualist is incapable of capturing the real intuitions of a competent speaker, for she is forced to claim that the speaker's intuitions concern what is said rather than the truth-value of what is said.

As far as I understand them, the main positions on the current market seem to endorse either the minimalist position or the contextualist one (or, to be precise, versions thereof). It should come as no surprise that I endorse the third possibility, i.e., situationalism. Following this possibility, the proposition expressed (what is said) is either true or false. But its truth or falsity must be determined in the context of the discourse or in the discourse situation. To further highlight this fact we can focus on a classical example (see Barwise and Etchemendy 1987: 121–122). Looking at a poker game, Jon says: *Claire has the three of clubs*. Jon's utterance expresses the proposition 'that Claire has the three of clubs'. This utterance concerns the situation of the game of poker being watched by Jon. For Jon's utterance to be true, it is not sufficient that the proposition it expresses be true (or the fact it expresses obtains). The proposition must be true in the relevant situation, i.e., the poker game being watched by Jon. If Jon is mistaken in identifying Claire, and Claire is not among the players of the poker game, Jon's utterance cannot be true. Furthermore, his utterance would not be true even if Claire were playing poker in another part of town and happened to have the three of clubs. Jon's utterance is true only if Claire has the three of clubs in *that poker game*, i.e., the game being watched by Jon. The notion of a situation captures the intuitive idea that our discourses and linguistic interchanges, not to mention our cognitive activity, concern given situations. If one says *Henry scored a wonderful goal* while watching the Manchester United/Arsenal match, what one says is true if and only if Henry scored a wonderful goal *during that match*. The wonderful goal Henry scored the previous Wednesday when playing for France does not make the relevant utterance true. Our utterance concerns the Manchester United/Arsenal match the utterer is watching; it does not concern another match. One's utterances, and one's thoughts, are situated. On this suggestion, the proposition expressed is *situated* as well. In other words, a given proposition gets its truth-value in a context-sensitive way. This should be the gist of situationalism. Like contextualism and unlike minimalism, situationalism assumes that the relevant situation affects the truth-value of the proposition expressed, but unlike contextualism it affects the proposition's truth-value *via* the situation against which the proposition is evaluated. It does not affect the proposition's truth-value in affecting (enriching) the proposition

expressed. In short, by opting for situationalism we can freeze the proposition and vary the situations. With contextualism, on the other hand, a change in the situation is likely to trigger a change in the proposition expressed.¹⁹ Finally, following minimalism, we have the very same proposition (and the very same truth-value) regardless of the change of situations.

According to contextualism, as I have represented it, a proposition's (and derivatively an utterance's) truth-value is absolute. This is possible inasmuch as one allows contextual features to participate in the determination of a complete, enriched, proposition. We would thus have different propositions expressed with a switch of the situation. The question that springs to mind concerns how we can define these propositions. According to situationalism (like minimalism) the speaker expresses a minimal proposition. The audience grasps this very proposition, and speaker and audience understand each other inasmuch as they locate this proposition in the right situation. Situationalism incorporates the gist of both contextualism and minimalism insofar as the proposition expressed is minimal yet its truth-value is context sensitive.

According to situationalism, (21)–(23) should incorporate the idea that truth is relative to a situation. Their representations would thus correspond to:

- (26) If *u* is an utterance of *Jane is not tall enough* and *s* is the situation in which *u* occurs, then [*u* is true iff] *Jane is not tall enough* relative to *s*].
- (27) If *u* is an utterance of *Jane is late* and *s* is the situation in which *u* occurs, then [*u* is true iff] *Jane is late* relative to *s*].
- (28) If *u* is an utterance of *Jon is too old* and *s* is the situation in which *u* occurs, then [*u* is true iff] *Jon is too old* relative to *s*].

One can object that this position faces a difficulty similar to the one faced by the contextualist position. While the latter faces the problem of determining how much extra information should enter the proposition, situationalism faces the problem of determining which components of the situation in which an utterance occurs are relevant.²⁰ Furthermore, how does a hearer, wanting to understand what is being communicated, discern what the relevant situation is? All I can say is that this information is pragmatically furnished and constitutes the background or setting upon which the communicative interchange or thinking episode occurs. It need not be specified, let alone conceptualized.²¹ As such, it does not need to enter the proposition expressed.

A word of clarification may be useful at this point. It goes without saying that some propositional content may end up in the proposition expressed without the speaker and/or hearer having a conceptual fix about it. One can utter *Armadillos are scary animals* and in so doing express the proposition 'that Armadillos are scary

animals' without holding a conception, let alone a concept, of Armadillos. One can also express the proposition 'that Plato is a Greek philosopher' without knowing who Plato was and thus without the ability to distinguish Plato from, say Socrates or Aristotle. This is not the issue about which contextualism and situationalism disagree. The disagreement enters the picture with the notion of enrichment. The position I am putting forward, unlike those that appeal to free enrichment, is not committed to the view that the cognitive apparatus engaged in our communicative exchange and thinking episodes is overstuffed with mental representations. In particular, situationalism is not committed to the view that unspoken expressions representing the relevant items in the given situation enter the speaker's and hearer's mind. It seems to me that the contextualists' appeal to enriched propositions fails to appreciate the insight of Perry's (1996) position that one's thoughts can be about something without one having to represent this very thing. One can say that it is 4:15 pm, where this concerns a relevant time zone, without one having to represent the latter. We can have thought, as Perry puts it, without representation. The notion of representation I have in mind is an intuitive one. One entertains a representation of something, say an object, a property or what have you, insofar as one comes to entertain a mode of presentation (conceptual or non-conceptual) of that very thing. Representations are crucial for an entity to be inferentially relevant. In the time zone example, no representation is needed in so far as the speaker does not engage in inferential reasoning based on the identity of the time zone.²² The simple fact that the speaker occupies a time zone suffices for her thought to be about it. An analogous story can be told about alleged underdetermined sentences such as *Jane is too old*, *Jane is ready*, etc. One need not represent *what* Jane is ready for, say the exam, for one's thought to concern Jane's exam. The simple fact that one's thought occurs in the situation concerning Jane's exam suffices.²³

As for communication involving non-indexical sentences, two individuals understand each other insofar as they come to entertain the same minimal proposition and, thereby, the same minimal thought. To be sure, when two people do not share the same situation misunderstandings can occur. Since communication is a dynamic process and speakers are reflective beings, misunderstandings due to the fact that the speaker and the hearer are not embedded in the same situation can quite easily be detected and corrected. Disagreement and misunderstanding are thus likely to be manifested in a joint activity, i.e., when the speaker's and her audience's behavioral output come into conflict. In a nutshell, for communication to succeed, the speaker and hearer must associate the same minimal proposition with a given utterance. This may be a sufficient condition for the success of the linguistic transaction.

But the key issue is whether the speaker and the hearer share the same situation, i.e., are co-situated. This fact is crucial to the success of communication.

When disagreement occurs we are likely to make explicit some aspect of the situation, (e.g. in a telephone conversation we may state the time zone). A simple question or expression of puzzlement is often sufficient to trigger the speaker to point to some aspect of the situation and, in so doing, to recover a shared situation. In a communicative exchange, the situation will typically change and adapt over time and the people engaged in the relevant communication will have various clues they can use to keep themselves co-situated. The recognition of a situation may not involve any conscious selection or discrimination.

I am not sure that a similar story can be told about grasping an enriched proposition. In particular, the grasping of a full-fledged proposition seems to require some cognitive effort for the speaker and hearer for them to entertain a representation (either conceptual or non-conceptual) of the enriched material. When a young child says that it is 3:00 pm, she need not represent the time zone, e.g. she need not represent that it is 3:00 pm Central European Time. Yet what she says is true only relative to a time zone. When one says that it is raining, one need not represent the location where it is raining. Yet what she says is true *iff* it is raining in the relevant location. The simple fact that one is situated in a time zone and location suffices for one's thought to be about the relevant time zone and location. The friends of free enrichment end up saying that the time zone and location pragmatically enter the proposition expressed and that the latter is universally true/false.

The friends of minimalism, on the other hand, may say that the minimal proposition expressed is true/false regardless of the time zone and/or location. But I do not see how such a proposition can be judged to be true/false without referring to the relevant time zone and/or location. From the speaker/audience's mental life viewpoint we can say that their mental states need not articulate all the information making them true/false. Just as the corresponding proposition is true/false only relative to a given situation, one's mental state is true/false insofar as it is situated. The very same mental state could be true in one situation while false in another: Jane's mental state need not represent the drops or cans of beer in the fridge. If she were to represent the cans of beer would she also represent cans of Stella Artois, Budweiser, Carling, Heineken, etc.? I take it that it is part of our cognitive makeup that we can discriminate a given situation without conscious effort. This is, I suspect, the background for language use. One can act and react in an appropriate way insofar as one is properly situated, i.e., insofar as one's behaviour rests on a given situation. One's behaviour need not be triggered by one's grasping of an enriched proposition. The simple fact that our cognitive activity and/or our communicative exchanges are situated suffices to explain our cognitive and/or communicative success.

Indeed, our contextualist friend might tell a story about how one can entertain an enriched proposition without having to conceptualize it or even to grasp it. But

I have no idea how this story might go. From a cognitive viewpoint, situationalism seems to be more parsimonious. It does not need to appeal to the idea of entertaining a situation, insofar as one can merely find oneself in a given situation whereas one cannot find oneself in a given proposition (unless one expresses it using 'I'). It may be worth saying that although one may not find oneself in a given proposition one may find oneself in the situation that makes this proposition true/false. In saying *He is to the left/back/front/...* the speaker ends up in the situation against which the proposition expressed gets evaluated. To borrow Perry's (1986) happy notion of unarticulated constituents, we can thus say that according to situationalism one can be the unarticulated constituent of the situation without being the constituent of the proposition expressed.

To summarize: the basic idea underlying situationalism is that the proposition expressed by an utterance must be determined by the syntactic elements active in the utterance; the proposition (semantically) expressed is a minimal one. In other words, the elements triggering the presence of propositional constituents must be present either at the surface level or in the underlying logical form. In terms of propositions, this amounts to saying that all the propositional constituents must be represented in the logical form of the utterance.²⁴

Notes

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1. This is a two-step theory of evaluation insofar as we first fix the content of the utterance (the proposition expressed) before we determine its truth-value. Hence, the identity conditions of a proposition are not determined by the truth-value of the utterance, but by the mechanisms of reference at work and the syntactic structure of the utterance. Simply put, I take propositions to be structured entities. In the case of the utterance of a simple subject-predicate sentence, the propositional constituents are the objects and the property referred to by the NP and the VP. When indexicals are at work, the propositional constituents are fixed by the indexicals' linguistic meaning (or character, to use Kaplan's terminology).

2. The champions of contextualism are the relevance theorists (Carston 2002, Sperber and Wilson 1986, etc.), Bezuidenhout 2002, Recanati 2004, Searle 1978, 1980, Travis 1985, 1989, etc. It goes without saying that the people I am characterizing as contextualists do not always agree among themselves and that they present different forms of contextualism. A moderate contextualist like Recanati, for instance, differentiates his position from the one advocated by radical contextualists like Travis and Searle (see Recanati 2004: Chapter 6). Among the minimalists we have Borg 2005, Cappelen and Lepore 2005, etc. Indexicalists (e.g., Stanley 2000, Stanley and

Szabo 2000, etc.) also present a form of minimalism. For the sake of simplicity and brevity I shall not discuss indexicalism in this paper. Recanati goes as far as suggesting a rapprochement between moderate contextualism and indexicalism. This discussion, though interesting, transcends the scope of this paper. However, if Cappelen and Lepore are right, moderate contextualism leads to radical contextualism (see Cappelen and Lepore 2005: Part 1). Be that as it may, in what follows one can read the arguments against contextualism under whichever guise it is manifested. Roughly, one is a contextualist insofar as one appeals to the existence of enriched or expanded propositions, and the argument I propose attempts to undermine any such appeal.

3. Roughly, among indexical expressions there are personal pronouns ('my', 'you', 'she', 'his', 'we', ...), demonstrative pronouns ('this', 'that'), complex demonstratives ('this pencil', 'that brunette in the corner', ...), adverbs ('today', 'yesterday', 'now', 'here', ...), adjectives ('actual' and 'present') and possessive adjectives ('my pencil', 'their car', ...). I shall say more about this list later, in my discussion of the minimalist proposal. The list I am proposing is inspired by Kaplan (1977, 1989).

4. In what follows I shall not distinguish between expansion (Bach's favorite term) and free enrichment (the term adopted by the relevance theorists).

5. It should be stressed that the examples proposed in favor of contextualism cannot be dismissed as ambiguity, syntactic ellipsis, polysemy, nonliterality, or vagueness.

6. We may also have to incorporate *demonstrations* (or *directing intentions*) if, following Kaplan (1977, 1989) we assume that demonstratives differ from pure indexicals insofar as the value of the former, unlike the value of pure indexicals, is determined by the demonstration (or directing intention) accompanying their use.

7. The list, though, does not concern merely comparative adjectives. Contextualists often cite examples involving quantifiers (e.g., *Every bottle is empty*), weather/time reports (e.g., *It's snowing, It's 3:15 pm*), knowledge attributions (e.g., *Jane knows that the train leaves at 3:15 pm*), etc.

8. Bach (1994) talks about completion. According to Bach, what is strictly speaking said with an utterance of (2), (3), or (4) is not even a proposition. It is a propositional radical which needs to be completed by some pragmatic processes of expansion in order to become a fully-fledged, truth-evaluable, proposition. On Bach's view, what is said (the propositional radical) and what is communicated (the enriched or expanded proposition) differ. In short, Bach's position differs from both contextualism and minimalism insofar as it rejects the idea that an utterance expresses a complete, truth-evaluable proposition.

9. To be sure, someone can express a different proposition from the one she believes she has expressed. This would be the case with Kaplan's well-known Spiro Agnew-Carnap example, where the speaker pointing to a picture behind herself she believes to be of Carnap utters: "That's the greatest philosopher of the 20th century". Unbeknownst to the speaker, though, Carnap's picture has been changed with one of Spiro Agnew. Our speaker believes she said of Carnap that he is the greatest philosopher of the 20th century. Yet she expresses the proposition that Spiro Agnew is the greatest philosopher of the 20th century.

10. Sperber and Wilson (1986: 193) explicitly endorse this view.

11. This seems to be the communication model favored by Relevance Theorists (e.g., Sperber and Wilson, Carston), according to which once we have a minimal proposition we generate some inferences. The latter are automatically generated by virtue of their cognitive impacts. It is thus via these inferences that we come to grasp the intended message, i.e., the enriched proposition.

12. In Corazza (2004: Chapter 2) I attempted to prove that meteorological terms function like contextual expressions (e.g., 'local', 'enemy', 'national', 'foreigner') and, as such, the proposition expressed using them contains a location. The latter, though, is not determined by free enrichment, but is selected by an underlying variable operating at the level of logical form. In this respect, meteorological verbs and contextual expressions fit within the indexicalist view as it has been defended, for instance, by Stanley (2000). The position I am favoring, unlike the minimalist one proposed by Cappelen and Lepore (2005: 1, footnote 1), admits for context sensitivity to expand beyond indexicality. That is, I assume that the literal meaning of contextals suggests that their value also depends on the context in which they occur. In Corazza and Dokic (2007) we propose some criteria allowing the distinction between contextual expression and non-contextual ones. For further criteria on this difference see also Stanley (2000) and Vallée (2003).

13. For a detailed discussion of attitude reports and their complex underlying structure aiming to capture both the proposition expressed and the mental state the attributer is in when expressing/believing/... that proposition, see Corazza (2004: Chapters 8–9).

14. For a discussion and defense of the contextualist intuitions see Predelli (2005: Chapter 4). Predelli, though, does not defend contextualism. He defends a traditional semantics viewpoint without endorsing minimalism. Although the position he defends seems to bear some resemblance to the situationalist position I shall propose in the next section, I am not sure Predelli would endorse situationalism.

15. I ran the experiment with some of my first year students and all, without exception, claimed that, whereas in the cleaning situation Jane said something true, in the drinking situation she said something false. It may be worth noting that this does not concern whether a proposition has been enriched. It merely concerns the truth value of what is said. That is to say, this answer is neutral on whether the output is true/false because of an enrichment of the minimal proposition or because the minimal proposition is evaluated *vis-à-vis* distinct situations. It may be worth mentioning that Bach (2002) seeks to undermine the power of intuitions concerning the explanation of semantic facts. In particular, he argues that people's intuitions do not campaign against semantic minimalism and in favor of contextualism: "It is the central aim of semantics to account for semantic facts, not intuitions. People's spontaneous judgments or 'intuitions' provide data for semantics, but it is an open question to what extent they reveal semantic facts and should therefore be explained rather than explained away" (Bach 2002: 23). Since the position I defend, unlike contextualism, does not rely on speakers' intuitions about the (minimal) proposition expressed, Bach's criticism does not apply to situationalism. As will become clear, the intuitions that situationalism relies on concern not what is said (the proposition expressed) but the truth-values of the latter. For recent empirical studies attempting to capture speakers' intuitions and how pragmatic processes can affect what is said, see Gibbs and Moise (1997) and Nicolle and Clark (1999), who favor the view that speakers always enrich minimal propositions when questioned about what someone said.

16. Cappelen and Lepore (2005: 93–94) recognize cases in which the narrator is ignorant or mistaken about the original context of the reported utterance. Yet they argue that the report is correct regardless of the ignorance and/or mistake of the context of the reported utterance. This is not a bullet many are willing to bite. As the example I mentioned makes clear, when the report is sensitive to the context of the report the ICD tests may not be satisfactory. This should further undermine Cappelen and Lepore's (2005: 114 ff) view that contextualists are committed to what they call *Contextual Salience Absorption*, i.e., the view that the relevant context automatically triggered is the context of the reported utterance (what they characterize as the target context) and not the context of the report (what they characterize as the story telling context). The Contextual Salience Absorption which should ultimately campaign in favor of ICD and, therefore, minimalism is not, *pace* Cappelen and Lepore, a reliable and empirically sound principle.

17. This formulation is borrowed from Higginbotham (1988). For a detailed discussion of it see Carston (2002: 50ff).

18. A word of clarification may be useful. So far I have talked of propositions being the bearers of truth-value. The T-schema, though, assigns truth-value to utterances. Following the (Frege-inspired) tradition we can say that an utterance *u* is true in a derivative way, i.e., if the proposition it expresses is true. For simplicity sake henceforth I shall assign truth-value directly to utterances.

19. This is the claim defended by Barwise and Etchemendy (1987). They argue that the situations enter what they characterize as Austinian propositions. For a defense of this view see Recanati (2004: Chapter 8).

20. Robyn Carston expressed this worry (personal communication).

21. It seems to me that the relevant situation against which a (minimal) proposition gets evaluated can contain variegated information. As such, the notion of situation I have in mind comes close to Stalnaker's pragmatic presupposition (cf. Stalnaker 1974).

22. For further details, see Dokic (2006b).

23. This does not preclude the idea that sometimes one entertains some mental representations of aspects of the relevant situation. Imagine a situation in which the television is showing a program about Roger Federer's 2005 Wimbledon win, while on the coffee table in front of the television there is a tennis review with a picture of Federer celebrating his 2004 Wimbledon win. If Jane says *What a wonderful game*, one needs to know whether she's referring to the 2004 or the 2005 game in order to understand what she says. Hence even if Jane and her audience are immersed in the same situation, i.e., they are both in presence of the tennis review and the television, the audience must to some extent conceptualize the review (or the television) in order to understand whether Jane was talking about the 2004 or 2005 match. There are cases where conflicting interpretations can arise from a shared situation and the audience must conceptualize aspects of the situation. Such cases are rare, however, and thus do not campaign in favor of free enrichment.

24. In this respect situationalism is on a par with indexicalism (e.g., Stanley 2000), i.e., the view that underdetermined sentences present at the LF level an hidden argument working like an hidden indexical picking out the relevant aspect entering the proposition. In short, situationalism, like indexicalism (and minimalism), assumes that all the propositional constituents must rep-

resented at the LF level. Yet, like minimalism and unlike indexicalism, situationalism does not assume the existence of hidden indexicals when so-called underdetermined sentences occur.

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