

The debate on context sensitivity

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The two ends of the spectrum

- ▶ We have seen that context sensitivity seems to be pervasive in natural languages.
- ▶ This is the reason why some philosophers, the **radical contextualists**, make the strong claim that every word is context sensitive.
- ▶ At the other end of the spectrum are the **minimalists**, those philosophers who claim that context sensitivity is restricted to the basic set.
- ▶ You may think that radical contextualists are too extreme. Even so, given the apparent pervasiveness of context sensitivity in natural languages, it is not obvious how it can be maintained that context sensitivity is restricted to the basic set.
- ▶ Let's see what the arguments of the minimalists are.

Indirect reports with "I"

- ▶ Suppose Leo utters sentence (1):
 - (1) I am hungry.
- ▶ Jack cannot give a true report of what Leo said by uttering (2):
 - (2) Leo said that I am hungry.
- ▶ The report is false because "I" uttered by Jack refers to Jack, so according to Jack's utterance of (2) Leo says that Jack is hungry. But what Leo said by uttering (1) is that Leo is hungry.

Indirect reports with "now"

- ▶ Suppose Leo utters sentence (3) at 3 pm on Monday:
 - (3) Jack is hungry now.
- ▶ Lea cannot give a true report of what Leo said by uttering (4) at 9 pm on Monday:
 - (4) Leo said that Jack is hungry now.
- ▶ The report is false because "now" uttered by Lea refers to 9 pm on Monday, so according to Lea's utterance of (4) Leo said that Jack is hungry at 9 pm on Monday. But what Leo said by uttering (3) is that Jack is hungry at 3 pm on Monday.

Indirect reports with “tomorrow”

- ▶ Suppose Leo utters sentence (5) on Monday:

(5) Jack will come tomorrow.
- ▶ Lea cannot give a true report of what Leo said by uttering (6) on Tuesday:

(6) Leo said that Jack will come tomorrow.
- ▶ The report is false because “tomorrow” uttered by Lea refers to Wednesday, so according to Lea’s utterance of (6) Leo said that Jack will come on Wednesday. But what Leo said by uttering (5) is that Jack will come on Tuesday.

Indirect reports with “here”

- ▶ Suppose Leo utters sentence (7) in via Festa del Perdono:

(7) Jack is here.
- ▶ Lea cannot give a true report of what Leo said by uttering (8) in via S. Sofia:

(8) Leo said that Jack is here.
- ▶ The report is false because “here” uttered by Lea refers to via S. Sofia, so according to Lea’s utterance of (8) Leo said that Jack is in via S. Sofia. But what Leo said by uttering (7) is that Jack is in via Festa del Perdono.

Indirect reports with “that”

- ▶ Suppose Leo utters sentence (9) while pointing at a Volvo:

(9) That is expensive.
- ▶ Lea cannot give a true report of what Leo said by uttering (10) while pointing at a Panda:

(10) Leo said that that is expensive.
- ▶ The report is false because “that” uttered by Lea refers to a Panda, so according to Lea’s utterance of (10) Leo said that a Panda is expensive. But what Leo said by uttering (9) is that a Volvo is expensive.

The inter-contextual indirect report test

- ▶ These cases show that context sensitive expressions tend to block indirect reports of what is said. More precisely:

one cannot give a true indirect report of what is said by an utterance containing a context sensitive expression if (a) in the report one uses the same context sensitive expression and (b) in the context in which one makes the report the features relevant to determine the referents of the expression are changed.
- ▶ We can use this property of context sensitive expressions to test for context-sensitivity: if an expression blocks indirect reports of what is said (in the sense explained above), this is evidence that the expression is context sensitive. Let’s call this *the inter-contextual indirect report test*.
- ▶ You may run the test with all the words in *the basic set of context sensitive expressions* and convince yourself that they all pass the test:

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

Beyond the basic set

- ▶ In the previous lecture, we have seen that, in addition to the context sensitive expressions listed in the basic set of context sensitive expressions, many other expressions of English seem to be context sensitive.
- ▶ How do these other expressions fare with respect to the indirect report test? Let's see.

A muggy summer evening in New York City

We're in a particular context now; we're in a café on 5th Street in New York City between Avenues A and B; it's one of those hot and muggy New York summer evenings, the lights are out, and we're drinking iced tea Call our context 5stC. In 5stC we're . . . cooking up thought experiments involving distinct utterances of a single sentence under diverse circumstances. We're thinking about different utterances of 'John is ready'. We're imagining the following two contexts of utterance of (1):

(1) *John is ready.*

Context of Utterance C1. In a conversation about exam preparation, someone raises the question of whether John is well prepared. Nina utters (1).

*Context of Utterance C2. Three people are about to leave an apartment; they are getting dressed for heavy rain. Nina utters (1). (Cappelen H. and Lepore E., *Insensitive semantics*, 2005, p. 90).*

Indirect reports

Here's a pretty obvious fact: whichever of these contexts of utterance we consider, no matter how dissimilar you think they are from each other, each of your utterances can still be reported disquotationally. To ensure this is utterly obvious, we'll right now engage in actual speech acts; the indented sentences below represent actual utterances by us in 5stC. These are acts in which we are describing the two utterances of (1) by Nina; in (1.1) we report on her utterance in C1, in (1.2) her utterance in C2:

(1.1) Nina said that John is ready.

(1.2) Nina said that John is ready.

(1.3) In both C1 and C2, Nina said that John is ready.

*Two features of our exercise are particularly significant. First, it's our intuition that all three of these reports are true. Second, we can say that all three reports are true in this context, i.e., in 5stC. Sitting here in a café on 5th Street between Avenues A and B in New York City, sipping on our ice tea, we can accurately disquotationally report what Nina said in contexts C1-C2. (Cappelen H. and Lepore E., *Insensitive semantics*, 2005, p. 91).*

"Ready" fails the inter-contextual indirect report test

- ▶ Cappelen and Lepore's conclusion is that "ready" fails the inter-contextual indirect report test for context sensitivity.
- ▶ Although the contexts in which Nina utters (1) are radically different from 5stC, in 5stC we can report what Nina said in these contexts by saying (11):

(1) *John is ready.*

(11) *Nina said that John is ready.*

- ▶ Moreover, according to Cappelen and Lepore, (12) is true:

(12) *In both contexts, Nina said that John is ready.*

Red apples

Let's now consider again the two contexts described by Bezuidenhout in which (13) is uttered:

(13) The apple is red.

Context 1: We're at a county fair picking through a barrel of apples. The apples are sorted into different bags according to the color of their skin. The son utters (13).

Context 2: We're at a county fair picking through a barrel of apples to discard those afflicted by a fungal disease that makes their flesh red. The son slices an apple and utters (13).

Back in the café on 5th Street

- ▶ Now suppose again that we are in our café on 5th Street. We may report the content of the son's utterance in Context 1 by saying:

(14) The son said that the apple was red.

- ▶ And we may also report the content of the son's utterance in Context 2 by uttering (14).
- ▶ Moreover, according to Cappelen and Lepore, in 5stC we may also say truly:

(15) In both Context 1 and Context 2, the son said that the apple was red.

"Red" fails the inter-contextual indirect report test

- ▶ Cappelen and Lepore's conclusion is that "red" fails the inter-contextual indirect report test for context sensitivity.
- ▶ Although the contexts in which the son utters (13) are radically different from 5stC, we can report what the son said by uttering (13) in these contexts by saying (14):

(13) The apple is red.

(14) The son said that the apple was red.

The daring hypothesis

- ▶ Cappelen and Lepore make the bold claim that
every instance of an allegedly context sensitive expression that is not a member of the Basic Set fails this test.
- ▶ (Exercise for the reader: try the test for other expressions that are claimed to be context sensitive and are not in the basic set).

Collective descriptions

- ▶ Now, suppose we know that there are two contexts in which (16) and (17) are true, although we don't know the times of these contexts:
 - (16) Yesterday Leo turned sixty.
 - (17) Yesterday Lea turned sixty.
- ▶ We cannot conclude that there is a context in which (18) is true:
 - (18) Yesterday Leo and Lea turned sixty.
- ▶ We cannot draw this conclusion because for all we know (16) might have been uttered on Monday and (17) might have been uttered on Tuesday, in which case (18) is simply false.

Context sensitive expressions block collective descriptions

- ▶ The above example illustrates the fact that genuine context sensitive expressions block collective descriptions. In Cappelen and Lepore's words:
 - [if v is a context sensitive predicate], from there being contexts of utterance in which 'A v-s' and 'B v-s' are true it doesn't follow that there is a true utterance of 'A and B both v'.*
- ▶ We can use this property of context sensitive expressions as a test for context sensitivity. Let's call it the **collective description test for context sensitivity**.

Applying the test to "weigh"

Cappelen and Lepore 2005

Circumstance 1. *Smith, who is an astronaut, steps out of his spacecraft onto a new and unexplored planet. As usual, he has brought his extremely accurate scale with him The first thing he does is step onto it, in full astronaut outfit, and it registers '80kg'. His fellow astronauts look at him, and utter: 'Smith weighs 80kg'.*

Circumstance 2. *Jones is at home on earth, it's morning, he's naked, he hasn't had breakfast, but he did go to the bathroom, and now he steps onto an extremely accurate scale. It shows '80kg'. His friends gleefully exclaim 'Jones weighs 80kg'. [...]*

We're interested in how we (i.e., C&L) can actually now, in this one context, describe the facts. Here's the description that we find natural of Circumstance 1:

(C1) *Smith weighs 80kg.*

Here's a description of Circumstance 2 that we also find natural:

(C2) *Jones weighs 80kg.*

It is also true that:

(C3) *Both Smith and Jones weigh 80kg.*

"Weigh" fails the collective description test

- ▶ If Cappelen and Lepore are right, "weigh" fails the collective description test. From the fact that there are contexts in which (C1) and (C2) are true we may conclude that there is a context in which (C3) is true:
 - (C1) Smith weighs 80kg.
 - (C2) Jones weighs 80kg.
 - (C3) Both Smith and Jones weigh 80kg.
- ▶ If "weigh" were a genuine context sensitive expression, we should not expect this to be possible, because genuine context sensitive expressions block collective descriptions.
- ▶ Again, Cappelen and Lepore make the bold claim that, **when the collective descriptions test can be applied, no context sensitive expression outside the basic set passes it.**

The Now scenario

- ▶ Suppose we utter the following discourse (from Cappelen and Lepore 2005):

(19) *Right now, Stephen is not wearing a hat. Yesterday he was wearing a hat. And when he then uttered 'I'm wearing a hat now' what he said then was true, even though he's clearly not wearing a hat now.*
- ▶ This utterance of (19) is coherent, and it is true if Stephen is not wearing a hat at the time of utterance, but he was wearing a hat the day before that time.
- ▶ Since "now" is context sensitive, the occurrences of "now" that are *used* when we utter (19) (those in blue) refer to the time of the context of utterance of (19), call it t_s . On the other hand, the occurrence of "now" that is *mentioned* when we utter (19) (that in red) refers to a time in the day before t_s (the time at which Stephen uttered "now"). Our utterance of (19) is coherent because it may very well be the case that Stephen wears a hat the day before t_s but he does not wear a hat at t_s .

The Red Rupert scenario

- ▶ Now suppose we utter the following discourse (from Cappelen and Lepore 2005):

(20) *In order to be red, an apple has to have red skin. That's a necessary condition for being a red apple. It is irrelevant, for instance, whether an apple is red on its inside. Here's an apple, call it Rupert; Rupert is red. On the inside, Rupert is white. Nonetheless, there are utterances of 'Rupert is red' that are false, not because Rupert's color changes, but because the speaker cares about what's inside Rupert rather than whether it is red or not. This affects the truth value of the utterance even though the color of the inside of the apple is completely irrelevant to whether Rupert is red.*
- ▶ Cappelen and Lepore claim that (20) is not coherent, namely (20) cannot be true. Yet, if "red" were context sensitive, (20) *should* be coherent, since the occurrences of "red" which are *used* in the context of utterance of (20) mean the same as "has a red skin", while the occurrences of "red" in a context in which the speaker cares about the inside of Rupert, "red" means "has a red flesh". It follows that "Rupert is red" should be true in the former context and false in the latter, if "red" were context sensitive.
- ▶ Cappelen and Lepore's conclusion is that "red" is not context sensitive. They also make the bold claim that **by a similar reasoning one may show that none of the expressions outside the basic set are context sensitive.**

An objection to radical contextualism

- ▶ We are now ready to see the minimalists' (Cappelen and Lepore's) argument against radical contextualism.
- ▶ The **radical contextualists** claim that **every word is context sensitive.**
- ▶ But the inter-contextual indirect report test, the collective description test, and the type of reasoning illustrated in the red Rupert scenario show that *none of the expressions outside the basic set are genuine context sensitive expressions.*
- ▶ So, radical contextualism is false.

Semantic minimalism

- ▶ Suppose we go along with Cappelen and Lepore and accept that indeed the tests they propose are evidence that the only genuine context sensitive expressions are those in the basic set.
- ▶ This means that **a sentence that does not contain an expression in the basic set should have a content which is stable across contexts**, namely it should express the same proposition no matter how different the contexts in which it is uttered are.
- ▶ (Given that tense is counted among the expressions in the basic set and English matrix clauses are always tensed, it seems that English matrix clauses are always context dependent. So be it. The point may be restated by saying: **no matter how different the contexts in which it is uttered are, a natural language sentence expresses a stable content, except for those aspects of its content which are contributed by expressions in the basic set**).
- ▶ This is indeed what **semantic minimalism claims.**

Some pressing questions

- ▶ An immediate problem for semantic minimalism is that, as we have seen in some detail, it seems that there are lots of sentences of English that do not have a stable content across different contexts.
- ▶ For example, we noticed that one may utter (21) to say that Leo is ready to leave, or to say that Leo is ready to take an exam, or to say that Leo is ready start a game, and so on:

(21) Leo is ready.

- ▶ It seems that the advocate of minimalism must provide provide an answer to these questions:

Question one: if (21) expresses a stable content across different contexts, how come that (21) may be uttered to say different things in different contexts?

Question two: and anyhow what is the content of (21) that remains stable across contexts?

Reporting a crime

Cappelen and Dever 2016

Consider the following case:

Jones is under suspicion of the murder of Smith, and is being interrogated by the police. Eventually Jones says, 'I'm the one who killed Smith'. The police tell the press 'Jones said that he is the murderer', or 'Jones said that he is guilty', or 'Jones said that he committed the heinous crime'.

These are all correct reports of what Jones said. Moreover, if you know that Smith is a Swede, and if that is important and relevant in your context, you can report Jones as having said that he killed a Swede.

Pluralism about what is said

- ▶ Now let's go back to question one.

Question one: if (21) expresses a stable content across different contexts, how come that (21) may be uttered to say different things in different contexts?

(21) Leo is ready.

- ▶ The minimalist's answer is this:

The answer: "by uttering one sentence, a speaker says a plurality of things, not just one thing." As we have just seen from Jones' case, there is independent evidence that this is so.

- ▶ This position is called *pluralism about what is said*. Let's elaborate on it a bit more.

What is said and what is semantically expressed

- ▶ When they adopt pluralism, the semantic minimalists claim that an utterance expresses many different propositions.
- ▶ One of these propositions is the *semantic content* of the utterance. Roughly, the *semantic content* of an utterance is the proposition one gets once the referents of the expressions in the basic set that are part of the utterance (if any) are fixed.
- ▶ For the minimalist, the semantic content of the utterance is stable across different contexts (if the referents of the expressions in the basic set are kept stable).
- ▶ The other propositions expressed by an utterance may vary from context to context.

An illustration

- ▶ For example, the **semantic content** of (22) uttered by Leo at 3pm on November 12 2021 is the proposition expressed by (23):

(22) I am ready.

(23) Leo is ready at 3pm on November 12 2021.

- ▶ **The contribution that “ready” gives to the semantic content of an utterance is stable across contexts.**
- ▶ Depending on the context, an utterance of (22) may also express other propositions in addition to its semantic content.
- ▶ For example, depending on the context (22) may also express the proposition that Leo is ready to take the exam at 3pm on November 12 2021, or the proposition that Leo is ready to leave at 3pm on November 12 2021, or the proposition that Leo is ready start a game at 3pm on November 12 2021, and so on.

A deflationary answer

- ▶ Given what we said about the minimalist's notion of semantic content, it should also be clear by now how the minimalists answer question two.

Question two: what is the content of (21) that remains stable across contexts?

(21) Leo is ready.

- ▶ The content of (21) that remains stable across contexts is **the proposition that Leo is ready** (ignoring the role of present tense).
- ▶ Exactly the same answer is also given for other cases of sentences containing allegedly context sensitive expressions outside the context set. Let's see another example.

Just being smart

Cappelen and Dever 2016

Consider utterances of Naomi is smart in different contexts. What is said by such utterances will depend on the contextually supplied comparison class. In some contexts, it can be used to say she is smart for a kid in kindergarten. In others, it can be used to say that she is smart compared to rocket scientists. . . . Speech act pluralism allows the pluralistic-minimalist to grant this. We are now looking for what these utterances have in common and why it is we can, for example, share that content across contexts.

According to minimalists, the simple answer is this: that Naomi is smart. That is what is invariant between contexts.

Explaining the deflationary answer

- ▶ Minimalists say that (21) expresses a content which is stable across contexts, namely the proposition that Leo is ready (ignoring tense):

(21) Leo is ready.

- ▶ By this they do *not* mean that what all utterances of (21) have in common is that they say that Leo is ready *for something*.
- ▶ The content of (21) which is stable across contexts is *not* the proposition that Leo is ready for something, is simply the proposition that Leo is ready *simpliciter*.

Why avoid existential quantification

- ▶ Indeed, assuming that the semantic content of (21) is the proposition that Leo is ready for something is clearly problematic.

(21) Leo is ready.

- ▶ Suppose that, after viewing Leo's results in a simulation of the exam, I assert (24):

(24) Leo is not ready.

- ▶ If “ready” contributes the property of *being ready for something* to the semantic content of (21), presumably “ready” contributes the same property also to the semantic content of (24).
- ▶ This predicts that the semantic content I asserted by uttering (24) is that it is not the case that Leo is ready for something, i.e. Leo is ready for nothing.
- ▶ Clearly, this is not one of the propositions I asserted when I uttered (24).

The unintelligibility objection

- ▶ Here is a possible objection to semantic minimalism.
- ▶ Semantic minimalists claim that the proposition semantically expressed by (21) is the proposition that Leo is ready:

(21) Leo is ready

- ▶ But this answer exposes the minimalists to the charge of making a claim that is not intelligible.
- ▶ One is not just ready or not, one is ready to do certain things and not other things. Being ready is a relation between individuals and things they are ready for. How can there be just the property of being ready *simpliciter*?

The minimalist's answer

... Clearly, a bunch of people can all be ready for an exam. Even a contextualist doesn't want to deny that ... But, look, what was thought problematic and puzzling with respect to readiness simpliciter, namely, that it seems impossible to get a grip on what these people all have in common, i.e., readiness, can now quite easily be regenerated with respect to the property of being ready for an exam. There are indefinitely many ways of being ready for an exam. If you were puzzled by the claim that a bunch of people could all be ready, you should, as far as we can tell, be equally puzzled by the claim that they can all be ready for an exam...

The point of this is embarrassingly simple: Even if you were to deny that several people can all be ready simpliciter, the worry (if we understand it right) recurs as soon as you tell us what each person is ready for. So, again, this bolsters our claim that the alleged worry has nothing at all to do with the semantics for 'ready'.

(Cappelen and Lepore 2005, ch. 11, pp. 168-169).

A related objection

- ▶ The claim that the stable content of any utterance of (21) is the proposition that Leo is ready *simpliciter* also raises a different objection.

(21) Leo is ready

- ▶ Let's see how Borg (2007) states the objection.

Borg on being ready *simpliciter*

For instance, consider the sentence 'Jill is ready': according to Cappelen and Lepore this expresses the minimal proposition that Jill is ready and presumably the sentence expresses something true in any situation in which Jill is ready. On the other hand, the sentence 'Jill is not ready' expresses the minimal proposition that Jill is not ready and this presumably expresses something true in any situation in which Jill is not ready. However, it seems that there are many situations in which both sentences will then be true together (for instance, where Jill is ready to go to the party but not ready to take the exam). Yet since, for Cappelen and Lepore, the second sentence is just the negation of the first, this looks problematic. (Borg 2007)

The inconsistency objection

- ▶ Borg's point is that Cappelen and Lepore's theory incorrectly predicts that any speaker who asserts (25) and (26) makes a contradictory assertion.

(25) Jill is ready to take the exam.

(26) Jill is not ready to leave.

- ▶ Indeed, suppose a speaker asserts (25). Then, among other things, she asserts the semantic content of (25), namely the proposition that Jill is ready (*simpliciter*).
- ▶ If the same speaker also utters (26), then, among other things, she asserts the semantic content of (26), namely the proposition that Jill is not ready (*simpliciter*).
- ▶ So, a speaker who asserts (25) and (26) asserts the proposition that Jill is ready (*simpliciter*) and also the negation of this proposition, namely the proposition that Jill is not ready (*simpliciter*).

Radical semantic minimalism

- ▶ A possible alternative to the **semantic minimalism** of Cappelen and Lepore is the **radical semantic minimalism** advocated by Bach (2006).
- ▶ Cappelen and Dever (2016) describe the position of radical semantic minimalists (or, as they call them, *nihilistic minimalists*) as follows:

... they deny that the minimal what is said can be true or false. On this view, the minimal what is said expressed by an utterance of 'Alice is ready' isn't yet something that describes a way the world can be. It doesn't tell you something about the world. The minimal what is said is a kind of frame, or skeleton, on which you can build a what is said that can be true or false; that is to say, build a what is said that describes the world. What context does is add an element that completes the skeleton, and makes it into a full-blown what is said.

Semantic minimalism without minimal propositions

- ▶ The radical semantic minimalists reject the view that there is the proposition that Leo is ready *simpliciter*, without being ready for something or other. So, they do not run into the unintelligibility objection and the inconsistency objection.

- ▶ They also reject the view that sentences like (21) contain a context sensitive word (ignoring tense). In this sense they reject radical contextualism, according to which "ready" is a context sensitive word.

(21) Leo is ready.

- ▶ They claim instead that (21) is **semantically incomplete**: it fails to express a proposition.

Semantic incompleteness

Bach 2006

The idea of semantic incompleteness is straightforward if you think in terms of (structured) propositions rather than truth conditions. Since these are made up of building blocks assembled in a particular way, it makes sense to suppose that in some cases such an assemblage, put together compositionally from a sentence's constituents according to its syntactic structure, might fail to comprise a proposition. I call what is thus built up a "propositional radical" to indicate that, although it comprises the entire semantic content of the sentence, it lacks at least one constituent needed for it to be true or false and to be the content of a thought or a statement. . .

A point of agreement

- ▶ Minimalists of all brands reject the idea that "ready" is a context sensitive word.
- ▶ Recall what the argument for this rejection is: "ready" fails the tests for context sensitivity described by Cappelen and Lepore.
- ▶ Both Cappelen and Lepore and Bach regards these tests as showing that, despite appearances, words like "ready" are not context sensitive.
- ▶ But do these tests really show this? Let's spend some time reflecting on this issue.

Hawthorne on "nearby"

[Cappelen and Lepore's] idea is that if an expression is context-dependent then it will not in general be amenable to [the inter-contextual indirect report].

Now 'I' is not amenable to this style of reporting (if U says 'I am hungry' I cannot report this by 'U said that I am hungry') . . .

*Let us try . . . 'nearby'. Suppose Ernie is in New York City and I am in Birmingham. Ernie says 'A nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food'. I can report this by saying 'Ernie said that a nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food', even though I am far away from him. . . . Now many of us are quite aware that **many context-dependent expressions behave very differently to the paradigm indexicals in certain important respects. On a very natural view, 'nearby' is context-dependent but much more amenable to disquotational reporting than 'I'. And there is an easy explanation of this: 'Ernie is nearby' is true relative to a contextually relevant location that is supplied by context, but the relevant location need not have anything to do with the location where the utterance is made.** (Hawthorne 2006).*

Hawthorne's point

- ▶ Hawthorne claims that "nearby" is context dependent because "x is nearby" is true, uttered in a context *c*, iff *x* is close to a location *p* which is contextually salient in *c*.
- ▶ Hawthorne's point is that **a location may be contextually salient in a context of utterance although it is not the location in which the utterance is made.**
- ▶ This is why, if Ernie says (27) in New York City, I can report what Ernie said by uttering (28) in Birmingham: the contextually salient location when Ernie utters (27) and when I utter (28) is New York City, not Birmingham.

(27) A nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food.

(28) Ernie said that a nearby restaurant has good Vietnamese food.

- ▶ On the other hand, since "I" refers to the speaker of the context, Jack cannot report the content of Leo's utterance of (1) by uttering (2), since in Jack's utterance of (2) the speaker has changed.

(1) I am hungry.

(2) Leo said that I am hungry.

Back to “ready”

- ▶ Now consider again the context in which Nina utters (1) to assert that John is ready to take the exam.

(1) John is ready.

- ▶ According to C&L, “ready” is not context sensitive because they can report the content of Nina’s utterance by uttering (11) in the 5th Street context.

(11) Nina said that John is ready.

- ▶ But if “ready” is context sensitive, presumably its semantics goes like this: “x is ready” is true, uttered in a context *c*, iff x is ready for y, where y is contextually salient in *c*.
- ▶ Arguably, when Nina utters (1), the activity of taking the exam is salient. Moreover, when C&L in the 5th Street context describe the context in which Nina utters (1), they raise the salience of the activity of taking the exam.
- ▶ So, the same activity (taking the exam) is salient both when Nina utters (1) and when C&L utter (11). This is why (11) can be used to report the content of Nina’s utterance.
- ▶ A short way to put it is that in the context of utterance of (1) and in the context of the report the contextual features relevant to determine the interpretation of the indexical expression “ready” are unchanged.

An objection

- ▶ One might object to the semantics proposed above for “ready”. Recall that there are two contexts in which Nina utters (1):

(1) John is ready.

- ▶ In one context, Nina utters (1) to say that John is ready to take the exam, in the other context Nina utters (1) to say that John is ready to leave.
- ▶ Now, according to Cappelen and Lepore, (12) is true:

(12) In both contexts, Nina said that John is ready.

- ▶ This should not be possible, according to the semantics which treats “ready” as context sensitive, since there is no single *y* (contextually salient in the context of utterance of (12)) such that in both contexts in which Nina uttered (1) she attributed to John the property of being ready for *y*.
- ▶ So, one might object, the semantics that treats “ready” as context sensitive is wrong.
- ▶ To see how this objection could be answered, let’s read another passage by Hawthorne first.

Hawthorne on mixed quotations

... before drawing conclusions from the assertability of “say that” sentences, we should remember just how lax ordinary people are in their use of ‘say that’. The authors’ own work is instructive in this regard, but it seems to me that they don’t properly draw the appropriate conclusions. Begin with some data. In ordinary English, we can say, using the appropriate intonation contour, ‘People in Boston don’t say that someone goes to Harvard, they say that someone goes to Harvard’. (Say the second token of ‘Harvard’ with a Boston accent.) Similarly, in an ordinary English text, it is quite acceptable to say ‘If someone in Oxford in the 1860’s said that they were going to see a grinder, they meant that they were going to see someone who prepares students for examinations’. Here, note, ‘grinder’ appears without quotes but is used to report a speech where it is used with a meaning which it doesn’t currently have. Thus ‘say that’ reports can be used to report on the phonetic form of speech, on the lexical choices made in speech, and so on, and in certain cases are blind to sameness or difference in meaning.

Hawthorne on mixed quotations (cont.)

It is true that we do not do this for Kaplan’s indexicals—we make certain automatic adjustments in the ‘say that’ report. But the fact remains that we are prepared to use a large range of vocabulary in certain ‘say that’ reports even when we are totally ignorant of the semantic content of the use we are reporting on (‘What did Thomas Hardy mean when he said that someone had a quantum?’) and, even when we are aware, the current meaning of a term that appears in the that-clause is irrelevant to the original speech act (as in the ‘grinder’ example). It thus seems clear enough that many ‘say that’ reports have a feel of ‘mixed quotation’—where part but only part of the report serves to quote a speech reported on—even though no quote marks are used, even in the written version (there are no use-mention police in the ordinary world.) If this is right, then the [inter-contextual direct report] test is a terrible test for context-dependence, unless we have a way of screening off ‘mixed quote’ readings. (Hawthorne 2006).

A short reply

- ▶ In short, here's how one might reply to Cappelen and Lepore's objection based on (12).

(12) In both contexts, Nina said that John is ready.

- ▶ To the extent that (12) is felicitous, it is understood as a mixed quotation, as in (29). But (29) is not a problem for the view that "ready" is context sensitive:

(29) In both contexts, Nina said that "John is ready".

- ▶ ((29) is not a problem because it says that in both contexts Nina uttered the sequence of words "John", "is" "ready", which is obviously true).
- ▶ And, by the way, genuine context sensitive expressions do appear in mixed quotations:

Mr. Greenspan said he agreed with Labor Secretary R. B. Reich on "quite a lot of things". Their accord on this issue, he said, has proved "quite a surprise to both of us". (From the New York Times, reported in Cappelen and Lepore 1997).

The collective descriptions test

- ▶ Now, suppose Smith is ready to take the exam and Jones is ready to leave.
- ▶ I can report the situation by saying:

(30) Both Smith and Jones are ready, Smith is ready to take the exam and Jones is ready to leave.

- ▶ According to Cappelen and Lepore, this shows that "ready" is not a context sensitive expression, since genuine indexicals block collective descriptions.
- ▶ Notice, however, that the context sensitive semantics for "ready" stated above predicts that one should be able to assert (30) as long as in the context in which (30) is asserted there is a salient activity that both Smith and Jones are ready to perform.
- ▶ There is one such activity which is salient, namely the activity of *doing one of these things: leaving or taking the exam.*

The Red Rupert test

- ▶ Finally, the last test used by Cappelen and Lepore to determine whether an expression is context sensitive or not is this: check on the coherence of a discourse in which the expression is used and, at the same time, it is pointed out that there is a context in which the expression means something different.
- ▶ This was the Red Rupert case:

The apple over there, call it "Rupert", is red, since it has a red skin, though it's white on the inside. However, there are utterances of "Rupert is red" that are false, because the speaker cares about the color of Rupert's flesh.
- ▶ This discourse seems odd, but it shouldn't be if "red" were context sensitive.
- ▶ Let's see what Hawthorne (2006) has to say on this test.

Hawthorne on the red Rupert test

*Of course, it is somewhat jarring if someone just says out of the blue 'A is nearby/ready/red but someone else is uttering falsely 'A is nearby/ready/red'. But what does that show? It is also somewhat jarring to hear out of the blue 'John is happy but there are false utterances of 'John is happy', but even the authors agree that 'John' has different semantic values on different occasions of use. No doubt we could more easily cotton on to the purport of 'I am happy but there are false utterances of 'I am happy', uttered without much set up, than we could cotton on the purport of 'John is happy but there are false utterances of 'John is happy'. But even the authors would not want to make much of this difference. The appropriate lesson is this: **context-sensitive terms are not alike with regard to the kinds of triggers and signals that allow us to smoothly shift contexts within a single conversation.** (Hawthorne 2006).*

A different objection to the tests

- ▶ A different objection raised about the tests for context sensitivity proposed by Cappelen and Lepore is that they are not consistent.
- ▶ In particular, Hawthorne (2006) has argued that some expressions test positive for context sensitivity if one applies the Collective description test and test negative for context sensitivity if one applies the Inter-contextual indirect report test.
- ▶ Let's see why.

Inconsistency of the tests

A car goes to Ernie's left and my right. Ernie says 'The car went left'. I can say 'Ernie said that the car went left', even though my orientation is radically different to his. By the lights of this test, then, ... 'The car went left' [is] context invariant, at least with respect to the contribution of 'left' ...

... suppose Ernie and I are facing each other. Noticing a ball rolling from his right to his left, Ernie says 'The ball is moving left'. Noticing a balloon moving from my right to my left, [I say] 'The balloon is moving left'. I cannot collect with 'The ball and the balloon are moving left'. ... What needs to be stressed in this context is that owing to the collection failures noted, [the Collective descriptions test] reckons 'left' ... context dependent. Thus while [the Inter-contextual indirect report test] indicates that [it is] not context dependent ..., [the Collective descriptions test] indicates that we have very good evidence that [it is]. Despite the authors' apparent convictions, their tests do not work in harmony. (Hawthorne 2006).

Taking stock

- ▶ We have seen evidence that context sensitivity is pervasive in natural languages. This led the radical contextualists to claim that every word is context sensitive.
- ▶ We have seen an alternative to radical contextualism: minimalism, according to which context dependency, contrary to appearances, is a restricted phenomenon.
- ▶ We have seen the arguments (the test) in favour of minimalism and against contextualism.
- ▶ We have also seen some objections to Cappelen and Lepore's minimalism and also some objections to the arguments that give in favour of minimalism.

Moderate contextualism

- ▶ Suppose you are persuaded by the objections raised against minimalism. Should you embrace radical contextualism then?
- ▶ There is a position which is alternative to both minimalism and radical contextualism: *moderate contextualism* (Cappelen and Lepore's term).
- ▶ According to moderate contextualists, *not all words are context sensitive, but the expressions in the (Cappelen' and Lepore's) Basic Set do not exhaust all the sources of semantic context sensitivity.*
- ▶ Let's see how one could argue for moderate contextualism.

A slippery slope

- ▶ We have seen that there is *prima facie* evidence that gradable adjectives are context sensitive.
- ▶ Indeed, sentence (31) may be true in a context in which a certain degree of fastness is required for being fast and false in contexts in which a higher degree of fastness is required for being fast.

(31) Mark is fast.

- ▶ Suppose that, contrary to what minimalists claim, you accept that gradable adjectives like “fast”, “small”, “large”, “tall”, etc. are context sensitive expressions.
- ▶ Cappelen and Lepore’s contention is that you are on a slippery slope: the type of reasoning that leads you to accept that gradable adjectives are context sensitive should lead you to accept that lots of other expressions are context sensitive; in short, you are headed toward radical contextualism.
- ▶ Stanley (2004, 2005) argues that you are not. Let’s see why.

The case for the context sensitivity of “know”

- ▶ Recall DeRose’s case for the context sensitivity of “know”:

Hannah and her husband are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. But as they drive past the bank, they notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Thinking that it isn’t very important that their paychecks are deposited right away, Hannah says “I know the bank will be open tomorrow, since I was there just two weeks ago on Saturday morning. So we can deposit them tomorrow morning.” But then Hannah’s husband reminds her that a very important bill comes due on Monday, and that they have to have enough money in their account to cover it. He says, “Banks do change their hours. Are you certain that’s not what is going to happen tomorrow?” Hannah concedes, uttering “I guess I don’t really know that the bank will be open tomorrow”.

Contextualism about “know”

- ▶ DeRose’s story is meant to illustrate the fact that the truth of a propositional knowledge attribution depends on the epistemic standard adopted by the speaker in the context in which the attribution is made.
- ▶ Stanley (2004) characterizes the position of the contextualist in this way:

In particular, for the contextualist, the word “know” has a content that is a function of the epistemic standards in the context. When Hannah finds out that she must cash her check before the day is out, her evidence must satisfy a higher epistemic standard in order for her to know that the bank is open. The contextualist accounts for this by supposing that the word “know” changes its content in the new context. It expresses a relation that Hannah stands in to a proposition only if her evidence for that proposition satisfies this higher epistemic standard.

Knowledge attribution and gradability

- ▶ For contextualists like DeRose propositional knowledge attributions are *gradable*. As Stanley phrases it:

For the contextualist, then, knowledge relations come in higher or lower “strengths”. Knowledge attributions are thus comparable to context-sensitive gradable adjectives, such as “tall” and “flat”. An attribution of tallness is sensitive to a contextually salient scale of height, as is an attribution to flatness. If what is at issue are basketball players, then that brings in one rather high standard for “tall”; if what is at issue are fifth-graders, then that brings in a considerably lower standard for “tall”. In this sense, one could speak of tallness relations coming in higher or lower “strengths” as well.

Against the context sensitivity of “know”

- ▶ Stanley (2004) argues that propositional knowledge attributions are *not* context sensitive: they do not depend on the epistemic standards of the contexts in which the attribution is made.
- ▶ In particular, Stanley’s argues that *the linguistic evidence* suggests that that the verb “know” is *not* context sensitive as contextualists like DeRose claim.
- ▶ Indeed, Stanley shows that
 1. propositional knowledge attributions fail linguistic gradability tests,
 2. unlike other context sensitive expressions, one cannot shift the features relevant for applying “know” within the same discourse.
- ▶ Let’s see each of these points in turn.

Linguistic tests for gradability

- ▶ There are two linguistic tests for gradability:
 - Adjectives like “tall”, “flat”, etc., which can apply to objects to different degrees, allow for degree modifiers like “very”, “really”, etc.:

- (32)
- a. That is very flat.
 - b. That is really flat.
 - c. John is very tall.
 - d. John is really tall.

- Moreover, gradable adjectives can be used comparatively:

- (33)
- a. This is flatter than that.
 - b. This is taller than that.
 - c. This is smaller than that.

Is “know” gradable?

... *prima facie*, *propositional knowledge ascriptions are not gradable*. First, *knowledge ascriptions do not seem to allow for modification*:

- (8)
- a. *John very knows that penguins waddle.
 - b. *John knows very much that penguins waddle.

Second, *there is no natural comparative conceptually related to “know”*. The following locutions are deeply strained:

- (9)
- a. ??John knows that Bush is president more than Sally knows it.
 - b. ??Hannah knows that Bush is president more than she knows that Clinton was president.

If the semantics of “know” did involve scales, it would be mystery why there wouldn’t be a comparative form of “know” available to exploit the scale. (Stanley 2004).

Apparent degree modification

- ▶ In the scenario described by DeRose, when Hanna’s husband reminds her that an important bill comes due on Monday and banks change their hours, Hannah says:

(34) I guess I don’t really know that the bank will be open tomorrow.

- ▶ Why doesn’t “really” in (34) count as a degree modifier applied to “know”?
- ▶ When “really” is applied to gradable adjectives as a degree modifier, it can be conjoined with the assertion of the unmodified form without inconsistency. For example, one can utter sentence (35-a) to say that John is tall, but not tall to a high degree:

- (35)
- a. John is tall, but not really tall.
 - b. Michigan is flat, but not really flat.

- ▶ However, this is not possible with knowledge attributions. Indeed, sentence (36) is odd:

(36) #If the bank is open, then John knows that the bank is open, but doesn’t really know that the bank is open.

- ▶ According to Stanley this suggests that “really” in (34) is not a degree modifier, but simply a pragmatic indicator of the inappropriateness of asserting that Hannah knows.

Stanley's conclusion

- ▶ For Stanley, the above considerations are evidence that “know” is not context sensitive:
Natural language expressions that are semantically linked to degrees on scales exploit this link in a variety of recognizable ways – by allowing for comparisons between degrees on the scale, and by allowing modifications of the contextually salient degree on the scale. If the semantic content of “know” were sensitive to contextually salient standards, and hence linked to a scale of epistemic strength (as “tall” is linked to a scale of height), then we should expect this link to be exploited in a host of different constructions, such as natural comparatives. The fact that we do not see such behaviour should make us at the very least suspicious of the claim of such a semantic link. Thus, an investigation into the context sensitivity of predicates such as “is tall”, “is small”, and their ilk adds to, rather than removes, the burden of proof on contextualists about “know”. (Stanley 2004)
- ▶ Moreover, for Stanley there is further evidence in favour of the conclusion that “know” is not context sensitive. Let's see what it is.

A feature of context sensitive expressions

- ▶ Stanley observes that, since context sensitivity is a property of individual expressions, then,
if an expression is context sensitive, different occurrences of that expression in a discourse should be able to take on different semantic values.
- ▶ For example, everybody agrees that “this” is a context sensitive expression, and indeed different occurrences of “this” are able to refer to different things in the same discourse, as when we utter (37) by pointing at different objects:
(37) This is larger than this.
- ▶ Other examples of the same phenomenon are (38) uttered by turning to one conversational participant and then to another, and (39) uttered in a live chronicle of a marathon:
(38) You owe me 10 bobs and you owe me 15 bobs.
(39) Now Abebe Bikila enters the stadium and now Rhadi Ben Abdesselam enters the stadium.

Following the pattern

gradable adjectives

- ▶ Comparative adjectives exhibit the same behavior of basic context sensitive expressions like “this”, “you”, “now”, in this respect.
- ▶ Here are some examples described by Stanley (2004):
suppose John, who is very small for his age, identifies with small things. He has a picture on the wall in his bedroom of an elephant fighting off a much larger elephant. He also has a framed tiny butterfly on his wall. When he is asked why he has both things hung up, he says:
(3) That butterfly is small, and that elephant is small
...
Now imagine a picture of a butterfly that is surrounded by much smaller butterflies; it is huge for a butterfly. It is next to a picture of an elephant that is surrounded by much larger elephants. The following is a good description of the situation:
(5) That butterfly is large, but that elephant isn't large.
- ▶ In these utterances, different occurrences of the adjectives “small” and “large” can receive different values: small for a butterfly, small for an elephant in (3), and large for a butterfly, large for an elephant in (5).

Following the pattern

quantifiers

- ▶ As we have seen, quantifier phrases are also claimed by many authors to be context sensitive, in the sense that they are interpreted relative to a contextually provided set of individuals.
- ▶ Quantifier phrases also follow the pattern described by Stanley. For example, Stanley and Williamson (1995) point out that (40) can express the proposition that every sailor on one ship waved to every sailor on another:
(40) Every sailor waved to every sailor.
- ▶ In this interpretation, the first occurrence of “every sailor” quantifies over the sailors on one ship and the second occurrence quantifies over the sailors on the other ship.

Breaking the pattern

“know”

- ▶ If the semantic content of “know” were sensitive to contextually salient standards, we should expect to be able to associate different standards of knowledge to different occurrences of “know” in the same discourse, just as we associate different degrees of smallness to different occurrences of “small” in the same discourse.
- ▶ Thus, we should expect (41) to be felicitous, but it’s not:

(41) If there is an external world, many normal non-philosophers know that there is, but, by contrast, no epistemologists know that there is.
- ▶ Again, this suggests that “know” is not sensitive to contextually salient standards.

Knowledge and the stakes of the subject

- ▶ Now recall Hannah’s case described by DeRose. It seems true that Hannah knows that the bank will be open on Saturday before the husband reminds her that an important bill comes due on Monday, but it seems false that she knows that the bank will be open on Saturday after the husband’s reminder.
- ▶ If “know” is not sensitive to contextually salient standards, how do we account for these facts?
- ▶ Stanley (2005) suggest that cases like Hanna’s show that whether a person x knows at a time t that p depends upon how much is at stake for x at time t .
- ▶ Here we cannot describe Stanley’s proposal in any detail. Let’s simply notice that the condition that Stanley introduces for knowing that p does not appeal to any feature of the context of utterance.

Taking stock

- ▶ *Prima facie*, it may seem that both “fast” and “know” are context sensitive: “fast” is sensitive to contextually salient degrees of fastness, “know” is sensitive to contextually salient epistemic standards.
- ▶ Yet, by investigating further we saw that the linguistic evidence points in a different direction.
- ▶ The different linguistic behavior of gradable adjectives and quantifiers on the one hand and “know” on the other can be explained if we assume that, while gradable adjectives are sensitive to contextually salient degrees on a scale and quantifiers are sensitive to contextually salient domains, “know” is not sensitive to contextually salient epistemic standards. Otherwise these differences remain a mystery.
- ▶ We also saw that there are theories which account for the *prima facie* evidence that “know” is context sensitive without assuming that “know” is genuinely context sensitive.
- ▶ So, the slide toward Radical contextualism can be stopped as long as one considers different types of linguistic evidence bearing on the issue of context-sensitivity and different theories of the meaning of “know”. If this is correct, one can make a case for moderate contextualism.

A methodological point

- ▶ It is worth emphasizing that *the point of the foregoing discussion of “know” is not to show that “know” is context insensitive.*
- ▶ Whether the best theory of “know” is one that treats it as context sensitive or not depends to some extent on whether non context sensitive theories like Stanley’s provide a good account of the *prima facie* evidence for context sensitivity or not.
- ▶ The point of the discussion is that, unlike what Cappelen and Lepore claim, if one allows that there are context sensitive expressions outside the Basic Set, one is not necessarily headed toward radical contextualism.
- ▶ Once the *prima facie* evidence that in different contexts an expression makes different contributions to what is said is balanced against further linguistic evidence and alternative accounts of the *prima facie* data, it may very well turn out that some expressions outside the Basic Set are context sensitive and other expressions outside the set are not.