Contextualism, Minimalism and context

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Abstract

The present paper presented two major approaches; minimalism and contextualism. The study aims to find out which approach has most successfully contributed to the debate on answering the question of the study of utterance meaning in context.

Our analysis argues in favor of the view that that contextualism, as opponent to minimalism, is the most successful approach in presenting meaning in context. More specifically the study supported contextualism based on a view from relevance theory, also some other contextualism's viewers.

Introduction

The relevance theory is based on a definition of relevance and two principles of relevance; the Cognitive Principle (that human cognition is geared toward the maximization of relevance), and the Communicative Principle (that utterances create expectations of optimal relevance).The main assumption of relevance theory is the inferential approach to pragmatics, the goal of inferential pragmatics is to explain how the hearer infers the speaker's meaning on the basis of the evidences provided (Wilson and Sperber 2002).

As many researchers have shown it is true that a language is a code which pairs phonetic and semantic representations of sentences. However, there is a gap between the semantic representations of sentence and the thoughts actually communicated by utterances. This gap is filled not by more coding, but by inference. Moreover, there is an alternative to the code model of communication. Communication has been described as a process of inferential recognition of the communicator's intentions (Sperber and Wilson 1986).

This study aims to find out which approach has most successfully contributed to the debate on answering the question of the study of utterance meaning in context. In order to answer this question the present paper is going to support that contextualism, as opponent to minimalism, is the most successful approach in presenting meaning in context. More specifically it will support contextualism based on a view from relevance theory.

Language and context

When one designates a red ink pen in front of someone and asks **(1)** Pleas *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. Objects to this view support 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, cited in Crazza2007).

The notion of what is said – as opposed to ''the literal meaning'' and as opposed to ''what is meant'' – is a theory laden notion that is intended to locate an important semantic feature of linguistic communication. The idea is that there are some features that identify the semantic meaning of an utterance and separates it from its *pragmatic meaning.* Now, these two notions are also theory-laden terms, but there is at least agreement that ''literal meaning'' is part of semantics while ''what is conveyed'' is a part of pragmatics (Pagin and Pelletier 2006). Semantics is said to analyze explicit, primary, literal meanings, the objective 'what is said', these are determinate meanings. Pragmatics then assumed to analyze indirect, nonliteral, implicit and secondary meanings (Wunderlich, 1980, cited in Ariel 2010)

The most significant theoretical contribution to establish and account for nontruth-conditional meaning was Grice's (1975, 1989) notion of particularized conversational implicatures. The terms 'semantics' and 'pragmatics' don't appear in Grice's work; his fundamental distinction was between 'saying' and 'implicating'(Carston1998: 8-9). Relevance theory may be seen as an attempt to work out in details one of Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions. In developing this claim, Grice laid the foundation for an inferential model of communication, an alternative to the classical code model. According to the code model, communicators encode their intend message into a signal, which is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code. However, according to the inferential model, a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided (Wilson and Sperber 2002).

Minimalism & Contextualism

In twentieth-century the Anglo-American philosophy of language has contributed to the study of utterance meaning in context. According to Stainton (2010) two dominant perspectives are being simplified from the Anglo American perspective. One tradition, call the *System Perspective* and the second traditional perspective call the *Use Perspective*.

System theorists have mainly focused on two kinds of rules: syntax and semantics. The use theorists have presented language as a sociocultural practice and what is crucial for use theorists is that humans do not merely use language to describe the world. Furthermore, according to the use perspective a speech act is a linguistic token rather than a type. There are disagreements between the two perspectives about what languages, linguistic items and meanings are. (Stainton 2010). The two perspectives also known as Minimalism and Contextualisim. The debate between minimalism and contextualism is part of a long tradition of disputes about where the boundary between semantics and pragmatics is situated (Borg 2010).

For an account of the linguistic exploitation of context in minimalism, the proposition expressed can be truth-evaluable without being enriched or expanded. In contrast contextualists have argued that an utterance's truth-value is context dependent (Corazza 2007).

For example: In uttering **(2)** *'It's raining'* at precisely this moment I communicate the proposition that it's now raining in Manhattan. Indeed, it seems that something stronger is true like in uttering these words I say that it's now raining in Manhattan. But while the present tense indicates the time of rain, no expression explicitly occurring in my utterance provides its location. The Minimalist takes there to be a strict correlation between the surface grammar of a sentence S and the proposition one can use S to say, relative to a context. Since there is no expression in (2) whose value at the context is Manhattan the proposition expressed by utterance of (2) cannot have Manhattan as a constituent. Contextualists deny this requirement of strict correlation, holding that the minimal proposition encoded in (2)'s syntax is amenable to an optional process of free enrichment (Stanley 2008).

Furthermore, semantic minimalism is an attempt to answer two questions: what counts as semantic content and what work does semantic content do? With respect to the first question, semantic minimalism holds that content is entirely determined by syntax- there is nothing to be had 'for free', as it were, at the semantic level (Borg 2010). Specifically, minimalism holds that it is not possible for features of the context of utterance to permit semantic content unless their presence is demanded by something at the syntactic level. Also with regard to the second question, semantic minimalism claims that context does contribute an element to the semantic content.

 However, Contextualism advances two main claims. The first of these claims is that minimal meanings are not possible: Some/many/all sentences in natural language are not truth-evaluable prior to pragmatic enrichment (of the non-syntactically triggered sort). Thus, if semantics concerns truth-evaluable entities, then semantic content must be open to rich pragmatic effects (Borg 2010). The second of the contextualists' claim is that minimal meanings are redundant. Even where sentences are truth-evaluable without rich pragmatic effects the resulting minimal meaning are (often) theoretically inert- they are not consciously accessible nor do they play a role in explaining communicative success-thus they cannot be the correct subject matter for semantics (see Carston 2002; Recanati 2004, cited in Borg 2010).

In response minimalists have tried to argue that minimal meanings are possible. They seek to defuse the myriad examples raised by contextualists who purport to

show pragmatic influence on semantics, usually by insisting on a rigid distinction between semantic content and pragmatic speech act content. They also argue that there is a role for minimal meanings in communication. Furthermore, some minimalists have argued that a major ground of support for minimalism comes from the thesis of the modularity of mind (Borg 2010).

The champions of contextualism are the relevant theorists Carston (2002), Recanati (2004), and especially Sperber and Wilson (1986). 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.

Among the minimalists are Cappelen and Lapore (2005) *'Indixicalists'* and especially Borg (2004). Stanley (2000) and Stanley and Szabo (2000) also present a form of minimalism.

Contextualism opponent of 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 (Corazza 2007). Semantic minimalists claim that propositions are invariant across contexts (Corazza and Dokic 2007). To illustrate, consider sentences **(3)-(5):**

(3) I'll come tomorrow.

(4) Bill is tall.

(5) Betsy's gift made her very happy.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986: 10)

As noted by Sperber and Wilson (1986), according to minimalism utterances (3)-(5) express those propositions regardless of the context in which the sentence (3)-(5) are uttered. Minimalists cannot determine who 'I', 'Bill' and Betsy' refer to, and which day 'tomorrow' picks out. It can only provide some very general indication. It might state, for example, that 'I' always refers to the speaker, that 'Bill' and 'Betsy' refer to people or other entities with those names, and that 'tomorrow' picks out the day after the utterance. This is not enough to determine which thought is expressed when sentences such as (3)-(5) are uttered

Semantic minimalism defends among others, the following theses:

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).*

(See Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 144, cited in Corazza 2007: 122)

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 (See Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 144, cited in Corazza 2007: 122).

To illustrate, take 'I' for example in **(6):**

(6) Jane: ''I am rich'' (Corazza 2007: 122).

The ICD test gives us:

(7) Jane said that I am rich (Corazza 2007: 122).

Meanwhile (7) does not capture what Jane said (i.e., as reports of what Jane said h/she is false), 'I' is context sensitive (indexical) expression, 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:

(8) Jane: ''Bill is too old'' (Corazza 2007: 122).

The ICD test would give:

(9) Jane said that Bill is too old (Corazza 2007: 122).

'Too old' need not be changed when going from direct discourse to indirect discourse, i.e., reported (9) is accurate, or so Cappelen and Lepore claim. Hence, the minimalist story goes, 'too old' does 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 (Corazza 2007).

For criticism toward the minimalist view, first of all, let's start by undermining the ICD test based on Corazza's (2007) view, We can 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-21team. 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.

However as the terminological classification suggests, members of the contextualist site tend to identify 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. In other words, the very same utterance of non-indexical sentences may express different propositions depending on the context in which it occurs (Corazza 2007). Furthermore, one proposition may be true while the other is false. 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:

(10) There is some beer in the fridge (Corazza 2007: 119).

Situation1. Jon is thirsty and asks for some beer and Jane utters (10). Competent speaker intuition: Jane says something false.

Situation2. Jon just finished cleaning the fridge and Jane utters (10). Competent speaker intuition: Jane says something true.

(Corazza 2007: 119)

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 (10) is intrinsically or essentially context-sensitive (Corazza 2007).

Furthermore, in order to reject minimalism, Relevance-theoretic view as a champion of contextualism gives a strong explanation for this issue. Relevance theory is a cognitive psychological theory. In particular, it treats utterance interpretation as a cognitive process. Like other psychological theories, it has testable consequences: it can suggest experimental research, and is open to confirmation, disconfirmation or fine-tuning in the light of experimental evidence (Sperber and Wilson 2002). Moreover, according to Carston (1998), relevance-theoretic holds strong versions of the "semantic underdeterminacy" theis that any single sentence type could have different truth conditions on different occasions of use on this view, truth-conditional semantics includes some pragmatic aspects of meaning, and the semantics of linguistic forms has little or nothing to do with truth condition. Also the bearer of truth is not the sentence but the proposition or thought the speaker uses the sentence to express on the given occasion of utterance (Carston 1998). For more explanation let's look at the following example:

(11) The kettle is black (Travis 1981, 1985, cited in Carston 1998: 63).

Discussing what is meant by the predicate 'black' in (11), there is a range of possible circumstances: Suppose the kettle is normal aluminum, but soot covered; normal aluminum but painted; cast iron, but glowing from heat; etc. In addition, according to the "pragmatic view", as Travis calls it, for any utterance, the contribution made by any and potentially all, of the linguistic items employed is context-dependent, so that a statement of the truth condition of a sentence is not possible (Travis 1981, 1985, cited in Carston 1998).

For more detail and supporting contextualism's view let's look at the sentences (3)-(5) again. For instance, if John says (3) on the 13th of May, it expresses the thought that John will come on the 14th of May; if Ann says (3) on the 20th of March, it expresses that thought that Ann will come on the 21st of March. The minimalists can say nothing about how the hearer, using non-linguistic information, determines on a particular occasion what the time of utterance actually is, who the speaker is, which Bill or Bitsy the speaker has in mind, etc., and hence which thought is actually being expressed. In every case, the syntactic element or the grammar can only help determine the possibilities of interpretation. Examples (3)-(5) show that as a result of referential indeterminacy such as that of 'Bill', semantic ambiguity such as that of 'gift', and semantic uncompleteness such as that of 'tall', a single sentence, with a single semantic representation, can express an unbounded range of thoughts (Sperber and Wilson 1986).

In order to explain what they mean by 'Semantic Minimalism' Cappelen and Lepore (2005) gave a list of expressions that they characterize as the Basic Set of Context Sensitive Expressions. And the class of indexical expressions is limited. This list contains only expressions like the pronoun "I", "he", "she" "we",…, the demonstratives "this", "that", "these", …, the adverbs "here", "now",

"tomorrow",…Roughly, an indexical is an expressions whose linguistic meaning direct us to some aspect of context in order to fix the reference. Thus, "I" direct us to the agent of the utterance, while "she" directs us to the relevant female demonstrated by an utterance of "she". If the linguistic meaning of an expression cannot be classified as an indexical. It is thus context-insensitive and the semantic value of an utterance of this expression will always be the same, regardless of the context in which it occur (Corazza and Dokic 2007).

In contrast, according to contextualism the proper names are indexical as well, comparative adjective such as "rich", "small", quantified expressions like "the book", "some students", common nouns like "local", "foreigner", "enemy" are context-sensitive expressions as well (Corazza and Dokic 2007). A common strategy to represent their context sensitivity is to suggest a variable working like a hidden indexical at the level of logical form. This view can be labeled *indixicalism* insofar as it explains, to borrow Recanati's terminology, contextual dependence in term of saturation rather than enrichment. Saturation is the process of adding semantic values to various parameters associated with simple expressions, so as to get full proposition, i.e. a truth evaluable entity (Recanati 2004). Saturation, unlike (free) enrichment, is a mandatory contextual process. As such, saturation is triggered by an indexical expression working either at the surface level or at the logical form level (Corazza and Dokic 2007).

However, by Reecanati's standars, all the indexical expressions in Cappelen and Lepore's Basic Set induce the need for saturation (Pagin and Pelletier 2006).

For example:

(12) I am in pain (Pagin & Pelletier 2006: 22).

(12) Needs saturation by context to fix the reference of 'I' and the time associated with the present tense in order to have a proposition expressed that is true or false (Pagin and Pelletier 2006).

Furthermore, the relevance-theoretic claims that the human cognitive system is oriented towards the maximization of relevance; that is, the various subsystems conspire together so as to tend to achieve the greatest number of cognitive effects for the least processing effort overall. However, for communication to succeed, it is sometime necessary for the relevance-oriented mind-reading capacity to overrule the determinate dictates of the linguistic system, and it is often able to do. Look at the following example:

Kato (of O.J. Simpson, at his trial):

(13) He was upset but he wasn't upset.

[=He was [upset]' but he wasn't [upset]''] (Carston 1998: 66).

Explaining these cases of (often successful) mind-reading is a basic task of a pragmatic theory concerned with actual processes of utterance understanding, a task the relevance-theoretic account is equipped to handle. In contrast, as data for a semantic theory, they are of no particular interest and will be subsumed in that theory's general account of word and sentence meaning; on most account of 'what is said' by these utterances, something false, and in the last case necessarily false, is said, although this has no bearing on the interpretive process (Carston 1998).

Also, according to the relevance- theoretic account, identifying what is communicated explicitly by an utterance (it's explicature) includes several pragmatic processes: disambiguation, Saturation of indexical elements, the recovery of unarticulated constituents and ad hoc concept construction, both of the latter being free from any linguistic suggestion. For illustration, if we take (13) the two instances of the word "upset" were understood as communicating different concepts of upsetness, at least one, but most likely both, involving a pragmatic enrichment of the encoded lexical concept UPSET; the second of the two concepts carries certain implications that the first one does not, implication whose applicability to Simpson Kato wants to deny. The proposition explicitly expressed here is true just in case O.J. Simpson had one sort of property at the time in question, but lacked another, related but stronger, property (Carston 1998).

Also according to contextualism based on the relevance-theoretic terms there are the completion processes required by utterances of the sentence as the following:
(14) Paracetamol is better. [Than what?] (Carston 1998: 66)
The Example in (14) are obvious cases of linguistic semantics (logical form) underdetermining the proposition expressed; they require a pragmatic process of completion before they can be judged as true or false descriptions of a state of affairs. However, they do not show that this is a predictable property of linguistic communication, because after all, a speaker could have used a sentence which encoded the missing constituent (Carston 1998):
(15) Paracetamole is better than nurofen (Carston 1998: 67).
It has been argued that while the linguistic semantics of an utterance often does in practice underdetermine the proposition it explicitly expresses, this is just a matter of convenience for speakers and hearers, and another sentence which fully encodes the proposition expressed (an eternal sentence) could always be supplied if the occasion seemed to warrant it (Carston 1998).
However, minimalists run a number of instability argument that has been adduced in favor of contextualism. Such as context shifting argument and incompleteness arguments are claiming that propositions are invariant across contexts. If they are right, then truth conditions are also, by definition, invariant across contexts. Then, the proposition that *Bill is tall* may be true relative to one particular situation but false relative to another, even within the same possible word. However, minimalists do not deny, though, that some (unambiguous) sentences may express some propositions only relative to a given context. Bill's utterance of 'I am tall' expresses the proposition *that Bill is tall*. If this sentence is uttered by Jane, it expresses the proposition that Jane is tall. Both Bill and Jane utter the same sentence, yet they express different proposition (Corazza and Doki 2007).
Furthermore, Cappelen and Lepore (2005) argues that the basic set does not contain a number of terms that in recent decades have been given a contextualist analysis, such as 'every' (contextual quantifier domain restriction), 'know' (contextual standards of knowledge) or 'happy' (contextual comparison class), But relating to

shifting arguments that will be a instability argument (Pagin and Pelletier 2006: 5). Consider the sentence:

(16) Every bottle is empty (Pagin and Pelletier 2006:13).

An utterance of (16) is likely to be concerned with a restricted range of bottles, not with every bottle in the universe. Moreover, the restricted range of bottles is related to context dependence. For instance, every bottle on a particular table at some party or every bottle on a particular shelf in some wine cellar. The intuitive content is then different, and the truth value well (intuitively) be different, even if the utterances are made at the same time (Pagin and Pelletier 2006).

In short, there is no doubt sophisticated communication demands a lot of mindreading. In verbal communication, speakers manage to convey a very wide range of meaning despite the fact that there is no independently identifiable basic layer of information for the hearer to pick up. As noted above, Verbal comprehension stars with the recovery of a linguistically encoded sentence meaning, which must be contextually enriched in a variety of ways to yield a full- fledged speaker's meaning (Carston 2002).

Conclusion

Relevance theory as a champion of the contextualist tent is a cognitive psychological theory. In particular, it treats utterance interpretation as a cognitive process. Like other psychological theories, it has testable consequences: it can suggest experimental research, and is open to confirmation, disconfirmation or fine-tuning in the light of experimental evidence (Wilson and Sperber 2002). Semantic minimalism differently from contextualism supports that that meaning is determined by syntax. But there seems to be a gap and just syntax is not enough to express a full proposition of an utterance. Contextualists, the side of which this paper is supporting, can fill this gap through reach pragmatic effects (Recanati 2004). The paper has shown that minimalists have failed to provide an account which makes the communication between speaker and hearer successful whereas Contextualists seem to have contributed more successfully in the utterance meaning in context. Therefore contextualism manages to answer the questions of our mind in everyday life.

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پوخته

ئهم توێژینهوهیه دوو ڕێبازی سهرهکی دهخاته ڕوو ئهوانیش ههردوو ڕێبازی (پرۆگرامی بچوککردنهوه و بهدهوروبهرکردن). ڕوونکردنهوهکه مهبهستیهتی ئهوه بخاته ڕووکه کام لهم ڕێبازانه سهرکهوتووبووه له سهرخستنی مشتومری وهڵامی ئهو پرسیارهی که دهکرێت سهبارهت به مانای ئاخاوتن له دهوروبهردا.

بهشێوهیهکی وردتر؛لێکۆڵینهوهکه ههڵدهستێ به پشتگیری کردن له ڕێبازی (به دهوروبهر کردن) به پشت بهستن به (تێوری پهیوهندی) و ههروهها به پشت بهستن به بیروڕای چهند کهسانێك له پاڵپشتانی (بهدهروبهر کارهکان).

ملخص

المرسوم به (السياق والبرنامج الحد الادنى والتنسيق) فى اطار تحليل الجمل ،ويرمى البحث الى اظهار المنهج الملائم ضمن هذين المنهجين والذى يقترن بطرح الايماءات المترتبة لاختيار احد المنهجين.

وبشكل ادق تنتهج هذا البحث طريقة (ربط النحو بالسياق المحيطى) استنادا الى النظرية (التواصل) وتعضيداً باراء مجموعة من الباحثين.