Context: Indexicals and Presupposition

(Chapter 6.1—6.3)

"Context" is sometimes used widely to describe whatever might affect the interpretation of an utterance.

In such usage, (a) anything in the *linguistic* text or speech action, and (b) any part of the *environment* might be part of the context.

Mostly what becomes a part of the context in this conception is something that is *noticed* by the participants…or at least, *can be noticed*. Any such item is eligible to be a part of the context. (Hidden thoughts and secrets that only one person knows can't be part of the context).

TYPES OF CONTEXT:

a. "common ground" (see text Ch. 4, pp. 215-219):

social "commonplaces"

a jointly developed slate of discourse commitments

a mutually developed public view of what they are talking about

information generated as the conversation evolves

b. "conversational background" (Ch. 5, pp. 296-302 on *modal base*, role of *w*):

what the relevant facts are

what is known

what is polite

what the authorities allow

what someone's goals are

TYPES OF CONTEXT (cont'd):

c. "salient features of the (non-linguistic) environment":

compare 'an open area' when said in a city, a farm, a forest

(and generally, any feature of the environment that determines "what counts" as exemplifying a predicate such as 'tall' or 'brown' or 'young', etc.)

that there is something unusual and easily noticed

the genders/ages/social stature of the conversationalists

physical situation of speaker/audience with respect to one another

d. "features of the speech situation":

time of speech (see text Ch. 5, pp. 279-289 on role of *i*)

who is speaking/who is addressee (audience)

where conversation is taking place

TYPES OF CONTEXT (cont'd)

e. "mixing environment and speech situation"

where speaker/addressee is looking

where speaker/addressee is pointing

perspective from which information is being presented

[and how all this interacts with deictic words]

f. how conversational policies are being followed (or not)

conventional and conversational implicatures (Ch. 4.5 pp. 239-255)

g. "presuppositions" (Ch. 6, pp. 349-365)

h. "speech act information"

a whole new dimension of evaluation (see Ch. 4.4, pp. 220-239)

GENERALLY:

These contextual features play a role in determining the "meaning" or "information" that is conveyed in a conversation (or text). But these are <u>not</u> relevant to the 'literal meaning' of the sentence. And therefore they might be thought to <u>not</u> be a part of semantics proper, and instead a part of "pragmatics".

However, there are many attempts to include much of this under the purview of semantics, by extending semantic methods. We've already seen how information about possible situations (<*w*,*i*>) can be employed so characterize some of these features of "context".

THE MULTIPLE COORDINATE APPROACH

This was initially introduced (Bar-Hillel, Montague, …) to handle *indexicals*, and that is still the main accepted use.

INDEXICALS: *I, here, you, now, then* (sometimes, anyway), *yesterday, that* and *those* (as demonstratives), *she*/*he*/*her*/*it*/… (as deictic pronouns)

THE IDEA IS: extend the notion of "semantic value in M, w, i, g" to "semantic value in M, w, i, c, g". The new index *c* is the *context*.

DO THIS BY: keeping the notion of a *possible situation* (<w,i>) and invoking a set of possible contexts, C. Then c∈C.

For any *c*,

a. $V(I)(c)(\langle w,i\rangle) = sp(c)$ [the speaker in *c*]

b. $V(you)(c)(\langle w,i\rangle) = adr(c)$ [the addressee in *c*]

c. $V(here_n)(c)(\langle w,i\rangle) = loc_n(c)$ [the location of the speech act in *c*]

d. $V(there_n)(c)(\langle w,i\rangle) = demloc_n(c)$ [the location being demonstrated in *c*]

a. If α is a constant $[\![\alpha]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} = V(\alpha)(c)(\langle w,i\rangle)$

b. If α is a trace or pronoun, $[\![\alpha]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} = g(\alpha)$

c. If Δ = [NP Pred], then $[\![\Delta]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} = 1$ iff $[\![NP]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} \in [\![Pred]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g}$

d. If $\Delta = [S_1 \text{ conj } S_2]$, then $[\![\Delta]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} = V(conj)(c)(\langle w,I\rangle)(\langle [\![S_1]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g}, [\![S_2]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g}\rangle)$

e. If Δ = [that S], then $[\![\Delta]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} = \{\langle w',i'\rangle : [\![S]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g}\}$

f. If Δ = [must S], then $[\![\Delta]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} = 1$ iff for all $\langle w',i'\rangle$ in mdb(c), $[\![S]\!]^{M,w,i,c,g} = 1$