

Specificity, Automatic Designation, and 'I'

Varol Akman and Aylin Koca
Bilkent University, Ankara

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Outline

- ✓ Specificity
- ✓ Context
 - Semantic Relativism: Contextualism vs. Invariantism
- ✓ Automatic Designation
- ✓ Scenarios
- ✓ An Explanation: Defeasibility
- ✓ Conclusion

Specificity

- ✓ A kind of definiteness
 - "My agents cannot wait to interrogate *the Colombian*."
- ✓ 'Identifiability' criteria for definiteness and specificity (Talmy Givón)

Identified by	definite specific	definite non-specific	indefinite specific	indefinite non-specific
speaker	+	-	+	-
hearer	+	+	-	-

Context

- ✓ A crucial feature of language and action
- ✓ Perry's "Indexicals and Demonstratives" was a major influence
- ✓ 'I' - the clearest (?) case of an indexical
- ✓ A major topic to which John Perry devotes considerable space in his oeuvre

From the textbooks

- ✓ Hans Kamp:
 - It has been suggested that all a semantic theory needs to say about 'I' is that the word refers in all cases in which it is used (except those where it appears inside direct quotation) to the person who uses it; and that is all there is to it.

From the textbooks (cont.)

- ✓ John Lyons:
 - The first-person pronoun, 'I' in English, refers (normally) to the actual speaker: i.e. to whoever is speaking at that moment.
- ✓ L.T.F. Gamut:
 - "I live in Amsterdam" is true in a given context just in case the individual who is speaking in that context does in fact live in Amsterdam.

Semantic relativism

- ✓ Peter Unger's well-known distinction: Contextualism vs. Invariantism
 - "That field is flat."
- ✓ *Contextualist*: According to contextually relevant standards, that field is sufficiently close to being such that nothing could ever be flatter than it is.
- ✓ *Invariantist*: That field is perfectly flat.

'What is said'

- ✓ For the contextualist, 'what is said' is not itself a simple thing. (There is an implicit reference to a contextual standard.)
- ✓ For the invariantist, 'what is said' is more directly related to the sounds.

Question

- ✓ Could 'I' be analyzed in the light of this important distinction?

Narrow vs. wide context

- ✓ Does designation depend on narrow or wide context?
 - NC: facts about the utterance (*a, t, l*)
 - WC: narrow facts + stuff that is relevant
- ✓ John Perry:
 - The clearest case of an indexical that relies only on the narrow context is 'I', whose designation depends on the agent and nothing else.

Automatic vs. intentional

- ✓ Is designation automatic (given meaning and public contextual facts) or does it depend in part on the intentions of the speaker?
- ✓ An automatic designation uses no intentions ("yesterday" vs. "that field").

Types of indexicals

	NARROW	WIDE
AUTOMATIC	I, now*, here*	tomorrow
INTENTIONAL	now, here	that, this man, there

Pure indexicals

✓ Perry:

- The indexicals 'I', 'now', and 'here' are often given an honored place as *pure* or *essential* indexicals.

- ✓ In the preceding table, this honored place is represented by the cell labeled 'narrow' and 'automatic'. However, it is not clear that 'now' and 'here' deserve this status, hence the asterisks.

Status OK?

- ✓ Does 'I' really deserve this privileged status?

- We think not...

- ✓ *Caveat*: It turns out that many people asked this question and came up with interesting answers.

The phony inclusive

- ✓ Stefano Predelli mentions an example due to Arnold Zwicky that the latter has dubbed the *phony inclusive use of we*.

- A display of intention to contain only the addressee, but not the waitress herself:

Waitress (to a customer): "How are we today?"

The phony inclusive (cont.)

- ✓ "How am I doing today?", addressed by Yeltsin (in bed due to a heart ailment) to a *double* of his who's just going out to meet with the North Korean delegation.

- ✓ This is more like "Are you ready to fool them?" [*Proof*: If there are several doubles, he might as well ask "How are we doing today?"]

The phony inclusive (cont.)

- ✓ Kaplan: 'I' is a pure indexical - something for which "*no associated demonstration is required, and any demonstration supplied is either for emphasis or is irrelevant*" (his italics).

- I have in mind such cases as pointing at oneself while saying 'I' (emphasis) or pointing at someone else while saying 'I' (irrelevance or madness or what?).

The phony inclusive (cont.)

- ✓ Now imagine a beat-up Yeltsin visiting the Madame Tussaud's London and admiring his shining waxwork. He says:

- "I'm the most vigorous man here."

- ✓ (Pointing is not even necessary.)

Attack

- ✓ [Inspired by Howard Wettstein]
- ✓ There has been an *unsuccessful* attack on Yeltsin's life. The Russian secret service recorded the whole incident and he's watching it.
- ✓ There's a certain moment he utters:
 - "I'm about to be attacked!"

Defeasibility

- ✓ (Kim, 1996) *Defeasibility of mental-behavioral entailments*:
 - If there is a plausible entailment of behavior B by mental states $M[1], \dots, M[n]$, there is always a further mental state $M[n+1]$ such that $M[1], \dots, M[n], M[n+1]$ together plausibly entail $\neg B$ (viz. failure to produce behavior B).

Defeasibility (cont.)

- ✓ *Defeasibility of contextual interpretations*:
 - If there is a plausible interpretation K of a certain expression in the presence of contextual features $C[1], \dots, C[n]$, there is a further contextual feature $C[n+1]$ such that $C[1], \dots, C[n], C[n+1]$ together plausibly entail a different interpretation (e.g. $\neg K$).

Conclusion

- ✓ Neither contextualism nor invariantism is a definite semantic position one would like to adopt.
- ✓ Once again, consider:
 - That field₁ is flat₂

Conclusion (cont.)

- ✓ It is probably wiser to take a more invariantist stance regarding the 1st part and a more contextualist stance regarding the 2nd.
- ✓ This is also what we should do for 'I', depending on its contexts of occurrence.

Credits

- ✓ Similar views were presented by - among others - Wettstein, Francois Récanati, Predelli, Claudia Bianchi, and Eros Corazza.
- ✓ **Bianchi**:
 - The reference of 'I' is not a direct function of the context of utterance (the semantic context); its context of interpretation is fixed by recognising the [speaker's] intentions.

Credits (cont.)

✓ Bianchi:

- The rule associated with 'I' seems to be
 - An occurrence of 'I' refers to the individual the producer of the utterance indicates as responsible for the utterance in the given context.
- We thus introduce an intentional factor in the very rule associated with 'I'.

Credits (cont.)

✓ Corazza et al.:

- The context or setting of a linguistic interchange plays a [crucial] role. The agent of 'I', like the relevant contextual parameters (e.g. *t* and *l*), is best understood to be the *conventionally determined* agent, and the agent determined by convention may well be distinct from either the utterer or the producer of the token of 'I'.

Stop the Press!

- ✓ In his most recent work ("Using Indexicals"), Perry has also introduced a finer analysis of 'I', using examples similar to those cited in this presentation.

Questions & Comments