

## Intention's role in truth

In the past three decades, a particular kind of contextualism has emerged criticizing the central thesis of the semantics for natural languages that dominated analytic philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. Inspired mostly by Donald Davidson's work, the thesis was built upon the idea that the meaning of a sentence was equivalent to that which Frege called its Sinn, i.e. the idea that we could extract from the meaning of an affirmative sentence a definite set of truth-conditions. The dominance of this idea has been so pervasive that it can be seen even in theories that deal with context sensitive terms, such as indexicals. Even if indexicals have their reference fixed by the context of their use, it is a given semantic rule that establishes the coordinates of the referential process. For instance, it is not possible to know the reference of the pronoun 'I' unless someone is actually uttering the sentence in which it appears. However, given the semantic rule 'the first-person pronoun refers to whoever is uttering the sentence' the pronoun's reference is immediately fixed once the word is uttered.

The attempts to expand the indexical model in order to account for other context sensitive terms, carried out by authors like Jason Stanley, intended to show that any variation in a sentence's truth-condition was, in the end, still fully controlled by semantic rules and that, whenever an information conveyed by an utterance was not so determined, it had to be explained by pragmatic models such as Paul Grice's. The upshot was the insulation of semantics from pragmatics and the preservation of Davidson's semantic thesis.

Radical contextualism in its different forms is an attack on the idea that truth conditions are necessarily determined by semantic rules. In examples like the one given by John Searle in his article *Literal Meaning*, 'John cut the grass', the meaning of the word 'cut' cannot fix the specific way in which the speaker is saying that the grass has been cut. Did John mow the lawn? Did John cut off a few pieces of the lawn in order to sell it? Did John collect a few samples of grass for his thesis in botany? In each of these cases, even if the meaning of the words remains the same, the conditions for the truth of their utterance is different. Moreover, such a difference cannot be accounted for in terms of a minimal rule modelled according to the first-person pronoun example.

If the radical contextualist criticism holds up, there must be another factor – a non-linguistic or extra-linguistic factor – responsible for setting the conditions under which a given utterance would be true. Otherwise, radical contextualism would run the risk of advocating a sceptic position regarding meaning and truth. In other words, to avoid an indeterminist position on truth-conditions, radical contextualism must present a positive thesis to go along with its negative criticism. The paper I am presenting compares two radical contextualist solutions to the problem of the determination of an utterance's truth-conditions: Charles Travis' Occasion-sensitivity and François Recanat's Truth Conditional Pragmatics. The fact that both of them support the aforementioned general negative thesis hides substantial differences in their projects. By exposing these differences my paper ends up showing an incompatibility between two perspectives that are taken by some of their critics as equivalent.

The comparison I propose is focused on the way each of these positions reads Grice's notion of "what is said". This notion is pivotal to the contextualist debate because it is supposed to be purely semantic, i.e. apart from fixing the values of indexical variables, the context should have no influence over the truth conditions of what is literally said by a speaker. To show that this is not the case is to demonstrate that truth conditions are liable to suffer the influence of contextual factors that are not conditioned by semantic rules. Therefore, Travis' and Recanati's strategies to prove their negative thesis is similar: they both try to show that some contextual readings of an affirmative sentence cannot be predicted by simply explaining the meaning of its words.

However, in Recanati's case, there is still the possibility of extracting a definite set of truth-conditions from the literal meaning of an affirmative sentence. The point for him is simply that it is not mandatory to do so. Each subsentential element of the sentence may contribute its literal meaning to what is being said, but it may also contribute a modulated sense depending on what the speaker intends to say. Recanati's goal is to defend the idea that a particular pragmatic factor – the speaker's intention – operates on the literal meaning of subsentential elements before the compositional process that generates a whole sentence takes place. Therefore, such a pragmatic factor penetrates, so to speak, what is said. The hearer, then, interprets unconsciously each subsentential element according to the context to grasp what the speaker intends to say, but he doesn't have to compute a whole literal sentence that may, sometimes, turn out to be bizarre (e.g. when someone says 'the book is on the table' we would have to suppose that the hearer computes the literal sentence that the only existing book is on the only existing table, before inferring that the speaker means that his friend's book is on his table).

Recanati's proposal that what is said is determined by the speaker's intention presupposes that the literal meaning of subsentential elements is equivalent to Frege's *Sinn*. The speaker's intention operates *on* this minimal representational feature and the hearer's understanding of what is said depends on his subpersonal ability to select which sense of the expression fits a given context. Travis' attack on what is said is much more radical, since he is denying the existence of this minimal subsentential semantic item. For him, the gricean notion of what is said is vacuous and cannot be reformed in the way proposed by Recanati. If he is right, Recanati's system falls apart because there would be nothing for the speaker's intention to operate on. Even the notion that it is the speaker's meaning that must be grasped by the hearer would be in danger since the speaker's meaning is read in terms of the way in which a subsentential sense – derived from, or equivalent to, the literal meaning – may fit a given context. It is in this way that their views are incompatible.

By defending Travis' read, this paper holds that the extra-linguistic factor responsible for fixing the truth conditions of an utterance cannot be the speaker's intentions as described by Recanati. The way to build a positive account of how the truth conditions of an utterance are fixed must abandon completely the gricean model and notions such as what is said. I end the paper suggesting how Travis' view contributes to building such a positive account.