

# Seminar on Context-Sensitivity

## Week Three

### 1 “Proposition Radicals”, “Semantic Incompleteness”, etc.

### 2 Arguing for context-sensitivity in attitude reports

### 3 Crimmins and Perry’s setup

- (1) Miles Hendon did not believe that he was of royal blood.
- (2) Miles Hendon believed that Edward Tudor was of royal blood.
- (i) *Opacity*: Someone who (under such-and-such circumstances) uttered (1) and (2) would be right, while if he were to utter the same sentences under the same circumstances with ‘he’ and ‘Edward Tudor’ interchanged he would be incorrect.
- (ii) *Direct Reference*: ‘[T]he utterance of a simple sentence containing names or demonstratives normally expresses a “singular proposition”—a proposition that contains as constituents the individuals referred to, and not any descriptions of or conditions on them.’
- (iii) *Semantic Innocence*: ‘Utterances of the embedded sentences in belief reports express just the propositions they would if not embedded, and these propositions are the contents of the ascribed beliefs.’

### 4 Crimmins and Perry: the view

Background: people have concrete “beliefs” (content-bearing particulars, not shared between people) made of concrete “ideas” and “notions” (also not shared).

When an (assertive) utterance of the form ‘A believes that S’ expresses a proposition, and the component utterance of ‘A’ is directly referential, the proposition it expresses is always of one of the forms

- (a) 
$$\exists b[B(a, b, t) \wedge \text{Content}(b, t) = p \wedge \bigwedge_i \text{Responsible}(n_i, r_i, b)]$$
- (b) 
$$\exists b[B(a, b, t) \wedge \text{Content}(b, t) = p \wedge \exists n_1, \dots, n_k \bigwedge_i (C_i(n_i) \wedge \text{Responsible}(n_i, r_i, b))]$$

where  $a$  is the referent of the utterance of ‘A’,  $p$  is the proposition expressed by the subutterance of  $S$ ,  $r_i$  are “roles” of  $p$ ,  $n_i$  are notions, and  $C_i$  are conditions on notions.

### 5 Questions about Crimmins and Perry’s view

- Are *all* propositions of these forms eligible to be expressed by utterances of ‘A believes that S’?
- C&P don’t talk about sentences in which belief ascriptions are embedded in the scope of quantifiers, modal operators, etc. But it isn’t hard to see how an extension of the view to these cases would go. Is the range of propositions expressible by embedded attitude ascriptions the same as the range of propositions expressible by unembedded ones? If not, why not? If so, it looks like some very strange sentences will turn out to be capable of expressing truths:
  - (3) Necessarily, at most one person believes that Obama is president.
  - (4) Necessarily, only those who are looking at Obama believe that Obama is president.
  - (5) Necessarily, for any  $x$ , only those who have a notion of  $x$  that they associate with the name ‘Superman’ believe that  $x$  is male.
- Does the treatment of ‘A believes that S’ carry over to ‘A believes the proposition that S’, and to

'A believes  $p$ ' (for variable  $p$ )?

## 6 Doubts about the need for "notions"

## 7 "Unarticulated constituents"

*Claim:* When a belief report expresses a proposition of form a, the notions  $n_i$  are *unarticulated constituents* of the proposition expressed. (And similarly for b and the conditions  $C_i$ .)

C&P's definition of "unarticulated":

Each constituent of [the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence] which is not itself the content of some expression in the sentence [*sic*: should be 'utterance'] is an unarticulated constituent of the content of the statement.

Suppose a normal utterance of 'Angela Merkel is German' expressed the proposition that Angela Merkel is from Germany. Then Germany would appear to be an unarticulated constituent. Is it?

If so: it doesn't seem to be true in any interesting way that 'the phenomenon of unarticulated constituency is similar to that of indexicality in the reliance on context' (700).

If not, either (i) propositions must be finely individuated, so that the proposition that AM is German  $\neq$  the proposition that AM is from Germany. But then we need more of an argument that the propositions expressed by belief reports are what C&P say they are, rather than some other propositions intimately related to them in the way the proposition that AM is German is related to the proposition that she is from Germany. Or else (ii) we must be liberal in positing unpronounced expressions in the syntax; but then why are we confident that there aren't relevant ones in belief reports?

## 8 "Belief is not a binary relation"

- (6) Necessarily, for any  $x$ , for any  $p$ ,  $x$  believes  $p$  iff [ $x$  has a belief whose content is  $p$  and in which a notion that is  $C_1$  is responsible for  $r_1$ . . . ].
- (7) Necessarily, for any  $x$ , for any  $p$ ,  $x$  bears the relation *believing* to  $p$  iff. . .

## 9 Uniformity and validity

- (8) If it is raining, it is raining.
- (9) If Obama is ready, and Obama is the president, then the president is ready.
- (10) If I am the man looking at you, and the man looking at you believes you are in danger, then I believe you are in danger.

How does the friend of unarticulated constituents talk about what seems to be good about these sentences?

## 10 Is transparency valid?

*Transparency* For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is  $N$ , then for all  $y$ ,  $y$  believes that  $x$  is  $F$  iff  $y$  believes that  $N$  is  $F$ .

A putative reductio of Transparency:

- P1 For all  $x$ , if  $x =$  Superman, then for all  $y$ ,  $y$  believes that  $x$  flies iff  $y$  believes that Superman flies.
- P2 For all  $x$ , if  $x =$  Clark Kent, then for all  $y$ ,  $y$  believes that  $x$  flies iff  $y$  believes that Clark Kent flies.
- C So if there is any  $x$  such that  $x =$  Superman and  $x =$  Clark Kent, then for all  $y$ ,  $y$  believes that Superman flies iff  $y$  believes that Clark Kent flies.