

1. Sensitive assessments

Assessments: acts of deciding whether to accept or reject something

Assessment phrases: “no”, “yes”, “that’s true”, “that’s incorrect”

Assessments of utterances normally (barring misunderstanding) seem to be assessments of whether conditions that the speaker was concerned to get across are satisfied. Involves taking into account features of the context of utterance.

- (1) Dana to Eric: “They live in the first big building after the cathedral.”

Corresponding need for the speaker to adapt to context of utterance.

Convergence of speaker and assessor interests: Dana wants to get across that certain conditions are satisfied, and as assessors of the truth of what has been said, we want to determine whether *those* conditions are satisfied.

2. Insensitive assessments in context-relative discourse

“Tasty”, “might”, “ought”, “good”, “if P, Q”

Concerns of judges and speakers seem best characterized relative to contexts.

Explicit relativizations and contextually sustained counterparts

Might: Alice has asked whether anyone has seen her keys. Bill, who left them in the car, answers:

- (2) “The keys might be in the car.”

Unknown to Alice and Bill, the neighbourhood girl, Emily, has just stolen the keys from the car and is hiding behind a bush, listening to the conversation. Two possible thoughts of hers in response to Bill’s utterance:

- (3) “No, they can’t be, because I have them here.”
 (4) *“That’s true, but I have them here.”

Tasty: Sam, seen by the dining table in a television documentary:

- (5) “Fish sticks are really tasty!”

Two possible comments by little John, who is watching the documentary and really dislikes fish sticks:

- (6) “No, they are disgusting!”
 (7) *“Yes, but they are disgusting!”

Insensitive Assessments: Semantic assessments where the assessor’s concern departs from speaker/thinker concern (concerns characterized with explicit relativization).

3. Theoretical interest: contextualism versus assessor-relativism

Contextualist analyses (*riding roughshod over radical, indexical, non-indexical, etc*):

TASTY-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form *X is tasty* is true if and only if X accords with the standard of taste that is relevant in the context of utterance (cf. Glanzberg 2007; Schaffer 2009).

MIGHT-C: An utterance of a sentence of the form *P might be the case* is true if and only if P is compatible with the body of information that is relevant in the context of utterance (cf. DeRose 1991, 1998; Bach 2008; Schaffer 2009).

- Corresponding accounts for *judgments* to the effect that X is tasty / P might be the case.
- Apparently, assessments of utterances do not follow speaker concerns, and hence do not follow contextualist analysis capturing such concerns.

Assessor-relativistic analyses:

TASTY-R: An utterance of a sentence of the form *X is tasty* is true relative to a context of assessment if and only if X accords with the standard of taste of that context. (cf. Lasersohn 2005).

MIGHT-R: An utterance of a sentence of the form *P might be the case* is true relative to a context of assessment if and only if P is compatible with the information available in that context (cf. MacFarlane 2005; Egan 2007)

Seems to straightforwardly account for insensitive assessments

Other interests: possibility of context-relative analyses of contents in apparently non-relative areas of discourse

4. Contextualist accounts of insensitive assessments?

A. Rejecting insensitive assessments (*mistaken, ignorant, etc*)

- Explicit negative semantic assessments (“false”, “not true”) tend to be less natural.
 - Leaves question of “no”. Different intuitions. “False / not true” morally loaded
- Possible to reply by explicit relativization when facing disagreement (Schaffer).
 - Just shows that we can retreat to a different claim.
- Perhaps insensitive assessments are due to presumption of common value of contextually determined variable?
 - Doesn’t explain eavesdropping cases.

B. Accommodation of felicitous insensitive assessments (Almér&Björnsson 2009)

S-ASSESSMENT / C-ASSESSMENT: When we assess utterances using various assessment phrases (“yes”, “no”, “that’s true”), we normally (barring confusion, misunderstanding, etc) assess the satisfaction of [their truth-conditions / the conditions that are made most “immediately salient” by the utterances as we assess them].

(8) A: “I [wonder if / believe] Bill lost his keys”

(9) B: “No, he didn’t, he had them in his pocket.”

- C-Assessment makes IA compatible with contextualism if the semanticist’s truth-conditions have a different theoretical basis than intuitive semantic assessments
- Makes room for *exactly* the evidence in favour of assessor relativism (trivially!)
- Why shift to other conditions by those very expressions when assessing them?
 - The assessor relativist has the very same problem!

5. Why would we have an assessor relative semantics in certain areas?

MacFarlane (2007): designed to foster controversy, coordinating attitudes. Consider (3) and (6) as replies to, respectively:

(10) “For all I know, they keys might be in the car”

(11) “Fish sticks are really tasty to me”.

- Not clear that this holds for “tasty” or “funny”.
- Not clear that it holds for epistemic modals. Seems geared towards affecting epistemic attitudes, but most intra-conversational assessments might be sensitive
- Most plausible for deontic modals and evaluatives: advice, prescriptions
- Incomplete explanation at best

6. The pragmatics of expressions of acceptance and rejection

“No” and “yes” express rejection and acceptance. What is understood as being rejected (action, reaction, attitude, prescription, proposition, event) varies from context to context depending on what makes the expression of assessment most conversationally relevant.

A. First-person introspectively based ascriptions ((8)&(9))

(12) A: “I was amazed how much healthier Tina looked.”

(13) B: “Yes, she has truly changed.”

(14) A: “I couldn’t believe how tall Sarah was”

(15) B: “No, it was almost freakish.”

- Presumed first-person authority, conversational interest.

B. Subjective taste judgments (tasty, funny, delicious, disgusting)

- Rejecting reaction / taste attitude towards the object in question
- First-person authority
- General interest in comparison
- Expresses own taste judgment and corresponding truth-conditions;
- Less interesting when obvious differences or expected mistakes
 - (16) Vinnie the Vulture: “This rotten lamb is truly delicious.”
 - (17) We: “Yes Vinnie, but too much will make you drowsy.”
 - (18) Little Sam: “That sauce looks yummy!”
 - (19) Parent: “It isn’t, Sammy, it is much too spicy for you.”

C. Might-judgments

- Expresses epistemic attitude of openness
- Highly relevant to reject from superior position when question of epistemic attitude is relevant; assessing judgment from inferior position irrelevant
- Expresses new epistemic judgment with new truth-conditions
- Sensitive assessments when assessor’s epistemic attitude is not at issue
 - (20) Participant: “So the prize might be behind door A or behind door B?”
 - (21) Host: “Yes.”
 - (22) Host: “No, you have ruled out B, but it can be behind C.”

D. Meteorological judgments do not invite insensitive assessments

- (23) Jane in London, on the phone: “It is raining”
- (24) Tomiko in Tokyo: *”No it isn’t”
- No privileged access
- Conversationally relevant across changes of location
- No clear alternative to reject other than belief / proposition

E. Explicit relativizations block insensitive assessment ((10), (11))

Employ expressions with the dedicated function of causing hearer identification of the relevant value of the contextual parameter, thus forcing attention to the relativized proposition. Compare stressing “I” (or “believe”) in “I believe that Bill that lost the keys”

7. Pragmatics of assessments or assessor-relative semantics?

Contextualism plus pragmatic machinery already needed handles the phenomena given switch to C-ASSESSMENT.