Contexts: Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Context (But Were Afraid to Ask)

Diana Mazzarella, Antonio Negro,** Carlo Penco****

* *University of Neuchatel*

** *FINO North Western Doctoral Consortium*

*** *University of Genoa*

Abstract

We give a short recap of how the notion of context has been developed in the philosophy of language since its introduction by Frege. We introduce various aspects of the concept of context: context of utterance, context at the semantics-pragmatics boundary, and social and cognitive context. We thereby offer to readers not accustomed to the distinctions used in the philosophy of language a framework to better understand the papers enclosed in this issue (and of which we provide summaries at the end of this introduction).

Keywords: Context of utterance, Common ground, Semantics-pragmatics boundary, Social philosophy of language, Cognitive context.

1. Introduction

As Domaneschi and Penco (2013) say, context is said "in many ways", like being for Aristotle. The topic of context in philosophy, as it is discussed today, was born with Frege's principle of contextuality, extensively discussed by Michael Dummett (1973, 1981), and developed with the seminal works by David Kaplan (1972, 1989a, b) and Robert Stalnaker (2002, 2014), who used different meanings and formalisations of the notion of context. The series of conferences on Modelling and Using Context, started by Patrick Brezillon in 1997, showed the many sides of the notion of context, which affects philosophy as much as artificial intelligence, psychology, or sociology.[1] Certainly, the term "context" has had a great

[1] For an early analysis of different concepts of context from a computer scientist's viewpoint, see Hayes 1997 or Brezillon and Turner 2021. For a list of the CONTEXT conferences

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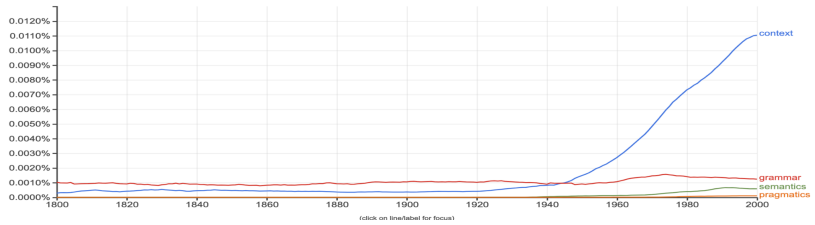
development in many areas of study in the second half of the XX century. The diagram below from the Ngram viewer shows the incredible increase in the use of the term "context" when compared to terms like "semantics", "pragmatics", or "grammar".



It would be difficult to speak of "context" without any specification of the kind of cultural or academic environment in which the term is used. For example, we frequently hear that artificial intelligence is "all about context",[2] but here too we can refer to a variety of applications. Even if we focus on the discussions of philosophers, we cannot come to a consensus about which notion of context is best suited for which theoretical purpose. Furthermore, the explanatory power of the notion of context is often questioned. It is obvious that when we say, "I have nothing to put on", the term "nothing" is to be understood under a contextual restriction. At first sight, one may think that the idea of universal quantification has no meaning without contextual restrictions. However, Williamson (2003) challenges this proposal and shows the viability of a general notion of non-contextualized quantifiers, leaving to pragmatics the problem of defining the contextual aspect. The debate on which role the notion of context should have (in syntax, in pragmatics, in semantics) is still alive. The notion of context has immediate applications in ethics, epistemology, and philosophy of language, and we already have many reference works (e.g., Preyer & Peter 2005, 2007, Pynn 2016, Penco & Vignolo 2020, Ciecierski & Grabarczyk 2020). While there is much discussion in ethics about the contextual dependence of ethical statements, a clear thematization of the concept of context remains lacking, as does the abundant discussion of contextualist epistemology. It seems that a clearer definition of the concept of context has been mainly developed in the philosophy of language and in linguistics, from which it is applied elsewhere. The first important distinction is the one between linguistic context and extralinguistic context.

Linguistic Context: Linguistic context refers to what precedes or follows a string of text. It is what helps understand the meaning of words in the context of a sentence or the meaning of a sentence in the context of a wider part of the text, with its anaphoric links. We speak in these cases of sentence context or discourse context. The work of Hans Kamp on *Discourse Representation Semantics* (Kamp & Reyle 1993) brought discourse context and the resolution of anaphora to the attention of both linguists and philosophers.

Extralinguistic Context: Extralinguistic context typically refers to both physical and cognitive features of a given situation. It is, first of all, what helps interpret the referents of indexicals and demonstratives. It also helps to understand the

from 1997 to 2019 see http://context19.disi.unitn.it/index.php/context-conferences-and-journal/

[2] See, e.g., Singer 2022.

various presuppositions that underpin a speech, as well as the various moves that allow the discourse to develop and update. The two main concepts of (extralinguistic) contexts derive from Kaplan's logic of demonstratives and Stalnaker's theory of presuppositions. In the former, we speak of the context of utterance, basically defined by time, place, speaker, and possible world. In the latter, we speak of cognitive context, or common ground, which is the set of presuppositions or propositions accepted as true by participants in a conversation (the context set).

Besides the broad distinction between linguistic and extralinguistic contexts, it is worth looking at some finer-grained notions of context discussed in the literature: opaque contexts, dynamic contexts and passive/active contexts.

Opaque Contexts: Opaque contexts are those linguistic contexts in which substitutivity breaks down. They include modal contexts, belief contexts, and other kinds of indirect contexts. Since Leibniz and Frege, the rule of substitutivity of identicals (the semantic counterpart of Leibniz's law of indiscernibles) was taken as a central rule in logic: we may substitute an expression with another with the same denotation and the truth value of the sentence does not change. From

(1) Hesperus is a planet

and

(2) Hesperus = Phosphorus,

we may derive

(3) Phosphorus is a planet.

Consider, though, how things change if we embed (1) inside a belief context like

(4) Pia believes that Hesperus is a planet.

I cannot conclude from (2) and (4) that Pia believes that Phosphorus is a planet because she might ignore that Hesperus = Phosphorus, and therefore she may rationally believe (1) and at the same time deny (3). Hundreds of papers discussed the problem of what happens when the golden rule of substitutivity fails, from Carnap 1956 to Evans 1982, or Kripke 1979, either challenging or developing Frege's view according to whom substitutivity in doxastic indirect contexts works by substituting expressions with the same sense and not just with the same reference (see also Kripke 2008). This topic also has a counterpart in epistemic logics, with an interplay of philosophical problems and artificial intelligence (on which see Frixione 1994 and Wang 2018).

Dynamic Contexts: Following Stalnaker, Irene Heim (1992) developed *Update Semantics*, which is based on the idea of meaning as *context change potential*. The meaning of a sentence has the power to change the context set, selecting which possible worlds must be cut off from the set of shared presuppositions. Semantics, therefore, must explain the dynamic of changes in discourse. Developments in dynamic semantics propose different formalisms with respect to both the context of utterance and the discourse context.

*Passive and Active Context*s: Kripke (2011) suggests a general distinction between passive and active contexts. The passive context, also referred to as the global context, consists of general background information available to the speakers. The active context, or local context, includes salient questions or topics, as well as assertions, relevant to the specific conversation in which the speaker and

the hearer are engaged.[3] It is the active context that helps the hearer understand presuppositions triggered by expressions like "again", "too", and so on.[4]

Given the breadth of the subject, we have opted to provide some opening notes to assist the reader in understanding the theoretical and historical background of the papers in this issue, with reference to three main areas: (i) Utterance context and demonstratives, (ii) Contextual dependence and the semantic-pragmatics divide, (iii) Cognitive and social context.

2. Context of Utterance: Indexicals and Demonstratives

The concept of context was only informally present in Frege's writings and had different connotations. One particular development of the notion of context found its first assessment in the philosophical environment of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where Hans Reichenbach was appointed in 1938 (with the help of Charles W. Morris) and Carnap arrived from the University of Chicago in 1954, the year after Reichenbach died, to be joined by Alonzo Church in 1967. The three philosophers and logicians extensively debated Fregean notions, although only Reichenbach (1947) attempted to present a formalisation of indexicals to which Frege had devoted much attention in his late paper "The Thought" (1918).

2.1. The Origin of the Formalization of Context in Logic

We find the first attempt to formalise the notion of context with Richard Montague (1930-1971), who studied with Alfred Tarski in Berkeley and later arrived at UCLA.[5] Under the influence of Carnap and Church,[6] Montague fully developed the first instance of intensional semantics: the semantic values of the expressions (e. g. names, predicates and sentences) are functions from possible worlds to extensions of the appropriate kinds (objects, classes and truth values). Crucially, though, Montague remarked that the semantic values of some expressions, like temporal or spatial adverbs ("now" or "here") or pronouns ("I", "he", "she" ...), are dependent not only on possible worlds, but also on other contextual factors like the speaker or the time and location of the utterance. Therefore, he further elaborated his original idea and proposed to consider intensions as functions from an *index* to an extension, where the index can be considered as the first formal representation of the idea of context. The index is a sequence of all the factors on which the semantic value of expressions depends (which for Montague included possible worlds, times, individuals and their role as speaker or addressee).

Montague intensional semantics had two problems: (a) a function from an index to a truth value underestimates the contribution of lexical meaning. Meanings cannot be reduced to intensions; (b) compositionality becomes impossible

[3] See Kripke 2011: Chapter 12.

[4] On the general discussion of the relations between global and local contexts, see Schlenker 2010, where the distinction concerns the problem of presupposition projection. Apparently, the terms "local context" and "global context" may be used in different settings, like social theories or artificial intelligence systems, and we do not consider the variety of these applications here.

[5] See the Introduction by Richmond Thomason of Montague (1974: 41).

[6] In his 1970 paper "Pragmatics and Intensional logic" Montague (1974: 145) recalls Carnap suggesting in conversation that "intensional object should be identified with function from possible worlds to extensions of the appropriate sources".

with quantification in modal or temporal contexts. Hans Kamp, one of Montague's students, and David Kaplan, Carnap's last PhD student, proposed double indexing as a solution to these problems. In what follows, we discuss them in turn.

To gain an intuitive understanding of the first problem, Kaplan (1976: 82) points out the distinction between the following utterances:

(5) I am here now.

(6) David Kaplan is in Los Angeles on April 21, 1976.

According to Kaplan, (5) is logically true, since, for any context, it is true in the world of the context, while (6) is not logically true. Gillian Russell (2008: 56) claims that (5) is a typical case of an analytic sentence that can be said to be "true in virtue of meaning", while this is not the case for (6). This distinction cannot be made with the index introduced by Montague. How to address this problem?

The answer—called "double indexing"—was to divide Montague's index into two different components: on the one hand, the context of utterance (made up of the relevant parameters like speaker, time, location and possible world), and on the other hand, a circumstance of evaluation (a possible world and a time). We need to distinguish between character and content. The character is the meaning or linguistic rule attached to linguistic expressions. In the case of indexicals like "I", "here" and "now" (and so on) the character is fixed, differently from the meaning of ambiguous expressions like "bank". However, the content of indexicals depends on the context of utterance, namely, content is always taken with respect to a given context. Contents are functions from possible worlds to extensions (the content of "I" is the function that for each possible world points to the individual who is the speaker in the context in which the sentence is uttered). To give an interpretation of "I am here now", then, I need first to understand speaker, time and location of the utterance. Only after the context provides the content of "I", "here", and "now", I can use the standard evaluation function from possible worlds to extensions. This formal aspect of Kaplan's theory is often connected with the direct reference theory, for which indexicals are direct reference devices like proper names (on this aspect see Martì 2022).

The second problem (about compositionality and quantification) concerns the use of modal or temporal operators. Think of

(7) Once, everyone now alive hadn't yet been born.[7]

The restriction "now alive" is inside the scope of the quantifier, but at the same time it takes the property of its subjects (being now alive) outside the scope of the temporal operator "once". The restriction concerns people alive at the time of the context of utterance but not alive in the context of the temporal operator (at the time when they were not yet born). We cannot make these distinctions with a single index à la Montague, where possible worlds, time, location, and speaker are all mixed together. We need to distinguish the context of the utterance from the context of evaluation given by the temporal operator, or, in other cases, by modal operators, like the following:

(8) Possibly, everybody now writing their papers could be at the beach swimming.

[7] We use here an example from Stalnaker 2014: 19. Kamp (1971), who introduced the idea of double indexing, used "now" as a sentential operator, before adhering to the most common view of using "now" as an indexical constant (see Kamp 2013: 7). Kamp gives abundant reference to the influence of Reichenbach on his view of temporal logic.

In this case, the restriction "now writing their papers" is inside the scope of the quantifier "everybody" but outside the scope of the modal operator "possibly", because—in the possible worlds where they are at the beach—they are not writing but swimming. The solution, again, is to distinguish character and content, where the character of "now" lets the property of *writing their papers* apply to the individuals in the possible world of the context of utterance, while the property of *being at the beach* is applied to the same individuals in the possible world of the circumstance of evaluation.

2.2. Kaplan's Standard View of the Context of Utterance

Kaplan (1989a, b) developed the logic of demonstratives where he gave both an intuitive presentation of the concept of context and a formal one. The intuitive idea is that utterance context is a representation of a situation, listing as parameters the central aspects of a situation in which a speech happens, mapping the traditional idea of the deictic centre given by Karl Bühler. For Bühler (2011: 102-103) the deictic field has its centre in the three deictic words, I, here and now, that form the coordinate system in which "all partners in communication are and remain caught up". The deictic centre maps what standard view calls "automatic" indexicals ("I", "here", "now") because uttering them automatically fix the reference.

Kaplan distinguishes pure indexicals and demonstratives, and this distinction is well represented in a schema proposed by John Perry 1989b[8] (before presenting a theory alternative to Kaplan's):

	Narrow Context <s,l,t>	Wide Context
Automatic	I, Now*, Here*	Tomorrow, Yesterday, …
Intentional	Now, Here	This man, There, This, That

We have here a perspicuous representation of the context-character-content (CCC) theory of indexicals, running between the two extremes of the spectrum. With pure indexicals ("I", "now", "here"), narrow context (time, location, and speaker) is sufficient for the individuation of the referent. However, with "here" and "now", we may also have different conceptions of the time and place ("here where I am", "here in this room", "here in this town", and so on—or "now at this moment", "now at this time of the year", "now in this historical period", and so on), as well as demonstrative uses, as when I point on a map and say "we will

[8] John Perry (1979) brought new arguments for the essentiality, or ineliminability, of indexicals. Simple examples show that beliefs or knowledge obtained through indexical expressions are not reducible to beliefs or knowledge of objective states of affairs: an amnesiac reading a biography of himself may learn a lot without realising that the biography is about him. If JP is in a supermarket and sees a trail of sugar on the ground and thinks "he, who is pouring sugar, is very stupid", he will go around looking for that idiot. But when he realises "I am pouring sugar", he will change the position of the sugar box to avoid pouring sugar idiotically from his cart. Although the proposition expressed in the context is the same in all cases—that is the ordered pair <JP, pouring sugar>—having thought in terms of "I" instead of "he" changes the content of the belief and the consequent behaviour.

arrive here…". On the other end of the spectrum, bare demonstratives ("this", "that") require a wide context (everything useful to fix the content, like a demonstration) on whose background to understand the referential intention of the speaker. Kaplan (1989b: 583) considered demonstrations as "a mere externalisation of a perceptual intention": the intention of the speaker is what determines the referent of a demonstrative.

The definition of context of utterance given by Kaplan has been a standpoint in the development of the concept of context. Different notions of context are often defined with respect to their similarity or difference from Kaplan's idea of the context of utterance. We hint here at some alternatives. To begin with, David Lewis (1980) accepted the idea of double indexing but thought that we do not need a two-stage procedure to pass from context to content. He agreed that we need a context (speaker, time, location, world of utterance) and an index (possible world and time) but considered Kaplan's idea of what is said redundant and suggested instead having a function from context-index pairs to extensions. Stefano Predelli (2005, 2013) partly follows Lewis' ideas.

Stalnaker (2014) identified some problems with Lewis' solutions and at the same time discussed the relation between Kaplan's context and his view of common ground. On the one hand, he claims, common ground or the context set of presuppositions taken for granted by the interlocutors in a dialogue may be part of the context, together with the standard parameters, given that—according to Stalnaker—presuppositions are part of the extralinguistic context. But the contrary holds too, and Kaplan's context may be considered, from a logical point of view, as part of the common ground or context set. For a discussion of these two possibilities, see Stalnaker 2014: § 1.5.

Partial alternatives to Kaplan's view on the context of utterance are often developed under different interpretations of Fregean ideas. Among these, we find Wolfgang Künne (1992), who relied on some Fregean remarks on hybrid proper names to reject Kaplan's "intentionalist" viewpoint of demonstrations and suggested that demonstrations should be treated as parameters of the Kaplanian context (see also Predelli 2006; Kripke 2008; Künne 2010; Penco 2013; Textor 2015; Stojnic 2021). We should also mention here Manuel Garcia Carpintero (1998, 2015), who followed Reichenbach's token reflexive theory, critically discussed by Kaplan (1989a: 519), François Recanati (2012, 2013), who recovered the Fregean idea of "modes of presentations" under a new perspective, and Korta and Perry (2020), on which we will elaborate in the following section.

3. Contextual Dependence and the Pragmatics-Semantics Divide

Are truth conditions the only fundamental aspect of the meaning or sense of a sentence? After the original Frege-Wittgenstein idea that the sense of a sentence (a Fregean thought) is given by its truth conditions, there have been many attempts to find different and subtler notions of the content of an assertion. Sentences with the same truth conditions (same assertoric content) may have different constituents and therefore different meanings. Indexicals may help: If we say, on Monday, "Today it is raining in Stokholm" and, on Tuesday, "Yesterday it was raining in Stokholm", we may claim that the two sentences have the same truth conditions: they are true if and only if on Monday it was raining. However, Kripke (2008: 204-206) insisted, commenting on Burge's interpretation of Frege,

that the two sentences have expressions with different meanings, and therefore, given compositionality, they should express different thoughts. To address this concern, much subsequent literature distinguished a logical or truth-conditional sense and an epistemic or cognitive sense (see, e.g., Garavaso 1991; Beaney 1997; Künne 2007; Penco 2003, 2013; Perry 2021). This literature includes Dummett's distinction between assertoric content and ingredient sense,[9] as well as different two-dimensional semantics projects (on which see Davies and Stoljar 2004). Korta and Perry (2011) suggested distinguishing different levels of truth conditions: reflexive truth conditions concern the truth conditions when the indexicals are not saturated ("I am tired" is true iff the speaker of the utterance is tired) and subject matter truth conditions (I am tired said by Diana is true iff Diana is tired). In Kaplan's theory, utterances are modelled as pairs of expressions and contexts, and the context of utterance is just the set of parameters that permits the interpretation of a sentence in context as a proposition.[10] Instead, in the reflexive and referential approach by Korta and Perry (2011), utterances are explicitly what the theory is about. Although context is intended à la Kaplan as the situation or circumstance in which a sentence is uttered, the parameters of the context (speaker, time and location) are considered properties of utterances. The proposed advantage of this theory is that it can help represent different cognitive significances of the utterance, depending on the relation different people have to the utterance itself. For this analysis, see de Ponte, Korta and Perry 2020.[11]

3.1. What is Said and the Problems with Standard Semantic Analysis

Central to this discussion is the question of how to define the intuitive notion of "what is said". In the traditional Gricean view, what is said is the truth-conditional content that is the result of a process of linguistic decoding, supplemented by disambiguation, reference assignment, and saturation of the indexicals (Grice, 1989). However, this is not generally agreed upon. Even when accepting the intuitive idea that "what is said" maps the conception of truth-conditional content, many authors argue for a more robust idea of context dependence and claim that

[9] Dummett claimed that "It is raining here" has the same assertoric content of "It is raining where I am", but the two utterances have difference ingredient senses as they behave differently in modal contexts or contexts with a temporal adverb like "always". "It is always raining here" has a different assertoric content than "It is always raining where I am", because "here" is temporally rigid, while "where I am" is temporally variable. Dummett's distinction has been developed by Gareth Evans and Jason Stanley and criticised by Tsohatzidis (2015) and Stojnić (2017). Rabern (2017) shows that Dummett's distinction is coherent with Lewis' principle of coherence.

[10] Kaplan (1989b: 584) distinguishes between utterances and occurrences of expressions in a context: the former belongs to the theory of speech acts and the latter belong to semantics.

[11] Perry (1989a) distinguishes pre-semantic, semantic, and post semantic uses of context. An example will do. Take the sentence "I saw her duck under the table". Before deciding the interpretation of the indexical, I need to understand which context we are referring to, whether the person in question had lost an animal or was seeking security in a worrying situation (earthquake, war…). We will therefore decide whether "duck" stands for an animal or for a verb. This is a pre-semantic use of context that helps determine what is said. The semantic use (saturation of indexicals) begins when syntactic ambiguity is resolved, given the knowledge of the situation. The post-semantic use is dependent on previous tacit assumptions. For example, if I say "it is raining" I assume that I am referring to the location where I am, so we may think that location is an unarticulated constituent of the utterance.

disambiguation and saturation are not enough to get to the truth conditions and that we need context to provide further elements contributing to what is said. We enter here into the debate on the boundaries between semantics and pragmatics, a debate that has resulted in a flourishing body of literature.[12] The contrast is between letting or banning pragmatic aspects enter into truth conditions. The following linguistic intuitions are typically discussed as challenging the standard Gricean analysis:

(i) *Context Shifting*: Depending on the context of the conversation, some utterances appear to have different truth conditions. If some parents say about their child:

"Diana is tall".

What they say may be true if we are comparing Diana to her schoolmates, but if we shift the context and we are speaking about basketball players, the conditions under which the sentence is evaluated change, and the utterance is false with respect to the average height of basketball players.

(ii) *Incompleteness*: If someone utters:

"Serena is ready".

What are they saying? They might say that she is ready for the last tennis game, or she is ready to begin a new life, or she is ready to climb Mount Everest, or maybe they are just saying that she is ready to go out. We cannot understand what is said, unless we know what Serena is ready for, deriving the information from the context.

(iii) *Domain Restrictions*: If somebody says in a classroom:

"Every boy is seated".

What are they saying? They are probably not saying that every boy in the world is seated, but that boys in the classroom are seated.

(iv) *Deferred Meaning*: If a waiter says:

"The ham sandwich is annoyed".

What are they saying? Not that a piece of bread and ham is annoyed! In this case, we need to rely on context to understand that the waiter refers to the person who ordered the ham sandwich.

(v) *Relativity of Truth*: of a plant whose leaves have been accurately painted green, somebody says

"The leaves are green"

in front of an artist wanting to photograph something green and in front of a botanist interested in the original structure of the plant. The same utterance seems to be true and false at the same time.

3.2. Answers to the Challenges

These challenges to the standard Gricean account of what is said have been addressed in different ways. Among many trends, we may identify indexicalism,

[12] Discussions on the topic began with Turner 1999, von Heusinger and Turner 2003, Bianchi 2004, Szabo 2004, and gave rise to different thematic series addressing the problem from different viewpoints, like the *Current Research in the Semantics/Pragmatics Interface* (CRISPI)(Brill) or the *Palgrave Studies in Pragmatics, Language and Cognition* and other collections.

minimalism, relativism, and contextualism as the main competitors.[13] In what follows, we provide a brief characterisation of each of them.

Indexicalists: In his paper "Semantics in context" and other contributions, Jason Stanley develops an original idea for treating domain restriction. When I say that I'll bring all the beers to the party or that all the dogs were barking, I don't usually mean a universal generalisation over all beer or all dogs, but rather I intend to limit the domain of quantification to some specific set, possibly assumed in advance in the conversation (the beers in my fridge or the dogs in the neighbourhood). Stanley and Szabo (2000) and Stanley (2005a, b) suggest incorporating domain restriction into semantics, associating indices to every nominal in a sentence. Indices bind the referent of the nominal to a subset of the domain (e.g., to a subset of the beers, the ones in my fridge). The question belongs to semantics because it implies assigning semantic values to constituents of a sentence, relative to a context that has an input in the logical form of the sentence. Not everybody agrees with this idea, called "indexicalism", and some alternative solutions do not require postulating bound variables in the logical form.[14]

Minimalists such as Cappelen and Lepore (2008) or Borg (2007, 2012) identify the truth conditional content of utterances with their minimal content, following the classical disquotational analysis (for which "*p*" is true iff *p*). For instance, the ordered pair <Serena, ready> or <Diana, tall> represent the minimal content expressed by the utterances "Serena is ready" or "Diana is tall". What "ready" or "tall" mean is a question of metaphysics or of speech act theory.

Relativists (such as McFarlane 2014) distinguish between the context of utterance and the context of assessment, where the same sentence can be true or false depending on the latter. A sentence, therefore, is true or false in the context of utterance depending on the context of assessment. For instance, "Diana is tall" is true if "tall" counts as relative to her schoolmates and false if "tall" is relative to the standard height of basketball players, or "the leaves are green" is true if "green" counts as relative to their appearance and false if "green" counts as the original colour of the leaves.

Contextualists such as Kent Bach, Robyn Carston, François Recanati, and others, rely on the notion of "intuitive truth conditions" or "pragmatic truth conditions" and, in general, insist on the general underdetermination of the meaning of the lexicon, which strongly depends on contextual clues. To face these problems, there are different strategies, mostly linked to different kinds of enrichment of the sentence in context.

Essentially, there are two main contrasts in the debate on semantics-pragmatics boundaries: on the one hand, the distinction between "implicit" and "explicit" approaches to context (Neale 1990), and on the other hand the relation between formal and informal notions in semantics. For the former question, contextualists take context as an element from which to find information for enriching the proposition (or the propositional template, assuming that meaning is underdetermined), while others tend to connect more strictly the logical form of the sentence to contextual restrictions, as exemplified above in Stanley's view of

[13] For a general assessment of the different trends on context dependence, including relativism, see the entry of *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* written by C. Penco and Massimiliano Vignolo (2020).

[14] Against the binding argument presented by Stanley, see for instance Neale 2005, in defence of Perry's idea of "unarticulated constituents". See also Zeman 2017.

indexicalism.[15] For the latter, Predelli (2005, 2013) considers clause-index pairs as the real objects of semantic evaluation, strictly distinguishing the semantic apparatus from reference to real-life objects or events. He, therefore, claims that part of the debate on context in semantics relies on misunderstanding the difference between informal and formal notions. Contextualists, on the other hand, insist on the idea of giving the idea of "intuitive truth conditions" a proper place in semantics.

3.3. An Example of a Contextualist Answer

Recanati (2005, 2010), who is one of the main proponents of contextualism, proposed the idea of "truth-conditional pragmatics", trying to explain the difference between "literal" truth conditions and "intuitive truth conditions". He distinguishes between saturation and modulation. *Saturation* is a mandatory pragmatic process guided by the meaning of the expressions. Indexicals are a clear case of expressions that require saturation, because—to understand the referent of "I"—the hearer is *guided* by the meaning of the indexical to select the speaker in the context of utterance, and analogously for other indexicals. *Modulation*, on the other hand, is a pragmatic process which is not triggered by the linguistically-encoded meaning of the expressions and concerns those cases in which the meaning of an expression is underdetermined. We need to directly rely upon the context in which a sentence is uttered, where "context" is intended both as objective and cognitive context, linked to world knowledge or shared beliefs. According to Recanati, the main modulation processes are free enrichment, loosening, and semantic transfer:

Free Enrichment may concern words like "tall" or "ready" (see (i) and (ii) above), and restrict their domain of application to some specific class of people or of actions (e.g., "tall" with respect to baseball players, or "ready" with respect to having the ability to participate in a tennis match);

Loosening, on the contrary, may broaden the domain of application, following Austin's example of "France is hexagonal" (apparently France's borders are not a perfect hexagon, but approximate it). In Recanati's example, "the ATM swallowed my credit card", the term "swallowed" applies to entities without a digestive system, but which may let something go inside the interior of their apparatus.

[15] Neale (1990) labels "implicit" and "explicit" the two main approaches to incomplete descriptions (and quantified NPs in general), which pose a difficult problem to any theory, starting from Russell's theory of descriptions. The explicit approach requires completing the matrix of the description to make the description to denote just one thing. This may be done with free enrichment or with more constrained means linked to some syntactic aspects (Carston 2002, Hall 2008, Neale 2004). The implicit approach assumes a contextual restriction of the domain of quantification. The implicit approach has been differently defended and developed by many philosophers and linguists: a first "simple" view would restrict the domain to a part of the world, for instance a situation (Barwise and Perry 1983). Westerståhl (1985: 49) remarks that we are not bound to use a unique context set as domain, given that different quantifiers in the same sentences may be interpreted relative to different domains (an assumption developed by Staney and Williamson 1995). Stanley and Szabò (2000), Stanley (2005) and others insist on the necessity of linking any possible completion with elements in the syntax, while Elbourne (2013) rejects the simple view of the implicit approach.

Semantic Transfer allows an expression to be used for a different meaning related to the expression, as in case (iv) above: "The ham sandwich is annoyed", where an inanimate object cannot have feelings, but in the context of a restaurant the meaning of "ham sandwich" is easily mapped onto the meaning of "customer who ordered the ham sandwich".

These and similar proposals, connected with an even more radical meaning underdetermination (Carston 2013, 2020, Unsteinsson 2015), have their critics, like Michael Devitt (2013, 2021) for whom there are conventional aspects in the meaning of the lexicon that should provide a better account. Lexicon, and the recognition of conventional rules of polysemy, should guide saturation processes, avoiding modulation processes. However, even stressing conventionality of meaning and relying on the idea of convention-guided saturation, the reference to context is unavoidable. If there is a slot to be mandatory filled in "tall", "ready", "ham sandwich", and so on, the context will decide what needs to fill the slot.

Although the notion of what is said remains a challenge for philosophers, the basic Gricean distinction between "what is said" and "what is implicated" is central to any theory of communication (however rich the notion of what is said is taken to be). According to Grice, rational speakers observe a Cooperative principle ("Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged") and some conversational maxims in order to provide true, informative, relevant and clear contributions to the conversation (Grice 1989). Crucially, according to Grice, when what is said appears to fall short of these conversational standards, hearers are then licenced to infer that what the speaker meant to communicate must be different or richer than what she literally said, and thus preserve this underlying assumption of cooperativeness. For instance, when someone replies "I'm tired" to an invitation for dinner, we can legitimately assume that what they intended to communicate was richer than what they said and infer that the speaker implicated that they are declining our invitation (and thus preserve the assumption that their utterance is relevant to the conversation at issue). Furthermore, Grice considers metaphors and irony as implicatures derived by the violation of the maxim of quality (telling the truth): when Shakespeare put in Romeo's mouth "Juliet is the sun", he made him violate the maxim of quality (everybody knows that Juliet is not the sun), thus licencing an array of implicatures (Juliet is like the sun, Romeo's life revolves around her, she is the source of joy in Romeo's life, etc.), that preserve the underlying assumption that the Romeo is still providing a cooperative contribution to the conversation.

A special case of implicatures, known as "scalar implicatures", has come to occupy a central place in the philosophy of language and linguistics. This kind of implicatures can be exemplified by the following utterance:

(9) Some students passed the exam.

In many contexts, an utterance like (9) can be taken to implicate that not all the students passed the exam, although the linguistically-encoded meaning of "some" (*at least some and possibly all*) is compatible with a situation in which all students passed the exam. From a Gricean perspective, this implicature—although generalized—is still context-dependent and can thus be cancelled without contradiction ("Some students passed the exam. Indeed, all of them did"). The debate around scalar implicatures concerns the conditions for their derivation, as well as the

extent to which they are linguistically—and not only pragmatically—mandated. Post-Gricean accounts, such as Relevancy Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995, Carston 1998), argue that this inference is licenced only under certain circumstances (e.g., in so-called "upper-bound" contexts, in which it is relevant to know whether *all the students passed the exams* is true, and at the condition that the speaker is judged to be sufficiently knowledgeable, see Breheny et al. 2013). In contrast with this, Neo-Gricean accounts maintain that scalar implicatures are derived routinely and independently of context, i.e. by default (Levinson 2000). Finally, scholars such as Chierchia (2013) have put forth "grammatical accounts", which see implicatures as arising through a silent exhaustification operator, akin to *only*, which acts on scalar alternatives. For a review of this debate, as well as the experimental evidence in line with or against these accounts, see Noveck 2018.

Finally, it is worth noting that Grice's heritage extends well beyond the issue of how to distinguish and explains different levels of meaning. For instance, more formally-oriented approaches to conversations, such as the *Questions Under Discussion (QUDs) framework* introduced by Roberts (1996/2012), have tried to provide a formalisation of the Gricean-inspired notion of "relevance to the conversation".[16] For instance, in the context of this framework, relevance is defined in terms of contextually established QUDs, that make up a stack of ordered questions that are prioritised in the common ground. According to this framework, an assertion is relevant if and only if it answers, at least partially, the current QUD.

4. Social and Cognitive Context

The notion of "cognitive context" may be interpreted in different ways, and we give here two main directions of research: (I) on the one hand cognitive context may be intended as the set of presuppositions given in the common ground, following Stalnaker's view. (II) On the other hand, cognitive context may be conceived as a psychological construct, in accordance with the research direction of Relevance theory. We will present some applications of the two directions. Both have relevance to what can be called the "social" context, that is, the context of conversational interactions where elements of social difference, prejudices and stereotypes may play a relevant role.

4.1. Common Ground, Social Context and Expressives

As discussed in section 1, Stalnaker's notion of context of utterance, the "context set", is defined as the set of presuppositions, i.e., propositions taken for granted in the common ground. In the philosophical arena, a new trend known as "Social Philosophy of Language" has emerged, discussing how to better define common ground (or context set) concerning the use of expressives, and more generally offensive language and hate speech (Khoo & Sterken 2021; McGowan & Maitra forth.). This trend has its roots in two established directions of research: on the one hand, the research on pornography as a speech act of subordination started by Rae Langton (1993), relying on older ideas of McKinnon (1987); on the other hand, the research on expressives (expressions like "Ouch" and "Oops" or "Jerk")

[16] See also Schoubye and Stokke 2016 and, for a criticism, Picazo 2022.

suggested by Kaplan (1999), developing some ideas of Frege. The discussion. on these themes has become so rich that we can only give a few hints.[17]

A short reminder of the first line of research (on pornography) makes us consider the relevant role that context plays in this discussion in prompting the revision of some aspects of the old theories. For instance, Saul reminds us that a speech act is not given by a sentence (or a video) but by an utterance in a context (or the viewing of a video in a context). She, therefore, claims that it is not pornographic videos per se that perform the act of subordinating women, but only some viewings of those videos in specific contexts. If the aim of McKinnon was to condemn pornography, she "should abandon the speech act approach" (Saul 2006: 247).

The second line of thought sparked a heated debate about the role of expressives or expressions arguably involving an expressive component, such as slurs, in altering the context set of a conversation. In the following, we offer some short remarks on this point. Slurs have a distinctive expressive power: they are defined as being derogative of an individual because of the individual's belonging to a social group with racial, sexual, or cultural connotations. Under negation, slurs behave differently from their neutral counterparts. Consider the following utterances:

(10) "John is a faggot",

(11) "John is homosexual".

If I deny (11) I just deny a fact,[18] while, if I deny (10), the derogatory meaning appears to escape negation. This suggests that slurs involve two contents:

(10a) John is homosexual

and

(10b) homosexuals are despicable as such.

There are different explanations of this kind of offensive language, starting from *semantic strategies*, for which the derogatory aspect belongs to the truth-conditional content of the utterance, and therefore (10) and (11) have two different truth conditions.[19] On the other hand, *pragmatic strategies* distinguish between the truth-conditional content and the derogatory aspect, claiming that (10) and (11) have the same truth conditions, but (10) conveys a derogatory aspect that (11) does not. Pragmatic strategies are of two kinds: on the one hand, starting from some notorious Fregean examples discussed by Kaplan (1999), and developed by Picardi (2006) and Williamson (2009), (10b) is conceived as a conventional implicature, something expressed but not asserted; on the other hand, starting from Stalnaker's idea of common ground, (10b) is considered to be a presupposition.

The role of context is much discussed under the idea that slurs are a kind of presupposition trigger. Stalnaker's theory says that a presupposition is appropriate if it is shared or accepted in the common ground. This might explain the facility

[17] In addition to the anthology of Khoo and Sterken (2021), we can consider Penco 2018 to be a development of some ideas of Eva Picardi (2006), also relying on Carpintero 2015, 2017.

[18] Apparently, tone of voice and social setting may be relevant: I may express the worst attitude using "neutral" words. However, in normal conversation, the difference between (10) and (11) is highly relevant, exactly for the reasons discussed in the text concerning the context set, that is the changes in common ground of interlocutors.

[19] For arguments supporting the semantic interpretation of pejoratives, see Hom 2012.

with which the slur is accepted in certain environments (where the presupposition is appropriate). However, as David Lewis (1979: 339) suggested, defining the process of *accommodation*, if you say something that requires a missing presupposition (e.g., using a slur requiring the presupposition of derogation towards a certain type of person), often "straightaway the presupposition comes into existence, making what you say acceptable after all". Therefore, presuppositions are a simple way to introduce into the conversational common ground a prejudice or a derogatory attitude, putting those who do not share the presupposition in an uneasy situation: if they don't say anything, it is as if they accept the presupposition. However, if they use the neutral term and not the slur, they may draw attention to what is actually the topic under discussion, partly cancelling or dismissing the presupposition. From a formal point of view, Bonomi (2006) introduces a new notion of *discommodation*, correlative to Lewis's accommodation, to explain what may happen in conversations with incompatible views. A participant in a conversation can open a "presuppositional slot" that allows a "local context shift". This lets the participant talk about a person without committing herself to the speaker's presuppositions.

The need for classification of the semantic and pragmatic approaches to slurs most likely conceals the complexity of the problem, which cannot be easily constrained within a precise definition and may benefit from different theories.[20] For instance, Cepollaro (2015, 2020) suggests a compromise between the conventional and presuppositional accounts, still relying on the conception of common ground.

As this brief overview shows, philosophers have become more attentive to the problem of social and ideological contrasts, where different presuppositions clash, and thus try to explain how the use of slurs may be a means to implicitly insert into the common ground derogatory attitudes that tend to be shared unless challenged.

4.2 Cognitive Context and the Relevance Theory Approach

A distinct approach to the notion of cognitive context was brought about by the cognitive turn in the field of pragmatics led by Post-Gricean frameworks such as Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1982; 1986/1995). This turn introduced a new characterization of the notion of context, conceived as a psychological construct:

> a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world. It is these assumptions, of course, rather than the actual state of the world, that affect the interpretation of an utterance. A context in this sense is not limited to information about the immediate physical environment or the immediately preceding utterances: expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker, may all play a role in interpretation" (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995: 15-16).

[20] Differently from semantic and pragmatic approaches, Lepore and Stone (2018) claim that derogatory words are just prohibited words. For a general presentation of the topic of pejoratives, see the paper by Robin Jeshion (2021), who distinguishes canonical, descriptive, gendered slurs, and stereotyping expressions. On impositions of social roles in the use of slurs, see Popa-Wyatt 2018.

The scope of context is thus very broad, at least potentially. Crucially, though, psychological plausibility imposes some constraints: although the range of assumptions that can be brought to bear on the interpretation process is virtually unlimited, comprehension relies on a subset of these assumptions. How is the actual context selected among them?

According to Relevance Theory, the context for the comprehension is itself selected or chosen during the comprehension process so that it allows, together with the linguistic input, to achieve an overall relevant interpretation of a given utterance. Typically, only those contextual assumptions that, combined with the incoming information, satisfy the hearer's expectations of relevance become part of the context for comprehension.

This marks an important shift of perspective on the role of context in utterance comprehension: context is not given or uniquely determined but is the result of the very same (non-demonstrative) inferential process that underpins utterance comprehension: "Communication requires some degree of co-ordination between communicator and audience on the choice of a code and a context" (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995: 43; see also Assimapokoulous 2017).

The idea that context is chosen during the process of interpretation has found interesting applications in different domains. For instance, Mazzarella and Domaneschi (2018) rely on this idea to explain the context sensitivity of presuppositions. Going beyond purely semantic approaches, they suggest that presuppositions are the output of an inferential process of pragmatic interpretation, in which their propositional content is constructed through a process of "mutual parallel adjustment" with the explicit content of the utterance, or what is said, and its implicatures. Consider, for instance, the following example (adapted from Mazzarella & Domaneschi 2018):

(12) Peter failed again

in which the semantics of the presupposition trigger "again" leads to the recovery of the proposition

(12b) Peter failed at (at least one) time $t < t'$.

Crucially, in different conversational settings, hearers can derive pragmatically enriched presuppositions, which specify not only the domain of Peter's failure but also the number of relevant times t at which Peter failed prior to t'. For instance, if Peter's parents were discussing whether Peter should change school, (12) would be relevant only if it provided good evidence in favour of the decision to move Peter to another school, and would thus be interpreted as presupposing that

(12c) Peter failed some school tests *many* times t_1-t_n before t'.

This is because, in such a conversational exchange, it is this proposition and not (12b) that allows the hearer to derive a relevant implicature. This example illustrates that the contextual assumptions exploited to establish what speakers intend to communicate are not given before the interpretation process starts. They are chosen or constructed on the fly, as part of the interpretation itself.

Given that the choice of context requires some degree of coordination between the speaker and the hearer, and that this involves some risk, some interesting questions arise: How can successful communication be achieved? Who is responsible for potential misunderstandings? Can the risky nature of communication be strategically exploited, especially in cases of manipulative or dishonest communication? We will focus on the latter question and briefly mention two

relevant directions of research, concerning respectively the notion of hearer manipulation and that of speaker accountability.

Maillat and Oswald (2009) and Maillat (2013) have proposed that the notion of (chosen) cognitive context can shed light on the phenomenon of manipulation. Specifically, they suggested that it is possible to define some forms of social manipulation as specific attempts to interfere with the process of context selection, by affecting the accessibility of potential contextual assumptions and preventing the hearer from accessing a dissonant, although optimal, set of these assumptions. For instance, in the case of the so-called "ad populum fallacy" (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2008), which involves judging something acceptable because it is considered acceptable by many people, this interference can be exercised in two distinct ways. The manipulator can increase the degree of accessibility of the intended conclusion *p* through repetition, or she can use an expression such as "Everybody says *p*" to force the inferential process through a cognitive shortcut for strengthening-by-repetition, thus achieving an analogous effect.

As far as speaker accountability is concerned, Mazzarella (2021) has argued that the notion of cognitive context can address the long-standing issue of what makes speakers more or less likely to successfully deny the intention to communicate some risky content (for a discussion on "plausible deniability", see Pinker 2007). Much literature in the philosophy of language has suggested that, in virtue of their cancellability, conversational implicatures can be strategically denied, thus allowing the speaker to reduce their accountability for implicitly communicated messages (Fricker 2012). Crucially, if we interpret speaker denials as strategic moves to prompt a reconstruction of the cognitive context (in line with Camp 2018), we can better understand why some denials are judged as clearly implausible, while others may allow the speaker the benefit of the doubt. According to Mazzarella (2021), this depends on the cognitive utility of the re-constructed context put forth by the speaker: the greater the cognitive effects licenced by the reconstructed context and the lower the cognitive efforts involved, the higher the degree of plausibility of the denial.

5. Papers in this Issue

We present the papers featured in this special issue following the main sections presented above and provide a short overview of their respective contributions. They approach different topics in the philosophy of language by focusing on the relevance of context—in its many forms—in their analyses.

5.1. Papers on Context of Utterance and Indexicals

The first two papers develop in different ways Künne's notion of "hybrid proper names". A general problem about indexicals and demonstratives concerns their treatment in functional role semantics. Functional role semantics tend to be exclusively linked to linguistic features, therefore avoiding notions of "reference" or of "context of utterance". Adding indexicals and demonstratives in a functional role semantics may take two directions: one, à la Robert Brandom, treating indexicals as anaphoric initiators; the other inserting a theory of reference into the functional role semantics system. **Tadeusz Ciecierski and Paweł Grabarczyk's** paper analyses the difficulty of this second strategy and works out in detail their solution in the setting of a particular functional role semantics, an update of Kazimierz

Ajdukiewicz's directival theory of meaning, where the meaning of a linguistic expression is defined in terms of the role of the expressions in specific sets of sentences. In the theory under discussion, "directives" are kinds of sentences intended as defining lexical meaning, on the ground of "acceptance" from competent speakers. To insert indexicals in the theory Ciecierski and Grabarczyk treat indexicals as hybrid expressions, construed as ordered pairs composed of a linguistic expression and a referent. Expressions like "I", "you", "today", as such are not well-formed expressions and require to be considered as hybrid symbols. Therefore, this solution follows the strict requirement for which every different expression will refer to distinct objects: hybrid expressions involving the same linguistic component, but with different non-linguistic components, will refer to distinct objects.

Maciej Tarnowski relies on Kaplan's idea that demonstratives are direct reference devices like proper names. Kaplan (1989a: 506-507) said that the theory of indexicals "may prove useful" to face the problems associated with a theory of reference for proper names, and remarked the following difference: while the character (linguistic meaning) of an indexical is a function from contexts to extensions, proper names have no particular linguistic rule that fixes the content depending on context; therefore the meaning of proper names is identical with their content, a constant function from possible worlds to extensions. Against Kaplan's fundamental difference between proper names and indexicals, few authors tried to define proper names as kinds of indexicals, and therefore make them more context-dependent than previously thought. These attempts would have the advantage of creating a unifying theory of both indexicals and proper names. Tarnowski gives a summary of these attempts, mainly by Pelzcar, Rami and Recanati and shows their shortcomings. His paper tries then to give a solution based on treating proper names as simple demonstrative, in a hybrid view that should overcome the difficulties of the earlier treatments of proper names as indexicals.

5.2. Papers on the Pragmatics-Semantics Divide

Some papers in this issue touch upon the semantic/pragmatics boundary with different answers. **Ernesto Perini Santos** traces back the problem of the semantics/pragmatics divide to an old debate between Benson Mates and Stanley Cavell, He discusses a well-known example by Charles Travis, showing the different answers provided to it by minimalists and contextualists, and their related problems, as raised, for instance, by Claudia Picazo about the enrichment strategy. Perini Santos relies on Stefano Predelli's point of view, according to which a clause-index pair may be true at one point of evaluation and false at another, depending on the circumstance of evaluation (where the concept of "circumstance" is slightly different from Kaplan's). Eventually, this solution would transcend the dichotomy between minimalism and contextualism: going back to the old debate between Mates and Cavell may reveal new perspectives that were previously hidden due to the too-limited Gricean paradigm.

Giuseppe Varnier and Salvatore Pistoia-Reda discuss the claim that the language system contains a deductive inferential core (logicality of language hypothesis). Their paper concerns the acceptability or non-acceptability of certain structures, like, for instance, the sentence "it is raining, and it is not raining", which should be not acceptable in the logicality of the language hypothesis. However, the logicality hypothesis may be improved or rescued from a "pragmatic" or contextualist viewpoint, given that the sentence may be interpreted with a modulation or enrichment

of the nonlogical material, as with "it is raining, and it is not raining heavily". Therefore, we may accept analytical sentences as grammatical if their structures can be rescued in principle. This discussion is applied to belief ascriptions, which appear sensitive to logical consideration, against the standard view.

Aldair Díaz-Gómez discusses the topic of scalar implicatures, which has become a very central point in the debate on the pragmatics/semantics divide. He presents the alternative between a pragmatic and a grammatical account of scalar implicatures, where the former relies on the context of the dialogue (common ground), while the latter relies on a strictly lexically constrained context. The pragmatic account requiring access to contextual information should block inferences from SI where the presupposed proposition has an empty domain. On the other hand, a grammatical account would leave the SI work with an empty domain. He then provides an experiment on the processing of SIs, showing how the results are more coherent with the latter solution.

Ines Crespo, Andreas Heise, and Claudia Picazo touch upon a topic that has been much debated in the wake of Grice's theory of conversation, namely metaphorical interpretation. They present a view proposed by Asher and Lascarides who argue that discourse coherence holds the key to metaphorical interpretation. Crespo, Heise, and Picazo do not reject this basic idea, but they argue that discourse coherence is insufficient to deal with certain cases of metaphor and irony. In view of such considerations, they speak out in favour of a broader notion of contextual background that includes both world knowledge and perceptual information. On their account, elements from the extralinguistic context can play a role analogous to that of the linguistic context. Thus, they propose a notion of contextual coherence, eventually enriched via "Questions under Discussion", derived from both linguistic and extralinguistic elements of the context of utterance. Such a construal, they argue, may also help to make sense of interpretation in impoverished contexts, that is, where no previous context of discourse is available.

5.3. Papers on Social and Cognitive Context

Dealing with the much-debated problem of the distinction between lying and deceiving, **Palle Leth** invites us to reflect on the notion of "warrantability" of the hearer's contextual assumptions. Warrantability is meant to capture the extent to which hearers are justified in taking a certain assumption as part of the speaker's intended meaning. Crucially, the coordination between speakers and hearers on the choice of context takes place within the boundaries of what could have been plausibly intended. On the one hand, speakers cannot expect hearers to appeal to unforeseeable or highly unavailable assumptions. On the other hand, hearers are justified in relying on assumptions that are salient and not idiosyncratic. Despite its inevitably blurry boundaries, warrantability can shed new light on traditional distinctions such as the lying-misleading distinction. Indeed, Leth argues that speakers that communicate untruthful content to deceive the audience are deemed to be considered liars in so far as the inferential derivation of such untruthful content is warranted, independently of its degree of explicitness. Warrantability is thus tightened to speaker responsibility.

It is worth noting that, while the speaker-hearer coordination that underpins successful communication relies on the choice of both code and context, the weight of these two factors can vary. Speakers can try to be as explicit as possible in formulating what they intend to communicate, thus reducing the role of

contextual inferences. Or they can strategically play with implicit communication, as is the case in insinuations, and let contextual inferences carry controversial or risky content. The relative weight of code and context may be consciously manipulated by interlocutors and have important social—and even legal—consequences. As **Claudia Bianchi** reminds us, for instance, the public debate about speech acts in sexual contexts is dominated by discussions concerning what consent and refusal amount to. Crucially, much of this discussion focuses on the interplay between what is explicitly stated and what can be contextually inferred: "consent to intercourse cannot be inferred from contextual factors such as clothing, alcohol or drug consumption, flirting or engaging in some form of intimacy". Reducing the room for contextual inference appears the most important in what Bianchi calls "distorted communicative environments", in which dangerous gender stereotypes are present and reinforced. In this paper, Bianchi makes a case to anchor theoretical discussions on the linguistic practices that characterise (or should characterise) sexual negotiations to non-ideal, real-life communicative environments, "where the parties involved are not necessarily engaged in ethical undertakings, with more or less the same goals, and more or less the same price to pay for the activities performed". Bianchi focuses on theoretical models of sexual negotiation, specifically on the Collaborative Models advocated by Kukla (2018), Gardner (2018) and Caponetto (2021), which conceive initiations of sex in terms of invitations, offers and proposals. She argues that real-life cases show the limits of the Collaborative Models, which by *presupposing* women's sexual agency can run the risk of masking prevarication and abuse.[21]

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