Abstract

Parametric context-sensitivity is a recognized but under-theorized form of context-sensitivity—under-theorized especially as compared to the sort of indexicality Kaplan [1977/1989] brought into focus. I single it out for attention here, using three case studies as stalking horses. Starting with modals, I bring out how parametric context-sensitivity problematizes prevailing definitions of context-sensitivity, and offer improved definitions. Turning next to variables (pronouns, and things like them), I bring out the way in which parametric context-sensitivity problematizes the idea that content is compositional, coming at Rabern [2013]'s insights from another direction. We will also see that clarity about the possibilities for parametrically contextualist analyses of pronouns helps in distinguishing several kinds of monstrous operations, and helps bring into focus what is at issue in the question whether (as Santorio [2019] has recently argued) the role of context in semantics is entirely post-semantic. As a third case study, I consider some Stalnaker-inspired parametrically contextualist analyses of indicative conditionals. Stalnaker’s theory renders the truth of indicative conditionals as sensitive to states of information. Does this mean that on his theory, indicative conditionals are 'subjective', i.e., descriptions of states of mind? That might depend, I explain, on a matter outside the compositional semantics, about whether and how one goes parametrically contextualist. I close with some discussion of what is at issue in deciding whether a given case of context-sensitivity is indexical or parametric. The big picture aim is to show that getting straight about parametric context-sensitivity pays dividends for a range of important semantic and post-semantic issues.

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1 Introduction

Some expressions are context-sensitive, except when they aren’t.

First example: modals like *must*. Compare these ([Kratzer 1977]):

(1) Maori children must learn the names of their ancestors.

(2) In view of Maori tribal duty, Maori children must learn the names of their ancestors.

On the face of it, the *must* in (1) renders the sentence context-sensitive. At one context, for example one where we are talking about New Zealand law, we could use (1) to say that in view of the laws of New Zealand, Maori children have to learn their ancestors’ names. We’re talking about what must be according the laws. In another context, we could instead use (1) to make just the claim (2) makes, about what must be according to Maori tribal duty. Thus (1) is context-sensitive. But observe this context-sensitivity is not shared by (2), though it too contains *must*. Even if we are in a context where we are talking about the laws of New Zealand, we hear (2) as about what must be according to tribal duty. So (1) is context-sensitive in a way that (2) is not. The *must* in (1) infects the whole sentence with context-sensitivity, but apparently the infection is contained in (2), thanks to the embedding environment the expression appears in. To put it in a theory-laden and contestable way, when we utter (2) at a context \( c \), the contribution of *must* to the determination of the proposition expressed does not depend on context. (Not anyway in the way that the *must* in (1) does.)

Second example: the third-person pronoun *he*. Compare these:

(3) He is wise.

(4) Every bowler thinks he is wise.

As everyone knows, *he* is context-sensitive: one can’t figure out what the content of (3) is without assistance from the context of utterance, and pretty obviously *he* is to blame for that. Except, *he* is sometimes not context-sensitive: the *he* in (4) obviously admits of a bound reading, in which case it manifests none of the context-sensitivity it shows in (3). So *he* is context-sensitive, except when it isn’t.

Third example: indicative conditionals. Suppose we’re sitting in a cafe. It would be weird to say:

(5) If we’re not at this cafe, we’re at the one across the street.

Why? Maybe it is because indicative conditionals are sensitive to a certain feature of context, namely the information we are mutually taking for granted in the
conversation. In particular, maybe there is a requirement that the antecedent of the conditional be compatible with this information (Stalnaker [1975]). We’re taking it for granted that we’re in this cafe, of course, so we get a clash with the antecedent. The requirement in question could be pragmatic, and/or to do with the presuppositions of the sentence; but it is natural to think it plays a role in the semantics (for example, by constraining the selection function used in the interpretation of the conditional, as on Stalnaker’s theory, discussed below). Thus indicative conditionals are context-sensitive—they are sensitive to states of information determined by the context (see also Gibbard [1981]). Except when they aren’t:

(6) Bill believes that if we’re not at this cafe, we’re at the one across the street.

This sentence is not weird—on the contrary, we could sensibly use it to explain why Bill is searching the cafe across the street for us, for instance. Clearly (6) does not exhibit the same sensitivity to the context that (5) does. We are still taking it for granted that we’re in the cafe we’re in, but the indicative conditional no longer minds this fact now that it is embedded where it is.

The sort of context-sensitivity we see in these examples isn’t the indexicality theorized by Kaplan [1977/1989]. Kaplan-style indexical context-sensitivity is the sort of context-sensitivity that is impervious to embedding, that shines through no matter what. The content of sentences containing the first person pronoun I, for instance, is generally sensitive to context, even when this expression is deeply embedded—say, in a relative clause under an attitude verb within a conditional (e.g., ‘If Bill thinks that the man who I saw is Ted, he’s wrong’). That’s the sort of impressive fact Kaplan sought to explain with the help of an unshiftable context parameter. My interest in this paper is in the other kind of context-sensitivity, the kind of context-sensitivity that can go away under the impact of the right kind of embedding. It is the shiftable context-sensitivity that Ninan [2010] identifies and brings into focus, and which Recanati [2004] discusses under the heading ‘saturation’. In this paper I call it parametric context-sensitivity. This sort of context-sensitivity, while a recognized commodity, rarely gets singled out for direct attention, though arguably it is more pervasive than indexical context-sensitivity. I single it out here. I am less concerned to make claims about specific constructions than I am to draw out a characteristic form context-sensitivity can take and unpack its lessons.

To say what parametric context-sensitivity is, we need especially to mind the gap between semantic value and content (in the ways emphasized by Lewis [1980], Ninan [2010] and Rabern [2012b, 2013]; instructive additional discussion appears in Dummett [1973], Stanley [1997], King [2003], Rabern [2012a, 2017], Yli-Vakkuri [2013], MacFarlane [2014], Stalnaker [2014], Steinert-Threlkeld [2017],...
Recanati [2018], Rabern and Ball [2019], Santorio [2019]). To be a parametric contextualist about some expression is in part to endorse a certain kind of post-semantic commitment about how the content of a sentence in context is supposed to be recovered from context. It is tied up with these things I will call bridge principles. In the next section I say how, following the trail blazed by Nan [2010]. An expression is parametrically context-sensitive when its extension is sensitive to a parameter of the index whose value is, according to the operative bridge principle, fixed by context. The point of the next section is to say that more slowly and explain what means. After that I will have said enough to talk through the case of modals, our first example above, in section 3. This example will help us to see, in section 4, why parametric context-sensitivity makes for some complications in the way that context-sensitivity is best defined.

I come to the second example (pronouns, or variables generally) in section 5. In the case of third-person pronouns, parametric contextualism is, at least implicitly, the dominant position in the literature. Following Rabern [2013], I review some of the tensions this kind of analysis raises for the approach of Kaplan [1977/1989]. A parametrically context-sensitive analysis of third-person pronouns raises the question whether such an analysis is available for other kinds of pronoun. In section 6, drawing on Santorio [2010], I discuss a parametric treatment of first-person pronouns. The idea that first-person pronouns are in-principle shiftable raises questions about monsters, and about the status of the context parameter. Those are the topics of sections 7 and 8 respectively. Bridge principles are seen to play a central role here.

When I get to the last example, indicative conditionals, in section 9, I try to bring out how attention to bridge principles can help to clarify basic questions about how one standard view—Stalnaker’s—works. Specifically I saw how to get at the question whether, on Stalnaker’s kind of view, indicative conditionals shake out to be “subjective”—that is, descriptions of states of mind. The answer turns on the bridge principle one goes in for, I claim. I also discuss how bridge principles might interact with two-dimensional conceptions of (not semantic value, but) content.

The point the paper is to come at parametric context-sensitivity from several directions, and to see how bridge principles interact with a diversity of important debates. The overall tendency is to see more and more varieties of context-sensitivity as parametric, and to make (Kaplan-style) indexical context-sensitivity look relatively exotic. So, in the penultimate section 10, I consider one sort of general strategy the indexicalist might deploy to analyze seemingly parametric cases of context-sensitivity instead in indexical fashion. The key move is to appeal to features of context that are to do with the tokening of the very utterance the target expression appears in. I say this idea tends to

\footnote{The term is from MacFarlane [2003].}
threaten explanatory power in semantics, and urge caution. Almost all of my discussion takes place from the vantage point of a two-dimensional semantic framework (specifically, that of Lewis [1980]): that is the sandbox I am in for the purposes of this paper, though I step out briefly on occasion. I can imagine ways of transplanting/extending the term ‘parametric context-sensitivity’ to other semantic frameworks, such as a dynamic semantics, but I don’t make any attempt to spell out how.

2 Truth at a context and content

Suppose we find ourselves in the sort of two-dimensional semantic framework described by Lewis [1980], drawing Kaplan [1977/1989]. I assume basic familiarity with the setup. Sentences compositionally receive truth values relative to a pair of a context $c$ and index $i$, where the latter is some tuple of parameters corresponding to possible features of context. (A starter package for the index might include a world parameter and a time parameter.) The semantic values of sentences are two-dimensional intensions: functions from context-index pairs to truth values. The picture is two-dimensional in the sense that one dimension—context—is rich enough to fix a value for the other dimension—index.\(^2\)

This two-dimensionality enables us to define an index-invariant notion of truth at a context in terms of our index-sensitive semantic values. We could say, following Kaplan, that a sentence is true at a context $c$ simpliciter just in case you get True when you evaluate the two-dimensional intension of the sentence at the pair of $c$ and the index $i_c$ fixed by that context:

$$\phi \text{ is true at } c \text{ iff } [\phi]^{c,i_c} = 1$$

This sort of definition is `post-semantic’ in that it takes for granted that the work of compositionally assigning sentences their intensions has already been accomplished. It sits on top of the semantics, as it were.

What good is this definition of truth at a context—why should it matter whether we can define it? Here are three interconnected motivations, motivations I take to be traditional. The first two emphasize the idea that truth at a context plays an important role in bringing the compositional semantics into contact with the data it is meant to systematize. One might think the notion of truth at $c$, while still technical, is closer to home than the notion of truth at $c, i$. We seem to have judgments that certain sentences uttered at certain contexts

\(^2\)One Lewis’s setup, context and index are generally asymmetrically rich: context can fix a value for the index, but not the reverse. So strictly speaking, we don’t have the same dimension twice over. We might therefore say the framework is asymmetrically two-dimensional, in contrast to the purer two-dimensional framework of for instance Segerberg [1973], where sentences are evaluated at pairs of worlds. There are operators definable in a pure two-dimensional semantics not definable in an asymmetric two-dimensional semantics.
have certain truth values. Maybe some good-enough percentage of the time, such intuitions can be explained as tracking this notion of truth at a context. If so, we can leverage those intuitions to constrain hypotheses about semantic values—the things we postulate mostly in order to leverage their compositionality in an account of the productivity of linguistic understanding. Second, maybe some good-enough percentage of the time, certain intuitions can be explained as tracking consistency and entailment, where entailment is a relation that preserves truth at a context. So again, the definition connects the two-dimensional intensions postulated in the semantics to the facts they are supposed to help illuminate.

Here is the third motivation. One might think that a sentence is true at a context exactly when its \textit{content} is true at that context, and that the significance of the former owes largely to the fact that it tracks the latter. That is an intu-itive idea. Here I am following Lewis [1980], not to mention Dummett [1973], Kaplan [1977/1989], Stalnaker [1978] and many others, in supposing that we have a need to associate declarative sentences with items of content—assertoric contents, propositional contents, propositions—which are distinct from their semantic values (their two-dimensional intensions), but which can be recovered from these values plus context. As Kaplan would put it, sentences in context say things, and what gets said by a sentence in context is, at least usually and in one important sense, the content of the sentence. But I won’t lean on the idea that tracking a notion of “what is said” is at the core of the content role. The authors I recently cited have diverse, not-always-totally-obvious conceptions of the content role—of what the job description of content is exactly—but typical versions of this job description include familiar things like: being fit to be the object of attitudes like belief; being what is represented by certain representations; being the fundamental bearers of truth values; being the fundamental relata of the consequence relation; being the sort of thing, the having of which by mental states has something important to do with the functional role of the state, and with the potential of an ascription of the state to explain action; being the sort of thing that one, in uttering a declarative sentence, is trying to put into conversational play—is trying to add to the common ground of the conversation—and which corresponds to the information the sentence in context conveys. And so on. While I am opinionated about how to think about the content role (Yalcin [2014]), there isn’t a need to get into here. The main point for now is that the sort of thing that best realizes the content role could well be—and on most theories, is—different from the sort of thing that realizes the semantic value role.

We are already supposing, for the sake of this paper, that the latter role is played by certain two-dimensional intensions. Most philosophers with opinions on the matter won’t take such intensions to be the realizers of the content
role. For a simple example, take the view favored by Stalnaker, according to which the realizers of the content role are sets of possible worlds. Two-dimensional intensions and sets of worlds are different sorts of things, so the meaning (semantic value) of a sentence and its content couldn’t be the same on such a view.

But maybe the meaning of a sentence in context and the content of a sentence in context are the same? That is how Kaplan [1977/1989] sought to understand things: he describes his two-dimensional intensions as mappings from contexts into contents. But I accept Lewis [1980]'s arguments against this conflation, together with the further considerations presented by Ninan [2010], Rabern [2012a, 2013]. What exactly is left after you evaluate a two-dimensional intension at context is a function from indices to truth-values. Thus it is depends on what sort of parameters your index contains. What parameters the index contains frequently depends on such things as whether the architecture of the language treats some meaning relationships between expressions as operator-operand relationships. This may well be a parochial matter about how that language happens to work. Such factors should influence our opinion about the richness of our indices in a compositional semantics for the language, but they needn’t impact our view about what plays the content role.

For instance: if, owing to some deep reflections on representational mental states, you emerged with the view that sets of possible worlds do best as the realizers of the content role, your confidence needn’t be shaken by the possibility of linguistic data which suggests that the natural language you speak deserves indices that contain a parameter for time (because it contains expressions helpfully modeled as temporal operators). As Lewis emphasized, if you want the notion of the content of a sentence in context, it is enough that you can recover this content object from the two-dimensional intension of the sentence, together with relevant aspects of context. One doesn’t need the idea that the content of a sentence in context is literally identical to the result of evaluating its two-dimensional intension at context. That is one especially simple kind of principle bridging semantic value and content—I’ll call it the Kaplan bridge principle—but one shouldn’t sign up for it from the thought it is somehow conceptually necessary. If you do that, it is apt to artificially limit your movement in compositional semantics. One can have a bridge principle that is a bit more subtle than Kaplan’s.\textsuperscript{3}

Here’s a simple example. Suppose you are with Stalnaker: contents are sets of possible worlds. But suppose also you are doing semantics for an operator-rich language. Your language has parameters for worlds $w$, times $t$, and, say, three other things $x, y, z$, who cares what they are. Then it’s easy to see how,\footnote{Indeed, as we’ll eventually see (section 5), there are good reasons to prefer a bridge principle more complicated than Kaplan’s. (In fact, there are good reasons for Kaplan to prefer a bridge principle more complicated than Kaplan’s.)}
abstractly, to write a bridge principle which tells you how to recover the content of a sentence in context as a function of its very rich two-dimensional intension:

**Bridge principle 1.**

The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is $\{ w : [\phi]^{c,w,x,c,y,c,z,c} = 1 \}$

We see that context fixes values for the parameters which the content of the sentence is not variable with respect to. To use Recanati’s term, it provides the instructions for saturation (Recanati [2004]).

Now it’s not hard to see that given such a view, a sentence is true at a context exactly when its content is true at that context. So, circling back to the point that started us down this road, one might think truth at a context matters because it aligns with the truth of the sentence’s content in context. For one might think that, at the end of the day, assertoric content is the main thing. One might think that the main payoff for knowing (‘cognizing’) a compositional semantics for a language is that it enables one to transfer (and receive) information; the information transferred is content; and that intuitions about the truth of a sentence tend to track, most of the time, its content.

It is good to see that the definition of truth at a context is not by itself a content bridge principle. Two theorists might disagree about the right content bridge principle, but agree about the definition of truth for sentences. Compare for instance the last indented bridge principle to this temporalist alternative:

**Bridge principle 2.**

The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is $\{ (w,t) : [\phi]^{c,w,t,x,c,y,c,z,c} = 1 \}$

This principle implies that contents are variable in truth with respect to time in addition to world. They are temporalist propositions. The eternalism of our first bridge principle is rejected. Yet one might accept this principle while also accepting the definition of truth for sentences given above: for one could hold that a sentence is true at a context $c$ just when the temporalist proposition it expresses is true as evaluated at the pair consisting of the world of the context and the time of the context. (I say this is one possible temporalist position.)

The disagreement between this theorist and our eternalist would not be visible from the point of view of the question: which sentences are true relative to which contexts?

This is important to keep in mind when we talk about context ‘initializing’ an index parameter. An ambiguity lurks there. The eternalist and the temporalist agree that context will fix a value for the time parameter when we come to

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4I’m assuming the usual idea that a possible worlds proposition is true simpliciter when it contains the actual world.
say when a sentence in context is true. So in one clear sense, the temporalist agrees that context ‘initializes’ this parameter. However, in another equally clear sense, she doesn’t: she rejects the idea that context initializes the time parameter when it comes to saying what the content of the sentence is.

This difference matters to the way that the eternalist and the temporalist answer the question: are tensed sentences context-sensitive? On one legitimate precisification of ‘context-sensitive’, our eternalist says yes and our temporalist says no. For our eternalist holds that the content of a tensed sentence is partly determined as a function of the time fixed by context of utterance, whereas the content that the temporalist associates with the sentence is not sensitive to context in this way. This dispute is not visible at the level of compositional semantics, and neither is it visible at the post-semantic stage of defining truth at a context. It’s about the bridge principle.5

One way to come at this to say that a bridge principle—or anyway, the subclass of bridge principles I want to focus on in this paper—divides index parameters into (at least) two groups. I will say that a bridge principle declares some index parameters content fixing, and declares others content variable.6 So our eternalist says that the time parameter is content fixing, whereas our temporalist says it’s content variable. If we wanted, we could mark out which parameters are treated as content-initialized by whatever bridge principles are in question. For instance, we could decorate those parameters with stars. So when our eternalist is doing compositional semantics but wants to make it clear that certain parameters but not others are viewed by her as content determinative—that a bridge principle to that effect is operative in the background—she can write: \([\alpha]^{c,w,t,x,y,z} / \).7

All this means there is room for distinctive, index-parameter-induced form of context-sensitivity. An expression \(\alpha\) might introduce context-sensitivity into a sentence, not because its semantic value is directly a function of context—as with straightforward indexicals analyzed in the classic Kaplan style, whose

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5Thus I agree with Ninan when he proposes “that the definition of assertoric content also be regarded as part of the postsemantics, and that its theoretical significance is comparable to that of the definition of truth at a context” [Ninan, 2010, 363].

6My notion of ‘content fixing’ roughly aligns with Kaplan’s talk of context “generating” content (Kaplan [1989, 591]; see also Rabern [2013], Rabern and Ball [2019]). But Kaplan thinks of context as generating content for subsentential components—he has a picture of content as structured—whereas I do not apply the notion of content below the sentential level, partly for reasons Rabern [2013] brings out. So I think it best to use different terminology.

Also: since Kaplan identified the parameters of the index with the parameters along which content could vary, his term ‘circumstance of evaluation’ is subject to ambiguity: one could use it as a synonym for ‘index’ (cf. [Ninan, 2010, 356]), or one could use it intending to pick out the full suite of what I am calling the content variable parameters (cf. [MacFarlane, 2009, 245, fn. 17]). So I’ll just avoid this term.

7N.b.: that’s not a different semantic value than \([\alpha]^{c,w,t,x,y,z} / \). The stars just help us convey a certain additional post-semantic commitment.
semantics values are always some nontrivial function of the context parameter $c$:

$$[[a]]^{c,i} = \ldots c \ldots$$

—but instead because the expression is some nontrivial function of a content fixing parameter $p$ of the index $i$:

$$[[a]]^{p,i} = \ldots p_i \ldots$$

Parametric context-sensitivity corresponds exactly to Ninan’s notion of *shiftable contextualism*:

In general, shiftable contextualism about an expression $e$ will arise whenever two conditions obtain: (i) $e$ is sensitive to parameter $X$ of the index, but (ii) parameter $X$ is fixed to its corresponding context value in the definition of assertoric content. [Ninan, 2010, 371]

What Ninan means by ‘the definition of assertoric content’ is what I mean by ‘bridge principle’. (I avoid calling these principles ‘definitions’ so as not to generate the impression that such principles capture the job description associated with the notion of content. They generally give no indication of the content role.) Note that as defined, shiftable contextualism about $e$ is strictly speaking compatible with the possibility that the parameter $e$ is sensitive is *not* shiftable by any operator in the language. What fundamentally matters is just whether $e$ is sensitive to a content fixing parameter. This is one reason I use *parametric* rather than *shiftable* in talking about this kind of context-sensitivity.\(^8\) But ‘parametric context-sensitivity’ and ‘shiftable context-sensitivity’ are interchangable, so long as one means by ‘shiftable’ exactly what Ninan does. So far as I know, Ninan was the first to carve out this important joint explicitly, though as he notes, the underlying idea has been in the literature for a while.

I just mentioned the possibility of index parameters which are such that no operators in the language happen to shift them—parameters that are *de facto* unshiftable. That will sound puzzling if one thinks the only motivation one could have for a postulating a parameter is evidence that the language contains operators for shifting it. But there are other ways to motivate a parameter, as MacFarlane [2009, 245] notes. For instance, parameters are good for separating meanings that need separating. We should like to semantically distinguish

\(^8\)Another is that ‘shiftable context-sensitivity’ might bring to mind the (different) idea, discussed below, that the context parameter is shiftable (‘shiftable-context sensitivity’). (Since the target context-sensitivity is a kind of sensitivity to indices, the ideal term would probably have been *indexical* context-sensitivity. But post-Kaplan, that label tends to get used to describe sensitivity to the context parameter. I follow that usage of ‘indexical’ in this paper.)
coextensive predicates like renate and cordate. If we have a possible worlds parameter, the predicates can receive distinct intensions. That’s a semantics-internal motivation for the parameter, separate from the question whether there are any modal operators in the language. Or again: does France fall into the extension of hexagonal? A possible view is that it does (relative to some standards of precision) and it doesn’t (relative to others). One might capture that idea by giving hexagonal an extension relative to a world parameter and a standard of precision parameter, so that France might fall in or out of the extension of hexagonal with variation in the standard of precision parameter only [Lewis, 1980, 21]. That motivates a parameter for standards of precision, even if there are no operators for shifting the parameter.

Summarizing: in addition to indexical context-sensitivity, there is parametric context-sensitivity. With parametric context-sensitivity, it is in a sense the value of the parameter that is context-sensitive. Expressions are context-sensitive mediately, via their sensitivity to a content fixing parameter. Here are the definitions to match our discussion:

- Expression $\alpha$ is indexical just in case for some $c,c',i$, $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{c,i} \neq \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{c',i}$

- Expression $\alpha$ makes for parametric context-sensitivity just in case for some $c$ and some pair $i,i'$ differing at most in the value of a content fixing parameter, $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{c,i} \neq \llbracket \alpha \rrbracket^{c,i'}$.

One possible reason parametric context-sensitivity has not received much explicit attention is the fact that given the sort of bridge principle implicitly assumed by Kaplan [1977/1989], it is ruled out. Kaplan takes the meaning of a sentence to be a character, which he describes as a function from contexts to contents. Thus Kaplan goes in for the following bridge principle, which says that the content of $\phi$ in $c$ is whatever is left over when you evaluate the two-dimensional intension of a sentence at $c$:

**Kaplan bridge principle.**

The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is $\{i : \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^{c,i} = 1 \}$.

This bridge principle implies that there are no content fixing index parameters. So it is incompatible with the existence of parametric context-sensitivity. Conversely, the presence of parametric context-sensitivity implies the falsity of the Kaplan bridge principle. Thus any evidence in favor of parametric context-sensitivity is evidence against the Kaplan bridge principle.

3 Case 1: Modals

Let’s circle now back to our first case. Kratzer [1977] famously suggested that a sentence like:
(1) Maori children must learn the names of their ancestors.

can, when uttered in an appropriate context, say just what (2) says:

(2) In view of Maori tribal duty, Maori children must learn the names of their ancestors.

On one (perhaps exegetically inaccurate but anyway worth examining) way of reading Kratzer, part of the idea is that the sentence (1) is context-sensitive in a way that (2) is not. The relevant context-sensitive expression in (1) is the modal must. This expression appears also in (2). Yet we have the feeling that context is doing more work contributing to the content of (1) than it is for (2). In (2), that work is carried out the in view of-phrase. So as whole, this sentence exhibits less context-sensitivity than its more succinct counterpart. Examples in this vein could be devised for basically any modal in English.

This is hard to understand if must is indexically context-sensitive, since that views leads us to expect (1) and (2) to be equally context-sensitive. But it is not hard to understand if must is parametrically context-sensitive. The main thing about parametric context-sensitivity is that it is context-sensitivity which can be semantically turned off, as it were. Suppose our semantics incorporates a content-fixing modal accessibility relation parameter $R$; and for concreteness suppose we have a content-variable world parameter, and nothing else in the index. Let the modal be sensitive to the accessibility relation parameter, for instance with a semantics like this:

$$\text{[must } \phi\text{]}^c.w,R = 1 \text{ iff for all } w' \text{ such that } wRw', [\phi]^{c,w',R} = 1$$

The bridge principle in the background is:

The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is $\{w : [\phi]^{c,w,R} = 1\}$

This predicts that a contextually supplied accessibility relation is what will be used in determining the content of the sentence (1). Its content is:

$\{w : \text{for all } y \text{ such that } wRc y, \text{ Maori children learn the names of their ancestors in } y\}$

In the sort of context $c$ under discussion for (1), the idea is that $R_c$ would be

$$R_c = \{\langle w, y \rangle : y \text{ is compatible with Maori tribal duty in } w\}$$

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9Of course, a story is owed about how $R_c$ is defined in general, for arbitrary contexts. Kratzer already carries a burden corresponding to this, about how conversational backgrounds are supposed to be fixed. Presumably it has something to do with speaker intentions and with question under discussion in discourse. I won’t try to carry the burden here.
Thereby we predict that the content of (1) depends on the context.

But we can also predict the context-insensitivity of (2). For we could allow operators, notably in view of-phrases, to shift the accessibility relation parameter, overwriting its value for sentences the operator embeds. For instance, we could say:

\[[\text{in view of Maori tribal duty} \phi]_{c,w,R} = [\phi]_{c,w,R'},\]

where

\(R' = \{w, y : y \text{ is compatible with Maori tribal duty in } w\}\)

This has the result that the content of the (2) does not vary with context in the way (1)'s content varies: its content at a given \(c\) is not determined with the help of \(R_c\).

To be clear: it’s not that we change the bridge principle across the examples. The same bridge principle is in the background in both cases. The relevant difference rather that the intension of (1) is sensitive to the value of the \(R\) parameter, whereas the intension of (2) is not. For (2), it does not matter how context initializes the value of the \(R\) parameter. By the time the value of this parameter matters—by the time the embedded modal is interpreted—the parameter has been shifted by the operator embedding it, and in a way that is insensitive to the initial value of this parameter.

This example is of course simplistic in the details. Most theorists, Kratzer included, will prefer a more complicated clause for the modal, one involving some ordering of worlds; and many will want to follow Kratzer in using conversational backgrounds (functions from worlds to sets of propositions) instead of simple accessibility relations to articulate the restriction on the modal. Further, no doubt in view of-phrases are semantically more complicated. If these phrases can in fact shift the restriction of a modal, the shifting seems to be optional, not obligatory (see Yalcin [2016] for some examples). But these places where the story can be elaborated are orthogonal to the main point, which is that if one wants to reconcile the idea that (1) is context-sensitive because it contains must with the idea that (2) is not context-sensitive despite also containing must, the thesis that must makes for parametric context-sensitivity can square this circle. The account could be scaled to more elaborate settings. We could equally well have one or more parameters for modal bases, and one or more parameters for ordering sources, and tell a parametrically contextualist story in the same fundamental vein.

4 Defining context-sensitivity

What does it mean to say that (1) is context-sensitive but (2) isn’t? Here are some further definitions. Where \(\phi\) is an unembedded sentence,
\( \phi \) is context-sensitive just in case for some \( c, c' \), the content of \( \phi \) relative to \( c \) differs from the content of \( \phi \) relative to \( c' \).

\( \phi \) is indexically context-sensitive just in case it is context-sensitive, and that is at least partly because it contains an indexical.

\( \phi \) is parametrically context-sensitive just in case it is context-sensitive, and that is at least partly because it contains an expression which makes for parametric context-sensitivity.

Note that the context-sensitivity of an unembedded sentence is a bridge principle-dependent notion, since it is defined in terms of content. Change the bridge principle, and you potentially change which unembedded sentences count as context-sensitive.

Observe also the restriction to unembedded sentences. Why not leave it out, as is typical? For instance:

A sentence is context-sensitive if and only if it expresses different propositions relative to different contexts of use. Stanley [2005a, 16]

The problem arises when we consider a pair like (1) and (2) relative to the very same context \( c \). Suppose we consider a \( c \) such that \( R_c \) is the accessibility relation fixed by the laws of New Zealand, rather than by Maori tribal duty. What proposition does ‘Maori children must learn the names of their ancestors’ express relative to \( c \)? Is a proposition whose truth turns on the laws of New Zealand? That’s of course plausible for the sentence considered unembedded, but we don’t want to say that about the sentence when it is embedded as it is in (2), when (2) is considered relative to exactly the same \( c \).\(^{10}\)

Really it’s not clear what it means, given the discussion so far, to say that an embedded sentence “has content” or “expresses a proposition”. The bridge principles which tell us how to recover the content of (proposition expressed by) a sentence plus context are post-semantic—specifically, post-compositional. They handle unembedded sentences. For all we have said, the notion of content does not apply to embedded constituents. Those constituents of course have meanings—compositional semantic values—but not necessarily content in the sense we have been using that notion. Items of content are things that compositional semantic values conspire to help determine. It’s common to speak casually of the ‘semantic content’ of subsentential expressions, but since that talk risks blurring the semantic with the post-semantic, I avoid it.

This is also brings out the limitations of a definition along these lines:

\(^{10}\)From an abstract perspective, the worry here is very closely related to the worry Rabern [2013] presses against Kaplan in connection with variable assignments (reviewed in section 5 below).
To say that $e$ is context sensitive is to say that its contribution to the propositions expressed by utterances of sentences containing $e$ varies from context to context. Cappelen and Lepore [2005, 146]

We have not defined what an expression’s “contribution to the proposition expressed” is—it could not be compositional semantic value, since that never varies from context to context for any expression—but insofar as we can make sense of it, it seems like must would shake out as context-sensitive on this definition, simply because (1), considered unembedded, expresses different propositions relative to different contexts, and the must it contains is squarely to blame for that. But to say that must, or the whole sentence (1), is context-sensitive is to miss the nuance of the situation, and yields the somewhat awkward view that the sentence (2) is not context-sensitive, though it contains a context-sensitive expression.\footnote{Of course, a sentence might contain a context-sensitive expression and yet fail to be context-sensitive merely because the sentence is true relative to every context (for instance, ‘I am speaking or I am not’). But (2) is obviously not this kind of example.} Better to say that must, along with the whole sentence (1), make for parametric context-sensitivity, that (1) considered unembedded is (parametrically) context-sensitive, and that (2) is not context-sensitive.

While we’re straightening out definitions, it’s good to separate parametric context-sensitivity from another idea. Since parametric context-sensitivity is not indexical context-sensitivity, it might sound like what John MacFarlane calls nonindexical contextualism (MacFarlane [2009]; see also MacFarlane [2014, 4.6]). But these things are not the same, for MacFarlane has some different things in mind by ‘indexical’ and ‘context-sensitivity’. His definitions go like this. Where $P$ is a feature of context,

An expression is $P$-context-sensitive iff its extension at a context depends on the $P$ feature of the context.

An expression is $P$-indexical iff its content at a context depends on the $P$ of that context.

MacFarlane’s definition of ‘context-sensitivity’ is very broad (as he stresses). On this definition, most of us shake out as contextualists about predicates like book and proton and quantifiers like some and every, because the extensions of these at a context depend on a feature of context, namely, the world of the context. MacFarlane would say that the interesting questions are not about whether an expression is context-sensitive, but whether it is $P$-context-sensitive for some aspect $P$ of context, and about whether $P$-context sensitivity needs to be explained in terms of $P$-indexicality. Context-sensitivity without indexicality (using those terms as MacFarlane defines them) is what makes for nonindexical contextualism.
MacFarlane’s way of defining ‘indexicality’ is close to the way other authors, such as those cited recently, would define ‘context-sensitivity’. So it is not surprising that this definition of indexicality leads to the sort of difficulties we have just been reviewing. Holding fixed the analysis of section 3, take again (1). Is this sentence sensitive to the accessibility relation feature $R$ of context? Certainly the content of the sentence at $c$ depends on $R_c$. So it looks to be $R$-indexical on MacFarlane’s definition. But of course, when the sentence is embedded as in (2), all bets are off. The whole sentence (2) is not $R$-indexical on MacFarlane’s definition. Should we say nevertheless that its subclause is $R$-indexical? But supposing temporarily that we can speak with propriety of the content of embedded clauses, it would seem wrong to say that the content of the subclause depends in any way on context. Certainly it is not a function of $R_c$. Thus when an expression or sentence make for parametric context-sensitivity, it’s hard to say whether they count as indexical or not, given MacFarlane’s definition.

It seems unclear how to apply MacFarlane’s notion of indexicality in a setting where expressions can be parametrically context-sensitive. The same goes for ideas which are defined in terms of that notion, in particular, nonindexical contextualism. In any case, it is clear enough that nonindexical contextualism is a different thing than parametric context-sensitivity.

5 Case 2: Variables

Earlier I said a content bridge principle divides index parameters into at least two groups: content fixing and content variable. There is a third way a content bridge principle might deal with a parameter: it might bind it.

One sees a version of this sort of idea in the textbook semantics for first-order logic. This semantics is usually given as a recursive definition of satisfaction: the semantics compositionally defines what it is for a wff to be satisfied by a pair of a model and a variable assignment. Although satisfaction is relative to a model and assignment, truth isn’t: truth is only relative to a model. Yet truth at a model is defined in terms of satisfaction at a model and variable assignment. Typically it looks something like this:

$$M \vDash \phi \iff \text{for any } g, M \vDash_g \phi$$

That is, $\phi$ is true relative to model $M$ ($M \vDash \phi$) just in case for any variable assignment $g$, $\phi$ is satisfied by $M$ relative to $g$ ($M \vDash_g \phi$). The unrelativized notion is defined in terms of the relativized notion by quantifying into the latter’s open position, tying that position off.

Turning back to our two-dimensional setting, it is not uncommon to think of variable assignments and index parameters as somehow set apart from each
other once they are both on the scene. (This is often reflected in the notation: one sees things written as ‘$M, c, i \vDash_\varphi$’ where the variable for the assignment function is subscripted to the turnstile, while reference to the index is off to the left, beside reference to the model.) Maybe this is partly because index parameters usually correspond to elements that can be found within the underlying semantic model, whereas a variable assignment could be conceived of as a mapping from an exogenous element (variables). Another reason assignments and indices are kept apart may be because there is debate, for some linguistic phenomena, about whether they are best handled on the model of modal operators, or on the model of quantifiers and variables. (See for instance the discussion of tense in King [2003]; also Cresswell [1990].)

Be that as it may, there is no harm in thinking of variable assignments as corresponding to just another index parameter (Lewis [1970]), and that is how I will think of them here. In first-order logic, after all, quantifiers are sentential operators which semantically function as assignment-shifters.

There is an interesting tension in Kaplan [1977/1989] about how to deal with the variable assignment. When he defines truth at a context for his formal semantics (547), the definition goes like this (using our notation, and skipping reference to models):

$$\phi \text{ is true at } c \text{ iff for all } g, \left[ \phi \right]^{c, w, t, g}_c = 1$$

While context is used to fix the world and time parameters, the variable assignment parameter is separated out—he universally quantifies over it to tie off, in the style we just saw is usual in the semantics for the language of first-order logic. However, in Kaplan [1989], a different idea is floated:

Taking context in this more abstract, formal way, as providing the parameters needed to generate content, it is natural to treat the assignment of values to free occurrences of variables as simply one more aspect of context. My point is taxonomic. The element of content associated with a free occurrence of a variable is generated by an assignment. Thus, for variables, the assignment supplies the parameters that determines content just as the context supplies the time and place parameters that determine content for the indexicals “now” and “here”. (591).

That’s to say, we can speak with propriety of the “the variable assignment of the context”, as we can about the world or time of the context. These remarks point towards a definition of truth at a context that would bring the assignment function in line with the other parameters:

$$\phi \text{ is true at } c \text{ iff } \left[ \phi \right]^{c, w, t, g}_c = 1$$
Now we have already noted that the definition of truth at a context is one thing and the bridge principle connecting semantic value to content is another. We said that Kaplan goes in for the Kaplan bridge principle, which says that the content of \( \phi \) in \( c \) is just whatever is left over when you evaluate the two-dimensional intension of a sentence at \( c \). That’s a function from indices to truth-values. This means that if the indices include a variable assignment parameter, then this object must vary in truth with respect to variable assignment.

That is a rather nonstandard idea about the occupant of the content role for sentences—and one Kaplan nowhere explicitly embraces. On the contrary, it is pretty clear he thinks that while propositions vary in truth with respect to world and time, they do not vary in truth with respect to variable assignment.

There is a problem here, as Rabern [2013] brings out (see also Rabern and Ball [2019]). We can’t: (i) have the Kaplan bridge principle, (ii) insist that the realizer of the content role is not something that varies in truth with respect to variable assignment, but (iii) use variable assignments to give compositional semantics for quantifiers and variables in something like the usual way. For (i) and (ii) together entail that there is no variable assignment parameter in the index; but (iii) entails that such a parameter has to be some shiftable aspect of the point of evaluation for sentences. At best we seem cornered into the weird idea that, since we can’t conceptualize variable assignments as a component of the index, we must locate the shiftable variable assignment dimension of meaning somehow in the context parameter. That is, we seem to have to say that quantifiers shift assignments by shifting the context parameter. (Or we must now trade our single context parameter for a set of separately shiftable “context parameters”, one of which is a variable assignment parameter.) That would seem to make quantifiers, in Kaplan’s jargon, monsters.

Obviously this is not where Kaplan wanted to end up. Whether or not we should be afraid of monsters, ordinary variable binding would seem to be a surprising reason to let them in. Maybe the realizer of the content role is the sort of thing that varies with something like variable assignments (cf. Heim [1982], Cumming [2008], Ninan [2012], Stalnaker [2014]), but the mere fact that we need variable assignments in the semantics for quantifiers is not an especially good reason for thinking so.

I think it is clear how we should want to escape this problem: give up (i), but keep (ii) and (iii), together with the idea that context fixes a default assignment. The variable assignment parameter is part of the index, but it is content-fixing. For instance, our bridge principle might be:

---

12 Despite the fact that contexts correspond to a single parameter in the formalism of Kaplan [1977/1989], Rabern [2013] reads Kaplan as working with just such a ‘parametrized’ notion of contexts in the semantics, citing remarks at Kaplan [1989, 591]. As indicated, I confine myself to Lewis’s style of two-dimensional semantics in this paper, where contexts are not definitely not parametrized. (More on the context parameter in section 8.)
Bridge principle 3.

The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is \{ $w : [\phi]_{c,w,t,g,c} = 1$ \}

Or, if we want to be temporalist,

Bridge principle 4.

The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is \{ $(w,t) : [\phi]_{c,w,t,g,c} = 1$ \}

A principle along such lines fits much of what Kaplan wants to say. (What it does not save, as the discussion in Rabern [2013] brings out decisively, is Kaplan’s idea that content is compositional. More on that below.)

I think this is in many respects the sort of solution we find implicitly in the literature. For it allows us to the kind of thing that is has routinely been said about the semantics of pronouns for decades (see for instance, Quine [1960], Montague [1970], Dowty et al. [1980], Heim and Kratzer [1998]). On the one hand,

(3) He is wise.

can be understood to be about a particular contextually fixed person—say, Jeff Lebowski. We model that by saying that the pronoun is a variable, that the context of utterance fixes\textsuperscript{13} a variable assignment, and that assignment assigns the pronoun (variable) a suitable denotation—for instance, Jeff Lebowski (or an individual concept of Jeff Lebowski, etc.). When we then turn to:

(4) Every bowler thinks he is wise.

we see the pronoun in the embedded clause has a bound reading. We don’t need an ambiguity theory of the pronoun to handle the bound and free occurrences, any more than such a theory is required in the semantics of first-order logic. The quantifier, or its associated lambda abstract, shifts the variable assignment for the embedded clause. To arrive at the truth-conditions of the whole, we must consider the embedded clause at a range of shifted assignments, in basically the way we see in first-order logic.\textsuperscript{14} But the result of the semantics is that (4) is not variable assignment-sensitive—its truth value and content do not depend on the contextually fixed assignment function—whereas (3) is so dependent. This is a paradigm of parametric context-sensitivity.

\textsuperscript{13}Somehow—insert here a theory of anaphora resolution. Also we might prefer to say that context fixes only a partial variable assignment, which could be represented as a set of total variable assignments.

\textsuperscript{14}Recall the first-order logic clause is: $M \models \varphi$ iff for all $d \in D_M$, $M \models [\varphi_{x \rightarrow d}]$, where $g[x \rightarrow d]$ is a variable assignment mapping $x$ to $d$ and which is everywhere else like $g$. 
Since this way of thinking about pronouns is familiar, parametric context-sensitivity is familiar. And since many, many things in natural language semantics have been analyzed with the help of (perhaps covert) variables of various sorts—think of quantifier and modal domain restrictions, tenses, comparison classes for gradable adjectives, situation or event variables in the treatment of aspect, relational expressions like local and home, and so on, in a list that could be arbitrarily extended—parametric context-sensitivity starts to look, if anything, like context-sensitivity in its garden-variety form. The kind of indexical context-sensitivity that Kaplan [1977/1989] is focused on—expressions whose context-sensitivity seems especially resistant to being shifted away by any embedding environment, like the first-person pronouns and demonstrative expressions—begins by contrast to look rather exceptional.

6 First-person pronouns as parametrically context-sensitive

Indeed, those expressions start to look so exceptional that one begins to suspect they can’t really be exceptions. Pressure to bring their analysis closer to the paradigm represented by third-person pronouns comes inter alia from bound readings. Let me briefly discuss the case of first-person singular pronouns. My interest is not in defending the view that these pronouns are parametrically context-sensitive—I only want to sketch what such a view would look like, drawing on Santorio [2010]—and thereby to give a sense of the sort of the potential empirical reach of parametric context-sensitivity.

On the issue of whether and how I is shiftable, two sorts of data have received particular attention. One is evidence of indexical-shifting intensional operators in languages beyond English, like Amharic, Zazaki, and Slave (Schlenker [2003], Anand and Nevins [2004], Anand [2006]). Second there are the kind of cases discussed by Rullman [2004]—what Kratzer [2009] calls “fake indexicals”. This example from Partee [1989] was perhaps the first:

(7) I’m the only one around here who will admit that I could be wrong.

The embedded occurrence of the first-person pronoun seems to have a reading where it performs as a variable bound by a predicate abstract. (“I’m the only one around here with the property of being an x who will admit that x could be wrong.”) This example is obviously difficult to explain if the semantics for I is given in Kaplan’s style—for instance, some version of:

\[ I^{c,i} = \text{the speaker of } c \]

For in the absence of context-shifting operators, this semantic value lead us to expect an unshiftable referent.\footnote{Some authors (e.g., Schlenker [2011]) view these two sorts of case as disconnected; others (e.g., Kratzer [2009]) think they are related.}

Kratzer [2009] argues that bound variable readings for first-person pronouns “present a major challenge for unified semantic analyses of referential and bound variable pronouns”, because although “a unified account for indexical and bound variable uses is easy to achieve for the third person pronoun he” there “seems to be no straightforward way to assign [first person pronouns] interpretations that could produce both indexical and bound variable readings” (188). To make her point, she considers a hypothetical treatment of I as a variable parallel to he:

For all variable assignments \( g \) admissible in context \( c \):

(a) \( [\text{he}_5]^{c,g} = g(5) \) if \( g(5) \) is a single male, undefined otherwise.
(b) \( [\text{I}_5]^{c,g} = g(5) \) if \( g(5) \) is the speaker in \( c \), undefined otherwise.

She writes:

Assuming that admissible variable assignments are constrained by utterance contexts, (a) covers both indexical and bound variable uses of he. A particular context \( c \) might determine that \( 5 \) picks out your grandfather, for example. All variable assignments admissible in that context will then assign your grandfather to \( 5 \). Since the reference of he is fixed in such a context, he comes out as a referential pronoun. Other contexts might not determine a reference for \( 5 \). In that case, different assignments admissible in such contexts could assign different individuals to \( 5 \), and he\(_5\) could thus be treated as a nontrivial bound variable pronoun. This type of account cannot be extended to 1st or 2nd person pronouns. Any admissible context \( c \) must pick out fixed referents for those pronouns. Even if we represent 1st or 2nd person pronouns as bound variables, as in (b) all admissible assignments for a given context \( c \) have to assign the same individual to them and, consequently, (b) cannot produce a nontrivial bound variable reading for I\(_5\). (188)

Drawing especially on Cable [2005], Schlenker [2003], Anand and Nevins [2004], Anand [2006], Kratzer ultimately favors the thesis that there is a species of predicate abstraction that involves context-shifting. She explores what it takes to explain the apparently highly limited distribution of this form of abstraction.

There clearly is a problem of explaining how Partee’s examples work without overgenerating—without predicting binding possibilities for first-person pronouns that don’t exist—and Kratzer advances our understanding on this matter. But I want to examine the way Kratzer sets up the problem in the paragraph
quoted above, in particular with the contrast she draws to the third-person case. She seems to say that the difference between a bound and a free (or “referential”) occurrence of he\textsubscript{5} depends on the extent to which context resolves the value of this pronoun. In particular, in order to get a bound reading for he\textsubscript{5} at a context c, she seems to suggest that c should not “determine a reference” for he\textsubscript{5}.

Is this the case? Let’s consider an example sentence, with two occurrences of the same pronoun (having the same variable index):

(8) He\textsubscript{5} is wise, and every bowler thinks he\textsubscript{5} is wise.

Depicting the sentence with the above indexing is usually understood to convey that the pronouns are co-referential. So normally this would be read as picking out a reading of the second pronoun where it is unbound by the intervening quantifier. But one key thing missing here is any indication of what the binder associated with the quantifier is binding. Make the routine assumption that a quantifier phrase can be associated with an index corresponding to the variable it binds.\textsuperscript{17} Then here are two possibilities:

(9) He\textsubscript{5} is wise, and [every bowler]\textsubscript{5} thinks he\textsubscript{5} is wise.

(10) He\textsubscript{5} is wise, and [every bowler]\textsubscript{4} thinks he\textsubscript{5} is wise.

(9) corresponds to a bound reading of the second occurrence of he\textsubscript{5}, while (10) corresponds to a free (referential) reading. Of course, the situation is exactly like the difference in predicate logic between (Fx \land \forall x Gx) and (Fx \land \forall y Gx).

The point is that we can make perfect sense of the possibility that (i) context c fixes a value for he\textsubscript{5}, even while (ii) there are occurrences of he\textsubscript{5} which are bound as considered relative to c. We might consider (9) relative to a context which fixes JL as the initialized value of he\textsubscript{5}. That will do crucial work in the first conjunct. But in the same example evaluated relative to the same context, another occurrence of he\textsubscript{5} might be bound. This presents no difficulty. A variable in \(\phi\) taking a bound reading relative to c is perfectly compatible with c fixing a value for that variable. The situation is not really different from the way in which a modal operator might require us to assess an embedded clause at a possible world other than the world of the context.

This point matters to the issue of what it would mean to treat first-person pronouns as variables analogous to third-person pronouns. For it lets us see how we could simultaneously say: (i) all admissible assignments for a given context c map the variable I to the speaker at c; but also (ii) occurrences of I admit of bound readings at c.

\textsuperscript{17}The association might come via affiliation with a lambda abstract which does the real binding, as for instance in Heim and Kratzer [1998]. The details don’t matter here.
Kratzer is of course correct that the semantic value she mentions for \( I \), labeled (b) above, presents a problem. It anchors the denotation of \( I \) to \( c \), so its denotation cannot shift unless context shifts. What we might do instead is bring the semantics closer to that of an ordinary variable—along the lines of:

\[
[I]^{c,g} = g(1) \text{ if } g(1) \text{ is a single person, undefined otherwise.}
\]

—and then move the usual requirement that \( I \) picks out the speaker to the post-semantic bridge principle, relocating it from the lexical entry for the word. This is essentially the proposal of Santorio [2010]. Let me describe his basic idea. If first-person pronouns are variables, then if we imagine that certain indices are only carried by first-person pronouns—suppose \( 1 \) is such an index:\(^{18}\)—then just as we lay it down that:

\[
t_c := \text{the time of context } c
\]

\[
w_c := \text{the world of context } c
\]

when we are explaining how to interpret a bridge principle that invokes those things, we can lay it down that:

\[
g_c(1) := \text{the speaker of } c
\]

Thereby we tell part of the story of what \( g_c \) is—of how it is supposed to be determined by context. That after all is a story we owed anyway, if we go in for the popular idea that there is such a thing as “the variable assignment of the context”. But since the first person pronoun is a variable, it is in-principle possible for there to be operators that shift its value.\(^{19}\)

\(^{18}\)Drawing on ideas going back to Schlenker [1999, 2011], Santorio [2010] proposes that first-person pronouns are variables whose numeral indices carry a special diacritical marking, and which are evaluated relative to dedicated variable assignment. I am abstracting away from these details (and their empirical motivations), in order to just get at the basic shape of an analysis of first-person pronouns as parametrically context-sensitive.

\(^{19}\)To be fully exact, we should that add there is a slight complication here, owing to the fact that the indices carried by pronouns are to some extent fictions. On the target reading, and modulo any purely syntactic constraints on indices there may be, ‘He6 is wise, and [every bowler]5 thinks he5 is wise’ is serviceable as a representation of the sentence, but so would be ‘He6 is wise, and [every bowler]5 thinks he5 is wise’ and ‘He5 is wise, and [every bowler]8 thinks he8 is wise’—these are notational variants (whereas ‘He4 is wise, and [every bowler]5 thinks he5 is wise’ corresponds to a different reading). Strictly speaking, a reading of a sentence fixes an (infinite) set of permissible indexings of the index-bearing elements, and context fixes a (perhaps partial) variable assignment only relative to some permissible way of allocating indices—to a choice of notational variant. Thus if \( \Phi \) is the set of notational variants of \( \phi \), then what context supplies is not a particular variable assignment, but rather a function from \( \Phi \) to variable assignments (cf. Ninan [2012, 29, fn. 42]). The important thing is just that the first person pronoun receive a distinctive sort of variable or variable index, so that it can be identified across notational variants in the post-semantic bridge principle.
It is interesting to compare the situation here to the eternalist who also wants temporal operators, and so wants a time index parameter. This eternalist will have a bridge principle such as principle 1 or 3 above, where context is used to fix the value of the time parameter. Such a principle lets the eternalist capture the idea that the content of tensed sentences depends on the time of the context of utterance—even if sensitivity to the context time is not written into the lexical entry for any expression. The same kind of story could be told for first person indexicals. With the right bridge principle, we can see how it could be that the content of sentences containing first-person pronouns depends (absent shifting) on the speaker of the context, despite the fact that no lexical entry requires reference to “the speaker of c”.

All this might seem like a curious bureaucratic reshuffling of familiar ideas, but part of what is at issue here is the division of labor on the road to the content of sentences containing first-person indexicals. We all know that (outside of unusual cases) I picks out the speaker. But where is the right place to put this aspect of our linguistic competence? Is in the lexical entry for I? Or does that aspect come in the level of the bridge principle which explains how variables receives their (default but shiftable) values from context? If the latter, then binding is in principle possible for these variables without context-shifting operators. (That doesn’t imply there aren’t context-shifting operators; it just means that context-shifting is not the only way of making sense of bound readings of first-person pronouns.) Note that if the context-sensitivity of first-person pronouns is parametric, then they are not indexical, in our defined sense of ‘indexical’.

The bridge principle is post-semantic, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t reflective of one’s semantic competence, or that it is “outside the language faculty”. To locate something in the post-semantics isn’t yet to locate it in the pragmatics, especially if the latter is understood to be a domain where linguistic facts are explained substantially by appeal to the general rationality of speakers. For all we’ve said, the bridge principle could be part of semantic competence narrowly construed; part of general pragmatic reasoning; or a mix of both.

7 Monsters

If we have operators for shifting indexicals, do we have monsters? There are alternative legitimate senses of ‘monster’ in the literature, as for instance Schlenker [2011], Rabern [2013], Rabern and Ball [2019], Stalnaker [2014], Santorio [2019] bring out. Let’s separate three notions in particular:

1. Context-shifting operators. The kind of operator shifts the context parameter, understanding the context parameter along the lines of Lewis
2. **Indexical-shifting** operators. The kind of operator that shifts the dimension(s) of evaluation which some or all the things traditionally called ‘indexicals’ are sensitive to, especially the first person and second person pronouns.

3. **Content-shifting** operators. The kind of operator that shifts a content-fixing dimension of evaluation.

These are all conceptually different things, though they may coincide, or stand in various entailment relations, in specific frameworks under specific assumptions; they all make sense; and for each, we can ask whether they are ever realized in any natural language. The recent empirical literature generally uses ‘monster’ to mean either a context-shifting operator or an indexical shifting operator (Schlenker [2003, 2011], Anand and Nevins [2004], Anand [2006], Santorio [2010, 2012]).

Content shifters are what Rabern and Ball [2019] call *content monsters*, and they correspond to the notion of monster identified in Rabern [2013]. What is the motivation for this interpretation of ‘monster’? Rabern fixes on the important point that Kaplan’s prohibition on monsters is traceable to his assumption that the content of a sentence in context is a function of the contents of its component parts in that context (an idea in turn animated partly by his ideology of direct reference). This assumption about the compositionality of content is not compatible with the existence of operators that shift content fixing parameters, for the sort of reasons reviewed already in sections 4 and 5. Parametric context-sensitivity—which exists whenever there are content-shifting operators—is an obstacle to seeing compositionality as operating anywhere other than at the level of (context-independent) semantic values. On Rabern’s reading of Kaplan, monsters are the sort of operators which would disrupt the compositionality of content. That fundamentally is what is supposed to be monstrous about them.

If within our Lewisian two-dimensional setting the Kaplan bridge principle is assumed along with his semantics for the things traditionally called indexicals, these three notions of monster coincide, a point the discussion in Rabern and Ball [2019] brings out. In such a framework, context-shifters just are indexical-shifters, and nothing could shift indexicals without shifting the context parameter. And while the Kaplan bridge principle implies that there are no content-fixing *indices*, the context dimension of evaluation is itself content-fixing in the relevant sense, inasmuch as its value is not abstracted over, like a content variable parameter; instead it enters into the determination of content. So in such a setting, the only sort of thing that could function as a content-shifting monster

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20 This is close to what Rabern and Ball [2019] call a ‘formal’ monster.
is an operator that shifts the context. No surprise, then, that these operators were slow to be distinguished. But once we drop these two assumptions, these operators can all come apart. There might be content-shifting operators, but no indexical shifters or context shifters; or there might be indexical shifters, but no context shifters. If we have something like Santorio’s semantics for the things traditionally called indexicals, there might even be context shifters but no indexical shifters.

We might think of the above list as ordered by decreasing exoticness. Content-shifting operators are ubiquitous—at least as ubiquitous as ordinary quantifiers. Indexical shift is considerably rarer, but seems to exist, perhaps even in English. True context-shifting perhaps remains unattested—the issue here is about whether the seeming examples can’t instead be understood along the lines of assignment-sensitive indexical shift, a matter in turn tied up with the status of the context parameter (about which more in section 8).

Since we can distinguish these three kinds of operator, it is a terminological question which (if any) to call monsters. If one approaches this as a question of Kaplan exegesis, Rabern [2013], Rabern and Ball [2019] make a strong case for identifying monsters with content-shifting operators. Moreover, such operators correspond to an interesting category, and interesting categories should have names. On the other hand, ‘monster’ seems now to have taken on a life of its own. Given that so much of the discussion of monsters in the recent empirical literature is tied up with the interpretation of indexicals, and given that the term conjures the idea of something rare or out of the ordinary (not something present virtually everywhere there is variable binding), it seems more consonant with contemporary usage to reserve ‘monster’ for operators which are either context-shifters or indexical shifters. Then again, since we can speak more exactly in terms of context-shifting, indexical-shifting, or content-shifting operators as necessary, it’s perhaps even more tempting to just drop talk of monsters altogether.

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21Rabern and Ball [2019] seem to be skeptical about the interest of indexical shifters. Discussing a definition of ‘monster’ along such lines, they write:

But this definition is completely uninteresting given that the set \{I, you, \ldots\} is stipulative. Why is it interesting that there are operators that shift the extension of expression in that class? We need to be told something about the expressions in that class in order for the ban on monsters to have any substance. (414)

But one might think it goes without saying that the first and second person pronouns correspond to an important and natural class of context-sensitive expressions, expressions which are fascinatingly difficult to bind as compared to the third person pronouns. The class is even more natural if there are operators which specialize in shifting them. Rabern and Ball seem to suggest that insofar as such operators are interesting, it is because they would belong to the broader class of content-shifting operators. Of course it’s notable if an operator is content-shifting; but given that ordinary quantifiers are content-shifting, it’s not that notable. Indexical shift, on the other hand, seems clearly more notable than that.
Let me turn to the idea of a context-shifting operator. Is there something conceptually problematic about this idea? You might think so if you think: “If it shifts, then ipso facto it’s part of the index”. But that would be mistaken. Context-shifting operators, understood as distinct from index-shifting operators, are logically possible things. If they don’t seem possible, you may be confusing semantic and post-semantic levels. What is true that the only context that ever matters to a bridge principle is the context of utterance—the matrix context for the whole sentence. It is that context that does the content-fixing for the relevant index parameters. If a sentence contains a context-shifting operator, then expressions embedded by the operator are evaluated relative to shifted values for the context parameter in the compositional process, but that doesn’t mean context is shifted from the point of view of the bridge principle. The bridge principle is post-semantic; context-shifters, if there are any, are part of the semantics. One should not confuse the post-semantic role of context in the bridge principle (where talk of “shifting” makes no real sense) with the possibility of compositional semantic context-shifting (which is perfectly intelligible, if perhaps exotic or unattested). If you confuse these roles, you might think context-shifting operators are impossible, when they aren’t.

Lewis might seem to have a different view of this matter when he says that “contexts are no substitute for indices because contexts are not amenable to shifting” [Lewis, 1980, 88]. He is often read as stipulating that contexts do not shift by definition (see for instance Schlenker [2011], Stalnaker [2014]). But I read him as making an empirical assumption about the grammar of natural languages like English, not as stipulating a conceptual truth about the background formal framework, or about the meaning of ‘context parameter’. (Recall the paper is about what it takes to define truth-in-English.) He argues, following Cresswell [1972], that the dependence of truth on context is, a matter of empirical fact, “surprisingly multifarious”, that many of these sensitivities to context seem, as a matter of empirical fact, not in fact shiftable by operators, and that the hypothesis that there is an non-shifting context parameter with “countless features” could be used to model these multifarious sensitivities in a compact way. We misread him, I suggest, if we interpret him to be saying that contexts don’t shift by definition. What is definitional about contexts, rather, is their multitude of features. The difference between context and index is that “indices but not contexts can be shifted one feature at a time” (italics mine)—not that, by definition, contexts could never shift.

8 The status of the context parameter

But one might have a very different reason for doubting that there could be context-shifting operators. This worry is not about their being conceptually
problematic. Rather, the worry is that the context parameter, understood along Lewisian lines, isn’t necessary, because all context-sensitivity is, as a matter of empirical fact, parametric. Lewisian contexts enter into the story, not at the compositional semantic level, but rather at the post-semantic stage. So there is no context parameter. *A fortiori* there are no context-shifting operators.

This view of the place of context in semantics is defended by Santorio [2019]. There are a few ways we could state this view. Suppose we keep the definition of indexicality supplied at the end of section 2, which says that an indexical is any expression whose semantic value is a nontrivial function of the context parameter. Then the view under discussion holds that no expressions are indexical in this sense:

**Anti-indexicality.** No expressions are indexical.

Of course, the expressions traditionally called ‘indexicals’ still exist, but the idea is that their context-sensitivity is parametric, and therefore they don’t exhibit the sort of indexicality theorized by Kaplan. Since there is no indexical context-sensitivity on this view, the only sort of context-sensitivity we ever find is parametric:

**Context-sensitivity is parametrized.** All context-sensitivity is parametric.

How can there be parametric context-sensitivity without a context parameter—if we have indices only? How can context fix the values for the content-fixing indices if we’ve eliminated contexts from the compositional semantics? There is no problem here, for context was already doing its content-fixing work at a post-semantic level of description. To illustrate, consider again our first bridge principle:

**Bridge principle 1.**
The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is $\{w : [\phi]^c_{w}, x_{c}, y_{c}, z_{c} = 1\}$

In Santorio’s brave new context-free world, the closest bridge principle looks like this:

**Bridge principle 1’.**
The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is $\{w : [\phi]^{w}_{c}, x_{c}, y_{c}, z_{c} = 1\}$

That’s not a very difficult adjustment. The difference is just that our compositional semantic values are no long two-dimensional intensions—the context parameter is gone, and instead we assume an ordinary multiple indexing semantics. (Thus this brave new world is really the pre-Kaplan age of Lewis [1970],
To go this route is to exit the two-dimensional sandbox we have been in for most of the paper, but it doesn’t require traveling far. As Santorio notes, we can define truth at a context and entailment in the post-semantics along a similar pattern, differing from our earlier definitions just in the absence of one superscript.

The possibility of this view raises the question: why exactly do we need a context parameter? I agree with Santorio [2019] and Rabern and Ball [2019] that most of the traditional motivations fail. Is it secured by the alleged unshiftability of the things traditionally called indexicals? No: their context-sensitivity could yet be parametric (and anyway the allegation is still under investigation). Is it motivated by “double-indexing” phenomena? No: that would prove too much, as the last paragraph of Lewis [1980] already hints; double-indexing phenomena at best call (surprise) for more indices. Is a context parameter necessary to secure ‘I am here now’ as a logical truth? It is not, as Santorio [2019] explains. More grandly, is a context parameter necessary to preserve the idea that compositionality resides at the level of content? That idea wasn’t going to work out anyway, as Rabern [2013] showed. A context parameter may be pretty handy for all these things—save the last—but it is hardly forced upon us.

One last reason for recognizing a context parameter is the one mentioned at the end of the last section: the idea that a context parameter is needed to handle the multifarious influence of context. This idea deserves more examination. One of Lewis’s examples is:

(11) Fred came floating up through the hatch of the spaceship and turned left.

Drawing on a lecture in Fillmore [1997], he warns: “… it matters what point of reference and what orientation we have established. Beware: these are established in a complicated way… They need not be the location and orientation of the speaker, or of the audience, or of Fred, either now or at the time under discussion” (82). Lewis is right that this sentence is replete with difficulties of contextual resolution, though he might have said more about why exactly the difficulties motivate a context parameter specifically. Deictic reference with he is also established in a complicated way, but for all that it seems possible to model its context-sensitivity as parametric. I take it one of Lewis’s main worries is that the relations of comparative salience and of relevance in context, which apparently play an important role in fixing the content of many context-sensitive sentences, are fixed in a holistic manner, depending on multifarious features of the context. But the question is, even granting that salience and relevance are fixed by the features of a context in a holistic way, why think this fixing can’t take place at a post-semantic level? A context parameter is required in the compositional semantics only if there are expressions which exhibit non-parametrizable context-sensitivity. Say that a deep indexical is an indexi-
cal whose context-sensitivity could never be mirrored perfectly by a parametric counterpart. If there are deep indexicals, then we need a context parameter.

The question whether there are such expressions ties in with longstanding debates at the semantics-pragmatics boundary about pragmatic enrichment (for overviews, see Stanley [2005b], Recanati [2012]). To chew over just one example, consider a modification of a famous case due to Travis (Travis [1994, 1997]):

(12) Every leaf is green.

Travis draws out the potential for a rather intricate level of context-sensitivity. His story, slightly adjusted:

Pia’s Japanese maple is full of russet leaves. She paints them green. She reports, ‘That’s better. Every leaf is green.’ A botanist friend then phones, seeking green leaves for a study of green-leaf chemistry. ‘You can take some from my tree,’ Pia says. ‘Every leaf is green.’

(See Travis [1997, 89].) Travis would say: the first time Pia says ‘Every leaf is green’, she speaks truly; the second time, she speaks falsely. We have what looks like contextual variation in the possible worlds intension of *green*, but it is at least hard to see what the missing parameter is, such that resolution of this parameter finishes the job of selecting the set of green things at an arbitrary world. One might have the feeling that one brings one’s understanding of the full contextual situation to bear on how to resolve *green* in context—that it isn’t just one or two discrete and parametrizable features of context that come into play. And there is pressure to resolve this context-sensitivity pre-semantically rather than post-semantically, in order that the appropriate property be ascribed to each of the relevant possible values of the bound variable in the quantified sentence. All this might hint that deep indexicality is to be found, not in the things traditionally called indexicals, but rather in open class expressions like *green*.

It would be interesting if one or more of the sorts of cases typically discussed under the heading ‘pragmatic enrichment’ or ‘radical contextualism’—Travis-like cases, noun-noun compounds, metonymy, genitive/posessive case, non-literality, and the like—provided the best cases of deep indexicality, and therefore a rationale for a specifically two-dimensional semantics. But of course, any claim that something is a deep indexical reads as an invitation to just try harder to parametrize it. (See Szabó [2001] for what we can read in retrospect as a parametrically contextualist analysis of *green* answering to Travis.) There is a whack-a-mole quality to this debate; one has to consider the examples case by case.

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22 The adjustment I made to Travis’s original example was to make the subject a quantifier phrase, in order to generate this pressure.
Even if there are no uncontroversial examples of deep indexicals—so that a context parameter isn’t required to model the facts—still, we may reach a point where the variety and heterogeneity of parameters that would be necessary for a language fragment starts to look like too much as compared to a system with a context parameter. Suppose you face a choice between two systems that make all the same predictions: (i) a context-free semantics with a dozen indices, or (ii) a semantics with a context parameter and only two index parameters. Is there a conceptual reason to think (i) gets at the truth better than (ii)? If there is, we have not uncovered it here.

9 Case 3: indicative conditionals

Let me highlight a last place where attention to the question of bridge principles can be clarifying. This is in the theory of conditionals—in particular, the question what the content of indicative conditionals is on a theory like that of Stalnaker [1968, 1975]. On this theory, indicative conditionals are context-sensitive. Specifically there is a certain sensitivity to states of information which are determined by the context. But what’s perhaps less than easy to see is whether this theory makes indicative conditionals “subjective”. Do indicative conditionals shake out as descriptions of epistemic states, or of related states of information, on this theory? When I utter an indicative conditional, am I inter alia describing myself? The answer to this question interacts with the question what bridge principle is assumed in the background.

First let me remind you how the theory works. Suppose I have two favorite cafes. They are across the street from one another. I want to take you to one of them but don’t care which, so I pick one at random and off we go. Sitting in the cafe, I can say (13) but not (5):

(13) If we weren’t at this cafe, we’d be at the one across the street.

(5) If we’re not at this cafe, we’re at the one across the street.

Why not? Stalnaker [1975]: among the worlds in the context set—the set of worlds compatible with what is presupposed in our conversation—one are possibilities where we aren’t at this cafe. But indicative conditionals require that there be antecedent possibilities left open by (contained in) the context set of the conversation. In this way, they are sensitive to the context.

How does Stalnaker implement this idea? Here is the conditional semantics of Stalnaker [1968]:

\[ w \models \phi \rightarrow \psi \iff f(w, [\phi]) \models \psi\]

23Here I use \( \models \) to denote truth at a world (in a model—reference to models left implicit).
The semantics is stated in terms of a selection function \( f \) that maps a world \( w \) and a proposition (set of worlds) \( p \) to a world where \( p \) is true, subject to several constraints. Stalnaker is interested in the intuitive idea that a conditional \( \phi \rightarrow \psi \) is true at a world \( w \) just in case \( \psi \) is true at \( w' \), where \( w' \) makes \( \phi \) true and otherwise “differs minimally” from \( w \) (see also [Stalnaker, 2014, 150]). The formal semantics does not fix substantive criteria for minimal difference, though it could be said to capture some very general necessary conditions on any legitimate notion of minimal difference.

Now to account for the specialness of indicatives given this semantic setting, Stalnaker [1975] postulates a “pragmatic constraint” on the selection of \( f \): if we consider \( \phi \rightarrow \psi \) relative to a context of utterance \( c \) whose context set is \( C \), then for any \( w \in C \), it must be that \( f(w, \llbracket \phi \rrbracket) \) is also in \( C \). The constraint ensures that the selected world makes true all the presuppositions that \( C \) captures. Indicative conditionals are context-sensitive on this account because their truth or falsity depends on a selection function which is determined in a context-sensitive fashion.

Interesting questions arise when we attempt to transplant Stalnaker’s one-dimensional modal semantics into a two-dimensional setting. The selection function relevant for any given indicative conditional is said to depend on context, but once we are in a two-dimensional setting where context-sensitivity can be made explicit, hard choices need to be made about how exactly this sensitivity is implemented, and different implementations make different predictions. Let me describe a few implementations; others are possible.

According to the first implementation, indicative conditionals are indexically sensitive to context. Call this selection function indexicality. The semantics is:

\[
  c, w \vDash \phi \rightarrow \psi \iff c, f_c(w, \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c) \vDash \psi^{25}
\]

Stalnaker’s pragmatic constraint on indicatives amount to the requirement that whenever \( \phi \rightarrow \psi \) evaluated at \( c \) is indicative and \( w \in i_c \), \( f_c \) must be such that: \( f_c(w, \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c) \in i_c \).

\( \llbracket \phi \rrbracket \) is short for \( \{w : w \vDash \phi \} \). Strictly speaking, Stalnaker’s 1968 semantics defines the selection function on world-sentence pairs rather than world-proposition pairs, but the sentences are only used for the propositions they express, and the propositional formulation is more convenient for where I’m going.

Also, take me to be restricting attention to conditionals without modal or conditional antecedents—those raise numerous orthogonal issues.

\( ^{24} \) Besides the requirement that \( f(w, p) \in p \) for any \( w \) and \( p \neq \emptyset \), the constraints are: (i) if \( w \in p \), then \( f(w, p) = w \); (ii) \( f(w, \emptyset) = \) the absurd world, where everything is true; (iii) if \( p \) is true at \( f(w, q) \) and \( q \) is true at \( f(w, p) \), then \( f(w, p) = f(w, p) \).

\( ^{25} \) \( \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c \) is short for \( \{w : c, w \vDash \phi \} \). In general, as I consider further parameters, \( \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c \) will continue to pick out a set of worlds. If \( i \) is the sequence of operative indices besides the world parameter and \( i_c \) is the result of setting their values with those of \( c \), read \( \llbracket \phi \rrbracket^c \) to pick out \( \{w : c, w, i_c \vDash \phi \} \).
I mention this theory to set it aside. While it predicts the sensitivity of unembedded indicative conditionals to the context set, it fails to predict the insensitivity of (many) embedded indicative conditionals to the context set. For example, suppose now we’re in the cafe waiting for Bill to join us. Bill glances into our cafe but fails to spot us—the cafe is big and busy. He then goes looking for us in the cafe across the street. I might explain as follows: “I told him we’d be in this cafe or that one, so...”

(6) Bill believes that if we’re not at this cafe, we’re at the one across the street.

This sentence evidently embeds the conditional (5). Relative to the stipulated context, we observe that whereas (5) is marked, (6) is fine. This is hard to understand if the truth-conditions of the conditional proposition Bill is said to be belief-related to by (6) are determined with a selection function which is required to select a world from the context set of our conversation. After all, there is no world in our context set where the antecedent of that conditional is true: the cafe referred to in the antecedent of the conditional is the cafe we’re both presupposing we are in fact in. The upshot is that given selection function indexicality, (6) ought to strike us as about as marked as (5) relative to the stipulated context. That is the wrong prediction.

The bigger picture observation is that (5) is context-sensitive in a way that (6) is not. Context-sensitivity which goes away under the impact of certain forms of embedding is a good sign of parametric context-sensitivity. So let’s consider two ways of capturing the sensitivity of indicative conditionals to context parametrically.

The first way posits a variable somewhere in the syntax of the conditional for selection functions. The assignment function interprets this variable, and outputs a selection function. Call this selection function variablism. The semantics is:

\[
c, w, g \models \phi \rightarrow \psi \text{ iff } c, g(\alpha)(w, [\phi]^c), g \models \psi
\]

where \(\alpha\) is the relevant selection function variable and \(g(\alpha)\) is a selection function. This semantics could be packaged with all sorts of possible bridge principles, but one obvious one would require that the contextually supplied assignment function \(g_c\) map any selection function variable \(\alpha\) to a selection function satisfying Stalnaker’s pragmatic constraint. For example, something like:

**Bridge principle for selection function variablism.**

The content of \(\phi\) in \(c\) is \(\{w : c, w, g_c \models \phi\}\), where if \(\phi\) contains any selection function variable \(\alpha\), \(g_c(\alpha)\) is a selection function satisfying Stalnaker’s pragmatic constraint.

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26For now; I return to it in the next section.
Since the selection function enters into the semantics as the value of a variable, and variables are the sorts of thing that can be bound, this theory makes room for the in-principle possibility of shifting. Even if the value of the selection function variable at $g_c$ is constrained by the context set, this is going to be semantically beside the point when the conditional is embedded under any operator that shifts the assignment function at $\alpha$. We’d presumably have to say belief operators are such shifters if we want to square selection function variablism with (6). Let me call the selection function variablist semantics paired with a bridge principle like the one above the variablist package.

A second parametrically contextualist idea is to add an index parameter for states of information $i$, modeled as sets of worlds (as in Yalcin [2007]). Let me call this the shifty state semantics. It would look like this:

$$c, w, i \models \phi \rightarrow \psi \text{ iff } c, f(w, i \cap [\phi]^c), i \models \psi$$

This semantics departs from Stalnaker in that we no longer suppose that the selection function is provided by context. We locate the relevant context-sensitivity in the input to the selection function, rather than in the selection function itself. The context-sensitivity comes in parametrically, with a bridge principle that does some content-fixing for the information state parameter:

**Bridge principle for shifty state semantics.**

The content of $\phi$ in $c$ is $\{w : c, w, i_c \models \phi\}$.

(Where $i_c$ is the context set of $c$.) Let me call the shifty state semantics plus this bridge principle the shifty state package.

A nice feature of the shifty state package is that once the semantics is given and the bridge principle stated, one does not need to articulate Stalnaker’s pragmatic constraint separately. The constraint is automatically captured by this package. And since this account is parametrically contextualist, we have the in-principle ability to handle embeddings like (6) within the semantics. Yalcin [2007] already suggests that attitude verbs serve to shift the information state.

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27A third idea, which I don’t discuss for reasons of space, would involve adding a parameter for selection functions.

28A superior clause would be $c, w, i \models \phi \rightarrow \psi \text{ iff } c, f(w, i \cap [\phi]^c), i \cap [\phi]^c \models \psi$. On this alternative clause, conditionals would also shift the information state parameter, as in Yalcin [2007]. That would get better results with, for instance, right-nested conditionals. But I abstract from this complication here.

29Where does the selection function come from? One could say it is just fixed by the background semantic model—formally speaking, this is how it goes in Stalnaker [1968]. Alternatively, one can universally quantify over the selection function feature of the model at the end of semantic interpretation, in basically the spirit of the supervaluationist approach recommended by Stalnaker [1980].
parameter, independently motivating such shifts with a puzzle about epistemic modals.\textsuperscript{30}

Another attraction of this implementation of Stalnaker’s theory of indicative conditionals is that it is conservative with respect to context-sensitivity. We shouldn’t postulate context-sensitivity beyond necessity. If the context-sensitivity of indicative conditionals is located in the input to the selection function, we shouldn’t say the selection function itself is context-sensitive. Of course there may be other reasons, beyond the few considerations we have brought up, to think the selection function is sensitive to context. But until we see those data, it makes sense to accept only the minimum effective dose of context-sensitivity needed.

Now let’s come back to the question I framed at the start. Do indicative conditionals shake out as descriptions of states of information on Stalnaker’s theory? When I utter an indicative conditional, am I inter alia describing myself? In particular, am I essentially describing the context set of my conversation?

This question is about the content of an unembedded indicative conditional in context. The answer, on both the variablist package and the shifty state package, is: no. On both theories, the content of a conditional proposition, once determined at a particular context, does not vary as a function of anyone’s epistemic state, anyone’s conversation, or any other state of information. The context set plays a role in fixing the content of the conditional proposition expressed, but the proposition so determined is not about the context set—where by that I mean: its truth does not vary as a function of what the context set of the context is like.

But it is interesting to see how one could give a different answer this question by changing, not the semantics, but the bridge principle. Suppose for example we kept the shifty state semantics, but adopted instead this bridge principle:\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Diagonal bridge principle.}

The content of $\phi$ relative to any context is $\{ c : c, w_c, i_c \models \phi \}$. Here the content of a conditional is taken to be a set of centered worlds, which we might understand along the lines of Lewis [1979] (cf. Egan [2007]). Now the answer to the question under discussion is: yes. The diagonal proposition can be construed as characterizing contexts based partly on their context sets—this proposition is partly characterizing what the agents at those contexts are mutually taking for granted. This is a kind of subjective content, in two ways. First, it is centered content. Second (and more relevant for present purposes),

\textsuperscript{30}Dynamic implementation of essentially the same idea about attitude verbs is in Heim [1992]. See also Anand and Hacquard [2013]. See Yalcin [2012] for some complications, with some solutions drawing on Willer [2013].

\textsuperscript{31}Compare the “diagonal view” discussed in Yalcin [2007].
it is an item of content whose truth at a centered world turns on a body of information—the information presupposed in discourse—fixed as a function of that centered world.\textsuperscript{32}

Two-dimensionalists of various stripes have often argued that sentences can be associated with two propositions, each playing some important role (Stalnaker [1978], Lewis [1980], Jackson [1998], Chalmers [1997]; Chalmers [2006] is an overview with further citations). Such theorists might prefer a bridge principle mapping semantics values in context to \textit{pairs} of propositions—to have names for them, \textit{horizontal} and \textit{diagonal} contents. A salient view in that vein would just glue together the two bridge principles we have already described for the shifty state semantics:

\textbf{Two-dimensionalist bridge principle.}

The horizontal content of $\phi$ in $c$ is \{ $w : c, w, i_c \models \phi$ \}, and its diagonal content is \{ $c : c, w, i_c \models \phi$ \}.

Needless to say, if we ask this two-dimensionalist whether indicative conditionals are subjective in their content, she will say \textit{yes} and \textit{no}, depending as the question concerns the diagonal or the horizontal.

\section{Pyrrhic indexicality}

The topic of indicative conditionals is also useful for illustrating the sort of debate that could be had about whether to handle any given case of context-sensitivity indexically or parametrically. In the last section I claimed that the idea that the selection function is indexically supplied comes to grief on simple embedding cases like (6). But if I read Stalnaker [2014] correctly, he would push back. Let me explain how.

Stalnaker proposes that a certain kind of “derived” context set is “relevant” for attitude ascriptions. If $R$ is Bill’s doxastic accessibility relation and $i$ is the basic context set of the conversation, Stalnaker says that the derived context set which is “relevant to the interpretation of statements, questions, or other speech acts” by us about Bill’s beliefs is given by the union of all the ways Bill’s doxastic state could be, for all we are presupposing given $i$—that is: $\bigcup_{w \in i} \{ w' : wRw' \}$ [Stalnaker, 2014, 92-3]. Unlike the basic context set, this derived context will\textsuperscript{32} Diagonal bridge principles bring out a limitation of the content fixing parameter/content variable parameter distinction. If we have the above principle, which kind of parameter is the $i$ parameter? On the one hand, its value is obviously fixed by the context parameter; on the other hand, the context parameter is itself variable. Therefore $i_c$ is variable, too; but that’s yet not to say that content is variable with respect to information states (it is not; it is variable with respect to centered worlds only). It appears we need a new term. We could call such parameters \textit{diagonalized}. I take it diagonalized parameters do not make for parametric context-sensitivity.
include worlds where we are not at this cafe, since in any normal case where we
say (6), there will be worlds \( w \) in our context set where Bill’s state of belief in
\( w \) leaves open worlds where we are not at this cafe. So, if Stalnaker’s pragmatic
constraint can be understood in such a way as to identify this derived context
as the one that matters for the indicative embedded in (6), we can escape the
original problem. On this theory, the whole ascription (6) would be context-
sensitive after all, because the embedded conditional is indexically sensitive to
a derived context determined as a function of the context set. The idea is that
when we evaluate a sentence like (6) at a context, what we should be doing
is considering contexts \( c \) where the sentence was just uttered. The utterance
of the sentence itself changes the context, and in particular, makes it the case
(somehow) that the derived context associated with Bill’s belief state is the
one that is subject to the pragmatic constraint associated with the embedded
indicative.

Stepping back, this illustrates a general strategy one might pursue to pro-
tect any indexical analysis from counterexamples. The idea is to save an index-
ical analysis by factoring in aspects of the context of utterance to do with the
tokening of the actual sentence itself, particularly the tokening of the embed-
ding environment of the expression being analyzed.\(^{33}\) (Cf. Dorr and Hawthorne
[2013].) Instead of fully accounting for the interaction of the attitude verb and
the embedded conditional in (6) within the normal compositional semantic pro-
cess, the idea is to cite the extra-semantic context change induced by the very
tokening of the sentence, and to make the embedded conditional indexically
sensitive to such effects.

This is a risky way to save indexicality. The idea that expressions can be
indexically sensitive to the effect of tokening their own embedding environments
should be regarded as a view of last resort. For this kind of appeal to context
can easily trivialize compositional explanation, and usually it requires a lot of
non-explanatory stipulation.

Let me use an example to bring out the worry. It is a familiar point that the
connective \( \text{and} \) can combine syntactically with most every major category: we
can use it to combine clauses (‘Bob is at the party \( \text{and} \) Steve is at the party’),
noun phrases (‘Bob \( \text{and} \) Steve are at the party’), verb phrases (‘Bob is at the
party \( \text{and} \) dancing’), adjectival phrases (‘Bob is at a fun \( \text{and} \) loud party’), and
so on. In a classic paper, Partee and Rooth [1983] gave a sophisticated analysis
of these facts, proposing a meaning for \( \text{and} \) which involves type-shifting. Con-
sider the following hypothetical extreme contextualist rejoinder to their analy-
sis: “We don’t need type-shifting at all. Partee and Rooth are missing the basic
point that \( \text{and} \) is indexically context-sensitive. Specifically, it is sensitive to the

\(^{33}\) I don’t take a stand on whether Stalnaker favors this as a general strategy. My interest
is not in Stalnaker exegesis but rather in this idea about how to save an indexical analysis.
very linguistic environment in which it appears—to the aspect of context which consists in its having been tokened in the grammatical place it was tokened. If it appears in between clauses, it expresses a function expecting the type of clause-meanings; if it appears in between noun phrases, it expresses a function expecting the type of noun phrases; and so on. What function and expresses depends on features of context—specifically, its own linguistic context.”

Such a ‘theory’ can certainly cover the data, but only because it is already so close to a list of the facts that need to be explained. It is not surprising that Partee and Rooth never consider an analysis along these lines. It is pretty clear that this kind of appeal to context can in principle ‘solve’ any problem in semantics. (Thorny questions about indefinites are finally dissolved: in some linguistic contexts, they are semantically equivalent to existential quantifiers; in others, to free variables; in still others...) Wherever a counterexample to your semantic analysis of an expression seems to appear, you can ‘save’ the analysis by stipulating that the expression, when it appears in the linguistic context of the counterexample, just means something different there—whatever it needs to mean to avoid the problem. Thereby this kind of strategy can easily trivialize any challenge of compositionality.

Stalnaker’s appeals to derived contexts are of course not as gross as this example with and. But it does seem to me that trivialization threatens down the road he is recommending. It threatens, for instance, when we imagine giving a list of constraints that tell us how the selection function for indicative conditionals is to be indexically resolved as a function of such-and-such features of the linguistic environment—features of the context that owe to the effect of uttering the sentence the conditional appears in. Such a theory requires various stipulated constraints for embedding under connectives, quantifiers, attitude verbs, and so on, stipulations which explain how the conditional is indexically sensitive to the extra-semantic effects of saying things which purportedly change which derived contexts are salient or live. Even if we can define various derived contexts from a context set in abstraction from specific linguistic constructions (as Stalnaker suggests we can), their specific forms interaction with pieces of discourse have to be stipulated, as do the facts about how tokenings of embedding environments impact judgements about which derived contexts matter where. One ends up here with a list of constraints. (“Expression α is sensitive to feature X of context when it’s unembedded; but it’s sensitive to feature Y when embedded under operator O; but it’s sensitive to feature Z when embedded under operator O′...”) Such lists are normally the data of theorizing, not the result of it.

It is important to see that once one is far enough down this path, one loses any Gricean rationale one might theoretically have had for trying to keep certain interactions out of the compositional semantics. Grice taught us to be
mindful not to pay, in the semantics, for what can already be had for free in the pragmatics. He taught us not to mistake the predictable features of any rational communicative practice for features to do with conventions of language, or with specifically linguistic knowledge. But of course, a theory which involves a list of stipulated pragmatic constraints about how conditionals are indexically sensitive to the impact of tokening the sentences they appear in must posit conventional knowledge of these constraints. Unless quite a lot more is said, it doesn’t come for free. On the contrary, this gets expensive, because in the absence of the productivity predicted by something like compositional interaction, construction-specific constraints are apt to accumulate. Outsourcing work to pragmatics is no explanatory merit if the pragmatics (or post-semantics) is nontrivially complexified as a result, and certainly not if the work could have been handled comparatively elegantly within the semantics. Remember: we need a semantics for conditionals and modals anyway. If some semantic theories but not others can save us from stipulations in the pragmatics—especially, the sort of explanation-compromising stipulations we see in the example in with and—then other things being equal, we should prefer the former kind. What’s nice about parametric context-sensitivity is that allows for a relatively reigned-in kind of context dependence, one that leverages compositional interaction in order to avoid, or at least limit, the need for stipulative lists.

11 Beyond two dimensions

My discussion of Stalnaker’s theory of conditionals doesn’t engage the further developments of Stalnaker [2014], which takes the theory in a more expressivist direction. Expressivist views, on some lines, are best understood as outside, or at least not fully contained in, the two-dimensionalist sandbox of this paper. For example, while we might read the expressivist views of Gibbard [2003] and of Yalcın [2007] as each invoking a distinctive index parameter (a hyperplan parameter in the case of the former, an information state parameter in the case of the latter), parameters they treat as content variable in the sense defined here, a key part of both theories, as Yalcın [2011] argues, is to treat the parameters as nonfactual. To treat the parameters as nonfactual is to reject the thought that the relevant fragments of discourse (normative talk and epistemically modal talk, respectively) ultimately answer to a “hyperplan determined by the context” or “information state determined by the context”. A definition of truth at a context like Kaplan’s, which would require those things to be defined, is disavowed on these expressivist views. That makes for a kind of failure of two-dimensionality. (We could say something similar for the story in Santorio [2016].)

This helps to get at one way a dispute between the expressivist and contex-
tualist can look. Both sides might agree completely in respect of the intensions that want to associate with expressions—they might agree on meanings, in one narrow but important sense. Their difference could instead be post-semantic, about how to fit the parameter into the larger picture. One side uses the parameter to model their ideas about the content of allegedly not-fully-factual states of mind, while the other side uses it to model a case of parametric context-sensitivity.

References


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