Contextualism in Semantics and Epistemology

Pro-Doc Romand FNS Mind and Reality
Certificat de Spécialisation en Philosophie Contemporaine
Geneva, spring 2011
Prof. P. Engel, J. Dutant, Episteme group.

1 Presentation

Taught by Pascal Engel (po) and Julien Dutant (as).
Tuesdays, 10–12, room A206 - aile Jura of the Bastions building, second floor.

Aims The seminar is common to the Certificat de Spécialisation en Philosophie Contemporaine and to the FNS Pro-Doc Programme on "Mind and Reality". It will address issues related to contextualism in semantics and epistemology, with a special emphasis on the semantics of "know" and related constructions such as epistemic modals. It will include introductory presentations, discussions of the literature and invited talks. Students from linguistics are very welcome.

Description Contextualism in semantics is the thesis that a part (or, in radical versions, the whole) of linguistic meaning is sensitive to the context in which one speaks. In particular, epistemic contextualism is the view that the meaning of "knows" is context-sensitive; it has been put forward to solve the problem of scepticism. We will examine recent debates on semantic contextualism focusing on the case of "knows" and we will discuss its philosophical implications.

Resources and required reading All the necessary texts will be put on the seminar's dokeos website. If you do not have access to dokeos, please contact Julien Dutant.
We have selected a minimal number of texts that **you have to read**:

1. Before the seminar starts: **two short introductory texts** and, if you can, a longer paper of your choice. See the *Background readings* section below.

2. During the seminar: **one paper every week**. (Beware of DeRose's long paper for week 3!)

Additional readings are suggested as general background and for every week.

2 Background readings

Here are background readings for all the course. **Before the course starts, you should read both items marked ** and one of the items marked *.**

For everybody

- **Rysiew (2009) "Epistemic Contextualism", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, intro, section 2 and sections 3.1-3.2.

- **Braun (2010) "Indexicals", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, section 1.

For those mainly interested in epistemology

- Rysiew (2009), the fully entry.

- *Engel (2007) *Va Savoir!*, chap 2. Présentation et critique du contextualisme, en français.

- *Montminy (2009) "Le contextualisme épistémologique".

- *DeRose (2009) *The Case for Contextualism*, Oxford University Press, chap 1.
  The book also contains several papers that we will discuss.

- Hawthorne (2004) *Knowledge and lotteries*, esp. chaps. 2 and 4; available on OSO. More difficult.

For those mainly interested in semantics

- Braun (2010), the full entry.

- *Portner (2004) *What is meaning?* chap. 1 (intro. to truth-conditional semantics) and section 10.1 (on indexicals).

- *Huang (2006) *Pragmatics*, sections 1.3 (basic notions of pragmatics) and 2.1 (implicature).

- *Kaplan (1989) "Demonstratives", esp. sections I-VI and X-XIV. (28 p., pdf with the relevant pages on dokeos.)

- *Récanati (2008) *Philosophie du langage (et de l'esprit)*, parties I-II. (Partie I pour une première lecture. Introduction en français.)

- Récanati (2005) "Literalism and Contextualism: Some Varieties". Overview of the debate between moderate contextualism ("literalism") and radical contextualism ("contextualism"). More difficult.
  Voir Récanati (2007), chap.4 pour une version française.

- Récanati (2004) *Literal Meaning*, esp. Introduction, chaps 1 et 4. Trad. fr. Récanati (2007). A radical contextualist programme; see also .

- Stanley (2007) *Language in Context*, Introduction. A moderate contextualist programme.

- Cappelen and Lepore (2005) *Insensitive Semantics*, chaps 1-3 and 7. A radical anti-contextualist programme.

3 Schedule

Depending on guest speakers and participant's interest in further topics (3.5), we may alter some of the may-june sessions. See the the seminar's dokeos website for latest schedule updates.

3.1 Contextualism

22 fev. Contextualism in semantics: overview   See the previous section for required readings.

1 mar. Contextualism about *knows*   DeRose (1992) "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions".
Further reading (epistemology): Cohen (1988) "How to Be a Fallibilist".
Further reading (language): Kaplan (1989), "Demonstratives", sections I-VI and X-XIV.

8 mar. Contextualism and skepticism   DeRose (1995) "Solving the skeptical problem".
Further readings (epistemology): Nozick (1981) *Philosopical Explorations,* pp. 167–187 and 197–217, if you don't know it — trad. fr. partielle *in* Dutant and Engel (2005). Otherwise Cohen (1999) "Contextualism, Skepticism and the Structure of Reasons" or Hawthorne (2004) *Knowledge and lotteries,* pp. 51–80, for internalist and externalist versions of contextualism, respectively.
Further reading (language): Lewis (1979/1983). Skip examples 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8 on a first reading.

3.2 Criticisms of contextualism

15 mar. Semantic Blindness   Schiffer (1996) "Contextualist solutions to skepticism".
Further reading (epistemology): DeRose (2006) "Bamboozled by Our Own Words", reply to Schiffer and Hawthorne.
Further readings (language): Hawthorne (2004, 98-111). If you've already read it, Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009) *Relativism and Monadic Truth*, pp. 33–43, 54–67.

22 mar. Linguistic disanalogies   Stanley (2004) "On the linguistic basis for contextualism".
Further reading (epistemology): DeRose (2005) "On the Ordinary Language Basis for Contextualism, and the New Invariantism", reply to Stanley. (Part of the paper assumes acquaintance with subject-sensitive invariantism. See below for references.)
Further reading (language): Davis (2007) "Knowledge Claims and Context: Loose Use", an account of the contextualist data in terms of loose use.

3.3 Alternative contextualist views

29 mar. Lewis   Lewis (1996) "Elusive Knowledge".
Further readings (epistemology). Cohen (1998) "Contextualist Solutions to Epistemological Problem" for criticisms; or Blome-Tillmann (2009) "Knowledge and Presuppositions" for a defence of a presupposition-based Lewisean view.
Further readings (language). Ichikawa (forth) "Quantifiers and epistemic contextualism", a defence of a quantifier-based Lewisean view; or Kratzer (2010) "The notional category of modality", a classic paper on the context-sensitivity of modals in general.

5 avr. Schaffer's Contrastivism   Schaffer (2007) "Knowing the Answer".
Further readings (epistemology). Hawthorne (2004, 77–80) *and* Aloni and Egré (2010) "Alternative Questions and Knowledge Attributions", discusses Schaffer.
Further readings (language). Aloni et al. (forth) "Knowing whether A or B", a formal semantics for knowing-whether claims. (If that is too formal for you, read Aloni and Egré (2010).)

3.4 Alternatives to contextualism

12 avr. Interest-relative invariantism Stanley (2005), *Knowledge and practical interests*, chap. 5.
  Further reading (epistemology). Hawthorne (2004, chap. 4), for a detailed defence. DeRose (2005) "On the Ordinary Language Basis for Contextualism, and the New Invariantism", for criticism.
  Further reading (language): Graff Fara (2000) "Shifting Sands", an interest-relative theory of vagueness — shorter statement and further discussion in Graff Fara (2008) "Profiling Interest-relativity".

19 avr. Relativism Macfarlane (2005) "The Assessment-sensitivity of knowledge attributions".
  Further reading (epistemology): Richard (2004) "Contextualism and Relativism", another defence of relativism.
  Further reading (language): Lasersohn (2005) "Context-Dependence, Disagreement and Predicates of Personal Taste", a relativist account of taste predicates.

26 avr. SPRING BREAK

3 may. Insensitive Invariantism Williamson (2005a) "Contextualism, Subject-sensitive invariantism and knowledge of knowledge".
  Further reading: Williamson (2005b) "Knowledge, Context and the Agent's Point of View".

3.5 Further topics

10 may. Relativism about epistemic modals Egan et al. (2005) "Epistemic Modals in Context".
  Further reading: TBA.

17 may. Experimental data Read one of Feltz and Zarpentine (2010), May et al. (2010) or Buckwalter (2010).

24 may. Knowledge and assertion DeRose (2002). "Knowledge, assertion and context".
  Further reading. TBA.

31 may. Open: to be fixed depending on guest speakers / participant's interests.

References

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