Fiction as a Base of Interpretation Contexts

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In this paper, I want to deal with the problem of how to find an adequate context of interpretation for indexical sentences, that enables one to account for the intuitive truth-value which some apparently puzzling indexical sentences like 'I am not here now' as well as other such sentences contextually have. In this respect, I will pursue a line which is halfway between the intentionalist perspective defended by Predelli (1998a, 1998b) and the conventionalist perspective presented primarily by Corazza (see Corazza et al. (2002), Corazza (2004b)). My own perspective is indeed a fictionalist one, where fiction is taken in terms of socially shareable make-believe games.

First of all, like Predelli, to deal with the above cases I find semantically more economical to multiply contexts rather than characters (as instead in Smith (1989) strategy). Indeed, I acknowledge that sometimes the context relevant for the semantic interpretation of an indexical sentence is not its proper context of utterance, but a shifted context. Yet I claim that the context shift here involved occurs in a perfectly predictable way, for such a shift is fiction-governed. Indeed, unlike Predelli, following Recanati (2000) I take that whenever the context relevant for the semantic interpretation of an indexical sentence is not its proper context of utterance, that context is not an intentional context, but a fictional context, i.e. a context which has at least one fictional parameter: a pretended agent, or a pretended space, or a pretended time, or a pretended world In order for the relevant utterance of that sentence to be formally represented as a pair of that sentence plus a certain fictional interpretation context, that utterance must indeed occur within a make-believe game in which the relevant utterance parameter is pretended to be a different entity. Thus, I pursue Corazza's criticism against the intentionalist perspective in holding that the appeal to speaker's intentions neither suffices nor is necessary in order to determine the right interpretation context.

Nevertheless, against Corazza, I claim that the fictionalist perspective is not a mere variant of the intentionalist perspective. For it precisely accounts for the idea Corazza defends that the contextual parameters constituting the relevant interpretation contexts are determined by a conventional setting. This conventional setting is precisely the make-believe game played with the utterance parameters. Insofar as this is a game, it is indeed a socially rule - governed activity and not an intentional phenomenon. This enables me to cope with some apparent counterexamples which Corazza presents against what he takes to be the fictionalist perspective.

Yet this appeal to the social and conventional character of make-believe games does not make the fictionalist perspective a mere variant of the conventionalist perspective either. For although I acknowledge with Corazza that one may appeal to conventions in order to see that the semantically relevant agent sometimes is not the real utterer of a certain "I"-sentence, in the case of a contextual shift the semantically relevant agent is the pretended agent of that sentence, regardless of what those conventions say on the relationship between agency and uttering; in fact, the pretended agent can either coincide or not coincide with the real utterer.

Finally, I maintain that, from the explanatory point of view, the fictionalist theory is at least as rich as another theory which Corazza (2004a) has recently proposed to deal with the same issues, i.e., the unbound anaphora theory. For it may also account for examples involving historical present, fictitious present, as well as fictitious languages. Insofar as Corazza's alternative theory is not economical (both for it postulates a complication of logical form for some indexical sentences at least and it presupposes an ambiguity in the semantic behavior of indexicals), I think that the fictional theory is also better than this further alternative.

References

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