

## MODERATE CONTEXTUALISM AND WHAT IS SAID\*

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The notion of what an uttered sentence says has received much attention in recent literature. The aim is to determine the extent to which truth-conditional or propositional content in natural language is dependent on context: is there any truth-conditional or propositional content expressed by a natural language entity (be it an utterance or a sentence) that can be determined without a rather liberal appeal to context? Some (Bezuidenhout 2002, Carston 2002, Travis 1994 and 1996) claim that only by giving a free rein to context can there be a content that is fully propositional or truth-conditional and constitutes what is said by an utterance. Appealing purely to the conventional aspects of meaning, and even allowing for saturation, that is, allowing context to assign reference to indexicals, contextuials (expressions such as 'friend', 'enemy', 'neighbour') and tense-indicators, will not suffice to obtain a proposition. At most, what is had is a proposition fragment or radical or a blueprint for a proposition. So, on this view no sentences of natural language semantically express full propositions, but only a propositional fragment or radical (if at all); and it is only against the background of a context, that a sentence, or rather an utterance of it, can express a full proposition and have truth conditions. Others (Borg 2004, Cappelen & Lepore 2005, Soames in his 2002 guise) argue that there is a minimal proposition that is semantically expressed by an uttered sentence. Such a minimal proposition is obtained through the grammar,

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syntax and linguistic meaning of the expressions contained in the uttered sentence and the intervention of context *only* when it is grammatically, that is, lexically or morphemically, triggered.<sup>1</sup> For example, indexicals, contextuals<sup>2</sup> and tense indicators trigger context, but not – so one version of the view claims – quantifier expressions or adverbs such as ‘ready’ or adjectives such as ‘red’. Following Cappelen and Lepore, let us call the former *Radical Contextualism* and the latter *Semantic Minimalism*.

An intermediate position is *Moderate Contextualism*. According to Moderate Contextualism, uttered sentences do semantically express a proposition (here they agree with Semantic Minimalism), but the role of context is not limited to that which is grammatically triggered, in particular, it is not limited to indexicals, contextuals and tense-indicators (and here they come closer to Radical Contextualism). Moderate Contextualism holds that there are further expressions whose semantic values are obtained relative to a context, and which are necessary for determining a (minimal) proposition. On MC, quantifier expressions, but not colour adjectives such as ‘red’, are context sensitive. The difference between Minimalism and MC, however, is not merely a difference in the number of expressions that are context sensitive but that according to MC contextual dependence of a proposition semantically expressed *need* not be lexically or morphemically triggered. For on MC – at least on the version I am advocating – uttered sentences such as ‘It is raining’ require context in order to express a full truth-evaluable proposition. Here context supplies the time via tense and it also supplies the place. Supplying the latter may or may not be triggered by a “hidden”

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<sup>1</sup> This is the way Cappelen and Lepore put it. It is not quite the way in which Soames puts it. For him, the proposition semantically expressed by a non-indexical or ambiguous sentence on an occasion of utterance is, roughly, either the proposition that is always asserted in all “normal” contexts once indexicality and ambiguity are resolved or the proposition that is determined by the semantic convention or competence rules of the sentence. For a discussion of these, see Ezcurdia 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Cappelen and Lepore are hesitant about including contextuals. For our purposes, it will do no harm to include them amongst the expressions their view takes to be context-sensitive.

syntactical element.<sup>3</sup> As long as we have evidence from speakers' semantic competence that such a contextual intervention is necessary, more to the point, as long as the linguistic meaning of, say, 'rain' requires there to be an element supplied by context, such intervention is allowed. The resulting proposition will be the proposition semantically expressed by the uttered sentence.

The difference between Radical Contextualism and Moderate Contextualism lies in the fact that for RC no proposition is ever semantically expressed, whereas for MC there always is a proposition that is semantically expressed by an uttered sentence. This proposition differs from other propositions that are the result of the pragmatics of the utterance. Whether in addition the semantically expressed proposition constitutes what is said is a complex issue to which I shall turn below.

MC has come under attack by Minimalists, specifically Cappelen and Lepore, who claim that MC is an unstable position. And Radical Contextualists (cf. Bezuidenhout 2006) have agreed. The claim is that MC is motivated mainly by arguments that ultimately lead it to RC. Such arguments are based on intuitions about what is said by an utterance, and they are of two sorts: context shifting arguments and incomplete proposition arguments. These involve assessing speakers' intuitions about what gets said by an utterance in a given context. If the intuitions are that what gets said differs from context to context – context shifting arguments – or that it is determined by context on pain of there being no proposition – incompleteness arguments –, then the claim is that context determines what gets said or, more precisely, the proposition said. In what follows, I shall only focus on context shifting arguments. I don't consider incompleteness

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<sup>3</sup> As usual, positing a hidden syntactical element will require syntactical evidence. According to this taxonomy, Indexicalism such as the one defended by Stanley ("all effects of extra-linguistic context on the truth-conditions of an assertion are traceable to elements in the actual syntactic structure of the sentence uttered", 2000, p. 391) would count as a moderate contextualist view. But so would Perry's unarticulated constituents view (Perry 1986).

arguments for they rely on intuitions about what is said by an utterance and, as I argue below, such intuitions are not reliable for testing for semantic content.

My main aim in this paper is to show that MC is a stable position. To this end I provide principled reasons for MC not to rely on arguments concerning our intuitions about what is said, and I motivate MC otherwise. A related aim is to show that MC, despite its similarities with Semantic Minimalism, does not face the challenges which the latter faces, and so it is on better footing than SM.

### **1. Evidence from intuitions**

Here is a common line of reasoning. If we are interested in finding out what a sentence uttered by a speaker says, it seems natural (almost obvious) to focus on speakers' intuitions about what is actually said by a given utterance. These intuitions are supposed to guide us in identifying the proposition said. So if a sentence (when uttered) intuitively seems to say different propositions given different contextual conditions, then the sentence is context sensitive. When this difference is due not solely to the presence of indexicals, contextuials or tense-indicators, contextualism is right (Moderate or Radical, depending on the extent to which this happens in language). The task is then to test out, for different sentences, competent speakers' intuitions about what the sentence says in different contexts of utterance. These are what context shifting arguments (CSA) consist of.

One sort of context shifting argument that contextualists give concerns our intuitions about what gets said (or semantically expressed) in a given context by a sentence containing a quantifier expression (e.g. Neale 1990, Stanley and Szabó 2000). Suppose (1) is uttered by Paul during a party in his house in New Zealand on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2005:

(1) There is no wine.

Our intuitions are that Paul has not intended to say, nor has he said or conveyed, that there is no wine *anywhere*, but rather that there is no wine at a particular location, namely, his house. Suppose further that I utter (1) in my flat in Mexico City. Our intuitions are that Paul and I have said different things with our utterances: I have said that there is no wine in my flat, and Paul that there is no wine in his house. These intuitions are supposed to be evidence that the proposition said by Paul is *that there is no wine in Paul's house* or *that there is no wine in context C'*, or some such, where context supplies the place of which it is said that there is no wine and thus restricts the domain of the quantifier.<sup>4</sup>

Cappelen and Lepore claim that this sort of argument puts Moderate Contextualists on a slippery slope to Radical Contextualism for one could generate a context shifting argument for just about any sentence or expression in the language. Take any sentence and consider whether what is said and/or conveyed could differ in different contexts, even when ambiguity, syntactic ellipsis, polysemy, nonliterality and vagueness are not an issue. It is likely that such arguments could be produced for any sentence. On this, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore. To take just one example consider the following situations described by Bezuidenhout (2002):

We are at a county fair picking through a barrel of assorted apples. My son says 'Here's a red one,' and what he says is true if the apple is indeed red. But what counts as being red in this context? For apples, being red generally means having red skin, which is different from what we normally mean by calling a watermelon, or a leaf, or a star, or hair, red. But even when it is an apple that is in question, other understandings of what it is to call it 'red' are possible, given suitable circumstances. For instance, suppose now that we're sorting through a barrel of apples to find those that have been afflicted with a horrible fungal disease. This fungus grows out from the core and stains the flesh of the apple red. My son slices each apple open and puts the good ones in a cooking pot. The bad one he hands to me. Cutting open an apple he

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<sup>4</sup> The verb's tense requires of context that it supply the time of which it is said that there is no wine. But this sort of context intervention is fine by Semantic Minimalism for it is grammatically triggered.

remarks: 'Here's a red one'. What he says is true if the apple has red flesh, even if it also happens to be a Granny Smith apple. (Bezuidenhout 2002, 107) According to Bezuidenhout's intuitions, what gets said by (2) is determined by the context in which it is said, such that even if the skin of the apple in question is not red, (2) may say something true.

(2) Here's a red one.

There are two issues to consider here. Firstly, if our argument just stops here, it is clear that it is no good. In order for any argument relying on intuitions to be good, the intuitions that thought experiments or actual cases elicit must be put to the test. In particular, we must ensure that we are getting *clear* and *widespread* intuitions, that is, intuitions that hold before any or most tests and intuitions that most of the relevant subjects have (in this case, speakers). When the intuitions are neither clear nor widespread, nothing may be concluded from them. Unfortunately, when contextualists give this sort of argument they do not put their intuitions to the test. Worse even, for when they are put to the test, our intuitions are strained and turn out not to be clear and/or widespread. We shall presently see this with Bezuidenhout's intuitions concerning (2).

Secondly, I think there are context shifting arguments that do not lead us into this slippery slope and which provide evidence for the context sensitivity of expressions (or whole sentences) beyond those admitted by Semantic Minimalism. These are context shifting arguments that consider, not speakers' intuitions about what is said by utterances, but rather their intuitions about the truth values of utterances. Granted, people's intuitions about the truth value of Bezuidenhout's son's utterance of (2) in the situation described is that it is true, so some may think that there is no genuine difference between a CSA regarding intuitions about what is said and one that tests intuitions about the truth value of an utterance. Whilst I agree that *alone* any CSA concerning truth value is in no surer ground than a CSA

regarding intuitions about what is said, it is on surer ground if certain conditions are met.

Consider a sentence  $S$  with an alleged context sensitive expression  $e$ . If

- (I) there is a *clear* and *widespread* intuition amongst speakers that  $S$  in a context  $C$  has a certain truth value and in another context  $C'$  it has a different truth value, and
- (II) not assuming that context enters (somehow) in the determination of semantic content renders most of what people semantically express when making literal and sincere utterances of  $S$  as having a different truth value (or no truth value) from what the clear and widespread intuition says,

then we have good evidence for thinking that context determines the semantic content of utterances of  $S$ , and that  $e$  is a context sensitive expression. Furthermore,

- (III) if for any sentence (be it  $S$ , or  $S'$ ,  $S''$ , ...) that contains  $e$  -or most of the sentences that contain it- (I) and (II) are true of them,

then we have even further evidence of  $e$ 's context sensitivity. My claim is that CS arguments concerning intuitions about *truth values* are compelling when they are supported by further evidence of type (I), (II) and (III), and are dependent on that evidence.

But why intuitions about truth values and not about what is said? Because when speakers make judgements about what is said they are not always good at identifying what is said, and much less so at distinguishing what is semantically expressed from what is pragmatically said, imparted or conveyed. When speakers judge what is said by utterances of sentences (1) and (2) they are highly influenced by context, and basically try to process what people are intending to convey in those situations. Consider propositional attitude attributions such as (3) and (4).

- (3) The ancient astronomers didn't believe that Hesperus was Phosphorus.

(4) Lois Lane didn't believe that Clark Kent was Superman.

Consider your intuitions about the truth values of these sentences or the utterances of these sentences. Our intuitions regarding these are in agreement, they are very clear and widespread: both sentences (or their utterances) are true. Think now about what those sentences (or their utterances) say. Here our intuitions do not coincide, they are not clear or widespread. Speakers differ widely on what the proposition semantically expressed (if any) or even pragmatically asserted is. Some claim that (3) expresses or says the proposition *that the ancient astronomers didn't believe that the object named 'Hesperus' was the object named 'Phosphorus'*, others the proposition *that they didn't believe that the astronomical object observed in the evening was the astronomical object observed in the morning*, etc. And something similar applies to (4), viz. *that Lois Lane didn't believe that the man she knew as Clark Kent was the man she knew as Superman*, or *that she didn't believe that the man who works with her in her office was the man with superpowers*, etc. Ask any untrained speaker and these are the sorts of reactions you will get: widespread agreement on truth values for which people have clear intuitions, and widespread disagreement on what is semantically expressed.<sup>5</sup> What these cases show is that speakers are not always reliable in identifying what is said, and much less so in distinguishing the propositions that are semantically expressed from those that are pragmatically imparted or conveyed by an utterance of a sentence, but are relatively good at detecting truth value; and when intuitions about truth value are clear, coincide greatly and are systematic in the way described in (II) and (III) above, they are good evidence for semantic content.

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<sup>5</sup> Some might want to argue that our intuitions are not so widespread for after all there are those like Salmon and Soames who hold that (3) and (4) are false, that the ancient astronomers did believe that Hesperus was Phosphorus, and that Lois Lane did believe that Clark Kent was Superman. But both Salmon and Soames recognize that there is a clear and widespread intuition that runs against them, and even set themselves the task of explaining away such intuition. (See Salmon 1986 and Soames 2002.)

Minimalists have expressed scepticism that we could learn anything different from arguments concerning truth values rather than from arguments concerning what is said.<sup>6</sup> And to an extent, I agree. If what we are asked to consider are just judgements about truth values of particular utterances, then we are on no better footing than we are concerning intuitions about what is said on those specific cases. For judgements about truth values rely on what the speakers think a certain utterance says, conveys and/or imparts. However, the situation is very different when what we are asked to do is not only consider the truth values of a given utterance, but to look for systematicity in our intuitions regarding truth values, systematicity of the sort required by (II) and (III). Upon doing so, we filter out what is semantically expressed out of what is pragmatically said, imparted or conveyed, by identifying its systematic effect on truth values of utterances in which they appear, and thus their type of contribution to semantic content.

An additional reason for thinking that intuitions about truth value that satisfy (I), (II) and (III), are good evidence for detecting semantic content is that they track speakers' semantic competence. It is the systematicity of (clear and widespread) intuitions about truth value that lead us to think that speakers are being sensitive to the constant elements of expressions, be these ones that require the intervention of context or not; and what remains constant across uses of an expression just is its linguistic meaning, knowledge of which is constitutive of speakers' semantic competence. Furthermore, a semantic theory aims at identifying semantic content, but we (or at least I) want such a theory to track the semantic content of an utterance of a sentence that is derived from speakers' semantic competence, either solely from it or from it and the contextual elements that semantic competence calls upon. It would be strange for semantically competent speakers to continue to

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<sup>6</sup> Cappelen and Lepore claim that they are at a loss when people ask them to consider intuitions about truth values (2005, p. 98), but the case just described shows that there are such intuitions. I think their bemusement might be best construed as an expression of the sort of scepticism described here.

use expressions in a language that render *most* of what they semantically express when they use those expressions as having a different truth value (or no truth value at all) from what they thought it would have. Suppose (counterfactually) that an expression *e* started life in a language as a context *insensitive* expression, but as time went on most of the semantic content of the utterances of sentences containing *e* were false, even obviously false to speakers, when speakers were using them intending to express something true. Then we would expect either

- (a) *e* to gradually become context sensitive, or
- (b) speakers to begin making explicit the relevant parts of context for *e*.

The cases that generate context shifting truth value arguments ('CSTA' henceforth) that satisfy (I), (II) and (III), are ones in which (b) is certainly not the case, so (a) would most plausibly be the case.<sup>7</sup> One could argue, of course, that neither (a) nor (b) are the case, but rather that what have evolved are our pragmatic strategies that allow us to be phonetically economical. But the fact that there is systematic disagreement between the truth values that speakers' think such sentences have and the values assigned to the putative semantic contents suggests that there is something about *e* that has evolved and become constant, and this suggests that it is part of *e*'s stable linguistic meaning.

## 2. A context shifting truth value argument for 'red'

CSTAs are harder to generate than the original CSA. Consider Bezuidenhout's example again and let us see if we can generate a CS truth value argument for it. In particular, let us test (2) for clear and widespread intuitions regarding truth value.

[...] suppose now that we're sorting through a barrel of apples to find those that have been afflicted with a horrible fungal disease. This fungus grows out from the core and stains the flesh of the apple red. My son slices each apple open and puts the good ones in a cooking pot. The bad one he hands to me. Cutting open an apple he remarks: 'Here's a red one'. What he says is

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<sup>7</sup> Or some equivalent of (a) if we are to blame the whole uttered sentence for being context sensitive and not one particular expression as Perry (1986) does by positing unarticulated constituents.

true if the apple has red flesh, even if it also happens to be a Granny Smith apple. (Bezuidenhout 2002, 107)

If as Bezuidenhout suggests what matters for our intuitions about what is said is the flesh of the apple, then it would not matter what sort of apple would be handed over by her son to her. If it did not have red flesh then (2) would not be true in that context. We have to acknowledge that all she says is that having red flesh suffices for truth in this context. But if we are in the business of giving truth-conditions (even if these are pragmatic truth-conditions), which I believe Bezuidenhout and all contextualists are, we need to have also necessary conditions for the truth of an utterance. I thus take her to mean that in that context (2) is uttered truly if and only if the apple has red flesh.

Think now of a case in which her son hands her over a Gala apple, an apple with red skin but white flesh, whilst uttering (2). Would we say that the utterance is true or false? Consider what the hearer's reaction would be in that circumstance. It wouldn't be just to say 'No, that's not right. You're wrong. It's not a red apple.' Rather it would be more like the following: 'No, that's not the kind of red we mean' or 'Stop joking about' or 'We want the ones with red flesh, not red skin', etc. My own intuitions tell me that Bezuidenhout's son said something true, irrelevant, but true. And those competent, yet untrained in semantics, speakers I have asked seem to share these intuitions. But if you don't share my own intuitions, then test the speakers around you. If most speakers' intuitions are with mine, then Bezuidenhout's example shows that we have widespread intuitions that contradict her claims that what is said in that situation depends solely on the flesh of the skin and that context determines how we are to understand 'red'. What suffices for my purposes, however, is not that there is widespread agreement with me that Bezuidenhout's son said something true, but rather that there is *no* clear or widespread agreement that he has said something false. The sort of reactions we

obtain in the situation just described shows that there is no such widespread agreement. Without it, there is no CSTA for Bezuidenhout's example.

Notice further that not supposing that 'red' is context sensitive does not render *most* of what people semantically express when making literal and sincere utterances of *S* as having a different truth value (or no truth value) from what the clear and widespread intuition says our utterances have. Think again of Bezuidenhout's son when he utters (2) whilst holding a red-fleshed and cut-open Granny Smith apple in the context of looking for apples with red flesh. Well, he has said something true, for the apple is red (in some way). That's the intuition we have and that is the intuition Bezuidenhout has. Contrast this with (2) being uttered whilst handing over apples with no red skin or flesh. In that case, (2) would have been false. What exactly counts as being red, as having the property of red, is something that needs further research. We need to look at our practices concerning how we classify objects as being red. Pending further research, we may say that (R) something is red (or has the property of being red) if and only if a significant part of the visually observable surface is red.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> That there are borderline cases of something's having the property red either because it is underdetermined whether it is red or orange, or because it has just a small red spot on its skin (or in the flesh), is not a source of worry. In these cases, we don't have clear and widespread intuitions about utterances of (2).

Note, also, that upon giving this characterization of our application conditions of the concept *red* I am not a semanticist engaging in metaphysics, as Cappelen and Lepore would suggest (2005, pp. 157-166). I am just pointing at the way in which we use it without analyzing it away, for the concept red appears again on the right hand side of the biconditional. Furthermore, I do not delve into issues of whether colours exist or whether colour concepts are vague, etc. Cappelen and Lepore are wrong in thinking that in saying something about our use of the concept or of the term 'red' one is thereby engaged in metaphysics.

Note further that in providing (R) one is not committed to claiming that the proposition must include the concept/property of having a significant part of visually observable surface as red. One may have it that 'A is red' simply expresses the proposition *that A is red*, or is true if and only if A is red. (R) concerns how we apply the concept or property, not the content of 'red'.

Consider now other sentences in which 'red' occurs and which are uttered sincerely and literally, that is, without intending to say something metaphorical, ironic, sarcastic, etc.:

(5) The red book is in the cupboard.

(6) Take out the red file.

(7) That watermelon is very red.

Independently of the contextual situation we consider, it is clear that (5)-(7) can be uttered with a literal use in mind. Given (R), would the resulting propositions have a truth value different from speakers' intuitions would say? Although one would need to review the situations in which the sentences are uttered, I suspect we would have a similar situation to that just discussed with (2). The same goes for other sincere and literal utterances of sentences containing 'red'. My suspicion would need to be bolstered by considering more cases, but what I have said so far suffices for showing how I would argue in each instance. And the more cases are tested, the greater the evidence in favour of the non-context sensitivity of 'red' (and other colour adjectives).

For those interested in developing counterexamples, I should just emphasize that the cases have to be ones in which the speakers are intending the sentences to be used literally, in particular, non-metaphorically, non-ironically, etc. Some may think that even considering only these cases, there are examples in which 'red' is used literally, but in which where (R) to hold they would be false utterances, contrary to what speakers would normally think. Say that before a glass of Malbec I say (8) and before a painting of young Elizabeth I I utter (9).

(8) Here is some red wine.

(9) She had red hair.

Were (R) to hold, then (8) and (9) could very well be false. More than this. It would appear that were (R) to hold in the cases of 'red wine' and 'red hair', most of our utterances containing these expressions would have a different truth value from

what speakers would have intended them to have. And so, we would appear to be before counterexamples to the non-context sensitivity of 'red'. However, it is unclear that we are before cases in which 'red' is being used as a genuine adjective, an adjective that expresses the property red. Consider the coherence of the following:

(10) Is red wine really red?

(11) Is red hair really red?

The fact that we can ask these questions coherently suggests that 'red' is not functioning as an adjective in (8) and (9), but rather that 'red wine' and 'red hair' constitute noncomplex nouns that refer to a kind just as 'water' does. So if counterexamples are to be provided, they had better be of a different sort.

Whether (R) is a complete account of our use of the concept red is not the point at issue, for I am not trying to give a full account of 'red' or, even, trying to prove that 'red' is not context sensitive. All I am trying to do is to identify motivation for MC that does not lend it unstable. The fact that there is no CSTA for 'red' does not, on its own, suffice for showing that 'red' is not context sensitive, though it lends great plausibility to it. Were there to be a CSTA for other expressions in the language beyond indexicals, contextuials and tense-indicators, but not for 'red', then MC would have been shown to be motivated in a stable way.

I do not think that we can generate such CSTA's for other examples given by contextualists in the literature such as 'Smith weighs 80 kgs', 'Jill didn't have fish for dinner', 'Lucas destroyed those shoes', 'That's a dangerous dog', and 'Mario is a philosopher'. (For a survey, see Cappelen and Lepore 2005, Chapter 3.) I shall not go through the cases for each of them here, but to make things fully explicit remember that the strategy is to look for intuitions that two utterances of the same sentence differ in truth value with a relevant difference in the contexts in which they are uttered, that such intuitions are not only widespread and systematic (in

the way described in (II) and (III) above) but are also clear. In order to make sure you are getting clear intuitions, you must put them to the test and see if they are strained in any way.<sup>9</sup>

I do think, however, that a CSTA can be generated for quantifier expressions.<sup>10</sup> I shall present it in the next section. If I am right in thinking that a CSTA shows that quantifier expressions are context sensitive but no such argument could be supplied for 'red' then we have found a way of stabilising Moderate Contextualism.

### **3. A CST argument for quantifier expressions**

Think of (1) again as uttered by Paul in his New Zealand home, and suppose further that there is no wine there. Our immediate intuition is that Paul has said something true, despite the fact that there is wine elsewhere. Suppose that I utter (1) in my flat in Mexico in an attempt to hide the wine in my flat from my guests. Our intuitions are that when uttered by me (1) is false, but when uttered by Paul (1) is true. Our intuitions here are widespread about the truth values of both Paul's utterance and my utterance.

Now, let us try to apply a twist in which our intuitions regarding truth value might be tested to assess whether our intuitions are clear. In the apple case we thought of a way in which intuitions might pull you in a different direction. We introduced an apple which could be thought of as red though it did not satisfy the property of being red in the way required by the context. An analogous case here would be to introduce a way in which we would be led to think of Paul's utterance of (1) as

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<sup>9</sup> In considering the case of 'Smith weighs 80 kg' one must make sure that what is being tested is the context sensitivity of the utterance, and what is not at play is the fact that our weight as a matter of fact fluctuates throughout the day depending on what and how much we have eaten and drunk.

<sup>10</sup> Amongst quantifier expressions I include definite descriptions though I shall say nothing about them here.

false by supposing that there is some wine somewhere at the time of utterance. But, of course, when Paul utters (1) there is wine somewhere at his time of utterance, and he is even aware of this. Indeed, what may have prompted him to utter (1) might be to request someone to fetch some wine from somewhere. He himself is then aware of the fact that there is wine elsewhere and so is his audience. We cannot, therefore, produce a twist analogous to the one we produced in the apple case in order to put a strain on our intuitions. For the twist is already there, and it is there most of the time when we use quantifier expressions. When we utter any of the sentences (1) or (12)-(15), we are thinking of the quantifier applying at a certain place or for a certain group. We are thinking of the domain as restricted somehow by context.

- (12) A few students failed.
- (13) Everyone put a life vest on.
- (14) Most vineyards have lost their crops.
- (15) Every table is covered with books.

Notice further that (II) is satisfied. Not supposing that context constrains the domain of quantifier expressions *does* render most of what we semantically express with our literal and sincere utterances as having a different truth value from what the clear and widespread intuition says our utterances have. Not only Paul would have said something false, but anyone who ever uttered (1) from at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century (or earlier) up until now would have uttered something false. Suppose (13) is uttered by someone after being shipwrecked, then (13) would be uttered truly in that situation, though rejecting context's role in restricting the domain of a quantifier would render any utterance of (13) false. And this runs against our

intuitions that sometimes (13) is true. The same can be argued for (12), (14) and (15), and most, if not all sentences with quantifier expressions.<sup>11</sup>

(III) is also satisfied. Think again of speakers' awareness that if any of these sentences were uttered taking the domain to be that of existing things, then most of what they would be uttering would be false. Surely, after so many centuries of using quantifier expressions, we would have learned something. Either our expressions would have become context sensitive, or we would have supplied the contextual material left out. We would always have to say 'There is no wine in the house'. But perhaps you think that that is what we do, that our utterances of (1) are in some sense incomplete (not only the propositions), that we just utter abbreviations of these longer sentences. What would supply that extra material? Presumably, context (be it speakers' intentions or a mutually known context). Whatever way we look it, it seems inevitable that context must come into play.

In conclusion, we have good evidence for thinking that quantifier expressions are context sensitive. How they are context sensitive is up for debate, but that is not our concern here. Our concern here is solely to show that they are context sensitive and that the test for their context sensitivity does not render every other expression produced by the Radical Contextualist (not at least in the case of 'red') as context sensitive, thus, allowing for a stable brand of Moderate Contextualism.

#### **4. The minimal proposition and what is said**

CSTAs rely on speakers' intuitions about the truth value of an utterance and these surely rely on what speakers think their utterances say even when they find it hard to agree on what is said. By relying on intuitions about truth values and how

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<sup>11</sup> The only exception I can think of is 'at least'. In their arguments, Cappelen and Lepore (2005, pp. 88 ff) focus their attention on this quantifier and then wrongly generalize their conclusion to other quantifiers.

context may affect these, it is more likely that the semantic content we actually obtain for a sentence which is context sensitive is truth evaluable, and so a proposition. This proposition may be dubbed 'a *minimal* proposition' for it does not include more contextual information that one may want to recover and that may be part of what a speaker has asserted, implied, implicated or conveyed. For example, an utterance of (16) just semantically expresses the proposition that Jamie took the key at time  $t'$  and at  $t''$  opened the door,<sup>12</sup> but what a speaker may have intended with it and may indeed have said is that Jamie took the key at time  $t'$  and at  $t''$  opened the door *with the key*. Cases of free enrichment such as this are ones in which context freely enriches the proposition said, but not the proposition semantically expressed.

(16) Jamie took the key and opened the door.

Other examples include:

(17) John ran to the cliff and jumped,

(18) Carla ate rabbit,<sup>13</sup>

where the propositions utterances of these say, given appropriate circumstances, are that John ran to the cliff and jumped *over the cliff*, and that Carla ate rabbit *meat*, respectively.

In the light of the CSTA strategy, it might appear that Moderate Contextualism is committed to the claim that the proposition semantically expressed is just the proposition that is said; but, as might have been noticed already, this move is too quick. Saying is a speech act just as much as asserting, ordering, etc., so what is said by an utterance will depend not solely on the speaker's semantic competence and the context it calls upon, but also on his intentions, on what he intends to do with his utterance. The issue is complicated further by the different uses the notion of saying has been put to in the literature.

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<sup>12</sup> The difference in the times I take to be recoverable through tense and context, not through 'and'. I am also here ignoring the way in which context restricts the domain of definite descriptions.

<sup>13</sup> These examples are well known in the literature, see Recanati 2004, Carston 1988 and 2002.

Consider a case of conversational implicature. When Harry utters (19) sarcastically he has intended to say and has communicated that Jackie is not a good painter. Has he also said that Jackie is a good painter?

(19) Yeah, Jackie is a good painter.

It all depends on how we construe 'saying'. If we understand it in Austinian terms just as a locutionary act, viz. just as the act of saying something of something else, then Harry's utterance of (19) might be taken as saying that Jackie is a good painter. If we take saying as more akin to asserting, where some commitment to the truth of what is uttered is involved,<sup>14</sup> then Harry will not be taken to have said that Jackie is a good painter. If we understand it in more Gricean terms, then it will all depend on a distinction between what is literally said and what is non-literally said, where 'literally' is construed as what has been expressed by virtue of the semantics of the uttered sentence. On this account, as is well-known, Harry will have literally said that Jackie is a good painter, but it will not be part of what he intended to say and indeed succeeded in communicating.

In constructing CST arguments we have used the notion of a literal use or a literal utterance or use of a sentence, but by it we have only meant that the speaker is uttering a sentence without intending to say something metaphorical, ironic, sarcastic, without intending to conversationally implicate something else, and so on. We have not intended by a 'literal utterance' anything about the success of the speakers' intentions in saying something, and so have not committed ourselves to a particular view of what is said. But even if we were to adopt the Gricean approach to what is said as something that opposes what is conversationally implicated, or any of the other approaches to what is said, it is just not true that the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance is *always* the proposition said. Although MC claims that an uttered sentence (as long as saturation is successful)

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Soames 2002, p. 78, and 2005 p. 359, footnote 7.

always expresses a proposition, this proposition need not be the proposition said, not even the one that as a matter of fact is literally said or asserted, for the proposition semantically expressed need not be one that the speaker intended to say or assert.

Some might want to argue that in cases of free enrichment speakers mean the minimal proposition, though they also mean other propositions, in particular, the freely enriched ones. Whilst I have some sympathy with these attempts, I do not think that one can adopt the same strategy with other pragmatic effects on language, in particular, with loosening and semantic transfer.<sup>15</sup>

(20) The ATM swallowed my card.

(21) The ham sandwich left without paying.

(22) I am parked outside next to the garage.

In (20) 'swallowed' is used loosely: its application conditions are relaxed so that not only things with throats can swallow. (21) and (22) are examples of semantic transfer, where 'the ham sandwich' and 'I' are used to refer to something to which the actual ham sandwich and the speaker, respectively, bear a systematic relation, viz. the ham sandwich orderer and the speaker's car. Claiming that the proposition semantically expressed is always (one of) the proposition(s) said would render speakers as intending to say very odd things with (20)–(22), even gibberish. For how can an ATM swallow anything or a ham sandwich leave or even someone park himself? Surely, speakers are more intelligent than this. Their intentions are to say that the ATM held the card, that the ham sandwich orderer left without paying and that the speaker's car is parked outside next to the garage. And these are sensible things to intend to say. So the minimal proposition is not always the proposition said.

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<sup>15</sup> Here I am agreeing with Recanati 2004, pp. 60-1. This paragraph takes up his argument against Soames's 2002 view of the relationship between the proposition semantically expressed and what is said or asserted.

Where does this leave us with respect to CSTA strategy? Firstly, loose talk and semantic transfer, unlike sentences uttered sarcastically, may be portrayed as cases in which the speaker intends to speak sincerely and literally in the sense meant by the CSTA strategy, that is, not sarcastically, ironically or even metaphorically.<sup>16</sup> So they are cases that cannot be out of consideration when elaborating a CST argument. I do not think, however, that these phenomena are so widespread that they may lead us to alter the linguistic meaning of 'ham sandwich' or 'I' or even 'swallow', or to consider them as context sensitive or context sensitive in new ways (for the case of 'I'). Condition (III) in the CSTA strategy would ensure that a particular instance of loose talk or semantic transfer does not lead us to claiming context sensitivity for these expressions, since no CST argument could be presented with most uttered sentences containing them.

Secondly, if CSTA appeals to what is said, it appeals to speakers' intuitive notion of what is said for obtaining intuitions about truth value, such a notion will be whatever notion speakers themselves have of what is said.<sup>17</sup> Whether one or another view of what is said is the correct view, though something that would be interesting to consider, is not essential for the strategy here advocated.

Finally, it should now be clear that whilst looking at people's intuitions regarding the truth value of utterances is a useful way to get at their semantic competence, it is not a route to identifying what is said by the utterances, at least not a direct route. We also need a theory of what is said that accords with speakers' intuitions. Such a theory would take it that what is said is open to recognition by the speaker

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<sup>16</sup> Is the speaker intending to use 'swallow' metaphorically? I do not think so for that would require her to form an intention to speak thus, but I doubt that she does form such an intention when uttering (20).

<sup>17</sup> One may also reformulate CST arguments so that they do not use the notion of what is said, but rather of what is uttered, so that the questions we ask speakers are not about whether different utterances say something true but rather just whether they are true utterances. This is fine, but I suspect that in obtaining their intuitions speakers are relying on their intuitions about what is said, whatever that may be for them.

for it is determined at least partly by his intentions. To what extent and how it is thus available to the speaker is something I leave others to determine.<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Has MC gone too far?

It is by recognizing the gap between what is said and the (minimal) proposition semantically expressed that we may avert many of the charges that Recanati (2004), Carston (2002) and others have brought against literalists, that is, those who equate the semantically expressed proposition with what is said. But there are some arguments and challenges that are brought by them against those who recognize the existence of a minimal proposition. These require defenders of a minimal proposition to say what the usefulness of such a proposition is. One such challenge is Clapp's Naturalistic Challenge (Clapp forthcoming). A second challenge requires defenders of a minimal proposition to provide reasons for the cognitive or communicative role of the minimal proposition (Carston 1988; Recanati 2004).

Here is Clapp's Naturalistic Challenge:

Suppose it is a fact that a sentence S (perhaps taken relative to a context) encodes proposition P as its *semantic* content. What *fixes*, or *grounds* this fact? In other words, of the uncountably many propositions or sets of truth conditions there are, what makes it the case that P, as opposed to P\*, is the semantic content of S? I think that it is agreed on all sides that *if* it is a fact that P is the semantic content of S (perhaps relative to context), then this fact must be grounded in natural psychological and/or sociological facts concerning the abilities and practices of competent speakers and interpreters. If the alleged facts concerning semantic content are not somehow grounded in such natural facts, then semantics would not fit into Chomsky's cognitive paradigm in linguistics, nor even into the broader project of "naturalizing epistemology." This is a consequence that I believe

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<sup>18</sup> See Recanati 2004, Chapter 3 and pp. 162-5, Bach 2001 and García-Carpintero 2001 for a discussion on the character of such availability. Many of García-Carpintero's remarks on such availability are driven by the view that there is a minimal proposition that is semantically expressed and constitutes what is said.

all parties would like to avoid. Indeed, though no semantic minimalist has *explicitly* addressed the naturalistic challenge, semantic minimalists have apparently been motivated to provide an account of semantic content which illustrates how such facts are grounded in facts concerning the ability and behavior of competent language users. (Clapp, L. forthcoming, p. 2)

Even without a detailed account of the connection between what is said and the proposition semantically expressed, we can see how my brand of MC can meet the Naturalistic Challenge. For precisely what motivates my MC are CSTAs which themselves are grounded on the need to track the semantic competence of speakers. Tracking systematicity of intuitions regarding truth values tracks semantic competence, filtering out what is owed to such competence from what it is not owed to it. So even if the connections between what is said and the proposition semantically expressed have not been spelled out, my brand of MC grounds the minimal proposition on certain psychological facts about speakers, in particular, on their semantic competence. What makes it the case that an uttered sentence *S* has a proposition *P* as its semantic content rather than a proposition *P\** is just the speaker's linguistic competence, in particular, his syntactic and semantic competence, and context where such competence requires it. Semantic competence just consists in the speaker's knowledge, be it tacit or conscious, of the semantic rules of his language. If such rules require it then context also supplies elements that are constitutive of the proposition semantically expressed, and so determine which proposition is thus expressed.

But even if MC's minimal proposition is grounded primarily on speakers' semantic competence, there is some reason to think that the minimal proposition does not play any cognitive or communicative role.

[...] the minimal proposition does not correspond to an aspect of what the speaker asserts and cannot be abstracted from it [...] The minimal proposition is a hybrid which goes beyond what is determined by the rules of the language yet has no psychological reality and need not be entertained or represented at any point in the process of understanding the utterance [...]

Do we need such a notion in theorizing about language and communication? (Recanati 2004, p. 64) <sup>19</sup>

Take the cases of loose talk and semantic transfer we discussed above. Recanati holds that in order to understand what a speaker says with (20), (21) or (22), one need not compute or entertain the minimal (and odd) propositions. If we need not do so for understanding, then why think that there is any role for such a proposition to play? The semantic rules or conventional linguistic meanings of the words uttered, as well as composition rules, have a role, insofar as they trigger by association the related concepts of *ham sandwich orderer*, *speaker's car* and *retaining*, before the proposition is computed, and such that what makes it into the computed proposition are these associated concepts. The minimal proposition –so Recanati's reasoning goes– has no role in this process. Carston's worry is similar:

A framework that gives you a semantic content that plays no role whatsoever in the mental life of communicators should be rejected. To endorse such a framework is 'to ignore the nature of communication and of cognition in general in the interest of a formal principle which has absolutely no bearing on human psychology'. (Carston 1988, p. 40)

We need a cognitive or communicative role for the minimal proposition if it is to be theoretically acceptable.

Cappelen and Lepore (2005) have replied to one version of Carston's objection by claiming that the minimal proposition is the content which (a) the speaker can expect his audience to grasp and (b) the audience can expect the speaker to grasp even if their information about the context is incomplete or mistaken; it is content which (c) can be expressed and grasped by someone who is not a participant in the context and (d) which speakers *know* can be transmitted through indirect quotation

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<sup>19</sup> Recanati is here talking of the Syncretic View which distinguishes, on the one hand, a semantic notion of what is said that is determined compositionally through the linguistic meaning of expressions in the uttered sentence and saturation and, on the other, a pragmatic notion that concerns the proposition that is available to the speaker. Of Recanati's taxonomy, this view would be the closest to Moderate Contextualism. However, since on MC the semantically expressed proposition does not purport to be identified with the content of what is said, MC cannot be characterized as an instance of the Syncretic View. His useful classification of the diverse positions held to date concern in an essential way what each takes what is said to be. Doing so means that views that count as contextualist on my account may not count as contextualist given his taxonomy.

to others who are in very different contexts. Do cases (20)-(22) satisfy (a)-(d)? Would the utterers of (20)-(22) *expect* hearers to grasp the minimal proposition even if they do not share the contextual background or are mistaken about context? The non-minimal propositions conveyed by utterances of (20)-(22) do not require much context in order to process them. In fact, utterances of (20) and (21) seem to require no context in order to process the non-minimal proposition. Given this and what has been said before about the implausibility of intending the minimal propositions, it is unlikely that minimal propositions satisfy (a) or (b). For some speakers (if Recanati is right) may not even entertain the minimal propositions and so cannot be said to expect that their audiences grasp it, nor vice versa.

Whether the minimal propositions expressed by utterances of (20)-(22) are ones that the speaker *knows* can be transmitted through indirect quotation in very different contexts from the original is not so (versus (d)). Suppose that various people are buying paintings of different dishes. Some are buying paintings of risotto, others of scallops, and others of different kinds of sandwiches. Each of them is holding a painting whilst queuing to pay. Amongst the people who are there are Joe, the original utterer of (21) about the ham sandwich orderer, and myself. Suppose I utter (23) in this context.

(23) Joe said that the ham sandwich left without paying.

Would (23) correctly report Joe's utterance of (21) about the ham sandwich *orderer*? I think not, for someone may rightly accuse me of saying that Joe said that the holder of the ham sandwich painting left without paying, and Joe himself may reasonably protest. More to the point, speakers will *not know* that the minimal proposition is transmitted through indirect quotation in this context, a context very different from the original.

(c) is the more likely role for a minimal proposition. Requiring the minimal proposition to be such that it can be grasped and expressed by someone who isn't

even a participant in the context of utterance does not require one to generate any hypothesis as to what speakers intend or expect of each other. It just states what as a matter of fact speakers and hearers can do when they have no knowledge of the context. Suppose that I come in to an art gallery that has a café and I do not know whether Joe is talking of an intended buyer of a ham sandwich painting or of a ham sandwich orderer when he utters (21). What proposition can I grasp in those circumstances? It appears that what I grasp is the odd minimal proposition about a particular sandwich that it left without paying, and that is all I can grasp given the circumstances. The minimal proposition is then the fallback proposition in communication and understanding, that is, it is the proposition that can be expressed and grasped by a subject who is not a conversational participant and hence not aware of the contextually relevant information.

The fact that the minimal proposition may not make an appearance in the cognitive processing involved in understanding an utterance, as it happens in cases of loose talk or semantic transfer, does not mean that they do not make an appearance at all. On many occasions of sincere and literal utterances which may or may not involve free enrichment do require the subject to process the minimal proposition. But not only in these cases. In cases of conversational implicatures, it is a requirement that the audience (and the speaker) process such a proposition. On the Gricean account, it is only because hearers know that were the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance to be taken as what the speaker intended to convey it would render the speaker as violating the Principle of Cooperation and/or one or more of its maxims, that they can infer a conversational implicature.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this paper I have argued that contrary to what Semantic Minimalists have claimed Moderate Contextualism is a stable view, by providing motivation for it

that does not lead to Radical Contextualism. I have further argued that the motivation for such a view does not commit it to a particular account of what is said for it does not rely on direct intuitions about the content said by utterances nor does it intend to capture the content said. What its arguments yield rather are the propositions semantically expressed, propositions which are derived from speakers' competence and a limited intervention from context. These are propositions that are sometimes, though not always, the content of what is said or asserted. Recognizing the difference between what is said and the propositions semantically expressed does not, however, leave us with a minimal proposition that is communicatively or linguistically otiose. For the minimal proposition is the fallback proposition, the proposition we can all understand or grasp even when we are unaware of the relevant contextual information.

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