Kvantifikator för en Dag

Essays dedicated to Dag Westerståhl on his sixtieth birthday

What is Stated and Cohesion

Palle Leth

Abstract

The contribution of cohesion to determining what statement is made by an utterance is considered in this paper. Two kinds of cohesion are explored, the first grounded on a rather formal relationship, the second of a more interactional character. The superiority of cohesion over the situation or the speaker's intention as a contextual criterion is claimed.

1. Introduction

The following piece of conversation is from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

Antonio   (1) Will you grant with me that Ferdinand is drown'd?

Sebastian (2) He's gone.

Antonio   (3) Then tell me, who's the next heir of Naples?[1]

In this paper, we shall consider (2) and try to see to what extent the cohesion of (1) to (3) contributes to determining what is stated in (2). By the phrase "what is stated" we understand the global propositional meaning of the utterance, whether it be literal or implicative in character.[2]

One might initially ask why we do not focus on (2) itself in order to determine what statement it makes. But it is immediately obvious that (2) by itself does not really make a statement. There are at least three reasons. First, there is an indexical element in (2), namely the pronoun *he*, to which we must find a referent in order to establish a propositional content for (2). Second, (2) is in need of disambiguation. The contracted form *he's* has two

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[1] Shakespeare (1611–12), 55–6 (act II, scene I, l. 239–40). For simplicity, I have printed these lines as prose.

[2] What is stated in (2), as we shall see, is neither constrained by the sentence meaning nor as unrelated to it as implications might be. That is why we have avoided the terms "what is said" and "what is implicated" as they are characterized by Recanati (2001), 75–77.

distinct readings – *he is* and *he has* – and the verb *go* is also ambiguous: there are several lexical entries for *go* in the dictionary. Third, it seems clear from (3) that Antonio is taking (2) as an affirmative answer to his question. How can he take Sebastian to state that Ferdinand is drowned by uttering (2) when (2) does not really mean "he's drowned"?

The literal meaning of (2), whatever it may be, is insufficient for these three reasons. It does not tell us who is gone, nor in which sense he is gone, nor how (2) can make the statement that he's drowned, if that be the statement (2) makes. Now it has never been denied that literal meaning often is insufficient for reasons similar to these and it has always been assumed that the context provides the instance of resolution of such uncertainties. The disagreement in contemporary philosophical and linguistic debate is the distinction, once the content of an utterance has been established, between what in the totality of the content is projected by the literal or semantic meaning and what is the result of contextual or pragmatic external factors. We will not take sides in this debate in the following. We will concentrate on a special kind of contextual contribution.

Most authors on the subject, when discussing the so-called interface between semantics and pragmatics, take as their examples singular sentences from the vernacular. When they stress or deny the importance of context in order to make sense of them they provide these otherwise isolated sentences with a little event situation in which they take place. Where this kind of tangible and perceptual situation will not do there is more often than not an ultimate appeal to the intention of the speaker. Saturation, disambiguation and the inferential purport are in the last resort, when they are not decidable from the situation, a matter of the thoughts, beliefs and desires of the speaker. This move from the externalism of the situation to the internalism of the intention takes place as quickly as it is questionable. It is questionable for the simple reason that it situates the instance of meaning where it is absolutely inaccessible and it allows in principle the content of an utterance to depart in non-regulated ways from that deriving from objective linguistic features.

We shall consider context in quite another, though more etymological, sense. As soon as we consider sentences, not isolated, but as they occur in the development of discourse, we will be more inclined to regard context neither as situation nor intention, but as the relationship between the sentences that compose a text. A discourse or text is not a simple gathering of sentences but a certain arrangement. This is what is meant when it is said that a

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text is constitutively cohesive. In what follows we will not only consider the textual environment of (2) but also what this textual environment tells us of the content of (2). Thus we will stress the importance of the textual cohesion for the statement made by an utterance. We shall successively consider two kinds of cohesion: in section 2, cohesion as the structural relationship between sentences and in section 3 cohesion as the relationship between the contents of the sentences.

Although we will stress the importance of context in the following we will limit the context of (2) to (1) and (3). This is for simplicity of course, but the context of (1) and (3) is in fact sufficient to demonstrate the productivity of cohesion for establishing what is stated by an utterance. We should also say that since it is clear that it is the interpretation of *go* that is crucial to the statement made in (2) we shall chiefly pay attention to this verb.

2. *Go* as a substitute

So what is stated in (2)? We know how Antonio interprets Sebastian's answer if we look at (3). Antonio evidently takes (2) as a straightforward confirmation of (1), viz. as stating:

(4) He's drowned.[3]

Is this interpretation justified? Why do we ask? Well, Antonio wants to know whether Ferdinand is drowned and Sebastian answers (2) and (2) certainly does not *mean* (4), so on what grounds does Antonio take Sebastian to state that Ferdinand is drowned? In our attempt to establish the cohesive contribution to what is stated in (2) we will first consider rather formal or structural cohesive reasons.

Imagine that Sebastian had contented himself with answering:

(5) He is.

In that case we would have no quarrel with Antonio's interpretation. On the contrary, it would have been completely incorrect not to take (5) as stating (4). We would not have

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[3] It may seem that (3) does not necessarily presuppose that Antonio takes (2) as stating (4). We will come back to our interpretation of (3) in the next section.

dreamt of insisting that (5) does not mean (4). For we would have conceived of (5) as a clausal ellipsis[4] and we know that it belongs to the semantic role of certain verbs, notably auxiliary verbs and the verbal substitute *do*, to function in a way as to stand for words already uttered or shortly to be uttered. These verbs behave in a manner analogous to the behaviour of demonstratives and other indexicals. Therefore it is not optional but mandatory to interpret them not according to their strict literal sense but according to their functional role. One reason why verbs like these function in this way is that their strict sense is not very strict but rather vague and general, suitable for a wide extension.

In (2) it is not question of ellipsis of course. But *go* might nevertheless function as a verbal substitute in (2). Of course, *go* does not systematically function in this way. This functioning is no part of a lexical definition of *go*. And it is generally considered that there is only one verbal substitute in English, namely *do*.[5] But the sense of *go* is indeed quite general and for this reason it would be possible to conceive of *go* as sometimes standing for verbs with a more particular sense.

If we want to relate *go* to *drown* in a formal or structural way it is also possible to construe the function of *go* in (2) in analogy with the phenomenon of co-reference. Co-reference is an undeniable feature of nominal phrases occurring in the same text. Two nominal phrases with different senses may refer to the same thing or person for example. Verbal phrases generally are not said not refer, so it is maybe misleading to speak of co-reference in relation to them. But it is possible to consider verbs as taking events as their referential arguments, so in this sense verbs might be said to refer.[6]

Whether or not verbs refer, the analogy is obvious and we will speak of discourse referents of verbs only for simplicity. You can introduce a discourse referent by means of a term with a particular sense and later, in order to avoid tedious repetition, you can refer back to this already introduced discourse referent by means of a term with a more general sense. Examples are legion. A possible way of interpreting (2) thus is that *go* operates in a similar fashion. In (1) a discourse referent is introduced, i.e. the possible event of Ferdinand's drowning, by the verb *drown*. (This event, as it happens to be, is twice fictitious, for it has

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[4] Halliday & Hasan (1976), 216.

[5] Halliday & Hasan (1976), 112.

[6] Kamp & Reyle (1993), 264.

never taken place within the fiction.) In (2) the verb *go* refers back to the event introduced in (1). *Go* may function in this way because it has a sense more general than *drown* has and, possibly, this use of *go* is due only to stylistic variation.

The above interpretation affirms that what is stated in (2) is nothing but (4). This interpretation is contextually or pragmatically determined of course, but it is pragmatic in a quite modest sense. Neither the situation wherein the conversation takes place nor the intention of Sebastian does provide an instance of decision here. There is not a distinction to be made between what is literally said and what is pragmatically implicated. There is only a systematic mode of functioning: general terms may substitute for particular terms when terms are used to speak of discourse referents. If it is acknowledged that this mode of functioning does exist not only for nominal phrases but for verbal phrases as well and if it is granted that *go* functions in this way in (2), then what is stated in (2) is precisely (4). There is not a primary semantic level of meaning according to the lexical sense of *go* and subsequently a pragmatic level of meaning, some contextually processed implication. Ellipsis, substitution and co-reference function without further ado, particularly without much of specific semantic content. The analysis of their mode of functioning is one-levelled and structural in character and so the analysis of *go* in (2) would be too if we ascribe this function to Sebastian's answer.

In sum, we would like to stress, first, that Antonio's interpretation as it appears in (3) is justified and second, that it is an interpretation for which what is stated in (2) is unequivocally and necessarily (4). No other content is available or possible.

3. The interactional restrictions

Our first proposal for a determination of the statement made by (2) on cohesive grounds utilized a formal or structural notion of cohesion. We tried to establish the relationship between (2) and (1) in terms of the function of the verb *go*. We shall now explore another kind of cohesion, which is not functional, but grounded on the content of the linguistic context. We shall not take (2) itself as our point of departure, but focus only on its position in the context. We shall try to determine the statement made by (2) by the restrictions that stem from the immediate textual context and the way (1) and (3) interact with the content of (2). For this reason, we shall not consider the meaning of (2) even in a preliminary manner.

Let us suppose there were a lacuna occurring in the text at the place of (2) and of the approximate volume of (2). Suppose further that we knew that the line missing was Sebastian's. How would we proceed in order to come up with a conjecture about its content?

We know from (1) that Antonio is asking whether Ferdinand is drowned or not and we know from (3) that he has got an affirmative answer, for he draws the conclusion that there is a next heir of Naples. Quite obviously there must be made reference to Ferdinand in the lacuna if the reply is an affirmative answer as to his drowning. Ferdinand must be mentioned in the lacuna. A more complicated question is what must be said of Ferdinand in order to make (3) cohesive.

Now it is clear that the conclusion drawn in (3) is justified provided only that Ferdinand has disappeared in some way or other and is not to return. That would suffice for counting the position of the next heir of Naples as vacant. So it might seem that we do not have to stipulate an answer claiming more than that. That Ferdinand has fatally disappeared is what we have to assume in order to account for the cohesion of the discourse. We may be tempted to say that this is the minimal content of the lacuna.

But cohesion in the sense we are considering now is not only a question of the correct consequences. Interactional cohesion is concerned with more than the inferential line of thought. It regards all the features of the text, not only the content but also the form. Maybe it would be possible to make a distinction between coherence and cohesion in order to account for this difference. If we attributed

(6) Ferdinand has disappeared and is not to return

as the content of the lacuna, it would confirm the inference made by Antonio but it would not explain the form his answer takes. If Sebastian said no more than (6) this would not be a wholly affirmative answer to Antonio's question. In fact, it would be a partial denial of Antonio's demand and for this reason would have textual effects. But Antonio's reply, introduced by an impatient *then*, comes smoothly, without interruption, tranquilly as if there was not really a doubt regarding Ferdinand's drowning. Antonio seems to want only a final and expected affirmation before jumping to the conclusion. There are no textual features

that bear witness to any disappointment on Antonio's part. If this is so then there could be no other content in the lacuna than a straightforward affirmation of Ferdinand's drowning.

Two objections might be made. First, it is certainly psychologically probable that Antonio should display his partial disappointment by some discourse marker or other. The fact that he does not however is hardly conclusive. But intentions, whatever they are, exist only in so far as they are exteriorized, usually as manifested by conventional means. Intentions that do not show do not count. Antonio's reply is not disappointed in form and therefore should not count as disappointed. Second, what does Antonio's interpretation of Sebastian's answer matter to the statement made by Sebastian? After all, Sebastian is not responsible for the taking up of his statement. But to utter something ambiguous, is it not to confide the determination of what is stated thereby to the interpreter?

These are complicated matters and we shall not pursue them here. We wanted to consider what the minimal linguistic context of (2) tells us of its content, and though this context does not give us an entirely conclusive suggestion, it nevertheless gives us a plausible one.[7] Of course it is possible to imagine quite different answers to Antonio's demand that would all make his reaction in (3) intelligible. (4), as we have suggested, is not the only possible cohesive content of (2). But we supposed that the lacuna were of a line's length and in this case it is a little difficult to figure out another reply that would fit so well into the context. If Sebastian did not yield to Antonio's demand he would probably have to develop a more lengthy answer if Antonio's answer should be cohesive. Our proposal is merely a conjecture, though it is a simple and probable one.

The cohesive restrictions of the context do not tell us, of course, what the content of the lacuna *must* be. They do tell us, however, what is a very likely content of the lacuna. If there were no lacuna instead of (2), but a sentence in a language unfamiliar to us, we would be justified in taking this foreign sentence to mean (4).

4. Conclusion

The proposals made for a cohesive determination of the content of (2) certainly go beyond the literal meaning of (2), whatever that literal meaning may be. When literal meaning is

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[7] Further support for our interpretation is available. In his reply before (2), Sebastian says: "I have no hope that he's undrown'd." Shakespeare (1611–12), 55 (act II, scene I, l. 233–40).

considered insufficient in order to make sense of an utterance, appeal is often made to the speaker. Her intention is supposed to decide to whom a pronoun is referring, in which sense an ambiguous expression is used and what inference is implicated. Cohesion, however, has nothing to do with the speaker's intention. From the point of view of cohesion, whoever utters (2) in the context of (1) and (3) has referred to Ferdinand by *he* and used *gone* as to affirm that Ferdinand is drowned. The content of (2) in this case is not a matter of the speaker's beliefs or what she happens to think of, her will to be truthful or to deceive. She might think that Ferdinand is still alive or that he is dead but not by drowning, but still that is not the content of her utterance, nor is it what she has stated.

Cohesion suggests that what is stated is not determined by appeal to someone's intentions. Just as an individual speaker is not in the position to attribute a sense of her own to the sentences of the language, so she is not in a position to pretend that she decides what is the content by an utterance of hers in a given linguistic setting. The content of utterances are more often than not contextually determined, but this contextual determination has nothing to do with perceptual surroundings or intentional interiors, it is a function of the cohesion of the linguistic context. Cohesion is not subjective, it is an internal feature of the discourse, commonly accessible and regulated by non-idiosyncratic standards. That is why cohesion is a criterion of sense superior to intention.

From cohesive considerations, we are invited to read (2) as making the statement (4). What the literal meaning of (2) is or what Sebastian takes himself to be stating just do not enter into consideration. It is certainly necessary to distinguish between the literal elements and the inferential elements in the statement once it is established, but that would be the topic of another paper.

Palle Leth

Department of Philosophy, Gothenburg University

Box 200, SE 405 30 Gothenburg

Sweden

e-mail: palle.leth@filosofi.gu.se

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