

Preface

From the end of the 19th century right up until today, Philosophy of Language has been plagued by an extensive, and notoriously confusing, literature on how to draw the distinction between semantic content and non-semantic content, or, in a terminology we prefer not to use, on how to draw the distinction between semantic and pragmatic content. This debate, at its deepest level, is about how to accommodate context sensitivity within a theory of human communication. It is concerned with the way in which contexts of utterance influence communicative interactions (and, as a corollary, *what* a context of utterance is and what it is to be *in* one). It is impossible to take a stand on *any* issue in the Philosophy of Language without being clear on these issues because what you consider as *evidence* for a semantic theory depends on how these distinctions are ultimately drawn. And it doesn't stop there. Epistemologists, Metaphysicians, Philosophers of Mind, Ethicists, Aestheticians, Philosophical Logicians, Psychologists, Linguists, Anthropologists, Literary Critics, Cognitive Scientists, and perhaps, everyone else, live by claims about whether this or that expression is context sensitive or not. More often than not, theorists conclude that a lot more context sensitivity abounds than one might have thought. All such claims presuppose a general theory of the role of context in human communication.

Our ambitious goal in this book is to defend a simple and naïve view about context sensitivity, the kind of view you might come up with after just a few moments reflection. Our view goes something like this: There are just a few easily identifiable context sensitive expressions in natural language. In English, they are familiar words like 'I', 'you', 'that', 'now', etc. In essence, our view is that there are no deep secrets or hidden surprises behind that 'etc'.

To this end, we defend a combination of two views, both of which we have given fancy names: *Semantic Minimalism* and *Speech Act Pluralism*. If these views are right (and they are), then numerous philosophers and linguists are guilty of some very profound mistakes. Not only that, but if we are right, then the

chief theses of a significant number of published articles and books are based on an internally inconsistent view. In this sense, our view is deeply critical of the last century of the literature on these issues. Since we are making these rather bold claims about colleagues' views, we try to be very careful in our presentations of the views we criticize. We have included extensive exegetical sections. As a result, our readers will, we hope, end up not only with a presentation of the correct view, but also with a clear understanding of the structure of the last one hundred years of debate about these issues.

The central opponents in this book are philosophers and linguists who inflate the role of context in semantics. We call such philosophers *Contextualists*. The common thread that runs throughout our criticism of contextualism is that it fails to account for how we communicate *across contexts*. People with different background beliefs, goals, audiences, perceptual inputs, etc. can understand each other. They can agree or disagree. They can say, assert, claim, state, investigate or make fun of the very same claim. No theory of communication is adequate unless it explains how this is possible. Contextualist cannot provide such an explanation. The solution proposed in this book is a context *insensitive* semantics (i.e. the view we call Semantic Minimalism), combined with Speech Act Pluralism.