

Contexts: Semantics and pragmatics for indexicals and linguistic interaction

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It is a rather obvious fact that the meaning of an utterance somehow depends on the context of its use. For instance, the meaning of indexicals like I, here, now depends on who is uttering them, when, and where, and whether an utterance is interpreted as ironic also depends on the context. But what is a context? This class will examine this question from both a semantic and a pragmatic point of view, thereby distinguishing different theoretical elaborations of the concept of a “context”, all of which play an important role in current semantic and pragmatic theories. We will see how a semantics for context-dependent expressions can be formulated and how pragmatic effects of utterances can be modelled, before we examine what the limits of the standard notions of a “context” are when it comes to phenomena of linguistic interaction, which we will then try to overcome by questioning some orthodoxies about contexts and context dependency. This class will therefore provide basic knowledge of theories of context in semantics and pragmatics, while also providing insights into recent research in this area.