

Homophonic Reports and Gradual Communication

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Abstract: Pragmatic modulation makes contextual information necessary for interpretation. This poses a problem for homophonic reports and inter-contextual communication in general: of co-situated interlocutors we can expect some common ground, but non-co-situated interpreters lack access to the context of utterance. Here I argue that we can nonetheless share modulated contents via homophonic reports. First, occasion-unspecific information is often sufficient for the recovery of modulated content. Second, interpreters can recover what is said with different degrees of accuracy. Homophonic reports and inter-contextual communication are often successful because the reporting context does not demand full accuracy.

1. Introduction

It is a common practice to engage in a conversation and to later share what we have learnt with further audiences. Here I will be concerned with those cases in which something originally said in a context C_1 is shared with a different audience in context C_2 , via an indirect report or by a plain assertion. These include, at least, the following kind of cases:

- Indirect reports. In particular, for reasons that will become clear later, homophonic indirect reports. A homophonic indirect report¹ is one in which the reporter reports what is said by uttering the exact same words as the original speaker. Imagine that Paula says ‘Marie has moved’. A homophonic indirect report would be ‘Paula said that Marie has moved’.
- Assertions (or possibly other speech acts) that can be reconstructed as indirect instances of indirect reports. An example might be useful. Imagine the following conversation: ‘I met Paula this morning and she told me about Marie. She has moved.’ I take it that ‘She has moved’ is not, strictly speaking, an indirect report. However, it could be reconstructed as one (‘Paula said that Marie has moved’).

- Assertions (or possibly other speech acts) in which the speaker shares information obtained in a previous speech act with a new audience. Going back to the previous example, this would be the case if the reporter was to simply assert ‘Marie has moved’. Again, there is an indirect connection to a possible indirect report. If asked ‘How do you know?’, the reporter could answer ‘I met Paula this morning and she told me’.

All these cases can be counted as indirect reports, on a broad understanding of report in which the locution ‘said that’ can be implicit or even optional. Thus, we can speak of an original and a reporting context. Although this will be my main focus, the ideas presented here can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to instances of inter-contextual communication, such as deliberations involving a number of non-co-situated interlocutors over a period of time, reading newspapers, etc. Thus I take the discussion to shed light on the phenomenon of sharing thoughts across contexts.

In order to report (in the broad sense, but also on a more restrictive sense), speakers seem to use at least two strategies: they repeat the same sentence, or they paraphrase what the speaker meant (or, better, what they take the speaker to have meant). In this paper, I will only be concerned with the first strategy. Using the terminology introduced so far, we can label the phenomenon I am interested in as ‘homophonic reporting’. Homophonic reports play a central role in our practice of communicating across contexts. They enable speakers to easily share content. Because of this, they constitute a central piece in ordinary inter-contextual communication. However, it has been argued (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005) that this kind of report should be inadequate if, as many philosophers hold, what gets communicated in most verbal exchanges are contents that go beyond conventional meaning, i.e., modulated contents. My aim here is to argue that homophonic reporting is compatible with the phenomenon of modulation. In order to argue for this claim, I will, first, distinguish two varieties of contextual information and explore how reporters exploit them, and, second, argue that recovering a coarser-grained version of the (originally) intended proposition often secures inter-contextual communication and homophonic reports. The standards governing reports are often low, and successful communication is a matter of recovering speaker meaning with the degree of accuracy required by the goals of the conversation. The resulting view of communication is one in which reporters take advantage of the background information shared by non-co-situated interpreters and exploit the features of the reporting context.

Before going into details, let me present some background. According to contextualism, what is said (i.e., the proposition expressed by a use of a sentence) is often, or perhaps always, the result of modulation². Modulation, or pragmatic adjustment, is the process whereby the conventional meaning of an expression gets modified in order to fit the specifics of the context of use. The modulated or adjusted content includes contextual elements that are not part of what the expression means. Here are three well-known examples:

(1) I'm tired (Carston, 2002).

The relevant degree of tiredness can vary from context to context. One speaker can use (1) to communicate that she is too tired to go out for drinks, whereas a different speaker can mean by the same sentence that she is too tired to watch a movie at home. The conventional meaning of 'tired' is enriched thus expressing something more precise than what is encoded in the expression.

(2) The leaves are green (Travis, 1996).

The conventional meaning of the adjective 'green' simply refers to a color. However, when this expression is used, its meaning can be made more specific. Speakers can use 2 to talk about the original color of the leaves, their observable color (imagine that the leaves are painted green), their color on certain observation conditions, the color that the leaves exhibit on a relevant part (perhaps only on a specific spot), etc. All these, let us say, contextual meanings, are more specific than the conventional meaning of 'green'.

(3) Tipper is ready (Bach, 1994).

The conventional meaning of this sentence does not specify what Tipper is ready for. In conversation, it can be used to say that Tipper is ready for dinner, ready for a job interview, ready to give a speech, etc.

Communication typically concerns modulated meaning. I will not provide any new argument for this claim here, as I take it to be well established³. Thus, I will assume that

conventional meaning very often falls short of speaker meaning and of the content retrieved by the interpreter in successful instances of communication. Typically, if by (3) a speaker means, e.g., that Tipper is ready for a job interview, the interpreter needs to retrieve this modulated content for the exchange to be a successful instance of communication⁴. Recovering only conventional meaning would most likely be insufficient.

The point that modulation is relevant for communication is quite uncontroversial. However, the problem arises when it comes to the recovery of modulated content. Whenever the meaning of a sentence undergoes a process of pragmatic adjustment, it seems that the interpreter needs to be aware of the relevant contextual features and thus have recourse to different kinds of knowledge, including plausibly knowledge about previous discourse, information that can be obtained via perception, knowledge about the speaker, etc. Because of this, Cappelen and Lepore claim that contextualism makes communication, and in particular inter-contextual communication, impossible (2005, 123-124). Of interlocutors situated in the same context we can expect some common ground, but things get complicated when we move to inter-contextual communication. According to these authors, a non-co-situated interpreter of an utterance (the interpreter of a homophonic report), someone without access to the context of utterance, lacks the information required to retrieve modulated content. Detractors of contextualism, called minimalists, have tried to ground inter-contextual communication on the transmission of conventional meaning rather than modulated content⁵. However, this is insufficient as an explanation of our communicative practices, as it is difficult to deny that very often we share modulated content, even across contexts.

In this article I argue that we are often able to communicate across contexts via homophonic reports because the differences between reported and reporting context are not as relevant to communication as it might first appear. I will distinguish three scenarios. First, modulated content can be recovered by having recourse to what I will call ‘occasion-unspecific information’ (section 3). Thus, the fact that the non-co-situated interpreter lacks access to the original context of utterance is not relevant to the interpretation of many homophonic reports. Second, occasion-specific information can usually be made explicit, i.e., the reporter can share relevant aspects of the original context of utterance with non-co-situated audiences (section 4). Third, in inter-contextual communication interpreters often recover impoverished contents, but

these contents can be enough to secure communication. Interpretation is gradual, and a high degree of accuracy is not always required (section 5).

2. The challenge

Let me start by insisting on what the problem is supposed to be. One strategy that speakers seem to use in order to communicate across contexts is what I have called homophonic reporting:

Homophonic reporting: In order to inter-contextually share what is said by an utterance of sentence S, the reporter repeats S.

Homophonic reporting covers those cases in which we share the information obtained in a speech act simply by uttering the exact same words that were originally uttered. Context-sensitivity can make homophonic reports inappropriate. To see why, let's think of an overtly context-sensitive sentence. Imagine Sandra uttering (4) in C_1 :

(4) I'm tired.

Regardless of the possible modulation of 'tired', the indexical creates a problem. If Javier was to report homophonically, he would utter 5:

(5) Sandra said that I'm tired.

But (5), uttered by Javier, is clearly inappropriate. It says that Sandra said that Javier, not Sandra, is tired. Since modulation is a phenomenon of contextual adjustment, the same should happen with instances of modulation. Modulation should make homophonic reports inappropriate. Moreover, modulation is pervasive. So, homophonic reports should always, or nearly always, be inappropriate. However, in many cases they seem to be an appropriate device to share information. The problem is to explain how it can be so.

A possible answer here is that homophonic reports do not really work. Contextualists have argued against the idea that sharing content across two non-identical contexts is always as

easy as using the same non-indexical sentence in both of them. Take indirect reports of the form ‘Speaker A said that p’, where p is the exact sentence that A originally uttered. Recanati (2006), Travis (2006) and Wieland (2010b) have argued that this kind of homophonic indirect report is often false. Wieland imagines the following example. We have a barrel full of apples. Some of the apples are affected by some fungus and we need to discard them. The fungus makes the interior of the apples red. Anne cuts an apple and says (6):

(6) The apple is red.

Now imagine that the apple is left on the table. When Emma gets home, she says that she is hungry and asks if that thing on the table is a red apple. A report such as (2) would be incorrect here:

(7) Anne said that the apple is red.

Given the new context, the plausible interpretation of ‘red’ is not *affected by some fungus* but rather *has red skin*. The moral of this example is that sharing linguistic meaning is not always enough for same-saying.

I think, however, that this is not the whole story. Although it is certainly true that homophonic reports do not always work, there seem to be cases in which this strategy can be successfully used. My aim is to explain why, i.e., in virtue of what (some) homophonic reports of modulated content are successful. Cappelen and Lepore (2006) provide a convincing example of a successful report:

(8) Dick Cheney and several other members of the Bush administration knew that Saddam Hussein posed no serious threat to the United States.

(8) is a quote from an interview with John Kerry on National Public Radio in 2004. Cappelen and Lepore (2006) hold that we can understand what Kerry said simply by reading (8) and that we can share it by repeating the sentence, i.e., with a homophonic report. I think this sounds plausible. Imagine that Niamh and Claire have been discussing about the Bush

administration. One of the sentences that Niamh has uttered is (8). Claire wants now to share with Theresa what she has learnt. One way in which she could do that is by uttering (8). However, some of the expressions in the sentence, including notably ‘knew’, have been thought to be context-sensitive. According to contextualists about knowledge⁶, whether an utterance of a sentence of the form ‘S knows that p’ is true partly depends on what is at stake, on how demanding standards for knowledge are. These can shift from context to context. Having access only to the linguistic meaning of (8), Theresa should be unable to grasp the modulated meaning of the sentence—or so the thought goes.

Here is another example:

(9) Napoleon was an interesting character.

About this sentence and a particular use of it by Cappelen, Cappelen and Lepore write:

Call this the Napoleon Speech Act. We think the following is obviously true: Other people in other contexts have said, could have said, and will say exactly what Cappelen said with the Napoleon Speech Act. This would be miraculous if RC [Radical Contextualism] were true. Those features which supposedly are constitutive of the content of (the what is said by) the Napoleon-Utterance are not shared by other contexts of utterance. The only way for it to be true that others have said what was said by the Napoleon-Utterance is if the specifics of the context of utterance are irrelevant to content determination. (Cappelen and Lepore, 2005, p. 127)

I take home the following point. Imagine now Niamh uttering (9) as part of a conversation with Claire. According to the contextualist, the proposition expressed by Niamh’s utterance will be the result of a process of modulation. In particular, who counts as an ‘interesting character’ is something that can shift across contexts, with some contexts being more demanding than others. A very simplistic contextualist theory for this expression could go as follows. In context, a threshold for the property of *being interesting* is determined. Whether or not Napoleon satisfies the expression ‘interesting’ depends on whether or not he is above the threshold. Presumably, the threshold will shift across contexts, thus giving rise to different understandings of (9). Alternatively, we can say that ‘interesting character’ is enriched in different ways (*interesting character when compared to ordinary people, interesting character for Spy fiction*, etc.). But now imagine that Claire wants to share with Theresa, who knows nothing about the original context of utterance,

Niamh's opinions. It seems that one way in which she can do that is with a homophonic report of (9).

Cappelen and Lepore's discussion is framed in terms of same-saying. This expression can be misleading. Minimalists about same-saying as Cappelen and Lepore hold that sameness of conventional meaning is enough for same-saying, in absence of classical indexicals. By contrast, contextualists use 'say' and related expressions ('what is said') to refer to modulated content. However, instead of focusing on same-saying, I will focus on interpretation. The reason for this shift in perspective is that I am concerned here with communication. Ultimately, what matters to communication is that the interpreter retrieves the proposition intended by the speaker, or a proposition related to it⁷. What I am interested in, and what is problematic for modulation, is how can the interpreter access modulated content. Thus viewed, Cappelen and Lepore's point raises a question about how can an interpreter grasp the modulated content of the original utterances of (8) and (9) in absence of knowledge of the original context. Cappelen and Lepore's line of reasoning highlights the fact that we often understand repetitions of sentences that have been originally uttered in contexts we know nothing, or little, about (i.e., we often understand homophonic reports). Here is the challenge. At least in some cases it seems that the only thing we need to do in order to communicate across contexts is to use the same non-indexical sentence in both of them, i.e., to repeat the sentence. But assuming that the content that is shared is not identical to the conventional meaning of the sentence uttered (i.e., that what we share is modulated content), how can the non-co-situated interpreters come up with the intended interpretation?

Note that the possibility to communicate across two different contexts C_1 and C_2 by using the same sentence is not a problem in case the contextual features relevant for modulation are kept identical in C_1 and C_2 . This can happen by coincidence, and it should be expected that speakers exploit the coincidence. Imagine that Niamh tells Claire during lunch 'It will rain on Saturday'. Later, Claire says to her neighbor Theresa 'A friend told me that it will rain on Saturday'. As many philosophers have argued, 'It will rain on Saturday' can be used to talk about a variety of places (the place where the conversation takes place or any other contextually salient place)⁸. However, since both conversations take place in the same city, and assuming that both concern that city, there is no reason why 'It will rain on Saturday' could not express the same content in them.

3. Occasion-unspecific information

What enables us to correctly interpret a homophonic report? How is it that quite often non-co-situated interpreters are able to retrieve a content that goes beyond conventional meaning? The first part of the answer is that, despite not sharing a full context, original speaker and non-co-situated interpreter typically share some background information. Homophonic reports are inter-contextual in the sense that the interpreter of the report is not co-situated with the original speaker and thus has no direct access to the reported utterance. However, this is compatible with there being some overlap between reported and reporting context.

The term ‘context’ is often loosely used. It refers to the conversational setting and what is common ground in it. But this includes several different types of information. At least, it includes the current state of the conversation, the physical setting, mutual knowledge about what is relevant and broader common knowledge⁹. It can be useful to distinguish two types of contextual information: occasion-specific and occasion-unspecific information. Occasion-specific information includes the current state of the conversation, information about physical setting and mutual knowledge about what is salient or relevant in the conversational setting. Occasion-unspecific information includes background information or common knowledge that can be used in the process of interpreting speech but that is not specifically tied to the conversation. This second type of information is often shared across contexts and exploited by reporters. Underestimating this fact might obscure our reporting practices.

Occasion-unspecific information includes factual and metalinguistic information. By factual information I mean information about the world, for instance, about historical events. This information is plausibly playing a key role in our interpretation of (8). The reason why we are able to understand what Kerry said (beyond conventional meaning) is that we share a great deal of knowledge with his interlocutors. In particular, this can be used to explain an inter-contextual interpretation of the context-sensitive term ‘know’ in (8). We, non-co-situated interpreters, know that Bush went to war in Iraq, that the justification for that war was the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in that country, etc. It is clear that, when talking about a war declaration, knowledge standards are high. Hence, we can infer a pragmatically adjusted meaning for ‘know’, just as a co-situated interpreter would do.

Metalinguistic information includes information about which interpretations are more frequent. Suppose that most of the time the expression ‘red’ is used to describe an apple it refers to the color of its skin, i.e. to certain varieties of apples. People familiar with this statistical knowledge will plausibly think that the stereotypical conversation in which the expression ‘red apple’ is used is one where ‘red’ described the apple’s skin, and use this information to interpret an out of the blue utterance of the sentence ‘I’ve bought some red apples’. Similarly, they can use their knowledge about the most frequent sense of ‘red’ when combined with ‘apple’ in order to interpret reports of the form ‘Paul said that the he had bought red apples’. These interpretations based on likelihood can be called ‘interpretations by default’¹⁰. When we interpret by default we trust that the present use will be aligned with (most) past uses¹¹. This explains why we have no problem with reports of utterances of (9), even assuming that ‘interesting’ is pragmatically adjusted. First thing to note, and not a case of modulation, is that an interpreter must identify who the name ‘Napoleon’ refers to. Here I will assume that the utterance is about Napoleon I because it is more frequent to find references to him than to Napoleon II or Napoleon III. In doing so, I interpret by default. Once I have identified a bearer, I move to the modulation of ‘interesting character’; I can reason as follows. Napoleon is a historical character. Usually, historical characters are compared with other historical characters. The threshold for ‘interesting’ can be taken to be higher than it is in conversations about, let us say, work colleagues. So I assume that the threshold here is as high as in other conversations about historical characters. Although I might not be able to come up with a very definite sense of ‘interesting’, I can roughly interpret that ‘interesting character’ means here something along the lines of *interesting for a military leader and/or emperor*.

Two clarifications are in order. First, it is worth noting that the reporter has here an active role. When a cooperative reporter decides to repeat the sentence that was uttered in the reported context, she does so on the (implicit, unconscious) assumption that the interpreter has the means to grasp the intended interpretation. In this sense, she is not simply repeating, she is choosing to repeat rather than to paraphrase¹². Second, interpretations by default, as well as interpretations based on general factual knowledge, are fallible¹³. Interpreting by default often enables us to get at the intended interpretation and thus can be considered a reliable strategy. However, it sometimes fails. Although we typically use the expression ‘red apple’ to refer to apples with red skin, there are conversations in which it can be used to talk about rotten apples

(apples that are red in the inside, see example in section 1). This should come as no surprise. In the process of interpretation, interpreters have recourse to the information that is available to them and use it in order to modulate the conventional meaning of the sentence used. However, in some cases the available information might be insufficient for them to guess what the speaker meant. In interpreting a homophonic report, the interpreter lacks information about the conversational setting. In some cases, this occasion-specific information would override an otherwise adequate interpretation by default.

I will finish with a possible objection. It could be argued that, given that occasion-unspecific information is shared, and occasion-unspecific information can be counted as contextual information (as part of the common ground), the examples I have discussed are not really instances of *inter-contextual* communication. We understand utterances of (8) and (9) because we do share a context with the utterer. Although how to individuate contexts is admittedly a difficult question, I think that one should resist this notion of inter-contextuality. The reason is that it is too restrictive. On this notion, few reports would count as properly inter-contextual, for we almost always share some background and use it in interpretation. Here is an example that would be ruled out. Imagine that I borrow a coat from a friend and find in a pocket a piece of paper that seems to be a shopping list with some items crossed out. On it, I read ‘red apples’ and come to think that my friend has bought red-skin apples. Intuitively, this is a case of inter-contextual interpretation. However, I plausibly share with whoever wrote the list knowledge about the most common use of ‘red apple’.

4. Explicit occasion-specific information

In the previous section I considered those cases in which the intended modulated content can be recovered by using occasion-unspecific information. I move now to scenarios where occasion-specific information is necessary for interpretation. First thing to ask is: Is dependence on occasion-specific information a problem for homophonic reporting? A positive answer seems reasonable: non-co-situated interpreters lack occasion-specific information, and so should be unable to grasp homophonic reports of occasion-specific modulated content. However, I will argue that dependence on occasion-specific information is not always a problem. I distinguish two kinds of scenarios. First, there are cases where the reporter can make explicit the required

occasion-specific information. These are the topic of this section. Second, there are conversations where the common ground between interlocutors includes a great deal of occasion-specific information relevant for interpretation. In these cases, the reporter might not be in a position to make everything explicit. I leave this second kind of cases for the next section.

Reporters ordinarily provide the background against which to interpret reports. For example, they can make the topic of the original conversation explicit. Imagine that (2) is used by a botanist working on a study on chlorophyll during a conversation with her colleagues¹⁴. In order to report the utterance to a new audience, I can say something like ‘The botanists were discussing about their study on chlorophyll. They needed more leaves. One of them said that the leaves (on the tree in the yard) are green’. Thus, I add an additional sentence that makes the occasion-specific information explicit. This added sentence provides the contextual information required to interpret the report. My point here is that, at least in some cases, small bits of linguistically articulated contextual information is all that is needed to recover the modulated content intended by the speaker.

It can be tempting to think of modulated content as something very specific, and indeed it can be so in some cases (this is the topic of the next section). For those cases, making explicit all the contextual information necessary to retrieve what the speaker means can be a difficult task, because of practical reasons. However, we should not suppose that this is what typically occurs. We can imagine Tipper’s friends chatting about Tipper’s bad performance on her last job interview. Discussing about a new interview she is having, one of them utters 3. We can take it that he means that Tipper is ready for the job interview, in the sense of having thought the answers that she will provide to some prototypical questions. But none of the interlocutors needs to entertain a very precise sense of exactly which questions she needs to be ready for in order to count as ‘ready’ in that conversational context¹⁵. A reporter could make the relevant contextual information explicit by saying ‘Tipper has another job interview. She has been thinking about HR’s questions’. In general, neither the speaker’s communicative intentions nor the output of the audience’s interpretation needs to be very fine grained. An enriched content such as *Tipper is ready for the job interview* might exhaust intentions and interpretation. Of course, there will be contexts in which (2) and (3) can express very specific contents. However, very specific contents are not always the case.

5. Communication as a gradual phenomenon

In the previous sections I have presented two kind of cases in which we can share modulated content across contexts through a homophonic report: cases in which the interpreter can recover the modulated content by having recourse to occasion-unspecific information and those in which the occasion-specific information required is made explicit. Here I move to a third scenario: cases in which having access to rich occasion-specific information is necessary in order to retrieve the intended proposition, but where the interpreter lacks access to the whole range of details that were common ground in the original exchange. I will argue that homophonic reporting can be adequate in these cases as well, although it not always is. The idea is the following. When the interpreter has an impoverished representation of the context of utterance, the output of her interpretation is also an impoverished version of what the speaker means. But this is a common phenomenon and does not preclude communicative success. As Relevance Theorists have argued,¹⁶ ordinary communication should not be seen as a perfect transmission of thoughts. In particular, my aim is to argue that interpreters (either co-situated or non-co-situated) often recover a content that is less specific than the content intended by the speaker. In this sense, interpretation is gradual. Whether the impoverished version of the intended proposition is enough for communication to be successful depends on what is at stake at the conversational context. Something similar can be said about homophonic reports. In an indirect report, the reporter plays with two contexts at once. The aim is to make accessible to a new audience those aspects of the reported utterance that are relevant in the reporting context. But not every aspect needs to be relevant. As a result, an impoverished content can be adequate given the purposes of the reporting context.

Let me first present the claim that interpretation is gradual in intra-contextual communication. The phenomenon I would like to draw attention to is that of conversations in which the interlocutors attain different, let us say, levels of understanding of a given utterance. By this I mean cases in which one interpreter reaches a deep understanding of what the speaker means, whereas the understanding of another interpreter is more superficial, or cases in which the interpreter does not reach a completely accurate representation of the proposition the speaker intends to communicate. The situation is quite ordinary. As a first approach, think of implicatures. Imagine that we are discussing about where to go for lunch. I look through the

window and say ‘It’s sunny’. With this information, most interpreters will probably interpret me as suggesting that we go out for lunch. Now imagine that we have been talking about our favorite cafés in town and you have told me about a very nice place with outdoor seating and that you like to go there when it’s sunny. Imagine, further, that I have asked you to take me there some time. With this additional information, you would probably take it that I mean something like ‘Let’s go to the place you mentioned earlier’. The same happens with modulation. When two interlocutors know each other well, and are aware of the topic of the conversation, and so on, then their understanding of each other’s utterances can be very deep. By contrast, in cases where an interpreter has only broadly grasped what the conversation is about, or has little information about the speaker, her understanding of the utterance will be more superficial. The more information an interpreter has, the more accurate her interpretation is.

Let us consider an example involving again the term ‘green’. Imagine that Pia has a tree with brown leaves. She receives a phone call from a botanist who tells her ‘I need green leaves’. If Pia knows nothing or too little about the person calling, she will have a rough understanding according to which she wants leaves with a certain color (leaves that are green in some sense or other). If she knows that this person is a botanist, she will interpret her utterance as concerning natural properties only. And if she knows that the botanist is working, let us say, on a research about chlorophyll, her understanding will be deeper. For example, she will exclude not only painted leaves, but also leaves that are green by the effect of something other than chlorophyll (microorganisms, mold, etc.). In the first two cases, the proposition retrieved by Pia is less specific than the one retrieved by, for example, the botanist’s colleagues. We can reflect this phenomenon by representing the output of their interpretations with propositions of different granularities. Propositions can be more or less fine-grained, depending on how specific the properties or concepts involved, the building blocks of the proposition, are. For example, the property *naturally green* is more specific than *green* and less specific than *naturally green because of the presence of chlorophyll*. Being naturally green because of the presence of chlorophyll is a way of being naturally green, which, in turn, is a way of being green.

Interestingly, there can be cases of successful communication even though the proposition recovered by the audience is coarser-grained than the proposition intended by the speaker. Imagine that when Pia receives the botanist’s call the leaves on her tree are brown. In this setting, a coarse-grained proposition such as *that the person calling needs leaves that are green in some sense or other*

would be good enough for Pia to provide an adequate answer, something like ‘Sorry, the leaves on my tree are brown’, even if the botanist has something more specific in mind (for example, *naturally green leaves*). One could dispute that this is a successful instance of communication on the basis that there is no unique proposition shared by Pia and the botanist. I will go back to this point and show that pluripropositionalism can help us understand what is shared between speaker and hearer, but for the moment let me note that the exchange would count as successful on ordinary standards. The botanist wants to get something (certain kind of leaves). She tells Pia. Pia gives her answer and, as a result of the linguistic exchange, the botanist acquires the information that she cannot get what she needs from Pia, which is correct.

Here is a second example. Imagine Sandra coming home after work on a Friday night and her two flat mates chatting about what to do. Andrew suggests that they go to the movies, to which Sandra replies ‘I’m tired’. Sandra is actually exhausted and means *that she is too tired to do anything other than going to bed*, thus excluding not only going to the movies, but also watching a movie at home, etc. However, because of the previous conversation, Andrew interprets *that Sandra is too tired to go to the movies* and decides to go on his own. François, by contrast, knows that Sandra has been through a difficult week at work and is well aware that she is exhausted, and so grasps the finer-grained proposition that Sandra intended. Again, even if Sandra intended a more precise content than *that Sandra is too tired to go to the movies*, and even though this content was recoverable to some interlocutors (François did recover it), we can consider her exchange with Andrew successful, given the purposes of the conversation. Andrew wanted to know if Sandra was up to go to the movies, and his interpretation of Sandra’s utterance was good enough for that. He just happened to recover, on the basis of the sentence expressed together with some contextual information (previous discourse, in this case), a coarser-grained proposition than the one intended by Sandra. Note also that in the two examples presented communication is not successful by luck. Both interpreters recover a proposition that is related to the one intended by the speaker. It is an impoverished version of it.

Together with these, there are of course cases in which a coarser-grained version of the intended proposition is insufficient to ground communication. Imagine now that Pia is decorating her garden and has painted the leaves on her tree green. She receives a call from the botanist and, not being aware that the botanist will use the leaves for a scientific study, she retrieves the proposition *that the person calling needs leaves that are green in some sense or other*. Here it

seems that the impoverished content will lead to a misunderstanding. According to her interpretation, the leaves on her tree count as what the botanist wants, but, according to the botanist's intended meaning, they do not.

As a general rule, we can say that impoverished contents are admissible when they are conducive to the goals of the conversation. An interpretation is goal-conducive when the information it provides can be fruitfully used as part of a plan to achieve the goal at stake, i.e., when it does not mislead the interpreter in the achievement of the goals. These can be practical, extralinguistic goals (getting leaves), but also more theoretical goals, as happens when the whole point of the conversation is to share information or discuss about a topic with no envisaged practical application. If the interpreter retrieves a coarser-grained version of the proposition intended by the speaker, and this coarse-grained proposition is informative enough for the achievement of the goal at stake in the conversation, then the exchange can be counted as successful.

The examples discussed are instances of the phenomenon of free enrichment, i.e., a pragmatic process whereby the meaning of an expression is rendered more specific. Let me say a bit more about successful communication for conversations in which meaning is enriched. I hold that it is a necessary condition for communication that the proposition recovered by the interpreter is suitably related (not necessarily identical) to the proposition intended by the speaker. What do I mean by 'suitably related'? In cases of enrichment, we can think of nested propositions. Conventional meaning determines a proposition p_1 . p_1 can be enriched, thus giving rise to the enriched proposition p_2 . A way of thinking about the relation between p_1 and p_2 is to see p_1 as included in p_2 . In this sense, they are nested. p_2 could in turn be further enriched. Informally:

Conventional meaning: p_1

Enrichment 1 (p_2): $\langle \text{enriched } p_1 \rangle$

Enrichment 2 (p_3): $\langle \text{enriched } p_2 \rangle$, i.e., $\langle \text{enriched } \langle \text{enriched } p_1 \rangle \rangle$

This can be used to represent the propositions used in the examples discussed. For example:

- (p₁) *Pia's leaves are green.*
- (p₂) *Pia's leaves are naturally green.*
- (p₃) *Pia's leaves are naturally green because of the presence of chlorophyll.*

All three propositions can be intended by a speaker who utters the sentence 'Pia's leaves are green'. p₁ captures the conventional meaning of the sentence, whereas p₂ and p₃ express enriched propositions. p₃ is finer-grained than p₂ and p₁. Similarly:

- (p₄) *Sandra is tired.*
- (p₅) *Sandra is too tired to go to the movies.*
- (p₆) *Sandra is too tired to do anything other than going to bed. (= Sandra is too tired to go to the movies, watch a movie at home, go out for dinner, read a novel, etc.).*

p₃ entails p₂ and p₁, and p₆ entails p₅ and p₄. If we think of the content of these propositions in terms of possible worlds, we can say that the set of worlds that make p₃ true is a subset of the set of worlds that makes p₂ true, etc. The proposition recovered by the interpreter is suitably related to the one intended by the speaker when it is included in it. Being included in it, it is entailed by it¹⁷.

Recovering a suitably related proposition is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Given an utterance, whether recovering a suitably related proposition *p* warrants communication will depend on the goals of the conversation. Going back to a previous example, both p₄ and p₅ are suitably related to the proposition intended by Sandra (namely, p₆). Now, the point of the conversation is to decide what to do and, in particular, to decide whether or not to go to the movies together. To this aim, p₄ is not informative enough. This proposition is both compatible with Sandra being too tired to go to the movies and with Sandra being too tired to work and not too tired to go to the movies. The granularity threshold is set by the goals of the conversation¹⁸.

What about inter-contextual communication? It often happens that, when an utterance is shared with a non-co-situated interpreter, some fidelity is lost. Imagine John and Laura chatting about Tipper's bad performance in her last job interview and the kind of things she must be ready for. Later, John reports 'Tipper has another interview tomorrow. Laura said that she is ready', addressing Jake, who was not present during the conversation. The property intended by

Laura could have been a very specific one. However, on the basis of the indirect report the non-co-situated interpreter will probably not be able to get at it. Rather, Jake's interpretation should be conceived as a coarser-grained proposition. Something like *that Tipper is ready for the job interview*. As with the previous examples, this can be a case of successful communication. For the purposes of John and Jake's conversation, it can be enough to convey *that Tipper is ready for the interview* and not something as precise as what Laura meant. Perhaps Jake just wants to get a rough idea about how Tipper is doing.

So far I have spoken of gradual interpretation. I think that, because interpretation is gradual and therefore the proposition intended by the speaker can be recovered with different degrees of accuracy, communication itself should be regarded as a gradual phenomenon. Rather than thinking of successful communication as the transmission of a unique proposition (the intended proposition), we should see it as a matter of recovering speaker meaning with the degree of accuracy required for the goals of the conversation. In the case of homophonic reports, the degree of accuracy is set by whatever is at stake at the reporting context. Reporting contexts can be less demanding than the original context of utterance, and so impoverished (or coarser-grained) versions of the intended proposition can be admissible.

At this point one could wonder whether there is any difference between this proposal and a minimalist approach according to which what is shared in inter-contextual communication is a minimal proposition, i.e., a non-modulated content, as Cappelen and Lepore hold. There certainly is a common point. The minimal content of an utterance can be considered an impoverished version of the (modulated) proposition intended by the speaker. My proposal leaves room for cases in which sharing a minimal proposition is sufficient for communication. However, minimal content is not the only impoverished content. We need to explain those cases in which cross-contextual communication requires the sharing of a modulated content. The examples presented suggest that there is a range of contents with different granularities that can be shared, with the granularity required being relative to the conversational goals. In some cases, we need to go beyond minimal content.

Interestingly, this analysis can be seen as a similarity view, but also as a form of pluripropositionalism^{19 20}. Rather than representing an act of communication as involving only one intended and one recovered proposition, we can represent the content of an utterance as a plurality of propositions, ranging from the minimal content of the sentence uttered (conventional

meaning plus referents of indexicals) to the modulated meaning intended by the speaker. In between, there might be a plurality of propositions with different granularities. When a speaker utters, e.g., (1), the content of her speech act includes, at least, a proposition corresponding to the minimal content of her utterance and a modulated proposition and, possibly other in-between propositions (p₅ and p₆, for instance). Thus viewed, the idea that communication is gradual is compatible with there being shared content—although it might not be the finest-grained proposition, there is a proposition that is shared between speaker and hearer.

What about the content of homophonic indirect reports? A homophonic indirect report is true if and only if it attributes to the speaker at least one of the propositions that she expressed in the reported utterance (and does not, on top of that, attribute any proposition that was not expressed in the reported utterance).²¹ Following the pluripropositionalist perspective, we can say that the report picks a subset of the propositions expressed in the reported context. This subset might include only one proposition, but we should not rule out the possibility that more than one proposition is transmitted. Which proposition(s) the reporter manages to transmit depends on what is available in the reporting context. As contextualists have noted (see section 2), reporting contexts in which the topic under discussion is radically different from the topic of the reported context lead to the misinterpretation of the homophonic indirect report²². In order for the reporter to successfully share content via a homophonic report, the reporting context must be similar enough to the reported context or otherwise contain enough clues about how to interpret the report—perhaps the previous discourse contains information about the reported context, perhaps the reporter herself makes some occasion-specific information explicit. Moreover, it can be the case that some impoverished contents are not conducive to the goal of the reporting context. Some impoverished contents, and in particular the minimal proposition, might be too unspecific. For the report to be adequate it must not only be true, but also transmit a proposition that is goal-conducive in the reporting context, that is, it must capture what the non-co-situated speaker said with the precision required for the new context. It seems reasonable to hold that this is what cooperative reporters typically do. When we report via a homophonic report we do that on the assumption that our audience has enough clues to grasp the reported utterance with the accuracy required for the purposes of our conversation. In the kind of cases of successful communication described above, those in which an impoverished content is transmitted across contexts, the report picks at least one of the propositions expressed by the reported utterance.

This proposition(s) is (are) not the finest-grained one, but something in between it and minimal content, and is goal-conducive in the reporting context. Pluripropositionalism can accommodate the fact that very often fine-grained propositions are difficult to share via homophonic reports with the possibility that many homophonic reports are nonetheless true and adequate.

6. Conclusions

Cappelen and Lepore write:

Contemporary philosophy of language has to a large extent lost sight of some fundamental facts about how we communicate *across* contexts. We can communicate and understand each other despite an overwhelming range of differences (in perceptual inputs, interests, cognitive processing, background assumptions, conversational contexts, goals, sense of relevance, etc.). This fact should be at the forefront of any reflection about communication, but it hasn't been. (Cappelen and Lepore, 2006, 1021).

I have argued that speakers can communicate modulated contents across contexts via homophonic reports. The reason is that, contrary to what Cappelen and Lepore seem to assume, the 'overwhelming range of differences' between contexts is not always relevant. I have distinguished three kinds of cases. First, occasion-unspecific information, shared by non-co-situated interpreters, can be sufficient to retrieve modulated content. Second, reporters are sometimes (perhaps often) able to make the relevant contextual information explicit, i.e., to provide some context for the homophonic report. Third, impoverished versions of the intended proposition can be good enough in the reporting context. This explains why homophonic reports of modulated content are often adequate. Together with this, homophonic reports sometimes result in misunderstandings. The interpreter of 'Anne said that the apples are red' can of course fail to see that Anne meant that the apples are red in the inside (rotten).

In the view of communication that I advocate, communication is gradual—the perfect transmission of a single proposition is not necessary for the success of a linguistic exchange. I have put forward a specific proposal unpacking the intuitive claim that interpreters often recover impoverished contents. According to this proposal, which can be seen as a form of pluripropositionalism, a coarser-grained version of the proposition intended by the speaker can ground communication, provided that it serves the purposes of the conversation. In inter-

contextual communication this is often the case. I have argued that this explains the usefulness of homophonic reports. Having limited access to the original context, the interpreter of a homophonic report might fail to grasp speaker meaning in all its depth. However, her interpretation might very well serve the purposes of the reporting context. Also, I have argued that reporters very often exploit similarities across contexts and rely on interpretations by default. Thus reporting is best seen as an active enterprise in which reporters take advantage of the audience's background knowledge and adapt to the fidelity standards required in the reporting context. As I wrote above, utterers of homophonic reports do not simply repeat an utterance—they choose to repeat rather than to paraphrase²³.

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¹ I take this expression from Recanati (2006).

² See Recanati (2004) for a presentation of the main claims of contextualism. We can distinguish two versions of contextualism. According to moderate contextualism, what is said is often the result of modulation. According to radical contextualism, conventional meaning is not truth-conditional and, as a result, modulation is a mandatory process.

³ See Sperber and Wilson (1995), Carston (2002), Recanati (2004) and Travis (2008).

⁴ Below I argue that identity between intended and recovered proposition is not necessary for communication. My point here is that, usually, conventional meaning is insufficient.

⁵ See Cappelen and Lepore (2005), and Wieland (2010a) and Begby (2013) for criticisms.

⁶ See e.g., DeRose (1992).

⁷ In section 5 I argue that an impoverished version of the intended proposition might be good enough.

⁸ Perry (1986) is the locus classicus. I will not discuss here whether this is an instance of modulation or of an unarticulated constituent. The repetition problem arises anyway.

⁹ I follow here Bach (2005).

¹⁰ Interpretations by default are a variety of what Bach (1995) calls ‘standardization’.

¹¹ Cappelen and Lepore (2007) hold that we have no way of predicting the modulated meaning of an utterance (development of logical form, in Relevance Theory’s terminology). Here I am arguing that the opposite is often the case. Using our knowledge of stereotypical conversations we can predict the modulation of many sentences.

¹² The situation is radically different from Wieland’s Secret Spy Context (Wieland, 2010b). In order to argue that our reporting practices are not reducible to phonetic duplication, Wieland imagines an example in which a reporter passes the message ‘Anne said that the apple is red’ from a spy to a non-co-situated spy. The role of the reporter in Wieland’s example is passive.

¹³ See Wedgwood (2007) for a similar point on fallibility and reliability.

¹⁴ I take the example from Travis (1996).

¹⁵ Borg (2016) uses a similar argument in order to cast doubts on the claim that speakers directly intend to communicate pragmatically adjusted contents. Although I agree with her that speakers need not have a very definite content in mind, I think that very often our communicative intentions go beyond conventional meaning. I explore the claim that communicative intentions are unspecific in Picazo (2019) and Picazo (forthcoming).

¹⁶ See Bezuidenhout (1997) and Carston (2002).

¹⁷ Negation reverses the relation. The proposition *that the leaves are not green (in some sense or other)* entails *that the leaves are not naturally green*, and so on.

¹⁸ A natural question now is: what about other cases of pragmatic adjustment, such as loosening, or the complex phenomena that contextualists have paid attention to, such as multi-dimensional adjectives? Exploring the suitable relations between the intended and the recovered propositions in these other cases goes beyond the scope of this paper. Let me just note that the relations can be varied and different for each phenomenon. Nonetheless, it is plausible to think that the basic ideas presented for enrichment will hold for other phenomena: interpretation will also be gradual, some suitable relation between intended and recovered proposition will be required and communicative success in cases of impoverished content will depend on goals. The suitable relation, however, might not be explainable in terms of nested propositions.

¹⁹ Noting that the interpreter sometimes recovers a proposition that is not identical to the one intended by the speaker, Relevance Theorists have put forward views of communication based on the similarity (not identity) between intended and retrieved proposition. However, it has been argued that similarity views are problematic for several reasons. See Cappelen and Lepore (2007).

²⁰ Thus the proposal is compatible with Cappelen and Lepore’s Speech Act Pluralism (2005). Pluripropositionalism can also be developed along the lines of Perry (2001), Korta and Perry (2007, 2011) and Corazza (2012). Following these authors, propositions can be understood as abstract objects that are used for classificatory purposes. Instead of a unique and definite proposition, we can attribute different contents to an utterance, depending on whether we focus on the speaker or the interpreter.

²¹ Capturing one of the propositions expressed might not be sufficient. As mentioned in section 2, because of the differences between reporting and reported context, some reports attribute a different proposition to the speaker—for instance *that the apple is superficially red* instead of *that the apple is red in the inside*. Nonetheless, these reports can be said to also convey the minimal proposition, and so in a sense they express one of the propositions expressed by the reported utterance. The second condition is needed in order to rule out these cases.

²² Assuming Recanati’s Availability Principle (Recanati, 2004), what is said with a use of a sentence crucially depends on what is available to competent interpreters.

²³ I have presented earlier versions of this paper at the 10th European Congress of Analytic Philosophy and the University of Granada, Department of Philosophy I. I am very grateful to the participants for their helpful feedback. Thanks also to Laura Delgado, Eduardo Pérez Navarro and an anonymous referee for their comments. Financial support: Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (Government of Spain) and European Union; grant PID2019-105728GB-I00 (MINECO/FEDER, EU).