
On individuating Contexts

Jan Köpping
Universität Frankfurt
koepping@em.uni-frankfurt.de

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In a Kaplan-style context theory, contexts are understood as the source of semantic values (referents) of indexicals and demonstratives. This is reflected in formal definitions that identify contexts (for a language) with (tuples of possible) values of indexicals (of that language). Thus, languages with expressions comparable to (some uses of) English *actually, now, here, I, you*, and (deictically used) third person pronouns necessitate contexts that are, mathematically speaking, nothing but tuples of one world, a concrete time-span and spatial location, and at least two individuals (i.e., speaker and addressee). There are possibly more individual parameters, but since not all contexts are demonstrative contexts, contexts in which somebody somehow demonstrates something, this is the lowest bound. This general outline is compatible with a spectrum of different ways to flesh out the details. More interesting notions of context try to reduce the set of possible contexts by formulating certain *constraints on individuation*. E.g., Kaplan held that the speaker needs to occupy the spatiotemporal position in the world denoted by the first three parameters and thereby reduces the set of admissible combinations considerably. He judges (1a) to be true at all contexts. However, he also mentions the now infamous example of an answering machine that plays a recording of (1) whenever the speaker is not at home. Intuitively, (1b), but not (1a), is true in such a scenario.

- (1) a. I am here now.
 b. I am not here now.

The talk explores more constraints on individuation proposed in the literature and challenges them with examples of the kind first discussed by Kratzer (1978). The general conclusion drawn from this discussion will be that less specific conditions on individuation are mandatory. Consequently, a very abstract yet flexible notion of context is gained.

References: • Kaplan, D. (1989): Demonstratives. In: *Themes from Kaplan*, ed. by J. Almong, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein, Oxford: OUP, 481–563. • Kratzer, A. (1978): *Semantik der Rede*. Königstein: Scriptor.