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A assumes B is already thinking about. It is one type of 'given information.' In contrast, with the remainder of the utterance 'is somebody at the White House,' A provides information that A assumes B doesn't yet know. It is 'new information.' Given information is assumed to be inferable from A and B's current common ground, whereas new information is not. New information is, instead, what is to be **added** to common ground. The way people refer to an object in a discourse (e.g., the committee, somebody, of the White House) depends on whether they believe that the object is readily evoked, known but unused, inferable, or brand new in their common ground for that discourse (Prince, 1981).

'Grounding' is the process of trying to establish what is said as common ground (Clark and Schaefer, 1989; Clark and Brennan, 1991). When A speaks to B in conversation, it is ordinarily not enough for A simply to produce an utterance for B. The two of them try to establish as common ground that B has understood what A meant by it well enough for current purposes. In this process, B is expected to give A periodic evidence of the state of his or her understanding, and A is expected to look for and evaluate that evidence. One way B can signal understanding is with back-channel signals such as *uh-huh, yeah,* a head nod, or a smile. Another way is with the appropriate next contribution, as when B answers a question asked by A. But if B does not manage to attend to, hear, or understand A's utterance completely, the two of them will try to repair the problem. One way is illustrated here:

A (on telephone): Can I speak to Jim Johnstone, please?

B: Senior?

A: Yes.

B: Yes.

In turn 2, B asks A to clear up an ambiguous reference in A's question, and in turn 3, A does just that. Only then does B go on to answer A's question. Turns 2 and 3 are called a 'side sequence' (Jefferson, 1972). Grounding takes many other forms as well.

Common ground is central to accounts of language and language use. It is needed in accounting for the conventions, or rules, of language and to explain how people contribute to conversation and to other forms of discourse.

See also: Context, Communicative; Contextualism in Epistemology; Conventions in Language; Information Structure in Spoken Discourse; Jargon; Pragmatic Presupposition; Presupposition.

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Context Principle

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It is a near truism of the philosophy of language that a word has meaning only in the context of a sentence; this principle is sometimes formulated as the claim that only sentences have meaning in isolation. This is the context principle, first emphasized in Western philosophy by Frege (1884), endorsed early on by Wittgenstein (1922: 51), and sanctioned more recently by Quine (1951: 42), among many others. The Principle and several different ways of understanding it seem to have been foreshadowed in classical Indian philosophy. (See also Matilal and Sen, 1988.)

In this article, I provide some background to the Principle, describe three ways of reading it (a methodological reading, a metasemantic reading, and an interpretational/psychological reading). I offer some reasons for endorsing the Principle, and some reasons for being skeptical.

The heated exegetical controversies over Frege's relationship to the Principle are not presented in this article. Some believe that Frege would have applied it to both sense and reference; others disagree. Some believe that Frege rejected the Principle in his later work, others that he retained it throughout. In addition, different authors take Frege to endorse different readings of the Principle: nearly everyone would agree that he accepted the methodological reading, but it is less clear whether he endorsed the metasemantic or interpretational/psychological reading. Such scholarly issues are not my concern in this article. For a thorough discussion, see Dummett (1981: 369ff, 1993a).

Sentence Primacy: Three Interpretations of the Context Principle

The context principle gives primacy to sentences. Specifically, sentences are taken to be semantically prior to the words that make them up. The Principle is, in this regard, a member of a family of theses that have some whole to being somehow 'prior' to its parts. As with all such doctrines, one obtains a holistic primacy thesis by specifying what the whole is, what its parts are, and in what sense the former is prior to the latter. Most important for present purposes, one can mean different things by 'prior.' Of particular interest here, one can take sentences to be methodologically prior, metasemantically prior, or interpretationally prior to the words that compose them.

Let me begin with the methodological reading of the Principle. In his *Foundations of Arithmetic*, Frege (1884: x) famously promised to keep to the following fundamental constraint: "never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a sentence." Taken as a methodological precept, this principle essentially tells the lexical semanticist only to contemplate the effect that a word can have on sentences in which it may be embedded. For instance, to find out the meaning of the word 'one' (an example of great interest to Frege), the lexical semanticist should reflect upon such questions as the following: What whole sentences containing 'one' have in common (e.g., "One apple fell" and "One dog died"); how sentences that contain words slightly different from 'one' differ systematically in meaning from maximally similar sentences containing 'one' (e.g., "One dog died" versus "No dog died"); and so on. What the lexical semanticist should never do is try to figure out the meaning of 'one' just by thinking about it – that phrase – in isolation (where in isolation means not embedded in any larger syntactic structure).

The second reading of the context principle considered in this article is the metasemantic reading. A metasemantic view is a view about the source of meaning. It poses an "in virtue of what" question. Here's an example. Suppose we ask

(1) In virtue of what is the sound **/to:fu/** meaningful? In virtue of what does it mean "a pale curd of varying consistency made from soybean milk," rather than "sea lion" or "watch"?

Notice that we are not asking, in (1), what the sound **/to:fu/** means. Rather, we are asking why it means what it does. Nor is this the causal-historical question about the steps whereby **/to:fu/** came to have this meaning. It is, instead, the issue of what more primitive present facts make for this less primitive present fact: how do the 'higher' facts emerge from 'lower' ones? For example, compare these two questions: what makes it the case that things have the monetary value they do, or what makes it the case that certain things are illegal, or rude, or immoral? These too are "in virtue of what" questions.

Some philosophers seem to have taken from Frege's discussion of "not asking for the meaning of a word in isolation" a claim about what makes words meaningful and what makes them have the meaning they do. The claim is that, fundamentally, only sentences have meaning. This is not to say that subsentences are gibberish. Rather, the entities that have meaning in the first instance are sentences. Unlike the first reading of the Principle, this doctrine is not about where one should look to find out about meaning; it is, rather, a doctrine about where meaning comes from, i.e., the basic source of meaning. What the Principle says is that the only things that have meaning non-derivatively are sentences, so it must be in virtue of their role within sentences that subsentential expressions have meaning at all.

Here is the same idea put another way: suppose that some expressions obtain their meaning from how they alter the meanings of larger wholes. Suppose, indeed, that this is how words/phrases obtain their meaning; they therefore have meaning only derivatively, not fundamentally. Now, it cannot be the case that all expressions obtain their meaning in this way or there would be an infinite regress. The claim says that the things that have meaning non-derivatively are sentences.

Does this mean that one must first grasp the meaning of each of the infinite number of sentences in the

language and only then solve for word meanings? No, not least because doing so is not humanly possible. To avoid this problem, proponents of the metasemantic version of the context principle can make several claims. First, they may insist on a sharp difference between (1) a psychological story about how humans grasp word and sentence meanings and (2) a philosophical story about the metaphysical underpinnings of word and sentence meaning. They may then eschew any claims about the first of these, stressing that they only mean to address the second (see Dummett, 1973: 4 for this approach). Second, the proponents of the context principle, read metasemantically, could propose that there is some finite cluster of simple sentences, the meaning of which one grasps from use; one then presumably solves for the meaning of the words and for the contribution of syntax, using just those sentences. Performing this finite task then gives the person the capacity to understand new sentences, a potential infinity in fact, on the basis of the (familiar) words in the (unfamiliar) sentences and how those words are structured. Either move would save the proponents of the metasemantic thesis from endorsing the absurd view that one first understands all sentences and only then understands any words.

So far we have examined two readings of the context principle. The first was merely methodological, a claim about how to find out what particular words mean: To find word meanings, look at what they contribute to sentences. The second reading was metasemantic, a claim about why words have the meanings they do: words only have meaning because of how they affect sentence meanings. The third reading of the Principle is interpretational/psychological. It is an empirical claim about the psychology underlying comprehension. Dummett (1993b: 97) discusses the view that "it is possible to grasp the sense of a word only as it occurs in some particular sentence."

In a way, this reading of the Principle is the most straightforward of the three: the idea underlying it is that the only things we are psychologically able to understand are whole sentences. Put in terms of generative capacity, the claim would amount to this: the only thing that our semantic competence generates are meanings for whole sentences; it does not output meanings for words/phrases (though it presumably uses word/phrase meanings in generating meanings for whole sentences, they just are never 'output'). Thus, we can understand words only when they are spoken within whole sentences. Even this most straightforward of the three readings admits of further subreadings, however. Dummett (1993b: 109), for instance, contrasted two varieties of "grasping a sense," one dispositional and the other occurrent. He granted that one may dispositionally grasp the sense of a subsentence outside the context of any sentence. However, he apparently denied – or anyway, has Frege deny – that one can, in the occurrent sense, grasp the sense of a word/phrase without grasping the sense of a sentence within which that word/phrase occurs. This would mean that one could "know the meaning" of a word in isolation, but that whenever one put that knowledge to work, in actual understanding, it would have to be in grasping a sentential content. This last is what the context principle would come to, on this weaker subreading of the interpretational/psychological principle.

Motivating the Context Principle

Having explained three senses in which one could take whole sentences to be prior to the words that make them up, let us consider reasons for endorsing sentence primacy. Some of these reasons support just one reading of 'priority.' Some support more than one. Given the limited space, I present only three such reasons and for the most part leave for the reader the question of which reason supports which reading of "Sentences are prior."

Frege believed that, in failing to obey his methodological constraint, "one is almost forced to take as the meanings of words mental pictures or acts of the individual mind" (Frege, 1884: x). Thus in the case of number-words, the failure to respect the principle could easily lead one to suppose that 'one' stands for a mental item, and hence that mathematics is somehow about mental entities, which in Frege's view is an extremely serious error (see Frege, 1884: 116). However, when one obeys the principle, one comes to the right view: the meaning of a word is not some idea that we associate with it, but is instead the thing that the word contributes to the meaning of larger expressions. Frege writes (1884: 71):

> That we can form no idea of its content is therefore no reason for denying all meaning to a word, or for excluding it from our vocabulary. We are indeed only imposed on by the opposite view because we will, when asking for the meaning of a word, consider it in isolation, which leads us to accept an idea as the meaning. Accordingly, any word for which we can find no corresponding mental picture appears to have no content. But we ought always to keep before our eyes a complete proposition. Only in a proposition [Satz] have the words really a meaning.

So, one advantage of endorsing the Principle is that it keeps us from making such a mistake.

Consider this related motivation: starting from the top – focusing on whole sentence meanings and only then considering what the parts must mean, in order for the observed whole meaning to be

generated – opens up the possibility of novel and surprising accounts of what the parts mean. Indeed, it becomes possible to conceive of syntactic parts that, though they have some sort of impact on meaning, do not themselves have a meaning in isolation. Such parts receive only what is called a 'contextual definition.' This concept is best explained by appeal to an example. If we start by looking at the phrasal parts of "The king of France is bald," asking what they mean, it can seem inevitable that the phrase, "The king of France," must stand for an object. What else could its meaning be, in isolation? This, of course, raises all manner of ontological issues: What is this bizarre object, since there is, in reality, no king of France? How can such an unreal entity be bald or not, so as to render this sentence true or false? And so on. Crucially, however, if we pursue the methodology suggested here and start with the whole sentence, we may notice, with Russell (1905), that the sentence as a whole means the following: there is exactly one king of France, and every king of France is bald. We may further notice that this whole meaning can be generated without assigning any reference at all to the phrase, "The king of France." This is not to say that this phrase makes no difference to what the whole means; patently it does make a difference. However, in place of a meaning-entity for "The king of France," all we need is a rule, a contextual definition, that says:

(2) A sentence of the form "The *F* is *G*" is true iff exactly one thing is *F* and everything that is *F* is *G*.

Taking this contextual definition to be the meaning-determining rule, we simply avoid the issue of what the phrase, "The king of France," stands for, since the phrase itself, upon analysis, does not contribute a constituent to the whole meaning. Another methodological advantage of the context principle, then, is that it is rather easier to arrive at this kind of contextual definition than if we begin with what the parts mean, in isolation.

A second kind of advantage is that, by strictly obeying the context principle, we automatically meet a key constraint of semantic theories: compositionality. Roughly speaking, compositionality says that the meaning of a whole expression is exhausted by (1) what its parts mean, and (2) how those parts are put together (*see* **Compositionality: Semantic Aspects**, **Compositionality: Philosophical Aspects** for more details.) Compositionality is accepted as a constraint for two related reasons. First, insofar as these are the sole determinants of whole meanings, we can explain why people understand complex expressions that they have never encountered before: they understand them by calculating the whole meaning from precisely these two elements, both of which are familiar. Second, were whole meanings not compositional, it would be an utter mystery how we finite beings could in principle know the meaning of the infinite number of sentences that, though we have never heard them, we would, but for our finite lifetime and memory, be capable of understanding. That is, compositionality accounts for an observed ability in practice and a different though related ability in principle. Notice, however, that compositionality is one side of a coin, the other side of which is the context principle. Compositionality says that whole meaning is entirely a function of part meanings plus structure:

(3) Whole meaning = <part-meaning$_1$, part-meaning$_2$, . . . , part-meaning$_i$, . . . part-meaning$_n$> + structure

The context principle employs this same equation to solve for a part meaning, i.e., taking part meaning to be entirely determined by the whole meaning, the meanings of the other parts, and the structure:

(4) Part-meaning$_i$ = Whole meaning – (<part-meaning$_1$, part-meaning$_2$, . . . part-meaning$_n$> + structure)

So, if we assign part meanings in line with (4), the context principle, we cannot help but get the desired result vis-à-vis (3), i.e., compositionality. (Note: obviously the manner of combination of part meanings and structure is not literally addition. Nevertheless, I use the symbols '+' and '–' to simplify presentation.) Automatically satisfying the compositionality constraint in this way is thus another advantage of endorsing the context principle.

A third kind of motivation for endorsing the Principle is that it seems to be connected with several other holistic primacy theses, each of which is allegedly independently motivated. (Unfortunately, space does not permit me to explain what the independent motivation is for these other theses. See Brandom, 1994, chapter 2, sections II and III, for discussion and an overview of the relations among these various primacy claims.) Kant (1787) famously insisted that judgment is prior to perception of individuals: seeing that María is a female, a person, tall, and the like is prior to seeing María. Put otherwise, whereas classical empiricists started with representations of individual objects and of universals and then built up complex mental representations that could be true/false, Kant turned this on its head: the whole representation (i.e., what is judged) is prior to the object-denoting parts that make it up. The early Wittgenstein (1922: 31) also insisted that facts are

prior to the objects and properties that make them up: "the world is the totality of facts, not of things." In a related move, Dummett (1973) has urged, following the later Wittgenstein, that the practice of assertion – and other full-fledged "moves in the language game" – is prior to the act of referring. As Wittgenstein (1953: 24) put it:

> For naming and describing do not stand on the same level: naming is a preparation for description. Naming is so far not a move in the language-game – any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess. We may say: *nothing* has so far been done, when a thing has been named. It has not even *got* a name except in the language-game. This was what Frege meant too, when he said that a word had meaning only as part of a sentence.

Adopting these primacy theses can, each in their own way, lead one to expect sentences to be primary as well. Goes the idea, what is judged are sentential representations; the linguistic item that corresponds to a fact is a sentence, and the linguistic item that we assert with is the sentence.

Dummett's point about sentence use deserves to be expanded upon, since it underlies several of the points made above. Dummett suggested that the only things that can be used in isolation – that is, used without being embedded in a larger structure – are sentences. He wrote (1973: 194):

> A sentence is, as we have said, the smallest unit of language with which a linguistic act can be accomplished, with which a "move can be made in the language-game": so you cannot *do* anything with a word – cannot effect any conventional (linguistic) act by uttering it – save by uttering some sentence containing that word.

Yet, as a famous Wittgensteinian slogan says, meaning comes from use (see Wittgenstein, 1953 and elsewhere). Thus, the things that have meaning fundamentally have it because of their use: an expression has the non-derivative meaning that it does because of the kinds of actions speakers can perform with it. However, as suggested just above, those just are the sentences. So words must get their meaning because they appear in meaningful sentences. Dummett, expanding on this Wittgensteinian theme, put the general lesson as follows:

> Indeed, it is certainly part of the content of the dictum [i.e., the context principle] that sentences play a special role in language: that, since it is by means of them alone that anything can be *said*, that is, any linguistic act (of assertion, question, command, etc.) can be performed, the sense of any expression less than a complete sentence must consist only in the contribution it makes to determining the content of a sentence in which it may occur (1973: 495; see also Dummett, 1993a).

A Possible Objection to the Context Principle

Having noted three kinds of reasons for embracing the context principle, let me end with an objection that may come immediately to mind. First, it seems that adults speak in subsentences all the time. I see a woman wearing a lovely garment and say to my wife, "Nice dress." I receive a letter in the mail, hold it up, and say to my companion, "From Spain." Such talk is absolutely ubiquitous. (For empirical support, see the papers in Elugardo and Stainton, 2004, and the many references cited there; for an overview, see Stainton, 2004.) Second, children learning a language seem to start with subsentences – which makes it equally hard to see how grasping a sentential meaning could be a prerequisite for grasping a subsentential one. Let us consider the problem that such subsentential speech might pose for the Principle.

Start with the methodological reading. It is a bit strong to demand that one never consider the word in isolation if words/phrases can be used unembedded to perform speech acts. More appropriate, and still in the broadly Fregean spirit, would be this claim: never *only* consider the word in isolation, but instead *also* consider its behavior when embedded in whole sentences. Non-sentential speech does not conflict with this latter, more inclusive, methodological precept. In addition, the methodological point of the context principle – to cure one of the habit of taking mental images and such as meanings – is met even on this weaker reading. Hence subsentence use actually poses no problems for the Principle, on this first reading.

What of the metasemantic doctrine? Notice that a key premise in the argument for the doctrine was that only sentences can be used to perform speech acts. Words and phrases cannot be: that is why they were denied meaning, fundamentally speaking. Yet, this key premise looks false, if words really can be used in isolation. Therefore, without this premise, some other argument must be given for the conclusion that only sentences have meaning fundamentally. Thus subsentence use, if genuine, does not falsify the Principle read in this way, but it does leave one in need of an empirically adequate argument for meaning having to come from sentences alone.

It might seem that a better argument for the claim that meaning must still come from sentences is at hand: Surely this doctrine is required to preserve compositionality. As I stressed above, you do not get (3) above unless you also accept (4) and (4) requires that word meanings – the meaning of the parts – not exceed what they contribute to full sentences. In fact, however, compositionality does not, on its

own, support the metasemantic doctrine, which makes two claims: first, sentences are a metaphysical *source* of word meaning, and second, they are the *only* such source. Neither of these claims, however, can be inferred from compositionality *per se*. All (4) gives us is a constraint: Whatever story we tell about where a word's meaning comes from, it must be consistent with sentence meanings being exhausted by what their parts mean. This does not support any claim about sources. Moreover, if words are used in isolation, then, though sentence use might be one source, it surely would not be the only one.

To see why compositionality does not, taken alone, support the metasemantic doctrine, consider an analogy. Take this proposal: facts about what art works are beautiful derive from facts about what works are attractive to (most) art experts. That is, it is in virtue of the judgment of (most) experts that art works are beautiful or not. Suppose one tried to defend this meta-esthetic view by saying: "Look, it can't be that most genuine experts are wrong about what's beautiful. They wouldn't be experts otherwise." This defense would not really succeed as an argument for the meta-esthetic view because, even granting it, one could only infer that it is a constraint on where beauty comes from that most experts are right about what is beautiful. This fact would not, on its own, support the idea that beauty comes from expert judgment. Nor would it support the even stronger idea that beauty comes solely from expert judgment. In the same way, compositionality may well impose a constraint on metasemantic theories: one might well contend that any successful metasemantics must have whole meanings exhaustively determined by part meanings and linguistic structure. Yet, one cannot go from such a constraint immediately to conclusions about where meaning-facts emerge from; still less can one move from such a constraint to a conclusion about the sole thing from which they emerge. In sum, given subsentential speech, we are still in need of a reason for embracing the metasemantic reading of the context principle.

Let me now make a brief detour into a related issue. One reason that it matters whether the metasemantic doctrine is upheld is this: If sentence meaning is the only source of word meaning, then it is arguable that the latter is indeterminate. That is, there might be no fact of the matter about what individual words "really mean." The argument goes like this. We can hold constant the meaning of every sentence in the language while varying the contribution that we assign to the words within those sentences. To give a highly simplified example, one way to assign the right meaning to the Spanish sentence, "María no fuma" ["María doesn't smoke"] is to assign the person MARIA to 'María', SMOKES to 'fuma', and DOESN'T to 'no'. Another way, which still gives the right meaning for the whole sentence, is to assign the person MARIA to 'María no' and DOESN'T SMOKE to 'fuma'. Now, with respect to this highly simplified example, we can find reasons for picking the first over the second option: 'fuma', 'no' and 'María' show up in lots of sentences, and their contribution in those other sentences is, surely, SMOKES, DOESN'T, and MARIA, respectively. So that is what they contribute here too. However, suppose we revised our view of the meaning of the other parts in all sentences containing 'fuma', 'María' and 'no'. Surprisingly, it has been suggested that this sort of rearrangement is something we could systematically do. The result would be that the complete set of sentences containing a given word leaves us with various options about what the word means. Further, assuming that the meaning of all sentences in which a word occurs is the sole thing that metaphysically determines its meaning, there can be no single thing that is "the meaning of 'fuma.'" This is the thesis of indeterminacy (see Quine, 1960 and Putnam, 1981 for worked-out examples).

I introduce the indeterminacy thesis because it highlights the sense in which the metasemantic version of the context principle says more than "the meanings one assigns to words must fit with the meanings one assigns to sentences containing those words." It also says that the word meanings are *exhausted* by sentence meanings – in a way that can lead to indeterminacy. In contrast, if word meanings depend also upon how words are used on their own, then even if the complete set of sentence meanings does not fix the meaning of individual words, we cannot yet conclude that word meaning is indeterminate. For word meaning might be more completely fixed by how words in isolation are used (for more on this connection between the context principle and indeterminacy, see Stainton, 2000).

We have seen that subsentence use is consistent with the methodological reading of the context principle. It is also consistent with the metasemantic reading, though it leaves this latter doctrine in need of an empirically adequate supporting argument. Consider finally the interpretational/psychological doctrine. It says that, as a matter of our psychology, we cannot understand a word, when uttered, unless it is embedded in a sentence. This reading of the context principle seems simply false, given the existence of subsentential speech. There is no hope for making it consistent with genuine subsentence use. Apparently, hearers understand subsentential expressions in isolation; hence their semantic competence must generate a meaning for such expressions in isolation. The best

hope for the Principle read in this strongest way is thus to deny that the phenomenon of subsentential speech is genuine: adults do not actually speak in subsentences, they merely appear to do so. What is really going on is that adults speak 'elliptically' in some sense – they produce sentences, but those sentences somehow "sound abbreviated" (see Stanley, 2000 for this sort of idea). As for children, who seem to grasp word meanings long before they grasp the meanings of any sentences, proponents of the interpretational reading of the context principle must make some fairly implausible suggestions. They may insist that children actually do understand sentence meanings even though they do not speak in sentences; or they may claim that what children mean by their words (e.g., 'doggie') is not what the adult word means. The child's expression, they might insist, is actually a one-word sentence meaning, "There is a dog," and hence is not synonymous with our word. (That is, on this second disjunct, the idea would be that children actually do not employ/understand *our* words outside sentences, but rather they employ homophonous sentences – until, that is, they are also competent with *our* sentences.)

Does this inconsistency with the interpretational/psychological reading mean that the other primacy doctrines – of judgment, facts, and assertion – are also required to make these implausible empirical claims? After all, it was suggested that those doctrines supported sentence primacy. The answer is no, because these other primacy doctrines really do not entail anything about only sentences being used and only sentence meanings being graspable occurrently. At best what they lend credence to is the primacy of a certain sort of content, namely the proposition. For, strictly speaking, it is propositions that are judged, propositions that correspond to facts, and propositions that are exchanged in assertion. Further, subsentential speech does not call the centrality of propositions into question: When I say "Nice dress" or "From Spain," *I* still convey something propositional; that is, a proposition about the salient dress to the effect that it is nice, and a proposition about the letter to the effect that it is from Spain, respectively. I merely do so using *linguistic expressions* that are not propositional. So, subsentential speech leaves proposition primacy intact. To move immediately and without further argument to any conclusion about the syntactic structures that (purportedly) express propositions, however, is to commit some kind of global use/mention error, running together features of a content (i.e., a proposition) with features of its supposed linguistic 'vehicle' (i.e., a sentence). In short, even if one takes judgments, facts, or assertions to be primary, one need not endorse the context principle vis-à-vis interpretation – since the latter is about the centrality of a certain class of syntactic items.

In summary, I have presented three different ways of reading the context principle: methodological, metasemantic, and interpretational/psychological. I then noted three rationales for embracing the Principle: to avoid the errors of psychologism, to enforce compositionality, and because of links to other independently motivated 'primacy doctrines.' I ended with an objection to the Principle, from non-sentence use. The suggested result, in the face of this objection, was two parts consistency and one part inconsistency: (1) the first reading of the Principle would be untouched, (2) the second would be left unsupported, but (3) the third reading would be outright falsified, so that the proponent of this reading of the Principle must make some (implausible) empirical claims to the effect that people do not actually speak subsententially.

See also: Compositionality: Philosophical Aspects; Compositionality: Semantic Aspects; Dummett, Michael Anthony Eardley (b. 1925); Frege, Gottlob (1848–1925); Holism, Semantic and Epistemic; Indeterminacy, Semantic.

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Context, Communicative

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Introduction

One of the central foci of research on language over the last several decades has been the relation between language and context. Work in linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, and philosophy of language has demonstrated a wide variety of ways in which language and verbally communicated information of various sorts are informed and even shaped by the social and interpersonal contexts in which speech occurs (see Duranti and Goodwin, 1992). Overlapping lines of research have also demonstrated various ways in which language **constitutes** context, including the social effects described in speech act theory (*see* **Speech Acts**), the formulation and attribution of beliefs in relevance theory (Grice, 1989; Levinson, 2000; Sperber and Wilson, 1995) (*see* **Relevance Theory**) and the 'creative use' of indexical terms such as pronouns, deictics, and other shifters (Silverstein, 1976) (*see* **Indexicality: Theory**). The focus on context, as both a constraining factor and a product of discourse, has led to increasingly fine-grained approaches to speech, since it is primarily in the formation of spoken or written utterances that language and context are articulated. The significance of these developments for linguistics lies in the increased precision with which linguistic systems, cognitive processes, and language use are co-articulated. For anthropology, it lies primarily in the fact that communicative practice is integral to social practice more generally. Language is a factor, if not a defining one, in most of social life, and ideas about language have had a basic impact on social theory for the last century.

Given the scope of these developments, it is unsurprising that there are various approaches to context corresponding to the disciplinary predilections of researchers. Speech act theory zeroed in on the relation between speech forms and circumstances as captured in felicity conditions and the doctrine of (illocutionary) force (Austin, 1962). Gricean approaches to conversation focus on inference and belief ascription under the assumption that speech is a cooperative engagement, subject to the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner (Grice, 1989) (*see* **Maxims and Flouting**). Relevance theory shares a focus on inference as a central feature of speech, but dispenses with the Gricean cooperative principle (*see* **Cooperative Principle**), maxims, and the tasks of calculating and testing for implicatures (*see* **Implicature**). In their place, it proposes to explain inferential processes in terms of a single principle of relevance according to which logical, encyclopedic, and lexical information are combined. Speech act, implicature, and relevance theories are all closely associated with linguistics and have in common that they treat context as built up utterance by utterance in the course of speaking.

From a social perspective, ethnomethodology (*see* **Ethnomethodology**) and conversation analysis have made major contributions to our understanding of language in interaction (*see* **Conversation Analysis**). Both assert that face-to-face interaction is the primordial context for human sociality (Schegloff, 1987: 208) and the most important locus of observation of language. While they may rely on the pragmatic and inferential processes studied by linguists, their focus is different. Conversation analysis (CA) has emphasized the temporal and hence sequential organization of verbal exchange (Sacks *et al.*, 1974), the existence of procedural rules guiding turn taking in talk, the phenomenon of conversational repair, and the micro-analysis of actually occurring verbal interaction. Psycholinguists and cognitive linguists treat context as a matter of mutual knowledge and cognitive representation, hence as a basically mental construct.

The approaches mentioned so far have in common that they treat context as a radial structure whose center point is the spoken utterance. They share a commitment to methodological individualism, which prioritizes the individual over the collective