

PARAPHRASE AND RHETORICAL ADJUSTMENT
An Essay on Contextualism and Cohesion

Fil. mag. Palle Leth
Department of Philosophy, Linguistics and Theory of Science
University of Gothenburg

Doctoral Thesis in Theoretical Philosophy to be publicly defended, by due permission of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Gothenburg and the University of Paris-Est, on January 29, 2011 at 10 a.m. in Lilla hörsalen, Humanisten, Renströmsgatan 6, Gothenburg.

Abstract

Ph.D. Thesis at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden in joint supervision with the University of Paris-Est, France, 2011.

TITLE Paraphrase and Rhetorical Adjustment: An Essay on Contextualism and Cohesion

AUTHOR Palle Leth

LANGUAGE English, with a summary in French

DEPARTMENT Department of Philosophy, Linguistics and Theory of Science, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, SE. 405 30 Gothenburg

This thesis is dedicated to two distinct but convergent issues: the possibility of paraphrase and an account of context sensitivity on the basis of textual cohesion (or coherence). The possibility of explaining contextual specifications of meaning as a side effect of establishing textual cohesion is explored through an investigation into the nature of texts. Taking off from existing theories of text structure, an ideal concept of cohesion is elaborated which accounts for textual connection by the interpreter's assignment of rhetorical relations (or discourse relations). In addition to connecting the elements of a text together, rhetorical relations have implications for the content of terms and sentences composing a text. The contextual meaning of terms and sentences are thus explained by the fact that the terms and sentences are parts of a text. Enriching the domain of context sensitivity, special emphasis is placed on the implications of rhetorical relations for predicate terms. Through an analysis of authentic literary examples, a certain conception of predicate reference is vindicated which is labelled rhetorical adjustment. The approach contrasts with several contextualist theories in linguistics and philosophy of language which prefer to account for the generation of meaning transcending the linguistic meaning of terms and sentences as specified by syntax and lexicon by means of external parameters such as the speaker's intentions and communicative aims. In this way the thesis is a contribution to the debate concerning the interface between semantics and pragmatics. Such a contextualism based on the notion of cohesion has implications for a certain conception of paraphrase. It is often emphasized that it is not possible to say the same thing in different words. It is argued that taking contextualism and cohesion into account justifies a conception of paraphrase according to which it is not opposed to, but contributes to the constitution of the original meaning. Such a paraphrase is undemanding in that it does not aim to capture all the aspects of the original wording, yet it is neither trivial, since it is unpredictable from a lexical point of view nor irrelevant, since it is a constitutive feature of the original expression in so far as it is part of a text.

KEYWORDS anaphora, coherence, cohesion, context sensitivity, contextualism, discourse relations, discourse structure, paraphrase, predicate reference, presupposition, rhetorical adjustment, rhetorical relations, semantics–pragmatics interface, text structure, transcendental, translation, word meaning