

About context, fiction, and schizophrenia

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1. Introduction

SLAM (*Schizophrenia and Language: Analysis and Modeling*)

- Pathological conversations between schizophrenic patients and psychologists
- Corpus: written transcriptions of recorded conversations
- Several stages of analysis:
 - ▶ identifying relevant discontinuities or inconsistencies
 - ▶ formalizing the relevant excerpts using SDRT
 - ▶ modeling schizophrenic discourse

What's the matter with context?

- a narrow notion of context in SDRT: a set of accessible possibilities to allow for the continued interpretation of conversation
- schizophrenic speakers sometimes use this set in a deviant way

Two hypotheses:

- (1) *Context management is a general challenge for schizophrenia*
- (2) *Uses of contexts in fiction can shed light on schizophrenia*

ToC

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Breaks in Pathological Conversations
- 3 Three Levels of Context
- 4 Schizophrenia and Context Management
- 5 Conclusion

2. Breaks in Pathological Conversations

Which death?

- (B124) Oh yeah (↑) and complicated (↑) and it's really very very complicated (→) politics, it's really something when you get into it, have to win or else when you lose, well, you're finished (↓)
- (A125) Yes
- (B126) JCD is dead, L is dead, P is dead uh (...)
- (A127) So you think they're dead because they lost (↑)
- (B128) No they won but if they're dead, it's their disease well it's it's (→)
- (A129) Yeah it's because they had a disease, it's not because they were in politics (↑)
- (B130) **Yes I mean** (→)
- (A131) Yes you think it's because they were in politics (↑)
- (B132) Yes, so well yeah there was C too who committed murder, uh huh (→) he was there too, the one in B but well (→) it, that, it's because of politics again

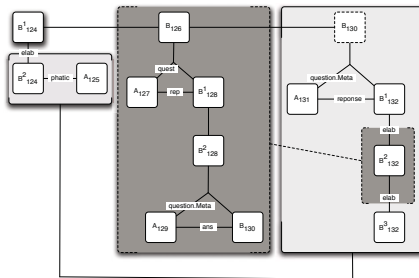
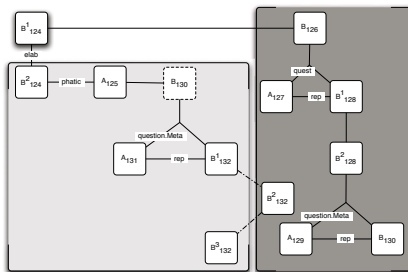
Locating the breaks

- Assumption: Schizophrenic people are logically consistent (Principle of charity)
- The dysfunction is not semantic \Rightarrow it is pragmatic
- Modeling two viewpoints on the same conversation:

Ordinary speaker (3rd-person point of view)	Schizophrenic speaker (1st-person point of view)
Pragmatic correctness ↓	Pragmatic deviance ↑
Semantic deviance	Semantic correctness
Contradictory content: <i>apparent</i> contradiction	Consistent content: <i>everything is OK!</i>

\Rightarrow Conversational representation *cannot* be limited to semantic content.

Two representations / two views of the same conversation



Importance of underspecification

Empirical data of pathological conversations with breakings generally involve a game on ambiguities

Examples:

- indexicals: “here” (in the room vs. in the hospital) Here
- polysemy: “dead” (between symbolic and literal meanings)
- polysemy: “lose” (x is lost vs. x lost y) Lose
- over-ambiguisation: “pro-vocation” (provocation vs. “pro-by-vocation”) Provocation

What does it reveal? Among the features of schizophrenia:

- A choice is never definitive: *do not eliminate anything!*
- Context-shifters
- Hypothesis: a problem of context management

3. Three Levels of Context

Three levels of context

A rough guide to make useful distinctions:

- Discursive context (narrow)
- Doxastic context (intermediate)
- Material and social context (broad)

Each level might be involved in underspecification resolution.

- A conversational break or an inconsistency may occur as soon as the context is not fully shared between interlocutors.
- *Conjecture*: Schizophrenia can be construed (at least partly) as a difficulty in context management.

(1) Discursive Context (Narrow)

This is the basic level taken into account in the dynamic analyses of conversations:

- it is internal to discourse, i.e. it is a purely linguistic kind of context;
- it can be applied across all the dimensions of discourse, i.e. syntactic, semantic and pragmatic;
- it includes an interactional aspect: a question requires an answer, speech-turns, etc.;
- it contains judgments: representations have a semantic content, or at least a thematic one.

Role of this level (in the framework of SDRT):

- “context” = the SDRS currently in progress, to which subsequent language acts can be attached.
⇒ it offers a number of attachment sites along the right frontier, which are made available to the speakers.
- It is used to solve anaphora and, in some cases, polysemy and homonymy.

Two examples

Example (Polysemy and homonymy)

a “Max wanted to see the river. He went to the bank.”

b “Max needed money. He went to the bank.”

Example (Anaphora resolution, by Asher & Lascarides)

“Max had a lovely evening. He had a great meal. He ate salmon. He ate a lot of cheese. He found *it* really wonderful.”

(2) Doxastic Context (Intermediate)

A broader level of context \approx David Lewis's *conversational score*.

- it makes a language-game possible;
- a *common ground*, i.e. a set of presuppositions shared by the interlocutors, with the beliefs of the speakers about the world and about their interlocutors, etc.;
- it is made up of implicit propositional contents, either common or distributed;
- it presupposes a common social context, or a common form of life in its background.

Role of this level:

- pivotal to mutual understanding between speakers;
- constrains the thematic possibilities;
- enables the interlocutors to solve some cases of homonymy and polysemy.

An example

Example (Thematic constraint)

- a Between academics: “I found a nice paper this morning”
- a Between interior decorators: “I found a nice paper this morning”

(3) Material and Social Context (Broad)

The largest level of context. It corresponds to the general background of the conversation, and it is potentially unlimited :

- it can involve locations, immediate physical environment, interlocutors' mutual positions and postures, etc.;
- it includes the social context of the interaction (medical, professional...), the relationships between interlocutors (parents, patients and nursing staff...), cultural environment, etc.;
- it includes interlocutors' relevant properties: children/adults, pathologies or not, cognitive skills, memory capacities, etc.

Role of this level:

- it partly determines the doxastic context \Rightarrow plays an indirect role in interpretation.
- it offers the referents of deictics (“this”, “that”...) and pure indexicals (“I”, “you”, “here”...).
- it solves some cases of homonymy or of polysemy.

4. Schizophrenia and Context Management

(4) Pragmatic Context (Intermediate)

A level that determines which *kind of language-game* is played.

- it can depend on the social context: a restaurant, a court, a theater...;
- it determines which kind of speech acts or utterances are performed: assertions, pseudo-assertions, avowals, notifications, etc.;
- it determines which kind of mental states are expressed by the speakers: beliefs, make-beliefs, commitments, etc.

Role of this level:

- it can shift the whole doxastic context;
- it can shift the resolution of deictics, indexicals, and some cases of homonymy and polysemy.

A mismatch at this level:

- generally implies a mismatch on the doxastic contexts;
- does not necessarily block the conversation continuation (e.g. telling stories to trusting children).

Pragmatic Context and Fiction

This level of context is theoretically used by philosophers to account for fiction (Predelli 1998, Voltolini 2006):

- pure indexicals like “I” or “here” are rigid designators, i.e. they denote the same object in every possible world
- one cannot explain their use with a fictional modality *à la* Lewis (1978)
- fictional utterances are *context-shifters* (Voltolini 2016)

Several features of interpretation change as a result of a switch from a serious pragmatic context to a fictional pragmatic context:

- the value of indexicals: “I” does not denote the actual speaker but a fictional narrator; and similarly for “here”, “now”, etc.
- the doxastic context: the presuppositions are those shared by the fictional characters;
- the value of deictics, i.e. the interpretation of elements belonging to the material and social context: one can stage surrounding objects to assign them with a new function.

From Fiction to Schizophrenia

Switching from a serious to a fictional context implies several basic shifts:

- the kind of *language-game*, hence
- *speech acts*: assertions are replaced by pretended assertions, questions by pretended questions, etc. (see Walton's 1990 *make-believe*);
- *descriptions* are replaced by *prescriptions to imagine* (Walton 1990);
- *mental states* expressed by our speech acts: beliefs are replaced by pretended beliefs, or even mere *suppositions* (Whitt 1985).

Hypothesis: there is a *schizophrenic language-game*, neither serious, nor fictional, nor poetic, nor humorous... involving:

- specific *speech acts*: *schizo-assertions*, *schizo-questions*, etc.;
- specific *contents*: *schizo-descriptions*;
- specific *mental states* expressed by schizophrenic speech assertions: *schizo-beliefs*.

A Schizophrenic Pragmatic Context

Such a context

- involves a schizophrenic language-game, and in particular schizo-assertions expressing schizo-beliefs
- potentially allows for a switch of
 - ▶ the material and social context and the doxastic context
 - ▶ the interpretation of indexicals, deictics, homonyms and polysemic terms.

Pathological conversations introduce a context gap:

- similar to the gap between the pragmatic context of an actor and the corresponding context of a passer-by with a hidden camera (see Goffman's 1974 "misframing")

More about fiction?

- Fictional utterances are mixed with non-fictional utterances
 - ▶ fictional and non-fictional contexts coexist so that the semantic evaluation of sentences can vary
 - ▶ some metarepresentational machinery is required in order for *make-believe* to arise (Voltolini 2016)
- Sass (1994) about schizophrenic deviant phenomenology:
 - ▶ no failure of reality testing
 - ▶ patients like Schreber let coexist their specific thoughts with (ordinary) beliefs about the world
 - ★ e.g. patients who (schizo)assert that the people around them are automata and simultaneously behave *as if* they were ordinary human beings (Bleuler 1911)
 - ▶ coexistence of two contexts with some metarepresentations.

Context juxtaposition



Le Voyageur français, *Le Pays des météores* (1902)

Dr Auguste Marie's Musée de la folie

“There are meteors and there are no meteors”

6. Conclusion

Linguistic modeling of breaks in pathological conversations reveals:

- ▶ the importance of underspecification, hence of context, in schizophrenic discourse
- ▶ the relevance of several levels of context

General proposal:

- context management by schizophrenic speakers conforms to specific (extraordinary) norms
- there is a kind of pragmatic context specific to schizophrenia, within which:
 - ▶ schizo-assertions are like assertions
 - ▶ schizo-descriptions are like descriptions
 - ▶ schizo-beliefs are like beliefs
- like fictional contexts, schizophrenic contexts:
 - ▶ generally co-occur with ordinary contexts for schizophrenic persons and are conceived of as such at a metarepresentational level
 - ▶ can co-occur with the serious ordinary pragmatic contexts of interlocutors ⇒ mismatch and conversational breaks