

# Contextualist theories of vagueness

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## Abstract

During the last couple of decades, several attempts have been made to come up with a theory that can handle the various semantic, logical and philosophical problems raised by the vagueness of natural languages. One of the most influential ideas that have come into fashion in recent years is the idea that vagueness should be analysed as a form of context sensitivity. Such contextualist theories of vagueness have gained some popularity, but many philosophers have remained sceptical of the prospects of finding a tenable contextualist solution to the problems of vagueness. This paper provides an introduction to the most popular contextualist accounts, and a discussion of some of the most important arguments for and against them.

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## 1. Vagueness

To say that a predicate is vague is to say that it displays the following characteristic symptoms: Firstly, its extension appears to have blurred boundaries or lack (sharp) boundaries; secondly, it appears to have borderline cases, i.e. cases where the predicate neither (clearly) applies nor (clearly) does not apply; thirdly, it appears to be tolerant in the sense that there is a degree of difference along the relevant dimension that is sufficiently small not to make any difference to its correct application<sup>1</sup>; and finally, it appears to give rise to the sorites paradox.<sup>2</sup> Consider the paradigmatically vague predicate 'is tall': Firstly, the extension of 'is tall' does not seem to have a sharply bounded extension, since it seems impossible to tell exactly how tall one needs to be in order for 'is tall' to apply; secondly, there appear to be borderline cases of tallness, i.e. people who are neither (clearly) tall nor (clearly) not tall; thirdly, 'is tall' appears to be tolerant, since it does not seem that a difference in height of a tenth of a millimetre can make any difference for the application of 'is tall'; and, finally, insofar as 'is tall' is tolerant, it is susceptible to the notorious sorites paradox.

The sorites paradox is an ancient puzzle which can be illustrated as follows: Imagine a line of men, differing by at most one tenth of a millimetre in height, where the first man in the line is Sultan Kösen, the world's tallest man, and the last man in the line is Junrey Balawing, the world's shortest man.<sup>3</sup> The paradox consists in that given the scenario just described, we can derive a contradiction from the following assumptions, each of which strike us as very plausible when considered in isolation:

- i. Sultan Kösen is tall.
- ii. Junrey Balawing is not tall.
- iii. For any two men differing by at most a tenth of a millimetre, either both of them are tall or none of them is.

From (i) and (iii), it follows that Junrey Balawing is tall, which contradicts (ii), and from (ii) and (iii) it follows that Sultan Kösen is not tall, which contradicts (i). Various attempts have been made to account for vagueness in a way that solves the sorites while preserving most of our initial intuitions, but none of these have met any general acceptance.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Contextualism about vagueness

### 2.1 The basic idea

Recently, a number of philosophers have tried to account for vagueness in terms of context sensitivity.<sup>5</sup> To say that a predicate is context sensitive is to say that its extension can vary as a function of features of the context of utterance. Paradigm examples of context sensitivity include core indexicals like 'here', and 'now', but it is also quite clear that the predicate 'is tall' is context sensitive in that its extension can vary as a function of the contextually relevant comparison class. One and the same person might count as tall relative to a context where the relevant comparison class is the class of professional cyclists, while counting as not tall relative to a context where the relevant comparison class is the class of professional basketball players. Indeed, many, if not all vague expressions appear to exhibit context sensitivity, so it may seem natural to conclude that there must be some kind of connection between these phenomena. However, these observations do not really support anything stronger than an empirical correlation between vagueness and context sensitivity. (Cf. Williamson 1994: 215.) Indeed, vagueness can be shown to be analytically distinct from the familiar forms of context sensitivity exemplified above. For instance, it can easily be shown that the vagueness of 'is tall' is distinct from its sensitivity to contextual shifts in comparison class. Firstly, this kind of context sensitivity is not necessary for vagueness. This becomes obvious as soon as we fix the comparison class, thus obtaining a predicate like 'is tall relative to the class of professional American basketball players in 2010'. This predicate is insensitive to shifts in comparison class, but it still displays the characteristic symptoms of vagueness. Secondly, relativity to comparison class is not sufficient for vagueness. We could stipulate a predicate 'is tall\*' such that someone counts as tall\* if and only if she is above the (precise) average height of the members of the contextually relevant comparison class. The extension of this predicate would vary with context in the relevant sense, but it would not be vague.

However, the central claim of contextualism about vagueness is that there is a much closer connection between vagueness and context sensitivity than a mere empirical correlation. The idea is that vagueness consists in a special kind of context sensitivity. Against this, several authors have raised objections of the following form: *Vagueness remains even when context sensitivity goes away, and since this shows that these are distinct phenomena, contextualism is false.*<sup>6</sup> Such objections are sometimes backed up by considerations like the ones above, which show that vagueness is distinct from context sensitivity of a certain familiar kind, like relativity to a contextually relevant comparison class. However, this is not enough to sustain an objection of this form against the contextualist theories that have been developed in recent years, since they do not entail that vagueness consists in any of these familiar forms of context sensitivity. On the contrary, the context-sensitivity constitutive of vagueness is supposed to be of a very special kind. The remainder of this section is devoted to the question of what kind of context sensitivity this is supposed to be like.

### 2.2 Indexical vs. non-indexical contextualism

In principle, it would be possible for a contextualist to hold that vagueness is a sort of ambiguity, that is to say, that the kind of variability in extension which constitutes vagueness results from variability in meaning.<sup>7</sup> However, proponents of contextualism have been quite explicit in their rejection of this idea, so we shall not pursue it here. (See Raffman 1994: 66, Fara 2000: 64, Soames 2002: 445, and Shapiro 2005: 152.) Another alternative is to say that vague expressions are indexical in the sense that the standing meaning may determine different semantic contents with respect to different contexts. This view, let us call it *indexical* contextualism, assimilates vagueness to a more familiar form of context sensitivity (without identifying it with familiar instances of it) and has thus been taken to be the most natural option by proponents as well as

critics of the contextualist approach. (See Soames 2002: 445, Stanley 2003: 271, and Keefe 2007.) However, there is another alternative, known as *non-indexical* contextualism, according to which the relevant contextual factors only affect the extension, not the semantic content. On the indexicalist view, the relevant parameters of the context will have a content-determinative role, i.e. they will determine (together with the standing meaning) what proposition the uttered sentence expresses. On the non-indexicalist view, the relevant parameters of the context will have a circumstance-determinative role, i.e. they will determine relative to which circumstance the proposition expressed should be evaluated.<sup>8</sup> On either of these views, there will be some (possible) objects that belongs to the extension relative to some context  $C_1$ , and fall outside the extension relative to some context  $C_2$ , where  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  differ only with respect to the relevant contextual factors. Consequently, one and the same sentence can be uttered truly with respect to  $C_1$ , and falsely with respect to  $C_2$ . There is, however, an important difference between the two views in that the indexicalist takes the two utterances to express different propositions, while the non-indexicalist takes the semantic content expressed to be the same in both contexts.

### **2.3 Determinate truth and open texture**

Not all sentences containing vague expressions are such that they can be true relative to one context and false relative to another. Sentences like 'Anyone taller than a tall man is tall' and 'No man is both tall and short' are invariably true in virtue of their expressing certain invariable relational facts.<sup>9</sup> One may even want to say that they are analytically true, since their truth is determined by linguistic meaning. There are also simple predicative sentences concerning certain cases, which are determinately true in the sense that their semantic status is determined solely by linguistic meaning and the relevant non-linguistic facts. Arguably, the sentences 'Sultan Kösen is tall' and 'Junrey Balawing is tall' (see section 1.1 above) are determinately true and determinately false, respectively, in this sense. However, in order for extension shifts to be possible, there must also be sentences that are neither analytical, determinately true, nor determinately false. More specifically, a necessary condition for the kind of extension variability invoked in the contextualist analysis is that the extensions of vague predicates are not totally determined by linguistic meaning, standard contextual factors, and the relevant non-linguistic facts.<sup>10</sup> If they were, it just would not be possible for the extension to shift as a function of the non-standard contextual factors appealed to in the contextualist analysis, since then the semantic status of each object would already be determined independently of these latter factors. Following Shapiro (2006: 10), we may say that on the contextualist view, vague predicates are open-textured,<sup>11</sup> and this is what makes it possible for the special contextual factors to play their intended role. But what are the special contextual factors supposed to be like?

### **2.4 Pragmatic contextualism**

On the pragmatic contextualist view (Soames 1999, Shapiro 2003, 2006), the relevant contextual factors are taken to be facts about the *state of the conversation*, as it were. As a conversation proceeds, various speech acts are made, and as a result, certain things come to count as true, at least for the purposes of the conversation. This can be modelled in terms of a conversational scoreboard, on which elements are added and removed as a function of what actually happens during the course of the conversation. (Cf. Lewis 1979.) Very roughly, if a certain assertion is made, and accepted (at least tacitly), it will go on the score, but it may also affect the score in other ways, for instance by removing previous elements with which it is inconsistent, or by putting a conversational standard in force according to which other assertions, which have not yet been made, will count as true as well. For instance, if the assertion that Fred is tall is made and accepted, then Fred will count as tall in virtue of the fact that the proposition that Fred is tall has been put on the score.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the assertion will put a conversational standard in force according to which anyone who is either taller than Fred, or stands in a certain (contextually

determined) similarity relation to Fred, will *also* count as tall. (Cf. Soames 1999: 209.) Thus, if Floyd is slightly shorter than Fred, but still sufficiently similar to Fred with respect to height, the proposition that Floyd is tall will also go on the score, and any elements that are inconsistent with these newly added propositions will be removed.<sup>13</sup>

So, on the pragmatic contextualist view, the context sensitivity that constitutes vagueness is identified with variability in extension relative to certain elements of the score. In particular, the extensions are taken to vary as a function of a certain kind of conversational standard, which in turn is determined by what assertions have been made (and what the contextually determined similarity relation is). The speakers will thus have a discretion to add or remove items from the extension, at least in the borderline area, and as they do this, the conversational standard that determines the extension will vary accordingly. This means that vague predicates are *judgement dependent* in the sense that the judgements of otherwise competent speakers *determine* the status of the objects judged. (Cf. Soames 1999: 209-210 and Shapiro 2006: 40.)

## 2.5 Psychological contextualism

According to psychological contextualism, the relevant contextual factors are certain *psychological states of the speakers*, which ground their dispositions to judge objects as falling inside or outside the extension.<sup>14</sup> This leads to a more individualistic notion of context, according to which each speaker will have her “own context”, so to speak.<sup>15</sup> Roughly, relative to a speaker *S*, an object *x* counts as falling in the extension of ‘is tall’ if and only if *S* is disposed to judge *x* as being tall. Since the judgmental dispositions may vary with respect to objects in the borderline area, the extensions may vary as well. Moreover, the dispositions will typically follow certain patterns. For instance, if two men differ only by one tenth of a millimetre in height, speakers will typically be disposed to judge either that they are both tall, or that none of them is, at least when their similarity is salient.<sup>16</sup>

Since judgemental dispositions determine extensions, one might be tempted to conclude that judgement dependence follows from psychological contextualism as well as from pragmatic contextualism. However, there is an important difference in that on the psychological contextualist view, what determines the semantic category membership is the psychological state which grounds the disposition to judge rather than the judgement itself. It is thus more appropriate to say that psychological contextualism entails a *co-determination* thesis, according to which certain psychological states determine both the relevant dispositions and the relevant category memberships.<sup>17</sup>

## 3. Arguments for contextualism

### 3.1 The sorites and tolerance intuitions

Contextualists solve the sorites paradox by denying premise (iii). Some contextualists, most notably Fara (2000: 70-71), take the context to determine a sharp boundary between the extension and the anti-extension, while others, like Soames, allow that even relative to context, there may be indeterminate cases which belongs to neither of these sets. If there is a sharp boundary, (iii) will simply be false, since there is a false instance, and if there are indeterminate cases, (iii) will come out as indeterminate, in virtue of there being an indeterminate instance (at least given standard truth-functional three-valued semantics; cf. Soames 1999: 207). Either way, the argument comes out as unsound.

Given the intuitive support for (iii), any theory denying it must be completed by an explanation of why we have these tolerance intuitions in the first place, and it has been argued that contextualism provides a particularly neat solution to this problem. Here is how it is supposed to work according to the psychological version of contextualism.<sup>18</sup> If we were to

consider each instance of the generalisation, we would find that each instance is true at the moment when we consider it. How so? Well, once we consider a pair of adjacent items in the series, their similarity is raised to salience, and this makes us disposed to judge them to be in the same category. In virtue of the co-determination thesis, this entails that the items do fall in the same category. Small wonder then that we think that the generalisation is true, when all the instances we consider turn out to be true. In effect, then, the tolerance intuitions are diagnosed as resulting from a certain kind of fallacy of equivocation.

The most obvious difficulty with this argument is that we can accept the psychological explanation of why we come to believe that each instance of the generalisation is true without accepting the co-determination thesis, according to which the extension shifts in a way that makes each instance true at the time of consideration. The story about how salient similarity affects our judgemental dispositions is all that we need in order to explain why we tend to form the belief that the instance is true. The co-determination thesis, which is the thesis that the contextualist needs to argue for, does not add anything to the explanation, and thus it cannot be claimed that we need to go contextualist in order to make this kind of explanation available.<sup>19</sup>

### **3.2 The forced march sorites**

Suppose we took a normal competent speaker and led her through the line of men described in section 1.1, and forced her to make a judgement on each member of the series with respect to his tallness. What would happen in such a “forced march”?<sup>20</sup> Well, a reasonable expectation is that at some point in the series, she would “jump”, i.e. start judging the men in the series not to be tall. Suppose we repeated this procedure, starting at different places in the series, and going in different directions. What would happen? Well, a reasonable expectation is that the speaker would jump in different places on the different runs through the series. Thus, on the one hand, it seems that the subject in the forced march will end up with an inconsistent set of judgements. But on the other hand, each individual judgment seems perfectly acceptable, and there does not seem to be anything incompetent about the subject’s overall behaviour. On the contrary, this is exactly the behaviour one would expect from a competent speaker in this kind of situation. So what is going on?

The contextualist can account for this in a rather straightforward way. Regardless of whether we opt for the pragmatic or psychological variety, contextualism entails a *borderline-reliability* thesis, according to which competent speakers’ judgements in the borderline area always come out as true (at least under favourable conditions). On the pragmatic view, this is guaranteed by the judgement-dependence thesis, while on the psychological view, it follows from the co-determination thesis. So, what happens in the forced march on the contextualist view is simply that the extensions of ‘is tall’ shifts in a way that makes all the judgements come out as true, and because of these shifts, the contradictions are merely apparent.<sup>21</sup> Any view which denies that the extensions shift in this way will be committed to the claim that the speakers in the forced march make at least some false (or untrue) judgments, and that they genuinely contradict themselves. Hence, the argument goes, contextualism seems to be the only viable option if we want to account for the obvious acceptability of the judgements made, and save the competence of the subjects in the forced march.<sup>22</sup>

An obvious problem with this argument is that it seems too strong to demand that the judgements must be true in order to be acceptable. It seems obvious that truth and acceptability can come apart, and thus we can use the notion of a conversational score to account for the acceptability of each of the individual judgements in the forced march in the very same way as the contextualist, but without accepting borderline-reliability or extension shifting.<sup>23</sup> We should indeed expect competent speakers to be reliable with respect to the clear cases, but it would be unreasonable to take competence to exclude untrue judgements in the borderline area. Given that the subjects are *forced* to make judgements for which they lack the appropriate grounds, it can



plausibly be claimed that their judgements are perfectly acceptable, even if untrue, and there is no reason why their competence should be questioned on the grounds of such mistakes.<sup>24</sup> Thus, linguistic competence should not be taken to entail borderline reliability, and acceptability should not be taken to entail truth.<sup>25</sup>

One might be tempted to object that the non-contextualist view is still problematic since it entails that the competent subjects will typically end up in genuine contradictions in the forced march. However, it is difficult to see the force of this kind of objection. Why should it be considered as a desirable feature of a semantic theory that it excludes the possibility of competent subjects ending up in genuine contradictions in certain tricky situations?<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the non-contextualist view does not entail that a contradiction will ever count as acceptable, as acceptability is still taken to vary across different stages of the conversation.

## 4. Arguments against contextualism

### 4.1 Unstable extensions

One worry about at least certain forms of contextualism is that they seem to require that extensions can shift rapidly, and without normal speakers' noticing. Indeed, the argument for psychological contextualism discussed in section 3.1 requires that the extensions shift whenever our focus of attention does (which it arguably does quite often) and it also requires that we do not notice these shifts, since otherwise we would not be inclined to equivocate in the first place. But then not only sorites arguments, but also parts of our intuitively fine everyday reasoning might be equivocal.<sup>27</sup> Suppose I observe two borderline red books and says: 'Book 1 is red. Book 2 is red. Hence, both of the books are red.' On the contextualist view there seem to be nothing to exclude the possibility that the extension of 'is red' changes during the course of the argument, and thus it seems that we cannot rely even on a simple rule like conjunction introduction in reasoning with ordinary language. It is not clear how the contextualist could handle this problem without undermining the argument in 3.1. The existence of stabilising mechanisms in natural language could perhaps be employed in order to safeguard against equivocation. For instance, if we had an operator like 'relative to the standings of the relevant contextual factors at time T', which could be applied to a vague sentence in order to eliminate the vagueness constitutive context sensitivity, we could use this device to stabilise everyday arguments, and thus avoid equivocation. However, this would not help with the problem that the contextualist view appears to render many of our actual everyday inferences equivocal, namely those where we do not in fact use any device of this kind. Moreover, such an operator could also be used in order to construct arguments against contextualism. There are several arguments of this kind in the literature, but the common idea behind them is that since we could use a stabilising device in order to eliminate the relevant kind of context sensitivity without thereby eliminating the symptoms of vagueness, vagueness and context sensitivity must be distinct.<sup>28</sup>

### 4.2 Stabilised extensions

One of the more sophisticated arguments of this kind is due to Jason Stanley (2003), and it is specifically directed against indexical contextualism. Firstly, the sorites argument would, intuitively, be just as compelling if we substituted (1) for (i) and (ii):

1. The 1<sup>st</sup> guy in the line (Sultan Kösen) is tall, and if the 1<sup>st</sup> guy is, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> guy is too, and if the 2<sup>nd</sup> guy is, then the 3<sup>rd</sup> guy is too, ..., and if the  $n-1$ <sup>th</sup> guy is, then the  $n$ <sup>th</sup> guy (Junrey Balawing) is too.

Secondly, indexicals have invariant interpretations under verb phrase ellipsis. Clearly, 'John likes you, and Bill does too' cannot be read as saying that John and Bill like different people.<sup>29</sup> If this is true of indexicals in general, then indexical contextualism entails that the semantic content of the predicate 'is tall' is the same in each conjunct of (1). Thus the context-sensitivity is gone, but vagueness remains.

There are several assumptions at work in this argument, and some of them can be rejected depending on what kind of contextualism is in question. The indexicalist contextualist could claim that although standard indexicals have invariant interpretations under verb phrase ellipsis, the special indexicality constitutive of vagueness is an exception in this respect.<sup>30</sup> And the non-indexicalist could simply point out that she is not even committed to the claim that vague predicates are indexical.

But even if we were to agree that this principle did not apply to vagueness-constitutive indexicality, we could still argue along the same lines by appeal to (2) instead of (1):

2. The 1<sup>st</sup> guy in the line is tall relative to the current standings of the relevant contextual factors, and if the 1<sup>st</sup> guy is, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> guy is too, and if the 2<sup>nd</sup> guy is, then the 3<sup>rd</sup> guy is too, ..., and if the  $n-1$ <sup>th</sup> guy is, then the  $n$ <sup>th</sup> guy is too.<sup>31</sup>

The idea here is to use a standard indexical expression—'current'—in order to fix the extension via the use of verb phrase ellipsis, and an explicit mention of the contextual factors which determine the extension according to the contextualist theory in question. And indeed, 'current' appears to be subject to the principle of invariant interpretation under verb phrase ellipsis, as the following example illustrates:

Hannah is worried about the current state of the economy, and Mary is too.

There is no reading of this sentence according to which Hannah and Mary are worried about different states of the economy, and 'the current state of the economy' appears to be analogous to 'the current standings of the relevant contextual factors' in all relevant respects. Thus, we have found a version of the objection which applies equally well to indexicalism and non-indexicalism, and which is independent of the assumption that the principle of invariant interpretation under verb phrase ellipsis applies to vague predicates in virtue of their alleged special indexicality.

How could contextualists respond? Of course, it would in principle be possible to dig one's heels in and deny that the principle of invariant interpretation under verb phrase ellipsis holds for 'current', but this does not seem like a very attractive position. Another option would be to question the possibility of having well-grounded pre-theoretical intuitions about (2), on the grounds that it refers to the special contextual factors, and thus cannot be properly understood independently of a detailed understanding of this theory. The idea here would be that it is not clear what sufficiently well informed subjects taking a neutral stance would say about (2), and it is not clear that critics of contextualism who report having the intuition that (2) is compelling can be considered as reporting an unbiased spontaneous response. Alternatively, the contextualist could concede that (2) is compelling, but argue that this is because the terms used to specify the context in (2) are *themselves* vague, and thus, we cannot really eliminate the vagueness-constitutive context sensitivity of the predicate 'is tall' in this way.<sup>32</sup> Either of these responses would require elaborations which would take us well beyond the scope of this survey.

## 5. Conclusion

This brief survey is by no means complete, and the above discussion of the different contextualist views and the arguments for and against them is certainly not exhaustive. All of the

arguments raise important issues, and each of these merits further discussion. The hope is that the discussion provided here, together with the various references given, can serve as a starting point for those interested in learning more about contextualism about vagueness as it has been understood and debated in the recent philosophical literature.

## Acknowledgements

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013)/ERC grant agreement n° 229 441-CCC), and from the Swedish Research Council (Dnr 435-2010-454). Parts of this material has been presented at various conferences, workshops and seminars at Stockholm University, the University of St Andrews, the University of Oxford, l'Institut Jean Nicod at École Normale Supérieure (Paris), and Albert-Ludwigs-Universität (Freiburg). I would like to thank the audiences on these occasions, an anonymous referee, and the section editor (Peter Pagin) for useful comments. Special thanks to Patrick Greenough, who was originally a co-author of this paper, and Mikael Pettersson, who read an earlier version of the manuscript and provided valuable feedback.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term 'tolerance' was introduced by Crispin Wright (1975: 333).

<sup>2</sup> There are forms of vagueness which may not meet all of these conditions, but presently, we are only concerned with what is sometimes referred to as *degree-vagueness*. This term is due to Alston, (1967: 219).

<sup>3</sup> According to Guinness World Records (<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com>), 16 November 2011.

<sup>4</sup> See Williamson (2004) and Keefe (2000) for presentations and discussion of the standard theories.

<sup>5</sup> Although there are several kinds of contextualist theories in the recent literature, the focus here will be on the kind that has been most widely discussed. It has been proposed in various forms by Diana Raffman (1994, 1996), Delia Graff Fara, (2000), Scott Soames (1999), and Stewart Shapiro (2006).

<sup>6</sup> This objection appears in its simplest form in Williamson (1994: 215), and in Keefe (2000: 10). See also Heck (2003: 120).

<sup>7</sup> Here, 'meaning' is understood as *standing* meaning or *character*. On such a view, the context sensitivity constitutive of vagueness would be *pre-semantic*.

<sup>8</sup> These distinctions are due to Kaplan (1989) and MacFarlane (2009: 234).

<sup>9</sup> These are often referred to as penumbral connections, since they hold even in the penumbra between the (clear) extension and the (clear) anti-extension. Cf. Fine (1975: 276).

<sup>10</sup> At least given that the meaning is taken to stay fixed across contexts like  $C_1$  and  $C_2$ . However, contrary to what Shapiro (2006: 40) seems to think, open texture is not a sufficient condition for contextual extension variability. Indeed, Shapiro's own open-texture thesis is a claim about what is determined by the meaning of the predicate (together with the relevant non-linguistic factors) and it is quite compatible with a view according to which nothing at all (not even the context) determines a semantic status for (even a subset of) the indeterminate cases.

<sup>11</sup> Soames (1999: 206) captures this by describing vague predicates as being partially defined.

<sup>12</sup> To avoid unnecessary complications, we assume that the comparison class is held fixed.

<sup>13</sup> The details here may vary. For instance, Shapiro (2003: 51-52) only talks about elements being *removed* from the score, and does not seem to think that propositions should be *added* in this way.

<sup>14</sup> Raffman (1996: 182) explicitly characterises the relevant contextual factors in this. When it comes to Fara's theory, the endorsement of psychological contextualism is less explicit (and Fara herself would probably object to the use of this label), but since what really does the work in her account are extension shifts which are effectuated by shifts in the attention of the speaker, the most obvious way to fill the gaps in her account would be to take the relevant contextual factors to be features of the subject's psychological states which are affected by such attention shifts, and then incorporate her theory into Raffman's more detailed account. For more details, see Åkerman (2009: 74-81).

<sup>15</sup> Of course, both the psychological and pragmatic notions of context may be taken to have a role to play in a contextualist theory. Indeed, Shapiro (2006: 26-27) takes his and Raffman's accounts to be complementary, and he even takes Raffman's account to be more basic (given that it can be sustained). Nevertheless, the two positions do



not seem to be fully compatible, since they differ with respect to what factors are taken to determine the extension. For a more detailed discussion, see Åkerman (2009: 67-71).

<sup>16</sup> On Raffman's account, things are a little more complicated than this, since she distinguishes between what might be called first-order and second-order dispositions, where the latter are dispositions to form dispositions of the former kind. (See Raffman 1996: 186.) This raises issues concerning which of these dispositions should be taken as determining extensions. See Åkerman (2009: 81-90) for further discussion.

<sup>17</sup> Alternatively, one could distinguish between *occurrent* and *dispositional* judgement dependence. See Åkerman (2009: 91) for further details.

<sup>18</sup> This is not the *only* possible contextualist solution. However, it is this kind of solution that has been argued to be superior to the ones offered by competing theories (Fara 2000: 54). For a discussion of other kinds of solutions, see Åkerman (2009: 96-101).

<sup>19</sup> Of course, if the extension shifts themselves were taken to be sufficiently salient, it might be plausible to expect them to affect our beliefs about the truth of the instances. However, this would also seem to undermine the explanation, since if the extension shifts were salient, we would no longer be as inclined to make the relevant kind of equivocation. See Åkerman (2011: 1-6) for a more detailed discussion of the points made here. See also Keefe (2007: 275-292) for a discussion of further problems with this contextualist strategy for explaining away tolerance intuitions.

<sup>20</sup> The term 'forced march' is due to Horgan (1994).

<sup>21</sup> This might not be completely obvious on the non-indexical view, since on this view, the content stays the same even when the extension shifts, so we still seem to get assertions and denials of the same content. However, this problem could be handled by claiming that a genuine contradiction requires assertion and denial of the same *full truth-conditional content*, which also include the relevant circumstance of evaluation. For more on the distinction between different levels of content within this kind of framework, see Recanati (2007: 42-46).

<sup>22</sup> The forced-march scenario is invoked by several contextualists, and is usually followed by a more or less explicit statement of this argument, or something to a similar effect. For the most explicit version of the argument, see Raffman (1994: 65-66, 1996: 189-190). See also Soames (1999: 213) and Shapiro (2006: 26).

<sup>23</sup> On the original scoreboard account given by Lewis (1979), the extensions of vague predicates stay fixed. The score only reflects changes in what counts as acceptable, or *true enough* at a given stage of a conversation.

<sup>24</sup> More generally, in situations where we for some reason *must* make a judgment on an item whose category membership is unknown to us, it seems perfectly acceptable to put it in one of the categories *for the purposes of the given situation*. This kind of decision need not be taken to entail a change in the extension.

<sup>25</sup> There seem to be many situations in which acceptability and truth can come apart, depending on which social norms are in force in a given situation. It may not be true to say that I like your new jacket, but it may nevertheless be acceptable, and it may not be acceptable to say that you look ridiculous even if it happens to be true. Of course, there may also be situations in which only what is true counts as acceptable, but this seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the forced march may well be taken to reveal a form of incoherence that is "insulated" in ordinary everyday use of vague language in a way that makes it seem perfectly coherent. Cf. Horgan (1994: 179-180) and Pagin (2010: 265).

<sup>27</sup> For objections of this kind, see Keefe (2007) and Sorensen (1998). For further discussion, see Åkerman (2009: Ch. 6).

<sup>28</sup> See Åkerman and Greenough (2010) for further discussion of some of these arguments.

<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the non-elliptical 'John likes you, and Bill likes you', the interpretation of the elliptical sentence will remain fixed even if the addressee changes between the first and the second conjunct.

<sup>30</sup> For replies of this kind, see Ellis (2004) and Gert (2007). A serious difficulty here is that when it comes to vague expressions, it seems hard to generate any "clean" data about invariability, since there is always noise from tolerance intuitions. For more details, see Åkerman (2009: 110) and Stanley (2005: 165-166).

<sup>31</sup> This version is due to Elia Zardini.

<sup>32</sup> See Åkerman and Greenough (2010) for discussion. It might also be possible to appeal to ignorance of the context relativity, or blindness to the relevant changes. See Åkerman (2009: 114-121) for more details.

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