

Wake Forest University

Department of Philosophy

welcomes

Prof. Anne Bezuidenhout
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“Towards a Unified Account of Perspective Shifting in Conversation”

In this paper I ask whether there are any features that mark indexicals as special and categorically different from other context-sensitive expressions ('contextuals' for short). I first consider and reject the claim that indexicals differ from other contextuals because their interpretation is "automatic" whereas the interpretation of other contextuals depends on accessing information about the speaker's communicative intentions and other information that is mutually manifest to speaker and addressee. I also reject the suggestion that indexicals are special because they have the property of "freezing" the context of interpretation to the context of utterance, whereas contextuals can be freely interpreted with respect to contexts other than the context of utterance. I will argue that the context of interpretation for indexicals can be shifted too. Several examples of such context shifting will be discussed, with a view to describing some possible constraints on context shifting with indexicals. Thirdly, I consider and reject a suggestion by Recanati (forthcoming) that even though indexicals are shiftable, they are different from other contextuals because the latter belong to a system of perspectivals that is distinct from and that has evolved from the system of indexicals. Recanati offers a test that he alleges can be used to distinguish indexicals from perspectivals. I argue that this test is problematic, and that the evolutionary claim is unsubstantiated at best. Instead of looking for ways to distinguish shiftable indexicals from perspectivals, we should be looking for ways to unify them in a single system.

Thursday, November 16, 2006, 4:30 pm
Tribble Hall Philosophy Library B316

This event is open to the public. If you need special assistance, please call
Donna Simmons at 336-758-5359 at least one week prior to the event.

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