

Chapter 3

Context-dependency in Thought

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Abstract

This paper deals first with the idea that the vehicles of our thoughts may be context-sensitive and second with the intimately related question of whether natural language (NL) can be the vehicle of thought (VOT). The thesis will be that of all the varieties of context-dependency that we can distinguish, especially when we focus on NL, the VOT can only be “affected” by automatic or pure indexicality. The way to proceed is: first, I will try to distinguish several varieties of context-dependency that impinge on NL utterances. Then I will argue that the VOT must be explicit in a way that NL expressions, because of all these context-dependencies, cannot. This means that, given that the VOT must carry full propositions, NL cannot be the vehicle of thought. In the final two sections, I will move to consider two main objections to the thesis advanced. The first is that the VOT might be as context-sensitive as NL is, provided we can identify thought-contents with relativized propositions. The second objection comes from the alleged existence of unarticulated constituents in thought.

1. Introduction: Context-dependency in Natural Language

The recent contextualism/ minimalism debate has arguably shown that natural language (NL) is largely context-dependent in the following sense: most, if not all NL utterances, depend on contextual information either in order to express a thought (a proposition with absolute truth-conditions) or in order to express the thought they are intended and intuitively judged to express (see, e.g. Carston, 2002, Recanati, 2004). These are some of the various ways in which this context-dependency of NL is exemplified:

(i) *Automatic indexicality*: some utterances contain indexicals whose content depend on a determinate set of contextual parameters, the prototypical example being ‘I’, which picks up the speaker in the utterance context.

(ii) *Wide-context indexicality*: in contrast with (i), there are indexicals whose content-picking function cannot be specified. Demonstratives, for instance, pick out a contextually salient entity in the context, but saliency is not reducible to a set of parameters.

(iii) *Other overtly context-sensitive expressions*: gradable adjectives exemplify a class of expressions which, not being indexicals, are context-dependent: ‘John is tall’ does not express a proposition unless a reference class and a standard are specified.

(iv) *Unarticulated constituents*: there are sentential utterances, such as ‘it is raining’ that express a thought that goes beyond what their semantics deliver. In order to get that “something else”, contextual information is required, or, to put it differently, the thought that these utterances express depends on the context of utterance. Utterances containing quantifiers plausibly belong to this class.¹

(v) *Meaning modulations*: the thought expressed by an utterance may not coincide with its alleged literal meaning, even if it is not so far away from the latter as to consider it “speaker’s meaning”. This may be the case of ‘the ham sandwich wants the bill’, whose meaning is plausibly that the customer who ordered the ham sandwich wants the bill. Modulations require contextual information.²

(vi) *Lexical ambiguities*: the meaning of homonyms and polysemous terms cannot be fixed in the absence of contextual information. Polysemy, on the other hand, is a ubiquitous feature of language (see Taylor, 2003).

(vii) *Rule ambiguities*: contextual information is also required to retrieve the thought expressed both by syntactically ambiguous expressions and by the use of semantic underdetermined rules, such as the one governing adj + noun constructions, which only specifies that the adjective modifies the noun. For instance, ‘that is a red pen’ may mean (at least) that the pen looks red or that the pen writes red. The concept expressed by the adjective modifies the concept expressed by the noun in both cases, but it turns out that such modification can be realized differently on different occasions. This example may look like a case of modulation: RED is modulated into RED WRITING. However, I think that this, as at least some of the so-called “Travis-cases”, can be dealt with as different determinations of underdetermined semantic rules. Suppose that the concept expressed by ‘red’ is RED and the concept expressed by ‘pen’ is a compound like PHYSICAL OBJECT USED FOR WRITING. Then one could say that the ambiguity in the construction ‘red pen’ results from PEN modifying mainly either one part of the construction (OBJECT) or the other (its telic *qualia* WRITING ARTIFACT: on this see Pustejovsky, 1995).

My purpose in what follows is to evaluate the claim that the vehicle of thought (VOT) may also be context-dependent. In particular, I will consider which of these context-dependencies can be also ascribed to the VOT. I will try to show that, except from automatic indexicality, the rest of context-dependencies jeopardize the idea that the vehicle of thought must carry thoughts, instead of just *expressing* them.

2. On carrying thoughts: the explicitness requirement for the VOT

NL utterances typically express thoughts. Contextualism has shown that in order to do so, NL makes massive use of contextual information. In many cases, NL utterances by themselves fall short of having a truth-conditional content; in other cases, the truth-conditions that they have as tokens of sentence-types do not coincide with the truth-conditions that they express. Thus, it can be said that NL utterances do not express thoughts by encoding or carrying them. On the side of the hearer, this means that in order to retrieve the thought expressed by an utterance, it is not sufficient to do the composition of alleged literal lexical meanings. The information provided by the syntax and the lexicon must be disambiguated, enriched, modulated or revised in the light of contextual information. This kind of general context-dependency of NL (of which (ii-vii) are species) has been called the ‘inexplicitness of NL’ (see Fodor, 2001).

Probably the main reason why NL cannot be the language of thought is precisely its being inexplicit (see Vicente and Martinez Manrique, 2005, 2008). The vehicle of thought, be it linguistic or not, cannot be inexplicit. Jerry Fodor (2001) says that “a thought cannot be inexplicit with respect to its own content (...) because a thought just *is* its content” (p. 14). Francois Recanati (2007) is right when he holds that this claim, as it stands, confuses contents and vehicles. Moreover, what Fodor claims about thoughts and contents can equally be said about truth-conditional meanings and contents of linguistic expressions -the truth-conditional meaning of a linguistic expression cannot be inexplicit about its content, because the truth-conditional meaning is its content-; yet, as has been said, linguistic expressions are remarkably inexplicit about their contents.

However, it is possible to justify the requirement of explicitness for the vehicle of thought in other ways. On the one hand, Fodor’s claim above may be re-interpreted. Perhaps what Fodor has in mind is that, given that a vehicle of a thought is a compound of otherwise discrete representations whose content is always the same, there is nothing more to having a thought than having that compound of representations activated³. But if having a certain thought is nothing but having a determinate complex of this kind of stable representations active, then there seems to be no room for ambiguities or inexplicitness of any sort. Now, this argument may not be completely convincing. First, tokening a certain representational complex does not guarantee that the compound is explicit, even if it is a well-formed compound. For example, there may be syntactic ambiguities, such as scope ambiguities, that make the representational complex inexplicit about its content despite the stability of the representations’ semantic properties. Second, on the present account, Fodor would be assuming a thesis of full-articulation or of homomorphic representation, as John Perry (1986/2000) puts it, such that the content of a representation is given only by the contents of its constituents. However, it is an open question whether there are unarticulated constituents, i.e. constituents of content that are nowhere represented.

Now, the main argument for explicitness that I would like to propose is a sort of regress argument (though it will have to be supplemented with other considerations in order to rule out unarticulated constituents). Roughly: if the vehicle of a thought were inexplicit about its content, then the thinker would have to interpret it adding contextual information to the information that the vehicle carries. Then either all that information is put together in a vehicle that carries it (which would then properly be called

the vehicle of thought) or else the regress goes on.⁴ In order to make this point it may be helpful to look at what happens with NL utterances: a well-formed NL sentence which is inexplicit about its content is subject to pragmatic interpretation. What we do in our pragmatics system is, basically, to put together linguistic and non-linguistic information. The output of the pragmatic system is a complete thought, which must make use of a vehicle capable of carrying it in an explicit way. The reason is that if it did not, the output of the pragmatic system would have to go through pragmatic processing again. Now, that could happen, but then either the process stops somewhere (and then we have found the vehicle of thought) or it goes on forever, which is absurd. Now, the claim is that what occurs with the output of the pragmatic system occurs with thought in general: what we call ‘our thinking’ has to use an explicit vehicle. If this argument is sound, then vehicles of thoughts must be explicit about their contents, carrying thoughts instead of just expressing them. Another way to put it is this: what content a certain token of the VOT has is not a matter of pragmatic interpretation, but of semantics alone.

Going deeper, and assuming the language of thought hypothesis, the requirement of explicitness implies two things: First, it implies that the vehicle of thought must have a classical compositional semantics, by which it is meant that the truth-conditional content of a token of a VOT is a function solely of its structure and the semantic values of its constituents. Second, the explicitness requirement implies that the constituents of a VOT must have determinate meanings. Compositionality is jeopardized by at least (iv) to (vii) context-dependencies. Cases (ii) and (iii) compromise at least the requirement of determinacy of meanings: the content of a demonstrative expression as well as the reference class, the standard, or what may, for a gradable adjective are largely underdetermined.

In contrast, automatic indexicals seem unproblematic *vis a vis* the explicitness requirement: the thought expressed by an utterance containing one of them can be obtained by semantic means alone. It can be said that automatic indexicals do not have a determinate meaning, unless such a meaning is identified with their character. However, the character of an automatic indexical is such that it determines automatically, i.e. without the recourse to interpretation, its occasional content. This, I take it, does not compromise the requirements of explicitness.

In what follows I will be arguing, against some possible objections and problems, for the view that the only context-sensitivity of the VOT is that

brought about by automatic indexicals. One first –I think, minor- problem has to do with demonstratives. It seems reasonable to hold that there are demonstrative thoughts, that, for instance one can have a thought about a certain person of the sort THAT MAN IS DRINKING A MARTINI. The problem is that if there are demonstrative expressions in the VOT then it seems to follow that the VOT admits more context-sensitivity than that of automatic indexicals. The reply to this point consists not in denying that there are demonstratives in the VOT, but in denying that they behave as NL demonstratives (as semantically underdetermined expressions). Rather, the behaviour of demonstratives in thought resembles that of automatic indexicals. If the vehicle of thought has expressions equivalent to ‘that man is drinking a Martini’, the demonstrative is, in the most common and simple case, linked to a percept –it points directly to the percept-, whose content is determined automatically by its cause.⁵

It may be that two occurrences of [the equivalent to] ‘that man is drinking a Martini’ differ in their truth-conditions: the percept may be the same, or very similar, on both occasions but not its content, as when the scene is such that I cannot distinguish what happens to be two different persons drinking. In these cases, and from the first person perspective, it may be impossible to discern what content the vehicle carries. However, such content is determined in a non-interpretative way, in contrast with the behaviour of demonstratives in NL. So the fact that there may be the equivalent to demonstrative expressions in the vehicle of thought does not count against the assumption of explicitness.

3. On relativized truth-conditions

Now let me turn to what I consider to be the two most pressing objections to the present view. First of all, it can be said that the above may hold, if at all, only if the truth-conditions taken into account are absolute truth-conditions. Utterances such as ‘it’s raining’ or ‘Peter is small’ perhaps lack absolute truth-conditions, but they do carry relativized truth-conditions. By this I mean what Recanati (2007) calls *lektons* or *thin contents*. A relativized proposition is that proposition (if it is such) that results from discounting the circumstances of evaluation from the absolute truth-conditions (the *Austinian proposition*, in Recanati’s terminology). (On relativism, see, e.g. Predelli, 2004, McFarlane, 2007). The Austinian proposition, in contrast, includes such circumstances of evaluation. Thus, my utterance ‘it is raining’, used to describe the present situation, has two kinds of content: the thin content that it is raining, which is true or false relative to the circum-

stances of evaluation (worlds and places, say), and the Austinian content that it is raining here, which is true in those worlds where it is raining in the place I actually am.⁶

Perhaps then the vehicle of thought could be as context-dependent as NL is, insofar as context-dependency is dealt with by means of relativized truth-conditions and thought-contents identified with relativized propositions. If thoughts are not absolute but relativized propositions, an equivalent in the VOT of ‘I am short’ would carry a thought –the thought that I am short-; yet, its absolute truth-conditions would vary from occasion to occasion, which is why it would be context-dependent. In a nutshell, the explicitness requirement can be met and the VOT still be context-dependent (and NL be the VOT) if its contents were relativized propositions or *lektons*.⁷

Now, there are two problems for this move. Let me call them ‘the problem of explanatory adequacy’ and ‘the problem of inexplicitness’:

3.1. The problem of explanatory adequacy

Briefly stated, this first problem consists in that relativized truth-conditions fall short of explaining behaviour. In this respect, thought-contents must be richer than relativized propositions. If I stand on tiptoe in the middle of the crowd it is because I think that I am short with respect to the people around, not because I believe the relativized proposition that I am short, which can have different truth values in different situations. Or if I pick up my umbrella it is because I think that it is raining where I am, not because I think simply that it is raining. Circumstances of evaluation matter when we focus on the explanation of behaviour.

It is possible to argue that even though circumstances of evaluation do matter, there is no reason why they should be represented. A relativized proposition can be taken to be just a propositional function that, *ceteris paribus*, produces different behavioural outputs depending on the different circumstances of evaluation it takes as arguments. In principle, there is no need for circumstances of evaluation to be represented. However, the problem is: how can this work unless circumstances of evaluation are represented one way or another? That is, how can circumstances of evaluation be taken as input for the behavioural output if the thinker does not have them in mind? One response, *à la* Perry (see next section), would be: the thinker could be just *attuned* to circumstances of evaluation. There are a variety of proposals within current Cognitive Science that could be thought

to support this idea: thus, many claim that cognition is situated, or embedded, in its environment in such a way that it can do without representing it (see Clark, 1997, for an extended introduction).

I purport to discuss this idea in the next section, when I turn to the issue of unarticulated constituents in thought. But for now let me say the following: it is dubious that this proposal could be applied to cognitive creatures like us. We, in general, are not attuned to a specific environment. When I think that it is raining, my thought can be about my surroundings, about a nearby place I see, about a place I am being talked about, about a place I recall or imagine, etc. what this means is that an occurrence of ‘it’s raining’ tokened in my mind is a terribly ambiguous utterance. If I am going to act based on its content, then I’d better know more about what it means. That is, I have to have some kind of representation of its circumstances of evaluation, i.e. the situation to which it applies. Being in that situation is not enough: I have to know that I *am* in that situation, and not in another. The difference between cognitive creatures like us and a simpler cognitive creature is that the input environmental circumstances for the latter are invariant, while ours are not. And it seems that the only way for a cognitive creature whose thinking takes very different circumstances of evaluation to attune its behaviour to them is by way of being informed of what those circumstances are.

It is true that absolute propositions are not well-suited either to explain behaviours: this is the lesson from the Frege and Putnam cases. The Frege cases show that absolute propositions are too coarse grained to explain behaviour: they make it mysterious why someone can buy all the music by Bob Dylan (as Bob Dylan) while being unmoved by what Robert Zimmerman (as Robert Zimmerman) does. Putnam cases, on the other hand, make manifest that absolute propositions are too fine-grained: they draw a distinction where, for the purposes of explaining behaviour, there is none, such as that between my twin’s (t)water thoughts and my water thoughts. However, the problem is different with relativized propositions. For the lack of harmony between wide contents and behaviour may be corrected by appealing to modes of presentation, narrow contents, or to the very vehicle carrying such contents.⁸ The explanatory deficit of relativized contents, however, is of a different sort, for it is not restricted to contents themselves: it also affects the very vehicle carrying such contents. Vehicles must carry *more content*, so to speak. In particular, they have to represent what the relativist puts in the side of circumstances of evaluation. That is, the explanatory deficits that affect absolute propositions derive from the

way we want to assign contents to representations: representational complexes themselves are not problematic. However, it seems that the explanatory deficits of relativized propositions have to do with the fact that the vehicle carrying them does not carry enough information or does not represent enough parts of the world.

It could be argued that there are more problems for the “absolutist”. Suppose I am speaking on the phone with S, from London, and she says ‘it’s raining here’. Both she and I then think that it’s raining in London. Yet, she picks an umbrella and I do not. Now, does this mean that absolute truth-conditions or Austinian propositions are not good candidates for explaining behaviour? It does not. First, the scenario here devised can be considered a Frege case: the difference in our respective behaviours is due to the fact that each of us thinks about London differently: it’s a “here” for her, while it’s a “there” for me.⁹ We have different indexical thoughts, which are mirrored by the vehicle of thought itself. But even if the scenario were retouched slightly so that there were no indexicals involved –e.g. if what she said were ‘it’s raining in London’, and then we both thought about London in the same way-, the difference in our behaviours could be explained in a non-problematic way, namely, by resorting to the interaction of the belief that it is raining in London with other beliefs –e.g., that I am in London or I am not-.¹⁰

Note, on the other hand, that the relativist cannot give this kind of reply when it is pointed out that thin contents cannot explain behaviour. She could try the following explanation: the same thought, namely, that it’s raining, brings about different behaviours due to a difference in some background beliefs. Thus, if I believe that it is raining and I believe that I am in a place where it is raining, I will pick up an umbrella; otherwise I will not. However, it is clear that in this case the explanatory job is entirely done by the background belief, namely, the belief that I am in a place where it is raining. The belief that it is raining enters nowhere in the explanation. In conclusion, whatever problems the absolutist may have in attuning Austinian propositions to behaviours, it seems clear that a proposition that leaves out circumstances of evaluation altogether is not better but significantly worse attuned to differences in behaviour. So the VOT cannot carry relativized propositions.

3.2. The problem of inexplicitness

The second problem for the relativist is that relativized propositions cannot really meet the explicitness requirement. It is simply not true that if the VOT carries *lektons* then the VOT can be both context-dependent and explicit. Think about utterance comprehension on a relativist construal. If we think of what a hearer of an utterance of ‘it’s raining’ has to do in order to understand what she is told according to this construal, it is easy to see that she has to go through a process of interpretation. She does not complete a propositional function with contextual information, as in the “absolutist” schema, but she interprets the utterance all the same.¹¹ Basically, she has to guess what situation the utterance must be evaluated against. In order to do so, she has to resort to lexical-semantic information, but, more important, she has to use her knowledge of the context of the utterance.¹² In a nutshell, vehicles carrying relativized propositions are subject to pragmatic interpretation.

Just paying attention to the phenomenology of thought, it seems that nothing similar to the process of utterance interpretation just sketched occurs in thought: the situation against which we have to evaluate our thoughts is present to us; it’s not something that we arrive at using semantic and pragmatic information as we do in NL comprehension. This suggests that circumstances of evaluation have to be linked to the VOT in a special way: either the vehicle includes a representation of the circumstances (thus having absolute truth-conditions) or else it has an index attached to it which points to them. Such an index, in turn, should behave as an automatic indexical, on pain of regress problems: it should behave as a demonstrative that signals unequivocally the situation against which the thought is evaluated. So vehicles of thoughts may carry thin contents, but only if at the same time they demonstrate the circumstances of evaluation of such thin contents, that is, if they carry thin contents... and something else. Returning to the purpose of this paper, we can so far conclude that, no matter whether we think in terms of absolute or relativized truth-conditions, the mechanics of context-dependency in thought are ultimately the mechanics of automatic indexicality.¹³

Now, in spite of all this, Recanati (2007) proposes that *lektons* can be the contents of thought. His discussion is mainly focused on *de se* thoughts and the class of thoughts exemplified by weather thoughts, so it is difficult to know whether he would hold the same position with respect to other context-dependencies. In any case, his attempted solution to the problem of the adjustment between *lektons* and behaviours is to resort to *modes* of thinking. Basically, what he claims is that the *explanans* of a given behaviour is not just the content of the thought, but also the mode in which this

thought is entertained, more in particular, whether the thought is in the perceptual mode, the memory mode or the anaphoric mode. A token of the equivalent to 'it's raining' in the perceptual mode makes the subject pick up an umbrella, whereas if the mode is anaphoric -linked to a previous conversation, for instance- the subject will only feel vaguely worried about other people getting wet.

This approach would also solve the second problem I have raised for the relativist. For modes not only allegedly help to explain behaviours; they also disambiguate between one it's-raining thought and another. If I think that it's raining in the perceptual mode, then there is no doubt that my thought concerns the present situation (or the scene that is the cause of my percept); if I am in the anaphoric mode, then the thought concerns the situation I have in mind, etc.

Now, this proposal may sound interesting sound interesting, but also a bit fishy, I think. The notion of a mode of thinking, or of tokening a thought-content, is not clear to me. Perhaps what is meant by, e.g. 'having a belief in the perceptual mode' is simply having a percept that gives rise to a belief. However, if this were so, we could ask ourselves what the content of such a belief might be: if it is a *lekton*, we have a problem of inexplicitness, since a *lekton*, as it has already been said, has to be interpreted. Moreover, we also have a problem of explanatory inadequacy, for it is the belief –and its content-, and not its cause, what brings about the behaviour to be explained. That is, mentioning the cause of the belief does not seem to change things a bit. So maybe what is meant is not that, but rather that what is entertained is a percept. The issue gets more complicated if we take this strand. Surely it can be argued that there are cases where percepts are causes of behaviours: simple organisms may have a very basic psychology where action is not mediated by beliefs and desires but responds directly to an interpreted stimulus –which can be called a percept. And surely some of our behaviours are similarly produced. The point is whether my picking up an umbrella is one of such behaviours. The usual way to explain a piece of behaviour such as my picking up an umbrella resorts to a belief-desire psychology. In particular, the most common explanation is that a certain percept caused a belief, which, together with a desire –of not getting wet-made me pick up the umbrella. And at any rate, I take it that when we discuss about contents of thoughts, we are discussing about conceptual contents, not about non-conceptual ones.¹⁴

So probably Recanati means something else when he speaks about modes of thinking. However, whatever he means, I take it that modes do

function as VOT demonstratives. That is, the perceptual mode picks up, automatically, the situation that produced the belief, the memory mode the situation one is remembering, etc. Consequently, modes complement the content of the thought by anchoring it to a certain situation; such anchoring is done in the same (automatic) way as VOT demonstratives anchor demonstrative thoughts to their content: i.e. in the same way as a ‘that’ in a belief produced by a percept is anchored to the cause of such a percept, the mode of a belief in the perceptual mode is anchored to the cause of such a belief. Perhaps it is possible to explain our cognitive economy without resorting to these “modes” Recanati introduces. But the point is that if we choose to include them as elements of our mental life, their presence does not seem to pose a problem for the thesis here advanced.

4. On unarticulated constituents

Some authors have argued that there are thoughts that go beyond what their vehicle codifies, that is, that some constituents of the truth-conditional contents of some thoughts are not explicitly represented. Ruth Millikan (2006) restricts such constituents to invariants in the environment in arguing that “aspects of a truth-condition are explicitly represented [only] when expressed as values of variables that can accept alternative values” (p. 49). Perry (1986/2000), in turn, includes parameters that can vary, as long as such variation is fixed. Thus, a child concerned only about the weather in the place he is in would not explicitly represent in his thought the location of the rain, even though it is a parameter that varies with changes in his own location. Especially conspicuous in this category of thoughts are some simple thoughts which apparently do not require that we are self-represented, be they about our internal states or about things that happen in our surroundings. As Perry (1985) puts it “at the “bottom level”, we have cognitions that have no representation of ourselves (or the present moment) which are tied pretty directly to cognition and action” (p. 241). In the way they are put forward, these are ideas that compromise the requisite of explicitness.

Now, there are two replies open to the defender of explicitness. The first is to hold that at least some of the examples do not compromise explicitness, when properly construed. Thus, it can be said that what we demand when we say that the vehicle of thought must be explicit about its content is not that every constituent of the content must be represented. Rather, that a vehicle is explicit about its content can be taken to mean,

minimally, that its content is not extracted by means of a process of interpretation. So the explicitness requirement may be conceptually distinguished from a requirement of full articulation or homomorphic representation (Perry, 1986/2000). But above all, it can be argued that the requirement has to do not so much with what notion of explicitness we assume, but with the regress argument that we have used to establish it and with the conclusion that it cannot be a matter of pragmatic interpretation what content a vehicle of a thought has. In the case of environmental invariants there is no question about what value a determinate constituent takes, and, for this reason, not having a representation for that constituent does not count against explicitness so construed.

Perry (1986/2000) gives the case of Z-landers, people who we would describe as speaking and thinking (when about the weather) only about the weather in Z-land. Such people, according to Perry, do not represent Z-land when thinking about the weather, which makes Z-land remain unarticulated in their thoughts. In a first approximation (see below), Perry also suggests that Z-land belongs to the truth-conditions of their weather-thoughts. But if it does, this should not pose a problem for explicitness, for Z-landers' thoughts about the weather cannot but be anchored to Z-land: if one of them tokens the equivalent to 'it's raining', there is no ambiguity to be resolved. The same goes for those simple thoughts Perry speaks about. Perry (1985), when speaking about simpler organisms than us says the following: "since they [themselves] are always in the background of their perceptions and actions, they [themselves] need not be represented in the cognitions that intervene between them" (p. 241). If there is no question that such thoughts are about themselves, there is no need to token a self-representation.

According to this line of defence, there should be no problem either in admitting that parameters that shift invariably may not have a corresponding indexical representation. The child in the example above may be content with tokening a simple 'it is raining' instead of 'it's raining here' because there is no question in his case that 'it's raining' always means that it's raining where he is. However, it cannot be accepted that parameters that can vary freely can also be unarticulated, for these parameters introduce ambiguity. Thus, when the child grows up and becomes concerned about the weather in other places, a tokening of the equivalent to 'it's raining' may mean a variety of things. So her thought that it is raining where she is must then be fully articulated.¹⁵

Yet, this response may be considered not fully satisfactory, since it introduces a revision of the notion of explicitness. I take it to be a minor revision, if at all, for it comes to the claim that x is explicit if and only if x does not allow more than one interpretation (i.e. its content is fixed), which I think captures one of the possible meanings of ‘explicit’. And in any case, it is the notion of explicitness we should care about in this debate, especially in light of the arguments advanced, as it has just been said. Nonetheless, it is also possible to defend explicitness without making any violence to the notion.

Thus, there is a second line available to the advocate of explicitness. It basically consists in denying that these examples show what they are intended to show, namely, that the truth-conditions of a vehicle of thought may exceed the content obtained by the composition of the contents represented. That is, instead of holding that the regress argument only supports a minimal explicit requirement –given that there are some unarticulated constituents in thought- it is possible to maintain that the argument does support a demand for full articulation, since *there are no unarticulated constituents in thought*. So it may be claimed, for instance, that the proposition a Z-lander entertains when tokening her equivalent to ‘it’s raining’ is simply that it is raining, i.e. that their concept of rain does not pick out a dyadic property (a relation between times and places), but a monadic one (a property of times).¹⁶

Perry (1986/2000) offers two ways to account for the thoughts of Z-landers. The first holds that a Z-lander’s weather thought is *about* Z-land, even if Z-land is not represented: thus, Z-land would be an unarticulated constituent of the content of her thought. The other way consists in ascribing not propositions but propositional functions: instead of saying that a Z-lander’s weather thoughts are about Z-land, we can say that they *concern* Z-land, meaning that Z-land is not part of the content of their thoughts, but the circumstance or situation against which their thoughts are evaluated. Of these two possibilities, Perry opts for the latter. On the one hand, he claims, going absolutist has the undesirable consequence that if Z-landers began to move to other places and have weather thoughts about these different places, then either we would have to ascribe them false beliefs, for we would have anchored all their weather thoughts to Z-land, or we should say that their rain concept has changed (1986/200: 180). On the other, the relativist approach seems to be combining two views: our own view, which regards Z-land as a component of the Z-lander’s weather thoughts, and the Z-lander semanticist’s view, which takes it that weather concepts denote monadic properties. Perhaps it can be objected that this mixed view is in

fact unable to do justice to any of its parties. However, the point is that when introducing the relativist view, Perry does mention the Z-lander semanticist's view that RAIN is a monadic concept. Yet, he does not seem to consider it an interesting option, for he does not discuss it.

Now, following Eros Corazza (2007), I think that the most natural and faithful way to describe what Z-landers think is by adopting their own view. In particular, given that a Z-lander does not have the notion of other places, at least as far as the weather is concerned, I see no reason to hold that her thoughts are about Z-land or even that they concern Z-land. (Think of someone lacking the notion of a possible world: would we say that, even so, her thoughts are about the actual world? And now imagine that there are parallel universes and someone is capable of travelling between them. Would she be fair to our language and our thinking if she translated 'the cat is on the mat' as meaning that the cat is on the mat in the world we live in?).

This approach has two apparent shortcomings. First, if we hold that the Z-lander's it's-raining thoughts are partially constituted by a monadic concept, then, when Z-landers became nomads, we would have to say that their concept of rain has changed –equally, we would have to say that their term 'rain' has changed its meaning- now being dyadic. However, it is possible to reply that precisely that's what has happened: they acquire new meteorological concepts as they abandon Z-land and develop the notion of "other places". Second, suppose that we are concerned with a farmer in Z-land that thinks things of the sort "all the cows are safe now". If we adopt the farmer's point of view, we should say that the quantifier is not restricted to a particular domain (say, to Z-land). But given that there are cows outside Z-land, and some of them are not safe, we would be ascribing a false belief to her.¹⁷ It is more charitable to ascribe to her the thought that all the cows of Z-land are safe, thus including Z-land as an unarticulated constituent of her thought. Now, I do not think this is right. If we adopt the Z-landers' point of view, we thereby adopt their view that the world begins and ends in Z-land –we take their ontology onboard- and so we can say that the truth or falsity of their thoughts must be evaluated against Z-land only, therefore obtaining a true belief.

Following this line of argument, one should say that when an animal perceives a potato and seizes it, the cognition that mediates both events is just that there is a potato there (or x cms. away). Millikan gives the example of bee dances. Bee dances, she says, represent direction, but the truth-conditions of a bee dance include the nectar, the hive and the sun, which

are not represented. Now, why should this be so? The content may be plainly that the direction is such and so. One thing is the truth-conditions that *we ascribe* and another is the truth-conditions of the thought (perception, dance or whatever). In a nutshell, what I propose is that if invariants from the environment are not represented, there is no reason for them either to enter into the content of the thoughts.

What about the child who entertains only thoughts about the weather in her surroundings? The case is not clear to me. If the child is able to entertain only present-tense thoughts (it's-raining thoughts), I would say that she cannot make the contrast here/there when thinking about the weather and that therefore she is not really able to think that "it is raining here (or where I am)". That is, her tokenings of the equivalent in the vehicle of thought to 'it is raining' would not mean that it is raining where he is but plainly that it is raining. Now, if she also has memories of weather events and can think it-was-raining thoughts, then she must master the distinction here/there (though not entirely). But then it is not clear why it must be assumed that she is not representing locations. On the contrary, it seems that she must represent them. Otherwise, how would she distinguish one raining past episode from another?

5. Conclusion

NL is widely context-dependent. The VOT, however, cannot be context-dependent, barring pure indexicality, because the VOT must be explicit at least in the sense that what content a VOT token has cannot be a matter of pragmatic interpretation: the content must be given by its semantics alone. I have tried to argue for this claim (and the consequence that NL cannot be the vehicle of thought) by means of a regress argument. Then I have tried to meet two possible objections. First, the VOT might carry relativized propositions so that the VOT could be context-dependent and explicit at the same time. I have argued that the explicitness *desideratum* is not actually met, for a vehicle carrying a relativized proposition is subject to pragmatic interpretation. Besides, relativized contents are ill suited for explaining behaviour. Second, the truth-conditional content of a vehicle of a thought may exceed what is explicitly represented: such is the case of unarticulated constituents. My response has been that some examples of unarticulated constituents do not really pose a problem to explicitness, when the requirement is construed as demanding only that a vehicle of a thought must have its content fixed. But even if the requirement is construed as a demand of full articulation, it is possible to defend that there are no unar-

ticulated constituents in thought. If we draw a distinction between the content that we ascribe and the content that a vehicle of a thought has, there is no reason to say that invariants in the environment, for instance, form part of the content of a vehicle of a thought.¹⁸

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Notes

1. The existence and characterization of unarticulated constituents, and how they enter into the proposition expressed by an utterance, are controversial issues. I tend to be sympathetic to Recanati's (2002) approach, but this is not an important matter for present purposes.
2. The example must be taken with caution. A token of 'the ham sandwich wants the bill' looks more like a polysemous utterance today, for the use of 'ham sandwich' to refer to a particular customer has been conventionalized. This means that most hearers do not *modulate* the meaning of 'ham sandwich' to obtain "the customer that ordered the ham sandwich" but simply select, according to the context, one of the possible meanings of 'ham sandwich'. So I ask the reader to think instead of the first uses of the locution: on those first uses there was a reference transfer (or modulation).
3. As a matter of fact, the argument Fodor (2001) puts forward is that the vehicle of thought has been shown to be compositional, and that compositionality entails explicitness. However, compositionality entails explicitness only if the constituents of the whole have stable determinate meanings. For more on the distinction between compositionality and explicitness, see Vicente and Martínez Manrique (2008).
4. For a more developed version of this argument and some exegesis of Fodor's argument, see Vicente and Martínez Manrique (2005).
5. In other cases, the content may be fixed by the cause of a percept which forms part of a memory, and so on.
6. McFarlane (2007) presents his relativism as a "non-indexical contextualism". It is a contextualist proposal in that it acknowledges that the Austinian content expressed by a sentence varies from token to token. It is non-indexical in that contextual factors are put mostly on the circumstance of evaluation side. Thus, if thin contents –what other philosophers call propositional functions– were the contents of propositional attitudes, we could have an (Austinian) context-sensitive VOT without compromising explicitness. This would mean that explicitness does not require context-insensitivity (automatic indexicality aside). What I want to do is, first, show that thin contents are not good candidates to be the contents of our thoughts, and so that the entailment from explicitness to context-insensitivity holds. Then I will question the idea that relativized propositions do meet the explicitness requirement.
7. In what follows in the section, I will be dealing only with the relativistic proposal, basically because a variant of it has been put forward by Recanati (2007) and is also mentioned by Carston (2008). There might be other proposals, though. For instance, one might claim that thought-contents are not absolute propositions, but reflexive propositions (see Perry, 2001). I will only say

it seems that reflexive propositions are way too general to be the usual contents of our thoughts, though they may occasionally be objects of thinking, as when one overhears a conversation and forms a thought which is utterance-reflexive.

8. The idea that one has to take the vehicle into account –the representation that stands for Bob Dylan is not the same as the representation that stands for Robert Zimmerman- is developed by Fodor (1990). Levine (1988) defends a similar proposal for demonstratives. This would be the most economic way for the absolutist to go. However, the most usual approach to THE Frege cases is the mode-of-presentation approach (inspired by Frege himself). Of special importance for the purposes of this paper is what has been called the ‘hidden indexical account’ (see Crimmins and Perry, 1989, Schiffer, 1992). Crimmins and Perry (1989) hold that modes of presentation are unarticulated constituents of propositional attitude ascriptions. Now, if this means that thoughts have modes of presentations as unarticulated constituents, my position is in trouble, for the explanatory inadequacy of absolute propositions could only be remedied if their vehicle carried more content (and the absolutist would end up having the same problem as the relativist). I defer to criticisms of Crimmins and Perry’s position such as Clapp’s (1995), (2008) and Schiffer (1992).
9. ‘Here’ and ‘there’ are not automatic indexicals in NL, but their (plausibly many) counterparts in the VOT should be.
10. The chain of thoughts is plausibly: “it’s raining in London; I am in London; I’ll pick up an umbrella”.
11. This would be Recanati’s (2004) or Relevance Theory’s (see Carston, 2002) “free enrichment” account. In other accounts, such as Stanley’s (2000) “hidden indexical” approach, the hearer must search for the saturation of a free variable within the wide context.
12. See Barba (2008) for a model roughly along these lines.
13. I assume that any kind of automatic indexicals would be represented indexicals, and moreover, that their content would be conceptual. This assumption may be disputed, though. For instance, Eros Corazza has pointed out that the automatic indexicals I speak about could be Pylyshyn’s (2007) style FINSTs, which are indexicals allegedly used in vision for binding purposes whose content is non-conceptual. It strikes me as odd that the situation against which we have to evaluate our thoughts (e.g. our it’s-raining thoughts) might not be conceptualized: it must at least be seen as a *here* vs. a *there*. But suppose it is not conceptualized: then circumstances of evaluation would not be part of the content of our thoughts, since thoughts contain only conceptual material. What this means is not that the relativist is right. Rather, it means that the content of a token of the equivalent in the VOT of ‘it’s raining’ would be that it’s raining, *simpliciter*. We would not have a context-dependent thought, but a fully articulated thought. I hope this becomes clear by the end of the next section.

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14. Following conventional wisdom, I assume that there is a difference between the nature of concepts and that of percepts, e.g. that concepts are amodal while percepts are not. This assumption has been under heavy attack lately (see e.g. Barsalou, 2003 or Prinz, 2002; and see Weiskopf, 2007, for a rebuttal), but discussing it here would take us too far afield. Let me just mention, somewhat dogmatically, that I don't think that the idea of reducing human cognition to perceptual and/or motor processing is very promising, even if it turns out to be a successful paradigm when applied to simpler cognitive creatures.
 15. This is an oversimplification: the child must be able to have it's-raining thoughts about various places from the very beginning, even if these are always in her surroundings. So her thoughts cannot really have unarticulated constituents. The same goes for Z-landers. Even if they think that Z-land is the only place in the world, their weather thoughts won't be all about Z-land as a whole. They will move freely among the various parts of Z-land and represent them as different places.
 16. For a development of this position, see Corazza (2007).
 17. This point was raised by Christopher Gauker.
 18. Research for this paper was funded by the Project FFI2008-06421-C02-02/FISO of the Spanish Ministry. I have to express my gratitude to the editors of this volume and Juan Barba, Begoña Vicente, Neftalí Villanueva and Eros Corazza for helpful comments.