Puns for Contextualists

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will first try to provide a new argument in favour of the contextualist position on the semantics/pragmatics divide. I will argue that many puns, notably multi-stable ones, cannot be dealt with in the non-contextualist way, i.e., as displaying a phenomenon that effectively involves wide context, the concrete situation of discourse, yet only in a pre-, or at least inter-, semantic sense. For, insofar as they involve ambiguous *utterances* rather than ambiguous *sentences*, these puns show that the wide context affecting them has a *semantic* role: it provides many truth-conditions for a single utterance. Moreover, I will try to show that the contextualist can provide a unitary account of the *general* phenomenon of puns. On the one hand, this account explains multi-stable puns as well as those puns the non-contextualist claims to deal with successfully, i.e., the ones involving a speaker-induced removal of a well-grounded misunderstanding. On the other hand, it also explains zeugmatic puns, i.e., those involving an 'impossible' meaning.

Keywords: Contextualism, non-contextualism, wide context, puns, multi-stability.

Introduction

In this paper, I will first try to provide a new argument in favour of the contextualist position on the semantics/pragmatics divide. The argument is based on an evaluation of the phenomenon of ambiguity as it occurs in puns. I will argue that many puns, notably multi-stable ones, cannot be dealt with in the non-contextualist way, i.e., as displaying a phenomenon that effectively

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involves wide context, the concrete situation of discourse, yet only in a pre-, or at least inter-, semantic sense. For, insofar as they involve ambiguous *utterances* rather than ambiguous *sentences*, these puns show that the wide context affecting them has a *semantic* role: it provides many truth-conditions for a single utterance. Moreover, I will try to show not only that non-contextualist replies to the contextualist account of this phenomenon of ambiguous utterances do not work, but also that the contextualist can provide a unitary account of the *general* phenomenon of puns. On the one hand, this account explains multi-stable puns as well as those puns the non-contextualist claims to deal with successfully, i.e., the ones involving a speaker-induced removal of a well-grounded misunderstanding. On the other hand, it also explains zeugmatic puns, i.e., those involving an 'impossible' meaning.

1. The contextualist/non-contextualist opposition and the role of ambiguity

As regards the divide between semantics and pragmatics, nowadays two main options confront each other: *non-contextualism* and *contextualism*. In point of fact, contextualism varies in type.[1] Yet the opposite position lacks even a common label.[2] Nevertheless, there is a clear-cut way to cash out the main distinction affecting these two positions *à propos* of the above divide. This distinction concerns the different conceptions those options have with respect to the so-called *wide context*, i.e., the concrete situation of discourse. To put it in Perry's (1997) terms, according to non-contextualists, wide context never has a *semantic* role, that is, it never fixes the truth-conditions a sentence has in

[1] Not only *truth-conditional pragmatics à la* Recanati (2004a) - according to which primary pragmatic processes determining contextual truth-conditional contributions of sub-sentential expressions may even bypass the linguistic meaning of such expressions – but also *broad indexicalism* à la Stanley (2007) - according to which linguistic meaning merely underdetermines contextual truth-conditions – turn out to be forms of contextualism, a radical and a moderate one respectively. For in broad indexicalism, linguistic meaning plus narrow context may well be unable to determine the truth-conditions of an utterance, i.e., of a sentence in wide context (for the notions of narrow and wide context see later).

[2] To outline this position, some use the label *semantic minimalism* (cf. Cappellen & Lepore 2005) – or the similar one *minimal semantics* (cf. Borg 2004). Predelli speaks of the "traditional approach" (2005, p. 13). By following a proposal put forward by Recanati (2004a), one might name this position *literalism*. Yet as Recanati himself admits, since according to this position what is semantically evaluated are sentences in context, one might well be justified in taking this position as a form of *narrow indexicalism*, according to which linguistic meaning automatically determines truth-conditions given a *narrow* kind of context (see immediately later in the text).

narrow context, or *index*, i.e., a set of a limited series of parameters – typically, agent, space, time, and world.[3] Typically, for non-contextualists wide context has the *post-semantic*, genuinely pragmatic, role of determining whatever extra-truthconditional factor of significance is conveyed by means of such a sentence in context. By a first approximation, for non-contextualists the proper objects of semantic evaluation are therefore *sentence - narrow context pairs*, theoretical representations of *utterances*, the concrete wide-contextual tokenings of sentences on the speakers' part.[4] Whereas according to contextualists, wide context *may* well have the semantic role in question. Properly speaking, in fact, in order for the contextualist to win the battle against her enemy, it is enough for her to show that contextualism is correct with respect to the purportedly semantic role of wide context in at least one case.[5] As a result, for contextualists the proper objects of semantic evaluation are utterances themselves, *qua* (roughly) sentences in wide context.[6]

Here is why the contextualist/non-contextualist distinction must be drawn this way. On the non-contextualist side, since wide context never has a semantic role, truth-conditions are assigned to sentences in narrow context by computing the truth-conditional contributions (in narrow context) of the sub-sentential components of such sentences, together with certain syntactic and compositional principles. Since such a computation turns out to be an utterly automatic process, even a semantic mechanism, something that is programmed to make that computation, may perform a truth-conditional assignment.

In this respect, the fact that what is semantically evaluated is a sentence in narrow context raises no problem. For the relevant truth-conditional computation remains entirely automatic. This is paradigmatically shown by indexical sentences, for which narrow context effectively is truth-conditionally relevant. Granted, without a narrow context an indexical sentence has no truth-

[3] For this distinction between wide and narrow context cf. Perry (1997, p. 595). Predelli (1998, 2005) has shown that narrow context has to be considered a context of interpretation rather than a context of utterance. For the narrow context's parameters can well differ from the parameters of a context of utterance. For a general reason as to why this must be the case, cf. Voltolini (2006).

[4] More precisely, for non-contextualists the objects of semantic evaluations have to be clause (a linguistic representation of a natural language sentence) – index (narrow context) pairs. See slightly later in the text.

[5] As Recanati (2004a, p.116) claims.

[6] Kaplan (1989b, pp. 584-585) argues that sentence – (narrow) context pairs are the right objects of semantic evaluation, for sometimes there are non-uttered sentences yet true in a context. However, contextualists simply put this argument aside. For according to them language *use*, hence utterances, is the starting point of semantic evaluation. Cf. e.g. Recanati (2004a).

conditions. Yet once one such context is provided, that sentence again obtains a certain truth-condition automatically. For that sentence also has a *linguistic meaning*, or better a *character*, which is completely determined by the linguistic meanings, or better the characters, of its sub-sentential elements. Character is a function mapping narrow contexts onto truth-conditional contributions. When one such sub-sentential element is indexical, its character specifies which parameter in narrow context has to be mobilized in order to give that indexical a certain truth-conditional contribution in a given narrow context. Thus, that parameter automatically determines the truth-conditional contribution that sub-sentential element gives in that context to the indexical sentence in which it figures.[7]

Consider e.g.:

1. I am American.

Given its linguistic meaning, (1) conveys that whoever is the (contextual) agent is American. Yet since (1) is an indexical sentence for it contains the indexical "I", not the sentence itself, but that sentence in a certain narrow context, has truth-conditions. Now, the character of "I" constituting the sentence's linguistic meaning is a function mapping narrow contexts onto referents, i.e., the truth-conditional contributions of "I" in those contexts. As is shown by its linguistic description, roughly "the agent in context", such a character specifies the 'agent'-parameter in narrow context so as to automatically obtain the agent in one such context as the referent of "I" in that context, i.e., as its truth-conditional contribution in that context. As a result, once (1) is taken along with a narrow context whose agent is Barack Obama, then (1) is *eo ipso* true in that context iff Obama is American. Something that even a mechanism may compute.

Now, contextualists reject this whole picture by appealing to the idea that language functioning is a matter of intentional use, not a matter of automatic applications of semantic operations. For them, therefore, there is no need to represent utterances by means of linguistic representations of any kind. Since utterances are the speakers' concrete productions, they can be semantically

[7] For this whole picture on indexicals, cf. Kaplan (1989a,b). Recanati (2004b, p. 1) claims that the character of an indexical is given by a token-reflexive rule. Since for each indexical its own token-reflexive rule specifies the narrow context parameter that has to be mobilized in order to provide the relevant indexical sentence its truth-conditions in a given narrow context, truth-conditional assignments for such sentences remain automatic.

evaluated in the concrete situations where they are uttered, i.e., in their wide contexts.

As is well known, it is rather controversial nowadays whether by means of the above account the non-contextualist manages to deal with all cases of context-sensitivity, especially those involving so-called *hidden* context-sensitivity, i.e., the contextuality that is not sententially articulated by means of the occurrence in a sentence of a context-sensitive expression.[8] Yet I want to stress here that even if the non-contextualist managed to deal with hidden context-sensitivity,[9] the contextualist should not worry, since there may turn out to be a very basic semantic phenomenon that preliminarily hinders any non-contextualist account.

Ambiguity seems to be one such phenomenon, according to which one and the same sentence of a natural language has different meanings, either because at least one of its terms has different meanings – *lexical* ambiguity – or because the sentence has different syntactic structures – *structural* ambiguity. At first glance, ambiguity indeed brings grist to the contextualist's mill. For the contextualist may well point out that disambiguation is a matter of wide context: a factor in the concrete situation of discourse helps one to settle whether the ambiguous sentence is used with one or another meaning. Yet the fact that a sentence is ambiguous is none other but the fact that it has different truth-conditions. Thus, proceeds the contextualist's argument, assigning to an utterance of that sentence certain truth-conditions rather than other ones is a matter of wide context. But this shows that in the case of ambiguity, it is precisely wide context that has a semantic role. More formally:

1. That a sentence is ambiguous is wide-contextually dependent
2. That a sentence is ambiguous = that a sentence has many truth-conditions
3. That a sentence has many truth-conditions is wide-contextually dependent [from 1,2]
4. Hence, wide context has a semantic role.

Yet the non-contextualist will immediately reply to the contextualist, you have run too fast. One may well accept the wide-contextual dependence of ambiguity. Yet this wide-contextual dependence merely shows that neither

[8] For this label cf. Borg (2004). Sentence (9) below presents a case of hidden context-sensitivity.

[9] I myself, for one, do not believe this: cf. Voltolini (2009). Yet for many attempts at non-contextually dealing with overall context-sensitivity, cf. e.g. the afore-mentioned Borg (2004), Cappellen-Lepore (2005), Predelli (2005).

natural language sentences nor their utterances are the objects of semantics. For wide context is certainly appealed to in disambiguation, but only in a *pre-semantic* role (to get back again to Perry's 1997 terminology). Wide context indeed serves just in order to select the *real* object of semantic evaluation, namely an underlying linguistic representation – e.g., a Mentalese sentence[10] – that automatically has its own truth-conditions, as the non-contextualist holds. Such a representation will represent an utterance of a certain natural language sentence. Theoretically speaking, one and the same natural language ambiguous sentence can be paired with different underlying linguistic representations, each endowed with its own truth-conditions.[11] Yet once one considers the wide context in which such a sentence is uttered, this context simply settles *which* underlying linguistic representation with its own truth-conditions has to be selected by the semantic mechanism as representing the relevant utterance of that sentence, i.e., the utterance of that sentence which is uttered in that wide context.

To be sure, for a more precise picture that accounts for indexicality as well, the non-contextualist must reintroduce narrow context and say that the real objects of semantic evaluations are those underlying linguistic representations plus narrow context. On behalf of the non-contextualist, Predelli (2005) has formulated this idea in the most articulated way. First of all, for him one and the same natural language sentence is to be associated, in accordance with its being uttered in different wide contexts, with different syntactically transparent[12] linguistic representations. He calls one such representation a *clause*. Moreover, he says, in order to account for indexicality, too, what really has to be associated with one such sentence are different clause-*index* pairs, namely, couples made by a linguistic representation plus a certain narrow context. From a theoretical point of view, one such pair indeed represents an utterance of that sentence, i.e., (roughly) such a sentence in a certain wide context. Now, for Predelli that pair is the real object of semantic evaluation. For that pair is automatically assigned certain truth-conditions, in conformity with non-contextualist *desiderata* about truth-conditional computation.

[10] For this idea, cf. e.g. Pinker (1994, p. 79).

[11] Since ambiguity is both lexical and structural, this formulation must be taken with a grain of salt. It would be more precise to say that what is paired with different underlying linguistic representations each one endowed with its own truth-conditions is a sentence *as syntactically opaque*. On their turn, such representations are instead *syntactically transparent* for their primary task is precisely that of presenting the different syntactic structures that sentence possesses.

[12] See the previous footnote.

As a result of this picture, ambiguity amounts to the fact that *different* clause-index pairs respectively representing different utterances of one and the same natural language sentence – i.e., respectively representing that sentence as taken in different wide contexts – respectively have *different* truth-conditions (automatically as it were). Thus, wide context plays a mere pre-semantic role. For it merely points out *which* pair has to be mobilized in order to represent the relevant utterance of that sentence.[13]

Consider e.g. the following both indexical and ambiguous sentence:

2. I am taking a babe to the bank.

This sentence is indexical for it contains the indexical "I" and is ambiguous because it contains the ambiguous term "bank". Given such an ambiguity, in accordance with its being uttered in different wide contexts, (2) is respectively associated with two clauses, clause *c* containing a term such as "$bank_1$" and clause *c'* containing a different term "$bank_2$". Consider now a narrow context, an index *i* whose agent is the former Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi. In accordance with its being uttered in different wide contexts, (2) is properly associated with two different clause-index pairs, namely *C* (*c*-*i*) and *C'* (*c'*-*i*). Now, *C* and *C'* are the proper objects of semantic evaluation: *C* is true iff Berlusconi takes the babe in question to a certain financial institution, while *C'* is true iff Berlusconi takes that babe to a certain river edge. In this perspective, wide context simply selects whether (2) should really associated with *C* or with *C'*, respectively having different truth-conditions. The selected pair will thus represent a certain utterance of (2), i.e., (roughly) (2) in that wide context. As a result, *pace* contextualists wide context has no semantic role.

More formally, a non-contextualist following Predelli rejects the previous contextualist argument, for she denies premise 2) of that argument. Instead, she puts forward this different argument:

1) That a sentence is ambiguous is wide-contextually dependent

2*) That a sentence is ambiguous = that a sentence is associated with different clause-index pairs respectively representing different utterances of that sentence and endowed with its own truth-conditions

[13] In point of fact, since for Predelli an utterance is roughly a sentence in wide context, it would be more precise to say that by selecting the right clause-index pair with its own truth-conditions, wide context makes it clear *which* utterance of the sentence has been really uttered. Yet for my present purposes I can leave this aside.

3*) That a sentence is associated with different clause-index pairs respectively representing different utterances of that sentence and endowed with its own truth-conditions is wide-contextually dependent [from 1), 2*)]
4*) Hence, wide context has no semantic, but simply a pre-semantic, role.

To be sure, a non-contextualist acknowledges that the situation at stake may be more complicated. Consider an utterance of an ambiguous sentence. It may be the case that, in order to fix the relevant clause-index pair representing that utterance, wide context operates not at a pre-semantic level, but so to speak within the semantic level itself. In other terms, it may be the case that only once that sentence is uttered, does it become wide-contextually clear which clause-index pair represents the relevant utterance. Thus, the semantic mechanism must be able to store all the pairs that may theoretically speaking be associated with that sentence. Yet once the relevant pair is selected, wide context still plays no semantic role. For that pair is automatically assigned certain truth-conditions. That pair wears those truth-conditions on its sleeve, as one might put it.[14]

2. Why puns really bring grist to the contextualist's mill

In his perspective, puns seem to cause no particular trouble to the non-contextualist. Granted, in order for a pun to work, it must exploit natural language ambiguity in some way or other. Yet the way it works is simply a *speaker-induced* removal of misunderstanding that is *well-grounded*, for it depends on the fact that the relevant natural language sentence is ambiguous. In an ordinary well-grounded misunderstanding, an interlocutor erroneously believes that a given utterance of an ambiguous sentence has a certain truth-conditional interpretation. Such a belief is mistaken, for that utterance actually has a different truth-conditional interpretation. In this respect, wide context makes it clear that the truth-conditional interpretation of a certain utterance is different from the expected one. In the theoretical terms Predelli provides for the non-contextualist, wide context makes it clear that the utterance corresponding to that sentence in such a context has to be represented by a certain clause-index pair endowed with its own truth-conditions rather than by another clause-index pair with its own truth-conditional interpretation. Once

[14] For these complications cf. Borg (2004, p.140-146).

the interlocutor realizes that, she may well remove her erroneous conviction and represent that utterance by the right clause-index pair with its own truth-conditional interpretation. Now, the only difference between an ordinary well-grounded misunderstanding and one prompted by a pun is that the latter misunderstanding is due to *intentional* factors. A pun's creator *wants* her interlocutor, first, to be led astray by a certain possible yet incorrect truth-conditional interpretation for an utterance of an ambiguous sentence, and second, to be led back to the correct truth-conditional interpretation of that utterance, just in order to have fun thanks to the clash of her semantic expectations.[15]

In order to see these cases, take first an ordinary case of well-grounded misunderstanding. Suppose Wim utters:

3. Paris is beautiful.

Typically, her interlocutor will believe that by (3) Wim is talking about the capital of France. Yet once Wim continues by saying:

4. I like the desert surrounding it

then wide context, specifically the wide-contextual factors of co-text and background knowledge (a noun such as "desert" and the background knowledge that the capital of France has no desert), will induce such an interlocutor to revise her interpretation and suppose that Wim, as he was indeed doing, was talking instead of Paris, Texas. In Predelli's terms, this means that the above utterance of (3) has to be represented by a certain clause-index pair containing the name "Paris_2", which is true iff the city in Texas so named is beautiful, rather than by another clause-index pair containing the name "Paris_1", which is true iff the capital of France so named is beautiful, as the interlocutor erroneously believed.[16] Second, consider one of the most famous puns by Oscar Wilde:

[15] In such a case, the comical effect will therefore conform to the so-called 'incongruity theory' of humor. On it cf. Morreal (2009:chap.1).

[16] For the purpose of this example, I take the name "Paris", hence any sentence containing it, to be ambiguous. In point of fact, along with some others I believe that proper names are indexicals (cf. Voltolini 1995). But if I assumed indexicality for proper names, it would make no big difference. For in Predelli's terms, a non-contextualist might then account for the misunderstanding by saying that the utterance of (3) should be represented by *another* clause-index pair. This pair differs from the pair the interlocutor erroneously took that utterance to be represented by because its *index*, not its clause, is different.

5. To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness. (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895)

In order for such a pun to work, an interlocutor is first erroneously induced by the presence in (5) of the noun "misfortune", to think that in the relevant utterance of (5) the ambiguous "to lose" means *to suffer deprivation*, so as to assign that utterance a certain truth-conditional interpretation. Yet as the utterance proceeds, a better look at the wide context in which (5) is actually uttered, more specifically at the fact that the wide-contextual factor of "to lose"'s cotext in (5) contains not only the noun "misfortune", but also the noun "carelessness", makes it clear that "to lose" here means *to misplace*, so that its correct truth-conditional interpretation is another. In this predicament, moreover, the interlocutor realizes that, by so construing (5), it was Wilde's intention to lead his interlocutor into such a misunderstanding. For he wanted to obtain a comical effect by means of his interlocutor's removal of the misunderstanding. In Predelli's terms, instead of being erroneously represented by the clause-index pair containing the term "to lose_1", which is true iff to suffer deprivation from one parent's death may be regarded as a misfortune and to suffer deprivation from both parents' looks like carelessness, the relevant utterance of (5) has to be correctly represented by another clause-index pair containing the term "to lose_2", which is true iff to misplace one parent may be regarded as a misfortune and to misplace both parents looks like carelessness.[17]

[17] For another example of a pun mobilizing a speaker-induced well-grounded misunderstanding yet involving structural rather than lexical ambiguity, take the famous Groucho Marx pun "I shot an elephant in my pyjamas. How he got into my pyjamas I don't know!" (cf. on this Borg 2004, p. 143fn.91). A similar explanation may be given for puns involving: i) indexicality rather than ambiguity; ii) sameness of meaning rather than difference of meaning contrary to previous expectations. Consider the joke Pinker (1994, p.80) presents: "First guy: I didn't sleep with my wife before we were married, did you? Second guy: I don't know. What was her maiden name?" Given the first sentence, an interlocutor would expect the second guy's utterance of his second sentence to be represented by a clause-index pair in which the theoretical counterpart of the pronoun "her" referred to a certain individual, the *second* guy's wife. This individual obviously differs from the individual, the *first* guy's wife, the theoretical counterpart of the description "my wife" denotes in the representation of the first guy's utterance. What's punny is that, contrary to previous expectations, the clause-index pair that really represents the second guy's utterance of his second sentence contains a theoretical counterpart of "her" yet referring to the *very same individual* the theoretical counterpart of "my wife" denotes in the representation of the first guy's utterance.

Yet, one may now immediately wonder, is this always the case with puns? As we have just seen, from the cognitive point of view, the non-contextualist considers puns as speaker-induced well-grounded misunderstandings, hence as things falling into the general category of aware misrecognitions. This is to say, for non-contextualists puns are cognitively on a par with cases of illusory perceptions in which one discovers that what one illusorily took in her perception to be a certain thing is in point of fact another. In the most famous example, Carneades discovered that what he illusorily took in his perception to be a snake was in point of fact a rope. If this is the case, puns have to be characterized by non-reversibility of interpretation. As a matter of fact, once we discover that what we illusorily took in our perception to be a certain thing is another thing, we can no longer even seem to see that thing as being the previous one. Once Carneades made the above discovery, the rope no longer appeared to him to be a snake. By parity of reasoning, in the case of puns once we discover the truth-conditional interpretation a certain sentence in wide context, hence a certain utterance, has to be assigned, we can no longer take that sentence in context, hence that utterance, as having the truth-conditional interpretation we previously and erroneously gave to it. The utterance remains linked with what we have discovered to be its correct truth-conditional interpretation. In Predelli's terms, we discover once for all that such an utterance is represented by a certain clause-index pair having a certain truth-conditional interpretation rather than by another clause-index pair having another truth-conditional interpretation, as we erroneously thought.

Yet cognitively speaking this does not always happen with puns. On the contrary, for many puns reversibility obtains. In such cases, an utterance first receives a certain interpretation, then another one, yet once it receives the latter interpretation the former is still at play. Once we realize that we have to do with one such pun, we continue going back and forth between the different interpretations for that utterance, precisely because neither prevails. From the cognitive point of view, this reversibility is easily accounted for once we find the right explanation for such puns. As Wittgenstein (1953, 1980, 1982, 1992) originally grasped, the general cognitive category under which such puns fall is not that of aware misrecognition, but that of *seeing-as*, at least the kind of seeing-as characterized by *Gestalt* switches. In our case, such puns are indeed characterized by the fact that certain linguistic configurations are endowed with multi-, or at least bi-, stability of interpretation. Unlike cases of aware misrecognition, in seeing-as of this kind reversibility indeed occurs. For

instance, one can pass from seeing a certain array of dots as being a two-dimensional cross to seeing them as being a rhombus and *vice versa*. Likewise, one can pass from seeing a certain configuration as being (a picture of) a duck to seeing it as being (a picture of) a rabbit and *vice versa*, right up to passing from seeing an Arcimboldo painting as being (a picture of) a face to seeing it as being (a picture of) a cluster of fruit and vegetables and *vice versa*. In this respect, the cognitive upshot of facing an ambiguous figure is a mixture of astonishment and disorientation. For although in one sense, or better at a certain experiential level, that of direct visual perception, we are experiencing one and the same thing, i.e., the item we actually have before us, yet in another sense or better at another experiential level, that of seeing-as, we have an alternate visual experience as of different things. Now, in many cases the inventor of a pun wants to get her audience to be involved in precisely the same predicament. That is to say, someone who understands one such pun is in a certain sense, or better at a certain experiential level, that of direct auditory/visual perception, still hearing/seeing the very same utterance she has before her, yet in another sense or better another experiential level, that of hearing/seeing as, she is having an alternate experience of hearing/seeing that utterance as having now one meaning, now another one. This alternation of meaning experiences, or more radically this ambiguity of the sentence's *utterance* rather than of the sentence itself, is what the inventor of a pun intends her interlocutor to have.

Consider for instance the following cases:

6. Condoms should be used on every conceivable occasion
7. Without geometry, life is pointless
8. Santa's helpers are subordinate Clauses.[18]

In all these cases, a sentence is ideally uttered in complete isolation. This may help the interlocutor not to be led astray by other possible factors of the specific wide context involved (co-text, gestures, salience effects, etc.) so as to focus just on the relevant wide-contextual factor, i.e., the utterer's intention to convey different meanings by means of *the very same utterance*. Thus, by

[18] Wittgenstein (1980, I§77) gives another such example. In this example, a singer playing Wagner's *The Rhine-gold* on stage addresses another singer who had just whispered to him something about egg-cooking by singing "Weiche, Wotan, weiche!". By that utterance, does the first singer mean the same as "Go away, Wotan, Go away!" or the same as "Soft, Wotan, soft"? Both, Wittgenstein would urge.

exploiting the ambiguity of the adjective "conceivable", the relevant utterance of (6) is meant to convey two different interpretations, namely not only that condoms should be used whenever there is a risk of pregnancy, but also that they should be used in any logically thinkable situation. By exploiting the ambiguity of the adjective "pointless", the relevant utterance of (7) is meant to convey two different interpretations, namely not only that a non-geometrical life is devoid of geometric points, but also that such a life is meaningless. By exploiting the ambiguity of the very same plural form, "clauses", of both the noun "clause" and the name "Claus", the relevant utterance of (8) is meant to convey two different interpretations, namely not only that those who help Santa are subordinate to him, but also that they are linguistic constructions.[19]

Now, the contextualist may well rely on such examples of puns in order to reply to her non-contextualist opponent as follows. Suppose we buy the non-contextualist account of ambiguity. As we have seen, in order to deny wide context a semantic role when ambiguity obtains, the non-contextualist claims that *one and the same natural language sentence* in different wide contexts has to be associated with *different* clause-index pairs that respectively represent the relevant *different* utterances of that sentence and automatically have *different* truth-conditions. So each utterance of the sentence, via its representing pair, has just one truth-conditional interpretation. In such a predicament, wide context simply selects which clause-index pair with its own truth-conditions represents the relevant utterance. Yet in the present cases of puns, we have *one and the same utterance* of a sentence having *different* interpretations, not just *one* interpretation. As the non-contextualist is instead supposed to claim, by making one such interpretation the truth-conditional interpretation of just *one* clause-index pair representing that utterance. On the contrary, for the contextualist those different interpretations amount to *different* truth-conditions for that very utterance – e.g. the relevant utterance of (7) for instance is true both iff a non-geometrical life has no geometrical point and iff that life is meaningless. But these different truth-conditional

[19] In advertisement, many puns work this way. Cf. Tanaka (1992). Here I have chosen cases of puns in which one can say that just one utterance of *one and the same natural language sentence* is involved, for the ambiguity on which the multi-stability of the utterance is involved is merely lexical. If the ambiguity involved were both lexical and structural, as in "My girl criticized my apartment, so I knocked her flat", we should more properly speak of a multi-stable utterance of one and the same *syntactically opaque* sentence, if not merely of one and the same string of uttered *words*. Whereas in case of a pun involving mere homophony, as in "Seven days without laughter makes one weak", we should rather speak of a multi-stable utterance of one and the same string of uttered *sounds*.

interpretations for that utterance depend on wide context; notably, on the fact that the utterer's intention is precisely to convey two meanings at one and the same time by means of the same utterance of a certain sentence. Thus, contextualism is vindicated. For in the case of our puns, wide context has a *semantic* role. More formally, the contextualist first rejects:

> 2*) That a sentence is ambiguous = that a sentence is associated with different clause-index pairs respectively representing different utterances of that sentence and endowed with their own truth-conditions

of the previous Predelli-inspired non-contextualist argument. Then, she puts forward this new argument:

> 1') That an utterance, i.e., (roughly) a sentence in wide context, is ambiguous is wide-contextually dependent
> 2') That an utterance, i.e., (roughly) a sentence in wide context, is ambiguous = that an utterance, i.e., (roughly) a sentence in wide context, has many truth-conditions
> 3') That an utterance, i.e., (roughly) a sentence in wide context, has many truth-conditions is wide-contextually dependent [from 1', 2']
> 4) Hence, wide context has a semantic role.[20]

Now, the claim that a contextualist account fits multi-stable puns nicely can be further corroborated. Consider that in the case of multi-stable puns, as in all cases in which a contextualist account suggests itself, not only is it wide-contextual for an utterance to have certain truth-conditions, but it is also wide-contextual which factor of the concrete situation of use is relevant for that truth-conditional assignment. Contextualism involves *meta-contextualism*, as some put it (cf. Bianchi 1999).

In this respect, take an utterance of:

9. Bill cuts the grass.

[20] Let me just stress once more that what the contextualist advocates here is that *one and the same utterance* has *more than one* truth-conditional interpretation, not that it is indeterminate whether one and the same utterance has a truth-conditional interpretation. Borg (2004, pp. 221-5) claims that Travis' version of contextualism, as it emerges e.g. from Travis (1997), amounts to the latter form of meaning eliminativism. Whether or not Borg's interpretation of Travis is correct, this form of eliminativism is not what I am defending here. The point is not that there is no such thing as a truth-conditional meaning for a punny utterance, as Borg might claim in reconstructing Travis' contextualism. The point is rather that there are as many truth-conditional meanings for that utterance as its utterer intends it to have in her multi-stable pun.

which presents a typical case for which a contextualist account seems to work. For a contextualist, that utterance has no truth-conditions in isolation; a certain wide context, i.e., the concrete situation in which (9) is uttered, fixes for it a truth-conditional interpretation. Yet according to a contextualist, this means not only that in order for that utterance to have truth-conditions one has to appeal to the concrete situation in which (9) is uttered, but also that it depends on that situation *which* of its factors is relevant in order to settle *which* truth-condition that utterance has. In a certain wide-contextual situation, one has to appeal to the fact that (9) is uttered within a story one is telling about the endings of a soccer match, hence to the *co-textual* factor of that wide context of (9), in order to settle that that very utterance is true iff Bill rips the grass to pieces. If instead (9) had been uttered in the course of garden care practice, one would have had to appeal to *this* factor of the new wide-contextual situation in order to settle that this utterance of (9) is true iff Bill trims the grass with a lawnmower.

Now, the same holds with our multi-stable puns. If somebody uttered (6) within some anti-AIDS campaign, that utterance would not be punny at all, for in such an utterance "conceivable" would merely mean *logically thinkable*. So, that utterance would be true merely iff condoms should be used in any logically thinkable situation. Yet if a comedian utters (6), in this new wide-contextual situation the prevailing wide-contextual factor is the comedian's intention that the new utterance of (6) be taken as a multi-stable pun. So, this utterance is true both iff condoms have to be used in every logically thinkable situation and iff condoms have to be used just in a pregnancy-inducing situation. Thus, it is not only wide-contextual for that utterance of (6) to receive a truth-conditional interpretation, but it is also wide-contextual which factor of the wide context provides the punny, bi-stable, interpretation: the utterer's intention.

3. Objections and replies

Up to now, I have first of all presented what I take to be a new interesting datum: a multi-stable pun counts as an utterance having different interpretations. Moreover, I have put forward a contextualist account of that datum: such interpretations for one and the same utterance are different *truth-conditional* interpretations for that utterance prompted by wide context, which thereby has a *semantic* role. Yet to say that the datum *may* be accounted for in contextualist terms does not yet obviously prove that it *must* be so accounted for. Perhaps the non-contextualist can still shoot some arrows from his bow.

What I will try to show in this Section is that the non-contextualist's arrows are blunt.

To begin with, a non-contextualist might try to deny the datum altogether. That is, she may suggest that in the case of a multi-stable pun *different* utterances are involved for one and the same sentence. Perhaps these are not physical utterances, but mental ones – typically, one in the speaker's, the other in the interlocutor's, mind. Moreover, such utterances are respectively represented by different clause-index pairs with their own truth-conditions. Thus, the case raises no particular problem.[21]

To be sure, such a strategy is appealing when we want to draw a distinction between a physical token of a sentence and its different interpretations due to different (mental) readings, hence different (mental) utterances, of it. For instance, this may happen with the case of a road sign such as:

10. (You) drive slowly.

In this case one and the same physical token – the road sign itself – of a certain sentence is matched by different (mental) utterances that are differently interpreted by each of the different drivers that pass in front of that sign. I interpret my reading of (10) as meaning that *I* have to drive slowly, you interpret your reading as (10) as meaning that *you* have to drive slowly, and so on.

Yet no such account is legitimately involved in the case of a multi-stable pun. Let me set well aside the single outer utterance that is involved in such a case, the concrete uttering of the relevant sentence on the speaker's part. Yet if we stick to *inner* utterances, here again we have, first of all, just one and the same mental utterance on the speaker's part. Yet this inner utterance has again *different* interpretations, as well as the speaker's outer utterance. Simply, we have just moved one step back – from outer to inner utterances – so as to focus on the speaker's mental utterance as our relevant datum. Moreover, if over and above that mental utterance that has different interpretations there is another mental utterance on an interlocutor's part that has just *one* interpretation, this is just an irrelevant utterance in the situation at stake. If in such a situation we have to choose between the interlocutor and the utterer, clearly it is the utterer who counts.[22] For as I said before, by uttering certain sentences in mere

[21] I owe this suggestion to Genoveva Marti.

[22] At least in normal cases. Sometimes, a punny effect is created in the interlocutor's mind completely regardless of the utterer's intentions. Everyone remembers John Fitzgerald Kennedy's saying in

isolation, pun creators often mean the relevant utterances as having different meanings and thereby want their interlocutors to understand those utterances as having such different meanings. So, taking one step back, from the outer to the inner, is really no advantage for the non-contextualist.

Incidentally, one similar ambiguity of the *utterance* does not take place with puns only. Sometimes speakers want to be interpreted as if they had uttered something that has different meanings even if there is nothing punny about it.[23] Consider Mozart's saying to Salieri *à propòs* of his compositions (according to the movie *Amadeus*):

11. I never thought that such a music were possible.[24]

Or take a lover saying to her lover who has finally chosen someone else:

12. I wish you what you really deserve.

In both cases, two interpretations are intended to be available for one and the same utterance: in the case of (11), both that Salieri's music is excellent and that it is very bad, in the case of (12), both that the errant lover has a happy life and that s/he has an unhappy one. All in all, therefore, it seems better for the non-contextualist to accept the datum as it occurs at the level of a physical utterance. For it presents itself again at the level of a mental utterance.

At this point, the non-contextualist may agree to put 2*) of her original argument aside in its overall scope – 2*), remember, states the following identity: that a sentence is ambiguous = that a sentence is associated with different clause-index pairs respectively representing different utterances of that sentence and endowed with their own truth-conditions. For she may modify 2*) in the light of the claim that *one and the same* clause-index pair, as a linguistic representation of an utterance, *may* have *different* truth-conditions.

Berlin "Ich bin ein Berliner" in order to say that he was to be taken as a real inhabitant of the city. Although his German interlocutors well grasped JFK's intention, they could not stop laughing when thinking of the other possible interpretation of the utterance as meaning that JFK is a pastry of a particular sort. (I thank Dan Zeman for having attracted my attention to this point).

[23] This is as it should be. For multi-stability is one thing, humor is another. If one wanted to stick to the 'incongruity theory' (cf. fn.15) to also account for the comical effect of multi-stable puns, one might say that humor here again depends on the reciprocal incongruity of the different interpretations involved.

[24] For the present moral of this example see also Sperber and Wilson (1987, p. 751). For Sperber and Wilson, this example indeed presents no problem for their relevance theory, as Morgan and Green instead claim (1987, p.727).

By so doing, the pair remains the real truth-conditional bearer; simply, in certain cases it has *more* than one truth-condition.

To begin with, this move seems to betray the spirit of non-contextualism. As we have seen, non-contextualists have put forward *clause*-index pairs wearing their own truth-conditions on their sleeves in order to satisfactorily deal with sentence ambiguity. Yet if some of such pairs have *different* truth-conditions, doesn't ambiguity come back in through the rear door? In any case, this move does not seem promising. Once one and the same clause-index pair is assigned *many* truth-conditions, the pair becomes not only a wheel that turns idly, but also something on which a semantic mechanism cannot operate. It is a wheel that turns idly, because there is no reason to assign different truth-conditions to one and the same pair rather than straightforwardly to one and the same utterance. But it is also something a semantic mechanism can no longer operate on. For how can a semantic *mechanism* not only computationally assign *many* truth-conditions to a pair, but also settle *to which pair* many such conditions are to be assigned? In order to do both things, the mechanism should be able to compute not only complex meanings out of simple ones (given a syntax) but also the utterer's intention, which as I said before is in this respect the decisive factor. Yet to begin with, it is not clear how a semantic *mechanism* can manage to compute that intention. As I said before, the fact that in a multi-stable pun a sentence is uttered in isolation *may* help the interlocutor to grasp the intention of that pun's utterer, hence its multi-stability; such a grasp does not seem to be an automatic matter. To be sure, there may be a mechanism for mindreading that allows one to compute the utterer's intentions, as some claim.[25] Yet this is no *semantic* mechanism. As any other mechanism, a semantic mechanism is *domain-specific*: it purportedly delivers the meanings (in narrow context) of complex expressions out of the meanings of their constituent expressions given a certain syntactical structure.

The non-contextualist may now be tempted by the opposite move. Why not stick to 2*) while representing *one and the same* utterance by *many* clause-index pairs, each with its own truth-conditions?

There may be an immediate justification for this move. For a non-contextualist may say that in a clause-index pair one may increase the index parameters. For instance, one may add a 'language'- parameter to an index. In such a case, the pair would be made by a linguistic representation obviously no

[25] Cf e.g. Leslie (1997).

longer of a natural language sentence, but of a string of words (or of sounds), plus an enriched index that pairs that representation not only with agent, space, time, and world, but also with a language. This new parameter fixes which language the above string belongs to.[26] As a result, one and the same utterance – or at least one and the same string of uttered words, or better of uttered sounds – may be represented by different pairs whose indexes' parameters are differently saturated; those pairs wear different truth-conditions on their sleeves, as it were. So, why not saying that something along these lines happens in the case of an utterance of a multi-stable pun? Take the sentence:

13. Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.

If you focus on the sound of it, (13) is like the French sentence:

14. Un petit d'un petit s'étonné aux Halles.[27]

Now, a non-contextualist may say that the same string of uttered sounds involved both by (13) and by (14) may be represented not only by a pair *C* whose index *i* contains English at its 'language'-parameter, which is true iff there is someone identical with Humpty Dumpty who sat on a wall, but also by a pair *C'* whose index *i'* differs from *i* for it contains French as its 'language'-parameter, which is true iff a child's child was astonished at les Halles.[28]

Conceived as an appeal to enriched indexes, perhaps this move accounts for the first of the two problems afflicting the previous non-contextualist move, *superfluity* (why not assign the different truth-conditions directly to the *utterance* rather than to a pair representing it?). Yet it does not account for the second of the two problems afflicting the previous non-contextualist move, *arbitrariness* (how can the semantic mechanism not only computationally assign many pairs to an utterance, but also settle when an utterance is multiply represented in this way?).

Granted, by appealing to the idea of enriched indexes, hence enriched pairs, the non-contextualist may say that this move raises no issue of arbitrariness. First, *any* utterance of the relevant sounds/words is represented

[26] Such an idea is envisaged by Recanati (2000).

[27] This pun can be found in a collection of English yet homophonically French nursery rhymes by van Rooten (1967).

[28] For an example involving the same string of uttered *words*, consider "I vitelli dei romani sono belli" which in Italian is true iff Romans' calves are beautiful while in Latin is true iff Vitellius goes to the call of war of the Roman god.

by *all* the pairs that one may obtain by giving different values to the new extra-parameter in the index. Second, the semantic mechanism searches for the extra-parameter in the index in order to compute truth-conditions for each of those pairs; in the case presented by (13), we have at least two pairs for one and the same utterance of sounds.

Yet the contextualist may reply that the idea of enriched indexes is rather *ad hoc*, or at least is *ad hoc* if one wants to apply it to the case of multi-stable puns. Theoretically speaking, one can always take a factor of wide context and put it in a suitable index. Yet one has to provide an independent reason as to why such a move should be performed.[29] To be sure, a non-contextualist might find a justification as to why one should add a 'language'-parameter to an index of a clause to be assigned to an utterance. The idea would be, an utterance of sounds or even of words cannot be semantically evaluated until it is established which language that utterance belongs to.[30] However, all the previous cases of multi-stable puns are precisely cases of puns in which it has already been settled *which* language a certain utterance of sounds/words belongs to; nevertheless, the utterance of the resulting sentence of *that* language counts as ambiguous. So, let us assume for argument's sake that by adding a 'language'-parameter the non-contextualist move accounts for bilingual multi-stable puns. Yet in order to account for all *monolingual* multi-stable puns, which are the overwhelming majority of such puns, the non-contextualist should find another parameter over and above the 'language'- parameter to be added to the relevant index. Yet what parameter could it be?

Yet the non-contextualist may reply, appealing to enriched indexes is not the right way for this move to be understood. In order to have different pairs for one and the same utterance, one should not enrich indexes, but rather duplicate clauses. So, one has to pair the same ambiguous utterance with pairs that differ with respect to their different clauses, which make those pairs possess different truth-conditional interpretations.

Yet this non-contextualist way of understanding the present move is rather artificial. It treats *utterance* ambiguity in the same way as the non-contextualist

[29] For an analogous criticism of the idea that when demonstratives are involved in a truth-conditional assignment the typical wide-contextual factors that are *prima facie* relevant for such an assignment, namely either demonstrations or *demonstrata*, have to be put in the relevant index, cf. Recanati (2004a, p.57).

[30] As Borg (2004, p. 140) accurately claims, by pointing to an original example by Davidson: does one string of uttered sounds/words count as an utterance of the English sentence "Empedocles leapt" or of the German sentence "Empedocles liebt"?

treated *sentence* ambiguity. An ambiguous sentence is such that it must be paired with different clauses, hence with difference clause-index pairs, that respectively have a different truth-conditional interpretation. Likewise for an ambiguous utterance. Yet in the case of an ambiguous *sentence*, the two different clauses hence the two different pairs respectively represent different *utterances* of such a sentence. But in the case of an ambiguous utterance, what are the different things that the two different clauses hence the two different pairs respectively represent? *Mental* utterances? Yet as we have seen before, in the case of a multistable pun an inner utterance is as ambiguous as an outer utterance. So, there are no different mental utterances the underlying clauses hence the pairs respectively represent. Or perhaps different meaning experiences, i.e., the experiences of hearing/reading an utterance as having a certain meaning rather than another one? Definitely, in the case of a multistable pun we have different such experiences. Yet a meaning experience is *not* what an underlying clause, hence a pair, should represent. What should be represented should be something that, unlike a meaning experience, has no meaning by itself, for it should receive its meaning precisely from the underlying clause, hence a pair, endowed with its own truth-conditional interpretation. So, the analogy between ambiguous sentences and ambiguous utterances the non-contextualist appeals to breaks down. In uttering an ambiguous sentence, its utterer means it in a particular way insofar her utterance is represented by an underlying clause – possibly, a Mentalese sentence – having its own truth-conditions and lending them to the utterance itself. But in thinking one and the same ambiguous utterance, its thinker means in a particular way insofar as her clause with its own truth-conditions represent *what*?

At this point, the non-contextualist may put forward another, perhaps more obvious, move. True enough, the datum that in the case of multi-stable puns one and the same utterance has different significances is undeniable. Yet, the non-contextualist may go on saying, since such different significances are precisely a matter of the utterer's intentions, as the contextualist has pointed out, they have to be taken as *implicatures* in Grice's (1975) classical sense rather than as *explicatures* (to put in Carston's (2002) terms); namely, as far as a sentence in (narrow) context is concerned, such different significances affect the level of what is *implicated* rather than the level of what is said, hence an extra-truthconditional level rather than the truth-conditional level. If this is the case, wide context is certainly involved, but in its typical *post*-semantic role. In

this case, wide context helps in assigning an utterance, which already has (via the proper clause-index pair representing it) just certain truth-conditions, different implicatures at one and the same time. In this respect, a non-contextualist may say, the comparison between the utterances of multi-stable puns such as (6)-(7)-(8) and the utterances of insidious sentences such as (11)-(12) is welcome. For, she would continue, each of the latter utterances is insidious. For by means of each such utterance its utterer intends to convey a plurivocal significance over and above the unambiguous truth-conditional meaning it already has. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same holds of each of the punny utterances of (6)-(7)-(8).

Yet this move again seems *ad hoc*. For the non-contextualist has claimed that in the case of puns involving a speaker-induced well-grounded misunderstanding to be removed, like the one presented by (5) before, meaning interpretation has to be accounted for at the *semantic* level. As a result, the non-contextualist has insisted that in such cases wide context operates at the *pre*-semantic level. Given the utterer's intentions, the relevant utterance has just one truth-conditional interpretation. Simply, as wide context enables one to discover, that interpretation is not the one originally supposed by the interlocutor. Yet why then in the case of multi-stable puns should wide context be appealed to at the *post*-semantic level? In other terms, it seems arbitrary to account for one and the same phenomenon of signification now at the pre-, now at the post-, semantic level.

In this respect, the contextualist account is more elegant. For it appeals to a *unitary* explanation enabling her to account for *all* kinds of puns – not only the two previously mentioned, but also a third case of puns involving *zeugmas* – precisely at the *semantic* level. The idea is, wherever there is a punny content for an utterance, this content has to be accounted for at the truth-conditional level: it is what the utterance *says*. Hence, the role wide context plays in the relevant pun depends on how to ensure that the punny content is what the utterance says. Let me describe things more in detail.

To begin with, the contextualist may even acknowledge that in the case of puns involving a speaker-induced well-grounded misunderstanding, wide context has a merely pre-semantic role. For she agrees that in such a case the relevant *utterance* of the sentence in question is not ambiguous. Yet for her what really counts in this move is that it saves the point of the pun, which is to let the interlocutor realize that the utterance *says* a certain thing (rather than another). For that utterance has certain truth-conditions, the punny ones. Yet

the contextualist will add that if we also want to save the point of the pun in the case of multi-stable puns, we have to claim that wide context should play a semantic role in such a case. For this time the point of the pun is to let the utterance *say* different things. The contextualist accounts for this utterance ambiguity by saying that in such a case wide context makes one and the same utterance have many truth-conditions. According to the contextualist, moreover, also in a third kind of case, namely the case of zeugmatic puns, wide context must play a semantic role. For this time the point of the pun is to let the utterance *say* an 'impossible' thing. On the one hand, the relevant sentence contains an anaphoric link syntactically suggesting that in the relevant utterance of that sentence, a certain sub-sentential token of a term yields the same truth-conditional contribution as another token of that term to which that token is anaphorically linked. Yet on the other hand, the anaphora notwithstanding, in that utterance the relevant token yields a truth-conditional contribution (possibly radically) different from the one provided by the token it is anaphorically linked to. As wide context, notably the utterer's intentions, again causes the utterance to say, thereby again playing a semantic role. Consider:

15. After two unsuccessful marriages, I find myself keeping my guard up, along with my underpants
16. I called her a whore and myself a cab
17. John and his driving licence expired yesterday.

In all the punny utterances of those sentences, a meaning shift occurs. Sometimes this shift is less radical, involving only different yet somehow related polysemical senses, sometimes it is more radical, involving ambiguity. Now, the anaphorical link subsisting in all these sentences does not prevent that shift from occurring. In the relevant utterance of (15), an implicit token of "keeping" refers back to a previous explicit token of the same word, yet the implicit token has a 'physical' reading while the explicit one has a metaphorical reading: underpants, not guard, are physically kept up. In the utterance of (16), an implicit token of "called" refers back to a previous explicit token of the same word, yet the implicit token means *retrieved someone's attention* while the explicit one means *labelled*. In the utterance of (17), an explicit token of "expired" refers back to a previous implicit token of the same word, yet the

explicit token means *came to an end* while the implicit one means *died*.[31] In all these cases, the anaphorical link would prompt one to interpret the second token exactly like the first one. Yet such a syntactically driven interpretation is rejected. For one realizes that the utterer's purpose was precisely to create a punny effect in which the meaning of the second token is shifted, the anaphoric link notwithstanding. This is precisely why the interpretation of the whole utterance is 'impossible'. For the contextualist, this interpretation is again a truth-conditional interpretation of such utterances: they say something 'impossible'.

Incidentally, once again this phenomenon – anaphorical link plus meaning shift in one and the same utterance – does not obtain in punny cases only.[32] Consider two utterances of:

18. Norman Mailer likes to read himself
19. He drank the whole bottle and smashed it to the floor.[33]

Contextualists would again say that also in these cases, the anaphoric link respectively tying "himself" to "Norman Mailer" and "it" to "the (whole) bottle" notwithstanding, those utterances of (18) and (19) are respectively true iff Norman Mailer likes to read some *work or other of his* and iff the demonstrated person drank *the whole content of a bottle* and smashed *that bottle* to the floor. Unlike the zeugmatic cases presented by (15)-(16)-(17), however, that the relevant utterances of (18)-(19) have such 'impossible' truth-conditions depends not on the utterer's intentions, but rather on other wide-contextual factors. These factors are i) *co-text* – the fact that the pronoun "himself" follows the verb "to read" in (18) and the fact that in (19) the first token of "bottle" is linked with the verb "to drink" and the adjective "whole", while the second token is linked with the verb "to smash" – and ii) *pragmatic relations* linking the ordinary referents with the extended referents of the relevant expressions in those utterances, namely a pragmatic relation linking

[31] Of course, in order to fully vindicate the anaphora, one may postulate an *ad hoc* concept that would be the disjunctive referent of both the first and the second token of the relevant subsentential term. Yet, as Carston and Wilson implicitly admit in putting forward such a proposal - cf. (1996, p. 427), (1997) - this move would annihilate the punny effect of the utterance. See also Lascarides, Copestake and Briscoe (1996, p. 47).

[32] Once again, one thing is the meaning shift, another is the comical effect. On behalf of the 'incongruity' theory of humor (cf. fn.15), one may again say that even here the meaning shift is comical for the 'impossible' interpretation is incongruous.

[33] For those examples, cf. Fauconnier (1985, p. 7) and Sainsbury (2010, p.139) respectively.

an author with his work in the case of (18) and another pragmatic relation linking a container to its content in the case of (19).[34]

Clearly enough, in such cases of meaning shift meta-contextualism is again at work. For it is wide-contextual which wide-contextual factor is relevant to determine the utterance's truth-conditions: utterer's intentions in the case of the above utterances of (15)-(16)-(17), factors i) and ii) in the case of the above utterances of (18)-(19). Such a meta-contextualism is even more evident if we consider different utterances of one and the same sentence, a punny and a non-punny one. Consider a punny utterance of:

20. I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I can't put it down.

In this utterance, the meaning shift from *literary work* to *physical copy of a work* involving the first token and the second (implicit) token of "book" respectively leads that utterance to have 'impossible' truth-conditions. These truth-conditions are induced by the utterer's comical intention to generate a zeugmatic effect. Yet if (20) were uttered without such an intention, the resulting utterance would not have such truth-conditions. Rather, it would just have the normal truth-conditions according which that utterance would be true iff the agent of the context were reading a work on anti-gravity and that reading could not be interrupted.

Conclusions

In this paper I have not only provided an interesting datum concerning multistable puns, according to which punny utterances of certain sentences have multiple readings, but I have also claimed that those readings affect the truth-conditional level of what is said by such utterances. As such different readings are prompted by a wide-contextual factor, namely the speaker's intentions, with respect to such utterances wide context plays a semantic role. Moreover, I have claimed, this account is grounded by the idea that punny interpretations affect the truth-conditional level of what is said also when puns of other kinds are at stake, namely both the puns involving a speaker-induced removal of a well-grounded misunderstanding and the zeugmatic puns. Simply, while in the former case wide context plays a pre-semantic role – it selects a given interpretation for an utterance of a sentence by choosing which meaning that sentence actually mobilizes – in the latter case it again plays a semantic

[34] For this way of putting the referential distinction in question cf. Nunberg (1979).

role, by making the utterance funnily say something 'impossible' in virtue of the speaker's intentions. Now, experimental pragmatics may further corroborate this latter idea, if it will experimentally turn out that, as I believe, language users straightforwardly interpret a punny utterance according to one of the three possibilities just sketched: a) by proving an interpretation that removes a previous interpretation; b) by providing a multistable interpretation; c) by providing an 'impossible' interpretation.

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