I. Two Themes

Kaplan on Indexicals

We can think of a sentence containing no indexical terms as a function from worlds (or circumstances) to truth values. Montague's way of treating sentences that do contain indexical terms extended that: think of them as a function from a world, together with an index (a specification of the relevant parameters) to a truth value. So the sentence

(1) I am speaking now.

When uttered by me at 1pm on Monday 10th October 2020 is a function from that sentence and the index <RH; 13.00 BST 10/10/2020> to a truth value T. It's natural then to think of the index as filling out the meaning of the indexical terms. Then (1) comes out as meaning much the same as (2):

(2) RH is speaking at 1pm on Monday 10th October 2020

But that doesn't seem right. There is something special about (1), in that whenever anyone utters it it will be true. But it surely isn't necessarily true! Another special feature: if I've forgotten who I am, or don't know what the time is, I can know that (1) is true, without knowing whether or not (2). If I'm muddled up, I might think that (2) is false.

So Kaplan proposed that rather than thinking of indexicals as involving a two stage approach (hence the idea of two-dimensional semantics), character and content.

Character: a function from context to content
Content: a function from circumstance to truth value.

Character can be thought of as the (linguistic) meaning of the sentence; content is what it is that is grasped, and then communicated (Kaplan: what is said). When I utter (1), and you understand me, the content is not the same as the content that I would grasp if I were to hear you uttering (1). But we would both express the same character.

The character of (1) guarantees that whenever it is uttered it will express a truth; but the content of what it expresses will differ in different contexts of utterance; and those contents will not be necessary. Evaluated with respect to different circumstances of evaluation they will be true or false. So when we evaluate (1) with respect to a circumstance of evaluation in which I said nothing on the 10th October, it will be false. (A sentence is necessary if its content is true with respect to every circumstance of evaluation.)

Difficult question: do (1) and (2) have the same content if (1) is uttered with the appropriate index? Some possible answers:

(i) Yes (Kaplan?)
(ii) No; (2) also includes sense as well as reference, whereas (1) doesn't (Kaplan?)
(iii) No; both (1) and (2) include senses (Evans)
(iv) No; (1) involves the self ascription of the property of speaking now, whereas (2) involves the ascription of the property of speaking to RH at a certain time; or, to unify the two, (2)

involves the self-ascription of inhabiting a world in which RH is ascribed the property of speaking (Lewis)

For a second advantage of the two-dimensional approach, consider the sentence

(3) Once, everyone now alive hadn't yet been born

That has two temporal operators, 'once' and 'now'. But we want them to pick out different times. The 'now' picks out the context of utterance; the 'once' quantifies over (past) circumstances of evaluation (Kamp; Vlach). Likewise with:

(4) My boat should have been longer than it actually is.

A broader notion of context: Common Ground (Stalnaker; Lewis)

So far we have thought of the context as something radically extra-linguistic: the time, the place etc, or an object that is pointed at when using a demonstrative. But suppose someone uses an anaphoric pronoun. Then the context might be thought of as involving the earlier linguistic items. But that still may not be enough. We can use pronouns without them clearly having either demonstrated items, or linguistic antecedents. There is shouting next door. "He's in a bad mood" I say. We are discussing the problems that the government are having; "He's not going to win the next election" I say, although no one has explicitly mentioned the Prime Minister.

Stalnaker's suggestion is that we need a broader notion of a set of propositions that are taken as given for the sake of the conversation. Some of these might have been common for a long time. Others will have been somehow introduced by the conversation, either explicitly or implicitly. These are what make up the 'common ground'. (Stalnaker is explicit that he wants these to be understood as independent of language: he wants to follow the Gricean programme of grounding the linguistic facts in mental states that that are not linguistic (see his *Context*). But the notion of common ground doesn't require this.

Once we have this broader notion of context given by common ground, we can assimilate a number of other phenomena to it. Lewis makes an impressive start in 'Scorekeeping': Presuppositional accommodation; permissibility; definite descriptions; coming and going; vagueness; relative modality; performatives; planning. Typically these don't involve explicitly articulated indexical elements. We might think that they are there, hidden in the unarticulated logical form. Or we might think that we have no need for that: we might think that we can have something analogous to indexicality without indexical elements.