CONTEXT-INDEXED COUNTERFACTUALS

Dr Mariusz Popieluch

Abstract

Experience tells us that the truth of the counterfactual depends on what is meant by the antecedent, which in turn rests on what context is assumed to underlie its reading (intended meaning). On most conditional analyses, only the *world of evaluation* and the *antecedent* are considered which worlds are relevant to determining the truth of a conditional. But that results in the underlying context being fixed, when evaluating distinct counterfactuals with the same antecedent on any single occasion – even when the context underlying the evaluation of each counterfactual varies. Alternative approaches go some of the way toward resolving this inadequacy by appealing to a difference in the consequents associated with counterfactuals with the same antecedent. That is, in addition to the world of evaluation and the antecedent, the *consequent* contributes to the counterfactual's evaluation. But these alternative approaches nevertheless give a single, determinate truth value to any single conditional (same antecedent and consequent), despite the fact that this value may vary with context.

My reply to these shortcomings takes the form of an analysis of a language that makes appropriate explicit access to the intended context available by introducing context indices (context names). That is, I give an account of a contextualized counterfactual of the form 'In context C: *If it were the case that … , then it would be the case that …*'. Although my proposal is largely based on Lewis' (1973, 1981) analyses of counterfactuals (the logic **VW** and its ordering semantics), it does not require that any particular logic of counterfactuals should serve as its basis – rather, it is a general prescription for contextualizing a conditional language. In fact the contextualization can be applied on the weakest of conditional logics. The advantage of working with ordering semantics stems from existing results (which I apply and develop) concerning the properties of ordering frames that facilitate fashioning and implementing a notion of contextual information preservation.