

CONTEXT SELECTION IN RELEVANCE THEORY*

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Abstract

This paper sets out to investigate the notion of context from a relevance-theoretic perspective, building up on previous research on the matter (Assimakopoulos 2003). Endorsing the idea that contexts are best viewed in cognitive terms as sets of assumptions that are brought to bear during the processing of an utterance, I collect the main arguments that relevance theorists have put forth regarding their treatment, focusing mainly on the central innovation of Relevance Theory on the matter, i.e. the proposal that contexts are actually selected during utterance interpretation rather than determined in advance of it. I then address the question of how contexts for interpretation are actually constructed on-line as well as how considerations of relevance, in the technical sense that Sperber and Wilson assign to the term, facilitate the seemingly effortless selection of contexts by the hearer and, to a certain extent, the speaker too.

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