

Lying and Misleading in Discourse*

Andreas Stokke

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Abstract

This paper argues that the distinction between lying and misleading while not lying is sensitive to discourse structure. It is shown that whether an utterance is a lie or is merely misleading contributing information to a discourse that is sensitive to the state of the discourse itself. The resulting account is applied to a number of ways of exploiting the lying-misleading distinction, involving conversational implicature, incompleteness, presuppositions, and prosodic focus. It is shown that assertion, and hence lying, is preserved from subquestion to superquestion under a strict entailment relation between questions, and ways of lying and misleading in relation to multiple questions are discussed.

1 Introduction

We sometimes have goals that urge us to mislead each other in conversation. Typically, we can meet them in two different ways, namely either by outright lying or by misleading while avoiding lying. There is a difference between lying and merely misleading. This distinction is important to us. We often take pains to stay on the right side of it in everyday matters. We build it into law codes, and it is a basic distinction in many religious systems of belief. There are famous cases of presidents and saints having exploited the difference dexterously, as do the rest of us with varying degrees of veracity. Recanati, Jennifer Saul, and to audiences at Umeå University (ENS, Paris) for helpful discussion. I am particularly indebted to Anders Schoubye and an anonymous referee for the Philosophical Review for extensive and very valuable suggestions.

Lincoln, “The report is in circulation in the House that Peace Commissioners are on their way or are in the city, and is being used against us. If it is true, I fear we shall loose the bill. Please authorize me to contradict it, if not true.” Lincoln wrote back, “So far as I know, there are no peace commissioners in the city or likely to be in it.”¹ In fact, the commissioners were on their way not to Washington, but to Fort Monroe, where Lincoln met them a few days later. Or consider the often cited case of Saint Athanasius who, when asked by pursuers sent by the emperor Julian to persecute him, “Where is the traitor Athanasius?”, replied, “He’s not far away.”²

This paper argues that the distinction between lying and merely misleading is sensitive to discourse structure. In particular, I argue that whether an utterance is a lie or is merely misleading depends on the topic of conversation, understood as the $T X H V W L R Q \quad X Q G H U \quad G L V F X$ (henceforth, QUD) in the sense of Roberts (2004), (2012). In the tradition from Stalnaker (1978), (1984), (1998), (2002), a discourse is taken to be a cooperative activity of information exchange aimed at the goal of inquiry, i.e., to discover how things are. In this setting a QUD is a subinquiry, that is, a strategy for approaching the goal of inquiry.

I propose that to mislead is to disrupt the pursuit of the goal of inquiry, that is, to prevent the progress of inquiry from approaching the discovery of how things are. On the view I will argue for, the difference between whether doing so counts as lying or as merely misleading

contrast between the dialogues in (1) and (2).⁵

Dennis is going to Paul's party tonight. He has a long day of work ahead of him before that, but he is very excited and can't wait to get there. Dennis's annoying friend, Rebecca, comes up to him and starts talking to him about the party. Dennis is fairly sure that Rebecca won't go unless she thinks he's going, too.

- (1) Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?
Dennis. No, I'm not going to Paul's party.
- (2) Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?
Dennis. I have to work.

In both cases Dennis conveys the misleading information that he is not going to Paul's party. But while Dennis's utterance in (1) is a lie, his utterance in (2) is not a lie.

The standard approach explains this difference by pointing to the fact that, in (1), the misleading information is said or asserted, while, in (2), the same misleading information is merely implicated. In the former case Dennis says or asserts something he believes to be false. In the latter he says or asserts something he believes to be true, but thereby implicates something he believes to be false.

However, as I demonstrate in this paper, once we look beyond classic cases of this kind, we need discourse-sensitive notions of saying and asserting in order to capture the lying-misleading distinction. Some accounts of the lying-misleading distinction, like that of Saul (2012b), allow what is said to go beyond what is linguistically encoded by an utterance. Yet, as we will see, such views are still unable to account for the way the distinction depends on the state of the discourse.

I accept the view that lying requires assertion, and that assertion requires saying something, as opposed to conveying information in indirect ways, e.g., by conversational implicature. But I argue that what is said by an utterance, in a particular context, depends directly on the QUD that is addressed by the utterance. In particular, I argue that the distinction between lying and misleading depends on the state of the discourse.

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certain kinds of incompleteness for misleading purposes. In addition, I show that the account explains how one can use presuppositions to mislead. Finally, section 5 discusses two com-

Because Bronston himself had earlier had a large personal bank account in Switzerland, he was charged with perjury. The basis of the perjury charge was that, while his second utterance above was literally true, it was deeply misleading in that it conveyed that Bronson had never had a personal Swiss bank account. The eventual verdict by the US Supreme Court was that a merely misleading statement is not perjury.⁸

The difference between lying and other forms of misleading speech also plays a central role outside special contexts of this kind. A real estate agent is not allowed to lie to you about the state of the house she is trying to sell, but she may not be accountable for misleading utterances that are not lies. And even about trivial, everyday matters, many people will choose to say something true but misleading rather than to outright lie, all else being equal.

There are most likely many reasons for this attention to the difference between lying and merely misleading. One suggestion is that part of the importance placed on avoiding lying stems from the role assertion plays in the system for accumulating and pooling information.

- (4) Elizabeth. How is Doris's relationship with Sean?
William. She insulted him at a party.

I think that William's utterance in (3) is a lie and that his utterance in (4) is not a lie, even though it is clearly misleading.¹¹ The reason for the difference seems clear. In both cases William's utterance provides a misleading answer to the question it is addressing. In the first case it provides the answer that the reason Doris lost her job was that she insulted Sean at a party. In the second case it provides the answer that her relationship with Sean is not good. Yet we have a strong sense that, whereas in the first case the answer is provided directly, or explicitly, in the second case the misleading answer is supplied indirectly, or implicitly.

At the same time, the only substantial difference between the dialogues in (3) and (4) is which question is being addressed. In other words, the same utterance (P R G ~~No~~ Pronoun) is, in one case, a lie and, in the other case, merely misleading. This suggests that the difference between lying and merely misleading is sensitive to previous discourse structure, and in particular to the topic of conversation, or QUD. In other words, whether you lie or merely mislead depends on which question you are interpreted as addressing.

These observations can be corroborated by considering possible continuations of the discourses. In general, it is characteristic of utterances that are misleading but not lies that one can subsequently retreat from the misleading information one conveys. That is, one can deny that one intended to convey the relevant misleading information, while this does not involve retracting one's utterance completely. Correspondingly, when one is lying, one is typically committed to the misleading information one conveys in a particular sense.¹² Part of the reason the contrast between assertion and conversational implicature has typically been used to exemplify the difference between lying and merely misleading is arguably that it represents a contrast between a committing and a less committing way of communicating.

To illustrate, consider the continuations of our previous examples in (1') and (2').

- (1') Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?
Dennis. No, I'm not going to Paul's party.
Rebecca. Oh, don't you think he'll be disappointed?
Dennis. #No, I'm going to the party.

- (2) Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?
Dennis. I have to work.

¹¹I use "utterance" to mean what Stanley and Szabó (2000, 77-78) call "grammatical sentence", that is, roughly, disambiguated phonological form (or the equivalent, for written sentences.) Hence, an utterance, in this sense, does not include pragmatic enrichments or implicatures, and does not include saturation of indexicals such as the pronouns, demonstratives, or indexical adverbs of space and time. An utterance, in this sense, is not identical to what I call P L Q L P D O F R Q W H Q W

Rebecca. Oh, don't you think he'll be disappointed?

Dennis. No, I just meant I have to work now.

In both cases Dennis's initial utterance conveys the misleading information that he is not going

committed to the misleading information he conveys. By contrast, in (4'), he is not committed to the misleading information he conveys, i.e., that their relationship is not good.

Another difference exhibited by classic cases of lying vs. merely misleading concerns the possibilities for denials by hearers. A lie can be met with an explicit denial, while a merely misleading utterance does not permit such denials, but typically requires questioning the speaker's intentions instead. This difference is illustrated by (1'') and (2'').

(1'') Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?
Dennis. No, I'm not going to Paul's party.
Monica. Yes, you are!

(2'') Rebecca. Are you going to Paul's party?
Dennis. I have to work.
Monica. #Yes, you are!/Wait, are you trying to make her believe you're not going?

The same difference is exhibited by (3) and (4), as shown below.

(3') Elizabeth. Why did Doris lose her job?
William. She insulted Sean at a party.
Garry. No, that wasn't the reason!

(4') Elizabeth. How is Doris's relationship with Sean?
William. She insulted him at a party.
Garry. #No, their relationship is fine!/Wait, are you trying to make her believe they're not on good terms?

I think this is sufficient to group (3) with (1), and (4) with (2), with respect to the lying-misleading distinction. Dennis's utterance in (3) involves the same kind of committing mode of communicating as in classic cases of lying. By contrast, in (4), the speaker does not incur such a commitment.

I conclude that the case of (3)–(4) shows that the difference between lying and merely misleading sometimes depends on whether the speaker commits herself to a misleading answer to a question she is addressing. Next, we will see that this kind of question-sensitivity also occurs for cases involving incompleteness.

2.3 Exploiting Incompleteness

As pointed out by Saul (2012b), one can sometimes exploit particular kinds of incompleteness in navigating the lying-misleading distinction. Here is an example:

conversation altogether. In particular, if William claims, in (3), that he was not addressing Elizabeth's question, this is significantly not analogous to canceling the implicature in (4). In the latter case the reply is still claimed to have been intended to be relevant to the question, although what it was most naturally taken as contributing is claimed to have been unintended. By contrast, to claim, in (3), that one was not addressing the question is to claim that one was not taking part in the conversation at all. I am not concerned with such anomalous cases here.

Larry is keen on making himself seem attractive to Norma. He knows she's interested in logic – a subject he himself knows nothing about. From talking to her, Larry has become aware that Norma knows that he has just finished writing a book, although she doesn't know what it's about. In fact, the book Larry wrote is about cats. Recently, Larry also joined an academic book club where the members are each assigned a particular book to read and explain to the others. Larry has been assigned a book about logic. But he hasn't even opened it.

⑤ Norma. What's the topic of the book you wrote? (o o))

(t. Inic. Bu o) N nh

Hf wa Mctiw o bā P

(6') Norma. Do you know a lot about logic?

Larry. My book is about logic.

Julie. #No, you don't know anything about logic./Wait, are you trying to make her believe that you know a lot about logic?

As before, this is evidence that (5) behaves like classic cases of lying, as in (1), while (6) behaves like classic cases of merely misleading, as in (2). In other words, the case of (5)–(6) demonstrates that one can sometimes rely on semantic incompleteness in order to mislead, while avoiding outright lying.

2.4 The Need for a Discourse-Sensitive Account

The cases we have examined suggest that an account of the lying-misleading distinction that relies on notions of saying or asserting that are not sensitive to discourse structure is likely to be inadequate. Importantly, this is so even given accounts on which what is said is allowed to go beyond linguistically encoded meaning.

Such an account is provided by Saul (2012b). Agreeing that lying requires saying something one believes to be false, Saul argues that what is said is constrained by the principle (NTE) below.

(NTE) A putative contextual contribution to what is said is a part of what is said only if without this contextually supplied material, S would not have a truth-evaluable semantic content in C.¹⁶

However, this principle is unable to account for examples such as (3). Williams's utterance is truth-evaluable without supplementation. It is true if and only if Doris insulted Sean at a party. Hence, (NTE) cannot count the utterance as $\vee D \setminus \text{that}$ Doris lost her job because she insulted Sean at a party, and hence, Saul's account cannot agree with the judgment that the utterance is a lie. The reason is clear. Namely, (NTE) is not sensitive to discourse structure.

On the other hand a particular virtue of Saul's account is that it pays close attention to the semantics-pragmatics distinction, and as such is able to handle cases like (6).¹⁷ Arguably, in this case, the speaker exploits the fact that his utterance allows for different completions. The most salient interpretation of his utterance is that Larry wrote a book about logic. Clearly this is the completion Larry hopes the hearer will fasten on, since it is the one that will in turn furnish an answer to the QUD, i.e., that he knows a lot about logic. At the same time, Larry is not committed to this contribution, and moreover there is a possible completion that he believes to be true. It is natural to think [bel] nao

So, although Saul's account makes explicit the fact that what is said, in the sense that is relevant for the lying-misleading distinction, may go beyond what is linguistically encoded in a sentence, her view retains the traditional conception on which the sentence is the basic unit of analysis. Yet, as we have seen this picture is unable to account for the way in which the lying-misleading distinction depends on discourse structure.

More generally, we can take from this section two desiderata for our account of the lying-misleading distinction. First, it must be sensitive to discourse structure, and in particular, to QUDs. Second, it must take into account the ways in which one can exploit incompleteness concerning what one can be construed as saying. In the following two sections, I provide an account that meets these criteria.

3 Questions under Discussion and What is Said

In this section I first explain how the notions of what is said and assertion figure in my account of the lying-misleading distinction. I then introduce the central components of the QUD framework, and I provide a rudimentary semantics for questions. Finally, I define a notion of what is said according to which whether a proposition counts as said or not by an utterance is determined directly by QUDs.

3.1 Saying and Asserting

I endorse the widely accepted, generic account of lying according to which to lie is to assert something one believes to be false.¹⁹ More precisely, for the purposes of this discussion, I propose to characterize lying as follows:

Lying

A lies if and only if

(L1) A asserts that p, and

(L2) A believes that not-p.

The challenge is to spell out a notion of assertion that will capture when an utterance is a lie and when not, and thereby provide an account of the lying-misleading distinction. Below, I outline the account of assertion I will be relying on.

In the tradition from Stalnaker (1970), (1978), (1984), (1998), (2002), we think of a discourse as proceeding against a background of shared information, called the *Context*. This information, that is, the information taken for granted by the participants in the conversation, is the information taken for granted by the participants in the conversation.

$D \setminus W \setminus I \setminus H \setminus \Delta \setminus D \setminus A \setminus V \setminus L \setminus H \setminus V \setminus O \setminus W \setminus K \setminus W \setminus H \setminus V \setminus D \setminus W \setminus K \setminus D \setminus U \setminus \Delta$

$J \setminus \Delta \setminus L \setminus V \setminus M \setminus F \setminus R \setminus L \setminus \# \setminus L \setminus W \setminus Q \setminus F \setminus A \setminus D \setminus F \setminus p \setminus K \setminus O \setminus \Delta \setminus H$

$D \setminus W \setminus V \setminus R \setminus Q \setminus R \setminus Q \setminus H \setminus \& \setminus V \setminus E \setminus D \setminus E \setminus p \setminus \bullet \setminus \epsilon \setminus D \setminus F \setminus \epsilon \setminus R \setminus @ \setminus W \setminus P \setminus S \setminus D \setminus Q \setminus O \setminus H \setminus P \setminus A$

I assume that assertion requires $\forall D \setminus \text{something}$, and furthermore, in accordance with Stalnakerian orthodoxy, that assertion involves a bid to make what is said common ground. Hence, I will assume the following necessary conditions on assertion:

Assertion

In uttering a sentence S , A asserts that p only if

(A1) S says that p , and

(A2) by uttering S , A proposes to make it common ground that p .

So, in asserting that p , a speaker makes an utterance that says that p and thereby proposes to make it common ground that p .²¹

The reasons for distinguishing between what is said and what is asserted in this way are familiar: A standard consideration involves cases of irony. Consider, for example, the dialogue in (7).

- (7) Carol. Did you like the movie?
Ted. [Ironically] Yeah, it was great!

I take it that Ted's utterance says that the movie was great.²² (This will be a consequence of the account of what is said I propose.) But, uncontroversially, Ted is not asserting that the movie was great. Hence, saying that p is not sufficient for asserting that p . Nor is Ted asserting that the movie was not great – even though to communicate this content is the point of his utterance. Hence, proposing to communicate that p , or to make it common ground that p , is not sufficient for asserting that p . Rather, assertion requires making a bid to add information to the common ground by saying it.

3.2 Questions under Discussion

The proposal I want to put forward relies on the framework for understanding discourse structure developed by Roberts (2004), (2012). I now go on to set out the components of this framework.²³

Roberts's central insight is that, to approach the Stalnakerian goal of inquiry, the discovery of how things are, "we must develop strategies for achieving this goal, and these strategies involve subinquiries."²⁴ Such subinquiries are aimed at answering questions that have been accepted as being under discussion.

²¹I use "sentence" to mean grammatical sentence, in the sense of footnote 11.

²²On some ways of using the notion of $\forall D \setminus \text{this}$ assumption is false. E.g., as Neale (1992, 523) points out, "If U utters the sentence "Bill is an honest man" ironically, on Grice's account U will not have said that Bill is an honest man: U will have made as if to say that Bill is an honest man." The reason for this is that on a Gricean understanding, saying that p is more akin to how we are understanding asserting that p . Such an account uses different notions to make similar distinctions, e.g., "making as if to say" vs. "saying", or the like.

²³I am not concerned with giving an exhaustive summary of the details of this model of discourse structure, but just with providing the requisite background for the characterization of the notion of what is said that will generate my account of the lying-misleading distinction. Here I follow the presentation in Roberts (2012).

²⁴Roberts (2012, 4).

J(8a)K= ff w : Mary is working in wgg

Answerhood

An answer (partial or complete) to a question $q?$ is the union of a non-empty, proper subset of $[q?]$.

As above, intuitively, an answer is a statement that rules in at least one cell, but not all. We therefore specify that an answer to a question $q?$ must be the union of a $SURSHU \quad QRQ \quad HPSW \setminus$ subset of the partition determined by $q?$, since neither a statement that rules in no cells nor a statement that rules in all cells of $[q?]$ is intuitively an answer to $q?$ ²⁸

To illustrate, consider the replies to (9a) in (11).

- (11) a. Mary is working.
b. Mary and Kelly are working.
c. Only Jim is working.

(11a) is a partial answer to (9a), since it is a positive answer to one of its subquestions, (10a), but remains neutral on the others. Correspondingly, (11a) rules in cells where Mary is working,

are eliminated. (Here, as throughout, I focus for convenience on cases in which the relevant speech act is accepted by the other discourse participants.) If one effectuates this change while disbelieving that Mary is working, one reduces the context set to a set that, according to one's own beliefs, excludes the actual world. Thereby one steers the narrowing of the context set that is unfolding through the discourse away from the actual world.

There are many ways of contributing information to a discourse. Information can be contributed by assertion, conversational implicature, or by other means. There are equally many ways of contributing misleading information. One may do so by asserting something one believes to be false, by conversationally implicating it, or in some other way. Asserting that one is not going to a party and implicating that one is not going are both ways of contributing this

In many cases the minimal content of a declarative sentence is a proposition. In the terminology of Recanati (1989), Bach (1994), Cappelen and Lepore (2004), and others, such a proposition can be identified as a so-called *PLQLPDO* *S*, i.e. a *Proposition* that is determined solely by composition of the constituents of the relevant sentence. For example, it is

But even in such cases, what a sentence can be used to say is constrained by its minimal content. In cases where the compositionally determined constraints on what is said fall short of propositionality, we can construe the minimal content as a range of candidate minimal propositions. As we will see, on my view, such cases allow for particular ways of exploiting the lying-misleading distinction.

As this suggests, my view disagrees with so-called *5 D G L F D O & R, Q W T H A W (1985)*, *L V W V* Sperber and Wilson (1986), Carston (2002), and Recanati (2004), (2010), who claim that compositional meaning always falls short of propositionality. On the other hand I refrain from adopting the strong position of so-called *6 H P D Q W L F Q* like Cappelen and Lepore (2004), according to which all grammatical, declarative sentences express propositional contents that are determined purely by lexical meaning and compositional procedures.³⁴ Instead, my view agrees with so-called *0 R G H U D W H & R I D E B A T H (2004)*, *O I G M A R I N G* that compositional content, although sometimes fully propositional, may fall short of complete propositionality.³⁵

3.5 What is Said

I can now state the definition of what is said that my account of the lying-misleading distinction turns on. Using $c(S)$ to denote a minimal proposition expressed by a sentence S in a context c , I adopt the following definition of what is said:³⁶

What is Said

What is said by S in c relative to a QUD $q?$ is the weakest proposition p such that p is an answer (partial or complete) to $q?$ and $p \supseteq c(S)$.³⁷

So, what is said, according to this proposal, is the weakest answer to a QUD that entails a minimal proposition expressed by the utterance in question, given the context. As before, we understand an answer to a question $q?$ to be the union of a non-empty, proper subset of $[q?]$, or intuitively, a statement that rules in at least one cell, but not all.

Let me first explain the way this characterization of what is said works in cases where the minimal content expressed is propositional. On this view what is said by a sentence S

³⁴For a different type of of Semantic Minimalism, see Borg (2004).

³⁵The view I argue for also disagrees with Cappelen and Lepore's *6 S H H F K \$ F W a c c o u n t i n g t o w h i c h P a n* utterance can assert propositions that are not even logical implications of the proposition semantically expressed. Nothing even prevents an utterance from asserting (saying, claiming, etc.) propositions incompatible with the proposition semantically expressed by that utterance." (Cappelen and Lepore, 2004, 4)

³⁶This proposal is defended in detail in Schoubye and Stokke (2015). See also Gauker (2012) for a view that has some similarities to this one.

³⁷A full account might take c to be a Kaplanian tuple consisting of speaker, time, location, and world, and include in such tuples a QUD (and perhaps other coordinates.) A sentence can then be defined as saying a proposition relative to such an extended Kaplanian tuple, the traditional coordinates of which are used to determine minimal content in the familiar way. (This does not rule out that some basic set elements may have their values determined in other ways, e.g., via common ground information.) On such an implementation, truth can then be defined relative to such contexts and worlds. Letting $c(S)$ denote what is said by S relative to c (understood as just suggested), S is true relative to a context c and a w if and only if $w \models c(S)$:

relative to a QUD $q?$ is always a proper subset of $[q?]$, that is, a proper subset of the complete answers to $q?$. Specifically, what is said is the weakest such proposition that entails the minimal proposition expressed by S , given the context. In other words, to determine what is said by S relative to $q?$, first find the proper subsets of $[q?]$ that entail the minimal proposition expressed by S , then pick the weakest of them. (By a proposition p being weaker than another proposition r , we mean that p is entailed by r , but not r by p .)

To illustrate, consider our previous example of the reply to (9a) in (11a).

(9a) Who is working?

(11a) Mary is working.

The minimal proposition expressed by (11a) is the proposition that Mary is working. So we look for proper subsets of the partition set up by (9a) that entail this proposition. As seen from Table 1, there are several proper subsets of $[(9a)]$ that entail that Mary is working. In general, any proper subset that contains some m -worlds and no $\neg m$ -worlds entails the minimal proposition expressed by (11a).

For example, the subset covered by cells 1 and 2 entails that Mary is working. But if this subset counts as what is said, this amounts to the prediction that, relative to (9a), (11a) says that Mary and Kelly are working, which is clearly incorrect. However, this proposition is not the weakest of the propositions in $[(9a)]$ that entail the minimal proposition expressed by (11a). Rather, the weakest of them is just the set of all worlds where Mary is working, i.e., the worlds covered by cells 1–4. So, in this case, what is said is just the minimal proposition itself, i.e., the proposition that Mary is working.

What about cases in which minimal content is not fully propositional? As we said above, in such cases, the minimal content can be construed as a range of candidate minimal propositions. For example, as we will see, (12a) may fall short of determining a fully propositional minimal content, and instead be associated with a range of candidates. In such cases I suggest that the interpretation “looks through” the candidates and tries to find a suitable content for what is said, given the QUD. In each case what is said is evaluated in the same way as above, i.e., as the weakest proposition that is an answer to the QUD and entails the relevant candidate minimal proposition.

We will see that sentences can be used to say things that go beyond their minimal contents. Yet what is said is precisely constrained both by minimal, compositional meaning and by QUDs, and hence so is assertion. I take this to be a natural extension of the Stalnaker-Roberts view of information exchange. The goal of inquiry – to answer the Big Question – is approached via subinquiries, i.e., QUDs. When solving the task of which information to add to the common ground as the result of an utterance, the participants of a discourse will look at the minimal content of the utterance and at which QUD is being addressed in order to determine what the speaker said.

Consequently, one way of being misleading is to contribute disbelieved information to the discourse. To lie is to assert a disbelieved proposition p , which in turn requires uttering a sentence that counts as saying that p , given the context and the relevant QUD.

4 Accounting for the Lying-Misleading Distinction

42 Defaulting to the Big Question

a central part of the reason why one can use this kind of semantic incompleteness to mislead while avoiding lying.

But are possessives to be seen as belonging to the basic set of context-sensitive elements that are saturated prior to determination of minimal content? As I said earlier, I will not attempt to answer this question in this paper.⁴⁰ However, as we will see next, there are good reasons to think that, regardless of how this issue is resolved, our account will be able to offer a plausible exp

that the s

According to what we suggested earlier, the interpretation will attempt to find a suitable content for what is said in terms of the candidate minimal propositions and the space of answers to the QUD. In (5) there are several answers to the QUD that entail (15a). The weakest of these is the proposition that the book Larry wrote is about logic. So, given the QUD, this candidate minimal proposition yields a plausible content as what is said. Furthermore, none of the answers to the QUD in (5) entail (15b). The same is true for other possible completions. For example, consider the candidates in (17).

- (17) a. The book Larry is thinking about is about logic.
- b. The book Larry is talking about is about logic.
- c. The book Larry has been working on is about logic.
- ...

No answer to the question in (5) entails any of these. Rather, since (15a) yields a plausible outcome for what is said, in this case, we predict that Larry is interpreted as saying, and hence asserting, that the book he wrote is about logic. This also accords with our judgment that Larry is lying in this case.

Now consider (6). Neither of the candidate completions in (15) is entailed by either the positive or the negative answer to the QUD in (6). Nor is any other possible completion. So Larry's utterance in (6) cannot be construed as saying anything relative to the local QUD. So, according to our earlier proposal, the utterance is instead seen as addressing the Big Question. Notice, however, that in cases like this, where there are different candidate minimal propositions in play, the Big Question does not distinguish a particular content as what is said. We could say, therefore, that each of the candidates in (15) and (17) is said. But this is not right. Larry is not lying, in this case, and therefore (15a) cannot be said, or asserted. This conforms to our sense that Larry, in (6), is not asserting any particular completion.

Instead, I propose that, in cases where an utterance is indeterminate between a range of minimal propositions, and moreover cannot be construed as saying anything relative to the relevant local QUD, the interpretation pulls back even further and takes as what is said the content of the Big Question. This proposal is in line with our earlier proposal that the interpretation of an utterance is determined by the content of the Big Question.

Intuitively, this is the content that would be understood by someone who had no access to the contextual information relevant for deciding between the candidate minimal propositions.

(18) is a plausible content for what is said in (6). And furthermore, Larry is naturally seen as proposing to add to the common ground the information it paraphrases. Part of the peculiarity of this case is that Larry makes an assertion that is, on the one hand, sufficiently specific to achieve his misleading purposes and, on the other hand, sufficiently non-committal to avoid lying. Given that (18) is asserted in (6), we predict that Larry is lying if he believes that (18) is false. This is the right result. In particular, we make the same prediction as on

If certain information is necessary to determine the content of some speech act, then appropriate speech requires that the information be presumed to be shared information at the time at which that speech act is to be interpreted. (Stalnaker, 1998, 101)

Stalnaker observes that a use of the first person, singular pronoun , requires that the speaker " must be presuming that the information that she is speaking is available to her audience – that it is shared information." (ibid.)⁴⁷ If this is right, the analogous observation should hold of the 3rd person. When someone uses the 3rd person, they must be presuming that the information that the intended referent is neither speaker nor hearer is available to the audience.

disbelieved information to be accommodated. Since presuppositions are not said, both of these are ways of misleading while not lying, even though such maneuvers may be accompanied by outright lying if what is asserted is likewise disbelieved.

Moreover, note that in these cases, misleading while avoiding lying does not correlate with the same kind of possibility for retreat as we observed for earlier cases. For example, one cannot, in general, retract gender information presupposed by a use of a pronoun. Hence, these cases illustrate a different way of being misleading while avoiding full-blown assertion of disbelieved information. But more particularly, there is arguably a sense that this kind of merely misleading is morally worse. For example, Marion in (25) did something worse than the kind of misleading that is susceptible to subsequent retreat. It is reasonable to think that at least part of this difference is due to the effect being

I D F L H

4.6 Negation

We can now return to the example of Nathan and the henchman in order to explain the sense that Nathan contributes misleading information – i.e., that he is not in the office – to the discourse, while avoiding lying. This requires an explanation of what is said by utterances involving negations. As we will see, this is straightforward, given our proposal.

The henchman’s question partitions logical space into cells corresponding to its complete answers. A complete answer is an answer that constitutes a yes or a no to each place Nathan could be. Clearly, the list will be very long. Moreover, some of the places will exclude each other, while some will not. And furthermore, for some of the places, it will be vague whether they are far away or not. Let us assume that there are five salient places Nathan could be: the office, the mall, the bar, his home, and the garage. Moreover, assume that the bar is in the mall. So the question determines the partition in Table 3

1 o : b : m : h : g	2 : o b m : h : g	
3 : o : b m : h : g	4 : o : b : m h : g	5 : o : b : m : h g

Table 3

Suppose further that (i) Nathan’s home is nearby, (ii) the mall, and hence the bar, are far away, and (iii) the garage is neither near nor far. In other words, the places that are not far away are the office, home, and the garage. Consequently, there are many proper subsets of the question that entail the minimal content that Nathan is not far away – e.g., the subset covered by cell 1, the one covered by cells 1 and 5, etc. The weakest of these is the subset covered by cells 1, 4, and 5. So this proposition counts as what is said.

Given the way things are set up in this simplified example, this proposition can be paraphrased in more than one way, as in (27).

- (27) a. Nathan is neither at the bar nor in the mall.

supposition accommodation.⁵¹ Even so, there are mechanisms that speakers use to indicate which questions they are addressing.

Roberts argues that one of these mechanisms, in English, is prosodic focus:

prosodic focus in English presupposes the type of question under discussion, a presuppo-

Melissa knows that Fritz is first going to Potsdam and then on to Rome tomorrow.

(31) Jack. Will Fritz go to Potsdam tomorrow?

Melissa. Fritz will go to [ROME]_f tomorrow.

Note that Melissa's utterance is not felicitous with a flat intonation. In other words, Melissa's utterance in (31) must be seen as addressing, not the question about Potsdam that was explicitly asked, but a different question, namely (29a). Relative to (29a), and ignoring the indexical,

Suppose, as in the previous scenario, that William knows that, while Doris did insult Sean, this is not the reason she got fired. Did he lie?

I think intuitions are unclear here. In particular, I think the degree to which one will judge William to be lying correlates with the degree to which one will judge that he can only be seen as addressing the question of why Doris got fired. To support this, suppose that the situation is as described above, but that Barbara, while pointing to the list, utters, "Why?", "What?", or the like. I think that, in these cases, intuitions that William is lying become stronger, and that the reason is that the degree to which his utterance can only be seen as addressing the question of why Doris got fired is strengthened.

One can avoid lying, while still being misleading, if one can exploit which question the hearers can be expected to accommodate, while remaining in a position to claim that one intended to address a different QUD.

5.2 Multiple Questions

The final issue I want to turn to concerns the fact that realistic contexts invariably contain multiple QUDs. Moreover, the different QUDs in a context are typically related to each other. One important way QUDs can be related is by specific kinds of entailment relations. I will

look at two such relations and then we will see how they relate to the MisQ re= ijOne c t

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This means that if one lies relative to a question, one lies relative to all questions that strictly entail it. Moreover, since the Big Question is always available, whether one can lie or not does not depend on which local QUDs are in place. As such, lying is always an option – namely, one can always utter a sentence that says something one believes to be false. Yet, as we will see next, the option of misleading without lying does depend on which QUDs are available.

If one conveys a misleading answer to a question, one will thereby also be conveying a

Contextual Question-Entailment

For all QUDs q, q^0 of a discourse, if $q < q^0$, then the complete answer to q^0 contextually entails a partial answer to q .⁵⁸

One way in which Contextual Question-Entailment can be satisfied is if the QUDs of a discourse stand in the relation of Strict Question-Entailment. For example, a complete answer to (33b) yields a partial answer to (33), and so on. But Contextual Question-Entailment also allows for cases in which the relation between the QUDs of a discourse is more subtle than Strict Question-Entailment. To take an example from Roberts (2012, 19-20), consider the questions in (36).

- (36) a. What kinds of seafood will John eat?
b. Isn't he allergic to clams?

As Roberts (2012, 19) observes, completely answering (36b) does not straightforwardly entail a partial answer to (36a). Suppose that the answer to (36b) is $\setminus H \text{ Even so, John might still eat clams for other reasons, e.g. out of politeness, or because he cannot resist. On the other hand, suppose the answer to (36b) is } Q \text{ Even so, that does not directly entail that John will eat clams, since there might be other reasons why he will not. However, Roberts proposes that in many contexts in which this kind of discussion takes place, it will be common ground that (a) one will not eat anything one is allergic to and (b) one will eat something unless one has reason not to. (a) takes care of the case in which the answer to (36b) is } \setminus H \text{ (b) takes care of the case in which the answer is } Q \text{, given the further observation that an answer to (36b) is a partial answer to (37).$

- (37) What reasons would John have for not eating clams?

In other words, Contextual Question-Entailment appears to be a promising way of explaining at least some of the intricate ways in which QUDs are related. Briefly, we try to order our QUDs such that those raised will deliver partial answers to the previous ones, given the common ground, and perhaps via bridge-questions.

Now consider the following situation:

Maria knows that John is allergic to clams, but that he will eat them anyway because he can't resist.

- (38) Kelly. What kinds of seafood will John eat?
Eric. Isn't he allergic to clams?
Maria. Yes, John is allergic to clams.

Intuitively, Maria is being misleading, since she conveys that John will not eat clams, and yet she is not lying because all she is asserting is that he is allergic to clams.

The reason Maria is not lying in (38) is clear. Her utterance expresses the minimal proposition that John is allergic to clams. The latter is entailed by the corresponding answer to Eric's question, and is therefore asserted by Maria. So we explain why she is not lying.

⁵⁸This is a slight simplification of clause (10g_{iii}) in Roberts (2012, 15).

How do we explain the sense that Maria is being misleading in (38)? That is, how do we explain that Maria succeeds in adding to the discourse the information that John will not eat clams? As noted, Roberts suggests that it is reasonable to assume that it is common ground that one will not eat something one is allergic to. It is natural to explain Maria's strategy for misleading as trading on a fact of this kind. The reason she can mislead Kelly and Eric

