

The Contextualist Debate

Paul Dekker

ILLC/Department of Philosophy
University of Amsterdam
p.j.e.dekker@uva.nl

September — December 2009

Meaning, Reference, and Modality

- Lots of lecturing;
- little discussion.

- Point for evaluation.

Today's Subject

- The contextualist debate,
- or, rather, the lack of a debate.

- Most of the debate is about who to classify as what, a minimalist or a contextualist, radical, or moderate.

- Nobody ever specifies what they all talk about: content.

- Also in the ILLC, people are classified as of one or the other kind. And so they do the others, explicitly, or implicitly.

- I try to raise the issues which I think are relevant in the discussion, and have no pertinent idea what conclusions to draw from them.

Overview

- ① General background—mainly Wittgenstein.
- ② Me as the devil's advocate.
- ③ Some contextualist arguments.
- ④ Some more or less minimalist responses.
- ⑤ Some of my remaining worries.

Logico-Philosophical Positivism

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.
 - 2.0201 Jede Aussage über Komplexe lässt sich in eine Aussage über deren Bestandteile und in diejenigen Sätze zerlegen, welche die Komplexe vollständig beschreiben.
 - 2.021 Die Gegenstände bilden die Substanz der Welt. Darum können sie nicht zusammengesetzt sein.
 - 2.0211 Hätte die Welt keine Substanz, so würde, ob ein Satz Sinn hat, davon abhängen, ob ein anderer Satz wahr ist.
 - 2.0212 Es wäre dann unmöglich, ein Bild der Welt (wahr oder falsch) zu entwerfen.

Logico-Philosophical Positivism

- 3.23 Die Forderung der Möglichkeit der einfachen Zeichen ist die Forderung der Bestimmtheit des Sinnes.
- 3.25 Es gibt eine und nur eine vollständige Analyse des Satzes.
- 5.5563 Alle Sätze unserer Umgangssprache sind tatsächlich, so wie sie sind, logisch vollkommen geordnet.

Gottfried Leibniz

- “quando orientur controversiae, non magis disputatione opus erit inter duos philosophos, quam inter duos Computistas. Sufficiet enim calamos in manus sumere sedereque ad abacos, et sibi mutuo (accito si placet amico) dicere: calculemus” (*Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*, C. I. Gerhardt (ed.), Berlin, 187590, vii, p. 200)
- “If controversies were to arise, there would be no more need of disputation between two philosophers than between two accountants. For it would suffice to take their pencils in their hands, to sit down to their slates, and to say to each other . . . : Let us calculate.” (Translation Russell, 1900)

Richard Montague

- “I reject the contention that an important theoretical difference exists between formal and natural languages.” (“English as a formal language”, Bruno Visentini (et al.), 1970, *Linguaggi nella Società e nella Tecnica*, Milan, pp. 189–224)
- “There is in my opinion no important theoretical difference between natural languages and the artificial languages of logicians; indeed, I consider it possible to comprehend the syntax and semantics of both kinds of languages within a single natural and mathematically precise theory.” (“Universal grammar”, 1970, *Theoria* 36, 373–98)

Logico-Philosophical Negativism

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

§89 Augustinus (Conf. XI/14): “quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio.” – Dies könnte man nicht von einer Frage der Naturwissenschaft sagen (etwa der nach dem spezifischen Gewicht des Wasserstoffs). Das, was man weiß, wenn uns niemand fragt, aber nicht mehr weiß, wenn wir es erklären sollen, ist etwas, worauf man sich besinnen muß. (Und offenbar etwas, worauf man sich aus irgendeinem Grunde schwer besinnt.)

On Determinate Meanings

§99 Der Sinn des Satzes – möchte man sagen – kann freilich dies oder das offen lassen, aber der Satz muß doch einen bestimmten Sinn haben. Ein unbestimmter Sinn, – das wäre eigentlich gar kein Sinn. – Das ist wie: Eine unscharfe Begrenzung, das ist eigentlich gar keine Begrenzung. Man denkt da etwa so: Wenn ich sage “ich habe den Mann fest im Zimmer eingeschlossen – nur eine Tür ist offen geblieben” – so habe ich ihn eben gar nicht eingeschlossen. Er ist nur zum Schein eingeschlossen. Man wäre geneigt, hier zu sagen: “also hast du damit garnichts getan”. Eine Umgrenzung, die ein Loch hat, ist so gut, wie gar keine. – Aber ist das denn wahr?

Going Shopping

- §1 Denke nun an diese Verwendung der Sprache: Ich schicke jemand einkaufen. Ich gebe ihm einen Zettel, auf diesem stehen die Zeichen: “fünf rote Apfel”. Er trägt den Zettel zum Kaufmann; der öffnet die Lade, auf welcher das Zeichen “Apfel” steht; dann sucht er in einer Tabelle das Wort “rot” auf und findet ihm gegenüber ein Farbmuster; nun sagt er die Reihe der Grundzahlwörter (...) bis zum Worte “fünf” und bei jedem Zahlwort nimmt er einen Apfel aus der Lade, der die Farbe des Musters hat. – So, und ähnlich, operiert man mit Worten. – “Wie weiß er aber, wo und wie er das Wort “rot” nachschlagen soll und was er mit dem Wort “fünf” anzufangen hat?” – **Nun, ich nehme an, er handelt, wie ich es beschrieben habe. Die Erklärungen haben irgendwo ein Ende.**
- Was ist aber die Bedeutung des Wortes “fünf”? – Von einer solchen war hier garnicht die Rede; nur davon, wie das Wort “fünf” gebraucht wird.

Classical Contextualism

- Indexicalism (Kaplan / Stalnaker / Lewis / Perry)
- Temporal reference (Prior / Jezus)
- Linguistic relativism (Quine / Whorf)
- Interpretation as a practice (Wittgenstein / Davidson)
- Recent players on old questions; some from the ‘dark side’ and some ‘naive’ ones:
 - ▶ Robyn Carston, Francois Recanati, Daniel Sperber, Charles Travis, Deirdre Wilson;
 - ▶ Herman Cappelen, Graham Katz, Ernest Lepore, Jason Stanley, Zoltan Szabo.
- Some old questions:
 - ▶ Is a general distinction between semantics and pragmatics tenable?
 - ▶ Can we say enough about meaning in terms of truth-conditions?
 - ▶ How pervasive is the context of use in interpretation?
 - ▶ (When) are we multiplying meanings beyond necessity?

Reference

- (1) Smith's murderer is insane.
- (2) Jones is raking the leaves.
- (3) *A*: Her husband is nice to her.
- (4) *B*: He is nice to her, but he is not her husband.

Reference

- Where is the coffeeroom? Well there!
- Go stand here!

Reference



Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1. Oktober 1952

Reference

- §85 “Also kann ich sagen, der Wegweiser läßt doch keinen Zweifel offen. Oder vielmehr: er läßt manchmal einen Zweifel offen, manchmal nicht. Und dies ist nun kein philosophischer Satz mehr, sondern ein Erfahrungssatz.” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1953, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*)

Predication

- The water is polluted.
- The mountains are dangerous.
- The Swiss are evil.

- The water is high.
- The mountains are high.
- The Swiss are high.

Predication

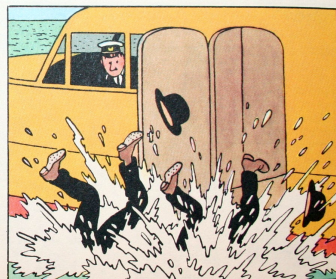
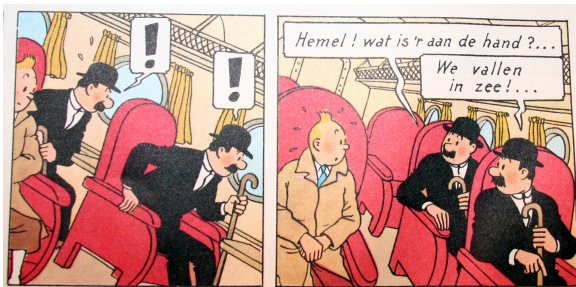
- Groenendijk and Stokhof presented a paper at the conference. (Fred Landman, 1989, “Groups”, *Linguistics and Philosophy*, p. 574.)
- The Onderwijs Comité gathered today. Benedikt was there. (Of course;-)
Unfortunately, Rens couldn't make it.
- The Jacksons have mud on their face.

Predication



Marlon, Jackie, Tito, Michael, Jermaine.

Predication



Quantification

- Fred claims that every schoolboy believes that a mathematician wrote *Through the looking glass*. (Herman Hendriks, 1993, *Studied Flexibility*, Amsterdam, ILLC, example (182), p. 85.)

$CLM(f, \forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow BEL(y, \exists z(MATH(z) \wedge WRT(z, TtLG)))));$

$CLM(f, \forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow \exists z(MATH(z) \wedge BEL(y, WRT(z, TtLG)))));$

$CLM(f, \exists z(MATH(z) \wedge \forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow BEL(y, WRT(z, TtLG)))));$

$\exists z(MATH(z) \wedge CLM(f, \forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow BEL(y, WRT(z, TtLG)))));$

$\forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow CLM(f, BEL(y, \exists z(MATH(z) \wedge WRT(z, TtLG)))));$

$\forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow CLM(f, \exists z(MATH(z) \wedge BEL(y, WRT(z, TtLG)))));$

$\gg \forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow \exists z(MATH(z) \wedge CLM(f, BEL(y, WRT(z, TtLG)))));$

$\exists z(MATH(z) \wedge \forall y(BOY(y) \rightarrow CLM(f, BEL(y, WRT(z, TtLG))))).$

\gg I can get them all.

Quantification

- John seeks a fish or a bike.
- $SEEK(j, \lambda P (A_FISH(P) \vee A_BIKE(P)))$;
 $A_FISH(\lambda y SEEK(j, \lambda P P(y))) \vee A_BIKE(\lambda y SEEK(j, \lambda P P(y)))$;
 $(SEEK(j, A_FISH) \vee SEEK(j, A_BIKE))$;
 $A_BIKE(\lambda y (SEEK(j, A_FISH) \vee SEEK(j, \lambda P P(y))))$;
 $A_FISH(\lambda x A_BIKE(\lambda y (SEEK(j, \lambda P (P(x) \vee P(y)))))$;
 $A_BIKE(\lambda y (SEEK(j, A_FISH) \vee SEEK(j, \lambda P P(y))))$;
-
- Pick your reading, imagine the situation, and say the sentence with that reading in mind. You can! (Can you?) You should be able to.

Quantification

- I know damn well what “Most” means, I know what “More than three means”; I know what “No” means, I know what “or” means as well!
- Determiner accommodation: $\mathcal{D} \Rightarrow \mathcal{D}^*(\mathcal{X}, \mathcal{Y})$.
- Pluralization (Winter, 2001, with alternatives, van der Does, 1992):
 - ▶ $\mathcal{D}(\bigcup \mathcal{X}, \bigcup(\mathcal{X} \cap \mathcal{Y})) \wedge \exists W \in (\mathcal{X} \cap \mathcal{Y})$ (if any): $\mathcal{Q}(\bigcup \mathcal{X}, W)$.
- Dynamification (Chierchia, 1995, with alternatives, Kanazawa, 1994):
 - ▶ $\uparrow \mathcal{D}(\downarrow \mathcal{X}, \downarrow(\mathcal{X} \circ \mathcal{Y}))$.
- All / Five / No boy scouts tease girl scouts and cover each other.
- Most girls in their orphanage who got a present from their directors thanked them for it.

Quantification

- Twenty-five Dutch firms own three-hundred forty-three Irish cows.
- Eight of the boys went to different movies and SMS-ed each other.
- Most sons of few townsmen hate half of the daughters of many villagers.
- Most pilots who shot at them hit few planes that chased them.
- Beyond the Frege boundary (Keenan 1992, Scha 1981)?
 - ▶ $\langle 25, 343 \rangle (\langle \text{dutch_firms}, \text{irish_cows} \rangle) (\text{own})$
- Beyond Compositionality (Hintikka 1973)?
 - ▶ $\mathcal{F}x(Tx) : (\mathcal{M}v(Sxv)) \cdot (\mathcal{H}vw)$
 $\mathcal{M}y(Vy) : (\mathcal{H}w(Dyw)) \cdot (\mathcal{H}vw)$

Contextualism

- “I think it is fair to say that not so long ago in philosophy of language formal semantic theories occupied the central ground (...). These days, the natural descendent of the formal approach, known as minimalism, has been consigned to the margins: not everyone rejects minimalism, but lots of people do. Minimalism is rejected in favour of contextualism: roughly, the idea that pragmatic effects are endemic throughout truth-evaluable semantic content.” (Emma Borg, 2006, p. 1)

Contextualism

- “If radical contextualism is true, systematic semantics is not possible since, according to [Cappelen and Lepore], there cannot be any systematic theory of speech act content.” (Peter Pagin and Jeff Pelletier, 2006, p. 1)
- “It [what is said (asserted, claimed, etc.)] depends on a potentially indefinite number of features of the context of utterance and of the context of those who report (or think about) what was said by the utterance.” (Herman Cappelen and Ernest Lepore, 2005, p. 4)
- “speaker intentions play a role in determining semantic content.” “Assigning intentional states to others (...) is a matter of more than mere syntax. It is not a general computational process but one which is itself highly context sensitive.” (Emma Borg, 2006, p. 19/20)

Contextual Supplies

- ① It's raining (here).
- ② John is tall (for a seven year old child).
- ③ John is finished (with grading).
- ④ Every philosopher (at this conference) comes from NY.
- ⑤ John and Mary went to Paris (together / separately).
- ⑥ John ate breakfast (this morning).
- ⑦ John had breakfast this morning (in the normal way through his mouth).
- ⑧ John ate (mushrooms).
- ⑨ The (person who ordered the) ham sandwich is getting annoyed.
- ⑩ The apple is red (on the outside).

Cutting the pie

- Cutting the pie.
 - ▶ With a knife.
- Cutting the grass.
 - ▶ With a mower.
- Or cutting the grass, with a knife.
- Isn't that funny?

Francois Recanati

- Contextualists claim that there are inherently “ego-centred” thoughts, and that there are no eternal sentences.
- “The evidence in favour of contextualism is provided by indefinitely many examples in which the same sentence, which does not seem to be ambiguous, is used in different contexts to say different things.” (p. 9)

Gricean Attack

- Griceans launched a successful, but not decisive, counter-attack, based on the following two principles:
 - (Parallelism Principle) “If a (...) sentence can be used in different contexts to say different things (...), then the explanation for this contextual variation of content is that the sentence has different linguistic meaning – is semantically ambiguous.” (p. 7)
 - (Modified Occam’s razor) “Senses (linguistic meanings) are not be multiplied beyond necessity.” (p. 8)
- A conflict between the two principles can be solved by conversational implicatures, stuff that is communicated, but not part of the linguistic meaning of the sentence used, nor part of what is said by the utterance itself.

Contextualist defense

- According to Recanati this argument does not apply because the contextualist does not accept the parallellism principle—“the propositional content of an utterance depends on the context and not just on the linguistic meaning of the sentence.” Contextual variation does not imply difference in linguistic meaning; so there is no semantic ambiguity and therefore modified Occam does not apply.
- This reasoning applies to Grice’s argument against Strawson’s idea that “and” is not \wedge —however, the contextualist only claims that there is context-sensitivity, no ambiguity.

Recanati's Three Types of Modulation

- Free enrichment:
 - ▶ The table (*of our living room*) is covered with books.
- Loosening:
 - ▶ The ATM *swallowed* my credit card.
- Semantic transfer:
 - ▶ The ham sandwich left without paying.

Francois Recanati's Red Car

- “(...) consider the adjective ‘red’. Vagueness notwithstanding, it expresses a definite property: the property of being red or having the colour red. (...) But in most cases the following question will arise: what is it for the thing talked about to count as having that colour? Unless that question is answered, the utterance ascribing redness to the thing talked about (John’s car, say) will not be truth-evaluable. (...) To fix the utterance’s truth-conditions, we need to know something more – something which the meanings of the words do not and cannot give us: we need to know what it is for that thing (or for that sort of thing) to count as being that colour. What is it for a car, a bird, a house, a pen, or a pair of shoes to count as red? To answer such questions, we need to appeal to background assumptions and world knowledge.”
(Francois Recanati, 2005, p. 183)

Anne Bezuidenhout's Red Apples

- “We’re at a county fair picking through a barrel of assorted apples. My son says ‘Here’s a red one,’ and what he says is true if the apple is indeed red. But what counts as being red in this context? For apples, being red generally means having a red skin, which is different from what we normally mean by calling a watermelon, or a leaf, or a star, or hair, red. But even when it is an apple that is in question, other understandings of what it is to call it ‘red’ are possible, given suitable circumstances. (...)”

Anne Bezuidenhout's Red Apples (Continued)

- (...) For instance, suppose now that we're sorting through a barrel of apples to find those that have been afflicted with a horrible fungal disease. This fungus grows out from the core and stains the flesh of the apple red. My son slices each apple open and puts the good ones in a cooking pot. The bad one he hands to me. Cutting open an apple he remarks: 'Here's a red one.' What he says is true if the apple has red flesh, even if it also happens to be a Granny Smith apple." (Anne Bezuidenhout, 2002, p. 107)

Red Apples

- So, what did he do? / He sorted the red apples. / Did he do *that* again yesterday?
- He sorted apples again, yes. / No, he didn't sort red apples again.
- He was doing the same thing, or the same kind of thing, but in a different way.
- Is this a semantic issue? Is this about the meaning of *red*?

Wouter Beek's Reply to Recanati's Red Car

- “This ought to automatically answer the question he subsequently poses: ‘what is it for a thing talked about to count as having that colour?’ Recanati already gave the answer: what it is for a thing talked about to count as red is what it is for a thing talked about to be assigned the property of being red or having the colour red. This trivially fixes the truth-conditions of sentences of the form ‘ x is red’ (provided object- and meta-language are the same).”
(Wouter Beek, 2009, p. 47)

Jason Stanley

- “Competent English speakers know the meanings of the words used, and understand how they are combined. Their grasp of the truth conditions of the utterance of that sentence (“Some philosophers are from New York.”) is due to their ability to combine the meanings of the words, relative to the context of utterance.”
- Sometimes more enters into the meaning of a sentence, something paraphrasable, but which is not a constituent; should we therefore abandon “the project of giving a systematic explanation of the source of our intuitions” and “appeal to unconstrained and non-explanatory notions or processes”?

The Contextualist Challenge

- “Here is the form of the standard challenge. First, a linguistic construction C is produced that appears to intuitively have a certain reading R . Secondly, the researcher claims that the readings cannot be due to the semantics of that construction. (...) The conclusion the researcher draws is that the assumption that the intuitive truth-conditions of a sentence relative to a context are due to semantics is incorrect.”

General Strategy Against the Challenge

- Strategy against challenges like the one above: reject semantic significance of the data; give a more sophisticated semantic treatment; argue for covert syntactic structure.
- It is the contextualist who comes up with such examples who must show that neither of these alternatives is available.
- Advocates of free pragmatic enrichment face the danger of overgeneration, when there are no *linguistic constraints*.
 - ▶ Why can “Every Frenchman is seated.” be taken to be about “Every Frenchman in class” but not about “Every Frenchman or Dutchman”?

On (Un)Articulated Constituents

- A binding argument for an ‘articulated constituent’ analysis:
 - ▶ Every time John lights a cigarette, it rains.
 - ▶ In every class, every boy was seated.

Modest Semantics

- “Unfortunately, too many objections to the semanticist assume that the responsibility of the semanticist is to generate within the semantics all information that a competent speaker and a member of a culture may derive from a communicative act.”

Pagin and Pelletier

- “Recanati and [Cappelen and Lepore] thus agree that semantics cannot play any *systematic* role in accounting for speech act content. According to Recanati, so much the worse for semantics; according to CL, so much the worse for the theory of speech act content.” (P&P, p. 31)
- “The middle ground can be occupied by an account that integrates semantic composition and modulation.” (P&P, p. 32)

The Principle of Contextual Compositionality

- $\mu'(\sigma(t_1, \dots, t_n), c)$, the structured meaning of the combination of the constituents t_1, \dots, t_n by means of operation σ in context c is:
 - ▶ $\langle \rho(\sigma), \mu'(t_1, c), \dots, \mu'(t_n, c) \rangle$

the ordered $n + 1$ tuple consisting of the composition function $\rho(\sigma)$ and the meanings of the constituents in c .

- $E_m(\langle \rho(\sigma), \mu'(t_1, c), \dots, \mu'(t_n, c), c \rangle)$, the modulated evaluation of such a structure in c with modulation function \mathcal{M} is:
 - ▶ $\mathcal{M}(\rho(\sigma)(E_m(\mu'(t_1, c), c), \dots, E_m(\mu'(t_n, c), c)))$

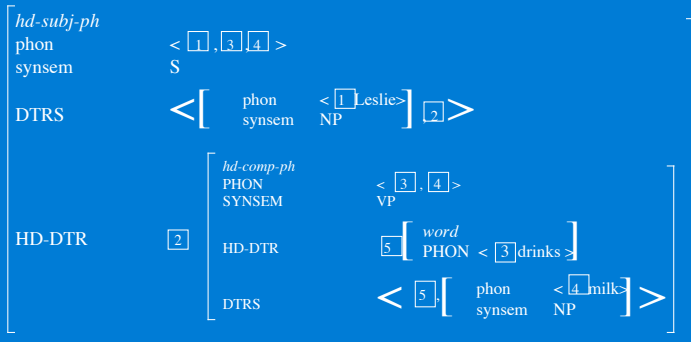
the modulation of the result of the application of $\rho(\sigma)$ to the modulated evaluation of the meanings of the constituents in c .

Remaining Worries

- On Overrepresentation.
- On Vacuity.
- On Underspecification.

“Leslie drinks milk” in HPSG

“Leslie drinks milk.”



Hans Kamp and Antje Roßdeutscher, 1994

- “DRS construction and lexically driven inference”, 1994, *Theoretical Linguistics*, 20.
- Der Tourist erkrankte an Typhus. Nach drei Wochen war er wieder gesund. Ein Arzt aus Izmir hat ihn geheilt.
- “Our ultimate goal is to account for the validity of the following inference.” (p. 172)
- Der Arzt aus Izmir hat ihn vom Typhus geheilt.
- The semantics of ‘heilen’, ‘erkranken’, ‘gesund’;
- the semantics of ‘wieder’;
- rhetorical connections.

Hans Kamp and Antje Roßdeutscher, p. 169

- Der Arzt heilte Peter mit Penizillin von einer Krankheit.

$n \ ec_1 \ x_1 \ w_1 \ y_1 \ z_1$	
$ec_1 < n$	
der Arzt(x_1) Penizillin(w_1) Peter(y_1) Krankheit(z_1)	
$e'' \ ec'_1$	
$e'' \text{ CAUSE}_{\text{heilen}} \ ec'_1$	
$x_1 = \text{Agent}(e'')$ $w_1 = \text{Instrument}(e'')$	
ec_1 :	$e' \ e$
	$e' \text{ CAUSE}_{\text{heilen}} \ e \ w_1 = \text{Causer}(e')$
	$e: \text{HEILEN}(y_1, z_1)$
	$y_1 = \text{Theme}_1(e) \ z_1 = \text{Theme}_2(e)$
$w_1 = \text{Causer}(ec'_1) \ y_1 = \text{Theme}_1(ec'_1) \ z_1 = \text{Theme}_2(ec'_1)$	
$x_1 = \text{Agent}(ec_1) \ w_1 = \text{Instrument}(ec_1)$	
$y_1 = \text{Theme}_1(ec_1) \ z_1 = \text{Theme}_2(ec_1)$	

Vacuity

- Modulation can change everything, and make “Mary smokes.” mean “Ferdinand floats in a bathtub.”
- Pagin and Pelletier: “Probably, there is a fairly small set of normal types of modulation, even if we go beyond the division into loosening, free enrichment and semantic transfer. Identifying modulations seems to a process motivated by standard considerations of relevance, charity and simplicity. There is reason to be optimistic about progress in mapping it out.” (p. 54)

Quantification over ‘Unarticulated Constituents’

- Every time John lights a cigarette, it rains.
- Anke, Laura, and Petra went to the bank.
- Bill outran Will. Everyone saw him.
- Every professor introduced every student to his class.
- The past 8 years the president was a republican.
The next 8 years he will be a democate.
- All boys sorted red apples.
- All policemen stopped the car.

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