On the relevance of parentheticals
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Potts (2008) has argued that appositions are amongst a range of phenomena which do not contribute to the truth conditional content of the utterances that contain them but which ‘contextualize the main clause’s contribution to the discourse’. In this paper, I argue that the idea that utterances may include constituents which contribute to their interpretation by altering the context for their interpretation applies to a range of parenthetical phenomena. Using my work on and-parentheticals and that-is parentheticals, I argue that there are different ways in which parentheticals may play a role in the pragmatic interpretation of their hosts. While some parentheticals affect the interpretation of their hosts at the level of implicit content, others may affect the interpretation of their explicit content. In particular, there are some parentheticals – e.g. that is-parentheticals and some and-parentheticals which play a role in the identification of the truth conditional content of their hosts. While this suggests that not all parentheticals are completely sealed off from the truth conditional content of their hosts at the level of pragmatic interpretation, it does not mean that the content of a that is or and-parenthetical is part of the content of the host. In this sense, it is compositionally independent, as Potts’ (2005) analysis would predict. The point is that the relevance of these parentheticals lies in the information they communicate about the truth conditional content of its host, or, in other words, in what I have called their ‘meta-conceptual’ role.