

Semantics without Truth

Master thesis in Philosophy

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Abstract

The human capacity for language is beyond doubt a very special ability and this thesis aims at shedding light on this ability by investigating the semantic basis for a theory of interpretation. Such a theory seeks to understand how a hearer understands what is meant by an utterance. Pragmatics plays an important role in accounting for a variety of topics relevant to communication – for instance, context of utterance, speaker’s communicative intentions, implicatures and inference, to mention but a few – but in this thesis it is the specific significance of semantics for a theory of interpretation that will be elaborated and defended. Semantics is fundamental, or so I shall argue, if we want to account for the special features of language that ground our human ability to convey complex thoughts and information across radically different contexts, a feature that is absolutely crucial for our rational nature.

I start out from a suggestion by Kent Bach that we can reserve a specific semantic role for a reconsidered version of Paul Grice’s notion of what is said. In the discussion I also defend his claim that saying does not entail meaning, something that in turn justifies his notion of what is said not to be identified with the proposition expressed or what is meant by an utterance. Yet, Bach’s use of ‘semantic context’ to determine indexical expressions are found wanting. I argue that since we have no good reason for letting contextual considerations into the semantic notion of what is said, given its explanatory purpose, the theoretical significance of what is said in addition to sentence meaning is minor.

In due course I defend a notion of semantics that concerns only the stable features of language, namely the level of meaning that is the same for a sentence every time it is uttered and in every context of use. One of Bach’s main claims is that semantics is non-propositional and I defend that claim by showing how sentences that contain context-sensitive expressions often fail to express a proposition. I also take this a bit further and propose an even stronger argument against truth-conditional semantics, which is based on the observation that there are complete declarative sentences that nonetheless fail to semantically express a proposition. If I am right, we should give up truth-conditional semantics. Instead of trying to specify propositional meaning I suggest that we restrict our aim, as semanticist, to specify how the words and the grammar work together to restrict the available interpretations.

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1. Semantics and Communication

The central task of the philosopher of language is to explain what *meaning* is, that is, what makes a language *language*.

Michael Dummett¹

What is communication?

When a communicator has the intention of conveying a thought to an audience she may try to convey that thought by providing cues for an interlocutor to consider. The cues provided can be sounds, signs and bodily movements. In addition to providing such cues the communicator expects the interlocutor to consider facts about the setting in which the communicative act takes place. If the interlocutor thereby recognises the intention of the communicator, this will count as an instance of successful communication.

We do not need to utter a sentence or a word in order to communicate. For instance, when I raise my glass to cheer a newly wedded couple I can succeed in communicating something like my heartfelt congratulations to the couple. For the interpreters to arrive at that interpretation it is crucial to see not merely me raising my glass, but also taking the venue, the wedding, in as a relevant fact in order to correctly interpret what I intended to communicate. If I make the same bodily movement in a pub – raising an empty glass while making eye contact with a friend in the bar – this may be sufficient for him to recognize that I have a communicative intention, which would probably lead him to think that I want another drink.

But let us say that I want to have a diet coke and not a beer. It seems that my friend at the bar will have a hard time interpreting my act of raising the empty glass as having that specific intended meaning; unless, of course, I do nothing but drink diet coke. It might be that I can manage to convey this preference by making some additional movements, maybe relying on a prior convention between my friend and me that a certain hand gesture means I want a diet coke. Yet it seems clear that in most cases a more efficient way of conveying a specific

thought or wish like that would be to utter the sentence ‘I want a diet coke.’ The chance of succeeding to convey that I want a diet coke in contrast to a beer seems to be considerably increased by making that utterance. Such an utterance would be an act of *linguistic communication*. Linguistic communication can be characterized as instances where the success is essentially dependent on the use and understanding of expressions of a language. In order to be successful, linguistic communication depends on the one hand, on the interpreter acknowledging the expressions being linguistic, and on the other hand, on the fact that those linguistic expressions are chosen by the speaker based, at least in part, on considerations about what is relevant for determining the intended meaning.^{2,3}

In general, I will assume that it should be the aim of a theory of communication to account for all the relevant cues in communicative situations. It should do this in two respects: It should consider how those cues can serve as input for the interlocutor and it should account for how communicators choose which cues to provide. Among all the cues that contribute to interpretation it is clear that linguistic cues are especially important since, as has been pointed out by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson among others, they enable us to express thoughts to a degree of explicitness not available in non-verbal interaction (2004, p.614). This can explain why making an utterance and not just raising my glass so drastically increased my chance of conveying the exact thought I intended to.⁴ This contribution is one of the reasons for which language is such an interesting study and the topic of my essay is therefore to consider the particular way linguistic expressions provide evidence for an interlocutor in a communicative situation.

¹ Dummett, 1978/1993, p. 96.

² Linguistic communication is of course not restricted to utterances, but indeed includes writing. Throughout this thesis I will only be concerned with utterances, but without the intention of claiming that utterances are in any sense superior to written linguistic communication. I take it that the claims I make about utterances also can be made about writing, yet I do not consider whether there might be relevant differences that should be accounted for within a theory of communication.

³ This familiar case of raising one’s glass is much discussed by Sperber and Wilson, see for instance their 2004.

⁴ That language is a crucial feature for human rational activity in general, as Dummett emphasised “[t]he use of language is [...] the rational activity *par excellence*” (1993, p.104). Also note Dummett’s commitment to language as the sort of thing that enables the human species to reach a level of sophistication in its thoughts that is unavailable to it without language possession (1989/1993), which is a further issue about the relationship between language and thought. In other words, Sperber and Wilson only commit to communication being more sophisticated while a large portion of the philosophical tradition thinks that our capacity for thought itself is drastically developed by the acquisition of language. In fact, Davidson (1975) goes even further than Dummett and takes it that only a linguistically competent being can have the capacity of thought, as it were.

In this essay my emphasis will be on interpretation and not on production⁵. The proposal is that a semantic theory has a vital role to play within what we can call a theory of interpretation. On my view, semantics should account for the linguistic expressions by specifying their contribution to utterance interpretation; or, to be more precise, by specifying their meaning. Linguists, psychologists and cognitive scientists in general are all involved in explaining communication, but philosophers can give their own contribution by providing an analysis of and deeper understanding of meaning. Within a theory of interpretation pragmatics plays a major role in understanding how an interpreter arrives at the intended meaning of an utterance, and the question of what is the right pragmatic theory is thus crucial. I do not aim at assessing any particular pragmatic theory in this thesis⁶, but I aim to defend the importance of semantics in a theory of communication. As we shall see, the borderline between semantics and pragmatics is not as clear-cut as we could hope for and as a result my discussion will place itself at the interface between semantics and pragmatics. In the subsequent sections I will explore reasons for why the semantics-pragmatics distinction has been, and indeed still is, much debated.

Code and inference

In a very simple code model of language we could imagine that each expression or sign of the language is correlated with one and only one thought or concept.⁷ That would make interpretation a matter of “translating” the code conveyed by the speaker into the correct interpretation, which basically just identifies the code with a coded message or copy that is stored in the interpreters mind. Such a simplistic account of language could maybe provide a semantic theory that would be easily comprehensible since semantics would simply have the role of cataloguing the one-to-one relation between a word and a concept.⁸ It is more and

⁵ This asymmetry in focus seems to be quite common. It has recently been criticized by Hornsby (2004).

⁶ Even so, the reader may notice an inclination to defend a pragmatic theory of the kind Bach proposes (see for instance Bach 1994a) and which in many respects are similar to Relevance Theory as proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986/95) and Carston (2002).

⁷ When I talk about ‘thoughts’ this is identified with propositions (with Frege’s conception of ‘Gedanke’ as the philosophical starting point). Concepts are constituents of a proposition, and for instance Sperber and Wilson (1986/95) takes concepts to be fodorian metarepresentations, i.e. when we hear a word the mental representation is the concept. Note that Frege (1918/97) warned against such “psychological” approaches.

⁸ For a more elaborated account of code models versus inferential models of language see for instance Sperber and Wilson (chapter 1 ‘Communication’, 1986/95).

more broadly acknowledged that language is more complex and flexible and does not work the way the simplistic code model predicts that it should. In order to see this, consider utterances of the following sentences:

- (1) They saw her duck.
- (2) Each minute a man is robbed in New York City.

There is semantic information encoded in these utterances, but this alone does not seem to suffice for an interpretation of what the speaker meant by making them. In case (1), for example, there is multiple ambiguity and reference ambivalence. What an interpreter need to do is to assign a reference to what is meant by ‘they’ and ‘her’. But even so, there would still be some alternative interpretations available depending on how one is to treat ‘duck’. If it is a noun, the interpretation could be that some group of people saw the duck owned by a certain female. If it is a verb phrase the interpretation would be that as Wilson puts it, “[t]he witnesses to a bank robbery saw the bank clerk bend her head to avoid a bullet.” (Wilson, 2007) The ambiguity in interpretation of (2) concerns whether there is a different man that is robbed every minute or whether ‘a man’ should be interpreted as ‘one single man’ such that it is one poor individual who is suffering the fate of being robbed every minute. Or as the pun goes: Each minute a man is robbed in New York City. We are going to interview him tonight. Thus the simple code model is insufficient for explaining utterance interpretation.

The flexibility of language seems to be one of its essential features, and because of this feature, interpreters need to consider not only linguistic information and they also need to make inferences in order to arrive at an interpretation. The benefit is, of course, that one no longer needs to codify everything one wants to convey and that one can succeed in communicating a thought without making it fully explicit. Just how and by what means interlocutors engage in such an inferential process will not be the main topic of interest here since that is part of a pragmatic theory, but it will be touched upon when needed to illuminate the tasks of semantics. What we must be aware of, however, is that it often takes more to arrive at the intended interpretation than considering the information that is encoded in the linguistic cues, and that by considering additional non-linguistic information the contribution of the linguistic cues may vary so as to yield different interpretations. For now I will refer to the study of the non-linguistic cues as belonging to the pragmatic side of the theory of interpretation. There is a range of cases where there can be pragmatic intrusion into

the content of what we would report the speaker as having said, and so the question that I will pursue is how, if at all, we are able to isolate the semantic information and thus separate the linguistic cues from the non-linguistic cues.

Meaning and interpretation

The project of accounting for the linguistic cues in communication is epistemological in character. The overall aim is to understand what it takes for language users to communicate complex thoughts by using language. Similar projects have been undertaken by Michael Dummett and by Donald Davidson.⁹ My point of departure in undertaking a similar project will be Kent Bach's claim that we need to operate with a purely semantic notion of what is said by an utterance in order "to account for the linguistically determined input to the hearer's inference to what, if anything, the speaker intends to be conveying in uttering the sentence." (Bach, 2001, p.15) The notion of what is said refers to a level of meaning that is, in Grice's initial formulation (1989), distinct from the sentence meaning on the one hand and what is implied on the other. The notion 'what is said' and the claim that it must be held purely semantics will be considered in detail in the subsequent chapters, but in order to do that we must first get a clearer conception of the role of semantics in a theory of interpretation.

Semantics and pragmatics are notions that, at least in Bach's terms, deal with different kinds of information used in communication. In general, Bach applies the semantics-pragmatics distinction to the information available to language users. Semantic information is, according to him, linguistic information while pragmatic information is extra-linguistic information (1999b, p.2-3). For Bach, it is important that the semantics-pragmatics distinction is made in terms of the information available to the interpreter and not in terms of the actual stages in an interpretation process that an interlocutor undergoes. Hence, there is no claim that a semantic recovery of meaning has any priority in a sequential account of the inference process. There are in addition a number of other distinctions to which the semantics-pragmatics label can be applied. Bach (1999b, p.2) provides a list that is helpful to repeat in full. The distinctions are:

⁹ See for instance Dummett (1978/93), Davidson (1965;1967).

Type vs. token

Sentence vs. utterance

Meaning vs. use

Context-invariant vs. context-sensitive meaning

Linguistic vs. speaker meaning

Literal vs. non-literal use

Saying vs. implying

Content vs. force

Bach says that these distinctions are useful in shedding light on the difference between semantics and pragmatics in the sense that any such distinction should respect these dichotomies although without being taken to coincide perfectly with any of them (1999b, p.2). As we shall see, several of these distinctions are relevant for discussing the borders between semantics and pragmatics.

A semantic theory will here be conceived as a part of a theory of interpretation but we should bear in mind that the overall epistemological project can be distinguished from a more metaphysically oriented project which aims to account for what makes an expression have the meaning it has. Stephen Neale draws attention to this difference when he says that we should make sure to distinguish between “[t]he metaphysical question concerning what *determines* (or fixes) what A [the speaker] means and the epistemological question concerning what is used by others to *identify* what A means” (2005 p.180). When Bach claims that what is said needs to be held purely semantic he restricts it to account for the meaning of sentences, i.e. to the content of the utterance which is metaphysically grounded in the semantic meaning of the sentence. Language users, or linguistic agents, use sentences in order to convey what they intend, but as Bach claims, there seems to be no straightforward way to go from the meaning of sentences to the meaning generated as the intended meaning by speakers. The semantic theory, in Bach’s sense and as I will take it here, is therefore connected to determining (in the sense of constituting) the meaning of sentences and not on how speakers determine (in the sense of ascertaining) the meaning of an utterance. We can therefore call the semantic project a theory of meaning and the pragmatic project a theory of interpretation. The former can be seen as a metaphysical project and the latter an epistemological project. As I will take it, the metaphysical project serves a role in the

epistemological project since the meaning of sentences is, as Bach says, the linguistic input into interpretation.¹⁰

When we are considering the meaning of sentences, as I will in this thesis, we could call that *compositional semantics*, while we could call considerations about what makes a word mean what it does *lexical semantics*. The sentence's semantics will be taken to be compositional because, as Bach says, "Semantics is the part of grammar that pairs forms with meanings. Presumably the meaning of a sentence is determined compositionally by the meanings of its constituents as a function of its syntactic structure." (2004, p.28) As we shall see later, this compositional account fits nicely with the constraint Bach puts upon what is said (i.e. the syntactic correlation constraint¹¹). The notion of what is said so understood captures the way word meaning and the syntax of a sentence work together in a sentence uttered to restrict the interpretations available. Or to use Neale's words, "[a] semantic theory for a language will explain how the syntactic structure of a sentence (or a sentence fragment) X and the meanings of the individual words in X conspire to constrain what speakers can say using X." (2005, p.189) From this picture we understand that there is an asymmetry between semantic and pragmatic information, and it might even make it seem as if there is a huge gap between a theory of interpretation and a theory of meaning. The connection is that the semantic information of a sentence is always a relevant cue for the interlocutor in any context of utterance, and what sentences mean restricts the available interpretations of the utterances of them.

Before we engage in any further elaboration of the semantic notion of what is said I think it will be useful to take a step back and look at how the discussion of semantics and pragmatics has evolved over the years in philosophy and linguistics, and try to pin down just how the debate about representation and explanation of meaning has its beginning in two diametrically opposing camps in the philosophy of language.

¹⁰ This connection seems to be acknowledged by Dummett as he says that "A semantic theory is not a complete meaning-theory but only a preliminary outline sketch of one; and it cannot be judged correct or incorrect until it has been expanded into a meaning-theory which displays the connection between the meanings of the sentences, as represented by the theory, and the practice of using the language." (Dummett, 1991, p.18)

¹¹ The constraint will be introduced in chapter 2.

Philosophical and linguistic background

Charles Morris (1938) introduced the notions of semantics and pragmatics alongside syntax (or originally, ‘syntactics’) in his tripartite distinction of the different domains of theoretical linguistics. The third notion, syntax, will not be of much concern here and when the notion is used it refers simply to the grammatical rules of language; in other words, it denotes the way simple expressions are combined in complex expressions.¹²

Semantics and pragmatics are described by Morris as follows: “Semantics deals with the relation of signs to their designate and so to the objects which they may or do denote.” (1938, p.21) And pragmatics deals with “the relation of signs to interpreters.” (1938, p.6) This initial formulation helps a little bit when it comes to understanding the distinction, but not more than that. We understand that semantics is something that concerns the relation between the language and the world, while pragmatics takes us a step into the field of language in use. What Morris’s formulation does not tell us is what the relationship between the two domains is and how they are applied in order to give an account of interpretation and communication.

Of course, ever since Morris’s original demarcation between semantics and pragmatics his distinction has been under dispute. Linguists and philosophers who tend to stress different aspects of theoretical linguistics have offered a variety of alternative formulations of the distinction. Just consider the two following formulations, both of which represent influential perspectives, and notice how radically they differ in emphasising different aspects of the field: Robert Stalnaker, for instance, writes that “Syntax studies sentences, semantics studies propositions. Pragmatics is the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed.”(1972, p.383) While Jerrold Katz, on the other hand, draws “the theoretical line between semantic interpretation and pragmatic interpretation by taking the semantic component to properly represent only those aspects of the meaning of the sentence that an ideal speaker-hearer of the language would know in an anonymous letter situation, [where there is] no clue whatever about the motive, circumstances of transmission, or any other

¹²The borderline between syntax and semantics is also an area of debate, mostly among linguistics. Neale (2005) has pointed out that *binding* “shows that a sharp division between syntax and semantics is illusory” (p. 189). A proponent of a strict limit between the two domains is Newmeyer, see for instance *Language Forms and Language Function* (1998).

factor relevant to understanding the sentence on the basis of its context of utterance.” (1977, p.14)¹³ What should strike us is the fact that while Stalnaker puts emphasis on propositions as the object that semantics studies while Katz stresses a “context-free” utterance – if that is what we can call the “anonymous letter situation” – as the aspects of meaning that are relevant for semantics. We will later see how both these aspects turn up as concerns in Bach’s notion of semantics and how they are in conflict, but for now it suffices for us to notice how much theorists can and do in fact differ when they are asked to delineate their field of research. Later I will come back to how Bach’s notion of semantics relate to these formulations.

Another way to shed light on these controversies is to look at two different and opposing traditions in the history of philosophy of language, namely the so-called ordinary language philosophy and the ideal language philosophy. The core issue of dispute between these traditions concerns the correct way to think about the nature of language: is it to be cashed out primarily in terms of and in virtue of our use of it or has the language a more abstract structure to it? Both semantics and pragmatics try to account for the meaning of language expressions or utterances, but the semantic level of meaning seems closer to how the ideal language philosophers accounted for meaning while pragmatic meaning is more tied up to language use, which was emphasised by the ordinary language philosophers. The difference between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning might thus be understood to have its origin in these opposing traditions.

Briefly put, the history of ideal language philosophy starts when pioneering philosophers like Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell begun their studies of natural language almost as a mere by-project of their main research programme in logic and the philosophy of mathematics that aimed at analysing mathematics in terms of logic.¹⁴ Furthermore, Alfred Tarski’s studies of truth (1944) became the foundation for analysing meaning in terms of truth-conditions, which was famously initiated and undertaken by Donald Davidson (1965; 1967) with the aim of applying its methodology to the scientific study of natural languages. Study of language was thus not restricted to mere formal and scientific discourse, as was the case for Russell,

¹³ Both quotations occur in Bach (1999b).

¹⁴ See for instance the classic works Frege (1892/1997; 1879/1997) and Russell (1903).

Frege, and, at least to some extent, Tarski. Whether Davidson's programme of natural language semantics could be successful has been a matter of great controversy. Tarski noticed the vagueness of language and, as a consequence, its resistance to systematic and precise specification in his work on the semantics of 'truth', but he took his claim to be generalized so that it concerns "any other word of everyday language" (Tarski, 1944, p.138). W.V.O Quine (1960) and similar observations to undermine and argue against any prospect of having a serious scientific investigation that could specify meaning in a precise manner thus disputing to some degree the scientific status of natural language semantics. Davidson, on the other hand, was more optimistic and thought that these difficulties could be resolved.¹⁵ At any rate, in this tradition semantics has been perceived as a more or less formal concern where meaning is ascribed to declarative sentences – in artificial or natural languages – in terms of truth-conditions.

In the opposite camp, the so-called ordinary language philosophers proposed a somewhat different perspective claiming that semantic properties, such as meaning, reference and truth, cannot and should not be ascribed to linguistic expressions in abstraction from their use. Some of the philosophers that have been said to endorse such a view are J.L. Austin, H. Paul Grice, Peter Strawson and John Searle, and it is commonplace to point back to their theoretical predecessor, Ludwig Wittgenstein, as the father of this philosophical movement since he was the one who formulated what has often been quoted as the slogan of the ordinary language philosophy, namely that "Meaning is use" (1953/67).¹⁶

As Austin (1956) pointed out, many utterances are perfectly meaningful even though they are not necessarily utterances of declarative sentences. He circumscribed and labelled such utterances as a special class called *performative* utterances. Searle (1975) described and gave a more elaborate taxonomy of a variety of such performative utterances or *speech acts* by

¹⁵ The difference between Davidson and Quine is one about the nature of language itself and not so much the interest or level of scientific importance put on natural languages. Quine thought that any precise semantics of, say English, would misrepresent the language precisely because meaning is naturally vague, ambiguous and paradoxical. Quine therefore conceived himself as providing a scientifically respectable reconstruction of the notion of meaning rather than a mere description (Quine 1960; Lepore and Ludwig 2005, p.2). In contrast Davidson thought it was possible to precisely describe and give the meaning of natural language expressions and sentences in English thereby illuminating our ordinary concept of meaning. Davidson himself describes the difference between him and Quine as follows: "Like Quine, I am interested in how English and languages like it (i.e. all languages) work, but, unlike Quine, I am not concerned to improve on it or change it. (I am the conservative and he is the Marxist here.)" (Davidson 1985, p.172)

¹⁶ The slogan should be taken for what it is, a slogan, since Wittgenstein's theory (or theories) of language is of course more sophisticated than what it comes down to in the slogan.

making distinctions between for instance promises (or commissives in general, like ‘I shall’, ‘I can’, ‘I will’), questions, directives (like ‘Get the bread!’), and expressives (like ‘Congratulations’, ‘Apologize’). Arguably, the meaning of such performative utterances or speech acts cannot be given solely in terms of truth-conditions.¹⁷ In addition to this taxonomy of various speech acts, we often make utterances that contain just a single word, a phrase, or just a fragment of a sentence. Such subsentential (or non-sentential) utterances cannot, or so it is argued, be ascribed a truth-condition from the linguistic evidence alone.¹⁸

In some sense we could say that ordinary language philosophers have won the battle. Although the claim ‘meaning is use’ would still be seen as very radical – not to mention, implausible – if understood literally as saying that the meaning of a sentence is wholly determined by how it is used¹⁹, it seems today as if considerations about the contexts of use is something that one cannot keep out of serious semantic theory about natural languages. On the other hand, some of the virtues that were traditionally held and defended by the ideal language philosophers still influence the debate, such as the search for a systematic account of semantic meaning. The latter stands out clearly in Stalnaker’s writings when he says (in a continuation of the above quote) that, “It is a semantic problem to specify the rules for matching up sentences of a natural language with the propositions that they express” (1972, p.383). Furthermore, the goal in much of the literature of ascribing meaning or content in terms of truth-conditions must be seen as a residual, maybe even an enduring legacy of the logical nature of language stressed by the ideal language philosophers.²⁰

My inquiries into this debate will mostly be following in the footsteps of the ideal language philosophers in the sense that I will mainly be concerned with utterances of declarative

¹⁷ See Davidson (1979) for an attempt at explaining the linguistic meaning of non-declarative sentences strictly within truth-conditional semantics.

¹⁸ Subsential utterances will not be given a detailed treatment in this essay, but I will briefly return to such utterances in chapter 4. Stainton is at the forefront on research on subsentential utterance. See for instance Stainton (1995).

¹⁹ A strict interpretation of ‘meaning is use’ would for instance create problems for explaining within a compositional account of language that a language seem to have an infinite number of meaningful sentences due to recursive devices such as ‘and’ and ‘but’. Yet only a finite number of them have and will ever be used, but we would still claim that they have meaning.

²⁰ I will not go into details about any specific proposal for how a truth-conditional semantic theory should be formulated. The key idea of truth-conditional semantics is to specify the meaning of sentences in terms of the axioms of truth-theory for the language which satisfies certain constraints (Lepore and Ludwig, 2007, p. 4). In order to challenge the possibility of truth-conditional semantics, we need only show that their main assumption, i.e. that we semantically can determine propositions, fails.

sentences, which are paradigmatically characterized in terms of the speech act of asserting. On the other hand, I will nod in the direction of the tradition of ordinary language philosophy by questioning the possibility of giving the meaning of even declarative sentences in terms of truth-conditions. Now, let us end this chapter by returning to the question about the role of semantics in a theory of communication.

Semantics in communication

As we have seen, we must take semantics to be complementary to pragmatics in our pursuit of understanding just how interlocutors arrive at the intended utterance interpretation. While the contribution of pragmatics clearly is needed in order to account for communication – after all, pragmatics concerns the speaker’s intentions, the context of utterance and the inference process that a hearer undergoes – the motivation for bringing in semantics in a theory of communication is easier to question. Thus we should ask what it is that semantics contributes that pragmatics cannot. In this section I will address this question and I will seek to defend one important role for semantics in a theory of communication by elaborating on some observations and claims put forward by Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore.

If the goal of semantics is to account for the linguistic meaning of items serving as input for the inference processes an interlocutor undergoes then we might say that the aim of semantics is to somehow capture the role of “language itself”. That is to say, we take items in a language to have meaning independently of use and that we *qua* theorists can specify those meanings independently of the contextual information that an interlocutor will need to use in order to determine (ascertain) the meaning of an utterance. In other words, what we want semantics to describe and explain are the repeatable and stable contributions of linguistic expressions in any utterance, i.e. to provide the encoded content that can be thought of as the point of departure in linguistic communication. We could therefore argue that the semantics-pragmatics distinction is to be drawn between what is stable and what is variable in the language and maybe we can use these broad characterizations to formulate an explanatory norm or adequate test for semantic theorizing. Within this framework we might be able to explain communication as the act of conveying something variable on the basis of the stable semantic content.

In less general terms, we can look at how Cappelen and Lepore's account of *shared content* is a proposal along these lines. Their point is that language users in general do not need to share an identical (or relevantly identical) contextual background in order to have successful communication. What Cappelen and Lepore want to emphasise by this is the fact that competent language users are able to communicate with other people with an "overwhelming range of differences (in perceptual inputs, interests, cognitive processing, background assumptions, conversational contexts, goals, sense of relevance)" (Cappelen and Lepore, 2006, p.1021). Being able to isolate the linguistic properties that enable such communication across different contexts would be a great virtue of any semantic theory, and it seems that an account of how this is possible would have interdisciplinary significance to all parts of science where communicative interaction and interpretation take part. In this sense, semantics is safeguarded and plays an important role in communicative theory.

Cappelen and Lepore's claim is that in such cross context communication the language users still share content and they want to explain this by appeal to the existence of some stable semantic features of utterances. I agree that this perspective on communication should be, as they say, at "the forefront of any reflection on communication" (2006, p.1021), and so I will elaborate some of the founding idea behind their argument from shared content. Let me briefly illustrate their point with the help of one of Cappelen and Lepore's own examples. Consider that Venus utters the following sentence

(3) Serena is really smart.

There is a sense in which we can understand what Venus said, namely *that Serena is really smart*, and this can be repeated in different contexts²¹ as well as reported by using indirect quotation:

(4) Venus said that Serena is really smart.

Cappelen and Lepore say that "What's puzzling is how you can achieve all this without extensive knowledge of the contextually salient aspects of Venus' original utterance of (1)[our (3)]" (2005, p.1021). According to the intuitive idea behind shared content, there is a

²¹ The claim is that the contexts must be "relevantly different". Cappelen and Lepore define 'relevantly different contexts' roughly as when the features of the context that fix the values of an utterance do not overlap between to speakers (2006, p.1024).

sense in which speakers have said the same thing when using the same sentence even though their contexts of utterance may radically differ from one another. At the same time, there is a sense in which two utterances of (3) can be said to express different proposition by using the same string of words. For instance, Venus can assert that Serena is a really smart tennis player by using (3) in one context, at the same time, as Cappelen and Lepore put it, she may in a context “where the topic is astute negotiators in professional sports, say that Venus is a really smart negotiator” (2006, p.1022). What is linguistically present in the two utterances encode the same information and is therefore stable, but the proposition expressed may well differ since it depends on the specific context of utterance.²²

I share Cappelen and Lepore’s belief that semantics should be able to explain just what the stable contribution of a sentence that is used in different contexts is. In what follows, we should therefore keep in mind the question whether Bach’s notion of what is said is able to account for the stable features of language and shared content.^{23,24}

Concluding remarks

Linguistic communication is beyond doubt a special feature about human nature. The ways we go about it so successfully seems, at least in part, to depend upon our ability to grasp the meaning of linguistic expressions. Yet, there is no simple strategy for determining what is meant by an utterance from the encoded meaning of a sentence. A division of labour between semantics and pragmatics would be beneficial for the goal of understanding how humans succeed in communicating given the special contribution of language. In due course of this essay, I will provide further reasons for why semantics needs to be restricted to only concern the stable meaning of linguistic expressions in order to assure that semantics has an autonomous role in a theory of interpretation. I will show that it follows from this that the

²² Sperber and Wilson call the stable content “the common core of meaning” (1995/1986 p. 9).

²³ Cappelen and Lepore claim that the stable semantic content must be propositional, but, as we shall see, that is not what will be proposed as a candidate semantic content in this thesis.

²⁴ I take the notion of propositional radicals or other metaphorical labels for what a sentence express when it does not express a proposition (like propositional fragments, propositional skeletons, propositional templates, gappy proposition etc), to refer to whatever the content is when it is not a proposition. Given the only metaphysics of propositions that I will assume in this essay, namely that they are things that are true or false, there might not be something that is just in some degree a proposition, i.e. something that only to some degree is true or false. Likewise, whenever I use the notion ‘full

semantic meaning of sentences (the compositional meaning) cannot be given in terms of truth-conditions.

The first thing that needs to be done is to introduce the notion of 'what is said' in order to consider its role in a theory of interpretation, and then we can encounter Bach's suggestion of how to isolate the linguistic information in an utterance. Bach claims that it needs to be held purely semantic in order to serve the role of accounting for the linguistic information available to an interlocutor.

proposition' I do not assume that there are propositions that can be, so to say, fuller than other proposition. The addition of 'full' is only a helpful device in order to avoid confusing propositions and propositional radicals, minimal proposition etc.

2. What is said

The utterance does not carry its literalness on its sleeve.

Kent Bach²⁵

In this chapter I will introduce and consider the notion of what is said. As we shall see, Bach's use of this notion diverges from how Grice initially thought of it and this difference seems to be due to the explanatory role what is said is thought to serve. It seems right, or so I will argue, that Bach's notion of what is said isolates a level of meaning distinct from the proposition expressed by an utterance. It may be objected that what is said and semantics so understood will lose its significance for a theory of interpretation. This would be a serious objection because we would seem to have failed to explain the special contribution of language in linguistic communication. I will argue that the role of semantics and its theoretical significance is justified when comparing what is said with what is meant by an utterance.

Paul Grice

Paul Grice will be important for our discussion since Bach endorses several aspects of his view. For this reason, I will begin this chapter by introducing some of Grice's basic ideas. As noted above, Grice is often seen as belonging to the tradition of ordinary language philosophers. This is so mainly because he studies natural language and communication, and because he acknowledges and emphasises the role of speaker's intentions in communication. Because of the latter he is in many ways the starting point for the whole field of pragmatics. Grice searched for a systematic account of the relation between what a given expression means and what the use of that expression may convey or communicate. If we are to have linguistic communication as our research topic, the challenge for linguists and philosophers of language is not only to appropriately describe the roles of semantics and pragmatics, but also to describe how they interact. Grice's work seems to take us in the right direction.

²⁵ Bach 1999b.

The main theoretical contribution by Grice that is relevant for this thesis is his widely accepted tripartite distinction between different levels of meaning. This is often referred to as the *basic triad* of meaning where Grice distinguished between ‘sentence meaning’, ‘what is said’ (by use of the sentence), and ‘what is implicated’ (from the use of the sentence in the specific sentence).²⁶ Together these three levels form what Grice takes to be “the total significance of an utterance”, or “what is meant” by an utterance (Grice, 1989, p.41 and p.118). Some preliminary clarifications of these terms will be given in what follows, but it is mainly the significance of and disputes over the notion of what is said that will be our concern and which will be elaborately discussed in this essay.

The distinction between the three levels can be explained with the help of an example: Suppose my colleague Eline and I are talking about a forthcoming philosophy conference and discussing whether or not it will be any good. Now assume that I utter the following:

(5) Tim is coming.

Intuitively, by uttering (5) I have expressed the proposition that Tim is coming to the conference, and so in Grice’s terms what is said by (5) should be *that Tim is coming to the conference*, since that is the proposition the speaker should be taken to express given the context of utterance. Furthermore, I might also succeed in implying something along the lines of that the conference will be good since we are both well aware of the fact that Tim always gives very good talks. It is clear that implying this is a matter of pragmatics since the implication arises from the context of utterance as a result of our mutual knowledge and not as a result of the stable contribution provided by the linguistic items and their mode of combination alone. It is, after all, nothing encoded in (5) which entails that since Tim is coming to the conference it will be good.

At the other end of the triad we find the sentence meaning, which is the encoded information of a sentence. In a compositional framework we can say that it is given by the meaning of the components of the sentence, i.e. the individual words and phrases, and their mode of combination given by the syntactic rules or principles that govern the language in question. In order to give the sentence meaning of (5), we do not need to know anything about the

²⁶ In addition to the basic triad of meaning Grice also included the level of word meaning (1989, p.117).

context of utterance. The sentence meaning is the stable meaning encoded in the sentence *type* and it need not even be uttered to have the meaning it has. That language should be like this finds an intuitive appeal in the productivity of language, i.e. the fact that natural languages have an infinite number of sentences because they contain recursive devices such as conjunction and disjunction.²⁷ For if a language is productive in this respect, there are an infinite number of sentences that never have and never will be used, but yet we would want to maintain that these sentences have meaning. In order to see this, the reader may pick, say, any three sentences in this paragraph and combine them with the help of a preferred recursive device. By iterating this process the result will be a new sentence highly unlikely to have ever been uttered before. The sentence meaning is thus supposed to capture some stable features of the language and not anything that arises from an actual utterance of the sentence. On that basis, the level of sentence meaning is understood to be semantic on the above favoured sense of semantics.

For Grice, what is said is the proposition expressed by an utterance. Even though Grice himself did not employ the terms semantics and pragmatics it is fairly uncontroversial to take them to correspond roughly with his notions of ‘what is said’ and ‘what is implied’, respectively. But this does not fit with the way we described semantics above, namely as something that concerns not the meaning that an interpreter arrives at, but the meaning that a sentence (or expression) has; i.e. where semantics is relevant for the narrower metaphysical project of meaning and not the epistemological project of providing a theory of interpretation. Grice’s notion of what is said corresponds to the proposition expressed by an utterance and since an interpreter often need to invoke contextual information in order to determine this proposition – which is something that Grice himself acknowledged – it seems as if the notion of what is said should be understood to be a pragmatic notion on our account of the semantics-pragmatics distinction. As a result, semantics, rather than being the sole determinant of content, is reduced to playing only a part at best. The question thus arises how Bach can defend a notion of what is said that is strictly a matter of semantic.

²⁷ This is what Chomsky calls the “creative” aspect of language. According to Chomsky, Otto Jespersen in his *Philosophy of Grammar* was one of the first linguists in the previous century to make this crucial observation about language when he stressed the notion of “free expression” (1977, p.156).

Bach argues, on the one hand, not only that we could have a purely semantic notion of what is said, but also that we actually need such a notion in order to account for the linguistic information available to the interlocutor. On the other hand, however, he argues that the proposition expressed by an utterance is a pragmatic issue where semantics can only be a part of the explanation of how an interlocutor determine (in the sense of ascertaining) what is meant by an utterance. This idea is at the heart of Bach's position, and is this idea I want to pursue in this essay and eventually explain and assess.

My main objective is to account for the semantic level, but let me briefly say something about implicatures in Grice's account first so that we can see how the level of what is said, whether it is semantic or not, relates to the total significance of an utterance. Grice introduced the term 'implicature' so as to distinguish this level of content from what is logically implied or entailed by an utterance. Grice showed that some words seem to contribute to the meaning of an utterance, even though they cannot belong to what is said. An instance of this is when one uses 'but' instead of 'and' in a clause, like in the following sentences:

(6) She is young and strong.

(7) She is young but strong.

According to Grice, this swap of words does not affect what is said. The reason for that is that the proposition expressed does not change its truth-value in these two utterances since both 'but' and 'and' is analysed as the same connective, namely as having the truth-functional role of a conjunction familiar from sentential logic. Yet, one clearly finds the 'tone' or what is conveyed in (6) to be rather different from (7). There is a sense in which it seems that (7) announces a discrepancy between being young and being strong which isn't present in (6). Instead of seeing this as part of what is said Grice claimed that this is a case of *conventional implicature*.

On the other hand, we have implicatures that arise from the conversational setting or context in which the utterance takes place. To take Grice's famous example (1989, p.33): a Professor is asked to give a letter of recommendation for a philosophy student who is applying for a job and writes that the student has nice handwriting. It appears that there is an implicature to the effect that the student in question is no good at doing philosophy. That is an example of a conversational implicature, which are implications that arise, according to Grice, from the

breaking of norms or maxims of conversation added together with information in the context of utterance. One significant difference between conventional and conversational implicature is that the conversational type can be cancelled, while conventional implicature cannot. What this means is that if we take the above conversational implicature, the Professor may very well deny that he means that the student is no good a philosophy thereby cancelling the implication. When it comes to the example of conventional implicature, however, it seems unreasonable for a speaker to claim that 'but' was just used as an ordinary conjunction. I will return to this feature and how cancelability may be a way of testing whether a certain level of meaning is semantic or not in the next section. We will not need to develop Grice's view any further here, but only notice that it is the origin of a popular and important account on how we might distinguish between different levels of meaning concerning utterance interpretation. I will now move on to consider how Bach's notion of what is said diverges from that of Grice in order to consider the theoretical significance of it.

Saying does not entail meaning

Bach employs what is said as a notion that aims at capturing the linguistic input or information in the comprehension process of interlocutors. At the same time he diverges from Grice since he "refines" what is said in several ways so that it can serve this purpose. As we have seen, in Grice's usage (and many others after him) what is said is thought to be tantamount to the proposition a speaker expresses in making an utterance. This makes what is said equivalent to what is stated by an utterance. Bach's way of using the notion diverges importantly from that of Grice in that, according to Bach, "saying something doesn't entail meaning it" (Bach, 2001, p.18). In this section I will explain what this slogan means and its theoretical import for Bach.

When Bach is claiming that saying does not entail meaning he distinguishes between, on the one hand, the speech act that a speaker does by a saying, i.e. that one actually states something by uttering a declarative sentence; and, on the other hand, the mere saying of that

sentence²⁸. This distinction between mere saying and the speech act one performed by so doing is drawn in accordance with Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary (speech) acts. Austin (1962) famously made this distinction in order to distinguish between "saying something and doing something in saying it" (Bach, 2005, p.25). For Grice the notion of what is said seems to be tantamount to that of an illocutionary act, which means that what is said by a declarative sentence is the same as what the speaker states. In other words, for Grice the content or the proposition expressed is made explicit on the level of what is said, just as we saw in example (5). In contrast, Bach uses the notion of what is said in a manner correlative to Austin's notion of a locutionary act. In Austinian terms this means that for Bach what is said is to be identified with the locutionary act while what is meant is something one could do in saying something and thus to be identified with the illocutionary act. To put it differently: you mean what you state, but you don't have to mean what you say.

The need for such a distinction between saying and stating can be justified by general empirical considerations about how we use language. Bach roughly distinguishes between three categories of use that demonstrate the need to distinguish between saying and stating (Bach, 1994a, p.143-144)²⁹. I will consider all three in turn and provide some examples for each of them.

A speaker may say one thing and (intentionally) mean something else.

When using language non-literally, for instance in cases of irony and metaphor, we mean something different than the literal meaning of the sentence we in fact utter. Consider for instance, if you were to utter (8) below to a friend that has betrayed you:

(8) You are a fine friend.

Non-literal usage means that you could mean to convey something different from what you have literally said by uttering (8), namely something to the effect *that the person in question is not a fine friend*. In Bach's terms, you have still said that the person in question is a fine friend; you just did not mean it. Consequently, saying did not entail meaning in this case.

²⁸ The current discussion will be restricted to declarative sentences, but notice that we could have brought about the same distinction between saying and meaning in relation to other speech acts as well.

²⁹ In fact there are four categories in (Bach 2005) but the examples shown here are sufficient as they cover all four categories.

To this category, we may also add cases where someone means something more (or less) than they say. For instance, let us say that Ann is uttering the following sentence:

(9) I can't drive because I have had a drink.

What Ann means, and is often taken to mean, is *that she can't drive a car because she has had an alcoholic drink* and not just the literal meaning that she has been drinking a liquid of any kind like water or orange juice. What has happened is that the concept drink in (9) is narrowed from referring to any liquid that can be drunk to mean just alcoholic drinks. On the opposite side of the scale we also find that concepts can be broadened. So, for instance, if Ann says something like the following:

(10) France is hexagonal.

then she is usually not taken to mean what (10) literally means, namely *that France has the exact geometrically defined shape hexagonal*. The concept hexagonal is rather expanded upon and broadened to cover the shape France in fact has.³⁰ It should therefore be clear that in cases of narrowing and broadening the speaker says something, i.e. the literal meaning, without thereby meaning what she says. So Bach seems to be right that even though interpretation is aimed at what we take the speaker to mean the latter is often meaning on a different level from what was actually and literally uttered.

A speaker might not say what he intends to say (by some error either in the speaker, hearer, or both).

We all misspeak every once in a while. Famous examples of misspeaks arise from cases of malapropism and the following instance is taken from the play *The Rivals* (Sheridan, 1775). Here the main character, Mrs. Malaprop, utters to a comic effect the following:

(11) He is the very pineapple of politeness.

The speaker clearly does not mean what she in fact uttered; rather, we take her to mean that he is the very pinnacle of politeness. One would *prima facie* think that an utterance of (11) would make no sense, but as Davidson has pointed out in his study of malapropism, “[w]hat is interesting is the fact that in all these cases the hearer has no trouble understanding the

³⁰ For more on broadening and narrowing see for instance Wilson (2003) or Lasersohn (1999).

speaker in the way the speaker intends.” (Davidson, 1986, p.90) Interesting as these cases might be, in and of themselves, it suffices for us to notice that malapropisms also demonstrate that we need a distinction between what is literally said and what is stated in everyday cases of discourse.

A speaker might say something without intending to communicate anything at all.

To this category belong translations, reciting and rehearsals, according to Bach. Suppose, for instance, that Ann plays the role of Nora in Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* and she says the following line:

(12) Oh, Torvald, I don’t believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

Given that saying does not entail meaning, Ann does not need to mean *that she herself does not believe any longer in wonderful things happening*, although that is what she is literally saying.³¹ So even in such cases, it is rather intuitive that there is a distinction to be made between the mere saying and what a speaker means by an utterance.

There are additional cases to the three above that might equally well support a distinction between saying and meaning in the above elaborated sense. First, it might involve spontaneous utterances, like saying ‘Ouch!’ when hurting oneself. What is said here is not a declarative sentence, and thus lies outside the realms of this thesis, but it seems plausible that such examples may provide further reasons for accepting Bach’s claim that saying doesn’t entail meaning. In making a spontaneous utterance there is clearly something that is said, but it seems harder to claim that there is something that the speaker meant, especially if speaker meaning is determined by the communicative intuitions the speaker had in making that utterance. A second example may be when I in the midst of making pancakes repeat the ingredients over and over again so as to remember what to get from the cupboard: “flour, sugar, salt”. Even though this is not a complete sentence (although we might use a complete sentence for the same purpose), we can describe this as an occurrence of a saying without also claiming that the speaker was making a statement or was asserting something by employing Bach’s distinction between saying and meaning. It is not too hard to agree with

³¹ I’m leaving to one side the contribution of ‘Oh, Torvald’. In what way such *vocatives* contribute to the meaning is an interesting study, but will have to wait for another occasion. For an account of *vocatives*, see Predelli (2008).

these considerations since these are the kinds of usage that we often engage in, so arguably they show that it is possible to distinguish between saying and meaning.

One last proposal will be considered concerning the distinction between saying and meaning. On Bach's view, what a speaker means or states by making an utterance comes down to what the speaker intended to mean, and so the speaker is the final authority of that level of meaning (Bach, 1994a, p.144)³². That seems right because even when misunderstood the speaker is entitled to correct whoever did not get the interpretation right by saying something like "I did not mean that p, I meant that q". So a speaker might cancel the interpretation an interlocutor arrives at concerning the level of what was the speaker's intended meaning. When it comes to what is said, the speaker is not the final authority. For what is said is due to some "objective" fact about which words and expressions the speaker actually uttered.

From these considerations it seems to follow that we should say that when we experience a slip of the tongue or otherwise make a mistake what was in fact uttered is what is said by the utterance, i.e. its literal meaning including the mistaken words or phrases. For instance, when my boyfriend asks whether I want tea or coffee, I might due to some mistake – e.g. lack of concentration – say "coffee", although I was really thinking about tea and intending to convey that I wanted tea rather than coffee. I might not even realize my mistake until I'm given a cup of coffee. Then I will say something like, "oh, I wanted tea!" To my surprise he responds, "You said coffee", maybe adding, "How could I know that you really meant that you wanted tea?" Knowing that such mistakes sometimes happen I take it that my boyfriend heard me right and I give him the final authority about my saying. This does nothing to change, though, the fact that I meant that I wanted tea and spoke with the intention of conveying that wish. The mistake was in the performance. I said something wrong given my intention of conveying what I meant.

In order to sum up this comparison of Grice's with Bach's use of the notion what is said, we should notice that Bach claims he holds a Gricean notion of what is said (albeit a 'refined' one) and may therefore be accused of not sufficiently taking into account what Grice in fact

³² This is a genuinely Gricean point and it is in fact a controversial claim since some people, like Kripke etc, takes it that a speaker's intentions could fail to be executed by their saying something. These critics of Grice will take the utterance to semantically mean X at the same time as the speaker intended to say something different Y. Here I, much like Neale, may be said to conflate intended meaning with what's meant. Not obviously wrong, but not obviously correct either.

has to say about this notion. Bach refers for the most part to passages that emphasise how the notion is connected to our intuitive understanding of ‘say’. But in fact Grice expands on this characterization in *Logic and Conversation*, and there we clearly see how their understanding of ‘what is said’ diverges. Grice intends the use of ‘say’ to be “closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he [the speaker] has uttered” (Grice, 1989, p.25). It is important not to conflate what is said by what is implied by an utterance. This means that when we know the language in which an utterance is made but nothing about the context of utterance, then, assuming that one uses the language in a standard way and that the speaker is speaking literally, we can know what was said. Bach would agree in that what is said is close to the conventional meaning of the words, but that is only true on his notion of the term; when it comes to interpreting whether or not a sentence is meant to be interpreted literally or not is a pragmatic concern, hence the quoted passage in this chapter’s ingress quote. Yet, Bach and Grice agree on the possible underdetermination of what was said when that is understood as tantamount to the proposition expressed.

The divergence in Grice’s and Bach’s view can be understood by considering the different perspectives they take on what is said. While Grice takes what is said to be a notion that covers what hearers recognise of the proposition expressed by the speaker, i.e. as an epistemological notion, Bach seems to take it to cover what is actually meant by an utterance of a certain sentence, i.e. a metaphysical notion. This does not mean that Bach rejects the levels of meaning which Grice initially pointed to by distinguishing between what is said by an utterance and what is implied. Bach rather expands the basic triad to include one more level of meaning. In Bach (1994a) he introduces this as the notion of ‘implicatures’, which aims to cover a role tantamount to Grice’s what is said.³³ I will leave behind any further detailed considerations of these levels of meaning since they belong properly to the broader project of accounting for interpretation; rather, I will return to the significance of a semantic notion of what is said and our above discussion.

³³ Bach’s pragmatic theory covers four levels of meaning; sentence meaning, what is said, conversational implicatures and implicatures. Implicatures refer to, roughly, the proposition expressed by the utterance when it is taken literally but where pragmatic processes like completion and expansion is added to what is said. This notion is therefore much closer to being what a hearer would take the speaker to have expressed *literally*. Implicatures are tantamount to Grice’s conversational implicatures (Bach denies the existence of conventional implicatures), i.e. what is further implied by the utterance. Bach’s paper ‘Conversational Implicatures’ (1994b) is, I would say, the classic piece on this distinction. Sperber and Wilson (1986/95) and Carston (2002) operate with the distinction between ‘explicature’ and ‘implicature’, which seems close to being tantamount to Bach’s distinction between implicatures and implicatures. For a useful discussion see (Bach 2006/08).

I think we should endorse Bach's arguments that what is said is a level that can be distinguished from what is stated, or, more generally, what is meant by a speaker in making an utterance. However, we must then go on to address the question of what theoretical significance what is said, so understood, has. For it does not follow from it being possible to distinguish between two levels of meaning that it is also necessary to do so in a theory of communication. In other words, we need to investigate whether what is said must play the part in a theory of communication that Bach claims that it does, namely to account for the linguistic evidence available to interlocutors. If saying does not entail meaning, as we showed above, it seems that semantics – when taken to concern the level of saying – can be questioned with regard to its role in a theory of interpretation. In order to discuss that question I first need to introduce the way Bach represents what is said by an utterance.

Saying reports

A consequence of the above discussion, and of the range of cases supporting the distinction between saying and meaning, is that it seems reasonable to think that we can report a saying by indirect quotation in a way such that what is said diverges from what was meant by an utterance.³⁴ But here there is a problem about the terminology, and care needs to be taken when that notion is employed. The reason is that the commonsensical notion of saying seems to be used for both reporting what is meant, in the sense of stated or asserted and to report the exact string of words that was literally or explicitly uttered. We must first of all notice that Bach uses what is said to refer to the latter kind of indirect quotation rather than the former kind, i.e. to refer to the mere saying and not to what was meant by the saying of it. He also uses what I will refer to as the *IQ-formula* in order to represent what is said by an utterance. This means that what is said in some of the above utterances on Bach's terms would be reported like the following:³⁵

(5)_{IQ} Trine said that Tim is coming.

(10)_{IQ} Ann said that France is hexagonal.

³⁴ Other kinds of saying reports would be direct quotation, as in "Ann: France is hexagonal".

³⁵ Leaving aside questions about indexical expressions like 'he' for the present purpose.

(11)_{IQ} Mrs. Malaprop said that he is the very pineapple of politeness.

As we will see later, Bach uses the IQ-formula as a test or criterion for what goes into what is said. The semantic content of an utterance, which I have already outlined, does not need to be fully propositional. However, it needs to be possible to indirectly quote it by using the IQ-formula. Bach explicitly states the IQ-test as a way of deciding which elements of a sentence contributes to what is said:

IQ-test: An element of a sentence contributes to what is said in an utterance of that sentence if and only if there can be an accurate and complete indirect quotation of the utterance (in the same language) which includes that element, or a corresponding element, in the ‘that’-clause that specifies what is said. (Bach, 1999a, p.340)

This also serves as a criterion for which notions we can and must ascribe a contextual reference or value to, according to Bach; i.e. we can ascribe contextual reference or values semantically only to the notions that blocks an ‘accurate and complete’ representation of what is said by the IQ-formula. As Bach points out himself, the inclusion of the clause ‘or a corresponding element’ allows for this. If the IQ-formula works, it can also function as a test of *semantic* context-sensitivity. In other words, it is a requirement that the semantic content of an utterance, i.e. what is said, can be indirectly reported or quoted using that formula. Just how the assignment of contextual references or values is done and the question of which notions need such assignments will be considered in more detail in the subsequent chapters.³⁶ For now I will follow Bach’s practise of using the IQ-formula as in the examples above to represent what is said by an utterance.

Semantics in interpretation

The assumption that saying does not entail meaning confirms a fundamental thesis or insight that further governs the study of communication, namely that there is a gap between what is said and what is stated or meant by an utterance. Or, if you like, that there is a gap between semantic and pragmatic information. What is the significance of that claim for the role of

³⁶ In ‘The Myth of Conventional Implicature’ (1999a) Bach uses the IQ-test in an argument against the existence of conventional implicatures defending the claim that “propositions that are allegedly a conventional implicature is really part of what is said” (1999a, p. 365).

semantics in a theory of interpretation? For Bach, it implies that it is not possible to interpret the meaning of an utterance solely from what is said. According to him, the right interpretation of an utterance is always due to pragmatic considerations. The reason for this will become clearer as we move on to the next chapters, but from the outset we can see this by considering a simple example of how the communicated meaning can be cancelled. I'll spend the following section elaborating this point.

Bach, quoting Grice again, claims that, "any proposition that the speaker is communicating that is distinct from what he says is explicitly cancellable" (Grice, 1989, p.44, in Bach 2001, p.18). This is a general claim that is hard or impossible to demonstrate since we would need to show that this is the case for any utterance of every sentence in a given language. Yet it seems like a reasonable assumption to make given the weight of some intuitive examples. Consider the following: At a dinner party, Louise utters (13) in order to express the proposition that she wants to have another cup of tea:

(13) I will have another cup.

According to Bach, the proposition that she wants another cup of tea must be cancellable since the proposition is "distinct" or different from what was explicitly said. What is said can be represented as follows:

(13)_{IQ} Louise said that she wants another cup.

The question is whether Louise can cancel the proposition expressed. It seems at least intuitively that she could do something to that effect. Just consider the following: Louise might notice whilst speaking that the host is in fact out of tea and in a swift effort to save her host any embarrassment she may hastily add something to her utterance that explicitly cancels the proposition that she wants another cup of tea. For instance, she may add something that conveys that what she really wants is a cup of coffee by saying, "Coffee, that is." The general point should be that whatever the speaker originally meant by her utterance she may add something to it and thereby effectively cancel her original intention by intentionally obstructing or diverting the otherwise correct interpretation of her original communicative intention. What is important to notice is that by so doing her original intention can no longer be sustained. After all, it is in conflict with what she knows is possible for the hearer to interpret given that she has added something to her utterance. And

since what is meant is determined by the speaker's communicative intentions she no longer means by her utterance what she originally meant to convey. What is meant therefore changes as a result of the speaker's altered intentions whilst what she said remains the same. In that sense, what is meant is cancellable while what is said is not.

It is also possible to cancel the proposition the speaker is communicating when the speaker means to convey a conversational implicature by her utterance. This is in accordance with Grice's account of implicatures. So, for instance, if Marie utters the following to a colleague in a discussion about an upcoming conference:

(14) It is far too close to Christmas.

in order to express *that she is not going to that conference*, that proposition can be cancelled as what is meant by an utterance of (14). She might be asked whether she will come to the conference and say, maybe somewhat cowardly, that she will come and that she intended other implicatures by the utterance, say for instance that she thinks that the conference might not attract as much audience as it would have done if scheduled at another time of the year.

On the other hand, it seems as if what is said on Bach's view cannot be cancelled. Consider, for instance, if Marie, in order to convey that she is not coming to the conference, utters something like:

(15) I am not coming to the conference.

If what is meant by an utterance of (15) corresponds exactly to what she said and a colleague says in reply, "I heard that you are not going to the conference", Marie cannot just say, "I did not say that". Rather, she might get out of the mess by adding something to the effect that what is said is cancelled as her intended meaning since what is meant may perfectly well diverge from what is said. She might do something, like smiling or blinking her eye, to convey clearly that her comment was not to be taken literally. She could have meant it to be taken ironically or as a case of hyperbole, like people do when they threaten to move out of the country if so-and-so wins the election. The reason for this seems to be that there is nothing in the semantic content (what is said) of the utterance that prescribes or entails a specific interpretation. When the interpreted speaker meaning diverges from what is said that interpretation can be cancelled; and, furthermore, the speaker meaning can be cancelled even if it is the same as what is said by the utterance. We might state it differently by saying that

the cancellable interpretation is one that is available from what is said, but it is not necessary given by what is said by the utterance. If it had been necessary, then it could not have been cancelled.

Despite such disconnections between what is said and the intended meaning by an utterance, what is said is thought by Bach to play a significant role in determining communicated meaning. Since what is said does not entail what is meant, we could think that it contributes as a necessary premise in an inference that gives you the intended meaning along with other kinds of information drawn from the context of utterance. But that does not seem to be right since Bach also says the following:

Whether a speaker means exactly what he says, something else as well, or something else instead, clearly it is never part of the meaning of a sentence that on a particular occasion of use it is being used to communicate anything at all. That is something the hearer presumes from the fact that the speaker is uttering a sentence at all. (Bach and Harnish, 1979, p.7, in Bach, 2001, p.18).

In other words, what the speaker says cannot alone determine what, if anything, is communicated by an utterance.³⁷ Whether or not the utterance should be interpreted literally – i.e. whether it should be taken to express the proposition that is the literal meaning or the encoded meaning of a sentence before relativizing it to a context of utterance – is an inference the interlocutor needs to make on the basis of evidence or cues over and above the mere saying. Thus even if the default interpretation of an act of saying takes it to mean just what it literally means, the default reading is something that is only given inferentially and pragmatically to the interpreter. We must therefore understand the semantic information that Bach's notion of what is said is thought to capture as merely a vehicle for the interlocutor to work on in order to understand what the speaker is trying to convey.

It is beyond doubt a highly sophisticated vehicle for communication, but yet to claim that it is necessary is too strong. What is said by an utterance guides the interpreter to make an inference about the linguistic communicative act, but has no necessary entailments upon what is meant by the utterance. The hearer has to work out what was meant on the basis of what was said in addition to considerations about why the speaker said what he said. As

³⁷ Bach and Harnish (1979) call this the Communicative Presumption.

previously noticed, the details of the inferential processes are neither the main topic of this thesis nor are they of Bach's main concern. But we may observe that Bach leaves a great deal of work to be done on the pragmatic side of the semantics-pragmatics distinction if what we want is a full theory of communication that helps identifying what is meant. There should, however, no longer be any question about whether there is something that is the semantic input that goes into an inference process and which together with information from the context leads up to what is meant by an utterance of a sentence. Thus semantic information is shown to be non-redundant and always "present" in the communicative situation, both for the hearer and the speaker. Bach writes that "[i]n effect the hearer seeks to explain the fact that the speaker said what he said, in the way he said it" (1999b, p. 9). In order to do that, the hearer must also take into account what was said, and that is, on Bach's account, a semantic notion and thus safeguards a role for semantics in a theory of interpretation.

Of course having secured a role of semantics in a theory of interpretation, new questions arise concerning the notion of what is said. It seems that in addition to compare what is said to what is meant by an utterance, as I have done above, we need to address the question of whether what is said is needed for the above outlined purpose when we already have a workable notion of sentence meaning and whether these two notions have different theoretical significance. I am not going to provide an answer to that question in this chapter, but will in the following show how the question arises from some of Bach's considerations. For now it is sufficient to notice that one reason for understanding what is said as being distinguished from the sentence meaning is that the level of what is said is essentially linked to an utterance or a saying while the meaning of a sentence does not depend on the sentence being uttered. In other words, while sentence meaning is the meaning of a given sentence *type* what is said seems to rather aim at capturing the meaning of a given sentence *token*. This part of an assessment of what is said will follow in chapter 4 after ending this chapter by seeing how Bach accounts for the semantic level of an utterance.

Syntactic correlation constraint

In the subsequent chapters I will consider utterances of sentences that contain context-sensitive expressions (Chapter 3) as well as sentences that are semantic incomplete (Chapter

4) in order to show that a purely semantic notion of what is said has the consequence that declarative sentences often fail to semantically express full propositions. To show this, we need to know what it means for what is said to be purely semantic, i.e. we need to know more about how to put constraints on the information that can be part of what is said. In this last section of this chapter I will therefore spell out Bach's suggestion for formulating just such a constraint.

Bach calls himself a *semantic minimalist* because he wants the context to play a minimal role in accounting for the semantic content or what is said of an utterance. This motivates him to introduce what he calls "the syntactic correlation constraint". The syntactic correlation constraint can be seen as a rule that constraints the information or the sources of information that can be allowed into determining what is said by an utterance. In explaining what the constraint amounts to Bach quotes Grice when he says that what is said should correspond to "the elements of [the sentence], their order, and their syntactic character" (Grice 1989, p.87 in Bach 2001, p.15). This means that according to the syntactic correlation constraint there is an isomorphism between a sentence's syntactic structure and its semantic content. When elaborating on what this means, Bach writes that: "His [Grice's] use of 'order' and 'syntactic character' suggest some sort of compositional principle, such that what is said is determined by the contents of the constituents ('element') of the sentence as a function of their syntactic relationships." (Bach, 2001, p.17) So the constraint can be connected to what semantics is meant to be about. It is a commonplace in the literature to assert that the sentences in a language should get their meaning from the meaning of the words and the way they are composed, i.e. by syntactical rules of composition, and so what the syntactic correlation constraints adds to this commonality is that the semantic meaning of a sentence is to be exclusively given by elements in the syntax and syntactical relations.

Furthermore, Bach adds that, "[s]yntactic correlation should not be construed as requiring that every element of what is said corresponds to an uttered element of the uttered sentence. But it does require that every element of what is said corresponds to some element of the uttered sentence." (Bach, 2001, p.17) The quote is central particularly in accounting for cases of semantic incompleteness. For a complete sentence there is no element in what is said that does not correspond to some constituent of the sentence. But as we shall see in chapter 4, not every declarative sentence is complete. A declarative sentence may contain unpronounced or

aphonic elements, which are connected to the sentence's syntactic structure, such as empty categories, implicit arguments, and syntactic ellipses. This means that the elements of what is said, i.e. the exact string of words that we hear or read, are not restricted to what is uttered; rather, they can include elements that syntactically are part of the sentence albeit not included in the utterance of it.

We now need to recall that what is said, in Grice's sense, is tantamount to what a speaker states or the proposition expressed by an utterance, and that on Grice's view the proposition expressed of a declarative sentence can be given compositionally. If we presuppose the meaning of the constituents of the sentence, i.e. the words, and their mode of composition, we can thereby get to the semantic meaning of the whole sentence. That is not quite where Bach wants to take us. For him we can compositionally determine only what is said by an utterance, but the proposition expressed or what is stated is not (always) determined compositionally since the sentence may need to be relativized to the context of utterance. And what's more, in cases where the sentence can be said to express a full proposition, whether or not that proposition is the proposition the speaker wanted to express, can only be determined by invoking pragmatic considerations. So, according to Bach, if we presuppose the meaning of the constituents in the sentence, i.e. the words, and their mode of composition, we can determine what is said by the utterance of that sentence even though that may or may not be a full proposition. This means that the syntactic correlation constraint has a radical consequence, namely that "[the] syntactic correlation [constraint] leaves open the possibility that what is said in uttering a sentence need not be a complete proposition."(Bach, 2001, p.18) Recalling from chapter 1 Stalnaker's emphasis on propositions as what semantics study, we understand that Bach's view differs fundamentally from Stalnaker's since we cannot (at least not always) determine a proposition from a sentence's or an utterance's semantic content. In turn this means that meaning on the level of what is said, i.e. semantic meaning, cannot be given in terms of truth-conditions and in the subsequent chapter I will pursue and defend such a conclusion.

Concluding remarks

As we have seen, there is no reason to claim that semantics is redundant in a theory of communication when we identify its contribution with Bach's account of the semantic notion of what is said. Even though saying does not entail meaning the level of saying is significant precisely because it is the saying that is the point of departure for an interpretation process. The notions of semantics and pragmatics are, as we have seen in chapter 1, used for different purposes, but the same can be said about the notion of what is said. That much should be clear by now. It is evident that the debate would have benefited from a unified use of such notions, but I intend to avoid going into a mere terminological debate about how to best use them. In the subsequent chapters I will consider various challenges for a semantic notion of what is said, i.e. to whether we can have a purely semantic notion of what is said that can stand as a pinnacle of the kind of contribution semantics can – and indeed must – give to a workable theory of communication.

3. The Challenge from Context

I turn now to one more, and very large, fly in the ointment: the fact that the same sentence may at one time or in one mouth be true and at another time or in another mouth be false.

Donald Davidson³⁸

When a sentence is uttered we often say that this event takes place in a *context of utterance*. A sentence can contain context-sensitive terms that need to be assigned a value relative to the context of utterance and this may generate a problem for a semantic recovery of the sentence meaning and for a semantic notion of what is said. In this chapter I will start by considering what the challenge from context is for the semantics-pragmatics distinction. I will then consider Kaplan's 'classic' way of accounting for the meaning of some such terms, namely indexicals and demonstratives, and then compare his account with the referential constraints that Bach uses in his representation of what is said by an utterances. In so doing, we see that in addition to providing referential constraints for most context-sensitive expressions, Bach thinks that some context-sensitive expressions can be given a determinate reference on the level of what is said. This claim seems to be somewhat in tension with the syntactic correlation constraint on what is said, and the plausibility of the proposal rests on arguments in favour of there being some contextual information that can be relevant for semantics. Assessing these proposals, I will argue that Bach fails to justify that some context-sensitive elements can be given a determinate reference on the semantic level and from which it follows that the theoretical significance of a semantic notion of what is said in addition to the level of sentence meaning, is highly questionable. At the end of the chapter I show how the favoured sense of semantics end up being unable to give the meaning of sentences in terms of truth-conditions, which is a conclusion I will return to and provide an even stronger argument for in the last chapter of this thesis.

³⁸ Donald Davidson, 1967, p. 33.

What is context-sensitivity?

The context of an utterance can contain both linguistic- and extra-linguistic elements. I take linguistic contextual elements to be information stemming from other sentences – or more to the point, the meaning of other sentences and speech acts that are prior to (and sometimes after) the utterance in question. The extra-linguistic elements of a context may include all other kinds of information concerning the environment where the utterance takes place. Of course, not all information surrounding an utterance is relevant for an interpretation of the utterance since the quantities of information that can be drawn from the context are indefinite, but there is *prima facie* no limit to what kind of information that can be relevant for interpreting an utterance. For that reason, we need to address the questions concerning what information is relevant for utterance interpretation, and more specifically, ask what kind of contextual information, if any, can be relevant in determining what is said if what is said is a semantic level of meaning, as Bach takes it to be.

Bach describes what can be included as contextual information in the interpretation of an utterance as “the conversational setting broadly construed.” (All quotes in this paragraph: Bach, 2005, p.21) He goes on to say that this is “the mutual cognitive context, or salient common ground.” This salient common ground between the speaker and the hearer may include, on the one hand, elements from the linguistic context, like “the current state of the conversation (what has just been said, what has just been referred to, etc.)”. On the other hand, Bach also takes context to include extra-linguistic elements, which he specifies as “the physical setting (if the conversants are face to face), salient mutual knowledge between the conversants, and the relevant broader common knowledge.”³⁹ But all these specifications belong to the broader question of what kind of information is, or can be, relevant for the inference process an interlocutor undergoes in arriving at an interpretation of the intended meaning of an utterance. It does not concern the level of semantics and what is said specifically. I will not discuss whether the above characterization of contextual information relevant for utterance interpretation is a viable characterization. That is an important question

³⁹ The parenthesis here seems redundant or misplaced. The physical settings might be relevant even though the communication takes place over the telephone, by email, etc. But this is not crucial for Bach’s argument.

for assessing Bach's (and anyone's) pragmatic theory, but that lies outside the scope of this essay.

Before I consider Kaplan and Bach's ways of accounting for context-sensitivity it is important to see just how context-sensitive expressions is a challenge for a theory of interpretation and for the semantics-pragmatics distinction. In order to do so I will present some examples of context-sensitivity. The recent years, an increasing number of difficulties with the traditionalist distinction between pragmatics and semantics have been uncovered. The range of cases that have bearing on this issue and which could potentially be treated is enormous and it is not within the scope of this essay to cover them all or even to cover a significant number of them. Instead I want to focus on a small subset of these cases and I begin by distinguishing between sentences whose meaning depend on context because of the existence of overt elements in the sentence that need reference assignment, and those cases of context-dependence that display the *incompleteness* of sentences. An account of the problem of incompleteness and the argument such cases establish against truth-conditional semantics will not be addressed until chapter 4. It is important to go through these simpler cases first because the argument for semantic incompleteness as an argument against truth-conditional semantics rests on assumptions that derive from these basic cases of context-dependence.

The following examples represent different ways in which a sentence can be context-sensitive due to overt element(s) of the sentence. Each sentence contains at least one context sensitive expression where the consequence is that compositional semantics, in isolation from the context of use, cannot determine a proposition by solely relying on the sentence's syntactic structure and the meaning of the words. Note that the goal is to show how different types of language expressions make a sentence context-sensitive. My aim is neither to give an account of all terms that may make a sentence context-sensitive nor to give an exhaustive presentation of the ones I consider.⁴⁰

First, consider an utterance of the following sentence:

⁴⁰ Other terms that can be claimed to be context-sensitive and which are not considered here might include epistemic and psychological attributions where we use words like 'know' and 'believe', comparative adjectives such as 'tall' and 'smart', quantifier expressions such as 'all', 'every', and 'some', vague terms such as 'red', 'bold', and philosophical/theoretical attributions of 'true' and 'false'.

(16) I am hungry.

This sentence is context-sensitive because it contains the English first person pronoun ‘I’. In order to specify the meaning of (16) we need to know who ‘I’ refers to, and so the semantic meaning of the sentence is dependent on information stemming from the context of utterance that can tell us who ‘I’ is referring to. Intuitively, we may think that the referent of ‘I’ is easily recoverable – referring to the speaker – and arguably this is the case in most utterances of sentences containing ‘I’. That ‘I’ is referring to the speaker seems to be so systematic and stable that ‘I’ has been argued to belong to the class of so-called ‘pure’ indexicals. Similar terms are for instance ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’ since they invariably seem to refer to the day of the utterance and the day after the utterance, respectively. It was Kaplan who first distinguished between ‘pure’ indexicals and ‘true demonstratives’ (like he, that, those, etc.) arguing that there is a semantic rule in the case of ‘pure’ indexicals that always fixes the reference of it – e.g. as ‘I’ can be taken invariably to refer to the speaker – while for ‘true demonstratives’ the reference depends on what object the speaker ostensively demonstrates. Whether or not there is such a category of ‘pure’ indexical expressions has been under much debate. I will return to consider further aspects of Kaplan’s semantic theory as well as to questions regarding the distinction between ‘pure’ indexicals and ‘true’ demonstratives later since these questions play a significant role in Bach’s proposal of a semantically relevant context. For now, let us return to our quest and once again look at some examples of context-sensitivity. Consider an utterance of the following sentence:

(17) That is John’s book.

Demonstrative terms (i.e. Kaplan’s ‘true demonstratives’, as noted above) such as ‘that’ in (17) also makes the sentence context-dependent since we need to know which object it refers to in order to evaluate the sentence for truth and falsity. In general, what a demonstrative term is taken to refer to is just whatever object the speaker demonstrates, and so in order for the speaker to provide additional cues for the interlocutor, an utterance of (17) is often followed by an extra-linguistic demonstrative or ostensive act. The speaker may, for instance, point a finger in the direction of the object she intends to refer to. If the speaker of (17) is pointing at a book – say the only book lying on a table – we could interpret the sentence as meaning something like ‘the book lying on the table is John’s book’. But the replacement of ‘the book lying on the table’ for ‘that’ is not linguistically encoded in the

demonstrative term ‘that’, since ‘that’ obviously can be used to refer to an indefinite range of other objects. The reference is therefore not wholly fixed by the linguistically encoded meaning of ‘that’.

Pronouns seem to work in a similar way. Consider an utterance of the following sentence:

(18) He was the greatest philosopher of the 20th century.

What would it take to give truth-conditions of this utterance? ‘He’ seems here to refer to whomever the speaker of (18) had in mind in making this utterance. If Heine was uttering (18), he might be using (18) to assert that Donald Davidson was the greatest philosopher of the 20th century, while Owen, in contrast may utter (18) to express that Paul Grice was the greatest philosopher in the 20th century. Whether or not any of these two propositions are true is not a matter for me to discuss, the point is only that the truth-conditions of (18) depends on who the speaker intended to refer to by the pronoun. In determining the sentence meaning it is not clear that such information can be supplied. The same seems to be the case for all indexical and demonstrative expressions. Note, however, that the context-sensitivity in cases such as these is overt since there are elements present in the sentences which make them stand in need of contextual reference fixing, and thus the need for reference fixing seems to be triggered by the way these words function as pointers or indicators of the intended reference.

A third way in which a sentence might be context-sensitive can be understood when we move to consider the following sentence:

(19) Barack Obama is president of the United States of America.

Prima facie, the sentence does not contain any context-sensitive expressions and it seems that the sentence expresses the proposition *that Barack Obama is president of the United States of America* regardless of the context of utterance. But that proposition cannot be evaluated for truth and falsity in any straightforward manner. For the proposition is false if the utterance of (19) takes place on October 15th 2008, since on that date George W. Bush is president of the United States of America. Yet, the proposition can be true relative to another context of utterance, say on February 5th 2009, conditional on all going as planned with Barack Obama’s inauguration on January 20th 2009. The utterance of (19) is context-

dependent because it is tensed, hence an utterance of a tensed sentence stands in need of specifying the time of the utterance before it can be evaluated for truth and falsity.⁴¹

Consider one more way in which a sentence might be context-dependent in order to have a determinate truth-evaluable content.

(20) Sue is going to the bank.

In (20) ‘bank’ is ambiguous since it can mean both the bank of a river and a financial institution. What an interlocutor will interpret the speaker of (20) to express will depend on contextual information. For instance, if the speaker had just said that Sue does not have any money, we would probably interpret the utterance of (20) as a case where ‘bank’ refers to a financial institution. (20) is thus context-sensitive because it contains a term which has different lexical entries and which therefore needs to be disambiguated. But that is not how it works for all ambiguous sentences. For just consider an utterance of the following sentence:

(21) I shot an elephant in my pyjamas.

If we take it as given that ‘I’ refers to the speaker, (21) still raises the question of ambiguity concerning who wears the pyjamas. In other words, the question is who is *in* the pyjamas: Is it the elephant or the speaker? This structural or syntactic ambiguity could be resolved by spelling out and choosing between the following alternative candidates for being the proposition expressed: either *that I shot an elephant while I was wearing my pyjamas*, or, maybe somewhat more bizarre, *that I shot an elephant that was wearing my pyjamas*.⁴² The ambiguity seems to be of a different kind from (20), since it is not due to there being more than one lexical entry for a word. The reason is rather that the predicate of ‘being in a pyjamas’ may be parsed in more than one way. On the former interpretation the subject of

⁴¹ There is an ongoing debate as to whether tense needs to be resolved before the tensed entity can be said to represent a proposition or whether tense is not a part of semantic content but belongs rather to the circumstance of evaluation. Kaplan (1989) is a proponent of the latter. This represents a relativistic account of semantics where the same proposition may differ in truth-value with respect to different circumstances of evaluation. Lewis (1980) has made an objection to that way of handling tense arguing that there seems to be no limit as to what can be put into the circumstance of evaluation. So in order to give the meaning of that sentence in terms of truth conditions, we need to know the time of utterance. Are the truth-conditions different? Is it not truth-evaluable on both contexts? There is a significant ongoing debate on relativistic semantics with John MacFarlane as one of main figures on the relativistic side of the debate. See for instance his (2003). These issues are of course to be taken seriously, but for the present purpose the details of the relativism versus contextualism debate in semantics will not be considered any further. In specifying propositions in this essay, I will not specify the time of the utterance, although that would be included in a more specific variant of the proposition.

⁴² The joke is due to the American comedian Groucho Marx, who added to (21): “How he got into my pyjamas I’ll never know.”

the predicate was ascribed to the referent of 'I', while on the latter interpretation the subject was taken to be the elephant.⁴³

Both sentences (20) and (21) need disambiguation in order to determine something truth-evaluable, the resolution of which seems again to depend first and foremost on what the speaker intended to say. Yet, as with indexical and demonstrative expressions and cases of tense, the necessity of interpreting these sentences relative to a context of utterance is triggered syntactically or lexically by elements present in the pronounced sentence. To put it somewhat differently, in these context-sensitive sentences the semantic content of the utterance is *underdetermined* from the constituents and their syntactic combination, but at least we have something explicit in the sentence that guides our way in determining something truth-evaluable. It is an open question just what kind of explanatory work semantics can do in determining the referents of these expressions and how the semantic meaning or linguistically encoded meaning of such sentences can be given. The semantic theories of Kaplan and Bach that will be discussed below are attempts at providing an answer. Before considering their proposals, however, I will spend just few paragraphs considering non-literal uses language.

Non-literal uses of language

In addition to indexical expressions, demonstratives, ambiguities and other expressions that make a sentence overtly context-dependent it can also be argued that there are utterances of sentences that underdetermine the proposition expressed in different ways. In the following cases of non-literal use of language, the apparent need to take in information from the context of utterance to determine the proposition expressed does not stem from context-sensitive expressions that are constituents of the sentence uttered, yet the sentence uttered is a perfectly declarative sentence. I will give only a brief overview of this issue since the main challenge that such utterances cause is to the determination of speaker meaning and not sentence meaning. In non-literal or figurative use of language the intended meaning differs

⁴³ It is interesting to note that the speaker may often not be aware of the ambiguities of the expressions she uses, and, on the other hand, that disambiguation often seems not to be something that an interlocutor is consciously aware of doing.

from what is linguistically encoded in the sentences (or phrases) uttered. Begin by considering an utterance of the following sentence:

(22) With her excellent spatial sense, Joan is sure to find a shortcut and be the first to arrive.⁴⁴

This could be a case of irony on the expense of Joan. Let me briefly illustrate: Suppose that we are on our way to a restaurant in a city which Joan has never before visited and we wonder whether Joan will find her way. We both know that Joan has a history of not being very good at showing up in time and somehow she “always” manage to get herself lost on her way to new places. When I utter (22) you can reasonably take me to speak *nonliterally* and thus take me to be ironic. Irony is traditionally characterized as conveying the opposite of what one’s utterance literally means.⁴⁵ If this is the case, then you cannot interpret my utterance literally in order to understand the meaning I intended to convey by saying (22). What you have to do is to consider the contextual background, which, among other things, includes what we both know or believe about Joan. By so doing you can use this information to infer that I meant my utterance of (22) to be taken ironically.

Consider next an utterance of the following sentence, which is not ironic but yet cannot be taken to express what it “literally” means:

(23) When she doesn’t get her own way Mary becomes a raging inferno.

An utterance of (23) is a clear example of a trope or what is also called figurative use of language (such as metaphors, metonymy or hyperbole). This use can be characterized as employing what is literally said by an utterance as a mere vehicle for what is meant in the sense that the former takes no part in what is meant by uttering it. The speaker clearly should not be taken to literally mean that she thinks that Mary in fact sometimes becomes an inferno and indeed a raging one. An inferno, a firestorm, a hellhole, or however we want to describe this just is not a property a person can have. On the other hand, in cases like similes, as in (24) below, what is said *is* part of what is meant, but does not seem to play a major role. Understatements and indirect answers are similar in the sense that the speaker uses them as mere cues of what she wants the interpreter to infer as further implications, just as, for

⁴⁴ Examples (22) and (23) are from Carston (2002, p.16).

instance, we are invited to infer a strong degree of inevitability by being provided with phrases such as the following:

(24) As sure as death and taxes.

Examples of figurative or non-literal use of language show that the proposition expressed by the sentence might diverge radically from the proposition the speaker intended to convey. As we saw in chapter 2 such uses motivated Bach's distinction between saying and meaning.⁴⁶ The way they depend on context is not fixed within the level of sentence or semantic meaning but rather concerns a kind of underdetermination of meaning from one level to another. Although their meaning is determined due to factors outside the linguistic content; I will not in the following include non-literal sentences such as the above in the set of context-sensitive sentences that I am interested in.

The challenge from context

In order to understand the challenge from context, we need to recall from chapter 1 that semantics has been seen as the study of properties of language on the traditional characterization of the semantics-pragmatics distinction, while pragmatics has been seen as the study of the properties of language use. Within this framework one can say that context is something that is relevant for an utterance, i.e. the use of a sentence, and not to the sentence itself. If there had been a one-to-one relation between a language expression and a concept, as in a simple code model of language outlined in chapter 1, information from the context of utterance would only be relevant for pragmatics and not semantics. But, as we have seen, many sentences appear to need contextual information in order to be meaningful. Thus properties of the context of utterance may be relevant for determining the truth-evaluable content or proposition. Given the aforementioned traditionalist presumption that context is only relevant for the use of language and thus relevant to pragmatics rather than semantics, we see that the apparent need for context in determining semantic meaning may prove to be a

⁴⁵ This account of irony, which was also held by Grice, is disputed by many linguists as being far too simplistic. See for instance Sperber and Wilson (1986/95 p.237).

⁴⁶ See the section 'Saying does not entail meaning' in chapter 2.

strategy for undermining and challenging the explanatory work that semantics can offer with respect to language use. As a result, it may threaten its role in a theory of interpretation.

If a sentence contains one or more context-sensitive expressions it cannot be said to express a proposition, i.e. something truth-evaluable, before a reference for each expression has been determined via information from context. The challenge is to specify in what way context may play a role in determining semantic meaning. As we saw in chapter 1, Stalnaker emphasised that semantics deals with propositions while Katz stressed the context-free situation. We now see why these opposing perspectives conflict since compositional semantics fails to determine a proposition in a context-free situation. The role of a compositional semantics and the syntactic correlation constraint on what is said also seems exposed. Nonetheless, it seems to be a futile strategy to deny that the context-sensitive sentences are typical for language use, but even if it is a story should be told about how context-sensitive sentences are given a semantic meaning since we straightforwardly manage to communicate by using such sentences. There is therefore no reason to deny that they are meaningful. If the reader cares to look at the last few sentences prior to this conclusion, it seems that every single one of them is context-sensitive. The take home message is thus that a sentence in isolation from the context of utterance normally fails to determine truth-evaluable content, i.e. a proposition, even though it may successfully be used by a speaker to convey a proposition. The simple model of the semantics-pragmatics distinction – the model where a sentence meaning was supposed to be given in terms of a proposition solely by means of the composition of the sentence – needs to be abandoned or modified.

As a remedy, Bach has suggested that the traditional conception of ‘context’, as concerning only what the hearer needs to consider in order to arrive at an interpretation of what is meant by an utterance, is wrong. Instead, Bach claims that we need to replace it with an understanding that distinguishes two subcategories of context which are relevant for semantics and pragmatics, respectively. Given this distinction, or so it is thought, we can preserve a significant explanatory role for semantics in a theory of interpretation at the same time as we allow some semantic characterizations of properties of the language to draw on properties of the context. We still need to spell out more details about how this can be done without conflating the two studies, but, as we will see towards the end of this chapter, the plausibility of employing such a semantic notion of context meets serious challenges.

I will now move on to consider how we can account for context-sensitive terms within the semantic frameworks of Kaplan and Bach. Although differing in many respects, parts of Kaplan's way of accounting for the stable meaning of linguistic expressions seem to be just what Bach should restrict his own semantic theory to account for. Bach locates himself as we have seen, mainly within a Gricean framework, while Kaplan approaches the issues of determining meaning from a different perspective; not by distinguishing what is said (or the proposition expressed by an utterance) from what is implied, but by distinguishing between context-insensitive and context-sensitive aspects of meaning, i.e. between what is stable and what is variant in an utterance. Given the challenge from context-sensitivity two strategies are available: We can give up a semantic determination of propositional sentence meaning altogether, or we can reformulate and refine the notions of context as well as the requirements and restrictions we put upon a semantic theory. I will pursue both strategies, but only to arrive on the former as my preferred strategy.

Character and content

Kaplan's best known contribution to philosophy of language is perhaps his study of indexical and demonstrative expressions, which we have already encountered in the previous discussion of context-sensitive terms.⁴⁷ In the due course of his study he formulated the distinction between the *content* and the *character* of words. For Kaplan, both notions are semantically relevant and needed in order to determine the proposition expressed by an utterance. He describes the distinction as follows: "*Character*, is close to the intuitive idea of linguistic meaning (and perhaps of cognitive content)" while "*content*, is what is said or expressed by an expression in a particular context of use" (Kaplan, 1989, p.568). Henceforth, I will only refer to Kaplan's notion of content as content_k so as to avoid confusion. Throughout the essay I have and will continue to use 'content' to refer to whatever the semantic content of a sentence is, which means that the semantic content is may differ according to which semantic theory one favours. Bach also uses the notion of content and it should not be assumed that Bach's use of content is tantamount to Kaplan's content_k . What

⁴⁷ Indexical expressions has been given different labels over the course of study: Reichenbach (1947) called such expressions "token-reflexive" while Russell (1940) described them as "egocentric particulars".

Kaplan's distinction amounts to is that the context-independent or stable meaning of a context-sensitive expression is its character. It is the linguistic meaning of an expression without being relativized to a context of utterance. On the other hand, the content_k of the expression is given by its meaning when the expression is relativized to an occasion of use, i.e. the content is given of a token sentence in a context of utterance. Kaplan claims that the context-independent or stable meaning of an indexical expression takes the form of a rule, which specifies the meaning of each context-sensitive term. As a result, the context-sensitive indexical expressions refer but only relative to a context. To illustrate, a rule can be specified for the first person pronoun 'I' as follows:

An utterance, *u*, of a sentence, *S*, that contains the indexical 'I' when uttered in a context, *c*, will have the speaker in *c* as the referent of the indexical.

This rule is a function from context to persons and it constitutes the character of the indexical. As we noted above Kaplan argued that there is a class of 'pure' indexicals (for instance 'I', 'today', 'here', and 'now') where the referent can be determined solely by reference to the character in every context of utterance. On the other hand, the 'true' demonstratives (like 'you', 'he', 'she' 'that' and 'this') cannot be determined as rigidly by their character, and they stand in need of something extra such as an associated demonstration (Kaplan, 1989 p.491). The character of an expression is on Kaplan's account the *standing linguistic meaning* of a term, i.e. it is a level of meaning which is stable and context-insensitive. When a sentence contains a 'true' demonstrative we need to determine the content_k and not only the character of the context-sensitive expressions in order to determine a proposition from an utterance of that sentence. Kaplan's notion of what is said is therefore connected to the content_k of an utterance. But as we have seen, the proposition a sentence expresses can vary from context to context, and as a consequence content_k and what is said on Kaplan's account will vary in just the same manner.⁴⁸ Thus it seems that what is

⁴⁸ For Kaplan, content_k is connected to the use of a sentence in the additional sense that its relevance is tied to the *circumstance of evaluation*. (Note the connection here to the previous footnote about tense and relativism as well.) The notion is not crucial for our purpose, but Kaplan states what he means by it as follows: "I mean both actual and counterfactual situations with respect to which it is appropriate to ask for the extensions of a given well-formed expression. A circumstance will usually include a possible state or history of the world, a time, and perhaps other features as well. The amount of information we require from a circumstance is linked to the degree of specificity on contents, and thus to the kinds of operators in the language." (Kaplan, 1989, p.502). He also claims that, "the result of evaluating the content of a well-formed expression α at a circumstance [of evaluation] will be an appropriate extension for α " (1989, p.501). By appropriate extension he means that for a sentence its reference is a truth-value while for a term it is either an individual (for names) or a function (for predicates). We might of course find expressions that have a stable or fixed content too, but

said on content_k on Kaplan's account is connected to what I called the epistemological project of understanding utterance interpretation. Character, on the other hand, seems to fit better with the metaphysical project of compositional semantics and lexical semantics, i.e. for accounting for sentence (or word) meaning isolated from what an interlocutor takes an utterance of it to mean.

To understand the difference between the character of an expression and its content it is useful to illustrate with an example. Consider the following case: Both Nick and Tim are making an utterance of the following sentence:

(25) I am sleepy.

What this illustrates is that utterances containing indexical expressions seem to, on one level, express different meanings in different contexts. By making this utterance there is a sense in which Nick has said one thing and Tim has said something else. Quite intuitively we see that the truth-values of the two utterances can differ. For when Nick says (25) he claims that it is he himself who is sleepy, while when Tim says (25) 'I' refers to Tim and not to Nick. But there is also a sense in which Nick and Tim have said the same thing. Kaplan's distinction between character and content captures this difference: The *contents_k* of the two utterances are different while the *characters* are the same.⁴⁹ Thus it seems that Kaplan provides a neat solution to the above problem of understanding the divergence between the sentence meaning in itself and what a sentence may mean (or be interpreted as meaning) in different contexts of utterance. By applying the notion of character we have an account of how there is something that an expression means independent of its use. So, just as in the above example (25), what is said by the utterance is for Kaplan something along the lines of the proposition *that Nick is sleepy* (if Nick was the speaker) or *that Tim is sleepy* (if Tim was the speaker). This is the content_k of (25). The character of (25) seems to be possible to spell out as *that the speaker is sleepy*, since 'I' on Kaplan's account is a 'pure' indexical that always refers to the speaker.

for Kaplan these can be represented by a constant function from circumstance of evaluation to an appropriate extension (1989, p.502). In more familiar terms, we can say that a sentence that does not contain any context-dependent expressions yields the same interpretation in every context of use.

⁴⁹ It is sufficient for our purpose to just put it this very simple, but see Kaplan (1989, p.507) for a more elaborated account on why this is so.

On Kaplan's proposal we are thus able to distinguish between the stable and the variant features of meaning, and so it is tempting to think that this distinction is similar to Bach's way of drawing the semantics-pragmatics distinction given the syntactic correlation constraint⁵⁰, which postulates an isomorphism between a sentence's syntactic structure and the meaning of the words, and the meaning of the sentence. But this is not were Bach want to take us. Bach's proposal is similar to Kaplan's account of stable linguistic meaning or character in some respect since semantically fixing the reference of a context-sensitive expression is not the same as giving a determinate reference for it in an interpretation. Yet, what is said is not restricted to the stable meaning or the character of the words since information available in a so-called "narrow context" can play a role in fixing the referent of the context-sensitive expressions. Before assessing the suggestion that there are two kinds of context I will consider Bach's proposal of how the referents of context-sensitive expressions are accounted for in order to determine what is said by an utterance in cases where it is not needed to invoke contextual information.

Referential constraints

Consider the following example where Sam is uttering (26) below (Bach, 2001, p.32-33):

(26) That tree is deciduous.

This is yet another case where there is an element present in the sentence that is context-sensitive. 'That' is a demonstrative expression which, put together with 'tree', indicates that there is some tree or other that stands in a relation to the property of 'being deciduous'. In other words, this property or predicate is ascribed to some object that Sam is demonstrating by the use of 'that'. Which tree Sam is in fact referring to is due to his communicative intention, i.e. the tree he is referring to is that tree he intended to refer to by uttering (26). Since the speaker's communicative intention is not part of the contextual information that can be used to determine the semantic content of what is said – in fact as we shall see below, not a part of context at all according to Bach – we need an account of how to specify what is said by an utterance of (26).

⁵⁰ The syntactic correlation constraint was introduced in chapter 2.

Bach holds that there is a *referential constraint* that helps an interlocutor in determining the object demonstrated.⁵¹ Kenneth Taylor (2001) suggests something similar⁵², and Bach in fact quotes Taylor in order to help us understand the way determination of the referent of a context-sensitive expression is constrained. Taylor says that “context-dependent ingredients of sentence meaning [i.e. context-sensitive expressions explicitly present in the sentence] more or less tightly constrain the *to be contextually determined values* of either suppressed or explicit parameters”. (Taylor, 2001, in Bach, 2001, p.33, my italics) For now, let us just overlook the possibility of “suppressed” parameters since that is only relevant for sentences that are dependent on context in a different manner, namely due to being semantically incomplete. Such cases of context-dependence and the proposed “suppressed parameters” will be considered in due manner in the subsequent chapter.

Bach’s referential constraints, and the similar parameters proposed by Taylor, are thought to show that when a hearer needs to determine the reference of a context-sensitive element of a sentence there is a lot of hypotheses about how to arrive at the correct reference that the hearer can rule out as irrelevant already from the start. In other words, even when the referent is underdetermined by the linguistic evidence in the sentence uttered, there seems to be a relevant parameter or referential constraint that leads the interlocutor to believe that the referent of the demonstrative must be “of a certain sort”. For instance, the constraint on ‘she’ is that it is used to refer to a female⁵³, while ‘that’ in the above is used to refer to some tree since it is put together with the word ‘tree’ (Bach, 2001, p.32).⁵⁴ There is clearly an intuitive appeal to these arguments since when we hear an utterance of (26) it is a lot of objects that just do not occur relevant to consider; for instance we do not consider whether Sam is referring to computers, grandfathers or days of the week. We simply take Sam to be talking about trees.

⁵¹ Bach introduces the notion of a referential constraint in his book *Thoughts and reference* (1987). This discussion relies on the account presented in Bach 2001.

⁵² We should notice that Taylor seems to be talking more in terms of processes than information as he directing his arguments mainly against Recanati.

⁵³ Greenhall (2007) argues that such an apparent constraint on gender pronouns is due to the existence of a conventional implicature rather than the existence of a referential constraint or parameter in the character or linguistically encoded meaning of the demonstrative.

⁵⁴ One could for instance object that ‘tree’ can be used to refer to some person, for example, to the boy who plays the tree in the school play, or it can refer metaphorically. But Bach could here respond that what counts as a tree is not something the semanticist is supposed to deal with. Alongside Cappelen and Lepore (2005) one can maybe say that such considerations are part of metaphysics rather than semantics. Bach writes one place that, “our real-world knowledge [...] intrudes here, but that knowledge is relevant to determining what is communicated, not what is said” (2001, p.15).

Bach (2001) does not elaborate much further on this issue so I will turn to Taylor in order to get a firmer hold of the proposal. Taylor argues for what he calls *parametric minimalism* and he holds that there are stable features of the sentence meaning that give rise to some parameters. On his view, what a sentence does – or, rather, what we can derive semantically from a sentence – is that it “typically sets up a semantic scaffolding which constrains, without determining, its own contextual completion” (Taylor, 2001, p.53). The crucial point is that the contextual completion that determines the complete proposition uttered by a speaker has to be done due to information stemming from the context of utterance. But a sentence does contain, according to Taylor, a variety of parameters that constrain the contextual completion of the proposition expressed by the utterance. Or to put it somewhat differently, the parameter’s value – that is, the sort of things that are among the (semantically) available interpretations of the sentence – must be “contextually supplied in some more or less tightly constrained way” (Taylor, 2001, p.53). Taylor distinguishes between types of context-sensitivity and he says that sometimes the parameter is explicitly expressed in the syntax, as in sentences that contain indexical expressions, demonstratives and tense (which I call *overt* or explicit context-sensitivity above), but at other times the parameter is “suppressed” or hidden in the “subsyntactic basement”. That is so in cases of incompleteness, for instance, which will be thoroughly considered in a chapter of its own.

How do we determine what is said in Taylor sense? First, take a sentence containing an indexical, like the following:

(27) She is wearing jeans.

In order to determine the correct referent of the demonstrative ‘she’ we need to know the speaker’s communicative intention – i.e. some pragmatic information – since there is nothing encoded in the sentence meaning that fixes the reference to one particular person. Thus only the speaker’s communicative intention can determine whom ‘she’ refers to in (27). That does not mean that there is nothing to say on the semantic side on what ‘she’ refers to, for we can specify the available values of a parameter for ‘she’. By appealing to the conventional meaning of the word the parameter is therefore restricted to females. Taylor claims that there is a:

[p]recise and well-defined function from objective features of the context, like who is speaker where and when [sic!], to semantic values of one sort of another. In the general case, however, the value of the relevant parameter will be constrained to be of a certain sort – a time, a place, a domain of quantification, standards of various sorts, reference points and classes of various sorts, the occupier of a certain lexically specified thematic role – and once determined, the value will be destined to play a certain role in constituting the completed propositional content of the relevant utterance. (Taylor, 2001, p.55).

The point is that these are “objective” features that provide the “minimal” or “thin” semantic content of the utterance. For Taylor, we need to resort to the context in order to specify what is said by an utterance; that is to say, in order to determine the right values or references of the context-sensitive expressions (Taylor, 2001, p.58-59).

Returning to Bach’s case, we must ask what Sam says by uttering ‘That tree is deciduous’ in (26). One suggestion could be that Sam is expressing the singular proposition *that t (the tree in question) is deciduous*, which can be put more formally as $\langle t, \text{being deciduous} \rangle$. But Bach argues that this cannot be what is said by the sentence (2001, p.32). In order to establish this, he applies the distinction between making a statement and a mere saying and claims that the singular proposition above may be Sam’s statement.⁵⁵ In other words, Sam may have intended to express the singular proposition, but that is not what the sentence in isolation from contextual information can be said to express. As we recall from chapter 1, what is said on Bach’s account is constrained by the syntactic correlation constraint to consider only “the elements of [the sentence], their order, and their syntactic character” (Grice 1989 in Bach 2001, p.15), and the claim seems therefore to be that whether or not (26) expresses the singular proposition lies outside the realm of what is said. The reason for why the singular proposition cannot be what is said by the utterance is that the demonstrative expression ‘that’ could have been used non-demonstratively in order to make a *descriptive* rather than an *objectual* reference. This distinction is similar to Keith Donnellan’s distinction between *attributive* and *referential* use of definite descriptions (1966), and Bach describes what his distinction amounts to as follows:

⁵⁵ This distinction is also elaborated in chapter 1 in the section ‘Saying does not entail meaning’.

[A] speaker refers to an individual objectually if it is not part of his referential intention how the hearer is to identify the referent; he intends only that the hearer identify the individual he has in mind and take it to be the one that he is talking about. The speaker refers descriptively if he intends to be talking about whatever uniquely satisfies the individual concept that the hearer is to recognize (even if the speaker is not using a definite description to express it) as determining the referent. (Bach, 1987, p.66)

In order to understand the difference it is useful to look at Donnellan's way of exemplifying how definite description may be used in two different ways. Consider first that we are at a party and that I notice a man sipping a drink in the opposite corner from us. The man is unfamiliar to me and I ask the following question while making a gesture somewhat in the direction of the man:

(28) Who is the man drinking a martini?

Donnellan's claim is that I perfectly well succeed in referring to the man in the corner even though it may turn out that the man is drinking water and not martini. This use of definite descriptions is referential on Donnellan's account but would be descriptive on Bach's account. Now consider that we are, while still within Donnellan's example, at a Teetotaller's party and that the manager has been told that someone at the party is drinking martini. The manager wants to find out who it is that is breaking the rules of the organisation and utters (28). What the definite description 'the man drinking a martini' in this case seems to refer to is whoever it is that satisfy the property of 'drinking a martini'. Donnellan calls this an attributive use of a definite description, while for Bach it has the label objectual.

Returning to Bach's original case, i.e. (26), we can understand the descriptive use of 'that' as referring to one specific tree and if that is the intended use, the speaker meaning may be given in terms of the singular proposition *that t (the tree in question) is deciduous*. This is analogous to Donnellan's referential use of a definite description although Bach calls it the descriptive use. On the other hand, in what Bach takes to be an objectual use of 'that' there might be one specific tree that Sam is talking about but which both the speaker and the interlocutors can in a sense remain ignorant of, i.e. they need not know which particular tree has the property of being deciduous. For instance, when (26) is used objectually, it may refer to "whichever tree dropped leaves on one's windshield" (Bach, 2001, p.33). The point is that in such a case there is no one singular proposition expressed by (26), and there is nothing in the sentence's stable meaning that can determine which of these is the intended meaning in a

context of utterance. The correct interpretation seems thus to depend on the speaker's intention, and so must be held outside what is said according to Bach's syntactic correlation constraint and the assumption (to be considered below) that speaker intentions cannot be part of a semantically relevant context.

Another candidate for being what is said of Sam's utterance of (26) is the general proposition *that the tree Sam is demonstrating is deciduous*. The first thing to notice is that it seems as if Bach considers this interpretation as not being restricted to whether the sentence is used descriptively or objectual. If he did, it would be redundant to provide additional reasons for rejecting the general proposition being what is said by the utterance. It seems right that this interpretation does not exclude any of the interpretations, since the proposition may have both the reading that whatever tree Sam is demonstrating it is deciduous (objectual use) and the reading that the one specific tree Sam is demonstrating (for instance by pointing in the direction of) is deciduous (descriptive use). In other words, with this general proposition the interpretation is not restricted to being a descriptive use of the demonstrative expression 'that'. Yet, Bach argues that even this proposal should be rejected on the grounds that Sam's demonstration cannot be said to be part of his saying (2001, p.33). The demonstrative act following the use of the demonstrative 'that' belongs to the context of utterance, and we must understand Bach so as to mean that this particular act belongs not to any contextual information that can be semantically relevant. (We have yet to consider this distinction and so we will have to return to this specific case, but, as I shall argue, it seems right that the ostensive act of demonstrating cannot be seen as semantic on Bach's view.) We may consider one additional, albeit related reason for not accepting the above proposition to be what is said by Sam's utterance of (26). It seems as if even though Sam had been uttering (26) without providing a demonstration by means of an ostensive act, Sam could still be reported as having said something although he failed to provide enough cues for the interlocutor to arrive at an interpretation of what he meant. This point rests on Bach's distinction between saying and meaning, and that what is said need not be fully propositional. This can thus be taken as an additional reason for accepting Bach's distinction between what is said and what is meant by an utterance, since we have a way of reporting Sam's saying even when he fails to provide the necessary demonstration.

The above proposals seem more or less ruled out. We should therefore consider Bach's preferred alternative. He claims that what is said of Sam's utterance of (26) is the following (Bach, 2001, p.33):

(26_{IQ}) Sam said that [a certain tree] is deciduous.

According to Bach, (26_{IQ}) is as accurate as we can specify what is said by (26). He says that "Here '[a certain tree]' does not specify what tree (if any) Sam was speaking of but, being enclosed in brackets, merely indicates that Sam referred to, objectually or descriptively, to some tree." (Bach, 2001, p.33) The claim is that on this way of stating what is said we are not restricting the interpretation to being either descriptive or objectual. What the bracketed material is contributing is a constraint on the reference of the demonstrative expression 'that' in (26) so that we specify the interpretation that whatever individual object is referred to must be a tree. We can state this differently by using Taylor's terminology: The values of the parameter for 'that' in the case of (26) are restricted to the set of trees. The report of what Sam said, i.e. (26_{IQ}), "does not specify which tree that is or what (descriptive) condition a tree must meet to be the tree in question". (2001, p.33)

What is determined as what is said by the utterance of (26) is therefore not a full proposition. Bach calls it an *open proposition* or a *propositional radical*, and so it seems to follow that semantics alone cannot, at least not always, determine a full proposition. In other words, on Bach's account we leave the full determination of utterances of sentences that contain indexical and demonstrative expressions to pragmatics. If we compare that with Kaplan's view, it is clear that they disagree on the scope of semantics since Kaplan thinks that even content_k is relevant for determining the semantic content of a sentence.. Bach's referential constraints are more like characters than content_k , albeit characters of a kind are spelled out in the representation of what is said by an utterance. Just like character, which is the stable meaning of expressions, the referential constraints seem to be invariable too. They are drawn from the lexical meaning of the words, alternatively from information about the linguistic context the words are in – i.e. from the other words that are constituents of the expression or sentence, and their way of combination – whenever that is needed. For instance, as we saw in example (26), an utterance of 'That tree is deciduous' was given the referential constraint '[a certain tree]' pairing 'that' with 'tree'. While Kaplan's character seems to be a property

of the words the referential constraints are not understood as to be properties of the words, but, devised for the goal of specifying the way words and composition of a sentence put constraints on interpretation. Yet we might say that this information is drawn from the character of the words. Thus we are neither left with the claim that the context-sensitive sentences are meaningless nor that the semantic meaning of a sentence is redundant in a theory of interpretation since the parameters or referential constraints provide information about the restriction on the relevant interpretations.

Semantically relevant context

The referential constraints seem to capture information that is stable of the sentence meaning or what is said. Given that the meaning of what is said is not propositional, at least in some cases, it is given as something less than propositional in accordance with the syntactic correlation constraint; i.e. it is drawn compositionally from the sentence constituents and their mode of combination. But Bach does not leave the semantics to this and he goes on to claim that some context-sensitive expression can and must be determined on the semantic level. In the following I will consider how context may play a role in determining the semantic notion of what is said. As outlined above, the challenge from context seems to open up for two possible outcomes: that we abandon the aim of giving semantic meaning either propositionally or truth-conditionally, or that we must modify our notion of semantics. Although what is said on Bach's view is non-propositional his proposal must be seen as an attempt to modify semantics such as to involve some contextual elements. What is said is, as we may recall, supposed to be purely semantic (in order to isolate the linguistic information an interlocutor has from other kinds of information). So to avoid pragmatic intrusion the contextual information relevant for what is said needs to be restricted appropriately. I will argue that Bach does not succeed in doing this. The consequence of this failure is that the theoretical significance of what is said is minimal if not superfluous since we already have the level of sentence meaning, and what is more, it seems that we cannot give the meaning of sentences containing context-sensitive elements in terms of truth-conditions.

Establishing a semantically relevant context seems to be promising for securing the significance of what is said as an independent level of meaning. Bach emphasises that

semantics concerns sentences and not utterances (2005, p.22-23), and so a semantic notion of what is said must be tied to the context-independent meaning of a sentence in order to respect the syntactic correlation constraint (where the semantic content of a sentence is understood to be a projection of syntax). This seems important for distinguishing what is said from sentence meaning. The proposal that there is some semantically relevant information from the context of utterance is, as noted before, radical but can provide a viable *semantic* notion of what is said if successful. This is so because it seems that language, strictly speaking, provides what is linguistically encoded in a sentence, i.e. the stable meaning given compositionally given from the constituents of the sentence and the syntax. Since what is said must be understood as a distinct level of meaning from the sentence meaning, we should not just repeat the elements of the linguistically encoded meaning and identify this as what is said. For if we do this it will be hard to see how the notion of what is said could avoid being theoretically superfluous. A better proposal seems to be that we relativize the linguistically encoded information (the sentence's stable meaning) in an appropriate manner to a semantic context in order to arrive at an independent level of what is said by an utterance at the same time as we retain a purely semantic notion of what is said; which is exactly what Bach's proposal tries to accomplish.

The notion of what is said is, as we have seen, intimately connected to the use of a sentence. One way of thinking about the distinction between sentence meaning and what is said is that while we can specify the meaning of a sentence independently of whether it is being used or not – i.e. sentence meaning can be given of a sentence-type – what is said seems to be the meaning of a sentence token. After all, it is not relevant to ask what is said if there has been no tokening of the sentence or in the complete absence of an utterance. The challenge for Bach, and really anyone who wants to have two levels of meaning distinguished in this way, is therefore to establish and justify that there is a relevant difference between the meaning of a sentence type and a sentence token (i.e. what is said) that makes both notions justified in a theory of communication. That difference can be established if some bits and pieces of the contextual information are semantically licensed to play a role in determining what is said.

In order to specify the contextual information that may play a semantic role Bach makes a distinction between the information that belongs to “narrow” and “broad” context, which is

thought to be relevant for semantics and pragmatics, respectively. Bach defines the difference as follows:

Narrow context: “Information that plays the limited role of combining with linguistic information to determine content (in the sense of fixing it) is restricted to a short list of variables, such as the identity of the speaker and the hearer, and the time and place of an utterance.” (1999b, p.7)

Broad context: “Anything that the hearer is to take into account to determine (in the sense of ascertain) the speaker’s communicative intention” (1999b, p.7).

The different kinds of context are somewhat asymmetric, at least if we think of context as information. Narrow context seems not to be restricted to the types of information that can be relevant but to the role this information can play. On other hand, the definition of broad context is given in terms of the information type. The broad context includes all the information that the speaker intends to be relevant for the interlocutor when the latter seeks to arrive at what is meant by an utterance, and it may seem as if there is no limit upon what evidence a speaker can intend to be relevant for the utterance. A key to understand this difference can therefore be to take advantage of the distinction we drew in chapter 1 between an epistemological project and a metaphysical project. Narrow context can be circumscribed as that which concerns the metaphysical project of accounting for what an expressions means. Hence, what goes into narrow context is only that which fixes or constitutes the meaning of an expression in a metaphysical sense, while broad context concerns the information involved in the epistemological project of giving a theory of interpretation, which aims to understand how a speaker comes to think – and be justified to think – that an utterance has a certain meaning. What we will need to address is therefore when and on what grounds contextual information is allowed into what is said. The above definition takes us some way, but Bach seems to rely on three other considerations that I will consider in turn.

First, Bach formulates a constraint that at first glance seems capable of serving as such a criterion, namely that what is said by an utterance may vary in different contexts if “the variability [is] provided for by lexical meaning and sentence grammar” (1999b, p.8). The first thing to notice is that this way of formulating the possibility of semantic variability is closely connected to the compositional account of semantics and the syntactic correlation constraint that Bach formulates for what is said. I think therefore that this must be seen as an

attempt to secure that the semantic variability does not conflict with the syntactic correlation constraint. But what does it mean that the variability is to be provided for in this way? I will consider each side of the conjunct in turn, starting with lexical meaning.

The simplest case of variability “provided for” by the lexical meaning must be ambiguous expressions. A word or phrase is ambiguous, as we have seen, when it has more than one lexical entry, as in the case of ‘bank’, which can mean both riverbank and financial institution (recall the above example (20), ‘Sue is going to the bank’). With respect to such context-sensitive expressions Bach’s claim must be understood as holding that what is said by an utterance of a sentence that contains an ambiguous expression may vary in different contexts of utterance. In the case of ambiguous expressions it seems reasonable to take the variability to stem from something that is present in the sentence. Similar treatments can be given to indexical expressions, demonstratives and tense which all make a sentence context sensitive (e.g. (16), ‘I am hungry’, and (17), ‘That is John’s book’). The meaning of such expressions cannot be said to have a definite reference, and yet the expressions themselves are explicitly present in the sentence, which signals that more definite reference fixing is called for.

On the other side of the conjunct we find variability provided for by sentence grammar. By this I take it that Bach means cases of syntactic ambiguity (e.g. as in (21) above; ‘I shot an elephant in my pyjamas’), and Bach may also include other syntactic phenomena such as syntactic ellipses, implicit arguments and empty categories, since these are also cases that can be resolved without violating the syntactic correlation constraint.⁵⁶

It therefore seems that we have a clear understanding of what it means to say that the origin of the variability stems from elements overtly present in a sentence. But even though the variability of the above cases can be justified as being due to lexical meaning and sentence grammar, this cannot serve as a criterion for when a determinate referent can be given for the purpose of determining what is said. This is evident when I recall that Bach provides referential constraints for demonstrative expressions when he reports what is said by them and does not report the determinate reference. Although the above quote suggests properties

⁵⁶ Further elaboration on why this is so will follow in chapter 4.

that are necessary for expressions that can be given a determinate referent, it does not serve to restrict appropriately which expressions can and which expressions cannot be given a determinate reference within semantic bonds. That is clear since it seems that in all of the above cases of context-variability (and indeed all instances of overt context-sensitivity) we may give a determinate reference. In other words, the criterion fails to give the sufficient properties an expression must have to be given a determinate referent.

The second criterion goes some way in providing what is missing. As we saw in chapter 2, what is said for Bach is what is indirectly quoted using the IQ-formula, and so narrow contextual information is to be understood as what minimally has to be added to the sentence uttered to indirectly report it as a saying.⁵⁷ In other words, the IQ-formula can be seen as a test where any expression that fails to be indirectly quoted must be given a definite contextual value. But whether this serves as an appropriate criterion rests on the plausibility of the IQ-formula. We therefore need an independent argument of why the IQ-formula is the best way of accounting for what is said by an utterance and we might even require the argument to show that there is no other way of representing what is said by an utterance. In addition, given that the IQ-test states that what is said must be given “an accurate and complete indirect quotation” (Bach, 1999a, p.340), but without providing any criterion for what ‘accurate’ and ‘complete’ means, it seems that having the IQ-formula as a way of testing what can be given a definite reference is, at best, uncertain. I therefore think that we should understand the IQ-formula more as a device for reporting what is said and not as a necessary requirement.

Of course, in order to not rule out that such an argument could be provided I shall stipulate that the IQ-formula should in fact be used for the purpose of representing what is said and then try to use it as a test for when expressions need to be given a determinate referent. In doing this we shall see that an additional problem arises: for it looks as if the IQ-formula neither provides an adequate criterion for when an expression should be given a determinate reference nor for when it should be given a referential constraint. This can be seen with the help of an example. Consider a case where Al utters the following sentence

(29) I am going to the movies.

⁵⁷ See the section ‘Saying reports’ in chapter 1.

On his initial definition of narrow context Bach says, as we saw, that the speaker is included in the list of variables that can be determined. Bach thinks ‘I’ to belong to the set of expressions that can be given a determinate referent and not just a referential constraint (Bach, 2005, p.39). The claim is even stronger since Bach also seems to think that ‘I’ must be given a determinate referent in order to fit into an IQ-formula. Then what is said by the above utterance can be represented as:

(29)_{IQ} Al said that he [Al himself] is going to the movies.

Prima facie, it seems reasonable to say that such a referent determination is mandated for by the expression ‘I’. That ‘I’ fails to be “accurately” indirectly reported without somehow ‘fixing’ the indexical seems in this case to be evident since it would obviously be wrong to report (29) as:

*(29)_{IQ} Al said that I am going to the movies.

This is because ‘I’ cannot (or at least need not) be taken to refer back to Al; rather, it seems as if ‘I’ refers to whoever is uttering the indirect report. An alternative would be to employ what could be said to be the character of ‘I’ so as to get the following:

** (29)_{IQ} Al said that the speaker is going to the movies.

But this too seems intuitively wrong as a report of what is said by an utterance of (29), and it falls prey for the very same reason as the previous formulation did since ‘the speaker’ on this proposal is not bound to refer to the speaker of the initial utterance. Bach seems therefore to have good reason to claim that ‘I’ in (29) above needs to be ‘fixed’ in order for the sentence to be indirectly quoted and the first interpretation above, (29)_{IQ}, is clearly what we in most contexts would take Al to have said. But it is crucial to observe that the latter is an adequate report only at the level of utterance interpretation. On the level of what the sentence means (i.e. on a metaphysical level) there seems to be no reason for why we cannot give what is said in the same manner as we represent sentences containing demonstrative terms, i.e. by specifying a referential constraint instead of giving a determinate referent of the expression. But then we should get the following specification of what is said by (29):

***₍₂₉₎_{IQ} Al said that [a certain person] is going to the movies.⁵⁸

Although being less specific, this way of representing what is said by the above utterance does not violate the IQ-formula in the (intuitive) sense that the two failed proposals did. It preserves the meaning of the initial utterance in the sense that the indirect quotation is not restricted in a way that would rule out the literal interpretations of the utterance where ‘I’ refers to the speaker. The scope of interpretation is in fact wider since we have added a referential constraint (or parameter) instead of contextually determining the referent of ‘I’ to refer to Al. Similar arguments can be provided for sentences containing ‘today’, ‘now’, ‘here’ and other instances that may create problems for an indirect report of the saying. For instance, ‘today’ may be given the referential constraint ‘on a certain day’, ‘now’ can be constrained to be ‘within a certain time span’, and ‘here’ to ‘at a certain place’. It seems therefore as if the IQ-formula is not sufficient to serve as a test for which expressions can be given a determinate referent and which cannot. It may still be claimed, though, that it is a necessary property of expressions that they are given a determinate reference on the level of what is said, and that will rule out ***₍₂₉₎_{IQ} as a sufficient solution to our problem. The last attempt I will pursue is therefore whether such a sufficient criterion can be given via Bach’s appeal to the existence of ‘pure’ indexicals.

According to Kaplan, ‘true’ demonstratives necessarily depend on an additional act of demonstration (for instance an ostensive act of pointing) in order for the hearer to become able to determine the referent of the expression. This necessity may be an alternative proposal for a test for which expressions can be given a determinate referent. The test is put negatively, as saying that if an expression does not refer without an ostensive act being provided, then it cannot be determined on the level of what is said. On the other hand, those expressions that do not necessarily require an additional demonstrative act can be considered to be ‘pure’ indexicals. This seems to be something that Bach might agree on since he argued, as we saw, against the general proposition *the tree Sam is demonstrating is deciduous* as being what is said by (26), ‘That tree is deciduous’; and he did so precisely

⁵⁸ We should note at this point, as Carston does, that Bach seem to be disagreeing with himself in what is the right way of reporting what is said. In (1994b) he seems to argue in the direction of accepting that ‘she’ can be given a determinate referent as well. See Carston (2002, p.180-181) for a discussion of why this is so. I will in the following just overlook that difference in Bach’s account(s), because it would not but strengthen my arguments against the plausibility of determining a definite referent on the level of what is said.

because he took the ostensive demonstrative act not to be a part of the saying. But the appeal to the existence of ‘pure’ indexicals is problematic, and Bach cannot just rest on Kaplan’s considerations about these since their very existence has been seriously challenged in the literature.

John Perry (2001) and Stephano Predelli (2005), among others, have presented a variety of examples where the use of ‘pure’ indexicals clearly demonstrate that what they refer to can vary due to the speaker’s communicative intentions so that an interlocutor needs to consider more cues than the one provided in the sentence in order to assign the right referent to the expression. In other words, ‘pure’ indexicals must be said to suffer from “character deficiency” in just the same manner as other ‘true demonstratives’ and similar expressions. I will here provide some examples to prove this with candidate ‘pure’ indexicals, such as ‘I’, ‘here’ and ‘now’. We start with ‘I’. First, consider the energetic history teacher who says the following in front of her class:

(30) OK, who am I? It’s now 1815; I’m short, I’m looking at my horse that has just been shot, I’m looking at the Prussians arriving on my flank, and I’m watching the English beat my army in the valley below. Who am I? (Perry, 2001, p.68)

In the phrase ‘I’m short’ (which might as well be an individual sentence), ‘I’ clearly does not refer to the teacher; rather, it refers to the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. It is easy to fix the context so that this will be the interpretation that the hearers, i.e. the pupils, should arrive upon given an utterance of (30). But on Bach’s account we would need to report this as a saying where ‘I’ refers to the speaker so that we would get the following interpretation:

(30)_{IQ} The teacher said that she [the teacher herself] is short.

But this report seems clearly wrong. The problem is that the way the semantic information here is explicated, which is thought to somehow restrict the available interpretation of the hearers, restricts it too much. Similar problems are found for ‘here’ and ‘now’ but now the problem is due to the way in which they are restricted. Consider first the following example from Perry (2001, p.61):

(31) Now that we walk upright, we have a lot of back problems.

In this example ‘now’ clearly refers to a much wider time-period than the immediate time of the utterance, say the millions of years passed since the first humanoid raised to his feet and

started strolling over the plains in Eastern- and Central Africa. Thus, to restrict ‘now’ to the immediate time of the utterance seems at best weird and so a more general analysis of ‘now’ seems to be called for. With respect to ‘here’ Perry provides the following examples:

(32) I left my pen here [small place, table].

(33) The evenings are cooler than you expect here [city, country].

The point is that ‘here’ obviously varies, as Perry puts it, with regard to the “question of how large an area is to count” (Perry, 2001, p. 61) and that this can only be determined by allowing considerations from the broader context to play a role in determining the content. A slightly more complicated example is put forward by Predelli (2005, p.57), which is similar to (30) in the sense that here too the speaker is a lecturer. However, this time the lecturer considers Aristotle’s book, *Nichomacian Ethics*, and in an attempt at being more vivid in her presentation reports it by the use of ‘I’ without thereby referring to the speaker and ‘now’ without speaking about the time of the utterance. The lecturer says:

(34) I argued at length that one lives the best life by exercising both moral and intellectual virtues. And now I am suddenly advocating a rather different position, namely that the good life must be devoted solely to theoretical activity. Do you see a way out of this apparent inconsistency?

What all these cases seem to show is that an unargued appeal to the existence of ‘pure’ indexicals should be met with well-deserved objections and resistance. The cases show that providing the meaning of sentences containing ‘pure’ indexicals is not as straightforward as one would first think. If Bach wants to appeal to the existence of ‘pure’ indexicals in order to justify that some expressions may be given a determinate referent in what is said, a careful argument needs to be given that shows how Perry’s and Predelli’s examples are mistaken. Without such an argument I think we can safely put Bach’s proposal aside.

So after having considered all three suggestions for how to give a criterion for which expressions that can be given a determinate reference on the semantic notion of what is said – i.e. the close connection to the syntactic correlation constraint, the IQ-formula as a test, and lastly the existence of pure indexicals – it seems that Bach has not succeeded in giving an adequate criterion for a semantic determination of any context-sensitive expressions. We should therefore not assume that this can be done before new arguments and considerations are provided. This does not mean that indexical expressions are a special class of expressions, which deserves a very special treatment within a semantic theory. In one sense

there is clearly some intuitive appeal in favour of taking expressions such as 'I' to have a more systematic or rigid manner of referring than the demonstrative expressions. But what the above considerations show is that we cannot assume that what is special about that class is that they always, and without contextual relativization, determine a reference.

Concluding remarks

The challenge from context showed us that we could not keep a "traditional" semantics-pragmatics distinction where context is only relevant for pragmatics if we also wanted to give the meaning of sentences in terms of truth-conditions or propositions. Bach accepted the challenge and rejected propositional semantics, but yet sought to throw in some contextual information to a semantic notion of what is said. My conclusion with regards to this attempt is twofold: First, I found that we have no adequate criterion for when contextual information can be included in the semantic notion of what is said. A variable notion of what is said therefore stands in danger of collapsing into a pragmatic notion that does not serve the role intended for it. After all, since semantics aims to account for the specifically linguistic information available to the speaker it would surely fail to do that for those expressions whose content varies across contexts. So there is a tension between a compositional semantics, the syntactic correlation constraint and the intended *explanandum* for what is said, on the one hand, and the apparent need for contextual assignment, on the other. In my view we cannot give up the goal of accounting for the linguistic information that serves as input to the inference process an interlocutor goes through in order to determine what is meant by an utterance. This information has an important theoretical significance since it provides a 'basis' for a pragmatic theory of interpretation and communication. In doing so, it potentially explains what is stable of language, which may enable us to account for phenomena such a cross context communication (as outlined in chapter 1). What we must give up is rather the idea of contextually assigning values to expressions to determine what a sentence means. Secondly, I showed that the stable linguistic features of an utterance are insufficient for determining a full proposition that can stand as a candidate for the semantic meaning of a sentence. On this point, Bach does not disagree. This means, in turn, that sentences containing context-sensitive terms cannot be given meaning in terms of truth-conditions.

When it comes to the theoretical significance of what is said my conclusion is slightly negative. As noted above, if what is said is concerned with giving the meaning of sentence tokens relative to a context of utterance while sentence meaning concerns the meaning of a sentence type, then the two notions would have different domains. We can still say that what is said is related to the tokening of sentences, since the notion is not relevant without there being a tokening or an utterance of a sentence. Yet, the meaning of the sentence token seems to be equal to the sentence type, conditional on the latter being determined compositionally without contextual information. The fact that a sentence is uttered is not in itself a semantic fact no more than it is a linguistically encoded fact, and so it is not clear why this fact should be relevant for specifying the meaning of the sentence. Had the question been what the interlocutor would take the speaker as having said the answer would probably stand in need of some rethinking, but, as long as we are operating with the metaphysical notion of semantics – which is a subproject in the epistemological project of a theory of interpretation – it should be able to isolate it from questions about what a sentence means depending on its being used, i.e. a sentence token.⁵⁹

If I am wrong and we can, as Bach claims, have some contextual influence on semantic content, it might be argued that more than the ‘pure’ indexicals can be ascribed a referent prior to determining the semantic content, which might prove that context-sensitivity in itself does not constitute an argument against truth-conditional semantics. But, as we will see in the next chapter, even if we were willing to grant Bach with a successful account along these lines there are still sentences that are semantically incomplete; and these cases, or so I will argue, constitutes an independent argument against truth-conditional semantics.

⁵⁹ Carston (2002, p.177-181) has argued from similar reasons that what is said is redundant. I (2007) she says that what is said is “minimally distinct from LEM [‘Linguistically encoded meaning’, similar to our ‘sentence meaning’], and playing no independent role in utterance comprehension”. (2007, p.14)

4. Semantics without Truth

[W]e should recoil from the unargued goal of attaining isomorphism by freely adding aphonics [...] as of adorning some garish Christmas tree with a new light whenever it seems to dark.

Stephen Neale⁶⁰

In this chapter I argue that semantic incompleteness constitutes a counterargument to traditional truth-conditional semantics. The claim to be defended is that the linguistic content of certain syntactically complete utterances fails to determine the proposition expressed and that semantics alone fails to provide truth-conditions for these utterances. I will indicate how this can be developed into an argument against truth-conditional semantics. I begin by describing and establishing semantic incompleteness before I go on to consider two separate responses to it. The first response claims that the incomplete sentences in fact express so-called minimal proposition. This approach may be promising, but, as I will argue, it deserves a thorough discussion about the metaphysics of proposition to be properly assessed. The second response – the one I will mainly focus on – is referred to as *the subsyntax thesis*. It claims that subsyntactic elements of the sentence uttered – i.e. syntactic elements that are unpronounced or aphonic – are parts of the syntax of the sentence. First, I will assess how the subsyntax thesis fares against Bach's minimalist constraint on semantics, i.e. the syntactic correlation constraint, which postulates, as we have seen, an isomorphism between the sentence's syntactic structure and its semantic content.⁶¹ This, we may recall, is motivated by the project of accounting for the linguistic information available to the interlocutor and that in order to do this what is said must be held purely semantic and restricted by the syntactic correlation constraint. The constraint, which seems to restrict semantics to be concerned with the stable meaning of an expression, is an important presupposition in order to establish semantic incompleteness as an argument against truth-conditional semantics. As we have seen, Bach claims that some contextual information can be allowed into what is said but he does not go all the way up to semantically determine full propositions; whether or not he is

⁶⁰ Neale (2005 p.187)

⁶¹ The syntactic correlation constraint is introduced in chapter 2.

right on this point does not change my argument. I will argue that Bach's formulation of the syntactic correlation constraint suffers from a somewhat vague formulation, but that this does not mean that Bach should embrace the subsyntax thesis.

After this I will go on to consider arguments in favour of the subsyntax thesis. Taylor argues that we can determine parameters for semantically incomplete sentences and this seems to make them function more or less like sentences that contain overt context sensitive terms, such as indexicals or demonstratives. If proponents of the subsyntax thesis succeed, incompleteness no longer establishes an argument against truth-conditional semantics since we either end up with something overtly context-sensitive or we can determine fully truth-evaluable propositions without violating the syntactic correlation constraint. I will consider some arguments in favour of endorsing the subsyntax thesis, but in the end I argue that they are all insufficient to establish it. In my view we should also be careful about endorsing the subsyntax thesis since it seems to be motivated on circular ground and it postulates more structure than is necessary for our goal of explaining the linguistic input into an interpretation process; the thesis is therefore neither well motivated nor required.

Semantic incompleteness

First, consider an utterance of the following sentence:

(35) Dandelions are yellow.

The above sentence is syntactically complete⁶² so there should, at least *prima facie*, be no need to assign contextual information to determine what proposition is expressed by an utterance of (35), namely *that dandelions are yellow*. Intuitively, that should also be enough to give us something truth-evaluable. We can state the truth-conditions of the proposition expressed by (35) as: 'Dandelions are yellow' is true if, and only if dandelions are yellow and false if, and only if, dandelions are not yellow. I will call utterances of sentences such as (35) *semantically complete*.

⁶² What counts as syntactically complete sentences pertains all and only to syntax and thus not to semantics or pragmatics. In this paper I try to use examples that are uncontroversial and in a simple subject-predicate form.

It is common to take sentences that contain *context-sensitive terms*, like indexicals, demonstratives, and ambiguous terms, to be both syntactically and semantically complete. Consider for instance (36) and (37) below:

(36) I am hungry.

(37) She is going to the bank.

The indexical terms ‘I’ and ‘she’ in (36) and (37) need to be ascribed referents in order for them to express propositions and be truth-evaluable. In (37), the ambiguous term ‘bank’ also needs to be disambiguated. It is clear that the context of utterance must be considered in order to do this, for it is only by so doing that we can say what the propositions expressed are: for instance, *that Trine is hungry*, if I were to utter (36), or *that Ellen is going to the riverbank*, if Ellen is the demonstrated object in (37) and ‘bank’ is used to refer not to the financial institution but to the bank of a river. I will not discuss how the referents of context-sensitive terms are determined and what role semantics play in doing so.⁶³ For the present purpose, what we need to notice is that we must determine the referents of overt elements of the sentences, namely ‘I’, ‘she’ and ‘bank’, in order for (36) and (37) to express propositions with a determinate truth-value. However, the fact that a sentence contains context-sensitive terms does not in and of itself entail that an utterance of that sentence is incomplete. So even though context-sensitivity is an important feature of language-use we are still not quite where I want to take us.

On many occasions – perhaps even most of them – we do not use syntactically and semantically complete sentences and yet we succeed in communicating a thought or a proposition. For instance, we can make *subsential* utterances like:

(38) On the top shelf⁶⁴

(39) John’s father⁶⁵

An utterance of (38) could in the right context be taken to express the proposition *that the marmalade is on the top shelf*, while (39), on the other hand, could be used to express the proposition *that the man standing at the door step is John’s father*. What is important in

⁶³See the earlier discussion on context-sensitivity.

⁶⁴Example due to Carston (2002, p. 17).

⁶⁵Example due to Stainton (1995, p. 289).

cases such as these is that we need to consider information from the context of utterance in order to determine the proposition expressed by the speaker.

But not even subsentential utterances will here be considered to be examples of semantically incomplete utterances, because they are incomplete on a more “basic” level; they are *syntactically* incomplete.⁶⁶ Unlike subsententials, semantically incomplete utterances are utterances of sentences that are syntactically *complete* and yet fail to express a full proposition. Consider utterances of the following:

(40) Paracetamol is better [than what?].

(41) Tipper is ready [for what?].

(42) It is raining [where?].

The bracketed material is not an overt part of these utterances but is provided to show that utterances of sentences such as these intuitively require a kind of *completion*. One can accomplish this by providing information along the lines of answering the questions in the brackets, which will make the utterances express full propositions that are evaluable for truth or falsity.⁶⁷ That is to say, one needs to complete them in order to see them as expressing full propositions. This we can do pragmatically by considering the context of utterance – where what goes into to the context is determined by the speaker’s intentions – but the pronounced linguistic content of these utterances does neither determine the kind of pragmatic completion that is called for nor does it indicate what contextual information may prove relevant for arriving at the interpretation the speaker intended.⁶⁸

Let me illustrate this by considering (42): Assume that (42) expresses a proposition, something like *that it is raining*. On the assumption that a proposition is a bearer of one truth-value which is timeless and universal, we face trouble. For such a proposition, if that is

⁶⁶ This is certainly another interesting phenomenon that a theory of communication needs to account for, but I will not discuss how and if full propositions can be determined from subsentential utterances. For a discussion of non-sentential assertions and semantic ellipses, see for instance Stainton (1995).

⁶⁷ Since I restrict the discussion to incompleteness stemming from sentences containing verb-phrases that seem to require a second argument place, I refer to the pragmatic process by which we can reach a full proposition as “completion”. In Bach’s framework there is another type of pragmatic process needed to determine a full proposition in cases where there is an unrestricted full proposition that is typically used to convey something more specific, such as, “I haven’t taken a bath [today]”. This he refers to as “expansion”, and both completion and expansion are processes necessary to determine what Bach calls the *implicature* of the utterance (Bach, 1994a).

⁶⁸ Note that Sperber and Wilson talk not of the proposition expressed thereby alluding to Grice’s notion of what is said; rather, they talk about *basic level explicatures*. They don’t find what is said to be a coherent notion nor that it is equivocal

what it is, can be true *and* false at the same time. This follows from the fact that it may be raining in one place and not raining in another place. Therefore, (42) doesn't express a full proposition. The other examples are similar: without specifying the relevant comparison class for (40) or the event relevant for (41) there is no one proposition expressed by (40) and (41). Utterances of semantically incomplete sentences are therefore rightly conceived as failing to express a full semantically determined proposition.

On the mistaken assumption (at least according to Bach) that what is said is equated with the proposition expressed – i.e. that it must be a full proposition – two main strategies can be distinguished in the literature: There are those who think that what is said by the utterances above must include a pragmatically induced specification of the bracketed material. They may be labelled *maximalists* or *contextualists* (henceforth contextualists).⁶⁹ On their account what is said is not determined by semantics alone and is therefore not a semantic notion. Those belonging to the opposite camp may be labelled *minimalists*. They hold that what is said must be given by the semantics, and so, according to the minimalist, what is said must be something less than the “completed” proposition that contains the bracketed material.

Bach holds a hybrid view; he agrees with the contextualists that completion of the incomplete utterances is a matter of pragmatics. However, his position differs radically from the maximalists since he holds that what is said must be held purely semantic. On his view, the notion of what is said is, as we may recall, that it needs to be restricted in order to serve the purpose of accounting for the linguistic information available to the speaker in communication (Bach, 2001, p.15). Accordingly, what is said in (40)-(42) can be roughly stated as follows:

(40)_{IQ} S says that Paracetamol is better.

(41)_{IQ} S says that Tipper is ready.

(42)_{IQ} S says that it is raining.⁷⁰

between (roughly) sentences in a declarative mood and sentences uttered as assertions (Sperber and Wilson: 1986/95, p.180-181).

⁶⁹ Recanati, Sperber and Wilson, and Carston will be examples of contextualists in this respect.

⁷⁰ I employ Bach's IQ-formula, see chapter 2 for details.

Given semantic incompleteness, what is said can sometimes be less than propositional and thus behave something like a “propositional radical” or “a fragment of a proposition” (Bach 1994a, p.127). This rejection of what is said as necessarily being fully propositional and leaving it to pragmatics to fulfil the required completion lies at the heart of Bach’s position and this combined view distinguishes him from other approaches – minimalists and maximalists alike – in the debate concerning the boundary between semantics and pragmatics. On the assumption that he is right and semantics needs to be restricted in order to account for the linguistic information, it follows that semantic incompleteness establishes a counterargument to truth-conditional semantics; or so I shall argue. A contextualist would not disagree to the claim that we cannot semantically determine a full proposition from semantically incomplete utterances, but some semantic minimalists do make this proposal and so we need consider their attempts within a minimalist framework to determine a proposition semantically.

Minimalists have deployed two strategies that may suffice to preserve truth-conditional semantics. First, Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore claim that utterances of sentences such as (40)-(42) express *minimal propositions*. I will start by briefly considering Cappelen and Lepore’s claim since if their proposal is successful it might rule out incompleteness as a counterargument to truth-conditional semantics. The second, and in my view more profound suggestion, is to fill out the bracketed material semantically by appeal to *the subsyntax thesis*. It is this latter strategy that I will concentrate on in the remainder of this paper.

Minimal propositions

Cappelen and Lepore claim that (41) expresses a minimal proposition, namely that Tipper is ready *simpliciter*. That proposition is true if and only if Tipper is ready. I have not postulated many properties that propositions need to have except for what I take to be very basic properties, such as that propositions are either true or false, and that their truth-value is stable (that is ‘timeless and universal’). Cappelen and Lepore’s claim is therefore radical in the sense that they choose to ignore what they refer to as metaphysical worries about what ‘readiness’ is (2005, ch.11). That is to say, the minimal proposition expressed by (41) may be true or false, but as semanticists we are not required to know which truth-value it has

because that comes down to what ‘ready’ means, i.e. to which property ‘ready’ depicts, and whether or not Tipper is a bearer of that property. To sort out this mystery one must call upon one’s favourite metaphysical theory; or so they claim.

As we saw in chapter 3, the challenge from context-sensitivity calls for two alternative solutions: either to give up propositional (and truth-conditional) semantics, or to find a way of including some contextual information in semantics. When it comes to incompleteness it seems that there is an additional option, namely to reconsider the nature of propositions. Cappelen and Lepore’s proposal may be an attempt of doing so, but if that is the case the proposal calls for a proper emphasis and research into the metaphysics of propositions. This is not the right place to take on such a project. As we shall see in the concluding remarks of this chapter, it also seems dubious to postulate the need for minimal propositions in order to explain shared content, i.e. the stable content that allows us to engage in cross context communication. It seems therefore as if Cappelen and Lepore’s motivation for postulating a minimal proposition for sentences like (41) is weakened. Instead of trying to explain context-sensitivity so that we can determine full propositions (if that is what minimal propositions are) they should engage in explaining what the contribution of these context-sensitive terms is that allows us to express different thoughts in different contexts.⁷¹

Syntactic correlation constraint revisited

An essential minimalist assumption that underlies my claim that incompleteness establishes an argument against truth-conditional semantics is that semantics is constrained so as to only treat those elements of the sentence that are traceable to the meaning of the words and the way they are combined syntactically. The completion necessary to reach a full proposition must be based on information from the context of utterance, and so I take it that a minimalist restriction upon semantics excludes the possibility of a semantic completion. The syntactic correlation constraint is Bach’s formulation of such a constraint and subsyntax is, at least *prima facie*, in conflict with this constraint. As we may recall, Bach uses Grice’s formulation to cash out a constraint on a purely semantic notion of what is said so that the latter

corresponds to “the elements of [the sentence], their order, and their syntactic character” (Grice, 1989, p.87 in Bach 2001, p.15). I will begin by looking at how there seems to be vagueness in Bach’s formulation of the syntactic correlation constraint that might make it look as if Bach could also embrace the subsyntax thesis.

The most relevant clause for comparing the syntactic correlation constraint with the subsyntax thesis is the following: “Syntactic Correlation should not be construed as requiring that every element of what is said corresponds to an *uttered* element of the uttered sentence. But it does require that every element of what is said correspond to *some* element of the uttered sentence.” (Bach, 2001, p.15, italics in original) Given the addition of that very last clause the following question must be addressed: What kind of *unuttered* element can take part in what is said? In other words, what does ‘some’ refer to in the above quote?

According to Bach, the unpronounced elements that are explicitly allowed within his framework are empty categories, implicit arguments, and syntactic ellipses.⁷² These add something to the semantic content, and it seems crucial for Bach to make a clear distinction between these unpronounced elements and those that might be claimed to derive from subsyntactic features. If there is no clear distinction, it seems that we have no reason to reject subsyntax on the basis of the syntactic correlation constraint. Unfortunately, the only hint Bach provides on this issue concerns syntactic ellipses. Information stemming from elliptical utterances is explicit, according to him, which means that elliptic information can be “recovered” and included in what is said. Bach defines ellipses as follows: “Utterances are elliptical, strictly speaking, only if the suppressed material is recoverable, at least up to ambiguity, by grammatical means alone” (1994a, p.131). The examples he provides are such as:

- (43) Bill is happiest when working.
- (44) Bill likes working and so does Al.
- (45) Bill wants pie for dessert and Al pudding.

⁷¹ In a series of reviews and responses Bach has been discussing these issues with Cappelen and Lepore where it is clear that they are in strong disagreement. See their respective Webpages. Bach (2006) particularly concerns incompleteness.

⁷² Note that Bach doesn’t explicitly say that the list is restricted to those three. On the contrary, it seems that more could be included since he claims that “a sentence can include unpronounced elements (Grice did not consider this), *such* as empty categories, implicit arguments, and syntactic ellipses” (Bach, 2001, p.15, my italics). Although this might leave room for some confusion, I take Bach to mean by ‘such as’ similar *syntactic* phenomena.

Without providing any “contextually salient substitutes”, (43) unequivocally *entails* that when Bill is working it is Bill himself and not Al or Jerome that is happiest.⁷³ Spelling out the elliptical material can be done via indirect quotation as follows:

(43)_{IQ} S says that Bill is happiest when Bill is working.

(44)_{IQ} S says that Bill likes working and Al likes working.

(45)_{IQ} S says that Bill wants pie for dessert and Al wants pudding for dessert.

Bach goes on to say that, “Since the recovered material corresponds to something in the sentence, though not necessarily to something that is phonologically realized, there is no reason to deny that the paraphrase specifies what is said.” (Bach, 1994a, p.132) So far so good. However, matters are different with incompleteness, “for in that case the inserted material is not only unheard, it is not even there syntactically. Linguistically speaking, it is not there to be recovered. For this reason, there is no linguistic basis for including such material in what is said.” (Bach, 1994a, p.132) The difference Bach is drawing our attention to is the fact that the syntactic ellipsis is called for by something that is overt in the sentence, while for a semantically incomplete sentence there is not any such syntactic correspondence.⁷⁴ In the absence of any further reasons for why subsyntactic elements should be seen as violating the syntactic correlation constraint, while ellipses and other unpronounced elements are not – and it seems that Bach does not provide such reasons – we have to rely on linguistic theories to describe the phenomena in question.

If Bach’s claim cannot be defended, his way of restricting semantics needs to be reformulated as to not include these elements. That could be devastating for his account of what is said since, among other things, we seem to lose the IQ-formula as a way of reporting sayings. Yet, in order to keep a semantics that only concerns the stable features of meaning, whether or not it includes resolution of ellipses or other seemingly syntactic

⁷³ Bach notes that this is not the case if a sentence is syntactically ambiguous, i.e. has alternative entailments relative to different disambiguations. Such sentences are not semantically incomplete (1994a, p.131-132).

⁷⁴ This could be understood by employing the Chomskian distinction between ‘Phonetic form’ and ‘Logical form’. The elements recovered in the ellipsis is part of LF although not part of PF. They are ‘phonologically null’ or aphonic yet relevant for the interpretation/recovery of what is said.

phenomena, we need to consider some independent argument in favour of the subsyntax thesis.⁷⁵

Subsyntax

Taylor endorses an account where parameters similar to those given for context-sensitive expressions are applied to semantically incomplete utterances. Given his account, what is said in the above examples can be stated as follows:

(40)_{IQ} A said that Paracetamol is better [than a certain thing in a relevant comparison class]

(41)_{IQ} A said that Tipper is ready [for a certain event]

(42)_{IQ} A said that it is raining [in a certain place]⁷⁶

Before discussing the source of the parameters, we should consider the significance of adding ‘certain’ in the bracketed material. This clause was also in the parameters for indexical and demonstrative expressions, as we have seen, but the significance of it appears to be greater on this proposal. With the inclusion of ‘certain place’ it seems that the sentence uttered can be paraphrased as follows: ‘There is a *demonstrated* place x such that A said that it is raining in x , and for any place y , if A said that it is raining at y , then $x = y$.’ In other words, what is achieved by adding ‘certain’ in the parameter seems to be that it provides us with something like a (indefinite) definite description⁷⁷ which captures that A said more than just that it is raining somewhere or other; rather, what A said is that it is raining somewhere *specific*. On this interpretation, the semantic content is not that it is raining just somewhere or another, but that there is one specific place (although not determined semantically) where it is raining. By adding ‘certain’ the bracketed material behave somewhat like a demonstrative⁷⁸, and although there is no full proposition – which would require us to also

⁷⁵ Note that syntactic ellipses are different from semantic ellipses: ‘It is raining’ can be claimed to have a semantic ellipses, namely that the completion is called for by semantic properties and not the syntax of the sentences. See Stainton (1995) for a discussion. For Bach, semantic ellipses are clearly outside the realm of semantics due to the syntactic correlation constraint.

⁷⁶ Taylor (2001) only discusses ‘raining’ without spelling out what is said by (8), as I have done above. So all the suggestions are mine and are following Bach’s way of representing content within the IQ-framework.

⁷⁷ Carston (2002) calls this an indefinite definite description.

⁷⁸ And so proponents could be tempted to say that semantic incomplete sentences contains a phonic or unpronounced indexicals.

specify the correct location in question – the utterances (40)-(42) are no longer semantically incomplete, only context-sensitive.

We can see this by comparing the parameter given for (42) and the parameter that we could give for the following sentence where the demonstrative ‘there’ is included:

(46) It is raining *there*.

Let us say that Chiara is uttering this while pointing at a hilltop about half a kilometre away from where we stand. Given that the ostensive act of pointing cannot be included as relevant contextual information (like we saw in chapter 3) that could be used to determine what is said by Chiara’s utterance, the following seems to be a reasonable parameter or referential constraint:

(46)_{IQ} It is raining [in a certain place]

This is the same parameter that we could give for (42), hence this way of accounting for incompleteness can be used for the purpose of reducing incompleteness to something very similar to context-sensitivity for indexicals or demonstratives. If this account is right, my case for incompleteness as an argument against truth-conditional semantics will be weakened. This is because we would also need to establish that also context-sensitive terms can make a sentence incomplete in order to establish these sentences as counterexamples. An outline of such an argument was given in the previous chapter but for the present purpose let us ignore that and concentrate on the above response to incompleteness.

For Taylor, the possibility of construing what is said as containing parameters is grounded on the assumption that there are hidden syntactic elements in the incomplete utterances. These are hidden on a subsyntactic level, which is understood as a syntactic level that is part of the sentence uttered even though it is unpronounced. Thus they are covert parts of the syntax of the sentence. This is different from claiming that the things missing in semantically incomplete utterances are elements of the *proposition* expressed (like John Perry’s unarticulated constituents⁷⁹) since that could just be filled in pragmatically. So subsyntactic elements of a sentence are not something to be recovered by a kind of completion process,

⁷⁹ The notion ‘unarticulated constituent’ appeared first, as far as I know, in Perry (1986).

but are already parts of the sentences albeit on an unpronounced level. The question is: What reasons have we for thinking that subsyntax exists?

Consider again (42): According to Taylor, what seems to be the case is that the *lexical meaning* of the verb ‘to rain’ explicitly marks *rainings* as a kind of process or event that a place undergoes.⁸⁰ Following Taylor’s suggestion, we seem to be able to specify a parameter for (42) that takes places as values, which is just something along the lines of what is suggested in (42)_{IQ}. What we have done could be described as fixing or restricting the completion of the sentence without determining the actual completion, since the latter needs to take place in a specific context of utterance by invoking pragmatic considerations.⁸¹

It clearly is not the case that the parameter stems from something *explicit* in the utterance of the sentence in the sense of being pronounced. Taylor suggests that the “subsyntactic basement of suppressed verbal argument structure” could be a source of the parameter (Taylor, 2001, p.53). It is called subsyntactic because it is not due to any missing element in the “explicit” or “pronounced syntax”. After all, semantically incomplete sentences in Bach’s sense are by definition syntactically *complete*. It is instructive to see how Taylor compares (42) with another sentence, (47) below, which has the same syntactic structure as (42) but which is clearly not semantically incomplete:

(47) He is dancing.

Taylor says that although dancing also requires a location for taking place the change that the place undergoes in an event of dancing is “not explicitly marked as such in the subsyntactic basement of the lexicon” (2001, p.54). In short, Taylor’s suggestion is that verb-phrases like ‘rain’ and ‘dance’ differ in just how they relate to locations. In the case of dancing he says that, “‘To dance’ does not mark the place where a dance happens as the undergoer of the

⁸⁰ Note that I restrict my discussion to one kind of incomplete utterances, namely those that include verb phrases. Even if the existence of subsyntax can be defended concerning other terms that make a sentence semantically incomplete, it is enough to show that an appeal to subsyntax is not well grounded for one (sort of) case to maintain that incompleteness provides a counterexample to truth-conditional semantics. It is also worth noting that it might be necessary to give different accounts of different sources of incompleteness.

⁸¹ This resembles how the referent of an indexical is fixed on Bach’s view, namely without specifying what or who is to be the reference of an uttered indexical in the actual context of utterance; rather, one just considers possible contexts of utterances. See Bach (2001) for how he compares his and Taylor’s accounts. In a sense the parameter specifies something that goes merely a part of the way towards specifying what’s being uttered; or, as Taylor puts it, it’s a “to-be-contextually-evaluated” parameter (2001, p. 53). Whether or not this is a plausible way of accounting for indexicals will not be discussed here.

dance. The theme or undergoer of a dancing is the dancer herself. The place where a dancing “takes place” is merely the place where the dancer dances.” (Taylor, 2001, p.54) Given this, it seems reasonable to say that (47) is not incomplete precisely because the relevant undergoer is specified in the sentence, although indirectly; that is to say, it is specified by the pronoun ‘he’.

Similarly, Taylor appeals to subsyntactic lexical structure of the verb ‘to rain’ to explain why (42) is incomplete: “Facts about the subsyntactic lexical structure of the verb directly entail that nothing fully propositionally determinate has been expressed by an utterance of a sentence like (5) [our (42)] unless a place is contextually provided.” So the claim is that any sentence containing ‘rain’, which doesn’t specify any location will be incomplete. However, Bach (2001, p.36) presents a nice counterexample to this consequence of Taylor’s view. Consider (48) below where (42) is embedded in a quantificational context:

(48) Whenever *it is raining*, most people use umbrellas.

The truth and falsity of the proposition expressed by this sentence is not due to the location of the raining, but rather depends on whether most people use umbrellas whenever they are out in the rain (we overlook for the present purpose what would count as the right interpretation of ‘most’). It does not purport to say that they are where it is raining whenever it is (2001, p.36). In other words, Bach’s claim is that (42) can be embedded in a quantificational context that quantifies over time and not locations. It seems intuitively right to say that this sentence is clearly semantically complete and therefore (48) shows that the mere occurrence of ‘raining’ in (42) without there being a specified location isn’t a sufficient condition for a sentence to be semantically incomplete. If it were, (48) would come out as incomplete as well. In other words, whether (48) is true or false is not due to raining happening *at a location*. Its truth-value does not depend on its raining on a specific location, like ‘Oslo’ or ‘London’, nor does it depend on whether it’s raining on the location where the “umbrella users” are at any the time of the raining, i.e. where it would be true only if most people in Oslo use umbrellas whenever it is raining in Oslo. Rather, (48) is true only if most people use umbrellas whenever they are out in the rain (because if they hadn’t they would have become wet). Bach thus seems to have good reasons for making his conclusion about (42)), namely that “It doesn’t follow from the fact that raining happens to locations and that

[(42)] does not express a complete proposition that the sentence contains a covert location variable.” (2001, p.37)

Furthermore, we can ask: Why do we not need to know where the dancer is when she is dancing? Taylor appeals to our mutual knowledge: “That a dancing must take place somewhere or other is a (mutually known) metaphysical fact about the universe – a fact that supervenes on the nature of dancing and the structure of space-time” (2001. p.54). This quote does not do much explanatory work for showing a relevant difference between ‘raining’ and ‘dancing’, which could explain why (42) comes out incomplete while (47) does not. After all, it seems as if we could say the exact same thing about raining. That is to say, we could paraphrase the quote by substituting ‘raining’ for ‘dancing’ and get “That a raining must take place somewhere or other is a (mutually known) metaphysical fact about the universe – a fact that supervenes on the nature of raining and the structure of space-time”. Thus, it is still unanswered why the location of the dancing is not as relevant for the sentence as the location of the raining. A claim that could explain the difference is that it is due to the sort of information we normally are trying to convey by the utterances of (42) and (47), but arguably that is a pragmatic fact independent of any syntactic consideration. Taylor attempts at providing an explanation by appealing to the following: “This is not to say that the place where a dancer dances is never of conversational relevance to us. It is merely to say that such conversational relevance as the location of a dancing enjoys is not a direct consequence of lexically generated requirements on semantic incompleteness.” (Taylor, 2001, p.54) But this seems merely to beg the question.

Another reason for not accepting the subsyntax thesis on the basis of Taylor’s considerations is that it is not required for a sentence that contains ‘dancing’ that it explicitly marks the undergoer of the dancing – i.e. the dancer – in order to be complete. After all, the following seems to be a complete utterance:

(49)A: What is this huge room for?

B: It’s for dancing.

If it is the non-presence of the undergoer of what is described in the verb-phrase that makes the sentence semantically incomplete, and the undergoer of dancing is the dancer and not a location, as Taylor claims, then B’s utterance in (49) should have been semantically incomplete. It clearly is not. After all, since the only thing that needs reference fixing in order

to get a truth-evaluable proposition is the demonstrative expressions ‘it’. It could be objected to this example that the syntactic structure is different from (42) but this is not relevant for Taylor’s arguments either, since he claims that the need to add something from “the subsyntactic basement” stems not from the level of sentence syntax but from the level of the words lexical meaning. So Taylor’s arguments for the subsyntax thesis do not seem very strong. However, to rule out the possibility that there might be other and more profound attempts at defending subsyntax cannot be done on this basis. I will not here assess other attempts at defending such a thesis but only notice some crucial features of the two most profound proposals.

The first thing to notice is that on Taylor’s account the incomplete sentences do not express full propositions if we cannot in addition give a semantic story of how to determine the referents of context-sensitive expressions – such as indexical expressions and demonstratives – and so even if it is the right way of accounting for incompleteness, the challenge against truth-conditional semantics may remain. An alternative candidate for adding information without actually specifying the location the speaker is referring to, is to say that (42) expresses the proposition *that it is raining somewhere*. That is roughly how another minimalist, Emma Borg, tries to fill in the missing information in order to give truth-conditions for (42) (Borg, 2004, p.228-231). Her suggestion could be paraphrased as an indefinite description with an existential quantifier: ‘There is a place x such that it is raining at x’. As one can see, this would be true whenever there is one or more place(s) where it is raining and false whenever there is no place where it is raining. Such an account might be promising since on this account there is a full proposition determined, but the proposal rests on the plausibility of the subsyntax thesis.

A different approach is Jason Stanley’s *indexicalism*. He holds a position that is minimalist in the sense that he accepts the syntactic correlation constraint or something similar to it,⁸² but yet maximalist in the sense that he takes the semantic content of incomplete utterances to be a proposition that includes the “missing” elements. In other words, he claims that a full

⁸² In ‘Context and Logical Form’ Stanley argues for the thesis that all truth-conditional effects of extra-linguistic context can be traced to logical form (LF) (Stanley, 2007, p. 30). In other words, he takes everything relevant for determining the semantic content to be traceable to the logical form of the sentences uttered, and for him the semantic content is a full proposition.

proposition can be recovered for the semantically incomplete sentences without violating the requirement of there being an isomorphism between the sentence's syntactic structure and the meaning of the words, and the proposition that it expresses. Unlike Taylor Stanley argues that it is not the lexical meaning of the words that gives rise to subsyntactic elements of the sentence, but, rather, that we support the thesis from the perspective of the syntactic structure or logical form of the whole sentence. I could have gone into the details of Stanley's so-called *Binding argument*, but there are strong arguments against his view so I will leave that for another occasion.⁸³ Whether or not subsyntax can be established is therefore still an open question, and it might just come down to being an empirical fact about language. I therefore want to end this section with two general considerations of why subsyntax is not a viable claim to hold on to.

First, I want to claim that the overall motivation and argumentation in favour of the subsyntax thesis should be rejected on the grounds that they are viciously circular. To see this we must recall that the subsyntax thesis (in one variant or another) is called for in order to resolve semantically incomplete sentences, i.e. in an attempt to determine full or truth-evaluable propositions on a semantic level free from contextual information. And indeed if subsyntax could be proven to exist, this might just be what we need to give us the result while maintaining truth-conditional semantics. The problem is that in attempting to justify the existence of subsyntax the proponents of the thesis points to the same semantically incomplete sentences. That is to say the circularity of their arguments is that they use semantically incomplete utterances as evidence for there being subsyntactic elements of the sentence uttered in order to rule out semantic incompleteness.

Stanley, for instance, says that any addition necessary to determine the truth-conditional content of the utterance (the proposition expressed) must be traceable to logical form (LF) (Stanley, 2007, p. 30). This goes hand in hand with his minimalism, and he states this as a matter of principle motivated by our need to avoid there being sentences where no proposition is expressed. Whichever necessary elements need to be added they must therefore be given a subsyntactic base (in the sentence's logical form⁸⁴). Taylor seems to

⁸³ For arguments against Stanley's binding argument that concerns (42) see Recanati (2002 and 2007) and Neale (2007). For an overview of various objections to Stanley's view see Ostertag (2008).

⁸⁴ See previous footnote on Chomsky's distinction between phonetic form and logical form.

argue in the same circular mode when he starts from the challenge of semantic incompleteness, which seems not to determine a full proposition, and then goes on to look at examples that are taken to be incomplete in order to complete them (e.g. ‘It is raining’ and ‘She is dancing’). His argument thus seems to be that if they are incomplete, then there must be a subsyntactic element in the sentence. Whether or not subsyntax exist may, as noted above, come down to an empirical question, but from the above arguments the burden of proof lies upon those who want to remain proponents of the subsyntax thesis.

Secondly, I want to question the theoretical significance of adding subsyntax. The search for, and the virtues of, a systematic semantic account of the stable contribution of language in communication may be violated by the above appeal to subsyntax, for such an account may become very complicated. This is the worry that Neale (2005) so nicely illustrates in the ingress of this chapter. Neale challenges the assumption that there needs to be an isomorphism between logical form and the language of thought. To put this in more familiar terms, the challenge is tantamount to doubting the claim that the semantic content of an utterance – whether that be what is said, the sentence meaning, or what we take a speaker to state – needs to be fully propositional, where propositional means that the semantic content corresponds precisely to the thought that the speaker wants to communicate and which the hearer needs to endorse in order for successful communication to take place. I wholeheartedly agree and, although there are some systematicity in adding a new light to the Christmas tree at its darkest spot, we clearly end up with something else than we wanted. The amounts of elements that may make a sentence in need of completion in order to explicate what the speaker expressed shows that there is a lot more to do for subsyntax in order to always represent the thought or proposition that the speaker “had in mind”. In my view, we are left with no independent motivation for why semantic completion of incomplete utterances is necessary.

Furthermore, it complicates the picture by adding further elements into the debate, and so if we have a simpler yet workable account, that might be sufficient for not endorsing an account that includes subsyntactic structure. The main motivation for maintaining something like the subsyntax thesis is that semantics can remain propositional and meaning can be given in terms of truth-conditions. Various motivations for this might be given and proponents of this should aim at showing the necessity of giving meaning in terms of truth-

conditions. Let me therefore end this section by briefly reconsidering one such motivation, which we touched upon in chapter 1, namely shared content.

Cappelen and Lepore claim that we are in need of propositional semantics, but given the above problems of determining a full proposition on a semantic (i.e. on a metaphysical) level, what must be considered is whether semantics can account for shared content without being propositional or whether shared content can be accounted for on a non-semantic level. To give the meaning in terms of truth-conditions provides an influential way of representing meaning, but it is still an open question whether we could have truth-conditional pragmatics instead of truth-conditional semantics.⁸⁵ Given the distinction outlined in chapter 1 between a theory of interpretation and a theory of meaning it is not clear that the relevance of representing meaning as truth-conditions on the semantic side has any priority over assigning truth-conditions to what an interlocutor takes a speaker to mean by making an utterance. Shared content was introduced in chapter 1 as a way of securing the need for semantics in a theory of interpretation. Central in Cappelen and Lepore's own account is, as we have just seen, that the semantic content of a sentence is a full (albeit minimal) proposition. I will maintain the claim that what we should seek to determine the stable content that is the same in every utterance of a sentence. But I see no reason for thinking that this must not be full propositions and it seems more reasonable to claim that what a *hearer* understands must be a proposition. The latter is, after all, what seems crucial for there being successful communication. What semantics do is to tell how the meaning of the words and the syntactic structure of a sentence conspire to constrain the available interpretations, and that is enough for communication.

Concluding remarks

What is the semantic content of an utterance? The claim defended in this thesis is that a pragmatic theory of interpretation must be distinguished from a semantic theory of meaning. Yet, semantics can contribute to understanding successful linguistic communication. The speaker provides linguistic evidence for the hearer to consider, and although interpretation of

⁸⁵ Recanati (2003) and Bezeudenhaut (2003) have proposed that we in fact can have truth-conditional pragmatics.

the linguistic content is a pragmatic question – i.e. it is not a necessary entailment from what is said to what is meant – semantics contributes in accounting for the meaning encoded in the sentences and expressions a speaker uses. Context-sensitivity and semantic incompleteness are both challenges to the semantics-pragmatics distinction and for determining semantic meaning, but, as we have just seen, the often underlying and unargued assumption that the semantic content needs to be propositional can and should be questioned. In the future, I think this assumption considered together with the metaphysics of propositions is the most promising ways of taking this debate to a further level.

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