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Talking Metaphors:  
Metaphors  
and  
The Philosophy of Language

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



## *Abstract*

In this dissertation I defend a non-indexicalist contextualist account of metaphorical interpretation. This theory, which works within Kaplan's double-index semantic framework, claims that context does not have the only role of determining the content expressed by an utterance, but also the function of fixing the appropriate circumstance of evaluation relative to which that content is evaluated. My claim is that the metaphorical dimension of an utterance can be found in the circumstance of evaluation, and not in the content which is expressed by the utterance. To that effect, I introduce a parameter in the circumstance of evaluation of an utterance, which I call 'thematic dimension'. I show how the introduction of this parameter is in harmony with a class of theories that have proposed a relativistic semantic treatment of other phenomena such as predicates of taste and knowledge ascriptions. At the same time, I question a number of other proposals, both semantic and pragmatic, which, I believe, do not reach the same level of empirical adequacy and formal correctness as my proposal.



*To the memory of my aunt Sara*



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## Introduction

Simon Blackburn, in his influential book (Blackburn 1984: 179), wrote:

Sadly...I incline to Hobbes's view that understanding things metaphorically is not understanding them at all, although it may often immediately yield understanding, and guide it and increase it. On this account a good metaphor at the open-ended level is expressed by an utterance which does not say that such-and-such is the case, but rather expressed an invitation or suggestion that a certain comparison be followed up. In this respect such an utterance...does not have truth conditions, but is successful or not in a different dimension.

The purpose of this dissertation is to rebut Blackburn's statement that metaphors require a 'special' sort of understanding which is disconnected from the knowledge of the truth-conditions of an utterance. In this respect, this dissertation is a defence of the claim that metaphors do have truth-conditions, whose understanding does not differ from the understanding of other phenomena for which a semantics has already been provided.

However, these claims I am boldly stating here will require a lot of effort and care on my part to be made work properly. On the one hand, I need to accurately explore the notion of 'truth-

conditions'. For, it seems evident that the notion cannot coincide with that of 'wordly' conditions, that is, concrete conditions in the world that verify the truth or falsity of statements. Let me make this clear with an example:

(1) The cat is on the mat.

An appropriate semantic system must deliver correct hypotheses as to the truth-conditional profile of utterances of a sentence such as (1). Given the mundane topic of the sentence, the system does not have any problem in delivering the correct conclusion that an utterance of this sentence is true if and only if the wordly condition *that the salient cat is on the mat* obtains.

Things are much less clear when we turn to the question of whether metaphorical utterances do have truth-conditions. What truth-conditions could a metaphorical utterance of a sentence such as

(2) Juliet is the sun.

have? If we stipulate that truth-conditions are just wordly conditions, then it is an a priori matter that sentences such as (2) do not have any verifiable truth-conditions and that, therefore, a semantic system cannot deliver any hypothesis concerning the meaning of (2).

However, it is also true that a semantic system must be empirically adequate. I follow Predelli (2005a) in thinking that a semantic system must deliver not only correct hypotheses concerning the truth-conditions of utterances, but also respect the judgements competent speakers make as to their truth or falsity.

Now, if it is true that we need to handle the notion of truth-conditions with particular care in the case of metaphor, it is also

true that competent speakers of English (and of any other language I am acquainted with), assent or dissent to the contents expressed by metaphorical utterances in the same way they do with ‘literal’ utterances. Consider:

(3) A: Jim is a Republican.

B: No, he is not. I have seen him at the last democratic convention.

(4) A: Jim is a bulldozer. We should hire him.

B: No, he is not. I spent the last weekend with him, and I found out he is a very fragile person.

Situations of this kind could be indefinitely multiplied. This particular example just shows that speakers follow patterns of acceptance/rejection of metaphorical claims identical to patterns of acceptance/rejection of literal ones. Thus it becomes clear that we must investigate how this is possible, and whether a semantic system should account for this fact.

To repeat myself, my motivation in writing this dissertation is that there are positive reasons to believe that the prospects of having a systematic semantic account of metaphor are plausible. The claim I am going to defend is that there is a way to show that the notion of truth-conditions finds a clear application to the case of metaphor. Also, my claim will be supported by the empirical adequacy of the semantic system I propose.

Leaving for a moment my project aside, I wish to give some reasons why my argument that metaphor is semantically explainable is not immediate. In fact, the reasons why my thesis is not easy to defend are several: first of all, it is only because important advancements in philosophical semantics and formal semantics have been made in the last twenty years that it is



possible for scholars like me to deal with Blackburn's challenge. Secondly, Blackburn's negative attitude towards a semantics of metaphor has been shared by most philosophers until very recent times. And like for any other scientific community, when a certain phenomenon is judged to be not treatable by the methods used by that community, the phenomenon is considered less worth being explored, if not totally hopeless. Thirdly, although philosophers and linguists have in recent times assumed a less negative attitude towards the idea that metaphors have truth-conditions, there is a strong trend today that takes figurative language on the model offered either by the Gricean pragmatics or by the so-called truth-conditional pragmatics. The idea shared by many is that metaphors are clear cases in which a speaker does not *say* what the words literally used would mean, but *means* something by the very uttering of these words. This idea has been radicalised by many philosophers of language and linguists today. To mention the most known: Recanati, Sperber and Wilson, Carston, Bezuidenhout, all take semantics to be an hopeless project because it is unable to deliver appropriate hypotheses as to the meaning of expressions in context, including metaphors. Their belief is that truth-conditional semantics works only for a very limited range of expressions which are context-dependent: indexicals (i.e. words such as 'I', 'here', 'today', etc.). In contrast, they propose to supplant the indexicalist account with a pragmatic framework which may explain all the forms of context-dependence without adding any rule to the expressive capacities of the language under study.

Notwithstanding all this scepticism and the several challenges posed by the 'new' wave of pragmatic theories, I argue that there are positive reasons to believe that metaphor can be accounted for semantically, although the kind of semantics I have in mind departs in a number of more or less subtle ways from the traditional way of taking it: basically on the model of Davidson's

truth-conditional semantics. Recent developments of relativistic semantics in a number of areas of discourse (e.g., knowledge ascriptions and predicates of taste) indicate an interesting way of treating metaphor: the basic idea would be to treat a metaphorical utterance as being accompanied with a ‘thematic dimension’ that specify the respect in which the content expressed by the utterance must be evaluated. Developing this idea has lead me to shed light on interesting aspects of metaphorical interpretation, which other accounts have clear problems to deal with. The last part of this dissertation is, therefore, devoted to discuss these issues and to show why my account is preferable to other proposals.

In Chapter 1 I critically assess Davidson’s argument against metaphorical meaning. Two questions have guided my analysis: why was Davidson reluctant to the idea of metaphorical meaning and what was, in turn, his positive explanation of metaphor understanding? These questions have lead me to inquire how Davidson’s argument is related to his philosophical project of providing a semantics of a natural language such as English, as based on a Tarskian theory of truth. I argue that Davidson’s rejection of metaphorical meaning presupposes Davidson’s theory of meaning, and that the latter faces a number of important objections.

My task in this chapter is not only to introduce the reader to Davidson’s ideas, but also to lay down a series of desiderata for any theory of metaphor: first of all, the theory should properly account for metaphor without violating the so-called ‘principle of compositionality’ (roughly, the idea that the meaning of a sentence is a function of the meaning of its constituent parts). Secondly, the theory should be empirically adequate in the sense that it should deliver correct judgments as to the truth-conditional profile of metaphorical utterances in accordance with the intuitive judgements of competent speakers. Thirdly, the theory should

have a plausible account of the role of context in the determination of a metaphorical interpretation.

The outcome of the chapter will be that Davidson's adherence to a strict version of the compositionality principle makes his account of metaphor unable to comply with the second and third desiderata I have just mentioned. Furthermore, Davidson fails to offer any serious hypothesis or sustained explanation of how a metaphor is interpreted. He appeals (1978: 47) to an 'imaginative' power of metaphors to make us see things under a certain light or perspective, but he does not develop this claim in any systematic way.

In Chapter 2 I assess a very different programme due to the British philosopher Paul Grice. Grice is without doubt one of the fathers of pragmatics, the discipline that deals with the uses of language in communication. Although Grice's initial philosophical motivations were addressed to find ways to explain the practice of making certain controversial claims in philosophy (see Carston 2002: 101ff.), soon he finished to develop an independent theory of conversation which is based on a clear distinction between what sentences literally say and what, on given occasions of utterance, these may further get across. Since then Grice's theory of implicatures has been used to account for a range of data notoriously difficult to treat semantically: from the contribution certain words such as 'even' or 'only' have in the 'total signification' of an utterance to conditionals and figurative uses of language, including metaphor. Grice also developed a theory of meaning, which was essentially based on the idea that meaning is an intentional property, upon which, he believed, sentence meaning ultimately depends.

In this chapter I intend to introduce the reader to the topic of implicatures (What are these and what is their connection to semantics? How do we distinguish between different types of

implicature? How do we derive them?), and to further investigate whether Grice's theory properly accounts for the case of metaphor. Grice's claim is that metaphor, like irony and other tropes, is another case in which a speaker *says* something but *means* something different. Grice also predicts that an interpreter of a metaphor works out its meaning by means of an inferential process that goes from the input given by its utterance, namely *what is said*, to the implicated content. The interpreter is helped in the recovery of the speaker's meaning by the presence of a series of conversational maxims, which Grice introduces and discusses at length in his classic paper 'Logic and Conversation' (1975). The role of these maxims in communication is controversial and recent pragmatic accounts (especially relevance theory) have posed several criticisms to it (but see Soames 2004, 2008 for a defence of Grice's maxims). Not only am I going to assess these criticisms but I shall also present a key pragmatic notion such as that of 'common ground' (Stalnaker 1999, 2002), which I explore to shed light on Grice's conception of conversational dynamics.

The conclusion I reach at the end of the chapter is that although Grice's contributions to the definition of the semantics/pragmatics interface are original and important, not so is his account of metaphor. An attentive analysis of Grice's tests to detect implicatures is sufficient to reveal that metaphor hardly passes any. Besides, there are specific problems due to Grice's assimilation of metaphor with other types of implicatures like irony, with which they do not seem to share any property and, also, to Grice's reliance on the idea that the interpretation of a metaphor starts with the recognition of some semantic deviance inherent in the metaphorical utterance. Given all these problems, I reach the conclusion that Grice's identification of metaphor with implicature is erroneous, and that a wholly different explanation must be sought.

However, Grice is not the only philosopher who has attempted to offer an explanation of metaphor in wholly pragmatic terms. Searle (1979) is another example. He attempts to offer an analysis of metaphor as a kind of speech act, whose structure is characterised by being indirect: in other words, by uttering a sentence with a certain literal meaning, the speaker manages to convey another speech-act. Accordingly, an utterance of:

(2) Juliet is the sun,

Should be considered similar in structure to an utterance of

(5) Can you tell me the time?

In which the literal meaning (a question regarding the hearer's ability to tell the time) does not coincide with the speech act dimension of the utterance (a request of telling the time).

I spend the first half of this chapter discussing Searle's view and the advantages it has over Grice's account and other more traditional views of metaphor (namely, Black's interaction theory [Black 1962, 1979] and the comparison view). However, I reject Searle's analysis on several grounds: first of all, it still adheres to a 'deviance' model of metaphorical interpretation, in which an utterance is metaphorical if and only if it is deviant in some semantic respect. I reject this model because it is inadequate – it fails to cover all cases of metaphor –, but also entails the view that many 'literal' utterances should not be considered as such, after all. Secondly, the principles of metaphorical interpretation that Searle proposes either have a semantic flavour or do not impose any semantic constraint on the contextual nature of metaphorical interpretation. This second aspect is particularly relevant since any adequate account of metaphor needs to capture the exact nature of

the context dependence of metaphors. However, it is not sufficient to say that an expression used metaphorically conveys different contents depending on its context of utterance. We need to have a clear explanation of this fact, which is precisely absent in Searle's account. Thirdly, Searle's proposal fails to find an appropriate place for metaphor within his philosophy of intentionality (Searle 1983). In other words, I argue that Searle is not able to explain what exactly metaphors represent and how they manage to represent.

In the second part of Chapter 3 I examine two other accounts of metaphorical interpretation, which work within speech act theory: I assess Alston's view (2000) and Barker's (2004). These accounts are interesting because of their attempts to investigate not just the principles of metaphorical interpretation, but the nature itself of metaphorical assertion. Alston's view pivots around the idea that speech acts are governed by conventions, whereas Barker's view places emphasis on the speakers' intentional activity. Accordingly, their attempts to explain metaphor go in the direction of determining the correct conventional or intentional structure of metaphorical assertions. However, I argue that these accounts fail to reach a satisfying answer to the question of how metaphorical assertions represent. In other words, I argue that they fail to tackle the issue regarding the truth-conditional profile of metaphors. I then propose an argument to the effect that metaphors are instances of conventional implicatures, namely, implicatures determined by some conventional element of an utterance. I propose to identify this element with 'hidden' quotation marks around the words or expressions used metaphorically. Although I find this account interesting, I do not endorse it for the reason that even if we accepted the presence of quotation marks, we would still owe an explanation of how it is possible that metaphors embed. An argument by Barker (2003) to the effect that

conventional implicatures intrude ‘what is said’ is considered and rejected on the ground that it does not comply with the proper logic of conventional implicatures, which keeps the level of ‘what is said’ on a firmly different semantic level. I conclude that metaphors are not instances of conventional implicatures, and that a proper logic of these (modelled on Potts’ 2005 semantics) must properly distinguish their semantic level from that of ‘what is said’.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I focus my attention on the so-called ‘truth-conditional pragmatics’, which is nowadays an important trend in the philosophy of language. This label is not intended to cover a single theory, but a bunch of contextualist accounts that share the assumption that literal meaning radically underdetermines truth-conditions. In other words, according to truth-conditional pragmatics the meaning which is conventionally associated to a sentence fails to capture the possible truth-conditions that that sentence may come to have in context. Thus truth-conditional pragmatics does not confine the role of context to the determination of values to indexicals and free variables, but extends it to cover every expression of natural language. Given this picture, defenders of this approach propose to reconsider the phenomena traditionally considered to fall under the coverage of Grice’s pragmatics. They claim that many cases which Grice deemed to be implicatures, can now receive a proper truth-conditional treatment, although this treatment marks a radical departure from the principles governing truth-conditional semantics. Accordingly, metaphor is seen as fully accountable in truth-conditional terms.

My intent in Chapter 4 is to assess some of the main contextualist proposals in the philosophy of language, especially focusing on Recanati’s writings and Sperber’s and Wilson’s relevance theory. After tracing the origins of truth-conditional

pragmatics back to Frege's conception of semantics, I introduce the reader to some important issues currently debated in the philosophy of language: for instance, the issue of 'unarticulated constituents' (expression due to Stanley, see Stanley 2007) and Recanati's proposal concerning the nature of 'what is said'. My discussion of Recanati's proposal is preceded by what I call *the Fregean Premise*: the idea that the role of context in determining the circumstance against which a given proposition is to be evaluated is considered by Frege and also by the contextualist to reduce to the fixation of contextual parameters in the proposition expressed by an utterance. In other words, the premise says that a contextual element has a role in the fixation of the truth-conditions of an utterance if and only if it is part of the proposition expressed by the utterance. The full significance of this premise will emerge in Chapter 7, when I shall provide an alternative to this view, more in line with the kind of semantics I favoured, which is relativistic in spirit.

I conclude Chapter 4 with a discussion of relevance theory, the theory originally proposed by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986 [1995]), which has been further developed by Carston (2002). Leaving the issue of meaning aside for a section, I concentrate on the account of communication offered by these authors, which radically departs from the assumptions characterising the Gricean pragmatics. The main assumptions of this theory are that language understanding is not governed by norms, as Grice and other philosophers thought, but only moved by considerations of relevance. In other words, communication is possible only because humans are geared to the maximisation of relevance, that is, to the maximisation of stimuli worth being processed. In the last part of the chapter I therefore reflect upon the consequences of adopting the relevance theoretic account of communication, especially in relation to the topic of metaphor. As



far as metaphor is concerned, relevance theorists propose a ‘deflationary’ model of metaphor understanding (Sperber and Wilson 2006), which is based on the assumption that the determination of a metaphorical content in context follows the same patterns of pragmatic determination of other more ‘literal’ cases (for instance, approximations). The final result of the interpretation is not an implicature, like Grice thought, but an ‘explicature’, a conceptual representation to which the speaker is explicitly committed. In the case of metaphor, the explicature of an expression used metaphorically is an *ad hoc concept*, a concept created by the speaker on the spot, by broadening or narrowing some of the conditions associated to its lexical entry. On this account, an utterance of (2) expresses an ad hoc category:

(6) Juliet is THE SUN\*,

a concept constructed pragmatically by the speaker which will be recovered by the hearer in the process of utterance comprehension (Carston 2002: Chapter 5).

Although the truth-conditional pragmatic explanation of metaphor fares better than the previous accounts in dealing with the speakers’ judgements concerning the truth-evaluability of claims such as (2), it does so by paying a high price. In Chapter 5 I offer a battery of counter-examples and arguments against truth-conditional pragmatics, showing that it is not a tenable doctrine. My criticisms touches the following main points:

- Truth-conditional pragmatics and, in particular, Recanati’s proposal trivialises the notion of compositionality.
- The truth-conditional pragmatic account of ‘ad hoc concepts’ does not fit well with the ‘Language of Thought Hypothesis’ (Fodor 1975), although Carston endorses it.

- Truth-conditional pragmatics is unable to distinguish expressions that can be metaphorical from expressions such as functional categories that cannot receive a metaphorical interpretation.
- The lack of semantic constraints on the interpretation of an utterance: certain constructions involving VP-ellipsis and anaphora require that a semantic system put specific constraints on the acceptability of certain interpretations. No constraint whatsoever is offered by truth-conditional pragmatics.

Given all these unwelcome features, I conclude that we must look for a theory of metaphor that deals with these issues better. With this conclusion in mind, I approach the final part of my dissertation.

In chapter 6 I consider a first semantic account of metaphorical interpretation due to the philosopher Josef Stern. Stern's account attempts to model the context-dependence of metaphor on the Kaplanian theory of demonstratives (Kaplan 1989). As Kaplan has shown that knowledge of indexicals is semantic insofar as there are rules (Kaplan's *characters*) that allow speakers to determine contents, so Stern thinks that metaphors have characters that allow speakers to determine the propositional components of their metaphorical utterances.

Following Kaplan's theory of demonstratives, Stern develops a formal theory of metaphors in which metaphorical meaning is captured by the presence at the level of the logical form of sentences of an operator which he calls 'Mthat'. The function of this operator is to attach to a literal vehicle  $\Phi$ , so as to determine a new expression with a nonconstant character: a function which yields different contents on each possible context of use, where the context of use is to be intended in a sense wider than Kaplan's

notion of ‘context’, an n-tuple of specific parameters such as agent, time, location, world, to include contextual presuppositions.

Stern’s formal analysis covers a wide range of data, including VP-ellipsis and anaphora, with a lot of interesting predictions as to the semantic behaviour of metaphors in such constructions. However, although Stern respects my initial desiderata of a theory of metaphor (it respects compositionality, it is empirically adequate at least for the cases it covers, and it accounts for the essential context-dependence of metaphor), it does so by relying on doubtful syntactic operations inherent in his operator and, also, by overcharging the expressive power of the language. Furthermore, I will show that in order to save his system by troublesome objections, such as the difficulty his system has to treat cases of nominative metaphor (e.g., ‘The sun is knocking at my door’), he develops solutions that are convoluted and inefficacious. Finally, I object to Stern’s account on the grounds that neither does it offer a satisfying semantic explanation of the dependence of an expression’s metaphorical dimension on the literal meaning of its vehicle, nor does it have an explanation of what makes a metaphor ‘apt’ (Hills 1997).

In Chapter 7 I am going to put forward a new proposal concerning metaphorical interpretation: the idea that the metaphorical dimension of an utterance is neither inherent in the meaning of an expression or sentence, nor inherent in the content expressed by one of its utterances, as all the accounts I have considered in this work have thought. To be sure, the metaphorical dimension is something that arises in context. However, against the contextualist and indexicalist proposals I have examined, my view is that the role of context does not affect the content expressed by a metaphorical utterance, but determines the appropriate circumstance of evaluation at which the expression used metaphorically get assigned its proper extension. Although

this idea has already been explored in other areas of philosophical semantics, no one has ever tried to apply it to metaphor.

In the first part of the chapter I present four cases that have received an explanation in harmony with my proposal. These include: Predelli's treatment of Travis's scenarios (Predelli 2005a, 2005b), John MacFarlane's 'non-indexical contextualist' account of adjectives like 'tall' and knowledge ascriptions (MacFarlane 2007, 2009), Lasersohn's relativistic semantics of predicates of taste (Lasersohn 2005, 2009), and Recanati's 'moderate relativism' (Recanati 2007). In the second part of the chapter, I extend some of the ideas of these philosophers to metaphorical interpretation. In detail, I argue that an account for a non-indexical contextualist semantics of metaphorical interpretation, as based on the postulation of what I call 'thematic dimension' in the circumstances of evaluation of utterances. Much of my discussion is devoted to clarify the nature and function of these 'thematic dimensions'. With that scope in mind, I investigate some puzzling cases involving operators that shift the dimension of evaluation, belief reports of metaphors and denials of metaphors. My claim is that my theory gives a clear account of these constructions, where other proposals have failed, or not even tried, to provide one.

As for any new attempt to explain a phenomenon that has already received a good deal of attention, there will probably be issues my account will not touch, for which other theories have made specific proposals. I do not aim to offer a comprehensive analysis of metaphorical cases either. My proposal is here more modest: I want to introduce a semantic framework within which the behaviour of metaphors can be investigated. My aim is to convince my reader that her investigation within this framework can be fruitful. Besides, if she adheres to this view she will also avoid all the objections I posed to the other available accounts.

Probably no one will ever come up with a receipt which will allow an interpreter to evaluate any kind of metaphor. Besides, whenever I come across some scholar who claims to have found such a receipt, my reaction is similar to that I could have to the vision of a predicator on the telly, claiming: “Jesus loves you!”. I would smile and I move to a different channel.

However, this is not to admit defeat, like Davidson prematurely did. I firmly believe that metaphors follow interesting patterns of production and interpretation, although I do not share at all Stern’s view that these can be subsumed under an indexicalist analysis. This chapter can be read as an attempt to offer a different key for a correct understanding of these patterns and, also, for the evaluation of the intrinsic nature of metaphorical ‘aptness’.

## Chapter I

# Davidson's Argument against Metaphorical Meaning

### 1. Aims of the Chapter

Some of the most important aspects of any theory of metaphor concern the relationship between meaning and truth in metaphorical utterances.<sup>1</sup> Do metaphors mean anything, and if they do, can they be the bearers of truth? More importantly, suppose the answer to both questions is affirmative, then a further question arises: is metaphorical truth a special sort of truth, or does it not significantly differ from other, more mundane truths (like, for instance, the one expressed by an utterance of the sentence 'today, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2011, most of the world market indices have gone down' asserting that on the day in which the sentence is uttered most of the world market indices have gone down)?

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<sup>1</sup> Talking about 'utterances', and not propositions, sentences or assertions is, perhaps, a *petition principii*, since I am taking for granted that utterances are the vehicle of metaphors. But I am not. It will turn out that my theoretical choice is for utterances as the vehicle of metaphors, and in due course this will be motivated by a series of arguments. For now, I am just using utterances in a non-theoretical sense, but the reader will see, as from this chapter, how the question is an important one which philosophers tend to puzzle about a lot.

These questions will resonate through the whole dissertation, and therefore I will give particular attention to them in examining the theories rival to mine.

My aim in this chapter is to assess Davidson's view on metaphor as exemplified by his well-known paper 'What Metaphors Mean' (1978). As already explained in the introduction, I have chosen to start with Davidson because I think he has been the first, within the tradition of analytical philosophy, to attempt to offer an answer to the above questions. His own account can be summarised by looking at his answer to the first question I have started with: whether metaphors mean something. Davidson's answer is negative, with a proviso that will be thoroughly assessed in the next sections: metaphors do not mean *something*, though they do not mean *nothing*. The proviso is, in fact, just this: metaphors have to be taken at face value, to mean just what their words taken in their most literal sense mean and nothing more. But if metaphors do not have any special (i.e., *further*) content attached to them, then the further question as to whether they express some truth, or some special truth, is senseless, at least according to Davidson.

In what follows I will fully assess Davidson's argument against metaphorical meaning, namely, *against the idea that metaphors mean something over and above what the words literally express*, trying to unpack the philosophical premises on which it is based, especially in the light of his overall semantic enterprise. In a nutshell, this enterprise, on which Davidson systematically worked at least for ten years from the late sixties of the last century,<sup>2</sup> is the attempt of offering a theory of meaning for a natural language like English. According to Davidson, this project pivots around the notion of truth mathematically developed by Tarski in the first half of the 20th century (Tarski 1933, 1944). The core idea of

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<sup>2</sup> See esp. Davidson (1967).

Davidson's theory is to take Tarski's notion of truth to be primitive and, on the basis of a finite base of axioms, to allow one to derive for each sentence of a language under study its truth-conditions. The assumption on which this theory is based is that the meaning of a sentence should be identified with its truth-conditions.

A further step Davidson (1973) took was to consider such a theory to be the basis of any possible interpretation of any language spoken by a community of individuals, via some further empirical assumptions regarding the nature of evidence an interpreter may come to hold with respect to the new language she is trying to learn and the community she is trying to interpret. I will consider this other Davidsonian step in § 4, where my semantic analysis of Davidson's argument will be integrated with a discussion of some of the philosophical reasons that may have led Davidson to reject the very idea of metaphorical meaning.

To anticipate my conclusion, Davidson's account of metaphor fails, and badly so. It fails for reasons internal to his philosophical theorising, but also for reasons external to it: on the one hand, Davidson's account fails because in the attempt to explain the structure and content of a theory of meaning, it eschews, more or less deliberately, important connections between such a theory and metaphors or other tropes. On the other hand, Davidson's account also fails because other accounts have in the meantime elaborated more precise and detailed analyses that go in the direction of answering those issues that Davidson had touched upon in his work. In particular, since Davidson's early work some substantive progress has been made in the attempt to determine and systematise the exact nature of the context's contribution to a theory of meaning and truth. Such a progress will also be shown to have strongly influenced the linguistic and philosophical foundations of metaphor studies.

However, the failure of Davidson's account is in a sense welcome to my project. I think that although Davidson's answers to



the questions concerning the nature of metaphorical meaning and truth are clearly unsatisfying, they have nonetheless led me, and will hopefully lead the reader, to think more clearly about the ultimate project of having a linguistic theory that may say something constructive about what metaphorical truth is (or is not), what metaphors convey (or do not) and if they convey content, how they do so.

Thus, the plan for the rest of the chapter is the following: in § 2 I introduce Davidson's argument, which I then discuss at length in § 3. In § 4 I offer some other philosophical reasons behind Davidson's rejection of the very idea of metaphorical meaning. I think that although these reasons may have some initial plausibility, there is enough room for a sustained criticism of them. In § 5 I deal with Davidson's suggestion that metaphor concerns the realm of pragmatics, and not semantics. I reject Davidson's suggestion on the ground that it is quite approximative and does not even fit well with Davidson's arguments against metaphorical meaning. In § 6 I discuss some more specific linguistic points concerning the nature of metaphorical interpretation, which create further problems for Davidson's account.

## **2. The argument**

Before exploring what Davidson's argument against metaphorical meaning is, I should say that in dealing with the argument, or more appropriately with its rational reconstruction, I have had to isolate certain passages of Davidson's paper, precisely those which present, more than establish, his main thesis:

[M]etaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation mean, and nothing more. (1978, p. 32)

This thesis certainly has a prominent role in Davidson's paper, but it has often been considered only for its critical role, i.e., of showing how certain authors (Black and Searle above all) had mistakenly taken metaphors to express some special kind of meaning.<sup>3</sup> This view can certainly find some textual support from Davidson's more or less explicit attacks on those authors' views:

The central mistake against which I shall be inveighing is the idea that a metaphor has, in addition to its literal sense or meaning, another sense or meaning.

It is of no help in explaining how words work in metaphor to posit metaphorical or figurative meanings, or special kinds of poetic or metaphorical truth. (*op. cit.*, p. 33)

However, I will try to convince the reader that Davidson's thesis, far from being a stubborn thesis defended against an array of other philosophical views, is a respectable thesis that can be framed within Davidson's philosophical semantics, putting some burden on metaphorical interpretation, which otherwise one could take as being totally unconstrained. Also, later on in this chapter, I will discuss a couple of Davidson's more positive ideas about the linguistic and cognitive roles metaphors seem to have. But as to now, I am entirely focused on his 'main thesis', which I am going to assess with the help of my reconstruction of the underlying argument in support of it. This should offer some precise clues as to where Davidson is leading his readers in his attempt to ban metaphors from any additional realm of meaning.

I present the argument below in order to show two basic features of Davidson's account: on the one hand, the argument offers some

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<sup>3</sup> See in particular the first lines of page 32 in the article. I will deal with Searle's account of metaphor in chapter iii. Strangely, Davidson ignores Grice's account, which takes metaphor as a special kind of meaning, namely, a conversational implicature. I will devote next chapter to an exploration of such model.

ground for the thesis that if anything has a meaning, that is something that can in principle be explained by appeal to an adequate semantic theory, of the kind privileged by Davidson: a Tarski-style theory of truth, which for any sentence of a given language delivers a theorem assigning to the sentence its truth-conditions. Metaphors, in this respect, are no exception: they also require a similar treatment if we want to maintain at least some connection with our semantic theorising about meaning. On the other hand, the argument has the role of determining the following complex conditional: if the thesis previously sketched holds (i.e., if meaning supervenes on truth-conditions), then any sentence that is assigned its meaning via an appropriate theorem of the theory will also respect whichever semantic property the system imposes upon it in order for the theorem to apply, and thus for the sentence to encode a meaning. For instance, if a condition for a sentence to have a truth-condition, and therefore to be assigned a meaning, is that its meaning (i.e., its truth-conditions) be a function of the meaning of its parts (i.e., their semantic values), then as the sentence is assigned its meaning through assignment of its truth-conditions, it will automatically exemplify the feature of being compositional.

That said, the first part of the argument can thus be characterised:

1: The meaning of a metaphor is the meaning of the sentence which is its vehicle.

This premise comes as no surprise if we follow Davidson in both taking metaphors to have a literal meaning, and taking sentences to be the kind of objects semantics is primarily engaged with. In fact, we know that for Davidson meaning and truth are strictly interwound as this further premise claims:

2: 'To give truth-conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence' (1984: 24).

Now, given that:

3: The truth-conditions of any particular sentence  $s$  belonging to a language  $L$  is given by a T-theorem of the form ' $s$  is true iff  $p$ ', where ' $s$ ' is the name of a sentence of the object language and  $p$  is a correct translation of  $s$  in the metalanguage.

We easily get

4: The meaning of any particular sentence  $s$  belonging to a language  $L$  is given by a T-theorem of the form ' $s$  is true iff  $p$ ', where ' $s$ ' and  $p$  are as before.

Having got to this point in the argument, we may reach a first conclusion:

5: The meaning of any *metaphor* with vehicle  $s$  in  $L$  is given by a T-theorem of the form ' $s$  is true iff  $p$ ', where ' $s$ ' and  $p$  are as before.

This conclusion covers the first essential aspect of Davidson's argument. A further premise in the argument is needed to show how compositionality is a feature that is preserved in metaphorical sentences.

6: The literal meaning of a sentence is given by the literal meanings of its constituent parts, their mode of combination and nothing more.<sup>4</sup>

Adding premise 6, which functions as an axiom in the semantic system theorised by Davidson, we reach the following conclusion:

7: The meaning of a metaphor with vehicle  $s$  in  $L$  is given by the literal meanings of its constituent parts, their mode of combination and nothing more.

Far from being two obvious results, the two results obtained from 5 and 7 deserve much more attention than it has usually been given in the literature, especially for the kind of constraints they seem to impose on a theory of metaphor. First of all, any theory of metaphor must explain how the metaphorical depends on the literal. Davidson has a straightforward answer: the metaphorical is nothing over and above the literal. The metaphorical dimension, so to speak, must not be sought in the meaning of the metaphor, but somewhere else. Secondly, metaphors must obey compositionality, for otherwise we should envisage new types of meaning and this is incompatible with the whole truth-conditional semantic enterprise.

However, if we strictly follow Davidson's reasoning we end up being committed to the view that given that all there is to the understanding of a sentence is the knowledge of the T-theorem associated to that sentence, then metaphor is no exception to this constraint. But even granting that the essence of what it is for someone to grasp the meaning of a sentence of  $L$  is fully captured by her knowledge of a T-sentence – a point that is far from being

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<sup>4</sup> More formally, a 'semantic theory  $T$  is *extensionally compositional* iff there is a function  $f$  such that for every node  $[\alpha[\beta\dots][\gamma\dots]]$  where  $[\alpha\dots]$  dominates immediate daughters  $[\beta\dots]$  and  $[\gamma\dots]$ , if according to  $T$   $\text{Val}([\beta\dots]) = x$  and  $\text{Val}([\gamma\dots]) = y$  and  $\text{Val}([\alpha\dots]) = z$ , then  $f(x, y) = z$ .' (Clapp, 2002: 267) I have changed a variable in Clapp's formulation, which contained an error.

settled today and that I am accepting here only for the argument's sake<sup>5</sup> – it is very difficult to remain satisfied with Davidson's argument. How could it even be possible to think that the understanding of a metaphor coincides with the grasping of the T-theorem associated to the sentence which is its vehicle? Our ability to understand metaphors, to understand, for instance, what Romeo is trying to get across by asserting the sentence 'Juliet is the Sun', seems to go far beyond the mere tacit knowledge of T-theorems. Davidson's attempts to provide in his paper some other positive clues as to how we interact with metaphors seems to recognise this point and thus divorces metaphor from a purely linguistic account. However, I am not interested here in the question of what kinds of cognitive mechanisms and processes are involved in metaphorical interpretation. This will be a matter I will deal with later on. Now I am interested in the question of *what sort of linguistic competence* speakers manifest in understanding metaphors. As to this question, given the extremely fixed nature of the competence required by Davidson I think his argument assumes a crucial importance in setting up a sort of ground zero for the successive philosophical debate around the nature of metaphorical interpretation. Thus, after having grasped Davidson's argument in its basic lines, we are left with the following engaging task: we need to establish whether the kind of semantic knowledge or linguistic competence presupposed by Davidson in the understanding of metaphors is all there is to it, whether it provides only part of the story or whether it totally misfires at such a task.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See § 6 for a discussion of the consequences deriving from accepting Davidson's idea of semantic knowledge.

<sup>6</sup> Here's a possible reply to my line of arguing, which was communicated to me by David Beesley: "Isn't Davidson essentially claiming that there is nothing at the level of semantics to distinguish between metaphors and other kinds of sentences? So there is no such thing as understanding a metaphor as such, at the semantic level. There is just the basic understanding of sentence meanings and the pragmatic features then deal with the identification of certain utterances as metaphors (in other words, metaphor is essentially bound with utterance and has nothing whatsoever to do with sentences in themselves)". This is certainly a

What has been done so far is to provide an argument for Davidson's rejection of metaphorical meanings. However, we do not yet know what philosophical reasons are given by Davidson in support of the argument, and therefore behind his rejection. The next section will provide a discussion of the linguistic evidence in favour of Davidson's view. In § 4 I will then complete such a discussion with an examination of further, more philosophical, reasons behind Davidson's rejection. After that, I think the reader will be ready to see why I think Davidson fails to ultimately provide a solid philosophical explanation of the linguistic and cognitive nature of metaphors.

### **3. Understanding the Argument**

If Davidson's approach to meaning is exemplified by step 4 reached in the previous section's argument, which directly leans on premise 3, it ultimately rests on the assumption, provided by premise 2, that the notion of meaning can be reduced to the notion of truth-conditions. But what justifies this assumption? The answer for Davidson is that since the content of premise 3 is a trivial thesis, whose material adequacy and formal correctness nobody can question, then the only way to deal with the slippery problem regarding the nature of meaning is to explain this in terms of the clearer and more stable notion of truth. Of course, Davidson had especially in mind those theories that try to identify meaning with entities like propositions, whose intensional nature made the very

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possible reading of Davidson's view. However, my interest is in the theoretical consequences of Davidson's rejection of metaphor from the realm of semantics and, also, in his reasons for confining metaphor to the level of utterance interpretation. My whole claim is that Davidson does not offer a plausible story as to why we should exclude a semantic explanation of metaphorical interpretation.

attempt to provide solid foundations to semantics look suspicious to Davidson.

Be that as it may, Davidson's move is not without its own theoretical problems, and has, in fact, been criticised on several grounds. I will mention here two problems that have some specific relevance in relation to the aims of this chapter. Before going to discuss these problems, it is important to stress a crucial difference between Tarski's original treatment (1944) of the truth predicate and Davidson's. While Tarski was trying to offer an explicit definition of the truth predicate, testing for its material adequacy and formal correctness, Davidson assumes the truth predicate to be primitive, and from this point tries to deduce a theory of meaning from a theory of truth (Foster 1976: 8-9).<sup>7</sup>

Once this difference is properly spelt out, many authors have wondered whether Davidson is legitimate in his reduction (especially, the move from 2 to 4 in the argument of the previous section). I am not going to review here all the criticisms moved to Davidson,<sup>8</sup> but they all seem to share the following line of reasoning: either the Tarskian biconditionals used by Davidson's type of semantic theory presuppose some clear knowledge of what the meaning of sentences is (in other words, what it takes for a sentence in an object language, say the English sentence 'snow is white', to have an appropriate description in the metalanguage, say *snow is white*); or, as a matter of empirical evidence, the truth-conditions envisaged by Davidson do not tell us *enough*, i.e., they are not informative about the kind of semantic knowledge speakers of a language have. This point is made vivid by Dummett (1975, 1976), who thinks that Davidson's theory may only be taken as a *modest* theory of meaning, to be contrasted with a *full-blooded*

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<sup>7</sup> Subtly technical questions arise when one considers whether truth itself is something that should be reduced to something more primitive. Field (1972) famously criticized Tarski for not having been able to reduce the truth-predicate to some more primitive physical entity, amenable to a physicalist conception of reality.

<sup>8</sup> Foster (1976), Dummett (1974), Soames (1992, 2002), Pietroski (2005).



theory of meaning, which should be able to clearly state under what conditions a speaker of a language manifests the knowledge of a sentence of her own language.<sup>9</sup>

Now, I myself do not think that any of these objections have a tremendous impact on the Davidsonian enterprise. As to the circularity argument, for instance, Davidsonians may argue that the circle is not vicious since it is not the meaning of any sentence which is presupposed by the T-schemas, but only the obvious fact that if anything can legitimately fill in some variable ‘s’ of an object-language  $L$ , then it is possible for it to satisfy a T-schema relative to that language. In particular, the antecedent of this conditional can only be satisfied by a theory of syntax that deliver correct judgements about the syntactic well-formedness of the sentences of the language under study. In other words, given an appropriate logical form determined by the syntax of  $L$  with regard to a sentence of  $L$ , say  $s$ , it will be possible to associate a semantic reading to  $s$  by assigning to each of its syntactic phrases  $\{s_1, \dots, s_n\}$  an interpretation function that deliver its semantic value  $\{\text{Val}(s_1), \dots, \text{Val}(s_n)\}$ . Therefore, the only result the theory is responsible for is to assign a syntactically motivated semantic description of ‘s’ in the metalanguage, but it is silent as to *which* description this will be.<sup>10</sup>

As to Dummett’s criticism, I think it has certainly some appeal, but I do not see why it should invalidate Davidson’s theory.

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<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Dummett is proposing to shift the attention away from the issue of reducing meaning to knowledge of truth-conditions, a task about which Dummett has always professed himself to be sceptical, and towards a quite different project, i.e., of individuating the verifiability conditions for any sentence of a given language, say  $L$ . Presumably these are given not by what a speaker of  $L$  knows in understanding the meaning of a certain complex expression, but by what constitutes his having that knowledge. According to Dummett (1976 [1996: 37]), “since what is being ascribed to a speaker is *implicit* knowledge, the theory of meaning must specify not merely what it is that the speaker must know, but in what his having that knowledge consists, i.e. what counts as a manifestation of that knowledge”.

<sup>10</sup> The noxious problem of ‘indeterminacy of reference’ kicks in here, but since its presence is peripheral to my interests in this thesis, I do not have to attempt a solution here.

Davidson may reject Dummett's 'full-bloodedness' condition, but then he has to answer the question of how his own theory of meaning, as fundamentally based on the attribution of truth-conditions, is to be implemented so as to make sense of the rational behaviour of speakers of a determinate language. Davidson is well aware of this issue, as he claims:

We are interested in the concept of truth *only because* there are actual objects and states of the world to which to apply it: utterances, states of belief, inscriptions. (Davidson 1999, in Lynch (ed.) 2001: 637. My emphasis)<sup>11</sup>

His answer is a follow-up to Quine's strategy of the radical translator (Quine 1960), who in the meantime has become more modestly a radical interpreter. Davidson's hope is to integrate what he calls *Principle of charity (PC)*, that is, all those interpretive strategies addressed to make sense of the speakers' behaviour in the light of our own rationality,<sup>12</sup> with his own theory of truth, so as to provide sufficient warrant for the interpreter to make correct hypotheses about what the speakers *mean* in saying what they say in their own language. This strategy leads us to the following view, which is an integral part of Davidson's philosophical semantics: given the empirical value of the thesis that meaning supervenes on truth, and the further plausible hypothesis that an interpreter of a community *C* speaking language *L* will use *PC* to make appropriate hypotheses as to what the speakers of *L* mean by what they say, the interpreter may reach a point in his interpretation which is called *disquotation*.

What is the property of disquotation and why is it so important? Following Larson and Segal (1995: 50ff.), it seems that the mechanisms of disquotation, which allows one to go from a

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<sup>11</sup> See also Sainsbury (2009) in this respect.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Hookway (1987: 173).

sentence of an object language, e.g., Italian, to the use of a corresponding sentence in the metalanguage, e.g. English, tell us how to go from the mention of a language to its usage. In doing so, disquotation relates a certain linguistic expression to the world. In other words, if, after having heard some Italian saying ‘La Spagna e’ una nazione Europea’, we are told that

- (1) La Spagna e’ una nazione Europea’ is true(-in-Italian) iff  
Spain is a European country,

then, provided that we know ‘La Spagna e’ una nazione Europea’ is a true Italian sentence, we come to know something about the world, that is to say, we come to know that Spain is a European country. Therefore we can disquote (1), and come to use the English sentence ‘Spain is a European country’ to express something true about the world.

Furthermore, from premise 3 and step 4 of the previous section’s argument, together with this property of disquotation, it follows that a semantic system like Davidson’s takes the linguistic competence of an English interpreter of a language like Italian as given by the tacit knowledge of theorems of the form of (1), and nothing more.

It seems we are now in a position to assess Davidson’s argument against metaphorical meanings. If there were such meanings, premises 2 and 3 of the argument would not be sufficient to deliver the meaning for those sentences containing them. The high context-sensitivity of metaphors, in fact, would make the task of finding appropriate translations of metaphorical sentences in the metalanguage impossible, so that other interpretive strategies should be sought. What is more, disquotation of a metaphorical sentence cannot lead to the gaining of any true piece of information about the world since there is no worldly condition that that sentence can stand to. What worldly condition could be said to

obtain by disquoting a metaphorical sentence like ‘Juliet is the sun’? None.

Sure, we could postulate that T-theorems like (1) also apply to metaphorical sentences, but this would enormously increase the base of axioms that a speaker of a language should know. Besides, there would now be contradictory axioms, axioms that would supply the speaker with conflicting interpretive hypotheses:

- (2) ‘Juliet’ refers to *Juliet*.  
‘Juliet’ refers to *the sun*.

We would envisage axioms of reference which stipulate that ‘Juliet’ refers both to the individual *Juliet* and to the star around which the earth orbits.

On the other hand, given the assumption that all there is to the meaning of a sentence is its truth-conditions, if we allowed that giving the truth-conditions were not sufficient to the meaning of some sentences of a language, the whole Davidsonian enterprise would collapse. In fact, if we allowed for metaphorical meanings, we would also discredit the role of disquotation in giving us information about the world, given that these meanings would be given by something over and above their T-schemas. Consequently, the strategy of the radical interpreter, guided only by the *PC* and *disquotational* techniques, would be destined to fail if we allowed for such transient and ephemeral meanings. Adding further T-schemas does not seem to be a viable strategy because the resulting T-theory would be not only difficult, if not impossible, to learn by a finite mind, but also inconsistent. Hence, Davidson concludes that metaphorical sentences (i.e., sentences containing expressions used metaphorically) do not have any meanings apart from the ones which result from composing the literal meanings of their parts.

However, there is clearly a tension between Davidson's claim that the meaning of a metaphor is the meaning of the sentence which is its vehicle, and the fact that, strictly speaking, assigning a literal meaning to a metaphor is, generally, a senseless project, which is doomed to failure from the start.<sup>13</sup> Since metaphorical sentences are not the kind of linguistic objects that allow for disquotation, we need to consider a different story to account for whatever insight they give us and whichever mechanism they are governed by.

Having assessed the linguistic evidence Davidson appeals to in order to contrast the idea of metaphorical meanings, I want to concentrate now on how to interpret such evidence in the light of Davidson's philosophical foundations. This will lead me to discuss some of the core ideas of Davidson's epistemology and metaphysics of language.

#### **4. General Problems for a theory of metaphor**

One very important feature of a semantic system such as the one envisaged by Davidson is that it should allow a user of a language *L* to make correct predictions of her interlocutor's linguistic behaviour. In other words, it should allow anyone capable of handling the system to make correct attributions of semantic knowledge to the speakers of *L*. In particular, for any language *L*, a semantic system should allow a speaker of *L*, and indirectly an interpreter of the community *C* speaking *L*, to predict that whenever a speaker utters assertorically a sentence *s* of *L*, she means *p* (= *s*'s truth-conditions and nothing else) in virtue of

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<sup>13</sup> The restriction introduced by 'generally' is important insofar as there are metaphors whose literal meanings are perfectly fine. For instance, 'Jesus was a carpenter' and 'No man is an island' are, literally speaking true, but they may be also taken as metaphors (see Hills 1997 for discussion). Thanks to Manuel García-Carpintero for making this point.

implicitly grasping some theorem associating  $s$  with its literal meaning  $p$ . If this story is plausible (and I have expressed no reason yet not to take it as such), then two important constraints on semantic theorising are implicitly respected. First of all, there is the constraint that a semantic theory should satisfy the property of PUBLIC AVAILABILITY (Davidson 1990: 314): meanings are the kinds of things that should be available to the speaker of a language. Propositions, so Davidson thinks, do not satisfy this constraint, whereas meanings in the reductive sense of truth-conditions associated to sentences do. Secondly, there is the important constraint of PRODUCTIVITY. Whoever understands, however implicitly, a theory of meaning of the sort envisaged by Davidson, should at least in principle be able to understand the meaning of any new sentence of the language spoken by her, in virtue of coming to hold a theorem that assigns to the new sentence its meaning via truth-conditions.

Now, metaphorical sentences lead to the following epistemic problem, which may be called *the ignorance of truth-conditions problem* (echoing here Larson and Segal 1995: 47). Consider in fact, these sentences:

- (3) Anger is the fluid that love bleeds when you cut it. [C. S. Lewis]
- (4) John's toothbrush is trying to kill him. [Larson and Segal 1995: 47]
- (5) Colorless green ideas sleep furiously. [Chomsky]

I have chosen a sentence that is clearly metaphorical (i.e., (3)), one that sounds quite bizarre (i.e., (4)) and another that does not make any sense at all, although syntactically fine. What is wrong with these sentences? Following Larson and Segal, we could say that although these sentences have truth-conditions, we are not in a position to evaluate them:

The truth-conditions all seem to involve some kind of misapplication of concepts that make it difficult for us to see how or in *what situations* they could actually apply. (Larson and Segal 1995:47. My emphasis]

Larson and Segal conclude that since a semantic theory cannot offer any plausible explanation of such cases, a ‘theory of aberrancy’ should be devised to face this difficult task. It is true that Larson and Segal do not discuss metaphorical cases (although (5) does seem to have some vague air of ‘metaphoricity’), but, presumably, since the case offered by (3) is not different from those of (4)-(5) in relation to the problem of (not) knowing their truth-conditions, I assume that Larson and Segal would think that any theory of metaphor should properly fall outside of any theory of semantics, as they suggest for (4)-(5). For, it seems *prima facie* obvious, we are barred from knowing the truth-conditions of most metaphorical sentences, where by ‘truth-conditions’ we mean something like ‘wordly’ conditions. Here Davidson would partake in this conclusion and possibly reinforce it with the following observation, which we will see to have some strong metaphysical implications:

A theory of truth does more than describe an aspect of the speech behaviour of an agent, for it not only gives the truth conditions of the actual utterances of the agent; it also specifies *the conditions under which* the utterance of a sentence would be true if it were uttered. This applies both to sentences actually uttered, by telling us what would have been the case if those sentences had been uttered at other times or under other circumstances, and to sentences never uttered. The theory thus describes a certain complex ability. (1990: 310. My emphasis)

Now we could represent Davidson's point by abstracting from some of its features. Davidson is saying that a theory of truth, say  $T$ , provides a pairing of each sentence  $s$  of  $L$  with its truth-conditions, say  $\theta$ . In particular, we may start with a language actually spoken, e.g.  $L$ , with its own syntax and formation rules. We then go on to provide a recursive semantics for such a language, say  $T_L$ , which assigns to each syntactic expression its interpretation. Although each expression will now be endowed with a semantic value only relative to its own interpretation, the final step of the recursive strategy, i.e., the assignment of a  $T$ -sentence to each sentence  $s$  of  $L$ , will characterise truth as an unrelativised notion, i.e. a notion that is not relative to any consideration external to the system (e.g., context, speaker's intentions, points of evaluation).<sup>14</sup> This step will take the form of a function  $\otimes$  of  $T$  such that for each  $s$  of  $L$ ,  $\otimes_{TL}:(s) \rightarrow \theta$  (i.e. for each sentence  $s$  of  $L$ ,  $T$  will deliver a function mapping  $s$  on to its truth-conditions). In virtue of holding a theorem of the form  $t = \otimes_{TL}:(s) \rightarrow \theta$ , one should be able to assess in any actual situation, say  $v'$ , whether the extension of  $s \in \text{Truth}$  or  $\notin \text{Truth}$  in  $v'$  given  $\theta$ . However, Davidson is not trying to say that given a theorem of this form, the theory will unconditionally pair  $s$  with  $\theta$ . For there are many theorems that will minimally differ from  $t$  (e.g.,  $t' = \langle s, \theta' \rangle$  where  $\theta' \leq_p \theta$ <sup>15</sup>), that will deliver correct judgments of truth-conditional. Though, as Davidson often repeats (see, for instance, Davidson 1977), it is only in virtue of the *available evidence* that a theorem of  $T$  may be verified. Once the available evidence is strong enough, we reach a point where it is possible to quantify over all the actual situations in which a given sentence  $s$  is verified, so that the meaning of  $s$  will be given by something like the following biconditional:

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<sup>14</sup> Although Davidson is willing to relativise the theory of truth to speakers of a language, times and occasions.

<sup>15</sup> ' $\leq_p$ ' is the part-relation.



(6)  $M(s) \equiv \forall v(s \text{ is true} \leftrightarrow \theta(v))$

(M is the meaning of the sentence *s* iff for every actual situation *v*, *s* is true iff the complex condition  $\theta$  obtains in *v*). Once the meaning of *s* is established in this way, any appeal to the context of use will become unnecessary and that, for Davidson, is the reason why “adverting to literal meaning and literal truth has genuine explanatory power” (1978: 33).

With respect to all the available evidence, it seems that Davidson is reaching this strong conclusion regarding metaphor:

*The question regarding metaphorical truth is senseless because there is no evidence whatsoever that we could possibly gain from experience so as to verify a certain metaphorical sentence.*

What sort of truth-condition would, in fact, be the one represented by a metaphorical sentence like the following:

(7) Time becomes blind. ? (De Lillo)

Given this semantic-ontological view, it becomes natural for Davidson to require a very different sort of explanation for the power of metaphors to give us insight.<sup>16</sup> In fact, the basic view Davidson espouses is that metaphors do not stand for any fact, although they may *provoke* or *prompt* or *make* us see some fact. He says, for instance:

Since in most cases what the metaphor prompts or inspires is not entirely, or even at all, *recognition of some truth or fact*, the

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<sup>16</sup> Something Davidson agrees with throughout the paper.

attempt to give literal expression to the content of the metaphor is simply misguided. (1978: 47)

It seems, then, that from the epistemic problem of ‘the ignorance of truth-conditions’ we have reached a more ontologically-burdened conclusion, which would prevent metaphorical sentences from being the object of our semantic theorising. This point seems the natural result of taking philosophical semantics as the discipline which tries to connect our theorising about language with how we come to recognise *truths or facts* in the world.<sup>17</sup> It is also supported by a tacit argument Davidson accepts in his paper, which regards the paraphrasability of metaphors. Davidson (1978: 32) says:

[M]etaphors cannot be paraphrased...because there is nothing there to paraphrase. Paraphrase, whether possible or not, is appropriate to what is *said*.

We see in this quotation the appearance of a concept which will accompany us throughout the whole dissertation, namely, the notion of ‘what is said’. Davidson is telling us that while normal utterances of literal sentences *say* something which can be paraphrased, metaphorical sentences do not. For instance, while the sentence

(8) I am hungry.

can be appropriately paraphrased in the following way:

(9) The speaker of (7), Francesco Gentile, is hungry at 2pm of the day 22 September 2011,

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<sup>17</sup> Notice how Davidson is presupposing a theory of truth which appeals to the notion of correspondence in the abovementioned passage.

The utterance of (8) is barred from a similar paraphrase, presumably because there is no eternal content such that an inscription of (8) could be substituted for it.<sup>18</sup> As a corollary of this argument, we can also state a first, Davidsonian definition of ‘what is said’

- (10) The ‘what is said’ of an utterance of a sentence  $s$  = The literal meaning of  $s$  + the actual condition in which  $s$  is uttered.

An opportune paraphrase should reveal how the literal meaning of  $s$  matches the actual condition for the obtaining of  $s$ . This is not possible in the case of metaphors. Therefore metaphors do not express any content beyond the literal meaning of the sentences which encode them.

With this part, I conclude my analysis of Davidson’s vast attack on the notion of metaphorical meaning and metaphorical truth. There is, I think, much insight that can be gained from this view. It certainly fits well with a certain picture of language that was still predominant in the seventies of the last century, and has even today its illustrious defenders (Cappelen and Lepore 2005 above all) and also has the merit of offering us a first framework for our investigation into the nature of metaphor. However, it will become clear that it is completely inadequate to deal with important questions concerning the level at which contextual imports enter into the composition and comprehension of metaphors.

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Eternal sentences’ are sentences which are always true or always false. The requirement of ‘eternality’ comes from Quine (1960), who appealed to it in order to avoid the need for propositions, whose nature Quine always considered to be suspicious. The requirement is that every non-eternal sentence can be translated into one eternal sentence which fully specifies the conditions of utterance of the non-eternal sentence.

## 5. Pragmatics?

This section and the next one are entirely devoted to the array of problems which affects Davidson's account as sketched in the previous sections. Before going to assess some potentially devastating arguments against Davidson's account, I think it is useful to first assess a proposal made by Davidson regarding the proper interpretive level at which metaphors should be evaluated.

*Pragmatic Analysis:* Davidson suggests that metaphorical interpretation does not concern linguistic meaning, but its use. Therefore it seems that, at least in some passages of his paper, Davidson is defending a pragmatic conception of metaphor.

I think metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use. It is something brought off by the imaginative employment of words and sentences and depends entirely on the ordinary meanings of those words and hence on the ordinary meanings of the sentences they comprise. (1978: 33. See also page 43)

But what, in Davidson's account, motivates a pragmatic re-analysis of any particular metaphor? One may say that since a metaphorical sentence is generally literally false, its falsity would launch the search for some implicature (a concept which will be extensively discussed in the next chapter). However, Davidson is barred from making such move for the following banal reason: implicatures – as we will see – are propositional in character, and therefore if we appealed to them we would re-introduce the idea that metaphorical sentences do express some content, after all.<sup>19</sup> Given this point,

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<sup>19</sup> Actually, this may be disputed to some extent. Sperber's and Wilson's early account of metaphor (1986/1995) pointed out that a characteristic of metaphor is the expression of what they call 'weak implicatures'. This concept is different from that of the traditional category of 'implicature', in that it allows for non-

Davidson's appeal to pragmatics, at least in the most common sense in which the term is taken, is wholly mysterious, if not simply inconsistent with his own theoretical presuppositions.

What about Davidson's implicit suggestion that metaphors have a special force attached to them, which would make them more similar to other kinds of speech acts, e.g. assertion, question, lie, etc.? Consider this passage:

[A]bsurdity or contradiction in a metaphorical sentence guarantees we will not believe it and invites us, *under proper circumstances*, to take the sentence metaphorically' (1979: 40. Emphasis added)

Here Davidson seems to be comparing the structure of metaphorical speech acts (if there is any such thing) to that of indirect speech acts. For instance, consider this utterance:

(11) Can you pass me the salt?

The literal meaning of this nondeclarative sentence is a question regarding the ability of the person to whom the question is addressed to pass the salt to the speaker. However, given the circumstance (in this case, the highly standardized circumstance imposed by the social context) the speaker is indirectly asking her interlocutor to pass her the salt.

However, two points need to be made. First of all, Davidson takes 'absurdity' or 'contradiction' to be a necessary and sufficient condition for recognising a metaphor. This seems to be plainly false,<sup>20</sup> as the following sentences demonstrate:

(12) Jesus was a carpenter.

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propositional effects of the kind Davidson would be satisfied with. I will discuss this notion in chapter iv.

<sup>20</sup> A point stressed by Leezenberg (2001).

(13) No man is an island.

These sentences are literally true, but their *preferred* interpretation is clearly metaphorical. Thus it is at least unclear what Davidson would say about these constructions.<sup>21</sup> It is instead quite important to stress that *no* theory of metaphor will be effective *unless* it theoretically motivates the choice of a metaphorical interpretation over a literal one. Only by giving an answer to the question regarding *under which circumstances* a sentence is metaphorical a theory would be worthy of consideration. Davidson does not provide any such answer, and therefore he fails to offer any principled reason to take metaphor as a sort of speech act.

Secondly, Davidson is not even clear as to his positive proposal regarding the type of function a metaphorical speech act would serve: *Imagination or seeing-as*? He often talks of the ability of metaphors to make us see one thing in terms of another. But other times he says that metaphor ‘makes us appreciate some fact – but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact’ (1978: 31). Finally, as the initial quotation of Davidson in this section states, he generically takes a metaphor to be launched by ‘the imaginative employment of words and sentences.’ No effort whatsoever is made by Davidson to put together, within a coherent framework, the notions of ‘imaginative employment’ and ‘seeing as’. In fact, these two notions belong to two very distinct cognitive categories.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> En passant, the same type of argument will be effective against Grice and speech-act theorists like Searle.

<sup>22</sup> The reader may look at Camp (2009), who brings some insight on this issue.

## 6. Beyond Disquotation

The problems for Davidson's account are even more radical and touch the essence itself of his philosophical semantics. Remember that in § 2, at the bottom of Davidson's argument, I stressed the following commitment of Davidson's theory: "given that all there is to the understanding of a sentence is the knowledge of the T-theorem associated to that sentence, then metaphor is no exception to this constraint". I see two ways to attack the conclusion that Davidson wants to draw from his commitment, namely, that the understanding of metaphors only requires the grasping of T-sentences: on the one hand, it is possible to directly show that metaphors are exceptions to Davidson's constraint that sentences' meanings are given by T-sentences (or to put in another way, that the knowledge of the sentences' meanings is given by the grasp of their corresponding T-sentences). On the other hand, it is possible to indirectly show that Davidson's argument does not even get started since there are examples of sentences whose literal truth-conditions are not fine-grained enough to individuate the actual situations which make the utterance of those sentences come out true. But then one may legitimately wonder whether disquotation provides a sufficient warrant to preserve any theoretically useful connection between truth and meaning, and whether Davidson's overall project is to be abandoned or revised consequently.

**6.1.** Within the first type of counterarguments to Davidson's view – those that directly attack the claim that metaphors' linguistic understanding is fully captured by the grasp of T-theorems – lay two arguments which I call the 'Embeddability Argument' and the 'Representation Argument'.

*Embeddability Argument*: metaphors embed, therefore there must be a content (i.e. a fully interpreted semantic structure) to be embedded. Just consider these sentences, which are, respectively, nondeclarative, embedded under the scope of some sentential operator (like the modal operator ‘perhaps’), deeply embedded in an intensional context, embedded in the antecedent of a conditional and, finally, embedded in a report:

- (14) Is Juliet the sun?
- (15) Perhaps Juliet is the sun.
- (16) I wonder why Romeo still considers Juliet his sun.
- (17) If Juliet is the sun for Romeo, then he should try to avoid any further contact with her.
- (18) Romeo said that Juliet is the sun.

If we follow Davidson’s suggestion that the interpretation of metaphors is a matter of interpreting the force of such utterances, then we should not expect metaphors to embed.<sup>23</sup> But since we can intuitively assess the truth-conditions of the metaphorical clauses of these sentences, it looks as if we are also able to determine how the truth-values of these clauses compose with the larger constructions in which they are embedded, so as to determine the truth-value of the whole sentences. Besides, if we take the suggestion that metaphors belong to some special sort of speech-act, e.g., the speech act of ‘metaphorizing’ or ‘inviting comparisons’,<sup>24</sup> then it would be impossible for a metaphor to be preceded by an attitude verb or by a report one. But clearly the

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<sup>23</sup> I am ignoring cases of so-called ‘biscuit conditionals’ (e.g., ‘If you are interested, there are some biscuits in the cupboard’). Cases like biscuit conditionals are special because the evaluation of the antecedent of the conditional does not have any relation with the truth-evaluation of the consequent (whether you are interested or not, it is always the case that there are biscuits in the cupboard). For a semantic treatment of biscuit conditionals, see Predelli (2009a).

<sup>24</sup> I’m using these expressions from Leezenberg (2001: 117), whose analysis has inspired the present criticism I am making of Davidson’s view.



metaphorical interpretation is *independent* from ‘my’ attitude in (16) and from the reporter’s perspective in (18).<sup>25</sup>

*Representational problem:* If metaphors do not stand for any facts, could it still be possible to claim that they have some sort of representational power? A possible solution to this question is given by Reimer (2001), who focuses on Davidson’s account of metaphor from a purely communicative point of view.<sup>26</sup>

Reimer defends Davidson’s idea that metaphors are not propositional in character, where by *propositional* she means *sentential*.<sup>27</sup> But she goes on to say that there may be a way for the Davidsonian to say that metaphors do express some propositional content, e.g., by appealing to Stalnaker’s conception of proposition, according to which “something is propositional just in case it represents the world as being a certain way” (Reimer 2001: 145). Therefore when a metaphor makes us notice certain things, it makes us notice certain similarities, there’s no need to “entertain any *proposition* (i.e. a sentence or set of sentences) affirming these similarities” (Reimer 2001: 147).

However, Stalnaker’s view on proposition (1986, 1999) is more complicated than Reimer thinks: the representational (i.e., conceptual) power of a proposition lies in pinning down a set of possible worlds in which the proposition holds. If so, to understand a sentence is to represent *that* set, and this implies that one is able to represent the sentence as being true in those worlds. Thus, it looks like the Stalnakerian picture presupposes a classical view of proposition. Therefore, on such a view if one comes to see the similarities that a metaphor brings about, it is because she has effectively been able to see what the world should be like in order

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<sup>25</sup> I will give an explanation of this fact in Chapter 7.

<sup>26</sup> In this chapter I have distanced myself from accounts such as Reimer’s because I think it is better to first explain Davidson’s theoretical reasons to reject metaphorical meaning, before assessing Davidson’s view on metaphor in communication.

<sup>27</sup> She appeals to a suggestion put forward by Moran (1996).

for the proposition (Stalnakerian sense which includes the classical view) to be true. This seems to imply that metaphors *do* have representational, i.e. fully conceptual, power.

**6.2.** Within the second type of counterarguments, i.e. those which indirectly attack not just Davidson's account of metaphor but Davidson's semantic programme, lay two arguments that are addressed to show how disquotations are not a theoretical virtue after all.

*Paraphrasability argument:* Davidson has provided a number of arguments against taking metaphor to express any content. One of such arguments states that metaphors are not paraphrasable in the way ordinary literal sentences are. However, consider the following sentences:

- (19) France is hexagonal.
- (20) Jim is tall.
- (21) Guinness is tasty.

Now, the argument goes as follows: First we consider the relevant T-sentences for (19)-(21):

- (19') 'France is hexagonal' is true iff France is hexagonal.
- (20') 'Jim is tall' is true iff Jim is tall.
- (21') 'Guinness is tasty' is true iff Guinness is tasty.

Then we ask whether competent speakers of English, in virtue of grasping (19')-(21'), are endowed with a semantic knowledge which provides necessary and sufficient conditions to truth-

evaluate those sentences.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, even granting that (19')-(21') impose some constraint on the interpretation of (19)-(21), these alone are not sufficient to deliver the right truth-conditions of those sentences. For there are *too many ways* in which (19)-(21) can be true, and thus there are too many ways to paraphrase their contents. For instance, (19) may count as true in a context of elementary geography class, but not in a context where the precise borders of France are salient. Similarly, (20) may be true in a context where Jim's height is evaluated with respect to the average height of his class, but not true with respect to some other standard of evaluation (e.g., the local basketball team). Finally (21) cannot be evaluated without some implicit reference to the speaker's standard of taste, or something along those lines.

But the point I am making here is not that these sentences can express too many contents – this is something on which several lines of research have expressed different examples. In fact, it could be replied that it is still possible to find appropriate truth-conditions of those sentences in the metalanguage or to play some semantic tricks at the level of their logical form.<sup>29</sup> The point is instead that once we allow extra-material to determine the semantic evaluation of those sentences, disquotation becomes subject to an open-endedness that is methodologically suspicious given the compositionality constraint implicit in our semantic theorising.<sup>30</sup>

The right conclusion to draw is that T-sentences alone fail to provide the correct semantic generalisation for a class of sentences

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<sup>28</sup> Indexicality provides instead an obstacle to the necessity of a semantic analysis based on T-sentences. Consider an utterance of the sentence 'It is sunny today' which we want to evaluate tomorrow. Thus, 'It is sunny today' is true iff it was sunny yesterday is uttered. In order to preserve truth, a T-schema should also preserve sameness of content, but this goes against 'homophonic' interpretations of the kind Davidson privileged.

<sup>29</sup> The problem of unarticulated constituents comes in here, i.e. the problem of whether these sentences contain elements which are not realised in their surface structure, but that are articulated at the deeper level of their logical form, whose semantic representation is made necessary to fully truth-evaluate them. Perry (1986) is a locus classicus. We will find this problem again especially in Chapters 4 and 6.

<sup>30</sup> I will deal with this issue in Chapter 5.

that are not metaphorical. They fail because they are unable to specify *under what circumstances* the sentences of the left-hand side would be true or false. As a consequence of that, disquotation is blocked and cannot deliver any substantial piece of information about the world. Therefore, Davidson's theory fails to provide the kind of 'complex ability' Davidson himself had described as being a theoretical virtue of his system (See § 4). It seems then that Davidson is not warranted to conclude that metaphorical sentences and literal ones are distinguishable in virtue of their paraphrasability, which indirectly leans on the issue of whether T-sentences provide a complete answer to the question of what kind of semantic knowledge speakers of a language hold. Simply, T-sentences do not provide a complete answer to that question.

The very last problem for Davidson's programme concerns the relationship between the strict extensionalist demands that a Tarski-style theory of truth imposes on a theory meaning. Consider this example, which is offered by Pietroski (2005: 268):

(22) France is hexagonal, and France is a republic.

Now, this sentence may be considered true since both conjuncts, given appropriate circumstances, are both true. By logic alone, we have the following inference, which is clearly valid:

$$(23) \quad \frac{H(f) \wedge R(f)}{\exists x(H(x) \wedge R(x))}$$

However, it seems that by validating this kind of inference we are forcing now the meaning of (22) to allow for a new meaning that clearly does not make any sense, as there is nothing in the world which is an hexagonal republic.

If this example shows something, it may be taken to further strengthen my conclusion that a Davidsonian semantics is unable to

capture all there is to be said about the meaning of natural language expressions because, as a matter of empirical evidence, important aspects concerning the semantics of the sentences of a natural language like English have been shown to be rather reluctant to be fully captured by a Tarski-style theory of truth. I will come back to this example later on since it has a straightforward similarity with a test provided by Stern (2000, 2006), i.e. the ‘VP-ellipsis Test’, for mixed literal/metaphorical contexts.

## **7. Conclusions**

My view in this dissertation approaches a less pessimistic perspective to the semantic study of metaphor than that reached by Davidson. For contrary to what Davidson thinks, I will show in the last chapter that there is ample space of manoeuvre to treat metaphors *semantically*. The arguments presented against Davidson here make it already problematic to maintain that the meaning of a metaphor is captured by the literal truth-condition associated with the sentence which is its most superficial vehicle. For metaphors embed and they also determine possible scenarios the representation of which make them propositional, and therefore at least partially paraphrasable. The question we are left with is then at what level metaphors express content: semantics or pragmatics?

According to Davidson, a metaphor cannot implicate anything, because that would make it propositional, against his assumption that metaphors do not have special meanings. But what if Davidson had followed the Gricean view that metaphors do implicate something over and above their literal meaning? That would help Davidson’s semantic programme to keep on doing its proper job, leaving to pragmatics the extra-work required by these ‘accidents’

of language. For reasons not entirely clear to me Davidson opted for a less than fully explicated view that metaphors give rise to some special speech-act of ‘metaphorising’. We saw how such a view is doomed to fail from the start given the embeddability of metaphors.

What needs to be done now is to understand what is the proper level of representation of a metaphor. One initial suggestion, following Sainsbury (2009), is that the meanings of certain sentences that require some special treatment in order to express some truth-evaluable content are *unspecific*; these sentences express the same content irrespective of their context of utterance. However, Sainsbury proposes this treatment in defence of Davidson’s truth-conditional semantics in the light of the kind of examples Travis (1985) originally presented against such a theory. For instance, consider

(24) John grunts.

According to Travis this sentence cannot be evaluated without appeal to some specific, occasional understanding of what it is for John to grunt. Sainsbury thinks that a Davidsonian may reply by using a test: the DENIABILITY test. Consider the denial of (23):

(25) John does not grunt.

It seems that you can deny (24) without having in mind any particular way in which John grunts. This strategy seems to safeguard Davidson’s semantics for this particular kind of example, but can it be applied to examples such as (19)-(21)? No, it cannot. It is in fact impossible to understand the denial of these sentences without having in mind some particular way in which the content embedded in the denial has to be taken. A fortiori, the same

situation will be present in the denial of metaphorical sentences, like:

(26) Juliet is not the sun.

I conclude then that this kind of strategy does not resolve Davidson's troubles, but accentuates them in a way which makes my search for a valid theoretical alternative quite urgent. It will turn out that all the problems metaphorical interpretation poses for Davidson's theory can be resolved only by considering a theoretical machinery that goes against Davidson's extensional semantics. In fact, I will later consider the idea of relativising truth to points of evaluation, where a point of evaluation will be treated along the lines indicated by Kaplan (1989) with the further introduction of a parameter, which I call 'thematic dimension', that will play a role in determining the truth-value of a content at a world. But before reaching that moment, other problems and other solutions inherent in the foundations of metaphor studies will have to be considered, and to these I now turn.

## Chapter 2

# Metaphor and Implicature

### 1. Grice's project

In the previous chapter I discussed how Davidson tried to preserve his semantic system from the intrusion of content that could be inferred from metaphorical utterances, by denying that metaphors express any propositional content beyond that which is encapsulated by the sentences that are their vehicles. Davidson's argument was shown to be not very plausible for a number of reasons concerning not only his very narrow conception of semantics, but also his inability to spell out a positive conception of metaphors and their connection with context. Consequently, Davidson was unable to reach a level of systematic analysis of how language users interpret metaphors, and this was taken as a further weakness of his view. However, the issues Davidson touched on in his paper on metaphor are still of great value since they clearly indicate a crucial dilemma concerning metaphors, at least as far as this investigation is concerned. The dilemma is as follows: either metaphors express some content that exceeds the semantic information encoded by the literal meanings of the sentences used to convey them, and then any compositional semantics is



unsuitable to explain this fact; or metaphors do not express any content beyond that which is encoded by the literal meaning of the sentences which are their vehicles, but then semantics alone cannot deliver the proper understanding of metaphors.

In this chapter I am going to assess a very different programme, which was started in the same years Davidson developed his own, but which took a very radical turn away from the kind of assumptions philosophers of language, semanticists and logicians had been making about communication. I am going to assess Grice's theory of conversation, summarised by his well-known lectures held at Harvard in 1967 [1975]. Given that the conception of communication originated by this programme has effectively changed the way philosophers and non-philosophers conceive of communication today, it would be no mistake to consider Grice's programme as a sort of theoretical revolution, whose effects are still not completely, even adequately so, assessed. Metaphor is a good test for such a programme since not only may it serve the purpose of showing the strengths and limits of Grice's theory of conversation, but it also indirectly casts doubt on his conception of meaning as based on intention recognition.

A basic claim of such a programme is that we do not need to enlarge the expressive power of the semantics of a natural language, in order to account for certain linguistic phenomena that are difficult to treat semantically. On the other hand, this programme aims at recognising that semantics alone cannot provide a full assessment of what speakers convey with their utterances. This, far from disproving the need for a notion of literal meaning, may be shown to presuppose it. We can, in fact, determine what the speakers mean in these cases *only* on the basis of what the speakers say, plus by reasoning on certain normative maxims that presumably govern any conversation. What the speakers say, in turn, can be determined only on the basis of the literal meanings of the words they choose in order to express the

proposition(s) they want to get across to their audience. What-is-said is therefore considered by Grice as the theoretical glue which serves to systematically connect the literal meaning of words and sentences to what these may be used to convey on some particular occasions.<sup>1</sup>

The idea that *saying* something does not fully capture what the speaker may mean by saying it was not new. Austin (1962) had already started his own programme on speech acts, which was based on similar distinctions, and in particular on the idea that locutionary acts (the acts of *saying* something) should be clearly separated from illocutionary and perlocutionary ones (respectively, the acts of performing a speech act by saying something and the acts of moving the hearer to do something in virtue of the illocutionary acts made). Searle was going to give his contribution to speech act theory soon. Strawson (1950, 1952) had opposed Russell's logical conception of language, claiming that the logical form of sentences does not univocally determine contents unless we also consider the role of speakers, and possibly of contexts, in achieving reference or making assertions.

What radically changed with Grice is, I think, that phenomena once considered to properly fall under the aegis of rhetoric were now receiving a systematic investigation, which made them appear no longer as the effects of some merely decorative function of language, but as crucial elements of the speakers' mental life, which could in principle be explained by appealing to systematic

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<sup>1</sup> From now I follow the convention of conjoining the three words constituting the complex expression 'what I said,' in order to form a syntactically unique expression. This is to signal that I am here dealing with a technical notion. Furthermore, I will use subscript letters to define, in a second moment, each conception of what-is-said that I am going to consider here (e.g., Bach's view on what-is-said will become what-is-said<sub>B</sub>). On the other hand, whenever I talk of the content expressed by an utterance, I will stick to the normal use of the expression 'what is said'.

norms of language and communication.<sup>2</sup> Far from being linguistic epiphenomena, it became evident that the cases Grice started investigating were core aspects of the language users' mental life, which the investigation of language alone could not possibly fully explain.

After having analysed Grice's programme, I will focus on his notion of 'conversational implicature' to see whether metaphor can be assimilated to it. My answer is negative: metaphors are not implicatures, and, in fact, they do not satisfy any of the conditions Grice associated to conversational implicatures. In particular, metaphors are not easily cancellable, they are detachable (the change of a term used metaphorically with another which is co-referential to it does not assure sameness of metaphorical interpretation), and they are not calculable in the way standard cases of conversational implicatures are. But there are further problems for Grice. One of these concerns Grice's idea that speakers of metaphors only 'make as if to say' something. This notion creates problems when we consider cases of embeddability of metaphors under some logical operators such as negation.

Finally, having shown how Grice's view of metaphor fails to offer any necessary condition for metaphor to be taken as conversational implicature, I will go on to further argue that it does not even offer a sufficiency criterion since, by identifying cases of metaphor with cases of irony, Grice ends up with the view that two very different phenomena should be considered as belonging to the same category.

The plan of the chapter is therefore as follows: In § 2, by reflecting upon certain utterances involving a discrepancy between their truth-conditional meaning and the truths apparently expressed by them, I discuss the limits of two philosophical theories which

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<sup>2</sup> Sure Black (1962) had already stressed the cognitive function of metaphors, but his interaction theory made them appear the result of almost magical properties of language, and therefore quite unpredictable from a theoretical point of view.

historically precede Grice's work, so as to pave the way for Grice's theory of implicatures, which I fully explore in § 3. There I present Grice's taxonomy of implicatures: conventional implicatures, generalised and particularised implicatures. In particular, I will focus on the notion of particularised conversational implicature, and show how it is supposed by Grice to apply to different phenomena (e.g., standard examples of conversational implicature, irony, metaphor). In § 4 I will present the battery of objections against Grice's analysis, and show that a proper account of metaphor does not require the notion of implicature at all.

## 2. Quineans vs. Austinians

The starting point of my discussion is an idea which has already emerged, namely, that a proper distinction should be made between the literal meaning of a sentence and what the speaker manages to convey by uttering that sentence. Furthermore, it will soon become clear that such a distinction does not capture all types of meaning that a systematic theory of language should explain. For, we will also need to make room for what a sentence, when uttered on some particular occasion, conveys, irrespective of any assessment of the speaker's intentions. A great merit of Grice (1975 [1989]) is that he first advanced a comprehensive taxonomy of these cases.

However, before giving an assessment of Grice's programme as being based on these distinctions, I would like to propose a comparison, partially based on historical considerations, between two schools of thought that will help me frame Grice's ideas better. I decided to call these two schools *Quinean* and *Austinian* after their respective philosophical fathers, Quine and Austin.<sup>3</sup> These

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<sup>3</sup> One may wonder whether Quine himself or Austin would have adopted the views which I am respectively calling Quinean and Austinian. Whether or not they would, my claim here is only that these schools of thoughts started within

two schools were dominating the philosophical scene of the fifties of the last century, before new important philosophical currents such as Grice's pragmatics and possible world semantics made their appearance. In particular, I am going to start my analysis by introducing some examples that are classically considered to require a treatment in terms of Grice's notion of implicature. I will explain why these examples pose problems to these two schools of thought and why Grice's theory of implicatures becomes then so appealing. By the end of this section, it will also be clear how strategic the notion of literal meaning is in Grice's programme. In the next section, I will be more specific about the different types of implicature, and also about the role of conversational maxims in calculating them.

Thus, let's first consider this bunch of cases:

- (1) They got married and had a child.
- (2) John will do his homework or he will be punished.
- (3) If it rains, the match will be cancelled.

There are two questions such sentences pose: first of all, under what worldly conditions are these sentences true or false? Secondly, what is their meaning? It seems to me that we can individuate a Quinean and an Austinian type of answer, depending on how we judge the questions to be interrelated. In between, there is Grice's option, which is a sort of middle ground for those who do not want to be fully committed to either of the two answers I am going to consider.<sup>4</sup>

On the one hand, there is the Quinean school of thinkers, which takes the two questions to be strictly related in that answering the

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two distinct philosophical traditions that can be traced back to these philosophers.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Grice (1989: 372).

first provides an implicit answer to the latter. Its basic assumption is the following claim:

*Quineans*: Truth-conditions determine meaning. Facts about meaning are exhausted by facts about truth-conditions. According to such a view, issues about meaning can only be resolved by appealing to a theory of truth extensionally defined for a language of first-order logic. Whatever does not square with such a language should be eliminated from its underlying ontology unless it is opportunely paraphrased in it.

On the other hand, there is another school of thinkers, which goes in the exact opposite direction of the *Quineans*. According to such thinkers, let's call them *Austinians*, truth is a property not of sentences but of statements.<sup>5</sup> In other words, it is not by virtue of some extrinsic or intrinsic property of a language such as English that sentences belonging to that language are true or false. It is only when a speaker, under certain contextual and normative conditions, utters such sentences that the question of truth arises. Hence the study of such further conditions becomes essential to the understanding of truth. If so, the study of meaning becomes an integral part of the study of truth, since the latter notion cannot be understood without having a firm grasp of the former.

According to the Austinian, the way we use the predicate 'is true' should be considered on a par with the use of any more mundane predicate like 'is red' or 'is funny'. That is, both kinds of predicate have their own conventions regulating their use, and failure to handle those results in failure to apply them in appropriate situations. 'This sentence is true', 'What you have just said is true' and 'It is true that I am Italian' are all sentences where

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<sup>5</sup> Austin (1950) is the *locus classicus*.

the predicate 'is true' or the sentential operator 'it is true that' are used in order to communicate that something has the property of 'being the case'. Understanding under what conditions these statements manage to communicate this requires a previous understanding of a series of elements, whose knowledge is given by a mixture of linguistic competence and worldly information. In 'This sentence is true' and 'What you have just said is true', for instance, we need to know, respectively, which sentence is being talked about and what the addressee has previously said. In 'It is true that I am Italian', we need, in addition, to know who the speaker is, and make sure that her statement provides an answer to a question specifically asking in that regard. Summarising:

*Austinians*: Truth is not a special property that sentences have or fail to have. Truth is what our uses of the predicate 'is true' or of any other similar device tell us about a certain class of things, i.e., statements. What these uses tell us is that some statements about states of affairs hold in virtue of a complex relationship between these states and the conventions governing the sentences used to represent them.

A crucial element that distinguishes these two schools regards the applicability of the predicate 'is true': while for the Quineans the predicate applies to sentences, for the Austinians it applies to statements, in virtue of the conventions associating sentences to the world. Given this distinction, it is worth noticing that, for the Austinians, the applicability of a predicate like 'is true' or a sentence-operator like 'it is true that' admits *degrees of successfulness* (Austin 1950: 130), as with the usage of any other predicate. For instance, someone asserting 'It is true that the average American family has 2.3 children' should be taken to have asserted something being itself true provided that what she has

stated fulfils the scope and interests of the conversation. This strategy is clearly not available to the Quineans, who hold that the predicate ‘is true’ is absolute, and hence not interest-relative or open to degrees of applicability.

Whether or not ‘true’ or ‘false’ are interest-relative, they are relative in another sense, for the Austinians: they can apply to statements only if some historic situation is being referred to by their utterances. It seems, in fact, correct to say that an utterance of ‘The average American family has 2.3 sons’ can be truth-evaluated only relative to some historic situation, say, the current year 2012. And it seems correct that an implicit reference to a situation is always being made by an utterance. The importance of this point will become apparent later on, especially in relation to my discussion of the possibility of an account of metaphorical truth along the lines suggested by Austin.<sup>6</sup>

For the time being, I will concentrate on the Quinean strategy to deal with sentences (1)-(3). If we adhered to the Quinean view that the truth of these sentences should mirror a purely extensional principle of compositionality,<sup>7</sup> then we would have to say that these sentences are true when and only when their truth-conditional profile is sufficient to deliver the correct assignment of truth-values to them. Their truth-conditional profile is, of course, given by the truth-conditional tables, which are here reported for pedagogical purposes:

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<sup>6</sup> The Austinian view will be properly discussed in the Chapter 7, in relation to the conception of ‘Austinian Proposition’ which is essential to characterise a version of situational semantics, which I myself espouse.

<sup>7</sup> See discussion in the previous chapter.



	$\wedge$
T T	T
T F	F
F T	F
F F	F

	$\vee$
T T	T
T F	T
F T	T
F F	F

	$\rightarrow$
T T	T
T F	F
F T	T
F F	T

Given these tables, the truth-conditions for (1)-(3) are restricted to the set of four logical situations each of these tables represents. In particular, (1) will be true iff both conjuncts are true, (2) will be true iff neither of the two disjuncts is false, and (3) will be vacuously true whenever the antecedent is false or its consequent true.

However, common sense would seem to tell us that things go differently than the way the Quineans describe. Certainly, the order of the two conjuncts matters for the assessment of (1), or doesn't it? If the order were not important, then the subjects of this sentence could have had their child and then got married. Would (1) be true under those conditions? Intuitions here waver, but most would certainly find something inappropriate with a restatement of the conjunction with inverted conjuncts. Similarly, the truth of (2) seems to be sensitive to the relation of the situations described. Suppose the second disjunct is true; then it seems that the first must be false for the second disjunct to be true. But suppose now that the second disjunct is true, and the first also. According to our truth-conditional table for disjunction, (2) should still be true, but according to our intuitive evaluation, it is not. Finally, as to (3), suppose it is true that the match is cancelled but false that it rains on the match's day. Then by the truth-conditional profile of conditional, we will have that (3) is true, but, once again, it seems that what (3) states is different (Strawson 1952: 83-84). Quineans are clearly exposed to difficulties in explaining these cases, which

are far from constituting minor aspects of the corpus of linguistic data that a semantics of natural language has to provide an explanation of.

It seems that, on the other hand, if we go with the Austinians and say that the truth-conditional profile of (1)-(3) is directly influenced by factors external to the meaning encoded by them (e.g., a temporal connotation in the meaning of ‘and’ or a causal one in the meaning of ‘or’), then we open even the most basic elements of a language, i.e., its truth-conditional operators, to an unwelcome massive ambiguity.<sup>8</sup>

But the problems do not end up here. What about utterances in which some specific element is responsible for the emergence of some meaning over and above the truth-conditional one? Consider:

- (4) He is rich but honest.
- (5) He is Italian; therefore, he is a good cook.

Here we have two utterances whose truth-conditional profile is given by the truth-table for conjunction: in other words, (4) and (5) are true iff the subject picked out by ‘he’ has both the properties which are predicated of him (‘being rich’ and ‘being honest’ in (4) and ‘being Italian’ and ‘being a good cook’ in (5)). However, in addition to the truth-conditional profile we have two words, ‘but’ and ‘therefore,’ which are responsible for generating some further meaning, that is to say, a contrast in (4) and a sort of entailment in (5).

Again, even though the Quineans are clearly not at ease in dealing with such sorts of example, Austinians would probably not go very far, either, if they claimed that the truth-conditions of these utterances are influenced by how things stand with the contrast implied by the word ‘but’ in (4) and the implication conveyed by

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<sup>8</sup> Against this hypothesis, see Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (2000).

‘therefore’ in (5). In fact, (4) and (5) would still be true if the relevant contrast and the implication were false. The problem becomes more acute when we consider that whichever meanings (4) and (5) further convey, they can be captured in propositional terms, as many philosophers of language have pointed out (Bach 1999, Neale 2001, Predelli 2003). But if these meanings are propositional, then they are certainly truth-evaluable.<sup>9</sup> Thus we have two truth-conditional contents in just one sentence, which makes the entire project of providing a clear-cut semantics of these utterances more complex than Quineans and Austrians could possibly admit. It is at this point that Grice’s theory of implicatures appears as a natural solution to all these problems. To this I shall now turn.

### **3 The theory of implicatures and the role of maxims in communication**

In this section I shall introduce the reader to Grice’s theory of implicatures. In § 3.1 I will be considering the role of ‘what is said’ according to Grice, and also his notion of ‘conventional implicature’. I shall use two tests, the ‘disagreement test’ and the ‘deniability test’, to judge the correctness of Grice’s distinction between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is conventionally implicated’. I will show that, contrary to what Bach thinks, Grice’s distinction is empirically correct. In § 3.2 I will move to discuss Grice’s notion of ‘conversational implicature’. I shall look at several applications of this notion and suggest that we should distinguish between two types of Gricean implicatures: those which ‘add’ something to what

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<sup>9</sup> Under the assumption that propositions are the privileged truth-bearers. This assumption has been challenged by some, but I won’t explore their challenges here. I will touch on this issue again in Chapter 3, in relation to Barker’s account of conventional implicatures.

is said and those which require that ‘what is said’ be judged by the hearer as deviant in order for the implicature to arise. I shall use Stalnaker’s notion of common ground to make this distinction more vivid. Towards the end of this sub-section I will further delineate the location metaphor has within Grice’s taxonomy of implicatures whose calculability is due to either the flouting or the violation of some conversational maxims.

Since his article ‘Meaning’ (1957), one of Grice’s most pressing worries was to define a psychologically real, and theoretically explanatory, notion of *speaker’s meaning*. According to Grice, defining this notion requires one to specify the basic effect reached by a speaker on her audience through the uttering of a sentence endowed with a particular mood. This effect can be characterised as the hearer’s recognition of the fact that the speaker has uttered certain words having a specific communicative intention in mind, which he or she, in turn, intends the hearer to recognise. The process is throughout intentional, and Grice attempts to reduce semantic notions such as meaning, entailment and what-is-said to the intentional activity of speakers. Such a reduction has been severely criticised (Ziff 1967), while some have made attempts to redefine it (Searle 1969, Schiffer 1972, even Neale 1992).

It is not my interest to discuss such a Gricean line of research, which I take in any case to be uninteresting for the scope of this dissertation.<sup>10</sup> Instead of focusing on Grice’s attempts to reduce semantic notions to what he considered to be more fundamental concepts such as speaker’s beliefs and intentions, I will be

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<sup>10</sup> Even if some Gricean scholars were to offer a successful reduction of semantic notions, this would, in my view, be completely irrelevant to the purpose of explaining what makes, for instance, a certain semantic interpretation more plausible than another. What is more, attempts to define semantic notions in terms of intentions will always presuppose knowledge of such notions. Similarly, to take an example from the philosophy of mind, the fact that a certain mental state could be theoretically reduced to a certain physical state will not, in my view, get rid of the phenomenon to be reduced. Actually each reduction of a certain phenomenon will always presuppose a *higher*, and independently specifiable, interpretation of it.

considering in this section Grice's important contributions to the definition of the semantics/pragmatics interface. My main goal here is to introduce the reader to the realm of what we may call the Gricean pragmatics, which has been considered for years and years the privileged home for metaphor. In the next section I will cast more than one doubt on this assumption, which I take to be unwarranted for several reasons, both descriptive and theoretical.

### **3.1 What is Said & Conventional Implicatures**

Suppose someone utters 'It's cold in this room.' She has thereby made a certain act endowed with a mood, in this case the assertive mood that is usually indicated by the symbol '┆' (to be read 'turnstile'), and a content, that is, the proposition that it is cold in the room the speaker is. The same proposition can be expressed by a sentence whose mood is not that of an assertion, but, e.g., of an interrogative: 'Is this room cold?'. In this case the speaker is not committed to the truth of that proposition, as the interrogative mood associated to her utterance indicates. Other moods, such as, for instance, the imperative (conventionally indicated in written language by '!'), introduce other kinds of commitment. What this shows is that it is possible to keep a content, the proposition expressed by the utterance of a sentence, fixed, while changing the mood or way of presenting such a content (e.g., assertively, interrogatively, imperatively, etc.).

Furthermore, it seems we can define the notion of speaker's meaning in two ways: on the one hand, we can look at the speaker's type of commitment in relation to the content expressed by her utterance. Generally, in an assertion this will be the commitment to the truth of the proposition expressed, while in a question – assuming a Hamblin-style semantics for questions – the commitment is lessened to the truth of at least one proposition in

the set of answers which is the extension of the question. On the other hand, Grice stresses the importance of the rational activity of language users in determining the nature not only of the speaker's main commitment, but, more generally, of 'the total signification' of her speech act. In the light of such a task, it becomes important for him to distinguish each level of contribution an utterance makes to the total signification intended by the speaker.

Within this framework, we can make the following preliminary distinction regarding the specific contribution of an utterance to the total signification of a speaker's speech act:

- (i) *Sentence level* (or *utterance's type level*): Words, expressions and the mode in which these compose to determine contents.
- (ii) *What is said*: the content actually determined on the basis of (i).

It is a very debated question nowadays whether Grice intended (ii) to be determined exclusively on the basis of (i), or whether further inferential processes should intervene in this process.<sup>11</sup> One could, for instance, appeal to Kent Bach's conservative reading of Grice's notion of what-is-said as based on what Bach calls the *Syntactic Correlation* constraint:<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The reader may consult: Neale (1992), Recanati (2004) Carston (2002: Chap. 1), Camp (2006). The theoretical notion of what-is-said is assumed by Grice only to 'a considerable extent' of 'intuitive understanding'. Here is his sketchy idea: "In the sense in which I am using the word *say*, I intend what someone has said to be closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered" (1989: 25). He adds that for "a full identification of what the speaker said" one has to proceed to the disambiguation of any indexical element of the sentence uttered, and *also* to the particular understanding of the meanings on the particular occasion of utterance. Again, Neale (1992) provides good discussion of these aspects of Grice's project.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bach 2001: 15.

*Syntactic Correlation Constraint*: what is said = “the elements of [the sentence], their order, and their syntactic character” (Grice 1989: 87).

This formulation is, I think, a good approximation of Grice’s view, and is certainly supported by Grice’s explicit endorsement.<sup>13</sup> However, it cannot be considered the whole story since Bach is deliberately avoiding an aspect of Grice’s theory that he rejects. This aspect is constituted by the category of what Grice calls ‘conventional implicatures’. Grice has in mind a class of words and expressions whose contribution, he thinks, goes beyond what is said by an utterance.<sup>14</sup> Following Bach’s characterisation (1999) of the phenomenon, we can divide such a class in two sub-classes:

- (6) a. ‘but’, ‘therefore’, ‘still’, etc.  
(*Contrastive particles*)
- b. ‘confidentially’, ‘honestly’, ‘between you and me’, ‘amazingly’, etc. (*Speech-act adverbs*)

Examples of the first class are the abovementioned utterances (4) and (5). Examples of the second class could be:

- (7) Honestly, I’m not going to eat your pasta.
- (8) Between you and me, she is not my girlfriend.

The kind of effect that words like ‘honestly’ or expressions like ‘between you and me’ are generally considered to bring about is to modify the way the utterance is to be interpreted, while what is said by the utterance is not affected by such encoded information. Thus

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<sup>13</sup> See also Grice (1989: 25) and Recanati (2004: 7).

<sup>14</sup> See also the very beginning of ‘Further Notes on Logic and Conversation’, where he strengthens the idea that to the distinction between what is said and what is implicated one should add the distinction between ‘what is part of the conventional force (or meaning) of the utterance and what is not’ (Grice 1989: 41).

the core intuition is that there are elements in the utterances of (4)-(5) and (7)-(8) which are supposedly responsible for generating some implicatures over and above what is said by them.<sup>15</sup>

Now, if it we adopted Bach's definition of *what is said*, let's dub it *what-is-said<sub>B</sub>*, we could not have a special category of conventional implicatures. The reason is simple. Since it is possible to find in the sentences' surface of (4)-(5) and (7)-(8) some syntactic elements which are responsible for what Grice considers implicatures, then by the Syntactic Correlation Constraint such elements should instead be part of *what-is-said*. This is, in its essence, the core of Bach's attack on the notion of conventional implicature (Bach 1999).

### **What is said and Implicature**

This is not the place for surveying the details of Bach's argument. I mentioned it because it seems to me a good starting point for those who are interested in defining the criteria for a theoretically useful notion of *what-is-said*. Bach's syntactic criterion may be one of these and it is certainly relevant to assess the current minimalism/contextualism debate.

A form of the *Syntactic Correlation Constraint* is, I think, implicit in Cappelen's and Lepore's semantic minimalism (Cappelen and Lepore 2005) whereby the notion of *what-is-said* is defined in conservative terms as the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of a sentence after every ambiguous/polysemous expression has been disambiguated, as well as every vague expression and indexical element.<sup>16</sup> According to

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<sup>15</sup> According to Christopher Potts (2005), at least another class of cases, namely, the class of appositives, requires an analysis in terms of conventional implicature, for which Potts himself provides an elegant semantics.

<sup>16</sup> Notice how even Grice allows for such operations on what is said by an utterance. See fn. 11.



such a definition of what-is-said, all the reports of (9) would not count as what is said by (9).

- (9) Francesco lives in 39 Premier Road.
- (10) Francesco Gentile lives in 39 Premier Road.
- (11) Alba's son lives in 39 Premier Road, Nottingham.
- (12) The seminar leader of 'Nature of Meaning' lives in 39 Premier Road, Nottingham.

Although in a sense (10)-(12) *say* the same thing said by (9), they do not under the interpretation of what-is-said which is favoured here. A more complex case is given by sentences which seem to require a completion in order to express a full proposition. However, they still would count as having said something under this analysis. For instance:

- (13) Jim is ready.
- (14) I've had breakfast.
- (15) This steak is tough.

Here Bach's theory departs from Cappelen's and Lepore's minimalism in that the latter, but not the former, considers (13)-(15) to express complete propositions, while Bach takes them to fail to do so. In order for the hearer to fully understand (13)-(15), she must make *explicit* what is *implicit* in them. In other words, she must elaborate on the content lexically articulated by (13)-(15) to the point they express:

- (13\*) Jim is ready *to go*.
- (14\*) I've had breakfast *today*.
- (15\*) This steak is not properly *cooked*.

Bach calls the process by means of which (13\*)-(15\*) are derived *completion*, whereas the expressions added in this process *implicatures* (not to be confused with *implicatures*). Sentences (13)-(15) are instead considered *propositional radicals* in that they do not determine full propositions by themselves, but some of their elements manifest a degree of negative acidity which indicates their need of completion. We could adopt the following convention of using ‘+’ and ‘-’ to indicate the semantic polarity of each syntactic element in (13)-(15). ‘+’ indicates that the element is semantically complete, while ‘-’ indicates that the element requires completion.

[S[<sub>NP</sub> Jim]<sup>+</sup> [VP is ready]<sup>-</sup>]

[S[<sub>NP</sub> I]<sup>+</sup> [VP have had breakfast]<sup>-</sup>]

[S[<sub>NP</sub> This steak]<sup>+</sup> [VP is rough]<sup>-</sup>]

With some distinctions yet to be made, Bach’s notion of *implicature* (Bach 1994, 2001) can be assimilated to Sperber’s and Wilson’s notion of *explicature*. This concept will be investigated in chapter 4 since radical contextualists generally appeal to this category to explain metaphor.

Coming back to Bach’s conception of what-is-said, I think we must distinguish his view from the one actually held by Grice, since Grice’s would be best defined as:

what-is-said<sub>G</sub> ≡ (what-is-said<sub>B</sub> – {conventional implicatures})

That is, Grice’s notion of what-is-said is equivalent to Bach’s notion less the class of conventional implicatures, which Bach takes to be part of what-is-said. Grice would, in fact, respect Bach’s criterion so long as no conventional implicature were to be

considered.<sup>17</sup> When an expression belonging to the class of conventional implicature triggers is present in an utterance, Grice would take the Syntactic Correlation Constraint to break down, so as to produce a bifurcation of the total signification of the utterance. Consider, in fact, an utterance of:

(16) Even Mr. Berlusconi was sober last night.

Grice would say that what is said by it, what-is-said<sub>G</sub>, is:

(17) Mr. Berlusconi was sober last night.

The further content triggered by ‘even’ would be something like:

(18) Mr. Berlusconi is usually not sober at dinner parties.

Crucially, Grice thinks that (18) could be false without affecting the truth-conditions of (17). Interestingly, there are two tests that

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<sup>17</sup> As Manuel García-Carpintero makes me notice, Grice's notion of "what is said" has a speech-act component ("dictiveness"), which Bach rejects. Now, García-Carpintero has objected that in a later chapter I appeal to Bach's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary levels to criticise relevance theory. In particular, since there I defend the notion of locutionary level, which is the core of Bach's conception of what-is-said, it could seem that I am both adopting Grice's notion of what-is-said and Bach's, which would make my view inconsistent. I do not think that adopting Bach's distinction makes my notion of what-is-said inconsistent. I think García-Carpintero assumes that I am espousing Grice's dictiveness condition on what-is-said. This is not the case. I take what-is-said to be partly determined by the sentence's locutionary level. However, contrary to Bach's view, I also take what-is-said as an interpreted string, namely, a clause to which a semantic system assigns an interpretation. It is this notion of what-is-said which can be equated to the (set of) truth-conditions expressed by an utterance. Potts' notion of 'at issue' content (Potts 2005) sufficiently captures this notion of what-is-said. Also, this notion of what-is-said obviously constrains the commitments in which the speaker when uttering a sentence. However, these commitments do not enter into the definition of what-is-said at any stage (*pace* Camp 2006). Thus, the notion of "dictiveness" García-Carpintero mentions in relation to Grice's view is irrelevant to mine. Furthermore, the distinction between what-is-said and conventional implicatures comes from taking into consideration further semantic properties of these other meanings, which Bach's account may cover only by adopting a model of multiple propositions which is similar, in some respects, to Potts' semantic analysis of conventional implicatures.

may be considered in order to distinguish the level of what-is-said from the level of what is conventionally implicated.<sup>18</sup> These are *the disagreement test* and *the deniability test*. Let's first consider the *disagreement test*, which I will present in form of an empirical hypothesis:

*Disagreement Test.Ø1.* Disagreement between A and B about a certain topic X is possible only when speaker A has rejected what speaker B has said about X (or vice versa).

Clearly, the notion of what-is-said invoked by Bach passes this test easily. Suppose, in fact, I assert (16). Then you could not reply by saying:

(19) ?? I disagree. The movie was not funny.

Semantically, (19) is an irrelevant reply to (16), as anything can be. Clearly, its content does not contradict the semantic content

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<sup>18</sup> Actually, there is a third test considered by Bach, namely, the 'Indirect Quotation Test': "an element of a sentence contributes to what is said in an utterance of that sentence if and only if there can be accurate 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 1999: 340). Accordingly, an indirect report of, for instance,

A: 'Even George Bush said something intelligent in his life.'

should include 'even', on pain of misreporting the speaker. Bach concludes that this test shows that words like 'even' contribute to what is said of an utterance. I take the test to be inconclusive. First of all, there are contexts in which a report that does not include 'even' would still be adequate (just imagine a context in which we are interested in whether A believes that Bush said something intelligent in his life). Secondly, allowing a proper distinction between the locutionary level of a speech act and the illocutionary one (and Bach is certainly sympathetic to the distinction), it results that what-is-said<sub>B</sub> has nothing to do with the speech acts conveyed by A. The fact that the semantic contribution of 'even' does not enter into the composition of the proposition *that Bush said something intelligent in his life*, but operates on it, is sufficient evidence to semantically treat it as not part of what the speaker has primarily conveyed.

expressed by (16). Syntactically, the situation is specular in that no element of (16) is present in the denial of (19).

Furthermore, given the notion of what-is-said<sub>B</sub>, conventional implicatures also pass the test, and therefore should be counted as part of what-is-said. In fact, it seem perfectly legitimate to reply to an utterance of (16) by saying:

(20) I disagree. Mr. Berlusconi is generally very sober at dinner parties.

However, although these data seem to support Bach's view, I claim that we cannot define the notion of what-is-said in the terms required by his *Syntactic Correlation Constraint*, for a second test clearly shows that at least one important logical operation requires that a distinction be made between the level of content to which the speaker is *semantically committed* and the level of what he or she is further implying:

*Deniability Test.Ø2.* In a conversation, only what is said by an utterance can be semantically denied.

Now, if we adopt what-is-said<sub>B</sub>, then it should be possible to deny (16) in one of the two following ways:

- (21) It is false that even Berlusconi was sober last night.  
(22) Even Berlusconi was not sober last night.

In (22), 'not' works as predicate denial, its function being that of denying that the extension of 'Berlusconi,' i.e. [[Berlusconi]], belongs to the extension of 'sober', i.e. [[Sober]]. Said otherwise, 'not' is a constituent of the proposition <Not <Sober, Berlusconi>> and not of the proposition <Not <Usually <Sober,

Berlusconi>>>. Clearly ‘not’ has not here the function of denying the implicature (18).

On the other hand, in (21) ‘it is false that’ is a propositional operator that turns the truth-value of a proposition  $p$  into its reverse. Does (21) deny (16)? According to the view I defend, it does not. It does not because semantic operators are not sensitive to implicated content in that it is not a matter of their semantic jurisdiction to deliberate on what is implicit in an utterance. Grice is right, after all.<sup>19</sup> However, the same test can be used to show that Grice is wrong to think that metaphor does not concern what-is-said. Metaphors can be denied, as will be shown in the next section after the discussion on implicatures is completed.

### 3.2 What is Said & Conversational Implicatures

The role of what-is-said is crucial to Grice’s theory for another reason. For it is one of the aspects that allows for the derivation of what Grice calls *non-conventional implicatures*. The purpose of this sub-section is to introduce the reader to this topic and to allow him or her to form an idea as to whether metaphor can be accounted for in terms of this model. I will try to be as much exhaustive as I can, analysing not only what Grice thought of such cases, but also what more contemporary philosophers have added to Grice’s original account.

To begin with, the utterances below, though apparently very different, are all taken by Grice to be cases of *non-conventional*

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<sup>19</sup> A possible strategy is to appeal to some ‘metalinguistic’ devices that scope over the implied content. Horn’s (1989) ‘metalinguistic negation’ is one of such devices. Metalinguistic negation works by denying the assertability conditions of an utterance, which also include the assertability conditions for its implicatures and presuppositions. However, it should be noticed that in order for such operator to work, the linguistic context must be broader than a single utterance of, e.g., (22). Generally, metalinguistic negation applies whenever the denied sentence is followed by another sentence which makes explicit the speaker’s real target of her denial, namely, some implied content (consider: ‘We didn’t eat some biscuits; we ate all of them’, in which the denial affects the implied content of the first clause, namely, the proposition *that we ate not all biscuits*).

implicature in that they express propositions the determination of which is not achievable by simply decoding what the sentences literally say. Nor are these propositions part of the conventional force of their respective utterances. They arise as the result of the speakers' general inferential capacities to derive conclusions from what has been said by an utterance. Sticking to Grice's way of talking, I will use the term *conversational implicatures* hereafter. Here are some examples of conversational implicatures:

- (23) A: Would you like some coffee?  
B: I have an examination tomorrow.  
+> *Yes, I'd like to have some coffee.*
- (24) A: Did your students pass the exam this time?  
B: Some students passed.  
+> *Not all of them passed.*
- (25) Mark lives either in Italy or in France.  
+> *It is possible that Mark lives in France.*
- (26) Bush is a genius.  
+> *Bush is an idiot.*
- (27) You're the cream of my coffee.  
+> *You are very important to me.*

Many questions can be raised as to the exact nature of these utterances, and, in particular, as to whether they belong to some unique genus, as Grice thought. But I shall proceed with order by first sketching Grice's own view. In the next section I will present some objections to Grice, especially addressed to confute his reasons to conflate irony with metaphor, and metaphor with other cases of implicatures.

In (23) the speaker B is implying that he likes the idea of coffee since he has an exam the following day. Given, in fact, our background knowledge that someone who has to deal with an exam may prefer to stay awake the night before the test for revision, (23) can be taken as a basis to infer the speaker's intention to accept the stimulant drink. (24) is a case of so-called *scalar implicatures*, i.e., implicatures whose calculability is due to the presence of elements belonging to a certain class which is ordered in a scalar way.<sup>20</sup> In (24), the denial of an element belonging to a particular class (in this case, the class of quantifiers) gives rise to an implicature to the effect that any higher element of the scale does not hold. By uttering (24) the speaker implicates that not all students passed the exam. If they had, the speaker would not have been cooperative in asserting the weaker proposition, thus contravening Grice's *cooperative principle* (see fn. 24). (25) is a case of *clausal implicature*, in that one of the two clauses of the utterance (either 'Mark lives in Italy' or 'Mark lives in France') may hold, but the speaker does not know which.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Scalar implicatures involve *Horn's scales* (Horn 1989), namely, classes of predicates having the same range of things to which the predicates belonging to the class can apply, and a thematic dimension that distinguishes the class from others in some relevant sense. A Horn's scale is structured in such a way that the first element on the left is the most negative exemplar of the class, whilst the last one is the most positive. Below are some examples of such scales:

{impossible, possible, certain}  
{bad, good, great}  
{cold, warm, hot}

The number of predicates for each class has here been reduced to only three, but certainly more fine-grained characterizations can be given. Suppose an intermediate element of one of these classes has been negated (e.g., 'possible', 'can', 'warm'). It is then assumed that only intermediate elements generate implicatures to the effect that if something is said to exemplify P, where P is an intermediate element of a Horn's scale, then it is not the case that that something is Q, where Q is a higher element of the scale, or possibly the highest.<sup>20</sup> A fortiori, if something is said not to be P, the same implicature will be in force here, possibly reinforced by the presence of the negative marker.

<sup>21</sup> Clausal implicatures belong to the class of Quantity Implicatures, implicatures based on the hearer's ability to infer that the speaker is observing or flouting the Maxim of Quantity (see below).



Finally, (26) and (27) are figurative cases of, respectively, irony and metaphor. Since in both cases what is (strictly) said is not what the speaker has plausibly in mind, the hearer must be able to determine what the speaker is trying to get across by uttering those sentences. In relation to these examples, Grice discusses the idea that speakers only ‘make as if to say’ the content expressed by (26) and (27). Since, on his view, saying something entails meaning it, it does not seem plausible that someone really means that her interlocutor is identifiable with the cream of a coffee or with incandescent matter, as Romeo with her Juliet.<sup>22</sup> Thus, following Grice’s more or less explicit characterisation of such cases, I attempt to draw in the table below the main difference Grice attributes to utterances (23)-(25) and (26)-(27), which is that of involving two distinct relations between the speaker and the proposition she literally conveys, i.e., ‘saying’ or ‘making as if to say’:

<b>Saying</b>	<b>Making as if to say</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Particularised implicatures</li> <li>• Scalar implicatures</li> <li>• Clausal implicatures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irony</li> <li>• Metaphor</li> <li>• Metonymy</li> </ul>

Someone may ask whether I am suggesting that there are two distinct types of implicatures here. My answer is both positive and negative. Negative in that the pragmatic mechanisms underlying these two types of implicatures are basically the same (see below). Positive in that the way an implicature of the ‘saying’ type affects a

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<sup>22</sup> Bach (1999: 337) criticises Grice’s appeal to the notion of ‘making as if’ on the ground that the notion is ‘too restrictive’ and also ‘conflates the locutionary and illocutionary levels of speech-act analysis’.

context is not the same as the way an implicature of the ‘making as if to say’ type does. Following Stalnaker’s notion of ‘common ground’ (Stalnaker 1999, 2002), let’s define a context set as the set of possible worlds which is compatible with the information shared by the participants in a conversation at a certain stage of it. Then an implicature of the ‘saying’ type will be defined in the following way:

#### IMPLICATURE TYPE #1

$$c = (p \ \& \ q) \in \{w\}$$

(Read: the asserted content  $p$  and the implied content  $q$  belong to the set of worlds in the context set or common ground  $c$ .)

In other words, such type of implicature is always added to what is said, and both contents belong to the set of possible worlds which are compatible with the common ground.

On the other hand, in the case of an implicature of the ‘making as if’ type, we have the following formula:

#### IMPLICATURE TYPE #2

$$c = (p \ \& \ q) - (p) \in \{w\}$$

Here, the relation of membership is defined only between the implicature and the set of worlds compatible with it. This is easily demonstrable: suppose I utter ‘Bill is a good friend’ intending to convey that he is not a good friend. Then the implicature will affect the common ground shared between me and my audience by impacting those worlds which are compatible with the belief that Bill is not a good friend, discarding those worlds which would be compatible with the asserted content, namely, the false belief that Bill is a good friend. In fact, since there are no possible worlds compatible with the conjunction of the asserted and the implied

content in the simple case of irony, the hearer must be in a position to update his common ground consistently.

Another difference that should be at least mentioned is that while (23) is considered by Grice to be a type of implicature arising only in some specific context (hence the expression ‘particularised’), while (24) and (25) are cases of so-called ‘generalised’ implicatures, i.e., implicatures arising as general features of the contexts which trigger them.

These differences notwithstanding, what lumps utterances (23)-(27) together is that in order to make sense of the speakers’ overall speech act, the hearers need to infer some other propositions which are not semantically expressed by the utterances (in Grice’s words, which are not part of the ‘utterance’s type level’).<sup>23</sup>

Following a taxonomy-oriented reading, these examples represent *nonminimal departures* from literal meaning, Griceanly intended as conventional meaning, and in this sense they should be counted as ‘nonliteral in the ordinary sense’ (Recanati 2001). Here I take Recanati’s ‘ordinary sense’ to approximate Grice’s general idea of *conversational implicature*, whose clearest definition is Grice’s:

CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE (CI). A man who, by (in, when) saying (or making as if to say) that p has implicated that q, may be said to have conversationally implicated that q, provided that (i) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle<sup>24</sup>; (ii) the supposition

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<sup>23</sup> Chierchia and others have challenged the idea that generalised implicatures are inferable. The hypothesis they make is that these implicatures are computed locally and are part of a specific linguistic module. While the hypothesis is certainly fascinating, I would like to suggest that it does not, by itself, disprove Grice’s analysis. A generalised conversational implicature could be computed locally, but only accessed globally, in virtue of the kind of inference I mentioned in the discussion of (24).

<sup>24</sup> Grice (1989: 26): "Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". Grice took this principle to be at the basis of any rational conversation.

that he is aware that, or thinks that,  $q$  is required in order to make his saying or making as if to say  $p$  (or doing so in *those* terms) consistent with this presumption; and (iii) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (ii) is required. (Grice 1989: 30-31)

This definition of CI is centred on the important idea that there must be some mutual assumption of cooperativeness among the speakers in order for an utterance to be interpreted correctly. In this regard, Grice goes on to elaborate a model of communication as based on four maxims, the function of which is to guide any correct interpretation of a speaker's utterance. These maxims are:

QUALITY: 'Try to make your contribution one that is true'.

1. *Do not say what you believe to be false.*
2. *Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.*

QUANTITY: Make your contribution as informative as is required and not more informative.

RELEVANCE: Be relevant.

MANNER: Be perspicuous.

Armed with CI's definition and the four maxims, Grice observes that utterances of (23) to (27) share a first property: this is the property of *calculability*.

*Calculability.*Ø3. Given a proposition  $p$ , which is the result of decoding the semantic information associated to an utterance  $u$ , a conversational implicature  $Q$  is what the hearer needs to infer, through the help of the maxims, in order to tackle one of the following cases:

(a) accommodate an apparent mismatch of such maxims;

(b) integrate the proposition  $p$  with a proposition  $p^*$  such that  $p$  is consistent with the abovementioned maxims only if  $p^*$  is derived;

(c) make sense of the speaker's blatant violation of some maxims of conversation.<sup>25</sup>

In all these cases, it is crucial for Grice that the speaker put the hearer in a position to grasp his or her intention behind such a violation, mismatch or request of qualification by uttering  $u$  with meaning  $p$ . The resulting idea is that whenever one implicates something, the hearer can infer the implicature by reasoning on such maxims and on the input proposition that is decoded from the utterance, which, according to Grice, is the first step of any correct interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

However, since what is said does not contain the conversational implicata as its meaning, something has certainly to be added. In Grice's words:

[T]he implicature is not carried by what is said, but only by the saying of what is said, or by "putting it that way." (1989: 39)

What does Grice mean by this sentence? The key, it seems to me, is to understand the nature of 'putting it that way'. Let's then try to be less vague and specify three types of case that may fall under this label:

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<sup>25</sup> I am skipping, for the sake of brevity, the case in which no apparent maxim is violated (See Grice 1989: 32).

<sup>26</sup> We will see in Chapter 4 how this assumption is radically attacked by recent works both in pragmatics.

(a') Under this class fall all those cases described in (a) above. For instance, a speaker who is asked to tell where a certain individual lives may assert that he or she lives somewhere in the South of France. The speaker seems to have asserted less than what required by the question, therefore contravening the maxim of Quantity. However, if she has done so it is because she has respected another maxim, i.e., the maxim of Quality, which requires one to assert what he or she has sufficient evidence for.

(b') Under this category fall all examples discussed in the exhibit on Bach's notion of *conversational implicature* plus some cases where no apparent maxim is violated (cf. Grice's example 'There is a petrol station round the corner' +> *There is an open petrol station round the corner*).

(c') Some of these maxims are *flouted*, that is, blatantly violated, so as to invite the hearer to recognise that the speaker is trying to get across something over and above what is said by his or her utterance. Take again the case of B's answer to A's question in (23). The answer is not a direct answer to A's question. In this, it violates the maxim of relevance, but by violating it the hearer can start an inferential process which is addressed to determine the speaker's real intention. By saying whatever B said, A is left with the task of finding a proposition such that B's answer makes sense within the conversation (clause ii in Grice's definition of CI). By a simple reasoning based on expectations and mutual beliefs, A is finally able to realise that B's utterance is indirectly answering his question, provided B's implicature is within A's ability to calculate (clause iii).

Metaphor and related tropes (e.g., metonymy and synecdoche<sup>27</sup>) are, for Grice, to be accounted for in terms of this third category. In particular, by blatantly violating the maxim of Quality, a speaker who utters a metaphorical sentence puts his or her audience in the position of having to infer the proposition(s) that best captures her communicative intention. For instance, suppose someone utters the sentence ‘Berlusconi is a virus in the Italians’ blood’.<sup>28</sup> Grice thinks that she does not say *that Berlusconi is a virus in the Italians’ blood* since this is a too blatant violation of the maxim of Quality (Berlusconi is not literally a virus). However, by violating such a maxim in such an *overt* manner the speaker is communicating that some further proposition has to be inferred by the hearer, so as to make her literally false (more appropriately, her categorically mistaken) claim consistent.

Notice how, under this account, any figurative trope is individuated, and then interpreted, only after its semantic ‘deviance’ has been recognised. We will see in the next section how this assumption is unwarranted, as well as other propositions that Grice’s theory of implicatures entail. Notice, also, that Grice’s theory does not offer any clue as to what kind of inference is in play when the hearer has to infer the proposition(s) the speaker of a metaphor is possibly trying to get across. This aspect will only be tackled in the next chapter, after the Relevance-theoretic idea of what counts as an inferential process is properly discussed.

In this section, I have sketched Grice’s theory of conversational implicatures. However, I have only discussed one feature of this

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<sup>27</sup> A metonymy is a trope in which something is not named by the word or expression standardly used to refer to that thing, but a word or expression closely connected to it. In Grice’s theory, an utterance of the sentence ‘The ham-sandwich left without paying’ +> *The client who ordered a ham-sandwich left without paying*’. A synecdoche is that figure of speech by means of which a part is named by its whole, and vice versa. As for metonymy, the implicature model predicts that an utterance of, e.g., ‘Italy lost the last European final against Spain’ +> *Italy’s football team lost the last European final against Spain’s football team*.

<sup>28</sup> This is an adaptation of Indro Montanelli’s unforgettable definition of Berlusconi. Montanelli was a renowned journalist in Italy.

class, that is to say, the property of calculability. In the next section, I provide direct evidence against the applicability of this model to metaphor by considering two other classic features of implicatures: *cancellability* and *non-detachability*. None of these properties apply to metaphor, which alone should provide enough evidence for not taking metaphors as implicatures. The interested reader may refer to the next exhibit to integrate my study of Grice's theory of implicatures with some recent contributions of philosophers of language, such as Saul and Recanati, to such a topic.

### **Some Recent Views on Implicature and Nonliterality**

For Grice the 'presence of an implicature' must be worked out by elaborating different data: on the one hand, intentions, context, and background knowledge are important insofar as they establish or influence the content of the utterance and its evaluation; on the other hand, according to Grice, the conventional meanings, corresponding to his theoretical notion of 'what-is-said,' which give the truth-conditional content of an utterance, and the aforementioned maxims pose two different kinds of normative constraints on the part of both the speaker and the hearer.<sup>29</sup> In (23), for instance, words like 'just', 'examination', 'tomorrow' are not randomly selected by the speaker, but chosen in quite an accurate way so as to discharge a double function: first, to allow the hearer to recognise in the features of the sentence the speaker has uttered the same features of a sentence she is already familiar with in her language. Secondly, through these features the hearer will be able to recognise that whoever utters a sentence possessing them, as in the context of (23), will produce in her a certain kind of response

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<sup>29</sup> Saul (2002a: 241) says that Grice's relying on the notion of what is said is a way to limit the import of speakers' intentions in an otherwise too full-blooded intention-oriented account of 'saying', which, according to him, required a balanced ratio between speaker's meaning and sentence meaning.



the speaker intends her to have.<sup>30</sup> In order for the communication to be successful, the cooperative principle and its maxims are to be respected either at the level of what-is-said or at the level of what-is-implicated (or both as a limiting case). When the level of what-is-said does not set down the interpretation, its burden will be assessed at the level of what-is-implicated. This seems enough to approximate Grice's letter for my purposes.

Now Recanati considers the examples discussed here, with the exception of metaphor, as 'nonliteral in the ordinary sense'. So he presupposes there is a nonordinary sense in which an utterance may be nonliteral, and also a sense in which we have ordinary literal sense, and perhaps one in which there is nonordinary literal sense as well. Where to draw a line, and how to motivate the distinction between the two senses of nonliterality just invoked? Here I only sketch the direction we could take in order to respond to the latter question, leaving more fine-grained distinctions to come along in the following sections.

There are two senses in which the nonliteral cases treated so far are distinguishable. One sense is that they all belong to the Gricean level of what-is-implicated as opposed to what-is-said. This level is the realm of implicature, which according to Grice is just "a blanket word to avoid having to make choices between words like 'imply', 'suggest', 'indicate', and 'mean'" (1989: 86). Following the useful characterisation of conversational implicature offered by Jennifer Saul (2002b: 229), I say that an implicature is 'what is *made available*' by the speaker to her audience through the uttering of a sentence possessing certain features. The interesting question is to what extent 'what is made available' by a speaker is under her rational control, and to what extent it is in the audience's responsibility to infer it. The second interesting question is whether

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<sup>30</sup> I'm probably simplifying the story, but at least I hope to be faithful to Grice's general description. See Schiffer (1972: chap. II) for a careful discussion of Grice's ideas. See also Neale (1992).

degrees of ‘availability’ should account for the differences between all the categories subsumed by Grice under the name of ‘implicature’.

Grice was certainly aware of having gone too far in his generalisation (see Grice 1989: 86). In that case, his not having cared much about possible subtler interactions between the two poles of a speech (speaker and possible audience) seems to open some gaps in his original account. In fact, if we follow Grice, an implicature is calculated whenever clause (ii) of the definition of (CI) obtains. But this is not always the case, as with Saul’s example of Bill Clinton saying ‘I don’t have any sexual relationship with this woman’, which, irrespective of our assessment of Clinton’s intentions, implicates that Clinton may have had sex with Lewinsky in the past. Either weaker or stronger clauses are then required for other kinds of implicature to arise, or simply some other level between what-is-said and the implicature has to be taken into consideration. Also, the connection between (ii) and (iii) is revisable since the passage from (ii) to (iii) seems to be barred by considerations concerning the point I have just made in relation to clause (ii). In other words, it seems possible to implicate something without intending the hearer to recognise the intention behind the implicature. The terminology of ‘making available’ is sufficiently neutral with respect to the demands imposed by clause (ii). A re-consideration of Grice’s notion of implicature is pressing, though.

The other sense can be characterised ‘phenomenologically’. Recanati (2001), for instance, claims that implicatures and indirect speech acts are all cases in which the hearer’s interpretive response is sensitive to their secondary and indirect characters. Hearers are generally *aware* that a secondary meaning (implicature) is in their responsibility to derive through a two-step procedure which emerges whenever the indirectness’ property of the speakers’ utterances is evident to them. Thus, hearers depend on what Recanati calls the ‘transparency condition’, according to which an

utterance expressing an indirect act or conveying a secondary meaning (i.e., those uses of words in Recanati's ordinary sense of nonliteral) has something special which "*is, or can be, perceived by the language users themselves*" (2001: 270-71. His emphasis). Recanati calls whatever respects this condition p-nonliterality (for reasons of space I will not comment on Recanati's terminology). According to Recanati, metaphors should not count as nonliteral in the ordinary sense, since they do not respond to this condition.

However, I think that there are reasons to resist Recanati's condition. In fact, hearers are not always aware of the indirectness. Prescinding from metaphor and irony, if you consider the previous examples, i.e. (23)–(27), it is at least arguable that in each case the hearer is aware of the underlying structure of the act. Speakers do not generally have immediate access to the primary act performed, but they respond directly to their interlocutors' utterances without calculating the further level implicated.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, it seems too strong to say that the hearer of (23.B)'s utterance is conscious of going through a two-step procedure to determine its relevant interpretation.<sup>32</sup> And, finally, in support of this line of thought, there are also reasons to doubt that the speakers' intentions or the audience's awareness of them are necessarily required for an implicature to be raised. Saul (2002b) gives a number of cases where either an implicature arises even though the speaker was not trying to convey it, or where a speaker is trying to convey it, but her audience fails to notice it. My concern is then about the necessity of a biconditional here between indirectness (of the act) and secondariness (of the perceived meaning). There are cases

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<sup>31</sup> Bach (1995) suggests that, for instances, cases of indirect speech acts go through a process which he dubs 'standardization'. It is very likely that something like this process happens in the case of scalar and clausal implicatures.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Camp (2006: 288). But see Bezuidenhout for a contrary reading (2002: 110).

where indirectness does not seem to imply secondariness, and other cases where secondariness does not seem to imply indirectness.

However, if indirectness always implies secondariness, as stated by Recanati (2001: esp. p. 270), then there are cases where the secondariness is not perceived by the hearers (without considering the cases where the indirectness is not *intended* by the hearers). So, Recanati's clause that whenever a conveyed meaning has secondary character, then it is satisfied by the 'transparency condition' (271), breaks down and is, to say the least, not conclusive. Recanati seems to have fallen in a common mistake in the philosophy of language: the fact that a certain description, say D, nicely applies in most cases usually grouped under a certain vaguely collective phenomenon, say P, does not entail that D is the correct explanation for any element belonging to this class by default. Nor does it provide sufficient ground for the claim that P should necessarily be accounted for as if it were a single phenomenon.

#### **4. Criticism of Grice's model**

For years, if someone asked a philosopher to tell what a metaphor is, he or she would probably have replied that Grice, when he identified metaphor as a typical case of conversational implicature, had already given a plausible answer to that question. Nobody seemed to be willing to challenge this claim, but, what is worse, nobody seemed to be willing to test cases of metaphor against the tests Grice offered for something to be counted as a conversational implicature. The purpose of this section is therefore to integrate my previous discussion of Grice's programme with the presentation of his tests for conversational implicature, and to discuss whether these are applicable to metaphor. Not surprisingly, metaphors do

not pass any of these tests. The conclusion I then draw is that the classification of metaphor as conversational implicature is a philosophical myth. More generally, the classification of metaphor as a pragmatic phenomenon is called into question.

In the previous sections, I have explicitly discussed one classic test for detecting implicatures, i.e., the ‘calculability test’: Implicatures must be capable of being inferred by the hearers. Recent studies, such as those discussed in the previous box, have somewhat challenged this test, but, generally, they have only shown the need of some refinement of this notion, without invalidating the basic idea that implicatures are *inferable* implications.

However, conversational implicatures are implications which, contrary to what happens in the case of entailments, are contextually *defeasible*. This can be highlighted by the following ‘cancellability test’.

*Cancellability.Ø4.* An implicature, which is a highly contextual implication, is always defeasible on the light of some further considerations.

An example of cancellability can be given in relation to negative sentences containing definite descriptions. For Grice, a sentence such as ‘The King of France isn’t bald’ conversationally implicates that there is a king of France. When someone wants to deny such implication, she may be adding a rejoinder of the following kind:

(28) The king of France isn’t bald; there is no king of France.

Other examples of cancellable implications are the following;

(29) There is a petrol station round the corner. But I don’t mean to imply/say/suggest that the station is open.

- (30) Some students passed the exam. Actually, all of them did.
- (31) Martin is such a good friend. I mean, he really is, but when he behaves like that he annoys me.<sup>33</sup>

For instance, let's ask what the speaker of (30) is trying to convey: what the total specification of the speaker's utterance is. We can take the truth-conditional content of the utterance as the conjunction of the propositions that there are some students who passed the exam and that all of them did.

Now, there is clearly a gain of semantic information in passing from the first context of utterance to the second utterance, resulting from the reinforcement of the existential assumption with a universally quantified statement to the effect that all students passed the exam.

Furthermore, the information of the first conjunct is already contained in the second in virtue of being entailed by it. The introduction of the universally quantified statement in the common ground of the conversation has the effect of defeating the obvious implicature that the only utterance of the first conjunct has launched, i.e., the implicature that some students failed to pass the exam. Against this implicature, the total specification of the speaker's utterance must not only convey that all students passed the exam (where 'All x'  $\subseteq$  'Some x'), but also that the speaker does not imply that some failed. In symbols:

$$(32) \quad \text{cg} = \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \exists x (Sx \wedge Px) \wedge \forall x (Sx \rightarrow Px) \\ \sim \text{Imp}_s (\exists x (Sx \wedge \neg Px)) \end{array} \right.$$

<sup>33</sup> The implicature here being something like: *a friend always treats you well.*

where ‘cg’ is common ground, ‘S’ and ‘P’ are variables standing for the properties of *being student* and *passing the exam*, ‘x’ is a variable bound by the existential and universal quantifiers, and ‘Imp’ stands for an operator similar to the classic ‘Belief’-operator in epistemic logic. Its meaning is that the speaker (represented by the subscript variable ‘s’) implies the content which is under its embedding force.

It is easy to verify how (32) contains information which could turn out to be inconsistent. Just consider the information contained in the last clause: that the speaker does not imply that there are students who did not pass the exam. Subtracting the most external operators from the left, ‘ $\sim$ ’ and ‘Imp,’ what is left is the proposition  $\langle \exists x (S(x) \wedge \neg P(x)) \rangle$ , i.e., the proposition that some students did not pass the exam. This proposition is what the first conjunct conveys if the second conjunct were not to be uttered. Such a proposition is obviously inconsistent with the focal information contained in the central clause, i.e., the proposition that all students passed the exam (i.e.,  $\langle \forall x (S(x) \rightarrow P(x)) \rangle$ ). Since the hearer mentally represents not only this proposition, but the whole representation in which this proposition is embedded, he or she is in a position to consider the first sentence uttered (i.e., the existential quantified one) as inadequate because potentially leading one to infer a proposition inconsistent with the upheld information that all students passed the exam.

We can then draw an intuitive principle from the considerations above:

P1. A proposition  $p$  expressed by an utterance of a sentence  $s$  in context  $c$  is accepted in the common ground iff it is not inconsistent with any relevant information in the common ground.

In other words, P1 allows for a proposition  $p$  to be part of the common ground if it is entailed by a proposition  $q$  just introduced in the common ground, or if  $p$  is already entailed by the common ground.<sup>34</sup> However, a proposition  $p$ , expressed by an utterance of  $s$  in context  $c$ , is discarded from the common ground if it is an implicature or a presupposition which is inconsistent with  $q$ , a proposition just introduced in the common ground, or inconsistent with the information already available in the common ground at the moment of its utterance. If a sentence  $s$  expresses a proposition  $p$  which is entailed by a proposition  $q$  just introduced in the common ground, but triggers an implicature which is inconsistent with  $q$ , the implicature must be discarded in order for the common ground to be correctly updated.

P1 provides an empirically testable hypothesis as to how the participants in a conversation update their common ground. By P1, the proposition expressed by the sentence ‘some students passed the exam’ can be accepted in the common ground. However, always by P1, its implicature must be discarded because it is inconsistent with a successive update of the common ground. Participants in a conversation resort to cancellability whenever their common ground results in a conflictive update due to an inconsistent implicated content. Since the first clause of (3) triggers an implicature which is inconsistent with the information introduced by the assertion of the universally quantified statement, the hearer must discard it in order to update her common ground correctly. Thus, whenever an implicature is cancelled by the speaker, the hearer must discard it from the common ground, so

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<sup>34</sup> Here we should consider some restriction on the notion of ‘entailment’ in order to avoid the unwelcome consequence that the common ground be taken as closed under entailment. So the proposal would be to confine this notion to that of ‘relevant entailment’, according to which a proposition is entailed by another only if the two are topic-related. For a discussion of ‘relevance logic’, see Edwin Mares’ entry ‘Relevance Logic’ in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/logic-relevance/>.



that its update can proceed smoothly. However, we must be careful here: not every proposition that gets discarded is also cancelled. For instance, we do not want to suggest that cases of sense disambiguation of a word (e.g., BANK<sub>1</sub> vs. BANK<sub>2</sub>) involve cancellability. In particular, the case in which a word is taken in its wrong sense does not lead to a manifestly inconsistent common ground, just to a different one. Thus, cancellability is one way, among many others, in which a speaker may avoid a wrong update of the common ground.

The resulting picture is a recipe for individuating implicatures and explaining why they can be cancelled, although someone has objected to the effectiveness of such test. Recanati (personal communication) has objected to the test on the ground that, for him, it is also possible to cancel what is said by an utterance. For instance, consider an utterance of:

(33) That chair is blue. But I don't mean to say that *that* [follows demonstration] chair is blue, I mean *that one* [follows another demonstration] is blue.

The argument states that since it is possible to use the same kind of cancellation device deployed in implicatures denials to discard a certain explicature<sup>35</sup> of an utterance, then the cancellability test does not provide a sufficient criterion to single out implicatures. This argument is, I think, unsound since it is based on a false premise. The premise is that the speaker is cancelling some information, although such information is not an implicature. My reply is that the speaker is not cancelling anything, but only making clear which proposition his or her audience must uphold. His or her operation has more to do with disambiguation than with

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<sup>35</sup> 'Explicature' is a technical term used by relevance theorists, and occasionally by other contextualists, to define the truth-conditional content of an utterance. I explore this concept in chapter 4, and criticise it in chapter 5.

cancellability. In particular, the speaker is not discarding a proposition because of its triggering an inconsistent implicature or presupposition. I conclude that the cancellability test provides a valid criterion for distinguishing implicated content from what-is-said, contrary to what Recanati believes.<sup>36</sup>

We must now ask whether the cancellability test applies to metaphor. The answer, as already anticipated, is negative. Consider these utterances:

(34) Juliet is the sun. But I don't mean to say that she is *the sun*.

(35) Mark is a pig. But I don't mean to imply that he is dirty.

[from Leezenberg 2001: 114]

There is something odd with these utterances, which I think I am now in a position to explain. Remember that, according to the principle I stated above, a sentence can be rejected if the proposition expressed by one of its utterances is potentially misleading because one of its implicata may result to be inconsistent with what is already part of the common ground. Now, neither the content expressed by (34) nor by (35) can be cancelled because the intended interpretations are expressed, and therefore are part of what is said, not of what is implicated. Given the intended interpretation of an utterance of 'Juliet is the sun', the second clause of (34) is just a way to contextually disambiguate the sense in which the first conjunct should be taken. Accordingly, (34) is importantly analogous to (33), demonstrating that metaphors, like indexicals and demonstratives, contribute to the truth-conditional content of an utterance, not to what is implicated.<sup>37</sup> On

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<sup>36</sup> Thanks to Greg Currie for discussion on this point.

<sup>37</sup> Sure, more has to be said about how exactly metaphors contribute to the truth-conditional contents of an utterance. I devote the last chapters of this dissertation to discussing different answers to this question. In particular, in the last two chapters I focus on two proposals, Stern's demonstrative theory and my non-indexical account, which both offer a semantic explanation of the truth-conditionality of metaphors.

the other hand, in (35) we have two possible interpretations, and neither is a case of cancellability. According to the first interpretation, (35) is a case in which a metaphorical sentence is uttered, and then its propositional content denied. But, obviously, asserting a sentence and ‘cancelling’ the content expressed by the utterance of that very sentence is just irrational. According to the second interpretation, (35) is ‘disambiguating’ the sense in which *being pig* is to be taken: precisely, not in the sense of *being dirty*.<sup>38</sup> In this, it is similar to the correct reading of (33).

The conclusion I draw is that metaphors are not cancellable in any obvious sense. If so, one of the most important tests Grice proposed to distinguish what-is-said from implicated content cannot be used to argue for the claim that metaphors are conversational implicatures. What about the other tests Grice devised?

There is one test we have not considered so far, and is the non-detachability test. Generally, an implicature will survive when what is said by the utterance which launches the implicature is changed, but its meaning preserved. In this sense the implicature is said to be non-detachable. In other words:

*Non-detachability.Ø5.* Given an utterance *U* of a sentence *s* meaning a proposition *p* in context *c*, and an implicature *q* arising in *c* from uttering *s*, if you substitute  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  elements in *s* with elements  $y_1, \dots, y_n$  which are in relation of

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Leezenberg (2001: 114). Incidentally, many people I have interviewed about this metaphor have resisted the stereotypical (and fully lexicalized) reading of ‘pig’ as *dirty*. Others have insisted that this case involves an implicature being cancelled. However, it cannot be an implicature since the sense *dirty* of the word ‘pig’ is fully lexicalised. It is true that this kind of metaphor is so conventional that it can hardly be used to convey new information. In the last chapter I offer an explanation of why this is so, based on the idea that it is difficult to provide a new thematic dimension relative to which a conventional metaphor can be interpreted. Be that as it may, I still believe that no implicature is involved and that cancellability is not the right test here since no potentially inconsistent proposition is cancelled by uttering (35). What we have instead is a case in which a fully lexicalised sense of the word ‘pig’, i.e. ‘dirty’, is rectified as it is not part of the utterance’s at issue content.

synonymy, so as to form a new sentence  $s'$  which still expresses  $p$ , or a sufficiently similar proposition, then  $q$  still arises if  $s'$  is uttered in  $c$  instead of  $s$ .<sup>39</sup>

For instance:

- |  |   |                      |
|--|---|----------------------|
| (36) Bush is a genius.                   | } |                      |
| (37) Bush is an extremely<br>clever guy. |   | +> Bush is an idiot. |
| (38) That idiot is a genius              |   |                      |

In the sentences (37) and (38) some element has been changed or altered from the original sentence (36). In (37), we have the same proper name but a different predicate, whose extension, if not the same, at least connotes the meaning of 'genius'. In (38) we have the same predicate but a different NP, a definite description and a deictic expression. All the same, the proposition expressed is basically the same, namely, that Bush is a genius (or a sufficiently similar proposition) as well as the implicature that Bush is an idiot. Thus, we have:

*Conversational implicature:*

Same content → same implicature.

<sup>39</sup> In the first draft of this chapter I had made the mistake of requiring extensional equivalence to define non-detachability. This is obviously too strong since there are many extensionally equivalent terms of, e.g., 'is a genius' that do not preserve the irony that could arise from uttering 'Bush is a genius', intending that he is an idiot (consider: 'Bush has an IQ of exactly 180'). Thanks to Stefano Predelli and James Andow for pointing this out to me.

In contrast, metaphors are detachable in that they do not survive when some element which is merely extensionally equivalent to it is changed. For instance,

(39) Juliet is the sun.

(40) The Capulet's daughter is the largest gaseous blob in the solar system.

(41) Juliet is the star at the centre of the Solar System.

Not +> Juliet is warm,  
bright, very important,  
...

And so on.

Nothing in (40) and (41) warrants an inference to the implicature(s) on the right,<sup>40</sup> although both predicates are extensionally equivalent to 'the sun' in (39). Consequently, another test devised by Grice to detect implicatures fails in the case of metaphor.<sup>41</sup>

It comes then as no surprise that metaphor passes a test which identifies not implicatures, but what is said by an utterance. This is the 'deniability test,' which we have already discussed.

*Deniability Test.Ø2.* Only what is said by an utterance can be semantically denied.

In § 4.1 we saw how conventional implicatures do not pass this test. Instead, metaphors do seem to pass the test quite easily:

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<sup>40</sup> But, as someone made me notice in conversation, there seem to be contexts in which it is possible to preserve the metaphorical interpretation of (39) by asserting (41).

<sup>41</sup> The test also fails in the case of manner implicatures, namely, implicatures calculated on the basis of *how* the content of an utterance is said.

- (42) Juliet is not the sun.
- (43) Jim is not a bulldozer.
- (44) The king of France (said of Sarkozy) won't be re-elected.  
(Compare: The king of France won't be re-elected; there is no king of France)

A theory of metaphor should clearly individuate what the speakers of (42)-(44) are saying, and what they are exactly denying. My theory of metaphorical denial will be elaborated in Chapter 7, but, for now, I am keen on the idea that whatever the speakers of (42)-(44) are actually denying, it is not an implicature, but some items which bear strong syntactic and semantic connections with the uttered sentence.

There is a final worry against Grice's account, which has been formulated by some in the literature (Leezenberg 2001; Carston 2002). This concerns Grice's identification of metaphor with an implicature of the 'making-as-if' type. For instance, according to Carston it would result from such identification that the speaker says nothing, when it is clear that something has been meant with those words, although the conventional form of such words does not reflect the proposition being expressed. Moreover, if, according to Grice, a maxim of truthfulness, that is, the maxim of quality ('do not say what you believe to be false'), has been flouted, then if nothing is said (but only 'as if said'), technically no maxim is violated. Whether or not this is an insurmountable theoretical issue, there is an underlying objection which really creates problems for Grice.

If metaphor were really of the 'making as if' type, then, according to the definition of this implicature I gave before, it would be possible to eliminate the proposition literally expressed from the common ground once the implicature has been calculated. However, as the cases of extended metaphors and embedded

metaphors show, it is not possible to discard the content literally expressed by a metaphor so easily. Consider:

- (45) Read o'er the volume of Young Paris' face,  
And find delight writ there with beauty's pen;  
Examine every married lineament,  
And see how one another lends content;  
And what obscur'd in this fair volume lies  
Find written in the marge of his eyes.  
This precious book of love, this unbound lover,  
To beautify him, only lacks a cover. (*Romeo and Juliet*; I.  
iii, quot. from Tirrell 1989: 17)

Understanding a complex metaphor like the one instantiated by Shakespeare's passage requires not so much the derivation of implications and the discarding of the literal message, but the ability to understand what it takes for 'Young Paris' to count as a book. The literal meanings of the words used by Shakespeare – whatever these are, I have not yet expressed my view – remain alive during the interpretation.<sup>42</sup> But on Grice's model they are simply functional to derivation of implicated content.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the reader should by now be convinced that assimilating metaphors to implicatures is not an available option. In contrast to implicatures, metaphors are not easily cancellable, they

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<sup>42</sup> A point stressed by an interesting paper by Carston (2010). Interesting because it puts emphasis on the notion of literal meaning in the interpretation of poetical metaphors, against the general trend of contextualists like Carston herself to discount such a notion. Unfortunately, I won't be discussing this recent proposal of hers since I have decided to focus in this dissertation on more 'conventional' metaphors.

are detachable and also deniable. Their relationship with the literal meaning of the expressions used metaphorically is also much stronger than the implicature model predicts. Further evidence has been adduced to reinforce a separation between these two categories. I would like to add just a word against Grice's assimilation of metaphor to irony. Even if metaphors were implicatures, they would not be of the same irony type. For it seems right to me to say that in irony, speakers really make as if to say something in the sense of pretending to say something, while conveying something else. This is not always the case, as the notion of pretence cannot be completely understood as a verbal action (see Currie 2006). But let's grant that Grice was certainly into something in his discussion of irony.

However, Grice is doubly wrong to consider both metaphorical and ironical interpretations to arise only because of the presence of some underlying semantic deviance. This is clearly false, as these examples show:

(46) Jesus was a carpenter. (Ted Cohen)

(47) You certainly know a lot.

Both utterances do not contain any semantic deviance and both, literally speaking, are true. So their interpretation is to be fixed elsewhere.

One may then wonder whether the whole project of explaining metaphor by appealing to speaker's intentions is undermined by the failure of Grice's account to provide one. In the next chapter I will deal with another account that has attempted to improve on Grice's view. Searle (1979) proposes a theoretically more articulated notion of metaphorical meaning in terms of speaker's meaning, which is based on principles the calculation of which should determine the particular metaphorical meaning expressed by each metaphorical utterance. Although these principles do seem to do



some good interpretive work, I follow Leezenberg (2001) in criticising Searle as having basically offered semantic principles in disguise. In fact, most of Searle's principles concern semantic properties of the sentences used metaphorically. I then propose a modification of Searle's argument, which takes metaphors to be *conventional implicatures*, i.e. implicatures that are determined on the basis of the conventional (i.e. literal) profile of the sentences uttered. Although I find the argument attractive, I reject it for the following reason: were it possible to treat metaphors as conventional implicatures, then it would not be possible to logically and pragmatically operate on the metaphorically implicated content. However, as a matter of fact, we do operate on metaphorical content in many different ways (e.g., we negate it, we use it in counterfactuals and belief reports, we also take it as input to further pragmatic operations such as irony). Some additional reflections upon conventional implicature and quotation will complete my discourse there.

## Chapter 3

# Metaphor and Speech-Act Theory

### 1. Introduction

Searle's contribution to the study of metaphor can be found in his paper 'Metaphor' (1979a). Searle shares with Grice the idea that metaphor belongs to the realm of speaker's meaning. Unlike Grice, though, Searle advances a more elaborated explanation of how a speaker determines the meaning of her metaphorical utterance, and how the hearer latches onto that meaning via some interpretive principles.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Searle proposes ways to distinguish metaphor from other tropes, in particular irony, which appears to be an advance on Grice's account.

However, I will show that Searle's account of metaphor fails in its attempt to identify the meaning of a metaphorical utterance with the notion of speaker's meaning. There are different problems Searle faces, which I am going to consider here. First of all,

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<sup>1</sup> Leezenberg (2001: 118) points out that a main difference between Grice and Searle is that Searle is a *descriptivist*, while Grice a *referentialist* about metaphorical interpretation. Such a distinction amounts to the way a metaphorical content is determined: at the level of thought, for the descriptivists, while at the level of how things resemble to each other, for the referentialists.

although Searle's principles are plausible, these appear to be semantic principles in disguise. In fact, it is legitimate to ask whether a semantic theory could incorporate them. Secondly, the distinctions Searle advances to distinguish metaphor from other tropes, especially irony, are not a real advance on Grice's account since they are based on the same superficial generalisations as Grice's. Thirdly, I will argue that Searle's account is inconsistent with some of the tenets of his theory of intentionality, as developed in (Searle 1983). Finally, Searle's account of speaker's meaning does not offer any empirically testable way to distinguish between assertive and implicated contents. Actually, his theory is unable to implement such a distinction.

In light of Searle's failure to offer an account of the representational properties of metaphorical utterances and his failure to distinguish asserted content from implicated one, I will analyse two other accounts within the tradition of speech-act theory, Alston's and Barker's, which have attempted to specify what a metaphorical assertion is. I do not think such accounts fare any better than Searle's. Therefore, I will offer a further argument to the effect that speech-act theorists would be better off considering metaphor as a kind of conventional implicature triggered by the implicit or explicit presence of quotation marks around the lexical items used metaphorically. I will first shed light on a number of properties that metaphors and conventional implicatures share. I will then reject such argument for the reason that whether or not implicatures are embeddable, the supposedly active conventional implicatures in the case of metaphor are irrelevant to the truth-evaluation of a metaphorical utterance.

Finally, I will consider an argument by Barker (2003) in favour of the view that since conventional implicatures are embeddable, then truth-conditional semantics must be false. I will reject this

argument because it does not square with the proper logic of conventional implicatures.

## 2. Searle's account

Searle is the champion of the view that metaphors are a kind of speech act, whose structure is not dissimilar from that of other speech acts, such as indirect speech acts (see Searle 1979b: chap. 2). According to Searle (1979a: 92), the general problem surrounding metaphor, as well as other non-literal cases, is the problem of 'explaining how speaker meaning and sentence or word meaning come apart.'

Searle (1979a: 94) asks:

How do metaphors work? ...What are the principles that enable speakers to formulate, and hearers to understand, metaphorical utterances? And how can we state these principles in a way that makes it clear how metaphorical utterances differ from other sorts of utterances in which speaker meaning does not coincide with literal meaning?

In other words, Searle is asking to find a set of principles that enable one not only to interpret metaphorical utterances, but also to distinguish them from other nonliteral cases. Some speech act theorists (Bach and Harnish 1979; Martinich 1984) have basically recognised this as *the* problem of metaphor, while others (Alston 2000 and Barker 2004: 53-55) have more focused on the specific problem of distinguishing the structure of a literal assertion from that of a metaphorical one.

Let's first focus on Searle's problem. To begin with, Bach and Harnish (1979: 68) have taken three sorts of relations to what is

said by an utterance to determine the possible value of the speaker's meaning as far as nonliteral utterances are concerned. These are:

(R1) *Sarcasm, Irony*: the opposite of what is said.

(R2) *Figure of Speech*: a figurative or metaphorical connection.

(R3) *Exaggeration*: the next evaluation toward the midpoint of the relevant scale.

Unfortunately, these relations are based on generalisations that are either false or too general to allow us to make any serious hypothesis or distinction as to what the speaker intends to get across with her nonliteral utterance. For instance, we already saw in the previous chapter how the idea that an irony conveys the opposite of what is said is, to say the least, misleading. As to R2, the idea of a metaphorical connection does not explain much, but itself requires an explanation. Besides, R2 fails to distinguish metaphor from metonymy. In metaphor, the 'connection' may be itself metaphorical, while in metonymy it can be traced at the level of logical form. Consider:

- (1) The ham sandwich left without paying.
- (2) Sally is a block of ice.

In (1) the relation between the individual to whom the definite description metonymically refers and the lexical item 'the ham sandwich' can be captured at the level of the logical form:

(1\*) (The x) (x R the ham sandwich)

In (1), we may take the individual standing for the definite description 'the ham-sandwich' to bear relation R to the ham-

sandwich which is contextually most salient. The underlying rule could be stated thusly: in order to pick out such individual, look for the most salient value in the context of utterance that saturates the relation in question. The relationship between Sally and a block of ice cannot be traced in the same way since the context of utterance alone does not suffice to saturate any such relation. It is not the context of utterance alone which determines how Sally is related to the class of blocks of ice, although it may facilitate the task by imposing constraints that need yet to be explored (see chapter vi).

Be that as it may, Searle believes that ‘metaphorical connections’ are indeed *systematic* and *predictable*, although he thinks that it is pragmatics and not semantics that should explain their occurrence. They are systematic in the sense that there are recurrent patterns of signification in metaphorical utterances. They are predictable in that there are interpretive principles the knowledge of which should allow us to interpret a broad class of metaphors based on them.

According to Searle, the first step in the interpretation is always determined by looking at whether the utterance is metaphorical or not. Like Grice, Searle (1979a: 114) maintains the strategy that the hearers should look for a meaning different from the sentence meaning whenever ‘the utterance is defective if taken literally’. Defectiveness, in turn, can be present in different guises, as ‘obvious falsehood, semantic non-sense, violations of the rules of speech acts, or violations of conversational principles’. Thus, given a defective utterance of a sentence, such as ‘S is P’, the final task is to determine the speaker’s meaning ‘S is R’.

How to compute the value of R? To begin with, Searle discards two options, which are related to two classic theories of metaphor, the comparison view and the interaction view. The comparison

view (hereafter CV) states that the metaphorical meaning is given by a restatement of the metaphor as a literal assertion of similarity.<sup>2</sup>

For a defender of such a view, an utterance of

(3) Sally is a dragon

is equivalent in meaning to a statement of the form

(4) Sally is *like* a dragon.

However, Searle points out that there are two unwelcome features inherent in such account. The first is ontological and has to do with the fact that, on such account, (3) licenses the following inference:

(5)  $\exists x$  (x is a Dragon).

(5) is of course false since there are no dragons, and therefore, Searle concludes, the comparison view is inconsistent. But there is another argument against the CV, this time more semantic than ontological. On the CV, (3) and (4) have the same truth conditions, given that (3) is supposed to be elliptical for (4), but this is false insofar as a metaphor and a statement of comparison, more often than not, differ in their truth conditions. This is clearly shown by another of Searle's examples. Consider:

(6) John is a gorilla.

Now, for Searle, (6) is roughly equivalent in meaning to:

(7) John is rough, nasty and prone to violence.

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<sup>2</sup> This account can be found in the works of Aristotle and ancient rhetoricians (see Hills 2012: § 2). A contemporary defender is Fogelin (1988).

According to the CV, (7) is derivable only because there is a true literal statement of similarity. In other words,

(8) John is like a gorilla,

is true. But, suppose, ethological investigation shows that gorillas are not rough, nasty or prone to violence at all. Then (8) would turn out to be false, and by modus tollens, (6) would be false too. But this is not the case, (6) does in fact communicate something true, so the CV, once again, must be in error.

The other theory that Searle considers inadequate is Black's interaction theory (Black 1962, 1979). According to such a theory, a metaphorical meaning results as the interaction of a literal frame and a metaphorical vehicle. Apart from considering this relationship of 'interaction' to be unclear, Searle notes that there are cases where there is no literal frame, and therefore the 'interaction' is by no means predictable.<sup>3</sup> For instance, in

(9) The bad news is a block of ice,

the definite description 'the bad news' refers metaphorically to Sally and therefore cannot be used as a literal frame for the metaphorical predicate 'is a block of ice'. The conclusion one may draw from this counter-example to the interaction theory is that a theory of metaphor should not just account for the simple case of predicates used metaphorically. Since the subject of a metaphorical utterance may be itself metaphorical, no interaction with the

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<sup>3</sup> An extensive discussion of the problems affecting the interaction theory is in White (1996).



predicate needs to be in force in order for the subject to express a metaphorical content.<sup>4</sup>

Having refuted these two theories, Searle is left with the task of offering a positive view as to how a metaphor is interpreted. He comes up with eight principles, which given a term X, should allow an interpreter to compute what the speaker means by uttering X. These principles are:

1. Things which are P are by definition R.
2. Things which are P are contingently R.
3. Things which are P are often said or believed to be R.
4. Things which are P are said to be R according to our own sensibility, 'culturally or naturally determined'.
5. P things are not R by definition, nor contingently R or believed to be R, but the condition for being P is like the condition for being R.
6. P and R are similar or the same; however, R results as a broadening of the application conditions associated to P.
7. Like (6) except that the P term is a relational predicate.
8. The P term conveys the semantic content of the R term by some principle of association (metonymy and synecdoche).

Searle considers and then rejects a ninth principle. The principle could be stated in this way:

9. Given two grammatical subjects S and S' and a predicate P used metaphorically, P will be taken to mean two different R-values, R' and R'', depending on the juxtaposition of P with either S or S'.

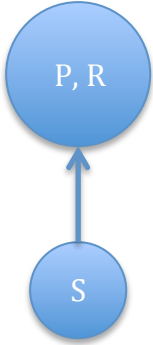
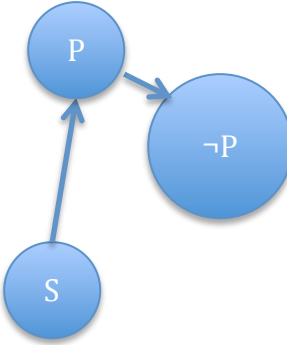
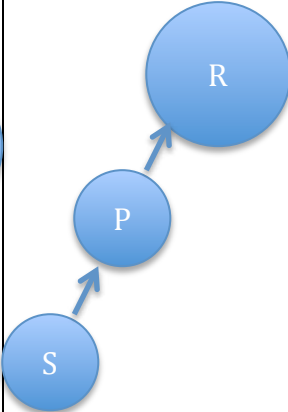
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<sup>4</sup> Ironically, Searle does not consider at all the problem of metaphorical reference, but only focuses on the simple subject-predicate cases, where the predicate is the element to be metaphorically interpreted.

This principle is a version of the interaction principle, already rejected by Searle. But here the principle is rejected on a different ground. According to Searle, a metaphor is never created, but only discovered, so to speak. In other words, given his set of principles there is no need to appeal to a principle of juxtaposition, which would entail that new metaphors can always be created by just juxtaposing two terms. What the terms S and S' do is only to restrict the possible R-values, and that is all.

While I wait to comment on these principles in the next subsection, I wish to conclude my discussion of Searle's theory with his attempt to distinguish metaphor from other tropes and, in particular, irony.

According to Searle, irony and metaphor are two uses of language that share the following properties: both emerge as the result of a 'defective' utterance of a sentence endowed with a certain literal meaning, and both do not require any extra-linguistic convention to be correctly interpreted. They differ in the way sentence meaning and speaker meaning 'come apart'. While in a literal utterance, sentence meaning and speaker meaning coincide, in irony, the sentence meaning is used as an input to determine the opposite of what the speaker says, and in metaphor it is processed through the principles Searle has offered to determine a possible value of the speaker's meaning. Schematically,

Literal utterance	Ironical utterance	Metaphorical utterance
		
<p>In this table, which reproduces Searle's (Searle 1979a: 122), we have the three basic ways in which, according to Searle, the speaker's meaning of a literal, ironical or metaphorical utterance can be determined. Given that S is the literal subject of the utterance, P its literal predicate and R what the speaker means by uttering P, we have the following scenarios: in the first column, P and R coincide, in the second column the semantic value of P must be inverted, in the third column R is determined through P via one of Searle's principles.</p>		

If we consider that, according to Searle, the literal meaning of an utterance is interpretable only relative to a certain *background* of assumptions, we get the following picture: an interpreter starts by checking whether the literal meaning of an utterance fits with the situation he is presented with. If the situation does not match the literal meaning of the utterance, he will recognise the utterance to be defective and therefore will proceed with the computation of a possible value for the speaker's meaning. If the speaker is speaking ironically, then he will simply negate the sentence meaning and obtain in this way what the speaker means. On the other hand, if the speaker is speaking metaphorically, he will use one of the eight principles Searle gives to compute what the speaker means. Finally, Searle contemplates the possibility of open-ended metaphorical

utterances, i.e., utterances whose contents cannot be reduced to a single R-value. Unfortunately, Searle does not say anything as to how the interpretation of these metaphors should proceed.

### 3. Criticism of Searle's account

As anticipated, there are different criticisms connected to Searle's view. To begin with, it seems to me that the principles offered by Searle have much more semantic weight than he recognises. Actually, Searle himself admits that metaphors do have a semantic role, namely, 'to plug' semantic gaps, where by a 'semantic gap' Searle means a linguistic context in which no literal expression could semantically express what a metaphor, within such context, conveys. According to Searle, in such cases no literal paraphrase can fill the gap that would result by eliminating the metaphorical expression in the sentence uttered.<sup>5</sup> As an example, Searle gives

(10) The ship ploughed the sea,<sup>6</sup>

which is a relational metaphor in that two nouns are related by a metaphorical predicate. Searle notes that, as in the case of (10), we often know what a metaphor means, though we are unable to reformulate such knowledge in literal terms. This *transparency* of metaphorical meaning seems to be a plausible feature of many metaphorical utterances, but the question is where exactly this knowledge comes from. My guess is that we have to look for better candidates than pragmatics, at least the kind of pragmatics we have

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<sup>5</sup> This goes against Searle's principles of expressibility (Searle 1969), according to which every thought can be literally expressed.

<sup>6</sup> Here, as with other examples, Searle seems to focus on fully conventionalised metaphors, that is to say, expressions whose metaphorical meanings have been lexicalised.

treated so far. I believe it is, in fact, quite implausible to assume that such knowledge is given or mediated by the knowledge of the speaker's intentions since these are not essentially involved in the determination of the favoured interpretation, as in the case of conversational implicatures. To repeat a point already stressed in the previous chapter, an implicature of an utterance is calculated from what is said by the utterance and the very fact that the speaker said whatever she said. This is the hallmark of all those cases that Recanati (2004, 2010) calls *post-propositional* in that their meaning is determined only once a full-blooded proposition has already been semantically decoded. Now, if Searle's view is a kind of *post-propositional* pragmatics, then all the objections that applied to Grice's apply also to it. In addition, some further objections can be devised and a question be raised: is Searle's account compatible with a non-*post-propositional* account of metaphorical interpretation? I leave this question open until the next section, and concentrate now on the main objections to Searle, under the supposition that he is really offering a post-propositional account of metaphor.

I am not denying that the speaker's intentions can be important to fix the right interpretation of a metaphorical utterance. What I am denying is that these have any special role to play in metaphorical interpretation. Speaker's intentions can be important to fix the interpretation of a literal utterance. Sometimes we need to check what the speaker has in mind in uttering a literal sentence, as, for instance, when one says 'I went to the bank this morning', having in mind the river bank and not the financial institution. However, we do not conclude that speakers' intentions have a substantial explanatory role in normal cases. Similarly, we may need to check the speaker's intentions in her uttering a metaphor which turns out to be also literally true, as in (11):

(11) Jesus was a carpenter.<sup>7</sup>

But more often we latch onto the metaphorical meaning without any intentional detour. A lot of research in psycholinguistics has fleshed out this aspect of metaphorical interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Metaphors can be as easily accessible as most literal uses of language.

Therefore, Searle's 'deviance' model, which we already rejected in Grice's account, cannot have empirical force either. Apart from being disproved by those metaphorical examples where no semantic defectiveness is traceable, this model is disconfirmed by the same type of experiments above-mentioned.

However, I am here especially interested in the theoretical framework endorsed by Searle because I think that, actually, it shows that a semantic account of metaphor is better able than a pragmatic one to explain the sort of knowledge we deploy in the understanding of metaphorical utterances. Searle's principles are, in fact, concerned either with semantic and conventional properties of sentences and words or with stereotypical properties, which at the end collapse into the category of conventional properties (see Leezenberg 2001: 121:122). For instance, principle 1, which states that the R value is by definition a P value, is certainly semantic insofar as it states the rather obvious fact that if a predicate is associated, by definition, with a certain set of properties {P1, ..., Pn}, then one of these properties must be actually instantiated by the individual of whom something is said by the use of that very predicate. Then the resulting claim will be true iff the subject's extension is in the extension of the predicate iff the subject has one of these properties. An example could be:

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<sup>7</sup> This is a metaphor which belongs to the category for which Ted Cohen once dubbed the term 'twice-true metaphors'.

<sup>8</sup> To name just a few: Gibbs (1994: 99-106) Giora (2003), Glucksberg (2008).

(12) Jim is a giant,

where ‘giant’ entails ‘being big’. Also, principles 2, 3 and 4 basically say that some predicates can be used to classify things in terms of their conventional or stereotypical properties. But then if something is said by the metaphorical use of one of these predicates in a given context, it is because these terms have conditions of application the knowledge of which a semantics of natural language can in principle include. Moreover, as Leezenberg notes (2001: 122), principle 3 is actually incoherent in that it does not make any sense for one to assert something she knows to be false, but believes to be true. In other words, if the speaker knows that gorillas are not violent, then she cannot assert ‘Jim is a gorilla’ on the basis that she believes that gorillas are violent.

Still, principles 5 to 7 presuppose knowledge of application conditions, or in any case, are based on an extension of those. Principle 8, on the other hand, presupposes both some interaction between S and P in the determination of R and, also, some ways of constraining the resulting metaphorical interpretation. The very fact that Searle recognises this interaction and the existence of possible constraints on metaphorical interpretations is indicative that an explanation of metaphorical interpretation should be looked for at a level other than pragmatics. In fact, I think it is impossible to respond, within Searle’s framework, to a number of questions, which are crucial to a correct assessment of the problem of metaphorical interpretation. What counts as an acceptable metaphorical interpretation? What constraints are there for a metaphorical interpretation to be acceptable? Why, for instance, is an utterance of (13) felt as unacceptable

(13) # Juliet is the sun, and Achilles is, too ? (Stern 2000)

None of these questions receives any attention in Searle's account and, for that matter, in any other speech-act theoretic account of metaphor.

Besides, Searle's attempts to classify tropes in terms of different conditions imposed on the derivation of speaker's meaning are unsatisfactory. For, as we already noticed for Grice, to say that an irony is based on the derivation of the opposite of what the speaker says is a false generalisation, while to say that in literal utterances sentence meaning and speaker meaning coincide seems to be a harsh conclusion. Take, for instance, these utterances:

- (14) France is hexagonal.
- (15) The room was silent.
- (16) It is raining.
- (17) Vegemite is tasty.

All these utterances are considered by the average speaker as literal (sure, at least in the case of (14) we need enough scene setting) though, in none of these examples the speaker means what the sentences uttered literally express. For France's shape is very irregular and only to a very large approximation may it be taken as hexagonal; in (15) the speaker is not talking of the only room in the world, but she has in mind a specific room. Besides, the room in question can be silent only to a certain degree, but not totally silent, which would be physically impossible. In (16) the speaker means that it is raining in Nottingham, while in (17) she is asserting that she finds vegemite tasty.<sup>9</sup> As these examples show, it is difficult to

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<sup>9</sup> Predicates of taste such as 'is tasty' or 'is fun' have been widely discussed within the debate between contextualists and relativists. Lasersohn (2005) provides a good starting point in the literature. It should also be noticed that there is at least a third theoretical option constituted by the kind of minimalism favoured by Cappelen and Lepore (2005). On this account, although the proposition expressed by an utterance of (17) is the same across contexts, what the speaker means by uttering it varies. I do not have much to say about



accept Searle's claim that sentence meaning and speaker meaning coincide in literal utterances.

Searle seems to have reasoned in this way: since the literal meaning alone does not determine a metaphorical interpretation, then it must be pragmatics that determine such meaning. As noted by some scholars (Stern 2000, Leezenberg 2001), Searle's reasoning is vitiated both by a naïve conception of literal meaning and by insufficient attention to the constraints imposed by the context of utterance on determining a metaphor's interpretation.

But there are two other problems afflicting Searle's theory, which have not received sufficient attention in the literature, I think. Both points are related to Searle's theory of intentionality, as developed in Searle (1983). First of all, according to Searle (1983), the problem of meaning is

how does the mind impose Intentionality on entities that are not intrinsically intentional? How is it possible that mere things can represent? And the answer I am proposing is that the utterance act is performed with the intention that the utterance itself has conditions of satisfaction. (1983: 167)

For Searle a meaning intention is an intention that "the physical events which constitute part of the conditions of satisfaction (in the sense of things required) of the intention should themselves have conditions of satisfaction (in the sense of requirement)" (*ibid.*, 166-167). In other words, a condition of satisfaction of an utterance is that the event described has truth-conditions.<sup>10</sup> However, since

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Cappelen and Lepore's speech-act pluralism since it seems to me to collapse in one of the pragmatic options already available (Grice's or Relevance Theory). Besides, as I will show in the next chapter, there are independent syntactic reasons to avoid minimalism. I will come back on the issue of predicates of taste in Chapter 7, where I will sketch its consequences for the understanding of metaphor.

<sup>10</sup> Another condition of satisfaction may be, for instance, that the presuppositions of the utterance be satisfied.

most metaphorical utterances, when taken literally, are false or absurd, then one may wonder how they acquire intentionality. One answer is that they have derived intentionality insofar as there are literal paraphrases of them. However, we already saw that there are cases in which no literal paraphrase is available but where we nevertheless understand the metaphor perfectly well.

Another answer, which is in Searle (1983: 148-9), is that metaphorical understanding is the result of **non-representational capacities**. However, this claim obviously contrasts with the previous explanation offered by Searle, which takes metaphors to have truth-conditions in virtue of there being principles that assign new truth-conditions to utterances containing them. Thus, either metaphors have truth-conditions or they do not. If they do, it cannot be just a matter of there being some literal paraphrase (because in some cases, metaphors that we judge as true do not have any paraphrase); if they do not, then Searle's account collapses into Davidson's non-representational account, which I have already rejected in the first chapter. Besides, allowing this solution would be to give up the important, though difficult, task of explaining how metaphorical utterances are endowed with intentionality.

Secondly, if metaphorical utterances can be characterised as being composed out of representational intentions, so can literal utterances as well as implicatures. On Searle's account, how do we distinguish these types of utterances? There does not seem to be any way to distinguish a metaphorical interpretation from a literal one or an implicature if all these acts are characterised by having the same kind of intention at their basis. Thus, the way these acts differ must be found somewhere else. Where exactly?

Can it be a difference in the mode in which these utterances are presented? The mode characterising literal utterances is the asserting force, which can be epistemically delineated as the commitment of the speaker to the state of affairs described by her

utterance. Generally, metaphorical utterances cannot commit the speaker to the states of affairs described, since there are not any. Shall we conclude that there is a special metaphorical force attached to metaphorical utterances? The problem is that nobody knows what this force is or how it could be devised in terms of linguistic evidence. Could it be a commitment to a possible state of affairs? The problem is that it is difficult to cash out a notion of commitment to impossible states of affairs, unless you are a dialetheist about impossible worlds and the like.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, it seems we have reached two main issues that Searle's account leaves unaccounted for:

- (i) Is a metaphorical utterance an act of assertion? If yes, how to distinguish it from a literal assertion?
- (ii) What does a metaphorical utterance exactly represent?

These questions are certainly crucial to any theory of metaphor, and therefore will be receiving particular attention in the following chapters. In the present context, there are some speech-act theorists who have particularly attempted to respond to the first question. To their views I shall now direct my attention. To anticipate, I think that these accounts fail to offer any insight into metaphorical interpretation for two reasons: first of all, they fail to offer a satisfying answer to question (ii); secondly, they fail to see that an answer to (i) cannot be separated from an answer to (ii).

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<sup>11</sup> Dialetheism is the view that there true contradictions. The most well-known defence of dialetheism is Priest (1987).

#### 4. Metaphorical Assertion?

There are two types of account in speech-act theory that have attempted to answer the question of what sort of speech act metaphorical utterances stand for. There is the *rule*-based account of Alston (2000) and the *intention*-based account of Barker (2004). After having examined their proposals, I will reject both accounts for the reason that they have avoided question (ii) of the previous section, and therefore have thought it possible to give an answer to question (i) without solving first the representational problem inherent in (ii).

According to Alston, there are two types of metaphorical utterances: on the one hand, metaphors that have a literal paraphrase and, on the other, metaphors that do not. For Alston (2000: 233), only the former type is to be appropriately considered as belonging to the category of assertion insofar as the speaker is *taking responsibility* for some proposition that is a literal paraphrase of what the metaphor expresses.

In normal contexts, Alston's notion of 'taking responsibility' can be cashed out in terms of the speaker's commitment to there being an illocutionary rule associated to the sentence uttered, which makes the sentence have a certain meaning. In other words, for Alston, a sentence has a meaning iff there is an illocutionary rule which establishes how the sentence is to be used. Given this account, figurative utterances are considered to be *parasitic* on utterances whose I-rules (i.e., illocutionary-rules) are already defined.

The problem I have with such a view is that, first of all, it divorces the notion of meaning from the notion of truth-conditions rather drastically. For instance, Alston (2000: 191) lays down the following rule for any act of assertion:

**D8.** In uttering S, U R's that p—In uttering S, U subjects his utterance to a rule that, in application to this case, implies that it is permissible for U to utter S only if p.

In other words, a speaker U who assertively utters a sentence S, takes responsibility (R's) that p (the proposition normally expressed by an utterance of S) in virtue of there being a rule permitting U to assert S only if p. Whether or not there is such a rule – in my opinion, we do not need to postulate any such rules over and above the linguistic conventions – Alston makes the further attempt to reduce the notion of meaning to this rule-conception of speech-acts.

He defines the meaning of a sentence in the following way:

**X.** A sentence's having a certain meaning consists in its being subject to a certain illocutionary rule. (Alston 2000: 192)

I believe this further reductive step is unwarranted for the following reason. If a sentence has a certain meaning in virtue of there being a certain illocutionary rule like D8, the rule itself exists only because we already know what it is for the sentence to have a certain meaning. We know how to use the sentence because we know under what conditions the sentence is true or false (to limit the discussion to the case of assertives). Similarly, we do not know what to do with the meaning of a word unless we know what kind of possible or actual state of affairs that word may contribute towards representing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This objection against Alston's reductive analysis of meaning should remind the reader of my general objection against intention-based accounts of meaning in the previous chapter (See Chapter 2, §3, fn. 9). The only difference between

Secondly, I do not think that someone who utters a metaphor is only derivatively asserting something so long as the content of her utterance is determined by whatever is required by the I-rule governing its literal paraphrase. For there may be no literal paraphrase of metaphors that we legitimately recognise to have meaning (see, e.g., Searle's ship metaphor) or there may be too many literal paraphrases (e.g., 'Juliet is the sun'), and this makes absurd the task of individuating which paraphrase the speaker is exactly committed to.

Thus, I do not think that a metaphorical assertion can be characterised along the lines proposed by Alston. What about Barker's intentional account? Barker (2004) looks more closely at the intentional activity of speakers in order to distinguish a literal assertion from a metaphorical one. In what follows, I will claim that such account does not fare any better than Alston's.

Barker disagrees with rule-based accounts of figurative assertions because he thinks that such assertions do not involve any pre-established set of rules, such that knowing them allow one to determine that the speaker is speaking figuratively. I basically agree with such a view, so I can skip it altogether.

However, I disagree with Barker when he takes a metaphorical assertion as being similar in structure to sarcastic assertions. For Barker, the similarity is based on the idea that, in both cases, the speaker does not have an intention to represent whatever the sentence uttered literally says. However, he adds that there is an implicit commitment to having an intention to defend some representational complex which is either the opposite of what the sentence literally says (*irony*) or modelled by the form of what the sentence literally says (*metaphor*).

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the two approaches is that their reductions go in opposite directions: top-down in the case of the reduction of meaning to intentions, ultimately its reduction to the biological world, while bottom-up in the case of the reduction of meaning to conventions, ultimately its reduction to the social structure of reality.

In Barker's terms, a metaphorical assertion can thus be defined as:

**Metaphor:** U asserts metaphorically that P by uttering S iff:

- (i) U performs  $A(S)_{\text{pro}}$ <sup>13</sup> (but lacks the intentions advertised);
- (ii) U advertises intentions (a) to represent her belief that a complex obtains whose form is metaphorically modelled by the form of  $\langle P \rangle$ ; and (b) to defend the state in (a);
- (iii) U has the intention advertised in (iib). (Barker 2004: 53)

Barker's account is a more elaborated version of Grice's in that it takes metaphor as being based on the speaker's *making as if* to say a certain thing in order to communicate something else. In other words, he takes the speaker to be pretending to assert that S, and by manifesting this pretended intention she adverts to the hearer that she has another intention, that of representing a metaphorical complex, namely, the complex  $\langle \text{Juliet}, P^* \rangle$ , where  $P^*$  is a property associated to the literal vehicle 'the sun'.

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<sup>13</sup> This is Barker's way to represent the idea that the speaker performs what he calls a 'proto-assertion', which is one of the two features of Barker's account of assertion. According to Barker (2004: 45), an assertion is composed, in fact, by two acts: a proto-assertion, which is the act of uttering a sentence advertising an intention to represent a complex; and a proto-communicative act, which is the act of uttering a sentence advertising an intention to defend a commitment property II. For instance, someone who utters 'It is probably raining' makes an act of assertion to the effect that she is uttering a sentence advertising her intention to represent that she has a certain subjective probability state and, at the same time, she utters that sentence with the intention to defend the possession of such state. The reader should also notice that, according to Barker, the assertion of 'It is probably raining' counts as an expressive act insofar as it purports to represent a certain internal state of the speaker, in the particular case, the one corresponding to her subjective probability state. This account falls within Barker's expressivist philosophy, which radically departs from the main trends in philosophical semantics nowadays, especially the possible worlds semantic framework.

I believe that Barker's account leaves more questions untouched than those it answers. To begin with, I disagree with those accounts of metaphorical assertion based on the notion of *making as if* or pretence intended as an illocutionary force of some kind. First of all, speakers do not pretend to assert, but actually make assertions by uttering metaphors.<sup>14</sup> Just consider the case of conventional metaphors, i.e., metaphors whose meanings are nowadays lexicalised. Would we be willing to say that speakers only pretend to assert these metaphors, while having in mind different truth-conditions? As for Egan's pretence account of idioms (2008), Barker seems to make the wrong prediction that hearers first recognise that the speaker is speaking in pretence, and therefore that the literal truth-conditions of the utterance must be discarded, and only then elaborate a new meaning, i.e., assign new truth-conditions to the sentence uttered.

This objection reminds me of a criticism Jason Stanley (2001: 51) poses to hermeneutic fictionalists.<sup>15</sup> The objection is the following: suppose we deem the Davidsonian theory of adverbs as the best semantic theory for adverbs. Since this theory postulates

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<sup>14</sup> One could object that they still assert the metaphorical content, while pretending to assert the literal content. There are two main problems with this objection. One is that it simply resumes Grice's notion of 'making as if to say', which I already dismissed in chapter 2. Secondly, even if one buys this story, it would still be a mystery how, in this view, metaphors represent whatever they represent. Sure, this reply presupposes that metaphors do have representational properties, and that it is in virtue of these properties that they embed, for instance. One could dismiss this reply and stick to a non-representational account of metaphor. However, she would incur in the same kind of problems that Davidson faces to explain the compositional properties of metaphorical expressions. This point is remarked in the text.

<sup>15</sup> Matti Eklund writes in the entry to 'Fictionalism' in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "Hermeneutic fictionalism about a discourse *D* is a thesis about the actual nature of the discourse: according to hermeneutic fictionalism we actually do not aim at the literal truth but only appear or pretend to do so. Revolutionary fictionalism, by contrast, insists that when engaging in *D* we *ought* only to make such pretend-assertions; the point of engaging in *D* would be achieved by pretend-assertions". This terminology was introduced by Stanley in the paper I refer to in the text. Stanley introduced the distinction between hermeneutic and revolutionary fictionalism having in mind Burgess's distinction between hermeneutic and revolutionary nominalism.



events, then it would follow that an average speaker should be committed to their existence. But someone may well reject such commitment, without making her attitude to the content uttered by her be that of pretence. Similarly, someone who utters a conventionalised metaphor, for instance ‘The table’s legs are asymmetric’, could reject a commitment to the existence of legs for a table without it being possible for us to say that she was only pretending to assert that the table she had in mind has legs.

Be that as it may, an account like this also makes the interpretive process quite a heavy matter. However, it ignores a large number of psycholinguistic and philosophical studies (Gibbs 1994; Gibbs and Tendhal 2006; Giora 2003; Bezuidenhout 2001; Guttenplan 2006; Glucksberg 2008) that have pointed out how metaphorical interpretation is immediate, direct and transparent. And even if there were no intention in the speaker’s mind to represent what the sentence uttered literally says, I do not think it follows that there is another intention on her part to advertise that she lacks that intention.

Secondly, and more importantly from my perspective, there is no attempt whatsoever in this account to explain how a sentence used metaphorically has the representational properties it has. Barker talks of a ‘form’ metaphorically modelled on the proposition literally expressed by the sentence uttered. What is this form and what is the relationship with the proposition ‘literally’ expressed? Unless Barker gives us an account of what a ‘form’ is and of how it is represented by our minds, his account sheds no light on the representational problem inherent in metaphorical interpretation. My suspicion is that Barker, like Davidson, has espoused a rather bare causal account of metaphorical interpretation.

However, we understand metaphors in the same transparent way as we grasp literal uses of language and we also accept some

metaphors as more acceptable than others. We reject mixed contexts (for instance, contexts characterised by VP-ellipsis) on the basis of some principles, whose nature must be investigated, and compose complex utterances by embedding metaphors in more literal contexts. In other words, metaphors do seem to have compositional properties, but if we followed any of the speech-theoretic accounts here discussed the behaviour of such properties would be hardly explainable.

Before concluding this chapter, I will present another argument to the effect that metaphors could be considered as conventional implicatures, propositions whose logical and compositional nature is separated from what is said by an utterance. This argument is offered as a way for the supporters of a pragmatic theory of metaphor not to throw the baby (i.e., an explanation of metaphor appealing to pragmatic principles) out with the bathwater (i.e., all the pragmatic accounts I have been dealing with so far).

### **5. Metaphor, quotation and conventional implicature**

One way to argue that metaphors are still in the domain of pragmatics is, I suggest, to consider metaphors to be akin to conventional implicatures, implicatures which, albeit determined by the conventional profile of an utterance, are evaluated at a level other than the asserted one. Then, given some further premises concerning the semantics/pragmatics division, one could conclude that metaphor is a special type of speaker's meaning. If the argument were on the right track, then the defenders of a pragmatic account of metaphor would have something to appeal to. The purpose of this section is therefore to spell out this suggestion in

some detail, and to rebut the argument for it on the basis that its premises are disputable and its theoretical benefits unclear.

Let's first review the essential features of conventional implicatures, some of which we have already encountered in the previous chapter:

- i. Conventional implicatures are typically non-core-truth-conditional aspects of an utterance;
- ii. Conventional implicatures are generally preserved under their embedding of truth-functional operators;
- iii. Conventional implicatures are triggered by some conventional element of an utterance.

As to (i), following Potts' (2005) analysis of the phenomenon,<sup>16</sup> I take that it is a matter of the logic of conventional implicatures that they require a level of assessment other than the core truth-conditional one. In other words, although conventional implicatures typically have truth-conditions, they are not the primary bearers of the truth (falsity) of an utterance. Thus, consider some classical examples of conventional implicatures involving appositives, contrasting particles and speech-act adverbs:

- (18) Mario Monti, who is the Italian First Minister, won't run in the next elections.
- (19) Jim is rich but nice.
- (20) Confidentially, he likes her very much.

In none of these examples, the conventionally implicated content modifies the truth-conditional profile of the sentences uttered.

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<sup>16</sup> While, as far as I am aware, Potts (2005) is the most detailed analysis of the phenomenon, we already saw in the last chapter that Grice (1989) was the first to pin down this class of implicatures. See also Neale (1992) for a careful discussion of Grice's taxonomy of implicatures.

Whether or not Mario Monti is the Italian First Minister, the primary proposition, i.e., the one whose evaluation will allow one to say that the utterance is either true or false, is that he won't run in the next election. The utterance is true (false) iff this proposition is true (false). In turn, such proposition is true or false irrespective of who the First Minister in charge in Italy is. Similarly, (19) is true iff Jim is rich and nice, irrespective of whether there is a contrast between being rich and being poor, and (20) is true iff the subject likes a woman, who is salient in the discourse, to a high degree, irrespective of whether the information given is known only to the participants in the conversation. These data are, I think, intuitive enough to allow for the following generalisation:

- iv. Conventional implicatures are aspects of meaning logically and compositionally independent of what-is-said (=asserted content). (See Potts 2005)

The distinction between conventionally imparted content and asserted content may be shown with some concrete examples. For instance, take an utterance of an unembedded sentence such as

(21) Messi, who is very short, is a great talent.

With an utterance of (21) the speaker is primarily committed to the truth of the proposition that Messi is very talented, but he also conventionally implicates that he is very short. Now, consider (21) under negation:

(22) It is not the case that Messi, who is very short, is a great talent.

Here the content conventionally implicated is not affected by negation, which is working in its standard ‘hole’ way, i.e., allowing the conventionally implicated content to be projected beyond the syntax of the simple sentence now embedded.<sup>17</sup> Incidentally, as others have pointed out,<sup>18</sup> conventionally implicated content is not cancellable in the way conversational implicatures are. Thus, on pain of inconsistency, you cannot assert:

- (23) # Messi, who is very short, is a great talent, but I don’t mean to say he is very short.

Thus, a conventional implicature’s meaning dimension is best configured as that of an entailment, which licenses inferences like the following ones:

- (24) Messi, who is very short, is a great talent.  
∴ Messi is very short.  
∴ Messi is very short and Messi is a great talent.<sup>19</sup>

All these facts are interesting in themselves, but they still do not suggest an answer to the question concerning the nature of the relationship between asserted content and implicated one. The theory I most favour in this sense is the one according to which conventional implicatures are comments on what is said by an utterance, or on aspects of the utterance itself. In this sense, they belong to the category of other meta-cognitive phenomena, e.g., quotation, and in particular, certain uses of quotation such as mixed quotation and scare quotes, of which more below.

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<sup>17</sup> Karttunen and Peters (1979) were the first to notice this behaviour of conventionally implicated content.

<sup>18</sup> See García-Carpintero (2011: 125).

<sup>19</sup> Compare with an ironic utterance of ‘He is a fine friend,’ which does not license the inference to the ironic content ‘He is not a fine friend’.

Finally, as to (iii), what conventional elements of an utterance are the best candidates to signal that the expression or sentence uttered metaphorically is to be interpreted pragmatically? Metaphors could be considered instances of what Carpintero, following Davidson, calls ‘double-duty quotation’. The phenomenon embraces different cases, such as *mixed quotation*, *scare quotes*,<sup>20</sup> and even cases of *metalinguistic negation*:

(25) Saddam Hussein did not pose an ‘immediate threat to the security of our people’, as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld said.

(26) A ‘fortnight’ is a period of fourteen days.

(27) We didn’t eat ‘[Abricots]’; we ate ‘[Eibricots]’.

These cases are characterised by the following features: (i) there is a mix of use and mention of the material quoted, in that the quotation may serve both the function of calling attention to the sign itself without preventing the material quoted from being used to contribute a content to the proposition primarily expressed by these utterances, whether or not this meaning coincides with what the words under quotation marks standardly mean;<sup>21</sup> (ii) the presence of meta-commentaries, whose function is to specify/rectify certain aspects of the utterances of which they are comments of. For instance, the meta-commentary inherent in an utterance of (25) could be taken as roughly:

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Mixed quotation’ is the phenomenon in which a word or expression is mentioned but also used with its standard meaning, whereas ‘scare quotes’ is when a word or expression is under quotation, implying that it should not be taken with its standard meaning.

<sup>21</sup> This is the most important difference with cases of *pure quotation*, in which we have the ‘semantic inertia’ of the material quoted. See Cappelen and Lepore (2007b), Predelli (2009b) and García-Carpintero (2011).

(25\*) That Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld said it by using a sentence including ‘immediate threat to the security of our people’.  
[García-Carpintero: 2011: 126]

To be fair, the assessment of (25) to (27) is not so uniform in the literature. We could, in fact, distinguish at least two theoretical options here. One option – the one more akin to the general hypothesis that metaphors involve some kind of quotation to be accounted in terms of conventional implicature – would be to treat these elements as contributing two types of content: semantically, what the lexical element, which is under quotation marks, encodes and, pragmatically, whatever the speaker has in mind by quoting that element. Under this view, the quotation marks are a referential device used to refer to the index demonstrated, i.e., the quoted material which serves as an index for whichever feature the speaker intends to refer. Alternatively, we could treat the quotation marks not as a referential device, but as an echoic use of language<sup>22</sup> which serves to bring one’s attention to properties the quoted lexical item possesses, the determination of which is crucial to assign new truth-conditions to the utterance. This seems to be the direction taken up by Recanati over the years and confirmed in his recent book *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics* (2010). Here, I will mainly be focusing on the first option since it is the one which could constitute an advance on the type of account Searle has offered.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, such a theory distinguishes two (or even more) levels of meaning: on the one hand, the primary proposition (the *message* in Predelli’s words, Predelli 2003) which corresponds to what-is-said,

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<sup>22</sup> Sperber and Wilson (1986 [1995]) provide a detailed analysis of the phenomenon.

<sup>23</sup> Reasons of space and time have prevented me from discussing the alternative view. In any case, it would have been some highly speculative material, so nothing is lost in my discussion.

and the ancillary propositions (the *attachment* also in Predelli's words) which constitute comments on the primary proposition or aspects of its utterance. The further claim is that such attachments may serve the function of helping the hearer determine the speaker's meaning.

Now, according to the view which I am going to suggest more than to endorse, metaphors are elements of an utterance that are either implicitly or explicitly put under quotation marks. For instance, when Romeo utters

(28) Juliet is the sun,

we should take his utterance to be properly represented as

(28\*) Juliet is 'the sun',

where the quotation marks refer to the index demonstrated, i.e. the definite description 'the sun', implying that it is not used with its standard meaning.<sup>24,25</sup> Accordingly, we get the following picture:

ASSERTED CONTENT: *Juliet is the sun.*

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<sup>24</sup> I think the possibility of hidden quotation marks around expressions used metaphorically could gain support from Stanley's argument for hidden semantic constituents (Stanley 2000 [2007]). This should prevent a possible objection that I am appealing to strange entities (i.e., quotation marks) that are not realised at the level of the sentence surface. Thanks to Greg Currie for discussion on this particular point.

<sup>25</sup> The fact that metaphorical utterances do not always make explicit use of quotation marks could be a mere accident, due to some sort of pragmatic laziness. In fact, it is often the case that in written language, especially in formal contexts, quotation marks are used to enclose words used metaphorically. Also, people using online instant message services such as msn or skype often resort to quotation marks, showing that they are somewhat aware of using words or expressions metaphorically. Some examples: 'Getting to the 'heart' of the matter' (From John Perry's blog: <http://www.structuredprocrastination.com/>); "The obsessions are difficult to walk away from. They stay with me wherever I go as 'added baggage'" (quot. in Schwartz 1996: 89); "It's always nice to realise that the 'cup' is still good to fill in" (from a msn chat).



CONVENTIONALLY IMPLICATED CONTENT: that the expression ‘the sun’ is used non-standardly [+> look for an alternative meaning]

SPEAKER’S MEANING: *Juliet is warm, central to Romeo’s life, etc.*

Under this account, the contribution a metaphorical expression brings to the fore is double: on the one hand, we have the semantic content that an utterance of the sentence without quotation marks would convey and which, incidentally, is still conveyed by the actual utterance. On the other hand, there is the content that must be elaborated, taking into account the role of quotation marks. This second dimension of meaning, one could argue, is part of pragmatics in virtue of both the way it is determined and the fact that it is not part of the literal meaning of the expressions quoted. As to the way such content is determined, one could implement the theory just sketched with Searle’s principles presented in section 2 of this chapter. Also, it could be conceded that speaker’s intentions play a crucial role to actually determine which property is exactly demonstrated by the very act of mentioning the expression(s) used metaphorically.<sup>26</sup>

This account is, as I take it, an advance on the model proposed by Searle for the following reasons. First of all, appealing to quotation avoids the unwelcome feature present in Searle’s account that metaphorical interpretations are determined on the basis of some semantic or other deviance. We saw how this model is descriptively inadequate – there are cases where no deviance whatsoever can be found in a metaphorical utterance – and

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<sup>26</sup> This seems to be recognised even by Carpintero (2011), who otherwise attempts to offer a more semantically oriented account of double-duty quotation.

psychologically implausible – it is discredited by almost any psycholinguistic theory in circulation. On the other hand, this new account preserves some intuitive properties of metaphorical interpretation: first, the dependence of the metaphorical meaning on literal meaning. In fact, the search for a metaphorical meaning is at least partially constrained by the presence of the token under quotation marks, whose metarepresentation at the level of the conventionally implicated content allows one to determine whether the properties expressed by the utterance are associated with its type or are to be derived pragmatically. Second, it seems to corroborate some ‘epistemological’ theories of metaphor, like, e.g., Camp’s (2009), which insist on the double perspective characterising metaphorical experience at once: i.e., the capacity to *see* something *as* something else, and in particular to see a particular phenomenon under a new light through the employment of a literal vehicle used in a ‘new’ context.

Thus, to recapitulate, according to the account of metaphor I have presented here the quotation marks function as a conventional device for referring to the index demonstrated and, indirectly, for signalling that the speaker is not using the material quoted with its standard meaning. In virtue of this referential act, the speaker brings attention to features of the quoted lexical item, in the same way scare quotes are used in other contexts such as, for instance, sarcastic utterances. Searle’s principles could then be implemented in such a theory, so as to determine the exact value of the speaker’s meaning, some proposition along the lines Searle’s account suggests. This analysis would have that the hearers have access to both dimensions of meaning, and this seems to be a virtue of the theory, contrary to the nowadays obsolete view (explicitly adopted by Searle) that in metaphorical interpretation we first reject the literal meaning of the expression(s) used metaphorically, and then we look for an alternative meaning. In conclusion, I take this

account to be a more adequate and elegant version of a Searlean speech-act account of metaphor.

Why do I want to resist it then? One reason is that even by considering metaphors to be surrounded by quotation marks, with conventionally imparted content, we still need an explanation of how it is that metaphors are the primary objects of embedding under different operators. Consider:

- (29) Jim is not a shark.
- (30) Perhaps Jim is a shark.
- (31) Even Jim is a shark.

These utterances have metaphorical expressions which are embedded under truth-conditional operators (i.e., ‘not’), modal operators (i.e., ‘perhaps’), even pragmatic operators like ‘even’. The fact that we may distinguish these operators from the utterances’ primary contents, and that the contents expressed by metaphorical expressions are clearly relevant to this assessment, makes clear that metaphors interact with operators semantically, i.e., truth-conditionally. Thus, if we treat metaphorical content as belonging to the realm of speaker’s meaning we still owe an explanation of how it is that metaphors compose with operators of different kinds, apparently in the same way as literal contents do. No explanation is given by Searle’s theory, and by extension, the revised theory I have proposed in this section does not do any better.

I want to conclude with a last point. One may say that the conventionally imparted content is irrelevant to the semantic assessment insofar as this is taken on board in the conversation without affecting the evaluation of the primary content under the embedding. However, we saw that the quotation marks would serve a semantic function, i.e., to refer to the material used as an index

within quotation marks in order to conventionally implicate that a hearer must determine its correct semantic value in a non-standard way. Now, as often happens in philosophy, a claim like this can serve for some philosopher to draw a modus ponens and for another to draw a modus tollens. There is a type of philosopher that may say: “Yes, this is cool, we have shown that there is some semantic composition in there, and therefore we can conclude that the phenomenon is semantic”. On the other hand we have an immediate reply from the adversary of the first philosopher: “No, this is not cool at all. Conventionally imparted content intrudes into what is said, and given Grice’s pragmatic taxonomy, we must conclude that pragmatics is more pervasive than Grice thought”.

Let me take this issue from the point of view of the second philosopher. An argument like the one expressed by my hypothetical philosopher is actually given by Stephen Barker (2003), who reasons in this way. Barker is impressed by the fact that whenever a conventional implicature is not assertable, the whole sentence in which the implicature is embedded is not assertable either. For instance, an utterance of

(32) Even Mother Teresa was pious,

would be infelicitous if, as is the case, Mother Teresa is taken to be an exemplar of pioussness. Given this aspect, Barker attacks both disquotational variants of truth-conditional semantics<sup>27</sup> and minimalist versions of truth<sup>28</sup> by saying that the following two disquotational principles are false.

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<sup>27</sup> See Davidson (1984).

<sup>28</sup> Horwich (1990).

**Disq1:** Where a quotational expression of the form ‘S’ denotes an interpreted sentence type, all instances of the following schema are assertable: ‘S’ is true iff S.

**Disq2:** Where a quotational expression of the form ‘S’ denotes an interpreted sentence type, the assertability conditions of ‘“S” is true’ are identical to those of ‘S’.

Barker’s complex argumentation can be reduced to the following schematic argument:

- (1) Implicatures intrude into what-is-said (Premise defended by Barker’s theory and truth-conditional pragmatics<sup>29</sup>)
- (2) A sentence ‘S’ is assertable iff S and the speaker has expressive property *II* and is committed to defend such a property (Premise of Barker’s theory)<sup>30</sup>
- (3) **(Disq1)** is false (from (1) and (2))
- (4) **(Disq2)** is false (from (1) and (2))
- (5) Truth-conditional semantics is not correct (from (3))
- (6) Minimalism is not correct (from (4))

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<sup>29</sup> Note, however, that Barker’s conception of what-is-said is very different from the one, already discussed, of Bach (see Barker 2003: 14-17) and the one defended by, e.g., Recanati or Relevance Theory. Contrary to Bach, Barker does not equate conventional implicatures with what-is-said and does not think that conventional implicatures provide explicatures in the sense of Relevance Theory. He takes up this claim on the basis that, according to him, the doxastic properties inherent in conventional implicatures enter into logical operators such as negation. This claim, which is essential to Barker’s theory of conventional implicature, is highly debatable from both a syntactic and semantic point of view, but it would require a whole section to assess its consequences fully.

<sup>30</sup> We do not need to go into the details of Barker’s analysis of what *II* is, but see fn. 12 in this chapter. Suffice it to say that, according to Barker, conventional implicatures encode properties instead of propositions. My argument is not affected by this theoretical move.

In particular (3) follows, according to Barker, because there may be instances of T-sentences such as ‘ “S” is true iff S’ that are assertable, while instances of only ‘S’ that are not. These are the cases in which a conventional implicature is infelicitous. Also, (4) follows the assertability conditions of ‘ “S” is true iff S’ diverge from the assertability conditions of ‘S’ in that the former may be licensed without requiring that the latter be also (insofar as these must taken into account the conventional implicature properties).

Barker’s concerns seem to be debatable, especially as far as his attack on truth-conditional semantics is concerned. For, once we take the theoretical care of keeping the primary truth-conditional import of an utterance of a given sentence S separated from all the ancillary contents S may further convey, no problem arises for truth-conditional semantics. Besides, as Barker recognises (2003: 27), **Disq1** should be kept separate from **Disq3**:

**Disq3**: Where a quotational expression of the form ‘S’ denotes an interpreted sentence type, all instances of the schema—‘S’ is true iff S—are true. (Barker 2003: 27).<sup>31</sup>

Disquotational truth-conditional theories are not required to follow **Disq1**, but only **Disq3**. Barker does not provide any knock-down argument against this type of theory since, in my view, his view illegitimately assumes that the theory should be committed to **Disq1**. But since truth-conditional semantics is not a theory of assertability conditions, it is unwarranted to claim that it should be bothered by principles like **Disq1**.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Of course, I am not considering here those problems that affect a Davidsonian theory of truth, already discussed in chapter I. I am just suggesting that a disquotational principle of the kind presented by Barker is not affected by his criticism, whether or not there are other independent reasons to reject it.

<sup>32</sup> So Barker is, I think, legitimated to only claim that disquotational theories do not provide much insight in the semantics of expressions triggering conventional

Perhaps Barker's argument is more to the point in the case of minimalism about truth, showing that 'S' and ' "S" is true' have different assertability conditions, but even there I am not sure whether the minimalist could not resort to the sort of distinction between primary and ancillary contents I have appealed to and dispose of Barker's criticism.

However, if the ambitions of the second type of philosopher are reduced to a considerable extent, our first philosopher should refrain from claiming victory. Even if we granted that she is right in claiming that the presence of quotation marks around metaphorical expression serve a semantic role, still this would be a very weak role. A sentence uttered metaphorically would now have a conventional device, i.e. quotation marks around the expression used metaphorically, to refer to it, so as to indicate that the expression requires a new interpretation. However, no semantic further mechanism has been activated in order to fix such interpretation. Supporters of pragmatics could then legitimately claim that we still need pragmatics to determine the final interpretation. In the next chapter, I will address all the strategies the 'new' pragmatic wave of language and communication has deployed in order to take over the 'terrain' of metaphor and figurativeness against the so far rather timid attempts to explain those otherwise. In particular, the main novelty introduced by such new accounts is that metaphor is not a *post-propositional* phenomenon, but involves mechanisms that occur before a full-blooded proposition is determined.

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implicatures. However, his further claim that the notion of 'truth remains mysterious' (Barker 2003: 31) is a step that simply does not follow.

## 5. Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that Searle's account of metaphor fails to offer a systematic pragmatics of metaphorical interpretation. First, I have shown that his principles are either semantic or presuppose some semantic constraints, which Searle's theory does not spell out at all. Second, I have rejected his 'deviance' model as being obsolete insofar as it is based on the view that hearers first interpret and reject the literal meaning of the sentence uttered and then look for some alternative meanings. Such a view is neither descriptively adequate nor psychologically plausible. Third, I have pointed to some potential problems inherent in the combination of Searle's account of metaphor and Searle's theory of intentionality. On the one hand, it seems that Searle's account of intentions is unable to theoretically distinguish metaphors from other uses of language, including literal uses and implicatures. On the other, I have expressed perplexities concerning how his more recent view, which takes metaphors to involve non-representational capacities, adheres to the account presented in his paper on metaphor. In the light of Searle's failure, I have then discussed two more recent accounts of metaphor from the perspective of speech-act theory. Neither of these accounts seems to make any substantial progress, although I have been able to focalise two important problems any account of metaphor should tackle: first, is a metaphorical utterance an act of assertion and if so, how should we characterise such an act in comparison to literal assertions? Second, what do metaphorical utterances represent? In the last section of the chapter, I have presented the view that metaphors are associated with acts of quotation. I have suggested that the information involved in these acts may be appropriately characterised in terms of conventional implicatures, and I have



discussed some of the basic features of these. However, I have concluded that the argument for such a theory is not fully convincing, insofar as we still need a substantial explanation of how it is possible that metaphors feature in larger constructions. This has led me to revisit the debate concerning the semantics/pragmatics division, which at this point of the dissertation is getting more 'hot'.

## Chapter 4

# Metaphor & Truth-Conditional Pragmatics

### 1. Introduction

All the analyses I have dealt with so far share a common assumption, namely, that the literal meaning of a sentence, in whichever way it has been characterised, has both a descriptive and an explanatory priority over the understanding of any figurative use that that sentence may have. Descriptively, a speaker of a language interprets another by first decoding the semantic content associated to her utterance, and only after each indexical has been assigned a value and each ambiguous expression has been disambiguated. Explanatorily, each interpretation of an utterance that does not correspond to the semantic content encoded by the sentence uttered is to be accounted for pragmatically (or in some other way, if you push forward a Davidsonian line, at least as far as the case of metaphor is concerned). This has been the most prominent *literalist* stance on the problem of metaphor until at least the end of the last century.

However, things have radically changed in the last fifteen years and today the trend goes generally against the literalist stance. A new wave of contextualist theories have attacked the literalist stance, trying to show how communication requires another model of language understanding. In the course of this dissertation I have mentioned certain cases that seem to pose troubles for this view. There are, in fact, utterances whose literal meaning, i.e., the one encoded by the sentences uttered, still underdetermine the possible interpretations which, given a context, they may receive. Approximations (e.g., ‘France is hexagonal’), predicates of taste (e.g., ‘liquorice is tasty’), restrictions on quantifier domains (e.g., ‘Everybody is present’) are just a small sample of examples where the literal truth-conditions do not seem to perfectly square with what the speaker intends to get across. The extent to which these cases tell against approaches traditionally considered to subscribe to some version of truth-conditional semantics is currently under intense discussion. One of the purposes of this chapter is to assess the debate in the light of its relevance to the study of metaphor.

In this chapter I am going to assess a whole class of theories which are grouped under the heading of *truth-conditional pragmatics*. In a nutshell, truth-conditional pragmatics (henceforth TCP) opposes the literalist claim that pragmatics intervenes only after the decoding of a sentence’s truth-conditional content, so as to determine new meanings with different truth-conditions and properties. Instead, TCP claims that pragmatics affects the truth-conditional content of utterances vastly and incessantly, so that the literalist descriptive and explanatory story is called into question as to its adequacy from the very start of the interpretative process of almost any utterance. The cases mentioned in the previous paragraph, and a few more others that I am going to consider here, are the evidence mostly adduced by TCP. The explanation of metaphor falls into this picture since the defenders of TCP press the

analogy between metaphors and these other cases. In particular, it has been suggested (Recanati 2001, 2004, 2010; Bezuidenhout 2001; Sperber and Wilson 2006; Carston 2002; Wilson and Carston 2006, 2008) that, like for approximations, predicates of taste and adjectives in general, processes of so-called *modulation* affect the meanings conventionally associated to expressions uttered metaphorically or metonymically. Accordingly, for each new context of utterance, a sentence is assigned different truth-conditions depending on which modulation is at hand.

Within TCP, the relevance-theoretic approach to language and communication (henceforth RT) is particularly important insofar as it encapsulates crucial elements of the contemporary contextualist debate in the philosophy of language, but it also has its own theoretical features. In particular, contrary to other contextualist proposals, the theory stresses the role of inferential mechanisms in the determination of truth-conditional contents – in contrast with associative processes described by other accounts like Recanati’s –, and the intervention of implicatures during this process, and not just after it has been accomplished.<sup>1</sup>

If TCP’s predictions are right, we should make room for a number of adjustments to our conception of language and communication. In a nutshell, these adjustments would amount to recognising that:

- (i) Besides functioning as evidential factors in the derivation of an utterance’s implicatures, contextual factors are crucial to determining its content (and not only the content of demonstratives and indexicals), and therefore to fixing its truth-conditions via modulation and other pragmatic processes;

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, RT is a *radical* version of contextualism, in contrast with more moderate forms that do not subscribe to this point.

- (ii) The composition of an utterance's content, metaphorical or otherwise, is not just the fruit of bottom-up processes but also of top-down influences (in a motto, pragmatics intrudes semantics).
- (iii) Metaphors do not form a natural kind; instead, they lie on a continuum with more literal utterances.
- (iv) Metaphors do have truth-conditions in a primary sense and, therefore, are normally asserted by the speakers.<sup>2</sup>

These points seem to have some 'revolutionary' flavour. If, in the light of the hypotheses TCP make, metaphor really turns out to be theoretically indistinguishable from other literal uses, then many tenets of truth-conditional semantics, as broadly taken, should be abandoned, making the whole enterprise a doubtful theoretical operation. One of these tenets is, I think, particularly important. It concerns the compositionality of language, i.e., the idea that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of its constituent parts and their mode of combination (and nothing else). If this principle, whose nature will be investigated in the next chapter, were judged as unreliable, then semantics would lose much of its traditional appeal.

Given the centrality of TCP within the contemporary philosophy of language, I have decided to give it particular attention, thus opting to have two chapters instead of one: in this chapter, I present the main ideas of TCP, including RT. In the final section, I will focus on the RT's account of metaphorical interpretation. In the next chapter, I will present my main counterarguments to TCP and, in particular, will focus on some linguistic evidence against the contextualist treatment of metaphor. One sort of evidence which

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<sup>2</sup> 'Normally' in the sense that they are asserted *directly*, and therefore are neither to be taken as indirect speech acts of some sort, nor to be made rely on the presence of paraphrases for their assertability (See Chapter 3, § 4, for a criticism of this model).

contextualists account find difficult to systematise concerns VP-ellipsis and anaphora in metaphorical settings. In this I will mainly follow Stern's discussion (2000, 2006), although it will turn out that I take distance from his semantic explanation of the phenomenon. The reader will have to wait for Chapter 7 to see my own proposal, which is more in line with recent developments in relativistic semantics.

## **2. Truth-conditional Pragmatics**

### **2. 1 The Fregean Premise.**

It was Frege who, about one hundred years ago, presented the issue I will be focusing on in this section, and which is nowadays highly discussed both in the philosophy of language and linguistics literature. The idea is that, roughly speaking, there are thoughts whose completion requires someone to fill in conceptual material into the propositional forms associated to the sentences used to convey such thoughts.<sup>3</sup> To fully understand how this works, let's do some basic Fregean semantic analysis, which I will use as a toy model for my discussion to come.

Frege's original view (1892b) is that a sentence expresses a thought if and only if each expression in the sentence is endowed with a sense that, when composed with the other senses, form this thought.<sup>4</sup> In turn a thought, and only a thought, is something 'for

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<sup>3</sup> Frege (1918 [1997: 15]): 'Thus the contents of a sentence often go beyond the thoughts expressed by it. But the opposite often happens too, that the mere wording, which can be grasped by writing or the gramophone does not suffice for the expression of the thought.' In the paragraph immediately before this passage Frege had just recognised the phenomenon of conventional implicature, although he used the metaphor of 'colouring' to name it.

<sup>4</sup> There is a problem lurking in the way I have put Frege's thought. 'Form' is ambiguous between two readings: it may have a transitive form, in which case it means 'create' or it may be intransitive, in which case it means 'shape'. If the

which the question of truth arises' (1918 [1997: 11]). Given these two premises, the Fregean picture is as follows: first of all, we start with predicates, 'unsaturated' entities that need to be completed by the right kind of entities, in this case objects.<sup>5</sup> For instance, the predicate 'is made of wood' may be represented as a first-order concept, i.e., a function whose argument can only be taken by objects. In symbols:

(1)     *Made of wood* ( ).

The brackets indicate that the predicate requires completion by an object of the appropriate type.<sup>6</sup> When we want to consider whether there is in reality something which is made of wood or not, we consider an object, for instance the chair I am sitting in whilst writing, and check whether this object 'saturates' the predicate.<sup>7</sup> The result of this operation is a full-blown proposition, which I have below indicated by enclosing the now saturated predicate with pointy brackets:

(2)     <*Made of wood* (chair<sub>i</sub>)>.<sup>8</sup>

The Fregean semantics ends up claiming that the proposition (or thought) which is now expressed refers to another kind of object, the Truth or the Falsity. In symbols:

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sense is 'create' then the resulting conception of compositionality is at odds with Frege's adherence to his 'contextuality principle,' the principle according to which only in the context of a sentence words have meaning (See Janssen 2012 for a discussion of Frege's views on compositionality).

<sup>5</sup> Second-order concepts, like quantifiers, are instead functions from first-order concepts.

<sup>6</sup> I take that abstract objects would not be the proper type of object to saturate such function. Sortal restrictions should be implicitly in force here.

<sup>7</sup> In contrast an object is, for Frege, semantically saturated in that it does not require any completion. The idea of saturation is discussed by Frege in 'Über Begriff und Gegenstand' (1892a).

<sup>8</sup> The subscript 'i' indexes the noun phrase to the salient chair of the context of utterance.

- (3)  $\langle \textit{Made of wood} (\textit{chair}_i) \rangle = \textit{T}$  iff The salient chair is made of wood.
- (4)  $\langle \textit{Made of wood} (\textit{chair}_i) \rangle = \textit{F}$  iff The salient chair is not made of wood.

Leaving the issue of what kind of objects the Truth and the Falsity are, this semantic account works so long as no elements of indexicality are considered. However, when we consider the question concerning which thought sentences containing indexical elements (e.g., tense predicates, locational adverbs like ‘here’ and ‘there’ and temporal adverbs like ‘yesterday’ or ‘tomorrow’, pronouns) express, this procedure does not suffice to deliver the result expected. In other words, the assignment of a truth-value for an indexical sentence is not possible *tout court*, for no ‘eternal thought’ is expressed by sentences containing indexicals.<sup>9</sup> Hence, sentences which do not express complete propositions pose a problem to those who, like Frege, strive to justify a whole body of knowledge (in his case, mathematical knowledge<sup>10</sup>) by appealing to a formal system in which logical proofs based on valid inferences can be carried out.

Thus Frege claims that for the purposes of doing logic, there cannot be thoughts which are incomplete, in the sense of not being fully specified. The question of truth, in fact, does not admit degrees, and therefore half thoughts have to be considered as not thoughts at all. Consequently, a sentence like ‘Today it is raining’

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<sup>9</sup> And, arguably, even when each indexical element of an indexical sentence is assigned a precise extension, the contents expressed by the two sentences, i.e., the indexical sentence and the eternalized one, are different in that the indexical feature gets lost in the latter.

<sup>10</sup> Frege’s original interest was in the conceptual justification of mathematical knowledge (see Currie 1982 in this regard), while he then moved to a different project, i.e. the project of reducing arithmetic to logic, giving rise to a programme which has since then been called logicism (Wright 1983).



does not express a complete thought by itself because of the presence of the indexical ‘today’, whose contribution for Frege (i.e., the sense which the expression contributes to the proposition expressed by an utterance of the sentence) varies from context to context. In order for an utterance of this sentence to express a complete proposition it must be completed by a sense for ‘today’. Senses are, in fact, for Frege stable and eternal. In particular we may consider, in Fregean terms, an indexical like ‘today’ to be a function from the sense each of us may associate with the day in which the sentence is uttered to the day at hand. Since functions are characteristically unsaturated for Frege (i.e., they require completion), the propositional function associated with such kind of sentences will deliver different truth-values when evaluated relative to different contexts.

Now, there are inescapable problems with such a view, especially concerning the exact nature of the semantic contribution of an indexical. First of all, if thoughts or propositions are the kinds of objects that are truth-evaluable, and these are constituted by senses, then the proposition expressed by me, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2012 in Nottingham, will be different from the proposition expressed by Greg Currie on the same day, in the same location. Since we attribute different senses to ‘today’ (I think of today as my ex girlfriend’s birthday, Greg Currie may think of today as the day in which he has to finish his paper), we therefore end up expressing different contents. But if context provides such a messy contribution, it is very difficult to explain the systematicity inherent in our uses of indexicals, and the intuition that I and Greg Currie have said the same thing, i.e., referred to the same day.<sup>11</sup> The problem is, of course, in Frege’s idea that thoughts are composed by senses, when it is clear that in order to understand the

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Perry (1977 [1997: 699]).

propositions expressed by indexical utterances we need to supply objects (e.g. days, speakers, locations, etc.) instead.

Secondly, notice how context enters twice into this picture: as the determinant of the utterance's content and as the circumstance at which the content is evaluated, where the latter should be intended as the particular sense each of us associates with the indexical in question. Frege does not distinguish these two components and, as a result, he goes on to say (1918 [1997: 24]) that the circumstance enters into the content. Let's call this assumption *the Fregean Premise* (FP) – it will in fact have that role in my successive presentation of TCP. However, there is a clear sense in which circumstances are external factors and are therefore neither linguistic nor conceptual. This is a serious problem for Frege since it makes his system unable to account for the 'essential' element of indexicality present in indexical sentences.<sup>12</sup> In other words, if an utterance of the sentence 'It is raining today' expresses the thought that it is raining on my ex girlfriend's birthday, then it is unclear how you should evaluate my utterance tomorrow. Would you evaluate it as the proposition that it was raining on my ex girlfriend's birthday? Clearly this new thought does not preserve the robust sense in which an utterance of a sentence like 'It is raining today', when evaluated the following day, must be translated into 'It was raining yesterday', so as to preserve the element of indexicality which was essential to it.<sup>13</sup>

Taking  $v$  and  $n$  to be variables ranging over circumstances, FP can be thus formulated:

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<sup>12</sup> Perry (1979) is a locus classicus.

<sup>13</sup> The conclusion is, according to Perry (1977 [1997: 706]), that 'there is no reason to believe we are on each occasion each equipped with some nondemonstrative equivalent of the demonstratives we use and understand.' This point has, I think, an important analogy with metaphor in that it is difficult to believe we are on each occasion each equipped with some nonmetaphorical equivalent of the metaphors we use and understand. I already criticized arguments to the effect that it is possible to essentially paraphrase metaphors, but I will come back on this point again in the next chapters.

- (i) An utterance  $u$  of a sentence  $s$  expresses the proposition  $\langle s, v \rangle$  in  $c$ .
- (ii) An utterance  $u'$  of the same sentence expresses the proposition  $\langle s, n \rangle$  in  $c'$ .
- (iii) Therefore,  $\langle s, v \rangle$  may be true in  $c''$ , while  $\langle s, n \rangle$  false, or vice versa.

In other words, although  $u$  and  $u'$  are type-identical, in virtue of being instantiated in two different contexts, i.e.,  $c$  and  $c'$ , they express different contents, i.e.,  $\langle s, v \rangle$  and  $\langle s, n \rangle$ , which can be assigned distinct truth-values when evaluated relative to another context, say  $c''$ . It follows from this that content variation entails variation of truth-values (and vice versa). This argument is crucial to the kind of contextualism I am assessing in this chapter. It will also have important implications for my account of metaphor, which rejects it.

## **2. 2 Contextualism.**

Frege's approach has been enormously important for two reasons: first of all, it was the first semantic account proposed for indexical languages (and it doesn't matter if successive work<sup>14</sup> has outclassed it); secondly, and most importantly, it contains some of the features of contemporary contextualism. We can, in fact, deem contextualism, and in particular its more recent variant TCP, as the theory to which a generalisation of Frege's ideas apply. For instance, Recanati says:

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<sup>14</sup> See Kaplan (1989). His account will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In the case of indexicals, the propositional contribution made by an expression depends upon the context and is not fully determined by the (context-independent) meaning which the expression (type) possesses in virtue of the semantic rules of the language. Contextualism is the philosophical position which generalizes that feature to ‘ordinary’ expressions. It holds that, in general (i.e. not only in the special case of indexicals), the propositional contribution of an expression is not fully determined by the invariant meaning conventionally associated with the expression type but depends upon context. (Recanati 2010: 17)

In short, there is more to an expression’s propositional contribution to the truth-conditions of a sentence in a given context than its encoded linguistic meaning,<sup>15</sup> and this applies not just to indexicals but also to a whole class of non-indexical items. In the next section I will offer a comprehensive list of such items, and see what Recanati means exactly with his claim.

It must be noticed that, in the same passage, Recanati distinguishes two versions of contextualism, a moderate one and a radical one. *Moderate contextualism* holds that the linguistic meaning of a non-indexical expression ‘needs not be’ what contributes to the proposition expressed by an utterance of a non-indexical sentence (under the pretence that there are non-indexical sentences), whereas *radical contextualism* says that it can never contribute to such a proposition since contextual factors enter predominantly into its determination.

Now, I think that Recanati’s distinction is slightly misleading because even the defenders of semantics, or at least of a certain type of semantics which may be called parametric, may grant that context is absolutely central to the determination of content. What

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<sup>15</sup> This is so even if you take a more liberal view about the sense of ‘conventional’ in force here, which also include an utterance’s illocutionary force and the utterance’s conventionally implicated contents (see García-Carpintero 2001: 107).

differs between radical contextualism and this other version of contextualism is the way context is said to contribute to truth-evaluable contents. For radical contextualists contextual factors help determine the content of our utterances in an uncontrolled, i.e., non-parametric, way. What I mean by this can be illustrated by considering the following utterance:

(5) It is raining.

Since the seminal work of Perry (1993) philosophers of language and linguists have claimed that this kind of utterance is a prototypical case involving an *unarticulated constituent* (UC). An UC is an element of an utterance which does not appear in the grammatical surface of the sentence uttered, but which, nevertheless, is represented at some level or other in order for the utterance of that sentence to express a truth-evaluable proposition. The idea is that since it is a metaphysical fact that an event of raining must occur in some particular location, (5) must be provided with a location in order to express a thought.<sup>16</sup>

Stanley (see the essays in Stanley 2007) has defended the truth-conditional semantic view that (5) contains a variable for location at the level of logical form (LF). Arguably, the presence of such parameter in form of a variable in the LF is traceable to its being bound by high-order quantifiers appearing in immediately precedent clauses, as in (6):

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<sup>16</sup> Objection: well, certainly it is a metaphysical fact that an utterance of ‘Mary danced’ presupposes a location of Mary’s dancing. Why then don’t we need the same treatment for this utterance, and postulate UCs? Recanati’s reply (2002: 306) is that we need to differentiate between two senses in which the requirement of UCs must be intended: *metaphysical* and *communicational*. Although both utterances of ‘It is raining’ and ‘Mary danced’ require that there is an UC for location in the metaphysical sense, from a communicational point of view only an utterance of ‘it is raining’ requires it to be part of the total package of information that constitutes the speaker’s meaning.

- (6) Every time John lights up a cigarette, it rains.

Here, the most intuitive truth-conditions for this utterance are that it rains at the location where John is situated. Whether we quantify over contexts, situations or what you have, the intuitive reading will always be one in which the raining event occurs simultaneously to the class of contexts, situations or what have you that we have quantified over.

However, Recanati (2002, 2010) has insisted that we should resist the kind of conclusion drawn by Stanley in favour of truth-conditional semantics (henceforth TCS). According to Recanati, the essential feature of UCs is not their ‘boundability’, and therefore their being variables at the level of the LF, but their *optionality*. In other words, it is sometimes optional for someone to represent an unarticulated constituent at the level of thought since this is not mandated by the sentence’s LF. To show this, Recanati appeals to an example in which detectors have been placed around the earth. The story tells that the earth is in a phase of drought, and events of raining have become extremely rare. Now, imagine a light starts to flash, and someone in the laboratory says: ‘It is raining’. In this scenario, her utterance would be taken to mean that ‘it is raining in some place or other’, without requiring the speaker, and even the hearer, to think of a particular place.<sup>17</sup>

The availability of an indefinite existential reading for utterances like (5) seems to pose troubles for TCS, or at least to the parametric version defended by Stanley. The details of this debate are beyond the scope of this chapter (see Zeman 2011 for a nice overview), but it is worth noticing that the two following points

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<sup>17</sup> People have tried to resist Recanati’s intuitions by saying that the utterance of ‘it is raining’ in this scenario should be counted as having a maximal location implicitly assigned by the context: ‘the whole earth’ (Stanley 2005a; Neale 2007) or ‘the territory’ (Martí 2006).

constitute essential features of the contextualist approach to language and thought proposed by truth-conditional pragmatics:

*TCP1.* The determination of truth-conditional content is a matter of optional pragmatic processes (in a sense yet to be explained).

*TCP2.* The level appropriate for the fixation of an utterance's truth-conditions is neither linguistic nor extra-linguistic (or a combination of both), but conceptual, i.e., it concerns the level of thought.

While I take both theses to be central to any account within TCP, I think that it is *TCP2* which essentially characterises the whole truth-conditional pragmatic enterprise (see also Carston 2002: 74). For it seems to me that TCP may appropriately be considered as an intentionalist approach to the study of language and communication, and as such it seeks to reduce semantic phenomena to intentional constructs of some kind. The reader may also notice the similarity between this approach and Frege's philosophical view, in that both take the realm of thought to be the privileged object of investigation.<sup>18</sup>

To anticipate, I think TCP is wrong in claiming that the whole evaluation of truth-conditions lies at the cognitive level. Whether or not propositions are mental constructions, and whichever internal composition they turn out to have, the connection between linguistic and extra-linguistic factors need not be curtailed, in the way TCP does by only considering the role of the mental in the explanation of semantic data. In Chapter 7 I will explore and defend this last claim, showing that a proper distinction between

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<sup>18</sup> My point concerning this conceptual connection should not make us forget that Frege was primarily interested in very different sorts of projects (See fn. 10 for references). His interest in language itself came later and, in any case, his concerns are not comparable to those of TCP. Also, it should be noticed that according to Frege, thoughts are abstract entities and not mental ones.

content and circumstance of evaluation has to be in force if we want to properly understand metaphor, and give it the right place in language and thought. For now, I need to further investigate TCP and the arguments offered in its support.

### **3. Recanati on what-is-said**

Recanati's contribution to the philosophy of language has the marks of a systematic and coherent defence of TCP. The writings I will mostly be focusing on in my discussion of Recanati's ideas are those he has defended in the last decade (Recanati 2001; 2002; 2004; 2010), but early versions of his particular contextualist account have been proposed since the early 1990s. It must also be recognised that Recanati has interestingly explored other approaches and he has recently defended a form of relativism, which he calls 'moderate' (Recanati 2007). I will discuss this other approach of his in chapter six. Here I am interested in spelling out Recanati's idea that the meaning of an expression is endowed with a certain semantic potential.

#### **3.1 Saturation vs. Free Enrichment.**

We already saw that Recanati claims that the true hallmark of UCs is their optionality: an UC is not a linguistically mandatory requirement in the interpretation of an utterance since there are possible contexts where no such provision is demanded to make sense of the sentence uttered. Recanati extends this feature to all those cases that belong to the category that he dubs 'free enrichment'. *Free enrichment* (henceforth FE) is a kind of optional, i.e., not mandatory, pragmatic process in which a propositional function is enriched by contextual factors, so as to determine a



truth-evaluable proposition. The optionality of FE contrasts with the mandatory nature of another process that Recanati considers to be fully pragmatic, specifically ‘saturation’. *Saturation* is the process by means of which a contextual value is assigned to the argument place of an indexical or demonstrative. Such process is mandatory insofar as it is the LF of the sentence itself that requires the assignment of a value to each of its slots.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, there are no contexts in which saturation can be dispensed with, but there are contexts in which FE is dispensed with without loss of information relevant to the truth evaluation of an utterance.

Now, someone could think that all cases of UCs are of the ‘free enrichment’ variety. However, Recanati (2002) distinguishes two types of UCs: A-type and B-type. B-type UCs are actually mandated by the LF of a sentence containing them since an utterance of that sentence would not allow for the full determination of a proposition without one of these UCs being provided. In this category fall all those cases for which Bach uses the term ‘completion’ (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of Bach’s notion of ‘implicature’). These cases may be distinguished in two ways, depending on whether the unarticulatedness is merely syntactical or parametric:

<i>Syntactic unarticulatedness</i>	<i>Parametric unarticulatedness</i>
Jim completed. (what?)	Those shoes are cheap/old/small.
Jim is ready. (for what?)	(relative to what?)
Jim prefers blond girls. (to what?)	Mary is talented (in which respect?)
Jim’s intelligence is not sufficient.	Everybody is present. (in relation to what?)

<sup>19</sup> On this role of context within a semantic theory, see Stanley and King (2005 [Stanley 2007: 138-9]) and Predelli (2005: chapter one).

(for what?)	Mary came too. (in addition to whom?)
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According to Recanati, it would be a mistake to conflate B-type UCs with cases of FE because B-type UCs are linguistically mandated by the LF of their sentences. In other words, the utterances of the sentences appearing in the table do not express a truth-evaluable content unless some material is added.<sup>20</sup> In the case of syntactic unarticulatedness, this material is purely syntactical and therefore straightforwardly linguistic. In the case of parametric unarticulatedness, the material is more conceptual, having to do with the provision of comparison classes or the restriction of domain quantifiers.

In contrast, A-type UCs are completely free, in the sense that there is nothing in the LF that mandates a syntactic completion or conceptual provision of extra-material. Any utterance of a sentence like ‘it is raining’ does, for Recanati, belong to such a class. Moreover, as far as the provision of a location is concerned, the lexical entry for ‘to rain’ would be identical to that for verbs like ‘to sleep,’ while dissimilar to that of verbs like ‘to arrive’, in which a slot for a location variable is instead marked:

- (7)  $[[\text{rain}]] = \lambda e [\text{RAINING}(e)]$   
 $[[\text{sleep}]] = \lambda e \lambda a [\text{SLEEPING}(e), \text{AGENT}(a, e)]$   
 $[[\text{arrive}]] = \lambda e \lambda a \lambda l [\text{ARRIVING}(e), \text{AGENT}(a, e), \text{LOCATION}(a, l)].$

Since the need for UCs of this ‘strong’ (i.e., not mandated) variety is purely a contextual matter, how does Recanati intend to preserve

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<sup>20</sup> With the exception, I think, of ‘Mary came too’, which is truth-evaluable irrespective of the conventional implicature triggered by ‘too’.

the intuition that, in most cases, a location is needed to evaluate an utterance of a sentence containing a verb like ‘to rain’? It is, I think, at this point that the *Fregean Premise*, as presented in the previous section, comes back with all its dialectical force. FP is the idea that a circumstance is not something external to the propositional contribution of an utterance, but part of it. Recanati (2002: 319) finds this premise attractive and thus attempts to formalise it in his account. Thus, in the case at hand he characterises the circumstance as a relational function, i.e., a function that takes a property, e.g., the property of raining, into an  $n$ -ary + 1 property like *Raining\_\_in* (*l*). In other words, a relational function is a function that transforms an  $n$ -ary relation into an  $n + 1$ -ary relation, where the  $n^{\text{th}} + 1$  argument is the circumstance (Recanati 2002: 319). Recanati gives a number of examples, from adverbs (e.g., ‘too’) to prepositional phrases (e.g., ‘in Paris’), which semantically seem to work in the way these variadic functions do.<sup>21</sup> Formally:

$$\text{Circ}_{\text{location}} (P(x_1, \dots, x_n)) = P^*(x_1, \dots, x_n, l)$$

[where *P* is the predicate to which the variadic function ‘*Circ<sub>location</sub>*’ applies,  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  are its arguments, and *P\** is the new predicate whose arguments are  $x_1, \dots, x_n$  and the location *l*.]

An example of how this work is the following: take an utterance of ‘It is raining in Nottingham’:

(7) It is raining in Nottingham.

The semantic function of ‘in Nottingham’ is to provide a variadic function which modifies the acidity of the predicate ‘is raining’, so as to determine a new predicate:

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<sup>21</sup> For further discussion and references see Zeman (2011: 87ff).

(8)  $\text{Circ}_{\text{location:Nottingham}}(\text{rain}) = \text{Rain\_in Nottingham.}$ <sup>22</sup>

As I said, it is not my intention to fully engage with Recanati's proposal concerning unarticulated constituents. However, before presenting Recanati's further meaning taxonomy, I wish to raise a point concerning what I have been discussing so far. It seems to me that the evidence for Recanati's distinction between A-type and B-type UCs is not that clear. It is, I think, possible to imagine scenarios which do not require the provision of B-type UCs in the form of comparison classes or restrictions of quantifier domains. For instance, consider Mary, who is a very talented girl. You may ask: what is her particular talent? My answer is that Mary is talented in basically every human activity, whether or not she actually exercises a particular one. Based on my knowledge of her, I could certainly go on to offer a detailed list of her talents. But my assertion is stronger. As far as I can figure out, if Mary had enough time to participate in a particular activity, she would excel at it. So I am entitled to think and assert that she is talented, full stop. If this is so, then there does not seem to be a strong reason to take B-type UC to be actually mandated by LF alone.

Recanati may reply that, after all, this is not a serious problem for contextualists but it would still be one for truth-conditional semanticists à la Stanley since these examples show that there is no variable in the LF of these sentences that needs to be saturated. Granted, these data would still be compatible with some non-parametric version of minimal semantics (such as Cappelen and Lepore 2005), in which propositions are allowed to be fully expressed by utterances of sentences containing elements that Recanati groups under the category of B-type UCs.

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<sup>22</sup> I leave to the reader the exercise of finding a solution to Stanley's cases of bound readings by adopting this strategy.

However, this kind of minimalism remains an odd view because it maintains that even in the presence of syntactic unarticulatedness, full-blown propositions are expressed. This cannot be right, for if it were we should get rid of an important connection between semantics and a syntactic criterion, namely, the ‘ $\theta$ -criterion.’ The principle can be stated in this way:

*$\theta$ -criterion.* Every phrase appearing in subject or complement position must bear a thematic role, and every thematic role determined by a phrase must be assigned to a subject or complement phrase. (Larson & Segal 1995: 97)

For instance, ‘complete’ describes an action involving two arguments (x, y), therefore it assigns two thematic roles: an agent and a theme (contrast with ‘give’ which assigns three thematic roles: an agent, a theme, and a goal). If a thematic role does not appear in the sentence surface, it must be provided by the hearer in his interpretation. The reason why a thematic role does not necessarily appear on the sentence surface is, I believe, purely pragmatic, we just lean on all sorts of shortcuts in communication whenever it is possible (See Bach 2006 on this point). Of course, the same kind of argument applies to restrictions of quantifiers domains and provisions of comparison classes, we speakers just do not bother to fully articulate them since we rely on the hearers’ tacit knowledge (See Carpintero 2001 for an elaboration of this view).

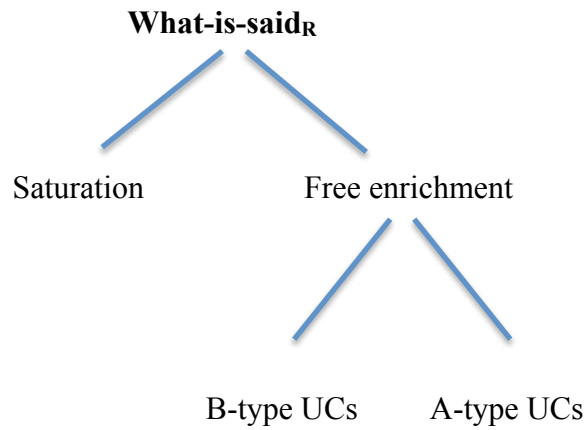
Thus, the form of minimalism defended by Cappelen and Lepore (2005) is, to borrow a Recanati title (Recanati 2006), a crazy theoretical view and I won’t be trying to defend it. The question is, however, whether other solutions may be explored and, actually, the answer is positive: in the last chapter I will argue that relativism can have the cake (accounting for all forms of UCs) and

eat it too (without appealing to additional variables in the LF of sentences).

Secondly, there is I think an issue concerning Recanati's semantics which has to do with what I called *the Fregean Premise*. If circumstances are variadic functions in the way characterised by Recanati, then they will take contents as input and get new contents as output. However, on the traditional Kaplanian view of semantics (Kaplan 1989), circumstances are functions from contents to extensions. Whether or not this move is functional to Recanati's contextualist account, he should motivate it more clearly. However, his account is not very clear as to the exact nature of these variadic functions, and as to how they are generated or supposed to modify the input property/relation to get the output property/relation in case of missing constituents. Like Frege, Recanati wants to preserve the intuition of what I will dub *propositional plenitude*: only full-blown propositions can be evaluated. However, what are the theoretical costs of allowing circumstances to enter into the propositions? Besides the problems already evinced in Frege's treatment of indexicality, in the next chapter I will argue that further problems can be found if we adhere to this sort of contextualism defended by Recanati and others.

Let's take stock now, and review the basic ideas of Recanati's picture discussed so far. We have two types of processes, *saturation* and *free enrichment*: the first consists in the assignment of contextual variables to indexicals, while the second has the form either of a provision of an UC or of a restriction/provision of a domain quantifier/comparison class. In the case of UCs, we have two types: B-type and A-type, the main difference being that the latter is of a 'strong', i.e., linguistically unconstrained, variety, while the former are only weakly 'free' in the sense that there is an actual input from the syntax/semantics of the sentences to the provision of an UC. Leaving aside my doubts on the necessity of

such a distinction, the resulting conception of what-is-said for Recanati, in short what-is-said<sub>R</sub>, is the following:



If we compare this first definition of What-is-said<sub>R</sub> with the notion of what-is-said given by Grice, it is immediately clear that we are dealing with a broadened conception here: what-is-said<sub>R</sub> is not limited to the content expressed by an utterance modulo its saturation, but also includes the class of its enrichments. This class contains two sub-classes: B-type unarticulated constituents, which are syntactically or semantically mandated, and A-type unarticulated constituents, which, in contrast, are completely free.

### 3. 2. Modulation

The picture just offered is not exhaustive. It lacks, in effect, an important aspect of Recanati's account. Such an aspect characterises the class of utterances that require some conceptual adjustment, namely, *modulation*, of lexical items. According to Recanati (2004, 2010), metonymy and metaphor are exemplars of modulation in that one or more items are subject to the hearer's adjustments of their encyclopaedic, stereotypical or definitional

features. The results of such conceptual operations are occasional meanings, which get into the truth-conditional content of an utterance. Like for UCs, modulation is an optional process; contrary to UCs, modulation does not provide additional constituents, but operates on the meaning of a word or expression. Accordingly, classic examples like

- (9) The ham-sandwich left without paying.
- (10) There is a lion in the square.

may be taken to mean, respectively,

- (9\*) The *client-who-ordered-a-ham-sandwich* left without paying.
- (10\*) There is a *statue-of-a-lion* in the square.
- (10\*\*) There is a *strong-man* in the square.

While (9) can be used only metonymically, (10) may have either a metonymical or a metaphorical interpretation. Interestingly, and contrary to what Recanati thinks, (10\*) and (10\*\*) do not seem to have much in common. (9\*) and (10\*) seem to be both derived from the same mechanisms providing B-type UCs, in which an input is given by the semantic system to articulate the propositional form associated to the sentences, so as to reach their full propositional completion.<sup>23</sup> In (10\*\*), in contrast, there is neither a syntactic completion of the proposition expressed by (10) nor a semantic rule that transforms the content expressed by ‘a lion’ into the resulting content ‘a strong man’ – for one thing, there is no

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Nogales (1999: 12)



semantic entailment that validates inferences to ‘lions are strong’ or ‘humans are lions’.<sup>24</sup>

Be that as it may, Recanati takes both the metonymical and metaphorical cases to implement some *modulation-functions*, which operate on the senses of some expressions to modify their conventionally encoded meanings. Formally:

$$(11) \quad F(\mu_{\Phi}) = \mu^*(\Phi)$$

(11) describes a function  $F$  (relative to context  $C$ ) whose argument is the meaning  $\mu$  associated with a certain expression  $\sigma$ , and whose value is a new interpretation  $\mu^*$  of  $\sigma$  (where  $\mu^*(\Phi) \neq \mu(\Phi)$ , i.e., the interpretation conventionally associated with  $\Phi$ ).

Finally, it is important to notice that cases that Grice would take to be conversational implicatures are now part of what-is-said<sub>R</sub>. For instance, consider these utterances:

(12) You’re not going to die. (*from that cut*)

(13) They married and had a child. (They married *and then* had a child)

According to Grice, an utterance of (12) conversationally implicates that the addressee is not going to die from the cut to his finger, while an utterance of (13) normally implicates that the subjects *first* married and *then* had a child. Instead Recanati takes (12) to be more akin to cases of FE, while (13) to cases of modulation (i.e., sense-extension).<sup>25</sup> All these examples, though, share something, namely their primary non-m-literal meanings, i.e.,

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<sup>24</sup> This poses the interesting theoretical question as to whether metaphor and metonymy belong to the same genus. Defenders of TCP think they do, for the same pragmatic mechanisms are active in their understanding.

<sup>25</sup> Carston (2002) provides a comprehensive case for the ‘enriched’ truth-conditionality of utterances like (11) and (12).

primarily communicated meanings that differ from the conventionally encoded meaning (t-meaning in Recanati's saying) in non-minimal ways.<sup>26</sup> Hence, we have here a theoretical choice which has important consequences for the study of metaphor. Metaphor, as other figurative uses, results now as being put on a par with other literal uses of language. In contrast, 'real' cases of non-literality are said to be conversational implicatures and indirect speech-acts, whose *secondary* pragmatic character involves inferences from what is said to the speaker's meaning. In this sense, only secondary pragmatic processes are, for Recanati, fully inferential, while primary pragmatic processes are associative processes which determine modulation functions for lexical items.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.3 The 'Availability Principle'

What justifies this very broad notion of 'literality'? According to Recanati, it is justified by a principle, which he calls the 'Availability Principle':

[W]hat is said must be analysed in conformity to the intuitions shared by those who fully understand the utterance – typically the speaker and the hearer, in a normal conversational setting. (Recanati 2004: 14)

The principle has clearly a phenomenological flavour: it is up to the hearer to determine whether a given utterance is true or false in virtue of the content she grasps. On this basis, if a contextual feature is relevant to the truth-conditions of an utterance then it is

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Recanati (2001; 2004). See also Bezuidenhout (2002: 111-2).

<sup>27</sup> I have already expressed doubts about this 'phenomenological' characterisation in chapter two, so I won't be repeating myself. The reader should be here interested in the taxonomy provided by Recanati, more than in his phenomenological considerations in its support.

part of what is said. Moreover, the principle provides justification for all those cases that today philosophers tend to call ‘Travis scenarios’.<sup>28</sup> A Travis scenario can be described as a pair of situations ( $s \neq s'$ , though there is a third global situation  $s''$  such that both  $s$  and  $s'$  are physically identical to  $s''$ , but different in some contextual aspects surrounding their physical environment) in which an utterance of the same sentence is made, leading to the assignment of distinct truth-values (suppose that in  $C$  an utterance  $u$  of  $s$  is true, while in  $C'$  an utterance  $u'$  of  $s$  is false).<sup>29</sup> If this happens, then we have evidence – so the contextualist argues – that different propositions have been expressed and that some elements in the sentence uttered is responsible for the variation of truth-values.

Can we agree with the contextualist conclusion that the meaning of almost any linguistic expression is context-dependent in the sense of contributing different contents in different contexts? With this question we reach, I think, the very core of the current debate surrounding the semantics/pragmatics distinction. Without presuming to be exhaustive, I propose to consider three possible answers to that question:

- A. Yes, all those linguistic expressions that are usable in a Travis scenario are context-dependent.
- B. Yes, all those linguistic expressions that are usable in a Travis scenario are context-dependent, but not in the sense of A. Those expressions are instead ambiguous between

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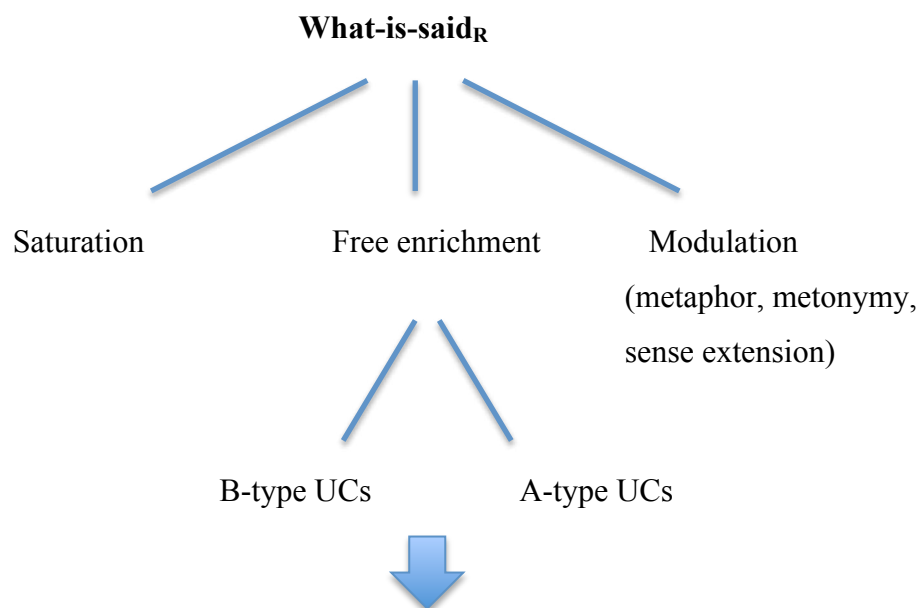
<sup>28</sup> Travis (1985) was, of course, the first to have brought the philosophers’ attention to them.

<sup>29</sup> The classic example discussed by Travis, which I will discuss in the next chapters, is the so-called ‘Pia’s case’. Pia has a maple whose leaves are red, but she decides to paint them green. Then, “intuitively”, an utterance of ‘The leaves are green’ is true in a situation in which a photographer needs to take a picture of a tree with green leaves, whereas an utterance of the same sentence will be false in the presence of a botanist. The conclusion contextualists draw from this kind of examples is that meaning radically underdetermines truth-conditions.

different readings, which themselves are context-dependent in the way indexical expressions are (so in principle amenable to semantic treatment).

- C. No, all those linguistic expressions that are usable in a Travis scenario are not context-dependent. They do not contribute different contents in different contexts. However, they are context-sensitive in the sense that they are sensitive to features of the circumstances of evaluation, and therefore end up assigning different extensions relative to different contexts.

In this chapter, I am mainly focusing on the A-type answer, which characterises contextualism as the philosophical approach according to which the majority of linguistic expressions are context-dependent. In the last chapter, after criticising an account of metaphor (i.e., Stern's) modelled on a B-type answer, I will defend a C-type approach. Let me now conclude this section by completing Recanati's conception of what-is-said with the following diagram.



Secondary Pragmatic Processes  
(implicatures, indirect speech-acts, irony)

Although the diagram may be accepted by any contextualist theory subscribing to TCP, there is an important caveat: the picture still adheres to the traditional view that pragmatic processes in the strong sense of Recanati's secondary pragmatic processes are the final output of semantic (and, of course, syntactic) inputs. RT, which I am going to assess in the next section, challenges this view, claiming that the pragmatic level of implicatures has a backward direction of influence on 'semantics', helping inferentially determine the truth-conditional content of an utterance, which should be supplanted by the relevance-theoretic notion of 'explicature'.

#### **4. Relevance Theory**

In this section I shall introduce the theory which goes under the name 'relevance theory' (RT) after Sperber and Wilson (1986 [1995]). Although RT shares the basic assumptions of other truth-conditional pragmatic accounts, it emphasises the inferential aspect of communication and meaning construction. It is also important because it offers the most comprehensive account of metaphorical interpretation available nowadays within TCP.

I will split my discussion of RT in two halves. In this section I am interested in sketching the general picture of language and communication defended by the relevance theorists, trying also to connect their ideas to other versions of TCP like Recanati's. In the next section I will present the relevance-theoretic approach to metaphorical interpretation.

Historically, RT originated in the 1980s of the last century, in line with the emergence of other contextualist proposals such as Travis' and Recanati's. In the span of fifteen years, from the first edition of *Relevance* (Sperber & Wilson 1986) to the appearance of Carston's book *Thought and Utterances* (Carston 2002), relevance theorists have made important contributions in several sub-fields of pragmatics, challenging the Gricean taxonomy of implicatures<sup>30</sup> and providing new explanations of meta-cognitive aspects of communication, in which they include irony. An important contribution they have made is to have clearly shown the need for a distinction between irony and metaphor, which previous accounts, like Grice's, had conflated.<sup>31</sup> In my exposition I will mainly follow the material of a course in pragmatics and RT, which was run at the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, Oslo, in 2008. I was lucky enough to participate in the event, and to meet people like Wilson and Carston, who introduced me to their theory. I shall divide my discussion of RT in four main sub-sections concerning the following issues: (4.1) whether language is governed by specific norms; (4.2) whether the model of language understanding based on some notion of 'code' is appropriate; (4.3) what role 'explicatures' have in the relevance theoretic framework; finally (4.4), what the significance of the claim 'meaning underdetermines truth-conditions' is.

#### **4. 1 Is language governed by norms?**

Before going to assess RT, I wish to look back at the history of analytic philosophy, and mention a work that has some important

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, relevance theorists do not believe in the existence of conventional implicatures, which they take to be higher-order explicatures.

<sup>31</sup> They have shown this by appealing to a distinction between descriptive and interpretive uses of language. See the next section for a brief discussion of the distinction.

connections with what will follow. Thus, an important date to remember is Unger's publication in 1975 of *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism*, which, according to some (DeRose 2009), is a crucial work in the history of contextualism. There Unger proposed to consider the term 'knowledge' as an absolute term, a term whose semantics is inflexible in that it does not admit degrees of application, but purports to denote 'an absolute *limit*' (Unger 1975: 55). Terms that are absolute in this sense are, for instance, 'empty,' 'full,' 'square,' 'flat,' etc. Context, according to Unger, plays an important pragmatic role in determining how we are actually able to use those terms, and Unger himself sketched a number of pragmatic principles to that effect.

Now, it is interesting to observe that until very recently, whenever a philosopher was reluctant to engage with a particular theoretical discourse, she had two options: either to follow an error-theory for that discourse – the option defended by Unger in the case of knowledge-ascriptions –, or to adopt a Gricean stance and distinguish two levels of contents, the level of semantic content of an utterance and the level of implicated content, that is, what the speaker intends to further convey by uttering a sentence having that semantic content.<sup>32</sup> It was a great merit of Sperber and Wilson, I think, to have shown that other options could be profitably explored. One of these options was going to be their RT, whose principles were in direct opposition to the philosophical trends of those times.

One such philosophical trend was to think that speakers follow maxims of truthfulness or literalness. An example is given by Lewis, in his classic paper 'Languages and Language' (1975 [1983]). There Lewis responds to a hypothetical criticiser of his

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<sup>32</sup> On this point, see Stanley and King (2005 [Stanley 2007]). On Grice's philosophical background, see Carston (2002: first chapter).

idea that language has a stratified basis of conventions upon which human communication emerges:

*Objection:* Suppose the members of a population are untruthful in their language L more often than not, not because they lie, but because they go in heavily for irony, metaphor, hyperbole, and such. It is hard to deny that the language L is used by such a population.

*Reply:* I claim that these people are truthful in their language L, though they are not *literally truthful* in L. To be literally truthful in L is to be truthful in another language related to L, a language we can call literal-L. The relation between L and literal-L is as follows: a good way to describe L is to start by specifying literal-L and then to describe L as obtained by certain systematic departures from literal-L. This two-stage specification of L by way of literal-L may turn out to be much simpler than any direct specification of L.

*Objection:* Suppose they are often untruthful in L because they are not communicating at all. They are joking, or telling tall tales, or telling white lies as a matter of social ritual. In these situations, there is neither truthfulness nor truth in L. Indeed, it is common knowledge that there is not.

*Reply:* Perhaps I can say the same sort of thing about this non-serious language use as I did about non-literal language use. That is: their seeming untruthfulness in non-serious situations is untruthfulness not in the language L that they actually use, but only in a simplified approximation to L. We may specify L by first specifying the approximation language, then listing the signs and features of context by which non-serious use can be recognised, then specifying that when these signs or features are present, what would count as untruths in the approximation language do not count as such in L itself. Perhaps they are automatically true in L, regardless of the facts; perhaps they cease to count as indicative. (1983: 183)



Lewis concludes this passage, somehow unhappy, by indicating the two possible directions of analysis: on the one hand, we could consider non-serious uses as inevitable violations of the convention of the language. This can be tolerated because such violations occur only occasionally and do not create real problems to the definition of **LI** (literal language, approximately the language where a sentence meaning coincides with its truth-conditional content), which is strong enough to predict minimal deviations of truthfulness in **L**.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, we could define what it is for a communicator to be literally truthful in **L** (to say something which would approximate truth in **LI**) by reflecting on a hypothetical situation, in which what would be defined is instead what it is for a communicator to be untruthful in the complementary language of **L**, say **Anti-L**. Call the first option *conservative*, the second one *creative*.

Under the first option (the conservative one), we have to tacitly know an idealised language, **LI**, in order to have a term of comparison for how to use **L**; under the second option (the creative one), we become the users of a different language whenever we speak figuratively. The first option seems to entail that we have an internalised language, which functions as a mirror of the language we actually speak, whereas the second one dissects whatever we take to be a good approximation of, say, English into two languages, the approximately literal **L**<sup>34</sup> and the **Anti-L**, but, for the most part, it is hard to say exactly which one of them we are actually speaking.

Be that as it may, following these models, when an interpreter processes what a speaker expresses literally or metaphorically, she always unreflectively refers to an idealisation of the language,

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<sup>33</sup> We could consider the relation between **LI** and its approximations, to be ancestral such that, if **LI** and  $\{L_1, L_2, \dots, L_n\}$  are related to each other, then all the properties essential to **LI** are R-heredited by  $\{L_1, L_2, \dots, L_n\}$ .

<sup>34</sup> Supposedly, such a literal language could be identified with what Fodor (1975) calls the Language of Thought (LOT) or *Mentalese*.

either a literal–L or an anti–L, in order to understand the content the speaker is trying to get across. In general, literal language is measured in terms of strict effectiveness and informativeness, while figurativeness is taken to be either a departure from those ideals or as based on a quite distinct linguistic and communicative model with its own conventions.<sup>35</sup>

## 4. 2 Against the Code Model

Relevance theorists attack this picture from a cognitive point of view. According to them (See esp. Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995: chapter one]), the picture is inadequate because it presupposes a psychologically unrealistic model of communication based on some notion of code. A code is a system which pair messages to signals (SW 1986 [1995: 4), where a message is an internal representation and a signal is the external modification of an environment which can reach a communicating device from another. Knowledge of the syntactic and semantic rules inherent in the code are sufficient to allow one to ‘decode’ the message, i.e. to extract information from the signal. A hypothetical *Begriffsschrift* would instantiate this model, but, as Frege and Russell already knew, natural languages are far from even approximating that ideal. Linguistic communication does not, in fact, respect this ‘simple’ picture in that signals are massively disturbed by their surrounding environments, and therefore there is nothing that warrants a perfect decoding once they reach their destination. Now, according to relevance theorists, the main problem with philosophical accounts such as Grice’s and Lewis’ is that they both subscribe to this

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<sup>35</sup> Perhaps an example of the latter way of explaining figurativeness is Walton’s make-believe theory of metaphorical interpretation (1993 [2005]).

model, whereby the derive normative constraints on the explanation of figurative uses of language.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the first move made by relevance theorists to show that this model is inadequate is to claim that the notion of ‘code’ is unnecessary to define the practice of communication. It is not necessary since for each message conveyed by a coded signal, there are infinitely many ways in which the same message could be conveyed without using some code. For example, consider the following scenario:

(14) *A bee is approaching B.*

A: ‘Careful, a bee is approaching you.’

A takes B’s arm.

A emits a scream.

A totally disregards what B is saying, looking at the direction of the bee.

As you can see, there are many ways in which A may draw B’s attention to the approaching bee. Most of these ways are not coded, but lean on A’s behaviour to obtain the same effect reached by A’s utterance that the bee is approaching. The first conclusion relevance theorists draw from this kind of example is that communicative intentions (i.e., intentions to the effect that one has an informative intention) are not necessarily coded messages. Similarly, an informative intention to the effect that a set of assumptions holds does not require the use of a code, but can be

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<sup>36</sup> What distinguishes Lewis’ approach from Grice’s then? Wilson and Sperber (2002) argue that both see figurative meanings as generated by systematic departures from literal meanings. But Grice needs the level of literalness to account for all figurative cases in which some of his maxims have been violated or flouted. His analysis of figurativeness could be defined as *indirect*. According to Lewis, indeed, literalness is fundamental because it functions as a *meta-theoretical* level where it is possible to screen off literal uses from figurative ones in a theoretically predictable pure way.

instantiated by the activation of other inferential mechanisms. The second conclusion is that inferential processes, as the ones activated by A's behaviour, are quite as important for communicative purposes. In any case, whether we intend to communicate something by using some code or just by activating inferential processes in our interlocutors, our intentions, as well as those of our interlocutors, are tuned to the maximisation of relevance. From this it follows:

*Cognitive principle of relevance:* Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.

In other words, cognitive systems like ours are attracted to relevant stimuli, namely, stimuli the processing of which are likely to hold positive cognitive effects.<sup>37</sup>

Crucial to this picture is that a certain assumption, or set of assumptions is mutually manifest to both speakers and hearers, in the sense of being cognitively accessible to them.<sup>38</sup> According to RT, this is most frequently the case since speakers and hearers share cognitive environments, i.e., environments in which a highly relevant set of assumptions is available to them, which are also ordered in terms of their accessibility (from the most accessible to the least accessible ones).

The second move relevance theorists make against the model of communication presented in § 4. 1 is to show that truthfulness is an inessential property of communication. In fact, if communication is successful whenever speakers and hearers exchange relevant

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<sup>37</sup> These may take the form of warranted strengthening of certain assumptions, or warranted revision of them.

<sup>38</sup> In this sense, this model rejects the so-called 'mutual knowledge hypothesis' (Lewis 1969, Schiffer 1972), based on the idea that in order for a communication to be possible there must be a common ground of assumptions shared by the participants in a conversation. One problem such a view has always been faced with is the possibility of a *regressus ad infinitum*. See Tendhal (2009) for discussion.

contextual information, then modelling it on norms of communication which have ‘truthfulness’ as an ideal limit<sup>39</sup> will always lead to an inappropriate model since relevant stimuli cannot be defined in its terms. A relevant stimulus is not something for which the question of truth arises. Also, a stimulus is something that admits degrees of relevance, depending on a large number of factors (e.g., assumptions available to the participants in a conversation, degrees of accessibility of those assumptions, interests and abilities of the participants, etc.).

The third move is to show that if language is one way, among others, humans have to communicate and exchange information, then the same, or sufficiently similar, mechanisms of understanding already active in other, fully inferential, forms of communication should be found here. Hence, even a coded system like language is, after all, understandable only by activating the same inferential mechanisms which are addressed to the maximisation of relevance. These mechanisms are already active in the process Recanati calls ‘saturation,’ i.e., the assignment of contextual values to indexicals, and in the disambiguation of meanings in an utterance (e.g., BANK<sub>1</sub>, financial institution, vs. BANK<sub>2</sub>, river bank, in ‘Mary went to the bank’). In both cases the hearer constructs the interpretation that is most accessible and relevant both to her and to the speaker. The inferential mechanisms become even more important when communication may look, at first glance, bizarre. Consider:

(15) What is past is past. (Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

(16) The pretty girl is pretty. (Carston 2002)

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<sup>39</sup> Consider Grice’s insistence (1975) that the most important of his maxims is the maxim of Quality.

Taken literally, the propositions expressed by these two utterances are tautologies. Tautologies are generally considered faults of style (cf. O. E. D.). A model of communication based on the notion of code would not be able to explain how it is possible to recover extra-relevant information from these examples. A fully inferential model is instead required. Moreover, a scrutiny of the behaviour of Unger's absolute terms shows that although truthfulness may not be a reachable end, there are contexts in which using one of these terms may lead to the gain of relevant information. For instance, consider an utterance of

(17) The fridge is empty.

Although the fridge is not completely empty (there is some salad and a pot of marmalade in it), it certainly invites the hearer to visit the local shop and provide some food. Again, an inferential model is required in order to explain how language users are able to make sense of this sort of utterance. RT claims that such a model is likely to be based on the following principle:

*Principle of Relevance.* Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of optimal relevance. (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995: 158])

In turn, this principle is based on the following presumptions:

*Presumption of Optimal Relevance.*

(a) The set of assumptions *I* which the communicator intends to make manifest to the addressee is relevant enough to make it worth the addressee's attention to process the ostensive stimulus.

(b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one the communicator could have used to communicate *I*. (Sperber and Wilson 1986 [1995: *ibid.*])

All these principles have to be understood psychologically and not normatively. What relevance theorists are looking at is a cognitively plausible model of communication, not normative principles or maxims à la Grice. According to RT, language users do not obey maxims of any sort, but only follow a ‘path of least effort’ in deriving implications from an utterance, stopping whenever their expectations of relevance are met or abandoned.

There is a final consideration relevance theorists make, and it is worth mentioning it because it leads me to pose a question concerning the processes of metaphor creation. According to Sperber (1994), a code system does not allow for creativity, since the activity of encoding and decoding are purely based on the manipulation of internal representations. In contrast, an inferential model, in which hearers work out more layers of meaning, accounts for this property. *Question*: is the creation and comprehension of a metaphor an inferential matter? More generally, can creativity be accounted for only by appealing to an inferential model? My answer is that if Sperber is right in claiming that inferential processes are creative, creativity does not (wholly) coincide with inferentiality. My model of metaphorical understanding won’t be based on an underlying inferential model, so I will take the burden of the proof to provide an alternative explanation of creativity. For now, I am content with making the strongest case for the relevance theoretic account of metaphor.

### 4.3 Explicature

What consequences does this model of communication predict in language understanding? Given the RT's insistence on the fallibility of inferential processes, one important consequence is that, according to such a theory, an interpretation of an utterance will never perfectly match what the speaker intended to say with it. An interpretation is always a fallible guess, so to speak. Accordingly, if a speaker *U* utters a sentence *s* expressing a proposition *p*, it is very likely that the hearer will interpret *U*'s utterance as having expressed *p*<sup>\*</sup>, a proposition sufficiently similar to *p* in that it shares a number of its relevant features, but not all.

RT then proposes to get rid of Grice's notion of what is said, which is psychologically too thin to have any useful application, and replace it with the notion of 'explicature'. An *explicature* is 'an ostensively communicated assumption which is inferentially developed from one of the incomplete conceptual representations (logical forms) encoded by the utterance' (Carston 2002: Appendix, p. 377).<sup>40</sup> For instance, to use a Chomskyan example:

(18) Visiting parents can be boring.

(17) has two LFs, depending on whether 'visiting' functions as an adjectival modifier of 'parents' or as the sentence's subject:

(18') [Visiting parents] [can be boring].

(18'') [Visiting] [parents] [can be boring].

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<sup>40</sup> The association of the word 'explicature' with 'explicit content' is misleading. Following Bach, it seems that RT confuses the etymology of 'explicature,' cognate of 'explicate' with that of explicit, which is not. This, as Bach says (2006: 5), obscures 'the fact that this content is partly implicit.' I have more to say about the consequences of the explicature hypothesis in the next chapter.



Suppose (18') is the LF used to communicate the actual explicature of (18), i.e., that parents who visit their offspring are boring. How does the hearer latch onto this reading? Since (18) is uttered in a context in which someone is talking about the recent visit she has received from her parents, (18') is the most relevant LF accessible to the hearer, and therefore the most likely to be accessed.

Moreover, implicatures may come at an early stage of the interpretation, and may have the form of implicated assumptions or implicated conclusions. Take this dialogue:

- (19) Bill: I've heard you moved from Manhattan to Brooklyn.  
Sue: The rent is lower. (From Wilson's Oslo Lectures)

Here RT predicts the following pattern of interpretation:

- (19a) Lower rents are a good reason to move. (**implicated assumption**)  
(19b) The rent in Brooklyn is lower than the rent in Manhattan. (**explicature**)  
(19c) Sue moved to Brooklyn because the rent was lower there. (**implicated conclusion**)

As you can see, the processes of interpretation run in parallel and therefore do not follow the linear process predicted by code models, in which the information encoded by Sue's utterance is first minimally accessed, and then a conversational implicature is derived from it.<sup>41</sup>

The degree of explicitness of an utterance is inversely proportional to the contribution of pragmatic inference: the more explicit an utterance is, the smaller the activation of inferential mechanisms will be. As an example:

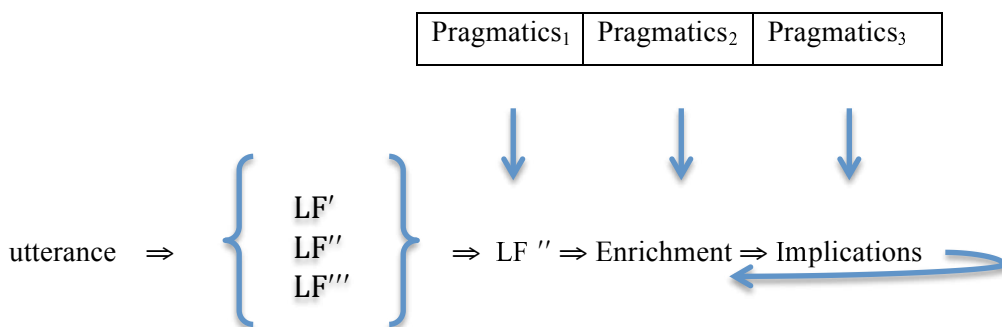
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<sup>41</sup> Borg (2004) provides the most comprehensive defence of this model.

- (20) Bill: Would you like to have supper with us tonight?  
 Sue (i): No, thanks. I've eaten.  
 Sue (ii): No thanks. I've eaten tonight.  
 Sue (iii): No thanks. I've eaten soup tonight. (Wilson's Oslo Lectures)

Although the explicature of (20) is (iii), the way the hearer may arrive at it varies depending on how explicit Sue is with her utterance and, therefore, how much contribution Bill has to inferentially provide.

Summarising, we have the following picture of language understanding adopted by RT, and at least by some other defenders of TCP, like, e.g., Bezuidenhout:



Once an utterance of a sentence is made, the first pragmatic operation is to disambiguate its possible logical forms. The second pragmatic operation is to enrich the LF just selected. The third pragmatic operation is to derive further implications from the explicature derived. These may also have a backward effect on the previous level, that is, the level in which the explicature is derived. One may wonder what role semantics is left with in this picture. The answer is that semantics has no role except for the encoding of LFs, which have to be pragmatically enriched in context. As

Bezuidenhout (2002) points out, adoption of TCP means nothing but to leave the whole truth-conditional semantic enterprise behind.

#### 4.4 Underdeterminacy

A further thesis that has been discussed in the literature since the work of Atlas and Grice himself, is what Carston and Bezuidenhout refer to as the ‘**Underdeterminacy thesis**:’ In Carston’s words:

U. [T]here are no eternal sentences in natural languages (that is, no sentences which encode a proposition or thought which is constant across all contexts), from which it follows that linguistic underdeterminacy of the proposition expressed by an utterance is *an essential feature* of natural language. (Carston 2002: 42. My emphasis)

Typical examples of U to be resolved by means of pragmatic adjustments are, according to Carston (2002: 28), lexical ambiguities, indexical references, missing constituents, unspecified scope of elements, underspecificity or weakness of encoded conceptual content, overspecificity or narrowness of encoded conceptual content:

- a. He went to the bank. [financial institution/river?]
- b. She said to her teacher that *she* needed a break.
- c. She’s ready. [for what?]
- d. *Every bottle* was *empty*.
- e. That movie is *hard*.
- f. I’ll bring *some food*.

[I highlighted or clarified in brackets those elements which are supposed to radically underdetermine the interpretation.] Two

points are worth considering. First of all, underdeterminacy should not be confused with indexicality, which is narrower than it. Secondly, it is also worth stressing that not all contextualists think of underdeterminacy in the strong sense of U. For instance, Bezuidenhout (2002: 125) defends a **weak effability thesis**, according to which ‘every possible thought can be *communicated* by means of some sentence of L’.<sup>42</sup> Carston (2002: 33) herself accepts a weak effability thesis (**First principle of effability**), but she changes Bezuidenhout’s ‘some sentence of L’ with ‘some utterance of some sentence’. The shift is significant insofar as, for Carston, sentences are not truth-bearers (very few would maintain this conception nowadays). For, the set of propositions is larger than the set of L-sentences. In fact, as already stressed, there are many well-formed sentences which fail to express propositions, but every proposition is a well-formed sentence. However, Carston’s position is stronger in that, for her, no L-sentence encodes a proposition unless contextual assumptions are added.

The importance of this debate would certainly deserve more attention than I give it here. However, if I have to take sides, the most reasonable hypothesis seems that offered by Bach (2006: 2), who argues, as Bezuidenhout indeed does, that humans tend to find more economic ways to express thoughts in communication. They do so by massively leaning on every linguistic means – think about anaphora and ellipsis cases – which allow them to communicate the same content that a sentence could fully express in shorter, less than explicit but more economic (so cognitively more fruitful) sentences. But then the radical contextualist seems at least not warranted in concluding that no thought or proposition can ever be explicitly expressed by some sentence from the fact that we

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<sup>42</sup> This principle should not be confused with Searle’s ‘Principle of Expressibility’ (Searle 1969), according to which any thought can be *fully expressed* by some sentence of L. It goes without saying that Carston rejects such a principle.

generally opt not to express it in fully explicit ways. In the next chapter, I will briefly take up this point again in one of the examples I use against RT. I shall now move to discuss the relevance-theoretic approach to metaphor.

## **5. The Relevance-theoretic Approach to Metaphor**

In this section I introduce the reader to the relevance-theoretic account of metaphorical interpretation.

### **5.1 The Continuity View**

Consider the following BASEBALL SCENARIO:

- (21)    A. Where is your son?  
          B. He's playing baseball in the garden with his father.

I have chosen this example, an adaptation from Bezuidenhout's (2002: 109), since it strikes me as different from the cases we discussed earlier. Apparently, everything looks in order here: there is no missing link in the two sentences, for the pronoun 'he' and the possessive 'his' are anaphorically linked to the 'son' in the question. Nor is there any incompleteness (missing constituents) in the B-sentence; hence this sentence seems to encode a proposition. But the contextualist claims that, strictly speaking, the son is not playing 'baseball' in the usual sense of the term. In fact, to play baseball one should play in a real team of nine players, on a field with a diamond-shaped circuit of four bases, and so on. One plays baseball in the garden only in a miniaturised sense, so to speak. Hence the sentence, as it stands, does not capture a truth-evaluable

proposition. Something has to be pragmatically adjusted, that is, ‘modulated.’

Nevertheless, this ‘imprecision’ cannot be attributed to any transparent feature of the utterance, for the hearer does not seem to be aware that she is processing something less-than-literal, though the meanings of the sentence are *directly* accessible to her. For one thing, it would not make sense to say that the speaker is successful in implying something over and above the sentence’s literal meaning, which is, strictly speaking, false. But it would certainly be absurd to respond to B by saying ‘Wait a minute, he’s not playing baseball!’ either. Thus, what is meant by the speaker B is not detached by the conventional meanings he has opted for in communicating the proposition <son, father, play baseball, in l (garden), at t (present)>; it is just that the conventional meaning of a word is to be adjusted through some minimal departure from its original sense in order to convey a true proposition. In particular the concept associated to the word ‘baseball,’ say BASEBALL, has to be broadened so as to apply to instances of baseball-in-the-garden.<sup>43</sup> This process is local – in our case it affects only the word ‘baseball’ –, and ‘top-down’ in the sense of depending on contextual assumptions and background knowledge. For Bezuidenhout (2002), an example like this shows the ‘nonself-interpreting’ character of language. In fact, she claims that only against a background of assumptions, and only through the particular understanding of the occasion in which a sentence is uttered, can it be interpreted. This is what Travis often calls ‘occasion-sensitivity’, a phenomenon whose import is supposed to radically undermine the possibility of any semantic analysis.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> On the notion of ‘broadening’ or ‘loosening’ of a concept associated with a word, and the opposite operation of ‘narrowing,’ see Carston (2002: chapter v), Wilson and Carston (2006), Rubio-Fernández (2008).

<sup>44</sup> The extent to which this claim creates serious problems to semantics will be investigated in the next chapters.

These examples are also extensively discussed by Recanati. He argues for a meaning taxonomy, which goes from the conventional meaning of the words (their t(type)-literal character), and the minimal deviations of an interpretation from the sentence's components (m-literal character), to the nonminimal deviations in the meanings characterising tropes such as metaphor and metonymy. Here the process involved is still primary (hence their p-literal character, which emerges from the interpretation of the underlying m-nonminimal deviations), in contrast with cases involving secondary processes like Gricean implicatures and indirect speech acts. Crucially, according to Recanati (2004: 77) there is a continuum of cases which goes from the minimal deviations of our baseball scenario to the more 'dramatic' (sic) cases of poetic metaphors.<sup>45</sup> This account is largely anticipated by Sperber & Wilson (henceforth SW) who argue in their classic (1986 [1995]) for a 'continuity view', according to which there is a continuum of cases from the clear examples of literalness to the most creative metaphors. Since the continuum's elements are governed by the same principles and understood via the same interpretive methods, this view naturally leads to their advocated 'deflationary' approach to metaphor.

*The continuity view.* '[T]here is no mechanism specific to metaphors, no interesting generalisation that applies only to them. In other terms, metaphorical interpretations are not a natural kind, and "metaphor" is not a theoretically important notion in the study of verbal communication.' (SW 2006: 172)

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<sup>45</sup> This includes intermediate cases of metonymy ('The hamburger left without paying') and sense extension, when a predicated is extended (loosened) to cover new instances under its conceptual range ('The ATM swallowed my credit card').

As it stands, this view is largely negative: not only do metaphors *not* form a natural kind, but their function in verbal communication is not very interesting either. What motivates such strong conclusions? In the remaining part of this chapter, I will discuss the main hypothesis of RT, the one involving the formation of ad hoc concepts. In an early stage, relevance theorists used to lay more emphasis on the notion of *weak implicatures*.<sup>46</sup>

## 5.2 Underdeterminacy, Relevance and Metaphor

Underdeterminacy, as shown above, implies that what speakers communicate is never fully encoded in a proposition and so cannot be comprehended by a hearer except by massively inferential adjustments. We are also told (SW 1995: 231) that the propositional forms of utterances are never identical to their speakers' thoughts, and that in order to determine the latter we have to guess what relationship exists with the former. The only means we have to do this is to take such propositional forms (or templates, schemas) as clues for their underlying conceptual contents, which they somehow resemble. Metaphors as well as metonyms and approximations do not constitute an exception to this, as they require the same inferential mechanisms that are active in the understanding of literal cases. Conversely, if the mechanisms which govern metaphorical interpretations are the same as the ones governing more literal uses, then RT argues that no *presumption of literalness* can be postulated, since in any case it is not the interpreters' default interpretation. But if literalness is not required, then any Gricean maxim leaning on it is redundant, if not out of place.

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<sup>46</sup> The reader may consult Pilkington (2000) for an overview of these two strategies.



Thus, what distinguishes such an account from Grice's? To respond to this question I have isolated four further questions, whose answering will be necessary to understand the relevance-theoretic approach:

- At what level does RT situate the metaphor's interpretation?
- How predictable are metaphors?
- What relationship is there between a metaphor's lexical constituents and the same metaphor's thought-constituents? Does an explicature of an utterance reflect some deeper underlying conceptual structure?
- What explanatory virtues has this pragmatic approach over Grice's?

**First answer (Level of interpretation): Explicatures and Ad Hoc Concepts**

RT rejects the Gricean-implicature approach to metaphor, for this seems to behave strangely. Take this example

- (22) A. Did Caroline clean her room?  
B. She is a princess.

According to Grice the speaker is just 'making as if to say' Caroline is a princess, leaving then open a range of implicatures to be calculated by the hearer. This view has been presented with various problems by the relevance theorists (SW 2002; Carston 2002). For instance, it would have the result that the speaker actually says nothing, when it is clear that something has been meant with those words, although the sentence's conventional form

does not reflect the proposition being expressed. Moreover, if the problem (provided that there is one here) is that a maxim of truthfulness, that is, the Maxim of Quality, has been flouted, then if nothing is said (but only ‘as if said’), technically no maxim would be violated. So there is a theoretical issue here, which Grice was unable to see. In consequence, RT shifts away from Grice’s account of metaphor in terms of conversational implicature.

According to RT, ‘metaphor affects not only the implicatures of an utterance but also its truth-conditional content’ (Wilson and Carston 2006: 405). The truth-conditional content we are discussing here is, of course, that which any truth-conditional pragmatics deems to be crucial for the understanding of any utterance: broader so as to include material that Grice’s restricted notion of what-is-said counted as implicature. In order to make room for this larger truth-conditional content, a new category is then advanced by SW, namely, that of ‘explicatures’. As we saw in the previous section, an explicature is an assumption communicated by an utterance, which is explicit insofar as it is a development of the logical form encoded by the sentence uttered. In one of the aforementioned examples related to U, as ‘Every bottle was empty’, an interpreter has to develop the underspecified logical form of the sentence by providing conceptual material which may pragmatically fill it out: restricting the domain of ‘every bottle’ to *every-bottle-on-the-table* or narrowing the concept associated to the lexical entry ‘bottles’ to *the wine’s bottles*, and so on. The same mechanisms are requested for the baseball scenario, where the hearer unreflectively broadens the lexical entry ‘baseball,’ associated to an atomic concept in the language of thought, so as to form an ad hoc category BASEBALL\*, which adds encyclopaedic information to the features characterising (analytically?) the atomic concept, and relaxing some of its logical

implications, so as to enable the communicators to highlight potential uses of the word outside its strict applicative range.<sup>47</sup>

The explicit content of an utterance is then determined, according to RT, only by the online and mutual adjustments of contextual assumptions and implications. As the previous example showed, the explicit content of the utterance ‘Caroline is a PRINCESS\*’ is obtained by mutual adjustments of contextual assumptions and implications made by the hearer while interpreting: the propositional form of (21.B)’s utterance – its encoded meaning – is in fact gradually enriched through the exploitation of both general and particular assumptions:

CONTEXTUAL ASSUMPTION<sub>1</sub>: A princess is spoiled, indulged, etc.

CONTEXTUAL IMPLICATION<sub>2</sub>: Caroline is spoiled, indulged, etc.

CONTEXTUAL ASSUMPTION<sub>3</sub>: A princess is not committed to any domestic work.

CONTEXTUAL IMPLICATION<sub>4</sub>: Caroline is not committed to any domestic work.

This set of assumptions/implications offers the ground for uncovering an explicature to the effect that Caroline is a PRINCESS\*. This explicature is constructed by the interpreter who forms an **ad hoc concept**, viz., PRINCESS\*, which can be predicated in that context of Caroline (said otherwise, Caroline instantiates in such a context the property of ‘being a princess\*’, if there is any such property). From here on, the hearer has enough material to implicate that Caroline did not do what she was

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<sup>47</sup> Carston (2002: 322) and Barsalou (quoted in Glucksberg 2001: 44) provide clear pictures of what ad hoc concepts are supposed to be. On the role of ‘ad hoc categories’ in the interpretation of idioms and metaphors, see also Glucksberg (2001; 2008). On the difference between Glucksberg’s account and RT’s see Wilson and Carston (2006: 414-415).

expected to do, *because* she is just *that* kind of princess who is unable to help her mother manage any domestic work. Notice also how this implication anticipates, with positive cognitive effects to gain on the part of both speakers and hearers, any further question regarding the reasons why Caroline did not help her mother.

Wilson and Carston are aware of the fact that the encyclopaedic entries they associate to ‘princess’ are hardly responsible for the emergence of such assumptions; nevertheless, they consider that the hearer will elaborate them without any difficulty, for they predict that the resulting explicature is the *only* interpretation which is *accessible* after the process of mutual adjustments via forward inference from available encyclopaedic assumptions and backward inferences based on the implied conclusion has been completed. Crucially, they think that no hypothesis about what is said is considered by the hearer without first assuming the implied conclusion of the utterance and then hypothesizing about the speaker’s meaning.

In conclusion, ad hoc concepts are constructed in the process of uncovering an explicature. Their role is to strengthen inferentially warranted implicatures and, in the presence of metaphorically richer context-discourses, to amplify the resonance of further weak implicatures (Carston 2002: 358). They have the apparently important cognitive function of orienting the hearer into a conceptual space. Ad hoc concepts are like functions which take as input the logical, encyclopaedic and lexical entries of a given atomic concept and give as output a superordinate category that shares some sub-set of the original concept’s features, those relevant to the context-discourse. Hence, the hypothesis is that (atomic) concepts can be modelled to accommodate the shape of things (objects, events, states of affairs, whatever is in your ontology). In a way which is characteristic of relevance theorists, the ontological and semantic status of these concepts is left

unexplained, since their focus is exclusively on the hearer's heuristics. Accordingly, the only factors which are determinant are the specific presumption of an assumption's relevance and the order of expectations its interpreters have. I assess the question of what determines this ratio in the next sub-section.

**Second answer (RT's comprehension heuristics).**

What warrants the uncovering of an explicature? And what guarantees do we have that the process does not lead to conflicting explicatures? According to RT, utterance interpretation is generally goal-directed so as to take into consideration only two factors: the presumption of an utterance's relevance and the expectations raised regarding how such a presumption must be satisfied. One may legitimately wonder how the ratio between this presumption and the expectations surrounding it could be calculated. However, this is unproblematic because the measurement of this ratio, so RT argues, comes for free from the 'Communicative Principle of Relevance': every utterance comes with its 'presumption of optimal relevance.' This means that any act of verbal communication, as any other ostensive stimulus, is interpreted in the correct way when the ratio between the cognitive efforts and effects of processing it are well-enough balanced.

Since human cognitive capacities are strongly constrained by their physical structure which imposes limits for processing stimuli coming from the environment, the hypothesis is that humans have developed a strategy for getting the best results from these limits. This strategy is that of 'following a path of least effort' in processing ostensive stimuli, until the most relevant interpretation (the one which your cognitive system has latched onto after having ruled out other less advantageous alternatives) is eventually accessed. Since humans also tend to the maximization of relevance ('Cognitive Principle of Relevance'), RT claims that we are able to

achieve communication even by means of any kind of error, misuse, imprecision, and in general massive underdetermination: all these cases will introduce assumptions that our cognitive abilities are able to latch on to and maximise their relevance.

Here, therefore, lies RT's response to our second question regarding the predictability of a metaphorical utterance. In (21.B), Wilson and Carston (2006: 422) argue that the justification for the uncovering of the explicature 'Caroline is a PRINCESS\*' is that it defeats its logically possible alternatives (whereby Caroline will help manage housework), since 'this is the first accessible interpretation to make the utterance relevant in the expected way, and it is therefore the one selected by the relevance-based comprehension heuristic'.

**Third answer (Resemblance).**

A controversial notion defended by SW and Carston is that of *resemblance*. In one sense, we already know that every thing resembles some other in certain respects and not in others. However, this blatant truth has however pressed many important researches in human rationality, from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* to the works of Tversky (1977) and Rosch (1973) in cognitive and experimental psychology or Lakoff's (1987) in cognitive linguistics, to mention but the most known. At the basis of verbal communication we are now told (Carston 2002: chap. V; also SW 1995: 228 ff.) that utterances can represent in two different ways: first of all, their propositional forms upwardly represent tokens of our language of thought, sentences of our Mentalese (Fodor 1979). But secondly, propositional forms can downwardly represent states of affairs, when the utterances are descriptive, or further thoughts when they are used in a meta-representational (i.e., *interpretive*) way, i.e., when they have high-

order representations as the objects of their representations (so they are interpretations of these representations).<sup>48</sup>

Now in the case of metaphors, metonymies and approximations, concepts are less-than-literal on RT's account, so their encoded content is in a relation of *non-identical resemblance* with their conceptual counterpart in the language of thought. According to Fodor, concepts in the language of thought (LOT) are individuated on the basis of their syntactic, compositional properties. But whereas, as far as the LOT is concerned, one has to think of concepts as types potentially determined by all their admissible syntactic operations, one can think of them semantically only on the basis of how we individuate them in the interaction with the physical world. In this worldly sense, two individuals have the same concept when they respond to the properties instantiating such concepts in the same way. Since our cognitive structures form a natural kind, we are expected to react in the same way to the environment, and hence to entertain the same concepts. Differences between two individuals as to the grasping of a certain concept are individuated by the fact that they have different MOPS (modes of presentation) of such concepts or, alternatively, different kinds of responses to the concepts' stereotypes whose experiencing permits them to get locked to the properties instantiating such concepts ('having a concept is something like "resonating to" the property that the concept expresses' [Fodor 1998: 137]).

At the communicative level, this has the following consequence according to Carston: that the concepts communicated via an utterance only resemble those which the sentence uttered encodes, the two differing in what encyclopaedic and defining (analytic) features speakers and hearers will *highlight* in the particular

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<sup>48</sup> Irony is given an account by the relevance-theorist in this latter sense.

occasion of exchange.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, at the propositional level, the two propositional forms, the one which is conveyed by the utterance, the other which is processed in the interpretation, will differ in a generally nonpredictable way once their logical and encyclopaedic properties are filtered in and out. When asked how communication is made possible if the exchange will always be somewhat defective, Carston would probably reply that this is not a problem insofar as it is not by assessing the meanings of words in isolation that we can understand the tokening of a particular utterance-type, but only letting our understanding of the context of utterance be guided by the relevance principles and the relevance-theoretic heuristic, so as to recover an explicature sufficiently resembling the thought(s) the speaker has managed to communicate.

**Fourth answer (Advantages over Grice's account).**

I conclude this survey of RT by mentioning the supposed advantages of its account of metaphor over especially Grice's implicature model.

First of all, against Grice's hasty treatment of metaphor, RT gives significant attention to the fact the speaker's communicated content can be determined even in the slippery case of metaphor. By having considered metaphor as a case involving 'making-as-if-to say,' and by having relied only on the mechanisms of implicature to explain what a metaphor conveys, Grice has deprived metaphor of its cognitive value, delimiting its role to the one rhetoric traditionally gave to it, namely that of merely ornamental function. Relevance theorists do not deny that a

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<sup>49</sup> There is a complication here. Carston appeals to a conception of concepts according to which they are defined by their analytic (logical) properties, in a way that calls to mind Carnap's meaning postulates. Since Carston leans also on a philosophy of thought which is a tribute of some of Fodor's ideas, this is idiosyncratic with Fodor's view that concepts are not definable at all since they lack underlying conceptual structure.\*



metaphor can give rise to further implicatures (captured by their notion of ‘weak implicatures’ of which I have said almost nothing since I am less concerned here with poetic metaphors), but clearly states that its basic function is comparable to that of other legitimate uses of words, i.e., to communicate explicatures.

Secondly, an implicature enters into the metaphorical interpretation through the mutual inferential adjustments I have already discussed. This point is worth stressing: a compositional system, of the kind underlying Grice’s notion of what-is-said, is now made superfluous by the occurring of top-down processes, which determine the ‘truth-conditional’ content of an utterance. In this system there is no space for a notion of minimal proposition,<sup>50</sup> which we can find in the work of many philosophers of language such as Grice (1975), Cappelen and Lepore (2005), Borg (2004).

Thirdly, the indeterminacy many see in metaphor is due to the extra assumptions and implications the speaker is not generally fully aware of having implicated or assumed to be true, but which are however part of the process which leads the hearer to derive the utterance’s explicit content. Again, the weaker the implicatures, the less explicit the (truth-conditional) content, and vice versa (the more explicit the content, the weaker the implicatures). The mechanism of metaphor is more complex than the implicature model suggests since the hearers’ responsibility to derive the correct interpretation is very often pressed by factors a speaker does not fully control. This implies that there is no *presumption of uniqueness* in what the audience may responsibly infer from the speaker’s metaphorical utterance. Indeed, this is the case for every utterance. Consistency between speaker’s and hearer’s assumptions is finally a matter of degree, but strongly constrained by considerations of relevance, which are sufficient for the determination of the explicit content of a metaphorical utterance.

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<sup>50</sup> See also Recanati (2004: 64-5).

Since Grice's account is based on notions such as code and truthfulness, it cannot deal with the communicative nuances of utterances, and therefore should be regarded with suspicion.

As far as other contextualist analyses are concerned, there is no extensive literature which compares the pros and cons of their conceptions of metaphor over RT's. They are pretty much considered RT's strong allies, though I think there are elements that should be more carefully analysed. In particular, Recanati takes modulation functions, which apply also to metaphors, to be non-inferential (2004: 29), while we just saw that RT envisages a fully inferential model. Moreover, what emerges from a comparison with Recanati's work is that the French philosopher is not disposed to follow RT in giving up the Gricean distinction saying/implicating, which he supports with his distinction between primary and secondary processes, whereas RT drops not only this distinction, but also the former notion, which is substituted by that of explicit content, i.e., encoded meaning that is pragmatically enriched. While I have already expressed doubts about the possibility of nailing down the Gricean distinction by means of Recanati's phenomenological considerations, I still need to challenge RT's arguments for its suppression, which I am going to do in the next chapter.

In conclusion, RT has been motivated by two orders of consideration to defend the explicature/ad hoc concepts hypothesis. First, **RT** subverts the Gricean explanation of lots of phenomena: where Grice assumed the rising of a conversational implicature, RT says that it is indeed a phenomenon due to top-down underdetermination, and that pragmatic adjustments are sufficient to construct the correct hypothesis about what the speaker explicitly says. Second, cases that Grice would explain by appealing to the idea that the speaker is only making-as-if-to-say brings about an inconsistency in his system, so that it is difficult to

logically guarantee the derivation of what the speaker actually meant. This has led relevance theorists to supplant Grice's notion of 'what is said' with their notion of 'explicature.'

## 6. Conclusions

Where am I now? In this chapter I have discussed some of the most controversial views within TCP, including RT's, and shown their connection with the topic of metaphor. While RT can be considered as a particular version of TCP, both RT and TCP belong to the philosophical doctrine of contextualism. Their main assumption, which I have highlighted in the chapter, is that whichever contextual feature is crucial to the determination of the truth-value of an utterance, that feature is part of the content expressed by the utterance.<sup>51</sup> I have also shown that such an assumption is implicit in Frege's writings, to which Recanati, for instance, often appeals. Of course, given the acceptance of what I call the 'Fregean Premise,' the resulting notion of 'what is said' defended by TCP is incompatible with Grice's and minimal semantics', but also, we will see, with the notion of semantic content inherent in non-indexical contextualism and relativism, which relativize truth to circumstances of evaluation and/or of assessment. According to these other accounts, not every aspect relevant to the assignment of a truth-value to an utterance is part of the content expressed by the utterance since we need to envisage circumstances of evaluation as well. I will explore these other views in the last chapter of the dissertation. Finally, what is the place metaphor has within the truth-conditional pragmatic accounts? Metaphor does not have a particularly interesting place in them since its linguistic and

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<sup>51</sup> Contextualism about knowledge ascriptions adopts the same kind stance (see DeRose 1996: 194).

communicative mechanisms are said to be on a continuum with other phenomena (metonymy, approximations, vague predicates, predicate of taste, and so on). Sure, there are differences within these accounts (Recanati appeals to modulation functions, RT privileges inferential processes), but they all agree on the ‘top-down’ nature of those mechanisms.

The advantages of TCP’s account of metaphor over the other theories I have explored so far are several: by broadening the application of semantics to phenomena that a Davidsonian account was shown to be unable to cover, TCP offers a comprehensive explanation of language understanding. By developing a pragmatic story of how the content of an utterance is contextually determined, TCP is immune to the problems affecting the Gricean model, which is entirely based on implicature. Similarly, by putting forward some hypotheses as to the construction of metaphorical interpretations, which are clearly psychological in nature, TCP avoids the idiosyncrasies of Searle’s account. Actually, a new field of investigation, lexical pragmatics, is being developed and its connection with TCP’s tenets are under investigation. It would seem therefore that the specific problems posed by metaphor are adequately covered by TCP. But how adequately, and how explanatory is its account? In order for a theory of metaphor to be part of a theory of language understanding, some essential problems inherent in the latter theory must find appropriate answers. These problems concern (at least) the following points:

- (i) The nature of compositionality;
- (ii) The general cognitive architecture in which language understanding must be integrated;
- (iii) The nature of contextual factors determining the felicity conditions of an utterance.

In the next chapter I will argue that none of these problems find adequate solutions within those accounts subscribing to TCP. Therefore, its explanation of metaphor will be called into question.

## Chapter Five

### *Don't Scratch*

### *Where it Doesn't Itch:*

## **Some Objections to Truth- conditional Pragmatics**

### **1. Introduction**

While in the previous chapter I made a case for truth-conditional pragmatics (TCP), and, also, for the relevance-theoretic account of metaphor, in this one I am going to argue against both TCP and such an account on several grounds. As I said at the end of that chapter, in order to have an account of metaphor that is both explanatorily satisfactory and descriptively adequate, we must first have a clear grasp of some important issues surrounding any theory of meaning. These issues concern, on the one hand, how meaning constrains the features of context that are important to the truth-evaluation of an utterance, and, on the other, what best hypotheses we can formulate as to the way meaning is structured in both

language and thought. My opposition to contextualist models of meaning is mostly due to their lack of satisfactory solutions to these issues, which, in turn, can be explained by the extremely relaxed way in which contextual factors are allowed to determine the content of complex expressions.

Having said that, my focus in this chapter will pivot around the following objections to TCP:

- *Overgeneration* – TCP's accounts massively overgenerate interpretations, so that it is difficult to make any principled prediction concerning what a speaker is communicating with an utterance. Actually, given the TCP's *maximal* treatment of many expressions, there could be contextual adjustments of the propositional forms associated to sentences, such that the resulting truth-conditions would be absurd, illogical, or simply unmotivated.
- *Lexical Meaning* – TCP does not make any principled distinction between expressions that can receive a metaphorical interpretation and those that cannot. Hence, TCP predicts that there are expressions that may be interpreted metaphorically when, clearly, they cannot receive a metaphorical interpretation. This is highly counter-intuitive and, thus, we should abandon TCP.
- *Compositionality* – For some the idea that a semantic system be compositional is a non-negotiable feature, for others it is still unclear what this feature amounts to. Here I will be presenting some versions of the compositionality principle, and I will show that a system that totally disrespects or trivialises it is in a worse position than a system that allows for some version of the thesis in terms of both explanatory power and descriptive adequacy.

- *Language of Thought* – The hypothesis that thinking requires the presence of a language of thought (LOT) is a controversial but fascinating hypothesis. Here I won't be attempting a particular defence of (LOTH). My aim is just to show that Carston's appeal to Fodor's hypothesis is unmotivated given the relevance theoretic hypothesis of ad hoc concepts (more generally, given TCP's emphasis on top-down processes intruding semantic encoded information). Moreover, I will show that the 'ad hoc concepts' hypothesis contrasts with an early thesis of Sperber and Wilson, which I find more plausible.

As far as metaphor is concerned, the problems just evinced extend to the contextualist explanation of metaphorical utterances. Stern (2006) has, for instance, argued that contextualism about metaphor overgenerates metaphorical interpretations. What does Stern exactly mean by this claim? The chapter will conclude with an analysis of this objection and, in particular, of the tests Stern uses in its support:

- *VP ellipsis* and *Anaphora* – There are metaphorical utterances or mixed utterances containing VP-ellipsis or anaphora that result to be unacceptable to a more or less high extent (e.g., 'Juliet is the sun and Achilles is, too', 'Quine demolished Carnap's argument, and so did John with Charlie's house'). These tests are taken by Stern (2000, 2006) to support his semantic approach, while Camp (2006) disagrees with Stern and opts for a pragmatic explanation. My intention is to show why contextualists find problems to accommodate these data.



Before kicking off, I would like to consider a particular sort of strategy that opponents of contextualism have adopted. This is the stance of those who, like Predelli (2005), take the whole challenge of contextualism to semantics, as traditionally intended, to be misguided. In the next section not only do I address this strategy, but I also start considering certain semantic properties of indexicals, the knowledge of which will become useful later on. In the next chapter, I will assess Stern's account of metaphor, which is based on some controversial analogies with indexicals.

## 2. The Objection from Misunderstanding

We saw in the previous chapter that TCP argues against TCS (= truth-conditional semantics) on the basis that two utterances of a non-indexical and non-ambiguous sentence can receive distinct truth-values on two separate occasions in virtue of their manifesting different truth-conditional profiles. Since, according to TCP, TCS encapsulates the view that to each non-indexical and non-ambiguous sentence one, and only one, set of truth-conditions is associated,<sup>1</sup> then given two distinct but sufficiently similar contexts, say *C* and *C'*, the same non-indexical and non-ambiguous sentence *s* should not have more than one set of truth-conditions. However, given the 'intuitive' possibility of distinct truth-evaluations in these two contexts, we must conclude – so the defenders of TCP argue – that *s* is associated with disjointed sets of truth-conditions, after all.

One way to bypass this argument is to defend the view that a non-indexical expression is associated with two or more distinct characters instead of one.

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<sup>1</sup> An early formulation of this view is in Searle (1980: 227).

**Character & Index in Kaplanian Semantics**

What is a character? Following the traditional semantic picture (Kaplan 1989, Predelli 2005), a character is nothing but the meaning of an expression, i.e., a rule that, given a context of utterance, picks out a content. For instance, the character of an indexical expression  $e$  appearing in an utterance  $u$  of a sentence  $s$  is the rule that delivers the appropriate parameter of the index  $i$  of  $u$ . An index<sup>2</sup> is an  $n$ -tuple of parameters relative to which each expression of an utterance receives its appropriate referent. Usually, an index will look as follows:  $\langle i_A, i_L, i_T, i_w \rangle$ , where  $i_A$  is the agent of the index,  $i_L$  is its location,  $i_T$  its time, and  $i_w$  its world.

To illustrate with an example, the character of 'here' is the particular rule that, given a context of use, returns the referent of 'here' for  $i_L$ . More formally, the character of 'here' is a non-constant function, i.e., a function that will deliver different contents in different contexts.<sup>3</sup> Here's, however, a problem. According to a naïve way of seeing the role of characters (see Predelli's discussion of the 'Simple-Minded View' in Predelli 2005), the character of, for instance, 'here', is the rule that returns the appropriate location of the utterance's index. In an uncontroversial case, such as an utterance of 'I am here', the character of 'here' returns the location in which the speaker is located. But what about an utterance of 'I am not here', as recorded by an answering machine? In this case the appropriate referent for 'here' is not the speaker's location, but

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<sup>2</sup> Kaplan labeled this collection of parameters as 'context', while Lewis (1980), following the Montogovian tradition, called it 'index', which is also used by Predelli in his writings. I have opted to use the Montogovian/Lewisian expression in order to avoid confusion with the ordinary way of using 'context' to refer to the context of an utterance. I will switch to Kaplan's use when there is not risk of being misinterpreted.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the character of a proper name is a constant function, i.e., a function that will deliver the same content (i.e., the individual bearing that name) in all contexts.

possibly the place where she intends the message to be heard. Hence, on pain of inconsistency, the character of ‘here’ cannot return the speaker’s location for  $i_L$  in this case.<sup>4</sup> Similar examples can be constructed for other indexicals (see Predelli 2005: chapter two and Romdenh-Romluc, K. 2007).

In response to this problem, one option is to assign different characters to the lexical entry for ‘here’ (and similarly for the other indexicals); in this case, we would have a character that picks out the location in which the speaker is and another character that picks out the location of the decoding.<sup>5</sup> Of course, now the expression ‘here’ turns out to be ambiguous between at least two readings. The main problem with such a view is that it envisages a radical change of meaning in expressions like ‘here’, by postulating a massive ambiguity of readings in its entry (See Predelli 2005: 49, 57). However, is it really plausible to say that the mastery of an indexical expression is fragmented into the mastery of many unrelated characters for that expression?

The idea presented in the box may apply to non-indexical expressions, too. For instance, take the well-known case, originally introduced by Travis, of the leaves of Pia’s tree. The story tells that the leaves of Pia’s tree are russet, but Pia decides to paint them green. Thus, in a scenario in which a botanist asks for the natural colour of the leaves, an utterance of ‘The leaves are green’ is false, while in a scenario in which Pia’s friend Charlie, a photographer, asks to take a picture of a tree with green leaves, an utterance of the same sentence is true. Recently, Kennedy and McNally (2010) have proposed a semantic analysis in which colour adjectives like

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<sup>4</sup> As Predelli points out, this kind of examples are clearly in tension with Kaplan’s insistence of working with what he calls ‘proper contexts’, contexts (i.e., indexes) whose parameters always coincide with the agent, location, time, world in which the utterance under evaluation takes places.

<sup>5</sup> Predelli (2005: 46) aptly calls this view ‘the Many Characters View’.

green are taken to be ambiguous between different readings; in particular, they are ambiguous between a reading in which the colour is taken to be gradable and one in which it is not.

Although Kennedy and McNally do not work within a Kaplanian framework, it would be a rather straightforward move, I think, to assign Kaplanian characters to each of the new lexical items that, under their analysis, belong to the same word-type. Would then knowledge of each character guarantee the correct applicability of the term in the context in hand, and therefore the obtaining of the right truth-evaluation of an utterance containing it? Not really. In their account, correlation properties are also required to determine the non-gradable reading of the colour term. As far as Pia's case is concerned, suppose we want to determine the extension of 'green' in the context concerning the botanist's interests. In that case, we are interested in whether the leaves can be correctly classified as green. To that end, we must consider whether the property denoted by the term is correlated with some other property that makes 'greenness' somehow available to the interpretation. If there is such property, then we are able to determine the extension of the colour term:

$$(1) \quad \llbracket \text{green}^{\text{nongr}} \rrbracket = \lambda x. P(x) \wedge \text{cor}(P, \text{green})^6$$

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<sup>6</sup> In the gradable case, we are interested either in the quantity of colour (e.g., the extent to which the object is covered with that colour) or in its quality (e.g., brightness). If the measure is less than a certain standard fixed contextually, then we would not count the utterance as true. So we need to know the value of this quantity. The resulting denotations are:

- a.  $\llbracket \text{green}^{\text{quant}} \rrbracket = \lambda x. \text{quant}(\text{green})(x)$
- b.  $\llbracket \text{green}^{\text{qual}} \rrbracket = \lambda x. \text{qual}(\text{green})(x)$

This account is more constrained than Rothschild's and Segal's indexicalist account, in which a colour term's meaning is an indexed property. In this account, no constraint whatsoever is imposed on the possible extension of a colour term (See Kennedy and McNally 2010: 5-6).

What to say about this option? As for the similar treatment of indexical expressions, we must consider the costs of postulating different characters for non-indexical expressions. Besides, we must also offer some story as to the exact nature of these characters. If context is required to provide correlation properties, which allow for the correct assignment of truth-values to utterances, how constrained is this approach respect to, e.g., the indexicalist one? In any case, I find this approach interesting, especially for the role it gives to correlation properties in fixing an interpretation, which, I think, could also be investigated in the case of metaphors (See next chapter). On the other hand, if we adopt a ‘moderate’ contextualist account of, e.g., colour terms, and say that a comparison class is provided contextually, so as to determine the property of a colour term,<sup>7</sup> such a provision turns out to be practically unconstrained. It seems then that as far as the first option is concerned, meaning becomes highly complex, involving several characters for each word-type, while, as to the second option, meaning is simply too relaxed to allow us to make any clear prediction. Moreover, this situation bears a similarity with the case of metaphors. In the next chapter, I will present both Stern’s proposal and Leezenberg’s, which rely on both the ‘indexical’ and the ‘ambiguity’ views, in that they claim that for each expression, there are two distinct characters, one literal and another metaphorical. The latter, in virtue of being non-constant, delivers different contents in different contexts. My discussion there will show that it is not necessary to appeal to this heavy semantic machinery to account for the ‘context-sensitivity’ of metaphors.

Be that as it may, this discourse leads me to formulate the following objection to TCP, which is in line with Predelli (2005): under all the analyses I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs,

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<sup>7</sup> Szabo’ (2001).

it is a commonplace that most, if not all, sentences containing non-indexical expressions will be evaluated differently relative to different contexts (leaving this notion of ‘context’ vague here). Indexicalist accounts, ambiguitist accounts, and even minimalist accounts à la Cappelen and Lepore agree that an utterance of a sentence containing, say, a colour adjective may communicate very different things, that is, express different properties in different contexts. What differs in these accounts is the way contextual features are taken to enter in the determination of content. A properly indexicalist account will assign unstable characters to indexical and non-indexical expressions in order to deal with improper indexes, while an ambiguitist view will probably assign a limited number of stable characters to each non-indexical expression but countenance only proper indexes. On the other hand, minimalism will assign only one character to each expression, and account for the ‘strange’ cases by appealing to some pragmatic story (this is, in fact, the spirit of Cappelen’s and Lepore’s speech-act pluralism in Cappelen and Lepore 2005). Finally, TCP takes the character of a non-indexical expression to be an identity function, which takes an expression as argument and always returns the expression itself as value. Under TCP, an expression’s contribution to an utterance’s truth-conditions can only be determined by pragmatic processes of the kind discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sure even the radical contextualist would agree that a word like ‘blue’ cannot be taken to mean ‘red’ (although, logically speaking, her account implicates that under certain adjustments, ‘blue’ could occasionally mean ‘red’). Thus, what guarantees that such twists do not systematically take place? A hypothesis formulated by relevance theorists (Origgi and Sperber 1998; Sperber and Wilson 1998; Carston 2005: chap. V) is that words function as ‘pointers’, viz., as schemas pointing to different points in the semantic (viz. lexical) space. What is innate and universal is the way such pointers are structured in our cognitive life. What is contingent is how they are directed towards the semantic space by both the human species at a certain stage of its evolutionary history and by each individual human being at a certain phase of her personal history, depending on how reality is presented to her and also on the conventions shared by the language

	<i>Character for a non-indexical expression</i>
<i>Indexicalism</i>	One unstable (i.e., nonconstant) character
<i>Ambiguity theories</i>	More than one stable character
<i>Minimalism</i>	One stable character
<i>Contextualism</i>	Identity function

Table indicating four different views concerning the character of a non-indexical expression.

Thus, except perhaps for minimalism, all these accounts share with radical contextualism (viz. TCP) the view that one and the same non-indexical sentence *s*, as uttered on different occasions, may be assigned distinct truth-values in virtue of the difference in the contents expressed by each new utterance of *s*. Said otherwise, all these accounts (with, again, the exception of minimalism) assume that *s* may be paired with more than one set of truth-conditions. This, in turn, would explain why the sentence can receive distinct truth-evaluations across the board.

Given this picture, it seems strange that radical contextualists accuse all these semantic accounts to subscribe to a more substantial assumption, namely that the meaning of a sentence encapsulates its truth-conditions. Under the indexicalist analysis, for instance, a sentence *s* expresses truth-conditions only relative to

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speakers of her community. According to the code model, two interlocutors will be unable to interpret each other whenever there is a mismatch of codes used by them, i.e., whenever the codes used lead to the selection of different points in the semantic space. According to the inferential model proposed by relevance theorists, nothing prevents two 'differently situated' pointers from being directed at the same point (i.e., meaning). The choice of a particular pointer over another derives from its being more apt to discharge its proper function, that of giving evidence that the information the speaker intends to communicate is best evoked by using that pointer (and not the other). Although this is an interesting story, it still does not avoid the logical possibility of radical twists of meaning. I radicalise this objection with my examples below.

a context; under the ambiguit analysis,  $s$  is associated with a precise set of truth conditions  $\{p_1, \dots, p_n\}$  such that, given a particular context, say  $C$ , one particular truth-condition, say  $p_i$ , is selected to represent how things are in  $C$ . Still the ambiguit may subscribe to the claim that for each sentence, there is more than one truth-condition. The radical contextualist only takes the further step of claiming that such a picture entails the (metaphysical) view that meaning radically underdetermines truth-conditions.<sup>9</sup> Given that semantic accounts that are either indexicalist or ambiguit agree with the contextualist on this issue,<sup>10</sup> where does the contextualist challenge really reside?

Moreover, all these accounts clearly adopt what in the previous chapter I called ‘The Fregean Premise’. Whenever a contextual feature is relevant to determine the appropriate truth-conditions of an utterance, that feature is part of what the utterance has expressed, i.e., of its ‘meaning’. This is the case for moderate contextualist theories of vague or colour terms, which require that context provides comparison classes, but also for the ambiguit positions of the kind proposed by McNally and Kennedy, which require the contextual provision of correlation-properties for one of their favoured readings. Under these views, there is a level of semantic representation that can be properly identified with the truth-conditional content of an utterance:

- (1)      Meaning\* = Truth-conditional content

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<sup>9</sup> Strictly speaking, the view is false given that, e.g., mathematical sentences do not certainly fail to determine truth-conditions in the way the Underdeterminacy thesis should require in order for it to be considered as a law-like generalisation.

<sup>10</sup> Clearly they do not espouse the metaphysical flavour of the underdeterminacy thesis, but the point is that they accept the challenge of the contextualists.



This second sense of meaning, which I have indicated as Meaning\*, captures all those contextual elements that are relevant to the assignment of a truth-value to an utterance. As such, it ought not to be confused with the notion of meaning as character, which is context-independent (but still context-sensitive).<sup>11</sup>

However, this way of talking of meanings blurs some essential distinctions. Following Perry (1997), we must take (1) *cum grano salis* if it is based on the disputable assumption that the meaning of a sentence encodes or expresses its truth-conditions or truth-conditional content.<sup>12</sup> The level which is appropriately connected to truth-conditions is *content*, in the technical sense given by Kaplan (1989) of a function from circumstances of evaluation to extensions. Since a circumstance of evaluation is initialised by some context of utterance, context always plays a determinative role. Since an extension is determined only at a circumstance, context also plays an evaluative role (MacFarlane 2009). On the other hand, meaning is a property of expression types, which is fixed by the conventions of the language and does not require the knowledge of any particular context. On the necessity of keeping these two levels firmly separate I will base my own theory of metaphor in the next chapter.

Keeping this distinction in mind, the kind of semantics I mostly favour does not have problems to admit that a sentence usually manifests different truth-conditions, depending on the context of utterance at hand. As a matter of fact, semanticists working within the Kaplanian framework actually agree with this view (see Predelli 2005a, 2005b; MacFarlane 2007, 2009). More accurately, they insist on the following point: a sentence can be assigned

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<sup>11</sup> Let's say that an expression is *context-independent* if its meaning does not depend on any feature of the context. It is *context-sensitive* if its semantic role interacts with features of the context.

<sup>12</sup> See also Stojanovic (2007: 97) for a discussion of Perry's point, which is emphasized by the further consideration that it is misleading to say that an utterance expresses just one content.

different truth-conditions since it may be evaluated at different circumstances, where a circumstance is traditionally taken to be a pair consisting of a world and a time. But once a circumstance of evaluation is fixed, no underdeterminacy follows: the semantic system will tolerate one and only one truth-value assignment.<sup>13</sup> Thus, one could argue that the whole challenge of the contextualists to the semanticists is based on a calculated misunderstanding: the idea, perhaps inherent in the Davidsonian programme but not in the Kaplanian one, that a sentence encodes its truth-conditions. Once this idea is deprived of its force, the contextualist challenges becomes something slightly different:

*Contextualist: Now that you have showed me that we must separate two levels of representation, meaning and content, you semanticist still have to tell me what the exact relationship between these two levels is. Besides, you seem to agree with me that context enters predominantly into the determination of content (the level we contextualists are really interested in), whether you're an indexicalist, an ambiguist or even a minimalist.*

*Semanticist: I take your challenge, my dear friend contextualist. I will show you what the relationship between meaning and content really amounts to. But before doing that (you will have to wait for the next chapter, I'm afraid), I need to clear the way for a correct understanding of the issue.*

*Also, don't think I'm pedantic, but I must warn you from considering me as an indexicalist, an ambiguist or even a minimalist. I'm none of these philosophers. If you have*

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<sup>13</sup> The challenge would then be to show a scenario in which the same circumstance were fixed in both contexts, but two distinct truth-evaluations were assigned to the two utterances of the same sentence.

*patience enough I will tell you what exactly my school is, my dear friend.*

### **3. The Objection from Overgeneration**

In this section I shall discuss a worry against TCP, which concerns the highly unconstrained nature of their pragmatic processes affecting what is said by an utterance. In particular, Cappelen and Lepore (2007a) and Saul (2002a: esp. 357-358) attack the relevance theoretic notion of explicature. Such a notion, as we saw in the previous chapter, is based on the idea of ‘resemblance’. In other words, an explicature is said to resemble the thought(s) the speaker intends to communicate, but will hardly be identical to it (them). However, this notion of ‘resemblance’ seems to carry the unwelcome consequence that any interpretation of a speaker’s thought may be acceptable under certain conceptual adjustments. But similarity (resemblance) is not transitive: if I say what you’ve said, and what you’ve said is what another person said, then what this person said is identical to what I say. But, if I say something only similar to what you’ve said, and what you’ve said is something only similar to what she said, then it does not follow that if I utter X, meaning something similar to what you’ve said, I say something similar to what she said by uttering X (See Cappelen and Lepore 2007a). Generalise this argument, and you get the bizarre view that we would never get to understand each other! We could only guess what we say. In what follows, I present a case which illustrates this line of criticism. The link with metaphor should then be obvious: if there are some independent reasons to avoid modulation/ad hoc concepts construction since these are likely to generate wrong truth-conditions, then we should look with suspicion at the same kind of operations in the case of metaphor.

*The Jessica Alba Case*

In the middle of a press conference, the famous actress Jessica Alba has been reported to have attacked the journalists in this way:

- (2) She tried to turn the tables on reporters by asking them what they liked best about Obama. When she didn't get an answer, Alba joked, "That's right, be neutral. Be Sweden." (<http://popwatch.ew.com/popwatch/2009/01/jessica-alba-an.html>)

According to RT's comprehension heuristic, hearers of Alba's utterances start to form hypotheses about their meaning during the act itself of Alba's uttering the two sentences. They will be processing the word 'neutral', and will probably activate an assumption which associates the concept NEUTRAL to the encyclopaedic information relevant to the context of utterance. In this case they will recover the concept SWITZERLAND from their memory (Switzerland is, in fact, the prototype of a neutral country). This process of mutual adjustments is very fast indeed, so fast that – at least if we take the consequences of RT's procedure literally – the explicit content of Alba's second utterance would be accessible even before Alba utters the sentence 'Be Sweden!'. On this hypothesis, hearers will be just attending a confirmation of the assumption which is most relevant to them. But instead of uttering what she was expected to utter, Alba uttered 'Sweden'. Suppose now a defender of RT participated in the conference as a journalist in disguise. Then as defender of RT she could not accuse Jessica of misusing her word, since what she explicitly expressed was in fact 'Switzerland,' not 'Sweden'! However, in this way we give up a crucial distinction between 'what the speaker actually said' and

‘what she tried but failed to say’. This distinction was of course an integral part of Grice’s original ideas regarding his theory of conversation.<sup>14</sup>

The story went on, and it turned out that Jessica Alba was right, after all. In effect, Sweden has always been a neutral state. However, suppose our relevance theorist still tried to correct the journalist who took the part against Alba, and said that the concept SWEDEN expressed by Alba’s utterance sufficiently resembles that of SWITZERLAND, which was the most relevant in that context, since the two concepts share encyclopaedic (both are examples of neutrality) and definitional features (both are countries). Alba’s utterance, then, justified by the RT’s heuristics, was felicitous after all. But this seems to be a desperate move for the relevance theorist, who is unable to see how the felicitous conditions of an utterance do not coincide with our expectations of relevance.

This example is interesting, I believe, because it shows that TCP, including RT, has given up a crucial distinction: Austin’s distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts, which instead Grice’s picture incorporates better. On the Gricean picture, in order to determine what illocutionary act is made by a speaker, an interpreter has to determine the underlying locutionary act (Grice’s what-is-said). By ignoring such a distinction, RT conflates what it would definitely be better to keep separate: “what goes on in a cognitive process with what information is available to that process”.<sup>15</sup> The independence of the two levels also permits us not

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<sup>14</sup> It should be added that even Grice’s account of conversational implicature has problems for accounting for such a kind of cases. As Saul (2002b: 239) points out, Grice’s problem is the equation ‘what is meant – what is said = what is implicated.’ But then Alba could still perfectly implicate ‘Switzerland,’ whenever she still continued to (mis)use the word ‘Sweden.’ Then the implicature would have a different sense than the original one. I think, however, that there is optimism for systematising Grice’s account, as Saul’s more fine-grained analysis of how an implicature may raise shows.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bach 2006: 6.

to conflate very different notions such as ‘saying’ in a locutionary sense and ‘asserting’ in an illocutionary one (on this see esp. Camp 2006, 2007; also Soames 2008). The loss of the original Gricean spirit has another important consequence, directly connected to the previous point, which Bach (2006: 6) has thus pointed out: “Besides, this criticism does not address the conception of what is said as the concept of a locutionary act, which is performed by the speaker, not the hearer”.

This last observation seems to point, finally, to another problem for RT, namely, having ruled out Grice’s Principle of Co-operation too quickly. In this way, RT’s supporters are also precluding themselves from understanding how the example might have taken another rational direction: the journalist, instead of correcting Alba, could have easily played along with her ‘way of speaking’, in which the word was accepted with its non-standard connotations, without thereby destroying the speech’s point.

#### 4. The Objection from Lexicality

A more specific worry against TCP concerns its merging, within the single category of modulated items, of expressions that can receive a metaphorical interpretation with expressions that clearly cannot. However, if everything can be modulated, why cannot words like ‘everybody’, ‘anyone’, ‘most’ be used as metaphors? Why, as Glanzberg (2008) points out, in any rich metaphorical discourse do these expressions, which linguists call *determiners*, still retain their literal meaning? Consider these two Shakespearean passages:

- (3) ‘*Ant.*: Shee *Eros* has  
Packt cards with *Caesars*, and false plaid my Glory

Unto an Enemies Triumph.’

Shakespeare (*Antony and Cleopatra*, IV, xiv, 18ff, quot. in White 1996: 25)

- (4) ‘Kent: Vex not his ghost. O let him passe! He hates him,  
That would upon the wracke of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer.’

Shakespeare (*King Lear*, V, iii, 313ff, quot. in White 1996: 26)

Here I won’t be attempting to offer an interpretation of these metaphors, since the reader may find the interpretive observations made by White (1996), from whom these quotations are taken, more interesting. What is important to observe is that the determiners appearing in (3) and (4), e.g., ‘my’ and ‘the’, as well as the complementizer ‘that’ and the connectives ‘not’ and ‘and’ are all used literally, and cannot be interpreted otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

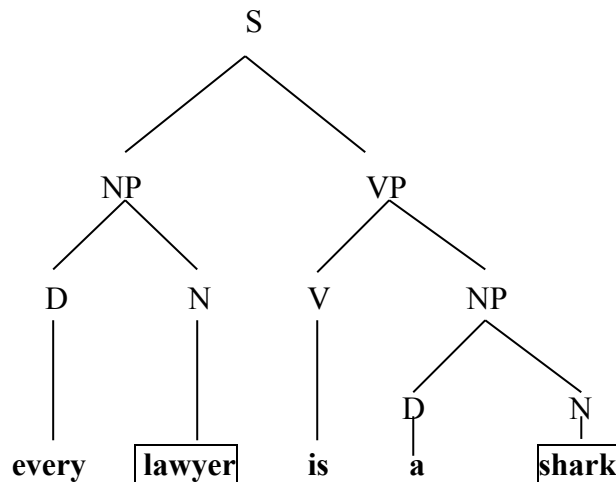
Glanzberg uses this kind of evidence to distinguish between lexical categories and functional ones, by imposing a constraint on what can be metaphorised. In other words, only lexical categories (basically, nouns, verbs, adjectives, maybe prepositions), which have a ‘thick’ semantics, can be interpreted metaphorically. In contrast, functional categories (e.g., determiners, complementizers like ‘that’ and ‘which’, connectives like conjunction and negation) show only a ‘thin’ semantics’, and therefore cannot receive a metaphorical interpretation.

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<sup>16</sup> A different discourse seems to apply to the case of prepositions, which seem to be interpretable metaphorically. See Lakoff & Johnson (2003) for discussion.

To illustrate this point, consider the syntactic derivation of this sentence, which can obviously lead to a metaphorical interpretation, whatever this interpretation may be.

(5) Every lawyer is a shark.



A syntactic structure (i.e., *tree*) like this poses non-trivial constraints on the interpretation of any utterance of (5). We will see in the next section that this sort of structure respects the demands of compositionality for the language system, and allows us to make important generalisations as to the linguistic knowledge (i.e., *competence* for Chomsky<sup>17</sup>) of speakers.

Also, the squared words at the final nodes of the tree are those that can be interpreted metaphorically.<sup>18</sup> In the particular case, it is ‘shark’ that actually receives a metaphorical interpretation, but we could alter the example so that both NPs in the subject and accusative positions would be interpreted metaphorically. I should also say that I am rather unsympathetic toward Glanzberg’s assumption that metaphor requires a very different conceptual system that operates on the language system. In defence of this

<sup>17</sup> See Chomsky (1965).

<sup>18</sup> I am less sure about the copula, which, although it does not seem to be interpretable metaphorically, can receive non-standard interpretations.



view, he merely quotes a passage from Lakoff's writings in which Lakoff states his conceptualist account of metaphor, without offering any argument in its defence. However, I am not interested here in what Glanzberg thinks about metaphor,<sup>19</sup> but only on the kind of evidence he uses.

Such evidence, it seems to me, can be used to offer an argument against TCP. The argument proceeds as follows:

- i. Metaphor is an instance of modulation.
- ii. Functional words like 'everybody', 'most', etc. can be modulated.
- iii. Therefore, functional words can be interpreted metaphorically.

To show that premise (ii) is true, just consider these cases:

- (6) Most were present.
- (7) Everybody was silent.

Applying the usual pragmatic machinery, (6) and (7) are interpreted in such a way that modulation functions determine new meanings for 'most' and 'everybody':

- (6\*) *Most-ministers* were present.
- (7\*) *Every-member-of-the-committee* was silent.

In Recanati's jargon, the meanings of 'most' and 'everybody', say  $\mu_1$  and  $\mu_2$ , are such that the result of applying two pragmatic

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<sup>19</sup> In his paper, in fact, he does not develop any insightful view on metaphor, since he is only interested in the 'interface' between the language system and what he calls 'the metaphor system'. Glanzberg remains silent as to which mechanisms are responsible for the metaphorical interpretation, although he assumes (without giving an argument) that these concern pragmatics and not semantics.

functions, e.g.,  $F'$  and  $F''$  to the arguments  $\mu_1$  and  $\mu_2$  will get new interpretations for  $\mu_1$  and  $\mu_2$ , say,  $\mu_1^*$  and  $\mu_2^*$  (i.e., [6\*] and [7\*]).

However, adding (ii) to (i) implicates that even functional words can be metaphorically interpreted. Nothing prevents a semantic system like that envisaged by radical contextualists to allow pragmatic functions to apply to functional expressions.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Recanati (2010: 42) says:

Metaphorical and metonymical interpretations result from the operation of such pragmatic functions, and the argument to the function may be the meaning of *any* expression, whether or not it is 'context-sensitive' in the standard sense in which indexicals and semantically underspecified expressions are. (Recanati's stress)

Insofar as there is no constraint whatsoever on the types of literal meanings that can be interpreted metaphorically, TCP is unable to tell what exactly makes an expression metaphorical. Notice that the point I am making is not that radical contextualists actually consider it possible for a determiner to be metaphorical, only that there is nothing in their account of meaning that prevents this. In the next section I provide another reason of why the radical contextualists face this situation.

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<sup>20</sup> We already saw in the previous chapter that TCP argues for the pragmatic modulation of other functional expressions like connectives. See, in particular, the discussion of 'and' and 'not' in Carston (2002: chapters three & four). Carston does not work with modulation functions, but nothing in her theory could not be formulated by using Recanati's machinery.

## 5. The Objection from Compositionality

The way TCP ignores important distinctions at the level of lexical semantics mirrors its lack of attention to other levels of semantic representation. In this section I shall discuss TCP's limits in dealing with a very important semantic property of a natural language like English: its being compositional.<sup>21</sup>

What does it exactly mean to say that the language is compositional? In particular, how shall we interpret the classical formulation of *compositionality* as the principle saying that the meaning of an expression is determined by the meanings of its constituent parts, their way of combining and nothing else?<sup>22</sup>

In this section, I will briefly review some of the ways in which the principle of compositionality may be interpreted. Then I will highlight the interpretation of the principle which radical contextualists, and in particular Recanati, have appealed to, and show how it is purely ad hoc, and hence unable to allow for any serious empirical generalisation. Finally, I will conclude the section by making some observations as to the way we should look at the whole issue of compositionality.

To begin with, it is true that the principle of compositionality is open to several interpretations, some of which are more cogent than others. As Szabó (2012) points out, the principle of compositionality is ambiguous between different readings, depending on how we interpret the meaning of some of the words

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<sup>21</sup> Compositionality is at the very core of much of the philosophical and semantic literature. See Werning et al. (eds) (2012).

<sup>22</sup> The 'and nothing else' clause seems to add a strong restriction on how the principle of compositionality should (not) be taken. If nothing more than what the principle states is required for its understanding, then considerations concerning contextual imports should not even be addressed. Since, however, it is an open question whether contextual intrusions are possible, then I will omit the clause in my discussion. However, it will turn out that I am rather sympathetic to the presence of the clause in the formulation of the principle.

that usually appear in the standard formulation of the principle. The standard formulation says:

COMPOSITIONALITY<sub>standard</sub>. The meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meanings of its constituents and of the way they are combined.

However, COMPOSITIONALITY<sub>standard</sub> is silent not only as to the way ‘function’ ought to be interpreted, but also as to the meanings of ‘the meanings of its constituents’ and of ‘they’, which appear in its formulation. First of all, ‘is a function of’ may have the meaning of ‘is determined by’ or the more technical one, according to which there is a function to the meaning of the complex expression from the meanings of its constituents and the way they are combined.

COMP<sub>functional</sub> There is a function to the meaning of a complex expression from the meanings of its constituents and the way they are combined.

COMP<sub>determinative</sub> The meaning of a complex expression is determined by the meanings of its constituents and of the way they are combined.

As Szabó (2012: 68) claims, the reading in which ‘is a function of’ is taken to mean ‘is determined by’ is too weak to capture the idea of linguistic change. In fact, the meaning of a complex expression could change, although its constituent parts would still determine it. More reasonably, linguistic change of a complex expression should imply that a new function is associated to it.<sup>2324</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Someone could still think that the two formulations are very similar. She should consider that only one reading entails the other, but not vice versa. In particular, it is the functional reading that entails the determinative one, but not vice versa. From the fact that a certain sentence’s meaning is

Secondly, the meaning of ‘the meanings of its constituents’ can be interpreted *individually* or *collectively*.<sup>25</sup>

COMP<sub>individual</sub> The meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meanings its constituents have *individually* and of the way they are combined.

COMP<sub>collective</sub> The meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meanings its constituents have *collectively* and of the way they are combined.

Here Szabó seems to prefer the collective reading for the following reason: if we adopt the individual reading then it is difficult to account for cases of co-referential proper names like ‘Cicero’ and ‘Tullio’. Taken in the individual sense, COMP would force us to say that the sentences ‘Cicero is Cicero’ and ‘Cicero is Tullio’ differ in meaning. The solution for Szabó is to allow for the collective reading of COMP, and to add to it a notion of ‘index’ so that two new representations are now given, i.e., ‘Cicero<sub>1</sub> is Cicero<sub>1</sub>’ and ‘Cicero<sub>1</sub> is Tullio<sub>2</sub>’. Sameness of index encodes *semantically encoded coreference*, and absence of coreference explains the difference in meaning.

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associated with a certain meaning it follows that the function is determined by its constituents. But from the fact that a certain sentence’ meaning is determined by the meanings of its constituents, it does not follow that there is a function to the complex meaning. The mathematical notion of function is then what we need to capture the idea that sentences are associated with semantic entities like functions that constitute their meanings. Thanks to Greg Currie for asking for a clarification here.

<sup>24</sup> For an exposition of the functional version of the principle of compositionality within the Kaplanian framework, see Westerståhl (2012: 203ff.).

<sup>25</sup> Szabó (2012: 68-9) invites to consider this analogy: the wealth of a nation, as fixed individually, is a function of the wealth of each individual citizen. On the other hand, the wealth of a nation, as fixed collectively, is allowed to be determined also by the properties groups or communities of individuals hold.

I must confess that I am somewhat reluctant to accept this solution for a reason having to do with the hypothesis of a language of thought (LOTH), which I will discuss in the next section. To anticipate, the LOTH claims that thoughts are wholly determinate representational structures, individuated from the individual concepts that compose them. Now, this claim entails the view that there cannot be individual concepts that bear the same representation, for otherwise we would have to say that a thought is not wholly determined on the basis of the individual concepts constituting them. In fact, the same thought could be also obtained from other individual concepts. In other words, introducing the idea of indexing seems to open the LOT to an indeterminacy that contravenes its very idea. In contrast, the LOT seems to require that COMP be taken with an individual reading, not a collective one.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, there is the ambiguity inherent in the expression ‘they’, as it appears in the formulation of COMPOSITIONALITY<sub>standard</sub>. Does ‘they’ refer to the meanings of the constituent parts or simply to the constituent parts?

COMP<sub>constituents</sub> The meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meanings of its constituents and of the way *those constituents* are combined.

COMP<sub>meanings</sub> The meaning of a complex expression is a function of the meanings of its constituents and of the way *those meanings* are combined.

As with the previous formulation, Szabó points out that one option is more restrictive than the other. The first option is rather restrictive in that, for instance, a quantified expression like ‘every

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<sup>26</sup> This point eschews important exceptions such as idioms (e.g., ‘He kicked the bucket’ = ‘He died’), whose meaning seems to be given collectively and not individually.

man' could not be subjected to domain restriction on pain of violating the principle of compositionality. In contrast, the second option is rather permissive in that it could allow bizarre semantic rules. For example, to stick to the quantifier case, Szabó asks to consider a rule that would intimate us to flip a coin and to restrict the domain of the quantifier to the set of blue things if the coin lands on tails. Obviously, if a semantic system has such compositional rules, then it is difficult to have a grasp of what compositionality is supposed to be.

As with  $\text{COMP}_{\text{individually}}$ , I am more favourable to the restrictive reading of  $\text{COMP}_{\text{constituents}}$ . My preference is due to my reliance on a purely disquotational account of meaning, according to which the meaning of, for instance,

(8)      Birds fly,

is simply given by the operation of composing its individual concepts.

(8\*)     BIRDS  $\otimes$  FLY

Such a theory takes individual concepts to be primitive, and explains the meaning of a complex expression by simply appealing to the way those primitives compose. The theory remains silent as to what the ultimate meanings of, e.g., 'birds' and 'fly' consist in. Also, in virtue of there being a homomorphism between an appropriate syntactic structure for (8) and its semantic representation (i.e. (8\*)), the theory explains why a complex expression has the meaning it has.<sup>27</sup> In the lack of a constraint of

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<sup>27</sup> Besides, it seems to me it avoids the noxious problem of substitutivity of co-referential terms under intensional verbs, i.e., verbs like 'to believe,' 'to hope,' 'to desire,' etc. At least as far as the LOT is concerned the two sentences 'Jim believes Cicero is happy' and 'Jim believes Tullio is happy' do

this sort, the following situation described by Horwich (1997: 513) can easily obtain:

The intuition that any expression “e” can be given any meaning F—that is, that it can be given the same meaning as any other expression “f”—is based on the correct idea that one can always decide to give “e” a use whereby it is interchangeable with ‘f’, by accepting the rules of inference

$$\begin{array}{cc} \dots e \dots & \dots f \dots \\ \therefore \dots f \dots & \therefore \dots e \dots \end{array}$$

And we can acknowledge that this sort of practice does indeed characterize a legitimate, actually deployed conception of “sameness of meaning”. But notice that such a practice cannot explain how a complex expression comes to acquire its normal meaning. Nor can it accommodate the notion of meaning that is relevant to translation.

This passage seems to properly characterise what the contextualist point of view on the issue is. Certainly, there are contexts where two different expressions may be given the same meaning in virtue of there being inferences of the kind Horwich mentions. But by allowing for meaning adjustments that clearly do not obey any compositional route, as contextualism does, nothing prevents deviant cases to crop up. The objection to contextualism is that it cannot account for the systematic way in which the meanings of complex expressions are determined. To illustrate with an example, consider this sentence:

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not express the same thoughts since the propositions expressed by the embedded sentences pick out different thoughts. I am using here ‘thought’ in a slightly different way than proposition. Thoughts in the LOTH are mental tokenings, propositions are not.



(9) There is a garage round the corner.

Now contextualists invite us to consider a scenario in which someone needs his car to be fixed, and thus asks a passer to indicate a local garage. The passer replies by uttering (9), which under, I think, any semantic account would simply take to express the proposition  $\langle \exists x (\text{Garage}(x) \wedge \text{Round the Corner}(x)) \rangle$ . However people like Carston (2004) and Recanati (2001) take an utterance of (9) to convey the proposition

(9\*) There is an *open* garage round the corner,

which is what the contextualist thinks the speaker intends to make available to her audience's interpretation. If this were so, none of the versions of COMPOSITIONALITY discussed so far would capture what the contextualists have in mind, not even the weaker formulations. For  $\text{COMP}_{\text{meanings}}$ , for example, presupposes a view of meanings as standing meanings as opposed to the occasional meanings that the contextualists care about.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the formulation of compositionality that contextualists have in mind is the following:

$\text{COMP}_{\text{pragmatic}}$  The meaning of a complex expression is a function of the *occasional meanings* of its constituents and of the way *those meanings* are combined.

However, this thesis is so trivial that makes compositionality a vacuous property of the language system. Now the thesis simply claims that the meaning of a complex expression *emerges from* the meanings of its constituent parts, but it does not put any constraint

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<sup>28</sup> The idea of 'standing' meaning is nothing but the idea that an expression has a character.

whatsoever on what arguments a sentence's meaning can take.<sup>29</sup> Contrast this formulation with the formulation of COMPOSITIONALITY that Szabó attributes to linguists:

COMP<sub>linguistic</sub> The meaning of a complex expression is determined by its immediate structure and the meanings of its immediate constituents.

How does this principle exactly work? To see how it works, we may consider another principle functioning at the syntax/semantics interface.

C-COMMAND A phrase X c-commands Y iff X does not dominate Y, and Y does not dominate X, and the first branching node that dominates X also dominates Y.

The principle states that, e.g., in the tree representing the syntactic structure of (5), 'every' c-commands 'lawyer' in that both nodes do not dominate each other and the first branching node (S in the tree) that dominates the first node dominates also the second. Similarly the node of 'every lawyer' c-commands the node of 'is a shark'. As Larson and Segal point out (1995: 249) although the principle is assumed as axiom by most syntactic theories, its semantic equivalent, as formulated in predicate calculus, is more a consequence of how meaning is related to logical form. In particular the resulting semantic constraint is that the node of 'is a shark' and its constituents is evaluated only with respect to the sequences determined by the NP 'every lawyer,' so that the traces<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> It is surprising how Recanati (2010) even attempts to formalise this trivial thesis.

<sup>30</sup> A trace is a structural residue left by the movement of a certain constituent to the place where it receives its interpretation.

within the node of ‘is a shark’ can only be interpreted as variables bounded by the NP ‘every lawyer.’

But consider a pragmatic enrichment of ‘Every lawyer is a shark’:

(10) *Every-lawyer-in-this-room* is a shark.

Now the meaning of ‘is a shark’ is not determined by its immediate structure but by a new NP, which will determine a very different sequence of elements that the predicate must satisfy. Sure, a new syntactic derivation may now be devised, but the question is how a speaker of English ever comes to understand a language if each well-formed and non-ambiguous sentence has, in fact, a potentially infinite number of syntactic derivations and semantic interpretation associated to it.

Recanati tries to limit the import of this line of criticism by saying:

Contextual modulation provides for *potentially* unending meaning variation. Meaning eventually stabilizes, making compositionality possible, because the (linguistic as well as extralinguistic) context, however big, is always finite. (Recanati 2010: 47)

However, define  $F$  as the standard meaning-function determining the meaning-type of an expression  $\sigma$ .  $P^*$  is the relation of being the immediate modulation function which is the successor of a given meaning. Then, it is obviously possible to reiterate such a function, so as to determine an infinite list of new meanings.

$$F(\sigma) = \mu$$

$$P^*(\mu) = \mu'$$

$$P^*(\mu') = \mu''$$

$$P^*(\mu'') = \mu'''$$

...

Contrary to what Recanati says, meaning never stabilises in this way.

Hence, by making compositionality subject to top-down influences, we can never predict what the meaning of a complex expression is. Considerations of relevance or cognitive finitude cannot block the argument, which is based on logical considerations, and not cognitive ones. Besides, making compositionality pragmatic means to abstract it away from the language system, i.e., the system of abstract representations the knowledge of which constitutes what, since Chomsky's pioneering work, has been called 'competence'. The question now is: why should contextualists appeal to compositionality in the first instance?

One way to escape the argument is to use Lasersohn's recent strategy (Lasersohn 2012) to say that pragmatics is compatible with compositional semantics in that it is based on a wholly different kind of aim, i.e., explaining the capacities of understanding of language users (whereas semantics is, roughly speaking, the study of the language as an abstract system). These capacities may perfectly turn out to be non-compositional (violating what Szabó calls the 'psychological principle of compositionality'), without modifying the wholly compositional character of the language. Insofar as Recanati does not follow this route,<sup>31</sup> my arguments

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<sup>31</sup> I think this view is not in line with the whole aim of contextualists to show both the failure of semantics to determine truth-conditions for utterances

against the contextualist appeal to pragmatic compositionality retain their force.

In contrast, I wish to conclude this section by stressing the following points:

- Generally, we should prefer restrictive formulations of COMPOSITIONALITY over permissive ones, since they allow us to explain certain phenomena better (e.g., linguistic change, LOT, an expression's acquisition of a standard meaning, binding, etc.)
- To say that strong forms of compositionality are better than weaker ones is not to say that weaker forms are false. Whenever a strong form entails a weaker formulation, then the weaker form should be accepted. However, more often than not, the explanatory power of the weaker formulation is insufficient.

I now turn to discuss another objection to TCP, namely, that it does not properly fit with the the hypothesis of a language of thought (LOTH).

## 6. The Objection from the LOTH

Since Fodor (1975), the hypothesis that thinking requires a language of thought (LOT) has been widely discussed.<sup>32</sup> The idea consists in deeming thinking to be possible because the brain is endowed with a representational system which has all the

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and also the pervasiveness of pragmatic processes at each level of semantic representation.

<sup>32</sup> For references, I suggest that the reader have a look at the entry 'LOTH' in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/language-thought/index.html#note-17>

appearances of a language like English, except for the following features:

- Unlike English, the LOT is not ambiguous. Every thought is disambiguated. The very idea of an ambiguous thought is incoherent. While the English sentence ‘Mary went to the bank’ is ambiguous between two readings, i.e., ‘Mary went to the financial institution’ and ‘Mary went to the riverbank,’ the LOT has two distinct representations, say  $\lceil \alpha \rceil$  and  $\lceil \beta \rceil$ . The two representations are tokened by distinct brain’s events.
- Unlike English sentences, the LOT sentences are all eternal. Indexicality is not a possible feature of the LOT. It follows that the LOT sentences are context-independent, their semantic interpretations being context-free.

Like English, the LOT instantiates these other features:

- It is syntactically and semantically structured, in other words it is compositional.
- It is computable: given the syntactic rules of the language, it is possible to specify algorithms that compute the meanings of the complex expressions (in a motto, semantics supervenes upon syntax).

My focus in this section is going to be based on a straightforward consideration: the LOT is not implementable by the kind of theory proposed by radical contextualists as based on the notion of ‘underdeterminacy’.<sup>33</sup> This would not be a problem if contextualists did not accept the LOT, but at least Carston (2002:

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<sup>33</sup> A first presentation of this argument is, as far as I know, due to Thomas Hodgson in his MLitt Dissertation at St Andrews, ‘Thought, Utterances and the Language of Thought’ (2008).

74ff.)<sup>34</sup> commits herself to it, and thus it is good to pause on her motivations.

I said that the idea of Underdeterminacy (for short ‘U’) does not fit well with the hypothesis of LOTH. The reason can be derived from a simple argument:

- i. LOTH sentences are wholly determinate thoughts.
- ii. Underdeterminacy states that no English sentence expresses a determinate thought.
- iii. In order for LOTH to be true there must be a thought that satisfies a scheme like the following: S Vs that  $\alpha$ .
- iv. Underdeterminacy denies that  $\alpha$  picks out a wholly determinate thought. (from ii)
- v. Thus, LOTH and Underdeterminacy are incompatible.

(i) follows from the condition that the LOT is computable, and a language is computable iff every sentence of the language is syntactically defined. (ii) is just a consequence of Carston’s formulation of U which I presented in the previous chapter.

U. [T]here are no eternal sentences in natural languages (that is, no sentences which encode a proposition or thought which is constant across all contexts), from which it follows that linguistic underdeterminacy of the proposition expressed by an utterance is *an essential feature* of natural language. (Carston 2002: 42. My emphasis)

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<sup>34</sup> See also Sperber and Wilson (1986 1995: 85): “It seems reasonable to regard logical forms, and in particular the propositional forms of assumptions, as composed of smaller constituents to whose presence and structural arrangements the deductive rules are sensitive. These constituents we will call *concepts*. An assumption, then, is a structured set of concepts”.

(iii) is motivated by the fact that LOTH subscribes to a representational theory of mind (RTM). RTM can be formulated as the thesis that thinking (and, for that matter, other cognitive processes as well) consists in causal sequences of tokenings of mental representations. Given a subject *S*, a propositional attitude verb *V*, and a propositional schema  $\alpha$ , a scheme like

(11) *S Vs that  $\alpha$*

must be such that there is a tokening of  $\alpha$  that allows the whole thought *<S Vs that  $\alpha$ >* to be computed. For instance, in order for someone to compute the information associated to (12)

(12) *Jim believes that Jane is happy,*

there must be a particular tokening of the thought embedded under the attitude verb ‘believes,’ i.e., the thought *that Jane is happy*.

But now premise (iv) kicks in. The premise denies that  $\alpha$  picks out a determinate thought, since there are not any. Take the sentence embedded in (12), i.e. the sentence ‘Jane is happy.’ From U and the ‘ad hoc concepts’ hypothesis, it follows that the sentence fails to express a proposition insofar as the concept associated to ‘happy’ may vary in its extension from one context to another. It may mean HAPPY\*, HAPPY\*\*, and so on. Thus a sentence like that embedded in (12) fails to pick out a proposition in the way the LOTH would require in order for it to be true.

Thus, if your sympathies go with Carston, you are left with two options: either to abandon the LOTH or to reformulate it. Carston opts for the second option. She says:

The particular concept is a component of the thought the speaker seeks to communicate (a ‘word’ of the Mentalese sentence



tokened) and, if communication is successful, of the thought recovered by the addressee. On this view, Mentalese must have a large stock of concepts that are not encoded by any element of natural-language form. (Carston 2002: 76)

I think that this move does not have much force. If you accept this view, then you are exposed to the same kind of argument I have offered in the previous section. Now, nothing will prevent the LOT from being open to a regressum, which clearly is at odds with the way the hypothesis was formulated. One of the most attractive feature of LOTH is, in fact, that it explains the productivity of language understanding. Given a combinatorial syntax, it is possible to derive an infinite number of thoughts, most of which our brains will never token. Now the hypothesis is that LOT contains an infinitely number of concepts. How could a finite mind possibly store all of them? This observation provides, I think, a knock-down argument against Carston's reading of the LOTH. It also stresses the importance the compositionality has for the hypothesis, which is recognised by Fodor in his recent *LOT 2* (2008).<sup>35</sup>

There is a further tension in relevance theory due to the relation between the hypothesis of ad hoc concepts and a constraint that Sperber and Wilson (1986 1995) imposed on reasoning. According to Sperber and Wilson, a concept is a sort of pointer containing three types of entries: a logical entry, an encyclopaedic entry and a lexical entry. The first contains the set of deductive rules that apply

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<sup>35</sup> Fodor (2008: 19-20) says: 'Over the last couple of years I've become increasingly convinced that capturing the compositionality of thoughts is what RTM most urgently requires; not just because compositionality is at the heart of the productivity and systematicity of thought, but also because it determines the relation between thoughts and concepts. The key to the compositionality of thoughts is that they have concepts as their constituents'.

to the concept; the second contains information relevant to the extension of the term; the third contain the information properly linguistic (e.g., the phonetic form of the item). Now, as far as the logical entry is concerned, Sperber and Wilson make the following ‘substantive’ claim:

A logical entry consists of a set of deductive rules, each formally describing a set of input and output assumptions: that is, a set of premises and conclusions. Our first substantive claim is that the only deductive rules which can appear in the logical entry of a given concept are *elimination rules* for that concept. That is, they apply only to sets of premises in which there is a specified occurrence of that concept, and yield only conclusions from which that occurrence has been removed. (SW 1986 [1995: 86])

Prescinding from the consideration that the LOTH actually forbids a concept to have internal structure, the idea that only elimination rules are allowed is at odd with the notion of *broadening* of a concept, which is fundamental to RT’s account of ad hoc concepts. For instance, according to SW, elimination rules for concepts work in the same way as the elimination rule of conjunction in logic:

$$(13) \quad \frac{P \wedge Q}{P} \quad \frac{P \wedge Q}{Q}$$

Thus, an utterance of, e.g.,

$$(14) \quad \text{Jim is a bachelor.}$$

allows for the following inference

$$(15) \quad \frac{\text{Jim is a bachelor}}{\therefore \text{Jim is an unmarried man}}$$

In contrast, introduction rules like the introduction rule of conjunction in logic is now allowed by SW.

$$(16) \quad \frac{P}{P \wedge Q}$$

We cannot make the following inference from (14):

$$(17) \quad \frac{\text{Jim is a bachelor}}{\therefore \text{Jim is a bachelor and Jim is very sexy}}$$

In the language of RT, (17) is unwarranted because it only introduces non-relevant assumptions in the process of interpreting (14).

But now, take an utterance that can be obviously interpreted literally and metaphorically. E.g.,

$$(18) \quad \text{Mary is a princess.}$$

Suppose it is interpreted literally. Then, given SW's constraint, we could make the following inferences:

$$(19) \quad \frac{\text{Mary is a princess}}{\therefore \text{Mary is a female}}$$

$$\frac{\text{Mary is a princess}}{\therefore \text{Mary is the daughter of a monarch or the wife or widow of a prince}}$$

but we should be prevented from making the following one, given that ‘being a spoiled girl’ is not a definitional feature of the lexical entry ‘princess’:

- (20)        Mary is a princess  
              ∴ Mary is spoiled girl

However, in contrast to SW’s claim, (20) is the kind of inference that the relevance theoretic account appeals to in order to explain how language users derive the explicature behind an utterance of (18). If so, then there is a clear violation of their constraint that a concept’s logical entry allows only for elimination rules. More generally, if there is such a violation then it should be possible to say that the literal and the metaphorical do not coincide, against one of the basic assumptions of RT and TCP.

I further develop this line of criticism in the next, and final, section of this chapter.

## **7. VP-Ellipsis and Anaphora**

I conclude my attack on TCP by considering a test used by Stern (2000, 2006) to show that metaphorical interpretation is sensitive to VP-ellipsis and anaphora. However, contextualists have problems to deal with such kinds of constructions, and the purpose of this section is to reinforce the point that their account of metaphor does not put sufficient constraints on acceptable interpretations.

A property anaphoric links generally require is identity of sense between antecedent and anaphor (Lakoff 1970). For instance:

- (21) That building over there is a bank, and so is that grassy bit of land by the river. (From Kennedy and McNally 2008)

(21) is clearly infelicitous because the sense ‘bank’ has in the first conjunct differs from the interpretation given to ‘bank’ in the second conjunct. This shift of interpretation creates a conflict with the independent identity of sense constraints imposed by so-anaphora.

We can find a similar pattern in cases in which the anaphor is metaphorical. Stern invites us to consider the following utterances:

- (22) Juliet is the sun.  
(23) The central body of our solar system is the sun.  
(24) # The central body of our solar system is the sun, and Juliet is, too.

As we will see better in the next chapter, Stern thinks that although (22) and (23) are two legitimate utterances, (24) is ill-formed because there is a tension due to there being two distinct characters for the expression ‘the sun’, one literal and the other metaphorical. Similar bizarre results could be obtained in the case of anaphora, but let’s focus on a case which looks more acceptable. Consider the anaphoric link in (24),

- (25) Quine demolished Carnap’s argument.  
(26) Anne demolished Carnap’s argument.  
(27) Quine demolished Carnap’s argument and so did Anne.

Imagine that (25) is uttered to represent a scenario in which Quine rejected Carnap’s argument by giving a very detailed logical argument, using all the technicalities of mathematical logic to do so. Also imagine that Anne gave another argument to dismantle

Carnap's argument, this time based on a very simple but efficacious observation. Now as far as (27) is concerned, the contextualist explanation is that the VP-ellipsis leads to infelicity because two different ad hoc concepts are expressed. But given that (25) and (26) also express two different ad hoc concepts, (27) should equally be infelicitous. However, (27) sounds much more acceptable than (24).

It is not easy to exactly say what is wrong with the contextualist account, but here's my concern. Contextualists do not have any story about what makes an expression metaphorical. They actually deny there is any dimension peculiar to metaphor. This is a very harsh conclusion, which not only deprives metaphor of its felt speciality, but it also shows an empirical inadequacy in accounting for the kind of examples Stern uses.

An account of metaphor should not only explain why (24) differs from (27), but also give the right importance to the metaphorical dimension of these utterances. By reducing such a dimension to the content conveyed by a metaphorical utterance, contextualists are unable to explain why mixed metaphors are generally infelicitous, or what makes it possible for an expression to receive a metaphorical interpretation instead of a literal one.

## **8. Conclusions**

In this chapter I have done two things. First of all, I have presented a number of objections to TCP and RT. I have argued that contextualism does not offer satisfactory solutions to a number of issues in the philosophy of language and mind, e.g., compositionality, LOT, lexicality. Secondly, I have related these issues to some problems specific to metaphorical interpretation, arguing that contextualism offers proposals that are either

incoherent with some of its tenets or inadequate. More specifically, I have severely criticised the idea that metaphorical interpretation requires processes of modulation affecting the level of what-is-said by utterances. What I have not done is to offer an alternative to the contextualist account. This is something I set out to do in the next chapter, where, after presenting and criticising an account of metaphorical interpretation leaning on ‘bottom-up’ semantic processes, I will discuss my own proposal.

## Chapter 6

# The Semantics of Metaphor: Indexicalism

### 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I have offered a series of objections to TCP, which can be summarised as follows:

- (a) TCP's account of truth-conditionality is so loose that it allows for improper truth-conditions;
- (b) Such an account does not square with important restrictions on the proper input of a semantic system, e.g., it does not respect compositionality (or at least it does not respect its most plausible readings);
- (c) TCP does not offer a plausible story as to how language and thought interact;
- (d) TCP is unable to explain what makes an expression metaphorical and, also, what relationship (if any) there is between the literal and the metaphorical.



More generally, I have identified the source of all these problems with the fact that TCP identifies the meaning of an expression with the contribution contextually given by it to the content expressed by an utterance containing that expression. Such contribution being open to the widest pragmatic intrusions makes the meaning of an expression a semantic entity that is intractable from a theoretical point of view.

The identification of meaning with content is unwarranted not only for the reasons given by (a)-(d), but also because there is a more plausible candidate for being the meaning of an expression, namely, its character. Put in a friendly way, the character of an expression is a rule the knowledge of which guarantees that, given a context, its application delivers a content. More formally, a character is that function which yields an intension or content, namely, a function from circumstances of evaluation to extensions.

CHARACTER =  $F(\text{context of use}) \longrightarrow$  content

CONTENT =  $F(\text{circumstance of evaluation}) \longrightarrow$  extension

In detail, the character of an indexical is that function that takes a certain parameter from an index and returns an appropriate content for it (e.g., an individual in the case of ‘I’, a location in the case of ‘here’, and so on). Also, the character of a predicate can usually be seen as a constant function from contexts to another function, the intension of the predicate which yields the sets of individuals having the property associated with the predicate.<sup>1</sup> The main difference between the semantics of indexicals and that of other expressions like predicates and definite descriptions is that

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<sup>1</sup> In many cases the character of a predicate coincides with the content expressed by any of its utterances (Leezenberg. 2001: 175, fn. 1). But there are cases in which the identification is not that simple since other contextual factors need to be considered, as was shown in the previous chapter.

only for the former does the semantics provide a rule which directly establishes the semantic value for these expressions in context. In this sense, indexicals are the paradigm of *directly referential* terms, terms whose semantics gives rules stipulating that their semantic values, once fixed, are the same in all circumstances of evaluation (Kaplan 1989: 493).<sup>2</sup>

Once the character has fixed a content, that content can be evaluated with respect to a circumstance, which in the traditional Kaplanian framework is just a pair constituted by a world and a time. The final output of this system is the assignment of a semantic value or extension<sup>3</sup> to that content relative to an opportunely selected circumstance of evaluation, usually the one initialised by the context of utterance. This, in a nutshell, is the basic picture of Kaplan's double-index semantics.<sup>4,5</sup>

As anticipated, it is commonly assumed by the semanticists working within the Kaplanian tradition that the character of an expression is what should properly be considered as its *meaning*, namely, that linguistic aspect the knowledge of which allows a speaker to use the expression correctly in a given context. Also, the character of an expression is that aspect that constrains its possible

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, indexicals have other uses: for instance, they can be used anaphorically and they can be bounded. Kaplan took the existence of these uses to be evidence for a lexical ambiguity in the meaning of these expressions. In contrast, Kamp (1981: 191-93) started developing a new theory, nowadays called *Discourse Representation Theory*, in which all these uses are grouped under a single rule selecting opportune referents from 'antecedently available entities' in discourse representations. What differs in these uses is the nature of these entities: real world individuals in the case of deictic uses of indexicals, other types of representation in the case of bounded ones.

<sup>3</sup> A referent in the case of proper names and definite descriptions, a set of individuals in the case of predicates, a truth-value in the case of sentences.

<sup>4</sup> The motivation behind the adoption of the double indexing system is "essentially to allow expressions buried underneath one or more operators (modal, temporal, epistemic) to ignore the current index of evaluation and only look at what's happening at the designated index" (Stojanovic 2007: 58).

<sup>5</sup> See Westerståhl (2012) for an accurate analysis of how compositionality is respected by Kaplan's semantics.

contexts of utterance, by individuating the class of its possible semantic values.

Now, I think that the only way of demonstrating that metaphor is within the domain of semantics is to show that there is a systematic connection between the meaning of an expression (i.e., its character) and the metaphorical dimension that, given a context, it may give rise to. This need is well expressed by the words of Josef Stern (2008: 267), who is probably the most strenuous defender of a semantic approach to metaphorical interpretation:

If we are to develop a semantic theory of metaphor, we must, first, demonstrate how we can capture its context-dependence without totally obscuring the boundary between the linguistic and extra-linguistic and, second, we must show why, given the substantial contextual input to our understanding of metaphor, a level of semantic knowledge is explanatory.

Stern offers an ingenious semantic account, which respects this basic theoretical need for a connection between meaning, metaphorical dimension and context. Such an account pivots around the idea that for each individual lexical item or expression there are two characters, one literal and the other metaphorical. Following an indexicalist route, Stern (2000: 16) believes that the metaphorical character of an expression is a non-constant function which yields different contents in different contexts. However, in contrast with indexicals such as ‘I’ or ‘here’, the character of a metaphor is more similar to an operator, whose function is to attach to a literal expression of a certain syntactic category and semantic type and to deliver a new expression of the same category and same type.<sup>6,7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The story is a bit different for nominative metaphors, as we will see later on.

<sup>7</sup> A first important difference between indexicals and metaphors can be traced: the mechanism underlying the semantics of indexicals is direct, not so for the

Stern identifies the character of a metaphor with an ‘Mthat-operator’, which attaches to its literal vehicle in the sentence’s logical form.<sup>8</sup> Its function is to determine a content. When the expression is used literally the operator is idle. Instead, when the interpretation required is metaphorical the metaphorical character gets selected and goes to look for properties saliently associated with the literal vehicle of the metaphor, which are presupposed in the context of utterance. These become the argument of the metaphorical character for the property actually predicated in context.<sup>9</sup>

This account provides a number of interesting hypotheses as to the semantic behaviour of metaphors especially in linguistic constructions like VP-ellipsis and anaphora. In this respect, it is clearly superior to those pragmatic accounts which I have dealt

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semantics of metaphors. In other words, given a context an indexical directly selects the appropriate parameter from the context. In the case of a metaphor, the character does not simply look at the context of use, but also at the literal vehicle itself. Stern (2000: 198-99) makes this point: “[P]art of what the speaker knows when she knows how to interpret a metaphor  $\Phi$  is not simply something about the single expression  $\Phi$ . Her knowledge of metaphor is closer to knowledge of an operator, of an interpretive operation she can perform on any (literally interpreted) expression. And in this respect the character of a metaphor is more like that of the demonstrative interpretation operator ‘Dthat’ than that of any individual indexical (type) such as ‘I’ or ‘here’”. Thus while in both indexicals and metaphors the final output is a directly referred term, the mechanisms underlying these expressions are in one case more direct than in the other. As Stern (2000: 256) puts it, there is ‘a continuum’ of uses from pure indexicals and demonstratives to demonstrative uses of descriptions and metaphors. This point should be separated from the further thesis of rigidity that applies to indexicals and, according to Stern, also to metaphors.

<sup>8</sup> More appropriately, the presence of this operator is traceable at the level of the LF of a given sentence-in-context. Sentences-in-contexts should, in fact, according to Kaplan, be regarded as the proper input of a semantic system. In Predelli’s theory (Predelli 2005), the input is said to be the pair constituted by a clause and an index, where a clause is nothing but a disambiguated sentence, whereas the index is, as usual, a collection of contextual parameters. Predelli adopts the further convention of naming Kaplan’s notion of content ‘t-distribution’, namely, a function that maps points of evaluation (Kaplan’s circumstances of evaluations) onto truth-values. Here I will stick to Kaplan’s terminology, although as I said in the previous chapter I have opted for Predelli’s notion of ‘index’ instead of Kaplan’s more general choice of ‘context’.

<sup>9</sup> We can reformulate Stern’s view using Predelli’s terminology: given an index, which now includes also a metaphorical parameter, a metaphorical utterance expresses a content that is the result yielded by an appropriate selection of the metaphorical parameter in that index.

with so far. However, it does not escape several criticisms that can be addressed to it from both a syntactic point of view and a semantic one. My plan in the first part of this chapter is, therefore, to show both the advantages and the disadvantages of this account, so as to pave the way for my own theory, which bears some similarities with Stern's but is different in crucial respects.

The plan for this chapter is as follows: in § 2 my starting point is a consideration of the form of indexicalism about metaphorical interpretation mostly due to Stern's work. I will offer a series of counter-arguments to it in §§ 3-4, and show how the entire project of explaining metaphorical expressions by adding characters to these expressions is bound to fail. I believe this failure is due, mostly, to the consequences of enriching the language's expressive power, which come with considerable theoretical costs, especially in terms of elegance and simplicity, and also adequacy. In § 5 I will pause on the general philosophical consequences of adopting Stern's indexicalist strategy.

## **2. Metaphor & Indexicalism**

In my discussion of indexicals in the previous chapter I pointed out that, according to the traditional semantic approach to indexicality, a properly situated semantic system should be able to assign the truth-value *Truth* to an utterance of a sentence containing an indexical whenever the content assigned by the system relative to an index is true at that index relative to the world and time of the context of use.<sup>10</sup> Formally, we can give the following truth-clause for sentence  $\phi$ :

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Predelli 2005: 42.

- (1)  $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{f, c, t, w}^M = T^{11}$  iff given a model  $M$ , an assignment  $f$  of values to variables,  $\{\phi\}(c)^{12}$  is true relative to  $(c_t, c_w)$ .

Equivalently,

$M, f, c, t, w \models \phi$  iff given a model  $M$ , an assignment  $f$  of values to variables, the content expressed by  $\phi$  in  $c$  is true relative to  $(c_t, c_w)$ .

There, I also mentioned the possibility of scenarios the semantic evaluation of which requires ‘improper’ indexes, namely, indexes which do not return the standard parameters for indexicals (e.g., the location where the utterance takes place). In contrast, Kaplan thought that an appropriate logic of demonstratives should only deal with proper indexes (in his way of speaking, ‘contexts’), indexes that always return the standard parameters. Kaplan also considered the possibility of operators that shift the standard parameter of an index to a non-standard one,<sup>13</sup> such as in (2):

- (2) In some context or other it is true that I am not tired.

in which the character of ‘I’ does not have anything to do with the speaker of the context of utterance of (2) in virtue of being preceded by the operator ‘in some context or other it is true that’. Kaplan (1989: 510) calls these kinds of operators ‘monsters’ and

<sup>11</sup> Read: “ $\phi$  is true in a model  $M$ , under an assignment  $f$ , given an index  $c$  and relative to the circumstance of evaluation constituted by the pair  $(t, w)$  of the context of use”.

<sup>12</sup> When ‘ $\phi$ ’ is surrounded by curled brackets, it means ‘the character of  $\phi$ ’. When this expression is accompanied by ‘ $(c)$ ’, it means ‘the content expressed by  $\phi$  in  $c$ ’ (cf. Kaplan 1989: 547).

<sup>13</sup> Predelli (2008: 292): “An operator  $M$  of this sort could then be defined as  $\llbracket M\phi \rrbracket_{c,w} = T$  iff  $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{c',w} = T$  for  $K(c')$ , where  $K$  is some condition on the relevant context(s)”.

adds that English is not a language containing any such operators. Many philosophers and linguists (Schlenker 2003; Predelli 2005, 2009; Stojanovic 2007 among others) have attacked Kaplan's orthodox, showing inadequacies and counter-examples to it.

Here I won't deal with these analyses here since they do not approach the topic of metaphor directly, but Kaplan's view has important consequences for a semantic theory of metaphor, and thus deserves my attention. To begin with, let me point out that when I say that Kaplan's theory is the orthodox view on indexicality, what I have in mind is that, apart from the obvious consideration that it was the first model-theoretic semantics devised for it, it combines two quite strong independent claims:

- (i) The proper logic of demonstratives countenances only proper indexes;
- (ii) The semantics of English does not contain monsters.

Now, these two claims have a specific importance for my discussion of metaphor. In fact, two scholars working within the Kaplanian tradition have investigated their import for a semantic account of metaphor. Both Stern (2000, 2006, 2008) and Leezenberg (2001) believe that metaphorical constructions should be accounted for by appealing to features of the Kaplanian semantics for demonstratives. Stern does so by considering that each metaphorical interpretation of an expression may be fixed only relative to an improper index for that expression, whose appropriate parameter is selected by a special operator that he calls 'Mthat-operator'. In contrast, Leezenberg makes the interesting observation that there is no need to appeal to improper indexes, and therefore to special operators that are 'internal' to an expression's semantics, since the semantics of metaphorical predication does not

really differ in kind from that of literal predication.<sup>14</sup> Both types of predication require specific contextual parameters, which Leezenberg calls ‘thematic dimensions’.<sup>15</sup> However, in order to defend this claim, Leezenberg contemplates the possibility of linguistic operators which shift contextual parameters, so as to determine new interpretations for expressions used metaphorically. If there are such parameters, then we would have some reasons to abandon one of the orthodox claims of Kaplan’s theory, namely, that English does not contain monsters. On the other hand, if Stern is right about claiming that the semantics of English requires metaphorical characters, then we will have to consider some substantial change in our current conception of linguistic competence.

In what follows I will argue that we do not need to include a new metaphorical character, as Stern claims, in order to give a semantic account of metaphorical interpretation. A more parsimonious and elegant solution is available, which may also be seen as vindicating Stern’s original claim that metaphor is a phenomenon requiring a semantic explanation. On the other hand, I will also defend the view that there are no operators that behave like monsters, at least not of the kind whose existence Leezenberg assumes. The presence of *predicate-limiting adverbials*, which Leezenberg deems to be a problem for Kaplan’s view, is not a real problem since these do not work as sentential operators at all. As the term already suggests, the precise grammatical role of these expressions is to specify the respect in which a given expression is

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<sup>14</sup> Thus, it seems to me that Leezenberg, more than Stern, adheres to the ‘continuity’ view of contextualists like Recanati and relevance theorists. To remind the reader, the continuity view claims that the interpretation of metaphorical utterances does not differ in kind from the interpretation of other literal utterances, but only in degree. Of course, Leezenberg disagrees with the contextualist theories of metaphor in pretty much every other respect.

<sup>15</sup> We will see that the main difference between my account and Leezenberg’s is that mine includes thematic dimensions in the circumstances of evaluation instead of positing them as contextual parameters.



to be interpreted. They do not modify the character itself of these expressions.

I shall devote the next section to sketch Stern's view. In §§ 3-4 I will focus on some evidence against Stern's operator, while in § 5 on understanding some important issues surrounding the interfaces between syntax and semantics in relation to Stern's semantics. Since my own theory shares more similarities with Leezenberg's, I shall discuss it in relation to mine in the next chapter.

## 2.1 Stern's Account

The reader will remember that in the previous chapter I mentioned a view on indexicality which Predelli (2005: 46) aptly named the *Many Characters View*. On this view an indexical expression is ambiguous between a standard reading, in which the character of the indexical selects a parameter from a proper index, and a non-standard one, in which another character associated with the indexical expression type selects a different kind of parameter from an improper index.<sup>16</sup>

Adapting this story to Stern's account, it turns out that we have a specular situation in the case of metaphorical interpretation. According to Stern (2000, 2006, 2008), expression types such as predicates containing indefinite descriptions (e.g., 'is a princess') or definite descriptions (e.g., 'is the sun') are not only associated with a 'literal' character, but also with another, very different character, which is responsible for the appropriate contextual interpretation of a metaphor. Thus, expressions that can be metaphorically interpreted are ambiguous: they have two characters, one literal and the other metaphorical, and an

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<sup>16</sup> As a reminder, a 'proper' index is one whose parameters "correspond in an obvious manner to the parameters of the context of utterance (or inscription)" (Predelli 2005: 41-42).

appropriate semantic system should be put in a position to receive as input not only a disambiguated sentence, but also one for which an appropriate selection of a literal vs. metaphorical character has been made. I will show in a moment how Stern's theory works in practice.

Apart from explaining how a semantic system takes into account the context-dependence of metaphors, Stern's theory has as other desideratum the need for an explanation of how the metaphorical dimension depends on the literal one. It should immediately be noticed that Stern does not maintain that there is a psychological dependence of the metaphorical upon the literal, which could be characterised as the requirement that hearers first have access to the literal meaning of an utterance and then derive a new metaphorical interpretation. In fact, Stern agrees with contextualists like Recanati, Bezuidenhout and relevance theorists that there is no need to first compute the literal meaning of an expression in order to determine its metaphorical content. What Stern wants to explain is how the metaphorical dimension of an expression semantically depends on its literal meaning.<sup>17</sup>

Recapitulating, we have two basic requirements that Stern's theory intends to satisfy:

- (i) the need for a semantic explanation of the context-dependence of metaphorical expressions;
- (ii) the need for a semantic explanation of the dependence of an expression's metaphorical interpretation upon its literal meaning.

In order to formally satisfy these requirements, Stern makes use of

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<sup>17</sup> Thus Stern rejects the contextualist view that literality and metaphoricality are on the same level and adopts a weak form of Davidson's thesis that a metaphor depends on its literal meaning. However, unlike Davidson, Stern fully endorses the view that a metaphorical utterance expresses a fully truth-evaluable content.

a complex semantic machinery. In analogy with Kaplan's 'Dthat' operator for dthat-descriptions, he introduces an 'Mthat' operator for mthat-descriptions, which is characterised as follows:

[The Mthat-operator is] a function from the 'metaphorically relevant' set(s) of properties presupposed to be m(etaphorically)-associated with [an expression]  $\Phi$  in its containing sentence  $S$  in the context  $c$  to a set of properties  $P$ .  
(Stern 2000: 115)

Since it is not immediately evident how Stern's definition captures the tasks inherent in (i) and (ii), some explications of what Stern means by his terminology is, I believe, opportune here. But, first, the reader may find the box below useful to integrate the present discourse with a sketch of Kaplan's original motivation for introducing his 'Dthat'-operator.

**Dthat**

Keith Donnellan in his classic 'Reference and Definite Descriptions' (1966) observed that definite descriptions, phrases containing a determiner like the article 'the' and a property like 'being the Italian first minister', have not only an attributive use, but also a referential one. The former use coincides with a generic reading of the description, according to which the descriptive property is ascribed to whoever has it in the world and time determined by the context of utterance.

The latter use allows a speaker, and indirectly her audience, to determine the referent of her utterance without this referent necessarily satisfying the description used to individuate him or her. For instance, we are at a party and I make you a gesture toward the table in front of us. I tell you: "The man who is drinking martini

is republican”. Suppose the individual in question is actually drinking water. Have I said something true? Most people would probably nod insofar as my predication is effectively successful (the man referred to is actually republican), although my description is not completely accurate.

Kaplan (1978) takes this kind of example as evidence for an ambiguity in sentence types containing definite descriptions. According to one reading, the attributive one, the article is taken to be the traditional Russellian quantifier, while, according to the other reading, the referential one, the description works as a demonstration which is ‘captured’ by an operator that Kaplan introduces, namely, the ‘Dthat’-operator. This term-forming operator has the function of “converting an arbitrary singular term into one which is directly referential” (Kaplan 1989: 521).

The referential reading of the abovementioned example is now treated in the following way:

(3) Dthat [‘the man who is drinking martini’] is republican.

Notice how the material within the scope of the operator is under quotation marks. This is because this material is not used, at least not primarily so, to ascribe whichever property the expression would ascribe without quotation marks. The quoted description functions more like a demonstrated index, which is used to refer to whomever the description applies to. Kaplan wants to maintain that in different circumstances of evaluation, different demonstrated indexes will determine different demonstrata (Kaplan 1978 [1997: 685]). Of course, once a demonstratum has been trapped into the proposition expressed by one of its utterances, it will behave as any other directly referential term: its evaluation will not vary with respect to different circumstances of evaluation.

The main difference between the Dthat and the Mthat is that the

Dthat is *partially denotational* in the sense that it contributes the object denoted by its embedded definite description to the proposition expressed. On the other hand, the Mthat is, like indexicals, *parametric* in the sense that it yields a parameter, whose value is supplied by the context of use (Stern 2000: 200; see also Camp 2005: 717-18).

Breaking down Stern's definition of the Mthat-operator, we have the following clauses:

- (i) [The Mthat-operator is] a function from the 'metaphorically relevant' set(s) of properties;
- (ii) Such properties are "presupposed to be m(etaphorically)-associated with [an expression]  $\Phi$  in its containing sentence S in the context  $c$ ";
- (iii) The function yields "a set of properties  $P$ ". (Stern 2000: 115)

(i) means that when the operator gets activated<sup>18</sup> it looks for those properties which are saliently associated with the vehicle of the metaphor in virtue of there being presupposed in the conversation by its participants. Given that the notion of salience invoked by Stern (2000: 149-54) belongs to the psychological domain, and not to semantics, I do not have much to say about it in this place.

I have more to say about (ii), in which the term 'presupposed' makes its appearance. Stern (2000: 117) makes appeal here to a Stalnakerian conception of presuppositions (Stalnaker 1999, 2002). This account characterises presuppositions both as a kind of mental attitude speakers have to some propositions in the common ground

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<sup>18</sup> The activation itself happens at the so-called *pre-semantic* level, in which disambiguation and reference assignment are effectuated.

of a conversation<sup>19</sup> – where propositions are taken to be sets of possible worlds – and also as felicity conditions on the assertability of sentences in context.<sup>20</sup>

Now, these presuppositions are associated with the literal vehicle of a metaphor, in virtue of there being some connection between them and the literal meaning of the expression used metaphorically.<sup>21</sup> In other words, such properties are properties that an appropriately situated interpreter would associate with the literal meaning of the expression used metaphorically. As Stern (2000: 121) notes, these properties do not need to function in the same way as Black's 'systems of common places' (Black 1962, 1979), which are invariably associated with the literal vehicle of the metaphor. The pragmatic conception of presuppositions only deals with presuppositions the presence of which makes a certain stage  $cs_n$  of a conversation progress to the successive stage  $cs_{(n+1)}$ .

Finally, there is the final output of Stern's semantic machinery, the propositional content which is ultimately delivered. On this account, the interpretation of metaphorical utterance such as

(4) Juliet is the sun

is a three-staged process. First, we have the selection of the appropriate character for each semantic constituent of (4). In the particular case, this representation will be:

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<sup>19</sup> This attitude has been characterized by Stalnaker (1999) as a sort of pretence.

<sup>20</sup> An advantage of this way of taking the issue of presuppositions is that, as Stalnaker notes (2002), we weaken the 'semantic' requirement that presuppositions are inherited by both asserted and denied tokens of the same sentence. In this picture, a proposition which is associated with an utterance does not need to be presupposed by the denial of the same sentence.

<sup>21</sup> Stern (2000: 124-25) makes the observation that the conventional presuppositions are different from the metaphorical ones in that computation of the first, but not of the latter, is necessary to make an interpretation appropriate. In metaphors, there is no pre-established set of presuppositions such that "must belong to *any* context set in which an occurrence of a token of the metaphor (type) receives an appropriate interpretation" (Ibid, 124. Stern's emphasis).

(5) Juliet is Mthat ['the sun'].

The selection of the metaphorical character activates the search for salient properties in the context of utterance, which then get trapped in the proposition expressed by (4):

(6)  $\langle j, \{\text{Mthat}[\text{'the sun'}]\}(c) \rangle$ . [where  $j = \text{Juliet}$ ]

Finally we get the evaluation of (4) at a world and a time:

(7)  $[[\text{Juliet is the sun}]_{c, t, w} = T \text{ iff } \langle j, \{\text{Mthat}[\text{'the sun'}]\}(c) \rangle$   
true at  $(c_t, c_w)$ ,

where  $t$  and  $w$  are the time and the world parameters in the circumstance of evaluation fixed by the context of utterance.

It should be immediately noticed that Stern's semantic analysis instantiates what, in Chapter 4, I have called the *Fregean Premise*. This is the view that the same sentence  $s$ , as uttered in two different contexts,  $c$  and  $c'$ , will express two different contents in virtue of encapsulating in them those contextual features which are relevant to the interpretation at hand.<sup>22</sup> In other words, by changing the relevant contextual parameter in the context of use a different content gets expressed:

(8)  $\langle j, \{\text{Mthat}[\text{'the sun'}]\}(c') \rangle$ ,

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<sup>22</sup> My formulation there was the following: "Taking  $v$  and  $n$  to be variables ranging over circumstances (i.e., contextual parameters), FP can be thus formulated:

- (i) An utterance  $u$  of a sentence  $s$  expresses the proposition  $\langle s, v \rangle$  in  $C$ .
- (ii) An utterance  $u'$  of the same sentence expresses the proposition  $\langle s, n \rangle$  in  $C'$ .
- (iii) Therefore,  $\langle s, v \rangle$  may be true in  $C''$ , while  $\langle s, n \rangle$  false, or vice versa".

which may end up being assigned a different truth-value, even though the circumstance of evaluation is the same:

- (9)  $[[\text{Juliet is the sun}]_{c', t, w} = F \text{ iff } \langle j, \{\text{Mthat}[\text{'the sun'}]\}(c') \rangle$   
is true at  $(c_t, c_w)$ .

I have already expressed criticism of this view in relation to contextualist views of metaphor, which I will extend to Stern's soon. However, before launching my attack on Stern's account, I would like to discuss a potential virtue of it.

### **3. VP-Ellipsis & Anaphora: Stern's proposal**

Stern's account is important for a number of reasons. First of all, it is the first account that has shown how metaphor could be systematically treated in a semantic way. Secondly, it has also contributed to debunking the contextualist challenges that I have explored in chapter 4. By treating metaphors as indexicals, Stern shows how metaphorical interpretations vary across contexts, and how, nevertheless, they are still within the domain of semantics given that the speakers' ability to produce and interpret metaphors is governed by their character-like rule.

Stern's account has apparently another merit, which I would like to discuss in this section. It offers an explanation of cases of VP-ellipsis and anaphoric links involving at least one metaphorical interpretation, which are problematic for the contextualist. Let's see how Stern deals with this issue. To begin with, let's consider this pair of sentences:



- (4) Jim went to the bank, and so did Mark.  
(5) Turin is a cold city, and Milan is, too.

Under any reasonable semantic analysis of anaphora and ellipsis, the interpretation of the second clause must be ‘copied’ from the interpretation of the first clause. In other words, the interpretation of the consequents in (4) and (5) must be the same as the interpretation of their respective antecedents. However, it is rather unclear in which sense ‘must be the same as’ is to be understood. Should we require that the sameness in question is syntactic sameness, or semantic sameness or possibly both? An answer to these questions is pressing insofar as it may reveal interesting aspects of metaphorical interpretation.

Suppose now that what (4) says is that Jim went to the local financial institution, whereas Mark went to the local riverbank. Then the anaphoric link would not be preserved, so that (4) would be infelicitous. Also, suppose in (5) the first conjunct is interpreted literally, while the second conjunct is given a metaphorical interpretation. Then the resulting ellipsis makes the utterance at least odd, unless a further clause, specifying that the respects in which Turin and Milan are cold are different, is added. Leaving aside for a second the nature of this further clause, let’s concentrate on Stern’s explanation of ellipsis. He takes this sort of evidence to demand the postulation of metaphorical meanings in addition to our stock of literal ones. But is he right?

In the previous chapter I briefly dealt with other mixes of literal/metaphorical constructions. There I expressed my concerns against the contextualist theories of metaphor, which I believe are unable to explain what is wrong (or acceptable) with these. For instance, we find different patterns of acceptability for utterances of sentences such as (6)-(9):

- (6) # Quine demolished Carnap's house, and he demolished his argument, too.
- (7) Quine demolished Carnap's argument, and so did Anna.
- (8) ? Juliet is the sun, and Achilles is the sun, too.
- (9) # The central body of our solar system is the sun, and Juliet is the sun, too.

The problem for the contextualist, I claimed, is that given her story about ad hoc concepts together with her underlying assumption that the metaphorical dimension and the literal one do not belong to different kinds, it is difficult for her to explain why, for instance, (9) is much less acceptable than (6) and (8), not to mention (7). Given, in fact, that the contextualist takes all the predicated material in these examples to be ad hoc concepts, she cannot explain the differences in acceptability between (6)-(8) and (9).<sup>23</sup>

In contrast, Stern's account does deal with these examples. On this view, the explanation of the differences in (6)-(9) is that (6) and (9) are *type* violations, whereas (8) is an example of *content* violation. (7), on the other hand, is just fine because we have the same type interpretation in both clauses and the context does not differ between them. In other words, (6) and (9) are infelicitous because there is a mix of literal/metaphorical types, and the anaphoric link generates a deep violation of grammatical rules (under Stern's assumption that the knowledge of a metaphorical character is part of the grammar). (8), in contrast, is simply odd because, although both antecedent and consequent receive the same type of interpretation (i.e., they are both metaphorical), their

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<sup>23</sup> One possible explanation is the relevance-theoretic appeal to the notion of cognitive effort. On their view, (9) could be said to be less acceptable than (8) because it requires more cognitive efforts for the hearer to be processed. I think this is not a good explanation. Actually, I think it is not an explanation at all. We need to offer a clear semantic account of both why (9) is not acceptable, and why (8) is judged as more acceptable. Psychological considerations do not help make any serious prediction here.

contextual *parameters* differ. In fact, when the *Mthat*-operator attaches to the first occurrence of ‘the sun’ in the antecedent of (8), it selects a certain parameter from the context  $c'$ , whereas when it attaches to another occurrence of ‘the sun’ in the consequent, it looks at a different context  $c''$  and therefore selects a different parameter.<sup>24</sup>

In this way, Stern obtains the results required: it explains the infelicity of (6) and (9), and it also offers a way to understand why they differ from (8): their infelicity is due to a type-violation, whereas that of (8) concerns the pragmatically determined interpretation of the two clauses. More formally:

- (6\*) #  $\langle q, \{\text{demolished}\}, \text{Carnap's house} \rangle \wedge \langle q, \{\text{Mthat} [\text{'demolished'}]\}(c'), \text{Carnap's argument} \rangle$ .
- (8\*) #  $\langle j, \{\text{Mthat} [\text{'the sun'}]\}(c') \rangle \wedge \langle a, \{\text{Mthat} [\text{'the sun'}]\}(c'') \rangle$
- (9\*) #  $\langle \text{The } x: \text{Blob } (x), \{\text{the sun}\}(c) \rangle \wedge \langle j, \{\text{Mthat} [\text{'the sun'}]\}(c') \rangle$ .

[where  $q$  = ‘Quine’,  $j$  = ‘Juliet’,  $a$  = ‘Achilles’, Blob = ‘Central body of our solar system’; the parts emphasised are those in which the oddity lies: characters in 6\* and 9\*, contextual parameters in 8\*.]

Insofar as Stern has an explanation for the oddity of these examples, whereas contextualists do not, I think his account deserves a special mention.

However, Camp (2005) disagrees with Stern’s reading of the data. She first notices that the intuition that (8) and (9) are semantically ill-formed can be explained away by pointing out that each sentence employs a single definite description to refer to

<sup>24</sup> Stern’s explanation (Stern 2006: 260) of cases like (8) is just good.

distinct objects. She then adds that a pragmatic explanation is preferable, for the link between the antecedent and the consequent of (8) can be cancelled:

(10) Juliet is the sun and Achilles is, too, but in their own ways.

Given that cancellability is a clear pragmatic test, Camp concludes that this provides an indication that we are in presence of a pragmatic phenomenon, contrary to what Stern believes. Interestingly, the same test can also apply to (6), yielding:

(6\*\*) Quine demolished Carnap's house, and he demolished his argument, too. Of course, not in the same sense.

If Stern's explanation starts looking weak, this feeling is reinforced by the following example:

(11) Mark may leave tomorrow, and Jim, too.

Suppose the first interpretation of 'may' is deontic (roughly, 'it is permissible for Mark to leave tomorrow'), whereas the second elided occurrence is simply epistemic ('it is possible that Mark will leave tomorrow'). Then you cannot 'cancel' (11), on pain of producing some oddity:

(12) # Mark may leave tomorrow, and Jim, too, but in different ways.

I have already expressed doubts about the use of this sort of test in Chapter 2, where I showed both that Recanati was wrong to think that cancellability applies to cases of demonstratives' resolution and also that cancellability is, likewise, not a test that applies to

metaphors. We have a specular situation here in the sense that I do not believe that Camp's test concerns a pragmatic property such as cancellability. The utterer of (10), for instance, is *specifying* the respect in which Juliet and Achilles are taken as 'the sun'. In contrast, (11) does not allow for such a specification because we are in presence of two distinct lexical items, which we may distinguish as 'may<sub>D</sub>' and 'may<sub>P</sub>'. Their co-presence produces the obvious oddity in (12), as the co-presence of two distinct lexical items did in (4). In other words, as the privileged interpretation of the first occurrence of 'may' is fixed, its reading is syntactically distributed over the second. This does not happen in (8) in so far as the first occurrence of 'is the sun' is syntactically identical to the second occurrence. The oddity is semantic, requiring the specification of the respect in which the interpretation of the two occurrences of 'the sun' must be taken.<sup>25</sup>

I think that Stern may resist Camp's accusation by simply insisting that whichever interpretation an expression is actually endowed with, that is not part of semantics to deliberate. What

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<sup>25</sup> Manuel García-Carpintero pointed out to me that this asymmetry is predicated on an unjustified assumption, namely that the two modals are distinct lexical items, and that this goes against one of the most popular accounts of modality, i.e. Kratzer's. I agree with his point, although I think that reformulating my view in Kratzer's semantic terms would leave the main point in the argument intact. So, according to Kratzer (1981) modals are not ambiguous, but the difference between, for instance, an epistemic and a deontic modal lies in the different conversational backgrounds chosen in the context (cf. Portner 2009: 48). Leaving aside a further aspect of Kratzer's theory, namely, that modals are interpreted not only relative to a *modal base*, which provides the relevant set of worlds at which the modal statement is to be evaluated, but also relative to an *ordering source*, which ranks the relevant worlds according to some accessibility relations, we have the following picture: a modal sentence *s*'s semantic value is  $[[s]]^{c, f}$ . In other words, *s* is assigned a semantic value only relative to a context and a conversational background, a function that assigns the content expressed by *s* at *c* at some relevant world. Now, it is clear that given the presence of an anaphoric link in the sentence (11), it cannot be the case that the relevant worlds at which the two conjuncts are evaluated be different. Under this account, anaphora is supposedly copying the first conversational background function onto the second one. Furthermore, I think that the contrast between (10) and (11) is not a contrast, after all. Besides, I do not see why you could 'cancel' the two different interpretations in (10), but not in (12). Camp does not provide any reason why this should be so. See my discussion on cancellability in chapter 2.

semantics does is to explain why the expression receives a certain interpretation instead of another.

Still, I think Camp is also right to claim that a different explanation is available, although I disagree with her view that it is pragmatic. She suggests that one and only one definite description is used by each single sentence to refer to two distinct objects in the same context. This is an interesting observation, which I would like to integrate in my theory modulo a correct understanding of Camp's modifier 'in the same context'. A question, therefore, starts getting pressing for my analysis: how is it possible for an expression  $\Phi$ , such as the definite description 'the sun', to end up referring to two distinct objects, and therefore being assigned distinct semantic values? I will deal with this question in chapter 7. I shall now conclude this section by formalising the argument against Stern.

Stern has adopted the following explanation of VP-ellipsis and anaphora:

- (i) Infelicity concerning cases of VP-ellipsis or anaphora are more serious when they are cases of type violation insofar as knowledge of types is part of the grammar;
- (ii) Given that the determination of a content in context is pragmatically intruded, this level falls properly outside the grammar;
- (iii) Given (i) and (ii), utterances of (6) and (9) are ungrammatical because of a type-violation. An utterance of (8) is felt more acceptable because it does not violate grammatical principles.

However, it is possible to use Camp's test to show that:

- (iv) An utterance of (6), which according to Stern instantiates a type-violation, becomes acceptable by adding a further clause specifying that the interpretations of ‘demolished’ differ (in some aspects whose nature needs to be investigated yet).
- (v) Therefore, Stern’s generalisation is wrong.

(v) is reinforced by appealing to examples like (11) in which a clear case of type-violation cannot be modified by adding a further clause such as that appearing in (6)\*\*. The conclusion seems to be that (6), and, presumably, (9) as well are not cases of type-violation. This is problematic for Stern because his theory is wholly based on the distinction between literal and metaphorical types.

In conclusion, what I have done in this section is to argue that although Stern’s explanation of VP-ellipsis and anaphora for crossed literal/metaphorical interpretations is interesting, an argument can be devised against it. Camp’s test supplies the additional premise to build up the argument, although I disagree with Camp’s pragmatic reading of the test. In the next section I shall provide further evidence against Stern’s semantic account, and prepare the reader for my own theory, which avoids Stern’s problems altogether.

#### **4. Criticism of Stern’s Account**

We saw in the previous section that Stern’s account does not offer a fully satisfying answer to the problem of VP-ellipsis or anaphora involving crossed interpretations. In this section, I will show that Stern’s account succumbs because of more pressing issues. Therefore, the outcome of this section will be that indexicalism is

not a viable solution to the problems surrounding a theory of metaphor.

First of all, I take Stern's explanation of the dependence of the metaphorical dimension of an expression upon its literal meaning rather weak. On Stern's account, the dependence is reduced to the fact that the metaphorical operator attaches to the literal vehicle of the metaphor, and goes to look for properties saliently associated with it. However, since there are too many properties that can be 'associated' to the literal meaning of an expression, there is no principled way to say why we should count all of them as good (remember Searle's example of the gorillas who are not aggressive, prone to violence, etc.?). What is more, Stern undoubtedly abandons any attempt to give a semantic explanation of this dependence. He rather opts for a pragmatic, or better psychological, explanation in terms of generic 'associations'.

Secondly, Stern's appeal to Stalnaker's notion of presuppositions is rather too liberal. For Stalnaker's conception is fully propositional, whereas Stern refers to presupposed properties, whose semantic status is less than clear. In the literature, a discussion on presupposed properties can be found in Stojanovic's brief discussion (2007: 62-69) of conventional properties associated with indexicals.<sup>26</sup> For instance, consider an utterance of:

(13) She is tall.

Here the speaker's use of 'she' presupposes that the subject who is being talked about is female. Is this property relevant to the truth-conditions of the utterance? Not at all. Suppose the subject is actually female, and she is tall. Then the fact that the subject is female is clearly irrelevant. Suppose now that the subject is tall, but

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<sup>26</sup> But see also Maier's work (2009: [http://ncs.ruhosting.nl/emar/em\\_rigpres.pdf](http://ncs.ruhosting.nl/emar/em_rigpres.pdf)). Thanks to García-Carpintero for pointing to me his work.



he is male. Then you may feel reluctant to accept (13), although the asserted content is actually true: the subject (who happens to be indistinguishable from a female body) is actually tall.

Be that as it may, it is unclear that we have anything like this in metaphorical interpretation. Imagine I utter:

(14) He is a gorilla.

What is exactly the property presupposed in (14)? Is it the property of *being violent* or *being prone to violence*? However, we know that gorillas are not violent at all. Stern adheres to Stalnaker's definition of presupposition (2002: 701): "To presuppose something is to take it for granted, or at least to act as if one takes it for granted, as background information – as *common ground* among the participants in the conversation". Although Stern's adherence to this definition is consistent, it does not explain much. For one may still want to know how it is possible that something already taken for granted be actually asserted. Besides, the case of creative metaphors poses a problem to this view since a metaphorical interpretation may arise without anything being taken for granted at the moment of the utterance.

Furthermore, given that we may basically presuppose anything in Stern's sense, then we do not have any satisfying criterion to distinguish a good metaphor from a bad one.<sup>27</sup> This problem already affected other accounts of metaphor, and Stern is therefore no exception. Stern could reply that a semantic theory of metaphor does not have the task of distinguishing good metaphors from bad ones. This is something, he may add, that pragmatics or perhaps rhetoric should deal with.

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<sup>27</sup> Incidentally, I take metaphors like (14) to be bad metaphors insofar as they do not give us any original insight of the subject of the metaphor, but only an unoriginal picture based on stereotypical properties of the vehicle.

I must say that I completely disagree with such a potential line of answer. A good semantic theory of metaphor must individuate a correct criterion to distinguish ‘apt’ metaphors from ‘unapt’ ones.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, a good semantic theory needs to distinguish what makes a predication more correct than another.

Thirdly, things get worse when we turn to consider the final clause of Stern’s definition of his ‘Mthat’-operator, claiming that its function is to contribute a set of properties *P* to the proposition expressed by the metaphorical utterance. Here Stern is clearly endorsing a descriptivist account of metaphorical interpretation. A descriptivist account is one that exclusively focuses on the role of descriptive information in interpretation, instead of determining appropriate extensions for metaphorical expressions. I am not against the idea that metaphorical expressions are endowed with descriptive information which is relevant to their interpretation. What I am going to deny is that this information has the role Stern gives it in the semantic system. I am going to give here two examples that clearly show how problematic Stern’s third clause is. Consider an utterance of:

(15) The spring awakes the flowers.

in a context of students’ revolt against a University’s controversial decision.<sup>29</sup> For the sake of argument let’s believe that the following literal interpretations for ‘the spring’ and ‘awakes’ obtain:<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I believe that the term ‘apt’ entered in the philosophical vocabulary concerning metaphor with Hills (1997).

<sup>29</sup> The sentence is taken from White (1996: 18), but I have adapted the context to my purpose.

<sup>30</sup> I am avoiding the usual relativization to contexts and worlds here, pretending that there is a ‘literal’ interpretation of these terms which is the same across contexts of use and circumstances of evaluation. Also, it is perfectly legitimate to imagine other contexts in which ‘the spring’ and ‘awakes’ are interpreted metaphorically. White (1996) provides interesting observations regarding the variety of subtle metaphorical modifications a sentence can be subject to.

(16)  $\llbracket \text{The spring} \rrbracket = \textit{the spring}$

$\llbracket \text{awakes} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda y (\text{Awakes}(x,y))$

In other words, I am assuming the semantic meaning of ‘the spring’ as nothing but the season of the year, whereas the semantic meaning of ‘awakes’ as a relational property that obtains just in case there are an  $x$  and a  $y$  such that  $x$  *awakes*  $y$ . What about the semantic meaning of ‘the flowers’? Here, given that the plural definite description is to be interpreted metaphorically, we should apply the Mthat-operator to get the interpretation required:

(17)  $\llbracket \text{Mthat}(\text{‘The flowers’}) \rrbracket_{c,t,w} = ?$

But what exactly is the interpretation required? According to Stern, Mthat takes the properties associated with the literal vehicle in context  $c$  as input and get new properties as output. This seemed to work well in the case of ‘Juliet is the sun’, a case of predicative metaphor, but it seems pretty awkward to say that in the present case what get semantically derived from combining the operator with the plural definite description are properties.

Now consider this other example:

(18) A storm broke loose in my mind,

said by Einstein to describe the exciting period of his life, between the spring and the summer of 1905, in which he wrote several papers. Let’s pretend that the only metaphorical interpretation regards the indefinite description ‘a storm’. What is the semantic meaning of such an expression in the discussed context?

(19)  $\llbracket \text{Mthat}(\text{'a storm'}) \rrbracket_{c, t, w} = ?$

Can the meaning of 'a storm' be a set of properties? That cannot be right, otherwise the utterance of (18) would receive the absurd interpretation that a set of properties (whatever these could be) 'broke loose' in Einstein's mind. But, clearly, properties are not the kind of semantic object required for the interpretation of (18) to proceed, to start with. Einstein is describing some kind of event that happened in his life, and we should expect that, semantically, an event or some similar object appear in the interpretation of his utterance. Similarly, we need individuals, and not properties, as the right kind of object required for the interpretation of (15).

Stern (2000: 228-229) has made two proposals to deal with nominative metaphors, but they both seem to me unsuccessful. The first is to say that an utterance of, for instance, (15), conveys the singular proposition *that the spring awakes the students*. In addition, (15) presupposes another proposition to the effect that there exist a unique class of things whose properties are the content of 'Mthat ['are the flowers'] in c. In other words, this presupposition is that which actually contains the 'metaphorical mode of presentation':

(21)  $\langle \text{There is exactly one class of things that possesses } \{ \text{Mthat} \text{ ['are the flowers']} \} (c) \rangle$ .

The problem with this view is that it locates the metaphorical dimension at the level of the utterance's presupposed content, while allowing the asserted content to be the 'literal' proposition having the class of students as its constituent. But in this way the metaphorical dimension is somehow divorced from the truth-

conditions of (15), a result which I think is quite unappealing. If one, like Stern, wants a theory that explains how the metaphorical dimension of an utterance relates to its truth-conditions, then an explanation along these lines is clearly not fruitful.

The other solution sketched by Stern is more interesting, but makes the semantics of a metaphorical utterance quite a complicated process. The strategy consists in applying first the Mthat-operator to the description, and then Kaplan's Dthat-operator to its outcome, namely, a property, so as to pick out the individual who has that property in context. In the case of (15), we would have the following interpretable string:

- (22) The spring awakes Dthat ['The x: x Mthat ['the flowers']'].

As Stern notes, on neither proposals is the metaphorical content (the set of properties) of the nominative metaphor an immediate constituent of the content asserted by (15). However, according to Stern, such content has a clear explanation in its semantics.

As I said, the first explanation given by Stern is not satisfying because it consigns the metaphorical interpretation to a level other than the truth-conditional one. According to the second explanation appealing to the 'Dthat', instead, we have that the metaphorical content only indirectly enters in the semantic content asserted by a metaphorical utterance having a nominative metaphor as its constituent. Again, it seems to me that in this way all the interesting semantic properties of a metaphor are lost or made become not relevant to the truth-conditions of the utterance. Besides, it is a legitimate worry that a semantics of an utterance such as (15) makes things too complicated by deriving interpretable strings such as (22).

My question to Stern and to anyone hoping for a semantics of metaphorical interpretation is: wouldn't it be better to have a unique rule specifying both the metaphorical dimension of an expression and its (direct) contribution to the content expressed by its utterance? My claim in the remnant part of this dissertation is that it is actually the case that we have a unique rule for metaphorical interpretation. This rule does not only simplify the whole interpretative process a lot, but it also provides a general understanding of what it is for a metaphor to be apt or not, something which is missing in Stern's account.

To sum up what I have done in this chapter so far, here is a bunch of issues that Stern's account is unable to deal with properly:

- (i) The dependence of the metaphorical dimension of an expression upon its 'literal' meaning;
- (ii) The semantic import of a nominative metaphor to the content expressed by its utterance;
- (iii) The aptness of a metaphor: what makes a metaphor good?

My 'big' claim in the next chapter is that my theory offers a clear and straightforward answer to all these issues, outclassing Stern's theory in terms of simplicity, elegance, and also adequacy. Besides, I will show that my theory also solves some interesting problems concerning belief reports of metaphorical contents and the semantics of denial. Before moving to the final step of this dissertation, I would like to conclude this chapter by pausing on some philosophical consequences of adopting Stern's indexicalist strategy.

## 5. Conclusions: M-that and Semantic Theorising

In this final section I pause to reflect on the consequences that Stern's introduction of an 'Mthat'-operator has for the semantic theorising. I am going to argue that such introduction may be resisted on more general theoretical grounds than those I offered in the previous sections.

Let's begin with Stern's rule for metaphorical interpretation, which is based on the presence of an operator at the level of the LF of any lexical expression in the grammar:

**(Mthat)** For every context  $c$  and for every expression  $\Phi$ , an occurrence of 'Mthat[ $\Phi$ ]' in a sentence  $S(=\dots\text{Mthat}[\Phi]\dots)$  in  $c$  (directly) expresses a set of properties  $P$  presupposed to be m-associated with  $\Phi$  in  $c$  such that the proposition  $\langle \dots P \dots \rangle$  is either true or false in the circumstance of  $c$ . (Stern 2000: 115)

With this rule Stern believes he has shown two things: on the one hand, the dependence of the metaphorical on the literal as based on the fact that the character associated with the metaphorical expression is individuated by the character of its literal vehicle; on the other hand, the context-dependence which apparently characterises most metaphorical expressions, apart from those more routinized which are context *invariant*. In fact, 'Mthat' is that operator 'at the level of logical form which, when prefixed to a (literal) expression  $\Phi$ , yields a context-sensitive expression 'Mthat[ $\Phi$ ]' whose tokens in each context  $c$  express a set of properties presupposed in  $c$  to be m-associated with the expression  $\Phi$ , such that the proposition  $\langle \dots \{\text{Mthat}[\Phi]\}(c) \dots \rangle$  is either true or false at a circumstance.' (Stern 2006: 262)

In particular, Stern believes that knowledge of this operator

guarantees that metaphor lies within the speakers' semantic competence. He says:

What the speaker does know in virtue of his semantic knowledge is the character of the metaphor, that is, a rule or directive to map a parameter of the context into the content of the metaphor in that context. Metaphorical character constrains which contents can be metaphorically expressed by which expressions in which contexts. (Stern 2008: 270)

More specifically,

The speaker's semantic competence in metaphor, like the semantic competence that underlies her ability to use demonstratives, consists in knowledge of that meaning, or character, namely, a function from the metaphorically relevant associated properties in the context set of presuppositions to the particular subset of properties that constitute the content of the metaphor in that context. Together with its contextual presuppositions, the character yields the content of the interpretation, but the meaning is not itself part of that content. (ibid, 278)

Most criticisms Stern's has incurred seem to have focussed on the analogy made by Stern between the Mthat operator and Kaplan's Dthat operator. The analogy breaks down in a number of ways. Here I will try to question more directly the use of such an operator for my immediate purpose at hand. In particular, I want to question Stern's claim that "Mthat is a rule of character that a speaker knows simply in virtue of his knowledge of language" (2000: 115).

Unfortunately, after more careful considerations, and also perhaps influenced by motivations similar to Kripke's in rejecting the ambiguity theories of Donnellan's referential/attributional



reading of definite descriptions,<sup>31</sup> I think that Stern's introduction of this operator has very bad consequences and, even independently of these consequences, its presupposed tacit knowledge is not required at all.

A very serious problem is the fact that if this operator functions at the level of the logical form of sentences, then it introduces some suspicious syntactic ambiguity. In fact, given a *pre-semantic* treatment of metaphorical expressions and by having accepted the 'no presumption of literalness' claim, Stern is committed to the view that a sentence like

(23) Juliet is the sun,

has five metaphorical ways of being interpreted and one literal, all of which have equal right of being initially processed by an interpreter:

(23.L) Juliet is the sun,

(23.1) Mthat['Juliet is the sun'],

(23.2) Mthat['Juliet'] is the sun,

(23.3) Juliet is Mthat['the sun'],

(23.4) Juliet Mthat['is the sun'].

(23.5) Juliet Mthat['is'] the sun.

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<sup>31</sup> The idea advanced by Kripke (1977) was that the ambiguity that some like Kaplan considered to be present in the case of definite descriptions could be resolved pragmatically by allowing the generic reading to be part of the semantics of the description and the referential one to be pragmatically derived. I am not a supporter of this view, but I see the force it may have in questioning examples like Stern's.

None of these readings has an interpretive priority over the other, but all have in principle a chance of being selected, even the first literal reading, depending on how the context, or sets of presuppositions shared by the speaker and hearer, turns out to be. This, as Catherine Wearing has recently pointed out, has a potentially disruptive effect due to the ‘massive overgeneration’ of characters it introduces into syntactic operations:

[I]f ‘Mthat’ is to appear in syntactic representations, there must be a syntactic projection in those representations into which it can go. In other words, there must be an appropriate branch on the syntactic tree to which ‘Mthat’ can attach. However, it is not clear what this branch might be. M-that operator does not seem to belong to any of the standard lexical or functional categories—it is not a noun, a verb, and adverb, a complementizer, or a determiner. At the same time, the Mthat-operator can apply to almost every type of syntactic constituent—whole sentences, nouns, noun phrases, verbs, verb phrases, adverbs and so forth, whereas existing syntactic categories are quite restricted with respect to how they can be combined. (Wearing 2006: 318)

The postulation of such aponic elements seems therefore to be not only ad hoc, but also quite unconstrained syntactically. Stern seems to have fallen in what Stephen Neale describes as a *scene-reading trap*. A scene-reading trap is one in which a semanticist falls whenever “he postulates a reading of some particular sentence S in order to explain data which, upon examination, has suggested itself to the semanticist because (a) a condition obtaining in a particular *scene* that he is articulating with a view to assessing for truth or falsity the proposition expressed by someone uttering S on a given occasion (or by a given utterance or use of S, as the semanticist might put it), has been erroneously built into (b) the

conditions necessary and sufficient for the truth of that proposition” (2007: 84-85). In other words, from the fact that a sentence such as (23) can, on certain occasions of use, have a reading in which ‘the sun’ is metaphorically interpreted, Stern concludes that this reading should be ‘built into’ the logical form of the sentence, opening in this way the sentence to unwelcome ambiguity.

What Neale further stresses is that such postulation of *aphonics* into the LF of a sentence are “wholly non-constant, nonperspectival, and non-descriptive in what they encode. In short, if they exist at all, they are expressions whose values are identified *wholly* pragmatically, without any guidance from their own meaning properties!” (ibid., 82) I will provide some discussion of this claim. For now, my point is that Stern, in order to preserve a dependence of the metaphorical on the literal, is reversing the order of explanation and making the literal subject to the quirks of the metaphorical. In other words, in trying to capture all the scenarios (*scenes*) in which a given sentence may take a metaphorical interpretation for some of its parts or its whole, he goes on to offer a model of understanding the truth-conditions of a sentence where one has to assume at a deep level all these readings from the start before being able to determine any truth-evaluable content. As a result, in this way it is difficult to see what kinds of advantages we are supposed to gain from having postulated such massive ambiguity in the LF (Cf. Stern 2006: 265-66).

There is also another worry, and it concerns the finitude of our semantic learning. The worry against Stern’s account is that it makes semantics incredibly rich by multiplying characters. The objection is that although Stern takes the operator itself to be a sort of character the knowledge of which makes a speaker linguistically competent in using metaphors, the semantic role of the operator is to generate new characters for each new metaphorical expression.

‘Mthat’ is something that selects a character. So, e.g., the character of ‘warm’ is a function that gives the property of having a high temperature. But ‘Mthat [‘warm’]’ selects a different character, I suppose often the property of being friendly and generous. If this is the picture, the question is: what does this character select from? If it is a function, what is its argument? Not context (in Kaplan’s sense) of course: context is the argument for character, and if you already have a character you do not need to select it. Maybe the idea is: ‘Mthat’ operates on ‘wide context’ (presuppositions, intentions, etc.). So, in a certain wide context where we are not talking about temperature but about personality traits, when applied to ‘warm’, Mthat yields the character which, given a context, picks out the property of being generous in that context. [This way of putting the worry is due to Stefano Predelli, whom I thank.]

Here I think that a reasonable characterisation of Stern’s view would be to say that a sentence containing an expression  $\Phi$  is endowed with two characters, one literal and the other metaphorical. Given a context, one of the two characters has to be selected (we are at the pre-semantic level here). Once one of these two characters is selected, it does its usual job. It yields a content in context. But where it goes to look for its argument is different: a ‘narrow’ context in the literal case, a ‘wide’ context in the metaphorical one. Furthermore, the metaphorical character is like an operator<sup>32</sup> in the sense that it is a function whose argument is not

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<sup>32</sup> “[P]art of what the speaker knows when she knows how to interpret a metaphor  $\Phi$  is not simply something about the single expression  $\Phi$ . Her knowledge of metaphor is closer to knowledge of an operator, of an interpretive operation she can perform on any (literally interpreted) expression. And in this respect the character of a metaphor *is more like* that of the demonstrative

a Kaplanian context, sure, but presupposed properties associated with the literal vehicle, which, as the objector says, are picked out from a ‘wide context’. So the metaphorical character of an expression is that function whose argument are presupposed properties associated with the literal vehicle and whose value is a new property in context.

Treating the M-that operator as an operator which selects a new character for each expression used metaphorically in a given context is problematic. For there would be too many characters, and given that our linguistic competence is finite, Stern would have to say that it isn’t, after all. Besides, in that way you would treat the operator more like a monster. These could be the reasons why Stern opts for a sort of lexical ambiguity instead. Still, I see the force of the objector’s point. It would make sense to say that Mthat selects appropriate characters for metaphorical expressions.

I guess part of the issue comes from Stern’s merging the idea of a character-like rule for metaphorical interpretation, and the different notion of operator he uses. Given that an operator is generally a function which operates either on characters or contents, it is somewhat misleading to identify the notion of operator with that of character.

Be that as it may, this section had the purpose of showing that there are further important worries about Stern’s account. One is that it syntactically multiplies readings, the other is that it overgenerates characters. Insofar as these worries are plausible, and Stern gives no clear answer as to how he could accommodate these, I think this is sufficient ground to abandon the project of explaining metaphor by adopting Stern’s indexicalist route. My last chapter is entirely devoted to the defence of a non-indexical contextualist view of metaphor. This account will be proven to be superior to

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interpretation operator ‘Dthat’ than that of any individual indexical (type) such as ‘I’ or ‘here’ ” (Stern 2000: 198-99. My emphasis).

Stern's in that it eschews the kinds of syntactic and semantic objections to it, and it also offers an interesting perspective on some important semantic issues concerning the semantics of metaphorical interpretation: in particular, the semantics of belief ascriptions and the semantics of denial.



## Chapter 7

# Metaphor & Non-Indexical Contextualism

### 1. Introduction

In Chapter 5 I briefly discussed the case of Pia's leaves, in which two utterances or inscriptions of the same sentence:

- (1) The leaves are green

were said to lead to the assignment of distinct truth-values in two contexts of utterance, although the environment in which the two utterances took place did not change. There I showed how different options are available for the treatment of this type of utterances. Let me quickly go through them again.

*Contextualism:* Two utterances of (1) express different propositions, which are given distinct truth-evaluations.

*Minimalism:* Although one proposition is expressed by the two utterances, what the utterers of this sentence mean in their different contexts is different.



*Indexicalism*: Each new utterance of (1) expresses a different content in virtue of the fact that the predicate ‘are green’ is indexical.

*Ambiguist*: A predicate like ‘is green’ is ambiguous between, say, two different, but wholly lexicalised, readings: one reading picks out a certain property, another reading picks out a different but related property.

In the previous chapter I have discussed and criticised Stern’s theory of metaphor. This account is, basically, a combination of indexicalism and ambiguity: the former aspect is due to the idea that each metaphorical expression has a character that yields a different content in each context of use, whereas the latter is due to the presence of two distinct characters for each expression, which are responsible for either a literal interpretation or a metaphorical one.

In this chapter I will contemplate the idea that the picture just given is not exhaustive. I will, in fact, present and defend a view which has nowadays gained support in different areas of the philosophical debate. The view I am going to propose is usually called ‘non-indexical contextualism’ (henceforth NIC) after MacFarlane’s original definition (2007, 2009). This view is basically Kaplanian in the sense that it works within Kaplan’s semantic framework, with an important emendation: instead of having the ‘standard’ pair <world, time> as the circumstance of evaluation determined by the context, NIC considers an additional parameter in it. The nature of this parameter is generally related to the discourse topic: it may be a knowledge parameter in the case of knowledge ascriptions, or a taste parameter in the case of predicates of taste, or what you like.<sup>1</sup> Also, what distinguishes NIC

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<sup>1</sup> Kaplan himself allowed that his notion of circumstance of evaluation could be expanded to include new parameters (Kaplan 1989: 502): “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

from contextualism is that it gives context an additional role: fixing the relevant circumstance relative to which the content of an utterance is to be evaluated.<sup>2</sup> Additional sensitivity to a dimension of ‘assessment’ is what differentiates NIC from relativism, at least in the sense given by MacFarlane to this doctrine (MacFarlane 2005).

In detail, I am going to argue here for a non-indexical contextualist view of metaphorical interpretation, which draws support from NIC and its most recent applications to several philosophical debates such as the semantics of knowledge ascriptions (MacFarlane 2009) and the semantics of predicates of taste (Lasersohn 2005; 2009, Stephenson 2007). This view is based on a clear distinction between aspects of context-dependence which are merely indexical, and other aspects which concern the dimension of evaluation of an utterance, that is, its circumstances.<sup>3</sup> As far as cases of knowledge ascriptions are concerned, NIC states that two grammatically identical ascriptions of knowledge to an individual may differ in truth-value without there being a difference in the proposition expressed by the utterances of those ascriptions.<sup>4</sup> In the Kaplanian jargon, the input the semantic system receives from the two utterances is the same, the initialiser of the contextual parameters being identical, but the difference in the circumstances of evaluation, which is determined by the presence of different knowledge parameters in them, makes the two

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linked to the degree of specificity of contents, and thus to the kinds of operators in the language”.

<sup>2</sup> MacFarlane (2009: 234) distinguishes between two roles of context: a ‘content-determinative’ role and a circumstance-determinative’ one.

<sup>3</sup> In Kaplan’s words (1989: 506): “Indexicals have a *context-sensitive* character. It is characteristic of an indexical that its content varies with context. Nonindexicals have a *fixed* character. The same content is invoked in all contexts. This content will typically be **sensitive to circumstances**, that is, the non-indexicals are typically not rigid designators but will vary in extension from circumstance to circumstance” (Emphasis in italics in the text, my emphasis in bold).

<sup>4</sup> In other words, given two contexts, C and C’, two utterances of the same sentence, e.g., ‘Jim knew that his keys were in his jacket’, may turn out to have two distinct truth-values in C and C’, although the proposition expressed in both contexts is the same.

ascriptions differ in truth-values. Likewise, the view I am going to put forward locates the context-dependence of a metaphorical utterance at the level of its circumstances of evaluation, instead of positing such a dependence in some features of the context of use. After having read the previous chapter my reader may be already persuaded that by treating the context-dependence of metaphors on the model of indexicals, we enormously complicate the semantics of natural language. I will show here that no complication follows if we treat metaphorical expressions non-indexically and on the model given by NIC to cover other semantic phenomena.

There is a possible argument against my appeal to circumstances of evaluation in accounting for metaphorical interpretation. The criticism could be put in this way:

*Appealing to circumstances of evaluation is a clever way for you to say that metaphorical interpretation is semantic, while allowing context to play a big role in determining what an actual circumstance of evaluation is. Thus you're trying to have the cake and eat it too, so what you're doing sounds more like cheating. Since what fixes a metaphorical interpretation always varies from context to context, and since you reject the indexicalist model, we must conclude that understanding metaphors is a matter of pragmatics, after all.*

I will take up this objection in due course, as well as the objection that my view of what a circumstance of evaluation is overgenerates parameters.

My plan in this chapter is to give the reader a critical overview of NIC, so as to pave the way for its application to the case of metaphor. I believe that we can apply NIC to the case of metaphor, while leaving Kaplan's system intact. Not only, I think, has this

strategy a number of advantages over Stern's account, but also gives a more correct understanding of metaphorical interpretation, which is based on powerful connections with the semantics of other phenomena. Moreover, while my strategy may sound somewhat conservative, it is not necessarily devised with the aim of defending Kaplan's orthodoxy. It may well be that we need to revise Kaplan's system for other good reasons. It is just that it does not seem to me that metaphor provides any serious threat to the system. Actually, the system can be fruitfully explored as it stands, or expanded without altering its essence.

My discussion will proceed in this way: in the next section I present four cases for NIC, so as to motivate my introduction in § 3 of what I call the thematic dimension of an utterance. There I am going to argue that the same metaphorical sentence, as used in different contexts of utterance, does not express multiple contents, but a minimal content which ends up being assigned different extensions at different circumstances of evaluation. In this sense, I propose that we shift our attention away from indexicalist and radical contextualist views, and focus instead on the problem of determining appropriate circumstances of evaluation for metaphorical utterances. Here is my major proposal: I introduce a non-standard circumstance of evaluation, which does not include just a world and a time, but also a specific parameter for the metaphorical dimension of a given utterance, namely, what I call its 'thematic dimension'. In § 4 I will discuss a number of interesting problems surrounding a theory of metaphor. These include the issue of disagreement and belief reports over metaphorical contents. There I will show why my account is superior to other proposals in dealing with these issues. Finally, in § 5 I will conclude my analysis by reflecting on the relative 'open-endedness' of metaphors, arguing that this aspect fits well with my account.

## 2. The Case for Non-indexical Contextualism

In this section I shall provide my reader with an assessment of cases whose explanation is in harmony with NIC, or with some other doctrine relevantly associated to it. This should put her in a comfortable position when, in the next section, I introduce the version of NIC which is appropriate for metaphor.

Case #01. An illustration of what NIC is can be found in Predelli (2005a, 2005b), where he presents the following consideration about Pia's case, which I introduced in Chapter 4, § 3.3:

The sheer fact that a sentence such as [1] may be uttered truly on some occasions, but falsely on others, is hardly a reason for philosophical excitement. If it is granted that neither indexicality nor ambiguity play a role in this example, it follows rather immediately that, in a certain sense, *uniqueness of meaning may be compatible with truth-conditional discrepancy*. This (at least from the semanticist's point of view) not too-exciting conclusion is, however, elevated to the status of a momentous philosophical tenet within the contextualist approach. (Predelli 2005b: 373. My emphasis)

Predelli considers, without being very generous with details, the idea that two utterances of the same non-indexical and non-ambiguous sentence expresses the same content (i.e., have the same intension) which, when evaluated at two distinct circumstances of evaluation (*points* in his terminology), yields two distinct truth-values (*t-distributions*, as he puts it).

A question Predelli does not address directly is how the relevant circumstance of evaluation of an utterance is selected and how it

effectively determines the appropriate extension for the content expressed by it. In other words, a potential objection to this account is that once the appropriate input of the semantic interpretation is given,<sup>5</sup> the system delivers its extension or semantic value in a purely *ad hoc* way. The next case is supposed to supply that element which allows Predelli's consideration to work in the desired manner.

Case #02. John MacFarlane (2007) reflects upon the philosophical foundations of semantic minimalism, the theory that any utterance of a non-indexical and non-ambiguous sentence expresses the same content across contexts. In Chapter 4, § 3.1, of this dissertation I have expressed my worries about this view, and I will not stress them again. However, MacFarlane lends a hand to minimalists such as Cappelen and Lepore, offering a potential solution to the problem of characterising the role of minimal propositions in semantic theorising:

I believe that most philosophers' worries about minimal propositions are rooted in puzzlement over the question this claim provokes: At which circumstances of evaluation is the proposition that [Nicola is really smart] true? Here I'm using the technical term 'circumstance of evaluation' the way David Kaplan taught us to use it in 'Demonstratives' (1989). A circumstance of evaluation includes all the parameters to which propositional truth must be relativized for semantic purposes. Though Kaplan himself included times in his circumstances of evaluation (and contemplated other parameters as well), the current orthodoxy is that circumstances of evaluations are just

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<sup>5</sup> To remind the reader, according to Predelli, the input of a semantic system is the pair constituted by a clause (i.e., a disambiguated sentence) and an index.

possible worlds. In this setting, our question becomes: At which possible worlds is the minimal proposition true? I'll call this the intension problem for minimal propositions (using the term 'intension' for a function from possible worlds to truth values for propositions, or to extensions for properties and relations). (MacFarlane 2007: 242; also quot. in Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009: 135-36)

The 'obvious' solution for minimalists is to let their notion of minimal proposition merge with Kaplan's framework and, in particular, with his 'division of semantic labour'. On this account, the semantic labour is a function of three levels: a pre-semantic level, a properly semantic one, and a post-semantic level. The first, as I pointed out elsewhere in this dissertation, is the level at which reference assignment and disambiguation take place; the semantic level is the level at which contents are assigned by the system to utterances (better, to sentences-in-context); post-semantics is finally the level at which the content is assigned its extension at an appropriate circumstance of evaluation. In a nutshell, MacFarlane suggests that minimalists should consider their minimal proposition as nothing but Kaplanian characters, functions that determine other functions from circumstances of evaluation to extensions.

Here, however, I am not really interested in the question of whether the minimalist notion of proposition is compatible with Kaplan's semantics.<sup>6</sup> What I am interested in is MacFarlane's substantial agreement with Predelli's claim that the problem of

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<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, I do not think this is going to work anyway. For minimalists take minimal propositions to be fully-fledged propositions, whereas Kaplanians take characters to be functions from properties to contents. Thus, from the semantic point of view we have two distinct mathematical entities here. An implicit suggestion in Recanati (2007) is to take them as narrow content, the content of the speakers' attitudes, which is what is 'in their head'. I am favourable to this option, although I do not see how Recanati's suggestion would work within his truth-conditional pragmatic framework discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, in which minimal propositions do not have any role whatsoever.

non-indexical and non-ambiguous sentences with variable truth-conditions reduces to the problem of assigning extensions to the contents expressed by their utterances. This problem finds a natural solution within the Kaplanian system. The variation of truth-conditions in the utterances of a non-indexical and non-ambiguous sentence is due to the variation of circumstances of evaluation across contexts of use. This is already captured by Kaplan's truth-clause in his LD:

*Definition*  $\llbracket \phi \rrbracket_{f, c, t, w}^M = T$  iff given a model  $M$ , an assignment  $f$  of values to variables,  $\{\phi\}(c)$  is true relative to  $(c_t, c_w)$ .

Still, given this particular truth-definition one may wonder how on this account the assignment of different extensions or semantic values to a non-indexical content is made possible, together with the intuitive variation of truth-conditions across contexts, if the world and the time of the contexts of evaluation are the same.

It is at this point that MacFarlane suggests (2007: 246) that we introduce a 'count-as' parameter in the circumstance of evaluation. The parameter can be considered as a function from properties to intensions (functions from circumstances of evaluation to extensions/truth-values).<sup>7</sup>

In this way, the truth-value of a given sentence or expression is allowed to vary across contexts, although its content remains fixed. The suggestion can be formalised in the following way: take two utterances of (1) in two contexts whose truth-conditions intuitively diverge. Now we have that the proper semantic representations of the two utterances of (1) are (1\*) and (1\*\*):

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<sup>7</sup> "The count-as" parameter is so called because it fixes what things have to be like in order to *count as* having the property of tallness (or any other property) at a circumstance of evaluation" (MacFarlane 2007: 246).



- (1\*)  $\llbracket \text{The leaves are green} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, o} = T$  iff  $\langle \{\text{The leaves}\}(c), \{\text{Green}\}(c) \rangle$  is true at  $(c_t, c_w, c_{\odot})$ ,
- (1\*\*)  $\llbracket \text{The leaves are green} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, o} = F$  iff  $\langle \{\text{The leaves}\}(c), \{\text{Green}\}(c) \rangle$  is true at  $(c_t, c_w, c_{\odot'})$ .

Here ‘ $\odot$ ’ represents Macfarlane’s ‘count-as’ parameter. Notice how the index parameter ‘ $c$ ’ is the same in both (1\*) and (1\*\*). However, the count-as parameter is different in the sense that the shift from the context in which the first utterance takes place to the context in which the second utterance does is distinguished by the presence of two distinct judgement criteria: the photographer’s perspective in one case, the botanist’s perspective in the other.<sup>8</sup>

MacFarlane (2009) applies this strategy to the case of knowledge ascriptions. In this paper, MacFarlane systematises the following suggestion by Kompa (2002: 87-88):

... an unspecific utterance is true or false, as the case may be, only relative to the imposed standard. The standard in turn is determined by contextual features like the speaker’s and hearer’s presuppositions, interests, intentions, their conversational goals &c. So a truth condition of an unspecific utterance could be roughly stated as follows, where ‘... is F’ be an unspecific predicate:

An utterance of “X is F” [sic] is true iff X meets the contextually relevant standard for F-ness.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Predelli 2005a: 146. Let me add a word on the notion of truth-conditions I am working with. It should not be confused with the idea of *wordly* conditions, which is only contingently related to it. I subscribe to Stojanovic’s consideration here: “I submit that there is no good theoretical or practical reason to insist that truth conditions should necessarily be *worldly* conditions. Maybe there is some historical reason. But once we see that the assumption is arbitrary, there is no reason to stick to it, not even for historical reasons. Instead, we should rehabilitate the term ‘truth conditions’ so that it means what it really means – and that is, simply, truth conditions, which may be conditions pretty much on anything” (Stojanovic 2007: 23).

Accordingly, the view defended by NIC is that ‘know’ expresses the same relation at every context of use, namely, the relation between a subject  $S$ , a proposition  $p$  and a time  $t$  such that  $S$  knows that  $p$  at  $t$ . More precisely, ‘know’ can be characterized as a function from circumstances of evaluation (world, epistemic standard) to extensions, such that a subject  $S$  is in the knowing relation to  $p$  and  $t$  at  $(w, e)$  iff  $p$  is true at  $(w, e)$  and  $S$  is in a sufficiently strong enough epistemic position at  $w$  and  $t$  with respect to  $p$  to meet the standard  $e$  (cf. MacFarlane 2007: 6).

Suppose I now utter:

- (2) As far as I know, the bank closes at 12:30.

This proposition contains an element of epistemic modality, which makes its reading to be, roughly, ‘For all worlds which are compatible with my knowledge in  $w$ , the bank closes at 12:30’. Given the purposes of my utterance and the strong epistemic position I am in at the moment of my utterance, the proposition I express by uttering (2) is true at the time of my utterance relative to the epistemic standard determined by my context. If it turns out that the bank’s regulation has changed the day my utterance takes place, and now the bank closes at 12:00, this would falsify any utterance of (2) taking place after this piece of information is updated in the common ground, but not before the update.

Let’s define  $k$  as the count-as parameter which enters into the circumstance of evaluation of a knowledge ascription such as (2). Let’s also take the clause following ‘know’ in (2) to be the proposition  $p$ . The semantic representation of (2) is:

- (2\*)  $\llbracket \text{As far as I know, the bank closes at 12:30} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, k} = \text{T}$  iff  $\langle \{\text{Know}\}(c), (\{I\}(c), p) \rangle$  is true at  $(c_t, c_w, c_k)$ .

In other words, the sentence ‘As far as I know, the bank closes at 12:30’ is true in context  $c$  iff the speaker of counts as being in the relation of knowledge with the proposition  $p$  at the circumstance of evaluation  $(c_w, c_k)$ , where the last parameter represents the knowledge parameter determined by the context.

Suppose we move to a different context, one in which it is quite important for the participants in the conversation to be sure that what I am saying is true (for whichever reason). Then the standards for evaluating my knowledge ascription arise, to the point in which my utterance of (2) can be judged as false. Semantically this may be represented as follows:

(2\*\*)  $\llbracket \text{As far as I know, the bank closes at 12:30} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, k} = T$  iff  
 $\langle \{\text{Know}\}(c), (\{I\}(c), p) \rangle$  is true at  $(c_t, c_w, c_k)$ .

As the reader can see, the content embedded on the right-hand side of the bi-conditional is the same in both (2\*) and (2\*\*). What changes is the circumstance of evaluation, which includes different values for the knowledge parameter determined by their respective contexts. Since in this new context the knowledge parameter introduces a different epistemic environment, the same proposition expressed by an utterance of (2) may well turn out to be false.

I believe this view is empirically adequate and formally correct. It gives a clear and efficacious representation of the layers of context-dependence involved in this type of utterance, without making the unreasonable claim that an utterance of (2) expresses different propositions in different contexts.

In light of the examples just discussed, I follow MacFarlane in distinguishing two ways an expression can be dependent on context. We have, in fact, *context-dependence* and *context-sensitivity*:

Given a contextual feature  $v$ ,<sup>9</sup> we have either of the two situations:

*Context-dependence*: An expression is  $v$ -dependent iff its content at a context depends on the  $v$  of that context.

*Context-sensitivity*: An expression is  $v$ -sensitive iff its extension at a context depends on the  $v$  of that context.

The reader should by now be able to see a connection between MacFarlane's definition of context-dependence and my definition of the *Fregean Premise* in Chapter 4, § 2.1: the idea that a contextual aspect is relevant to the truth-conditions of an utterance iff it is part of the content expressed by the utterance. *Contextualism* and *indexicalism* both conform to MacFarlane's *context-dependence* and my *Fregean Premise*. In contrast, NIC conforms to *context-sensitivity* and rejects the *Fregean Premise*.

There is a potential worry for NIC that MacFarlane (2009: 239-41) briefly considers. This concerns *indirect reports* such as the following:

- (3) *Francesco*: I know that the bank closes at 12:30.  
(later on in the day)  
*Bill*: Francesco said/asserted/believed that he knew the bank closes at 12:30.  
*Ivonne*: That's false.

Suppose that my standards of knowledge were such that my relation to the proposition that the bank closed at the indicated time in the context of my utterance counted as knowledge. Suppose that,

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<sup>9</sup> I have substituted MacFarlane's notation for stylistic reasons.

actually, the bank closed at 12:00 for a new policy. Then given that this new policy has been brought to the fore in discussion, I did not know that the bank closed at 12:30, although at the time of my utterance I was in a position to know that proposition. The reader should bear in mind that we are in a different context now (just consider my use of the past). Now it seems natural to say that, although the context has changed, Bill's report is true because his report is sensitive to my standards of knowledge tuned to the time in which my utterance took place, not to his current standards. This is what Ivonne completely misses with her denial of Bill's report. This intuitive fact needs a clear semantic explanation, which I am going to provide in the next case.

For now, I want to progress a little bit more with my discussion and add that a case such as (3) is problematic for the contextualist because the knowledge relation I have with the that-clause when I utter (2) and the relation is attributed to me when Bill reports me is, on this doctrine, supposed to be dependent on features of the context of use, as also the indexicalist believes. In this sense, the relation should be sensitive to the speakers of the respective contexts, but is clearly not.

Finally, what about a case like the following (modelled on MacFarlane's example on page 240 of his paper):

- (4) # Francesco knows that the bank closes at 12:30, but he doesn't know that the bank closes at 12:30.

How to explain the oddity of (4)? I follow MacFarlane in holding that the oddity is due to the fact that a context of use should determine one knowledge parameter, but we are here in the presence of two conflicting standards. Notice how the oddity disappears or diminishes if you shift the temporal coordinate of the first utterance to the past:

- (5) Francesco knew that the bank closed at 12:30, but he doesn't know that the bank now closes at 12:30.

Interestingly, a knowledge parameter seems to be sensitive to the fixation of a value for other parameters like the time parameter. It seems in fact odd that given the same time parameter, two knowledge parameters are both in force. The dynamics of conversation requires that at each time one knowledge parameter should be in force. If you shift the time parameter, then the knowledge one may be shifting, too, without disrupting the conversation.

There are other worries that need to be considered, but at present I am happy with the formulation of NIC which I have just given. It offers a clear and adequate semantic analysis of knowledge ascriptions and adjectives as well.<sup>10</sup> It also offers some interesting prospects for a correct understanding of the dynamics of conversation, in which speakers may hold different points of view on the same content expressed either by two utterances of the same sentence or by one utterance as evaluated against different situations.<sup>11</sup>

Case #03.

Suppose we have just watched the latest David Lynch movie. I think it is quite boring, while you think it is quite exciting. I assert:

- (6) It was quite boring, wasn't it?

To which you reply:

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<sup>10</sup> See Åkerman, J., and Greenough, P. (2010) for an application of NIC to the semantics of vague terms.

<sup>11</sup> I am using the word 'situation' in the technical sense given by Barwise and Perry in their situation semantics (Barwise and Perry 1983).

(7) It wasn't boring. I found it exciting.

What exactly are you denying? And what exactly am I asserting? The problem with these utterances is that someone could report us in this way:

(8) Francesco said/asserted/believes that David Lynch's latest movie is boring. Greg said/asserted/believes that it is not. They are both right, from their own perspectives.

From (8) it may seem to follow that the ascriber of these beliefs is falling into a contradiction: for he thinks that *X is P and, at the same time, not P*. How can that be possible? The obvious reason why he is not contradicting himself is that he is allowed to report Francesco and Greg as being both right because his report collects the different perspectives from which my assertion and Greg's one have been made, and there is nothing strange with that. Of course, we need a semantic explanation for this fact.

Suppose now I utter:

(9) Stanley Kubrick was British.

And you reply:

(10) He wasn't.

Here the ascriber of our asserted contents/beliefs could not report us in the way he did in (8), on pain of being inconsistent:

(11) Francesco said/asserted/believes that Stanley Kubrick was British. Greg said/asserted/believes that he was not. They are both right, from their own perspectives.

Perspectives, intended as standards a speaker has or adopts during a conversation, are things which allow her to make assertions about *subjective* issues, but do not have any role whatsoever in assertions about facts of the matter, which are supposed to be *objective*. Hence reports of these assertions are also indifferent to the points of views speakers may have in asserting whatever they are asserting about the world and its states of affairs.<sup>12</sup>

Recent developments in relativistic semantics (Laserson 2005, 2009; Stephenson 2007), in line with contributions from the philosophy of relativism (MacFarlane 2005; Köbel 2002), have recognised the importance of semantically distinguishing these features of ‘subjective’ assertions, arguing for the need to include a judge parameter in their semantic evaluation.

How does this work? Take an utterance of ‘It is boring’ as uttered by me, about the latest David Lynch movie. Its semantic representation is:

(6\*)  $\llbracket \text{It is boring} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, j} = T$  iff  $\langle \{It\}(c), \{Boring\}(c) \rangle$  is true at  $(c_t, c_w, c_j)$ .

(6\*) says that the sentence ‘It is boring’ as uttered in context  $c$  by me is true iff the last David Lynch movie is boring at the time and world of my utterance, relative to the judge parameter which is contextually determined by the context as the speaker of the context of utterance (i.e., Francesco Gentile).

This, once again, is nothing but NIC as applied to predicates of taste. It should also be noticed that there are cases in which the judge parameter does not coincide with the speaker. In other words, there are cases involving predicates of taste that do not have a *de se*

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<sup>12</sup> The reader should take this observation *cum grano salis*. I am not endorsing any strong metaphysical view based on a rigid separation of the ‘subjective’ from the ‘objective’. Actually, as I will explain in the next case, even certain ‘objective’ facts can be taken as perspectival. Or better, it is legitimate to think that our descriptions of these objective facts are perspectival (more on this later).



reading (Lewis 1979b). This is especially common in free indirect discourse (see Lasersohn 2009: 364; see also Schlenker 2004). For instance:

(12) Jim went to the beach yesterday. It was good fun.

Here the speaker is not saying of herself that she had fun the day before. She means that Jim had a lovely day at the beach. According to Lasersohn (2009: 364), it is “normal practice in such cases to assess [the claim] relative to a pragmatically salient person who was involved”. In (10) the person involved is supplied by the linguistic context, and we assess the whole claim easily, as for cases of pronominal anaphora.

Let me reflect on two considerations before moving to the next case. First of all, as for the previous case it is quite easy to show that contextualists have problems when dealing with predicates of taste. The reason is double: on the one hand, they lose track of ‘faultless disagreement’, that is, the idea that two speakers may disagree about the same content and be both right. On the other hand, they are unable to explain the interaction of predicates of taste with truth-conditional operators like negation. The two problems are obviously related, as the argument below shows.

Consider an utterance of ‘It is funny’ uttered by me, and an utterance of ‘It isn’t funny’ as uttered by you. Here are the renditions of (13) and (14) given by the contextualist and the non-indexical contextualist.

(13) It is funny.

(14) It isn’t funny.

(13\*) It is funny-to-me. (Contextualism)

(13\*\*) Relative to me (i.e., my aesthetic standards), it is funny.  
(NIC)

(14\*) ? It isn't funny-to-you. (Contextualism)

(14\*\*) Relative to my aesthetic standards, it isn't funny. (NIC)

If the proposition expressed by an utterance of (13) is equivalent to (13\*) then the denial of (13) should be equivalent to (14\*). This absurd conclusion is another unwelcome consequence of the contextualist theory of meaning.<sup>13</sup> Much more in line with the intuitions of speakers is the idea that the assertor of (13) and her denier are asserting their claims from their respective perspectives, but still disagree about the same content.<sup>14</sup> What this also shows is that the truth-conditional operator of negation does not scope over the judge parameter and, obviously, it could not. Parameters of this kind are intensional elements, and it is a conceptual error to allow

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<sup>13</sup> Glanzberg (2008) and Stojanovic (2008) among others have attempted to make the relativistic stance less cogent by showing that contextualists can both have their own semantics for these kinds of predicates and also accommodate the notion of disagreement. As to the semantics, Glanzberg proposes a semantics for predicates of taste as based on the notion of scalarity, which has been investigated for other types of adjectives (see Kennedy 2007). As far as disagreement is concerned, Stojanovic attempts at showing how the very notion of faultless disagreement is not faultless, after all (see also Glanzberg 2008: 16). Ultimately, I do not think either attempt succeeds in diminishing the force of relativism. In the case of Stojanovic's criticism, I think that faultless disagreement is still disagreement and not just misunderstanding. It is disagreement in that there is a content the disagreement is about, and the contenders tacitly agree that the disagreement is about this content (see my discussion of the disagreement test in chapter 2). However, the disagreement may result to be faultless insofar as there is no objective fact of the matter such that one stance is more correct than the other. Crucially, no notion of misunderstanding is active within relativistic semantics. As to Glanzberg's criticism, it may be argued that whether or not the notion of scale that Glanzberg appeals to is present for these adjectives, such notion is irrelevant to assessing the question of whether truth must be relativized to a judge parameter. So it seems to me that Glanzberg's argument just begs the question of whether there is independent evidence against relativism. Glanzberg then appeals to Creswell's general criticism against the Montogovian conception of index, based on the fact that there does not seem to be a principled way to say what an index should (or should not) include. Similarly, relativism seems to be open to the same parametric open-endedness, which would make our semantic competence difficult to explain. I find this objection weak since it does not present any direct evidence against relativistic semantics. As such, it is not so much an argument as a concern, for reasons already stressed by MacFarlane (2009: 245-46).

<sup>14</sup> A similar pattern can be found in epistemic modals, see Stephenson (2007: 492).

extensional operators to operate on them. It follows that the appropriate truth-clauses for (13) and (14) are:

$$\models_{w, t, j} \langle \{X\}(c), \{\text{funny}\}(c) \rangle$$
$$\models_{w, t, j} \langle \text{Not} \langle (X)(c), \{\text{funny}\}(c) \rangle \rangle$$

[where X is the salient subject of conversation.]

Secondly, there is another interesting aspect to consider concerning the semantics of attitude constructions. In this case, I follow Lasersohn (2009) who holds that a theory of attitude verbs is indexical in the sense that it treats predicates of taste like ‘is funny’ as involving a hidden argument. This argument works as a *de se* pronoun which, whenever it is embedded within an attitude verb, gets contextually saturated by the verb’s subject. A number of cases can be given as evidence:

- (15) Mark believes liquorice is (to be) tasty.
- (16) Mark considers liquorice to be tasty.
- (17) Mark thinks liquorice is tasty.
- (18) Mark imagines liquorice to be (is) tasty.

Now at least (15) and (17) allow for an exocentric reading, roughly equivalent to:

- (15<sub>E</sub>) Mark believes liquorice is tasty *w.r.t.* the standards of taste of person y/ community z.
- (17<sub>E</sub>) Mark thinks liquorice is (to be) tasty *w.r.t.* the standards of taste of person y/ community z.

(Try to get the same readings with (16) and (18) and you'll get less clear-cut results<sup>15</sup>).

However, in general, we read (15)-(18) to be *saying* that the complement-clause is true with respect to Mark, the subject of the ascription. It is, in fact, natural to take (15)-(18) as requiring an assessment relative to the subject's autocentric perspective. This also explains the example discussed in the previous case:

(3) *Francesco*: I know that the bank closes at 12:30.

(later on in the day)

*Bill*: Francesco said/asserted/believed that he knew the bank closes at 12:30 today.

*Ivonne*: That's false.

Bill's report is obviously sensitive to Francesco's standards of knowledge, not her owns. This seems to imply that it is not correct to characterise the semantics of attitude verbs as simply involving a relation between the subject and the proposition she is said to be in a relation with. We need to have a relation between a subject, a proposition and an appropriate parameter determining how the relation between the subject and the proposition is to be taken.<sup>16</sup>

(19)  $[[\text{believes that } p]]_{c, t, w} = \lambda x. x \text{ believes that } p \text{ at } (c_t, c_w)$ ,  
w.r.t.  $\clubsuit$ , the parameter which determines what it is for  $x$  to stand in the relation of 'believe' with  $p$ .

[where  $\clubsuit = j$  or  $\clubsuit = k$ , etc.] Here, as I will make more clear in the next section, the parameter  $\clubsuit$  is fixed by  $c$ , so it does not appear in

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<sup>15</sup> Actually 'imagine' followed by an infinitive is autocentric, while 'imagine followed by a that clause can be both autocentric and exocentric.

<sup>16</sup> In § 4 I will argue that the relation in question should not be seen, as Lasnik claims, as indexical but anaphoric.

the semantic evaluation of the complex phrase because, to paraphrase Lasersohn (2009: 365), it is fixed pragmatically.

I will now conclude my introduction to NIC by discussing an important doctrine which is at the intersection between the philosophy of language and the philosophy of time: temporalism.

Case #04.

In this introduction to NIC I should mention its most important historical precursor, which is Prior's temporal logic and, more generally, the philosophical doctrine which is named 'temporalism'. In my presentation of this doctrine I will mainly follow Recanati's comprehensive discussion of the topic in Recanati (2007). Since Recanati's adoption of what he calls 'moderate relativism' shares a lot of features with NIC, I think it is opportune to sketch it also in relation with temporalism.

*Temporalism* is the view that a sentence such as "It is raining" expresses a proposition which is true at certain times and false at others. In contrast, *eternalism* is the view that the same sentence, when it is uttered, expresses a proposition which is absolutely true or false in virtue of including a precise time parameter in it.

I think temporalism is a plausible view, although I am aware there are important objections to it.<sup>17</sup> Reasons of space oblige me to stay focused, so I will only sketch the theory and its advantages.

Take an utterance of

(20) It is raining.

as uttered by me on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2012 at 12:30pm in Nottingham. It seems correct to say that the truth-evaluation of (20)

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<sup>17</sup> An important collection of essays on this topic is Jokić, A., and Smith, Q. (2003). See esp. Richard's introduction. A careful analysis of the Priorian semantics of time can be found in an Italian book, which is more oriented to linguistics: Bonomi and Zucchi (2001).

will vary, depending on the situations in which its content is assessed.<sup>18</sup> Adapting a well-known formalism in situation-semantics to our case, and taking ‘e’ to be a variable for events, we could represent what I have just said in the following way:

$\tau_1$ : <Rain\_Nottingham (e); yes>

$\tau_2$ : <Rain, Nottingham (e); yes>

.

.

,

$\tau_n$ : <Rain, Nottingham (e); no>

Given a collection of time parameters  $\langle t_1, \dots, t_n \rangle$  we may ask whether the content expressed by (20), namely the temporal proposition *that it is raining in Nottingham*, is true w.r.t. each one of them: whether it is true at 12:30pm, at 12:31pm, ..., at 15:38pm, and so on. Under this framework, propositions are functions from  $\langle \text{worlds, times} \rangle$  to truth-values.

The reader will remember Frege’s objection (Chapter 4, § 2.1) to a similar view on the ground that for the purposes of doing logic we cannot allow the truth-evaluation of propositions to be relative. Propositions are absolutely true or false. The objection is easily disposed of if we adopt the following stance: a temporal proposition becomes a fully-fledged proposition when a temporal circumstance is added to it. In the words of Kaplan:

There is another kind of ‘content’ associated with a fugitive sentence like [20], namely, the content of a particular utterance of [20]. In a sense, any particular utterance (token) of a fugitive sentence (type) is an *eternalization* of the

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<sup>18</sup> Kaplan (1978 [1997: 683]): “without disputing the facts, if [20] were true at one time, it would fail to be true at some later time”.

fugitive sentence. The relativization to time is fixed by the time of the utterance. (Kaplan 1978 [1997: 683])

Kaplan is here implicitly endorsing a view which Perry and Barwise attribute to Austin (1970): the view concerning what they call ‘Austinian propositions’. An Austinian proposition is the result of completing a propositional function with a situation against which the function is evaluated. In other words, it is the ‘total truth-conditional package’ of information conveyed by an utterance.

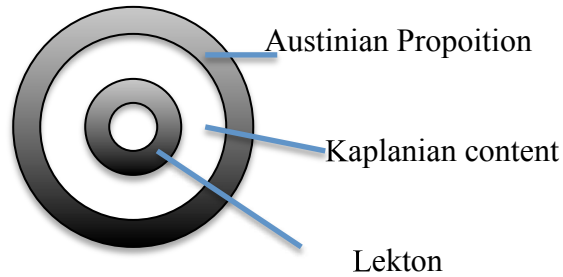
This view is also shared by Recanati’s adoption (2007) of what he calls a ‘moderate’ form of relativism (in short MR), in which Recanati distinguishes between two levels of content, the *lekton* and the Austinian proposition.

According to MR, the *lekton* is the content expressed by an utterance modulo its saturation and, possibly, its enrichments. Adding a circumstance to the *lekton* allows one to determine the Austinian proposition of an utterance. In turn, the *lekton* can be narrowly or broadly individuated. The *lekton* is narrowly individuated when it only concerns what is said by an utterance modulo its saturation (basically, Grice’s notion of what is said). This is the level of psychological content, the content of our attitudes.<sup>19</sup> The *lekton* is broadly individuated when it coincides with Kaplan’s notion of *character*: a function from contexts of use to contents.<sup>20</sup> We get the following picture:

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<sup>19</sup> See fn. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Here I will not investigate how this framework fits with Recanati’s truth-conditional pragmatics. Interesting questions arise as soon as we start asking whether the two systems are really compatible with each other. Let’s pretend that the Recanati I am discussing in this section is not the same Recanati I discussed in the previous chapters. Let’s pretend that this Recanati is Recanati\*, an English philosopher and not a French one.



The most inner white circle corresponds to the sentence uttered, while the most inner black circle is its *lekton*. Then we have the Kaplanian content, which is determined by the lekton and, finally, the whole Austinian Proposition which encircles all the other contents in virtue of being a function of all them.

Recanati argues for the need of Kaplanian contents between the *lekton* and the Austinian proposition precisely for the reason that we need functions which take us from circumstances of evaluations to truth-values.

As already discussed by Kaplan in the previous quotation, an utterance will determine a circumstance of evaluation with respect to which the content narrowly individuated will be evaluated. But nothing prevents the circumstance of evaluation of the context of utterance from shifting to another or being shifted by an operator, like in the case of world-shifting operators in modal logic.<sup>21</sup> The presence of temporal operators in natural language demonstrates this:

<sup>21</sup> In modal logic we use, for instance, '□' '◇' to represent the 'necessity-operator' and the 'possibility' operator. Given an accessibility relation between possible worlds R, the following conditions for these two operators are:

$\llbracket \Box \alpha \rrbracket = T$  iff For all v such that  $R(w, v)$   $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_v = T$

$\llbracket \Diamond \alpha \rrbracket = T$  iff For some v such that  $R(w, v)$   $\llbracket \alpha \rrbracket_v = T$ .

Other operators include fictional operators (operators that shift the world of evaluation to a fictional one), deontic operators, epistemic operators, etc.



(21) In a month it will be the case that it rains in Nottingham.

If the embedded sentence expressed an eternal content determined by the coordinates of the context of utterance, then we would have the following inconsistent propositional rendering of (21):

(21\*) # In a month it will be the case that it rains in Nottingham on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2012.

Kaplan infers from this that propositions are temporally neutral. It goes without saying that the same strategy can also be applied to locations, and that the need for propositions which are locationally neutral is given by the presence of operators that shift the location parameter. Consider an utterance of ‘It rains’. It is perfectly legitimate to ask whether the proposition expressed by me, in Nottingham, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September is true with respect to different locations (indicated by ‘ $\lambda$ ’ + specific location in subscript), to a greater or lesser extent related to the place in which I utter the sentence:

$\lambda_{\text{FOREST FIELD/nottingham}}$ : <Rain(e); yes>.

$\lambda_{\text{NOTTINGHAM}}$ : <Rain(e); yes>.

.

.

.

$\lambda_{\text{EDINBURGH}}$ : <Rain(e); no>.

Given the shiftability of these parameters we can formulate this principle:

*Neutrality*: The Proposition expressed by an utterance is neutral with respect to the parameters of possible

circumstances, unless the parameter is fully articulated by the sentence uttered.

A further principle, which is modelled on (Kaplan 1989: 504), can be formulated with respect to the possibility of adding operators that specify those parameters:

*Operator:* If we wish to isolate a particular parameter  $v$  and regard it as a feature of possible circumstances we can introduce operators  $\mathfrak{R}$  that shift  $v$ : ‘ $\mathfrak{R}$ (it is the case that\_)’, etc. To make such operators interesting we must have contents which are  $v$ -neutral.

It should be noticed that on the previous page I have basically presented a view which, strictly speaking, crosses the borders of NIC. Giving the possibility of several situations in which an utterance can be evaluated as to its truth, none of which has a privileged status, we would be better off saying that we are dealing with relativism. NIC offers a weaker claim: only one circumstance is the one at which an utterance is evaluated and this is determined by the context of utterance.

Trying to summarise some of the main points of discussion in this section, we have that NIC is committed to the following theses:

- Is indexicality the only form of context-dependence? No: we also have a form of context-sensitivity due to the determination of circumstances of evaluation.
- What enters in a circumstance of evaluation? Two answers: whatever serves to determine the circumstance of evaluation (MacFarlane); Whatever can be shifted by an appropriate operator (Kaplan).

- What shifts during a conversation and what remains fixed? Contents or parameters? At least in the case of certain phenomena (e.g., predicates of taste) it is the parameters that shift, for otherwise disagreement would not be possible.
- Operators: a contextual aspect relevant to the truth-conditions of an utterance goes in the circumstance of evaluation if there is an operator that can shift it (Kaplan).

In the next section I will investigate how these claim fit with a non-indexicalist contextualist account of metaphor.

### **3. Non-indexical Contextualism and Metaphor**

In this dissertation I have taken a stance against those theories that treat metaphorical utterances as expressing different contents in different contexts. My criticisms have been addressed to both pragmatic accounts that attempt to explain metaphor by appealing to modulation processes and, also, semantic accounts like the one favoured by Stern that appeal to a combination of pre-semantic and semantic processes. My criticisms have testified the presence of several problems or unresolved issues for these views, but two main criticisms stand up more prominently: these concern the overgeneration of content, which affects the contextualist accounts, and the overgeneration of characters, which is a consequence of Stern's theory.

If we agree that fixing a metaphorical interpretation does not work in the way contextualists or indexicalists propose, how then do I plan to explain metaphor at all? In the previous section I have offered some evidence coming from different topics in the philosophy of language and semantics which may give a

straightforward answer to this question: metaphor requires a non-indexical contextualist treatment, along the lines suggested for the cases of knowledge-ascriptions and predicates of taste. The main feature of NIC is that it treats these other cases by appealing to enriched circumstances of evaluation, involving specific parameters the presence of which is necessary to determine appropriate extensions for the expressions of an utterance.

The task for the rest of this chapter is to, first of all, individuate an appropriate parameter in the circumstance of evaluation of metaphorical utterances. Secondly, the subsequent task is to investigate whether the presence of this parameter behaves in a way similar to the other parameters like the knowledge parameter or the judge parameter, which I have already discussed. To that effect, it will be important to see how this parameter behaves in certain contexts: for instance, attitude verbs and denials. In this section, however, I will only focus on the nature of the parameter I introduce in the semantics of metaphors and on the issue of whether there are operators in a natural language like English that specify the value this parameter can take. In the next section I will extend my discussion to attitude verbs and denial.

The main claim of my theory is that the metaphorical dimension of an utterance is not identifiable with the content expressed by it. Nor is it part of the meaning (i.e. a Kaplanian character) of the expression to be interpreted metaphorically. A metaphorical interpretation is given by what I call the particular thematic dimension at which an utterance is evaluated. In other words a thematic dimension ‘specifies the theme of a discourse, or what the discourse is about’ (Leezenberg 2001: 166). Sometimes, the literal meanings of a sentence is sufficient to determine what the thematic dimension of the utterance is, but more often it is context and the extra-linguistic information it carries that determines it. In this case

we need to recover the thematic dimension, so as to determine the appropriate extensions for each constituent of an utterance.<sup>22</sup>

This framework can be better illustrated with a simple example. Suppose we are at an artist's exhibition and I utter:

(22) This painting is grey.

Suppose we are also discussing the different colours chosen by this artist for his paintings. The painting in question is an abstract painting representing a grey circle. My utterance then is true in virtue of being a correct classification of the painting as grey with respect to the thematic dimension 'the most salient colour'. It should be noticed that here it is not essential to my argument that this thematic dimension is the kind of 'wordly' dimension which usually makes utterances of (22) count as true. The fact that speakers assume this dimension to be part of the meaning of the predicate 'is grey' is not a valid reason to consider it as such. Consider a variant of the modal argument applied to predicates:<sup>23</sup>

(23) The most salient colour of this painting could have been grey (in fact, it is).

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<sup>22</sup> This 'recovering' does not involve inferential processes, which are based on fully conceptual representations. It has more to do with non-conceptual information, that is, information which may be useful to determine a fully-fledged representation, but which does not need to be fully represented by the thinker. Information of this kind can usually be given in terms of a description (see examples below), but this is something that comes as the result of an attempt made by us to conceptualise it.

<sup>23</sup> The modal argument was originally given by Kripke (1972) to show that proper names cannot be equated to definite descriptions, for they behave differently when evaluated at different possible worlds. Proper names behave rigidly, that is, they refer to the same individual across possible worlds, whereas definite descriptions do not. Kripke used the argument against descriptivist accounts of proper names. A version of the argument for indexicals can be found in Stojanovic (2007), to which my present discussion is in debt.

(24) The most salient colour of this painting could have been the most salient colour of this painting (in fact, it could not have been otherwise).

(23) is contingently true, (24) is necessarily true. Given that the truth-conditions of these utterances differ, I infer that ‘grey’ does not mean the same as ‘the most salient colour’. More generally, I infer that thematic dimensions are not aspects of the meaning of an expression.

Now consider another utterance of (22) in a context in which we are discussing a very depressive painting. In this case the thematic dimension relative to which my utterance is to be evaluated is something like: ‘the painting’s main emotive aspect’. My utterance is true iff its content, the proposition *that the salient painting is grey*, is true with respect to the thematic dimension determined by the context.

Thus, my theory accounts for the variability of truth-conditions of a sentence in context without requiring that the sentence expresses different contents in different contexts of utterance. This is a welcome result given that I avoid in this way all the problems affecting TCP and Stern’s theory. Neither does my theory overgenerate contents, nor does it overgenerate characters. In my account, expressions have just one character and determine just the same content across all contexts. However, being sensitive to which particular thematic dimension they are evaluated at, every expression will be assigned a different extension for each context of utterance. Defining  $\vartheta'$  as the thematic dimension operative in the first utterance of (23), we have that the extension of grey is:

(25)  $\llbracket \text{grey} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \vartheta'} = \{x: x \text{ are grey at } t \text{ in } w \text{ relative to } \vartheta'\}$

Defining now  $\vartheta''$  as the thematic dimension operative in the second context of utterance of (23), the extension of grey is now:

$$(26) \quad \llbracket \text{grey} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \vartheta''} = \{x: x \text{ are grey at } t \text{ in } w \text{ relative to } \vartheta''\}$$

The reader may find herself appropriate truth-clauses for (22), as uttered in the two imagined contexts, following the non-indexicalist contextualist account I have proposed.

An interesting application of the theory is the case of so-called ‘twice-true’ metaphors’. These metaphors are both metaphorically true and literally true, like for instance:

(27) Jesus was a carpenter.

(28) No man’s an island.

Suppose the context in which (27) is uttered is such that the speaker wants to both impart the information that Jesus’s job was carpentry and, at the same time, impart the information that Jesus’s role in people’s life is identical with the role a carpenter has with the things he works with.<sup>24</sup> In other words, someone who is asserting (27) metaphorically is attempting to reconceptualise Jesus in a particular way (Nogales 2009). To that effect, knowing the literal meaning of ‘carpenter’ is essential to determine the thematic dimension of the context of utterance, say *Role played by carpenters*. Calling this dimension  $\vartheta^{\text{role}}$ , the metaphorical truth-clause of (27) becomes:

$$(27_{\text{met}}) \quad \llbracket \text{Jesus was a carpenter} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \vartheta^{\text{role}}} = \text{T iff } \langle \text{Jesus, Carpenter} \rangle \\ \text{is true at } (c_t, c_w) \text{ w.r.t. } \vartheta^{\text{role}}$$

<sup>24</sup> Be careful: don’t confuse this information with the metaphorical claim itself.

whereas the literal truth-clause of (28) is the same except that the thematic dimension is here idle:

(27<sub>lit</sub>)  $[[\text{Jesus was a carpenter}]]_{c, t, w} = T$  iff  $\langle \text{Jesus, Carpenter} \rangle$  is true at  $(c_t, c_w)$ .

Notice how a metaphor like (27) is a good metaphor or, in Hills' words (1997), an 'apt' metaphor because the presence of a clear thematic dimension allows the whole metaphorical predication to succeed. Metaphors based on very stereotypical properties like 'Jim is a gorilla' or 'Jim is a pig' are much less apt in this sense. In these cases there is, in fact, no thematic dimension provided by the linguistic context or extra-linguistic context of the utterance. We just rely on very conventional properties of these terms to determine a very conventionalised type of meaning, similar in many respects to slurs that are shared by some culture or groups of people, and that are devoid of serious assertive force.

Let me now consider this objection to my account, which is modelled on MacFarlane's attempt (2009: 244) to reply to Stanley's objection (2005: 147-152) against an epistemic standard parameter:

- i. We should only countenance a parameter of circumstances if there is an operator that shifts it.
- ii. There is no operator that shifts thematic dimensions.
- iii. Therefore, we should not countenance a thematic dimension parameter.

A defender of a non-indexical contextualism for a particular area of discourse has two strategies to reply to this argument. On the one hand, he can adopt MacFarlane's defence of an epistemic standards parameter, which pivots around the non-necessity of operators for



the purposes of providing a semantics of the discourse under analysis. On the other hand, he may try to show that English is a language that allows for operators that shift the relevant parameter. My defence of NIC for metaphor will lean on the second strategy.

I believe there are operators that shift a thematic dimension parameter. Consider this utterance, which is taken from Leezenberg (2001):

(29) As far as style is concerned, this book is good.

Now, according to Leezenberg adjectives like ‘good’ are *weakly thematically determined* in the sense that in order to deliver an appropriate extension an interpretive system must supply a thematic dimension. Usually, it is context which provides it, but here we have the presence of an operator, ‘as far as style is concerned’, which designates the appropriate thematic dimension: *style*. Formally:

(29\*)  $\llbracket \text{As far as style is concerned, this book is good} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \phi} = T$   
iff  $\langle \text{Book}_i, \text{Good} \rangle$  is true at  $(t, w)$  w.r.t  $\mathcal{D}^{\text{style}}$

[where the subscript ‘i’ indexes the noun phrase to the salient book of the context.]

This account parallels Lasersohn’s intensional treatment of expressions like ‘for you’ or ‘to Jim’ in the semantics of predicates of taste. For instance, the prepositional phrase ‘to Mark’ in

(30) Avocado tastes good to Mark.

is treated under this account in the following syncategorematic way:

(30\*)  $\llbracket \text{Avocado tastes good to Mark} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, j} = \llbracket \text{Avocado tastes good} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \text{mark}}$

I therefore disagree with Leezenberg's claim (2001: 168) that operators of this kind are Kaplanian monsters in the sense that they operate on the characters of expressions such as 'good'. Allowing thematic dimensions to be part of the index of sentences-in-context like 'Avocado is tasty' or 'This book is good' would make the whole system work in a Lewisian/Montogovian way, which does not countenance a distinction between index and circumstances of evaluation. Besides, there is an obvious disanalogy between Kaplanian monsters and these operators. While operators like 'as far as style is concerned' help determine the extension of a given expression, a monster selects a different content. But for reasons made clear in this chapter and in the previous one it is an unwelcome feature of a semantic system to deliver different contents for expressions which are non-indexical.

Turning back to metaphor, I said we find the same kind of operators for expressions used metaphorically. Here are two examples:

(31) Financially, the last Moody's rating was a quake.

(32) Kripke is the Bobby Fischer of philosophy.

The evaluation of (31) is basically identical to that of (29) and (30), and is based on the following rule:

(31\*)  $\llbracket \text{Financially, the last Moody's rating was a quake.} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \emptyset} = \llbracket \text{the last Moody's rating was a quake} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \spadesuit \text{finance}}$

On the other hand, I am treating a phrase such as 'of philosophy' as an intensional operator working in the same way

adverbials do in the cases just discussed. Assuming that an NP like ‘Bobby Fischer’, when preceded by an article, expressed the property *being Bobby Fischer*, which is weakly thematically determined, we have the following truth-clause for (32):

- (32\*)  $\llbracket \text{Kripke is the Bobby Fischer of philosophy} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \phi} = T$  iff  
 $\langle \text{Kripke}, \{ \text{Bobby Fischer} \} (c) \rangle$  is true at  $(t, w)$  w.r.t  
 $\phi^{\text{philosophy}}$

The fact that phrases like ‘the Bobby Fischer’ alone do not express a complete property should not be a mystery when we compare it with other cases:

- (33) Rome is the capital (of Italy).  
 (34) Switzerland is the country (between Italy and Germany).  
 (35) Obama is the president (of the U.S.).

Alternatively, we could treat these phrases adopting Recanati’s treatment of ‘variadic functions’ discussed in Chapter 4, in which the thematic dimension modifies the acidity of the predicate with  $n$  arguments, generating a new predicate with  $n+1$  arguments:<sup>25</sup>

Thematic dimension<sub>philosophy</sub> (P(k)) = P\*(k, *Philosophy*)

Thematic dimension<sub>country</sub> (P(r)) = P\*(x, *Italy*)

[Where P is a predicate, k = Kripke, r = Rome and P\* is a new property which is the result of applying the thematic dimension to P and its arguments.]

<sup>25</sup> Zeman (2011) provides an argument to the effect that Recanati’s account of variadic functions can be implemented by a relativist semantics.

I wish now to conclude this section by considering two worries about my theory, which have already been addressed in the literature. One is the worry that my account overgenerates parameters, while the other is that the role of context is predominant in my explanation of metaphor. If it is, then it is not clear why we should consider my view semantics.

I believe that both claims are rather weak. In reply to the first objection, I follow MacFarlane:

A...reason for resisting an epistemic standards parameter is a worry about opening the floodgates. If “know” is context-sensitive but not indexical, it is unlikely that is the only such expression. Very likely we’ll also want nonindexical contextualist treatments of other expressions, too. To handle each new expression, we’ll need a new parameter of circumstances. Pretty soon our nice ordered pairs will become ordered n-tuples! One might advise stopping this proliferation of parameters right at the beginning.

So stated, this isn’t much of an objection. Maybe you just need a lot of parameters to do semantics. This doesn’t make semantics intractable, unsystematic, or impossible (we have computers, after all). And there’s no reason why we can’t ignore most of these parameters when we are trying to illuminate the semantics of a particular class of expressions (say, epistemic words) (MacFarlane 2009: 245-46).

So long as the postulation of a parameter follows determinate semantic patterns (and that’s what I am trying to show here with thematic dimensions), then it is no objection to say that we are multiplying parameters. The situation is identical to other fields of science: suppose a physicist has theoretical reasons to postulate a certain entity in his explanation of a certain phenomenon. If the entity plays a certain role in his model, then that is sufficient ground to entail its existence. If it turned out that his explanation of

the phenomenon is not adequate for other reasons, then we would have strong reasons to doubt about the existence of such entity in our physical ontology.

The second objection concerns the role of context, and presumably of things like intentions or presuppositions, in determining an actual circumstance of evaluation. If this is so, why not consider the whole strategy pragmatic, after all? This somehow reminds me of the case discussed in the philosophy of mind concerning Mary, the physicist who knows everything about the functioning of colour experience, but never experienced any colour. Well, likewise here, the fact that the mechanisms of metaphor understanding require a brain to function properly in a given environment is no objection to the presence of those mechanisms, whose explanation is semantic. The fact that in order for those mechanisms to work we need that speakers also share an environment and be able to recognise their attempts at communicating is not very surprising. But it is one thing to experience a metaphor, it is another to understand its functioning.

In conclusion, in this section I have argued for the theoretical need for thematic dimensions in the evaluation of a metaphorical utterance. I have given evidence for a non-indexicalist contextualist account of these thematic dimensions, and proposed a general hypothesis concerning what makes a metaphor apt: the presence of a thematic dimension which allows us to precisely determine the extension of a given expression used metaphorically. Putative metaphors that do not follow this pattern are either not metaphors at all or, perhaps, are the kind of poetic metaphors whose sophistication does not allow for a determination of their extensions in context. I will now proceed to provide a non-indexicalist contextualist account of belief reports of metaphors and metaphorical denials.

#### 4. Belief reports and Denial

In the previous section I have introduced my non-indexical contextualist account of metaphor, which pivots around the postulation of an appropriate parameter in the circumstance of evaluation of a metaphorical utterance. I have also argued for the presence of operators that shift the value of such a parameter. Finally, towards the end of the section I have made some general remarks on the role of parameters in a semantic system like the one I favour. One point I have stressed is that we should contemplate their presence only so long as our explanation of a certain phenomenon requires it for its empirical adequacy.<sup>26</sup> Thus, what I am going to do in this section is to check whether the postulation of a thematic dimension is effectively required by the system for its adequacy. My answer is that it is, as the presentation of the next two cases is intended to show.

The issues I will consider here concern belief reports and denials of metaphors. Both issues seem to share a common feature: if someone utters a metaphor within a belief report or if the metaphor falls under a truth-conditional operator such as negation, the contribution the metaphor brings is clearly truth-conditional. Consider:

- (36) John is not a bulldozer.
- (37) Juliet is not the sun.
- (38) Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun.
- (39) Paris believes that Juliet is not the sun.
- (40) Paris believes that Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun.

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<sup>26</sup> Where by ‘empirical adequacy’ I roughly mean ‘conformity to the speakers’ intuitions about the truth-conditions of those utterances for which the system is asked to deliver correct judgements’.

Doubtless, there are contexts where the embedded sentence in these complexes, e.g., ‘John is a bulldozer’ and ‘Juliet is the sun’ are to be intended metaphorically. Actually, this is what most of the time an appropriate system requires in order to deliver appropriate semantic values for utterances of these sentences. Of course, this aspect constitutes a strong objection to all those views that deny that metaphors are primarily truth-conditional. In this respect, Davidson’s view, Grice’s and even Searle’s all fall short of an explanation of why utterances of these sentences manifest a clear truth-conditional profile and, therefore, it must be concluded that their accounts are not empirically adequate. The question I am going to tackle in this section is therefore: how does my account explain the truth-conditional profile of cases such as (36)-(40)? I will start with belief reports, and then progress to discuss cases of denial.

#### **4.1. Belief Reports.**

In the previous section I followed Lasersohn in claiming that in the case of knowledge ascriptions and predicates of taste under belief reports we need to treat attitude verbs indexically in the sense that we should envisage a slot in their lexical entries, whose function is to collect those parameters that appear in the semantic evaluation of their unembedded sentences. A slot of this kind should be filled by an appropriate parameter, which is fixed by the context. In other words, against the ‘simple-minded’ view that treats an attitude verb as a binary cognitive relation which exists between a subject and a content, this view requires that the relation be a three-place relation between a subject, a content and a parameter which fixes what it is for the subject to be in that relation with that content. Hence in the previous section, I formulated the following clause for attitude verbs:

- (19)  $\llbracket \text{believes that } p \rrbracket_{c, t, w} = \lambda x. x \text{ believes that } p \text{ at } (t, w)$ ,  
w.r.t.  $\clubsuit$ , the parameter which determines what it is for  $x$  to  
stand in the relation of ‘believe’ with  $p$ .

[where  $\clubsuit = j$  or  $\clubsuit = k$  or  $\clubsuit = \vartheta$ , etc.]

Without this requirement, the semantic system would not be in a position to deliver the appropriate truth-conditional evaluations for knowledge ascriptions and predicates of taste under the scope of attitude verbs.

However, here I want to claim that it is more correct to treat the argument for the slot in the attitude verb as anaphoric and not indexical. By this I mean that it is not the context of the reporter which settles how the slot is to be filled, but appropriate anaphoric links with the linguistic or extra-linguistic context. This change is not a radical departure from Lasersohn’s view since I maintain that ‘believe’ and other affine verbs show a tripartite relational structure.

In detail, a system that would not be capable of distinguishing between these two reports should be considered as inadequate on any reasonable view:

- (41) Mark believes that liquorice is tasty (to him).  
(42) Mark believes that liquorice is tasty (to his community).

(41) is felicitously assertable only in a context which has made clear that the interpretation of ‘tasty’ is sensitive to Mark’s standards:

- (41\*) Mark<sub>i</sub> believes that liquorice is tasty<sub>i</sub> (to him).



In contrast, (42) is felicitously assertable only in a context which has made clear that the interpretation of ‘tasty’ is sensitive not to Mark’s standards, but to those of his community, which are this time supplied by the extra-linguistic context:

(42\*)  $c_j$ : Mark believes that liquorice is tasty<sub>j</sub> (to his community).<sup>27</sup>

This sensitivity to different dimensions of evaluation characterises, I believe, attitude reports of metaphors, too. Suppose I want to report Romeo’s belief that Juliet is the sun.<sup>28</sup> To remind my reader, according to my account Romeo’s utterance ‘Juliet is the sun’ is true iff the content expressed by his utterance, *that Juliet is the sun*, counts as true with respect to a particular thematic dimension, say, the centrality Juliet has in Romeo’s life. The semantic evaluation of Romeo’s utterance with respect to the abovementioned thematic dimension is:

(43)  $[[\text{Juliet is the sun}]]_{c, t, w, \ast} = T$  iff  $\langle \text{Juliet}, \{\text{Sun}\}(c) \rangle$  is true  
at  $(c_t, c_w)$  w.r.t  $\mathfrak{D}^{\text{centrality}}$

In other words given Romeo’s particular context which determines that thematic dimension, the semantic value for ‘Juliet’, namely,

<sup>27</sup> A linguistic context that would make (42) true could be the following story: “Mark is a child who, having a strange alimentary disorder cannot eat liquorice. However, all his friends told him great things about liquorice. His sister Mary always eats liquorice and she seems to enjoy it very much. Mark now believes that liquorice is tasty”.

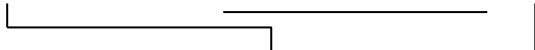
<sup>28</sup> Objector: “What sort of belief could this be? Nobody believes that human beings are stars”. Reply: “And nobody believes that France is hexagonal, that Holland is flat and that Italy is a boot, but we assert these things all the time and most of the time we assert truths”. Objector: “I am not convinced”. Reply: “Do you remember Recanati’s distinction between lekton as narrow content and Austinian proposition as lekton plus circumstance?” Objector: “Yes, I do”. Reply: “Good, then we have a specular situation here. In the narrow sense, the content of ‘Juliet is the sun’ is something that no rational being would entertain. In the ‘Austinian’ sense nothing is wrong with entertaining the full ‘idea’ that w.r.t a certain aspect Juliet and the Sun are identical”. Objector: “I am still not convinced”. Reply: “Sir, this is philosophy. It’s your turn, give me a better explanation then”.

the individual *Juliet*,<sup>29</sup> is in the extension of ‘the sun’ relative to the designated thematic dimension. Again, if we are careful not to confuse wordly conditions with truth-conditions, there is nothing bizarre with my account: it just systematises what it is for someone to utter a metaphorical sentence and say something true.

Now, the following step for my account is to capture this sensitivity to the designated thematic dimension of Romeo’s utterance in my report of his belief. The truth-clause for (38) is:

$$(44) \quad \llbracket \text{Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun} \rrbracket_{c, t, w} = T \text{ iff} \\ \langle \{ \text{Believe} \}(c), (\text{Romeo}, (\text{Juliet}, \{ \text{Sun} \}(c))) \rangle \text{ is true at } (c_t, \\ c_w) \text{ w.r.t } \mathfrak{C}^{\text{centrality}}$$

My claim is that ‘believe’ is associated with a free variable, whose value is anaphorically supplied by the thematic dimension ‘centrality’. This, in turn, is inherited by Romeo’s previous claim which had introduced it in the common ground of the conversation. This aspect of the interpretation is not captured by (44). The conversational dynamics of my report of Romeo’s utterance of the sentence ‘Juliet is the sun’ is best captured in the following way:

$$(45) \quad \langle \langle \text{Juliet is the sun} \rangle_j; \mathfrak{C}^{\text{centrality}}_i \rangle \text{ Romeo believes}_i \text{ it}_j.$$


Here the subscript ‘i’ marks the anaphoric link between the thematic dimension determined by Romeo’s context of utterance and the attitude verb, whereas the subscript ‘j’ marks the link between the content of Romeo’s assertion and the object of Romeo’s belief. I am also using double quotation marks in a technical sense here: they indicate that the material within them

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<sup>29</sup> Let’s pretend we are not dealing with a fictional context here, and that Juliet is a real individual in the world.

represents the Austinian proposition expressed by Romeo's utterance.

Suppose now we move to a different context, in which I want to deny that Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun. Here we have two possibilities. On the one hand, I can deny that Romeo literally believes that Juliet is the sun. Or I can deny that with respect to the designated thematic dimension of 'centrality', Romeo does not believe that Juliet is the sun.

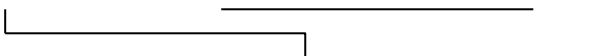
(46)  $\llbracket \text{Romeo does not believe that Juliet is the sun} \rrbracket_{c, t, w} = T$  iff  
 $\langle \{\text{Believe}\}(c), (\text{Romeo}, (\text{Juliet}, \{\text{Sun}\}(c))) \rangle$  is false at  $(c_t,$   
 $c_w)$ .

(47)  $\llbracket \text{Romeo does not believe that Juliet is the sun} \rrbracket_{c, t, w} = T$  iff  
 $\langle \{\text{Believe}\}(c), (\text{Romeo}, (\text{Juliet}, \{\text{Sun}\}(c))) \rangle$  is false at  $(c_t,$   
 $c_w)$  w.r.t  $\Theta^{\text{centrality}}$

In other words, what (47) says is that it is true that Romeo does not believe that Juliet is the sun because it is false that w.r.t the  $\Theta^{\text{centrality}}$  Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun. In contrast, (46) is true iff it is false that Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun, *tout court*.

Adopting the formalisation I have used in (45), we can represent the anaphoric link between 'believe' and the thematic dimension present in (47) in the following way:

(48) " $\langle \text{Juliet is the sun} \rangle_j; \Theta^{\text{centrality}}_i$ ". Not: Romeo believes<sub>i</sub> it<sub>j</sub>.



Here the subscript 'i' marks the anaphoric link between the thematic dimension determined by Romeo's context of utterance and the attitude verb, whereas the subscript 'j' marks the link between the content of Romeo's assertion and the object of

Romeo's belief. Also, notice how this representation of my utterance of 'Romeo does not believe that Juliet is the sun' would especially make sense in a context in which the utterance was followed by another along the lines of: 'He now thinks that Juliet is a spiny cactus'.

In contrast, (47) can be simply represented in this way:

(49) <Juliet is the sun><sub>i</sub>. Not: Romeo believes it<sub>j</sub>.

Here the representation simply makes clear that Romeo does not believe the absurd proposition that Juliet is the sun. Absence of double quotation marks is indicative of the fact that we are not dealing here with a whole Austinian proposition and, therefore, there is not a thematic dimension that may serve the purpose of providing an anaphoric link with the attitude verb in the second clause.

Finally, I wish to spend a word on constructions such as (40) involving more than one embedding of propositional attitudes. How does the theory deal with such cases? Here again there are precise patterns which the semantics of attitude verbs embedding metaphors shares with the semantics of attitude verbs embedding predicates of taste. Consider:

(50) John believes that Mark believes liquorice is tasty.

It is natural to take an utterance of this sentence as stating that John believes that Mark believes liquorice is tasty to Mark.<sup>30</sup>

(50\*) John believes that Mark<sub>i</sub> believes liquorice is tasty<sub>i</sub>.

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<sup>30</sup> Stephenson (2007) makes the same observation also in regard to epistemic modals.

If this is so, then it is more natural to treat the dependence of the ‘judge’ parameter for ‘tasty’ upon Mark as evidence for the anaphoricity of such relations, more than for the indexicality of it. If the judge depends on something other than Mark’s stance, then we can treat (50) along the lines sketched for (42\*): the anaphoric link is not given by the immediate linguistic antecedent, but by the extra-linguistic context:

(50\*)  $c_j$ : John believes that Mark believes liquorice is tasty $_j$ .

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We have a similar pattern in metaphorical interpretation. Reconsider (40):

(40) Paris believes that Romeo believes that Juliet is the sun.

It is natural to take an utterance of (40) to state that Paris believes that Romeo believes Juliet to be the sun w.r.t the thematic dimension (whatever that is) used by Romeo to assert his content:

(40) Paris believes that Romeo believes $_i$  that Juliet is the sun $_i$ .

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We do not take Romeo’s belief to be influenced by what Paris believes about Juliet, as we do not take Mark’s belief that liquorice is tasty to be influenced by what John believes about liquorice.

All this evidence seems to show that my prediction that the semantic system requires thematic dimensions for the evaluation of attitude ascriptions embedding metaphors is correct. What is more, my account finds support from the semantics of attitude verbs embedding predicates of taste and, although I have not focused on those, a similar pattern is traceable in the semantics of attitude verbs embedding epistemic modals. I will now move on to discuss my view on metaphorical denials.

## 4.2 Metaphor & Denial

One of the assumption my account is based on is that instances of the following schema are, generally, not evaluable:

An utterance *u* of a sentence *s* at *C* is true iff the proposition *p* expressed by *s* at *C* is true (MacFarlane 2009).

Confining my present discourse to metaphor, the correct consequence I draw is that we would not be able to evaluate any metaphor if a thematic dimension did not accompany an utterance of the sentence in which one or more expressions used metaphorically appear. This is true of declarative sentences used metaphorically as well as of their denials. Without the provision of a thematic dimension we would not be able to determine what exactly someone who wants to deny a metaphor is denying.

Still, a contextualist could argue that her theory is able to explain the same data by appealing to her view on explicatures. Someone who replied to Romeo by uttering:

(51) Juliet is not the sun.

would be taken to mean something like:

(52) Juliet is not THE SUN\*,

whatever the ad hoc concept THE SUN\* meant for her.

However, and prescindng from the reasons I have already provided in Chapter 5 to not adhere to a contextualist account of metaphor, I agree with Camp (2006: 296ff.) that contextualists

have problems to explain cases in which a speaker is not denying the metaphorical interpretation, but is simply ‘opting out’ like in the following beautiful exchange from Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* :

- (53) Raskolnikov: I only killed a louse.  
Sonya: A louse. A human being!

Here Raskolnikov is confessing his crime (the murder of Alyona Ivanovna and her sister Lizaveta) to Sonya, and he is attempting to justify it by describing Alyona as a louse.

The core of Camp’s criticism is that given the contextualist account of ad hoc concepts, we should expect Sonya’s reply to target Raskolnikov’s metaphorical interpretation.

[T]he crucial point is this: if the original speaker’s utterance had genuinely ‘lodged’ a new, temporary use for them, then that meaning should necessarily be inherited by any later use of those same words in that same context which *responds* to the initial claim (Camp 2006: 297)

However, Sonya is rejecting Raskolnikov’s words altogether,<sup>31</sup> and we need a clear explanation of her behaviour. Unfortunately, Camp has none.

I believe my account nicely deals with this sort of construction, and in the remaining part of this section I will spell out my proposal. But, first, since Sonya’s reply does not include the negation, and I am here interested in the interaction between this

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<sup>31</sup> The issue I am discussing nicely intersects with the philosophical literature on the topic of ‘imaginative resistance’. The expression was, I believe, introduced by Richard Moran in a paper on metaphor (Moran 1989; see also Moran 1994). For discussion of the phenomenon in relation to fiction, see Gendler (2000) and Currie (2002).

operator and metaphor, let me slightly modify her utterance, without modifying the substance of her claim:

- (53\*) Raskolnikov: I only killed a louse.  
 Sonya: You didn't kill a louse. You killed a human being!

Now, on any charitable hypothesis about what Sonya is denying it is evident that she is not denying that Raskolnikov actually killed a louse. Her rejection targets the whole metaphorical mode of Raskolnikov's assertion. Since a louse is, by definition, a small, parasitic insect, we can, in a non-tendentious way, interpret Raskolnikov's claim with respect to the thematic dimension: meanness. Leaving aside the presuppositional contribution of 'only' to Raskolnikov's entire signification of his utterance, we can represent his primary claim in the following way:

- (54)  $\llbracket \text{I killed a louse} \rrbracket_{c, t, w, \theta} = T$  iff  $\langle \text{Killed}, (\text{Raskolnikov}, \{a \text{ louse}\}(c)) \rangle$  is true at  $(c_t, c_w)$  w.r.t.  $\theta^{\text{meanness}}$

If Sonya wanted to deny that Raskolnikov actually killed someone, but leaving the metaphor intact, her denial would be:

- (55) You didn't kill *the* louse.

This leaves as common ground the presupposition that it would be correct to describe Alyona as *a louse*. But her denial has exactly that as a target, namely, the presupposition that it is appropriate to describe Alyona as *a louse* (given that she is a human being). Her denial appeals to what since Horn (1989) linguists have called metalinguistic negation, a pragmatic operator which does not scope over propositions, but rejects the entire force of an utterance due to



its defectiveness. In other words, her denial can be thusly described:

- (56) It is not appropriate to assert “I killed a louse”, given that you killed a human being.

We have here two recurrent patterns in metaphorical denials: either a denier denies the metaphorical interpretation or she denies the metaphorical utterance itself because she considers the thematic dimension chosen inadequate. I have opted to call this latter form of disagreement ‘verbal disagreement’, while I shall call the former ‘substantial disagreement’.

**Verbal disagreement:**

Not  $\vdash_{\ast}$  ‘s’

**Substantial disagreement:**

c, t, w,  $\vartheta \models \neg p$

In conclusion, my theory has shown a clear application of thematic dimensions even to the case of denial. Either a metaphor is rejected as part of the utterance’s force (verbal disagreement) or it is accepted as the dimension relative to which a certain content is denied (substantial disagreement). In both cases we have a clear application of thematic dimensions to the process of interpretation.

**5. Conclusions: On the open-endedness of metaphor**

My desideratum in this chapter was to show that thematic dimensions are things required by the semantic interpretation of metaphorical utterances. The plan was to demonstrate that an

appropriate semantic system requires these entities in order to deliver appropriate judgements of truth-conditionality concerning metaphorical utterances. Insofar as I have been able to show that we actually need these parameters in the case of belief reports and denials, I feel that my account is in good shape. Actually, I think my account is in better shape than any other account I have dealt with in this dissertation. I wish then to conclude this chapter by reviewing some of the advantages that my non-indexicalist contextualist account of metaphor has. After that, I will briefly mention a further pleasing aspect of this theory which I have not dealt with before, namely, the ease with which it deals with the open-endedness of many metaphors.

First of all, my account avoids the problematic claim contextualists make regarding the propositional component of a metaphorical assertion. In their view, a metaphorical utterance will deliver different propositions in different contents. I showed how this creates problems at the level of the compositionality of language, at the level of the LOT, but also at the level of linguistic constraints required for the interpretation of certain constructions such as those involving VP-ellipsis and anaphora.

In contrast, my account neatly divides between two levels of content: the minimal level constituted by what Recanati calls the *lekton* of an utterance, and the ‘Austinian’ proposition which is the result of combining the *lekton* with an appropriate thematic dimension. Between these two levels, I also showed the need for Kaplanian contents, functions from circumstances of evaluation to truth-values. It is my belief that far from making things more complex, this account, which is based on a rigorous ‘division of labour’, is in line with important projects in the philosophy of cognition (above all, Fodor 1983 and Dennett 1991).

Secondly, my account of metaphor shares a number of important features with the semantic explanation of other phenomena: for instance, knowledge ascriptions and predicates of taste. This fact is

welcome to my project, it shows how language understanding is based on recurrent semantic patterns, and metaphor seems to be no exception.

Thirdly, my account is empirically adequate: it clearly goes in the direction of meeting the speakers' intuitions about a number of interesting cases, which I have discussed in this chapter. What is more, it does so without incurring any unwelcome outcomes.

There are certainly things that would need to be added, improved, or perhaps just discussed in more depth. The nature, for instance, of the anaphoric links I have discussed in § 4.1 is just an iceberg point, below which important syntactic and semantic issues reside. It will be the next step of my future investigation, I hope.

There is a last element of discussion I wish to at least mention here. Metaphors are things we enjoy because we can always go over them and complete their 'meaning'. In this sense, I have found this passage on the nature of a song very helpful also in understanding the experience of metaphor. It comes from an artist whom I love, Bonny Prince Billy:

I feel like a song is completed when the writing is done and I present it to a friend, partner, or group of musicians. Then it's completed when we record together and finish mixing. Then it's completed each and every time someone listens. I think that a song, for the most part, is completed by the listening experience. It enters into people's brains and mutates and then might get completed again—in their dreams, in mix tapes that they make, or in new listening experiences that they have. So it isn't ever finished because there's never going to be a definitive listening experience.

Some metaphors have the same kind of effect: how many times have I gone over Shakespeare's metaphor "And Juliet is the sun"?

How many thematic dimensions did I look for before my whole experience of this metaphor could be said to be completed?

Metaphor lovers are like hitchhikers: they jump from a vehicle to another for the simple pleasure of assessing their journey from different perspectives. The idea behind thematic dimension was nothing but an attempt to give a scientific profile to this metaphor.



## Conclusions

During these years of research I met several types of philosophers: those who thought metaphor to be a worthless thing, not to be dignified by a true philosophical mind. Luckily, these were the minority of philosophers I met. To these philosophers I do not have anything to say. A second class of philosophers (luckily again, a small group, although with a number of very good philosophers in it), told me that Grice had already shown us everything to be shown concerning metaphor. If you are among these philosophers, but have approached this thesis with an open-minded attitude, then I believe you will by now agree with me that Grice's pragmatics does not offer any valid solution to the problems surrounding a theory of metaphor. Chapter 2 should have made clear why a model of metaphor as based on the notion of implicature is a non-starter.

A different type of philosopher is the one who thinks that metaphor is a special speech-act, whose structure differs from literal assertion. I suspect you may be this philosopher, so let me tell you that Chapter 3 should have given you some hard times. If you want to defend the view that metaphor is a special kind of speech-act, many questions are at the moment left unresolved: why should we consider metaphor special in the first instance? Are you sure that the structure of metaphorical assertion follows the patterns you predict? How do you intend to answer the question of how

## CONCLUSIONS

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metaphors represent? What is your view on the compositionality of language? Do speech acts compose in the same way meanings do? If not, how do you want to explain things such as the productivity of language and its learnability? So long as we do not receive clear answers to these questions, I doubt that an account of metaphor can be given in your terms.

Then there were those philosophers who, though fascinated by the topic, found it difficult to believe that metaphor could be treated in semantically systematic terms. If you were or still are among these philosophers, who seem to share a Davidsonian spirit, let me tell you this: I hope my account of metaphor has given you some reasons to be more positive as to the possibility of approaching metaphor with a spirit of scientific research. Things can certainly be improved, but the presence of many recurrent patterns in the interpretation of metaphors, as shown in Chapter 7, allow us to be moderately positive as to the applicability of semantic ideas to metaphor.

Finally, there is the group of philosophers I have been more engaged with: the 'new' wave of more or less young contextualists who have attempted to offer me a theory of everything, but with very poor results. If you are among these philosophers, I believe you may have not even reached the end of this work. But if, lucky chance, you have, then let me tell you that you are still in time to abandon your attempts to explain everything and follow me in the modest task of finding specific solutions to our needs of scholars devoted to the comprehension of linguistic problems. My work in Chapter 5 to 7 has been to show how an explanation along your lines is faced with considerable general theoretical problems, while your view of metaphor is, to say the least, gappy.

An account of metaphor along the non-indexicalist contextualist lines I have offered here is a project which I hope someone may find not just attractive, but also worth being put into practice and extended to cover new cases of metaphor or, why not, to cover

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other tropes or linguistic phenomena which are still in need of a semantic treatment.

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