Some Reflections on Conventions

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In Overlooking Conventions *Michael Devitt argues in defence of the traditional approach to semantics. Devitt's main line of argument is an inference to the best explanation: nearly all cases that linguistic pragmatists discuss in order to challenge the traditional approach to semantics are better explained by adding conventions into language, in the form of expanding the range of polysemy or the range of indexicality (in the broad sense of linguistically governed context sensitivity). In this paper, we discuss three aspects of a draft of Devitt's* Overlooking Conventions, *which was discussed at a conference in Dubrovnik in September 2018. First, we try to show that his rejection of Bach's distinction between convention and standardization overlooks important features of standardization. Second, we elaborate on Devitt's argument against linguistic pragmatism based on the normative aspect of meaning and show that a similar argument can be mounted against semantic minimalism. While Devitt and minimalists have a common enemy, they are not allies either. Third, we address a methodological difficulty in Devitt's view concerning a threat of over-generation and propose a solution to it. Although this paper is the result of collaboration the authors have written different parts. Carlo Penco has written part 1, Massimiliano Vignolo has written part 2 and part 3.*

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1. *Conventions and the problem of standardization*

One of Devitt's main claims against linguistic pragmatism (or contextualism) is that many examples intended as cases of meaning underdetermination fall under a more *general* mechanism of meaning formation that Devitt calls 'metaconventions' governing polysemy. However, polysemy is a battlefield among different approaches: cognitive approaches, psycholinguistic approaches, synchronic and diachronic approaches and computational approaches, with no real consensus on the

status of polysemy itself (see for instance Ravin et al. 2000, Nerlich et al. 2003, Vanhove 2008, Falkum, Vicente 2015).

For instance, there is no agreement on whether to treat a linguistic phenomenon as polysemy or semantic generality. The Russian verbs *plavat'* and *plyt'* are both used do designate multidirectional or mono-directional motion in water. In English we have three verbs for motion in water representing passive motion ('float'), self-propelling motion of animated individuals ('swim') and motion of vessels and people aboard ('seal'). We may claim (a) *plyt'* actually distinguishes the three different meanings depending on context, and we may distinguish three differ-ent lexical units (or conceptual units), or we may claim that (b) *plyt'* is semantically general and does not distinguish among float, swim and sail (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2008: 8–9).

There are various tests for distinguishing semantic generality and polysemy, but this distinction is really 'a tricky business' because it often depends on the question under discussion in a specific theoretical settings (see Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2008: 10–13). We accept here some common results in the recent discussion on polysemy and will not enter the debate of polysemy vs. semantic generality. Neither we will follow Grundzinska 2011, who claims, contrary to Devitt's view, that consid-ering polysemy a semantic phenomenon and not a pragmatic one leads to blurring the distinction between semantics and pragmatics and to meaning eliminativism.

We claim that Devitt's insistence on the role of metaconventions for grounding polysemy does not lead to such an undesirable consequence if a more restricted view of conventional meaning is adopted, avoiding a too generalized use of polysemy. Our discussion points to a distinc-tion between what we may call 'strong' and 'weak' metaconvention. Such distinction might be helpful to cope with the alleged shortcomings of Devitt's liberal use of polysemy.

In *Overlooking Conventions,*[1] Devitt employs the notion of metacon-vention to address the problems raised by Nunberg (1979: 149–150), who suggests solving some ambiguities of meaning with a pragmatic account of deferred reference and 'explain polysemy without having to introduce any linguistic conventions.' Nunberg was intoducing one of the most debated examples in the literature on meaning underdeter-mination:

(0)   The ham sandwich is sitting at table 20.

Given that sandwiches are inanimate things, they are not agents of actions. The predication 'is sitting' constrains a shift of the meaning of 'ham sandwich' into something that accepts the predicate 'sitting'. In this case the person who ordered the ham sandwich. Nunberg in-troduces here a pragmatic mechanism, analogous to a metonymical

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[1] Given that we refer here to the incomplete draft, dated 7/9/2018, our critical remarks are not strictly directed to the forthcoming book, which might have a different take on the problem discussed here.

transfer from a part to the whole. With the idea of metaconventions Devitt suggests that we have *general* rules for defining different types of conventional meaning with the same lexical entry. They are typically presented in the following form:

if a word refers to things of type X will also refer to things of type Y

Examples are:

> A *count noun* for an organism yields a *mass noun* for its skin (rabbit, crocodile…)
> A word for a *physical entity* yields a word for its *content* (book, television…)
> A word for a *location* yields a word for its *legal entity* or its *people* (state, city…)

In linguistic literature these kinds of expressions are defined as 'dot-objects' or 'dual kinds terms'. They are expressions that can refer to different types: for instance, 'book' or 'television' may refer to a physical or an information entity, 'house' or 'room' may refer to the building or to the location; 'meal' or 'breakfast' may refer to an event or to food. What constrains the choice of the relevant type is the predicative phrase, with a mechanism called 'dot exploitation'. Dot-exploitation is a light form of coercion[2] that consists in exploiting one aspect of the dot-type expression, by predicating only that aspect. In 'The meal was heavy', the predicate 'heavy' constrains the type 'food eaten', while in 'the meal lasted one hour' the predicate 'lasted' constrains the type 'event'.

This particular way to constrain the choice of the type also helps distinguishing regular or logical polysemy from irregular or accidental or idiosyncratic polysemy.[3] Regular or logical polysemy relies on lexical rules, while accidental polysemy is a kind of lexical ambiguity that depends on context. Two basic criteria for distinguishing logical or proper polysemy from accidental polysemy are the Test of Anaphoric Cotenability and the Co-predication Test.[4] The anaphora test is easily exemplified:

(1)   That book is boring. Put *it* on the shelf.

Here apparently the anaphora refers to a book as physical object, while the first occurrence of 'book' refers to an informational object.

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[2] See Pustejowsky-Jezek (2008); Asher (2011). On coercion see also Asher (2015).

[3] The distinction is not always clear. Apresjan (1974), after distinguishing regular and irregular polysemy, considers the example of the ham sandwich as a case of regular polysemy, something that has been put in doubt later (see Asher 2011, 2015).

[4] Copredication is a topic of interest since Montague 1975 and has raised many problems and tentative solutions in logic and linguistics (see. e.g. Barhamian et al. 2017). Here we are only interested in using it to challenge the idea of too an easy generalization of proper polysemy. We do not discuss tests for distinguishing polysemy from generality or indeterminacy, a topic on which Devitt just raised some doubts and did not elaborate in the draft discussed here.

The copredication test is given as follows: we are in front of a proper polysemy when, in the same sentence, we can attribute to an expression different predicates, concerning different types of things the expression stands for.

Examples are:

(2)   Mary picked up and mastered three books on mathematics. *[the two predications refer to a physical object and to its content]*

(3)   The city mainly voted democrat and passed a progressive law *[the two predications refer to population and legal entity]*

The copredication test helps understanding the way in which we disambiguate, following the mechanism of dot-exploitation mentioned above. The choice of the type depends on the lexicon used for the predication because the kinds of predications *constrain* the type. In example (2), the predicate 'pick up', a verb for physical activities, constrains the expression 'book' to be intended as a physical object. The predicate 'mastered', a verb for capacities and abilities, constrains the expression 'book' to be intended as an informational object. The choice of meaning therefore depends on the relations among types in the lexicon, which can be viewed as an expression of ontological relations embedded in the lexicon. 'Dual kind terms' are a perfect exemplification of Devitt's examples.

The above criteria for 'proper' polysemy put some worries on a generalized use of polysemy to widen the number of conventional meanings. Devitt presents his answer to Nunberg's example as a consequence of a general metaconvention prompting the following conventional reading:

(4)   A word for ordered food yields (in restaurants at least) a word for who ordered it.[5]

Here we face a problem. Actually, it seems that 'ham sandwich' is not a *typical* case of polysemy. There are at least two reasons: as Asher remarks, sentences (0) and (5) seem to stand at different levels: a sentence like (0) is more difficult to process than a sentence like (5):

(0) The ham sandwich is sitting at table 20.
(5) I'm parked out back.

There is a standard metaconvention according to which the word referring to a private vehicle of transportation is often referred to with the word for the owner. I may say: 'my car is parked out back', but nobody would have any difficulty to understand my using (5) as referring to my car (Asher 2011: 250–251). Sentence (0) seems missing this easy interpretation. Second, and even more important, (0) presents some problems about copredication, making some sentences awkward or contradictory:

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[5] As in Devitt (draft: 143).

(6)   The ham sandwich went away and then he came back and paid for it#.[6]

(7)   The ham sandwich left without paying and I have eaten it#.

(8)   The ham sandwich that hasn't been eaten is on the counter#.[7]

These problems make the example (0) difficult to be solved in a semantic framework. Even Stanley (2005b: 225), one of the strongest antagonist of contextualists, recognized that problems coming from examples like (0) are genuinely worrying for a semanticist: on the one hand, we recognize that the intuitive truth conditions involve a person rather that a sandwich. But Stanley continues: 'Yet it's not clear that a process that maps ham sandwiches onto persons counts as genuinely semantic.' However, also Recanati's contextualist solution is not without problems. If we take (8) we might interpret it with the reading that the eater of the ham sandwich that hasn't been eaten is on the counter; but why couldn't we interpret it with the reading on which the ham sandwich itself has been put back on the counter? With a general definition of transfer, Asher (2011: 69) claims, 'there are no constraints on when a sense transfer function can be introduced at all (…). Why should we make the transfer in some cases and in other we couldn't?' Transfer function simply runs the risk of overgeneration of meanings.[8]

Devitt implicitly gives a suggestion for an answer. Metaconventions have typically this form:

"A word for a *physical entity* yields a word for its [informational] *content*",

Differently from the general form of metaconventions, example (0) seems to require a specification:

(4)   A word for ordered food yields (*in restaurants at least*) a word for who ordered it.

Our italics makes it apparent that there is some contextual restriction that does not appear in more general metaconventions linked to dual kinds terms expressing polysemy and able to pass the copredication test.

Nunberg's example—example (0)—reminds us that we have an analogous problem with numbers. Certainly there is a general conven-

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[6] Suggestion by Belen Soria.

[7] The Example is given in Asher (2011: 65). For a more detailed discussion of similar examples see Asher (2015: 68, 77).

[8] Somebody might use the idea of metonymy. However, cases of this kind are not exactly cases of metonymy because they do not represent a part for a whole, or, better, the part for the whole is *highly theoretically construed and strongly context dependent*: the food for the eater, the chair for the person who should be sitting on the chair, the number for the person somehow linked with the number in a certain situation. Recanati (2010: 167) acknowledges the problem of the dual interpretation: "The ham sandwich stinks' can be so understood, in a suitable context, even though the property of stinking potentially applies to sandwiches as well as to customers'. In this way transfer is not a linguistically controlled process, but it is mere pragmatics, depending freely on intentions and context.

tion to use numbers to refer to everything, and in particular to tables where waiters serve customers, or to customers themselves:

(9) (Customer at table) number 7 left without paying.

However, also numbers seem not to pass copredication tests:

(9) Number 7 went away and then he came back and paid for it#.

(10) Number 7 went away and left itself completely empty#.

There is an obvious convention to use numbers to refer to people in restaurants. The convention is fairly general and works in many other contexts, as, for example, in chess competitions ('Number 7 ended the game'), at the post office ('Number 23 go to the cashier'), at the Hospital ('Please pay attention to number 25'). However, there is no *general* convention for which *kind* of object a number represents: a customer, a chess player, a patient, a bed, a table or what else. The convention is restricted, every time, by a specific setting and by previous agreement on the use of one part of lexicon. In case of restaurant, numbers and food may be used to refer to the person sitting at a table or ordering food. But we need a specific context and a specific agreement among waiters at the restaurant. It cannot be generalised.

Let us make a further example: the expression 'chair' is used at conferences to refer to the chairperson. It seems, again, that there are problems with copredication. We doubt that we can properly accept:

(11)   The chair (referring to the chairperson) is not here yet and it (referring to the piece of furniture) is empty#.

Our suggestion is that we are in front of kinds of conventions that, being restricted to specific cognitive contexts, should be distinguished from the standard production of 'conventional meanings' via polysemy. We might call them 'restricted' or 'weak' conventions.

To sum up, these kinds of cases (i) don't appear to be subject to copredication and therefore they cannot be counted as 'dual kinds terms' like 'city', 'book', 'lunch' etc. and (ii) are more 'localised' or linked to specific *cognitive contexts*. Saying that they are 'localized' we mean that they require also a very specialised 'mutual understanding' in local environment (waiters in the restaurant, participants to a conference, and so on). All these cases are not easily treated inside Devitt's framework of metaconventions explaining disambiguation of conventional meanings. Furthermore, they seem to be a good approximation of what Bach meant by 'standardization', which is connected with some kind of *weaker* metaconventions insofar as it requires 'online' inferential processes (restricted to local or specialised cognitive contexts).

The two main ideas supporting standardization are (i) mutual beliefs and (ii) streamlining or default inferences. It is true that Bach's standardization is something not clearly defined and with no sharp and neat difference from convention. However, there is an interesting aspect of Bach's definition of conventionalization as based on '*general* mutual belief', while standardization does not entail such thing (Bach

1995: 683). The implicit suggestion, I suggest, is that linguistic conventions based on general mutual beliefs should be contrasted with conventions based on some *particular* mutual beliefs: a convergence of beliefs grounded on some particular contextual or cognitive settings. We may say that there is no *general* linguistic convention for treating 'ham sandwich', 'number 7', 'bed 25', and 'the chair' for a *specific* kind of object, but only a general strategy of *online adjustments* to recover different kinds of objects depending on the specific or particular contexts.

A useful distinction might be the following: some basic linguistic (meta) conventions are disambiguated *by linguistic context* via type selection constrained by the lexicon. These are typical cases of conventional meanings. Other more specialized cases are disambiguated *by specific cognitive contexts* and require more 'streamlining' inferential processes. Are these cases of standardization? We are content to point out some interesting aspects of Bach's idea of standardization. Not every disambiguation comes from metaconventions, as Devitt (draft: 143) recognises:

> 'Metaphors, Metonymy, synecdoche, yield other examples of polysemous phenomena which often become conventionalized, yielding ambiguities. These processes leading to new meanings are to some extent "rule-governed, and predictable", although not to the extent of those covered by meta-conventions'.

Therefore, Devitt himself acknowledges that there are different kinds of conventions, some generate conventional meanings from polysemy and some are less generalized. We tried to show the difficulty of a too hasty generalization of the idea of meta-conventions supporting different conventional meanings given by polysemy. Shall we be obliged to accept underdetermination of meaning? Sometimes, probably, yes.

2. *The normativity of meaning and minimalism*

Devitt's main line of argument against linguistic pragmatism is based on an inference to the best explanation. Semantics in the traditional approach and linguistic pragmatism agree that their principal theoretical goal is to explain the literal truth conditional content of utterances of sentences. Linguistic pragmatism disagrees with traditional semantics on the idea that all context sensitivity is morpho-lexico-syntactically triggered, either in the form of a plurality of related conventional meanings (polysemy) or in the form of conventions of saturation (indexicality in Devitt's broad sense of linguistically governed context sensitivity). According to linguistic pragmatists, semantic conventions provide at most propositional schemata (propositional radicals) that lack determinate truth conditions. Even in cases in which a sentence possesses determinate truth conditions by semantic conventions alone, there is very often a mismatch between the truth conditions so determined and the truth conditions of the utterances of the sentence. The conclusion drawn by linguistic pragmatists is that the truth conditions

of utterances are underdetermined by their narrow and broad semantic properties and a new theoretical approach introducing truth conditional roles for pragmatic properties is called for.

According to Devitt, the explanation of truth conditions supplied by semantics on the traditional approach is superior to the explanation supplied by linguistic pragmatism because the former accounts for the normative aspect of meaning while the latter does not. Normativity is constitutive of the notion of meaning. If there are meanings, there must be such things as going right and going wrong with the use of language. The use of an expression is right if it conforms with its meaning, and wrong otherwise. If literal contents of utterances are thought of in truth conditional terms, conformity with meaning amounts to constraints on truth conditions. In case of polysemous expressions the speaker undertakes the semantic burden of selecting a convention that fixes a determinate contribution to the truth conditional contents expressed by utterances of sentences. In case of expressions governed by conventions of saturation, the speaker undertakes the semantic burden of loading the demanded parameters with contextual values.

Devitt says that the problem for linguistic pragmatism is to provide an account of how the conventional meanings of expressions constrain truth conditional contents of utterances, if the composition of truth conditions is not governed by linguistic conventions, and how, lacking such an explanation, linguistic pragmatism can preserve the distinction between going right and going wrong with the use of language. In the following we will elaborate on Devitt's argument against linguistic pragmatism based on the normative aspect of meaning and show that semantic minimalism suffers from a similar difficulty. It is difficult for minimalists to explain the normative aspect of meaning.

Semantics on the traditional approach, which Devitt defends, and linguistic pragmatism agree on the view that the goal of semantics is to explain the literal contents of utterances of sentences. They both agree that there must be a close explanatory relation between the meaning encoded in a sentence S and the semantic contents of utterances of S. One corollary of this conception is that if a sentence S is systematically uttered for expressing different contents at different contexts, some expression occurring in S must be context sensitive. As said, the point of disagreement is that semantics on the traditional approach explains context sensitivity by pluralities of conventions and by conventions of saturation, whereas linguistic pragmatism explains it in terms of modulation (optional pragmatic processes).

The debate between Devitt and linguistic pragmatists takes for granted from the start the explanatory connection between meanings and contents of speech acts. Semantic minimalists (Borg 2004, 2012, Cappelen and Lepore 2005, Soames 2002) instead reject such explanatory connection. On their view, semantics is not in the business of explaining the contents of speech acts performed by utterances of sentences. Minimalists work with a notion of semantic content that does

not play the role of (direct) speech act content. According to minimalists the semantic content of a sentence is a full truth conditional content that is obtained compositionally by the syntactic structure of the sentence and the semantic values of the expressions in the sentence that are fixed by conventional meaning. Moreover, minimalists say that the set (the *Basic Set*) of genuinely context sensitive expressions, which are governed by conventions of saturation, comprises only overt indexicals, demonstrative, tense markers and a few other words. Minimalists call the semantic content of a sentence its *minimal proposition*.

The above statement that minimal propositions are not contents of speech acts requires qualification. Cappelen and Lepore (2005) argue indeed for Speech Act Pluralism. They argue that speech acts have a plurality of contents and the minimal proposition of a sentence is always one the many contents that its utterances express. In order to protect Speech Act Pluralism from the objection that very often speakers are not aware of having made an assertion with the minimal proposition as content, and, if speakers were asked, they would deny to have asserted the minimal proposition, Cappelen and Lepore argue that speakers can sincerely assert a proposition without believing it and without being aware of having asserted it.

Semantic minimalists oppose linguistic pragmatism and argue that their examples conflate minimal propositions with speech act contents. Although Devitt and semantic minimalists have a common enemy, they are not allies because they disagree on the theoretical goals of semantics and, consequently, their respective notions of semantic content diverge. In the remainder of this section we will argue that semantic minimalism suffers from a difficulty about the normative aspect of meaning no less than linguistic pragmatism does.

The difficulty for semantic minimalism is brought to light by incompleteness arguments. An incompleteness argument shows that there is no invariant proposition that a sentence S expresses in all contexts of utterance. For example, with respect to the sentence 'Mary is ready' an incompleteness argument starts from the observation that if the sentence is taken separately from contextual information specifying what Mary is ready for, people are unable to evaluate it as true or false. This evidence leads to the conclusion that there is no proposition—that Mary is ready (*simpliciter*)—that is invariant and is semantically expressed by 'Mary is ready' in all contexts of utterance.

Minimalists have responded to incompleteness arguments in two ways. Cappelen and Lepore (2005) accept the premises of incompleteness arguments, i.e. that people are unable to truth evaluate certain sentences, but argue that from these premises it does not follow that minimal propositions do not exist. Borg (2012) adopts a different strategy. Borg tries to block incompleteness arguments by rejecting their premises and explaining away people's inability to truth evaluate the sentences in question. We will argue that both manoeuvres fail.

Cappelen and Lepore (2005) raise the objection that incompleteness arguments try to establish metaphysical conclusions, for example about the existence of the property of being ready (*simpliciter*) as a building block of the minimal proposition that Mary is ready, from premises that concern psychological facts regarding people's ability to evaluate sentences as true or false. They rightly point out that psychological data are not relevant in metaphysical matters. Cappelen and Lepore say that people's inability to evaluate sentences like 'Mary is ready' as true or false independently of contextual information does not provide evidence against the claim that the property of being ready exists and is the semantic content of the adjective 'ready'. On the one hand, they acknowledge the problem of giving the analysis of the property of being ready as a very difficult one, but only for metaphysicians, not for philosophers of language or semanticists. On the other hand, they (2005: 164) argue that semanticists have no difficulty at all in stating what invariant minimal proposition is semantically encoded in 'Mary is ready'. The sentence 'Mary is ready' semantically expresses the minimal proposition that Mary is ready. There is no difficulty in determining its truth-conditions either: 'Mary is ready' is true if and only if Mary is ready.

Cappelen and Lepore address the immediate objection that if the truth conditions of 'Mary is ready' is represented by a disquotational principle like the one reported above, then nobody is able to verify whether such truth conditions are satisfied or not. If the premises of incompleteness arguments are taken at face value, as Cappelen and Lepore do, this fact is witnessed by people's inability to evaluate 'Mary is ready' as true or false independently of information specifying what Mary is ready for. Cappelen and Lepore (2005: 164–165) respond that it is not a task for semantics to ascertain how things are in the world. For example, it is not a task for semantics to say whether 'Mary is ready' is true or false. That a semantic theory for a language L does not provide L-speakers with a method of verification for L-sentences is not a defect of that semantic theory. Cappelen and Lepore say that those theorists who think otherwise indulge in verificationism.

Cappelen and Lepore's confidence in disquotational truth-conditions betrays their underestimation of the real nature of incompleteness arguments. Contrary to what they claim, the conclusion of an incompleteness argument is not a metaphysical conclusion about the existence of this or that entity. Rather, incompleteness arguments provide evidence against the possibility that certain entities get associated with certain expressions as their semantic contents. The conclusion of the incompleteness argument about the adjective 'ready' is not that the property of being ready does not exist because people are unable to evaluate 'Mary is ready' without considering contextual information. The real conclusion of the incompleteness argument is that a semantic theory that assigns the property of being ready to the adjective 'ready' as its semantic content is in tension with the normative aspect of meaning. The reason

why there is no minimal proposition that Mary is ready is not that there is no property of being ready. This is a metaphysical claim that does not follow from people's inability to truth evaluate 'Mary is ready' without taking into account what Mary is ready for. The reason why 'Mary is ready' does not express the minimal proposition that Mary is ready is that the property of being ready cannot be the semantic content of the adjective 'ready', even if one grants that it is a real property. In general, and contrary to Cappelen and Lepore's interpretation, the gist of incompleteness arguments is not that certain entities do not exist, and *a fortiori*, the minimal propositions having those entities as constituents cannot exist. Rather, the gist of incompleteness arguments is that such entities, if any, cannot be the semantic contents of words, because a semantic theory that assigns such entities to words as their semantic contents is incompatible with the normative aspect of meaning, that is with the idea that speaking a language entails being under the normative control of semantic rules. We shall elaborate on this point.

Let us examine the following example in order to better understand the strength of this objection against Cappelen and Lepore. Suppose that a semantic theory for English contains a disquotational clause like (A) below, which arguably captures the idea that Cappelen and Lepore have in mind when they say that the semantic content of the adjective 'ready' is the property of being ready (*simpliciter*):

(A)   For any object o 'ready' applies to o if and only if o is ready.

Insofar as (A) is a semantic clause, it has a normative import. It establishes that it is right to apply the adjective 'ready' to all and only objects that are ready. In order for semantics to capture the normative aspect of meaning, clause (A) must exert its normative control over competent English speakers. Moreover, it must also be possible to explain how the adjective 'ready' arrived at the semantic property of applying to all and only objects that are ready. Of course, it is not a task for (descriptive) semantics to answer such question, but a semantic theory must be compatible with an explanation of this sort. Thereby, if we gather evidence that a semantic theory precludes such an explanation, we have evidence that that semantic theory is flawed.

If the premises of incompleteness arguments are true, then it is a fact that people are unable to evaluate sentences like 'Mary is ready' as true or false independently of contextual information. If this is a fact, then people's linguistic practice cannot be under the normative control of clause (A). The reason why people's linguistic practice cannot be so governed is that clause (A) establishes conditions for the application of the adjective 'ready' such that competent speakers are never able to tell whether they are satisfied or not by any object o. This is just witnessed by people's inability to evaluate sentences like 'Mary is ready' as true or false independently of contextual information.

The premises of incompleteness arguments, taken at face value, show that the semantic rule expressed by clause (A) is not applicable

because nobody within the linguistic community is able to tell when the conditions for the application of 'ready', as they are captured by clause (A), are satisfied and when they are not. Since rules must be applicable, the conclusion follows that clause (A) does not express any rule, and therefore cannot be a semantic clause, as it cannot play the normative role that is constitutive of semantic rules. Clause (A) does not account for the normative aspect of meaning.

Analogous considerations show that learning of the meaning of the adjective 'ready' cannot amount to learning of the meaning of a word governed by the semantic rule expressed in (A). Presumably we learn the meaning of words such as 'ready' by being exposed to utterances of simple sentences like 'Mary is ready'. If the premises of incompleteness arguments are taken at face value, they show that competent English speakers are never able to track the truth-value of 'Mary is ready' independently of contextual information. If this is true, the premises of incompleteness arguments show that assertions of simple sentences like 'Mary is ready' cannot be expressions of the belief that Mary is ready, i.e. the belief that the conditions for the application of 'ready', as they are captured by clause (A), are satisfied by Mary. If assertions of a simple sentence like 'Mary is ready' are not expressions of the belief that Mary satisfies the application conditions of 'ready', whatever we learn from being exposed to assertions of that sort cannot be the meaning of a word that is governed by the semantic rule expressed by clause (A).

It is important to stress that this argument against Cappelen and Lepore has nothing to do with verificationism. The point is not that competent speakers are unable to evaluate sentences like 'Mary is ready' as true or false because of their epistemic and cognitive limitations. Even if speakers knew everything about Mary, they would not be able to tell whether it is true or false that Mary is ready, unless someone specifies what Mary is said to be ready for. The satisfaction of the application conditions for 'ready', as they are captured by clause (A), is something that is impossible for competent speakers to track. It is like a game whose rules are such that no referee is able to tell whether they are respected or violated by the moves of the players. Clearly such rules could not exert any normative control over the players of the game.

Moreover, in setting up the argument against Cappelen and Lepore one does not need to deny that semantic properties are objective in the sense that they are independent of explicit knowledge and discriminating abilities that competent speakers possess individually or as whole linguistic community. Externalist theories of reference hold that semantic properties are unaffected by explicit and discriminating abilities since they are determined by objective, causal connections to the world. However, externalists do have an account of how words are bestowed with their semantic properties, which basically rests on baptismal events and, above all, multiple groundings. Baptismal events and multiple groundings require dispositions to keep tracks of individuals,

objects, substances, properties and relations in favourable environmental circumstances. Words have the referents they have because, de facto and with the collaboration of the environment, most referential practices are related to those referents. For example, part of the explanation of the fact that the name 'Mary' refers to Mary is that there are (were) people with the disposition to keep track of Mary and the environmental circumstances are (were) favourable (say, Mary does not change the way she looks from one day to the other, or there are not one thousand people looking like her in the same community and people who ground the name 'Mary' onto Mary interact constantly with her). Part of the explanation of the fact that the word 'water' refers to water (the substance whose chemical structure is H_2O), is that there are (were) people with the disposition to keep track of samples of water and the environmental circumstances are (were) favourable. Part of the explanation of the fact that 'blond' refers to the property of being blond, is that there are (were) people with the dispositions to keep track of exemplifications of the property of being blond and the environmental circumstance are (were) favourable. This implies that there are (were) favourable environmental circumstances in which competent speakers are (were) able to point at Mary and say truly 'She is Mary', or to point at a sample of water and say truly 'That is water', or to point at a blond person and say truly 'He/She is blond'. This in turn implies that there are (were) favourable environmental circumstances in which competent speakers are (were) able to truth evaluate sentences like 'That is Mary', 'That is water', 'She is blond', 'Mary is blond'.

Externalist theories of reference keep semantics distinct from theories of linguistic competence. Semantic describes properties of linguistic symbols, theories of linguistic competence describe the abilities of competent speakers to produce and use linguistic symbols. Linguistic competence with referential and inferential abilities is not constitutive of semantic properties. Linguistic symbols are the products of linguistic competence, its outputs (see Devitt and Sterelny 1999: 169). Of course, there is a causal relation between linguistic competence and linguistic symbols. But, as Devitt and Sterelny (1999: 172) point out, there is also a logical relation between linguistic competence and its products: producing linguistic symbols with their semantic properties is what makes it the competence it is. In order for linguistic competence to produce linguistic symbols governed by semantic rules, the conditions for the application of semantically simple words fixed by those semantic rules must be something of which competent speakers are able to keep track in favourable environmental circumstances.

The problem is that if the premises of incompleteness arguments are accepted a true, speakers do not possess the ability to track exemplifications of the property of being ready (*simpliciter*) and do not possess the ability truth evaluate sentences like 'Mary is ready'. Thereby, the externalist account of reference does not work for expressions like

'ready'. And if one loses the account of how the adjective 'ready' got assigned the property of being ready as its semantic content because speakers are unable to track exemplifications of the property of being ready, one loses an account of how clause (A) can exert any normative force over linguistic practices of competent speakers.

Cappelen and Lepore are right that the premises of incompleteness arguments do not entail that certain properties like being ready (*simpliciter*), or being tall (*simpliciter*), or being strong (*simpliciter*), or having enough (*simpliciter*) etc. do not exist. But this is beside the point. The premises of incompleteness arguments show that speakers are never able to track exemplifications of those properties. It follows that minimalist semantic clauses like (A) express semantic rules such that nobody is ever able to tell when they are respected and when they are violated. Such minimalist semantic rules are inapplicable and inapplicable semantic rules cannot exert any normative control over linguistic practice. Semantic minimalism faces a problem with the normative aspect of meaning: if linguistic practice is not under the normative control of semantic rules, there cannot be such things as going right and going wrong with the use of language.

In *Pursuing Meaning* Borg adopts a different strategy against incompleteness arguments. Borg rejects their premises and explains away the intuitions of incompleteness. Borg (2012: 92–102) agrees that speakers have an intuition of incompleteness with respect to sentences like 'Mary is ready', but she argues that intuitions of incompleteness emerge from some overlooked covert and context-insensitive syntactic structure. Borg says that 'ready' is lexically marked as an expression with two argument places. On Borg's view 'ready' always denotes the same relation, the relation of *readiness*, which holds between a subject and the thing for which they are held to be ready. When only one argument place is filled at the surface level, the other is marked by an existentially bound variable in the logical form. The argument role corresponding to the direct object is existentially quantified instead of being assigned a particular value. The suppression of the direct object arguably changes the semantic content of the adjective: it denotes not the original two-place relation, but a property generated by existentially quantifying the object argument-role. Thereby 'ready' makes exactly the same contribution in any context of utterance to any proposition literally expressed. For example, Borg says that in a context where what is salient is the property being ready to join the fire service the sentence 'Mary is ready' literally expresses the minimal proposition that *Mary is ready for something* not that *Mary is ready to join the fire service,* and in a context where the property of being ready to take an exam in logic is salient 'Mary is ready' still literally expresses that *Mary is ready for something.* As Borg (2012: 104) points out, the minimal proposition that *Mary is ready for something* is almost trivially true, because it is true in any possible world where Mary exists. Yet,

Borg warns us not to conflate intuitions about the informativeness of a proposition with intuitions about its semantic completeness.

Borg's explanation of the intuitions of incompleteness is that speakers are aware of the need for the two arguments, which is in tension with the phonetic delivery of only one argument. Speakers are uneasy to truth-evaluate sentences like 'Mary is ready' not because the sentence is semantically incomplete and lacks determinate truth conditions, but because their expectation for the second argument to be expressed is frustrated and the minimal content that is semantically expressed, when the argument role corresponding to the direct object is not filled at the surface level, is barely informative. Borg's response to incompleteness arguments avoids the problem that affects Cappelen and Lepore's version of minimalism. On Borg's view, speakers are able to truth evaluate the minimal content of 'Mary is ready', since that content is the minimal proposition that Mary is ready for something. If 'ready' in sentences like 'Mary is ready' literally means *ready for something*, competent speakers are obviously disposed to track the application conditions for 'ready'.

In a significant respect Borg's solution goes in the same direction as the traditional approach in semantics. As said, on a traditional semantic theory the meaning of context sensitive expressions sets up the parameters that must be loaded with contextual values. Sometimes the parameters are explicitly expressed in the syntax of the sentence as with indexicals, demonstratives, tense markers of verbs. Sometimes, instead, the parameters do not figure at the level of surface syntax. Philosophers and linguists disagree on where the parameters that do not show up at the level of surface syntax are hidden. Some (Stanley 2005a) hold that such parameters are associated with syntactic elements that occur in the logical form. Taylor (2003) advances a different theory. Taylor argues that hidden parameters are represented in the syntactic basement of the lexicon. They are not constituents of sentences but subconstituents of words or phrases. On Taylor's view, the lexical representations of words and phrases specify the parameters that must be loaded with contextual values in order for utterances of sentences to have determinate truth conditions. Taylor's proposal is a way of implementing the view that context sensitive expressions are governed by conventions of saturation and that context sensitivity is always morpho-lexico-syntactically driven. Taylor's view amounts to a denial of the phenomenon of meaning underdetermination and semantic incompleteness and it is a way of treating context sensitivity within the camp of traditional semantics. Thus, when Borg says that 'ready' is lexically marked as an expression with two argument places, she says something that might go in the very same direction as Taylor's. If Taylor's proposal is a way of implementing the traditional view in semantics, so it seems to be Borg's view. Yet, Borg is unwilling to accept this conclusion. Borg refuses to treat 'ready' and all the expressions that

are typically involved in incompleteness arguments as context sensitive expressions.

We will argue that Borg's conception of semantics faces a problem and the utterance-oriented conception of semantics on the traditional approach seems to fare much better with respect to that problem. Borg's version of minimalism maintains that the semantic content of a sentence S is typically different from the contents of speech acts performed by utterances of S. Clapp (2007) raises the following naturalistic challenge to minimalism. If it is a fact that an expression has a certain meaning, this fact must be grounded in facts concerning the linguistic abilities and practices of competent speakers. The difficulty for minimalism is to provide an account of what grounds the fact that an expression has the meaning it has, since minimalism keeps semantic contents apart from speech acts contents. Facts regarding speech acts contents have no bearing on facts regarding semantic contents (Cappelen and Lepore 2005: 211). On the other hand, utterance-oriented semantics has the advantage of relying on regularities of uses in linguistic practices. As Devitt (2007: 52) says, meanings are not 'God given', but as conventions need to be established and sustained by regular uses. On Devitt's view, linguistic rules reveal themselves in the regular uses of certain forms for expressing certain contents. In order to individuate conventions, theoreticians can rely on an inference to the best explanation: they must consider whether the regular use of an expression for performing certain speech acts is best explained by positing a linguistic rule for using that expression. Coming back to the example with the adjective 'ready', Borg owes an explanation of what make it the case that 'ready' literally means 'ready for something' when its second argument place is not lexicalized at the surface level. As Clapp points out, Borg's view that our linguistic knowledge is encapsulated in a dedicated module that represents the biconditional that the sentence 'Mary is ready' is true if and only if Mary is ready for something offers no answer. The problem is simply relocated. The problem now is to explain in virtue of what the language module works the way Borg takes it to work.

One might think that there are other theoretical reasons for favouring Borg's conception of semantics. In the next section we will discuss a recent attempt that Borg made to support the claim that minimal contents play an important theoretical role that contents of other kinds cannot play. We will argue that Borg's argument is inconclusive. In the remainder of this section we will comment on two earlier arguments that Borg provides for proving her version of minimalism superior to Cappelen and Lepore's one and to Bach's radical minimalism.

Borg (2007: 351) argues that her account provides a more credible version of minimalism than Cappelen and Lepore's version. According to Cappelen and Lepore, the sentence 'Mary is ready' expresses the minimal proposition that Mary is ready (*simplicter*). If this is so, then the sentence 'Mary is not ready' expresses the proposition that Mary

is not ready (*simpliciter*). Borg argues that Cappelen and Lepore proposal is unable to explain situations in which both sentences are true together, for instance if Mary is ready to go to the party but not ready to take the logic exam. Borg proposal accommodates this case giving narrow scope to the negation: 'Mary is ready and Mary is not ready' is true if and only if there is something for which Mary is ready and there is something for which Mary is not ready. We will not address the question whether Borg's argument is a good one against Cappelen and Lepore. We point out that it does not raise any difficulty for a traditional utterance-oriented semantics according to which there might be true utterances of 'Mary is ready and Mary is not ready.' Suppose John is talking to Jeff and Mark. Jeff wants to know whether Mary is ready to go to the party and Mark wants to know whether Mary is ready to take the logic exam. John can say 'Well, Jeff, Mary is ready but, Mark, she is not ready' and tell the truth. John can say that having in mind going to the party for the saturation of the first occurrence of 'ready' and taking the logic exam for the saturation of the second occurrence.

Borg (2012: 209) makes an attempt to promote her view against Bach's radical version of minimalism. Borg says that the view that the sentence 'Mary is ready' literally expresses the minimal content that Mary is ready for something copes with the Cancellability Test. She rightly says that readings that make it explicit the presence of an existentially bound variable cannot be cancelled without contradiction. It is not possible to say without contradiction 'Mary is ready, though I do not mean ready for something'. Borg's conclusion is that a reading that cannot be cancelled without contradiction seems to have the right to be the literal content of a sentence. Borg rhetorically wonders why one cannot cancel the existentially bound content and assert the gappy content (the propositional radical) that Bach takes to be the literal content of 'Mary is ready.' In the same vein, Borg says that it is always possible to retract a contextually enriched content. Even in a context in which it is readiness to go to the party that is salient, one can say 'Mary is ready, but I mean to take the logic exam, not to go to the party.'

We want to stress two points in reply to Borg. First, it is true that in Borg's example the speaker retracts the content that Mary is ready to go to the party. But the speaker does so by loading another value for the parameter of 'ready.' This is in line with the metaphysical role that the speaker plays in the determination of what is said. What is said is not determined by what is salient in the context of utterance, or by what the hearer understands, or by what the hearer is expected to understand. It might be very likely that in a context in which going to the party is salient, if the speaker says 'Mary is ready,' the hearer will understand that Mary is ready to go to the party. But this is not determinative of what the speaker semantically expresses. Moreover, it does not follow that Mary is ready for something is the literal meaning of 'Mary is ready' from the premise that such content is not cancel-

lable. On the traditional approach, that Mary is ready for something is a logical consequence of the semantic contents of utterances of the sentence 'Mary is ready.' Clearly, if the semantic content of an utterance of 'Mary is ready' is that Mary is ready to take the logic exam, that semantic content entails that Mary is ready for something, which cannot be cancelled without contradiction. It does not follow that 'ready' is not a context sensitive expression and that 'Mary is ready' literally expresses the minimal content that Mary is ready for something.

Second, it is worth noticing that the speaker cannot retract the content that Mary is ready to go to the party by saying 'Mary is ready, but I mean for something, not to go to the party.' That move would be an open violation of the maxims of the cooperative principle. Indeed, the speaker would make it manifest that she is literally saying something that is almost trivially true, and thereby not informative or relevant. The speaker cannot retract the content that Mary is ready to go to the party by retreating to Borg's minimal content that Mary is ready for something without making it explicit that she is not cooperative. We will come back to this point in the next section.

We have one last comment on minimal contents. Minimalists argue that minimal propositions serve as fall back contents when contextual information helpful for hearers to figure out the speakers' intentional states is inaccessible or insufficient or unreliable. Borg holds that linguistic knowledge is encapsulated in a language module and insulated from non-linguistic information. The linguistic knowledge so encapsulated and insulated guarantees that any competent speaker is able to recover a truth conditional content merely through exposure to the sentence uttered. Yet, semantics on the traditional approach does not need to deny the existence of a layer of truth conditions that are recoverable only on the basis of strict linguistic knowledge. Semantics in the narrow sense is the study of the meanings of simple expressions and their modes of combination. These semantic properties of expressions determine the conditions that must obtain in order for an utterance of a sentence to express a truth. This is the layer of truth conditional content that some philosophers (Perry 2001, Korta and Perry 2011) capture with the notion of token-reflexive content, or utterance-bound content and in model-theoretic or other formal approaches to languages (Kaplan 1989) is represented with semantic compositional clauses that quantify over indexes that represent contextual factors. A competent speaker can know what conditions must obtain for an utterance of a sentence or a sentence at an index to express a truth without having any clue about the speaker's intentional states that determine the values of saturation and, therefore, without grasping the semantic content of the utterance (Korta and Perry's locutionary content). Any other additional layer of truth conditions such as minimal propositions seems to be an arbitrary posit that becomes an idle wheel.[9]

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[9] Korta and Perry (2006, 2008) discuss several examples to show that in

3. *Fixing conventions*

In this section we will address a methodological difficulty in Devitt's view and propose a solution to it. As said, Devitt's strategy for defending the traditional approach to semantic is to expand the range of polysemy and indexicality (in the broad sense of linguistically governed context sensitivity) by increasing the number of conventions in language. Devitt's view raises the immediate difficulty of telling what is the evidence for tracking conventions in language. Devitt rejects the recourse to intuitions on truth conditions, judgements on reports on what is said, judgments on contents consciously accessible during online processing of sentences, and judgments on input for rational reconstruction of conversational implicatures. Notoriously, such judgments by laypersons are inconsistent and unreliable because they tend to conflate contents that are semantically expressed with contents that are pragmatically conveyed. On the other hand, the experts' judgments run the risk of being biased by the theories they embrace.

Devitt suggests looking for evidence in the regular and systematic usage of expressions. If speakers regularly and systematically use certain expressions to express certain contents, then theoreticians must consider whether such regularities are best explained by supposing that there are linguistic rules of using those expressions that way. Theoreticians are justified to posit conventional rules if by doing so they obtain the best explanation of speakers' linguistic behaviour.

We believe that Devitt's methodological picture is basically correct but it is too sketchy as it stands and runs the risk of over-generation. Let us consider the following example with 'to cut'. It seems uncontroversial that in many typical contexts, the verb 'to cut' conveys the information that the act of cutting is performed in a canonical way depending on the situation:

Hairdresser context: John cut Marie's hair [with hairdressing scissors]
Cook context: John cut the meat [with a knife].
Fireman context: John cut the car door [with rescue shears].
Woodsman context: John cut the tree [with an axe].
Tailor context: John cut the silk [with tailor's scissors].
Gardener context: John cut the grass [with a lawnmower].

It seems a regularity of use that in specific contexts the verb 'to cut' conveys the information that the act of cutting is performed with a specific tool. Is this information encoded in the meaning of the verb 'to cut'? If this is so, is it encoded in virtue of polysemy or in virtue of a convention of saturation? And if it is a convention of saturation that demands the speaker undertake the semantic burden of having in mind a tool or a way of cutting, how can we tell whether there are

many cases hearers do not need to grasp what speakers semantically say in order to understand what speakers intend to convey. It is enough that they gasp the utterance-bound content.

other parameters that require saturation, for example about the rapidity or the precision and straightness of the cut, or the location where the action of cutting takes place? Devitt sketchy suggestion that if the examination of linguistic usage shows that an expression is regularly used to express certain contents then we have good evidence that such use is conventional is not much help to work out the answers. What kind of data can theoreticians rely on in order to make progress in their semantic theories?

Some philosophers (see Borg 2012: 206) and linguists propose to look for evidence at the syntactic level. Recanati (2004: 102) discusses and rejects the Binding Criterion:

A contextual ingredient in the interpretation of a sentence S results from saturation if it can be 'bound', that is, if it can be made to vary with the values introduced by some operator prefixed to S.

The problem with the Binding Criterion is that it over-generates. As Cappelen and Lepore (2002), Breheny (2004), and Recanati (2004) point out, if the Binding Criterion is employed as a test for detecting parameters that demand saturation, it yields an unacceptable proliferation of parameters. In point of fact, in order to defend the Binding Argument from the charge of over-generation, Stanley (2005b: 235) urges not to interpret it as a criterion for detecting hidden parameters. Stanley says that the Binding Argument must be taken as an inference to the best explanation of bound interpretations: by postulating covert variables one can explain bound interpretations. On Stanley's view, evidence for bound interpretations comes from speakers' intuitions on truth conditions. From Stanley's perspective, then, the Binding Argument does not provide evidence for detecting hidden parameters. Rather, it presupposes evidence for bound interpretations from speakers' intuitions on truth conditions.

Furthermore, Recanati (2004: 110) proposes an alternative explanation of bound interpretations that avoids the presence of covert variable in the logical form of expressions. Recanti rejects the argument from premises 1 and 2 to conclusion 3:

1. In the sentence 'whenever Bob lights a cigarette, it rains', the reference to the location varies according to the value of the variable bound by the quantifier 'whenever Bob lights a cigarette'.

2. There can be no binding without a variable in the logical form.

3. In the logical form of 'it rains' there is a variable for locations, although phonologically not realized.

Recanati argues that this argument is fallacious because of an ambiguity in conclusion 3, where the sentence 'it rains' can be intended either in isolation or as a part of compound phrases. According to Recanati, the sentence 'it rains' contains a covert variable when it occurs as a part of the compound sentence 'whenever Bob lights a cigarette, it

rains', but it does not contain any variable when it occurs as an atomic sentence.

Recanati explanation of bound interpretations exploits expressions that modify predicates. Given an n-place predicate, a modifier can form an n+1 place or an n–1 place predicate. Expressions like 'here' or 'in London' are special modifiers that transform the predicate 'it rains' from a one-place predicate to a two-place predicate but provide also a value for the new argument place. Recanati argues that expressions like 'whenever Bob lights a cigarette' are modifiers like 'here' and 'in London'. They change the number of predicate places and provide a value to the new argument through the value of the variable they bind. Recanati's conclusion is that although binding requires variables in the logical form of compound sentences, there is no need to insert covert variables in sub-sentential expressions or sentences in isolation.

Thus, to appeal to the Binding Criterion amounts to putting the syntactic cart before the semantic horse with the risk of over-generation and fallacy and the appeal to the Binding Argument presupposes a methodology that relies on speakers' intuitions on truth conditions, which Devitt explicitly rejects. If evidence is not to be found at the syntactic level, it must be found elsewhere.

In the previous section, we saw that Devitt puts much weight on the normative aspect of meaning in order to mount an argument against linguistic pragmatism. One might try to analyse the semantic burdens that speakers undertake in utterances of sentences to collect evidence for the structure of semantic contents. This is to say that one might collect evidence by the study of the moves that speakers are allowed or obliged to do for defending or retracting their utterances. Elaborating on Grice (1989), Michaelson (2016: 477) takes into consideration the Cancellability Test:

If q is part of the semantic content expressed by a sentence S at a context C, then:
A. One should not be able to consistently utter 'S, but not Q' at C, where
B. 'not Q' is a standard way of denying q.

However, with respect to Devitt's attempt to defend the traditional approach to semantics by expanding the range of polysemy, the Cancellability Test has a severe limitation. Consider the sentence 'John and Mary got married and had a child'. Devitt explains the interpretation that John and Mary got married before having a child by polysemy: 'and' is a polysemous word having multiple meanings, one for the truth-functional conjunction and one for the temporally/causally ordered conjunction. Of course, the temporal ordering can be cancelled. One might say 'John and Mary got married and had a child, but not in that order'. Yet, as Michaelson acknowledges, to argue that Devitt's theory is mistaken because it fails the Cancellability Test would be to beg the question against Devitt. It is open to Devitt to claim that the phrase 'but not in that order' does not cancel a pragmatic enrichment but makes

it explicit a disambiguation. The Cancellabiltiy Test does not supply relevant data for deciding whether certain forms of context sensitivity can be explained by polysemy and it has a very limited application for Devitt's purpose of collecting data from the usage of sentences.

The Cancellability Test is based upon the idea that the semantic content of an utterance is something to which the speaker is committed on pain of contradiction or semantic incompetence. Elaborating on this idea, some philosophers like Saul (2012), Michaelson (2016), Borg (2017) have proposed to make use of judgements of lying for tracking semantic contents. The central assumption is that if a speaker utters a sentence S and is not lying, then p is not the semantic content of S provided that the speaker believes the content p to be false and intends to deceive her audience about p. Michaelson (2016: 482) offers the following formulation of the Lying Test:

If *p* is part of the semantic content associated with a sentence P,
   as uttered by X to Y, then either:
A. P is a lie, or
B. it is not the case that X believes that p is false, or
C. it is not the case that X intends to deceive Y with respect to p.

Michaelson and Borg[10] employ the Lying Test to argue against the idea that the conjunction 'and' is polysemous. Consider the following example in Borg (2017):[11]

A rich catholic fundamentalist decides to leave her entire fortune to Jack, as long as Jack has lived his life in full compliance with the precepts of Catholicism. The rich fundamentalist asks John for information about Jack's life. John intends to favour his friend Jack wishing him to inherit the huge amount of money and, knowing that Jack had two children before getting married, he says:

Jack got married and had two children.

John intends his speech act to make the rich fundamentalist believe that Jack got married and *then* had two children. John's utterance is misleading and clearly intended to be so. Moreover, John knows that it is false that Jack got married before having two children.

By the application of the Lying Test, Michaelson argues that since John is not lying, believes the temporally ordered content to be false, and intends to deceive the rich fundamentalist about that content, the temporally ordered content is not the semantic content of John's utterance. On Michaelson's view, the Lying Test provides evidence in favour of the unified account of the meaning of 'and' and against the polysemous account.

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[10] More precisely, Borg argues against linguistic pragmatism and in defence of minimalism.

[11] Borg's example is a variation of an example in Saul (2012: 37).

We agree that the Lying Test is somehow on the right track for collecting evidence in semantics but disagree on Michaelson's on his conclusion against the polysemous account of the meaning of 'and' (and we disagree with Borg on her use of the Liying Test for defending minimalism). Michaelson says that the polysemous account predicts that John semantically expressed the temporally ordered content that Jack got married before having two children because it is the speaker's prerogative to choose how polysemous expressions should be disambiguate, and John intends for his use to be disambiguated temporally. We argue that Michaelson's argument fails because it conflates the metaphysics of meaning with the epistemology of understanding. Certainly, it is the speaker's prerogative to choose how an expression has to be disambiguated. In the above scenario, if someone charged John of lying, nothing could prevent John from defending himself and claiming that he said that Jack got married and had two children in one order or the other. John's self defence could not be impeached by observing that that is not how the rich fundamentalist interpreted John's utterance or that John knew that that was not how the rich fundamentalist would interpret his utterance. What the hearer does or what the hearer is expected to do is not determinative of semantic content. To say that it is the speaker's prerogative to choose how an expression should be disambiguated is to say that the speaker undertakes the semantic burden of choosing a certain meaning. To the extent that in the depicted scenario John is allowed to choose the truth functional meaning for 'and' and to defend his choice explicitly and in public, there is no reason to force upon his utterance the temporally ordered content, even if John knew that the rich fundamentalist would interpret his utterance that way.

Of course, John's communicative strategy is very tricky, but what makes it tricky is just the fact that in the above scenario John can play with the polysemy of 'and'. Indeed, if we change the scenario and imagine a situation in which John cannot play with the polysemy of 'and', we get evidence in favour of the polysemous account. Suppose that the rich fundamentalist asks John the following direct question and John gives the following answer:

Fundamentalist: Did Jack get married and have two children or did he have two children and get married?

John: Jack got married and had two children

In this case, the intuition that John is lying and not merely misleading his interlocutor is stronger than the intuition that John is not lying. Nobody would accept as legitimate John's defence that he was not saying that *Jack got married and then had two children.* Contrary to the previous scenario, given the formulation of the question asked by the rich fundamentalist, in which it is clear that the conjunction 'and' is used with the temporally ordered content, John cannot respond that he was not saying that *Jack got married and then had two children*, on pain of

making it open that he did not understand the question, and thereby on pain of showing himself linguistically incompetent or non-cooperative.

The view that treats the conjunction 'and' as polysemous offers a straightforward explanation of what happens in the second scenario. The rich fundamentalist uses 'and' with the temporally ordered meaning. Therefore, the retreat to the truth functional meaning would be an unacceptable admission of linguistic incompetence on behalf of John. In this case John cannot play with the polysemy of 'and', given the way in which the rich fundamentalist asks the question. It is not obvious that the unified account of the meaning of 'and' can cope with this case, as it lacks an explanation of the strong intuition that John is lying and not merely misleading his interlocutor.

One interesting aspect of the Lying Test is that it works with a notion of semantic content that is characterised in terms of the semantic burdens that speakers undertake in utterances of sentences. It connects semantic contents to utterances in virtue of the linguistic liability that speakers are held to have for the contents of the speech acts they perform. These semantic burdens can be investigated by studying the moves that speakers are allowed or obliged to make when their utterances are challenged, on pain of linguistic incompetence, irrationality or non-cooperativeness. The analysis of such moves is helpful to work out a solution to the slippery slope argument that threatens the theories that aim to treat context sensitivity as a semantic phenomenon. The slippery slope argument leads to the conclusion that if one starts treating some expressions as context sensitive on the basis of context shifting arguments and incompleteness arguments, one loses a principled way to distinguish context sensitive expressions from context invariant ones and a principled way to select for any context sensitive expression the parameters that demand saturation, because for any expression and after any process of saturation one can always raise further questions about more contextual precisifications.

Our answer to the slippery slope argument is that what matters is not the openness to further questions for more precisifications, but the kind of legitimate answers that speakers are allowed to give. We propose to use more vigorously the No-Idea Test that Recanati discusses in (2010: 84).[12] The basic insight underlying the No-Idea Test is that if an expression demands the saturation of a certain parameter, the speaker is not allowed to reply with 'I have no idea' to a request of precisification. For example, the No-Idea Test provides evidence that the verb 'to arrive' requires saturation for the location of the arrival, as the infelicity of the following dialogue shows:

A. John has arrived.
B. Where has he arrived?
A. I have no idea.#

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[12] Recanati (2010: 84) says that the No-Idea Test was originally proposed by Jarmila Panevova.

The reason why the speaker is not allowed to reply with 'I have no idea' is that the speaker cannot avoid undertaking the semantic burden of specifying the location where John arrived on pain of committing her speech act to the content that John arrived in some place or other. This content is in open violation of the maxims of conversation, because it is not relevant and very likely the speaker has no justification for making an assertion with that content. The speaker cannot commit herself to that content, on pain of proving herself non-cooperative.

Likewise, one is not allowed to reply with 'I have no idea' to a request of precisification for those expressions like 'ready', 'tall', quantified nouns phrases, that linguistic pragmatists typically employ to construct counterexamples to semantic theories on the traditional approach. The following dialogues are all infelicitous:

A. John is ready.	A. John is tall.	A. There are no beers.
B. What is he ready for?	B. What is he tall for?	B. Where?
A. I have no idea.#	A. I have no idea.#	A. I have no idea.#

On the contrary, the No-Idea Test shows that the way in which the action of cutting is performed is not part of the semantic content of the verb 'to cut'. The following dialogue looks fine:

A. John cut the cake.
B. How did he manage to cut the cake? There were no cooking utensils in the kitchen!
A. I have no idea.

This is evidence that the verb 'to cut' does not demand saturation for the way of cutting. As Devitt points out, 'to cut' might have a context invariant content along the lines of *to produce linear separation in the material integrity of something by a sharp edge coming in contact with it*. The information about the way in which the action of cutting is performed is pragmatically conveyed, not semantically encoded in the meaning of 'to cut'.

The No-Idea Test provides evidence that 'ready', 'tall', quantified noun phrases pattern with 'to arrive'. Their meaning demands that the speaker undertake the semantic burden of saturating certain parameters. Weather reports are other examples that linguistic pragmatists typically employ to argue against traditional semantic theories. We acknowledge that weather reports are much more controversial cases. On the one hand, the following dialogue might seem infelicitous as much as the previous ones:

A. It is raining.
B. Where is it raining?
A. I have no idea.#

On the other hand, Recanati (2002: 317) has discussed the 'weatherman' scenario for supporting the claim that 'to rain' does not demand saturation for locations: after weeks of total drought, one of the alarm

bells that are connected to rain detectors that have been placed all over the territory rings in the monitoring room. The weatherman on duty in the adjacent room says: 'It is raining'. The following dialogue looks fine (Recanti 2010: 86):

A. (The weatherman) It is raining.
B. Where is it raining?
A. I have no idea. Let us check.

Recanati holds that the truth conditions of the utterance of the weatherman are that it is raining in some place or other. According to Recanati, the possibility of the indefinite reading proves that the felt compulsion to complete truth conditions of weather reports with locations, when such a compulsion is indeed felt, has a pragmatic nature. Recanati (2010) gives a long argument against the possibility of explaining the indefinite reading through a covert existential quantification on the parameter for the location.

As we said, this case is very controversial and we have no space to discuss it at length. We have just a couple of remarks. First, taking for granted that the weatherman is not able to make reference to the location where it is raining (i.e. to entertain a singular proposition about that location), it does not follow that the weatherman does not have in mind that location by description, in such a way that the weatherman is able to denote the location where it is raining (i.e. to entertain a general proposition about that location). Indeed, the weatherman can think of that location as the location where the rain detector that caused the alarm bell to ring has been placed. There is a reading according to which the truth conditions of the weatherman's utterance are that it is raining at the location where the rain detector that caused the alarm bell to ring has been placed. Thus, we put in doubt the claim that the weatherman's example is a genuine case of indefinite reading.

Second, Recanati's argument against the possibility of explaining indefinite readings through a covert quantification rests on a doubtful and idiosyncratic intuition. Recanati argues that there are utterances of 'It is not raining' that cannot be given the indefinite reading that somewhere it is not raining, which is the reading that is predicted by the theory that explains indefinite readings through covert existential quantification over the location parameter. Recanati (2010: 103) discusses a 'reversed weatherman' scenario: after a long period of heavy rain and floods all over the territory detectors for the absence of rain are placed. One day the alarm bell connected to a detector rings and the weatherman on duty says 'It is not raining'.

Recanati's comment is that he finds it rather hard to understand the utterance with the content that somewhere it is not raining (wide scope indefinite reading). Recanati's intuition is that the only available interpretation is that it is not raining anywhere (narrow scope indefinite reading). According to Recanati, the weatherman ought to say 'The rain has stopped', which could be interpreted as meaning that

the rain has stopped somewhere. Thus, Recanati's conclusion is that the theory that explains indefinite readings of weather reports through a covert quantification over the location parameter is unable to explain the unavailability of the wide scope indefinite reading in the reversed weatherman scenario.

We acknowledge that weather reports are very controversial cases and leave the full discussion of them for another paper. We want to stress, however, that Recanati's argument rests entirely on his intuition that the wide scope indefinite reading in the reversed weatherman scenario is not available. We find Recanati's intuition no less controversial than weather reports in general.

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