

Radical minimalism, moderate contextualism

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[To appear in Gerhard Preyer and Georg Peter (eds.), *Content and Context. Essays on Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.]

Abstract

Cappelen and Lepore distinguish between what is said by an utterance and the proposition determined by the semantics of the sentence uttered. Their theory involves answers to two questions:

1. How much pragmatics is involved in semantically determining the proposition?

Their answer: "very little." Pragmatic "intrusion" should be kept to a minimum.

2. How much pragmatics is involved in determining what is said by an utterance?

Their answer: "a lot." There are indefinitely many propositions that can be correctly called "what is said." They set no maximum to the pragmatic intrusion into what is said, no limit to the pragmatically determined elements of what is said by an utterance.

In our view, Cappelen and Lepore's minimalism regarding the first question is not minimal enough; their speech act pluralism regarding the second, however, is too pluralistic. We are more radical minimalists about the proposition contributed by semantics, more moderate contextualists about what is said.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cappelen and Lepore's (hereafter, "C&L") book *Insensitive Semantics* faces issues involved in reconceptualizing the nature of and boundaries between semantics and pragmatics in the light of the phenomenon often called "pragmatic intrusion." The received theory might have been expressed this way. Semantics

* The first author thanks the University of the Basque Country (9/UPV 00I09.I09-14449/2002) and the Diamond XX Philosophy Institute for support. The second author thanks Stanford University and the Diamond XX Philosophy Institute for support. Both authors thank the editors and the anonymous referees for their valuable comments and suggestions.

determines *what is said*; that is, the proposition that is expressed by an utterance is determined by the conventional meanings of the words used and compositional rules for combining words. Pragmatics takes as its input what is said, and, taking into consideration facts about the particular utterance (and possibly some other conventions) determines what has been conveyed and what speech acts have been performed, largely by considering the communicative and other perlocutionary intentions of the speaker.

The classic picture of pragmatic intrusion is that we often need to reason about the intentions of the speaker in order to determine what is said; semantics doesn't get us the whole way. Authors like Bach (1994), Carston (1988, 2002), Recanati (1989, 2004), Sperber and Wilson (1986), and others point to a variety of cases: comparative adjectives, quantifier expressions, weather reports, etc.

C&L seek to develop a concept of semantics that does not countenance pragmatic intrusion. They alter the received picture by disengaging the "output" of semantics, the "semantic content," from the intuitive concept of "what is said." The semantic content can be determined without regard to intrusive pragmatic elements. Pragmatics plays a role in getting us to what is said, but since what is said is beyond the border of semantics, it isn't intrusion. Thus their "semantic minimalism." But C&L have further ambitions about the concept of what is said; they want not only to demote it from the role of being the terminus of semantics, but also to undermine the idea that it is an important, central, and robust concept of pragmatics. Thus their "speech act pluralism."

We are sympathetic to the project of keeping semantics free of pragmatic intrusion, but we pursue a somewhat different strategy, that we see as both more radical than that of C&L, and closer to their motivating ideas. On the issue of what is said, however, we differ; we think what is said, or some theoretical explication of it, has a central and honorable role to play in pragmatics.

This essay began as a contribution to a symposium on *IS* for *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. In order to meet the page limits, the second part of our case, concerning pragmatic pluralism, had to be cut. At the invitation of Gerhard Preyer we basically include the entire original paper here, with such changes as the passage of time and the accumulation of wisdom have dictated.

2. TERMINOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

First, there is the “content” of an utterance, more commonly called “the proposition expressed.” The question is, how much pragmatics is involved in determining it. Literalists say none. Contextualists say a lot. Moderates say something in between. But this concept of semantic content is basically a conflation of two quite different concepts. We’ll call these *locutionary content* and *semantic contribution*.

Locutionary content is rooted in such common locutions as “what X said,” and “what X said by uttering (saying, writing, signing) so and so.” They surface in Austin, Grice, and the “new theory of reference.” There the *theoretical* concept of *the proposition expressed* is motivated by intuitions mined with the help of these common-sense concepts. This is most explicit in Kaplan’s *Demonstratives* (1989), in the crucial Peter-Paul argument (pp. 512-513).

Our working definition of “locutionary content” is the conditions the truth of an utterance of a declarative sentence put on the objects it is about. This is called “referential content” in (Perry 2001). The locutionary content, is, we think, *normally* what is said, but not in those cases for which Grice used “make as if to say” instead of “say.” There are also other cases, such as informative identity statements, where we might not identify what is said with the locutionary content (see (Perry 2001)). Thus we agree with C&L and others that “what is said” is a rather complicated concept, but we find more order in this complexity than they do.

The second root of the concept of content is “semantic contribution.” Meaning is commonly assumed to be a property of simple and complex expressions that derives from conventions that pertain to the meaning of simple expressions, found in a lexicon, and conventions about modes of combination. This is what the semantic component of model-theoretic or other formal analyses of languages assign to expressions. It is also what philosophers and cognitive scientists take to be a central aspect of knowledge of language, of “semantic competence.”

“Content” is a semi-technical expression. The philosophy of language has been heavily influenced by Kaplan’s use, where paradigmatic content primarily is

assigned to utterances, or uses of declarative sentences, or, as officially in his formal development, pairs of such sentences and contexts, where contexts are quadruples of agent, location, time and world (Kaplan 1989). Declarative sentences are the model, and the content is taken to be a proposition that incorporates the truth-conditions of an utterance, use, or sentence in context. We will reserve the use of “content” for utterances, uses, and sentences in context, and “meaning” for types of expressions, following Kaplan, whose approximation to meaning is called “character.” So, in Kaplan’s system, the content of a sentence in context is a function of the character of the sentence and the context. We’ll use the term “semantic contribution” for the property of sentences that C&L seem to be after.

In our terms, C&L maintain that the semantic contribution of a sentence is not as tightly linked to the locutionary content of an utterance of the sentence as might be thought. Locutionary content is a concept that belongs to pragmatics, semantic contribution belongs to semantics. With this we agree. Thus there are two questions instead of one:

How much pragmatics is involved in determining the locutionary content of an utterance?

How much pragmatics is involved in determining the semantic contribution of a sentence used in a standard way in an utterance?

We are contextualists with regard to the first question, and minimalists as regards the second, and so in broad agreement with C&L. We are more moderate than they on the first question, which we pursue in sections 5 and 6. We start with the second, where our complaint is that C&L are not minimalist enough. But, before that, a remark on the epistemology of language.

2. A NOTE ON EPISTEMOLOGY.

The word “pragmatics” brings to mind two sorts of facts that are connected with particular utterances. First are narrow contextual facts: the speaker, audience, time and place of the utterance. Second are matters of the intentions of the speaker (and perhaps relevant mental states of other participants in the conversation). The paradigms of such intentions are the sort that Grice emphasized in his study of implicature: intentions to convey something beyond,

or in place of, what is literally said. But in fact the discovery of intentions is involved at every stage of understanding utterances.

Herman says to Ernie, "I am tired." Ernie learns that Herman is tired. Knowledge of different kinds is involved here. First, there is the knowledge Ernie has as a semantically competent user of English. We take this to be the knowledge of the meanings of the words of English and how to interpret the modes of combination one finds in complex English expressions. This, *and this alone*, seems to us to be semantic, at least from a *minimalist* perspective. And this does *not* depend on anything about the utterance; Ernie's knowledge of the semantics of the English sentence "I am tired" was in place before Herman said anything, and the same knowledge would be involved in his understanding of anyone's utterance, or Ernie's own production of such an utterance.

Then there is perception of the public factors involved in Herman's utterance: Ernie hears the words Herman uses, and recognizes them as sounds that could be used as words of English. He also sees that Herman is the speaker.

Then there are Herman's intentions. If, as we assume, Ernie knows no Norwegian, he might briefly entertain the possibility that the sounds he hears are being used as Norwegian words. But why would Herman say something in Norwegian to Ernie? So he concludes Herman is speaking English, a fact about Herman's intentions in producing the noises he does. Notice that Ernie's knowledge of the semantics of "I am tired" will likely play a role here. If Herman emits some sounds which sound like "Albuquerque is probably pregnant," his knowledge of Herman's likely intentions and the semantics of "Albuquerque is probably pregnant" would instead argue for the utterance not being in English.

Having established that Herman intends to be speaking English, another layer of thinking about intentions comes up with the word "tired." Probably Herman realizes he is not an automobile, and means to use "tired" in the sense in which people who would like to nap are tired. There is the issue of exactly what Herman counts as "tired." Consistent with English he might mean to say that he is tired as opposed to being full of vim and vigor, or that he is dead-tired, barely able to lift a pencil. More intentions. Then, finally, there is the question of what Herman is trying to convey, to implicate, by saying what he does. That he needs a

coke? That he needs a nap? That he needs a vacation? That battling with the absurdity of life and language has driven him to a deep and unshakeable ennui? More intentions.

Our point is that the understanding of particular utterances requires a great deal of knowledge in addition to semantic knowledge, properly so called, and knowledge of intentions saturates every aspect of understanding in every transaction. The picture that semantic knowledge, in any reasonable sense, gets us very far by itself is untenable. In particular, the idea that simply by knowing the meanings of English expressions and modes of composition we can get to the locutionary content, and only after that, in figuring out implicatures, to what we need to discover and reason about intentions, is certainly false.

3. MINIMALISMS

In Kaplan's theory, philosophical arguments about what is said guide the choice for what the content of an utterance is taken to be, suggesting that content is *what is said*, in a fairly robust sense and intuition-rich sense of that phrase, which, in the limited sort of cases Kaplan considers, is or is very close to locutionary content in our sense. Character is semantic contribution. Content is determined by character and context. This gives us two possible, Kaplan-inspired, minimalisms:

- i) Minimal Semantic contribution should be like Kaplan's *content*: it is determined by character *plus* context (agent, location, time, world).
- ii) Minimal Semantic contribution should be like Kaplan's *character*; it is the same for every utterance of a sentence.

Minimalism i) seems to be a non-starter. In Kaplan's system, *content* is what *varies* from utterance to utterance, even though the semantics ---everything Kaplan's theory tells us about the sentence, everything in the lexicon and the compositional rules--- stays the same. Minimalism ii), on the other hand seems quite promising; it identifies minimal semantics with exactly the sort of facts that semantic theories like Kaplan's provide, and the usual meaning of "semantics," viz. the meaning of expressions as determined by the conventions of the language to which they belong.

C&L explain their basic idea as follows:

The idea motivating Semantic Minimalism is simple and obvious: The semantic content of a sentence S is the content that all utterances of S share. It is the content that all utterances of S express no matter how different their contexts of utterance are. It is also the content that can be grasped and reported by someone who is ignorant about the relevant characteristics of the context in which an utterance of S took place. (p. 143)

C&L emphasize their broad agreement with Kaplan, so this use of “content” is rather odd; for Kaplan the content is what *changes* with context; the character remains the same and is what is grasped by someone ignorant of context. If the *contents* of all utterances of a sentence S were the same, their truth-value would also be the same: a bullet no one wants to bite. At this point one might suppose that minimalism ii) fits everything in the Basic Idea so well that this use of “content” must just come to “contribution.” Thus we would have:

There is a *semantic* contribution that all utterances of a sentence S make to contents of the utterances, which is the same for all utterances whatever the context and is what someone who is ignorant of the relevant characteristics of the context grasps.

However, having given us this basic idea of semantic minimalism, C&L almost immediately replace it with another conception; they call it an “elaboration,” but it is really nothing of the sort. It is a move from something *prima-facie* coherent like ii) to something *prima-facie* incoherent like i). They list seven theses of what we shall call C&L Semantic Minimalism. The heart of the matter is their thesis 5, which gives us our next concept of minimalism:

iii) C&L minimalism (pp. 144-145)

In order to fix or determine the proposition semantically expressed by an utterance of a sentence S, follow steps (a)-(e):

- a) Specify the meaning (or semantic value) of every expression in S (doing so in accordance with your favorite semantic theory...).
- b) Specify all the relevant compositional meanings rules for English (doing so also in accordance with your favorite semantic theory...).

- c) Disambiguate every ambiguous/polysemous expression in S.
- d) Precisify every vague expression in S.
- e) Fix the semantic value of every context sensitive expression in S.

What are clauses c) through e) doing in an exposition of semantic *minimalism*, a description of the “content” that all utterances of a sentence *share*? The clauses c), d) and e) all pertain to factors that *differentiate* the content of English sentences as used by different people at different times, or with different intentions about which meanings of ambiguous expressions they wish to employ, and the standards of precisification for vague expressions. Something has gone awry, and the basic idea of semantic minimalism has slipped away.

4. K&P MINIMALISM

We will propose two forms of minimalism that are more in accord with C&L’s basic idea ---more pure--- than C&L minimalism. We will call them “Kosher and Pure minimalisms” or “K&P minimalisms” for short.

Both forms of K&P minimalism result from eliminating parts of C&L minimalism. The first form eliminates d) and e); the second form eliminates c) as well.

For this purpose we use the concept Content_M from (Perry 2001). In general, the content of an utterance is what the world has to be like for the utterance to be true, taking certain things about the utterance as fixed. Let \mathbf{u} be an utterance of “I am tired” in English, the meanings of the words and the mode of composition involved are given, but not the speaker, time, etc. The Content_M of \mathbf{u} is:

- (1) That the speaker of \mathbf{u} is tired at the time of \mathbf{u} .

(1) is what we call a *reflexive* content of \mathbf{u} , since it puts conditions on \mathbf{u} itself. Content_M gets at the vision behind C&L’s basic idea: it is what all utterances of the same sentence have *in common*.

Of course, two utterances, \mathbf{u} and \mathbf{u}' of “I am tired” by different people will not have the same *content*, reflexive or locutionary, and they may differ in *truth-value*. This difference is reflected in the difference between (1) and (2):

(2) *That the speaker of **u**' is tired at the time of **u**'.*

Suppose you find a note **n** that reads "I am tired." You don't know who wrote it, or when, but you assume it is written in English. On the C&L account you *do not* grasp the semantic contribution of the sentence, for you do not have the information necessary, on their theory, to grasp "the proposition semantically expressed." But of course you do, and you can report it:

Note **n** is true iff the person who wrote it was tired at the time he wrote it.

Suppose Tom wrote the note at noon Wednesday. If you knew that you could say,

Note **n** is true iff Tom was tired Wednesday.

The proposition that Tom was tired Wednesday is what we call the locutionary content of the note; the Content_c or the referential content in (Perry 2001). It is what is required of the world for the note to be true given *not only* that it was written in English, *but also* that it was written by Tom on Wednesday. With the sentence "Tom was tired Wednesday" you can actually *express* the proposition Tom expressed with the note. Without that information you cannot *express* that proposition, but you can give an *utterance bound* or *reflexive* characterization of it.

The requirement that to grasp the *semantic* content of an utterance you need to know the contextual facts, so that you can *express* the locutionary content, as opposed to merely providing an utterance bound description of it, is unmotivated by C&L's basic idea, and by the general truth-conditional and compositional approach to semantics.

If one looks at a formal theory, such as Kaplan's in "Logic of Demonstratives," the compositional clauses work at the level of utterance bound meaning; that is, they quantify over contexts, and thus contextual factors. One can grasp the contribution that parts make to wholes, on Kaplan's account, without having any idea who made the utterance and when (or what the context of a sentence-context pair is).

Consider, for example, a note:

- (3) Because I ran a marathon yesterday, I am too tired to fix the car today, so I'd better wait until tomorrow, so you can't use it to go to the store until then.

We can grasp the utterance bound truth-conditions of (3) if we grasp the utterance bound truth-conditions of the parts; we don't need to know who said it, and when, and to whom.

This is not a point that simply pertains to indexicals. Suppose the note is "I'll fix the car soon." What does the speaker mean by "soon"? It is a vague expression. C&L would claim that we don't grasp the semantic "content" unless we can fix what counts as "soon." But surely we do grasp that utterance bound truth-conditions:

The note is true iff the author of the note fixed the car he is referring to within the length of time that counted as upper bound of what counted as "soon" according to his intentions.

Suppose you get an email from Gretchen that says, "David has made an amazing discovery." There are a lot of Davids. You don't know which one Gretchen is referring to with her use of "David": David Kaplan, David Hills, David Israel? You respond, "David Who?" Your response can be understood precisely because you *do* grasp utterance-bound truth-conditions of the email:

This email is true if the David the author it was referring to with "David" has made a great discovery.

By recognizing the fact that the *common* semantic contribution of sentences of English is at the level of utterance bound truth-conditions, we can provide a conception of semantic contribution and semantic content that is much more in accord with C&L's basic idea:

KP-1

The semantic contribution of an English sentence is determined by the meanings of the expression in the sentence in English and the English rules for modes of combination, plus a disambiguation of any ambiguous expressions. The semantic content of an utterance of the sentence is the reflexive truth-conditions of the utterance, where contextual factors, the

reference of nambiguous¹ names, and standards of precisification are not fixed but quantified over.

We also propose a more radical rendering of semantic minimalism, limited to a) and b) on C&L's list.

KP-2

The semantic contribution of an English sentence is determined by the meanings of the expression in the sentence in English and the English rules for modes of combination. The semantic content of an utterance of the sentence is the reflexive truth conditions of the utterance, where contextual factors, the meanings of ambiguous expressions, the reference of nambiguous names, and standards of precisification are not fixed but quantified over.

This is the conception of semantic contribution needed by the working epistemologist of language or cognitive scientist. Consider Grice's example (Grice 1967) "He was in the grip of a vice." What does someone know, who hears this sentence uttered, and recognizes the expressions, based merely on his knowledge of the meanings of words and the grammar of English? We suggest, following Grice rather closely, something like this:

This utterance is true iff the speaker is using "in the grip of a vice" to mean "has a particularly bad habit or moral failing," if the person the speaker uses "he" to refer to has a particularly bad habit or moral failing, or if the speaker is using "in the grip of a vice" to mean "held by a clamping vise" and the person he is referring to is held by a clamping vise.

The material to the right of the "iff" provides us with an utterance bound truth-condition. This is a complicated proposition that is ultimately about the utterance itself. This proposition fits very well with C&L's basic idea, for it is what a semantically competent speaker of English grasps simply in terms of that semantic competence, with no additional knowledge of the intentions of the speaker beyond that of speaking English.

¹ 'Nambiguous' is Perry's (2001) neologism for names with multiple bearers. This phenomenon is quite different from ordinary lexical ambiguity. See (Perry 2001), ch. 6.

Perhaps we need to emphasize that utterance-bound contents are *not* our candidates for what is said, or *the* proposition expressed, or locutionary content. The utterance-bound content of an utterance *u* of “I am tired” is the proposition that the speaker of *u* is tired. This is certainly *not* what is said. The speaker was not *saying* something about his or her own utterance, but about him or herself.

We believe that once either of these truly ---radically--- minimalist conceptions of semantics is adopted, many of C&L’s arguments against the presence of pragmatically or contextually determined elements in locutionary content, such as unarticulated constituents, lose whatever force they may have had. But for now we turn to C&L’s ‘Speech Act Pluralism’.

5. PLURALISM AND CONTEXTUALISM

Both minimalists and contextualists must face the question:

How much pragmatics is involved in determining the locutionary content of an utterance? (For the moment, you can take ‘locutionary content’ just as our technical term for ‘what is said’.)

Once C&L have separated locutionary content from the output of semantics, they are free to agree with contextualists: a lot of pragmatics is involved in getting to what is said.

This is not their only coincidence with contextualism. They share with many contextualists the assumption that for the generation of implicatures it is necessary to have what we called an expressive description of a certain proposition, not what is said, but the (enriched) explicature (in Carston’s terminology) or the contextually shaped what-is-said (in C&L’s terminology (pp. 179-181)). We argue elsewhere² that this is a mistake; one can reason about the likely intentions of a speaker on the basis of a very utterance-bound description of what he has said.³

² See Korta & Perry (2006).

³ It is true that relevance theorists admit mutual adjustments of explicatures and implicatures, so the former need not be determined *before* the latter. Our point, anyway, is that the expressive description of the proposition need not be determined neither *before* nor *after* the determination of implicatures; an utterance-bound description will often do either as the input for an inference or as the result of mutual adjustment. Thanks to one of the referees for raising this point.

But what is most surprising and puzzling to us is that, concerning what is said, now distinguished from both the semantic content and the enriched explicature, C&L defend a contextualism virtually without limits. That is, they appear to deny the utility of what is said, or theoretical concepts based on our intuitions about what is said, play a significant role in shaping the enterprise of semantics and pragmatics.

In our view C&L's 'Speech Act Pluralism' is the collection of three different theses that we will call 'content pluralism', 'the relativity of what is said,' and 'pragmatic indiscernibility'. The first we accept; the second leads to a theoretical pessimism we don't want to share; the third we reject; it goes directly against Grice's fundamental distinction between what is said and implicatures, and, ironically, combined with the second, threatens to undermine any motivation for C&L's version of semantic minimalism. Let's consider them one by one.

5.1. CONTENT PLURALISM

Content pluralism concerns the quantity of contents of an utterance; it claims that any utterance has a variety of them. We have already argued for the existence, for any utterance, of at least a minimal content corresponding to the semantic contribution of the sentence uttered, a locutionary content which can be considered for our current purposes more or less as what is said, and a bunch of more or less utterance-bound or reflexive contents somehow 'in between'. Each of these contents is available for the hearer when understanding an utterance. We (theoreticians) can represent them as different propositions, with different truth-conditions. Contrary to what is common usage among philosophers and linguists, then, it is misleading to talk of *the* content of an utterance ---or equivalently about *the* truth-conditions of an utterance. We think there is a plurality of contents, of sets of truth-conditions of an utterance. We agree with C&L on this point. We are pluralist on contents.

However, assuming that any of these contents can equally be considered *as said* is an error too, and so also that they can be called "the proposition expressed," where that bit of technical terminology is introduced, as is common, in terms of the intuitive concept of what is said.

As we pointed out, we do not ordinarily consider the utterance-bound truth-conditions of an assertion as what is said or even part of what is said. If O.J.'s utterance u is of "I am innocent," he has not said that there is a unique speaker of u and that person is innocent. He hasn't said anything about u at all. Someone who heard u , but didn't hear who said it, would know its utterance-bound truth-conditions, but not what was said. Probably, he could figure out who said it, and thus what was said, if he knew enough about the trial he was attending.

Another sort of pluralism that must be acknowledged has to do with the plurality of *descriptions* or other designations available for any particular proposition. If one takes propositions to be abstract objects, then, like any objects, there will be innumerable ways of designating them. There is a special, perhaps canonical, way of designating propositions in (philosophical) English: embed a sentence that expresses the proposition from the speaker's context in a *that*-clause. Among the innumerable ways of designating propositions will be ordinary ways open to competent language users:

that O.J. is innocent

What O.J. just said

Whatever O.J. just said (I didn't hear him clearly)

as well as ways that are used by theorists, in the context of a certain way of modeling propositions:

$\{w \mid \text{O.J. is innocent in } w\}$, that is, the set of possible worlds in which O.J. is innocent;

$\langle\langle\lambda x[x \text{ is innocent}] \rangle, \text{O.J.}\rangle$, that is, the ordered pair consisting of the property of being innocent and O.J.

The plurality of descriptions of what O.J. said, does not, of course, imply a plurality of things O.J. said.

Finally, we ordinarily count the subject-matter preserving entailments and near-entailments of what a person said as among the things they said. So O.J. said he was innocent, then he said that he wasn't guilty; that he didn't do the

deed; and so forth. If he said he wore shoes and socks and a coat that day, then he said he wore shoes and he said that he wore socks and a coat.

Another complication, and the primary reason we think it is worth developing a semi-technical concept, *locutionary content*, as an explication of what is said, is that the latter concept has a heavy *forensic* aspect, that is tied to its daily use in not only describing utterances but assigning responsibility for their effects, but isn't helpful for theoretical purposes.

Consider a variation of one of C&L's examples. Suppose L and C are with some worshipful graduate students in the philosophy lounge. Looking at famous philosopher X, affectionately called "that moronic clown" by C and L, L says, somewhat carelessly since others are listening, "That moronic clown just published another book." Our concept of locutionary content (still in development) would zero in on the proposition L believed, and intended to communicate to C, namely, that X just published another book. Something like Donnellan's concept of referential uses of descriptions would help get to that content. We wouldn't want the moronic attributes, real, or imagined, or merely ascribed affectionately with some sort pretence, to be part of the locutionary content. But suppose one of the graduate students spreads the word that L think X is a moron. Called to account by L, the student says, "But that's what you said." We would have at least great sympathy with the student's claim. L was responsible for the effects of his careless utterance. This forensic aspect of what is said, is partly responsible for the sense that what is said is so contextually relative as to be theoretically useless.

The concept of what is said that partly motivated the "new theory of reference" comes close to what Perry calls the "referential content" of an utterance. It is the proposition that captures the requirements the truth of an utterance places on the objects referred to. In a wide variety of cases, preserving these requirements with a different form of words will count as "saying the same thing." And in a wide variety of cases, the counterfactual possibilities to which an utterance directs our attention will involve those objects and requirements, and not other requirements involved in referring to them in the actual world. So "Aristotle might not have been named 'Aristotle,'" and "I might not be speaking, or might not even exist," make perfectly good sense.

But in some cases, it is clear that the information one intends to communicate is not the referential content, but something that involves the conditions of actual world reference. If K says to a confused P, “Donostia *is* San Sebastian,” he intends to convey that “Donostia” is another name, or perhaps one should say, the real name, of the Basque city of San Sebastian. He does not merely intend to honor that city with an attribution of self-identity. In such cases, the ordinary use of what is said, may track the information conveyed, rather than the referential content.⁴

These complications with the ordinary use of “what is said” do not imply that it cannot be the basis of a robust and useful theoretical concept; and of course it has been just this, in at least two quite different traditions, Gricean pragmatics and the new theory of reference of Donnellan, Kripke, Kaplan and others. The considerations raised by C&L fall far short of showing otherwise.

5.2. *THE RELATIVITY OF WHAT IS SAID*

C&L jump from content pluralism plus the observation that it is sometimes difficult to determine what is said and the claim that there are a lot of descriptions or reports, indefinitely many, about what is said, to the conclusion that no one description or report is more correct than any other, and therefore, any of them counts as said by the utterance. Their ‘first thesis of Speech Act Pluralism’ is:

“No one thing is said (or asserted, or claimed, or ...) by any utterance: rather, indefinitely many propositions are said, asserted, claimed, stated, etc.” (p. 199).

There is no compelling argument for this conclusion. While it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly what is said, for reasons just surveyed, it is often very easy to identify what is said; as easy as it is *to say the same thing*. Take one of C&L’s examples. O.J. uttered:

- (4) At 11:05 p.m. I put on a white shirt, a blue Yohji Yamamoto suit, dark socks, and my brown Bruno Magli shoes.

⁴ See Perry (2001) pp. 118ff.

Knowing English, the identity of the speaker, and the day of the utterance, there is no difficulty in identifying what was said. JP can do it and can also say the same thing uttering (referring with 'he' to O.J., and talking about the same day):

- (5) At 23:05 he put on a white shirt, a blue Yohji Yamamoto suit, dark socks, and his brown Bruno Magli shoes.

KK could also say it uttering:

- (6) Gaueko 11k eta 5ean, alkandora zuria jantzi zuen, eta Yohji Yamamoto traje bat, galtzerdi ilunak eta bere Bruno Magli zapatak.

This is one of the most amazing properties of linguistic action. It is possible for different people, O.J., J.P. and KK for instance, to say the same things, in different places, different contexts, in different languages. C&L should accept that these three utterances express the same proposition, and constitute no argument for the relativity of what is said. They would also agree, we think, that one can correctly report what O.J. said uttering:

- (7) O.J. said that at 11:05 p.m. (the day of the offense) he put on a white shirt, a blue Yohji Yamamoto suit, dark socks, and his brown Bruno Magli shoes.

But one could also report it as

- (8) O.J. said that at shortly after 11:00 p.m. (the day of the offense) he put on a shirt, a Yohji Yamamoto suit, socks, and his Bruno Magli shoes ---he mentioned the colors, but I don't remember them.

The that-clause does not provide a *canonical* description, for the sentence that follows the "that" does not express the proposition in question. It does identify some of the constituents of the proposition (O.J., suit, socks, Bruno Magli shoes) and delimits accurately if incompletely others (the colors of the suit, socks, and shoes, and the exact time). Similarly with

- (9) O.J. said that he put on his clothes ---I don't remember which--- at 11.00 pm ---more or less.

Finally, one can just say,

(10) What O.J. said

to designate the proposition in question.

This plurality of descriptions in no way implies the existence of a plurality of propositions *said* by O.J.'s original utterance. All of them are true descriptions of what O.J. said, although only (7) is a canonical, *expressive description*. (8)-(10) are less and less informative and do not claim to express the same proposition O.J. did --- (10) is of course sub-sentential, so doesn't express a proposition at all.⁵

Even when there is some relativity to context in what is said, there is not the radical sort of relativity required to undermine the utility of what is said as a basis for theoretical work. As we noted, if L says "That moronic clown just wrote another book," forensic issues may introduce a certain amount of relativity. Those issues aside, whether one wants to maintain that L said that X just wrote another book, which, assuming X is not both a moron and a clown, would require a Donnellan-like treatment of descriptions, or rather maintain that L managed to convey the information that X just wrote another book to C, not by saying it, but by saying something else, obviously false or without truth-value, and thereby implicating that X just wrote another book, would depend on one's overall theory. But theorists, in debating this, would be using and developing what is said as a central theoretical concept, not abandoning it.

5.3. PRAGMATIC INDISCERNIBILITY

C&L go further than content pluralism and the relativity of what is said. They claim that, given some facts that should be mutually known, the following would also be true descriptions of what O.J. said:

- (11) He said that he dressed up in some really fancy clothes late in the evening.
- (12) He said that he changed his clothes right after 11 p.m.
- (13) He said that he stopped exposing himself to the neighbors right after 11 p.m.

⁵ Sometimes by making sub-sentential utterances speakers do express full propositions (see Carston 2002, 152-57), but this is not the case with (10).

(14) He said that he gave the sign at 11:05.

All of these examples are naturally regarded as falling into one or both of two categories. They may be what one might call incremental implications of what O.J. said. That is, what O.J. said, together with certain assumptions, as for example that Bruno Magli shoes and Yohji Yamamoto suite are pretty posh duds, implies that he dressed up in fancy clothes. Or they may be regarded as implicatures: why else would O.J. tell us of these brands, if he didn't want to impress us with what a fancy dresser he was?

Most authors would consider (11)-(14), in the right context, as reports of putative implicatures ---stronger or weaker, following Sperber and Wilson's (1986) distinction--- of O.J.'s sayings. They could only be considered as reports of what he said, as C&L do, if one ignores the Gricean distinction between what is said and what is implicated by an utterance. And this is what C&L do. Contrary to what they seem to assume when defending (their version of) semantic minimalism,⁶ C&L just end up erasing the Gricean theoretical distinction between what is said and what is implicated by an utterance:

“There is no fundamental theoretical divide between sayings and implicatures. They are both on the side of speech act content. Whatever mechanisms might generate implicatures are also all used to generate what speakers say” (p. 204)

This is really puzzling. C&L's greatest enemies, confessed radical contextualists such as relevance theorists for instance, do admit that the same kind of pragmatic processes are involved in the derivation of both what-is-said (explicatures, in their terminology) and implicatures;⁷ but neither they nor other radical contextualists like Recanati, Searle or Travis are ready to blur the distinction between what-is-said and implicatures. C&L are. And thus, they go not only

⁶ Here for instance: “We agree with her [Carston] that you need a contextually shaped content to generate implicatures in all of the cases she discusses... What's needed in order to derive the implicature in these cases is a contextually shaped content, i.e., a contextually shaped what-is-said.” (p. 180).

⁷ Recanati (2004) makes a distinction between primary and secondary pragmatic processes in order to distinguish the (non-inferential) pragmatic processes involved in getting at 'what is said' and pragmatic processes involved in the inference of implicatures. Relevance theorists think that the same kind of (inferential) pragmatic processes are involved in the derivation of both explicatures and implicatures.

against what everybody else accept in pragmatics nowadays (this we don't consider bad in itself; we sympathize with defenders of unpopular causes), but they go also, we are afraid, against their own version of semantic minimalism.

6. SEMANTIC MINIMALISM DEFEATED

Consider the following premises, both quoted from C&L:

- a. 'There is no fundamental theoretical divide between sayings and implicatures' (p. 204)
- b. 'One of the many propositions asserted by an utterance [i.e., one of the sayings] is the semantic content of the utterance (the proposition semantically expressed)'. (p. 200)

Ergo---one can be lead to conclude:

- c. There is no fundamental theoretical divide between the proposition semantically expressed, sayings and implicatures.

So we are asked to believe that, on the one hand, there is a minimal proposition called the 'semantically expressed proposition', that results from the sentence's conventional semantic meaning plus pragmatic processes of reference fixing, disambiguation, and precisification, that plays a crucial role in a theory of understanding and communication. But, on the other hand, this proposition is only one, among indefinitely many others. What is so important about it? It isn't what is said. Even if it were, it would only be one of indefinitely many "sayings." Why are the factors, specific to the utterance, that resolve ambiguities, the reference of demonstratives and names, worthy of elevation into the well-guarded realm of semantics, while other utterance specific factors are not? The relativity of what is said seems to undermine any story that would account for what is special about their "semantic content."

CONCLUSION

Our main contentions, then, are as follows:

- We agree with C&L in a minimalist conception of semantics. Semantics is the study of the conventional meanings of types of expressions and modes of combination.

- We disagree that the suitable conception of semantic contribution, given the minimalist perspective, is their conception of semantic content, which incorporates into semantics not only the objective contextual facts that resolve the reference of indexicals, but also a number of factors that depend on the intentions of the speaker and perhaps also other mental facts about the participants in the conversation in questions: the resolution of demonstratives, the reference of names, and precisification of vague terms.
- We instead maintain that, insofar as semantics needs to reason about contents (propositions) rather than merely about meanings (or characters), the appropriate vehicle is the utterance-bound content, which quantifies over contextual and intentional factors.
- That said, we do not maintain that such minimal semantic contents are what is said, and we claim that determination of what is said inevitably depends on factors typically inferred by pragmatic methods. Here we agree with C&L.
- We disagree, however, with their skepticism about the theoretical usefulness of what is said. We are confident that a theoretically useful concept of what is said, explicated as locutionary content, can be developed that will play more or less the roles contemplated by both Grice and the new theorists of reference.
- We do not claim to have provided such a concept here, but only to have made some progress towards developing it.

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