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## **Context *ex Machina***

KENT BACH

Once upon a time it was assumed that speaking literally and directly is the norm and that speaking nonliterally or indirectly is the exception. The assumption was that normally what a speaker means can be read off of the meaning of the sentence he utters, and that departures from this, if not uncommon, are at least easily distinguished from normal utterances and explainable along Gricean lines. The departures were thought to be limited to obvious cases like figurative speech and conversational implicature. However, people have come to appreciate that the meaning of a typical sentence, at least one we are at all likely to use, is impoverished, at least relative to what we are likely to mean in uttering it. In other words, what a speaker *normally* means in uttering a sentence, even without speaking figuratively or obliquely, is an enriched version of what could be predicted from the meaning of the sentence alone. This can be because the sentence expresses a “minimal” (or “skeletal”) proposition or even because it fails to express a complete proposition at all.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, it is now a platitude that linguistic meaning generally underdetermines speaker meaning. That is, generally what a speaker means in uttering a sentence, even if the sentence is devoid of ambiguity, vagueness, or indexicality, goes beyond what the sentence means. The question is what to make of this *Contextualist Platitude*, as I’ll call it. It may be a truism, but does it require a radical revision of the older conception of the relation between what sentences mean and what speakers mean in uttering them? Does it lead to a major modification, or perhaps even outright rejection, of the semantic-pragmatic distinction? I think

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<sup>1</sup> To keep matters relatively simple, I will generally limit the discussion to declarative sentences. These are the ones that are, or were, generally thought uncontroversially to express propositions. I will not worry about imperative, interrogative, and more marginal sorts of sentences. I will also assume, perhaps controversially, that declarative sentences are not marked for assertion (or for constative use, to borrow the generic term from speech act theory) in the way that imperative sentences are marked for directive use (for issuing orders, making requests, or giving advice) and interrogative sentences are marked for asking questions.

not. This platitude does not support the radical-sounding views that go by names like ‘contextualism’ and ‘truth-conditional pragmatics’.

I have long accepted a certain picture, inspired partly by Austin and mostly by Grice, of what is involved in language and communication. In my judgment this picture captures both the conventional and the rational (intentional and inferential) ingredients of communication. It provides a basis both for accepting the autonomy of linguistic semantics and for appreciating the complex, creative, and cooperative nature of what people do in speaking to and in understanding one another. It accentuates the importance of a number of fundamental distinctions, which often get blurred, confused, or even ignored. I will begin by sketching this picture of language and communication. Then, in its support, I will offer some simple arguments for ten points.<sup>2</sup>

The collective upshot of these arguments is that the older conception of the relation between what sentences mean and what speakers mean in uttering them is in better shape than has lately been supposed. Not only that, the semantic-pragmatic distinction holds up against the now widely recognized fact that what speakers mean generally goes beyond sentence meaning and does so in ways that not long ago were not even contemplated. I can sum up very simply the rationale behind my allegiance to this older conception. First, the Contextualist Platitude does not require a radical reconstrual of semantics, at least not if we take the meaning of a sentence to be determined compositionally by the meanings of its constituents in a way that is predictable from how its constituents fit together syntactically.<sup>3</sup> However, since for some sentences what is thus determined does not yield a complete proposition, it cannot be assumed that the output of a semantic theory is a set of truth conditions for all the (declarative) sentences of the language. But there is no reason to assume that.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The main elements of this intentional-inferential picture were presented in Bach and Harnish 1979 and are summarized in Bach forthcoming. Various specific features of it are presented in my other papers listed in the References section and in the papers collected in the ‘Semantics-Pragmatics Series’, <http://online.sfsu.edu/~kbach>. At the expense of glossing over certain details, often important ones, here I will focus on the big picture.

<sup>3</sup> I am well aware that this is vague, but I want to put it in a theory-neutral way. Perhaps the semantics of a sentence is a projection of a particular level of its syntax, say its logical form as in GB theory, or maybe there is no one level of syntactic structure that provides the entire input to semantics.

<sup>4</sup> Many (declarative) sentences, though syntactically well-formed, are semantically incomplete, in that they do not express propositions at all, not even relative to a disambiguation and fixation of any references. See the last paragraph of Point 1 and also Bach 1994.

Second, the Contextualist Platitude does not undermine the need for a purely semantic notion of saying and, correlatively, of what is said. We still need the distinction between saying something and meaning something, even if what is said, when not fully propositional, falls short of what a speaker *could* mean. So, for example, if the March Hare exclaimed, “I’m late, I’m late,” but didn’t add “for a very important date,” he still would have said something, even though he didn’t say what he was late for. He could be accurately reported as having said that he was late. Similarly, without the distinction between saying something and meaning something we would have to deny that speakers say anything at all when speaking figuratively. If a disorganized administrator says to his assistant, “You are the CPU of this department,” he really is saying that the assistant is the CPU of that department, even though computers, not departments, have CPUs.

Third, contemporary enthusiasts for contextualism trade on a number of ambiguities involving such terms as ‘say’, ‘mean’, ‘refer’, ‘utterance’, ‘context’, and ‘interpretation’ (see the Appendix for a list of these tricky terms and their dual uses). One especially pernicious ambiguity is displayed by the phrase ‘utterance interpretation’, which is often used by those who wish to replace sentence semantics with truth-conditional pragmatics. While using this phrase to mean the psychological process whereby listeners figure out what speakers are trying to communicate, some contextualists use it as if it meant something more abstract, something akin to semantic interpretation. That is, they treat utterance interpretation as if it were a mapping from syntactic structure to utterance contents, except that the mapping is sensitive to broadly contextual factors.<sup>5</sup> In so doing, they seem to think that an utterance (as opposed to a sentence) can express things independently of what the speaker means in making it, and treat utterances almost as if they are agents.

### **The Picture: Language and Communication**

For the sake of discussion, let’s make the simplifying and rather artificial assumption that utterances are always utterances of complete, grammatical sentences.<sup>6</sup> Then we can focus on

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<sup>5</sup> I am unaware of any general account of what these factors are, although there are accounts of very special cases, such as indexicals and discourse anaphora.

<sup>6</sup> This excludes the complications introduced by utterances of ungrammatical sentences and of mere phrases as well as by various sorts of speech disfluencies, such as breaking off sentences in midstream or punctuating them with ‘um’s, ‘uh’s, and ‘ya know’s. Also, I will be making the common simplifying assumption not only that sentences are the units of utterance (that what counts as one utterance is the utterance of one sentence) but that

sentences and utterances of them. In my view (see Point 1), we should attribute semantic properties to sentences and pragmatic properties to utterances.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this is simple: taken as properties of sentences, semantic properties are on a par with syntactic and phonological properties — they are linguistic properties — whereas pragmatic properties belong to acts of uttering sentences in the course of communicating. This conception of the semantic-pragmatic distinction is inspired by, indeed is a generalization of, Grice's point that what a speaker implicates in saying what he says is carried not by what he says but by his saying it — and sometimes by his saying it in a certain way (1989, 39).<sup>8</sup> The speaker's act of uttering a sentence is what brings extralinguistic information into play.<sup>9</sup>

Then there is Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts, between saying something and doing something in saying it. This distinction is easy to overlook. That is partly because the word 'say' plays a dual role as a locutionary verb and as an illocutionary one, roughly synonymous with 'state' (or 'assert'). In the locutionary sense, one can say something without stating it (or performing any other illocutionary act whose content is what one says). One might not be stating anything, or one might be speaking figuratively and be stating something else, though not expressly. The illocutionary act a speaker performs in saying something depends on his communicative intention.<sup>10</sup> What he means in saying what

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the units of communication are utterances of individual sentences. Though simplifying, this assumption does not imply that what speakers can communicate in uttering a sentence, or what their listeners take them to be communicating, does not depend on the previous discourse. Also, I will focus on spoken language, indeed face-to-face utterances at that. Presumably, though, the same basic principles that govern face-to-face communication govern other sorts of communication as well, even though in those cases the participants generally have less information to go on, about the communicative setting and about each other.

<sup>7</sup> I am supposing that utterances are acts of producing tokens of sentences. Uttered sentences have semantic properties; acts of uttering them do not (of course, speakers' communicative intentions have contents). As for tokens of uttered sentences, they have the semantic properties of the sentences of which they are tokens; they have no semantic properties of their own. Any seemingly semantic properties of tokens are really pragmatic properties of utterances. These depend entirely on the communicative intentions of speakers; semantic properties of sentences and their constituents do not.

<sup>8</sup> I should note that although I agree with Grice that what is said in uttering a sentence is closely correlated with the meanings of the sentence's constituent expressions and how they are put together syntactically, I do not accept his view that saying something entails meaning it. If one is not speaking literally, one is still saying something, even though one means something else. Also, his Grice's conception of what is said did not countenance the case in which a sentence does not express, even relative to the context, a complete proposition. See Bach 1994, 141-4, for discussion of Grice's conception and my reasons for modifying it.

<sup>9</sup> I formulate, motivate, and defend my conception of the semantic-pragmatic distinction in Bach 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Here I depart from Austin (1962), who assimilated all illocutionary acts to the regularized ones performed in special institutional or social settings, and follow Strawson (1964), who argued that most ordinary illocutionary

he says (if he means anything at all) may be just what he says, what he says and more, or something else entirely. What he says provides the linguistic contribution to the audience's inference to his communicative intention. Communicative success requires uttering a sentence which, given the mutually salient information that comprises the extralinguistic cognitive context of utterance, makes the speaker's communicative intention evident and enables his audience to recognize it. The fulfillment of a communicative intention, unlike intentions of other sorts, consists in its recognition. Whereas you can't stand on your head by virtue of anyone's recognizing your intention to do so, you can succeed in communicating something if your listeners recognize your intention to communicate it.

Speakers and listeners rely on certain presumptions, speakers in order to make their communicative intentions evident and listeners to recognize those intentions. Although Grice appears to present his maxims as guidelines for how to communicate successfully, I think they are better construed as presumptions about speaker's intentions. The listener presumes, and the speaker expects him to presume, that the speaker is being cooperative and is speaking truthfully, informatively, relevantly, perspicuously, and otherwise appropriately. Because of their potential clashes, these maxims or presumptions should not be viewed as comprising a decision procedure. Rather, they provide different dimensions of considerations for the hearer to take into account in figuring out the speaker's communicative intention. They ground strategies for a speaker, on the basis of what he says and the fact that he says it, to make what he means evident to the hearer and for the hearer to figure out what the speaker means in saying what he says. Contrary to the popular misconception that these maxims or presumptions play a role only in implicature (and oblique and figurative speech generally), they are operative even when one means just what one says. However, if an utterance superficially appears not to conform to these presumptions, the listener looks for a way of taking the utterance so that it does conform. He does so partly on the supposition that he is intended to do so. Communication is achieved when the audience understands the speaker in the sense of recognizing his communicative intention, partly on the basis of what he says, and partly on the basis, given the conversational presumptions, of the fact that he says it in that particular communicative context.

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acts are not conventional but communicative in character and succeed not by conformity to convention but, in Gricean fashion, by recognition of intention.

Here is a pair of simple examples. A surgeon says to his wife, “I am going to cut the front lawn.” For all that he says, he could mean that he will take a scalpel and use it to cut a number of blades of grass, but of course he does not mean that. His wife, relying on stereotypical knowledge of lawn mowing, presumes that if he did mean that, he would have said more (see Point 6). So she rightly takes him to mean that he will cut the whole lawn with a lawnmower. Later he comes inside, hears the tea kettle screaming for a while and finally goes into the kitchen. Surveying the damage, he finds his wife, tells her she forgot to turn off the stove, and adds, “The tea kettle is completely black.” For all that he says, he could mean that the tea kettle is black all over, rather than at least partly of some other color. But his wife takes him to mean that the tea kettle, which they mutually know to be made of aluminum, has been completely blackened as a result of the mishap in the kitchen. And presumably that’s what he does mean. In both cases, she could not figure out what he meant unless she relied, at least implicitly, on the supposition that he intended her to figure it out, partly on the presumption that he was being relevantly informative. If he meant something less evident, he would have spelled it out. She is to presume, as Stephen Levinson puts it, that “what isn’t said, isn’t” and that “what is simply described is stereotypically exemplified” (2000, 31-32).

It is easy to exaggerate how well linguistic communication works. No doubt many failures of communication do not get noticed and, when they do, do not get mentioned. Still, in order for it to work as well as it does, we as speakers must be very good at selecting sentences whose utterance makes evident to our listeners what we mean, and as listeners we must be very good at figuring out what speakers mean in uttering them.<sup>11</sup> To the extent that we leave much of what we mean to inference, we rely on our listener’s ability to figure out what we

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<sup>11</sup> Much attention has been paid to the processes involved in understanding utterances, but little has been paid to the production side, to how we manage to say what we say. Maybe this is because we don’t really have a clue about this process works, except in the simplest case, in which you utter a sentence whose semantic content is precisely what you are trying to convey, or, as it is casually said, you “put your thoughts into words.” The thing is, though, we rarely do that. Psycholinguists who study language production generally assume, or at least pretend, that we generally do. Making this grossly simplifying assumption still leaves them with plenty to worry about. Even if speech were just a matter of putting a thought into words (perhaps by translating from the language of thought into a natural language), the task of explaining what is involved in speaking would still be daunting. When we have something to say, we need to come up with some linguistic means for saying it: a sentence. We need to recover lexical items and a syntactic form by which to say it, to know what sounds to produce, and to know how to produce them. These stages or levels of speech production are all areas of active psycholinguistic investigation (see Levelt 1989 for a comprehensive survey of the problems under study, and a well-developed approach to them). But the fact is that speaking is rarely a straightforward matter of putting a thought into words, however difficult even this is to explain.

mean on the basis of what we say, given the circumstances in which we say it, the fact that we said that rather than something else, and the presumption that we said it with a recognizable intention. How we manage to make ourselves understood and how we manage to understand others are very complex processes which, like most cognitive processes, are far beyond the reach of contemporary psychology to explain. As theorists, the best we can do is speculate on some of the features of these processes, most notably what it takes to implement Grice's discovery that communication involves a distinctively reflexive intention (and its recognition). Specifically, the intention includes, as part of its content, that the audience recognize this very intention by taking into account the fact that they are intended to recognize it.

What is loosely called 'context' is the conversational setting broadly construed. It is the mutual cognitive context, or salient common ground. It includes the current state of the conversation (what has just been said, what has just been referred to, etc.), the physical setting (if the conversants are face-to-face), salient mutual knowledge between the conversants, and relevant broader common knowledge. As will be argued later (Point 9), so-called context does not determine (in the sense of 'constitute'), but merely enables the hearer to determine (in the sense of 'ascertain'), what the speaker means. It can constrain what a hearer could *reasonably* take a speaker to mean in saying what he says, and it can constrain what the speaker could *reasonably* mean in saying what he says, but it is incapable of determining what the speaker actually does mean. That is a matter of the speaker's communicative intention, however reasonable or unreasonable it may be.

### **Simple Arguments for Ten Points**

I will be offering some simple arguments for the following ten points:

1. Semantics concerns sentences, not utterances.
2. Saying something is one thing, stating or otherwise meaning it is another.
3. Semantic content always underdetermines speaker meaning.
4. We generally don't make fully explicit what we mean, and what we don't is not part of what we say.
5. The semantic content of a (declarative) sentence cannot be equated with what it is normally used to assert.
6. Pragmatic regularities give rise to faulty "semantic" intuitions.
7. Focusing on sentences representative of those we use or might use is to commit a massive

sampling error — even unusable sentences have semantic contents, however unintuitive.

8. What is said (in the locutionary sense) matters even though understanding an utterance often does not require entertaining or representing it.
9. Context does not literally determine what is said or what is meant.
10. Demonstratives and most indexicals do not refer as a function of context — they suffer from a character deficiency.

For some points there will be more than one argument. Indeed, under some there will be more than one point. And some of the arguments may not be entirely simple. So the title of this section is not to be taken quite literally.<sup>12</sup>

### *1. Semantics concerns sentences, not utterances.*

According to the Contextualist Platitude, generally what a sentence means falls well short of what a speaker means in uttering it. Recognizing this platitude has led some implicitly to assume that semantics concerns utterances, not sentences, or even that there is no need for semantics at all (at least construed as that part of grammar that delivers sentence interpretations). The relevant task, it is thought, is to give a theory of something called “utterance interpretation,” not quite psychological but not merely semantic. It is sometimes thought to concern the processes whereby hearers interpret utterances and sometimes to concern something more abstract, analogous to semantic interpretations of sentences but without having to be projections of syntactic structure. The picture of language and communication sketched above should suggest why, even though I accept the Contextualist Platitude, I am against the idea of utterance semantics, but there are direct arguments against it.

One such argument is due to David Kaplan, who stresses the importance of not confusing utterances with sentences-in-contexts. Focusing on the role of semantics in explaining entailment and formal validity, he points out obvious problems that arise, on an utterance semantics, due to utterances of sentences containing indexicals or demonstratives. For example, noting that “utterances take time, and [one speaker’s] utterances of distinct sentences cannot be simultaneous” (1989a, 546), Kaplan argues that utterance semantics would get the

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<sup>12</sup> I have previously argued for some of the points I am defending now, but here I am offering simpler arguments for them. Points 2, 8, and 9 were defended in ‘You don’t say?’ (2001a), points 3 and 4 in ‘Speaking loosely’ (2001b), and Point 6 in ‘Seemingly semantic intuitions’ (2002).



wrong results. He proposes a somewhat idealized conception of context to make allowances for sentences that can be true but cannot be truly uttered ('I am not uttering a sentence'), sentences (or sequences of sentences making up an argument) that take so long to utter that their truth values can change during the course of the utterance, and sentences that are too long to utter at all. For different reasons, utterances of sentences like 'I know a little English' or 'I am alive' are likely to be true, even though their contents are not true in all contexts. For, as Kaplan points out, using 'I say nothing' to illustrate, "there are sentences which express a truth in certain contexts, but not if uttered" (1989b, 584). Similarly, utterances of sentences such as 'I don't know any English' and 'I am deceased' are likely to be false, even though these sentences can still express truths relative to some contexts. These facts can be explained only if semantic contents are assigned to sentences-in-contexts (where contexts here are construed more abstractly than as contexts in which sentences are actually uttered), not to utterances.

Kaplan's arguments are nice, but they exploit special features of particular sentences. There is a more general reason for rejecting utterance semantics. Consider that utterances are often nonliteral, in which case a speaker says one thing and means something else instead (also, many utterances are indirect — even if the speaker means what he says, he means something else as well). For example, one might say 'I could eat a million of those chips' and mean something a bit more realistic. Now surely it is not the business of semantics to account for the contents of utterances that are not literal, since in such cases the speaker is trying to convey something that is not predictable from the meaning of the uttered sentence (or, if it is ambiguous, from its operative meaning). Obviously not just anything that a speaker means, no matter how far removed it is from what the sentence means, counts as semantic content, and the semantic content of the sentence is the same whether an utterance of it is literal or not. So semantic content is a property of the sentence, not the utterance. After all, the fact that the sentence is uttered is a pragmatic fact, not a semantic one.

Moreover, the only respect in which an utterance has content over and above that of the uttered sentence is as an intentional act performed by a speaker.<sup>13</sup> And in that respect, the content of an utterance is really the content of the speaker's communicative intention in

making the utterance. In other words, the only relevant linguistic content is the semantic content of the sentence, and the only other relevant content is the content of the speaker's intention. Focusing on the normal case of successful communication, where the listener gets the speaker's communicative intention right, can make it seem as though an utterance has content in its own right, independently of that intention. But this is illusory, as is evident whenever communication fails. In that case, in which the speaker means one thing and his audience thinks he means something else, there is what the speaker means and what his listener takes him to mean, but there is no independent utterance content.

The claim that semantics concerns sentences, not utterances, is not undercut by the fact that many (declarative) sentences, though syntactically well-formed, are semantically incomplete, in that they do not express propositions at all, not even relative to a disambiguation and fixation of any references. Truth-conditional pragmaticists, especially relevance theorists (they imagine that virtually all sentences are semantically incomplete in this sense), are overly impressed by this fact. This fact exposes a tension between two traditional conceptions of sentence semantics — as giving truth conditions and as providing interpretations of logical forms. It used to be assumed that the two go together, at least in the case of declarative sentences. Every such sentence, it was thought, has a truth condition (at least relative to a context), and a semantic theory delivers the truth condition off of the logical form of the sentence (assuming this is the level of syntactic representation that provides the input to semantics), as a function of the semantic values of the basic constituents of the sentence and their syntactic arrangement. However, since some, indeed a great many, sentences are semantically incomplete, the presumed confluence of the two conceptions breaks down — what the compositional semantics delivers often needs some sort of completion or augmentation before a truth condition (or something with a truth condition, i.e., a proposition) is yielded. But requiring a truth condition for every sentence conflicts with the other conception of semantics, on which the semantic content of a sentence is a projection of its syntax. In my view, we need to opt for this second conception. To do so is not to give up semantic compositionality but only to abandon the dogmatic assumption that every

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<sup>13</sup> As explained in note 7, I am taking utterances to be acts of uttering sentences, not the tokens of sentences thereby produced. Sentence tokens do not have semantic properties independently of the sentence types of which they are tokens.

(declarative) sentence has a truth condition (relative to a context).<sup>14</sup> Nor does it require, on the grounds that utterances of (declarative) sentences that do not have truth conditions do have truth conditions, changing the subject matter of semantics from sentences to utterances. We merely need to recognize that when speakers utter semantically incomplete sentences, they must mean something that includes an element that does not correspond to anything in the syntax of the sentence.

*2. Saying something is one thing, stating or otherwise meaning it is another.*

Austin's distinction between "locutionary" and "illocutionary" acts, between saying something and doing something in saying it, is commonly neglected these days. Perhaps that is because it is so easy to use 'say' interchangeably with 'state' (or 'assert'). But stating or asserting is a case of performing an illocutionary act, of meaning and trying to communicate something, and that goes beyond mere saying (in the locutionary sense).

Why is the locutionary notion of saying needed, along with the correlative, strictly semantic notion of what is said? It is needed to account for the each of the following cases, situations in which the speaker:

- says something but doesn't mean anything at all (by 'mean' here I mean 'intend to communicate')
- does not say what he intends to say, as in the misuse of a word or a slip of the tongue
- means what he says and something else as well (cases of implicature and of indirect speech acts in general)
- (intentionally) says one thing and means something else instead (nonliteral utterances)

So far as I know, no one who rejects a strictly semantic notion of what is said has addressed the question of what is said in each of these cases. In the first case, allowances have to be made for (the verbal side of) such activities as acting and translating. The need to provide for the second and third cases is obvious. As for the last case, suppose someone speaks

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<sup>14</sup> Given the phenomenon of semantic incompleteness, it is not generally feasible to give the semantics of sentences, by means of T-sentences, in terms of truth conditions. For example, if 'Steel isn't strong enough' is semantically incomplete, then the T-sentence 'The sentence "Steel isn't strong enough" is true iff steel isn't strong enough' is semantically incomplete too. It is more feasible to specify the semantics of such a sentence in terms of its propositional content, whether or not complete. I call the contents of semantically incomplete sentences 'propositional radicals' (Bach 1994, 127), but sometimes they are called 'propositional matrices' or 'partial propositions'.

endearingly to his lover, ‘You are the ketchup on my fries.’ Presumably he is not speaking literally (never mind the merits of his figure of speech). So whatever he means and thereby states (a matter of his communicative intention) is distinct from what he is saying. But this requires that he is saying something.<sup>15</sup>

### *3. Semantic content always underdetermines speaker meaning.*

The Contextualist Platitude says that semantic content generally underdetermines speaker meaning. There are several obvious reasons for this. For one thing, the semantic content of many (declarative) sentences is not a complete proposition (something truth-evaluable). So if a speaker utters such a sentence and what he means must be a complete proposition, the semantic content of the sentence cannot comprise what he means. For another thing, insofar as much natural language is vague, then arguably, at least on the assumption that there are no vague propositions, there is no fact of the matter as to which proposition a given sentence expresses. Then, if what a speaker means in uttering a vague sentence is precise, the sentence’s semantic content does not determine what he means.<sup>16</sup> A third reason why semantic content can underdetermine speaker meaning is that the speaker might not mean something determinately. A fourth reason is that even if the semantic content of the sentence a speaker utters is a complete and precise proposition, the speaker might mean something else or something more. He might not be speaking literally, and he might be speaking indirectly.

These are reasons why semantic content *often* underdetermines speaker meaning. But I am making a stronger claim: the semantic content of a sentence, even considered relative to a reading, a resolution of any vagueness, and a set of referents of context-sensitive elements, including indexicals and tense markers, *always* underdetermines what a speaker means in uttering it. Here’s why. Even if what a speaker means consists precisely in the semantic

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<sup>15</sup> There is a further reason for adopting a strictly semantic notion of what is said. As we will see in Point 7 below, there are a great many sentences whose semantic contents are too bizarre for them ever to be uttered (what such a sentence means is not something a speaker would ever mean or could even say in order to mean something else). Nevertheless, if you uttered such a sentence, you would say something: whatever the semantics of that sentence predicts you’d say.

<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, if what a speaker means can be less than fully precise, it may be that the semantic content of the sentence he uses does comprise what he means. Here I am assuming a distinction between imprecision and indeterminacy — it can be determinate that the speaker means such-and-such even if the proposition that such-and-such is imprecise. Contrariwise, it could be indeterminate what a speaker means even if the plausible candidates for what he means are all perfectly precise propositions.

content of the sentence he utters and that content is precise, this fact is not determined by the semantic content of the sentence. The reason for this claim is very simple: no sentence has to be used in accordance with its semantic content. *Any* sentence can be used in a nonliteral or indirect way. A speaker can always mean something distinct from the semantic content of the sentence he is uttering. That he is attempting to communicate something, and what that is, is a matter of his communicative intention, if indeed he has one. If he is speaking literally and means precisely what his words mean, even that fact depends on his communicative intention.<sup>17</sup>

Also, what is said (in the locutionary sense) does not depend on the speaker's communicative intention. Although what a speaker chooses to say and how he chooses to say it (a certain sentence on a certain reading) depends on what he wishes to convey, what he says is compatible with any of various communicative intentions that he might have in uttering it (if indeed he has any), regardless of how obscure that intention may be. So what he says cannot depend on what his communicative intention actually is.

*4. We generally don't make fully explicit what we mean, and what we don't is not part of what we say.*

We generally don't say what we mean, not because we're usually insincere but rather because we leave much of what we mean to inference. Even when we are using words or phrases literally, we generally do not use the entire sentence literally. That is, what the sentence means, and what we thereby say in uttering it, comprises merely a skeletal version of what we mean. For example, suppose a customer at a Taco Bell says, "I want a taco." Presumably he means that he wants to be presented with, within a short time, a ready to eat, uncontaminated taco of a normal size. But obviously he doesn't say most of this, and the sentence he uses is not an elliptical version of some more elaborate sentence that spells these things out. This phenomenon is so pervasive that we tend not to notice it, not just when engaged in ordinary conversation but even when theorizing about language and communication.

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<sup>17</sup> This is why, contrary to a widespread misconception, Gricean maxims (or conversational presumptions, as I prefer to think of them) are operative *whenever* we use language to communicate. As mentioned earlier, they do not come into play only when a speaker seems to be implicating something, is performing an indirect speech act, or is not speaking literally — they always apply.

To begin to appreciate this point, just glance at some examples of sentences taken out of context, in this case from newspaper articles or letters to the editor.

- (1) It could have been worse.
- (2) We regret any confusion.
- (3) Water is a matter of public debate.
- (4) The information really helped show us where there were holes in the system.
- (5) San Francisco is less of a problem because we have more aggressive code enforcement.
- (6) Requiring the use of barbless hooks, recycling fishing line, and posting signs in multiple languages that describe how to properly unhook birds would diminish the problem.

In each case, it should be obvious that something is missing in what is said, relative to what the writer meant, but what that is is not at all obvious.<sup>18</sup>

We generally don't make fully explicit what we mean in uttering a sentence, even when we're using the individual words in them literally. Then for every sentence we do utter, there is a more elaborate, qualified version we could utter that would make what we mean more explicit. However, these are not the sentences we do utter. Indeed, they are not ones we even think to utter. Surely we don't form a thought to express, think of an elaborate sentence to express it with, and then, in the interests of conversational efficiency, work out a stripped down version of the sentence to use instead. Whatever qualifications or disclaimers the writers of the above sentences may have intended, surely convoluted sentences expressing them didn't first come to their minds, only to then to be edited.

*5. The semantic content of a (declarative) sentence cannot be equated with what it is normally used to assert.*

Offhand, one might think that for any sentence, the most likely use of that sentence is a literal one. However, this is not true of most sentences we use. Indeed, a great many sentences are very hard to use literally, even if one uses the individual words and phrases in them literally. Normal uses of the following sentences illustrate what I call *sentence nonliterality* (Bach 2001b). In each case, what a speaker is likely to assert includes the contents of the italicized parenthetical words, even though these are not parts the sentences being uttered.

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<sup>18</sup> Note that to say that the utterance is taken out of context does not show that context provides the missing elements. See Point 9.

- (7) Alice hasn't taken a bath (*today*).
- (8) Barry and Carrie went to Paris (*together*).
- (9) The table (*in this room*) is covered with books
- (10) Fran will get George's job (*immediately*) after he retires.
- (11) Eve had nothing (*suitable*) to wear.

Sentence nonliterality might seem paradoxical or at least puzzling, but it is not. It is entirely predictable, given the way in which the efficiencies of ordinary communication interact with linguistic meaning. Maybe there is a conversational presumption that sentences are used literally, but if so this is one presumption that is commonly overridden.

There is nothing particularly normal about speaking literally. Indeed, as Point 4 suggested, most sentences that are used at all tend not to be used literally.<sup>19</sup> That is why it is naive to suppose that the semantic content of a declarative sentence (relative to a context) can be defined as what a speaker would normally assert in uttering the sentence. Indeed, to suppose that for most sentences a likely use of it is a literal one can, as we will see next, lead to erroneous semantic judgments (or so-called intuitions). Relying on such judgments implicitly assumes that if a sentence would normally be used in a certain way, that use is a literal use. In fact, it is to be expected that intuitions about what is said should be faulty, given our ability to say one thing and successfully convey something much richer and our correlative ability to recognize what others are doing when they are exercising that first ability. These abilities of ours are so fluent as to distort our reflective semantic judgments. What we think is expressed by a given sentence is colored by what we know a speaker is likely to mean in uttering it, especially if there is some one sort of context which we tend to imagine it being used in. To keep one's semantic judgments from being pragmatically contaminated, it is always a good idea to imagine a variety of contexts of use, even wildly improbable ones.

#### *6. Pragmatic regularities give rise to faulty "semantic" intuitions.*

Some philosophers think that explaining semantic intuitions is the job of semantics. One would have thought that its job is to explain semantic facts, for which intuitions are merely evidence. In my view, there is no particular reason to suppose that such intuitions are reliable and robust or, indeed, that they are responsive mainly to semantic and not to pragmatic facts.

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<sup>19</sup> A great many more sentences are not used at all, and most of those are not even feasible to use. See Point 7.

Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that such intuitions play a role in the process of communication.

Now according to the previous point, the semantic content of a (declarative) sentence is not to be identified with what it would normally be used to assert. Not only that, since our intuitions about the semantic contents of sentences tend to be geared to what they're used to assert, our intuitions are biased toward typical uses rather than literal uses.<sup>20</sup> To appreciate this reconsider the examples listed above and some variations on them.

- (7) a. Alice hasn't taken a bath.
  - b. Alice hasn't taken a bath *today*.
  - c. Alice hasn't taken a bath *since she found a dead rat in the tub*.
- (8) a. Barry and Carrie went to Paris.
  - b. Barry and Carrie went to Paris *together*.
  - c. Barry and Carrie *each* went to Paris *last summer*.
- (9) a. The table is covered with books.
  - b. The table *in this room* is covered with books
  - c. The table *I finished painting five minutes ago* is covered with books.
- (10) a. Eve had nothing to wear.
  - b. Eve had nothing *suitable* to wear *to the opera*.
  - c. Eve had nothing (*at all*) to wear *when she finished skinny dipping*.
- (11) a. Fran will get George's job after he retires.
  - b. Fran will get George's job *immediately* after he retires.
  - c. Fran will get George's job *but not for at least two years* after he retires.

Regarding examples like these, it is often claimed that what a speaker says in uttering one of the (a) sentences is the same thing as he would have said in uttering the corresponding (b) sentence. The only difference, it is suggested, is that the (b) sentence makes what is said more

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<sup>20</sup> As the following examples illustrate, seemingly semantic intuitions tend to be responsive more to what is meant (or even implied) than to what is merely said. Interestingly, theorists who rely on such intuitions tend themselves to elide the distinction between what is meant and what is said. Part of the explanation for this tendency is that the sentences we utter tend to mean much less than what we mean in uttering them. The sentences we utter often express so-called "minimal" propositions rather than the richer propositions we mean in uttering them. However, theorists tend to let their conversational competence, which includes the ability to exploit various sorts of pragmatic regularities, to get in the way of their professional judgment. They consider isolated sentences, implicitly assume typical contexts of utterance, imagine what utterances of them would likely be intended to convey, and attribute the result to the semantics of the sentence or to what it says. See Bach 2002 for further discussion.



explicit.<sup>21</sup> However, it would seem that to utter the (a) sentence is not to *say* something that would be said in an utterance of the corresponding (b) sentence. After all, even if a speaker meant what the (b) sentence expresses, he could have meant something else, such as what is expressed by the (c) sentence, in which case he would have *said* the same thing. No one would suggest that what the speaker would have *said* in that case is what the (c) sentence expresses. By parity of reasoning, there is no reason to suppose that if what the speaker meant is in fact what the (b) sentence expresses, this is what he said either.

People's intuitions about what sentences mean and what speakers say tend to be insensitive to the distinction between the semantic content of a sentence and what it is most likely to be used to convey. Intuitions are tainted also by the fact that when a sentence is considered in isolation, certain default assumptions are made about the circumstances of utterance. These assumptions depend on one's knowledge of the world and of people's typical communicative purposes. So we tend not to discriminate between the semantic content of a sentence and the likely force of uttering a sentence with that content. This is just what you'd expect if speakers typically don't make fully explicit what they mean and exploit the fact that it's obvious what they leave out.

We read things into the meaning of a sentence or into what a speaker says in uttering it that are really consequences of its being uttered under normal circumstances. Our seemingly semantic intuitions are responsive to *pragmatic regularities*. Pragmatic regularities include regularized uses of specific expressions and constructions that go beyond conventional meaning, as well as general patterns of efficient communication, which involve streamlining stratagems on the part of speakers and inferential heuristics on the parts of listeners. These regularities are pragmatic because it is the speaker's act of uttering a given sentence, not the sentence itself, that carries the additional element of information.

*That* a speaker says what he says rather than something else can contribute to what a speaker is likely to be taken to mean. Indeed, that he says it one way, by using certain words rather than certain others, can also contribute to what he is likely to be taken to mean in using those words. But people's intuitions (even philosophers') about what is said tend to be

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<sup>21</sup> Some relevance theorists go so far as to claim that the (b) sentence gives the "explicit content" of the (a) sentence, even though an utterance of the (a) sentence is less explicit, relative to what the speaker means. Here they seem to overlook the obvious difference between something's being explicit and, as their term 'explicature' suggests, its being made explicit.

insensitive to these subtleties. Even so, people's actual reasoning in the course of figuring out what speakers mean takes these considerations into account. So, for example, a listener supposes that:

- If the speaker could have made a stronger statement, he would have.
- If the speaker needed to have been more specific, he would have.
- If there was something special about the situation, the speaker would have mentioned it.

However, if what the speaker actually said is obviously not strong or specific enough but it is obvious how he could have explicitly made it stronger or more specific, he does not need to do so. It is presumed that additional information, were it mentioned, would have needed to be mentioned. In both reasoning generally and in rational communication in particular, we presume that things are not out of the ordinary unless there is reason to think that they are, and we presume that if there is such reason, this would occur to us (see Bach 1984). So, as Stephen Levinson puts it, "If [an] utterance is constructed using simple, brief, unmarked forms, this signals business as usual, that the described situation has the expected, stereotypical properties" (2000, 6). Otherwise, as he goes on to say, "If, in contrast, the utterance is constructed using marked, prolix, or unusual forms, this signals that the described situation is itself unusual or unexpected or has special properties."<sup>22</sup> Also, to make fully explicit what one means, when one could speak much more economically and exploit the default assumptions that in fact obtain in the circumstances in which one is speaking, would not only take an effort and be boring, it would be misleading.

So there is no need, at least not in general, to expect semantics to explain what people would normally mean in uttering a given sentence. One shouldn't let features of stereotypical utterance contexts get incorporated into the semantics of a sentence. Nor should the fact that the utterance of a given sentence is likely to have a certain intuitive content not obviously

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<sup>22</sup> Levinson identifies three presumptions or "heuristics" that yield defeasible inferences as to a speaker's communicative intention (2000, 31-34):

- Q-heuristic: what isn't said, isn't.
- I-heuristic: What is simply described is stereotypically exemplified.
- R-heuristic: What's said in an abnormal way, isn't normal.

These are closely related, respectively, to Grice's (1989, 25-6) first maxim of quantity ("Make your contribution as informative as is required", second maxim of quantity ("Do not make your contribution more informative than is required?"), and maxim of manner ("Be perspicuous," and specifically to the submaxims "Avoid obscurity of expression" and "Avoid prolixity").

projectible from its form automatically elicit an explanation in terms of more subtle elements of form. Although there may be special cases that require semantic explanation, grounded in syntax or in lexical structure, these are only special cases. Generalizing from these cases leads to an overgeneration problem — more structure, hence more meaning or more meanings, than most sentences really have. Similarly, there is no need for an expansive notion of what is said, on which what is said is not entirely predictable from the semantic content of the sentence.

7. *Focusing on sentences representative of those we use or might use is to commit a massive sampling error — even unusable sentences have semantic contents, however unintuitive.*

Most of the (English) sentences that philosophers and linguists use as examples (of course linguists look at much wider and richer ranges of examples) presumably are representative of the vast variety of sentences that (English) speakers have used or might use (this ignores the fact that interest in particular linguistic phenomena often focuses attention on unrepresentative clumps of examples). However, sentences actually used or even potentially usable are not representative of (English) sentences in general. That is not just because most sentences are far too long to be used in real life. Most sentences, even ones of fairly modest length, express things that are too bizarre ever to say, much less mean (the really long ones express things that are just too complex to understand). Here are some random examples:

- (12) a. Three triangular raisins and an active, orbital clone brainwashed some unusually packaged concubines.
- b. A ghastly horde of flunkies died in order to maim an erotic barn until forty-three rutabagas imploded.
- c. Some refugees cashed in because a beef cake refused to protest against an overwhelmingly addictive searchlight.
- d. Any support group can revolve unless the one and only blasphemous infrared asylum shoplifts with gusto.
- e. Cyborgs blushed, as if your mom believed in ridiculously macrobiotic rainbows, while the plumb bobs rejoiced randomly.

To convince yourself that simply by concentrating on sentences people might actually use philosophers and linguists tend to commit a massive sampling error, visit a random sentence generator on the Internet. With its help you can find all the examples you want of sentences

no one would ever have occasion to use, except perhaps under extremely bizarre circumstances.<sup>23</sup> Many of these, I bet, are sentences whose utterance most competent speakers would regard as utter nonsense, as not saying anything. Yet such sentences are perfectly meaningful (well, maybe ‘perfectly’ is a slight exaggeration) and are as much the business of semantics to reckon with as those that have a prayer of ever being uttered. They are perfectly typical sentences of English (or whatever the language in question), even if not typical of sentences we utter.

Why does this point matter? Because a great many claims that philosophers or linguists make about the semantics of sentences and about “what is said” by sentences (or by utterances of them) depends on ignoring such sentences. However, unusable sentences still mean something, and something would be said in uttering them, even though such sentences would never ever be used at all. Most sentences are unusable, and for them nothing counts as a normal use. That is enough to show (Point 5) the error in supposing that what a sentence means, or its semantic content relative to a context of use, is what it would normally be used to assert. So we should not suppose that English grammar is so constrained that most meaningful, well-formed sentences express (have as their semantic contents) things we are ever likely to mean — or even say. The semantic contents of sentences that no one would ever have a use for are determined in just the same way as the semantic contents of other sentences, compositionally as a function of their constituents and their syntactic structure. For those sentences, we can’t depend on our intuitions about what they mean or about what speakers would say or mean in uttering them. Their semantic contents are too bizarre to be at all intuitive.

8. *What is said (in the locutionary sense) matters even though understanding an utterance often does not require entertaining or representing it.*

Four reasons were given under Point 2 above for the need for a strictly semantic notion of what is said. However, neglecting such reasons some (e.g., Recanati 1995 and 2001, and Carston 2002, 170-183) have argued against the empirical relevance of a strictly semantic

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<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, randomly pick sentences that you hear or read and in each one randomly substitute nouns for nouns, verbs for verbs, adjectives for adjectives, etc. Repeat as long as you want. If you think that some kinds of semantic anomaly yield ungrammaticality, try different random substitutions when need be until a grammatical sentence is yielded.

notion of what is said on the grounds that it plays no role in the psychology of utterance understanding. Their argument comes down to this: people can usually figure out what a speaker says, in the looser, partly pragmatic sense of 'say', without having (first) to figure out what the speaker says in the strict semantic sense. However, as I have previously replied (Bach 2001a, 24-25), it is not obvious why facts about what the hearer does in order to understand what the speaker says should be relevant to what the speaker says in the first place. How could the fact (if it is a fact) that what is said sometimes doesn't get calculated (explicitly inferred) by the hearer show that it is a mere abstraction? Employing the semantic notion of what is said does not commit one to an account of the temporal order or other details of the process of understanding. This notion pertains to the character of the information available to the hearer in the process of identifying what the speaker is communicating, not to how that information is exploited. Even if what is said (strictly speaking) is not actually calculated, it can still play a role. Although a hearer might not explicitly represent what is said by the utterance of a sentence, hence not explicitly judge that it is not what is meant, still he would be making the *implicit* assumption that it is not what is meant. Implicit assumptions are an essential ingredient in default reasoning in general (Bach 1984) and in the process of understanding utterances in particular. Communicative reasoning, like default reasoning in general, is a case of jumping to conclusions without explicitly taking into account all alternatives or all relevant considerations. Even so, to be warranted such reasoning must be sensitive to relevant considerations and relevant alternatives. This means that such considerations can play a dispositional role even when they do not play an explicit role.

That's my previous, complicated reply to the argument that what is said, in any empirically legitimate sense, generally must be calculated by the hearer. Here is simpler reply, a *reductio ad absurdum* based on recent work by the psycholinguist Raymond Gibbs (2002). Gibbs's work has shown, just as one would intuitively expect, that understanding of clearly figurative utterances can often be achieved without calculating what is said even in a loose sense. For example, listeners can figure out what a speaker means in uttering sentences like (13) and (14) without first calculating their literal meanings or figuring out what a speaker would mean if he used them literally:

(13) The best ladder to success is hard work.

(14) The economic downturn poured cold water over my ambitions.

If Gibbs is right, then the very argument designed to debunk a strictly semantic notion of what is said works just as well against the looser, allegedly more intuitive notion. In relying on the psychological fact that often the hearer need not calculate what is said in the strict semantic sense in order to understand what a speaker means, this argument would lead to the absurd conclusion that clearly figurative contents, when they are all that is calculated, count as what is said. So being the first proposition calculated by the listener is not a good test for being what is said by the speaker.

*9. Context does not literally determine what is said or what is meant.*

It is often casually remarked that what a speaker says or means in uttering a given sentence “depends on context,” is “determined” or “provided” by context, or is otherwise a “matter of context.” That’s not literally true. Assume that by context we mean something like the mutually salient features of the conversational situation. Does context determine what the speaker says? Suppose he utters an ambiguous sentence, say “Gina wants to belong to a golf club.” Presumably he is saying that Gina wants to belong to a group of golfers, but given the ambiguity of ‘golf club’, he could be saying, however bizarrely, that Gina wants to belong to a thing that is used to hit golf balls. Context doesn’t literally determine that he does not.

And context doesn’t constrain what a speaker actually means. It can constrain only what he can reasonably mean and reasonably be taken to mean. That is, it constrains what communicative intention he can have in uttering a given sentence and reasonably expect to get recognized. So suppose someone says, “Harry has a happy face.” Presumably what he means is something to the effect that Harry has a facial expression indicating that he’s happy. Even so, he could mean, however strangely, that Harry’s face is itself happy (as if faces can be in different moods on the sadness-happiness scale). Similarly, a speaker who says, “Many investors lost every dollar,” presumably means that many investors in some particular deal each lost every dollar that they respectively put into that deal, even though that goes well beyond the meaning of the sentence. But it is not literally context that determines that this is what the speaker means in uttering the sentence.

*Breakfast Anyone?*

To appreciate what context doesn’t do, let’s revisit a commonly discussed example and

examine it more closely. The discussion will also revisit some earlier points about intuitions. This is relevant because it is often claimed that our intuitions correctly recognize the contribution of context to what is said.

(15) I haven't had breakfast.

The usual line on this example is that someone who utters it on a given day says that they haven't had breakfast *that day* and that this element of what is said is provided by context. If that were correct, then what one says in uttering (15) would be no different from what one would have said if one had uttered (15') instead,

(15') I haven't had breakfast today.

However, if you ask people if there's any difference between what is said when (15') rather than (15) is uttered, many will say, yes, there is a difference: the speaker of (15) didn't *say* that he hadn't had breakfast that day. That's because he left this for inference (notice that this inference is much harder to make if (15) is uttered late in the day).

It might be replied that the speaker of (15) didn't *explicitly* say that he hadn't had breakfast *that day*. That is, he didn't spell out the relevant time period. But why suppose that this was *said* at all? Of course, it was what the speaker meant in saying what he said, but he just didn't quite say it and left it for his audience to figure out. Is that so hard to accept? Evidently.

All right. Then presumably someone who utters (16), the positive version of (15), on a particular day, says that they have had breakfast that day.

(16) I have had breakfast.

Well, then, compare what someone would say in uttering that with what they would say in uttering each of these sentences:

(17) a. I have filed my tax returns.

b. I have eaten caviar.

c. I have had breakfast in bed.

In uttering (17a) a speaker wouldn't be saying that he has filed his tax returns that day. That year is more like it, but he not *saying* that either. In uttering (17b), he wouldn't be saying that he has eaten caviar that day. Probably what he means is that he has eaten caviar before. And if he uttered (17c), surely he wouldn't be saying (or meaning) that he has had breakfast in bed that day. So context doesn't determine what he does mean.

Moreover, it is easy to imagine circumstances, however improbable, in which someone who utters (15) does not mean that he hasn't had breakfast that day. Here are a few such circumstances.

- the speaker works the graveyard shift and utters (15) to a co-worker shortly after midnight
- it is common to have breakfast at work, even if one has already had it at home
- people are permitted to have breakfast only one day each week
- having breakfast is illegal

You can figure out for yourself what the speaker probably would mean in each of these situations. In none of them would someone who uttered (15) be saying, much less mean, that he hadn't had breakfast that day. So, it might be objected, the context makes the difference: someone who utters (15) in a *normal context* says that they haven't had breakfast *that day*. If they had uttered it in one of the other contexts, they would have said something else, and in each case the difference would be explained by the difference in context.

This context *ex machina* explanation is feeble. Context doesn't *determine* anything in these cases. Rather, it's the speaker's communicative intention that picks up the slack. But communicative intentions can affect only what is meant, not what is said. Communicative intentions cannot affect what is said in a given context, since one could say a certain thing in a given context and mean any one of a number of things in saying it. To be sure, maybe only one of those things is what one could reasonably mean in saying that, and only one of those things is what one could plausibly be taken to mean in saying that, but what one can reasonably mean or plausibly be taken to mean in saying something need not be what one actually said. And, as noted in Point 4 above, with many sentences what is said in uttering the sentence is something that one cannot reasonably mean or reasonably be taken to mean — in such cases it is very hard to mean that rather than some qualified version of what is said.

I neglected to mention why philosophers are inclined to insist that in uttering (15) a speaker says that he hasn't had breakfast that day, and not that he hasn't had breakfast, period. They are appalled at the alternative. Surely, they maintain, he didn't say that he hadn't *ever* had breakfast or that he hadn't *previously* had breakfast. But of course he didn't *say* either of those things (he didn't utter any such word). He *said* that he hadn't had breakfast, period. Objectors who complain that it is just counterintuitive to suppose that the speaker of (15) said that he hadn't had breakfast, period, support their complaint by arguing that my view makes



the highly implausible assumption that a Gricean quality implicature is operative here. They suppose that I am committed to the claim that the listener has to infer that the speaker meant that he hadn't had breakfast that day (partly) from the fact that what he said was so glaringly false (surely he has had breakfast before). But this is not what I am assuming. The example is a case of conversational *implicature*, not implicature (see Bach 1994), and what the speaker means is an expanded version of what he said, the proposition that is obtained from the explicit propositional content by including an additional element, in this case a restriction of the time period to the day of the utterance. What drives the inference is not the falsity of the explicit propositional content but its lack of relevant specificity. This is evident if we consider that the same thing occurs with the affirmative sentence, 'I have had breakfast'. This sentence is obviously true rather than glaringly false, but what a speaker is likely to mean in uttering it is something more relevantly specific, that he has had breakfast that day.

*10. Demonstratives and most indexicals do not refer as a function of context — they suffer from a character deficiency.*

The reference of so-called pure indexicals, such as 'I' and 'today', is determined by their linguistic meanings as a function of specific contextual variables (this is context in the narrow, semantically relevant sense). However, the reference of other indexicals and of demonstratives is, as Perry puts it, "discretionary" rather than "automatic," and depends on the speaker's intention, not just on "meaning and public contextual facts" (2001, 58-59). That is, the speaker's semantic intention is not just another contextual variable, not just one more element of what Kaplan calls "character" (1989a, 505). The fact that this intention determines the referent does not imply that the specification of the meaning of a discretionary indexical or a demonstrative contains a parameter for the speaker's intention. Rather, given the meaning of such an expression, in using it a speaker must have some intention in order to provide it with content relative to the context in which he is using it.

It is a separate question whether the audience can identify the referent (assuming the speaker is using the expression referentially). In order to ensure that, the speaker needs to take mutually salient contextual information into account in forming his intention. He must exploit such information in deciding what expression to use to refer to a certain individual. He would thereby intend his audience to rely on such information in order to identify that individual,

and to take him as intending them to rely on it in so doing. In the course of forming an intention to refer to something and choosing a term to refer to it with, to make his intention evident a speaker exploits what is antecedently salient in the speech situation or else makes something salient by demonstrating it or with the words he uses (the gender of a pronoun, the nominal in a demonstrative phrase, or even predicate in the sentence). The communicative context (context broadly construed) enables the audience to determine (in the sense of ascertain) what he is referring to, but it does not literally determine (in the sense of constitute) the reference. Of course, in order for his referential intention to be reasonable, he needs to utter something in that communicative context such that his audience, taking him to have such an intention and relying on contextual information that they can reasonably take him to intend them rely on, can figure out what the intended reference is.

So neither sort of context, narrow or broad, determines the references of demonstratives and discretionary indexicals. Unlike pure indexicals, they do not refer as a function of the contextual variables, the narrow context, given by their meanings. Nor does the broad, communicative context determine the reference, in the sense of making it the case that the expression has a certain reference. That merely enables the audience to figure out the reference. So we might say that demonstratives and discretionary indexicals suffer from a *character deficiency* — they do not refer as a function of context. Accordingly, it is only in an attenuated sense that these expressions can be called ‘referring’ expressions. Besides, they have clearly non-referring uses, e.g., as proxies for definite descriptions and as something like bound variables.<sup>24</sup>

Some simple examples involving reference and anaphora will illustrate the role of speakers’ intentions. Compare (18a) and (18b):

- (18) a. A cop arrested a robber. He was wearing a badge.  
b. A cop arrested a robber. He was wearing a mask.

It is natural to suppose that in (18a) ‘he’ refers to the cop and in (18b) to the robber. It is natural all right, but not inevitable. The speaker of (18a) could be using ‘he’ to refer to the robber, and the speaker of (18b) could be using it to refer to the cop. Such speakers would probably not be understood correctly, at least not without enough stage setting to override

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<sup>24</sup> See Neale 1990, ch. 5. King 2001 shows likewise for complex demonstratives (demonstrative phrases of the form ‘that F’).

commonsense knowledge about cops and robbers, but that would be a pragmatic mistake. Nevertheless, the fact that ‘he’ could be so used indicates that it is the speaker’s semantic intention, not the context, which determines that in (18a) it refers to the cop and in (18b) to the robber. The same point applies to these examples with two anaphora:

- (19) a. A cop arrested a robber. He took away his gun.  
b. A cop arrested a robber. He used his gun.  
c. A cop arrested a robber. He dropped his gun.  
d. A cop arrested a robber. He took away his gun and escaped.

In (19a), presumably ‘he’ would be used to refer to the cop and ‘his’ to the robber, whereas in (19b) both would be used to refer to the cop, in (19c) both would be used to refer to the robber, and in (19d) ‘he’ would be used to the robber and ‘his’ to the cop. However, given the different uses of the pronouns in what is essentially the same linguistic environment, clearly it is the speaker’s intention, not the context, that explains these differences in reference. It is a different, pragmatic matter how the audience resolves these anaphors and determines what they refer to. The broad, communicative context does not determine what these references are but merely provides the extralinguistic information that enables the audience to figure them out.

### **The Bottom Line**

The ten points and the arguments for them presented here provide new support for the older picture of language and communication, and help sustain a fairly standard semantic-pragmatic distinction. The basic idea is very simple: what a speaker says (I don’t mean the fact that he says it) depends on the semantic content of the sentence he utters and not on the communicative intention with which, or on the cognitive context in which, he utters it.

Context, like minoxidil and anti-oxidants, has limited benefits. Leaving aside the special case of pure indexicals, what varies from context to context (not to be confused with being determined by context) is what a speaker is likely to mean and could reasonably mean in uttering a given sentence. So consider these last examples:

- (20) a. I love you too.  
b. Willie almost robbed a bank.  
c. I feel like a burrito.

It is not hard to figure out that there are at least four different things that a speaker could mean in uttering each of them, but context is not what determines what that is. Rather, it helps the listener figure that out and it may constrain how the speaker can expect to be understood.

An utterance of a semantically incomplete sentence and a typical utterance of any sentence whose semantic content falls short of what a speaker is likely to mean in uttering it both involve conveying a proposition with constituents that are not articulated, but these are not part of the sentence's semantic content.<sup>25</sup> We need the level of locutionary act and, correlatively, a strict, semantic notion of what is said in order to account for (the content of) what a speaker does in uttering a sentence independently of whatever communicative intention (if any) he has in uttering it and regardless of how the content of that intention may depart from the semantic content of the sentence. Pragmatics does not contribute to what is said, but only to the speaker's decision about what to say (in order to make evident what he means) and to the listener's identification of what the speaker means, given that the speaker said what he said.

The older picture of language and communication is compatible with the Contextualist Platitude, which says that the meanings of the sentences we use tend to be impoverished relative to what we mean in uttering them. That platitude does not support the radical-sounding views that go by names like 'contextualism' and 'truth-conditional pragmatics'. It should be recognized for what it is, a platitude.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> An unarticulated constituent does not correspond to anything in the syntax of the sentence but is nevertheless thought to be part of "what is expressed" by an utterance of the sentence. An alternative approach, which does not fall under the heading of "contextualism" or "truth-conditional pragmatics," is to posit hidden variables in the syntax, variables whose values are somehow "contextually provided." Although there are special cases, such as relative adjectives and nouns like 'local', 'foreign', 'neighbor', and 'disciple', for which this approach is plausible, freely positing hidden variables just to insure that the semantic contents of sentences (relative to contexts) are complete propositions is unwarranted. And it is certainly not needed to account for the propositions that speakers are likely to convey.

<sup>26</sup> Grateful thanks to Lenny Clapp, C. Bill Jones, John MacFarlane, Patrick Rysiew, Jenny Saul, and two anonymous readers for alert corrections and valuable suggestions, most of which I heeded.

## **Appendix: Some Dangerous Ambiguities**

The following ambiguities (or perhaps polysemies) should be self-explanatory, especially given the picture presented above. The foregoing points and arguments should make clear why these ambiguities/polysemies are dangerous. In each case (except for ‘semantic’) the first use of the term is semantic in character and the second is pragmatic. The two should not be conflated.

### *semantic*

- pertaining to or a matter of linguistic meaning
- pertaining to or a matter of truth conditions

### *reference*

- by an expression to an object
- by a speaker with an expression to an object

### *meaning*

- linguistic meaning: sense of an expression (word, phrase, or sentence)
- speaker’s meaning: what a speaker means

### *speaker’s meaning*

- what a speaker means by a sentence (or phrase) when using it
- what a speaker means (tries to communicate) in uttering a sentence (or phrase)

### *utterance*

- what is uttered
- act of uttering

### *utterance meaning*

- meaning of an uttered sentence
- speaker’s meaning in uttering a sentence

### *say*

- perform a locutionary act
- state or assert, especially in using an declarative sentence without using any of its constituent expressions nonliterally

### *what is said*

- the content of a locutionary act (or equivalently, the semantic content of sentence, relative to a context of utterance)
- the content of the assertion made in using an declarative sentence without using any of its constituent expressions nonliterally

### *context*

- set of parameters whose values fix or delimit the semantic values of expressions with variable references

- set of salient mutual beliefs and presumptions among participants at a stage in a conversation

*determine*

- make the case (constitutive determination)
- ascertain (epistemic determination)

*interpretation*

- assignment of semantic values
- inference to speaker's communicative intention

*demonstrative reference*

- reference by a demonstrative
- speaker's reference by means by demonstrating

*use (a term) to refer*

- use a term that refers
- use a term and thereby refer

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