UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI GENOVA

SCUOLA DI SCIENZE UMANISTICHE

DIPARTIMENTO DI ANTICHITÀ, FILOSOFIA E STORIA

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Metodologie Filosofiche

Tesi di Laurea

Sulla questione semantica-pragmatica:

Uno spettro di approcci

Relatore: Vignolo Massimiliano

Correlatore: Domaneschi Filippo

Candidato: Bruno Saverio

Anno Accademico 2022/2023

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 4
II. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS 7
2.1 Triad of meanings 7
2.2 Literal truth-conditions vs intended truth-conditions 11
2.3 Semantic underdetermination 13
2.4 Gricean framework 21
2.4.1 Conversational maxims and implicatures 24
2.4.2 Limits of the Gricean picture 28
III. A SPECTRUM OF POSITIONS 36
3.1 Indexicalism 37
3.2 Minimalism 42
3.2.1 Three tests for indexicality 48
3.3 Contextualism 52
3.3.1 The cognitive debate 53
3.3.2 The formal debate 56
3.3.3 The conceptual debate 58
3.3.4 Relevance Theory 63
IV. CRITICISMS AND RESPONSES 68
4.1 Indexicalism 68
4.2 Minimalism 73
4.2.1 Minimal content as an idle wheel 73
4.2.2 Reflexive content 75
4.2.3 Misunderstanding Incompleteness argument 82
4.2.4 Answers to C&L's tests for indexicality 84
4.3 Contextualism 86
4.3.1 Gricean Argument 86
4.3.2 Cappelen and Lepore's critics 89
4.3.3 Criticism of Relevance Theory 91
V. CONCLUSION 96
Bibliography 98

I. INTRODUCTION

During the middle of the 20th century, there were two opposing approaches within the study of language. The first one was held by Frege, Russell, Carnap, Tarski, etc. and was called *Ideal Language Philosophy*. Such philosopher were, and are, logicians concerned with the study of formal languages and, through them, tried to understand how some parts of natural language work. It is specially thanks to the works of Davidson, Montague, Lewis and Kaplan, in the sixties, that formal tools were fruitfully used to build a valid prospect of natural language understanding. Their efforts gave birth to contemporary formal semantics, a discipline concerned with the study of meaning in natural languages using formal tools from logic and mathematics. The central aim of Ideal Language Philosophy, and consequently of formal semantics, is to build a logical-mathematical model of how the meanings of (declarative) sentences are a function of their structure and the meanings of the words composing them. The meaning of simple expressions, in turn, are their conventional assignment of worldly objects or rules for assigning worldly objects: for instance, to names are appointed single entities, to monadic predicates are ascribed sets of objects, to *n*-places predicates are assigned an ordered set of *n* objects, etc. In this way, the idea is to derive from a well-formed sentence in a given language a worldly state of affair which describes its truth-condition which, in turn, represents its meaning. In other words, formal semantics is the study of the expressions' properties on which the truth-conditions of the sentences, in which the expressions occur, depend. In this framework, knowing a language means knowing a procedure by means of which it is possible to deduce the truth-conditions of any sentence of that language.

The other approach, held by philosophers like Wittgenstein, Austin, Grice and Strawson, was the so-called *Ordinary Language Philosophy*. Their central idea was that many features of natural language were out of reach from a formal semantics prospective. They advocated for a less logical approach and emphasized the pragmatic and social dimension of language as used in a communicative context. Their work, on the other hand, gave rise to contemporary pragmatics, a discipline which greatly contributed to the development of linguistics. Ordinary language philosophers reject the idea that definite truth-conditions can be derived solely from the syntactic properties of sentences and the linguistic meanings associated with the expressions they it contain. They contend, instead, that the context in which a sentence is uttered play an essential role in determining the content conveyed by utterances. It is therefore misleading to define the meaning of utterances without taking in account how speakers use them in particular contexts. It is exactly in this background that

Austin's theory of speech acts and Grice's theory of meaning tried to highlight the role of speakers' use of language to explain how, the same sentence, in different contexts, can be used to express a broad variety of contents and, on the other hand, how the same sentence, in a given context, may convey a wide range of information when uttered (§2.1 and §2.4). Now, despite the early antagonism that characterized the study of language, nowadays semantics (i.e. the formal study of meaning as truth-conditions) and pragmatics (i.e. the study of language in use) are conceived as complementary areas which, with their appropriate methods, shed light on different aspects of linguistic communication. The compromise arrived with the withdrawn, by both parts, of some of their original tenets. On one hand, semanticists recognized the abundance of context-sensitivity in natural language and, as such, abandoned the idea that the relationship between words and world could be established independently of the context of use.[1] On the other hand, the wide majority of ordinary philosophers admit that the conventional dimension of language is beyond the speaker's use. Following the latest Grice, it has been drawn a widely accepted distinction between what a simple/complex expression *conventionally means* and what its *use means* in a given context. The reason behind introducing such distinction, which in turn differentiates semantics and pragmatics, was necessary to explain the numerous instances in which the meaning conveyed by a speaker is not entirely dictated by the conventional linguistic meaning of the sentence uttered, like indexicality, ambiguity, semantic underdetermination, vagueness, implicature, non-truth-conditionality and illocutionary force. It's within this background that different position emerged. For the sake of this introduction, we can roughly individuate two groups: on one side there are the one closer to a semantic approach who tend to reduce the contribution of contextual information and speakers' intentions in determining the truth conditions of utterances. The tendency is to preserve Grice's orthodox view that argues that, with the sole exception of indexical and demonstrative expressions, linguistic meaning alone determines the explicit content of an utterance. Any additional interpretation generated in hearers should be reduced to cases of ambiguities, implicatures or presuppositions. Examples of such approach are Katz (1977), Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore (2005), Jason Stanley (2007) and Borg (2004). On the other side, there are the so-called "contextualists", who emphasize the pervasiveness of the contextual and intentional intrusion into the determination of what someone explicitly say. While maintaining the overall framework of Grice's theory, the general idea is that no proposition can be expressed without some inarticulate constituent

[1] In this sense, the works of David Kaplan (1989) put an end to the strive of deriving singular propositions from sentences containing demonstratives without involving the speaker's intentions.

being contextually provided. This consideration, along with a reevaluation of context-sensitivity and speaker's meaning, leads to a modification of Grice's distinction between explicit and implicit content. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1995), Francois Recanati (2004) and Robyn Carston (2002) are the most notable examples of this theoretical trend. Now, the delineation between semantics and pragmatics has been articulated in multiple ways. Formulations have typically fit into three primary types: linguistic meaning vs use, truth-conditional vs non-truth-conditional meaning and context independence vs context dependency. In this essay my goal is to describe the state of art on the semantics-pragmatics distinction in light of context-sensitivity, by analyzing four positions: The Orthodox view, Indexicalism, Minimalism and Contextualism. In the chapters that follow I'll highlight what these positions regard as semantics and what as pragmatics by seeing what counts as purely semantic content and what as pragmatic supplement. This will be accomplished by examining, for each of the above positions, the logical or syntactic proximity between sentence meaning and the proposition expressed, the amount of semantic underdeterminacy of natural language, the interaction between literal meaning and the background of inarticulate assumptions, and how the overall communication process should work.

In Chapter II, I begin by providing a brief introduction to key concepts that will be central throughout the paper, aiding us in identifying the problem and laying our conceptual background. An intuitive distinction will be drawn between linguistic meaning and speaker meaning, leading to the development of a rough differentiation between what the speaker explicitly communicates and what is implicitly communicated. The primary focus will be on the relationship between encoded linguistic meaning and the proposition explicitly communicated. I will introduce the main features of the Gricean Framework before delving into the main challenges. In Chapter III, I will present three proposed solutions: Indexicalism, Minimalism, and Contextualism, each with its respective answers to the problems outlined in Chapter II. In the following and final chapter, I will examine the critiques and responses directed at these positions. It's important to emphasize, however, that this essay discussion represents only a portion of the broader debate on this issue. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview, but rather focuses on conducting an in-depth analysis of the three specific positions mentioned above.

II. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter I'll briefly introduce some key notions that are at the center of this paper. In §2.1 I'll introduce the basic triad of meaning (i.e. sentence meaning, what is said and what is implicitly or indirectly conveyed, e.g. implicatures and presuppositions) through their general characterization shared by all the different frameworks that we'll see in the next chapter. In §2.2 it will be shown how a mere truth-conditional approach to utterances can't grasp the amount of content that an ordinary speaker conveys with its use. Such gap between literal and conveyed propositional content will introduce us to the notion of "semantic underdeterminacy" which undermines the possibility to derive a determinate truth-conditional content without admitting some pragmatic intrusion. Since there's still debate on the sources of underdeterminacy, I'll mainly focus on the generally accepted ones, mentioning only some other debated cases. In conclusion, it will be introduced the main features of the Gricean Framework by highlighting the general understanding of the verbal communication's nature and the interactions between the different levels of meaning and the context for the derivation of implicatures.

2.1 Triad of meanings

Much of the interest in the study of linguistic communication is directed toward the distinction between the notions of semantic content and non-semantic content. The reality of such distinction is the reflection of a more fundamental intuition on human communication which states that speakers communicate more contents than the one conveyed by the sole lexical meaning of the uttered sentence. There's very often a divergence between what a speaker says and what he means, between the content of the linguistic expressions used and the content he meant to convey by using them. Moreover, it is well accepted that a speaker can convey his communicative intentions either explicitly or implicitly, that is, either by an overt content more or less similar in logical form to the sentence uttered, or by a covert content retrievable using conversational maxims and relevance strategies. Many labels have been given to the explicit content: "what is said", "proposition expressed", "truth-conditional content", "explicature", "impliciture"; meanwhile the implicit content is generally known as "implicature"[2]. This conceptual distinction is followed by a separation of pragmatics in *near-*

[2] Among the implicit contents we also find presuppositions and expressives, but here the focus in on implicatures.

side pragmatics and *far-side pragmatics*[3]. The first is concerned in determining the explicit proposition expressed by means of the semantic properties of the sentence used along with contextual features, the second focuses on what kind of speech act are performed in saying something, what implicatures are generated by the proposition expressed and, in general, why what was said has been said.

The most common kinds of contextual features involved in near-side pragmatics are those which play a significant role in the resolution of ambiguities, vagueness, indexicals, demonstratives and homonymies. In many cases, to derive the full propositional content of an utterance, it is necessary to appeal to such contextual factors. As matter of fact, in speaking of explicit content, we have to keep in mind two dimensions of meaning:

> I) *Sentence meaning/linguistic meaning*: that context-independent content derived *only* by the conventional meaning of the words occurring in a sentence plus the way they are grammatically combined.

It is that level that Grice called "sentence meaning"[4] and Kaplan called "character"[5]. Mostly[6], this kind of content isn't sufficient to determine the truth-condition that the sentence has in a given utterance's context, nor does fully determines the intended proposition expressed, for it is that level of content which is derived by the only semantic competence of speakers, without any pragmatic intrusions that determines, when needed, the semantic content of the occurring expressions. Thus, the encoded linguistic meaning of an utterance produces a range of possible determined truth-conditional content (see Example 1). Borrowing an analogy from Recanati, this level of meaning can be seen as the semantic "skeleton" or a schema upon which some other mechanism has to operate in order to derive the explicit content communicated by a speaker.[7] This schema-like feature of sentence meaning is a consequence of the well-known *underdeterminacy thesis*.[8] It is important to highlight that all these possible

[3] K. Korta & J. Perry, *The pragmatic Circle*, in *Synthese*, Vol. 165, No. 3, 2008, pp. 347-357.
[4] H. P. Grice, *Utterer's meaning, Sentence-Meaning and Word-Meaning*, in *Philosophy, Language and Artijicial1ntelligenc*e, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1968, pp. 49-66.
[5] D. Kaplan, *Demonstratives*, in *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 481-563.
[6] Whether all sentences need pragmatics to express a proposition or if there're some exceptions, is still debated. Contextualist hold that pragmatics is always needed since all expressions, in variable degrees, are context-sensitive; on the other hand, many literalists hold that it is not always the case, and some sentences are truly context-insensitive. For more cf. R. Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances*, Blackwell Publishing, 2002, §. 1.2.2.
[7] With this, Bach isn't suggesting that the linguistic meaning isn't truth-conditional (thus propositional), but that it isn't the proposition expressed by a speaker through its use in a context.
[8] To put it explicitly, for "underdeterminacy thesis" it's meant the fact that syntactical combination of the lexical meaning of the expressions occurring in a sentence S isn't sufficient to obtain determinate truth-conditions (i.e. a specific state of affair).

contents are hinged, to some extent, to the encoded meaning. For example, if it's true that a sentence like "Marco is coming now" may express an indefinite number of determined propositions in different contexts, it can never express that *cats have an average of 3 million of hair*.

The second dimension is the:

> II) *What is said/proposition expressed*: that context-dependent content which the speaker expresses exploiting the linguistic encoded meanings with *respect* to particular contexts.

Unlike sentence meaning, the proposition expressed is a fully propositional content, that is, it expresses a determinate state of affairs which explicit the conditions under which the proposition is true. It is obtained by fixing the semantic content of context-dependent expressions occurring in the sentence, by resolving ambiguities, vagueness, homonymies etc. If the linguistic meaning offers a range of possible propositions, the what is said is that specific proposition that, among all the others, is actually expressed in a given context of utterance. As Recanati puts it: "What is said results from fleshing out the meaning of the sentence (which is like a semantic 'skeleton') so as to make it propositional. The propositions one can arrive at through this process of contextual enrichment or 'fleshing out' are constrained by the skeleton which serves as input to the process. […] the propositions in question all have to be compatible with the semantic potential of the sentence"[9].

Let's have a closer look to these preliminary considerations by exploiting an example. Let **u** be the declarative utterance "I'll buy it tomorrow", said by A the 25th of July 1999 while talking to his mother about a specific gift he still has to buy for B's birthday (call this object C). If we should represent the literal encoded meaning of the sentence uttered, we'd not take in considerations the contextual parameters and we'd obtain a content of the following form:

> (1) *The speaker obtains through money or accept the truth of the object he refers to with the pronoun "it" the day after the utterance.*

Note that "buy" is polysemous since it could either mean "obtain something in exchange of payment" or "to accept the truth of something". Since at this level of meaning no disambiguation process has occurred yet, such polysemy is to be explicitly represented.

[9] F. Recanati, *Literal Meaning*, Hal archives-ouvertes, 2003, p. 25.

Besides this, this level of meaning is the truth-conditional schema or semantic potential of the sentence. No reference fixed for the two context-sensitive expressions (e.g. the pronouns "I" and "it") and no disambiguation occurred. With this form, potentially infinite propositions can be expressed: that "I" could select all possible individuals who uttered that sentence, that "it" could pick out all existing object and that "tomorrow" could fix whatever date that (as long as is the day after the utterance). It is trivial to say that if we consider all the possible combinations of these parameters, it would be an immense number of propositions.[10] But it would be an error to deem all these possibilities completely disconnected from each other. Despite all these countless possible contents, one thing is common to all these propositions: all of them is still similar in logical or syntactic form to the sentence meaning (this will be important when we'll discuss the minimalistic approach). As said above, no proposition like *the collapse of wall street was an economical disaster* is to be found among this domain, for the lexical level of content works as a *matrix* for the potential propositions. It is then task of contextual parameters to narrow-down the to the actual one which the sentence was used for in that context. This brings us to the second dimension of meaning. In our example the proposition expressed/what is said has the following form:

> Given that A is the speaker, C is the salient object and the day of the utterance is the 26th of July 1999, "I'll buy it tomorrow", uttered in c, is true in English iff *A will obtain through money C the 26th of July 1999*

This is the content obtained once all context-dependent expressions are saturated and once the expression "buy" is disambiguated. This proposition was among the countless one allowed by the propositional schema above, but it is only through the intrusion of contextual features that it was possible to "make it collapse" into the explicit content intended by the speaker.

Now, as said at the outset, there's a third level of meaning; a level which includes all those contents which go beyond what is literally said. H. P. Grice (1913–1988) was the first to systematically study the differences between what a *speaker* means by using a specific sentence from what the *sentence* used by the speaker means. Consider the following conversation:

(2) Alex: Can you help me studying this afternoon?
Luca: I have to meet Angela.

[10] That's why the sentence meaning is a schema of propositions, such as in logic there are schemas of formulas to represent countless instances.

In a typical exchange, Luca *meant* that he is not going to help Alex this afternoon by *saying* that she has to meet Angela. He didn't say that she is not going help Alex, and the sentence he uttered does not explicitly express that. In order to frame such distinction, Grice introduced the technical term *implicature* for those contents which fall within the speaker's meaning (i.e. what the speaker intends to convey to his audience) but do not correspond to what he explicitly said, but it is implicitly communicated. According to Grice, hearers assume that speakers, during a conversation, are rational and cooperative agents and, as such, whenever the explicit content conveyed by their utterances seemingly violates certain rules of cooperativeness, it is because they are actually communicating something else through that utterance: an alternative meaning that would make the speaker rational and cooperative again. I'll get in more details in §1.4, for now is sufficient to say that the third level is:

> III) *Implicature*: that content implicitly communicated based on what has been explicitly said and originated by an apparent uncooperative behavior of the speaker.

2.2 Literal truth-conditions vs intended truth-conditions

As said above, what distinguishes what is said from the implicatures is the fact that the former must be closely related to the conventional meaning of the words contained in a sentence. This idea, however, leaves room to different ways of interpreting such "close relation". It can be held, for instance, there's a one-to-one correspondence between the proposition's constituents and the sentence's ones. Which means that for every element that constitute ~~the~~ what is said there is a syntactic counterpart in the sentence uttered.[11] Other philosophers, on the other hand, endorse the idea that such one-to-one relation is between the proposition's elements and the constituents of the sentence's logical form. Indexicalists, for example, claim that such isomorphism is not to be searched at the syntactical level, but at the logical one. Only by individuating the logical elements as the propositional's counterparts we can make sense of Grice's framework (for reasons I'll highlight later). Finally, the loosest interpretation sees such relation as a mere development of the utterance's logical form. The idea, thus, is to keep a logical-based relation, but with the recognition that a logical enrichment of the sentence is needed. Such position is held by Contextualists.

[11] This idea is captured by the so called "Isomorphic Principle". As Frege puts is: "we [are] able to distinguish parts in the thought corresponding to the parts of a sentence, so that the structure of the sentence serves as the image of the structure of the thought". (Frege 1923/77: 55)

Let's set aside the last position for now and take into consideration the former two. In both cases the sentence meaning still plays a central role in determining the explicit content of an utterance since both endorse the idea that the proposition expressed departs from the sentence meaning *only when it is necessary* to obtain the determined truth conditions expressed in a context. In order to keep the distance between the two levels to the minimum, philosophers who endorse such positions appeal to the notion of saturation. Saturation is that process aimed at determining the semantic value (or semantic content) of those context-dependent constituents of a sentence (either in its syntactical form or in its logical). For example, the sole semantic analysis on a sentence like "You are short" does not express the truth-conditions that such sentence has when uttered in a context, for the speaker must provide both the referent for the demonstrative pronoun "you" and standard of shortness referred to. Other well-known example of saturation are genitives. The sentence "Alex's car", for instance, doesn't express any specific propositional content unless the relation between Alex and the car has been contextually established. Other examples include predicates like "tall", "skinny", "better", "ready", "on the left", etc. This process, thus, takes place only when the sentence includes elements which lack of a fixed propositional content and, as such, require a contextual completion. Thus saturation is a mandatory process which semantics puts in place in order to achieve the proposition expressed by a speaker in a context. Any other processes which involve contextual information are deemed as optional for the determination of the explicit content and are confined within the far-side pragmatics.

It often happens, however, that even if an utterance expresses a complete, truth-evaluable proposition, what an utterance literally says doesn't correspond to what it intuitively seems to express. Regardless of the syntactical or logical form of the utterance, there are many examples where the proposition semantically expressed doesn't correspond to the explicit content. Such cases can't be explained by appealing to any saturation process or, as we'll see in §4.1, we'll face an overgeneration problem. Take, for instance, the following well-known examples:

(3) You are not going to die
(4) Alex has two children
(5) I've had breakfast

Kent Bach[12] imagines a child crying due to a little cut and her mom, to defuse the situation, utters (3). What supposedly she wants to say is something like "You are not going to die for that cut", but the literal proposition expressed (i.e. the complete proposition strictly derived from the sentence meaning, either from its syntactical or logical form) is that the child is immortal, he's not going to die *simpliciter*. The extra content provided by the cut doesn't correspond to anything in the sentence itself. Moreover, no process of saturation is required apart from the reference fixing of the pronoun "you", for the literal proposition is already complete and truth-evaluable. As matter of fact, we can easily imagine a context where the same utterance its used to convey this literal content. Similarly, if someone utters (4) he probably wants to explicitly convey that Alex has *exactly* two children but, truth-conditionally speaking, Alex will still continue having two children even if he had three.[13] From a semantic point of view, case five express the proposition that the speaker has had breakfast before the time of the utterance. Strictly speaking, thus, the speaker could have had his last breakfast two years before his utterance and the proposition would still be true but this is hardly what the speaker means when asked if he wanted something to eat. What he probably wants to explicitly convey is that he already had breakfast that very morning. However, this aspect of the speaker meaning would be external to the what is said and be treated as a matter of implicature if we accept a strict relation between sentence meaning and explicit content (like the first two approaches described above) as much as implying "he is stingy" when uttering "he is Genovese".

What I wanted to highlight in this section is that it often happens that the proposition literally expressed is different from the actual proposition expressed. There are many other processes which are not saturation and nonetheless contribute to the enrichment of the linguistically encoded meaning for the determination of the actual proposition communicated. What is at stake, and I'll try to put forward in the rest of this essay, is weather such enriched content is still to be considered the what is said or an implicature. Weather we're still within the boundaries of the near-side pragmatics or in the field of the far-side pragmatics.

2.3 Semantic underdetermination

At the outset of the previous paragraph we've seen how often happens that he proposition expressed by an utterance doesn't match with its sentence meaning for there are many expressions context-sensitive, that is, expressions which by themselves don't have a specific

[12] K. Bach, *Conversational Impliciture*, in *Mind and Language*, Vol. 9, n. 2, p. 134.
[13] This linguistic phenomenon is taken in account in Grice's framework with the name of "scalar implicature".

semantic value. A number of philosophers, as matter of fact, strongly argue for a thesis that is generally known as "semantic underdetermination". According to this thesis, there are many expressions of natural languages for which their linguistic meaning cannot determine by itself what is said. Rather, in order to ascribe a truth-conditional content to a sentence as used by a speaker, it is necessary to take into account contextual factors. In general, semantic underdeterminacy claims the inability to specify the truth-conditions of a sentence in a given context without some pragmatic intervention. There are many expressions that exhibit such phenomenon: color predicates, perspectival predicates (i.e. predicates whose application requires that a point of view or perspective salient in the conversation), personal taste predicates, relational predicates, incomplete definite descriptions and Saxon genitive. For clarity sake, we can distinguish three kinds of underdetermination (Carston 2002, p. 19):

a) Linguistic meaning underdetermines what is meant
b) What is said underdetermines what is meant
c) Linguistic meaning underdetermines what is said

The first two points are straightforward since its evident that implicatures strongly depart from both the linguistic meaning and the explicit propositional content expressed by an utterance. It's about the third point that I wish to dwell on, that is, the idea that the linguistically encoded meaning of a sentence uttered underdetermines the propositional content expressed by the same utterance. The hearer has to engage pragmatic inferences in order to retrieve not only implicatures but also the proposition the speaker intends to explicitly convey. We've already seen some examples of linguistic underdeterminacy, but it is worth to say something more about its sources.

Linguistic ambiguities and indexicals are widely acknowledge as expressions that necessarily need pragmatic additions in order to derive the what is said. This is also true even by those who wants to keep the distance between sentence meaning and what is said to the minimum. There's a problem for those semanticists who aim to give natural language sentence's a truth-conditional form (hence propositional) though. The semantics of a formal logical language is given in terms of a truth-theory of that language. A theory that aim at assigning to each sentential formula derivable from that language a condition on its truth but, in order to do so, propositionality (i.e. the idea that each well-formed-formula express truth-conditions) and context-independency are important factors. If this works perfectly for logical languages, the same can't be said when we try to apply it to natural languages since context-

sensitivity, non-propositionality and vagueness are common phenomena and this raises the question of how a semantics for natural languages is to be characterized. The dominant, traditional-oriented view is that it is still to be given in terms of truth-conditions, notwithstanding such problems. In the case of indexicality, the widely adopted solution is, for example, to quantify the sentence over utterances and contextual features, that is, to abstract from any particular contexts. An instance is the sentence "I go to Rome", where the T-sentence takes the following form:

(6) (u)(x)[If *u* is an utterance of "I go to Rome" and "I" refers to *x*, then *u* is true iff *x* goes to Rome]

As it can be seen, the T-sentence itself is given in the consequent of the conditional, while the utterance and contextual parameters over which the truth-conditions range are in the antecedent.[14] Now, as said in §1.1, such content is propositional since express truth-conditions, but we can't determine a state of affairs which would make such proposition true or false since the process itself which fixes the reference of "I" is question of pragmatics. The case is even clearer when we're dealing with demonstratives: "this", for instance, can refer to almost every object in a given context. It's impossible to establish a rule which automatically selects the object the speaker has in mind when using such expression. Linguistics rules, alone, may return the truth-conditions of a sentences, but cannot always give the proposition expressed.

Another linguistic phenomenon that supports semantic underdeterminacy are those utterances that contain expressions that seems to not determine a fully propositional content even after reference assignment and disambiguation processes. The encoded meanings of the following utterances, for instance, seem not to determine a complete proposition:

7. (a) Alex is tall
   (b) Marco is ready
   (c) Basketball is better

[14] A "classic" T-sentence form cannot be applied to a context-sensitive sentence for it would take the following form: ["S" is true iff p] and, if "p" stands for, for instance, "Saverio goes to Rome", then the very same S, when uttered by Mario Rossi, would be false even if he is actually going to Rome. This happens since the whole T-sentence remains context-independent and the different interpretations that S has in different contexts would not be caught. If, on the other hand, we want to use a disquotational form (i.e. ["S" is true iff S]), the whole T-sentence would be context-sensitive and won't give back a truth-evaluable proposition: ["I go to Rome" iff I go to Rome]. (see Carston, 2002, §1.5.1)

(d) The apple is red

Despite their being well-formed sentences in English, it is necessary to know some context in order to assess the truth or falsehood of the propositions expressed. We *need* to know what Marco is ready for, compared to what basketball is better, what part of the apple is red, the height standard to which Alex's height is compared to, in order to determine if the state of affairs subsists or not.[15] The problem, here, is that the missing constituent needed for a fully-propositional content is not to be found in the sentence's syntactic level and seems to be supplied pragmatically. Now, in order to cope which such phenomenon, three solutions have been proposed: the first one, held by Stanley and Szabó (2000, 2005), is to insist on the presence of an unarticulated constituent that is to be found in the logical form of the sentence and which, like an overt demonstrative, needs to be saturated by some contextual value. The second one, proposed by Bach (1997, 2001), argues in favor of a syntactically constrained notion of what is said even if this results to be propositionally incomplete. Despite the various objections to this thesis, Bach hold that such "purely semantic notion of what is said"[16] have a legitimate theoretical role and is both empirically and psychologically significant. The last approach, supported by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and Carston (2002), allows that pragmatic processes can supply constituents to what is said without any linguistic pointer. An analysis of such positions will be given in the next chapter.

There are cases, on the other hand, which are fully sentential and fully propositional, given reference fixing and disambiguation, and so don't require any further contextual addition. The problem is that such proposition doesn't correspond to what the speaker intends to explicitly convey. The underdeterminacy thesis, in such cases, mostly claims that a semantic analysis, despite giving a fully propositional content, is inadequate to grasp the speaker's explicit content. Take the following examples:

(e) Every participant is drinking alcohol

(f) It is raining

Suppose that (e) is uttered by the house's owner with the intention to congratulate himself for the event. What we understand is that he expressed that everyone *at the party* is drinking

[15] Many names have been given to these incomplete contents: K. Bach called them *propositional radicals* or *fragment of propositions*, Sperber and Wilson described them *as sub-propositional logical form*.
[16] K. Bach, *You Don't Say*, in *Synthese*, Vol. 128, 2001, 16.

alcohol. There's nothing, though, within the meaning of the quantifier "everyone" or of the noun "participant" that has such domain restriction. The semantic theory would return the interpretation that ["Every participant is drinking alcohol" is true in *c* iff everything that is a participant is drinking alcohol at *t*], but this is not what he meant. Same consideration for case (f), where there's no syntactical constituent which specify the place where it is raining and it is hard to imagine a context where someone wouldn't want to refer to a location. Again, it can be posit a hidden linguistic element, possibly at the logical level, which requires to be saturated, or accept such content but denying that it is the proposition expressed.

I'll conclude this paragraph by highlighting some other cases where there is little consensus on their being examples of semantic underdeterminacy. By this I mean cases where other pragmatic processes apart from disambiguation and saturation are required to determine the proposition explicitly meant by a speaker but that, nonetheless, the sole semantic theory derives a propositional content that could, therefore, be argued to constitute the proposition expressed by the utterance.

8. (a) Alex and Mark went to Rome
   (b) It takes time to arrive home
   (c) She fell and broke her finger
   (d) The Earth is round

The first example is very likely to be understood as conveying that Ale and Mark went to Rome *together* but this specification is nowhere to be found syntactically. Same consideration could be done for 8(b), where the speaker wants probably to indicate that it takes *long* time to arrive home. Case 8(c), instead, is a typical case of "and" conjunction in natural language. Truth-conditionally, the conjunction is true iff both conjuncts are true, but this is not all the story when it is used in normal conversations. As matter of fact, 8(c) is crucially affected by the order of the conjuncts such that, if we reverse them, the utterance will convey the information the subject broke her finger and in a second moment she fell. The causal relation, which is probably the focal point of the speaker's communicative intentions, would be lost and with it the perception that he said something true at all. At last, case 8(d) is a case which, within the contextualism program, is called "over specificity". As it can be imagined, what the speaker probably means by uttering (d) is that the Earth is *roughly* round since such approximation, in his idea, doesn't undermine the conversational goal. The question is still the same: where does this change is to be dealt with?

What is controversial in all these examples is if such content enrichments are to be treated as part of what is said (i.e. the explicit content) or as implicatures. Philosophers who want to involve as little as possible the pragmatic processes to the determination of what is said opt for the second option, meanwhile it could be argued in favor of the pervasiveness of pragmatic processes and opt for the first one. What I wanted to do in this paragraph is to give some examples which could show the range of ways in which the linguistically encoded meaning may undetermined the proposition expressed by a speaker through an utterance. I would then summarize them with the following list:

(1) Semantic ambiguity
(2) Indexicality
(3) Unspecified domain restriction
(4) Missing constituents
(5) Loosing or widening of the encoded meaning

The fundamental question at the heart of the discussion revolves around the attribution of truth-conditional content to natural language sentences. The focal point of the matter lies in whether such content can be legitimately ascribed to sentences themselves, or if it is exclusively tied to speech acts when placed within specific contexts. The attributed linguistic meaning of sentences through the language's semantic rules, while critical for comprehension, doesn't make them the intended explicit content. However, the extent and significance of this distinction vary depending on one's perspective: some philosophers and linguists (those that embrace Contextualism, see §3.3) argue that the difference between these two types of content derives by the essential context-sensitivity of natural language, that is, that natural language sentences are inherently context-sensitive and thus lack determinate truth-conditions. On the other hand, anti-contextualists contend that the distinction can be abstracted through a legitimate idealization. Such idealization, also known as "Convenience view" (CV), claims that:

> (CV) For every statement that can be made using a context-sensitive sentence in a given context, there is an eternal sentence that can be used to make the same statement in any context. (Recanati 1994, p. 157)

Basically the idea is that, to transform a context-sensitive sentence into an eternal one, a simple substitution suffices: replace the indexical elements of the former with non-indexical counterparts that bear identical semantic values. This change can effectively eliminate the distinction since it is entirely possible, for a speaker, to exclusively utter eternal sentences. The primary reason for employing context-sensitive sentences, in addition to eternal ones, is the remarkable efficiency they offer in communication since they allow for a much more concise expression of ideas. In essence:

> […] the infinite set of sentences that a linguistic system generates can be partitioned into two infinite subsets, one consisting of the underdetermining non-eternal sentences, which speakers find a very convenient effort-saving means for communicating their thoughts, and the other consisting of the infinite set of fully determining (i.e. proposition-encoding) eternal sentences […] leaving no room for interpretive manoeuvre (Carston 2002, p. 32)

According to the anti-contextualist perspective, thus, instances context-sensitive sentences (such as indexical sentences) can be converted into eternal-sentence by essentially substituting contextual elements with the eternal counterparts with the same semantic value. Using a context-dependent sentence, thus, involves relying on the language's contextual features instead of utilizing one of the eternal sentences that it offers for conveying the same message (for, say, mental effort). Despite this reasonable position, most of contextualists refuse the Convenient View. The reason is primarily due to a disbelief in the existence of eternal sentences. This denial is fortified by several arguments, attacking referential expressions, definite descriptions and predicates. I'll report, as an example, an argument for the first two.

It can be argued that reference always relies on a contextual framework. This extends beyond just indexical expressions and incomplete definite descriptions like "the table" or "the professor". Even proper names and complete definite descriptions are suggested to be context-dependent concerning reference. Cohen (1980) and Recanati (1994) argue, for instance, that proper names can be viewed as a form of indexicals, which implies that a single proper name, like "Aristotle" can point to different referents in varying contexts. This differs from the conventional view, where proper names are thought to be rigid designators, maintaining the same reference across all contexts. The conventional view suggests that one must know the identity of a name's bearer in order to properly master a language and, as such,

that “proper names are part of the language in a very strong sense” (Recanati 1994, p. 159). However, the alternative perspective claims that this knowledge is more extralinguistic and contextual and that knowing the bearer of a name is similar to knowing the speaker's identity, which can be contextually determined but isn’t a prerequisite for mastering the language in a strong sense.

Regarding complete definite descriptions, on the other hand, one could argue that the reference of a definite description is consistently tied to the domain of discourse within which it is intended to be evaluated (i.e. “that with respect to which the speaker presents his or her utterance as true” (Recanati 1987, p. 62) like the actual world, a fragment of it, someone’s belief-world, a fictional world etc.). This is illustrated in cases where someone uses a definite description, and the reference depends on the context’s specific domain in which it is fixed/interpreted. Recanati (1987) presents the following case: it’s 1999 and both you and I are aware that Lucinda holds the mistaken belief that Peter Mandelson is the Prime Minister of Britain in 1999. Knowing that Mandelson is in the next room, I utter the following sentence to you:

> (41) Lucinda will be delighted to find that the current prime minister of Britain is in the next room.

Here the idea is that my use of the description “The current prime minister of Britain” refers to Mandelson rather than to the actual Britain’s prime minister (Tony Blair) because it is intended to be interpreted with respect to Lucinda’s belief-world, in which Mandelson is the Britain’s prime minister. Indeed such use of sentence (41) , which implicitly involves attributing a specific belief to Lucinda, is quite ordinary and underscores the fundamental idea that the linguistic system is a flexible tool that can be employed in various manners in a communication.

The relativity of reference to the domain of discourse extends to even those complete descriptions that have traditionally been considered rigid, where the semantic value remains the same across all possible worlds. Take, for instance, the description “the successor number of 3”. While 4 is the successor number of 3 in all possible worlds, it doesn’t need to be held in all domains of discourse. For example, Lucinda might believe that 7 is the successor of 3, thus demonstrating an inescapable context-dependent dimension natural language. Even what is typically regarded as the “strictly-semantic” interpretation, where the description is assessed concerning the actual world, is fundamentally a pragmatic matter since it hinges on

identifying the domain of discourse as the actual world. Consequently, even sentences that are deemed strong candidates for being eternal are, in reality, context-dependent. One might wonder if the domain could be explicitly defined, making the quantified phrase eternal but this suggestion misses the target since, due to the indexical nature of elements involved in specifying the domain, even if the quantificational domain were to be described explicitly its correct interpretation would still depend on the intended domain of discourse (Recanati 1994, p. 159). These arguments are indeed controversial and represent only the tip of the iceberg concerning the debate. However, despite presenting an alternative to the pervasiveness underdeterminacy in language, the Convenience View doesn't represent a menace to the idea that that such underdeterminacy of the proposition expressed by an utterance is an essential feature of natural language.

2.4 Gricean framework

In this chapter we've addressed many concepts with which we try to characterize how human's verbal communication works. But these concepts don't offer a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon without a framework which glues and puts them in relation. For long time, the most widely accepted communication model was the *code model*. According to this model, communication occurs via *encoding* and *decoding* of messages, or linguistic signals. In this process, the source (i.e. the speaker) converts a mental content into a linguistic signal (i.e. the code). This process is called *encoding*. The linguistically encoded thought is then transmitted through some kind of medium from point A to point B. If such message arrives, the hearer converts it back into a mental content. This is *decoding*. If this process is successful, then both the speaker and the hearer end up with the same thought or mental representation. Communication, thus, consists in a successful transfer of one person's mental representation to another through the codification of the same code (i.e. shared language). The feature that I want to highlight of this model is that it presupposes that the sentence uttered always have a truth-conditional content determined by the sole linguistic rules of syntax and semantics, independently of the speaker's intention. Coding and decoding are possible only if both hearer and speaker know the rules which govern the code used to exchange mental contents (i.e. in this case the linguistic rules of a given shared language). Now, based on what has been said until now, we know that such schema is wrong or, at least, insufficient to explain how natural language is used in real conversations. The rules fixing the reference of indexicals and disambiguates polysemous and ambiguous expressions are not sufficient to determine the truth-condition of a sentence uttered in a context. As matter of fact,

we've seen how the speaker's intentions are, on many occasions, a necessary tool to establish them. The linguistic rules governing the syntax and the semantics of a shared language play an important role indeed in conveying the speaker's communicative intentions (see §2.1), since a rational agent cannot reasonably think to convey certain intentions through an inappropriate use of the linguistic mean, but this consideration is only a fragment of how a successful communication occurs. It Is in this context that Grice's communication model takes place. Paul Grice's (1913-1988) works exerted a powerful influence on the way philosophers and linguists think about meaning and communication. Given a sentence S and a speaker A, Grice underlined the importance of separating (i) what S means, (ii) what A said on a given occasion by uttering S, and (iii) what A meant by uttering S on that occasion. He developed a systematic framework to define the different levels of meaning by providing an analysis of the utterer's meaning and the sentence meaning and, by doing this, clarified the relationship between the formalistic account of language and the ordinary-use approach. But let's start with order. In response to the code model, Grice develop a so called intention-based form of communication. In his view, a communicative exchange is a particular kind of rational, cooperative and oriented to a goal behavior. He was primarily interested in what it is for a speaker to mean something by uttering a sentence, and his fundamental thesis, which is still today taken in great consideration, was that *expressions' meaning can be defined in terms of speaker's meaning and, in turn, speaker's meaning in terms of intention*. Grice's basic idea that speaker meaning (i.e. what a speaker means with a given utterance) depends on his intention seems quite straightforward. What it isn't is what kind of intention does it. His first idea was to suggest *that S meant that p iff S intended to produce in A the belief that p* (where *S* stands for the speaker, *e* for the sentence uttered and *A* for the audience) but Grice immediately raises the following problem:

> I might leave B's handkerchief near the scene of a murder in order to induce the detective to believe that B was the murderer; but we should not want to say that the handkerchief (or my leaving it there) meant anything or that I had meant by leaving it that B was the murderer. (Grice 1957, pp. 381-382)

The philosopher, thus, proposed what we could call a reflexive-intention clause: *S meant that p iff S intended to produce in A the belief that p by means of recognition of S' intention*. Even in this case, though, Grice spots some counter-examples which show how such intention recognition, from the hearer, may be just coincidental. What is needed is a connection

between the belief the speaker is trying to induce and its recognition. This last consideration brings us to Grice's final account of what kind of intentions the speaker must have to communicate:

> The speaker must have three kinds of intentions:
> (i_1) that the audience should believe that *p*
> (i_2) that the audience should recognize the speaker's intention i_1
> (i_3) that it be by means of the recognition of (i_1) that the audience comes to believe that *p*

Grice, thus, gives the following summarize of how to intend what a speaker means by using a specific utterance: "Shortly, perhaps, we may say that "A meant something by x" is roughly equivalent to "A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention"[17].

Now if the shift of focus from the conventional meaning to the speaker's intentions gained Grice many followers, his idea to reduce the expressions meaning to the speaker's meaning was perceived as too rough and drastic. In his opinion, for instance, "Mont Blanc is more than 4.000 meters tall" means that Mont Blanc is more than 4.000 meters tall *only because* people mean that by using "Mount Everest is 8.849 meters tall". Similarly, "7+5=12" means that seven plus five equals twelve only because people mean that when use such sentence[18]. What words mean depends on the how they are used in a social context by speakers and a sentence *e* means *p* because it is used to mean *p*. For this disregard of the role of conventions in linguistic exchange, Grice attracted many criticisms (Searle 1965, Ziff 1967, Platts 1979) which led him to recognize a distinction between *linguistic meaning* and *speaker's meaning*: the first term refers to the conventional meaning of an expression/sentence which is fixed by the linguistic rules which govern the use of that expression/sentence in a linguistic community, while the second terms refers to that content which the speaker intends to convey by using that expression/sentence in a conversational context. However, the explanatory power of Grice's framework doesn't stop here. It offers, without any doubt, a better theory than the code model to explain how speaker's intention intervenes to determine the explicit content but, as we've seen in §2.1, we use language to also convey implicit contents which are not so closely related to the conventional meaning of

[17] H. P. Grice, *Meaning*, in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3, 1957, p. 384.
[18] Grice theory, thus, can be seen as following Wittgenstein thesis that meaning is use.

the sentence used. One of the main merits of Grice's theory is that it offers a way to explain how these contents arise and a rational procedure to derive them. But in order to see it, it is necessary to explain what the conversational maxims are.

2.4.1 Conversational maxims and implicatures

Verbal communication, as was mentioned in the previous paragraph, consists in a process of production and recognition of communicative intentions. According to Grice, communication is a (a) rational, (b) cooperative and (c) goal-oriented behavior. All conversations are governed by a tacit collaboration between the speakers and a complex system of expectations. The maintenance of collaboration and their rational attitude is due to the fact that each of them is driven by a set of aims that they try to achieve through a series of "linguistic moves". Conversations, thus, are governed by the so called *Cooperative Principle*, which states: "Make your conversational contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1975, p. 45). For a better understanding of what he means by this principle, Grice, echoing Kant, distinguishes four categories which articulate what it means for a speaker to be cooperative: quantity, quality, relation and manner.

I) *The quantity category* claims that speakers must provide as much information as requested by the conversation. This means to:

(a) make each contribution as informative as required by the conversation's goal and to

b) not contribute with more information than required.

The idea is that speakers are *adequately informative* in a regular conversation. If I'm asked which football teams are playing tonight, I won't answer by enumerating how many times the teams have already faced each other and other niche statistics which are not requested by the conversational goal. Same consideration if I'm asked whether I know where to find a gas station and I answer with a simple "yes". In this case my contribution would result little informative and, as such, uncooperative with respect to the speaker's expectation on his communicative intentions.

II) *The quality category* includes a maxim which states to make true contributions and two specific sub-maxims:

(a) don't say what you believe to be false and

(b) don’t say things for which you lack evidence.

These maxims account for the fact that, normally, speakers have the expectation that their interlocutors utter sentences that are sincere and justified. If these wasn’t the case, speakers would deem the conversation pointless and useless for the achievement of the conversational goals.

III) Under *relation category*, Grice places a single maxim, namely, “be relevant”. Despite its being terse, with this claim Grice asserts that each participant must provide *appropriate information with respect to the conversational content and goals*. If, for instance, I’m within a conversation about shoes and I’m asked which pair is the most expensive I’ve seen recently, I cannot answer by explaining why the combination pistachio-walnuts is the best one on the ice-cream. The content of my utterances must be coherent with the conversational topic. But, apart from far-fetched cases, it is also true that, occasionally, it is difficult to understand the relevance-focus throughout a conversation. Imagine being vegan and that you are having conversation about veganism with a friend of yours which seems to be interest in it. Suppose, now, that this friend asks you reasons to start a vegan diet and you start numbering the benefit it would have on the environment. Despite it may seem appropriate what you’re saying, the friend may have expected you to talk about the benefits it would have to his health, not to the environment and, thus, judge your contribution not relevant to his conversational goals. The misunderstanding may have been his or your fault, but the point is that there are cases where many contents seems to be appropriate but, as matter of fact, are irrelevant to the conversation, leading to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. On the other hand, this maxim is particularly interesting since it guides hearers to the understanding of sentences which may have many different interpretations. Suppose you are watching the rocket launch containing the James Webb telescope with a group of friends and that, at a certain moment, someone utters: “It is ready!”. Now, as we’ve seen in §2.3, this is a typical case of semantic underdeterminacy and the hearers have to figure out how to complete the sentence in order to retrieve the proposition expressed (as well as fixing the reference of “it”). By assuming that the speaker is cooperative and, as such, uttered a pertinent sentence, the interlocutors understand that among the many possible contents his utterance may generate the most plausible one is that *the rocket is ready for the launch* (and not, for instance, that the pasta is ready to be eaten). As matter of fact, Contextualism highlights this maxim as the most important one for the understating of the cognitive

processes behind hearer's recognition and identification of the speaker's utterances. But I'll get in more detail about this in the next chapter.

IV) *The manner category*, at last, is understood as relating not to the what is said (like the previous ones) but to how interlocutors have to express themselves. We can summarize this category with the maxim "be perspicuous" and a series of sub-maxims like:

(a) Avoid obscurities of expressions
(b) Avoid ambiguities
(c) Avid prolixity
(d) Be orderly

This maxim captures the idea that we expect other interlocutors to speak clearly in order to be understood by others and thus be cooperative. Each speaker should use a known vocabulary and avoid expressions he knows to be difficult to disambiguate or whose referent is hard to fix. Now, before explaining the role these maxims have on generating implicatures, it is necessary first to have a quick clarification on what is meant by explicit content of an utterance (i.e. what is said). Grice recognize the underdeterminacy thesis in its basic form and, as such, is aware that the sole linguistic meanings of the expressions occurring in an utterance are in many cases insufficient to determine its truth-conditional content. The necessity of pragmatic processes which assign a truth-value to some expressions was a clear aspect to Grice. Indeed, he acknowledges two linguistic phenomena where such pragmatic intervention is necessary: indexicality and semantic ambiguity. We can thus say that the linguistic meaning determines the what is said *with the sole exception* of indexicals and demonstratives (semantic level), and only after the disambiguation process occurred (pre-semantic level). Take the following utterance: "These are tight on me but I'll buy them anyway" proffered by A at t_0 in a shoes store. The proposition expressed, given that t_1 is an interval following t_0 and B as the objects referred by the demonstratives, is that *B are tight on A and A buys B in* t_1. As it can be noticed, not only Grice minimizes the pragmatic contribution to the minimum but has also a strict truth-conditional approach to the what is said since the adversative conjunction "but" is reduced to the logically-equivalent coordinative conjunction "and". Based on these considerations, we can summarize Grice's notion of what is said using S. Neale's characterization of the Truth-conditional semantics' thesis:

> For every declarative sentence *x* with all lexical, structural, anaphoric and prosodic ambiguities resolved, the truth conditions of what is said (or the proposition expressed) by *x*, relative to an occasion or context of utterance, are wholly determined by (i) the meanings of the individual words in *x*, (ii) prosodic features of *x*, (iii) principles of semantic composition that reflect *x*'s syntactic structure and prosody, and (iv) the systematic effects of a preestablished set of features of the occasion or context of utterance (exploited by the meanings of indexical expressions). (Neale, 2016, p. 229)

Now that we have a clear picture of what Grice means by "what is said", let's go back to the maxims and their relationship with the speakers.

We said that these maxims are guidance rules that speakers should ideally follow to maintain a rational and cooperative behavior in a verbal exchange. It is evident, however, that in ordinary conversations that this isn't the case and that speakers' utterances don't meet the maxims. Indeed, Grice distinguishes five different attitudes a speaker may have toward them:

> 1. He may quietly and unostentatiously VIOLATE a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be liable to mislead.
> 2. He may OPT OUT from the operation both of the maxim and of the CP [i.e. Conversational Principle]; he may say, indicate, or allow it to become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. […]
> 3. He may be faced by a CLASH: He may be unable, for example, to fulfill the first maxim of Quantity […] without violating the second maxim of Quality […]
> 4. He may FLOUT a maxim; that is, he may BLATANTLY fail to fulfill it. On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfill the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of a clash), is not opting out, and is not, in view of the blatancy of his performance, trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a minor problem: *How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that is observing the overall CP?* (Italics mine) (Grice 1975, p. 49)

The central idea of Grice, thus, can be summarized as follows: since it is assumed that the speaker is cooperative and follows the conversational maxims, when his utterance overtly violates or one or more maxims or he exploits on of them, the hearer seeks for a different interpretation by deriving another content based on what the speaker explicitly said and the

contextual information, in order to make his interlocutor cooperative again. As matter of fact, there is an implicature whenever a speaker utters a sentence with a certain truth-conditional content *p* to implicitly convey another propositional content *p'* through a recognizable violation of the cooperative principle. Let's see this, take the following conversation:

A: "Do you want some peanuts?"
B: "Thanks, but I'm allergic"

Here B overtly uses the relation's maxim to convey an implicit content. B doesn't directly answer to A's question but exploit a shared general knowledge about the world (i.e. that if someone is allergic to a food generally avoids eating it) to convey his answer. But in order to do so, there must be some implicit expectations by both sides: B expects (a) A to consider himself rational and cooperative, and (b) that A is able to retrieve the implicature on the base of the context and what he said; while A expects B to be cooperative notwithstanding such apparent irrational behavior. There's, thus, a game of mutual expectation behind the implicature's generation. There would be other considerations to make in order to get a complete picture of the Gricean approach, like the different kinds of implicatures, how the procedure for their derivation works and the different properties they have, but this is not part of this paragraph's aim. The goal is to highlight how the three levels of meaning (i.e. sentence meaning, what is said and implicature) are defined within this framework, how they interact with each other and what does it take for generating the implicatures. Now that we have a clear picture of these topics, let's see the objections that have been moved and the solutions proposed.

2.4.2 Limits of the Gricean picture

Despite the fact that the Gricean framework had and still has a huge influence on the contemporary debate in linguistics, his work has been subject to many objections. The most widespread criticism of Grice's system concerns the generation of conversational implicatures. Stephen Levinson, in *Presumptive Meanings: the Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature* (2000), argues that the Gricean maxims provide an inadequate description of verbal communication as they, sometimes, allow the derivation of unintuitive implicatures. For instance, according to Grice's theory, the utterance of

(9a) Roberto gave some chocolate to his dog and it died

would violate the first sub-maxim of quantity if interpreted with the causal reading

(9b) Roberto gave some chocolate to his dog and *consequently* it died

This is because the speaker, if he really wanted to communicate the causal reading of the utterance, would have said explicitly (9b) in order to be adequately informative. But, since he decides to utter (9a) and thus be uninformative, it is reasonable to assume that he has no real intention of communicating (9b) but wants, rather, to imply its negation. This reading, despite coherent with Grice's theory, seems unlikely though. The fact that Grice's maxims sometimes do not seem to be able to provide a plausible description of the most intuitive interpretations of certain utterances has also been noted by W. Davis, who argues that "for nearly every implicature correctly predicted by Gricean theory, others are falsely predicted"[19] and that conversely "implicatures exist that cannot be derived from conversational principles"[20]. To show this, Davis proceeds by supposing that to an agent A is asked, "Did anyone die?" and he might answer "Some did," or he might simply say "Yes." If he answered "Yes", he would be affirming that some died, just as if he had answered "Some did." But he would not have implicated anything further. If we can use the Gricean argument to derive the implicature of "Some did" then we should also be able to use it to show that a "Yes" answer has the same implicature (since in both cases the content expressed would be that *some did*) but it does not. The answer "Some did" would implicate that it is not the case that everyone died, while an answer like "Yes" would not (W. Davis, 1998, pp. 34). We could consider the maxim of Quality to suffer the same problems: Grice attributes sarcasm, irony, metaphor, understatements, exaggeration and hyperbole all as flouting of the Quality's maxim and thereby using implicature to create these phenomena. Example of flouting the maxim of Quality has been said is sarcasm, phenomenon for which something overtly untrue is used to imply the opposite, but it is straightforward to find examples where this doesn't hold. For example, if I say to my brother "your face is hideous" this is obviously not true, but doesn't necessary implicate the opposite, instead it may suggest that I am just trying to annoy him. Defenders of the Gricean approach might argue that when talking to my brother I was flouting the maxim of Politeness to annoy him. However, this response is inadequate since what I am

[19] W. Davis, *Implicature: intention, convention, and principle in the failure of Gricean theory, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*, 1998, p. 33.
[20] Ibid.

saying is clearly also violating the maxim of Quality, so Grice's theory provides no clear reason to apply one maxim rather than the other when calculating the implicature. The only way that it is decided that in one case I was being sarcastic while in the other I was annoying my brother is because we intuitively decide which is which, not because Grice's system has any way of doing this. This is called the *problem of differentiation* (W. Davis, 1998).

Another problem that Grice's framework faces is the so-called *pragmatic circle* (J. Perry and K. Korta, 2008). In §2 we have seen Perry and Korta's distinction between two kinds of pragmatics: near-side and far-side. The first one is concerned with the notion of what is said and all those facts relevant for its determination; the second one is concerned about whatever happens *beyond* what is said: kinds of speech acts, implicatures, presuppositions and in general why what was said, was said. Now, one of the central features of Grice's framework is that an implicature arises each time the semantic content of an utterance (i.e. the propositional content) violates at least one of the four maxims, for the audience assumes the speaker to be cooperative during the conversation and an overt infraction of the conversational maxims leads to search for an alternative content based upon the explicit content and other contextual features[21]. This process involves reasoning about what is said, about the speaker's intentions, the conversational maxims and the reasons behind the explicit content. From now I'll refer, following Perry and Korta, to this general pragmatic reasoning as *Gricean reasoning*. Thus, to derive an implicatures it is both required an explicit content that may violate the conversational maxims and the Gricean process that allows to recover the intended implicature. However, it is a matter of fact that we also apply Gricean reasoning to derive the explicit content of an utterance. Resolving context-sensitive expressions, anaphors, ambiguities and vagueness require taking account of the speaker's intentions, what facts are relevant and what makes sense in the conversation. For example, if I walk into my hotel asking the receptionist my room's keys and he utters "I'll take them", I will take him to refer to my keys with his use of "them". More explicit cases are anaphors: "Kepa tossed a pen and he sat down". The preference for a joint reference between the expressions "Kepa" and "he" is driven by the maxim of quantity and of relevance. These cases are explained in terms Gricean reasoning: relevance, expectation on linguistic cooperation and alike reasons play a crucial role in determining the explicit content uttered. It has also been observed by Levinson (2000), that some sentences-constructions have the property of having "the truth conditions of

[21] Topic of discussion, past conversations, belief on speaker's beliefs and other forms of expectations are all features that influence the search's direction for alternative interpretations.

the whole expression depend on the implicatures of some of its constituent parts"[22]. He specifically noticed how generalized implicature may affect the derivation of explicit contents. Take the following example:

(10) a. "You know I always eat all the meat; from my plate I ate some vegetables and the meat".

b. […]; from my plate I ate [some (vegetables and the meat)]

c. […]; from my plate I ate [(some vegetable) and the meat]

(11) a. […]; from my plate I ate some [*but not all* (vegetables)] and the meat

b. […]; from my plate I ate some [*but not all* (vegetables and the meat)]

Sentence (10) is syntactically ambiguous. It can be either interpretable as (10b) or (10c) depending on the scope of the quantifier "some". (10b) generates the generalized conversational implicature expressed by (11b) while (10c) generates (11a), but (11b) is incompatible with (10a), since the first part of the sentence entails that I ate all of the meat. Thus, the correct syntactical structure must be (10c), but then, this is an example that shows how implicatures may be used as tools for the disambiguation process which is ultimately essential to derive the what is said. Grice's Framework doesn't seem to work as intended for a problem arises: how can implicatures interfere with the determination of explicit content if this second is required to derive such implicatures? Or more in general the problem is the following: "Gricean reasoning seems to require what is said to get started. But then if Gricean reasoning is needed to get what is said, we have a circle"[23]

Another objection which the Gricean Framework has to face is about the strict linearity which links the three levels of meaning. In Grice's view, the comprehension process of an utterance starts by grasping the sentence meaning, from which the proposition expressed will be thus determined and, through this, derive eventual implicatures. However, such step-by-step process seems to be unnecessary. Imagine you just turned on the radio and hear the following conversation (so you don't know neither the topic nor the identity of the speakers):

12) A: "Did you hear any screams ?"

B: "I was asleep".

[22] Cf. S. Levinson, *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicature*. Cambridge, 2000, MA: MIT Press, pp. 213-214.

[23] J. Perry and K. Korta, *The Pragmatic Circle*, p. 349.

Grice claims that we, as listener, should first determine the proposition expressed by B's utterance in order to recover his implicature but this is clearly not the case: you don't know what B said since you cannot fix the pronoun's reference but, as matter of fact, you can easily tell the implicature he conveyed. It seems that the explicit content of B's utterance is not necessary to understand that he didn't hear any scream since he was asleep. The content derived by our linguistic competence alone already enables us to understand the implicit communicative intention of the speaker, without passing through the explicit content. As matter of fact, it often happens that we're not able to recover the explicit content of many utterances but that, despite this, it is nevertheless possible to grasp the implicatures they are meant to convey. This example shows how the Gricean idea for which there's a linear progression of content which starts with the sentence meaning to the proposition expressed and then eventually to implicatures is too strict and that, in some cases, is possible to derive the implicit content only from the linguistic level.

There is one last series of objections which I want to present before moving to the next chapter, and it comes from the contextualist side. These objections are composed by three different arguments: the *Context Shifting argument*, the *Incompleteness argument* and the *Inappropriateness argument*.

(a) The *Context Shifting argument* is exemplified as follows:

> Suppose someone suspects that an expression *e* […] is context sensitive. How could he go about establishing this? One way that philosophers of language do so is to think about (or imagine) various utterances of sentences containing *e*. If they have intuitions that a semantically relevant feature of those utterances varies from context to context, then that, it is assumed, is evidence *e* is context sensitive.[24]

Let's examine this argument more closely and take the following example given by C. Travis (1997):

(13) The leaves are green.

Now imagine a speaker uttering (13) in two different contexts. In both of them he's referring to a tree whose leaves are naturally reddish but, for some scenic reason, have been painted of

[24] H. Cappelen, E. Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics*, Blackwell Publishing, p. 17.

green. In the first one the speaker is talking with a photographer who is seeking for a green subject for his photo shooting. What he said is intuitively true. In the second context, he's talking with a botanist who is interested in the natural color of the leaves. What he said is intuitively false. According to Travis, in the two contexts, (13) has the same conventional meaning, but crucially a different semantic interpretation:

> If the story is right, then there are two distinguishable things to be said in speaking [(13)] with the stipulated semantics. One is true; one is false; so each would be true under different conditions. That semantics is, then, compatible with semantic variety, and with variety in truth involving properties. So what the words of [(13)] mean is compatible with various distinct conditions for its truth.[25]

Even though (13) does not contain any of the obvious indexical, it is in some sense context-sensitive, that is, it expresses different propositions in different contexts. The objection is that the Gricean account underestimated the amount of context-sensitive expressions in natural languages. As matter of fact, Grice recognizes only a small set of these expressions and all of them are overtly context-sensitive (e.g. pronouns, possessives, time predicates, time and space adverbs and demonstratives), but this are, in the contextualist view, only the obvious cases, not the totality.

(b) A second kind of argument for context-sensitivity is the *Incompleteness argument*. It's goal is to demonstrate that, by adopting the Gricean semantics, the proposition semantically expressed by some sentence S is in many cases incomplete, that is, doesn't express a truth-conditional content which is evaluable as true or false. Cappelen and Lepore report the argument as follows:

> Consider the alleged proposition that P that some sentence S semantically expresses. Intuitively, the world can't just be P simpliciter. The world is neither P nor not P. There's no such thing as P's being the case simpliciter. And so, there is no such proposition.[26]

Examples that show this phenomenon have been shown in §2.2. Sentences containing adjectives like "tall", "ready", "old", "fast", "rich" etc. all clearly show that a contextual

[25] C. Travis, *Pragmatics*, In B. Hale & C. Wright, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, p. 89.
[26] Ibid., p. 11.

information is required to recover the communicative intention of the speakers and, with it, a full propositional content. Contextualists (and Indexicalists) argue that there's no such thing as "being ready/tall/fat/old" *simpliciter*: there is no semantic content which is stable throughout all utterances of, say, "John is fast" and which is independent of some contextual information. Here, again, the criticism points to Grice's characterization of what is said, how it is construed and to his underestimation of natural language context-sensitivity.

(c) The third argument is the *Inappropriateness Argument*. Contextualists claim that the pragmatic enrichments are necessary in order to account for the intuitions speakers have about the truth-conditions of utterances. The pragmatic processes of completion and enrichment are pervasive. If an utterance expresses a full propositional content even in the Gricean account, it often happens that this content is somehow inappropriate to be labeled as the explicit content of a speaker. In §2.2 I brought examples as:

(14) Every participant is drinking alcohol.
(15) It is raining.

but another example is:

(16) It will take time to get there.

The objection that is moved to the orthodox view is not that we can't derive a propositional content, nor that different utterances of the same sentences have distinct truth values, but instead that, according to Grice, the extra content that we grasp when hearing such sentences is to be accredited to secondary pragmatic processes that work at the implicit level. Nobody takes the speaker to mean with (14) that all participant in the universe is drinking alcohol; nor that with (15) means that it's raining in some place or other of the universe; or when uttering (16), that it will take whatever amount of time to get there. Contextualists argues that the propositions expressed by (14), (15) and (16) are enriched quite naturally and without any effort. It is not a matter of implicature. Moreover, recall Grice's definition of speaker meaning:

"*U* meant something by uttering *x*" is true iff, for some audience *A*, *U* uttered *x* intending
(1) *A* to produce a particular response *r*

(2) A to think (recognize) that U intends (1)

(3) A to fulfill (1) on the basis of his fulfillment of (2)[27]

If we adopt the Gricean picture, we should admit that the speaker *meant* to convey such inappropriate contents: in particular, he explicitly meant that all participant in the universe is drinking alcohol in uttering (14), that it's raining in some place or other of the universe in uttering (15) and so on. The question that contextualists ask is if this is really the case at all. Intuitively, it isn't. In general, what contextualists object is that, on Grice's picture, what is said is tightly constrained by the linguistic meaning. Despite accepting the distinction between what is said and what is implicated, they believe that such distinction must be modified. In particular, they reject the *syntactical constrain* that Grice put on the semantic content that an element of the sentence must correspond to each element which composes the proposition expressed by an utterance. Thus, in a scenario where I tell a friend of mine "I failed all exams", the explicit content that he understands in the Gricean framework is that I failed not only the exams I had to attend, but every exam, also the ones I'm not supposed to attend. This is so because there is no syntactical element in the sentence that specifies the domain of quantification and, as consequence, such enrichment must be treated as an implicature. However, we've seen that contextualists hold that this is against our basic intuitions. No one first understands that I failed all exams and only in a second moment realize that I must be talking about only those I had to attend.

These were just some objections moved to the Orthodox view, but the resulting advice is clear: something, within the Gricean picture, must be changed if we want to meet our intuition in communication. In the following chapter I'll present the main alternatives to the Orthodox view.

[27] H. P. Grice, *Utterer's Meaning and Intention*, in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 2, 1969, p. 151.

III. A SPECTRUM OF POSITIONS

In the previous chapter I've presented the *basic triad* of meaning. Given an utterance, we have to distinguish three levels of contents: sentence meaning (or lexical encoded meaning), proposition expressed (or what is said) and implicature (or what is implied). The first one offers a type or schema of possible propositions with a similar logical form upon which a determined propositional content is selected via contextual features and which, in turn, may be used to convey other contents through conversational maxims. This triad may be grouped is two different ways depending on how the relation between literal meaning and what is said is assumed to be: the Orthodox interpretation, for example, stresses the close relation between the two notions. This means that the process for obtaining a full propositional content involves mainly the lexical conventions that pertain to the meaning of simple expressions and the conventions about modes of combination, leaving small room for free pragmatic interventions. All those information that doesn't fall under this process, but are nevertheless conveyed, are deemed as implicatures. On the other hand, we have the Contextualist approach, which highlights the pervasiveness of underdeterminacy of literal meaning. Though constrained by the sentence meaning, the proposition expressed strongly depends on pragmatics processes even beyond overt cases of indexicality. There's more context-sensitivity then the one suggested by the traditional approach. For this reason, the speaker's intentions are always to be taken into account to reconstruct the specific content (i.e. truth-conditions) he wants to convey.

It has already been said that there is general consensus about the logical or syntactic proximity between sentence meaning and proposition expressed, something which implicatures lack. However, this view leaves space to different interpretations on how much constrain the first puts on the second. This flexibility depends mainly on three factors: how many context-dependent expressions we're to admit, if we're to accept the syntactical or the logical bond between linguistic meaning and proposition expressed, and which kinds of pragmatic intrusions we assume. Depending on these three factors, we can distinguish four basic positions concerning the role of context and speaker's intentions in determining the propositions expressed by utterances of natural-language sentences: Orthodox view, Indexicalism, Minimalism, and Contextualism. We've already seen in the previous chapter the main aspects of the Orthodox view and we also put forward some objections that have been moved to it. Many philosophers have therefore drawn the conclusion that changes need to be made to the theory by working in particular on the notion of what is said. In this chapter I'll present the remaining three approaches by paying attention to how they drew the line

between pragmatics and semantics and how they delineated, each in its own way, the role that pragmatic processes play in linguistic communication.

3.1 Indexicalism

Indexicalism is that approach that acknowledges the context-sensitivity of linguistic encoded meaning, but it also recognizes that the only pragmatic process required for the determination of what is said is that of saturation, that is, that pragmatic mechanism *triggered by the linguistic meaning* of context-dependent expressions that fixes their semantic values through a content-determining rule associated with them (i.e. character). According to Indexicalism, thus, it is the sentence itself which, through the conventional meaning of context-sensitive expression, triggers the intervention of speaker's intentions recovery. However, this basic explanation falls short. One of the most noteworthy contributions of Contextualism has been to show how the set of context-sensitive expressions isn't exhausted by overt indexicals. Many adjectives (such as "tall", "ready", "beautiful", "skilled", "useful" etc.) and phenomena like domain restriction or the lack of location specification (e.g. "it's raining") exhibit a form of context-sensitivity that is not captured by this "conventional-meaning call". Moreover, like in cases of domain restriction and location specification, there's no articulated lexical component which triggers the context-sensitivity. Indexicalists, in order to account for these cases while still holding saturation as the only pragmatic process, move their attention from the syntactical form of sentences to their logical form. The reason is simple but ingenious: it is possible that these unarticulated constituents are not to be found in the superficial grammatical structure but in the logical one[28]. Basically, Indexicalism seeks to rehabilitate at the level of logical form the role that the syntactic constraint had for Grice at the level of grammatical form. A such, these grammatically absent constituents are represented as free logical variable that have to be contextually satisfied in order to obtain a full propositional content. The linguistic encoded meaning is represented as a logical formula that contains free slots to be filled. In cases of domain restriction, for example, each quantifier is associated with a variable *f(x)* that, once filled, restricts the domain over which the quantifier ranges[29] or, in cases of location, it is assumed that the verb in question hides a variable which specify where the action occurs. Same reasoning with the adjectives above mentioned. Let's see an example:

[28] It was Russell to spread this consideration after his works on definite descriptions (cf. *On Denoting*, 2005).
[29] Note that even if this variable has been introduced to allow an unarticulated domain restriction, even with the "absolute" interpretation of the quantifier (i.e. where the quantifier ranges over the whole universe) the variable have to be saturated; namely, with the whole universe.

(17) a) It was raining, Mark was smart and he unplugged all plugs.

b) [It was is raining$_{f(z)}$]$_{(t1)}$ and [Mark was is smart$_{f(x)}$]$_{(t1)}$ and [unplug (c_o, all plugs$_{f(y)}$,*t1*)]

In this example, (a) is our sentence and (b) is its logical form (roughly). All context-sensitive expressions in (a) have a free-variable counterpart in (b): the semantic value of the pronoun "he" has an anaphoric link with the subject "Mark", those of the verbs at past tense will be the value of *t1*, the location where it rains is the content of *f(z)*, Mark's smartness is in respect to *f(x)*'s value and the plugs domain is restricted to *f(y)*. Now, the idea is that whenever a speaker utters (a), the sentence enters as input to the hearer's linguistic module and, after some compositional algorithm, the output (i.e. the semantic representation) is something of the form of (b). But (b) doesn't still constitute a full proposition, for there are free variables to be saturated. This is not anymore task of semantics and only the speaker's pragmatic competence/module can fill the free logical slots. Once the reference of all of them has been fixed, the result is the hearer's interpretation of the proposition expressed. Note that, intuitively, we tend to interpret (17a) as having said that Mark unplugged all plugs *because* it was raining, but an Indexicalist would deem this addition as part of what is implicated rather than of the what is said, for no syntactical nor logical component suggests this causal relation. On the other hand, a Contextualist would accept this kind of intrusion as still part of the explicit content, for they admit a not-triggered process called "modulation" along with that of saturation. Aside from this, the idea behind indexicalism should be clear: whenever contextual factors intuitively affect the truth-conditions of an utterance, indexicalism offers a systematic account in terms of saturation of logical variables. Since Indexicalists are bound to deal with all the cases presented by the contextualists, it's compelling to develop a strategy or method to treat all such cases. In this regard, Stanley and Szabó (2000) came up with the *Binding Argument* that if it is true that there's a variable in the sentence's logical form, then it is possible to produce a more complex sentence in which the value of such variable depends on the value of another variable bound by a quantifier. Their thesis, thus, is that to show that an element of an utterance's semantic content is the result of a saturation process it suffices to show that it can vary in relation to the values of a variable constrained by a quantifier placed before the statement. Take, for instance, the following example:

(18) Every time Maria waters the plants, it rains

The most immediate interpretation of (18) is that every time Mary waters the plants, it rains in the place where Mary waters them. According to this interpretation, the place where it rains varies according to the instant in which Mary waters the plants. Thus, assuming that the logical form of "it rains" is of the following form: "[it rains (f(t),g(t))]", then the value of the variable *g(t)*, which determines the place where it rains, depends on the value of the variable *f(t)* which determines the time of when it rains, which in turn is bounded by the quantifier that varies on the time intervals at which Mary waters the plants. One can take this interpretation into account if the logical form of (18) is as follows:

(18') [For all *t*: *t* is a time interval and Maria waters the plants in *t*](it rains *f(t)*, *g(t)*)

In this case, the value of the variable *f* is an identity function such that *f(t)=t* and the value of the variable *g* is a function that assigns to each value taken by the variable *t* (i.e. the various times Mary waters the plants) the place where Mary waters the plants.
Other expressions which can be treated with the saturation process are the qualitative predicates. Take the following example:

(19) Some elderly people in this nursing home are old.

A possible interpretation of (19) is that some elderly people in the nursing home in question are old when compared to the average age of an elderly person. Again, this interpretation is explained by admitting a variable in the logical form of the predicate "old":

(19') [Some x: x is an elderly person in this nursing home]($old_{f(x)}$ x)

In this case, the value of the *f* function is a function that takes each value of *x* and returns the average age of an elderly person. Hence the predicate "old" hides in his logical form a variable that need to be saturated with some age standard for being predicated of someone.
Of course, such argument must work also for the quantifiers. Let's therefore take one last example:

(20) On a planet in the solar system, all inhabitants are composed of carbon

The most intuitive interpretation semantically links the domain of the inhabitants referred to with that of the planet in question. Again, this interpretation is captured by the following logical form:

(20') [Exists x: x is a planet of the solar system]([all y: y are inhabitants]$_{f(x)}$
(composed of carbon y)

The value of the *f* function is a function which restricts the domain of the quantifier [all y: y are inhabitants] to the set of inhabitants of planet *x*. To get a more linear and argumentative view of the Binding Argument, I report below how Recanati, in *Literal Meaning* (2004), reconstructs the argumentation:

> Fully spelled out, Stanley's Indexicalist argument against optional ingredients runs as follows:
> 1. Contextualists say that in the simple statement "It rains", the tacitly understood location of rain is unarticulated and results from an optional pragmatic process of free enrichment.
> 2. In "Everywhere I go it rains", binding occurs: the location of rain varies with the values introduced by the quantifier "everywhere I go".
> 3. There is no binding without a bindable variable.
> 4. Therefore, "It rains" involves a variable for the location of rain.
> 5. It follows that the contextualist is mistaken: in the simple statement "It rains", the location of rain is articulated. It is the (contextually assigned) value of a free variable in logical form, which variable can also be bound (as in the complex sentence "Everywhere I go, it rains")[30]

In §4.1 we'll see how Recanati argues for a fallacy within this argument, but for now it is enough to point out that what Stanley and Szabó want to exhibit with the Binding Argument is that it is unnecessary to involve some modulation process in order to explain the context-sensitivity of such linguistic expressions. If it is possible to show, like these examples do, that there is a semantic bound between two expressions in the same sentence in such a way that the interpretation of one depends on the values of another, then this proves that there must be

[30] F. Recanati, *Literal Meaning*, pp. 161-162.

some hidden element in the logical form of such expressions even when not embedded in complex sentences. Therefore, expressions like "tall", "old", "fast", "ready" and quantifiers enclose a logical variable that requires to be saturated in order to deliver a truth-conditional content. Quantifiers and predicates already require completion at the level of their mandatory linguistic rules and, as such, doesn't require optional pragmatic processes. We have to keep in mind, that the debate between contextualism and indexicalism is not over how much truth-conditional context-sensitivity there is in natural language, but rather over how much *indexicality* there is. The fundamental issue is whether the truth-conditional interpretation of statements is entirely a matter of semantics (indexicalist program) or whether there is some extra ability on which the understanding of what is said depends beyond the knowledge of meaning and referents (contextualist program).

But, at this point, an obvious objection against truth-conditional semantics arises: given that natural language clearly contains obvious (and unobvious) indexical expressions, how can Stanley, and in general the defenders of a semantic what is said, maintain that "truth-conditional interpretation of assertions is entirely a matter of semantics"[31]? We've seen how indexicalists acknowledge the pervasive context-sensitivity of natural language, so how is Stanley's claim to be interpreted? A second question that needs to be answered is what the theoretical motivation behind such theory is. Why, for instance, it should be preferred Indexicalism over Contextualism? Stanley's response to both our questions is suggested in the following passage:

> Suppose my principal claim is true, that all effects of extra-linguistic context on the truth-conditions of an assertion are traceable to logical form. Then, the effects of context on the truth-conditional interpretation of an assertion are restricted to assigning the values to elements in the expression uttered. Each such element brings with it rules governing what context can and cannot assign to it, of varying degrees of laxity. The effects of extra-linguistic context on truth-conditional interpretation are therefore highly constrained. If this picture of truth-conditional interpretation is correct, then it is fundamentally different from other kinds of interpretation, like the kind involved in interpreting kicks under the table and taps on the shoulder. We do not interpret these latter sorts of acts by applying highly specific rules to structured representations. Nor is the role of extralinguistic context in interpreting these acts in any way constrained, as it is in the case of linguistic interpretation. Thus, if the

[31] J. Stanley, *Context and Logical Form*, in *Linguistics and Philosophy*, Vol. 23, 2000, p. 398.

> interpretation of assertions in fact functions in the way I have sketched, one should be suspicious of views that assimilate it too quickly to the ways in which we interpret non-linguistic acts.[32]

The answer is that although to determine the truth-conditional content of a sentence like "I'm tired" in a context *c* we need to know who the speaker in *c* is and what he's tired of in *c*, which is obviously not semantic knowledge, it is nevertheless true that, if indexicalism is right, such pragmatically information is *required* by conventional linguistic meaning for the determination of the truth-conditions. Despite knowing who is speaking does not in itself pertain to the linguistic rule of the expression "I", it is nonetheless the speakers and hearer's knowledge of its character (using Kaplan's terminology) that informs him that knowing who is speaking is required to determine the truth-conditions of the sentence "I'm tired". Same consideration for the expression "tired", where a standard of tiredness is required by the semantic knowledge of the expression itself. A requirement that, keep in mind, is evident by looking at its logical form. The Indexicalist thesis can thus be formulated more clearly by saying that, although the sole semantic knowledge alone is insufficient to determine the truth-conditions of certain utterances, the pragmatically information required to determine them is nonetheless specified by the linguistic meaning itself. Therefore, the Indexicalist response to the arguments brought by the Contextualists is that the context-sensitivity that many sentences manifest is explained by the presence of some unobvious indexical expressions; expressions whose linguistic meaning (or character) specifies, and therefore constrains, what information must be pragmatically provided to determine their semantic content in different contexts of utterance.

3.2 Minimalism

Minimalism is that position according to which "*there are two equally legitimate notions of what is said*: a purely semantic, minimalist notion, and a pragmatic notion"[33] (for simplicity "what is said$_{min}$" and "what is said$_{prag}$"). The minimal semantic content (what is said$_{min}$) is that content of a sentence (with respect to a context) obtained compositionally by the semantic value of its components and determined by pragmatic processes only when strictly necessary (namely, only for indexicals). The pragmatic content (what is said$_{prag}$), on the other hand, captures the speech's act content, a far richer content which accommodates a wider range of

[32] Ibid., p. 396.
[33] F. Recanati, *Literal Meaning*, p. 86.

pragmatic processes than the one syntactical triggered. The Minimalists's idea is to promise a partition acceptable to both the Orthodox and the Contextualists view by admitting a technical-sense interpretation of what is said captured by the semantic analysis, and an intuitive sense of it captured by the Contextualists' one. While the first notion is determined by a bottom-up processes (i.e. computational rules applied to the lexical meaning), the second one is to a large extend determined by top-down processes (i.e. those described by Contextualism). According to semantic Minimalism, every well-formed declarative sentence expresses a complete content, with a fixed set of truth-conditions; and this content is determined exclusively by the lexical or syntactic features of the sentence itself.[34] A sentence's minimal semantic content lines up with Grice's notion of what is said since it remains closely connected with the sentence's linguistic form. But let's get in more detail by highlighting the main features of Cappelen and Lepore's version of Minimalism.

In *Insensitive Semantics* (2005), Cappelen e Lepore (C&L) present the basic idea behind Semantic Minimalism 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. The minimal proposition cannot be characterized completely independently of the context of utterance. Semantic Minimalism recognizes a small subset of expressions that interact with contexts of utterance in privileged ways; we call these the *genuinely context sensitive expressions*[35]

The author's intentions seem clear. It seems conceivable that various utterances of (21):

> (21) Roberto has a tall child

express, in some sense, the same content; namely that *Roberto has a tall child*. Unlike Indexicalism, although it isn't indicated to whom the child's tallness is compared with, for

[34] Bach's "propositional radicals" precisely collides with this idea by claiming, instead, that sentences often express incomplete propositions.

[35] H. Cappelen and E. Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics*, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 143.

Minimalists this sentence expresses a fully propositional (i.e. truth-conditional) content, and it is the same for every utterance of (21); namely:

(21') "Roberto has a tall child" as uttered in *c* is true in L iff Roberto has a tall Child.

We've seen in §2.4.2, however, how the Incompleteness argument has been used by both Contextualists and Indexicalists to argue that some expressions have some form of contextual dependency. In particular within such expressions we find predicates such as "tall", like used in (21). The argument is based on the intuition that if we take, for instance, the sentence uttered in (21) without taking into consideration the contextual information about the standard of height in respect to which Roberto's child is compared, it is not possible to determine which state of affairs it describes and, as consequence, determine if it is true or false. This intuition leads to the conclusion that a proposition which states that Roberto's child is tall *simpliciter* doesn't exist. Moreover, if we add that the different utterances of (21) express distinct propositions (i.e. Context-shifting argument), it is likely that such sentence has some form of contextual dependency. Cappelen and Lepore must therefore propose an answer to these objections.

C&L's answer is that the Incompleteness argument leads to metaphysical conclusions that are not within the semantics' concern. In their view, even if speakers wouldn't be able to describe a situation in which this condition is satisfied (for no contextual comparison in offered), this is not a matter of semantics. It isn't within semantic tasks to describe how the world has to be in order to verify the truth-conditions of such sentences. It is up to Metaphysics to define what makes an object "tall" *simpliciter* and not a concern of philosophy of language. The Semantics' task is to capture that dimension of content which competent speakers grasps through compositional rules (plus eventual contextual features) and to represent this content in form of a disquotational sentence T-sentence which specify the conditions under which the utterance is true (i.e. what is said_{min}). If then no one is able to verify such conditions, this is irrelevant to the fact that such content represents a full proposition. It could be argued that this *apparent lack* of state-of-affair determination (in the sense that we, as speakers, don't know if it subsists or not) is what motivates hearer's to find more content conveyed by the utterance in question, but this, again, is not the semantics' field anymore, for we're now talking about the assertion made (i.e. what is $\text{said}_{\text{prag}}$) with the utterance and, as said at the beginning, this is matter of pragmatics. Cappelen and Lepore,

therefore, argue that such inability to provide a semantic evaluation of a phrase like "Roberto's child is tall" does *not* provide any evidence against the idea that the property of being tall *simpliciter* exists (and that it is the semantic content of "tall"). With C&L's words:

> You don't need metaphysical assistance in order to know which proposition you semantically express. It's the proposition *that A is red*. You don't need metaphysical assistance in order to know the semantic truth conditions: An utterance of 'A is red' is true just in case A is red. That's the entire story. You now know all that you need to know. Notice, even if you're some kind of verificationist who thinks he only knows what it is for A to have red eyes if he knows how to figure out that A has red eyes, we have a response to you: First, don't be a verificationist; it's a false view. Second, if you can't resist being one, we'll tell you how to verify the proposition that A has red eyes: go find out whether she has red eyes.[36]

Despite the taunting and provocative words, in §4.2 we'll see how such answer is unsatisfactory from many points of view and that C&L's understanding of the Inappropriateness argument is only partial. But for now what is important is to have a clear picture of how minimal semantic contents are to be understood and that, for minimalists, the idea that there are propositions such as A is tall, A is rich and A is ready is not an unreasonable thesis to hold.

Another feature of Minimalism is that all semantic sensitivity is grammatically triggered, that is, the only context-sensitive expressions that have to be saturated in order to derive the minimal semantic content are indexicals. This restricted set of terms takes the name of *Basic Set* and includes:

> Pronouns: "I", "you", "he", "she", "it" in various cases and number
> Possessives: "mine", "your", "his", "their", "our"
> Other adjectives: "actual" and "present"
> Adverbs: "here", "there", "now", "today", "yesterday", "tomorrow", "henceforth"
> Demonstratives: "that" and "this" in various cases and number
> Other words and verbs which indicate tense.

[36] Ibid., p. 164.

The approach presented so far isn't very different from Grice's save for the idea that there are four level of content (linguistic meaning, what is said$_{min}$, what is said$_{prag}$ and implicatures). It is indeed important to explain why it is emphasized the distinction between the what is said$_{min}$ from the what is said$_{prag}$ and for this reason it is essential to introduce a principle called *Speech Act Pluralism*. Before doing it, I shall spend a few words on the methodological assumption of C&L's minimalism (which may not be endorsed by other minimalists). C&L hold what they call a "naïve" approach to speech act contents: hearer's non-theoretical beliefs and intuitions about what a speaker claimed with an utterance are taken as valid description of what the speaker actually said$_{prag}$. What a speaker asserts is what he meant to communicate and what we understand he has asserted from our context: "It is what we respond to, question, laugh at, take seriously, ignore, agree or disagree with"[37]. With this simple approach, C&L are rejecting one of the most shared assumptions in the study of language: the *original-utterance centrism*, that is, the idea that the speaker's context has a privileged role in determining what he asserted with his utterance. C&L's thesis is that what a speaker asserts is partially determined by how it's reported in later contexts, by different hearers. It is for this methodological assumption that the authors, in their examples, make extensive use of quotes to report what a speaker said and also the reason why the context-sensitive tests proposed in their book always involve whether or not we've positive intuitions on quotes. So, each time C&L reason on how hearers would report an utterance they are actually reasoning on the speech act contents[38]. Now, let's get back to the *Speech Act Pluralism* principle:

> No one thing is said (or asserted, or claimed, or . . .) by any utterance: rather, indefinitely many propositions are said, asserted, claimed, stated, etc.[39]

The proposition semantically expressed by a declarative utterance **u**, then, doesn't exhaust the speech act content of **u**, for no one thing is said$_{prag}$ with an utterance, but a wide range of proposition *in addition* to the minimal semantic content. This claim, as it can easily be seen, is (partially) consequence of the methodological assumption laid above, for not only the speaker himself may want to convey more contents with a single utterance, but, if we consider the different descriptions that may be given of what one asserted, the speech act contents augment

[37] Ibid., p. 191.
[38] Same considerations must be applied to the cases I'll present.
[39] Ibid., p. 199.

considerably. This consideration is more evident if we consider a lengthy utterance like the following:

> (22) You are right, Frodo, […] to go back is to admit defeat, and face worse defeat to come. If we go back now, then the Ring must remain there: we shall not be able to set out again. Then sooner or later Rivendell will be besieged, and after a brief and bitter time it will be destroyed. The Ringwraiths are deadly enemies, but they are only shadows yet of the power and terror they would possess if the Ruling Ring was on their master's hand again.[40]

What did Gandalf say_{prag}? Tens of description could be given trying to catch what he $said_{prag}$ and every single one of them would be correct (presumed we're all competent speakers) and the total of these descriptions would constitute the range of contents conveyed by this utterance. Moreover, features of the assessment context (i.e. hearer's context), influence how hearers would describe what has been $said_{prag}$ in (22). I'll list some contents:

I) Gandalf $said_{prag}$ that the Company can't go back to Rivendell, for it would be soon sieged and the Ring taken.
II) Gandalf $said_{prag}$ that they can't surrender now, for it would mean to go back to Rivendell, where they would be safe only momentarily. But soon enough Sauron will destroy the city and claim the Ring.
III) Gandalf $said_{prag}$ that Frodo is right in not wanting to go back to Rivendell, for only destruction will fall upon it and, once the Ring taken, the Ringwraiths will gain their full power.

The examples may go on for pages. Moreover, since the assessment context plays an important role in determining the content of an utterance, if I tell you that Gandalf is finally happy to hear from Frodo's mouth something that actually makes sense, another way to express the content of (22) would be the following:

IV) Gandalf $said_{prag}$ that Frodo is right for once.

[40] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of The Rings*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, p. 295.

No one of these contents is more correct than others and there's no correct answer for which report describes the actual speech act content of (22). The general point that C&L want to stress is that "our intuitions about what speakers say depend on a wide range of considerations not all of which are encoded solely in the meanings of the words uttered. It is only when these considerations are combined with the meanings of the words used that it makes sense for us to ask what an individual said with his utterance"[41]. Some of the considerations in question are: facts about the speaker's intentions and beliefs, facts about the conversational context (either of the original utterance or of the report), general knowledge about the world and logical relations (such as implications). A last consideration is that such characterization of speech acts has an important epistemic consequence in whether speech act contents are amenable to scientific theorization.[42]C&L refuse the possibility of "*any* systematic theory from which one can derive all of which is said by an utterance"[43] for what was asserted by **u** is excessively variable with respect to indefinitely many features of countless possible contexts of quotation. It seems too optimistic to ask for such theory.

3.2.1 Three tests for indexicality

Let's conclude this paragraph by introducing a set of criteria put forth by minimalists to differentiate between expressions that belong to the Basic Set and those that do not. Cappelen and Lepore (2005) laid out three tests aimed at identifying context dependency. They asserted that these tests are only successfully passed by overt indexicals.

The first is the *Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Reports.* It works as follows: take an utterance *u* of a sentence S by speaker A in context C. An Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Report of *u* is an utterance *u'* in a context C' of the sentence "A said that S". C&L's idea is that, in most cases, expressions truly dependent on the context lead to judge such indirect reports as untrue or inappropriate. This means that, when the presence of an expression *e* within a sentence tends to hinder disquotational indirect reports (meaning it makes such reports false), this provides evidence that *e* is context-sensitive. The reason is fairly simple: by its very definition, the context-sensitivity of *e* implies a shift in its semantic interpretation from one instance of utterance to another. Therefore, if *e* is indeed context-sensitive and a speaker A employs it in a context C while a second speaker B uses it in context C' (where salient contextual factors change), the semantic value of their uses of *e*

[41] H. Cappelen and E. Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics*, p. 194.
[42] See corollary 3., pp. 200-201.
[43] Ibid.

would be different. As matter of fact, any speaker who wants to utter a sentence whose semantic content is the same as another's speaker's utterance and he finds himself in a different context, he is precluded from using *e*. In other words, he cannot convey the second speaker's utterance disquotationally. Take the following example: imagine that Ruben utter the following sentence referring to Alex the 21August 2023:

23) You weren't ready yesterday

Now let's suppose that the 15 September 2023 a friend of mine, talking with Luca, wants to report what Ruben said almost one month ago. Obviously, he cannot use the same words used in that time since, otherwise, we'd have something like:

(24) Ruben said that you weren't ready yesterday

The report would be clearly false since in this second context the words "you" and "yesterday" have a different reference from the reference they had in the context of Ruben's utterance. The point Cappelen and Lepore's want to make is that all and only the expressions in the Basic Set block Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Reports. Expressions like "ready" (like in the example above), "tall", "red", "fast" etc. do not show the same feature, since disquotationally report sentences containing such terms seem to work fine. (i.e. they are not deem as false or inappropriate). Take, for example, the following utterance:

(25) Mark is not tall

Said by Alex referring to the average soldiers' height. In any other context another speaker may report what has been said by simply uttering:

(26) Alex said that Mark is not tall

Moreover, imagine that the sentence (25) is uttered by a speaker in two distinct contexts C and C'. Given that there is a relatively stable semantic content associated with (25), one could describe the two events in a conjunctive form:

(27) In both C and C', Alex said that Mark is not tall

This fact, according to Cappelen and Lepore, provides evidence against contextualist and indessicalist theories.
The second test proposed by the two philosophers is the so-called *Collective Description Test.* It is presented as follows:

> If a verb phrase v is context sensitive (i.e., if it changes its semantic value from one context of use to another), then on the basis of merely knowing that there are two contexts of utterance in which 'A v-s' and 'B v-s' are true respectively, we cannot automatically infer that there is a context in which 'v' can be used to describe what A and B have both done. In short, from there being contexts of utterance in which 'A v-s' and 'B v-s' are true it doesn't follow that there is a true utterance of 'A and B both v' (Cappelen and Lepore 2005, p. 99)

The case extends also to singular terms. The reason is soon said. This arises due to the fact that the semantic interpretation of *v* in the preceding sentences is determined within specific contexts. However, it is not said that these two semantic interpretations are captured by the meaning of *v* as used in a third context. Suppose, for instance, that the sentences "A is here" and "B is here" are true in C1 and C2 respectively. From this doesn't follow that in C3, where the place is different from C1 and C2, is true that "A and B are here". Once more, each of the expressions enumerated within the Basic Set successfully meets this criterion, while other expressions deemed as context-sensitive by Contextualists and Indexicalists fail the test.
The third test, the *Inter-Contextual Disquotational Test* (ICD), states that *e* is a context-dependent expression only if there are valid utterances following the given structure, in which *e* appears within the statement S.

> "There are (or can be) false utterances of "S" even though S"

And, for the same logic:

> "There are true utterances of "S" even though it is not the case that S"

Let's see a concrete example. Suppose we are trying to determine whether the expression "she" is context sensitive. To do so, according to the ICD Test, we choose a sentence S containing such expression like:

(28) "She is blonde"

and then we proceed to formulate the ICD structure of S, namely:

(28ICD) "There are (or can be) false utterances of "She is blonde" even though she is blonde"

C&L stress the point that, *intuitively*, any utterance of "she is blonde" by a speaker who is referring to a not-blonde girl, suffices to establish that the test utterance of (28ICD) expresses a truth. Same considerations follow for all the other expressions within the Basic Set. Now, to see why other allegedly expressions do not pass the test, Cappelen and Lepore present a closely related test called the RCSA-test; acronym that stands for *Real Context-Sensitive Argument*. In order to understand the test, the two philosophers highlight the difference between the context *in* which a Context-sensitive argument (CSA) is told, called Storytelling Context and the context *about* which a CSA is told, the Target Context. With the first context, they mean the stage or setting which describes the situation in which a story is presented (or narrated), with the second one, instead, they refer to an agent's point of view within the story context. Thus, if an expression is genuinely context sensitive, we should be able to construct an RCSA-test for it, that is, "we should be able, in a Storytelling Context, to use e in a sentence S that semantically expresses a true proposition and simultaneously describes a Target Context in which S is used falsely (or vice versa)"[44] (still based on our intuitions). Let's see this with an example applied to the alleged context-sensitive predicate "red":

> In order to be red, an apple has to have red skin. That's a necessary condition for being a red apple. It is irrelevant, for instance, whether an apple is red on its inside. Here's an apple, call it Rupert; Rupert is red. On the inside, Rupert is white. Nonetheless, there are utterances of 'Rupert is red' that are false, not because Rupert's color changes, but because the speaker cares about what's inside Rupert rather than whether it is red or not. This affects the truth value of the utterance even though the

[44] Ibid. p. 108.

> color of the inside of the apple is completely irrelevant to whether Rupert is red (C&L 2005, p. 111)

The Storytelling Context, in this case, is the narrator's context. A context where "red" is used to refer to the apple's skin. On the other hand, the Target Context is the speaker's context in which he uses "red" to talk about the apple's inside. Cappelen and Lepore argue that such story is counter-intuitive and unconvincing because when "red" is used in the Storytelling Context to describe a Target Context, it takes the semantic value it has in the Storytelling Context, and not the semantic value it would have had if it had been used in the Target Context. In other words, when we use "the apple is red" in our context to describe a state of affair, it is the features of this context (i.e. how we use "red") that determines whether an object in such state of affair is correctly described by that utterance (i.e. whether the apple is red). Now, it is fundamental to stress that the reasons C&L bring in favor of their positions are essentially based on their intuitions and they are aware of it,[45] but don't offer any other valid methodology to support their claims apart from intuitions. The tests presented in this section, however, constitute an important step toward a systematic attempt to recognize the context-sensitivity of natural language's expressions and, most importantly, boosted the philosophical debate around the possibility to set up such criteria. Let's conclude this chapter by presenting one last alternative to the Orthodox view.

3.3 Contextualism

Contextualism encompasses a range of theories that span across a spectrum extending from a more moderate position to the most radical perspectives. I will not dwell into the differences among these theories and, instead, my focus will center on their shared attributes. For this reason and for the fact that contextualist theses are articulated on multiple levels of linguistic analysis, I'd like to present this last position differently from what has been done so far. Indeed, for a better understanding of Contextualism it is worth presenting the ongoing debate between contextualists and semantic minimalists regarding language understanding and its formal analysis. Such debate can be framed in three different ways:

[45] About this, they write: "Of course, it would be boring were the entire debate reduced to a collision of intuitions: we say all utterances of (5a)–(5b) are intuitively false; our opponents insist that they can hear some as true. How do we press forward? Well, since it's supposed to be news that these expressions are context sensitive, anyone who thinks there can be true utterances of (5a)–(5b) needs to bolster her case: she could try to do so by bringing us to recognize some of these utterances as true, perhaps by getting us to reflect further upon the sorts of data presented in CSAs" (Ibid. p. 109). Where (5a) is "There are true utterances of 'George knows that he has hands' even though George doesn't know he has hands" and (5b) is "There are true utterances of 'Fire engines are red' even though fire engines aren't red.".

Firstly, the discussion can be framed as an inquiry into the organization of the human language faculty and the mechanisms governing the use of semantic and pragmatic cognitive resources during everyday conversational interactions. It is built upon insights and methodologies originating from the fields of psycholinguistics. While predominantly empirical in nature, this discourse also invites philosophers to contribute by assessing and analyzing the conceptual tools behind both the theories and the empirical studies advanced by experts in psycholinguistics. Another approach to frame the debate is to view it as a discussion concerning the logical structure of natural languages and the integration of context sensitivity into a formal and compositional framework for understanding the meaning of sentences in a natural language. In essence, if we aim to construct a model-theoretic explanation for a language, capable of establishing truth conditions for any given sentence within that language, we face the question of how to adapt such framework to accommodate expressions whose meanings are influenced by the conversational context. A third perspective through which the debate can be approached is from the conceptual point of view. In this context, the primary objective is to achieve clarity regarding essential concepts, such as the notions of “saying” and “implicating”, and to establish a clear demarcation between these concepts. This involves posing questions like: what constitutes a conversational implicature? Can there be different methods for distinguishing implicatures from explicit statements, on one hand, and from entailments and presuppositions on the other? Is it worth to identify an intermediate content that lies between what is said and what is conveyed? (as the notion introduced by Bach (1994) of "impliciture") Alternatively, the debate can revolve around the methodologies inherent to philosophers’ conceptual investigations like the use of intuitions as reliable tool of analysis or the credibility of constructing hypothetical scenarios (thought experiments) that can serve as tests for these intuitions. Of course, the debate is much deeper and articulate than the one I can present in the following sections, but it is sufficient to give a clear picture of Contextualism’s main features in all his layers of study.

3.3.1 The cognitive debate

The debate in question revolves around the extent to which human’s semantic processing operates independently of pragmatic processing. The debate between minimalism and contextualism has primarily focused on the understanding aspect of language processing, rather than its production aspect. Furthermore, this debate often assumes a distinctly Chomskyan framework, grounded in the acceptance of a computational model of the language faculty. Given this background, Minimalism posits that the language system operates as a

distinct module, possibly particularly complex and incorporating submodules, which remain unaffected by contextual information. As such, this module doesn't have access to contextual cues like the speaker's identity, timing, location, salient elements and mutual knowledge among conversation participants. Contextual information only influences the output of the language system which manifests as a representation of the logical form (LF) derived from the linguistic string taken as input. This logical representation, in turn, is the basic content upon which assigning the propositional form (PF) to the input string, that is, the explicit content of the utterance (or set of explicit contents, Wilson and Sperber 1993, pp. 23-24) obtained by a pragmatic elaboration of the underlying LF. For instance, consider the utterance (29a) below. The LF representation for this sentence could resemble the structure outlined in (29b):

(29) a. He has a bat

b. [There is a y: $Bat_{1/2}(y)$] Have ($x_{\text{(salient male)}}$,y)

Here, "Bat_1" and "Bat_2" are to be intended as symbolizing respectively one of the two meanings associated with the lexically ambiguous term "bat" (i.e. the animal or the sports equipment). Moreover, contextual features are still required to attribute a value to the variable *x*. This reference assignment of such variable is semantically constrained, as the third-person singular masculine pronoun "he" semantically encodes the detail that the referent is male and holds significance within the ongoing conversational context. Nonetheless, it can be argued that this information doesn't form an integral part of the propositional content conveyed by the utterance. Instead, it functions as a rule or procedure designed to assist the audience in determining the referent of the pronoun, consequently shaping the propositional content of the sentence. As a result, the information represented in (29b) represents an instruction for the pragmatic system to complete the LF representation in a suitable manner such to produce a likely representation of the propositional content uttered by the speaker[46]. Opponents of Minimalism generally contend that there exists a significantly wider disparity between the representation of the LF of an utterance and the representation of its PF. They argue that transitioning from the LF representation to the PF representation necessitates pragmatic processing which extends beyond the mere task of assigning values to unbound variables or

[46] Depending on how the logical form is conceived, one can be oriented toward Indexicalism or C&L's minimalism for instance. As matter of fact, part of the debate among minimalists concerns the LF representation itself and the extent of its correspondence with a representation of the propositional form (PF) of the utterance.

selecting from alternative lexical and structural features. Such processes could involve various pragmatic modulation processes like enrichment, loosening or pragmatic transfer (Carston 2002, Recanati 2004, Nunberg 1995). Processes that I'll discuss in section §3.3.3. Importantly, these modulation processes are not mandatory and they are not triggered by any linguistic/logical element within the LF. Rather, they are triggered by information available within the conversational context. For instance, in (29a) the word "have" is not ambiguous but, depending on the context, it could be interpreted in different ways. Suppose that (29a) is uttered in response to someone who asked who owns a baseball bat or to someone who asked who is holding a baseball bat. One has to grasp whether the focal point of the conversation pertains to the bat's owning or its physical possession to comprehend how the word "have" has to be understood and, with it, the state-of-affair intended by the speaker. Additionally, consider the minute variations in comprehension that arise from the specific term associated with the verb "have" such as: "have a bat", "have a chat", "have a meal", "having a talent", "having an idea", etc. These instances highlight the subtle differentiations in meaning produced by the verb's use in different contexts (Searle 1995, Travis 1997). The core argument put forth by contextualists, emphasizes that the content explicitly expressed by a speaker can be inherently incomplete in various respects, even after resolving lexical and structural ambiguities and assigning contextual values to indexical elements. These "partial" contents are articulated by speakers with the presumption that hearers can draw from the context the pertinent cues to recover the intended content. Through this process, they can construct a complete and detailed PF representation of what has been said.[47] Some contextualists, furthermore, argue that language processing is influenced by contextual features right from the earliest stages of comprehension and that pragmatic mechanisms might operate even before the linguistic module takes place. This position is to be framed within a more general debate around how language processing is to be understood. This debate involves proponents of two contrasting perspectives: on one side there are those who assert that language processing occurs in a serial manner, with different types of information being progressively engaged in stages (starting with syntactic-semantic elaboration followed by pragmatic's one) (Marcus 1972, Frazier 1987, Osterhout & Holcomb 1992); on the other side

[47] Ferreira and Patson (2002, 2007) challenge the idea that hearers need to reconstruct a complete and detailed PF at all. They argue that, in many situations, it is required a "good enough" representations that enables the hearer to have a general idea of the speaker's communicative intentions. In other words, Ferreira et al. contended that the system's primary task is to generate representations that are apt for the specific purpose the listener seeks to achieve with the assistance of the linguistic input. Their argument underscores the fact that listeners are seldomly required to provide evidence for the accuracy or exhaustive depth of their comprehension regarding a given utterance. This observation carries significant implications for the design and structure of the language processing system.

there are those who maintain that language processing is a dynamic process where multiple processes simultaneously occur (Altmann & Kamide 1999, Sanford & Sturt 2002). From this viewpoint, pragmatic influences can potentially exert influence right from the earliest moments of comprehension, making the role of LF representations somewhat unclear since it would inherently be pragmatically influenced.

There is a wide collection of experimental research pertaining to the ongoing debate between contextualism and minimalism. Experiments centered around different aspects of language comprehension, including pronoun resolution, the coherence of discourse, contextual frameworks, shifts in topic and the construction of focus among others. Certain authors have drawn upon this extensive experimental literature to advocate either their contextualist or minimalist viewpoints. The realm of investigation extends also to various forms of non-literal language application like metaphors, irony, metonymy and idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, the focus has extended to examining scalar implicatures and other Gricean conversational implicatures.

3.3.2 The formal debate

Formal semanticists, who focus on building comprehensive formal theories that yield truth conditions for natural-language sentences, faced the challenge posed by contextualists in three distinct ways. Firstly, this challenge can be interpreted as an effort to dismiss the contextualists' thesis, essentially casting doubt on the notion that there genuinely exist expressions exhibiting the kind of context-sensitivity put forward by constextualists. Secondly, the challenge can be seen as an effort to manage the data, demonstrating that these expressions ultimately fit within established categories of context-sensitive terms, such as indexicals, which can be addressed through conventional methodologies. Lastly, the challenge could involve accommodating the data, showcasing the feasibility of constructing compositional theories capable of effectively handling context-sensitive expressions beyond the realm of indexicals.

As we've seen in the previous paragraphs, Cappelen and Lepore (2005) adopt the first strategy by arguing that there is only a small set of context-sensitive expressions (i.e. Basic Set). For the C&L's minimalist perspective, the distinction between lexical meaning and the speaker's intention remains sharply demarcated. In this view, contextual modulation, which pertains to the speaker's meaning, plays an important role into the determination of satisfaction conditions of a given utterance, while the compositional framework is expected to solely handle semantic meaning, independently from any satisfactory consideration. The

second strategy, on the other hand, is endorsed by indexicalists like Stanley and Szabo (2000) who deny that the kind of context-sensibility shown by contextualists calls for modulation processes, but rather it is to be assimilated to cases of indexicality related to the LF of the uttered sentence. Since both positions have already been discussed respectively in §3.2 and §3.1, I'll briefly present what we can call the "accommodation" approach. Advocates of this strategy claim that "we have to do our best to account for the intuitive-truth and satisfaction-conditions of utterances, and to the effect we may have to liberalize the notion of meaning/content to the point of blurring the semantic/pragmatic distinction" (Recanati 2010, p. 43). The idea is to make contextual modulation compatible with the concept of compositionality despite the fact that, so far, the classic approach to compositionality made room only for lexically-triggered context-sensibility. Recanati, in *Truth-conditional Pragmatics* (2010), has developed this standpoint by positing that the meanings which undergo semantic composition to determine the truth-conditional content of a spoken sentence are the (optional) pragmatically modulated meanings of its constituent parts. In order to promote this idea, he introduces the notion of a *modulation function* (*mod*) that operates on an expression and a given context as its arguments. The value of *mod*, with argument the expression *e* in the context *c*, is a function that is contextually appropriate for the interpretation of *e* in *c*. That is, when the modulation function that the context makes salient is applied to the character of the expression within that context, it yields the modulated meaning of that expression within that particular context. In instances where the salient function equates to the identity function, the expression adopts its literal interpretation. In this sense, "literalness is considered a unique instance of (zero) modulation" (Recanati 2010, p. 45). For example, Recanati points out that a way to interpret the phrase "The city sleeps" involves understanding "the city" as a metonymy to the city's inhabitants. In this context (call it *c*), we presume that a contextually pertinent metonymic function (call it *g*) is applied to the content of the expression "the city". This application yields the modulated content *The inhabitants of the city*. This modulated meaning, in conjunction with the (zero) modulated meaning of "sleeps", produce the overall truth-conditional content of the entire utterance "The city sleeps". Therefore, the interpretation of a complex expression (as "The city sleeps" as used in the context *c*) can be seen as a function derived from the modulated meanings of its syntactic components and the way they are combined. Following Recanati's schema[48], we can capture

[48] Recanati presents the following schema to capture such modulating-based compositionality (2010, p. 44). The interpretation of complex expression represented as I(α●β) is the following:

$$I\,(\alpha\bullet\beta) = f(mod(\alpha, c^1)(I\,(\alpha)_{c1}), mod(\beta, c^2)(I(\beta)_{c2})) = f(g_1(I\,(\alpha)_{c1}), g_2(I\,(\beta)_{c2}))$$

the interpretation of the complex expression "The city sleeps" as used in *c* (i.e. *I*("The city sleeps")$_c$) as follows:

$$I(\text{“The city sleeps”})_c = f\,(g_1\,(I\,(\text{“The city”})_{c1}),\, g_2\,(I\,(\text{“sleeps”})_{c2}))$$

Where c_1 and c_2 corresponds "…to sub-parts of the context *c* in which the complex expression [The city sleeps] is used (I assume that if a complex expression $\alpha\bullet\beta$ is used in a context *c*, each of its constituents is used in a sub-part of *c*, for example α in c^1 and β in c^2)" (Recanati 2010, p. 44) and g_1 and g_2 correspond to the two pragmatic modulation functions which the context makes salient: g_1 carries the metonymic function from "The city" to the content *the inhabitants of the city*, and g_2 carries the identity function on "sleeps"[49]. However, the primary concern regarding Recanati's proposal revolves around its compatibility with the principle of compositionality that formal semanticists standardly use. Recanati himself acknowledges that his idea doesn't adhere to strong compositionality since, instead of preserving the notion that the content of an expression is determined by the *contents* of its constituents and their syntactic arrangement, his proposal sees the content of a complex expression as being function of *the modulated meanings* of its parts and how are arranged. However, Recanati asserts that his approach yields anyway a weak form of compositionality. Indeed, by introducing the context as an additional parameter for the function which returns the utterance's content, we can establish that the modulated meaning of a complex expression is a function of the modulated meanings of its constituent parts, their syntactic arrangement, and the way these are modulated (provided by the context). Referring to Pagin (Pagin 2005, p. 313), Recanati contends that this weaker form of compositionality is compatible with the objectives of formal semantics, as many formal models already assume that the meaning function incorporates context as one of its parameters. It is still debated whether this proposal effectively maintains a sufficiently robust concept of compositionality since it greatly depends on the possibility of formalizing the notion of contexts, sub-contexts and salience. However, delving into this matter in depth exceeds the scope of this section. Let's now face the last aspect of the Minimalism-Contextualism debate.

3.3.3 The conceptual debate

[49] Similarly, an alternate interpretation of "The city sleeps" could be that the city is silent. This would instead involve applying the identity function to "the city" and invoking a metaphorical modulation function for "sleeps".

At the beginning of such philosophical dispute we find scholars who followed Wittgenstein's idea regarding meaning being understand in terms of use. One such scholar is Travis (1985), who advances the claim that the content expressed (i.e. the truth-conditional content of a sentence uttered in a specific context) greatly varies across contexts, even while the reference to specific entities remains constant. Searle (1980) presents a similar perspective regarding the change of truth-conditional content depending on the shifting background circumstances. Strong advocate of the underdeterminacy thesis, Searl affirms that:

> The literal meaning of a sentence only determines a set of truth conditions given a set of background practices and assumptions. Relative to one set of practices and assumptions, a sentence may determine one set of truth conditions; relative to another set of practices and assumptions, another set; and if some sets of assumptions and practices are given, the literal meaning of a sentence may not determine a definite set of truth conditions at all. (Searle 1980, p. 227)

In his view, the background (i.e. the set of capacities, assumptions and general knowledge) is fundamental for meaning and comprehension. Searle's position becomes most apparent when we take into account some specific examples. He showed how the use of common verbs such as: "cut", "mend", "take", "clean", "make", "bring", "open", "close", "take" and "play", yields distinct truth conditions due to the components of the contextual Background that come into play. To illustrate it, let's see various instances limiting our focus to human agents, tangible objects, and of the verb "open":

(30) a. Leonor opened a gift
b. Margarida opens a popsicle
c. Marta opened her wallet
d. Leonor opened the fridge
e. Matilde opens a wound
f. Rita opens the window

While the semantics of the term "open" remains constant across these instances, its interpretation differs significantly in each case. The manner in which "open" contributes to the utterance's truth conditions varies in respect with the particular context in which it is used within a sentence. The action of opening a wallet is obviously distinct if compared to opening

one's would and this, in turn, diverges from the notion of opening a gift. Crucially, it appears that the interpretation of "open" is determined by the meaning assigned to object that has being opened, and this is the outcome of an underlying framework of assumptions pertaining to the process of one entity opening another. In essence, this background of assumptions determines what it means for some *x* to open *y*; it defines the scenario we represent after hearing an utterance (or reading a sentence). Such idea finds also support by noticing the difficulty we face in understanding the following examples:

(31) a. Diego opened the dust
b. Mark opens a glass
c. Roberto opens piece of door

Following Searl, the challenge arises not due to a lack of understanding of individual words or any syntactical complications, but instead because our existing Background framework fails to equip us with the requisite for the understanding of the act of opening dust, glass, or pieces of doors. This hinders our ability to assign meaningful truth conditions to these sentences.[50] Such view is only one among the many that since the '80 challenged the standard view of semantics. As matter of fact, before this period, it was widely accepted a view that clearly distinguished between sentence meaning on the one hand, which was regarded within the competence of semantics, and speaker meaning on the other, field of pragmatics. Such distinction is captured by Neale's fundamental tenet of truth-conditional semantics presented in §1.4 and what Berg (2002, p. 351) calls the Standard View of Semantics (SV):

> *Standard View of Semantics (SV)*:
> Every *disambiguated* sentence has a determinate semantic content, *relative* to an assignment of contents to its indexical expressions, and not necessarily identical to what may be conveyed (pragmatically) by its utterance.

In other words, once the syntactical and lexical ambiguities have been resolved and contextual values have been attributed to indexicals and demonstratives, the outcome is a complete propositional content that corresponds to the sentence's truth-conditional content. The content thus derived ~~is~~ coincides with what has been literally said through an utterance.

[50] For a complete exposition of Searle's notion of Background refer to *Checking Searle's Background*, by David Sosa, in *Teorema: Revista Internacional de Filosofía*, 1999, Vol. 18, pp. 109-123.

We have already seen what the standard contextualists' reply to SV is, namely, the *Context-Shifting argument*:

(i) There are cases were the content of a sentence S determined by the SV is true in one context but not in another
(ii) The difference noted in (i) is not due to ambiguity or indexicality
∴ SV must be wrong.

Relevance theorists like Sperber and Wilson, as well as Carston, along with Neo-Gricean philosophers like Bach and Recanati, have highlighted various instances of semantic underdetermination or incompleteness. In these instances, the encoded meaning of a sentence falls short of a fully propositional interpretation, or at least of the meaning directly conveyed. This conveyed meaning involves the pragmatic adjustment of the encoded meaning. Bach (2008) distinguishes, among the modulation processes, completion and expansion. Recanati (2004) discusses the processes of free enrichment, loosening and semantic transfer. Within the realm of relevance theory, Sperber and Wilson (1995) and Carston (2002) refer to processes such as enrichment and loosening. For clarity sake, let's adopt Recanati's terminology and have a closer look to these modulation processes:

- *Free enrichment* is that process responsible for making more specific the interpretation of an utterance beyond its literal meaning. It works at level of single expressions, like in cases where the expression "jumping", as used in a context, is understood as "jumping over the wall" or where the expression "cows" as used in "I ate cows" is understood as "cow meat". This type of enrichment called "free" because it isn't governed by linguistic constraints, that is, there are no linguistic triggers that warn the hearer/speaker that some kind of intervention is required, but it is the context and the expectations that asks for it. As matter of fact, while saturation is a bottom-up process under linguistic control, free enrichment is a top-down process guided by pragmatic considerations. The example that Recanati brings forward is the following:

(32) Mary took out her key and opened the door

We normally tend to interpret (32) to mean that Mary used the key to open the door, although this connection isn't explicitly stated in the sentence. Such matching between the intuitive

truth conditions of the utterance and the SV's truth conditions is achieved through the process of free enrichment.

- *Loosening* is introduce by Recanati as "the converse of enrichment" (Recanati 2004, p. 50) and consists in the widening of the predicate's application given by its literal meaning. That is, when a condition required for the application of a concept is relaxed in the context, resulting in an expansion of the predicate's applicability. The example brought by Recanati is the following:

(33) The ATM swallowed my credit card

As matter of fact, the act of swallowing cannot be attributed to an ATM, since ATMs lack the biological mechanisms necessary for this action. However, by loosening the criteria for the term, we create an *ad hoc* concept which loses its biological features and, as such, can be applied more broadly. Robyn Carston (2002, p. 328) presents other examples like:

(34) a. There is a rectangle of lawn at the back
b. This steak is raw
c. Here is my new flatmate [referring to a newly acquired cat]

The lawn area in (34a) is unlikely to precisely be a true rectangle. Instead, it is more likely to *approximately* be of rectangular shape, since having two opposite sides equal in length is rather difficult. Same reasoning for (34b), where the steak, possibly presented at a restaurant, is not actually in a raw in the sense of being uncooked but, rather, it is very likely that it is under-cooked than desired by the speaker. Lastly, in case (34c) the cat cannot be a flatmate strictly speaking but, by losing the human's features which characterize the term, we can predicate of a cat to be a flatmate.

- *Semantic transfer* is that pragmatic process where "… the output is neither an enriched nor an impoverished version of the concept literally expressed by the input expression. It's a different concept altogether, bearing a systematic relation to it" (Recanati 2004, p. 51). Take, for instance, the expression "the ham sandwich" in the sentence "The ham sandwich left without paying" said by a waiter. The expression "the ham sandwich" is very likely used to deliver the content *the ham sandwich orderer* rather than the sandwich itself. Same consideration for the utterance "I am parked outside" said to a friend of mine while I am

into my car. In this case, despite the fact that the property of being parked outside should literally be applied to a car, in this context it comes to denote a property which applies to me.

In the three debates that I've outlined (the cognitive debate, the formal debate, and the conceptual debate), the picture I've presented is inevitably an oversimplification of the much more intricate and multifaceted situation in which the debate currently is. However, it is clear that there won't be a single definitive argument that conclusively favors contextualism over minimalism or vice versa. Another thing which is clear to the majority of the philosophical community is that the standard view of semantics from the 1980s needs to be reconsidered, and there exists a range of positions lying between extreme minimalism and radical pragmatism which, on the current state of the debate, bring uncertainty on which position along such spectrum one is recommended to adopt based on current evidence.

Before concluding the chapter, however, I wish to dwell on a specific theory within the contextualist position which, in the recent years, has been particularly influential in shaping the discussion about the nature of communication by emphasizing the role of cognitive processes in understanding natural language; all of this still within a Neo-Grician prospective.

3.3.4 Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory (RT) adopts a cognitive perspective in its examination of human communication and the comprehension of utterances, taking inspiration from Grice's philosophical analysis of speaker meaning and his insights into the nature of communication. While RT owes a significant debt to Grice's foundational ideas, it's important not to overstate this connection. Focusing on the hearer's perspective, one of the most notable departures from the Gricean framework is its abandonment of the Conversational Maxims that were part of Grice's explanation of the inferences guiding hearers in deducing the speaker's communicative intentions. As discussed in chapter §2.4.1, Grice developed the notion of "Cooperative Principle" which guided hearers' interpretive inferences based on the idea that speakers should conform their contributions with the shared purpose of the ongoing conversation. Grice subsequently formulated a set of specific maxims and submaxims to explain such notion. In their initial presentation of RT, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986) replaced these maxims with the sole *relevance* principle. According to the Relevance Theory framework, the human cognitive system is inherently inclined towards achieving a complete and faithful representation of the world while maintaining a balance between such achievement and the cost of energy resources to do so. Such idea is captured by the concept of *relevance*, which is a characteristic of any input to any cognitive process. Inputs can yield

various types of cognitive effects within the system: they might combine with existing assumptions to yield new conclusions (referred to as *contextual implications*), strengthen existing beliefs by offering new evidence, contradict and eliminate pre-existing information, or restructure the organization of it. To see this, let's report an example which doesn't directly involve language. In *Cognitive Linguistic: An Introduction*, V. Evans and M. Green present the following example (p. 460):

> Imagine driving down the road in your car with the radio on. In this context, you are bombarded with sensory-perceptual stimuli including visual stimuli as well as linguistic and non-linguistic sounds. Suppose that you have been worried about your car lately. In this context, you might "tune out" the linguistic sounds coming from the radio and focus your attention on the sounds coming from under the bonnet. Depending on whether these sounds are out of the ordinary or not, this information will interact with what you already know about your car and allow you to draw some conclusions. In this context, the car's sounds are more relevant than the radio's sound. Now imagine that you are late for work and concerned about the time. You transfer you attention to the linguistic sounds coming from the radio and listen for the newsreader to announce the time. In this context, the radio's sounds are more relevant than the car's sounds.

The idea here is that the subject actively draw his attention to certain kinds of stimuli in order to revise his so-called *cognitive environment*[51] for specific purposes (either see whether the car is broken or if he is on time). In order to understand the notion of relevance, it is however important to underlie that these effects can either be advantageous or not for an individual, that is, they may improve or diminish the accuracy of the cognitive system's knowledge about the world, and they could make valuable information more accessible or harder to retrieve. An input is deemed *relevant* to a cognitive system only when it brings benefits to that system, meaning it produces *positive* cognitive effects. In the example above, for instance, all those stimuli that effectively participated to the confirmation of the car's state or to realize the time bring positive effects. Moreover, another crucial factor which determines the degree of

[51] Sperber and Wilson define an individual's cognitive environment as follows: "The cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him […] A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time iff he's capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true […] The total shared environment of two people is the intersection of their two cognitive environments, i.e. the set of all facts that are manifest to them both" (Sperber and Wilson 1995, pp. 39-41).

relevance of an input is the *cognitive effort* it demands for processing. Obtaining cognitive effects from an input necessitates the allocation of a certain amount of cognitive resources (e.g. memory, attention, and heuristic strategies, among others). Consequently, the relevance of any stimulus involves a trade-off between the positive cognitive effects it offers and the processing effort it requires: the greater the effects and the lower the effort, the greater the input's relevance. Moving from this consideration, at the core of this framework, we find the so-called "*Cognitive Principle of Relevance*", which asserts that human cognition is inherently oriented toward the maximization of relevance (for all kinds of inputs). This principle is rooted in the evolutionary idea that constant selection pressures have driven humans to develop mechanisms for identifying potentially relevant inputs and processing them in the most efficient and cost-effective manner. In essence, the cognitive system is fine-tuned to prioritize information that can yield valuable effects while minimizing the expenditure of cognitive resources and this, as one can easily expect, has major consequences in linguistic understanding as well. Inputs that involve acts of overt communication, such as linguistic communication or gestures, possess a unique property that sets them apart from other inputs (e.g. perceptual). These inputs give rise to specific expectations of relevance to the addressees, that is, expectations about the cognitive effects they will produce and the mental effort they will demand. When a speaker communicates, there's an implicit assurance that the utterance is *optimally relevant*, indicating that it's the most relevant one speaker could have produced based on their competence and intentions. This idea is captured by the so-called *Communicative Principle of Relevance* which states that "Every act of ostensive communication (e.g. an utterance) communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Carston 2002, p. 379). This principle is an extension of the Cognitive Principle of Relevance and is rooted in the overt intentionality that accompanies utterances. Furthermore, the utterance is guaranteed to be at least relevant enough to justify processing since the speaker openly seeks attention and effort from the listener which, as a result, entitles the listener to expect a certain quality of information without excessive and fruitless efforts. This presumption of relevance allows RT's theorists to scheme how the comprehension procedure (or heuristic) of utterances works. Robyn Carston (2002, p. 380) defines it as follows:

> *(RCS) Relevance-theoretic Comprehension Strategy*:
> (a) construct interpretations in order of accessibility (i.e. follow a path of least effort);
> (b) stop when your expectation of relevance is satisfied.

In effective communication, this procedure reduces the possible interpretations down to a single, coherent interpretation. Moreover, such heuristic is responsible for both the derivation of the explicit content and of any implicature. Let's see how, roughly, this mechanism works with an example. Suppose we're talking about our common friend Rita. Now, it's within our shared knowledge background (i.e. *shared cognitive environment*) that she has serious problems with her fiancée Paul, more specifically, we both know that he has had abusive behavior toward her on many occasions. Based on the fact that the topic of discussion is Rita and Paul's relationship, such abusive-related information is particular *manifest* to both of us, that is, it is an easily retrievable information (in terms of cognitive effort) to representing mentally and accepting it as true or probably true. Suppose that I utter the following sentence:

(35) a. She has had enough from him

Although I uttered a well-formed sentence in English, its encoded linguistic meaning provides only a template for the derivation of explicit content I intend to convey. It requires, specifically, to fix the reference for the pronouns and the incomplete constituent of "enough" (enough for what?). RCS tells us that your pragmatic module, in order to derive such content, must construct interpretations starting with that information in your cognitive environment in order of accessibility (thus manifest) until your expectation are satisfied. Now, as said above, the information of whom we're talking about and about Paul's abusiveness are particularly "on the surface" of both our cognitive environment and, as such, easily retrievable from your prospective. It is very likely, thus, that the first interpretation you're going to formulate is the following:

b. Rita has had enough abusive treatment from Paul

Such interpretation, moreover, would probably satisfy your expectation toward the contribution to the conversation I should make. This entitles the module to stop processing alternative interpretations and offer as output a content which, in your understanding, constitutes the explicit content of my utterance. With more specifics about our shared cognitive environment, it is also possible to explain the derivation of a secondary content like *Rita decided to leave Paul* by similar processes described by Grice (cf. §2.4.1). One last thing that Relevance Theorists have to account for is how to differentiate the explicit and implicit

content(s) of an utterance. Sperber and Wilson (1986 p. 182) propose the following definitions:

> (I) An assumption [i.e. proposition] communicated by an utterance *U* is *explicit* if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by *U*.
> (II) Any assumption communicated, but not explicitly so, is implicitly communicated: it is an *implicature*

Indeed, Relevance Theory challenges the traditional way of distinguishing between the explicit and implicit content of an utterance. In the conventional view, the explicit content typically refers to the decoded propositions directly derived from the utterance, while the implicit content comprises the inferences drawn from these decoded assumptions. The Gricean perspective assumes that any aspect of utterance interpretation that goes beyond simple disambiguation and reference assignment is typically viewed as an implicature. As such, the standard view tends to categorize additional meaning derived through pragmatic processes, such as enrichment or reinterpretation of certain words or phrases, as implicatures. For instance, when interpreting "and" as "and then" in specific contexts, Gricean followers might consider these interpretations as implicatures. However, as we have seen by treating cases like (32)-(34), Relevance Theory posits that no propositional content is *simply* decoded, and the retrieval of any content, explicit content as well, inherently involves an element of modulation. In this sense, Relevance Theorists contest division between explicit and implicit content based on this decoding-inference dichotomy and proposes a demarcation line on the base of the sentence logical form. The reason is simple: if we were to adopt the traditional demarcation, we'll be forced to consider many contents intuitively judged as explicatures as implicatures, like in the case of (35b); while adopting a distinction based on the development of the sentence logical form would allow us to accommodate speakers intuitions of what is explicit and what is not in a fairly clear way (Sperber and Wilson 1986, p. 183)

Now that we have explored various viewpoints concerning the semantic-pragmatic distinction beyond the conventional Gricean perspective, it is time commit ourselves in a more comprehensive analysis. This involves not only recognizing their merits, but also being aware of their inherent limitations and the critical arguments that have been moved against them. This is exactly what the next chapter is about.

IV. CRITICISMS AND RESPONSES

Now that I've presented the diverse perspectives concerning the semantic-pragmatic distinction, beyond the traditional Gricean framework, it is necessary to go beyond the mere acknowledgment of their merits. As in all theories, we need to be aware of their inherent limitations and an understanding of the critical counterarguments that have been posited against them. This chapter is dedicated to precisely this goal. I'm going to present the main arguments against Indexicalism, Minimalism and Contextualism along with the corresponding responses put forth in defense of these positions. Moreover, as I did in the last chapter, I'll pay particular attention to the critics of Relevance Theory within the section dedicated to Contextualism.

4.1 Indexicalism

In *Literal Meaning* (2004), Recanati has raised two objections against Stanley and Szabó's approach. These objections challenge the strength and validity of the argumentative strategy put forward by indexicalists. Recanati's first objection contends that the argument is too strong since it leads to consider not only elements that might reasonably be treated as saturation processes but also elements that are implausible candidates for being treated as such. His second objection focuses on the binding argument's potential fallaciousness, which he attributes to an inherent ambiguity in one of its premises.

Regarding the first objection, Recanati claims that the Binding Argument "…works too well. It obliges us to treat as provided through saturation not only contextual elements which can plausibly be regarded as values of variables in logical form, as well as elements for which at least the question arises, but also many contextual elements for which that sort of treatment is simply out of question. This is a serious weakness which should lead one to doubt the reliability of the Binding Criterion" (Recanati 2004, p. 155). To support this idea, Recanati presents the following case:

(36a) The policeman stopped the car.

When we interpret (36a) we find ourselves making certain assumptions regarding the manner in which the car came to a halt due to the actions of the policeman. In the most natural interpretation of the scenario, we assume that the policeman, in his role as a traffic enforcer, made some appropriate signals to the driver, who then obediently brought the car to a stop.

However, an interesting shift emerges when we envisage a scenario in which the policeman was, as matter of fact, the one driving the car. In such a case, our understanding of his act of stopping the car undergoes a profound shift, distinct from our initial interpretation where we assumed he was regulating the traffic. These distinct "manners of stopping" are integral to our comprehension of the utterance but these exist as additional feature of the interpretation, that is, as linguistically optional process outside the what is strictly conveyed in the minimal sense which is merely that the policeman caused the car to stop in some unspecified manner. However, the Binding Argument suggests that even in this case, the contextually provided constituent (i.e. the manner of stopping the car) is linguistically articulated through the use of a logical variable since we can build a second sentence which contains a quantifier that binds the way the car is being stopped:

(36b) In some way or other, the policeman stopped the car

This leads to the following logical form:

(36c) [some x: manner to stop a car x]([the y: policeman y]([the z: car z](y stopped z in the manner x)))

If we apply the Binding Argument, we obtain the counterintuitive conclusion that the logical form of the statement “the policeman stopped the car” contains a variable that takes as its values the ways of stopping a car (e.g., by intimating the driver to stop using a signal paddle, or by placing himself in front of the car, or, in case he is the driver, by simply turning off the engine with the car’s keys). We should then conclude that the contextually provided manner of stopping is determined through a bottom-up process of saturation, like the reference of indexicals but, unlike indexicals, we can perfectly understand (36a) without necessarily knowing in what manner the policeman stopped the car. In sum, the Binding Argument is insensitive to the intuitive difference between establishing the referent of an indexical and the manner of stopping a car for the understanding of an utterance and, as such, this conclusion argues against Stanley’s and Szabo’s strategy.

Recanati’s second objection focuses on the fallacy of the Binding’s argument premises. To see this, recall Recanati’s reconstruction of the argument (Recanati 2004, pp. 161-162):

1. Contextualists say that in the simple statement “It rains”, the tacitly understood location of rain is unarticulated and results from an optional pragmatic process of free enrichment.
2. In “Everywhere I go it rains”, binding occurs: the location of rain varies with the values introduced by the quantifier “everywhere I go”.
3. There is no binding without a bindable variable.
4. Therefore, “It rains” involves a variable for the location of rain.
5. It follows that the contextualist is mistaken: in the simple statement “It rains”, the location of rain is articulated. It is the (contextually assigned) value of a free variable in logical form, which variable can also be bound (as in the complex sentence “Everywhere I go, it rains”).

In Recanati’s objection , the argument is fallacious due to an ambiguity arising at step 4. This ambiguity revolves around the question of which specific sentence of “It rains” is the subject of concern when it is asserted that this sentence incorporates a variable (due to binding). In the context of the more complex sentence “Everywhere I go it rains”, it can be reasonably accepted that such sentence contains a location variable that the quantifier binds. However, for step 5 to be valid, it’s necessary a stronger assertion at step 4. Step 4 must be interpreted as claiming that the location variable is also present when the sentence “It rains” is uttered in isolation, without being embedded in any other sentence. As such, Stanley’s argument relies on an implicit premise, one that remains unarticulated but underpins the entire argument, and Recanati formulates it as follows (p. 162):

(4.5) In “Everywhere I go it rains”, the sentence on which the quantifier “everywhere I go” operates is the very sentence “It rains” which can also be uttered in isolation (and whose usual interpretation involves a contextually provided ingredient)

If we endorse (4.5), it logically entails that the variable which is bound in the complex sentence must also be present, unbound, within the simple sentence “It rains”. However, such new premise it’s harder to accept for those who accept the analysis of adverbial modification in terms of variadic functions[52]. By this, Recanati suggests that the phrase “everywhere I go” not only plays a role in binding the variable but also contributes to the existence of the

[52] Variadic functions are functions that can take a variable number of arguments.

variable itself. In this case by providing an additional argument for specifying a location. This phenomenon is clearer if we take into consideration prepositional phrases[53]:

> Consider "in Paris". In "In Paris it rains", the prepositional phrase "in Paris" contributes both (a) a variadic function which adds an extra argument-role to the set of argument-roles of the input predicate "rain", and (b) an argument which fills the role. This duality is quite transparent since the prepositional phrase consists of two items: a preposition which determines the type of the extra argument-role, and a name which specifies what fills the role. (Recanati 2004, p. 162)

The objection, thus, is that the quantificational phrase "everywhere I go" doesn't just semantically bind the value of a pre-existing argument in "it rains" with a location, but it directly contributes to create such extra argument. Taken alone, the logical form of "it rains" doesn't contain any reference to the place where it rains. Only when combined with a quantificational phrase it is provided with an additional argument for a location specification. In a more formal way, Recanati treats many examples brought in defense of the Binding Argument in terms of variadic functions which are operators that, when applied to an n-place predicate P, results in the generation of an n+1 place predicate. Recanati thus, recognizes that a binding semantic requires the presence of a variable in the logical form but at the same time rejects Indexicalism by admitting that the language contains expressions that modify the number of arguments of predicates.

Stanley's answer to such objections focus on the accuses of overgeneration of the Binding Argument. In *Semantics in Context* (2005), Stanley's strategy is essentially to claim that the alleged problematic examples are not so intuitive as some contextualists think. Take for example another case presented by Recanati (2004, p. 157):

> (37) John is anorexic, but whenever his father cooks mushrooms, he eats.

In this example, Recanati argue that the intuitive interpretation of (37) is that John eats the mushrooms prepared by his father. Intuitively speaking, a type of binding comes into play in this scenario, as there is a correlation between the food consumed by John and the food prepared by his father, i.e. mushrooms. This, however, would imply that "he eats" contains a hidden variable which demand a specification, in all situations, of what the subject eats, but

[53] i.e. a group of words that begins with a preposition and ends with a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase.

this cannot be the case since the verb "to eat" in (37) is intransitive. The conclusion is that the binding criterion must be rejected. Stanley responds by denying that the semantic interpretation of (37) is that whenever John's father prepares mushrooms, John consumes those mushrooms and by denying that Recanati's suggestion that (37) is akin to the sentence "everywhere I go it rains" so that any approach that justifies the introduction of an unexpressed variable in "it rains" should similarly imply an unexpressed variable regarding what is consumed in "he eats". In order to defend this idea and to show that the semantic truth-conditions of (37) are not as Recanati describes them, Stanley presents two dialogues:

1) A. Whenever John's father cooks mushrooms, John eats.
   B. No he doesn't, he eats broccoli when his father cooks mushrooms.
1) A. Whenever John lights a cigarette, it rains.
   B. No it doesn't, though it rains somewhere else.

According to the intuitions of Stanley's informants in (1), it is not acceptable to reject the content of A's assertion simply because one believes John eats broccoli instead of mushrooms when his father cooks mushrooms and this, in Stanley's opinion, shows that the semantic truth-conditions (37) are not the ones that Recanati suggests. Conversely, the smoothness of the discourse in (2) shows that the semantic content of (1) corresponds to the one indexicalists prompt. Stanley then concludes by claiming that "our intuitions about truth and falsity clearly reveal this to be a reflection of our background assumptions, combined with the semantic content of [(37)]" (Stanley 2005, p. 33). The idea, then, is that even if we may naturally understand that John consumed the mushrooms prepared by his father, this assumption is not rooted in semantics. Instead, it is an interpretation generated from our general communicative expectations and conversational maxims, together with additional assumption such as the fact that John's father used a pan to cook those mushrooms or that John's father is not a peacock. All these assumptions that guide our intuitions about what an utterance mean are made independently of semantic cues and do not originate from the semantics of the utterance. Despite the convincing answer to this objection and similar others[54], Stanley doesn't seem, to my knowledge, to have offered a counter-argument to Recanati's objection to the Binding-argument or to the specific example of (36b) and this is a major limitation for Stanley and Szabo's methodology and, more generally, for indexicalism.

[54] For all the responses cf. Stanley, *Semantic in Context*, in *Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, Oxford University Press, 2005, §VI.

4.2 Minimalism

As we've seen, minimalists insist on presenting a notion of what is said$_{min}$ that is at the same time truth-evaluable (i.e. propositional) and yet as distant as possible from any mediation of speaker's intentions (apart from the ones required for indexicals). In doing so, the only allowed pragmatic interventions are those needed to fix the semantic content of indexicals (i.e. saturation). Yet, this minimal semantic notion generally raises two kinds of objections by non-minimalists philosophers: either it is deemed as an idle wheel which serves no purpose in understanding language and communication, or it seems inconsistent (specifically C&L's version) with the initial premises. For the first objection we will follow Recanati's considerations (2004), while for the second one we'll refer to Perry and Korta who, in order to make sense of the minimalist approach, develop what they believe to be the genuine notion of minimal semantic content of an utterance: the *reflexive content*. I'll then conclude by presenting two more critics to C&L's position, namely, those against their interpretation of the Incompleteness argument and those against their tests for indexicality.

4.2.1 Minimal content as an idle wheel

Let's start with Recanati's objection. We have largely observed that the minimal proposition proposed by Cappelen and Lepore doesn't align with the intended content explicitly conveyed by an utterance (i.e. what is said), it isn't autonomously derived from the language's rules independently of the speaker's intentions (cf. basic set) and, at the same time, it doesn't necessarily correspond to an element of what the speaker asserts (as effect of refusing the *original-utterance centrism*, §3.2). It's a hybrid construct that surpasses what the language rules determine and yet, in Recanati's opinion, lacks psychological reality since it doesn't need to consciously be entertained or represented at any point during the process of utterance's understanding. To see this, let's consider an example in which the interpretation of a particular constituent depends on another constituent in the sentence is interpreted. Specifically, we're searching for a case where if the content-assigning process of two sentence's constituents (one overtly context-sensitive and the other not) don't engage in a mutual interaction, it would result absurd to employ the minimal content predicted by C&L to explain the overall understanding process[55]. Take, for instance, the following scenario:

[55] There are other cases where minimalists may defend themselves but that, nevertheless, the kind of interpretation for a word or syntagma influences the interpretation of another. For instance, to interpret the utterance "Rita finished Leo's book", we have to assign a value to "finish" (e.g. finished reading, writing,

> Suppose that there has been a ritual fight between respectively five warriors and five beasts. The beasts are a wolf, a lion, a hyena, a bear, and an alligator; the warriors are armed with swords and carry shields with distinctive decorations (the first warrior has the moon on his shield, the second one has the Eiffel Tower, the third one has the Metro-Godwin-Mayer roaring lion, etc.). Each warrior is assigned a particular beast which he or she must stab to death. After the ritual fight, the five beasts lay on the ground with a sword through their body. (Recanati, p. 101)

Given this context, suppose I utter:

> (38) Bring me the lion's sword, I want to have a look at it.

In this particular context, the expression "the lion" seems to offer two accessible interpretations: firstly, it can be taken literally, referring to the lion as one of the beasts in our scenario. Alternatively, it can be interpreted non-literally, referring to the warrior who bears an image of a lion on his shield. If we opt for the first interpretation, the possessive construction will be interpreted as a relation between the animal and the sword *that pierced its body*, as this would be the salient connection. On the other hand, if we choose the second interpretation, the relation will be a different one since it would focus on the salient relationship between the warrior and the sword *he employed in the battle* (perhaps against the bear, the wolf or another beast). Now, let's assume that the correct interpretation is the second one, where the speaker is actually referring to the warrior with the lion on his shield and wishes to see his sword (say, the one emerging from the bear's body). In this context, to determine C&L's minimal proposition expressed by the utterance, we must give to the word "lion" its literal interpretation and assign a value to the possessive relation "lion's sword" by appealing to the speaker's meaning (since there's no other way to contextually determine it even from C&L's minimalism). The problem, however, is that this last content has been assigned by the speaker together with the non-literal interpretation of the word "lion" and the phrase "the lion's sword" contributes to the total minimal proposition with something like *the sword which the lion employed in the battle*. For Recanati, it's absurd that this content plays

---

printing, repairing etc.) and to the genitive "Leo's book" (e.g. owned, wrote, interested in etc.). There is an obvious interaction between these two values since the overall assignment must be coherent. If by "Leo's book" we mean "the book wrote by Leo", it's unluckily that to "finished" will be assigned the meaning "finished writing".

any part in the understanding process which all of us go through to get the what is said$_{prag}$ of (38). The minimal content, construed as C&L's suggest, thus becomes an idle wheel to the understanding process. However, if someone insists on employing a strictly semantic concept of "what is said", one that is propositional and truth-evaluable but still free from any influence by the speaker's communicative intent, there exists a more suitable candidate: Perry and Korta's notion of *reflexive content*. Let's thus move to the second objection of C&L's minimalism and, through it, to introduce another conception of minimal content.

4.2.2 Reflexive content

"How much pragmatics is involved in determining the semantic contribution of a sentence used in a standard way in an utterance?"[56]. This is the main question that Korta and Perry address in *Varieties of Minimalism Semantics* (2006). In Perry and Korta's (P&K) view, C&L's version of minimalism is not minimalistic enough in answering this question, but to see why, as it often happens, we have to start from David Kaplan. In his theory, Kaplan distinguishes two aspects of meanings: the content and the character. The character of an expression *e* is the linguistic convention which governs its use (i.e. it's norm) and that, in turn, determines the content of *e* given a context (i.e. it's intension). It is formally represented as a function from context to content. On the other hand, the content of an expression *e* is generally understood in functional terms respect to content of the whole utterance it is part of, that is, how *e* contributes to the proposition expressed by the utterance. In particular, Kaplan (1989) endorses intensional logic, which allows to represent the content of an expression as a function from circumstances of evaluations (i.e. possible worlds) to extensions. A similar distinction is mirrored when talking about sentences/utterances: by "character of a sentence S" Kaplan means a function of the characters of the occurring expressions in S plus the way they are combined; whereas for "content of an utterance" (or, in Kaplan's terms, "content of a sentence in a context") he means the value of the function of the sentence's character and the context, where context is a quintuple of elements: agent, place, time, object and world. Now, given this distinction, P&K recognize two kinds of Kaplan-inspired Minimalism:

I) The minimal semantic content should be like Kaplan's *content*

II) The minimal semantic content should be like Kaplan's *character*

[56] J. Perry and K. Korta, *Varieties of Minimalist Semantics*, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2006, pp. 451-459, p. 452.

Now, recall how C&L explained Semantic Minimalism:

> 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.

But then they proceed to say:

> The minimal proposition cannot be characterized completely independently of the context of utterance. Semantic Minimalism recognizes a small subset of expressions that interact with contexts of utterance in privileged ways; we call these the *genuinely context sensitive expressions*.[57]

Despite C&L's endorsement of Kaplan's methodology[58] and its use to discredit both Contextualism and Indexicalism[59], their use of the term "content" is in conflict with Kaplan's use. The *content* is exactly that level of meaning which (may) change along with the context; it is the *character* that remains the same independently from it, for it is the lexical rule which, context after context, select the expression's content. This sort of difference brings us back to §2.1 when I discussed the difference between sentence meaning and what is said. The sentence meaning, through its abstraction from the actual utterance's contextual features, seems to be a good candidate as that level of meaning which stays constant across various utterances of the same sentence. It seems strange, then, that C&L endorse version (I) of the above Kaplan-inspired Minimalism. We find a confirm of this in the next page, where C&L clarify their position as a conjunction of seven thesis. P&K are interested in the fifth:

> (5) 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, i.e., we want Semantic Minimalism to be neutral between the different accounts of how best to assign semantic values to

[57] H. Cappelen and E. Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics*, p. 143.
[58] "One central goal in this book is to defend the uncontaminated intuitions that underlie Kaplan's methodology from a wide range of popular objections" Ibid., p. 2.
[59] Cf. Ibid., §8 (p 116 on) and §6 (p. 78 on).

linguistic expressions; e.g., objects, sets, properties, functions, conceptual roles, stereotypes, or whatever).

(b) Specify all the relevant compositional meaning rules for English (doing so also in accordance with your favorite semantic theory; again, we insist upon Semantic Minimalism being neutral between different accounts of how best to respect compositionality).

(c) Disambiguate every ambiguous/polysemous expression in S.

(d) Specify every vague expression in S.

(e) Fix the semantic value of every context sensitive expression in S.[60]

The troubling clauses are (c) through (e) for they block the initial idea which identifies the minimal content with the content shared by all utterances of a given sentence S. The content-flexibility of S in different contexts is precisely granted by the speakers' intention to disambiguate ambiguous or polysemous expressions, to specify vague terms and to fix the value of context-sensitive expression contained in S. As P&K point out, "Something has gone awry, and the basic idea of semantic minimalism has slipped away"[61].

It is at this point that Perry and Korta propose two versions of Minimalism, which are based upon Kaplan-inspired version (II) and are obtained by eliminating clauses (c)-(d)-(e) and (d)-(e) respectively. To see this clearly: let be **u** an utterance of "you are late". Suppose now that no contexts features are given (i.e. speaker, time, place etc.). The reflexive-content of **u** (or Content_M) is:

(39) *The person the speaker of **u** is addressing* is late *for the event that the speaker of **u** has in mind*

This content is called "reflexive" or "utterance-bound" since it puts conditions on **u** itself. As it can be seen, since it is built upon the sentence's character (and hence the sentence meaning), this content is determined before the processes of saturation takes place and thus doesn't require the knowledge of contextual factors. Furthermore, these truth-conditions are "available to any competent speaker and need to be appealed to in understanding both the generation and the comprehension of the utterance"[62], but, as we'll see in the next paragraph,

[60] Ibid., p. 144-145.
[61] J. Perry and K. Korta, *Varieties of Minimalist Semantics*, p. 456.
[62] J. Perry and K. Korta, *Pragmatic Circle*, in *Springer*, 2008, pp. 347-357, p. 350.

it would be a mistake to identify it as the proposition expressed. It would be better to see it as the semantic pre-condition to the actual proposition expressed. In P&K's view, it is precisely this kind of content which captures C&L's idea of content shared by all utterances of such sentence, for it quantifies over contextual features and thus preserves the potentiality to be resolved in a truth-evaluable proposition for each actual context of utterance, hence granting its content-flexibility. C&L's claim that in order to grasp the semantic content of an utterance is required to know the contextual facts results unmotivated, since the utterance-bound content can accomplish the same results of C&L's notion of what is $said_{min}$ without *any* pragmatic intrusion. Now, my use of "any" isn't quite appropriate. As said above, two version of reflexive-content are given: the first version is obtained by eliminating all of the last three clauses of (5) and the second by the last two. It is easy to understand that only the first version *truly* removes all pragmatic intrusions, while the second one leaves a small opening for it, since already includes disambiguated terms. Let's see it with an example. Take an utterance **u** like "I like the smell of earth" and again suppose no context is given. The word "earth" is polysemous for it may either mean soil or refer to our planet. Since the only distinction is morphemic, suppose also that this sentence is being uttered and not written. Now, the first version allows an utterance-bound content of the following form:

> (40) "I like the smell of earth", uttered in c, is true in English iff *The speaker of* ***u*** likes *with respect to* ***u****'s speaker standard of likeness* the smell of *soil* or the smell of *planet Earth*.

Logically represented as: (P&K are indexicalists with respect to context-sensitive expressions)

> (41a) […] iff ∃y(([y: speaker of **u**]) & (likes the $smell_{(y,\ s)}{}_{f(z)}$ ∨ ([y: speaker of **u**]) & (likes the $smell_{(y,\ e)}{}_{f(z)}$)

Since our semantical understanding alone has to take account of both meanings, the result would be a disjunction-like semantic content where *s*=soil and *e*=Earth. It is then up to our pragmatic faculties to select which interpretation is more appropriate and relevant to the context. On the other hand, the second version would provide a reflexive content with no disjunction, for the polysemy was already resolved at pre-semantic level. Thus to grasp this version of the utterance-bound content, **u** cannot be given without some contextual

parameters, namely the speaker's intention regards the word "earth". But this version, I think, has no reason to be even considered, for it would face the same critic P&K moved to C&L, namely that this content would not represent anymore the content shared by all utterances of "I like the smell of earth", for in same contexts the speaker may refer to our planet and in others to soil. As matter of fact, in *The Pragmatic Circle* (2008), Perry and Korta endorse this first version of Minimalism as it can be seen from how they deal with a polysemy example[63]. There's a point, however, that seems in my opinion to be problematic even for the first reflexive-content version. In *How to Say Things with Words* (2007), P&K include the following intention among those required for a speaker to perform a locutionary act:

> (4) Having the intention of producing an utterance that will have certain reflexive truth-conditions, and of thereby producing an utterance with certain referential truth-conditions […][64]

The reasons for including utterance-bound contents among those intended by the speaker is because only at this level much of the information necessary to produce the intended cognitive effects (for example explain some informativity aspects of identity statements) may occur. It is even required to grasp the intended illocutionary force of an utterance (e.g. commissives)[65]. But take again the utterance "I like the smell of earth": does the speaker really intend to convey a disjunction-like reflexive content? In saying "This lawn is really bright", do I intend to convey that the lawn I intend to refer to is either shining or intelligent? It seems counter intuitive. However, this doesn't seem to be a big deal for P&K's theory. It could be argued that just as P&K distinguish the *intended* locutionary content from the *actual* one (cf. next paragraph), so it could be done for the reflexive content and this move doesn't seem to bring difficulties with it. But mine are only pondered intuitions.

Before moving on and introduce P&K's notion of locutionary content, there's another difficulty that would be settled by adopting the utterance-bound content as the minimal semantic content, and this is the so called *pragmatic circle*. I already presented the fallacy in question in §2.4.2 by showing how, within the Gricean framework, to derive an implicatures it is both required an explicit content that may violate the conversational maxims and the Gricean process that allows to recover the intended implicature. However, it is a matter of fact

[63] Ibid, p. 350-351.
[64] J. Perry and K. Korta, *How to Say Things with Words*, in *ResearchGate*, 2014, p. 5.
[65] For the identity statement see: Ibid., pp. 12-14 and for the commissive case: pp. 17-18.

that we also apply Gricean reasoning to derive the explicit content of an utterance. Resolving context-sensitive expressions, anaphors, ambiguities and vagueness, all require taking account of the speaker's intentions, what facts are relevant and what makes sense in the conversation. The hotel example and Levinson's case (cf. §2.4.2), already showed how Grice's idea of a linear progression from sentence meaning to implicature is incorrect. Despite this issue, it is also true that Gricean reasoning needs an initial content upon which start its functions. A content that, once grasped, allows the audience to search for both the explicit content and for eventual implicatures, to guess the speaker's intentions and evaluate its cooperativeness to the maxims. Moreover, it is also clear that such content should be free from pragmatic intrusions and exclusively semantic, otherwise the circularity would not be eliminated. The answer proposed by P&K is to identify such content with the reflexive truth-conditions. It not only meets all the above properties, but also is strictly linked with the actual explicit content (see §2.1), shifting the starting point of Gricean Reasoning from a determinate content to a propositional schema not-so-different in logical/syntactic form from the first. Such content would preserve the possibility for pragmatic intrusion on both the what is said and beyond it. An example will help: suppose I'm talking to a friend of mine about my last encounter with Alessandro, the owner of my house, and I utter:

(41) I was irritated by Alessandro's behavior

Let's suppose that my hearers, as competent speakers, understand firstly the reflexive content of the utterance and, by recognizing the words, the language spoken and its semantics, they form the following reflexive-content:

(41a) The utterance **u** I just hears is true iff ∃x and ∃y such that x is the speaker of **u**, x is using the conventional meaning associated with "Alessandro" as name of y to refer to y, the grammatical form suggests that x is referring to a time t1 antecedent to the time of **u**, and either (i) x is using "irritate" with the meaning "making a little angry" such that x is irritate by y's behavior at t1 or (ii) with the meaning "causing inflammation" such that y's behavior caused inflammation on some part of x at t1.

(41a) provides an acceptable starting point for Gricean reason for both the derivation of the explicit content (near-side pragmatics) and far-side pragmatics. Now that a stable content is given without any prior pragmatic intrusion, the audience will proceed by fixing the reference

of the speaker "x" and of Alessandro "y": probably fixing the reference of "I" is immediate and doesn't involve much pragmatics[66], but fixing "Alessandro" involves, among other things, knowing the topic of the conversation until the time of the utterance, assuming that the speaker is observing Gricean relevance maxim and expecting that the speaker's general-intention in using the word and his specific-intention to refer to an individual coincide.[67] Same considerations about relevance and informativity would be involved in disambiguating "irritated" or in determining that the time t1 prior to utterance's time coincided with the already mentioned last encounter with Alessandro. Meanwhile, Gricean reasoning may even start the search for implicatures, eventual presuppositions updating and other cognitive effects. With such new framework, it is also justified what Levinson said about the (general) implicatures: they may even retroactively influence the determining process of the explicit content, for the implicature-search process starts in parallel with that of the what is said. As consequence of such shifting of implicature generation, it is also explained how speakers may convey, through an utterance **u**, an implicature without the full-propositional content of **u** being grasped by the hearers. If a fireman is appointed to rescue someone from a building on fire and hears "I am here" upstairs, he doesn't need to grasp the propositional content *Marta is at the second floor of* etc. to derive the implicature "come to the second floor and save me". P&K's idea to shift the starting point of Gricean process from a fully-determinate proposition to its reflexive-content has three main advantages: avoid the pragmatic circle, explaining Levinson's observations and give a reason for implicatures generated without knowing what is said. Unfortunately, it is too much to ask for a detailed account of this achievements but I hope to have at least presented a clear sketch of P&K's success with such modified minimal content.

The aim of this paragraph has been to offer an overview on the kind of content that P&K consider to be shared by all utterances of any sentence S. It is a concept more in accord with minimalism than C&L. "minimal semantic content". It is a content with truth-conditions on the character meaning of the sentence which, in turn, is in close connection with its sentence meaning. This characterization makes it take the form of a content which puts conditions on the utterance itself and in doing so also, it is that semantic content which speakers grasp in virtue of their linguistic competence only. A compact definition is offered by Perry and Korta, which write:

[66] It is the reason why many philosophers distinguish between "narrow context" and "wide context", where the first one contains objective facts about the situation of utterance like the speaker, place and time, while the second one contains broader consideration upon the speaker's beliefs, expectations, desires etc.
[67] Here I'm using Kripke's notions of "semantic reference" and "speaker reference".

> 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.[68]

4.2.3 Misunderstanding Incompleteness argument

In §3.2 we've seen Cappelen and Lepore's answer to the Incompleteness argument. The two philosophers assert that the inability to provide a semantic evaluation for an utterance like "Roberto's child is tall" doesn't constitute evidence against the theory for which the property of being tall *simpliciter* exists and serves as the semantic content of the adjective "tall" (thus accusing contextualist of being guilty of endorsing a form of verificationism). They acknowledge the challenge of providing an analysis of properties like being tall simpliciter but, however, they contend that this challenge primarily pertains to metaphysics and isn't a concern for philosophers of language or those engaged with semantics. This defense, however, doesn't seem to have got the point of the argument. As M. Vignolo points out in *What Incompleteness Arguments Are And What They Are Not* (2014), the ultimate aim of an incompleteness argument is not to arrive at a metaphysical conclusion regarding the existence of entities of one type or another. Rather, they provide evidence against the notion that certain entities, regardless of their existence, can be linked to linguistic expressions as their semantic contents while others cannot. For instance, the conclusion drawn from an Incompleteness argument involving the adjective "tall" is not that the property of being ready simpliciter doesn't exist because speakers are incapable of semantically evaluating an utterance containing such term as true or false without relying on contextual information. Instead, the conclusion of the Incompleteness argument is that a semantic theory attributing the property of being ready *simpliciter* to the adjective "tall" as its semantic content would be "… incompatible with any account of linguistic competence, according to which to learn the meaning of an expression and to be competent in its use amounts to being able to use that expression insofar as it is governed by a semantic norm"(Vignolo 2014, p. 129). Indeed, the evaluation of a semantic theory for a language L cannot be conducted in isolation from how

[68] J. Perry and K. Korta, *Varieties of Minimal Semantics*, p. 458.

competent speakers bestow, use and learn L's expressions. To better grasp the significance of this response to Cappelen and Lepore's objection, let's consider the following example:

> Suppose now that a semantic theory for English includes a disquotational axiom such as (A) below, which arguably captures what Cappelen and Lepore have in mind when they say that the semantic content of "tall" is the property of being tall (simpliciter) and that semanticists have no difficulty at all to specify the truth conditions of the sentence "Bradley is tall" and the proposition it expresses:
> (A) For any object o, "tall" applies in English to o if and only if o is tall (Vignolo, pp. 120-121)

Vignolo argues that any semantic theory, must leave room to an explanation of how the linguistic abilities of competent speakers are regulated by the semantic norm of the semantic clause (A). Similarly, it should also be possible, at least in principle, to provide an account of how the term "tall" has acquired the semantic content of applying exclusively to those things that are tall *simpliciter*, otherwise it would remain a mystery how words become linked with their semantic properties and how these associations are acquired (and passed on) through exposure to language use. Of course, it's not within the realm of semantics to resolve such questions but a semantic theory must at least be consistent with a theory capable of addressing these inquiries. Consequently, if we have evidence suggesting that such explanations are not feasible, then we possess evidence (albeit indirectly) that the semantic theory that embraces semantic clause (A) might be incorrect. The point of the Incompleteness argument, thus, is to show that competent speakers are not able to offer a semantic assessment of utterances like "Roberto is tall" without considering the contextual information. This outcome implies that the linguistic skills necessary for grasping the meaning of the adjective "tall" cannot be considered as being governed by the semantic norm enunciated in clause (A). This is the case because clause (A) establishes conditions for the application of the adjective "tall" such that competent speakers are never able to ascertain whether these conditions are met or not, and this is demonstrated by their evident inability to provide a semantic evaluation of utterances containing adjectives like "ready", "tall", "smart", "fast" etc. without any contextual clue.

In conclusion, in contrast to Cappelen and Lepore's claim, and independently of any consideration from metaphysics, the Incompleteness arguments demonstrate that even if we concede the existence of certain entities, such as the property of being tall *simpliciter* or the property of being ready *simpliciter*, these entities cannot serve as the contents associated with

words within a semantic theory. This is because a semantic theory so constructed is fundamentally incompatible with any theory concerning language acquisition and comprehension as governed by semantic norms.

4.2.4 Answers to C&L's tests for indexicality

Based on what has been said in §3.2.1, Cappelen and Lepore introduce a new criterion for spotting context-sensitive expressions in the form of inter-contextual disquotation reports. Such criterion appears to yield results that conflict with those obtained using the standard criterion. C&L make a crucial distinction between two types of CSA (Context-Sensitive Argument): the standard criterion relies on what they call an "Impoverished CSA" (ICSA) which essentially is a description of two target contexts, C1 and C2, in which a given expression *e* is used to carry different meanings. However, Cappelen and Lepore reject this conclusion, contending that ICSA consistently produce illusory intuitions. Instead, they propose a second and more complex type of test known as "Real CSA" (RCSA). RCSA differ from ICSA in that the expression *e* is used within the storytelling context, denoted as C3, in which the usage of *e* in C1 and/or C2 is being described and reported. While ICSA involve two "target contexts" C1 and C2, and a presumed shift in semantic value between them, RCSAs additionally encompass the "storytelling context" C3. The idea, thus, is that if an expression was truly context-sensitive, the process of inter-contextual disquotation is blocked as we move transition from C1/C2 to C3. Suppose Luca asserts the utterance "Mattia is ready" in C1 to say that Mattia is ready to take a shower and repeats the same utterance in C2 to say that Mattia is ready to take the train. Cappelen and Lepore argue that in any C3 the following claims are all true:

(E1) "Luca said that Mattia is ready" (referring to C1)
(E2) "Luca said that Mattia is ready" (referring to C2)
(E3) "In C1 and C2 Luca said that Mattia was ready"

According to Cappelen and Lepore, Contextualism and Indexicalism face challenges in accounting for the truth of such example. However, it has been noted that the difficulties in explaining the truth of (E1)-(E3) are not as impossible as suggested by the two philosophers[69].

[69] As a reminder, Cappelen and Lepore skepticism toward a contextualist answer is that "According to RC, the two utterances of (1) assert (say, claim) radically different propositions. What each says depends on features specific to their contexts of utterance. How, then, is it that we are now able to use in [E3] an utterance of ["Luca

The context C3 may indeed differ from contexts C1 and C2 for differences in the speaker, time, place etc. but it's indeed possible that in C3 both the speaker and the audience have access to the pertinent information to determine the value of "ready" as used by Luca in C1 and C2 respectively, that is, in C3, the speaker and interlocutor may be aware that Luca was discussing Mattia's intention to take a shower in C1 and his plan to take the train in C2. For a better understanding, let's endorse the Indexicalist prospective for the moment. Indexicalists, for instance, would argue that the adjective "ready" possesses a concealed variable of the form "f(x)" within its logical structure. In this setup, the variable x can assume contexts as values, while the variable f works as a function that associates to the value of x what one is prepared to do in that particular context. Consequently, the logical representation of (E3) can be seen as follows:

> L-E3: In C1 Luca said that Mattia was ready$_{f(x)}$ and in C2 Luca said that Mattia was ready$_{f(y)}$

This analysis yields the interpretation that (E3) is true if and only if, in context C1, Luca said that Mattia was ready to take a shower and, in context C2, that he was ready to take the train. Naturally, this interpretation is made possible by the specific values assigned to the variables f(x) and f(y) and, thus, by the contextual features of C3. On the other hand, some philosophers have presented some examples that show how the alleged context insensitive expressions that C&P take in exam indeed block inter-contextual quotations. Take, for instance, Sarah Jane Leslie example (2007, p. 145): John is currently seeking for a job, eagerly anticipating an interview for his ideal job. Unfortunately, he didn't prepared himself, he's struggling to recall the details of his thesis and is overwhelmed with nervousness. The night preceding John's stressful encounter with the APA (American Philosophical Association) he met a couple of friends that asked him whether he was ready to have dinner with them. In this context, he was indeed ready to have dinner, so he responded appropriately by saying: "Yes, I'm ready". Suppose now that John's thesis advisor overheard this, and the next day, as John awaited his interview in terror, the advisor took this comment as evidence to support his claim that "Last night he said himself that he was ready". Now, the advisor's

---

said that Mattia was ready"] to describe accurately and literally what she said in those different contexts? That shouldn't be possible if RC is right. For, if RC is right, the proposition expressed by an utterance of [E1]-[E2]) […] in [E3] should be shaped by features specific to [E3], and we have no reason to think that these features match the contextual features relevant in the original utterance. More specifically, we have no reason to think those change between uttering [E1] and [E2] so that the content changes appropriately." (*Insensitive Semantics*, p. 91).

report is clearly inappropriate in this context since the expression "ready" refers to being prepared for the interview, whereas when John said "I am ready" the previous night, he meant that he was ready to have dinner. This simple example demonstrates that Cappelen and Lepore's claim that an expression like "ready" doesn't block inter-contextual reports is false. By following a similar scheme, is possible to formulate examples also for expression like "tall", "rich", "extrovert", etc. In order to prevent inter-contextual disquotation, Leslie had to take only two relatively easy steps: (i) select a parameter within the storytelling context to be ready for, and (ii) make sure that such parameter in the target context was not mutually evident to the conversational participants in the storytelling context. As such, a possible answer proposed by Recanati (2006, p. 28) and Leslie (2007, p. 145-146) to C&L tests' results is that such "covert" context-sensible words make possible inter-contextual disquotations when a particular relationship exists between the storytelling context and the target context, a relationship in virtue of which the storytelling context adopts the relevant values of the target context.

4.3 Contextualism

As we've seen in §3.3, Contextualism overextends the idea that it's not individual sentences themselves that possess a fixed and independent meaning but rather sentences express a determined content only in the context of speech acts, thereby thoroughly endorsing the semantic underdeterminacy thesis. However, while it has gained significant attention and actively participating to the linguistic debate, it's obvious that not all voices in the philosophical community have embraced this view. Indeed, both adherents of Minimalism and proponents of Indexicalism have articulated critics and objections to Contextualism. In the following sections I will present the main objections and criticisms that have been raised, while also considering some possible responses offered by its defenders.

4.3.1 Gricean Argument

Recanati, in *Contextualism and Anti-contextualism* (1994), addresses what he calls "the standard argument against contextualism" (p. 156) that is, the Gricean Argument. Recanati reconstructed the argument as resting on two main premises, one implicit and one explicit. The implicit one claims that:

Parallelism Principle:

> If a (syntactically complete) sentence can be used in different contexts to say different things (to express different propositions), then the explanation for this contextual variation of content is that the sentence has different linguistic meanings - is semantically ambiguous

Anti-contextualists, however, provide a more favorable explanation for a contextual variation in content and this refers to the presence of indexical expressions in a sentence, without having to recall semantic ambiguity. However, it's important to note that indexicality is typically limited to a well-defined category of expressions, which includes personal pronouns, demonstratives, tenses, certain spatial and temporal adverbs. If a sentence express different propositions in different contexts and doesn't contain one of these recognizable expressions, the Parallelism Principle can be safely applied to deduce that the sentence is semantically ambiguous. The explicit premise, on the other hand, is what Grice referred to as Modified Occam's Razor:

> *Modified Occam's Razor*
> Senses (linguistic meanings) are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.

According to this principle, we should avoid concluding that the intuitive difference in interpretation implies a difference in linguistic meaning (i.e. semantic ambiguity). Instead, we should attribute this difference to characteristics of the context of utterance, rather than an ambiguity in the sentence itself.

These two premises seems to paddle in opposite directions. When applying both Modified Occam's Razor and the Parallelism Principle, we are, from one side, discouraged from considering contextual differences as differences in propositional content (Parallelism Principle), and, from the other, we're restrained from interpreting these differences as arising from variations in linguistic meaning, which would imply semantic ambiguity (Modified Occam's Razor). To address this issue, Grice proposed a general solution based on the concept of conversational implicature. This solution allows for explaining the contextual differences in interpretation as deriving from implicatures triggered by features of the context of utterance. It maintains that the sentence itself is not ambiguous and that it's the propositional content remains constant across different contexts but admitting the intuitive shifting of content as matter of implicit content rather than explicit. Thus the Modified Occam's Razor and the Parallelism Principle push in favor of an analysis that accounts for

differences in interpretation in terms of conversational implicature, instead of an account in terms of a variation in propositional content. To see this, let's take an example to show an instance of how the Gricean Argument would respond to the case of the "and" conjunction: in his work *Introduction to Logical Theory* (1952), Strawson emphasizes a crucial distinction between the logical formula "p ∧ q" and the natural-language sentence "p and q". While the above logical formula is logically equivalent to "q ∧ p", the situation is different for the natural-language sentence since the order of the clauses may indeed be relevant to the truth-conditions. As such, Strawson introduces the concept of various "uses" of "and" in natural language, each corresponding to different truth-conditions for "p and q". In some contexts, "p and q" might be used to convey that *p* happened and then *q* followed, whereas in other contexts, it might convey something equivalent to "p ∧ q". The critical point here is that there is no fixed rule determining the truth-conditions of "p and q" independently of the context, unlike its logical counterpart, which has unchanging truth-conditions defined by the logical "∧" operator. This distinction highlights the inherent flexibility and context-dependent nature of natural language, where the meaning of "and" can vary based on the specific context in which it is used. In such specific case, Recanati reconstructs the Gricean Argument as follows:

> (i) Instead of saying, with Strawson, that there is a semantic difference between "p ∧ q" and "p and q", we may consider that there is no such difference and that the truth-conditions of "p and q" are actually the same as those of "p ∧ q". For example, we may consider the temporal implication in "They got married and had a child" as a conversational implicature, external to what is said, rather than considering it as part of the truth-conditions of the utterance in a certain type of context. In this way, we are able to maintain that the truth-conditions of "p and q" are determined by the truth-table for "∧", independent of the context of utterance.
>
> (ii) By virtue of Modified Occam's Razor and the Parallelism Principle, the account in terms of conversational implicature is preferable to the account in terms of a truth-conditional difference between "p ∧ q" and "p and q". (Recanati 2004, pp. 224-225)

As this example shows, the general answer of Anti-contextualists to the contextualists' Shifting Argument is that it is not indispensable that the example brought by contextualists actually express different propositions in different contexts; it may be case, instead, that such intuitive interpretation's difference is to be explained in terms of conversational implicature

while holding that the same content has been explicitly expressed (i.e. what is said). As matter of fact, given the Modified Occam's Razor and the Parallelism Principle, an account in terms of conversational implicature is indeed favored to an account in terms of content variation. The Anti-contextualist argument, despite offering a valid alternative to explain the content variation of the same sentence, is deemed by Recanati as fallacious since it begs the question. The Parallelism Principle, as matter of fact, cannot be accepted by contextualists. This principle is based on the idea that any change in propositional content should be explained by a corresponding change in linguistic meaning. However, this premise conflicts with the core view of contextualists, who contend that the propositional content of an utterance depends on the specific context rather than solely on the linguistic meaning of the sentence. Indeed for contextualists, variations in the propositional content of an utterance do not necessarily indicate corresponding changes in the linguistic meaning of the sentence itself and, as such, the Parallelism Principle cannot be adopted by a contextualist perspective. If this principle is discarded, then Modified Occam's Razor, which relies on it to favor an account in terms of implicature over an account based on contextual variation in propositional content, can no longer be employed as a supporting argument. Why is this? Because the Modified Occam's Razor highlights the preference for an account based on implicature over an account involving semantic ambiguity. However, when the Parallelism Principle, which explains content variation in terms of semantic ambiguity, is abandoned to accommodate the contextualist perspective, the Modified Occam's Razor cannot any longer bring forward implicatures as means to substitute the alleged semantic ambiguity of contextually variable propositional content[70].

4.3.2 Cappelen and Lepore's critics

Cappelen and Lepore (2005) have raised an objection to Contextualism, particularly directed at a radical form of contextualism (RC). The underlying idea is straightforward: if Radical Contextualism were a valid framework, it would be almost miraculous for people to

[70] It is important to point out that although the Parallelism Principle is not explicitly stated as a premise in the Gricean argument, it must be counted as a premise to the whole argument since the Modified Occam's Razor is invoked to support the preference for an account based on implicature over one on truth-conditional content. However, this preference can be effectively maintained only if one accepts the underlying assumption of the Parallelism Principle. Thus, the Parallelism Principle is implicitly presupposed by the Gricean argument. To illustrate this point, Recanati provided two examples of actual applications of the Gricean argument: I've reported the first one, which involves Grice himself, who employed the argument to challenge Strawson's treatment of the word "and"; the second example is brought by Kripke in his critique to Donnellan's position on the referential/attributive distinction of definite descriptions (cf. S. Kripke, *Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference*, 1977).

successfully communicate across various contexts of utterance. However, such successful communication occurs routinely and without any miraculous interventions. Therefore, RC cannot be true. To elaborate on this objection, consider the following: if RC were valid, then the meaning of an utterance uttered by a speaker (let's call him A) in a given context of utterance (C) would depend, at least partially, on the highly specific features of that context. These features might include:

(i) Knowledge from the prior discourse context
(ii) Knowledge derived from the mutual perceptual environment
(iii) Any knowledge triggered by the words being used[71]
(iv) Knowledge about the speaker and audience purposes and abilities (like assuming that a speaker will communicate in a manner consistent with their level of world experience and intelligence or providing the most reasonable information one could expect to be providing)
(v) Knowledge of the general principles governing conversational exchanges, including conversational maxims and norms of politeness.

If RC were true, to understand what someone meant by an utterance like "Metallurgy is fascinating" we would need a considerable amount of information to take into account of and being able to manipulate. We would have to know the specifics of prior conversations, details about A's audience, the shared perceptual environment, and much more. This would make it almost miraculous for anyone not only to understand simple utterances (like the above one) but to consistently grasp an articulate and steady conversation. However, everyday experience shows that successful communication occurs without requiring such an extensive retrieval of contextual information. Therefore, RC is untenable for the amount of contextual information needed to retrieve the speaker's intended meaning. Despite not directly addressing this question, Relevance Theorists lay down a possible psychological answer following the trails of Grice's works. As we've seen in §3.3.4, Sperber and Wilson (1987) advocates for a comprehension module that focuses on utterances and other ostensive stimuli. This system is considered might function as a submodule of the theory of mind, to which it has a close connection. The relevance-theoretic account builds itself on fundamental Gricean concept that utterances naturally generate expectations that help direct the hearer toward the speaker's intended meaning. Utterances inherently create expectations of relevance and the core

[71] Like the domain within which the denotation is necessarily located, the uses or functions of the objects that can be the denotations of the associated terms, the causal roles associated with things denoted etc.

premise of Relevance Theory is that these expectations of relevance are sufficiently specific and foreseeable to serve as a reliable guide for the hearer to comprehend the speaker's intended meaning. Despite the amount of contextual features which come into play during a conversation, only specific information occur to fix what is said by the speaker. The inherent human inclination to maximize relevance allows us, to some degree, to anticipate and influence the mental states of others and by meta-representing someone's inclination to identifying the most pertinent information, we are able to produce a stimulus designed to capture the audience's attention, trigger the pertinent array of contextual assumptions among all the background information, and guide the audience toward a desired conclusion. Such "presumption of its own optimal relevance" (Carston 2002, p. 379), constitutes an answer to C&L's argument since to understand the explicit content of an utterance isn't needed the whole amount of information present on the communicative background (e.g. (i)-(v) above), but just a specific relevant-subset and, what's more, the audience doesn't have to go through any process of "finding out" what such relevant-subset is, since is the speaker himself that select the most relevant linguistic output given his expectations of what manifest assumptions the audience have. The communicator's primary objective is to ensure her message is comprehended, consequently it is in his best interest, considering his own abilities, to design his ostensive stimulus in a manner that maximizes its clarity and ease the understanding for the audience. As said since the outset of this thesis, Contextualism is a philosophical framework that includes a range of theories; to the most moderate theories (such as Bach's) to the to the most radical ones (such as Searle's, Travis's and Sperber and Wilson's). As such, the criticisms made to this family of theories may be critical of some positions but not of others. For the present purpose I'd put aside any further arguments against the general Contextualism and focus on critics and limits of the Relevance Theory.

4.3.3 Criticism of Relevance Theory

In their work, Sperber and Wilson's goal is to frame pragmatics within the broader framework of cognitive science. This shift in perspective is driven by idea that a single cognitive principle, the Cognitive Principle of Relevance, can be the theoretical base for a comprehensive theory of communication. Unquestionably, this book has feed an intense debate, gathering both proponents and detractors, holding significance for multiple reasons. Foremost, it draws attention to the vital role of contextual inference within language comprehension, it offers singular insights into the nature of context, and perhaps most notably, it constitutes a bold attempt to align pragmatics with cognitive theories. As an

alternative to the disjointed and yet empirically grounded observations prevalent in contemporary pragmatics, Relevance Theory is presented as a comprehensive and theoretically cohesive framework within which frame such empirical data. However, the critics on such bold thesis span on multiple levels: some critics contend that the book rests upon assumptions about human cognition that appear improbable, others criticize the overlook to the latest developments in semantics, pragmatics, and the study of inference (Levinson 1989, §3), and other more contend that the theory isn't able offer a satisfactory analysis of the keys notion at the core of theory itself, resulting incomplete and, for some aspects, contradictory. Its ambition to provide a globally reductive theory has been judged as too bold and the theory itself has many obscure features, with questions arising about its empirical applications. This said, let's delve into the ongoing debate and the criticisms that have been raised to Relevance Theory.

In the early 1970s, Grice's account of meaning was initially received as a revolutionary step towards establishing a comprehensive theory of communication. Nevertheless, it became apparent that several significant issues remained unresolved. One of the most pressing concerns was related to how the content communicated could possess the inherent saliency required for both the speaker and audience to effectively coordinate its production and its recognition. Sperber and Wilson's book represents an ambitious effort to address this fundamental question and, in order to do so, proposes a solution which diverges from the conventional approach of relying on Gricean general cooperative maxims. Instead, they based their solution on the crucial concept of "relevance" which works as the main principle governing each human cognitive faculty. Regarding the faculty of language, Sperber and Wilson put forth a linguistic deductive module tasked with handling logical forms originating from linguistic input. These logical forms are essentially "structured sets of concepts"[72] with each concept linked to a specific memory address which, in turn, host additional concepts that can be subjected to processing. To explain what controls and directs the operation of such linguistic system, from the selection of the specific context within which search for the interpretation of an utterance, to the selection of the explicit content, Sperber and Wilson introduced the notion of Cognitive Principle of Relevance[73]. Indeed, Relevance (from now on "R") is not mentally represented within the cognitive system nor is it a direct object of computational operations. Instead, it functions as an external constraint that

[72] Levinson, *A review of Relevance*, in *J. Linguistics*, Vol. 25, 1989, p. 457.
[73] The idea that human cognition is geared towards the maximization of relevance (that is, to the achievement of as many contextual (cognitive) effects as possible for as little processing effort as possible).

influences and shapes the cognitive processing system and acts as a guideline or boundary that guides how the system handles and integrates information and concepts. R, in the analogy with industrial productivity, is defined as the ratio between E (the number of contextual effects) and C (the cost of effort to obtain E). Thus, given all the possible interpretation an utterance U can express, our linguistic module will select the one that bears the best ratio between E and C (i.e. as many contextual effects with the minimum elaborating costs). This concept of equation behind utterance understanding, however, necessitates a form of measurement of E and C. Indeed, an admitted problematic of Relevance Theory is the lack of a way to obtain such measurements. Regarding this issue, Sperber and Wilson write that:

> Things go differently when it comes to assessing contextual effects achieved by human minds, and the processing effort needed to achieve them. On the contextual-effects side, we have argued that non-quantitative confirmation values are involved. If so, then these effects cannot be measured. On the processing-effort side, the prospects for quantitative assessment are no better. For example, we do not know what elementary operations complex thought processes reduce to. We do know that the duration of a mental process is not an adequate indicator of its cost for the organism: time spent in high mental concentration involves greater effort than equal time spent in relaxed daydreaming. (Sperber and Wilson 1986, p. 130)

The lack of a way to assess such variables is already, by itself, a fundamental knot that needs to be unraveled since it constitutes that empirical base upon which the theory is supposed to be tested. Given the present state of psycholinguistics, there's no way to assess the measure of E and C and, as such, the theory may be an exercise of finding the intuitively correct interpretation(s) of a given utterance which aligns with R. This way of proceeding is thus directed toward establishing the manner in which this alignment is achieved, constructing a satisfactory retrospective narrative that accounts for a significant range of effects that justifies an interpretation instead of others. This approach does not appear to represent any significant improvement over the retrospective Gricean explanations with which Sperber and Wilson have expressed dissatisfaction with[74] and, additionally, making up the same sort of just-so-

[74] […] the analyses of implicature which have been proposed by pragmatists have shared with these intuitive reconstructions the defect of being almost entirely ex post facto. Given that an utterance in context was found to carry particular implicatures, what both the hearer and the pragmatic theorist can do, the latter in a slightly more sophisticated way, is to show how in very intuitive terms there was an argument based on the context, the utterance and general expectations about the behaviour of speakers, that would justify the particular

stories (post hoc justifications) so heavily criticized to the adaptationist program in evolutionary biology. Sperber and Wilson, aware of this difficulty, stick to a comparative analysis of relevance. With this they mean that an interpretation is never simply relevant, but always *more relevant than* another one. Assessing the most relevant interpretation consists in selecting the best association between linguistic logical form and modulated content (in terms of costs-benefits) from competing ones. In order to do so, however, Sperber and Wilson base almost exclusively their comparison by assessing the contextual effects that different interpretations have on an oversimplified set of contextual assumptions, dismissing a quantitative analysis of the costs and raising, more importantly, a perplexity about how this comparative process should be integrated in the pragmatic module. Indeed, in order to assess the most relevant interpretation among all the possible ones (within a specific cognitive context), our cognitive system must compute *all of them* before assessing which one bears the best cost/effects ration[75]. The situation become even more critical since, on the cost side, we need to take into account that there's not only the effort needed to process all the explicature in a given context, but also the effort needed to access to a suitable context where it is possible to access to the correct interpretation. Context itself is treated as a variable to achieve relevance:

> It is not that first the context is determined, and then relevance is assessed. On the contrary, people hope that the assumption being processed is relevant (or else they would not bother to process it at all), and they try to select a context which will justify that hope: a context which will maximize relevance. In verbal comprehension in particular, it is relevance which is treated as given, and context which is treated as a variable. (Sperber and Wilson, p. 142)

Achieving the maximum relevance is necessary to choose the most optimal context for processing an interpretation. This context should facilitate the most favorable balance between the effort expended and the resulting impact. If things are like this, we're then facing a crucial difficulty for the theory: to access different cognitive contexts and comparing all the interpretations within each of these contexts, would involve a huge increasing of C and, if this was the case, R would always bear a negative value, paradoxically resulting in selecting any

---

interpretation chosen. What they fail to show is that on the same basis, an equally convincing justification could not have been given for some other interpretation that was not in fact chosen. (Sperber and Wilson 1986, p. 37)

interpretation at random (Levinson 1989, p. 463). Sperber and Wilson, aware of this problem, suggest that there must be a sort of *heuristic* that estimates the costs for the majority of the available interpretations without computation (i.e. without energetic costs or, at least, insignificant)[76]. Unfortunately, this is a poor answer since now the theory's survival depends on an unknown and obscure heuristics which co-participates to the utterance's interpretation(s) process along with the Cognitive Relevance Principle. This question is still debated.

A last critic that Relevance Theorists must address is related to generalized conversational implicatures (GCI's). GCIs have been the key focus of Neo-Gricean pragmatic theory due to their consistency across different languages and their close interaction with linguistic structure and meaning. In contrast, Sperber and Wilson prioritize the classic particularized implicatures and are committed to reducing implicatures, including GCIs, and the entire Gricean system of maxims, to the principle of Relevance (R) (Sperber and Wilson 1986, pp. 161-163). The main challenge with this reductionist approach is that GCIs are generalized, meaning that they typically apply unless there are compelling reasons to believe otherwise. They represent default contextual inferences that, in turn, influence the selected interpretation (cf. ch. §1.4.2 p. 25). However, R cannot predict any stable form of inference without a constant context but this, as we've seen, is not the case since the context is treated as a variable for R's assessment.

In conclusion, the criticisms directed towards Relevance Theory highlight the ambition and complexity of a new paradigm in pragmatics. While this cognitive framework has undeniably offered a fresh perspective with which understand communication and cognition, the criticisms we have seen shed light on deep limitations of the theory. Notably, these criticisms emphasize the need for a more comprehensive account of context, the lack of a clear idea of how the relevance property works, the difficulties in testing a theory that purports to make empirical predictions and its excessive form of reductionism. It is important to recognize that these criticisms do not diminish the significance role that Relevance Theory is playing in contemporary's debate in philosophy of language, but rather established the research addresses and issues that will characterize the theory's future research.

[76] "The automatic filtering out of some phenomena and the automatic pre-empting of attention by others can be seen as a heuristic device aimed at maximizing cognitive efficiency: in general, it is the phenomena which are least likely to be relevant which get filtered out, and those most likely to be relevant which pre-empt attention."(Sperber and Wilson p. 152) And: "What makes these hopes reasonable is that humans have a number of heuristics, some of them innate, others developed through experience, aimed at picking out relevant phenomena." (Ibid., p. 156)

V. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the goal of this thesis was to undertake the exploration of the semantics-pragmatics distinction, with a particular emphasis on context-sensitivity. By analyzing four prominent positions: The Orthodox view, Indexicalism, Minimalism, and Contextualism, the study has delved into the boundaries between what is considered as semantic and as pragmatic content. After introducing the necessary notions to face the question, including the distinction between linguistic meaning and speaker meaning and the Gricean framework, which set the ground for the future complexities of the semantics-pragmatics question, in Chapter III we started dwelling into three possible alternatives to the Gricean theory: Indexicalism, Minimalism, and Contextualism, each offering distinct responses to the challenges outlined in the earlier chapter. These positions were scrutinized in light of three major lenses: the treatment of encoded linguistic meaning and the proposition explicitly communicated, the focus on logical and syntactic proximity between sentence meaning and explicit content and the degree of semantic underdeterminacy admitted. As we got to the final chapter, the primary arguments against the three positions were introduced, accompanied by the corresponding responses provided for each position. It is essential to acknowledge that, with this thesis, I have dived only into a small part of the broader semantics-pragmatics debate. Numerous other perspectives, such as diverse takes within the Relativist view and the notions of philosophers not fitting into the spectrum outlined in Chapter II, couldn't be addressed in this thesis. Consequently, the goal wasn't to present a comprehensive overview but rather to delve deeply into the analysis of these three particular positions.

Under a closer look, all the debates we've seen are debates about the nature of context and its way to interact with some pure form of linguistic information. It isn't thereby reductive to say that the semantics-pragmatics issue is a debate on the notion of context. We have seen a fraction of how context plays a crucial role in the association utterance-meaning and this is probably due to the extensive application that the word "context" have. Throughout this essay, for instance, we treated context including: speakers intentions, concrete features of the scenario where the communicative act occurs, various manifestness layers of assumptions, general linguistic-related knowledge, various types of expectations and general worldly knowledge. Whatever is outside a relative strictly definition of linguistic matter, we're going to speak of it as contextual and whatever parameter interferes with what is assumed to be a pure linguistic piece of information, is context. I can only hope, then, for a convincing theory

of communication that offers a solid classification of contextual features and, upon it, builds a cognitive-based model of its dynamics.

Bibliography:

Altmann, Gerry T. M. and Kamide, Yuki, (2000), *Incremental interpretation at verbs: Restricting the domain of subsequent reference*, *Cognition*, Vol. 73, No. 3, pp. 247-264.

Bach, Kent, (1994), *Conversational Impliciture*, *Mind and Language*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 124-162.

Bach, Kent, (2001), *You Don't Say*, *Synthese*, Vol. 128, pp. 15-44.

Cappelen, Herman and Lepore, Ernie, (2005), *Insensitive Semantics*, Blackwell Publishing.

Carston, Robyn, (2002), *Thoughts and Utterances*, Blackwell Publishing.

Davis, Wayne, (1998), *Implicature: intention, convention, and principle in the failure of Gricean theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, reprinted in paperback (2007).

Evans, V., & Green, M., (2006), *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Ferreira and Patson, (2007), *The 'Good Enough' Approach to Language Comprehension*, *Language and Linguistics Compass*, Vol. 1, pp. 71-83.

Frazier, Lynm, (1987), *Sentence processing: A tutorial review*, M. Coltheart (Ed.), *Attention and performance 12: The psychology of reading*, pp. 559–586.

Frege, Gottlob, *Logical Investigations*, trans. by P. Geach and R. Stoothoff (ed.) 1977, Oxford: Blackwell.

Grice, H. P., (1957), *Meaning*, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 377-388.

H. P. Grice, (1968), *Utterer's meaning, Sentence-Meaning and Word-Meaning*, *Philosophy, Language and Artijicial1ntelligenc*e, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Kaplan, David. (1989a), *Demonstratives*, J. Almog, H. Wettstein, and J. Perry (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*, 481–563. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kepa Korta and John Perry, (2008), *The pragmatic Circle*, *Synthese*, Vol. 165, No. 3, pp. 347-357.

Korta, Kepa & Perry, John, (2007), *How to say things with words*, Savas L. Tsohatzidis (ed.), *John Searle's Philosophy of Language: Force, Meaning, and Mind*, Cambridge University Press.

Kripke, Saul, (1977), *Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference*, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 255-276.

Levinson, S. (1989), *A review of Relevance*, *Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 455-472.

Levinson, Stephen C., (2000), *Presumptive Meanings: The Theory of Generalized Conversational Implicatur*e, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Neale, Stephen, (2016), *Determinations of Meaning*, E. Lepore and D. Sosa and (eds.) *Oxford Studies in the Philosophy of Language*, Vol. 2, Oxford University Press.

Numberg, Geoffrey, (1995), *Transfers of Meaning*, *Journal of Semantics*, Vol. 12), No. 2, pp. 109-132.

Osterhout Lee and Holcomb Philip J., (1992), *Event-related brain potentials elicited by syntactic anomaly*, *Journal of Memory and Language*, Vol. 31, Issue 6, pp. 785-806.

Perry, John and Korta, Kepa, (2006), *Varieties of Minimalist Semantics*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 73., No. 2, pp. 451-459.

Recanati, François, (1994), *Contextualism and Anti-contextualism in the philosophy of language*, *Savas Tsohatzidis Foundations of speech act theory: philosophical and linguistic perspectives*, Routledge, pp.156-166.

Recanati, François, (2003), *Literal Meaning*, Hal archives-ouvertes.

Recanati, François, (2010), *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*, Oxford University Press.
Russell, Bertrand, (1905), *On Denoting*, *Mind*, Vol. 14, No. 36, pp. 479-493.
Sanford, A. J., & Sturt, P., (2002), *Depth of processing in language comprehension: Not noticing the evidence*, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 9, pp. 382–386.
Searle, John R. (1995), *The Construction of Social Reality*, Free Press.
Searle, John, (1980), *Minds, brains, and programs*, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 417-457.
Sosa, David, (1999), *Checking Searle's Background*, *Teorema: Revista Internacional de Filosofía*, Vol. 18, No. 1, *La filosofía de la mente de John Searle: intencionalidad y conciencia* (1999), pp. 109-123.
Sperber, D. and Wilson, D., (1986), *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Blackwell, Oxford.
Stanley, Jason and Zoltán Gendler Szabó, (2000), *On quantifier domain restriction*, *Mind & Language*, Vol.15, pp. 219–261.
Stanley, Jason, (2000), *Context and Logical Form*, *Linguistics and Philosophy*, Vol. 23, pp. 391– 434.
Stanley, Jason, (2005), *Semantic in Context*, *Contextualism in Philosophy: Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, Oxford University Press.
Strawson, P. F., (1952), *Introduction to logical theory*, Wiley.
Tolkien, J.R.R., (2005), *The Lord of The Rings*, HarperCollins Publishers.
Travis, Charles, *Pragmatics*, (1997), B. Hale & C. Wright, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 87-107.
Travis, Charles, *Pragmatics*, B. Hale & C. Wright, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, Blackwell, pp. 87-107
Vignolo, Massimiliano, (2014), *What Incompleteness Arguments Tell Us about Semantics and Linguistic Competence*, P. Stalmaszczyk (ed.) *Semantics and Beyond. Philosophical and Linguistic Investigation*s, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 271-290.