On Occasion:
Invisible Minimalism and the Pragmatic Frame

En alguna ocasión:
minimalismo invisible y el marco pragmático

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Abstract: This paper compares Kent Bach's peculiar version of semantic minimalism with the most radical form of contextualism in philosophy of language: Charles Travis's occasion-sensitivity. Bach posits a distinction between a contextually insensitive semantic notion of what is said in an utterance and the pragmatically enriched content a speaker can communicate with it, whereas Travis refuses to isolate the content of what is said in an utterance from the act of uttering it. I will argue that Bach's content dualism fails precisely as a result of its willingness to ascribe "pure semantic content" to an entity that is structurally pragmatic.
Keywords: Minimalism; occasion-sensitivity; semantics/pragmatics divide; minimal propositions; Pragmatic Frame.

Resumen: Este trabajo compara la peculiar versión de minimalismo semántico defendida por Kent Bach con la forma más radical de contextualismo en la filosofía del lenguaje: el ocasionalismo de Charles Travis. Bach plantea una distinción entre una noción semántica contextualmente invariable de lo que se dice en un enunciado y los contenidos pragmáticamente enriquecidos que un hablante puede comunicar con él, mientras que Travis se niega a aislar el contenido de lo que se dice en una emisión del acto de pronunciarlo. Argumentaré que el dualismo de contenidos defendido por Bach no es sostenible, porque la estructura teórica que propone termina intentando atribuir "contenido semántico puro" a una entidad que es estructuralmente pragmática.
Palabras clave: minimalismo; ocasionalismo; división semántica/pragmática; proposiciones mínimas; Marco Pragmático.

0. Introduction

Kent Bach has argued for a peculiar version of semantic minimalism[1] (sometimes termed "radical semantic minimalism" or "radicalism"[2]), which he claims is based on a systematic improvement of some of the fundamental theses set forth by Grice, (especially in "Logic and Conversation" [1989]). The main thrust of Bach's particular brand of minimalism is his sharp separation of a pure, contextually insensitive, semantic notion of what is said from all the pragmatically enriched ways of accounting for what a speaker might want to convey in uttering a sentence under given circumstances. Broadly speaking, the first content corresponds to the content of the locutionary act, the second to the illocutionary act a speaker performs in uttering a sentence with a given conventional meaning.

I call Bach's minimalism "peculiar" because his account of the features of the first kind of content is at odds with the views of most semantic minimalists[3]. When defending the purely semantic content of the locutionary act from pragmatic intrusions, Bach claims that such content does not have to be propositional; more often than not, speakers use syntactically complete and well-formed sentences to which no complete semantic content – a proposition – corresponds. Ironically, this assumption draws Bach's minimalism (henceforth referred to as Minimalism without Minimal Propositions, or MWMP for short) close to the most radical contextualist position in the philosophy of language: Charles Travis's occasion-sensitivity (Travis, 2008).

As we shall see, for rather different reasons than those motivating Bach, Travis also rejects the stipulation of a minimal proposition as the invariant semantic content of all tokens of the same sentence type. Both positions can therefore accurately be described as *anti-propositionalist*. This general feature, common to both philosophical projects, will have an impact on their corresponding views about the frontier between semantics and pragmatics.

Precisely in working out the main implications of Bach's proposal for the nature of the semantics/pragmatics divide, some authors, such as García-Carpintero (2006), have argued that Bach is aligned with contextualism regarding the content of the illocutionary act because this content, although "built out of what is said" (Bach, 2001, 19) is only extractable in the right context. On the other hand, the argument continues, in viewing the first kind of content as independent of the purely semantic one, which corresponds to the locutionary act thus performed – whose meaning remains available as the result of a mere grammatically and syntactically well-formed articulation of a sentence-type – Bach advances a minimalist or literalist position regarding the latter sort of content.

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1   Cf. Bach, K. «Conversational Impliciture», *Mind and Language* 9, 1994; «The Myth of Conventional Implicature», *Linguistics and Philosophy* 22 (Issue 4), 1999; «The Semantic-Pragmatics Distinction: What it is and why it matters», in: Ken Turner (ed.): *The Semantics-Pragmatics Interface from different points of view*, Oxford, Elsevier, 1999; «You don't say?», *Synthèse* 128, 2001; «Context *ex Machina*», in Z.Szabó (ed.): *Semantics Versus Pragmatics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005; «The excluded middle: semantic minimalism without minimal propositions», *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 73, Issue 2, 2006.

2   See Bach, 2006.

3   For instance, it doesn't match Cappelen and Lepore's (Cappelen&Lepore 2005) or Emma Borg's (Borg 2012) arguments for semantic minimalism.

A philosopher like Carpintero, who wants to draw a distinction between the act of effectively uttering something and *what is said* in an act of utterance (which is recoverable and analyzable independently of the speaker's intentions and the circumstances of utterance) may find Bach's position regarding the autonomy of these contents usefully *dualistic*. Defending formal semantics against contextualist threats, Carpintero claims not just that Bach's position is dualistic, but that it is *rightly so*; formal semantics is possible only to the degree that the pure semantic content of an utterance can be isolated from any sort of pragmatic contagion[4].

Travis's assault on any conceivable form of minimalism entails, among other things, an undermining of all kinds of formal semantics projects. At the center of his view is a disavowal of any attempt to isolate the content of what is said in an utterance from the act of uttering it – either as a means of paraphrasing the content of a speech act or as a theoretical elaboration on how that paraphrasing can be adequate. For Travis, isolating the content of what is said in an utterance from the act *x* of having uttered it is meaningless, which leads him to argue that the former can only be determined *within* the latter. And *this* is the core argumentative move that I want to explore in this paper – the point where Travis cuts out one of the steps built into Bach's argument, the consequences of which I will trace with regard to both projects. If my argument holds, Bach's content dualism fails precisely as a result of its willingness to ascribe "pure semantic content" to an entity that is structurally pragmatic. Furthermore, as we shall see, the differences distinguishing a proposal like Travis's and that put forth by Bach go beyond the level of mere terminological dispute about feasible notions of "semantics" and "pragmatics". Instead, these differences represent a genuine empirical disagreement about the nature of language, understanding and communication.

1. Bach's minimalism and the Pragmatic Frame: take one

The most distinctive feature of Bach's minimalism – which will also turn out to be the most problematic – is its strong support for a purely semantic notion[5] of what is said, i.e. the content of any natural language sentence when uttered. Such a strict notion of what is said is aimed at preventing the intrusion of pragmatic interpretative processes when it comes to obtaining the minimal content of the uttered sentence. The alleged "pure semantic content" of an utterance is then constrained by the Syntactic Correlation Principle, according to which what is said in any utterance of a sentence type should correspond to "the elements of the sentence, their order, and their syntactic character" (Bach, 2001, 15). Where there is some element of meaning the speaker wants to communicate with her utterance, and where this element is not represented syntactically in the logical form of the sentence she utters, it must be excluded from the semantic content

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4   García-Carpintero 2006, 46: "I rely on Kent Bach's work to distinguish two notions of what is said, one in response to Grice's views, which I take to represent a pragmatic, speech-act notion, and another which is closer to characterizing the subject matter of formal semantics. […] Bach's notion of saying, explicated in terms of Austin's notion of locutionary act, is of course closely related to Grice's formality feature, while his illocutionary notion (properly restricted to indicative sentences) of explicitly stating is closely related to dictiveness."

5   Cf. Bach, 2001, 15: "This paper defends a purely semantic notion of what is said against various recent objections".

of the utterance at stake. Since syntactically complete and well-formed sentences to which no complete semantic content corresponds are entirely conceivable, Bach's MWMP rejects the "scholarly adage" that ascribes to a complete sentence the expression of a proposition – even if a minimal one. The defender of MWMP thus admits that syntactically well-formed sentences can be semantically incomplete and thus convey no more than a "propositional radical", even if no indexical or demonstrative terms are to be found in them.

Occasion-sensitivity reveals that something about the theoretical framework just described is inadequate, however: namely, the way it so sharply dissociates semantic and pragmatic properties of uttered sentences, or what sentences mean and what speakers mean when they utter them.

Bach relies on a neo-Gricean notion of pragmatics that fundamentally associates the pragmatic competence of both speaker and audience with the use and intentional handling of the meaning of well-formed sentences in a natural language. Grice's fundamental goal was to explain data about context-sensitivity in natural language use in a way that leaves room for a systematic and largely context-insensitive semantics. Thus he had to sharply separate two things: the conventional, fixed meaning of expression types and the contextually variable handling of them by speakers and conversants. This is precisely the distinction that is undermined by Travis's occasion-sensitivity, which has immediate consequences for the usual ascription of the explanatory tasks to be performed by semantics and pragmatics. After criticizing this tenet of Grice's model in the introduction to *Occasion-Sensitivity* (Travis, 2008, 10)[6], Travis goes on to explore two non-reducible working definitions of pragmatics, accompanied by two non-reducible definitions of semantics, the combination of which would suffice to refute the above-mentioned approach to the semantic/pragmatic divide, and thus to refute the MWMP's view on that divide.

One generally accepted definition of pragmatics, Travis reminds us, holds that pragmatics concerns the linguistic phenomena left untreated by phonology, syntax, and semantics. A second definition – attributable to Kalish (1967) – states that pragmatics "is the study of properties of words which depend on their having been spoken, or reacted to, in a certain way, or in certain conditions, or in the way, or conditions, they were" (Travis, 2008, 109).

By contrast, a first definition of semantics – essentially attributable to David Lewis (Lewis, 1970) – views semantics as being dedicated to the study of certain relations between words and the world, and especially to those on which the truth or falsity of words (on their articulation in well-formed sentences) depends. On this view, a semantic theory that does not contain a systematic treatment of truth conditions is not to be counted as a genuine semantic theory at all. A second definition of semantics has at its core the idea that any theory of meaning for a natural language must be able to provide us with the meaning of its words and sentences, based on a recursive interpretative scheme (see Davidson, 2001).

Now if one assumes – as I intend to do here – that the general conditions for referring to objects in the world with words from a natural language are inextricably related to the circumstances or the way in which they were or could have been uttered, then, given the above combination of definitions of semantics and pragmatics, all semantic issues are, inevitably, also pragmatic ones.

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6   We shall return to this dispute when discussing examples of occasion-sensitivity below.

According to the four definitions of semantics and pragmatics I have outlined above, a semantic theory for a language – whether it takes the first or the second orientation, and bearing in mind that semantic atoms are always signs that can be uttered – would have little to do with either the recursive determination of the truth conditions of all the sentences that can be built in that language (as independent from the circumstances in which they can in fact be built and uttered) or the ascription of minimal propositions to any and every token of a given sentence type in the language. We might call this theoretical commitment the "Pragmatic Frame".

The Pragmatic Frame represents the most radical form of contextualism in the philosophy of language, stressing J. L. Austin's claim that we can only speak about the truth and falsity of sentences in a language to the extent that evaluating a token of a sentence type refers us to a "historical event" (Austin, 1961, 88). By "historical event" is meant an utterance act, whereby a speaker addresses a specific audience at a specific historical moment. This general framing has served as the theoretical background for the occasionalist examples we shall discuss below.

Now this scenario is at odds with any kind of theory of meaning for a language that aims exclusively to determine the recursive truth conditions of sentences that can be built in it, based on its semantic atoms, their grammatical disposition, and correct syntactic articulation. Supporting the Pragmatic Frame implies accepting that questions about the truth and falsity of uttered sentences within a natural language only arise at the level of "historical events" performed by competent speakers. Furthermore, in the Pragmatic Frame, what counts as the meaning of a sentence in a natural language is what makes it *a means of expressing thoughts* – and not the semantic conveyer of a thought as a fixed propositional content. The meaning of a sentence enables it to express thoughts because it is a description of how things are (or should, or could be); thus the possibility of uttering the same sentence type in different circumstances is the possibility of describing different states of affairs. Since every description admits of many applications, and since the possibilities for sentence utterance are unlimited, *different applications* of a *single description* correspond to many different thoughts. If one and the same description (sentence) can correspond to many different thoughts, then the truth conditions of any such thought cannot be the truth conditions of the sentence.

2. A purely semantic content

When establishing the notion of *conversational implicature* in his theoretical framework, Grice narrows down the *what is said/what is implicated* dichotomy in quite an inflexible way. His target is the stipulation of a fundamental distinction between the literal content of an uttered sentence *S* and another kind of propositional content, which is not articulated by *S* but can be inferred from the uttering of *S* by linguistically competent interlocutors, given the relevant conversational features of the locutionary act, the intentions of the speaker, and a set of conversational maxims which, as a whole, determine what Grice calls the Cooperative Principle.

The Cooperative Principle requires that the speaker make her contribution in a manner guided by the accepted purpose or direction of the communicative exchange in which she is engaged. The cooperative effect is reached if the speaker respects the four Conversational Maxims set forth by Grice:

- *Maxim of Quality*: do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
- *Maxim of Quantity*: your intervention has to bring enough information and it does not have to bring more information than is necessary.
- *Maxim of Relation*: the information you give must be relevant to the purposes of the conversation in which you are engaged.
- *Maxim of Manner*: be clear, by avoiding obscurity of expression or ambiguity; be brief, by avoiding unnecessary prolixity; speak orderly in your contribution to the conversation.

If speakers and interpreters in a conversational interchange presuppose that the four maxims are being respected by their partners, and so too the Cooperative Principle, they can also presuppose that, whenever any of the four maxims is violated by the speaker, she intends such a violation to be computed in the interpretative process as the conveying of an extra, linguistically non-articulated but conversationally relevant piece of information: a conversational implicature.

The stipulation of the *what is said/what is implicated* dichotomy pushed Grice to argue that these two kinds of content fully cover the scope of conversationally available data. Furthermore, he defended a literalistic view of the semantic content —*what is said*— of an utterance. What is said by an utterance of any sentence type cannot exceed, according to Grice, the syntactically articulated components of the sentence, being subject to the Syntactic Correlation Principle described above. Grice thus argues for the ascription of literal semantic content to any particular utterance of a sentence type as its corresponding *what is said*. If the interpretation of an utterance brings to the fore non-articulated elements in the sentence as used, these elements should not be considered part of the semantic content of the utterance at stake.

In spite of the Syntactic Correlation Principle, Grice did not argue for a contextually invariant notion of what is said. His proposal includes the interpretation of indexicals and demonstratives in the sentence type as uttered, along with the semantic disambiguation of terms, whenever such processes are necessary to fix the pure semantic content of an utterance. And that is all. Even if the referent of an indexical varies from context to context, the presence of the indexical can be traced to the syntactic structure of the sentence type. And even when the content of an utterance is ambiguous – whether because the sentence uttered contains ambiguous terms or the sentence itself is structurally ambiguous – the operative meaning of the utterance under analysis will still correspond, after disambiguation, to a strict interpretation of its syntactic elements.

Amongst the objections usually raised to this Gricean picture is the imposition of pure (or minimal) semantic content, ascribable to every utterance. Because the great majority of sentences that can be construed in a natural language confirm semantic incompletion or indeterminacy (something that Bach himself acknowledges) even after the ascription of referents to indexicals and demonstratives and the disambiguation of terms, they do not express a complete thought or proposition. And this is troubling for the Gricean dichotomy because, if true, *nothing is said* when most sentences are uttered.

By contrast, it is a pragmatically well-known fact that many *complete* sentences are not always used to express the minimal proposition extractable by the Syntactic Correlation Principle. This minimal proposition can even fail to be psychologically computed by both speaker and interpreter in the communicative process.

Given the above criticisms of the idea of purely semantic content, we might raise the following questions:

I. What purpose does the Gricean dichotomy between *what is said/what is implicated* serve, if it can indeed be the case that no propositional content can be ascribed to the first member, such that, the second member being essentially inferred from the first when nothing is said, nothing can be implicated?
II. Can semantically pure content, obtained by the application of the syntactic correlation norm, be incomplete?
III. If so, what is its status in a theory for interpreting utterances of a natural language?

Kent Bach answers these questions with a theory (MWMP) that is based on a strict separation between semantic and pragmatic content and that follows three main lines of argumentation:

i.   In a modified version of the Gricean dichotomy, a purely semantic notion of what is said in an utterance can be defended and the Syntactic Correlation Principle maintained.
ii. The semantic content of an utterance must not correspond to a complete thought or proposition, not even a minimal one.
iii. The main factor determining the communicated content of an utterance of a sentence type is not the context in which it is uttered, but the communicative intentions of the speaker.

3. Meaning what you say and communicative intentions

When Grice explores the contrast between "implicating" and "saying" in "Logic and Conversation", he stresses the "non-natural" kind of meaning produced by both; furthermore, he defends what he calls an intuitive understanding of *saying* – which on his view attaches the latter to the Syntactic Correlation Principle. To the extent that, for Grice, the content of what is said by an utterance never includes non-articulated components of the corresponding sentence type and is constrained by syntactic correlation, one can infer that:

a) The only kind of linguistic material that counts as the pure semantic content of an utterance is the literal meaning of the corresponding sentence type.
b) The isolation of that content is determined by a commitment to a strict compositional combination of the meaning of the semantic atoms of a sentence and their syntactic disposition.

Grice further assumes that *saying something implies meaning what one says*. Because of the Maxim of Quality, the speaker must commit herself to a belief in the truth of what she says. And this is why Grice had to establish another locution to classify examples of irony, metaphor, etc., where the speaker clearly does not mean what she says (Grice classifies these as cases of "making as if to say"). To a certain extent, Grice conflates "saying" with "stating": a speaker who says something must be taken to be stating it. Having seen that this is not what happens in

non-literal utterances (such as those involving irony or metaphor), Grice had to adjust his own first dichotomy in order to account for these distorted examples of the first term (what is said).

It is not completely certain, however, that in non-literal uses of language the speaker is merely "making as if to say something". Rather, it seems more intuitive to view examples of irony or metaphor as cases where the speaker does say something, but means something else instead. Suppose, for instance, that I say to my cat:

(1) You are my honey bun.

Even if the literal content of (1) is what I effectively say, this is surely not what I mean when I utter the sentence. In a framework that stands for a purely semantic notion of what is said, however, the literal meaning of (1) *is* the corresponding *what is said*, and this content should be preserved if one wants to maintain a clear distinction between semantic and pragmatic content – contrary to what we already said about the Pragmatic Frame's view. In a Gricean framework, where the literal content of (1) is the corresponding *what is said*, what I (really) mean to say when uttering it should be taken as a conversational implicature.

Besides non-literal uses of language, one can count on further counterexamples to the Gricean notion that "saying something implies meaning what one says". A speaker may want to say something but unintentionally say something else (e.g. slips of the tongue); or she can say something without intending to say anything whatsoever (as in pronunciation exercises, recitals, or oral translation). But MWMP considers relevant the distinction between cases of conversational implicature and non-literal uses of language – in which the speaker does not mean what she says, but there is still something that has been said, i.e. the literal content of the uttered sentence or expression[7].

Insisting upon a refinement of the original Gricean dichotomy does have a purpose, as well as a new cluster of theoretical consequences for MWMP as a whole. Let us focus on these now. If a speaker uttering F in a context C does not commit herself to the truth of F, then the *what is said* of F must not coincide with the content she wants to communicate when uttering F. The content of what the speaker wants to communicate and that her interlocutors recognize can:

I.   Coincide with what is said by the uttered sentence F in C.
II. Exceed the (literal) *what is said* of F in C.
III. Be completely distinct from *what is said* by F in C.

Be this as it may –and that is the most important anti-contextualist thrust of MWMP– the content a speaker wants to communicate when uttering a sentence F in C is only determined by the *communicative intentions* of the speaker in C and not by the features of a conversational context like C.

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7   This distinction is in line with Bach's concern for the preservation of the autonomy of literal semantic contents *vis-à-vis* the creative workings of speaker-meaning. Grice himself had dealt with non-literal uses of language (such as metaphor and irony, both conversational implicatures in his jargon), and classified them as instances of "making as if to say", where one or more of the four maxims is being exploited. In the famous example of the teacher (arguably) recommending an ex-student for a post by stating that "John has nice handwriting and usually shows up to class on time", the speaker is not saying that and meaning it. Instead, in exploiting the maxim of relation and perhaps the maxim of quantity, the meaning conveyed by the implicature *replaces* what is said.

What can be communicated by the utterance of a given sentence *F* in a context like *C* is not necessarily encoded in the literal meaning of *F*. The content communicated by a use *x* of *F* in a context like *C* is inferred by an interlocutor, based on the fact that the speaker uttered *F* in *C*. This communicative presumption is available in the communicative situation where *F* is uttered, even if in such a situation what the speaker means to say coincides with the literal meaning of *F*. As a result, in the framework of MWMP, even when *what is communicated* in a use *x* of a sentence type *F* coincides with the corresponding *what is said* – i.e. when a sentence is uttered to convey its literal meaning – such a coincidence must still be accounted for as a consequence of the *communicative intentions* of the speaker uttering *F*.

4. First new dichotomy: conversational implicature/conversational impliciture

Above, I explained why the classic Gricean dichotomy —what is said/what is implicated— is not exhaustive according to MWMP. I even supported MWMP's parting from that dichotomy, given the clash between the syntactic correlation constraint and the resolution of indexicals, demonstratives, and ambiguity. Now I must justify this departure from within the MWMP framework itself.

To inquire whether the contents in Grice's original dichotomy exhaust the domain of communicated content in an act of utterance is equivalent to pondering whether a speaker can in fact convey more information when uttering a sentence than the literal *what is said* and the conversational implicatures. MWMP itself considers this to be possible and calls the extra layer of information made available by an utterance "conversational *impliciture*". Like Gricean implicatures, the content of implicitures also surpasses what is said in a literal sense. Just like conversational implicatures, conversational implicitures are cancelable and can be vague or indeterminate. What, then, distinguishes them?

Conversational implicitures —like implicatures— exceed the literal content of an utterance. But whereas the first are mere elaborations of that literal content, the second can correspond to completely different propositional contents from the ones conveyed by the original sentence type as uttered.

An *implicatum* is distinguishable from what is said in an utterance and can be inferred from the content of the utterance itself. The so-called *what is said* is thus a propositionally determined content, and the secondary kind of content that can be communicated in addition to it by an utterance – the implicature – is a new proposition, conceptually separable from the literal content of the first.

In the Gricean framework, the content of the implicature can fail to have a single lexical component in common with what is said by the utterance from which it is inferred. Take the following sentence:

(2) It's past 10 pm.

In uttering (2), the speaker might be doing more than telling her interlocutor what time it is; in particular, she might be further implying that a certain restaurant is already closed.

A conversational impliciture, by contrast, is a kind of propositional content that develops or expands the explicit content of an utterance through pragmatic processes of different

sorts, such as any of the four presented by Recanati in *Literal Meaning*[8] (except saturation, because this is usually taken to be a pre-semantic interpretive process or, alternatively, as a mandatory pragmatic process)[9].

Now we shall get back to Bach's new dichotomy. As the term itself suggests, conversational impliciures are *implicit* in what is said by an utterance, whereas conversational implicatures are contents implicated by a specific act of utterance where a sentence type is used. The same sentence type can thus produce both conversational implicatures and conversational impliciures. Take the following sentence:

(3) Romeo has a girlfriend.

In MWMP's framework, one possible conversational *impliciure* of (3) is the proposition that Romeo has only one girlfriend. Possible conversational *implicatures* of uttering (3) could be: the speaker's interlocutor should not ask Romeo out on a date; Romeo is not gay; or even Romeo is divorcing his wife.

Now that we have presented the main conceptual differences between Grice's and Bach's dichotomies, we shall introduce some examples of sentences that can convey conversational impliciures, according to MWMP:

(4) John and Joan got married.
(5) John and Joan went up the hill.
(6) Joan got married and became pregnant.

MWMP claims that the above sentences express complete thoughts or propositions. Let's not dispute this claim now. What is new in this proposal, and what accounts for the explanatory value of conversational impliciures, is based on a presupposition. MWMP argues that it is reasonable to presume that in any act of utterance where the above sentences are used, the speaker intends to communicate more than the information encoded in the literal meaning of the sentence types, namely:

(4a) John and Joan got married [to each other].
(5a) John and Joan went up the hill [together].
(6a) Joan got married and [then] became pregnant.

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8   See Recanati (2004), Chapter 2.
9   *Saturation* is understood by Recanati as a pragmatic, linguistically mandatory interpretative process, through which the complete propositional content of an utterance is obtained when contextual values are ascribed to indexicals, demonstratives, vague predicates or those whose domain of application is not fixed by their literal meaning in the uttered sentence. By *free-enrichment*, Recanati understands a kind of pragmatic process that is not linguistically mandatory, but which aims at obtaining the fully propositional content of an utterance. In typical examples of free-enrichment, singular expressions in an utterance – such as a predicate or a connector – are focused on as a means of finding out whether their local meaning surpasses the content of their literal meaning. *Loosening* is what Recanati calls the pragmatic process whereby the application conditions of a given predicate are expanded to create a new, locally determined concept, with broader application conditions. Finally, *transfer* is the pragmatic process whereby a new meaning is ascribed ad hoc to a concept. This new meaning, even if semantically bound by the literal meaning of the predicate, extrapolates its normal conditions of application. By means of a set of sub-conscious inferences, the pragmatic interpretation of an utterance obtains its intuitive truth conditions, and these typically exceed both its literal meaning and its literal truth conditions, compositionally obtained.

The expressions in brackets, though not syntactic components of the uttered sentences, may indicate what the speaker meant to say when she uttered (4), (5), or (6). In order to make her meaning completely clear, the speaker of the first set of sentences ought to include the lexical additions bracketed in (4a), (5a), and (6a).

Within MWMP, a revision of any of the first three sentence types that makes the corresponding speaker-meaning fully explicit is called an "expansion" of its original *what is said*, and the non-articulated lexical additions to that first content are called "implicit qualifications" of the first literal version. Bach argues that any typical utterance of a sentence like (4), for instance, encloses the pragmatic phenomenon of sentence non-literality. He claims that in typical acts of utterance, even when all the constituents of the corresponding sentence type are used literally, the sentence itself as a whole is not literally meant by the speaker. Bach justifies this pragmatic phenomenon by saying that the propositional content the speaker normally wants to convey in her act of utterance does not correspond to the literal, compositionally determined version of the sentence types listed in (4), (5), and (6). Instead, he claims, the propositional content that corresponds to what the speaker wants to communicate in a typical act of utterance of (4), (5), or (6) is implicit in what is said in any of them.

Bach goes as far as to claim that a speaker using sentence (4) in a normal act of utterance does not say that John and Joan got married to each other, any more than she would say that had she said:

(7)   John and his sister Joan got married.

That the implicit qualifications of (4), (5), and (6) are not part of the respective *what is said*, Bach claims, is something that can be proved by a version of the Gricean test of cancelling implicatures, now applied to conversational implicitures. A speaker who cancels the implicit qualification of (4a) –e.g. by saying: "John and Joan got married, but not to each other"– would not be contradicting herself.

MWMP further revises the Gricean dichotomy by defending semantic incompleteness in terms of what is said. Let us assume that a syntactically well-formed sentence can be semantically incomplete or indeterminate, given the Syntactic Correlation constraint and a simple compositionality principle. Bach takes as "semantically incomplete" or indeterminate any sentence that does not express a complete (even if minimal) thought or proposition. Let us focus on a pair of examples:

(8)   John and Joan are ready.
(9)   Joan first got married.

For Bach, (8) and (9) don't express complete propositions. But assuming that a speaker who utters a sentence should aim to communicate a complete thought or proposition with her utterance, he further argues that when using (8) or (9), a speaker must mean more than what is encoded in the literal meaning of her sentences. Accordingly, if we stick to the hypothesis that a speaker must mean a complete proposition when she utters semantically incomplete sentences like the two above, we should stipulate expanded versions of speaker meaning for both, such as:

(8a) John and Joan are ready [for the marriage].
(9a) Joan first got married [and then became pregnant].

The hypothesis, defended by Bach, that a speaker must mean a complete thought or proposition in every act of utterance commits him to the conclusion that, even if (8) and (9) are not elliptical versions of (8a) and (9a), the speaker who utters the first two should mean the complete propositional content of the latter two, and could thus expect her interlocutors to interpret her utterances as conveying the content of the expanded versions.

Both the ascription of implicit content and the completion of incomplete semantic content at the level of what is said are taken by MWMP to be pragmatic interpretation processes, which should not prevent the idea of pure, literalistic semantic content of what is said from remaining in the theory. The semantic incompleteness of many well-formed and syntactically complete sentences does not have any other sort of impact on the distinction between what is said and what is communicated besides classifying the first type as the pure semantic content of an utterance and the second as the corresponding pragmatic content, while rejecting the "scholarly adage" that ascribes to every syntactically complete sentence the expression of a proposition.

At this point, I must stress my disagreement with the establishment of a new dichotomy within MWMP, since it merely reinforces a strict distinction between semantic and pragmatic content, thus rejecting the main thrust of the Pragmatic Frame. However, the stress that this proposal puts on implicit content of utterances, as a layer of meaning between the literal content and conversational implicatures, seems accurate.

5. Second new dichotomy: what is said/what is communicated

This section aims to do more than simply present and criticize the second dichotomy set forth by Bach. By providing a critical analysis of the overly-strict divide imposed by MWMP between what is said and what is communicated in an act of utterance, this section constitutes a step towards the Pragmatic Frame.

Bach narrows a distinction between semantics and pragmatics to the following scope of application: a standard definition of semantics and a standard definition of pragmatics for a natural language must bear on two types of content conveyed by utterances performed in it, and, further, they must account for the *modus operandi* that enables the extraction of both kinds of information in an interpretative process. Semantic information should be defined as the information encoded in a sentence just as it is uttered – i.e. the linguistically invariant content, plus the resolution of syntactically articulated components whose values vary across different utterances of the same sentence type. Semantic information should thus account for no more than the resolution of indeterminate expressions within the narrow or semantic context (supposedly) framing an utterance.

Pragmatic information, in turn, is all the extra-linguistic information made available by an effective act of utterance. Whereas semantic information is conventionally signaled in the sentence type as uttered, pragmatic information is any kind of information generated or made relevant in a particular act of utterance.

When arguing for the necessity of keeping a pure semantic notion of what is said in the theory, MWMP recalls some truisms that derive from the act of uttering a sentence.

The act of uttering a sentence type, besides making the content encoded in the lexicon of the sentence available to an audience, makes new and extra-linguistic information associated with that specific locutionary act relevant. The articulation between that extra-linguistic material and the linguistic content of the lexicon is the right input (according to Bach) for the interlocutor's identification of the speaker's communicative intentions. That articulation, furthermore, constitutes a platform of interface between semantic and pragmatic information. According to Bach, pragmatic information made available in an act of utterance is relevant to identifying the communicative intentions of the speaker only where she intends these communicative intentions to be deciphered by her interlocutor or audience when using a given sentence. Communicative intentions, Bach goes on, in contrast to other sorts of intention, are only made operative by a mutual recognition on the part of both speaker and interlocutor.

This specific kind of mutual recognition of communicative intentions, it is argued, does not apply to purely semantic information, since information of this second type remains available independently of both the communicative intentions of the speaker and their recognition by her audience. To illustrate this phenomenon, Bach quotes an example from Barwise and Perry:

> Even if I am fully convinced that I am Napoleon, my use of "I" designates me, not him. Similarly, I may be fully convinced that it is 1789, but it does not make my use of "now" about a time in 1789. (Barwise and Perry, 1983, 148)

The strict divide Bach imposes between semantic and pragmatic information can be disputed by relying on different arguments. But it is important to bear in mind that the crucial point for MWMP is that the content of what is said by a speaker in an act of utterance excludes any kind of information determined by the corresponding communicative intentions or the circumstances in which the utterance is made – otherwise, the so-called pure semantic content of the utterance would be tainted by pragmatic interference.

6. Context for what? Bach and communicative intentionalism

Philosophers can be very good at avoiding worn-out terminology from a given debate and partially replacing it with parochialisms of their own. Sometimes, these idiosyncratic replacements keep them in line with the mainstream debate; more often than not, however, they invest their peculiar terms of art with a substantially new flavor, which may alter the conditions of the debate. For my present purposes, I wish only to stress the fact that Travis replaces the term "communicative context" with "occasion of speaking" or "circumstances of speaking". In turn, Bach substantially adapts the classic Gricean notion of "speaker-meaning" to match his own notion of "communicative intentions". Both terminological reassessments are important for my line of argument here.

Bach's content dualism, sketched above, prevents him from accepting that the communicative context (more or less akin to Travis's "occasion of speaking") has *any* role to play in determining the content of either the locutionary or the illocutionary act: the first is determined by the semantic content of the sentence uttered, whereas the second, Bach

claims, is exclusively determined by the speaker's communicative intentions in performing the relevant illocutionary act. Of course, this second determination itself varies from context to context because the communicative intentions a speaker may reasonably have and reasonably expect her different audiences to acknowledge also vary from context to context. For Bach, however, the fact that such conveying and decoding occurs within different "occasions of speaking" does not provide these occasions with any power to determine the mental content of speakers' communicative intentions.

What does Charles Travis do with this picture of language and communication? We ought to start with a key claim of his that indicates the nature of his position on each strand of the dualism mentioned above:

> Given words may have any of many semantics, compatibly with what they mean. Words in fact vary their semantics from one speaking of them to another. In that case, their semantics on a given speaking cannot be fixed simply by what they mean. The circumstances of that speaking, the way it was done, must contribute substantially to that fixing. [T]his does not mean that there is a function from certain parameters of speaking to semantics, taking as value for each argument the semantics words would have where those values held. It thus also does not mean that there might be a precise theory, generating, for each semantics words might have, necessary and sufficient conditions for their having that. Still, *we may describe how circumstances do their work*. (Travis, 2008, 123)

The main tenet of occasion-sensitivity is that what it is for words to express a given concept is for them to be apt for contributing to any of many different conditions of correctness – notably for truth conditions, which vary from one occasion of speaking them to the next. Since words mean what they do by expressing a given concept (what Travis, after Frege, calls "thoughts"), it follows that meaning does not determine truth conditions. Compared to traditional views, this view ties thoughts less tightly to the linguistic forms that express them, and in two directions: a given linguistic form (a sentence), meaning fixed, may express an indefinite variety of thoughts (complete or incomplete); one thought can be expressed in an indefinite number of syntactically and semantically distinct ways.

How does this view differ from Bach's content dualism**,** and why can it be said to be in better shape than Bach's MWMP when accounting for our dealings with language, the relation between language and thought, and the relation between language and the world?

In his "Insensitive Semantics" (2006), Travis states that his main disagreement with minimalists is about which properties we should legitimately ascribe to simple expressions and utterances of a natural language, such as English. He accepts, first, that propositional minimalists' main goal[10] in assigning properties to sentences in a natural language is to obtain theorems such as:

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10 Travis refers especially to Cappelen and Lepore's argument for semantic minimalism in their *Insensitive Semantics* (2005). In this book, they outline semantic minimalism along three structuring principles: (a) it recognizes just a limited number of context-sensitive expressions in a natural language, such as English, and thus acknowledges a small effect of the context of utterance on the semantic content of the uttered sentence. In this framework, the only recognized context-sensitive expressions are those listed and analyzed in Kaplan's "Demonstratives", that is, the set of indexical expressions Kaplan divides into "pure indexicals" and "true

(T) The sentence "The submarine is yellow" (expresses the minimal proposition that the submarine is yellow and) is true *iff* the submarine is yellow.

Second, he accepts that, in the case of an anti-propositionalist like Bach, the corresponding aim is to provide an interpretation of the logical form of the sentence that obeys the Syntactic Correlation Principle[11]. Travis further insists that we should also recognize (T) as identifying what the sentence "The submarine is yellow" claims to be the case and which state of affairs must obtain in order for such a sentence to be true. His occasionalist argument against the validity of such theorems runs as follows:

a. The state of affairs described by all possible utterances of some sentence *S* simply does not exist. Thus a theorem like (T) is unable to state the conditions that the world must satisfy in order for a sentence such as "The submarine is yellow" to be true.

b. Open sentences in a natural language (e.g.__*is yellow*) are always susceptible to understandings, which are pragmatic, case-to-case based properties of sentence components that arise from an actual act of utterance, by a particular speaker at a particular time. Therefore, in order to ascribe the predicate __ *is yellow* to an object *o* referred to in some utterance *u* – and to make a statement about *o* that can express a thought or be truth-evaluable – we must specify an understanding for such a predicate in the utterance under analysis.

Following this standpoint, Travis goes on to argue that in a theorem such as (T), the predicate __ *is yellow* in the consequent of the biconditional is either used with some particular understanding (of being yellow) in mind or it is not. If the predicate is used on some particular understanding (1st scenario), then the necessary and sufficient conditions that must obtain in order for the sentence to be true consist in assigning to the predicate (and so to the sentence) a property that it does not have (for the mentioned sentence on the left-hand side of the biconditional does not specify any understanding of being yellow). But, if the predicate __ *is yellow* is not used with any particular understanding in mind (2nd scenario), then the biconditional fails to determine any condition under which the sentence could be true. Why should this be the consequence of the second scenario? Because on the right-hand side of the biconditional (which provides the necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of the sentence), the whole sentence is used (and so is the predicate __ *is*

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demonstratives"; (b) because of this limitation on the phenomenon of context-sensitivity in natural languages, semantic minimalists argue that all semantic context-sensitivity should be grammatically triggered; and (c) beyond fixing the semantic value of indexicals and demonstratives, the context of utterance has no relevant effect on the proposition semantically expressed or on the truth conditions of the uttered sentence. Thus the semantic content of each utterance *u* of a sentence *S* is the proposition that all utterances of *S* express (keeping stable the semantic values of indexicals and demonstratives).

11 Within an anti-propositionalist framework such as Bach's, (T) wouldn't make sense. Bach acknowledges this much in Bach, 2005, 25: "Given the phenomenon of semantic incompleteness, it is not generally feasible to give the semantics of sentences, by means of T-sentences, in terms of truth conditions. For example, if 'Steel isn't strong enough' is semantically incomplete, then the T-sentence 'The sentence "Steel isn't strong enough" is true iff steel isn't strong enough' is semantically incomplete too. It is more feasible to specify the semantics of such a sentence in terms of its propositional content, whether or not complete. I call the contents of semantically incomplete sentences 'propositional radicals'."

yellow); without ascribing any particular understanding to the predicate, the biconditional fails to provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of the sentence, because it doesn't specify the worldly state that must obtain in order for it to be true or false. For a speaker to evaluate an object *o* as being yellow or not, she must rely on some parameters, and these parameters specify, in language, the ways the world is.

If we accept Travis's premises, we must cope with two disappointing possible inferences. In the first scenario, the biconditional proves false. In the second scenario – and in the absence of necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of the sentence – a theorem such as (T) simply fails to state anything whatsoever about its truth conditions.

The defensibility of minimalism – in any of its forms – depends on things and states of affairs in the world being such a way that we might speak of them without understandings. If this were achievable, then we could reasonably infer theorems which, like (T), ascribe the minimal proposition *P* to some sentence *S*, thus stating the truth-conditions of *S*, or we might invariably interpret the logical form of *S* according to the Syntactic Correlation Principle.

The "occasionalist challenge" to this theoretical method of learning and giving the meaning of sentences in a natural language addresses the indispensability of understandings for the ability of these sentences to say something that might be true or false, or express a thought. If we do not go further than accepting the general compositionality rules for building and analysing the meaning of sentences, we certainly won't be able to say whether and when a particular submarine we are talking about counts as yellow, or which understanding will turn some particular utterance u22 of "The submarine is yellow" into a true utterance.

In this refined application of the Pragmatic Frame to linguistic analysis, assigning an understanding *x* to the predicate __ *is yellow* in u22 blocks the possibility of ascribing to u22 (or to any other utterance of the same sentence) any one of the minimalists' favorite semantic properties. Understandings bar the ascription of *a minimal proposition* expressed by such an utterance in a model like Cappelen and Lepore's, for minimal propositions, in not specifying understandings for their components, will fall into one of the scenarios described above. Moreover, they also preclude Bach's "pure semantic content" of utterances, constrained by the Syntactic Correlation Principle and independent of any element of meaning the speaker wants to communicate with her utterance. This is because understandings are inevitably drawn from the speaker's grasp of different world states accompanying each "historical act" of utterance and are thus pragmatic projections (even in Bach's own use-based understanding of pragmatics) that must accompany each and every act of utterance that can be either truth-assessable or indirectly quoted.

But in precluding pure semantic content, they preclude the possibility of speakers' using it as a communicative presumption for hearers to infer their case-to-case communicative intentions. Recall what Bach says about the indispensability of this content:

> We need the level of locutionary act and, correlatively, a strict, semantic notion of what is said in order to account for (the content of) what a speaker does in uttering a sentence independently of whatever communicative intention (if any) he has in uttering it and regardless of how the content of that intention may depart from the semantic content of the sentence. (Bach, 2005, 28)

If the so-called pure semantic content is tainted by understandings, which occur despite the fact that the meaning of the words they are understandings of *is fixed,* how can this content possibly function as a reliable input for inferring speaker-meaning – or the speaker's communicative intentions? This disavowal of a semantic notion of what is said does more than block a reliable platform from which to infer the illocutionary content of a speech-act; in addition, it undermines Bach's intentionalistic model for explaining access to that content. As we've seen, Bach dismisses the role of (communicative) context in determining what is said or what is meant. For him, context can only determine which communicative intentions speakers can reasonably expect to be recognized by their audiences, based on what they choose to say. But if, following the lead of occasion-sensitivity, we acknowledge that understandings attach to linguistic expressions that keep their conventional meaning fixed across contexts, we are bound to conclude that their case-to-case specification is in fact determined by the contextual setting that frames each occasion of speaking. As Travis puts it:

> Since what "is blue" speaks of in meaning what it does is simply being blue, it is thereby eligible to speak of that, on occasion, on any of the understandings that being blue admits of. Indeed, if it were not – if it were somehow reserved, in point of meaning, for speaking of being blue on only certain understandings of being blue – then it would not speak of *being blue*. It would rather speak of being blue on a special sort of understanding of that. The meaning of an English expression makes it *for* saying a certain sort of thing in speaking English. The meaning of "is blue", in making those words speak of being blue, makes it for (e.g.) calling something blue on the understanding there would then be of its being so. (Travis, 2006, 43)

This general account of the role understandings play *qua* properties of the expressions we use across occasions of speaking (which make them contribute to different conditions of correctness) may very well require that occasion-sensitivity reshape the traditional semantics/pragmatics divide, by arguing that words *do* indeed have semantic properties, but only as a function of the speaking in which they occur, thus rendering those properties also pragmatic. This terminological refinement, however, only maps an empirical study of the properties words in a language have in virtue of meaning what they do. As it turns out, the fear Carpintero had expressed regarding the blurring of the frontier between semantics and pragmatics by defenders of contextualism – that it "ultimately concerns an issue with empirical implications: the scope and limits of a serious scientific undertaking, formal semantics" (García-Carpintero, 2006, 35) – can be fruitfully expressed, from the standpoint of occasion-sensitivity, in the opposite direction. It can be argued that the rigidification of that divide through the postulation of a pure semantic content of what is said threatens our ability to grasp that understandings are *semantic* properties of words in a language, which only stand out in occasions of speaking.

7. Bach's minimalism and the Pragmatic Frame: take two

The occasionalist objections against a pure semantic notion of what is said considered above did, in fact, lead Travis to propose a revision of the standard frontier between semantics and pragmatics – but only at the end of an extended working-out of the role

played by understandings in language and communication. Indeed, in the introduction to *Occasion-Sensitivity*, Travis sets out to defend his view against the sort of Gricean and neo-Gricean objections we have been analysing, in a way that incorporates the problems raised for Griceanism(s) by the *semantic* workings of understandings[12]. Here, he writes:

> Inspired by Grice, many have learned contempt for questions of the form "When would we say such-and-such?" or "How would we describe such-and-such?". The contemptuous idea would run like this. Consider, say, a range of people – candidate knowers that it is now mid-December. Or, again, some range of (physical) objects – candidates, say, for being red or not. Now let us partition the range in two ways. First, we partition it into those cases of which "we would say" that they knew it was December, or that the objects were red, and those cases of which we would not say this. Then we partition it into those cases of which it is *true* that they know it is December, or that it is red, and those in which it is *not* true (or false) to say this. There is no reason, the thought is, why these partitionings should coincide. There are all sorts of reasons why we might or might not say something. Truth is another matter. […] Occasion-sensitivity makes for two errors in this way of putting things. First, we cannot partition cases of things being colored as they are into those which *as such* are ones of something being colored red and those which *as such* are not. There is, in general, no such thing as being red, independently of any particular understanding of so being. Even less could there be such a partitioning in the case of knowing such-and-such. Second, and by the same token, there is no such thing as the cases which are those we would call ones of something being red – apart from some particular occasion for the calling. Again, all the less for knowing something. *There is not yet any sensible notion of discord or harmony between these (non-existent) partitionings*. (Travis, 2008, 10)

This view poses a double threat for MWMP as a project. Not only does it dissolve the plausibility of a purely semantic notion of what is said, but it also blocks the inferential procedure posited by Bach for arriving at the communicated content of an utterance from that first, locutionary kind of content. Because understandings are features of the linguistic meaning of expressions from a natural language that cover a potentially infinite range of worldly states that they are fit to describe in meaning what they do, and because, for that reason, they are not syntactically traceable, they bar the syntactic correlation principle that, for Bach, worked as the general input for getting at purely semantic content. (Understandings are thus anything but psychological or private features of language-mastery and communication.) But also because, as in Travis's example, there is no such thing as the set of cases "which are those we would call ones of something being red, apart from some particular occasion for the calling", the communicated content that Bach views as inferentially extractable from the linguistically determined input of what is said (exclusively via correctly figuring out the speaker's communicative intentions) can never be arrived at apart from the external features of

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12 This is very important: when reframing definitions of semantics and pragmatics in his "Pragmatics", Travis repeats over and over again that expressions in a natural language *do* have semantic properties (he even speaks of their having "semantics"), but only within occasions of speaking. That's why the semantic properties they have, being a function of the act of speaking in which they occur, are also pragmatic properties.

the specific occasion in which the speech act is performed. In fact, within Travis's framework, what helps interlocutors to figure out communicative intentions, and even to ascertain them when they are misleading, are features of the specific occasion of speaking. One of Travis's many direct examples of occasion-sensitivity hints at this:

> Take, for example, the English "Sid grunts" (spoken of Sid at a time). Sid has been in an accident. The fear is that he has lost his ability to grunt. Pia gives him a sharp blow in the solar plexus. He responds with a grunt. Which Pia reports (correctly) by saying, "Sid grunts!" By contrast, Pia and Zoe are planning a soirée. Pia would prefer Sid not to come. (He knows too much.) So she says, "Don't invite Sid. Sid grunts." But Sid is the most urbane of men. He has no such habit. Pia speaks mendaciously, so falsely. (Travis, 2006, 42)

Following the lead of occasion-sensitivity, we can now appreciate why both elements in Bach's content dualism must ultimately be abandoned. Specific features of the occasion in which words are spoken make available the relevant understanding of those words; it is against this background that words, in meaning what they conventionally mean, are fit (or unfit) to talk about the relevant circumstances. Circumstances of speaking thus determine the understanding attached to given spoken words in the first place. Contrary to what Bach claims, hearers do not extract the communicated content from purely semantic content, making an inferential "leap" from the literal content of the locutionary act to the pragmatically enriched content of the illocutionary act. Instead, a certain understanding emerges as salient in the circumstances of utterance, such that semantic content is inextricable from communicated content. Rather than hinging on the transmission of a speaker's communicative intentions, this contextually constrained determinacy of meaning is grounded in the salience of the specific understanding that the relevant words have, given the occasion in which they are uttered. Finally, the occasionalist will insist that neither the accuracy of a speaker's ascription of a given understanding to her words, nor the adequate interpretation of those words by her interlocutor, nor agreement between them regarding which specific understanding is then operative is determined by a mental act of intending or by a syntactically constrained positing of specifications of meaning, as extra-layers of the logical form of uttered sentences. As occasionalism shows, the specific understanding words then bear is in fact established by the environmentally determined features of the occasion of utterance.

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