Is There a Place for Truth-Conditional Pragmatics?

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RESUMEN

La pragmática veritativo-condicional es el punto de vista de acuerdo con el cual el significado de una oración en una proferencia no proporciona por sí sólo un contenido veritativo-condicional (incluso después de que se produce la desambiguación y se ha fijado la referencia); ese significado puede complementarse pragmáticamente de indefinidamente muchas maneras, proporcionado indefinidamente muchas condiciones de verdad. Recanati aboga por una versión de esta doctrina. Yo argumento que las perspectivas de éxito de una doctrina de este tipo son escasas. Indico también brevemente cómo los fenómenos relativos al contexto que motivan el pragmatismo podrían ser manejados por el punto de vista de la tradición semántica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *pragmática, semántica, significado, interpretación, ambigüedad, fijación de la referencia, contenido veritativo-condicional, intuiciones, imprecisión.*

ABSTRACT

Truth-Conditional Pragmatics is the view that the meaning of the sentence in an utterance does not alone yield a truth-conditional content (even after disambiguation and reference fixing); that meaning can be pragmatically supplemented in indefinitely many ways yielding indefinitely many truth conditions. Recanati urges a version of this doctrine. I argue that the prospects for the doctrine are dim. I also briefly indicate how the semantic tradition view might handle the context-relative phenomena that motives pragmatism.

KEYWORDS: *Pragmatics, Semantics, Meaning, Interpretation, Ambiguity, Reference Fixing, Truth-Conditional Content, Intuitions, Imprecision.*

I. INTRODUCTION

François Recanati is a leading figure in the exciting movement of linguistic "contextualism" or "pragmatism". His latest book on the subject, *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics* (2010), like his earlier one, *Literal Meaning* (2004), is a model of philosophy: bold theses clearly stated; knowledgeable;

subtle distinctions; and lots of argument. Still, it seems to me that he is off on the wrong track.

The pragmatist movement opposes the traditional view of the semantics/pragmatics distinction coming from "truth-conditional semantics" and with roots in formal semantics. Recanati calls the traditional view "Minimalism" [Recanati (2010), p. 5]. On this view, with two important qualifications, a sentential utterance has its truth-conditional content simply in virtue of the (largely)[1] conventional rules of the speaker's language. This content is typically thought to be "what is said" by the utterance and its constitution is typically thought to be a "*semantic*" matter. In contrast, the pragmatists think that these two qualifications do not go nearly far enough and so urge a "truth-conditional pragmatics" according to which the truth-conditional content varies from context to context and the variation is a "*pragmatic*" matter.[2] So the content is partly constituted pragmatically. Recanati is sympathetic to a strong version of truth-conditional pragmatics but urges a weaker version. I shall argue that neither version is viable.

The two important qualifications to the "Minimalist" tradition are as follows. (1) An expression will frequently be ambiguous: more than one meaning is conventionally associated with it. If an expression is ambiguous, its contribution to "what is said" will depend on *which* of those conventions the speaker is participating in, on which of its meanings she "has in mind". (2) An utterance may contain indexicals (and tenses), deictic demonstratives, or pronouns, the references of which are not determined simply by conventions. What is said by one of these terms depends on reference fixing in context, on what Recanati neatly calls "saturation" [Recanati (2004), p. 7]. The reference of the "pure" indexical 'I', 'here', and 'now' is determined by public facts about the speaker. The reference of a demonstrative like 'that' or a pronoun like 'it' is to the particular object the speaker "has in mind" in using the term. And the best theory of this, in my view [Ibid. pp. 290-5], is that the speaker has that object in mind in virtue of her thought being linked to it in a certain sort of causal-perceptual way.[3] (It follows from this, note, that the reference of the term is determined by *a mental state of the speaker*. The context external to the speaker's mind plays a reference-determining role only to the extent that relations to that context partly constitute the mental state.)[4]

So variation in truth-conditional content arising from disambiguation and reference determination is not the issue. The issue is whether there are other variations in content from context to context and if so whether they are semantic or pragmatic. According to truth-conditional pragmatics there are many more and the extra are pragmatic not semantic: semantics *underdetermines* the content.

There is another variation in content from context to context that is not the issue. It is taken for granted by all that, by varying the background knowledge, a sentence can be used to convey indefinitely many messages.

Paul Grice (1989) emphasized that an utterance of a sentence that *said that p* might, given an appropriate background, be used to *conversationally impli-cate* that *q*. The hearer can then use a "pragmatic inference" to derive that implicature from what is said. It is easy to see then that, by varying the back-ground, we can vary the truth-conditional implicature. The implicature is of course pragmatic but, for Grice, the initial what-is-said that the speaker uses in making the implicature is truth-conditional and semantically determined. The pragmatists think there is no such semantic what-is-said: there are prag-matic contributions not just at the "secondary" level of implicatures but at the "primary" level of what-is-said [Recanati (2004) p. 21]; pragmatics is in-volved "from the beginning". That is the issue.

II. METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

How are we to get at the truth of the matter in this issue? I have consid-ered this methodological question elsewhere, arguing for various theses that are crucial to assessing truth-conditional pragmatics. I summarize.

II.1 *The Role of Intuitions*
Pragmatists rest their theories ultimately on appeals to meta-linguistic intuitions:

> Our intuitive judgments about what *A* meant, said, and implied, and judgments about whether what *A* said was true or false in specified situations constitute the primary data for a theory of interpretation, the data it is the theory's business to explain [Neale (2004), p. 79].

Robyn Carston thinks that the various criteria in the pragmatics literature for placing "pragmatic meanings" into "what is said", "in the end…all rest…on speaker/hearer intuitions" [Carston (2004), p. 74]. This is certainly true of Recanati's criterion. What he "means by 'what is said' corresponds to the *in-tuitive truth-conditional content* of the utterance" [Recanati (2010), p. 12]. He applies "the 'availability' criterion, according to which what is said is the proposition determined by the truth-conditional intuitions of the participants in the talk-exchange themselves" [Ibid. p. 14]. This reliance on meta-linguistic intuitions is not, of course, peculiar to the pragmatists: it is the *mo-dus operandi* of philosophy of language in general. Nonetheless, I have ar-gued [Devitt (1996), (2012)], it is very mistaken. This is important for truth-conditional pragmatics because, we shall see (sec. III.5), the only chance of saving it depends on the appropriateness of resting on intuitions.

II.2 *A Theoretical Base*

   We should not proceed by simply consulting intuitions. And we certainly should not proceed by mere stipulation (as, in effect, Recanati points out: Recanati (2010), pp. 12-14). So how should we proceed? I have urged a way in "What Makes a Property 'Semantic'?" [Devitt (2013a)]. We need a *theoretical basis* for distinctions that play a role here; for example, for the Gricean one above. I argue that the required basis is to be found by noting first that languages are representational systems that scientists attribute to species to explain their communicative behaviors.[5] We then have a powerful theoretical interest in distinguishing, (a), the representational properties of an utterance that arise simply from the speaker's exploitation of a linguistic system from, (b), any other properties that may constitute the speaker's "message". I call the former properties "what is said", and "semantic", and the latter, "what is meant but not said", and "pragmatic". This theoretical basis then provides an argument for the view that what is said is constituted by properties arising from (i) linguistic conventions, (ii) disambiguations, and (iii) reference fixings. As already noted, this is a traditional view. However, whereas that view is typically promoted on the basis of intuitions, I claim to have given it a theoretical basis.

   From my perspective, semantics is concerned with the representational properties that symbols have in virtue of being uses of a language, the properties that constitute what is said. These properties contribute to conveying the message of an utterance. Other factors may also contribute to conveying the message but these are not the concern of semantics. So the key semantic issue is the nature of those linguistic representational properties. The symbols have those properties in virtue of being part of a representational system of conventional rules. So the key issue comes down to: What are the conventions that constitute the system?[6]

   How do we answer this key question? We look for evidence from regularities in behavior. Is this expression regularly used to express a certain "speaker meaning"? If so, is this regularity best explained by supposing that there is a convention of so using the expression?

   In sum, my methodology for tackling the semantics-pragmatics dispute starts from the view that a language is a representational system posited to explain communication. From this start I provide a theoretical motivation for a sharp distinction between two sorts of properties of utterances: semantic ones constituting what is said; and other, pragmatic, ones that contribute to the message conveyed. Finally, we take properties to be semantic if that is the best explanation of regularities in behavior.

   What, in general, is the pragmatist challenge from this perspective? We should take the traditional view to be that the literal truth-conditional content communicated – something that could be the basis for an indubitably pragmatic implicature – is standardly my semantic what-is-said, constituted only by

properties of sorts (i) to (iii), properties arising from conventions, disambiguations, and reference fixings. I say "standardly" because the tradition does, or at least should, allow that occasionally what is communicated is a pragmatic enrichment or impoverishment of what-is-said. We should then take the challenging claim to be that pragmatics plays a much bigger role: this semantic what-is-said is never, or is seldom, the content communicated: the content is semantically underdetermined; a new theoretical framework is called for.

In *Overlooking Conventions: The Trouble With Linguistic Pragmatism* (forthcoming) I claim that this challenge can be met. I argue that many of the striking examples that motivate linguistic pragmatism exemplify semantic rather than pragmatic properties (in my senses, of course). The work of the pragmatists shows that there are more properties of sorts (i) to (iii) than we had previously noted. All of these go into the semantic what-is-said; there is no interesting "semantic underdetermination". This view is in the spirit of the tradition that pragmatism rejects. No new framework is called for.

The present paper gives more than a glimpse of the argument for this controversial thesis. For, in rejecting truth-conditional pragmatics in section III, I will be showing how some of those striking examples might be accommodated semantically.

II.3 *The Metaphysics of Meaning and the Epistemology of Interpretation*

I have elsewhere identified three methodological flaws of linguistic pragmatism [Devitt (2013b)]. The first of these, already mentioned (II.1), is the heavy dependence on intuitions. The second concerns the important distinction between the study of the properties of utterances – what is said, meant, implicated, etc. – and the study of how hearers interpret utterances. We might say that the former study is concerned with *the metaphysics of meaning*, the latter, with *the epistemology of interpretation*. As noted, according to pragmatists, conventions, disambiguation, and reference fixing underdetermine the truth-conditional content of what is said. Pragmatists believe that the shortfall is made up by "pragmatic inferences" [Carston (2004). p. 67]. This belief, I argue [Devitt (2013b), sec. 2], is badly mistaken. If there were a shortfall, it would be made up, just like the standard disambiguation and reference fixing, by something noninferential that the speaker has in mind. Pragmatic inferences, of which Gricean derivations of conversational implicatures are an example, have absolutely nothing to do with any shortfall in the constitution of what is said. Pragmatic inference is something the hearer may engage in to interpret what is said.

The methodological flaw of confusing the metaphysical and epistemological studies is almost ubiquitous among pragmatists.[7] Recanati is a prominent example.[8] A sign of the problem is his equation of what is said "with what a *normal interpreter* would understand as being said, in the context at

hand" [Recanati (2004), p. 19; see also p. 16]. But what is said by a speaker must be equated with something resulting from what *she* did. And there is no guarantee that the normal interpreter will understand what she said: the context may be so misleading that any normal interpreter would *mis*understand. In fact, the metaphysics-epistemology confusion runs right through Recanati's discussion. Thus, he mostly writes as if what is said is constituted *by processes in the hearer*. So, he sees his disagreement with the Minimalist tradition as over *which* of these processes does the job:

> The dominant view is that the only pragmatic process that can affect truth-conditional content is saturation. No "top-down" or free pragmatic process can affect truth-conditions – such processes can only affect what the speaker means (but not what she says) [Recanati (2010), p. 4].

In contrast, Recanati holds that the "top-down" process of "modulating" senses, of "free enrichment", also goes into what is said:

> pragmatics is appealed to not only to assign contextual values to indexicals and free variables but also to freely modulate the senses of the constituents in a top-down manner [Recanati (2010), p. 10].

The modulation processes that are supposed to do the job are those of the hearer in comprehension:

> we…equate what is said with (the semantic content of) the conscious output of the complex train of processing which underlies comprehension" [Recanati (2004), p. 16].

Yet the truth of the matter is that only the speaker could modulate any sense that might go into what she says. And Recanati does not entirely lose sight of this truth (see, for example, Recanati (2004), pp. 17, 56-7). What we have here is a genuine confusion (see, for example, Recanati (2010), pp. 1-2).[9]

The cost of the confusion is great. Recanati's metaphysics of meaning rest largely on his epistemology of interpretation. Yet, even if his claims about a hearer's processes of understanding are right – and we should note that they seem to be supported only by intuitions – they throw little if any light on the metaphysical issue. Consider what is said, for example. Not only do interpretative processes not constitute what is said, Recanati's claims about those processes do not provide significant evidence about what does constitute it. This is not to deny that, if we knew a great deal more about language understanding than, appropriately, Recanati claims to know, then that knowledge might provide good evidence about the metaphysics of meaning. But the little we now know is not much help with the metaphysics.

Against this methodological background, I turn now to the examination of truth-conditional pragmatics, a view that stands in sharp contrast to the traditional view that a sentential utterance has its truth-conditional content - its what-is-said - largely in virtue of its conventional meaning.

III. TRUTH-CONDITIONAL PRAGMATICS

III.1 *RC and TCP*

Recanati helpfully distinguishes two versions of truth-conditional pragmatics:

> TCP is the weaker of the two. It holds that the linguistic meaning of an (ordinary, non-indexical) expression *need not be* what the expression contributes to propositional content. Radical Contextualism (RC) holds that it *cannot be* what the expression contributes to propositional content. Although, in this book, I make a case for TCP, I am sympathetic also to the stronger position," [Recanati (2010), p.17].

In urging the weaker TCP, Recanati obviously has in mind that it is *very often* the case, even if not always (as with RC), that an expression contributes a pragmatic modulation of its linguistic meaning to the propositional (= truth-conditional) content.

I shall be rejecting both RC and TCP. Here are some statements of them:

> …in general, the meaning of a sentence only has application (it only, for example, determines a set of truth conditions) against a background of assumptions and practices that are not representable as a part of meaning [Searle (1980), p. 221].

> What words mean plays a role in fixing when they would be true; but not an exhaustive one. Meaning leaves room for variation in truth conditions from one speaking to another [Travis (1996), p. 451].

> According to contextualism, the sort of content which utterances have…can never be fully encoded into a sentence; hence it will never be the case that the sentence itself expresses that content in virtue solely of the conventions of the language. Sentences, by themselves, do not have determinate contents [Recanati (200), p. 194][10].

Now everyone accepts, of course, that encoded conventional meaning alone does not usually determine truth-conditional content: reference determination and disambiguation are also needed. But RC/TCP holds that much more is needed to get the content, as Anne Bezuidenhout makes explicit:

meaning underdetermines truth-conditions. What is expressed by the utterance of a sentence in a context goes beyond what is encoded in the sentence itself. Truth-conditional content depends on an indefinite number of unstated background assumptions, not all of which can be made explicit. A change in background assumptions can change truth-conditions, even bracketing disambiguation and reference assignment…contextualists claim that there is a gap between sentence meaning and what is asserted, and that this gap can never be closed….the radical context-dependence of what is said [Bezuidenhout (2002), p. 105)].

This passage presents another striking aspect of RC/TCP: sentence meaning can be supplemented in an *indefinite* number of ways to yield truth conditions. As a result, this supplementation can yield an *indefinite* number of different truth conditions:

What the English '___ grunts', or any other open English sentence, *means* leaves it open to say any of indefinitely many different things, at a time, of a given item, in using that open sentence of it [Travis (2006), p. 40].

words can take on an indefinite variety of possible senses [Recanati (2004) p. 134].

TCP holds that an expression may, but need not, contribute its sense — i.e. the sense it independently possesses in virtue of the conventions of the language; it may also contribute an indefinite number of *other* senses resulting from modulation operations… applied to the proprietary sense [Recanati (2010), p. 19].

RC has problems with the idea that expressions have "meanings" or "senses" at all. According to Recanati, RC rejects the Fregean presupposition "that the conventions of the language associate expressions with senses" [Recanati (2010), p. 18]. Recanati himself prefers to talk of expressions having "semantic potential" rather than meanings [Ibid. (2004), p. 97]. But RC should accept – and, so far as I know, does accept – that expressions have *some* conventionally constituted property, *whether called a "meaning", "sense", "semantic potential", or whatever*, that constrains truth conditions. For, this constraint is simply a consequence of supposing that people are using a language at all. In supposing this, we are supposing that, simply in virtue of being in the language, an expression has some conventionally-determined property that contributes to conveying the message. And it contributes by constraining truth conditions, thus making the interpretative task of the hearer not simply a matter of mindreading. It is only because both speaker and hearer participate in the conventions that constitute this constraining property that the sentence can play its crucial role in communicating a message.

This raises two questions for RC/TCP. (1) How can a sentential utterance have this conventionally constituted constraining property without that property fully determining a truth condition? (2) How can this property allow indefinitely many truth conditions? I don't think that RC/TCP has a satisfactory answer to these questions.

To see why we should start by reminding ourselves of the two ways that context-relative phenomena are *already* accommodated within traditional truth-conditional semantics. These traditional ways handle (A) indexicality and (B) ambiguity. Since RC/TCP "brackets" these traditional ways of handling context-relativity - as indeed it must if it is to *be* a challenge to the tradition – it needs to identify some other way in which sentences can constrain truth conditions without determining them. That's the problem for RC/TCP.

The discussion of (A) and (B) to follow serves not only this negative purpose of undermining RC/TCP but also the positive purpose of showing how the tradition might be saved. For, it shows how the tradition might handle novel, previously unnoticed, context-relative phenomena of the sort that have motivated pragmatism. This is not to say that the discussion establishes that the tradition *can* handle this wide range of phenomena. That would be a task way beyond the scope of this paper. What I hope to show is that whereas the prospects for RC/TCP are dim, those for the tradition are promising.

III.2 *(A) Indexicality*

The first way that the tradition takes account of context relativity is by noting that the references of indexical elements are determined in context. Indexicals have a conventional meaning – what David Kaplan calls a "character" – that does not fully determine a truth condition – what Kaplan calls a "content". To get a truth condition the convention demands saturation: there is a "slot" that must be filled in context. This indexicality gives the tradition easy answers to questions (1) and (2): the constraint on truth conditions is provided by a Kaplanesque character; variations in what the speaker has in mind in context can yield indefinitely many truth conditions. Now it is obvious that RC/TCP cannot avail itself of these answers because RC/TCP is a rejection of the tradition of truth-conditional semantics. Any context-relative phenomena that are explained in this indexical way can be accommodated within that tradition. So it is puzzling that one way Recanati understands RC is as "a form of contextualism that 'generalizes indexicality'" to all terms [Recanati (2010), p. 19]. If RC did thus generalize indexicality it would not be truth-conditional *pragmatics* but an implausibly radical version of truth-conditional *semantics*.

This negative point against RC/TCP immediately suggests a positive point for the tradition. Perhaps many pragmatist phenomena can be accommodated in this indexical way. I think that many can: there are more indexical elements in language than the familiar list.[11] Here are some plausible

examples. (a) I have argued [Devitt (2004), (2008c,d)] that one favorite pragmatist phenomenon, the referential use of definite descriptions, provides a paradigm. Descriptions are *standardly and regularly* used referentially. Indeed, the vast majority of uses of descriptions are referential. The best explanation of this is that there is a convention for referential descriptions, like that for complex demonstratives, of referring to the particular object the speaker has in mind. (b) It is plausible to think that there is a convention for quantifiers that implicitly restricts their domains in context. Thus, the domain of "Everyone went to Paris" is implicitly restricted to everyone *in a certain group*. (c) It is plausible to think that the convention for "It is raining" is that it implicitly refers to a location that the speaker has in mind.[12] (d) Perhaps the convention for sentences like "I have had breakfast" involves an implicit reference to a period.[13]

Whether or not these examples, and others, can be thus accommodated within the tradition, the negative point remains. So, if RC/TCP is to survive it must find answers to (1) and (2) that do not appeal to indexicality. RC/TCP needs some phenomena that are context-relative in other ways. According to pragmatists there are many such phenomena.

Thus, Carston thinks that pragmatic processes "supply constituents to what is said solely on communicative grounds, without any linguistic pointer" [Carston (2002), p. 23]. Charles Travis does not think that terms like 'grunt' are indexical [Travis (1997), p. 93]. And there is no sign that other pragmatists have an indexical view of many of their favorite examples of context relativity. These examples include 'cut' [Searle (1980), pp. 222-3]; 'red' [Bezuidenhout (2002), p. 106]; and 'rabbit', as in 'He wears rabbit' and 'He eats rabbit' [Recanati (2004), pp. 24-5]. But if these expressions do not involve indexicals, our questions remain. (1) How could a sentence containing such a term constrain the content of an utterance without the utterance being truth conditional? (2) How could the term yield indefinitely many truth conditions?

III.3 *(B) Disambiguation*

This brings us to disambiguation, a second way that the tradition takes account of context relativity. Some expressions are governed by more than one convention and hence are ambiguous; 'bank' and 'visiting relatives can be boring' are favorite examples. According to the tradition, such expressions are disambiguated in context by whatever meaning the speaker has in mind. This yields an easy answer to (1): the conventions governing an expression constrain truth conditions by determining a set of possible truth conditions, one of which is made actual in context. But this way of dealing with context-relative phenomena is no more available to RC/TCP than the indexicalism of (A) because it would also accommodate the phenomena within the tradition. Furthermore, concerning (2), although with variation in context an ambigu-

ous expression yields more than one truth condition, it does not yield the indefinite number required by RC/TCP.

Once again, a negative point against RC/TCP immediately suggests a positive point for the tradition. It is tempting to treat many pragmatist favorites as previously unacknowledged examples of ambiguity, in particular, of *polysemy*: they are expressions that have several *related* conventional senses. But then context relativity in such cases would be just the familiar one of disambiguation in context. Consider 'rabbit', for example. It is already accepted that it is ambiguous between being a count noun as in 'many rabbits' and a mass noun as in 'eats rabbit'. It seems plausible to think that 'wears rabbit' illustrates another related meaning as a mass noun. Then, whichever of these senses a particular speaker has in mind gets into the convention-governed what-is-said. So it is a semantic property not a pragmatic one.

There is reluctance among linguistic pragmatists to treat seemingly polysemous expressions as genuinely ambiguous. One source of this reluctance is Grice's "Modified Occam's Razor", "Senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity" [Grice (1989), p. 47]. This is usually construed as requiring that we not posit a new sense *wherever there is a pragmatic derivation* of the message from an uncontroversial old sense. Embracing this construal is the last of the three methodological flaws of pragmatism that I have noted elsewhere [Devitt (2013b)]. The Razor, thus construed, cannot be right because it would make all metaphors immortal. The metaphorical meaning of a word is derived from its conventional meaning. Over time, a metaphorical meaning often becomes regularized and conventional: the metaphor "dies"; the expression is now polysemous/ambiguous. Yet a derivation of what is now a new conventional meaning from the old conventional meaning is still available. Indeed, that derivation will be center stage in the diachronic linguistic explanation of the presence of this new meaning (sense) in the language.

Recanati construes the Razor in this usual way [Recanati (2004), p. 157] and seems to accept it [Ibid. (1993), p. 285], but it is not clear that the Razor influences him much. He has another problem with treating polysemous expressions as ambiguous: "it does not seem that there is a *discrete* list of senses available but, rather, a continuum of possible senses to which one can creatively add in an open-ended manner" [Ibid (2010), p. 18; see also his discussion of 'get' (2004), p. 134]. But the creative use of expressions is not at odds with the tradition. The tradition accepts that an expression can have a speaker meaning other than its conventional meaning – in a metaphor, for example. And, in time, such a speaker meaning can become a new conventional meaning of the expression. Indeed, this is the story of polysemy (as Recanati notes: (2010), p. 70). The tradition does not suppose that languages never change!

However successful the tradition may or may not be in thus extending ambiguity, RC/TCP still faces the difficult question (1). How can the con-

straint imposed by a sentence – along with the familiar reference determination and disambiguation in context – fail to fully determine a truth condition? Take 'cut' for example. As pragmatists insist, it seems to contribute different actions to the message conveyed by 'Max cut the grass' and 'Max cut the cake'. But there is a constraint on what it can contribute; it can't contribute just anything. So what is the constraint? It is not (A), a Kaplanesque character that demands saturation in context. And RC/TCP cannot hold (B), that the constraint is a set of meanings from which one is selected in the context, on pain of slipping back into bed with the tradition.

The problem for RC/TCP deepens when we note another feature of the tradition.

III.4 *(C) Imprecision*

The tradition takes account – certainly *should* take account - of some context relativity in a way that *grants a role for pragmatics*. Utterances can be elliptical: a *more precise* message than the truth-conditional what-is-said is conveyed in the context. This acknowledges that it is sometimes ponderous and boring to convey the precise message by fully exploiting the available linguistic conventions. More to the point, it acknowledges that sometimes the only available conventions determine a meaning that is *vaguer* than the desired message. So a vague what-is-said is *enriched* in context into a more precise message; the speaker conveys the precise proposition she means with the help of the imprecise proposition she expresses. This is a plausible story for a novel nominal compound like Recanati's 'burglar nightmare' [Recanati (2004), p. 7]. Perhaps the story could accommodate 'cut': 'cut' is seen as referring to what is common to cutting grass, cutting cakes, and all other forms of cutting. So it means something along the lines of *produce linear separation in the material integrity of something by a sharp edge coming in contact with it* [Hale and Keyser (1986)]. This view has some plausibility but it is obviously not available to RC/TCP. For, on this view, 'cut' *would* help fully determine a truth conditional what-is-said: it would contribute that common action to the truth condition of 'Max cut the grass' and 'Max cut the cake'. What 'cut' would thus contribute would be rather imprecise, of course, but nonetheless it could provide the needed constraint: anything that is to count as a cutting action has to be of that rather vague kind. In sum, imprecision cannot provide RC/TCP with the needed answer to question (1).

The enrichments mentioned here are pragmatic. There can also be pragmatic impoverishment: the proposition meant is *less* precise than the proposition said.[14] These are ways other than conversational implicatures in which what is meant can depart from what is said. They are reminiscent of Recanati's "free enrichments" [Recanati (2004), p. 52]. But whereas his enrichment goes into a partly pragmatic what-is-said, mine does not. Rather, it is a potential message that is an expansion of a semantic what-is-said. And, to

repeat my main point, the semantic what-is-said that is thus expanded is already truth-conditional and so there is no place here for "truth-conditional pragmatics". Finally, the pragmatic enrichment is a potential message but it may not be the actual one because it, like the semantic what-is-said, can be the basis for a conversational implicature.

III.5 *Verdict on RC and TCP*

In the case of indexicality, (A), the constraint on possible truth conditions is a convention that demands a certain sort of saturation by the speaker in a context to yield a truth condition. In the case of polysemy, (B), the constraint is a set of conventions, one of which is selected by the speaker in a context. In the case of imprecision, (C), the constraint is a convention that determines a vague truth condition that the speaker enriches in a context to convey a more precise message. RC/TCP cannot appeal to any of these constraints in answering the difficult questions. So what could the answers be? What is this constraint, constituted by a convention grasped by speaker and hearer, that does not determine truth conditions?

Recanati has the basis for an answer, but it is not a good basis. Remember that, for Recanati, "'what is said' corresponds to the *intuitive truth-conditional content* of the utterance" [Recanati (2010), p. 12]. So he could answer by conceding that utterances of type (C) *do* always have a convention-exploiting, truth-conditional content. However, he could continue, this "minimal" content is never the *intuitive* content according to RC, and it need not be and very often isn't that content according to TCP. This raises the question: Intuitive *to whom*? Recanati has in mind: intuitive *to the folk* involved in the communication. I have two comments. First, RC's claim about folk intuitions strikes me as highly implausible and TCP's, as dubious. Second, and much, much, more important, why should we care about these meta-linguistic intuitions in the scientific study of language and communication? We should be concerned with the application of a *theoretically motivated what-is-said* (sec. II.2). And we should not expect any intuitions the folk may have about the application of any notion of *what-is-said* they may have to be a reliable guide to the application of the needed theoretical notion.

So I think that the Recanati answer fails. So far as I know, the contextualists have provided no other answer. I very much doubt that they could provide one.

Recanati notes an objection to TCP: "Communication…becomes a miracle". He thinks that the objection fails

> because the problem it raises is a problem for everybody, not merely for TCP. *Whenever* the semantic value of a linguistic expression must be pragmatically inferred, the question arises, what guarantees that the hearer will be able to latch on to the exact same semantic value as the speaker? [Recanati (2010), p. 6].

But this misses the point. The demand is not for a guarantee of successful communication but for an account of *language's* contribution to that success. TCP must posit some conventional property of 'cut' and its ilk that is recognized by a linguistically competent hearer and yet does not determine truth conditions. That TCP has not done, leaving us with the miracle.

I hope to have shown here that the prospects for RC/TCP are dim. I have also described the resources that the tradition has available to handle the wide range of phenomena that the pragmatists have drawn attention to. I have given some examples of such handling. This is a long way, of course, from demonstrating that the tradition can handle all these phenomena.

IV. WHITHER LINGUISTIC PRAGMATISM?

Suppose RC and TCP must be abandoned. Could truth-conditional pragmatics be saved nonetheless? RC and TCP concern what is asserted by an utterance using *a sentence in a language*. What about other utterances? Consider the time before there was a language. Then it is obvious that the conventions of a language cannot constitute a truth-conditional content. So any assertion by our pre-linguistic ancestors would not be so constituted: it would have a truth-conditional speaker meaning but not conventional meaning. Similarly, consider our present situation in a foreign country knowing only a few words of the alien tongue. The truth-conditional content of any assertion we make using just one of those words is partly constituted by the conventions for that word but is otherwise not conventionally determined. So that content is at least partly pragmatically constituted; it is a pragmatic enrichment of what is conventionally determined. However, the pragmatic nature of communication with little or no shared language is familiar and does not make for an *interesting* truth-conditional pragmatics. What about the use of sub-sententials in our own language to make assertions? If Robert Stainton is right in arguing for a "pragmatics-oriented approach" to these phenomena [Stainton (2005)], that motivates an interesting truth-conditional pragmatics. I argue elsewhere (forthcoming) that he is mostly wrong about this: most sub-sentential assertions can be handled semantically. If this is right, then I think truth-conditional pragmatics cannot be saved.

Where else might pragmatists look for salvation? Clearly, noting novel indexicalities and ambiguities of the sort discussed in (A) and (B) is not the way. If salvation is to be found, I conjecture, it would have to be by showing that phenomena of the sort discussed in (C) are far more widespread than the tradition allows: pragmatic enrichments and impoverishments are not just occasional features of linguistic communication but near-ubiquitous features. This would be bad news for the tradition but, to emphasize, even this would

not save RC/TCP because what would be thus enriched and impoverished would be a truth-conditional what-is-said.

Finally, even if linguistic pragmatism could be saved in one of these ways there seems to be an intrinsic limit to what it can achieve. Suppose pragmatism demonstrates convincingly that a range of utterances have messages that are not constituted by semantic truth-conditional what-is-saids. Where does pragmatism go from there? What room is there for *theory*? We can say, as I think we should, that what the speaker has in mind constitutes the meaning of each of those messages. But there seem to be no more substantive generalization that we could make.[15] For, a substantive generalization about those meanings would require some regularity in using certain forms to convey certain messages. And with regularities we would get conventions. We would be back with the tradition.

But let me not finish on this negative note. Recanati and other pragmatists have done a wonderful job of identifying linguistic phenomena that do not, on the face of them, seem to fit the traditional way of drawing the semantics-pragmatics distinction. I think that the right way to respond to this is not to replace the traditional conceptual framework with a new one but to work to accommodate the phenomena within the traditional framework.[16]

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NOTES

[1] I say "largely" because the tradition probably accepts the Chomskian view that some syntax is innate. The qualification should be taken as read in future.

[2] It is a vexed issue exactly what "semantic" and "pragmatic" do and should mean. I shall clarify my usage in sec. II.2; see also Devitt (2013a), secs. 3 and 4.

[3] Some prefer to say that the term refers to what the speaker "intends to refer to". This can be just a harmless difference but it may not be. Having *x* in mind in using the term simply requires that the part of the thought that causes that use be linked to *x* in the appropriate causal way. In contrast, for a speaker *literally* to intend to refer to *x*, given that intentions are propositional attitudes, seems to require that she entertain a proposition containing the concept of *reference*. So she can't refer without thinking about reference! This would be a far too intellectualized a picture of referring. Uttering and referring are intentional actions, of course, but it seems better to avoid talking of intentions when describing them.

[4] Recanati takes Minimalism to involve the following constraint: "'what is said'…departs from the conventional meaning of the sentence (and incorporates con-

textual elements) *only when this is necessary to 'complete' the meaning of the sentence and make it propositional*" [Recanati (2004), p. 7)]. This captures the traditional qualification (2) nicely, but not (1). Where a sentence has more than one conventional meaning it is not apt to say that disambiguation "is necessary to 'complete' the meaning of the sentence and make it propositional".

[5] This view of human languages is rejected by Chomskians. They see these languages as internal states not systems of external symbols that represent the world. I argue that this is deeply misguided [Devitt (2006a), chs 2 and 10; (2006b); (2008a,b)].

[6] I think that conventions should loom very large in our view of human language. In stark contrast, Chomsky thinks that the "regularities in usage" needed for linguistic conventions "are few and scattered" [Chomsky (1996), p. 47]; see also (1980), pp. 81-3]. Furthermore, such conventions as there are do not have "any interesting bearing on the theory of meaning or knowledge of language" (1996: 48). I think these views are very mistaken [Devitt (2006a), pp. 178–89; see also (2006b), pp. 581-2, 598-605; (2008a), pp. 217-29].

[7] As I have noted [Devitt (2013a), sec. 4], the confusion is presumably related somehow to a lack of attention to the ambiguity of 'pragmatics'. As commonly used, it refers sometimes to the study of communication and sometimes to the study of the "pragmatic" properties of utterances.

[8] Some other examples: Bezuidenhout (2002); Carston (2004); Korta and Perry (2008); Levinson (2000); Sperber and Wilson (1995); Stainton (2005); Stanley and Szabó (2000). Bach (1999), (2005) and Neale (2004) are notable exceptions.

[9] Surprisingly, Reinaldo Elugardo and Robert Stainton have defended this pragmatist confusion, claiming that it does no "undue harm". For, "a key determinant of content, in the metaphysical sense, is speakers' intentions. And...we insist that the intentions that a speaker can have are importantly constrained by her reasonable expectations about what the hearer can figure out" [Elugardo and Satinton (2004), pp. 445-6]. I have heard similar defenses from other pragmatists. But, I argue, these are attempts to defend the indefensible [Devitt (2013b), sec. 3].

[10] What about the "relevance theorists"? Carston has this to say: "the Travis/Recanati concept of 'what is said', as inevitably involving extensive pragmatic input, is very close to the relevance-theoretic view, though there the terms are 'proposition expressed' and 'explicature'" [Carston (2002), p. 170].

[11] Jason Stanley (2007) urges that there are very many more.

[12] Recanati has a lengthy discussion of such "weather reports" [Recanati (2010) pp. 77-125].

[13] How is such an implicit reference to be handled in the syntax? It would be wise to leave this subtle matter to linguists. But what if our best current syntactic theory does not allow for this reference? Then we should expect linguists to modify the current theory. If the conventions of the language do indeed include this reference then that fact has to be accommodated by the grammar of the language.

[14] "The ATM swallowed my credit card" [Recanati (2004), p. 26] may once have been an example although now it is surely a dead metaphor.

[15] Note that this is a claim about meaning. The pragmatists might well hope for substantive generalizations about a hearer's interpretation of meaning; see Recanati's response to the objection that "modulation is unsystematic" [Recanati (2010), pp. 9-10, 27-47].

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