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A Defense of Semantic Minimalism

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**A DEFENSE OF
SEMANTIC MINIMALISM**

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A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Semantic Minimalism is a position about the semantic content of declarative sentences, i.e., the content that is determined entirely by syntax. It is defined by the following two points:

Point 1

The semantic content is a complete/truth-conditional proposition.

Point 2

The semantic content is useful to a theory of utterance interpretation.

Against this position, Contextualists present two main arguments:

Incompleteness Problem

For some sentences, semantic interpretation gives us a propositional radical.

Inaccessibility Problem

For some sentences, semantic interpretation gives us a proposition that is complete/truth-conditional but not consciously accessible.

The Incompleteness Problem, an argument against Point 1, claims that the semantic content of a sentence like “Tipper is ready” expresses a propositional radical that requires a completion specifying what Tipper is ready for to express a complete proposition. Since this completion is pragmatically determined, Contextualists argue that semantic interpretation alone sometimes fails to determine a content that is complete/truth-conditional.

The Inaccessibility Problem, an argument against Point 2, claims that the semantic content of a sentence like “Jack and Jill are married,” i.e., *Jack and Jill are each married*, is oftentimes consciously inaccessible; what is accessible is the pragmatically determined proposition that *Jack and Jill are married to each other*. Contextualists argue that in such cases, the semantic content fails to play any role in explaining communicative success.

My aim in this dissertation is to endorse a version of Minimalism by defending Point 1 and Point 2 against these two arguments. In Chapter 1, I put the disagreement between Minimalists and Contextualists in clearer focus by separating it from another disagreement concerning the notion of saying. In Chapter 2, I defend Point 1 by arguing that the Minimalist view that I favor, according to which the semantic content of a sentence like “Tipper is ready” is a complete/truth-conditional, albeit unspecific, proposition, is a more reasonable view than Contextualism. In Chapter 3, I defend Point 2 by showing the plausibility of the idea that the semantic content of a sentence like “Jack and Jill are married” plays the input role in a speedy subconscious process that “mirrors” the Gricean implicature process.

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1 A Terminological Disagreement

1.1 Introduction

My aim in this dissertation is to endorse a version of Semantic Minimalism by defending the following two points about the semantic content of declarative sentences:¹

Point 1

The semantic content is a complete/truth-conditional proposition.

Point 2

The semantic content is useful to a theory of utterance interpretation.

But before I get into a discussion about whether or not these two points can hold up to the arguments that Contextualists have brought up against them, it will be useful to put the disagreement between Minimalists and Contextualists in clearer focus by separating it from another, quite independent, disagreement concerning the notion of what is said.

For some reason or other, the following view about what is said has become somewhat standard in the philosophy of language:

Standard View About What Is Said

What a speaker said by uttering a sentence, *S*, is identical to the truth-conditional content of *S*.

According to those who hold this view, the correct way to get to the truth-conditional content of *S* is by determining what the speaker said by her utterance of *S*. The problem is, however, they

¹ In what follows, when I speak of the semantic content, I am referring to the semantic content of a *declarative* sentence.

disagree about what content is what is said. For example, consider the following conversation between *A* and *B*:

A: Are Jack and Jill siblings?

B: Jack and Jill are married!

On one side of the disagreement are those I will call “Semanticists.” They argue that what *B* said by her utterance of “Jack and Jill are married” is the minimal proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*. Thus, according to Semanticists, this minimal proposition is the truth-conditional content of “Jack and Jill are married.” On the other side of the disagreement are those I will call “Pragmaticists.” They argue that what *B* said by her utterance is the pragmatically enriched proposition that *Jack and Jill are married to each other*. Pragmaticists claim, therefore, that this enriched proposition is the truth-conditional content of the utterance² of “Jack and Jill are married.”

We see, then, that the disagreement about what is said is essentially a disagreement about what is the truth-conditional content of a sentence or utterance. But, as I will argue in this chapter, the disagreement about what is said is merely terminological. Therefore, not only is it useless in determining what is the truth-conditional content of a sentence or utterance, it is irrelevant to the debate about whether or not the semantic content of a sentence, *S*, is the truth-conditional content of *S*. Consequently, it needs to be separated from the substantial disagreement between Minimalists and Contextualists regarding the two points mentioned above.

My aim in this chapter is to show that the disagreement about what is said is merely terminological. In Section 1.2, I discuss Grice’s notion of saying, which has been central to any discussion about what is said. As we will see, it is difficult to position him relative to the

² According to Pragmaticists, the bearers of truth-conditional content are utterances, not sentences.

disagreement about what is said because proponents on both sides of the disagreement claim that their own view is largely Gricean. In Section 1.3, I discuss each of the two sides of the disagreement. Finally, in Section 1.4, I argue that the disagreement between Semanticists and Pragmaticists is merely terminological and, therefore, irrelevant to the substantial disagreement between Minimalists and Contextualists that will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

1.2 Grice's Notion of What Is Said

The notion of saying is central to Grice's widely influential theory of conversational implicature. Grice distinguishes what is implicated (i.e., implied, hinted at, suggested, etc.) from what is said, and he explains that the former is "built on the latter."³ But despite the centrality of the notion to his theory, Grice fails to give a precise characterization of it. In fact, he seems to give two possibly inconsistent characterizations. On the one hand, Grice explains that he is using a "favored" and "in some degree artificial" sense of "say",⁴ which differs somewhat from ordinary uses of the word for the purpose of "greater theoretical utility".⁵ On the other hand, he writes, "I shall, for the time being at least, have to assume to a considerable extent an intuitive understanding of the meaning of *say*".⁶ We will see in what follows that each side in the disagreement about what is said favors one of these two characterizations.

According to Grice's "favored" or technical notion of saying, what a speaker says is "closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered."⁷ The

³ Grice (1989), p. 49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

conventional meaning of an uttered sentence of a language *L* is, roughly, what a competent speaker of *L* understands the sentence to mean without having any knowledge of the context of utterance. But what is said, for Grice, can go beyond the conventional meaning. That is, when needed, certain information must be recovered from the context of utterance in order to determine what a speaker has said in that context. Grice discusses what this information is in connection with the following example:

Suppose someone to have uttered the sentence *He is in the grip of a vice*. Given a knowledge of the English language, but no knowledge of the circumstances of the utterance, one would know something about what the speaker had said, on the assumption that he was speaking standard English, and speaking literally. One would know that he had said, about some particular male person or animal *x*, that at the time of the utterance (whatever that was), either (1) *x* was unable to rid himself of a certain kind of bad character trait or (2) some part of *x*'s person was caught in a certain kind of tool or instrument (approximate account, of course). But for a full identification of what the speaker had said, one would need to know (a) the identity of *x*, (b) the time of utterance, and (c) the meaning, on the particular occasion of utterance, of the phrase *in the grip of a vice* [a decision between (1) and (2)].⁸

Considering the above passage, we might formulate Grice's technical notion of saying, which we will call "what is said_(G)," as follows:

Grice's Technical Notion of Saying

What is said is the conventional meaning of the uttered sentence with the following information, recovered from the context of utterance, included: (a) the referents of indexicals, (b) the time of utterance and (c) the intended meanings of ambiguous expressions.

This notion of what is said_(G) is certainly appealing for its simplicity. Unfortunately, the notion is inconsistent with an essential feature that Grice assigns to saying.

When we take a look at the other major theory associated with Grice, his theory of meaning, we see that Grice understands saying as a type of intentional action. That is, a speaker says only

⁸ *Ibid.*

what she intentionally expresses or means by the sentence she utters. To put it more simply, for Grice, *saying something entails meaning it*.⁹ He notes that this feature of what is said makes it the case that a speaker sometimes only “makes as if to say.”¹⁰ Two categories of instances where a speaker only “makes as if to say” are: (i) instances of irony, metaphor, misuse of a word, and slip of tongue (i.e., where a speaker means something completely different from what she *appears* to be saying) and (ii) instances of translating, reciting, and rehearsing (i.e., where a speaker does not mean anything by her utterance).

The problem is, Grice’s claim that saying something entails meaning it conflicts with his technical notion of what is said. It is often the case that what a speaker says_(G) is not what she means by her utterance. In fact, the content that is said_(G) is not even on the speaker’s mind as she makes the utterance. Here, I am not referring to instances of the first category (e.g. of irony or metaphor) but to instances where a speaker says_(G) one thing but means something more specific than what she said_(G). For example, suppose I utter the sentence, “Jack and Jill went to the bank.” Assuming that my audience can recover from the context of utterance how I am using the word “bank” (let’s say, to mean the financial institution), they have all the information that they need to determine what I said_(G), which is that *Jack went to the bank and Jill went to the bank (leaving it an open question whether or not they went to the bank together)*. Under normal circumstances, however, what I meant by my utterance is not what I said_(G) but the more specific proposition that *Jack and Jill went to the bank together*.¹¹

⁹ See Grice (1957) and Grice (1969).

¹⁰ Grice (1989), p. 31.

¹¹ One might argue that the speaker also meant what is said_(G) in this case, given that what is said_(G) is entailed by the pragmatically enriched proposition that *Jack and Jill went to the bank together*. But, I don’t think so. It is unlikely, I think, that the speaker, in uttering “Jack and Jill went to the bank,” *intentionally* expressed or meant the unspecific proposition that *Jack went to the bank and Jill went to the bank (leaving it an open question whether or not they went to the bank together)*. I don’t think that this particular proposition is on the speaker’s mind.

Now, there are many instances like the above where a speaker says_(G) one thing but means something more specific than what she said_(G). Given this, Grice has three options. First, he could hold on to both his technical notion of what is said and the claim that saying something entails meaning it but grant that in a good number of instances speakers do not say but only “make as if to say.” Second, he could hold on to his technical notion of what is said and give up the claim that saying something entails meaning it. According to this option, what I said in the above situation is that *Jack went to the bank and Jill went to the bank (leaving it an open question whether or not they went to the bank together)*. Third, he could hold on to the claim that saying something entails meaning it and give up his technical notion of what is said. According to this option, what I said in the above situation is precisely what I meant, that *Jack and Jill went to the bank together*.

As I mentioned earlier, both Semanticists and Pragmaticists claim that their own view is largely Gricean and that their particular notion of saying best captures the notion that Grice had in mind. We will see in what follows that Semanticists take the second option mentioned above, agreeing with Grice that what is said is strictly constrained by the syntactic elements of the uttered sentence. Pragmaticists, on the other hand, take the third option, agreeing with Grice that a speaker always means what he says, which makes it the case that what is said oftentimes contains pragmatically determined elements.

1.3 The Two Sides of the Disagreement

Semanticism

As I noted earlier, for Grice, what a speaker says is “closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered.”¹² Semanticists interpret this constraint on what is said very strictly, arguing for the following view:

Semanticism

What is said departs from the conventional meaning of the uttered sentence (and includes pragmatically determined elements) only when the sentence contains context-dependent constituents¹³ whose semantic values need to be assigned in order for the meaning of the sentence to be made fully propositional.

Take, for example, an indexical sentence such as “She is a graduate student.” This sentence does not express a complete proposition unless a referent has been assigned to the demonstrative pronoun “she.” Therefore, according to the above view, what a speaker has said in uttering “She is a graduate student” includes the semantic value of “she,” which is pragmatically determined.

Now, Semanticists call the relevant type of pragmatic determination “saturation.” Saturation is the process whereby the meaning of an uttered sentence is made fully propositional by the assignment of semantic values to the context-dependent constituents of the sentence. According to Semanticism, pragmatic determination of what is said is restricted to saturation. That is, what is said can include pragmatically determined elements only insofar as those elements are needed to make the meaning of the uttered sentence fully propositional. We will call the Semanticists’ notion of saying “what is said_(s).”

To better understand the process of saturation, let’s contrast it with another pragmatic process. Consider again the following sentence uttered in response to the question, “Are Jack and Jill siblings?”

¹² Grice (1989), p. 25

¹³ Or, as some philosophers think, the sentence contains “unarticulated” constituents that need to be contextually supplied in order for the meaning of the sentence to be made fully propositional.

(1) Jack and Jill are married.

According to Semanticism, what the speaker said_(S) by her utterance of (1) is the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*. But in the given context of utterance, this is not what the speaker meant by her utterance; she meant something more specific, namely that *Jack and Jill are married to each other*. Now, the pragmatic process that is involved in arriving at the latter interpretation is not required to establish propositionality; what is said_(S) is fully propositional, and nothing in the uttered sentence forces us to bring in pragmatically determined elements about the relationship between Jack and Jill. This pragmatic process is called “free enrichment,” and it is “free” in the sense that it is not required to make the meaning of the uttered sentence fully propositional.

Let’s consider two more examples of the Semanticists’ notion of saying:

(2) John has three children.

(3) She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped.

What the speaker said_(S) by her utterance of (2) is the proposition that *John has at least three children*. In a typical context of utterance, however, this proposition is not what she meant by her utterance; she meant the more specific proposition that *John has exactly three children*. Likewise, what the speaker said_(S) by her utterance of (3) is the proposition that *She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped (in some direction)*, with the referent of “she” assigned by the process of saturation. But in a typical context of utterance, this proposition is not what the speaker meant by her utterance. In this case, she meant the more specific proposition that *She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped off the cliff*, again with the referent of “she” filled in.

In all three examples, (1)-(3), we see that what the speaker said_(s) by her utterance is different from what she meant by her utterance.¹⁴ What the speaker meant includes pragmatically determined elements that make more specific what she said_(s), but they are not necessary to make the meaning of the uttered sentence fully propositional. Thus, we see that Semanticists reject Grice's claim that saying something entails meaning it. What is important to remember about Minimalism, then, is that it endorses a very strict constraint on what is said and that any pragmatic determination of what is said is restricted to the process of saturation.

Pragmaticism

Like Semanticists, Pragmaticists agree with Grice that what a speaker says is "closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered."¹⁵ As I noted earlier, they too consider their notion of what is said to be largely Gricean. But whereas Semanticists interpret Grice's constraint on what is said very strictly, Pragmaticists interpret it more loosely, allowing pragmatically determined elements (via the process of free-enrichment) to be part of what is said. In so doing, they are able to uphold Grice's claim that a speaker always means what she says. Recanati is the main contemporary proponent of Pragmaticism, and it is his notion of saying that I will discuss in what follows.

To understand Recanati's notion of what is said, it is useful to look at his two main criticisms of Semanticism. First, according to Recanati, Semanticists oftentimes get wrong the *intuitive* truth-conditions of sentences. Consider again the following sentence uttered in response to the question, "Are Jack and Jill siblings?"

¹⁴ See footnote 11.

¹⁵ Grice (1989), p. 25.

(1) Jack and Jill are married.

Recanati thinks that normal interpreters have reliable intuitions about what is the truth-conditional content of an utterance. Now, in the given context, he thinks that the hearer will intuit the pragmatically enriched proposition that *Jack and Jill are married to each other* as the truth-conditional content of the utterance of (1). He goes on to state that “those intuitions [that normal interpreters have about what is the truth-conditional content of an utterance] correspond to a certain ‘level’ in the comprehension process...that is the level of ‘what is said’.”¹⁶ According to Recanati, therefore, what the speaker said by her utterance of (1) is not the minimal proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*, but the enriched proposition that includes the pragmatically derived information that Jack and Jill are married to each other.

The second criticism is related to the first. Again, for Recanati, the level of what is said is a “certain ‘level’ in the comprehension process.”¹⁷ This certain level, according to him, is one that serves as the input to the Gricean process of implicature generation. In other words, Recanati thinks that what is said is the proposition on the basis of which we infer what is implied. Thus, noting that “an essential aspect of [Grice’s theory of implicature] is that the hearer must be able to recognize what is said and to work out the inferential connection between what is said and what is implied by saying it,”¹⁸ Recanati goes on to propose the following constraint on what is said:

Availability Constraint

What is said must be intuitively accessible to the conversational participants (unless something goes wrong and they do not count as ‘normal interpreters’).¹⁹

¹⁶ Recanati (2004), p. 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Now, another problem with Semanticism, according to Recanati, is that what is said_(S) oftentimes cannot be the input to the Gricean implicature process since, according to him, it is oftentimes not intuitively or (as he usually puts it) consciously accessible to the conversational participants. Consider, for example, the following conversation between *A* and *B*:

A: Do you think John would be interested in a four bedroom apartment?
B: John has three children.

Assuming familiarity with the Gricean implicature process, what *B* seems to have implicated by her utterance of “John has three children” is that she thinks that John would indeed be interested in a four bedroom apartment. Now, the proposition on the basis of which we infer this implicature is the proposition that *John has exactly three children*, not the minimal proposition that *John has at least three children* (which would potentially give rise to a different implicature). According to Recanati, the minimal proposition in this case is not consciously accessible to the conversational participants. So, for Recanati, it is the pragmatically enriched proposition, which is the input to the Gricean implicature process, that is what is said by the utterance of “John has three children.”

Here, then, is the view of Recanati’s Pragmaticism:

Pragmaticism

What is said is the consciously accessible proposition that serves as the input to the Gricean implicature process, which normal interpreters would intuit as the truth-conditional content of the given utterance.

A key difference with Semanticism is that, according to Pragmaticism, free enrichment may be involved in determining what is said, i.e., the notion of what is said, according to Pragmaticists, which we will call “what is said_(P).” This, of course, is because sometimes the proposition that

normal interpreters intuit as the truth-conditional content of an utterance includes pragmatically determined elements that go beyond those determined by saturation.

To conclude this part, let's consider one more example of the Pragmaticists' notion of saying:

(3) She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped.

According to Semanticists, what the speaker said_(S) by her utterance of (3) is the proposition that *She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped (in some direction)*, with the referent of "she" assigned by the process of saturation. But Recanati argues that this proposition is not what normal interpreters intuit as the truth-conditional content of the utterance, being consciously inaccessible to the conversational participants. According to Recanati, what the speaker said_(P) by her utterance of (3) is the pragmatically enriched proposition that *She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped off the cliff* (with the referent of "she" filled in), which is the consciously accessible proposition that normal interpreters would intuit as the truth-conditional content of the utterance of (3).

1.4 Why the Disagreement Is Terminological

As we have seen, Semanticists and Pragmatists oftentimes disagree about what is said by a particular sentence or utterance. Let's review what they think is said in the examples discussed above:

(1) Jack and Jill are married.

What is said_(S): *Jack and Jill are each married.*

What is said_(P): *Jack and Jill are married to each other.*

(2) John has three children.

What is said_(S): *John has at least three children.*

What is said_(P): *John has exactly three children.*

(3) She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped.

What is said_(S): *[The referent of “she”] ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped (in some direction).*

What is said_(P): *[The referent of “she”] ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped off the cliff.*

Both sides claim that the content they identify as what is said is the truth-conditional content of the given sentence or utterance. As I mentioned earlier, this is because they adhere to the standard view about what is said, according to which what a speaker said by uttering a sentence, *S*, is identical to the truth-conditional content of *S*. Their disagreement about what is said is, therefore, essentially a disagreement about what is the truth-conditional content of a sentence or utterance. But, as we will see, their disagreement is merely terminological.

In what follows, I argue that both Semanticists and Pragmaticists rely on intuitions to defend their notion of saying. But the intuitions they are eliciting are not intuitions about what is said *proper* (assuming, of course, that there is such a thing). Both sides seem to have in mind a particular role that they think what is said should play in a theory of utterance interpretation, and the intuitions they are eliciting are ones about whichever content plays this role. Thus, they beg the question at hand. Their disagreement, I think, turns out to be nothing more than a terminological dispute about which of the two contents, what is said_(S) or what is said_(P), should be called “what is said.” Bach and Recanati have been the main figures in the disagreement about what is said, and it is their views that I will primarily be discussing in what follows.

Let’s begin with a discussion of how Bach, a main proponent of Semanticism, defends the notion of what is said_(S). According to him, the following schema provides a test for determining

what is said: “S said that...”²⁰ The idea is that something being appropriately reportable in indirect quotation is good grounds for thinking that it is part of what is said. Compare the applications of this test in (4a) and (5a) to the utterances of (4) and (5):

(4) Jack is hungry.

(4a) *S* said that Jack is hungry.

(5) Honey, Jack is hungry.

(5a) *S* said that, honey, Jack is hungry.

According to Bach, since our intuitions about (4a) tell us that the proposition that *Jack is hungry* can be indirectly quoted, it is part of what the speaker said by her utterance of (4). On the other hand, since our intuitions about (5a) tell us that the element, *honey*, cannot be indirectly quoted, it is not part of what the speaker said by her utterance of (5).

Now let’s apply this test to a case where Semanticists and Pragmaticists disagree about what is said. Consider again the following sentence uttered in response to the question, “Are Jack and Jill siblings?”

(1) Jack and Jill are married.

Here again are the possible contents that the speaker said by her utterance of (1):

What is said_(S): *Jack and Jill are each married.*

What is said_(P): *Jack and Jill are married to each other.*

In this case, which of the following is the correct indirect speech report for the speaker’s utterance of (1)?

(1a) *S* said that Jack and Jill are each married.

²⁰ According to Bach’s Indirect Quotation (IQ) Test, “An element of a sentence contributes to what is said in an utterance of that sentence if and only if there can be an accurate and complete indirect quotation of the utterance (in the same language) which includes that element, or a corresponding element, in the ‘that’-clause that specifies what is said” (Bach (1999), p. 340).

(1b) *S* said that Jack and Jill are married to each other.

Semanticists would claim that (1a) is the correct indirect speech report in this case. Of course, Pragmaticists would disagree and argue that our intuitions clearly tell us that (1b) is the one that is correct. But Bach defends the Semanticists' position by noting that it is to be expected that our intuitions will generally favor what is said_(p) as what is said since "we are focused on what we are communicating or on what is being communicated on us, not on [the minimal proposition]".²¹ This explains why our intuitions might tell us that (1b) is the correct indirect speech report for the speaker's utterance of (1). Bach goes on to say, however, that if our intuitions were "sensitized" to "the difference between the contribution that is made by the semantic content of a sentence and that made by extra-linguistic factors to what an utterance communicates,"²² they would favor what is said_(s) as what the speaker said. So, according to him, if our intuitions were sensitized in such a way, they would tell us that (1a) is the correct indirect speech report for the speaker's utterance of (1).

With regard to sensitizing our intuitions, this is what Bach has in mind: Present normal interpreters with a sentence like (1), followed by a cancellation of what is not explicit in the utterance, such as the following:

(1c) Jack and Jill are married but not to each other.

Then ask the interpreters if they sense a contradiction or merely a clarification. I agree with Bach that in this case the interpreters would recognize that what the speaker said by her utterance of (1) is what Bach thinks is said, given that (1c) seems to be a clarification and not a contradiction.

²¹ Bach (2002), p. 24.

²² *Ibid.*

Another way our intuitions can be sensitized, according to Bach, is the following: Present normal interpreters with the pragmatically enriched version of a sentence like (1), namely:

(1d) Jack and Jill are married to each other.

Then ask the interpreters if what the speaker said by her utterance of (1d) is the same as what she said by her utterance of (1). I again agree with Bach that in this case the interpreters would sense a difference between the two and say that the utterance of (1d) says something that is not said by the utterance of (1). This, according to Bach, shows that interpreters, if their intuitions are sensitized, would choose what is said_(s) as what the speaker actually said, and, consequently, they would choose (1a) as the correct indirect speech report for the speaker's utterance of (1).²³

There is, however, an obvious problem with Bach's test. Our intuitions about whether or not an indirect speech report is correct depend largely on our intuitions about what is said, but our intuitions about what is said are unreliable. There are at least two usages for the verb "say," a natural-language usage and a technical usage, and our intuitions about what is said depend on which usage is being understood. Now, our intuitions will favor (1b) as the correct indirect speech report for speaker's utterance of (1) if "say" is being understood in its natural-language sense. On the other hand, our intuitions will favor (1a) as the correct indirect speech report if "say" is being understood in its technical sense. Bach's idea of sensitizing our intuitions is merely to change how we understand "say," from the natural language usage to the technical usage, so that our intuitions will favor the indirect speech report that includes what is said_(s) and not what is said_(p). Therefore, it turns out that Bach defends the Semanticists' notion of saying by

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

eliciting intuitions, not about what is said *proper*, but about what is (in a technical sense) said, i.e., the content that Semanticists think is what is said.

Pragmatists think that their defense of their notion of saying has an advantage over the Minimalists' defense in that the intuitions they appeal to are not directly intuitions about what is said but intuitions about truth-conditions, which they think are more basic and reliable. As I mentioned earlier, Recanati thinks that the proper way to determine what is said is to elicit intuitions about the truth-conditional content.²⁴ Normal interpreters, he thinks, have intuitions about what is the truth-conditional content of an utterance, and these intuitions are intuitions about what is said *proper*. Since normal interpreters intuit what is said_(P) and not what is said_(S) as the truth-conditional content of a given utterance, the former, according to Recanati, is what is said *proper*.

Since the intuitions appealed to, on Recanati's defense, are not directly intuitions about what is said, Recanati avoids the problem mentioned above (i.e., that our intuitions about what is said are unreliable). However, his defense of the Pragmaticists' notion of what is said runs into another problem. This quite obvious problem is that there is no reason to assume that the proper way to determine what is said is to elicit intuitions about the truth-conditional content of an utterance. To put it another way, there is no reason to assume that the intuitions that normal interpreters have about the truth-conditional content are intuitions about what is said *proper*. One could argue that these intuitions are not about what is said *proper* but about what is more broadly communicated. In that case, Recanati is merely eliciting intuitions about what is more broadly communicated and claiming that these intuitions are about what is said *proper*. It turns out,

²⁴ Recanati (2004), p. 14.

therefore, that to defend the Pragmaticists' notion of saying, Recanati, like Bach, is merely eliciting intuitions about the content that he thinks is what is said.

As I stated earlier, both Semanticists and Pragmaticists have in mind a particular role that they think what is said should play in a theory of utterance interpretation, and the intuitions they are eliciting are ones about whichever content plays this role. Semanticists think that what is said should be the objective content of an utterance that is independent of the fact that the utterance is actually made. Therefore, it should be the *non-cancelable* content of an utterance. For example, consider again the following example:

(2) John has three children.

What is said_(S): *John has at least three children.*

What is said_(P): *John has exactly three children.*

Whereas what is said_(S) is non-cancelable, what is said_(P) is cancelable, as the following proposition makes clear:

(6) *John has three children, but not exactly three; he has exactly five children.*

Now, as we saw earlier, the intuitions that Bach elicits to defend the Semanticists' notion of saying are not about what is said *proper* but about what is (in a technical sense) said, which is the content that plays the role just discussed, i.e., the objective, non-cancelable content of an utterance.

Recanati, on the other hand, thinks that what is said should be the input to the inferential pragmatic process of implicature generation. In other words, it should be the content on the basis of which we infer what is said. Therefore, it should also be consciously accessible. We saw earlier that the intuitions that Recanati elicits to defend the Pragmaticists' notion of saying are also not about what is said *proper*. Rather, the intuitions are about what is more broadly

communicated, which is the consciously accessible content that is the input to the Gricean implicature process.

We see, then, that there are two contents in question, what is said_(S) and what is said_(P), and neither Bach nor Recanati is able to show that the content they favor is what is said *proper*. Their disagreement about what is said seems to be nothing more than a terminological dispute about which of the two contents should be called “what is said.” Consequently, I hope to have shown that the disagreement about what is said is not only useless in determining what is the truth-conditional content of a sentence or utterance, it is irrelevant to the debate about whether or not the semantic content of a sentence, *S*, is the truth-conditional content of *S*. Therefore, it needs to be separated from the substantial disagreement between Minimalists and Contextualists regarding Point 1 and Point 2. To this discussion I now turn.

2 Defending Minimalism, Part One

2.1 Introduction

The first argument that Contextualists present against Minimalism is what I call the Incompleteness Problem:

Incompleteness Problem

For some sentences, semantic interpretation gives us a propositional radical.

Here are some examples that are commonly used to illustrate this problem:

- (1) Tipper is ready.
- (2) Rupert is red.
- (3) Bill is tall.

According to Contextualists, sentences like (1)-(3) fail to semantically express complete propositions; they require completions like the following (shown in the brackets) to be truth-evaluable:

- (1a) *Tipper is ready [to go to the party].*
- (2a) *Rupert is red [on the outside].*
- (3a) *Bill is tall [for a fifth grader].*

Since these completions are pragmatically determined, Contextualists claim that in some cases semantic interpretation alone does not give us a content that is complete/truth-conditional. Thus, they use the Incompleteness Problem to argue against my first point about the semantic content of declarative sentences:

Point 1

The semantic content is a complete/truth-conditional proposition.

My aim in this chapter is to defend Point 1.

But first, I want to discuss whether or not it is an essential feature of Minimalism that the semantic content be a complete/truth-conditional proposition. Bach, for one, does not seem to think so. According to his view, which he calls “Radical Semantic Minimalism,”²⁵ sentences like (1)-(3) fail to semantically express complete propositions. However, they should not be viewed as context sensitive since, according to him, there is nothing at the syntactic level that appeals to the context of utterance. Instead, the sentences are simply propositional radicals. Now, since, for Bach, sentences like (1)-(3) are not context sensitive (unless, of course, they contain obviously context sensitive elements, such as “I” or “here”), he claims that his view is a version of Minimalism, not Contextualism.

The problem with Bach’s view, however, is that it seems to be too similar to Contextualism.²⁶ Both views claim that the semantic contents of some sentences relative to contexts of utterance are too underdetermined to express complete propositions. Both views also claim that the semantic content of an uttered sentence is oftentimes not what the hearer intuitively takes to be said by the utterance. Now, on Recanati’s Contextualist view, if the semantic content of a sentence is a propositional radical, it cannot be what is said by an utterance. In contrast, it is perfectly fine for a propositional radical to be what is said on Bach’s view. But, as we saw in the previous chapter, this difference between the two views is merely terminological. Another difference between the two views is that more sentences are semantically incomplete according to Contextualism than according to Bach’s view. But, as we will see in this chapter, drawing a non-arbitrary line between those sentences that are considered semantically complete/truth-

²⁵ See Bach (2006).

²⁶ Borg and Stanley also note this similarity. See Borg (2007) and Stanley (2005b).

conditional and those sentences that are considered semantically incomplete is a difficult if not impossible task. Therefore, it seems to me that there are far more similarities than differences between Bach's view and Contextualism.

Given the above problem with Bach's view, then, I think that it is safe to say that it is an essential feature of Minimalism that the semantic content be a complete/truth-conditional proposition. My aim in this chapter is to defend Point 1 by trying to show that the Minimalist view that I favor, according to which the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are complete/truth-conditional, albeit *unspecific*, propositions, is a more reasonable view than Contextualism.

In Section 2.2, I present two arguments against the Contextualist view that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are propositional radicals. What these arguments show is that unless Contextualists can draw a non-arbitrary line between those sentences that they think semantically express complete/truth-conditional propositions and those sentences that they think semantically express propositional radicals, their view leads to the undesirable conclusion that a great number of sentences (that they think are semantically complete), and perhaps all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete.

In Section 2.3, I argue that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3), though they are complete/truth-conditional, are unspecific, contrary to what Cappelen and Lepore think. To argue this, I use Cappelen and Lepore's tests for semantic context sensitivity and show that they are reliable only if we take utterances of (1)-(3) to semantically express the unspecific propositions that I think they express.

Finally, in Section 2.4, I discuss five potential problems for the version of Minimalism that I favor. My aim in this section is to show that Contextualists have no good arguments against this view. Moreover, since their own view leads to the undesirable conclusion that a great number of sentences (that they think are semantically complete), and perhaps all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete, I conclude that the Minimalist view that I favor is a more reasonable view than Contextualism.

2.2 Two Arguments Against Contextualism

In this section, I present two arguments against the Contextualist view that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3):

- (1) Tipper is ready.
- (2) Rupert is red.
- (3) Bill is tall.

are propositional radicals. What these arguments show is that that unless Contextualists can draw a non-arbitrary line between those sentences that they think semantically express complete/truth-conditional propositions and those sentences that they think semantically express propositional radicals, their view leads to the undesirable conclusion that a great number of sentences (that they think are semantically complete), and perhaps all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete.

2.2.1 First Argument

The first argument is from Cappelen and Lepore. According to Contextualists, (1) fails to semantically express a complete proposition because it doesn't specify in what sense Tipper is

ready. For it to semantically express a complete proposition, it needs to be completed by adding some propositional content that specifies what Tipper is ready for. Here again is one way that (1) can be completed (the added propositional content is in italics):

(1a) Tipper is ready *to go to the party*.

This sentence, according to Contextualists, unlike (1), is semantically complete because it includes the information of what Tipper is ready for. But here's the first argument against Contextualism, as stated by Cappelen and Lepore: "Whatever arguments a Moderate Contextualist might proffer for the view that a certain sentence *S* is incomplete, generalize; i.e., if those are sufficient reasons for holding that *S* expresses an incomplete proposition, then all sentences do."²⁷ In other words, Contextualists argue that (1) is semantically incomplete because it doesn't specify in what sense Tipper is ready. But, if that is the argument they use to claim that (1) is semantically incomplete, we can use the same argument to claim that (1a) is also semantically incomplete. That is, we could argue that (1a) is semantically incomplete because it doesn't specify in what sense Tipper is ready to go to the party. Just as there is an indefinite number of ways that Tipper can be ready, there is an indefinite number of ways that Tipper can be ready to go to the party; the following show just three:

(4) Tipper is ready to go to the party *in the sense that she is dressed*.

(5) Tipper is ready to go to the party *in the sense that she is prepared to see her ex-boyfriend there*.

(6) Tipper is ready to go to the party *in the sense that she is ready to party*.

Therefore, unless Contextualists can show that there is a difference between (1) and (1a), which makes it the case that the former requires a completion to semantically express a complete

²⁷ Cappelen and Lepore (2005), p. 60.

proposition whereas the latter does not, their view, as I mentioned above, leads to the undesirable conclusion that (1a), as well as many other sentences (that they think are semantically complete), if not all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete.

Contextualists might argue that the difference between (1) and (1a) has to do with speaker intentions: A speaker, in uttering (1), usually has the intention to communicate in what sense Tipper is ready, but, in uttering (1a), usually does not have the intention to communicate in what sense Tipper is ready to go to the party. But, as Cappelen and Lepore note,²⁸ this difference is not relevant to our discussion. Our discussion is about whether or not (1) and (1a) semantically express complete propositions. It is irrelevant to the discussion what a speaker usually intends (or doesn't intend) to communicate by her utterance of (1) and (1a). Just because a speaker, in uttering (1), usually intends to communicate in what sense Tipper is ready doesn't show that this information is required for (1) to semantically express a complete proposition. Likewise, just because a speaker, in uttering (1a), usually does not intend to communicate in what sense Tipper is ready to go to the party doesn't show that (1a) is a semantically complete proposition. In other words, it is perfectly reasonable to claim that a sentence like (1a), which is not accompanied by an intention to communicate some completion, is still semantically incomplete. Therefore, Contextualists cannot use this argument about speaker intentions to draw a non-arbitrary line between examples like (1) and (1a).

How about an appeal to our intuitions? Contextualists might argue that the difference between (1) and (1a) is that the former sentence "feels" like it requires a completion to be truth-evaluable and the latter does not. But, again, as Cappelen and Lepore note,²⁹ it is quite easy to

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68

make it the case that a sentence “feels” like it requires a completion to be truth-evaluable.³⁰ Consider the following context: Tipper knows that her ex-boyfriend is going to be at her friend’s birthday party tonight. All week she has been preparing for what she’s going to say to him. She is mentally and emotionally ready to see him. All she needs to do now is get dressed for the party. Now, suppose we hear an utterance of (1a) in this context. In this case, I think that (1a), like (1), “feels” like it requires a completion to be truth-evaluable. That is, our intuitions seem to tell us that we can’t evaluate whether or not the utterance of (1a) is true without specifying in what sense Tipper is ready for the party; the utterance, it seems, would be true if we specify that Tipper is ready for the party in the sense that she is prepared to see her ex-boyfriend there and false if we specify that Tipper is ready for the party in the sense that she is dressed.

Finally, suppose Contextualists grant us that (1a) is no different from (1) in the sense that it is semantically incomplete and requires a completion like the following (in italics) in order to semantically express a complete/truth-conditional proposition:

(7) Tipper is ready to go to the party *in the sense that she is dressed*.

Then, they might go on to say that a non-arbitrary line can be drawn between the semantically incomplete sentences (1) and (1a) and the semantically complete sentence (7). But, of course, this move doesn’t work since whatever reason Contextualists use to argue that (1) and (1a) are semantically incomplete can also be used to argue that (7) is semantically incomplete. For

³⁰ Searle, of course, famously noted this as well. He gives the example, “The cat is on the mat,” and shows that our intuition about whether or not this sentence expresses a complete/truth-conditional proposition is dependent on the context in which the sentence is uttered. Here is one context he describes: The cat is on top of the mat but the cat and mat are floating freely in outer space making it the case that the cat is upside down with the mat on top of it. Now, if we hear the sentence in this context, it seems to “feel” like it requires a completion to be truth-evaluable. The point Searle wanted to make with this example is that “for a large class of unambiguous sentences such as ‘The cat is on the mat,’ the notion of the literal meaning of the sentence only has application relative to a set of background assumptions. The truth conditions of the sentence will vary with variations in these background assumptions; and given the absence or presence of some background assumptions the sentence does not have determinate truth conditions” (Searle (1978), p. 214).

example, if Contextualists argue that (1a) is semantically incomplete because it doesn't specify in what sense Tipper is ready to go to the party, we could argue that (7) is also semantically incomplete because it doesn't specify in what sense Tipper is ready to go to the party in the sense that she is dressed. Would an utterance of (7) be true if Tipper is dressed in normal attire but is going to a costume party, or if Tipper is a three-year-old girl who decides that she wants to wear a swimsuit to the party in the middle of winter? The point is, drawing a non-arbitrary line between those sentences that Contextualists think semantically express complete/truth-conditional propositions and those sentences that they think semantically express propositional radicals is a difficult if not impossible task.

2.2.2 Second Argument

The second argument is just an extension of the first. Maybe Contextualists, at the end of the day, would concede that (1) as well as any sentence that has the form "Tipper is ready to *X*" are semantically incomplete. But what about a completely different sentence, one that seems to be more obviously complete in the semantic sense? For example, consider the following sentence:

(8) Jane is happy.³¹

I think that most Contextualists would agree that (8) is semantically complete. It expresses the complete proposition that *Jane is (just plain) happy*. But, as we will see, the previous argument

³¹ This example is from Borg, but how she uses it slightly differs from how I will use it in this second argument. She uses the example to defend her idea that sentences like (1) have "liberal" truth-conditions, i.e., liberal in the sense that they allow a range of more specific conditions, each of which would make the given utterance true. A possible reason for rejecting this idea, she says, is that liberal truth-conditions aren't real truth-conditions because they don't specify a unique set of conditions that would make the given utterance true. She offers the example (8) to argue that even a sentence that seems to have real truth-conditions, like (8), actually has "liberal" ones. Therefore, "the fact that liberal truth-conditions don't specify a unique set of conditions under which the utterance is true doesn't itself seem to be a problem, since it seems that very few (if any) truth-conditions are that restrictive" (Borg (2004), p. 232).

against Contextualism works with respect to this example as well. That is, if Contextualists argue that (1) is semantically incomplete because it doesn't specify in what sense Tipper is ready, this argument can be used to show that (8) is also semantically incomplete. We could say that (8) is semantically incomplete because it doesn't specify in what sense Jane is happy (i.e., what Jane is happy about). Just as there is an indefinite number of ways that Tipper can be ready, there is an indefinite number of ways that Jane can be happy. Therefore, unless Contextualists can show that there is a difference between (1) and (8), which makes it the case that the former requires a completion to semantically express a complete proposition whereas the latter does not, their view, to repeat, leads to the undesirable conclusion that (1a) and (8), as well as many other sentences (that they think are semantically complete), if not all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete. As we will see, it isn't easy to show this difference.

Perhaps Contextualists could argue that the difference between (1) and (8) has to do with the kind of information that the former sentence allegedly lacks. In other words, maybe there is something special about this information that makes it the case that if it is not included, the sentence in question is semantically incomplete. Here are some ways Contextualists think that (1) can be completed (the added information is in italics):

- (9) Tipper is ready *to go to the party*.
- (10) Tipper is ready *to meet Jane for lunch*.
- (11) Tipper is ready *to get married*.

But we could argue that (8) lacks the same kind of information. It too can be completed in the following ways:

- (12) Tipper is happy *to go to the party*.
- (13) Tipper is happy *to meet Jane for lunch*.
- (14) Tipper is happy *to get married*.

In both cases, the kind of information that is lacking answers the question: In what sense is Tipper ready/happy?

Maybe the difference between (1) and (8) lies in the fact that in some context, *C*, Tipper can be ready for one thing and, at the same time, not be ready for something else. For example, in *C*, Tipper can be ready to go to the party in the sense that she is dressed and, at the same time, not be ready to see her ex-boyfriend there. So, for this reason, we can't evaluate whether or not (1) is true in *C* without specifying in what sense Tipper is ready. And it is this fact about (1), Contextualists might argue, that differentiates (1) from (8). But the same point can be made about (8). That is, in *C*, Jane can be happy about one thing and, at the same time, be unhappy about something else. For example, in *C*, Jane can be happy to get married and, at the same time, be unhappy to move to a new city with her new husband. So, it seems to be the case that, just like (1), we can't evaluate whether or not (8) is true in *C* without specifying in what sense Jane is happy.

Next, for the same reason mentioned above, Contextualists cannot argue that the difference between (1) and (8) has to do with speaker intentions. That is, they cannot use the following argument to show the difference between (1) and (8): A speaker, in uttering (1), usually has the intention to communicate in what sense Tipper is ready, but, in uttering (8), usually does not have the intention to communicate in what sense Jane is happy. Again, the reason they can't use this argument is because it is not relevant to our discussion. Our discussion is about whether or not (1) and (8) semantically express complete propositions. It is irrelevant to the discussion what a speaker usually intends (or doesn't intend) to communicate by her utterances of (1) and (8).

Finally, how about an appeal to our intuitions in this case? Perhaps Contextualists could argue that (1) “feels” like it requires a completion to be truth-evaluable, but (8) does not, even more so than (1a). But, for (8) as well, it is quite easy to make it the case that the sentence “feels” like it requires a completion to be truth-evaluable. Consider the following context: Jane just received her grade on a term paper that she cheated on. She feels really terrible and guilty about cheating but, at the same time, she is happy about her grade and about the fact that she will now be able to graduate. Now, suppose we hear an utterance of (8) in this context. In this case, I think that (8), like (1), “feels” like it requires a completion to be truth-evaluable. In other words, our intuitions seem to tell us that we can’t evaluate whether or not the utterance of (8) is true without specifying in what sense Jane is happy.

Therefore, as we have seen, it is not an easy task to show that there is a difference between (1) and (8), which makes it the case that the former requires a completion to semantically express a complete proposition whereas the latter does not. This, in turn, shows that drawing a non-arbitrary line between those sentences that Contextualists think semantically express complete/truth-conditional propositions and those sentences that they think semantically express propositional radicals, is a difficult if not impossible task. But, unless Contextualists can draw this non-arbitrary line, their view leads to the undesirable conclusion that a great number of sentences (that they think are semantically complete), and perhaps all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete.

2.3 Unspecific Propositions

In this next section, I discuss Cappelen and Lepore's three tests for semantic context sensitivity. A number of objections have been raised questioning the reliability of these tests,³² but I will not address them here. For the most part, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that these tests do indeed show that expressions such as "ready," "red" and "tall" are context insensitive (i.e., their semantic values do not change from one context of utterance to another), and, therefore, the following sentences semantically express complete/truth-conditional propositions:

- (1) Tipper is ready.
- (2) Rupert is red.
- (3) Bill is tall.

I don't agree with them, however, that these sentences semantically express the following propositions, respectively:

- (1b) *Tipper is (just plain) ready.*
- (2b) *Rupert is (just plain) red.*
- (3b) *Bill is (just plain) tall.*

Rather, I think that they semantically express the following propositions, respectively, each of which is a complete/truth-conditional but also *unspecific* proposition:

- (1c) *Tipper is (in some respect) ready.*
- (2c) *Rupert is (in some respect) red.*
- (3c) *Bill is (in some respect) tall.*

In what follows, I argue that Cappelen and Lepore's tests for semantic context sensitivity are reliable only if we take utterances of (1)-(3) to semantically express the unspecific propositions, (1c)-(3c), respectively. We will look at each of their three tests in turn.

2.3.1 Test 1

³² See, for example, Bezuidenhout (2006), Recanati (2006) and Szabo (2006).

Here is Cappelen and Lepore's first test for semantic context sensitivity:

Test 1: An expression is context sensitive only if it typically blocks inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports.³³

Their reasoning for this test is as follows:

1. By definition, if an expression *e* is context sensitive, then *e*'s semantic content can change from one context of utterance to another.
2. So, if *e* is context sensitive, and Lepore uses *e* in a context of utterance *C1* and Cappelen uses *e* in context of utterance *C2*, it is only by *accident* if their uses of *e* have the same semantic content.
3. Therefore, if, in *C2*, Cappelen wants to utter a sentence that has the same semantic content as Lepore's utterance in *C1* of a sentence *S* (which contains *e*), he can't use *S*. In other words, he can't report Lepore's utterance disquotationally.

Here is an example that Cappelen and Lepore give to illustrate their argument: Suppose Lepore utters the following sentence in a context where Justine is the contextually salient audience and a blue hat is being demonstrated:

(15) You should wear that.

Now, consider the following indirect report uttered by Cappelen in a different context where Ludlow is the contextually salient audience and a pair of sandals are being demonstrated:

(16) Lepore said that you should wear that.

Obviously, the indirect report uttered by Cappelen fails because his uses of the words "you" and "that" don't have the same semantic values as Lepore's uses of the same words in his utterance of (15). Therefore, since "you" and "that" block inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports, they are context sensitive.

³³ Test 1 is discussed in Cappelen and Lepore (2005), pp. 88-99.

Contrast the previous example with another example that Cappelen and Lepore give: Suppose Nina utters the following sentence in a context where she is asked whether or not John is well prepared for an exam.

(17) John is ready.

Now, consider the following indirect report uttered by Cappelen in a different context where he is talking to Lepore in a café in New York City:

(18) Nina said that John is ready.

In this example, the indirect report uttered by Cappelen seems to be intuitively true. Of course, one might argue that the utterance seems to be intuitively true only because we know the context of utterance for (17) and so we read into the utterance of (18) the information that *John is ready for the exam*. Thus, Cappelen and Lepore ask us to imagine two contexts of utterance for (17):

C1: Nina utters (17) in a context where she is asked whether or not John is well prepared for an exam.

C2: Nina utters (17) in a context where three people are about to leave an apartment; they are getting dressed for heavy rain.

Then, they ask us to consider the following indirect reports uttered by Cappelen in a café in New York City:

(19) In *C1*, Nina said that John is ready.

(20) In *C2*, Nina said that John is ready.

(21) In both *C1* and *C2*, Nina said that John is ready.

It seems to be the case that all three of these indirect reports uttered by Cappelen are intuitively true. Moreover, according to Cappelen and Lepore, one can't argue that the utterances of (19) and (20) seem to be intuitively true only because we know the contexts of utterance for (17) and

so we read into them the information, respectively, that *John is ready for the exam* and *John is ready to leave the apartment*. For if we did this, then (21) would not be intuitively true, but (21) is intuitively true. Cappelen and Lepore conclude that since the expression “ready” fails to block inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports, it is context insensitive.

Cappelen and Lepore go on to claim that since “ready” is context insensitive, (17) semantically expresses the complete/truth-conditional proposition that *John is (just plain) ready*. According to them, it is this proposition that Nina says by her utterance of (17) in *C1* and *C2*, which they think explains why Cappelen’s utterance of (21) uttered in a café in New York City is intuitively true. Now, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that “ready” does not pass their first test for context sensitivity and that this shows that the expression is context insensitive. Moreover, I agree that since “ready” is context insensitive, (17) semantically expresses a complete/truth-conditional proposition. I don’t agree with them, however, that the semantic content of (17) is the proposition that *John is (just plain) ready*.

Recall in the previous example that, according to Cappelen and Lepore, Nina says the same thing in *C1* and *C2* by her utterance of (17), namely the proposition that *John is (just plain) ready*. It should be the case, therefore, that the following indirect report uttered by Cappelen in a café in New York City is intuitively true:

(22) In *C1* and *C2*, Nina said the same thing.

But my intuitions tell me that it is not true.³⁴ Let’s consider another example that shows more clearly that such an indirect report is intuitively false. Suppose George utters the following

³⁴ Of course, on a trivial notion of saying, we can argue that Nina said the same thing in *C1* and *C2*. According to this notion, a speaker says the same thing on two occasions if she uses the same words on those two occasions. But on this notion, even (16) in the above example would be considered to be intuitively true. So, obviously, this is not the notion of saying that Cappelen and Lepore have in mind.

sentence in a context where he passes by Tipper's house, sees Tipper at the front door and assumes that she is ready to go inside her house to sleep.

(1) Tipper is ready.

Next, suppose Ben utters the same sentence in a context where he passes by Tipper's house a few seconds after George does, also sees Tipper at the front door but, unlike George, assumes that she is ready to go out to a party.

Again, for Cappelen and Lepore, (1) semantically expresses the proposition that *Tipper is (just plain) ready*, and it is this proposition that George and Ben say by their utterances of (1) in the example above. It should be the case, therefore, that the following indirect report uttered by Cappelen in a café in New York City, regarding their utterances, is intuitively true:

(23) George and Ben said the same thing.

However, I think that it is even more obvious in this case that the indirect report is intuitively false.

Returning to the previous example, then, why is it the case that Cappelen's utterance of (21) seems to be intuitively true whereas his utterance of (22) seems to be intuitively false? With regard to the latter, I think that this indirect report fails because, contrary to what Cappelen and Lepore think, we read into the utterances of (19) and (20) the information, respectively, that *John is ready for the exam* and *John is ready to leave the apartment*. As a result, our intuitions tell us that in *C1* and *C2*, Nina did not say the same thing. But, if we read into the utterances of (19) and (20) the context specific information mentioned above, then why does Cappelen's utterance of (21) seem to be intuitively true? Shouldn't it be intuitively false like his utterance of (22)?

I think that an utterance of (17) can express more than one proposition in a given context. In the example we are considering, Nina's utterance of (17) in *C1* and *C2* expresses the *specific* (i.e., specific to the context of utterance) propositions, respectively, that *John is ready for the exam* and *John is ready to leave the apartment*. As I stated earlier, I think that our knowledge of *C1* and *C2* makes us intuit these specific propositions as what Nina said by her utterance of (17) in these contexts. This explains why Cappelen's utterance of (22) seems to be intuitively false. But, in addition to these specific propositions, I think that all utterances of (17) express the *unspecific* proposition that *John is (in some respect) ready*. In both *C1* and *C2*, therefore, one of the propositions that Nina expresses by her utterance of (17) is the unspecific proposition that *John is (in some respect) ready*. This explains why Cappelen's utterance of (21) seems to be intuitively true even though we read into the utterances of (19) and (20) the context specific information mentioned above.

Of course, one might argue that it is not the unspecific proposition that *John is (in some respect) ready* that all utterances of (17) express but, rather, the proposition that *John is (just plain) ready*. This too could perhaps explain why Cappelen's utterance of (21) seems to be intuitively true. But, if it is the case that (19) expresses the specific proposition that *In C1, Nina said that John is ready for the exam* and (20) expresses the specific proposition that *In C2, Nina said that John is ready to leave the apartment*, which explains why Cappelen's utterance of (22) seems to be intuitively false, then it follows that (19) and (20) also express the unspecific proposition that *John is (in some respect) ready*, which is what I think that all utterances of (17) express. It does not follow, however, that if the utterances of (19) and (20) express these specific

propositions, they also express the proposition that *John is (just plain) ready*, which is what Cappelen and Lepore think that all utterances of (17) express.

Now, suppose we don't have any knowledge about the contexts, *C1* and *C2*, in which Nina utters (17). Then, the only proposition that we know that Nina expresses by her utterance of (17) in these contexts is the unspecific proposition that *John is (in some respect) ready*. In this case, not only does Cappelen's utterance of (21) seem to be intuitively true, his utterance of (22) also seems to be intuitively true. So, there is a sense in which Nina says the same thing in *C1* and *C2* by her utterance of (17), and this is the semantic sense. According to this sense, Nina's utterance of (17) in both contexts, as well as any other context, semantically expresses the unspecific proposition that *John is (in some respect) ready*. Our knowledge about the contexts in which (17) is uttered may make some more specific way of being ready salient, which again explains why Cappelen's utterance of (22) seems to be intuitively false in the original example, but this doesn't show that the semantic content of "ready" varies from one context to another.

Therefore, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that since the expression "ready," as well as "red" and "tall," fail to block inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports, they are context insensitive. However, I don't agree with them that (17), for example, semantically expresses the proposition that *John is (just plain) ready*. Rather, I think that it semantically expresses the unspecific proposition that *John is (in some respect) ready*, which could be just one of several propositions that is expressed by an utterance of (17) in a given context.

2.3.2 Test 2

Here is the second test for context sensitivity that Cappelen and Lepore present:

Test 2: Context sensitive expressions block collective descriptions.³⁵

Their reasoning for this test is as follows:

1. By definition, if a verb phrase, v , is context sensitive, then v 's semantic content can change from one context of utterance to another.
2. So, if v is context sensitive, and we know that A v -s is true in one context of utterance and B v -s is true in a relevantly different context of utterance, it doesn't follow that there is another context of utterance in which A and B both v is true.
3. Therefore, an expression is context sensitive only if there is no guarantee of collective usage.

Here is an example that Cappelen and Lepore give to illustrate their argument. Suppose that an utterance of the following two sentences are true in their respective, relevantly different, contexts of utterance:

- (24) Bill left yesterday.
(25) John left yesterday.

From this, it doesn't follow that there is another context of utterance in which an utterance of the following collective description is true:

- (26) Bill and John left yesterday.

This, of course, is because we have no guarantee that what "yesterday" refers to in the utterance of (26) is the same content that "yesterday" refers to in the utterances of (24) and (25). According to Cappelen and Lepore, since there is no guarantee of collective usage, "yesterday" is context sensitive.

³⁵ Test 2 is discussed in Cappelen and Lepore (2005), pp. 99-104.

Contrast the previous example with another example that Cappelen and Lepore give: Suppose that an utterance of the following two sentences are also true in their respective, relevantly different, contexts of utterance:

- (27) Mount Everest is tall.
- (28) The Empire State Building is tall.

In this case, unlike in the previous example, it does seem to follow that there is another context of utterance in which an utterance of the following collective description is true:

- (29) Mount Everest and the Empire State Building are both tall.

According to Cappelen and Lepore, since the expression “tall” does not block collective descriptions, it is context insensitive. They go on to claim that the utterance of (27) semantically expresses the proposition that *Mount Everest is (just plain) tall*, and the utterance of (28) semantically expresses the proposition that *The Empire State Building is (just plain) tall*. Therefore, how “tall” is used in the utterances of (27) and (28) is the same. That’s why the expression can be used in another context of utterance to describe both Mount Everest and the Empire State Building.

Now, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that their second test shows that the expression “tall” is context insensitive. However, I don’t think that the propositions semantically expressed by (27) and (28) are the ones they propose. Again, I think that (27) and (28) semantically express the unspecific propositions, respectively, that *Mount Everest is (in some respect) tall* and *The Empire State Building is (in some respect) tall*. On the view that I favor, the utterance of (29) is still true (and therefore “tall” still does not block collective descriptions) since how “tall” is used in the utterances of (27) and (28) is the same. But, unlike what Cappelen and Lepore think, I

think that (29) semantically expresses the unspecific proposition that *Mount Everest and the Empire State Building are both (in some respect) tall*.

Notice in the previous example that the two things being discussed, Mount Everest and the Empire State Building, are things that are conventionally tall. That is, they are things that we normally associate the quality of tallness with. To put it another way, most people, assuming they are familiar with Mount Everest and the Empire State Building, would agree that (27) and (28) are true even without knowing the respective contexts in which they are uttered. But, compare (27) and (28) with an utterance of the following sentence:

(30) Tom Cruise is tall.

Unlike Mount Everest and the Empire State Building, Tom Cruise is not conventionally tall. There are, of course, contexts in which an utterance of (30) could be true. But most people, assuming they know who Tom Cruise is, if they heard an utterance of (30) out of context, wouldn't naturally think that the utterance is true.

The point I am getting at is this: Because Mount Everest and the Empire State Building are conventionally tall things, it seems reasonable or even correct to say that (27) and (28) semantically express the propositions, respectively, that *Mount Everest is (just plain) tall* and *The Empire State Building is (just plain) tall*. Accordingly, it seems reasonable or even correct to say that Mount Everest and the Empire State Building share the same quality of (just plain) tallness. But, consider (30). It seems completely unintuitive to me to claim that (30) semantically expresses the proposition that *Tom Cruise is (just plain) tall*.

Now, contrast Cappelen and Lepore's example involving Mount Everest and the Empire State Building, with the following example: Suppose that an utterance of the following two sentences are true in their respective, relevantly different, contexts of utterance, which I specify:

(30) Tom Cruise is tall. (Context of utterance: Tom Cruise is being compared to the average Malaysian male who is 5 feet 5 inches tall.)

(31) Shaquille O'Neal is tall. (Context of utterance: Shaquille O'Neal is being compared to other NBA players.)

Then, consider the following collective description uttered in another context of utterance:

(32) Tom Cruise and Shaquille O'Neal are both tall.

In this case, I think that it is unintuitive to say that Tom Cruise and Shaquille O'Neal share the same quality of (just plain) tallness. Now, the utterance of (32) is perfectly natural in the given context, as Cappelen and Lepore would agree. But, I think that this example makes it clear that it is natural only because we understand it to mean the unspecific proposition that *Tom Cruise and Shaquille O'Neal are both (in some respect) tall*. If we understood it to mean the proposition that *Tom Cruise and Shaquille O'Neal are both (just plain) tall*, I think that the utterance of (32) would not be intuitively true.

Thus, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that the expression "tall" does not block collective descriptions and is, therefore, context insensitive. So, the meaning of "tall," as it is used in (27) and (28), as well as in (30) and (31), is the same. And this explains why the utterances of the collective descriptions, (29) and (32), are intuitively true. But, I think the previous example shows that the meaning of "tall" is not what Cappelen and Lepore think it is.

Let's consider one more example that Cappelen and Lepore give. Suppose that an utterance of the following two sentences are true in their respective, relevantly different, contexts of utterance:

(33) Jackie has blue shoes.

(34) Jackie has blue sunglasses.

Then, consider the following collective description uttered in another context of utterance:

(35) Jackie has blue shoes and sunglasses.

According to Cappelen and Lepore, the utterance of (35) is perfectly natural, which shows that the expression "blue," since it does not block collective descriptions, is context insensitive. They claim that the utterance of (33) and (34) semantically express the propositions, respectively, that *Jackie has (just plain) blue shoes* and *Jackie has (just plain) blue sunglasses*. Therefore, how "blue" is used in the two utterances is the same, which explains why the expression can be used in another context of utterance to describe both Jackie's shoes and sunglasses. Again, I agree that the meaning of "blue," as it is used in (33) and (34), is the same, but it is not what Cappelen and Lepore think it is.

In this example, Cappelen and Lepore don't specify the contexts of utterance for (33) and (34). Let's imagine the following two contexts for them, respectively:

C1: I'm looking to borrow some shoes that will match my outfit. As long as the shoes contain some blue, I think they will be a match. My friend, Sarah, remembers that Jackie has a pair of shoes that are primarily silver with a thin blue strip that runs across the side of each shoe. She utters, "Jackie has blue shoes."

C2: I see Jackie wearing sunglasses with bright blue frames and matching bright blue lenses. Surprised that she would wear such unusual sunglasses, I utter to my friend, Sarah, "Jackie has blue sunglasses!"

Having knowledge of the contexts in which (33) and (34) were uttered, I think that it is unintuitive to say that Jackie's shoes and Jackie's sunglasses share the same quality of (just plain) blueness.³⁶ Now, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that the utterance of (35) is perfectly natural in the given context. But, I think that this example, like the previous one, makes it clear that it is natural only because we understand (35) to mean the unspecific proposition that *Jackie has blue (in some respect) shoes and sunglasses*. If we understood it to mean the proposition that *Jack has blue (just plain) shoes and sunglasses*, I think that the utterance of (35) would not be intuitively true.

So, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that since the expression "blue," as well as "tall" and "ready," do not block collective descriptions, they are context insensitive. But, again, I don't think that Cappelen and Lepore are correct with regard to what these expressions mean.

2.3.3 Test 3

Here is the third and final test for context sensitivity that Cappelen and Lepore present:

Test 3: Context sensitive expressions pass an Inter-Contextual Disquotational (ICD) test and admit of real context shifting arguments.³⁷

This is how the ICD test works: Take an expression *e* and put it in a sentence *S*. *e* is context sensitive only if there is (or can be) a false utterance of "*S*," even though *S*. Their reasoning for this test is as follows:

³⁶ *Without* having knowledge of the contexts in which (33) and (34) were uttered, it might seem intuitive to say that Jackie's shoes and Jackie's sunglasses share the same quality of (just plain) blueness. But this is because most people, if they heard an utterance of (33) and (34) out of context, would understand them to mean that *Jackie has shoes that are primarily blue on the outside* and *Jackie has sunglasses that are primarily blue on the outside*, respectively. And if a pair of shoes or a pair of sunglasses are primarily blue on the outside, then, as a matter of convention, we might think of them as having the quality of (just plain) blueness.

³⁷ Test 3 is discussed in Cappelen and Lepore (2005), pp. 104-112.

1. By definition, if an expression, e , is context sensitive, then e 's semantic content can change from one context of utterance to another.
2. So, if e is context sensitive, then the semantic content of e as it is used in this context of utterance (i.e., in the context of this chapter) need not be the same content of e as it is used in another context of utterance.
3. Therefore, to test whether e is context sensitive or not, simply use e in this context of utterance and, at the same time, see if you can describe another use of e in another context of utterance. For example, take an expression e and put it in a sentence S , then see if there can be a false utterance of " S ," even though S .
4. If there can be a false utterance of " S ," even though S , then e is context sensitive.

Here is an example that Cappelen and Lepore give to illustrate their argument: Consider an utterance of the following sentence:

(36) She is French.

According to Cappelen and Lepore, the expression "she" passes the ICD test since the following utterance is true:

(37) *There is (or can be) a false utterance of "She is French" in some context, C^* , even though in the actual context, C , she is French.*

For example, I can utter "She is French" in some context, C^* , and say something false about Julie even though in the actual context, C , my utterance of "She is French" says something true about Sally. Since "she" passes the ICD test, Cappelen and Lepore claim that the expression is context sensitive.

Expressions like "ready," "red" and "tall," however, don't pass the ICD test, according to Cappelen and Lepore. This, they claim, shows that these expressions are context insensitive. Here's an example that they give to argue that the expression "red" does not pass the ICD test. Consider an utterance of the following sentence about an apple called "Rupert":

(38) Rupert is red.

According to Cappelen and Lepore, the expression “red” does not pass the ICD test since the following utterance is false:

(39) *There is (or can be) a false utterance of “Rupert is red” in some context, C*, even though in the actual context, C, Rupert is red.*

To support their claim that (39) is false, Cappelen and Lepore present the following story about Rupert:

Red Rupert

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

Cappelen and Lepore argue that if (39) were true, this story should be true. But, according to them, the story is obviously false and, therefore, (39) is false. And if (39) is false, then “red” does not pass the ICD test, which shows that it is context insensitive. They go on to claim that since “red” is context insensitive, (38) semantically expresses the complete/truth-conditional proposition that *Rupert is (just plain) red*. Now, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that their third test shows that the expression “red” is context insensitive. But, again, I don’t agree that the semantic content of (38) is the one they propose. Rather, I think that the semantic content of (38) is the unspecific proposition that *Rupert is (in some respect) red*.

Let’s consider the story about Rupert again. I don’t think that this story is obviously false, as Cappelen and Lepore think. It only seems to be false, I think, because they present it in a way

that is misleading.³⁸ More specifically, they leave out key phrases in the story that, had they been included, would show that the story could be true. Here is a revised version of the above story (with the added phrases in brackets):

*Red Rupert**

[Suppose that in some context *C*,] In order to be red, an apple has to have red skin. That's a necessary condition [in *C*] for being a red apple. It is irrelevant, for instance, [in *C*] whether an apple is red on its inside. Here's an apple, call it Rupert; [in *C*] Rupert is red. On the inside, Rupert is white. Nonetheless, there are [or can be] utterances of "Rupert is red" [in some other context *C**] that are false, not because Rupert's [outside] color changes, but because [in *C**] the speaker cares about what's [the color] inside Rupert rather than whether it is red [on the outside] or not. This [i.e., Rupert's inside color] affects the truth value of the utterance [of "Rupert is red" in *C**] even though the color of the inside of the apple is completely irrelevant [in *C*] to whether Rupert is red.

Clarified in such a way, I think that the story about Rupert could be true. That is, a speaker could utter "Rupert is red" in some context, *C**, and say something false about Rupert (i.e., that Rupert is red on the inside) even though in the actual context, *C*, her utterance of "Rupert is red" says something true about Rupert (i.e., that Rupert is red on the outside).

Now, on my account, it makes sense that the story about Rupert could be true. As I stated earlier, I think that an utterance of (38) can express more than one proposition in a given context. One of the propositions it can express is a proposition that is specific to the context of utterance. In the example we are considering, an utterance of (38) in *C* can express the specific proposition that *Rupert is red on the outside*, and an utterance of (38) in *C** can express the specific proposition that *Rupert is red on the inside*. The story (as it is presented in *Red Rupert**) seems to be true because, knowing the contexts of utterance, *C* and *C**, we naturally intuit these specific

³⁸ Bezuidenhout also notes that the story is misleading, but from this argues that Cappelen and Lepore's third test fails to show that an expression like "red" is context insensitive. For her argument, see Bezuidenhout (2006).

propositions as what is said by the utterances of (38) in these contexts. So, it turns out that on my account there is a sense in which (39) is true.

But, if (39) could be true, doesn't that mean that the expression "red," like "she," passes the ICD test and is, therefore, context sensitive? I don't think so. As I stated earlier, I think that in addition to the specific propositions mentioned above, all utterances of (38) express the unspecific proposition that *Rupert is (in some respect) red*. So, on my account, there is also a sense in which (39) is false. That is, if Rupert is (in some respect) red in the actual context, there cannot be another context in which Rupert is not (in some respect) red, or, to put it another way, there cannot be another context in which Rupert is in no respect red. In contrast, there isn't a sense in which (37) is false. That is, if a speaker utters "She is French" in the actual context and says something true about one person, unarguably there can be another context in which the speaker utters "She is French" and says something false about another person. Therefore, we might say that as long as there is *some* sense in which an expression does not pass the ICD test, it is context insensitive. On my account, then, as on Cappelen and Lepore's account, the expression "red" is context insensitive whereas the expression "she" is not.

Another issue, however, is, why prefer my account over Cappelen and Lepore's? On their account, there is obviously also a sense in which (39) is false. According to them, all utterances of (38) express the proposition that *Rupert is (just plain) red*. And if Rupert is (just plain) red in the actual context, there cannot be another context in which Rupert is not (just plain) red.

The problem is, on Cappelen and Lepore's account, it is not the case that the story about Rupert (even as it is presented in *Red Rupert**) could be true. Recall, the story could be true because an utterance of (38) in *C* can express the specific proposition that *Rupert is red on the*

outside, and an utterance of (38) in C^* can express the specific proposition that *Rupert is red on the inside*. Now, if the utterances of (38) in C and C^* express the specific propositions mentioned above, it follows that they also express the unspecific proposition that *Rupert is (in some respect) red*, which is what I think that all utterances of (38) express. It does not follow, however, that if the utterances of (38) in C and C^* express these specific propositions, they also express the proposition that *Rupert is (just plain) red*, which is what Cappelen and Lepore think that all utterances of (38) express. Therefore, if the story about Rupert could be true because the utterances of (38) in C and C^* express these specific propositions, it seems to be the case that the story could be true on my account but not on Cappelen and Lepore's.

So, I agree with Cappelen and Lepore that since the expression “red,” as well as “ready” and “tall,” do not pass the ICD test, they are context insensitive. Although, as I explained earlier, I think that these expressions can be shown to be context insensitive just in case there is *some* sense in which they do not pass the ICD test. But, again, I don't agree with Cappelen and Lepore that (38), for example, semantically expresses the proposition that *Rupert is (just plain) red*. Rather, I think that it semantically expresses the unspecific proposition that *Rupert is (in some respect) red*. To conclude, I think that each of the three tests discussed in this section is reliable to show the context insensitivity of expressions such as “ready,” “red” and “tall” only if we take utterances of sentences like (1)-(3) to semantically express the unspecific propositions described above.

2.4 Five Potential Problems for Minimalism

In this last section of Chapter 2, I discuss five potential problems for the Minimalist view that I favor, according to which the following sentences:

- (1) Tipper is ready.
- (2) Rupert is red.
- (3) Bill is tall.

semantically express the following complete/truth-conditional, albeit unspecific, propositions, respectively:

- (1c) *Tipper is (in some respect) ready.*
- (2c) *Rupert is (in some respect) red.*
- (3c) *Bill is (in some respect) tall.*

My aim is to show that Contextualists have no good arguments against this view. Moreover, since their own view leads to the undesirable conclusion that a great number of sentences (that they think are semantically complete), and perhaps all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete, as we saw in Section 2.2, I wish to conclude that the Minimalist view that I favor is a more reasonable view than Contextualism.

2.4.1 First Problem

The first potential problem comes from Recanati. He writes:

The abstract condition we can associate with [sentences like (1)-(4) independent of background assumptions] is, precisely, too abstract to enable us to tell the worlds in which the condition is satisfied from the worlds in which it is not. It is not determinate enough to give us specific truth-conditions or obedience-conditions.³⁹

Take (3), for example. According to the Minimalist view that I favor, the abstract condition that we associate with (3) independent of background assumptions is the unspecific proposition, (3c), i.e., *Bill is (in some respect) tall*. Recanati's argument is that this proposition is too abstract or

³⁹ Recanati (2004), 91.

unspecific for us to be able to tell the worlds in which it will be true from the worlds in which it will be false. In other words, since we don't know what Bill is tall in comparison to, we don't know when (3c) should be taken as true.

But is it really the case that we don't know when (3c) should be taken as true? It seems to me that (3c) is true in any world where there is something that Bill is tall in comparison to and false in any world where there isn't something that Bill is tall in comparison to. Note that the Minimalist view that I favor is different from Cappelen and Lepore's version of Minimalism, according to which the proposition semantically expressed by (3) is the following proposition:

(3b) *Bill is (just plain) tall.*

Perhaps (3b) is indeed too abstract for us to be able to tell the worlds in which it will be true from the worlds in which it will be false. For on Cappelen and Lepore's account, we don't know what it means for something to be (just plain) tall. Determining what tallness is, they claim, is a task for metaphysicians.⁴⁰ So technically, on their account, we could know that Bill is tall for a fifth grader or we could even know that he is a six feet tall fifth grader and still not be able to determine whether or not (3b) is true.

Of course, Cappelen and Lepore would argue that, according to their version of Minimalism, we do know when (3b) should be taken as true: It is true in any world where Bill is (just plain) tall and false in any world where Bill is not (just plain) tall. It may be the case that, on their account, we can't determine whether or not (3b) is true *in some particular context of utterance*, but they would argue that this is not semantically relevant. According to them, what's important is that we

⁴⁰ See Cappelen and Lepore (2005), pp. 170-175.

know that the proposition semantically expressed is truth-evaluable, not that we know the actual truth value of the proposition in some particular context of utterance.

But on the Minimalist view that I favor, not only do we know when the semantic content of (3), i.e., (3c), should be taken as true, we can determine whether or not (3c) is true in some particular context of utterance. For example, if we know that Bill is tall for a fifth grader, we know that (3c) is true. Likewise, if we know that Bill is a six feet tall fifth grader, we also know that (3c) is true (since he is tall compared to, for example, elementary school boys). Of course, an obvious problem with this analysis seems to be that (3c) turns out to be true in every world since there is always something that Bill is tall in comparison to. So to this potential problem I now turn.

2.4.2 Second Problem

Again, according to the Minimalist view that I favor, the proposition semantically expressed by (3), for example, is true in any world where there is something that Bill is tall in comparison to and false in any world where there isn't something that Bill is tall in comparison to. Another potential problem for this view, then, is that it seems to be the case that (3c) is true in every world since there is always something that Bill is tall in comparison to. But isn't it unintuitive to claim that an utterance of "Bill is tall" is true in, for example, some world where Bill is a 30 year old man who is five feet tall?

Similarly, suppose that in some world, "Rupert" refers to an apple that is pale yellow on the inside and green on the outside except for a small red stamp mark. Now, on the view that I favor, the proposition semantically expressed by (2) is true in any world where Rupert is in some respect red and false in any world where Rupert is in no respect red. Therefore, in this world, the

proposition semantically expressed by (2) is true. But isn't it unintuitive to claim that an utterance of "Rupert is red" is true when Rupert's redness consists only of a small red stamp mark?

First of all, I'm not sure that it really is unintuitive to claim that an utterance of "Bill is tall" is true in some world where Bill is a 30 year old man who is five feet tall. It may be unusual to say that it is true, but I don't think that it is incorrect. Here is a context in which it does not seem unintuitive to claim that an utterance of "Bill is tall" is true, where "Bill" again refers to a 30 year old man who is five feet tall: Suppose Bill is coaching a basketball team that consists of kindergarteners. To demonstrate what it means to dunk a ball, he dunks a ball into a basketball hoop that is designed for elementary school children. One of the kindergarteners, in awe of Bill's dunking ability, utters, "Bill is tall!" In this context, I think that it is clear that the utterance of "Bill is tall" is intuitively true.

Likewise, here is a context in which it does not seem unintuitive to claim that an utterance of "Rupert is red" is true, where "Rupert" refers to an apple that is pale yellow on the inside and green on the outside except for a small red stamp mark: Suppose we're separating green-skinned apples that have red stamps on them from green-skinned apples that have purple stamps on them. The stamp on Rupert is a little faded. You ask which category Rupert belongs to. I utter, "Rupert is red". In this context, I think it is clear that the utterance of "Rupert is red" is intuitively true.

Now, I think that a better argument against the version of Minimalism that I favor might be that, on this view, the proposition semantically expressed can turn out to be trivially true. My response is that this is not really a problem for the view that I favor. According to my account, an utterance has a variety of contents. One of these contents is the proposition semantically

expressed, which can be determined by looking at just the obvious syntactic constituents of the uttered sentence; another is what is intuitively said or what the speaker intended to communicate by an utterance, which oftentimes includes pragmatically determined elements. Each of these contents is available to the conversational participants, and each of these contents has its own truth-conditions. It is, therefore, misleading, I think, to refer to *the* content or *the* truth value of an utterance.

So, even though the proposition semantically expressed by, for example, (3) can turn out to be trivially true, this is not a problem for the Minimalist view that I favor. Certainly, the view does not claim that this proposition is the one that is being communicated. It is merely claiming that, based on the obvious syntactic constituents of (3), we can determine a complete/truth-conditional proposition. And the fact that there can be a discrepancy between the truth value of the proposition semantically expressed by (3) in some context of utterance, *C*, and the truth value of what the speaker intended to communicate by her utterance of (3) in *C* is perfectly compatible with the view that I favor.

2.4.3 Third Problem

According to the Minimalist view that I favor, (1) semantically expresses the unspecific proposition that *Tipper is (in some respect) ready*. Therefore, an utterance of (1) is true in some context, *C*, if in *C* Tipper is ready for something. For example, if in *C* Tipper is ready to go to the party, then an utterance of (1) is true in *C*.

Likewise, the following sentence:

(40) Tipper is not ready.

semantically expresses the unspecific proposition that *Tipper is not (in some respect) ready*. Therefore, an utterance of (40) is true in some context, *C*, if in *C* Tipper is not ready for something. So, if in *C* Tipper is not ready to see her ex-boyfriend at the party, one might think that an utterance of (40) is true in *C*. From this, one might conclude that if in *C* Tipper is ready to go to the party but not ready to see her ex-boyfriend there, an utterance of the following sentence would be true in *C*:

(41) Tipper is ready and Tipper is not ready.

But, (41) is obviously a contradiction. Here, then, is another potential problem for the version of Minimalism that I favor: It seems to be the case that a sentence and its negation can both be true in some context of utterance.⁴¹

My response is that, contrary to appearances, on the view that I favor, an utterance of (41) cannot be true in any context of utterance. Again, an utterance of (40) is true in *C* if in *C* Tipper is not ready for something. But there are two ways that we can interpret the sentence, “Tipper is not ready for something”:

(42) *There is something that Tipper is not ready for.*

(43) *There is nothing that Tipper is ready for (or It is not the case that there is something that Tipper is ready for).*

If the second conjunct in (41) is interpreted as (42), then it could be the case that an utterance of (41) is true in some context (e.g., the context in which Tipper is ready to go to the party but not ready to see her ex-boyfriend there). However, if the second conjunct in (41) is interpreted as (43), as I think it should be, then an utterance of (41) cannot be true in any context of utterance;

⁴¹ On Cappelen and Lepore’s version of Minimalism, this problem does not arise since (41) semantically expresses the proposition that *Tipper is (just plain) ready and Tipper is not (just plain) ready*, which will be false in any context of utterance

for if it is true that Tipper is ready for something, then it must be false that there is nothing that Tipper is ready for. Therefore, on the Minimalist view that I favor, it is not the case that a sentence and its negation can both be true in some context of utterance

2.4.4 Fourth Problem

Next, I'd like to discuss an alternative view that also defends the idea that sentences like (1)-(3) semantically express complete/truth-conditional propositions. Another potential “problem” (or challenge) for the version of Minimalism that I favor is to explain why this view is more favorable than the alternative view.

According to Stanley, “the intuitive truth-conditions of an utterance are due to semantic interpretation.”⁴² So, for example, suppose that in some context, *C*, a speaker utters (1) and the hearer intuits that what the speaker expressed by her utterance is the proposition that *Tipper is ready to go to the party*. Stanley thinks that this proposition is what is semantically expressed by (1) in *C*. The contextually supplied information (i.e., what Tipper is ready for in *C*), he claims, “can be traced to logical form”⁴³ and is, therefore, a semantic matter. According to him, “there is an unpronounced pronominal element in the logical form of the sentence uttered, whose value is [an explicit specification of an activity: what Tipper is ready for in *C*].”⁴⁴ To put it another way, at the level of logical form, “ready” in (1) is actually “ready for an *X*”, and the value of *X* is somehow “provided” or “assigned” by the context in which (1) is uttered.

So, on Stanley's account, the propositions semantically expressed by the following two sentences in *C* are the same:

⁴² Stanley (2005), p. 253.

⁴³ Stanley (2000), p. 391.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

- (1) Tipper is ready.
(44) Tipper is ready to go to the party.

According to his view, both sentences semantically express the proposition that *Tipper is ready to go to the party*. The difference between the two is that (1), but not (44), contains covert structure. Now, without getting into Stanley's reasons for why he thinks that (1) contains covert structure, I'd simply like to show that there is a fundamental problem with his view that (1) and (44) semantically express the same proposition in *C*. The problem is that the contextually supplied information (i.e., what Tipper is ready for in *C*) can be cancelled in the context of utterance, which suggests that it is not part of what is semantically expressed by (1) in *C*.

Consider, for example, an utterance of the following sentence in *C*:

- (45) Jane is still getting dressed for the party. Tipper is ready.

In this context of utterance, clearly the hearer would intuit that what the speaker expressed by her utterance of "Tipper is ready," as it occurs in (45), is the proposition that *Tipper is ready to go to the party*. For Stanley, therefore, this proposition is what is semantically expressed by "Tipper is ready" as it occurs in (45). But, consider the following expanded version of (45), also uttered in *C*:

- (46) Jane is still getting dressed for the party. Tipper is ready. But, Tipper is not going to the party. She has a final exam tomorrow, so she's going to the library.

If Stanley is correct, an utterance of (46) in *C* would be incoherent. On his account, "Tipper is ready" as it occurs in (46) would semantically express the proposition that *Tipper is ready to go to the party*; for when the hearer reaches the end of the second sentence in (46), she is in the same position that she was in when she interpreted the utterance of (45). But, if "Tipper is ready," as it occurs in (46), semantically expresses the proposition that *Tipper is ready to go to*

the party, as Stanley's view suggests, then the hearer would have to regard the rest of the utterance of (46) as a contradiction

But I think it is clear that an utterance of (46) in *C* is perfectly coherent. This, I think, shows that Stanley's view, according to which (1) and (44) semantically express the same proposition in *C*, is fundamentally problematic. According to the Minimalist view that I favor, (1) semantically expresses the unspecific proposition that *Tipper is (in some respect) ready*. This view, unlike Stanley's, can explain why an utterance of (46) in *C* is perfectly coherent.

Now, Edwin Williams has objected that my argument against Stanley's view may be insufficient to show that (1), for example, does not contain covert structure.⁴⁵ He asks us to compare (1) with the following sentence:

(47) John is glad.

According to Williams, it is obvious that (47) contains covert structure, whose value is provided by the context in which (47) is uttered. So, in a particular context of utterance where John is glad about, say, passing his class, he, like Stanley, thinks that (47) semantically expresses the proposition that *John is glad about passing his class*. Williams goes on to argue that my argument against Stanley's view fails to show that (47) does not contain covert structure. He gives the following example:

(48) Joan is going to a party. Mary is glad. Mary is not glad that Joan is going to a party.
Mary is glad that Bill raised bail.

⁴⁵ The following argument is from a personal note from Edwin Williams.

Williams claims that an utterance of (48) is “distinctly odd” because “Mary is glad” contains covert structure, whose value is provided by the context in which it is uttered. So, as it occurs in (48), it semantically expresses the proposition that *Mary is glad that Joan is going to a party*.

But I think that there is a problem with Williams’s argument here. Consider another example involving “glad”:

(49) Joan is going to a party. Mary (her roommate) is glad. Mary is not glad that Joan is going to a party; she wishes that Joan were going to the library since they both have a final exam tomorrow. But Mary is glad that she has the house to herself to study.

My intuitions tell me that an utterance of (49) is perfectly coherent. This, I think, shows that an utterance of (48) is odd, not because “Mary is glad,” as it occurs in (48), semantically expresses the proposition that *Mary is glad that Joan is going to a party*. Rather, it is odd perhaps because what Mary turns out to be glad about (i.e., Bill’s raising bail) is strangely off-topic. In other words, it is odd for a speaker to go from saying that Joan is going to a party to saying that Mary is glad that Bill raised bail. It is not odd, however, for a speaker to go from saying that Joan is going to a party to saying that Mary is glad that she has the house to herself to study.

Likewise, it is not odd for a speaker, in uttering (46), to go from saying that Jane is not ready to go to the party to saying that Tipper *is* ready to go to the library (perhaps the two are sharing a cab). But an utterance of the following sentence, I think, is odd:

(50) Jane is still getting dressed for the party. Tipper is ready. But Tipper is not ready for the party. She is ready to pay Bill’s bail.

Again, this utterance is odd, not because “Tipper is ready,” as it occurs in (50), semantically expresses the proposition that *Tipper is ready for the party*. Rather, it is odd because what Tipper turns out to be ready for (i.e., paying Bill’s bail) is strangely off-topic.

Perhaps one might argue that the above analysis is wrong given that an utterance of the following sentence does not seem to be odd:

(51) Jane is still getting dressed for the party. Tipper is ready to pay Bill's bail.

That is, one might argue that (51) shows that it is not odd for a speaker to go from saying that Jane is still getting dressed for the party to saying that Tipper is ready to pay Bill's bail. Therefore, an utterance of (50) is odd, not because what Tipper turns out to be ready for (i.e., paying Bill's bail) is strangely off-topic. Rather, it is odd perhaps because, as Williams's suggests, "Tipper is ready," as it occurs in (50), semantically expresses the proposition that *Tipper is ready for the party*.⁴⁶

But I think that there is an explanation for why an utterance of (51) is not odd, even though an utterance of (50) is odd for the reason that I think, i.e., because what Tipper turns out to be ready for is strangely off-topic. When we hear an utterance of (51), we consider the two sentences in (51) to be independent sentences. That is, we understand the utterance to be saying something about Jane and then something else, unrelated, about Tipper. Understanding the utterance in such a way, I think, makes it not odd.

When we hear an utterance of (50), however, we consider the first two sentences in (51) to be related because the speaker, in uttering "Tipper is ready," seems to be speaking loosely, expecting the hearer to understand via context what she meant by her utterance. Now, when we hear an utterance of (51), we might initially understand "Tipper is ready" to mean that *Tipper is ready for the party*. But, this interpretation gets cancelled, and we see that "Tipper is ready" actually means that *Tipper is ready to pay Bill's bail*. Having said this, I think that an utterance of

⁴⁶ Thanks to Gil Harman for bringing up this objection.

(51) is odd for the following simple reason: When we hear an utterance of (51), we consider the first two sentences in (51) to be related for the reason mentioned above. But, “Jane is getting dressed for the party” and “Tipper is ready to pay bail” does not seem to be related in any way. Thus, I think that my analysis for why the utterances of (48) and (50) are odd stands.

Consequently, I think that my argument against Stanley’s view works for “glad,” just as it works for “ready,” and that neither word involves covert structure. Moreover, I think that just as (1) semantically expresses the incomplete proposition that *Tipper is (in some respect) ready* in any context of utterance, (47) semantically expresses the incomplete proposition that *John is (in some respect) glad* in any context of utterance. And this view (i.e., the Minimalist view that I favor), unlike Stanley’s, can explain why an utterance of (46), as well as an utterance of (49), is perfectly coherent.

Williams, however, gives one more argument in support of the view that (47) contains covert structure. According to him, (47) simply cannot express the incomplete proposition that *John is (in some respect) glad*. He writes: “One can say, on seeing John gleefully walking down the street, ‘Boy, he sure is glad about something,’ but not ‘Boy, he sure is glad,’ unless of course you know exactly what he is glad about.”⁴⁷ From this, he argues that (47) must contain covert structure, whose value is provided by the context in which (47) is uttered. Moreover, he suggests that “ready” is like “glad” in the sense that it too contains covert structure.

With regard to this argument, I’m not sure I agree with Williams that an utterance of (47) cannot express the unspecific proposition that *John is (in some respect) glad*. Consider the following context: Suppose you and I are waiting in a lobby to be called in for a job interview.

⁴⁷ This quote is also from a personal note from Edwin Williams.

We overhear John's interview going on in the room next door, which does not seem to be going very well for John. A few minutes later we see John leaving the room with a huge smile on his face. Confused, you ask me, "How do you think John did?" I reply, "I don't know, but look at him. He sure is glad." In this context, we don't know what it is exactly that John is glad about. Nevertheless, I think that it is acceptable to say that "John is glad." And the reason it is acceptable is because in this context "John is glad" expresses the proposition that *John is glad about something* or, to put it another way, *John is (in some respect) glad*, which again is what I think is the semantic content of (47).

Now, before I continue to the fifth potential problem, I'd like to discuss a second objection, similar to the first, that Williams has made against the Minimalist view that I favor. In Chapter 3, I argue that the following sentence:

(52) Jack and Jill are married.

semantically expresses the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*. Williams, however, argues that (52) may involve covert structure, just as (1), in his opinion, may involve covert structure. He suggests that "married," like "equal," is syntactically ambiguous. Therefore, according to him, it could be the case that (52) semantically expresses both of the following propositions:

(53) *Jack and Jill are married to each other.*

(54) *Jack is married to someone and Jill is married to someone.*

So, (52) can mean (53), just as "X and Y are equal" can mean that *X and Y are equal to each other*. It can also mean (54), in which case (52) contains covert structure (i.e., "to someone"), whose value is provided by the context in which (52) is uttered.

First, I want to address the idea that “married” is syntactically ambiguous; more specifically, the idea that (52) semantically expresses (53). I think that we can use Grice’s Cancelability Test to show that (53) is not part of the meaning of (52). Consider the following cancellation of (53):

(55) Jack and Jill are married, but not to each other.

Of course, one could argue that ambiguities can be canceled. So, (55), it might seem, fails to show that (52) does not semantically express (53). But, I think that there is a difference between canceling an ambiguity and canceling an element that is not part of the meaning of an uttered sentence.

Consider the well-known example from Grice where a speaker implies by his utterance of “He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately”⁴⁸ that *Smith has a girlfriend in New York*. Here is a cancellation of this implicature:

(56) Smith has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately, but I don’t mean to imply that he has a girlfriend in New York.

When an implicature of an utterance is explicitly canceled, as in the above example, we see that the uttered sentence still expresses a complete proposition. That is, when the utterance of “He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately” no longer carries the implicature that *Smith has a girlfriend in New York*, it is clear that the uttered sentence still expresses a complete proposition, i.e., the proposition that *Smith has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately*, which is the semantic content of the sentence.

Compare the above example with an example where a particular meaning of an ambiguous term is being canceled:

⁴⁸ Grice (1989), p. 32.

(57) Jane went to the bank, but by “bank” I don’t mean the financial institution building.

When a particular meaning of an ambiguous term is explicitly canceled, as in the above example, we see that the uttered sentence does not express a complete proposition unless the canceled meaning is replaced with another meaning. That is, when the meaning of “bank” as the financial institution building is canceled in an utterance of “Jane went to the bank,” the uttered sentence does not express a complete proposition unless the meaning of “bank” as the financial institution building is replaced with another meaning of “bank,” e.g., a river bank. This, of course, is because the meaning of “bank” must be present as part of the semantic content of “Jane went to the bank.”

Thus, it seems that we have a way to distinguish between canceling an ambiguity and canceling an element that is not part of the meaning of a given sentence. Again, the difference between the two is that when an ambiguity is canceled, the canceled meaning must be replaced with another meaning for the uttered sentence to express a complete proposition, but when an element that is not part of the meaning of a given sentence is canceled, no such replacement is needed since this element need not be present as part of the semantic content of the sentence.

Now, I want to argue that (55) is an example of canceling an element that is not part of the meaning of “Jack and Jill are married” and not of canceling an ambiguity. I think that (55) is like (56) in the sense that when the utterance of “Jack and Jill are married” no longer carries (53), i.e., the content that *Jack and Jill are married to each other*, it is clear that “Jack and Jill are married” still expresses a complete proposition. What it expresses is the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*, which I think is the semantic content of “Jack and Jill are married.” Unlike in the case of ambiguities, the canceled content of the utterance of “Jack and Jill are married,” i.e., (53),

need not be replaced with another content for the uttered sentence to express a complete proposition. This, I think, shows that (53) is not part of the meaning of (52) and that “married” is not syntactically ambiguous, at least in the way that Williams suggests.

Lastly, I want to quickly address the idea that (52) semantically expresses (54) and not the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*, as well as the idea that it contains covert structure (i.e., “to someone”), whose value is provided by the context in which (52) is uttered. Consider the following context: Suppose my husband and I are at a party. Everyone else at the party seems to be single. I say, “We must be the only two people here who are married.” My husband replies, “Jack and Jill are married.” Now, further suppose that we both know that Jack and Jill are siblings and that Jack is married to Kate and Jill is married to Larry. In this context, if Williams is correct and (52) contains covert structure, then (52) would mean that *Jack is married to Kate and Jill is married to Larry*. But I think it is clear that in this context (52) simply means the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*, which again is what I think is the semantic content of (52). To conclude then, with regard to positing covert structure in the syntax of a given sentence, I think that it should be done only when there is a clear justification for doing so. In the case of (51), as well as (1), I don’t think that such a clear justification is there.

2.4.5 Fifth Problem

The fifth potential problem comes from Bach. He presents the following objection to the claim that sentences like (1)-(3) semantically express complete/truth-conditional, albeit unspecific, propositions:

First, on the assumption that any sentence can be used literally, it would follow from this suggestion that [(1), for example] could be used to mean [(1c)]. But it seems that [it] could not be so used. An explicit completion in the form of [(1c) itself], is necessary to

convey such a proposition. Similarly, it does not seem that the negation of [(1)] could be used to convey, respectively, that Tipper is not ready for anything.⁴⁹

But, is it really the case that (1), for example, could not be used to mean (1c)? Consider the following example:

Tipper, The Impatient Queen

Tipper is our very impatient queen. In her queendom, she has made sure that everyone knows if she is ready for something and that she never has to wait for anything. Whenever she is ready for something, she rings a special bell that is heard throughout her queendom. One quick ring means that she's ready for breakfast. One quick ring followed by one long ring means that she's ready for her massage. Two quick rings means that she's ready for a drive around town. There are so many ring combinations that her subjects can only identify the ones they must attend to. Suppose you and I are sitting around somewhere in her queendom and suddenly hear a ring combination that we are not familiar with. Hearing it, I utter, "Tipper is ready."

In this scenario, I think it is clear that what I expressed by (1) is the unspecific proposition that *Tipper is (in some respect) ready*. A slight modification to the above story will show that the negation of (1) could also be used to mean the proposition that *Tipper is not ready for anything*.

Consider the following modified story:

Tipper, The Impatient Queen*

Tipper is our very impatient queen. In her queendom, she has made sure that everyone knows if she is ready for something and that she never has to wait for anything. Whenever she is ready for something, she rings a special bell that is heard throughout her queendom. One quick ring means that she's ready for breakfast. One quick ring followed by one long ring means that she's ready for her massage. Two quick rings means that she's ready for a drive around town. There are so many ring combinations that her subjects can only identify the ones they must attend to. Suppose you and I are sitting around somewhere in her queendom. It has been an unusually long time since we heard a ring combination. Puzzled, I utter, "Tipper is not ready."

⁴⁹ Bach (1994), p. 130.

These two examples, I think, clearly show that sentences like (1)-(3) can indeed be used to express the complete/truth-conditional and unspecific propositions that I think they express, contrary to what Bach thinks.

In conclusion, I hope to have shown in this section that Contextualists have no good arguments against the version of Minimalism that I favor, according to which the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are complete/truth-conditional, albeit unspecific, propositions. Moreover, since their own view, as we saw in Section 2.2, leads to the undesirable conclusion that a great number of sentences (that they think are semantically complete), and perhaps all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete, I think that the Minimalist view that I favor is a more reasonable view than Contextualism. I now turn to a discussion about Point 2 to further support the claim that Minimalism is favorable to Contextualism.

3 Defending Minimalism, Part Two

3.1 Introduction

The second argument that Contextualists present against Minimalism is what I call the Inaccessibility Problem:

Inaccessibility Problem

For some sentences, semantic interpretation gives us a proposition that is complete/truth-conditional but not consciously accessible.

Here are some examples that are commonly used to illustrate this problem:

- (1) Jack and Jill are married.
- (2) I've had breakfast.
- (3) Mary got married and got pregnant.

Typically, when we hear utterances of these sentences, we understand them to mean the following propositions, respectively:

- (1a) *Jack and Jill are married to each other.*
- (2a) *I've had breakfast today.*
- (3a) *Mary got married and then got pregnant.*

In such cases, Contextualists argue that the following propositions, which are the semantic contents of (1)-(3), respectively, are not consciously accessible to the hearer at the time of utterance:

- (1b) *Jack and Jill are each married.*
- (2b) *I've had breakfast at least once before.*
- (3b) *Mary got married and Mary got pregnant (order of events not specified).*

They go on to claim that, since these propositions are not consciously accessible, they do not play any role in explaining communicative success. Thus, Contextualists use the Inaccessibility Problem to argue against my second point about the semantic content of declarative sentences:

Point 2

The semantic content is useful to a theory of utterance interpretation.

My aim in this chapter is to defend Point 2.

For many cases, it is uncontroversial that the semantic content is useful in interpreting an utterance. Take, for instance, the well-known example from Grice where a professor, in his recommendation letter for a student who is applying for a philosophy job, writes, “Mr. X’s command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular.”⁵⁰ According to the Gricean implicature process, the hearer arrives at the implicature that *Mr. X is not a good candidate for the philosophy job* by taking into consideration the semantic content of the uttered sentence and, in so doing, realizing that the speaker has flouted the first Maxim of Quantity (i.e., “Make your contribution as informative as is required”). To preserve the assumption that the speaker is being a cooperative conversationalist, the hearer concludes that the speaker must have meant something other than the semantic content, namely the implicature. In cases like this, therefore, the semantic content is useful to a theory of utterance interpretation in the sense that it is the input to the Gricean implicature process.

But to defend Point 2, I need to address examples like (1)-(3), where the semantic content, according to Contextualists, is not consciously accessible and, therefore, cannot play any role in interpreting an utterance. With regard to these cases, I agree with the following passage from Devitt:

⁵⁰ Grice (1989), p. 33.

But the speedy automatic part of language processing, which is most of it, is subconscious and peripheral; it is more brute-causal than rational-causal. This applies not only to syntactic and semantic processes arising simply out of “linguistic knowledge” but also to pragmatic processes arising out of “world knowledge,” including those processes that disambiguate and assign referents to indexical and demonstrative expressions. So perhaps grasping a Gricean derivation intuitively is like that. “Without thinking”, a hearer goes through what may be a fairly brute-causal process that takes appropriate account of the clues for a Gricean derivation, perhaps without even representing these *as* clues: she has become “hard-wired” to process these clues appropriately. This speedy subconscious process “mirrors” the rational process of a Gricean derivation.⁵¹

So, in cases involving (1)-(3), I think that the hearer comes to understand what the speaker intended to communicate by grasping a Gricean derivation intuitively. That is, she comes to understand what the speaker intended to communicate via a speedy subconscious process that “mirrors” the Gricean implicature process. And in this speedy subconscious process, I think that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) play the input role – that is how they are useful to a theory of utterance interpretation. Of course, there is too much that is unknown about language processing to try to prove this idea. So, my aim in this chapter is to defend Point 2 by trying to show the plausibility of the idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) play such a role in utterance interpretation.

In Section 3.2, I make a distinction between (i) a content that is not consciously accessed and (ii) a content that is not consciously accessible. This distinction is important because (i), unlike (ii), I think, can be useful to a theory of interpretation. Furthermore, I think that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are each the first type of content and not the second. That is, at the time of utterance, they are not consciously accessed, not consciously inaccessible. Having made this distinction, I go on to show that there are other examples where the semantic content of a sentence is not consciously accessed yet clearly plays some role in how the hearer arrives at

⁵¹ Devitt (2007), p. 15.

the intended implicature. In so doing, I hope to increase the plausibility of the idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) play the input role described above.

Next, I argue that the Inaccessibility Problem is mistaken. I think that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3), though they are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, are consciously accessible. That they be consciously accessible is, I think, a requirement for them to play the input role described above. In Section 3.3, I present four arguments for the conscious accessibility of the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3).

Finally, in Section 3.4, I give a possible explanation for why the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance. The reason, I argue, is not because they are consciously inaccessible, as Recanati thinks. Rather, it is because there are certain conventions that influence the hearer's interpretation of utterances of sentences like (1)-(3). These conventions, I think, cause the hearer to quickly intuit the intended implicatures as what were communicated, making it unnecessary to consciously access the semantic contents. This explanation, assuming that it is correct, further shows the plausibility of the idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) play the input role described above by explaining why it might seem as though these contents are not consciously accessible (or not accessed in any way) when, in fact, they are.

3.2 An Important Distinction

Like Recanati and other Contextualists, I agree that if the semantic content is not consciously accessible at the time of utterance, it cannot play any role in interpreting an utterance. Therefore, I agree that the Inaccessibility Problem, if its claim is true, is indeed a problem for Minimalism.

In Section 3.3, I argue that the claim is mistaken. But before I turn to this issue, I want to make a distinction between (i) a content that is not consciously accessed and (ii) a content that is not consciously accessible. As I mentioned earlier, this distinction is important because (i), unlike (ii), I think, can be useful to a theory of interpretation. We will see that Recanati confuses the two in his argument against the usefulness of the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3). As a result, I think that his argument against Point 2 is incorrect.

As I mentioned in the previous section, my aim in this chapter is to defend Point 2 by showing the plausibility of the idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) play the input role in a speedy subconscious process that “mirrors” the Gricean implicature process. In this section, I begin my defense by showing that there are other examples where the semantic content of a sentence is not consciously accessed yet clearly plays some role in how the hearer arrives at the intended implicature. In the next section, I further my defense by directly arguing against the Inaccessibility Problem.

3.2.1 Recanati’s argument against Point 2

To make his point that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) do not play a role in utterance interpretation, Recanati asks us to compare the following two sentences:

- (4) I am French.
- (5) John has three children.

He writes:

In the relevant situation of utterance [of (4)], both the speaker and the listener are *aware* that the speaker says he is French, and thereby implicates he is a good cook. This typical case of implicature is different from a case like [(5)] in which the speaker is not only (like the hearer) *unaware* of the proposition literally expressed, but would strongly deny having said what the minimalist claims was actually said.

It turns out that there are two sorts of case. On the one hand there are prototypical cases of implied meaning, in which the participants in the speech situation are *aware* of both what is said and of what is implied, and also of the inferential connection between them. On the other hand, there are the cases illustrated by [(5) as well as (1)-(3)]. Given his willingness to treat certain aspects of the intuitive meaning of [(5) as well as (1)-(3)] as conversational implicatures external to what is literally said, the minimalist must explain why those implicatures, unlike the prototypical cases (for instance the French/cook example), do not have the property of *conscious 'availability'*.⁵²

In the above passage, we see that Recanati agrees with the following claim:

C: If a hearer is not consciously aware of the semantic content of a sentence, *s*, at the time of utterance, *t*, the semantic content of *s* is not consciously available (or accessible) at *t*.

This claim is essential to his argument against Point 2, which goes something like this:

- (R1) Typically, when a person hears an utterance of sentences like (1)-(3), she is not consciously aware of the semantic content of the uttered sentence.⁵³
- (R2) *C*: If a hearer is not consciously aware of the semantic content of a sentence, *s*, at the time of utterance, *t*, the semantic content of *s* is not consciously available (or accessible) at *t*.
- (R3) So, the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are not consciously accessible at the time of utterance.
- (R4) If they are not consciously accessible, they cannot play any role in utterance interpretation.⁵⁴
- (R5) Therefore, Point 2 is wrong.

Now, I think that the above argument is incorrect because *C*, in my opinion, is false. Just because a hearer, at the time of utterance, is unaware of the semantic content of (5), for example, does not

⁵² Recanati (2004), pp. 11-12 (my italics).

⁵³ That Recanati agrees with (R1) is clear in the above quoted passage.

⁵⁴ There are many passages in Recanati's works that show that he agrees with (R4). Here's one: "Let the semanticist use [the semantic content] if he or she wants to, provided he or she agrees that...the minimal proposition has no psychological reality. It does not correspond to any stage in the process of understanding the utterance, and need not be entertained or represented at any point in that process" (Recanati (2001), p. 89).

make it the case that the semantic content is not consciously *accessible* at the time of utterance. It just makes it the case that the semantic content of (5) is not consciously *accessed* at the time of utterance.

There is, I think, an important distinction that should be made between (i) a content that is not consciously accessed and (ii) a content that is not consciously accessible. When we say that the semantic content is not consciously accessed, we simply mean that the hearer is not consciously aware of it. But when we say that the semantic content is not consciously accessible, we mean that it has “no psychological reality.”⁵⁵ That is, it is not in the hearer’s mind at all and cannot, under any specified conditions, be consciously accessed as a possible interpretation of the given utterance.

Taking into account this distinction, I think that *C* should be revised as:

*C**: If a hearer is not consciously aware of the semantic content of a sentence, *s*, at the time of utterance, *t*, the semantic content of *s* is not consciously accessed at *t*.

The above argument might then be reformulated as follows:

(R1*) Typically, when a person hears an utterance of sentences like (1)-(3), she is not consciously aware of the semantic content of the uttered sentence.

(R2*) *C**: If a hearer is not consciously aware of the semantic content of a sentence, *s*, at the time of utterance, *t*, the semantic content of *s* is not consciously accessed at *t*.

(R3*) So, the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance.

(R4*) If they are not consciously accessed, they cannot play any role in utterance interpretation.

(R5*) Therefore, Point 2 is wrong.

⁵⁵ Recanati, (2004), p. 64.

But I think that this argument, like the previous one, is incorrect. This time, it is because (R4*) is false. In my opinion, even though the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, they can (and do) play a role in utterance interpretation.

In what follows, I present four cases where the semantic content of a sentence, though the hearer does not consciously access it at the time of utterance, clearly plays a role *subconsciously* in how she arrives at the intended implicature. These examples, therefore, show that the semantic content of a sentence need not be consciously accessed at the time of utterance for it to be useful to a theory of interpretation. This, in turn, makes more plausible my idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3), though they are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, play a role in utterance interpretation, i.e., the input role in a speedy subconscious process that “mirrors” the Gricean implicature process.

3.2.2 Four cases where the semantic content is not consciously accessed yet plays a role in utterance interpretation

Case 1: Examples where the semantic content is obscure

Suppose *A* and *B* are talking about Jack. *A* asks *B*, “Do you think that Jack is smart?” *B* replies, “I overheard him say, ‘Advanced long-chain fuels and chemicals are generated from short-chain metabolic intermediates through pathways that require carbon-chain elongation.’” By her utterance, *B* seems to implicate that she thinks that Jack is smart. This implicature is worked out in the following way: *A* concludes that *B* thinks that Jack is smart to preserve the assumption that *B*, being a cooperative conversationalist, intentionally said something obscure by her utterance. Now, at the time of utterance, I don’t think that *A* (assuming that she is not an expert in advanced

long-chain fuels and chemicals) is consciously aware of the semantic content of the sentence that *B* uttered. What she is consciously aware of is the fact that what *B* said is quite difficult to understand, which is the input to the Gricean implicature process. But *A* is consciously aware of this fact, I think, because she subconsciously grasps the semantic content, which allows her to recognize that *B*'s utterance is quite difficult to understand. In this way, I think that the semantic content of the sentence that *B* uttered, though it is not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, plays a role in how *A* arrives at the intended implicature.

Case 2: Examples where the semantic content is incomprehensible

Suppose *A* is traveling in a country where speaking English is uncommon. She asks a stranger, "Do you speak English?" The stranger replies, "I England no me." By her utterance, the stranger obviously implicates that she does not speak English (or, at least, understandable English). This implicature is worked out in the following way: *A* concludes that the stranger does not speak English to preserve the assumption that the stranger, being a cooperative conversationalist, did not intentionally say something irrelevant or obscure by her utterance. In this example too, when *A* hears the speaker's utterance, it is not the semantic content of the uttered sentence that she is consciously aware of; rather, in this case, it is the fact that what the speaker said is ungrammatical or incomprehensible, which is the input to the Gricean implicature process. But, again, I think that *A* is consciously aware of this fact because she subconsciously grasps the semantic content, which allows her to recognize that the stranger's utterance is ungrammatical or incomprehensible. Therefore, the semantic content in this example as well seems to play a role in utterance interpretation even though it is not consciously accessed at the time of utterance.

Case 3: Examples where the semantic content is too familiar

Suppose *A*, while traveling in the non-English speaking country, starts up a conversation with a local resident. She asks him, “Are you familiar with English nursery rhymes?” He replies, “Mary had a little lamb.” By his utterance, the man seems to implicate that he is indeed familiar with English nursery rhymes. This implicature is worked out in the following way: *A* concludes that the man is indeed familiar with English nursery rhymes to preserve the assumption that the man, being a cooperative conversationalist, said something relevant by his utterance. I think that this is another example where the hearer is not consciously aware of the semantic content of the uttered sentence at the time of utterance. In this case, *A* is not consciously aware of the specific proposition that *Mary had a little lamb*. Instead, what she is consciously aware of is simply the fact that the man has recited part of a nursery rhyme, which is the input to the Gricean implicature process. But, again, I think that *A* is consciously aware of this fact because she subconsciously grasps the semantic content, which allows her to recognize that the utterance is part of a nursery rhyme. So in this example too, the semantic content, though it is not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, seems to play a role in how the hearer arrives at the intended implicature.

Case 4: Examples where the semantic content is too long

This one is a familiar example from Grice: Suppose *A* asks *B* about Miss *X*’s recent singing performance. *B* responds, “Miss *X* produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score of “Home sweet home.”⁵⁶ By her utterance, *B* seems to implicate that she thinks that Miss *X*’s performance was terrible. This implicature is worked out in the following way: *A* concludes that *B* thinks that Miss *X*’s performance was terrible to preserve the assumption that *A*, being a

⁵⁶ Grice (1989), p. 37. Thanks to Gil Harman for suggesting this example and type of case.

cooperative conversationalist, intentionally said the unnecessarily long proposition instead of the more succinct proposition that Miss *X* sang “*Home sweet home*.” In this example as well, when *A* hears *B*’s utterance, it is not the semantic content of the sentence that *B* uttered that *A* is consciously aware of. Rather, in this case, what *A* is consciously aware of is the fact that *B* said what she said in an unnecessarily long way, which is the input to the Gricean implicature process. But, again, I think that *A* is consciously aware of this fact because she subconsciously grasps the semantic content, which allows her to recognize that the utterance was formulated in an unnecessarily long way. Therefore, the semantic content in this example also seems to play a role in utterance interpretation even though it is not consciously accessed at the time of utterance.

3.2.3 A fifth case

In the four cases discussed above, I think that the semantic content plays the following role in how the hearer arrives at the intended implicature: At the time of utterance, the hearer subconsciously accesses the semantic content, which allows her to recognize *X*, the input to the Gricean implicature process. In these cases, *X* is some fact about the given utterance (e.g., the fact that the utterance is incomprehensible or that it is formulated in an unnecessarily long way). So the semantic content, though it is not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, is, I think, subconsciously accessed. How else could the hearer recognize, for example, that the speaker’s utterance in the second case is part of a nursery rhyme? It might seem as though the semantic content in these four cases is not accessed in any way, but that is just because the hearer is able to quickly intuit *X*, for a number of reasons. For example, in the second case, the hearer is able to quickly intuit the fact that the speaker’s utterance is part of a nursery rhyme because the utterance is very familiar. In such a way, therefore, I think that the semantic content in each of

the four cases discussed plays a role in utterance interpretation even though it is not consciously accessed at the time of utterance.

Now, I think that something similar is going on with examples like (1)-(3). That is, I think that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3), though they are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, are subconsciously accessed. And in such a way, they play a role in how the hearer arrives at the intended implicature. We might say that examples like (1)-(3) fall under a fifth case: *Case 5: Examples where the semantic content is conventional*. Let's consider example (2), uttered in some normal context of utterance:

(2) I've had breakfast.

Though the semantic content of (2), i.e., the proposition that *I've had breakfast at least once before*, is not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, I think that it is subconsciously accessed, which allows the hearer to recognize the proposition that *I've had breakfast this morning* via a speedy subconscious process that "mirrors" the Gricean implicature process. In this process, I think that the semantic content of (2) plays the input role. As in the above cases, it might seem as though the semantic content of (2) is not accessed in any way, but that is just because the hearer is able to quickly intuit the proposition that *I've had breakfast this morning* for some reason (namely, the effects of convention) that I will explain in Section 3.4. A similar analysis, I think, can be given for examples (1) and (3).

So, for cases like (1)-(3), the role that I think the semantic content plays in a theory of utterance interpretation is the input role described above. As I mentioned in the previous section, there is too much that is unknown about language processing to try to prove this idea. But, in this section I hope to have increased its plausibility by giving other examples where the semantic

content of a sentence is not consciously accessed yet clearly plays a role subconsciously in how the hearer arrives at the intended implicature. In the next section, I argue that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are consciously accessible even though they are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance. That they be consciously accessible is, I think, a requirement for them to play the role that I think they play in a theory of utterance interpretation.

3.3 The Conscious Accessibility of the Semantic Content

As I mentioned in the previous section, I agree with Contextualists that the Inaccessibility Problem, if its claim is true, is indeed a problem for Minimalism. But in this section, I argue that the claim is mistaken. In other words, I argue that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3):

- (1) Jack and Jill are married.
- (2) I've had breakfast.
- (3) Mary got married and got pregnant.

which are, respectively:

- (1b) *Jack and Jill are each married.*
- (2b) *I've had breakfast at least once before.*
- (3b) *Mary got married and Mary got pregnant (order of events not specified).*

are consciously accessible at the time of utterance.

In the previous section, I showed that the semantic content of a sentence need not be consciously accessed at the time of utterance for it to be useful to a theory of utterance interpretation. But for it to play a role in utterance interpretation or, more specifically, for it to play the input role that I think it plays, the semantic content needs to be consciously accessible at

the time of utterance even if it is not consciously accessed at this time.⁵⁷ In other words, it needs to have “psychological reality” in the sense that it is in the hearer’s mind at the time of utterance even if it is not consciously accessed at this time and, under certain specified conditions, it *could* be consciously accessed as a possible interpretation of the utterance. Only if it is psychologically real in this sense could it be subconsciously accessed and play the input role described above.

In what follows, I present four arguments, each of which, I think, shows that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3), though they are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, are consciously accessible.

3.3.1 Cancelability Argument

At the end of “Logic and Conversation,” Grice presents a set of features that conversational implicatures might be expected to possess. One of these is cancelability. According to Grice, a putative conversational implicature can be cancelled in two ways. First, it can be *explicitly* cancelled if, “to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that *p*, it is admissible to add *but not p*, or *I do not mean to imply that p*.”⁵⁸ Second, it can be *contextually* cancelled if “one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature.”⁵⁹

Here, I focus on the first type of cancellation. Recently, some philosophers have argued that not all conversational implicatures are explicitly cancelable and, therefore, Grice’s cancelability test is not a reliable test for determining when an implicature is present.⁶⁰ In my opinion, the

⁵⁷ To play the input role described above, the semantic content needs to be consciously accessible *at the time of utterance*. If it is merely consciously accessible upon reflection, all that shows is that one could determine what is the semantic content of a given sentence.

⁵⁸ Grice (1989), p. 44.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ See, for example, Blome-Tillmann (2008), Burton-Roberts (2006) and Weiner (2006).

cancelability test is a reliable test in this sense, but rather than discussing this issue, I want to discuss another sense in which the test is reliable. I think that the cancelability test can be used to show that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3), though they are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, are consciously accessible.

Again, when we hear utterances of (1)-(3), we typically understand them to mean the following propositions, respectively:

- (1a) *Jack and Jill are married to each other.*
- (2a) *I've had breakfast today.*
- (3a) *Mary got married and then got pregnant.*

But, (1a)-(3a) can be explicitly cancelled, as the following propositions demonstrate:

- (1c) *Jack and Jill are married, but not to each other.*
- (2c) *I've had breakfast, but not today.*
- (3c) *Mary got married and got pregnant, but not necessarily in that order.*

The fact that they can be cancelled, I think, shows that the semantic contents of (1)-(3) are consciously accessible at the time of utterance.

Take an utterance of (1), for example. According to Contextualists, the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*, which is the semantic content of (1), is not consciously accessible in instances where we understand the utterance of (1) to mean (1a). But if the utterance of (1) expresses (1a) and the semantic content is not consciously accessible, then (1c) should be a contradiction: We would understand it to mean the proposition that *Jack and Jill are married to each other, but not to each other*. (1c), however, is clearly not a contradiction. This is because the semantic content of (1) is consciously accessible, and we understand (1c) to mean the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married, but not to each other*. A similar analysis can be given for the utterances of (2) and (3).

Now, one might argue that the semantic contents of (1)-(3) are consciously accessible *only when* a cancellation is actually being made. So, in normal instances when we hear an utterance of (1), for example, the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married* is not consciously accessible. Only when we hear an utterance such as (1c), where a cancellation is actually being made, does the proposition become consciously accessible.

This argument seems implausible to me. Suppose an utterance of (1) and (1c) occur in the same conversation, as in the following conversation between *A* and *B*:

A: Jack and Jill are married.

B: I thought Jack and Jill were siblings.

A: Jack and Jill are married, but not to each other.

According to the argument in question, *B* is unable to consciously access the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married* when she hears *A*'s first utterance in the above conversation. Note, the argument is that *B* could not consciously access the proposition at this point in the conversation, not just that she is not consciously accessing it at this time. But, according to this argument, when *B* hears *A*'s second utterance, she is suddenly able to access it. This seems implausible to me. It is more reasonable, I think, to suppose that the semantic content of (1) is consciously accessible whenever we hear an utterance of (1). Typically, we do not consciously access it, but under certain specified conditions (e.g., when a cancellation is being made), we consciously access it as a possible interpretation of the utterance.

Here is a similar objection. One might argue that facts about (1c) cannot be used to show facts about an utterance of (1) since the two utterances are distinct. That is, although the semantic content of "Jack and Jill are married," as part of (1c), is consciously accessible, this fact alone

does not show that the semantic content of (1), as an independent utterance, is also consciously accessible.

My reply to this argument is that a cancellation can occur at any point during a conversation. In other words, we can break (1c) down into two separate utterances: *Jack and Jill are married* and *They're not married to each other*. In most instances, the second utterance can occur at any point in the conversation to cancel the pragmatic enrichments in the first. Consider, for example, a slightly revised version of the previous conversation between *A* and *B*:

A: Jack and Jill are married.
B: I thought Jack and Jill were siblings.
A: They're not married to each other.

We see, then, that the pragmatic enrichments of an utterance of (1), as an independent utterance, can still be cancelled. This, in turn, shows that the semantic content of (1), as an independent utterance, is consciously accessible.

Here is another type of objection. As I mentioned earlier, some philosophers think that not all conversational implicatures are explicitly cancelable. Here is one type of example they use to make their argument:

(4) I haven't had breakfast.

When we hear an utterance of (4), we typically understand it to mean the following proposition:

(4a) *I haven't had breakfast this morning.*

The semantic content of (4), however, is:

(4b) *I haven't ever had breakfast.*

According to Contextualists, (4b) is not consciously accessible. And, as the following proposition demonstrates, it seems to be the case that we cannot use the cancelability test, as we did in the previous examples, to show that it is consciously accessible:

(4c) *I haven't had breakfast, but I've had breakfast this morning.*

This proposition clearly does not make sense. So, according to some philosophers, since the pragmatic enrichments in utterances like (4) cannot be explicitly cancelled, not all conversational implicatures are explicitly cancelable.⁶¹

Now, I think that (4c) does not make sense, not because we understand it to mean something that is a contradiction, namely the proposition that *I haven't had breakfast this morning, but I've had breakfast this morning*, but rather because the semantic content of (4) is consciously accessible. That is, we understand (4c) to mean the proposition that *I haven't had breakfast ever, but I've had breakfast this morning*, which obviously does not make sense.

I propose that for this type of example, we can cancel the putative conversational implicature in the following way:

(4d) *I haven't had breakfast, and certainly I haven't had breakfast this morning.*

In other words, an implicature *p* can be cancelled by adding to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that *p*, the content *and certainly p*. If Recanati is correct and the semantic content of (4) is not consciously accessible, then (4d) would be redundant: we would understand it to mean the proposition that *I haven't had breakfast this morning, and certainly I haven't had breakfast this morning*. But (4d) is clearly not redundant. This is because the semantic content of (4) is consciously accessible, and we understand (4d) to mean the

⁶¹ See Burton-Roberts (2006).

proposition that *I haven't had breakfast ever, and certainly I haven't had breakfast this morning.*

A similar analysis can be given for the following negative sentences:

(5) Jack and Jill aren't married.

(6) John doesn't have three children.

Finally, let's consider other kinds of pragmatically determined content that are cancelable. One such content is the result of the pragmatic process of lexical disambiguation. Consider an utterance of the following sentence, where "bank" is initially understood to mean a financial institution building:

(7) She went to the bank.

We can cancel the initially understood meaning of "bank" in the utterance of (7), as the following proposition demonstrates:

(7a) *She went to the bank, not the financial institution building, but the river bank.*

Now, according to my argument here, the fact that the first meaning of "bank" (i.e., the financial institution building) is cancelable shows that the second meaning of "bank" (i.e., the river bank) is consciously accessible when we hear an utterance of (7). I think that this analysis is certainly acceptable. That is, it is acceptable to think that when we hear a word that is ambiguous, the different definitions of the word are consciously accessible. Of course, we only consciously access the meaning of the word that we think is being used, but we certainly *could* consciously access the other meaning(s), as is evident when a cancellation is being made. Thus, we see that the cancelability test (i.e., as it is used to show the conscious accessibility of the semantic content) is reliable even when we consider other types of cancellations.

3.3.2 Force Argument

According to this next argument, when we compare an utterance of some sentence *S* with an utterance of a sentence that expresses what Recanati thinks is said by the utterance of *S*, we see that the second utterance⁶² sometimes does not capture the full force of what the speaker communicated by her utterance of *S*. This, I think, suggests that the semantic content of *S* is consciously accessible and playing a role in our interpretation of the utterance of *S*.

Here's an example. Suppose Mary likes Bill and is hoping that he will ask her out on a date. One day, Mary gets a phone call from Bill. The following is part of their conversation:

Bill: *What are you doing this Friday?*

Mary: *I'm not doing anything.*

Let's consider Mary's utterance. The semantic content of the sentence she uttered is the proposition that *Mary is not doing anything at all*. But this proposition, according to Recanati, is not consciously accessible. It is unreasonable to suppose that there is not one thing that Mary is doing on Friday; it is also unreasonable to suppose that Bill would think that there is not one thing that Mary is doing on Friday. Therefore, the semantic content, since it is not what our pre-theoretic intuitions tell us is said by Mary's utterance, is not what is said by her utterance, according to Recanati. Rather, what is said is something along the lines of *Mary is not doing anything important*.

But, compare the utterances of the following two sentences:

(8) I'm not doing anything.

(8a) I'm not doing anything important.

Let's suppose that Mary utters (8a) instead of (8) in the conversation above. In this case, I think that her utterance is less "forceful" than her original utterance. When Bill hears an utterance of

⁶² This is the content that we normally understand as what was communicated by the utterance of *S*.

(8) in reply to his question, I think that he clearly gets the message that Mary is very interested in doing something with him and that even if Mary has something to do on Friday she will change her plans to meet with him. On the other hand, if Bill hears an utterance of (8a) in reply to his question, I don't think that it is as clear to him that Mary will drop everything to meet with him if he asks her out. He might think that she has something unimportant that she still needs to do or that she'd rather do than meet with him. It seems to be the case, therefore, that an utterance of (8a) does not capture the full force of what Mary communicated by her utterance of (8).

Here is a similar example. Suppose *A* has set his friend *B* up on a blind date with a girl named Julia. Consider the following conversation between *A* and *B*:

A: Are you sure I will get along with her?

B: Everybody likes Julia.

The semantic content of the sentence *B* uttered is the proposition that *Everybody in the whole world likes Julia*. This proposition, according to Recanati, is also not consciously accessible and is, therefore, not what is said by *B*'s utterance. Instead, what is said is something along the lines of *Everybody who knows Julia (that I am aware of) likes her*.

But, again, compare the utterances of the following two sentences:

(9) Everybody likes Julia.

(9a) Everybody who knows Julia (that I am aware of) likes her.

If *B* utters (9a) instead of (9) in the conversation above, I think that his utterance is less "forceful" than his original utterance. In uttering (9), *B* clearly gets across the message that he thinks that *A* will get along with Julia. But if *B* utters (9a) instead of (9), I think that he is less assuring to *A* that the two will get along. Therefore, similar to the previous example, it seems to

be the case that an utterance of (9a) does not capture the full force of what *B* communicated by his utterance of (9).

In both these examples, therefore, the original utterance seems to have more “force” than what Recanati thinks is said by the utterance. I propose that this “force” is the result of the hearer in some way grasping the semantic content of the sentence. For example, I think that an utterance of (9) is more “forceful” than an utterance of (9a) because the hearer, when she hears an utterance of (9), takes into consideration either consciously or subconsciously the proposition that *Everybody in the whole world likes Julia*; this, in turn, increases the “force” of the utterance. So, according to this analysis, the semantic content is in the hearer’s mind at the time of utterance, which shows that it is consciously accessible. A similar analysis can be given for the example involving (8) and (8a).

Such an analysis, I think, is plausible. If I say to you, “I will love you forever,” my utterance is more “forceful” than what Recanati thinks is said by my utterance, the proposition that *I will love you for as long as I live* (i.e., assuming that neither of us are considering love in an afterlife). Presumably, this is because you are in some sense aware that a possible interpretation of my utterance is the proposition that *I will love you for all eternity*, and this awareness contributes to the force of my utterance.

So according to the Force Argument, the reason why (8a) and (9a) do not capture the full force of what was communicated by the utterances of (8) and (9), respectively, is because the semantic content of (8) and (9) are consciously accessible and playing a role in our interpretation of the utterances of (8) and (9). This argument, therefore, supports my idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3), though they are not consciously accessed at the time of

utterance, are nevertheless consciously accessible and playing some role, perhaps subconsciously, in utterance interpretation.

3.3.3 Clarification Argument

Another way we can show that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are consciously accessible at the time of utterance is by asking for a clarification of what the speaker meant by her utterance. Consider the utterances of (1)-(3) again:

- (1) Jack and Jill are married.
- (2) I've had breakfast.
- (3) Mary got married and got pregnant.

For each of these utterances, we can ask for a clarification of what the speaker meant by asking the following questions, respectively:

- (1d) To each other?
- (2d) This morning?
- (3d) In that order?

The fact that we can legitimately ask such questions, I think, shows that the semantic contents of (1)-(3) are consciously accessible at the time of utterance. When we hear a typical utterance of (1), for example, it is certainly acceptable to respond by uttering (1d). It is acceptable, I think, because the semantic content of (1), the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*, is consciously accessible. If it was not consciously accessible, as Recanati thinks, and what is consciously accessible is just the proposition that *Jack and Jill are married to each other*, then it would be redundant to ask (1d). It would be just as redundant as uttering (1d) in response to an utterance of the following sentence:

- (11) Jack and Jill are related.

Obviously, we understand a typical utterance of (11) to mean the proposition that *Jack and Jill are related to each other*. That's why it would be redundant to utter (1d) in response to an utterance of (11). Now, if we understood an utterance of (1) to mean the proposition that *Jack and Jill are married to each other* and the semantic content was not consciously accessible, then it would be just as redundant to utter (1d) in response to an utterance of (1). But, the fact that we can legitimately utter (1d) in response to an utterance of (1), I think, shows that the semantic content of (1) is consciously accessible as a possible interpretation of the utterance of (1). A similar analysis, I think, can be given for the utterances of (2) and (3).⁶³

3.3.4 Parallelism Argument

I offer one last argument, a negative argument, to support the idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are consciously accessible at the time of utterance. Consider the following pairs of syntactically parallel sentences:⁶⁴

(2) I've had breakfast.

(12) I've had caviar.

(13) I have nothing to wear.

(14) I have nothing to repair.

According to Recanati, the semantic content of (2), the proposition that *I've had breakfast at least once before*, is not consciously accessible when we hear a typical utterance of (2). However, when we hear a typical utterance of (12), which is syntactically parallel to (2), the semantic content of (12), the proposition that *I've had caviar at least once before*, is consciously

⁶³ The argument that was made against the Cancelability Argument might be made against this argument, namely that the semantic contents of (1)-(3) are consciously accessible *only when* a clarification is actually being asked. But, for the same reason mentioned on pp. 79-80, I think that this argument is implausible.

⁶⁴ These examples are from Bach (1994).

accessible. Similarly, according to Recanati, the semantic content of (13), the proposition that *I have nothing at all to wear*, is not consciously accessible when we hear a typical utterance of (13). However, when we hear a typical utterance of (14), which is syntactically parallel to (13), the semantic content of (13), the proposition that *I have nothing at all to repair*, is consciously accessible.

Now, given the obvious linguistic and structural similarities between syntactically parallel sentences, I think that Recanati needs to give an explanation for why one sentence is consciously accessible at the time of utterance, while another sentence that is syntactically parallel to it is not consciously accessible. Recall, Recanati's view is that the semantic content of a sentence like (2) is not able to be consciously accessed at the time of utterance, not just that it is not being consciously accessed.

On the view that I favor, no such explanation is needed. According to this view, the semantic contents of (2) and (12), as well as the semantic contents of (13) and (14), are all consciously accessible at the time of utterance. But when we hear typical utterances of (2) and (13), the semantic contents of these sentences, though they are consciously accessible, are not consciously accessed for some reason that I will discuss in the next section. Again, given the obvious linguistic and structural similarities between syntactically parallel sentences, I think that this is a more plausible view than Recanati's.

Here is another version of the Parallelism Argument. Consider another pair of syntactically parallel sentences:⁶⁵

- (15) The ham sandwich is getting restless.
- (16) The ham sandwich is getting eaten.

⁶⁵ These examples are also from Bach (1994).

Assuming that both sentences are uttered in a normal restaurant setting, Recanati claims that the semantic content of (15), the absurd proposition that *The actual ham sandwich is getting restless*, is not consciously accessible because we intuit as what the speaker said the proposition that *The ham sandwich orderer is getting restless*. However, according to Recanati, the semantic content of the syntactically parallel sentence (16), the proposition that *The actual ham sandwich is getting eaten*, is consciously accessible.

As I stated earlier, given the obvious linguistic and structural similarities between syntactically parallel sentences, I think that Recanati needs to give an explanation for why one sentence is consciously accessible at the time of utterance, while another sentence that is syntactically parallel to it is not consciously accessible. For this pair of examples, Recanati does in fact give an explanation. He writes:

In my framework, the process of metonymical transfer is 'local', not global, yet it is sensitive to the linguistic (and extralinguistic) context in which the expression which receives the metonymical interpretation occurs. In particular, it is sensitive to the meaning of the predicate expression.⁶⁶

For Recanati, therefore, the semantic content of (15) is not consciously accessible because at the “local” constituent level, once we interpret the predicate expression, “is getting restless,” which requires a person (or at least an animate object), we immediately understand the subject expression, “ham sandwich,” to mean the ham sandwich orderer and not the actual ham sandwich. Thus, it is the concept of the ham sandwich orderer that goes into our “global” interpretation of the utterance of (15), and the literal proposition that *the actual ham sandwich is getting restless* need never be entertained.

But consider an utterance of the following sentence in a similar context:

⁶⁶ Recanati (2004), p. 33.

(17) The ham sandwich is getting lonely.

On Recanati's view, the semantic content of (17) is not consciously accessible because at the "local" constituent level, the ham sandwich orderer is a better candidate than the ham sandwich for the status of argument for the predicate expression, "is getting lonely," which obviously requires a person (or at least an animate object). Thus, it is the concept of the ham sandwich orderer that goes into our global interpretation of the utterance of (17), and the literal proposition that *the actual ham sandwich is getting lonely* need never be entertained.

My intuitions, however, disagree about this example. I think that the semantic content of (17) is consciously accessible at the time of utterance. It seems clear to me that when we hear an utterance of (17), we consciously entertain the literal proposition that *the actual ham sandwich is lonely*, consider it as a possible interpretation of the utterance (e.g., it can be input for the implicature that the ham sandwich orderer should order another dish), and, if we see that it is not a good interpretation, infer that the speaker meant by her utterance something else, namely the proposition that *the ham sandwich orderer is lonely*.

This analysis of (17) is consistent with the view that I favor, according to which the semantic contents of the syntactically parallel sentences (15), (16) and (17) are all consciously accessible at the time of utterance. Again, given the obvious linguistic and structural similarities between syntactically parallel sentences, I think that this is a more plausible view than Recanati's view, which, in my opinion, incorrectly claims that the process of metonymical transfer occurs "locally." To conclude, I think that each of the four arguments presented in this section shows that the semantic contents of sentence like (1)-(3), though they are not consciously accessed at the time of utterance, are consciously accessible.

3.4 The Significant Role of Conventions

In the previous section, I gave four arguments to support the idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are consciously accessible at the time of utterance. But if the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) are consciously accessible, as I claim, then why are they not being consciously accessed at the time of utterance? Recanati, of course, thinks that it is precisely because they are not consciously accessible that they are not being consciously accessed. But, as I will argue below, I think the reason is that there are certain conventions that influence the hearer's interpretation of utterances of sentences like (1)-(3). These conventions, I think, cause the hearer to quickly intuit the intended implicatures as what were communicated, making it unnecessary to consciously access the semantic contents. To put it another way, these conventions cause the interpretation process for utterance of sentences like (1)-(3) to be a speedy subconscious one. Assuming that this explanation is correct, it further shows the plausibility of the idea that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) play the input role in a speedy subconscious process that "mirrors" the Gricean implicature process by explaining why it might seem as though the semantic contents of these sentences are not consciously accessible (or not accessed in any way) when, in fact, they are.

3.4.1 Grice's Maxims of Conversation

Before I show how certain conventions influence our interpretation of utterances like (1)-(3), I want to review how Grice explains the implicature process in general. According to Grice, conversation is based on a shared principle of cooperation, which he thinks goes something like this:

Cooperative Principle

Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.⁶⁷

He introduces the following four maxims to flesh out this principle:⁶⁸

Maxim of Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relation

Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

According to Grice, a conversational implicature is generated when a speaker fails to fulfill a maxim in some way or other.⁶⁹ Here is a well-known example: Suppose a speaker utters “Miss X produced a series of sounds that corresponded closely with the score of ‘Home sweet home’.”⁷⁰ By her utterance, the speaker has flouted the Maxim of Manner, more specifically, the maxim “Be brief.” To preserve the assumption that the speaker is being a cooperative conversationalist, the hearer concludes that the speaker has implicated that Miss X’s performance was not great.

So, for Grice, it is failure to fulfill a maxim that gives rise to conversational implicatures. In

⁶⁷ Grice (1989), p. 26.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁹ According to Grice, a speaker can fail to fulfill a maxim in a number of ways: (i) by unostentatiously violating a maxim, (ii) by opting out, (iii) when being faced with a clash and (iv) by flouting a maxim (Grice (1989), p. 30).

⁷⁰ Grice (1989), p. 37.

what follows, however, I argue that in some cases when a speaker attempts to get across an implicature by merely failing to fulfill a maxim, the hearer has a difficult time arriving at the intended implicature. In these cases, the speaker also needs to follow a certain maxim, which I will call the *Maxim of Convention*, in order to get across the intended implicature without difficulty. Moreover, I argue that when a speaker follows the Maxim of Convention to effectively communicate a conversational implicature, oftentimes the hearer does not consciously access the semantic content of the uttered sentence. This is because the speaker, in following the Maxim of Convention, takes into account certain conventions in making her utterance, which causes the hearer to quickly intuit the intended implicature as what was communicated. In these cases, it might seem as though the semantic content is not consciously accessible to the hearer. Examples like (1)-(3), I think, fall under these cases.

3.4.2 Introducing the Maxim of Convention

Consider an utterance of the following sentence in some normal context:

(18) I have a million things to do.

By this utterance, the speaker likely gets across the following implicature:

(18a) *I have a lot of things to do.*

Here is how the hearer arrives at this implicature, according to the Gricean implicature process: The hearer recognizes that by what she said (i.e., the semantic content of (18)) the speaker has flouted the Maxim of Quality, according to which one must not say what one believes to be false. So, to preserve the assumption that the speaker is being a cooperative conversationalist, the hearer concludes that the speaker has implicated (18a).

Now suppose that the speaker utters the following sentence instead of (18) in the same

normal context:

(19) I have one million one hundred forty-four thousand things to do.

Even though (19) is structurally parallel to and just as much of an exaggeration as (18), my intuitions tell me that an utterance of (19) does not give rise to the implicature (18a) in the same way that an utterance of (18) does. If I heard an utterance of (19) in some normal context, I would not immediately understand it to mean (18a) as I would if I heard an utterance of (18) in the same context. Instead, I would consider the semantic content of (19), i.e., the proposition that *I have (literally) one million one hundred forty-four thousand things to do*, as what the speaker likely wanted to communicate by her utterance. I might eventually arrive at the implicature (18a) via the Gricean implicature process but not without some difficulty.

This example, I think, shows that there is something that makes it easy for us to interpret the utterance of (18) as (18a) and more difficult for us to interpret the utterance of (19) as the same implicature. I think this something is convention. My ideas about the specific conventions that influence our interpretation of utterances are still a work in progress, but perhaps in this case there is some convention in effect that involves popular expressions. That is, perhaps the speaker in uttering (18) is following some convention of using a popular expression like “a million things to do” instead of an unpopular expression like “one million one hundred forty-four thousand things to do.” And it is because the speaker is following this convention that she is able to get across the implicature (18a) by her utterance of (18) without difficulty. From this, we might say that in some cases, to effectively communicate an intended implicature, the speaker must use popular expressions.

Here are some other examples that show the importance of following this particular type of

convention in getting some implicatures across:

(20) I would kill for that job.

(21) I would commit arson for that job.

(22) Sally is a stick.

(23) Sally is a pencil.

In some normal context, an utterance of (20) typically gives rise to the following implicature:

(20a) *I really want that job.*

But in the same context, an utterance of (21), even though it is structurally parallel to and just as much of an exaggeration as (20), does not give rise to the implicature (20a) in the same way that an utterance of (20) does. Just like in the above example, if I heard an utterance of (21) in some normal context, I would not immediately understand it to mean (20a) as I would if I heard an utterance of (20) in the same context. Instead, I would consider the semantic content of (21), i.e., the proposition that *I would (literally) commit arson for that job*, as what the speaker likely wanted to communicate by her utterance. I might eventually arrive at the implicature (20a) via the Gricean implicature process but, again, not without some difficulty.

Similarly, in some normal context, an utterance of (22) typically gives rise to the following implicature:

(22a) *Sally is very thin.*

But, again, an utterance of the structurally parallel and similarly exaggerated sentence (23) in the same context does not give rise to the implicature (22a) in the same way that an utterance of (22) does. If I heard an utterance of (23) in some normal context, I would be a little confused. Instead of immediately understanding it to mean (22a), as I would if I heard an utterance of (22) in the same context, I would have to think about what Sally and a pencil have in common. Again, I

might eventually arrive at the implicature (22a) via the Gricean implicature process but not without some difficulty.

Now, according to my analysis, the reason why a speaker can effectively communicate the implicature (20a) by uttering (20) but not by uttering (21) is because, in uttering the former, she is following the convention of using a popular expression like “kill for an X” instead of an unpopular expression like “commit arson for an X.” Likewise, in uttering (22), the speaker is also following this particular convention by using an expression that is commonly used to indicate thinness. She is, therefore, able to get across the implicature (22a) by her utterance without difficulty. Had she not adhered to this convention and uttered a sentence like (23) instead, she would not have gotten across this implicature as easily.

At this point I want to introduce what I call the Maxim of Convention, which consists of two specific maxims:

Maxim of Convention

1. Formulate your sentences in accordance to linguistic conventions.
2. Formulate your sentences in accordance to social/cultural conventions.

Again, the Maxim of Convention is different from the Gricean Maxims in the sense that it needs to be followed in order for some conversational implicatures to get across without difficulty. In what follows, I discuss each of the two maxims in detail.

3.4.3 Maxim of Convention, part 1

Here again is the first of the two maxims that make up the Maxim of Convention:

Maxim of Convention, part 1

Formulate your sentences in accordance to linguistic conventions.

Under this maxim there is undoubtedly a good number of submaxims that can be specified, but so far I have thought of just three:

Submaxim 1: Use popular expressions.

Submaxim 2: Use words that are commonly used in the particular situation.

Submaxim 3: Use nonspecific terms, which includes round numbers.

Since I have already discussed the first submaxim, let's look at some examples for the second:

(24) I am starving.

(25) I am malnourished.

(26) His father is insane.

(27) His father is of unsound mind.

(28) She almost died writing the term paper.

(29) She almost passed away writing the term paper.

In some normal context, utterances of (24), (26) and (28) typically give rise to the following conversational implicatures, respectively:

(24a) *I am extremely hungry (but not to the point of starvation).*

(26a) *His father is very unreasonable (but not to the point of having a mental disorder).*

(28a) *She had an extremely difficult time writing the term paper.*

Now, in the same context of utterance, suppose (25), (27) and (29) were uttered instead of (24), (26) and (28), respectively. Even though the two sentences that make up each of the pairs of sentences above have basically the same meaning, the second sentences do not give rise to the implicatures, (24a), (26a) and (28a), respectively, in the same way as the first sentences. For example, if I heard an utterance of (25) in some normal context, I would not immediately understand it to mean (24a) as I would if I heard an utterance of (24) in the same context. Instead, I would consider the semantic content of (25), i.e., the proposition that *I am (literally)*

malnourished, as what the speaker likely wanted to communicate by her utterance. Again, I might eventually arrive at the implicature (24a) via the Gricean implicature process but not without some difficulty. A similar analysis, I think, could be given for the other two pairs of sentences.

Again, according to my analysis, the reason why a speaker can effectively communicate the implicatures (24a), (26a) and (28a) by uttering (24), (26) and (28), respectively, but not by uttering (25), (27) and (29), respectively, is because, in uttering the former sentences, she is following some convention of using words that are commonly used in the particular situation, like “starving,” “insane” and “died,” instead of words that are not commonly used, like “malnourished,” “of unsound mind” and “passed away,” respectively.

Next, here are some examples that show the importance of following the third submaxim in getting some implicatures across:

- (30) A baby could pass the midterm exam.
- (31) A seven month, three days old baby could pass the midterm exam.

- (32) I could eat a cow.
- (33) I could eat a dairy cow.

- (34) It's 200 degrees in here.
- (35) It's 213 degrees in here.

Let's consider the first set of examples. In some normal context, an utterance of (30) typically gives rise to the following implicature:

(30a) *The midterm exam is very simple.*

Now, if a speaker utters (31) instead of (30) in the same context, she should get across an implicature similar to (30a), given that she is flouting the Maxim of Quality by uttering (31), just

as she is by uttering (30). We could even say that by uttering (31), she is flouting the Maxim of Quantity (i.e., “Do not make your contribution more informative than is required”) or perhaps the Maxim of Manner (i.e., “Be brief”). But in this case, not only does the speaker have a difficult time getting across the implicature (30a) by her utterance, I think that she is unable to get it across at all, at least in a normal context of utterance. Instead, what she communicates by her utterance is the semantic content of (31).

Again, I think this shows that there is some convention in effect here. And in this case, the convention makes it easy for us to interpret the utterance of (30) as (30a) and prevents us from interpreting the utterance of (31) as the same implicature. The particular convention in effect here, I think, is one that involves nonspecific terms. More specifically, I think that the speaker in uttering (30) is following some convention of using a nonspecific term like “baby” instead of a specific term like “a seven months, three days old baby.” And it is because the speaker is following this convention in addition to flouting the Gricean maxims that she is able to get across the implicature (30a) by her utterance of (30).

Likewise, in uttering (32) and (34), the speaker is also following the convention of using nonspecific terms (which includes round numbers). She is, therefore, able to get across the following implicatures, respectively, by her utterances:

(32a) *I am extremely hungry.*

(34a) *It's very hot in here.*

Had she not adhered to this convention and uttered (33) instead of (32) and (35) instead of (34) in a normal context of utterance, I think that she would not have gotten across these implicatures at all. Rather, what she would have communicated by her utterances of (33) and (35) are the semantic contents of those sentences, respectively.

3.4.4 Result of following the Maxim of Convention

Hopefully, at this point I've shown that following the Maxim of Convention is sometimes required in order to get across an intended implicature without difficulty. Before I go on to discuss the second of the two maxims that make up the Maxim of Convention, I want to make the following point: When a speaker follows the Maxim of Convention to effectively communicate a conversational implicature, oftentimes the hearer does not consciously access the semantic content of the uttered sentence.

Here again are the sentences we looked at where the speaker, in uttering them, is adhering to the Maxim of Convention (the intended implicatures are stated below the sentences):

(18) I have a million things to do.

(18a) *I have a lot of things to do.*

(20) I would kill for that job.

(20a) *I really want that job.*

(22) Sally is a stick.

(22a) *Sally is very thin.*

(24) I am starving.

(24a) *I am extremely hungry (but not to the point of starvation).*

(26) His father is insane.

(26a) *His father is very unreasonable (but not to the point of having a mental disorder).*

(28) She almost died writing the term paper.

(28a) *She had an extremely difficult time writing the term paper.*

(30) A baby could pass the midterm exam.

(30a) *The midterm exam is very simple.*

(32) I could eat a cow.

(32a) *I am extremely hungry.*

- (34) It's 200 degrees in here.
(34a) *It's very hot in here.*

In all these examples, I think that the hearer does not consciously access the semantic contents of the utterances in order to arrive at the intended implicatures. Take a typical utterance of (24), for example. When a person hears this utterance, she does not consciously access its semantic content, i.e., the proposition that *I am (literally) starving*. Instead, what she is consciously aware of at the time of utterance is the intended implicature.

Taking into consideration the previous section, I propose that the semantic contents of the utterances in these examples are consciously accessible at the time of utterance. They are not consciously accessed, however, because of certain conventions that the speaker is following in making the utterances. These conventions, discussed earlier, cause the hearer to quickly intuit the intended implicatures as what were communicated, making it unnecessary to consciously access the semantic contents. This, in turn, makes it seem as though the semantic contents are not consciously accessible.

Now, I think that some of the examples that Contextualists use to illustrate the Inaccessibility Problem (which states that for some sentences, semantic interpretation gives us a proposition that complete/truth-conditional but not consciously accessible) are ones like the above. That is, they are ones where certain conventions cause the hearer to quickly intuit the intended implicatures as what were communicated, making it seem as though the semantic contents of the utterances are not consciously accessible when, in fact, they are.

Consider the following familiar example:

- (36) She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped.

Typically, when we hear an utterance of (36), what we are consciously aware of is the following

proposition:

(36a) *She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped off the cliff.*

From this, Contextualists argue that the semantic content (36), which I state below, is not consciously accessible:

(36b) *She ran to the edge of the cliff and jumped (in some direction).*

According to my analysis, however, the semantic content is consciously accessible at the time of utterance. We may not be consciously aware of it, however, because some convention is causing us to quickly intuit the implicature as what was communicated. That there is some convention influencing our interpretation of the utterance is apparent, I think, when we contrast (36) with the following sentence:

(37) *She ran to the edge of the cliff and hopped.*

In the same normal context of utterance, suppose (37) was uttered instead of (36). Even though the two sentences have basically the same meaning, the utterance of (37) does not give rise to the parallel implicature, *She ran to the edge of the cliff and hopped off the cliff*, in the same way that an utterance of (36) gives rise to the implicature (36a). If I heard an utterance of (36) in some normal context, I would immediately understand it to mean (36a). But if I heard an utterance of (37) in the same context, I would not immediately understand it to mean the parallel implicature. Instead, I would consider the semantic content of (37), i.e., the proposition that *She ran to the edge of the cliff and hopped (in some direction)*, as what the speaker likely wanted to communicate by her utterance. I might eventually arrive at the parallel implicature via the Gricean implicature process but not without some difficulty.

This example, I think, shows that there is some convention that makes it easy for us to

interpret the utterance of (36) as (36a) and more difficult for us to interpret the utterance of (37) as the parallel implicature. In this case, I think that the speaker, in uttering (36), is following some convention of using a word that is commonly used in the particular situation, i.e., “jumped,” instead of a word that is not commonly used, i.e., “hopped.” And it is because the speaker is following such a convention that we are able to quickly get to the intended implicature, which, in turn, makes it seem as though the semantic content is not consciously accessible at the time of utterance. But just as the semantic content of (37) is consciously accessible, I think that the semantic content of (36) is consciously accessible; it’s just not consciously accessed like the former. And this, again, is due to the effects of convention.

In the next part, I discuss the second of the two maxims that make up the Maxim of Convention. Though some of the examples that Contextualists use to illustrate the Inaccessibility Problem are ones that are linguistically conventional, many of the examples, I think, are ones that are socially/culturally conventional (or both linguistically and socially/culturally conventional). In other words, they are ones where social/cultural conventions (or both linguistic and social/cultural conventions) cause the hearer to quickly intuit the intended implicatures as what were communicated, making it unnecessary to consciously access the semantic contents of the uttered sentences.

3.4.5 Maxim of Convention, part 2

Here again is the second of the two maxims that make up the Maxim of Convention:

Maxim of Convention, part 2

Formulate your sentences in accordance to social/cultural conventions.

I think that there are many social/cultural conventions that influence our interpretation of utterances. Again, my ideas about the specific conventions that influence our interpretation of utterances are still a work in progress, but in attempt to identify some of them, I want to return to our main examples (1)-(3):

- (1) Jack and Jill are married.
- (2) I've had breakfast.
- (3) Mary got married and got pregnant.

Let's consider each in turn. Typically, when we hear an utterance of (1), what we are consciously aware of is the following proposition:

(1a) *Jack and Jill are married to each other.*

From this, Contextualists argue that the semantic content of (1), which I state below, is not consciously accessible:

(1b) *Jack and Jill are each married.*

But, again, according to my analysis, the semantic content is consciously accessible at the time of utterance. We may not be consciously aware of it, however, because some convention is causing us to quickly intuit the implicature as what was communicated. That there is some convention influencing our interpretation of the utterance is apparent, I think, when we contrast (1) with the following sentences:

- (38) Jack and Jill are each married.
- (39) Jack is married and Jill is married.

In the same normal context, suppose (38) or (39) were uttered instead of (1). Even though all three sentences have the same literal meaning, I think that only the utterance of (1) gives rise to the implicature (1a). What gets communicated by the other utterances, at least in a normal

context of utterance, are the semantic contents of the uttered sentences. This, I think, shows that there is some convention that is making us interpret the utterance of (1) as (1a). In this case, I think that it is a linguistic convention of using a common phrase like “X and Y are married” to get across the implicature that *X and Y are married to each other*.

But, in addition to this linguistic convention, I think that there is some social/cultural convention that is influencing our interpretation of the utterance of (1). Contrast (1) with the following sentence:

(40) Mr. Smith and Mrs. Brown are married.

In the same normal context, which I will now specify as a normal *American* context, suppose (40) was uttered instead of (1). Further, suppose that Mr. Smith and Jack refer to the same person, as do Mrs. Brown and Jill. Then, even though the two sentences are logically equivalent, the utterance of (40) does not give rise to the parallel implicature, *Mr. Smith and Mrs. Brown are married to each other*, in the same way that an utterance of (1) gives rise to the implicature (1a). If I heard an utterance of (1) in some normal American context, I would immediately understand it to mean (1a). But if I heard an utterance of (40) in the same context, I would not immediately understand it to mean the parallel implicature. Instead, I would consider the semantic content of (40), i.e., the proposition that *Mr. Smith and Mrs. Brown are each married*, as what the speaker likely wanted to communicate by her utterance. I might eventually arrive at the parallel implicature via the Gricean implicature process but, again, not without some difficulty.

This, I think, shows that there is some other convention that is influencing our interpretation of (1). In this case, I think that we are aware of some social/cultural convention that in America a married couple typically shares the same last name. This knowledge, I think, is also playing a

role in making it easy for us to interpret (1) as (1a) and, at the same time, making it very difficult for us to interpret the utterance of (40) as the parallel implicature. Had the speaker uttered (40) in some culture (e.g., Korean culture) where there is a shared knowledge that women usually don't take their husband's last name, I think she would have gotten across the parallel implicature more easily.

With regard to (1), therefore, I think that there are a number of conventions, both linguistic and social/cultural, that influence the hearer's interpretation of the utterance. These conventions, I think, are what cause the hearer to quickly intuit the implicature (1a) as what was communicated, making it unnecessary for the hearer to consciously access the semantic content of the uttered sentence. This, in turn, makes it seem as though the semantic content is not consciously accessible. But just as the semantic contents of (38)-(40) are consciously accessible, I think that the semantic content of (1) is consciously accessible; it's just not consciously accessed like the former contents. And this, again, is due to the effects of convention.

A similar analysis, I think, can be given for (2):

(2) I've had breakfast.

Typically, when we hear an utterance of (2), what we are consciously aware of is the following proposition:

(2a) *I've had breakfast today.*

From this, Contextualists argue that the semantic content of (2), which I state below, is not consciously accessible:

(2b) *I've had breakfast at least once before.*

Again, according to my analysis, the semantic content of (2) is consciously accessible at the

time of utterance. We may not be consciously aware of it, however, because some convention is causing us to quickly intuit the implicature as what was communicated. That there is some convention that is influencing our interpretation of the utterance is apparent, I think, when we contrast (2) with the following sentence:

(41) I've had caviar.

In the same normal context, which again I will specify as a normal *American* context, suppose (41) was uttered instead of (2). Even though the two sentences are structurally parallel, the utterance of (41) does not give rise to the parallel implicature, *I've had caviar today*, in the same way that an utterance of (2) gives rise to the implicature (2a). If I heard an utterance of (2) in some normal American context, I would immediately understand it to mean (2a). But if I heard an utterance of (41) in the same context, I would not immediately understand it to mean the parallel implicature. Instead, I would consider the semantic content of (41), i.e., the proposition that *I've had caviar at least once before*, as what the speaker likely wanted to communicate by her utterance. I might eventually arrive at the parallel implicature via the Gricean implicature process but, again, not without some difficulty.

This, I think, shows that there is some convention that is influencing our interpretation of (2). In this case, I think that we are aware of some social/cultural convention that in America people typically have breakfast every morning, and this knowledge is making it easy for us to interpret (2) as (2a). Moreover, we are also aware that in America people typically do not have caviar daily, and this other knowledge is making it difficult for us to interpret (41) as the parallel implicature. Had the speaker uttered (41) in some culture where caviar is typically eaten every day, I think she would have gotten across the parallel implicature more easily.

Therefore, in this case as well I think that it is some convention (or conventions) that is causing the hearer to quickly intuit (2a) as what was communicated by the utterance of (2), making it seem as though the semantic content of (2) is not consciously accessible. But, again, on my analysis, just as the semantic content of (41) is consciously accessible, the semantic content of (2) is consciously accessible; it's just not consciously accessed like the former. And this, again, is due to the effects of convention.

Finally, let's consider (3):

(3) Mary got married and got pregnant.

Typically, when we hear an utterance of (3), what we are consciously aware of is the following proposition:

(3a) *Mary got married and then got pregnant.*

From this, Contextualists argue that the semantic content (3), which I state below, is not consciously accessible:

(3b) *Mary got married and Mary got pregnant (order of events not specified).*

Again, according to my analysis, the semantic content of (3) is consciously accessible at the time of utterance. In this case, I think we may not be consciously aware of it because there are several conventions that cause us to quickly intuit the implicature as what was communicated. First, there is the obvious linguistic convention of using a common phrase like "X and Y" to get across the implicature that *X and then Y*. An utterance of the following sentence, though it is logically equivalent to (3), typically does not give rise to (3b) since it too adheres to this convention:

(42) Mary got pregnant and got married.

But, in addition to this linguistic convention, I think that there is also some social/cultural convention that is influencing our interpretation of the utterance of (3). Contrast (3) with the following sentence:

(43) Mary got a dog and got a cat.

In the same normal context, suppose (43) was uttered instead of (3). Even though the two sentences are structurally parallel, the utterance of (43) does not give rise to the parallel implicature, *Mary got a dog and then got a cat*, in the same way that an utterance of (3) gives rise to the implicature (3a). If I heard an utterance of (3) in some normal context, I would immediately understand it to mean (3a). But if I heard an utterance of (43) in the same context, I would not immediately understand it to mean the parallel implicature. Instead, I would consider the semantic content of (43), i.e., the proposition that *Mary got a dog and Mary got a cat (order of events not specified)*, as what the speaker likely wanted to communicate by her utterance. I might eventually arrive at the parallel implicature via the Gricean implicature process but not without some difficulty. This, I think, shows that there is some other convention that is influencing our interpretation of (3). In this case, I think that we are aware of some social/cultural convention that people typically specify the order of the two events, getting married and getting pregnant, but not of getting a dog and getting a cat.

In conclusion, with regard to (1)-(3), as well as other examples that Contextualists use to illustrate the Inaccessibility Problem, I think they are ones where certain linguistic and social/cultural conventions cause the hearer to quickly intuit the intended implicatures as what were communicated. So when a speaker follows the Maxim of Convention, taking into account these conventions, the hearer oftentimes does not consciously access the semantic contents of the

uttered sentences, which, in turn, might make it seem as though they are not consciously accessible. But, on my analysis, the semantic contents are consciously accessible, just not consciously accessed because the kinds of conventions we discussed cause the interpretation process for these utterances to be a speedy subconscious one. And in this speedy subconscious process that “mirrors” the Gricean implicature process, I hope to have shown in this chapter that it is plausible that the semantic contents of sentences like (1)-(3) play the input role.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I endorsed a version of Semantic Minimalism by defending the following two points about the semantic content of declarative sentences:

Point 1

The semantic content is a complete/truth-conditional proposition.

Point 2

The semantic content is useful to a theory of utterance interpretation.

According to the version of Semantic Minimalism that I favor, the sentence “Tipper is ready” semantically expresses the complete/truth-conditional, but also unspecific, proposition that *Tipper is (in some respect) ready*. In Chapter 2, I argued that Contextualists have no good arguments against this view and, since their own view leads to the undesirable conclusion that a great number of sentences (that they think are semantically complete), and perhaps all sentences, are actually semantically incomplete, I concluded that the Minimalist view that I favor is a more reasonable view than Contextualism.

Moreover, according to this view, the semantic content of a sentence like “Jack and Jill are married,” i.e., the proposition that *Jack and Jill are each married*, is always consciously accessible at the time of utterance although, at times, not consciously accessed. In Chapter 3, I argued for the plausibility of the idea that the semantic content of a sentence like “Jack and Jill are married” is important to a theory of utterance interpretation in that it plays the input role in a speedy subconscious process that “mirrors” the Gricean implicature process.

I realize that the Minimalist view that I favor has not been fully supported in this dissertation. However, in showing that the view is more reasonable than Contextualism in the ways that I

discussed and that it is plausible in terms of the role that it claims the semantic content plays in a theory of utterance interpretation, I hope to have contributed in some way towards a proper understanding of the semantic content of declarative sentences and the role it plays in explaining communicative success.

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