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Metasemantics: A Normative Perspective (and the Case of Mood)

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22.1 Introduction: Metasemantic Debates

David Kaplan and Robert Stalnaker articulated an important distinction between *semantics* and *metasemantics* or *foundational semantics*, ascribing complementary roles to each. To the former category belong theories that assign meanings to their bearers, prominent among them linguistic expressions. To the latter belong theories that provide “the basis” for ascribing such meanings (Kaplan, 1989b: 573–574) or state “what the facts are” that give these meanings to their bearers (Stalnaker, 1997: 535). This is a metaphysical undertaking – one concerning the *grounding* of meaning-facts, i.e. what *determines*, *fixes*, or *constitutes* them.¹ Like Fine (2007), I take this sort of project to be wider than Kaplan and Stalnaker appear to envisage: related issues arise about representational mental states, and about squarely pragmatic matters such as conversational implicatures.² But the central concern remains the facts in virtue of which expressions in natural languages have their meanings (Schiffer, 2016: 503, 511).

The terminology in which we have cashed out this undertaking is recent, but the concern itself has a long history, as long as the philosophy of language.³ Thus, Grice (1957) offers a metasemantics on which the meaning relation is at its heart psychologically determined by a particular

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¹ Burgess and Sherman also point this out in their introduction to a recent compilation (2014a: 3), as does Jaszczolt in her related contribution to this.

² Aptly, Jaszczolt calls it “metapragmatics” in her contribution to this volume (Chapter 7).

³ Cf. also Burgess and Sherman (2014: 3) and Jaszczolt (Chapter 7, this volume).

kind of reflexive intentions – Neale (2016) provides an up-to-date version. Davidson, on the other hand, argued both for a Tarskian truth-conditional format for semantic theories, and an interpretativist metasemantics to decide which one better characterizes languages in use – cf. Glüer (2011, 2018) and the essays in Lepore and Ludwig (2013).

In a relatively recent review on the topic (García-Carpintero, 2012a), I outlined and referenced what I took to be the most prominent metasemantic proposals along with these two: the Chomskyan alternative psychological view, which appeals instead to “subpersonal” states, a “Platonist” view that thinks of languages as abstract entities, and the Austinian normative approach that I myself favor, promoted by Alston (1964), Austin (1962), and Searle (1969).⁴ Although displaced for a while by the influence of Gricean and Chomskyan views, it has made a significant return of late, and it is now favored by many philosophers and linguists. On this view, the meaning-facts about natural languages are determined by social norms and social conventions.

Lewis (1979) is a deservedly influential forerunner of current versions. With his “scorekeeping” analogy, Lewis showed how to model some of the normative facts that play crucial metasemantic roles in them. My goal in this review is to present recent debates on the metasemantic undertaking from an Austinian perspective. The recent discussion has mostly addressed a specific case, the metasemantics of context-dependent expressions in general and indexicals/demonstratives in particular. To offer a slightly different perspective, I will focus on the metasemantics of force-indicators such as the declarative, interrogative and imperative moods, which, as I’ll show, raise similar issues; I’ll keep an eye, though, on the debates about indexicals.⁵ This will be a rather opinionated presentation, simply assuming the views on the metasemantics of expression-types endorsed in the aforementioned earlier contribution. Focus on the metasemantics of force-indicators will further help to clarify the Austinian view.⁶

Metasemantic debates presuppose views on the underlying semantic facts, as I’ll illustrate below with our illustrative cases, moods and demonstratives.⁷ They thereby also presuppose views about what languages are; in fact, in the earlier discussion I presented metasemantic proposals as deriving from views on the nature of language. In keeping with my already announced Austinian stance, here I will assume that natural languages are essentially social tools. I concede that we need the

⁴ Harris and Unnsteinsson (2017) show that this tradition owes more to Wittgenstein’s ideas than is sometimes acknowledged.

⁵ When I planned the chapter, I thought this would offer a new perspective on the topic, compensating for the fact that I will be mostly assuming what I said in the earlier contribution on the more general issues. I have since found that Bianchi (2014a) had already used the same device for related purposes; Recanati (2018: 128–129) also discusses the case of illocutionary force in support of his metasemantic views.

⁶ In line with my goals, I will provide the most recent significant references I am familiar with; readers can find references to further relevant work in them, and in Jaszczolt’s piece (Chapter 7, this volume).

⁷ Again, Jaszczolt points this out too.

notion of an *idiolect*, an individual's language at a particular time. I agree with Chomskyans that facts about language acquisition are crucial to make fundamental theoretical decisions, and for them we need a causal-explanatory notion of individual idiolects. But everybody also needs a notion of a social, community language, a “communalect” (Lassiter, 2008) – a *linguistic* one, not a socioeconomic or political one.⁸

This is first on account of the facts about deference and reference dependence on community facts underlying the externalism that Burge, Kripke and Putnam have emphasized, which writers sympathetic to idiolect-first approaches like Higginbotham (2006), Heck (2006), Lassiter (2008) and Ludlow (2011) strive to accommodate. There are other facts worth noticing. Consider, for instance, the case of deviant uses leading to lexical innovations (“to google”), which, as Armstrong (2016a) rightly notices, *prima facie* offer better prospects to argue for a Davidsonian view than those that Davidson himself considered, like malapropisms and tongue-slips.⁹ As Armstrong (2016b: 101ff.) points out, there are constraints on this; speakers would consider “to airplane” say, to be unacceptable; but this appears to be because the communal language already has a lexical item for the intended notion, “to fly.” Our language faculty, plus mind-reading capacities, has as little difficulty in interpreting “to airplane” as “to google” in suitable contexts. Higginbotham (2006: 147–148) offers a related case – differences inside languages, or across languages, regarding cases for which the resultative construction is or is not acceptable; once again, the language-faculty resources required to interpret them are fully in place. This is not an isolated phenomenon; instances of it multiply (irregular verbs, etc).

What, then, is the debate? It is one of explanatory priority. As Higginbotham (2006) puts it, it concerns whether “social phenomena – deviant speech, partial understanding, historical change, and the like – are to be viewed as deriving from the interactions of the several grammars of individuals, without any essentially social residue,” or whether they depend “upon social variables” (Higginbotham 2006: 142; see also Heck 2006: 64–66; and Wiggins, 1997). As indicated, here I will just assume the social picture: communalects have a primary role, while idiolects are just an individual's more or less accurate representations or theories thereof at particular stages.¹⁰ More specifically, I will assume that, in the explanatorily

⁸ Higginbotham (2006: 143ff.), Lassiter (2008: 619), and Armstrong (2016a: 91) share my assumption here that social, externalist views of language are compatible with the core Chomskian account of acquisition data – the first two from perspectives otherwise sympathetic to the Chomskian individualistic picture on languages and metasemantics. Everybody also needs to idealize (in the way this is always done in science) both idiolects and communalects, cf. Santana (2016: 512). Lassiter (2008: 616–617) and Heck (2006: 74) make too much of the difficulties in specifying the linguistic community whose conventions are in place. Cf. Jackson (2010), García-Carpintero (2018: 1119–1127).

⁹ Lepore and Stone (2017) provide compelling critical discussions of Davidson's cases. Higginbotham (2006) and Lassiter (2008) also note the significance of lexical innovations.

¹⁰ Armstrong (2016b) offers good reasons to wonder whether Davidsonian individualism can account for the social facts, some of them overlapping, with points to be examined below. They can be extended to reject the Chomskian

prior sense, languages are conventional devices put in place and backed by social rules. I will assume a minimal characterization of conventions – a common core to the accounts by Lewis (1975), Bach and Harnish (1979: 120–134), Davis (2003: 204–219), Marmor (2009), and Geurts (2018). A convention is a social regularity in the behavior of a group, which serves a common interest (it solves a “coordination problem,” on Lewis’ account) and is arbitrary in that there is an alternative which would have solved it just as well.

22.2 Locution and Illocution

On the broad metasemantic picture for linguistic types sketched in the previous section, languages are social tools devised for communicative purposes. Conventions concerning the specific lexical items and constructions of a particular language, plus a sub-personal combinatorial linguistic competence driven by our biology, join to assign to sentence-types semantic contents that it is apt to characterize as “speech-act potentials” (Bach and Harnish, 1979; Alston, 2000), in ways I will elaborate.¹¹ The underlying social and psychological facts determine which assignments are correct. In what remains of the chapter I will present metasemantic views that develop this rough picture, illustrating them by focusing on the case of force-indicators and context-dependent expressions. The view of semantic content – “what is said” – assumed here is thus “social” (Camp, 2006: §6) or “forensic” (Perry, 2009: 191).

In this section and the next, I will explore a distinction of Lewis’ (1980) in what I indiscriminately described in the previous paragraph as “semantic content.” Yalcin (2014) disambiguates the two notions as “semantic value” and “content”; others refer to them as, respectively, “compositional” vs. “assertoric” content.¹² I will here use the (from my perspective) descriptively more accurate “sentence character” (or just “character” for brevity),¹³ and “locutionary meaning” (“locution”). Character is ascribed to sentences, given

individualism that Heck (2006), Higginbotham (2006), and Ludlow (2011) advocate. I doubt that the meaning externalism that (unlike Chomsky himself, or Chomskyans like Pietroski [2018]) the three of them defend make their views stable. Armstrong (2016a) also offers a good account of how the sort of convention-based view of languages that I will assume can account for lexical innovations. I do not think that the facts that we will be discussing can be properly explained by taking the relevant communities to exist “only as a projection of an individual” (Lassiter 2008: 621) in any substantive sense; Heck (2006: 77–80) has a good critical discussion of this sort of view.

¹¹ The proposal to be developed cashes out in a particular way the slogan “meaning is normative,” which has been the topic of massive controversy. Miller’s contribution to this volume offers a good up-to-date picture, as do Glüer and Wikforss (2018) and Liebesman (2018). García-Carpintero (2012a: 411–418) is a previous presentation of my own take on it.

¹² Dummett (1973), García-Carpintero (2006), Ninan (2012), Rabern (2013), and Stanley (1997), among others, make related distinctions.

¹³ Borrowing and generalizing from Kaplan (1989a), although I am not committing thereby to Kaplan’s entire panoply of views on context-dependence. I mean the term as synonymous with *sentence standing meaning*, on the assumption that rule-governed, constrained standing meaning (Maitra, 2007) is pervasive in natural language.

the widespread context-dependence present in natural language, in order to fulfill central explanatory tasks for theories of natural languages, among them: accounting for facts about *systematicity* and *productivity* in understanding, communication and acquisition, and explaining judgments about entailments, truth-value or correctness relative to particular situations.¹⁴ Locutionary meaning is the linguistically determined speech act potential assigned to sentences in context. Ultimately, the data in need of explanation in those cases (systematicity, etc.) track primarily locutions, and hence characters should properly relate to them; but, as Lewis (1980) points out, it does not follow that they should be identified, and there are reasons against this that we will now examine.

On the Austinian picture of the basic metasemantic facts that I want to further elaborate here, utterances play a central role. Utterances are intentional actions, speech acts. In his contribution to the present volume, Brian Ball provides a compelling account of an important set of distinctions that Austin (1962) makes, of different acts we perform in making utterances.¹⁵ Ball – as he says, not primarily for exegetical reasons, but for explanatory purposes congenial to the ones I am about to illustrate – offers a compelling account of Austin’s notorious view of utterances as separable in different, but somehow embedded acts: a “phonetic,” a “rhetic,” a “locutionary,” an “illocutionary,” and a “perlocutionary” act.

Rehearsing arguments from Moltmann’s (2017), Ball provides forceful replies to Searle’s (1968) criticism, and an account of the locutionary/illocutionary distinction that I find adequate.¹⁶ The rhetic act is the act of using lexical items and their grammatical modes of combination “with a certain more or less definite ‘sense’ and a more or less definite ‘reference’ (which together are equivalent to ‘meaning’)” (Austin, 1962: 93). To individuate the locutionary act, as Ball construes it, we generalize away the specific lexical items.¹⁷ In contrast with Searle’s (1968) alternative suggestion, and in line with the considerations about the semantics of moods to be discussed in Section 22.4, locutions do not merely consist of a propositional content but include also specifications on force: they can be the presentation of a content with erotetic, directive, or assertoric force, and perhaps further forces if they are “locuted,” on which more below.¹⁸

¹⁴ Cf. Yalcin (2014: 18–23) for more details on those explanatory goals, and the contribution to this volume by Borg and Fisher (Chapter 9). *Systematicity* concerns the fact that speakers who, say, competently understand *John loves Mary* can equally understand *Mary loves John*; *productivity*, the fact that competent understanding is in principle unbounded: *the son of Mary swims, the son of the son of Mary swims*.

¹⁵ Cf. also Recanati (2013), mostly coincident with Ball’s account.

¹⁶ See also, for related views, García-Carpintero (2006: 43–47; 2019a); Camp (2007: 208–212); Recanati (2013: 624–625).

¹⁷ To the extent, I should say, that the expressions themselves are not part of what is conventionally meant: I will be putting aside here issues created by token-reflexivity, briefly touched upon in the next section; cf. Radulescu (2018a, 2018b) for a good discussion.

¹⁸ Locutions do not differ from standard propositional contents only in this; they also typically include separate planes of propositional content: an “at-issue” one, plus others presupposed or conventionally implicated (García-Carpintero, 2006: 43–47; 2008: 68–76).

Nonetheless, the locutionary act performed in an utterance should be sharply distinguished from the illocutionary act.¹⁹ If someone utters *The vote was anonymous*, meaning that the vote was unanimous (Bach and Harnish, 1979: 33), the locution is (let's assume) the assertoric presentation of the propositional content that the vote was anonymous, but it is at the very least unclear whether the speaker becomes thereby assertorically committed to that content.²⁰ But this is what is required for the illocutionary act to occur. In the proper context (for instance, if the audience is familiar with the fact that the speaker systematically incurs in this malapropism), the speaker might well become assertorically committed instead to the claim that the vote was unanimous; but this is not of course his locutionary act.

Everybody in these debates wants to preserve the intuitive distinction between *literal*, or *direct* meanings, and nonliteral, implied or indirect meanings.²¹ Locuted meanings are what is literally, directly conveyed: the presentation of a set of more or less well specified at-issue and backgrounded contents with more or less specific forces. The previous case shows that the speaker need not be committed to the relevant content in the way constitutive of that force. *Substitution* implicatures and indirect speech acts in general (in contrast with *additive* implicatures, like Grice's [1975] recommendation letter and gas petrol examples; cf. Meibauer, 2009; Vanderveken 1991: 375–376) also support the point, for in such cases the speaker is not illocutionarily committed to the locuted content. Consider (1):

- (1) It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

Famously, (1) is the first line of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. By occurring in a fiction, Austen, the utterer of (1), is not assertorically committed to its locuted content; Austen is only performing a different illocutionary act, fiction-making.²² This is also so even if – as I think – she is doing that by “playing” a fictional teller (she herself, I'll assume) who is making the locutionarily conveyed assertion. Note in addition that, although a competent reader might initially not realize this, by the time that reader has

¹⁹ My distinction here corresponds to the one between *sentence force* and *utterance force* by Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1990: 171) and Murray and Starr (2020; §1).

²⁰ Cf. Davis (1999: 35fn), Unnsteinsson (2017). Unnsteinsson makes the very good point that, due to structural or lexical ambiguity, the locuted content will be in such cases typically too underspecified for the speaker to assertorically commit to it. Even in our example, nothing in the context rules out the interpretation that the vote lacked “individuality, distinction, or recognizability,” which is one of the meanings of *anonymous*; cf. also Stecker (2010: 157). I am also sympathetic to Unnsteinsson's claim that the speaker *said* (in a Gricean sense) that the vote was unanimous (García-Carpintero, 2019a, in press a).

²¹ Perhaps Cappelen and Lepore (2005: 57) are an exception; Travis is also a doubtful case (Fisher 2019: fn. 24). Unlike Bach and Harnish (1979: 70), I do not distinguish between *literal* and *direct* – I consider the distinction they make to be superfluous.

²² As I have argued (García-Carpintero, 2019), following Currie (1990) and others, but providing an alternative Austinian account to his Gricean proposal.

finished the book she will have learned that (1) is meant ironically.²³ (1) thus offers two reasons to distinguish locution from illocution: (i) the utterer is merely fiction-making the locuted content, hence merely simulating an assertion of it; (ii) the (fictional) teller is actually not assertorically committed to the locuted content, because it is only ironically meant: she is just echoing, in jest, a folk judgment.

Metaphors provide a second illustration. Imagine someone uttering (2) in reply to a request to express her view about controversial current affairs, say, gender policies, or Catalan secessionism:

- (2) The strategy of the equidna is never sufficiently extolled, even if it works only due to the lack of serious predators.

Perhaps after consulting the web, a competent listener will establish that (2) conveys something to the effect that the speaker would prefer not to have questioners obliging her to confront these difficult issues, and she does not wish to volunteer any view on the matter anyway. She is not assertorically committed to the advantages of the (quite poor, I am told) defensive strategies of equidnas (Camp, 2007: 209–212).

As I indicated above, contemporary semanticists assign some semantic significance to at least the three moods apparently present in all languages, declarative, interrogative, and imperative (Charlow, 2014; Starr, 2014; Roberts, 2018). Character, not just locution, thus includes information about potential illocutionary force. Following Hanks (2015: 9), Recanati (2013: 625–626; 2019) rejects what Hanks characterizes as the *taxonomic* version of Frege's traditional force-content distinction, which I have assumed in the discussion so far. This is an idea influentially articulated by Stenius (1967), i.e. that there is a meaning-component (a truth or fulfillment-conditional component) common to speech acts of different illocutionary types, including questions, directives, and assertions. But, as Collins (2018: 3538–3539) shows, Hanks' reasons are not cogent. For current semantics *also* distinguishes meanings for NPs, meanings for VPs, and forceless meanings for phrasal combinations thereof, which are common constituents of the distinct semantic objects assigned to imperatives, interrogatives, and indicatives. The appeal to current semantics thus in fact legitimizes force-endowed sentential meanings as much as their forceless common "parts." This is what I am calling (*at-issue*) *locuted content*; it is meant to be a forceless traditional proposition.

²³ This offers a reason to posit a fictional teller. The fact that (1) is meant ironically is in this case derived along the lines that Grice (1975) suggests for irony (putting aside the well-established fact that his account does not work in general): we realize that whoever is telling us the story goes on to provide in it good evidence for its falsity, thus *prima facie* violating Grice's Quality maxims. The derivation assumes someone who is "making as if to say" (1), i.e. simulating that it is put forward assertorically – a fictional teller. This is an "internal" justification of the ironical character of (1), from the content of the fiction. Evidence of Austen's disparaging attitudes toward contemporary beliefs may provide further, "external," motivation that (1) was meant this way. This, incidentally, gives support for the view that the fictional teller mocking them that Austen "plays" is in fact she herself (Wilson, 2011: 114; Urmson, 1976: 153).

Now, in contrast to Hanks and others who have written recently on the traditional topic of the “unity of propositions,” I think we should adopt an attitude toward them that is as minimalist as possible. Propositions are force-neutral, but they also lack any “structure” – whatever that might mean for abstract entities (Keller, 2013). I will assume the Stalnakerian view that they are just properties of *circumstances of evaluation* (cf. Richard, 2013). What are such circumstances? For Stalnaker they are complete and consistent possible worlds, for Lewisians *centered* possible worlds; more on this below. I will think of them as “smaller” than full possible worlds, as in Situation Semantics or in “truthmaker semantics” (Fine, 2017).²⁴

I have heard it objected that it is essential for propositions to fulfill their theoretical role (being the contents of speech acts and mental attitudes, helping define rational transitions involving them) that they be truth-evaluable, but properties fail to meet this condition: you need subject and predicate for that, as it were. But this is confused. Traditional propositions are “modally neutral”: the same proposition *that snow is white* is expressed, no matter which possible world one is in, whether it is one in which snow is white or one in which it is blue. Even if one traffics in modally aligned propositions (which have their truth-values necessarily), one will need modally neutral counterparts – say, derived by lambda-abstraction (Schaffer, 2012). So, by themselves, traditional propositions are not “truth-evaluable” either, in the sense the objection assumes. But this is as it should be. Thus, if one imagines that snow is white, we do not need to evaluate the act as either true or false, fulfilled or unfulfilled; by itself the act of imagining lacks “direction of fit” (García-Carpintero, in press b).

We do need to evaluate the act for truth when we assert or judge the proposition. But there is no problem for the traditional view here either, because acts of asserting or judging take place in a particular possible world, which supplies it (or perhaps a more circumscribed situation) as the one with respect to which they are to be evaluated. This is not a problem for the property view either, for similar reasons. On Lewis’ account of first-personal thought, propositions are subject-neutral properties; two subjects uttering to themselves in their inner speech *I am happy* judge the very same thing. But one might be wrong and the other right because, in judging, they bring to bear for the evaluation of their judgments not just a world or smaller situation in it, but also themselves at the time of the judging, as purported bearers of the relevant properties.²⁵ The properties that propositional contents are may merely determine partial functions from possible worlds, or smaller situations, to truth-values. But

²⁴ “Smaller” not just spatiotemporally (say, events in our light cone), but also at the level of detail (say, domain of individuals, relevant features, etc.) at which events are specified.

²⁵ García-Carpintero (2015b) offers an introductory presentation.

this again is as it should be; the contents that we literally assert are almost always vague, indeterminate, or otherwise underspecified.²⁶

22.3 Semantic Content: Character and Locution

Having thus distinguished locutions from illocutionary acts, I will go back now to the Lewisian distinction between sentential character and locutionary meaning. As Katarzyna Kijania-Placek explains in her contribution to this volume (Chapter 14), indexicals typically have three types of uses. A sentence like *He is happy* might be uttered on its own, the pronoun *he* perhaps accompanied by a pointing gesture. In that case, philosophers after Kaplan (1989a) would think of its *at-issue* locutionary content as a singular proposition, ascribing the property of being happy to the male pointed at.²⁷ The pronoun might be anaphoric on another expression, getting its referent from it: *Peter thinks that he is happy*. And it can be bound by an expression of generality: *Everybody/somebody thinks that he is happy*. These are not isolated facts; other expressions exhibit the same variations, and they systematically obtain across languages. Take, for a second example, the case of temporal indicators. If uttered in isolation, the tense in *It is raining in Donosti* will be interpreted as referring to a particular time demonstrated in the utterance. However, we find also *It is August 16th 2019, and it is raining in Donosti*, and *It is sometimes/always raining in Donosti*.

Considerations of explanatory power promote a unifying explanation. Semanticists have advanced different sophisticated frameworks to account for the data in such an explanatorily powerful way. For our purposes, however, we can make the point we need by using the simple and hopefully familiar technical apparatus of First-Order Logic (FOL) used in Tarskian-Davidsonian truth-conditional approaches.²⁸ We can think that explicit indexicals like *he*, or the hidden counterpart linguists have reasons to posit in the *logical forms* corresponding to the sentences – the syntactically articulated representations that act as inputs to the semantic machinery – for instance in the case of tense, behave semantically like variables in FOL languages. They are interpreted relative to *assignments*, which can be varied relative to (contextually specified) domains of quantification, suitable to capture the semantic behavior of expressions of generality. For *He is happy*, we get something like this representation:

²⁶ Cf. García-Carpintero (2019a) and further references there. Lasersohn (1999) and von Stechow and Gillies (2011) offer good models for underspecification.

²⁷ In a descriptively adequate framework, the locution should also include another, not-at-issue propositional content, specifying as a presupposition triggered by the pronoun's ϕ -feature that the individual in question is male (García-Carpintero, 2000, 2018; Heim, 2008).

²⁸ For a recent sophisticated proposal for the case of pronouns, cf. Del Prete and Zucchi (2017). Larson and Segal (1995) is an excellent textbook introduction to Davidsonian truth-conditional semantics; Heim and Kratzer (1998) provides the standard textbook introduction to the ideas I am about to summarize.

(3) On the presumption that x is the “demonstrated” male, x is happy.

(3) is not right, in many ways. For one thing, the presupposed condition that the referent is male really belongs in a different content-plane.²⁹ Also, *demonstrated* is placed inside scare quotes to point in the direction of the complications to be discussed below – cf. Kaplan’s (1989: 525fn.) nice metaphor that the referent of a demonstrative is whoever appears in the “demonstration platform.” But set that aside; what we thus obtain by way of the semantic, compositionally determined content for (3) is a property like the one that linguists routinely represent these days by enriching the language of FOL with lambda-abstraction operators:

(4) λx .On the presumption that x is the “demonstrated” male, x is happy.

Lewis (1980) insists that there is no difficulty in deriving from semantic, compositionally given sentential meanings like (4) locutionary propositional contents that correspond better to what is intuitively said when sentences are literally uttered. Writers in the semantic tradition I am rehearsing invoke at this point the following recourse: the “demonstrated” male in the context of a particular utterance is identified with the value of the relevant variable given by a particular assignment, which is said to have been selected by the utterance context C (Heim and Kratzer, 1998: 243). We thus obtain representations like this for locuted contents:

(5) $[\lambda x$.On the presumption that x is the “demonstrated” male, x is happy.] a , where a = the C -“demonstrated” male, if any.

This summarizes what I take to be Lewis’ (1980) considerations for distinguishing sentential from locutionary meanings.³⁰ As indicated above, I am calling the former “characters” on the assumption that we can generalize Kaplan’s (1989a) character/content distinction to all context-dependent expressions, along the lines illustrated here for the case of *he*. As Borg and Fisher show in their contribution, context-dependence of the kind just illustrated is pervasive, and not only because tense is ubiquitous. There are very good reasons to think that context-dependence of that sort applies to the domain of quantifiers (Stanley, 2000), modals (Kratzer, 2012), gradable adjectives like *tall* (Kennedy, 2007), and many other items.

²⁹ Cf. Heim and Kratzer (1998) for a more accurate account.

³⁰ I have been passing over the details of a technical dialectics that I do not think goes to the heart of the matter. Lewis (1980) in fact bases his argument on the assumption that temporal expressions like *always* and others are “operators” – modifiers that compositionally combine with full sentences. King (2003) replies by arguing that they are in fact variable-binding quantifiers, which combine with open sentences. Rabern (2013) counters that this does not change anything relevant because, given certain compositionality issues, variable-binding expressions by themselves induce the Lewisian distinction. Glanzberg and King (2020) retort in their turn that they do not, when one understands *compositionality* in a more liberal way that is in fact perfectly adequate. This debate is usually set up on the mistaken assumptions about truth-evaluability that I reject immediately below in the main text. The real issues concern principle (L) below.

Now, the technical trick of identifying “demonstrated” objects with assignments might well be considered “cheating” (Recanati, 2018: 119), on account of issues addressed in recent debates about the semantics/pragmatics distinction, nicely summarized by Borg and Fisher in their contribution to this volume (Chapter 9), which I will rehearse from the present perspective in a moment. As I have indicated, Lewis (1980) was assuming a principle that, following Armstrong (2016a: 91), I am going to call *(L)inking*:³¹

(L) The content communicated by a literal utterance of S in context C is *caeteris paribus* the semantic content of S in C.

In my terms so far, (L) identifies *at-issue* locuted content (i.e. the propositional content that is presented with the literally indicated illocutionary force in a literal utterance) with the content assigned to the uttered sentence by its character relative to the context of the utterance.

In spite of assuming (L), Lewis (1980) distinguishes character and locution, and I follow suit. This is sometimes motivated by considerations of truth-evaluability or “incompleteness”: unlike (5), (4) is “incomplete,” or not-truth-evaluable. But I find this misguided. First, there is nothing propositionally incomplete in itself about (4), unless one assumes a structured view of propositions that we have good reasons to reject (Keller, 2013). (4) may well be a full-fledged propositional content, if this is just a property. Second, what is primarily truth-evaluable is not propositions, but the utterances we make with them (García-Carpintero, in press c), or perhaps their “results” (Moltmann, 2017). But there is no problem in evaluating for truth “feature-placing” assertions of properties like (4): they typically obtain in the actual world and may fail to obtain in smaller situations (Fisher, 2019). Besides, such contents systematically correspond to Stalnakerian “diagonal” or Perrian “reflexive” propositions (García-Carpintero, 2006: 56, 64), whose truth-evaluability is not in question.

The real issue is whether (L) is true; and it is enough that (L) is philosophically up-for-grabs for Lewis’ (1980) distinction to be entirely pertinent, even if in the end (L) can be upheld. Contents like (4), or the corresponding diagonal or reflexive propositions, are not those we intuitively put literally forward when we assert *He is happy*, as confirmed, for instance, by Saul’s (2012) and Michaelson’s (2016) “Lying Test.” Contents like (5) may do, perhaps in support of (L) for this particular case, as Lewis was assuming. But there are good abductive reasons to question this. Nowak (in press) offers some of them.³² On the one hand, even if (4) is all that counts as the semantic content of our sentence – disconfirming (L) – there are

³¹ Recanati’s *Determination Thesis* (2018: 118) and Kennedy’s principle *Interpretive Economy* (2007: 36) are in the same spirit.

³² Cf. also Smit (2012: 63–64). The early pages of Heck (2014) go in the same direction, but I think that he, like Recanati (2018), in fact is closer to a view like the one I suggest below, §22. 4 – although they would perhaps articulate it in a more Gricean ideology.

conceptually and empirically solid ways to explain how speakers might nonetheless converge on something like (5); “postsemantic,” pragmatic resources – those involved in the derivation of indirect meanings and implicatures – account for it. On the other hand, proposals to uphold (L) in these cases, rehearsed below, are highly problematic.

Harris (in press) nicely articulates, with good recent evidence, the more general considerations behind Nowak’s argument, along lines similar to those I provided earlier (García-Carpintero, 2006). Harris argues that the semantics/pragmatics divide traces a natural, real divide in cognition: one separating a sufficiently isolated Fodorian module (each one’s Chomskian, I-language), from central inferential capacities. On this view, semantics only provides *constraints* on the intuitive literally conveyed meanings – like (4) in our previous example – and hence (L) fails. Harris also provides a detailed reply to compositionality-based objections to this view of semantics, grounded on the fact that what it ultimately composes is the values of characters in context, which I had also briefly addressed (García-Carpintero, 2006: 51–52). To account for systematicity and productivity, constraint semantics does need a characterization of compositionality that allows for “pragmatic intrusion” throughout the composition process; Pagin and Pelletier (2007) provide one.³³

Kratzer puts nicely the main idea behind constraint semantics: “Words, phrases and sentences acquire content when we utter them on particular occasions. What that content is may differ from one context to the next. It is the task of semantics to describe all those features of the meaning of a linguistic expression that stay invariable in whatever context the expression may be used. This invariable element is the meaning proper of an expression” (Kratzer, 2012: 4). As indicated above, this is a view that so-called contextualists in debates about the semantics/pragmatics divide have advanced, including Bach (1994), Carston (2002), Neale (2005, 2016), and Schiffer (2003), on the basis of considerations related to Nowak’s and Harris’.³⁴ So-called minimalists like Borg (2012) and Cappelen and Lepore (2005) are sympathetic to such motivations, but they nonetheless want semantics to deliver truth-evaluable contents, as opposed to mere constraints. Such appeals to truth-evaluability are objectionable along the lines indicated previously (cf. Fisher, 2019). Moreover, it is unclear how consistent their motivations and their proposals in fact are: the motivations commit them to (L), but it is very unclear that their proposals in fact vindicate it.³⁵

³³ Cf. also Pagin and Westerståhl (2010). Philosophers who assume (L) also have reasons to invoke this notion of compositionality; cf. Glanzberg and King (2020: fn. 40).

³⁴ Yalcin (2014), Glanzberg (2018), and Pietroski (2018) adopt a more radical view, close to Chomsky’s take on these issues, making semantic contents even thinner than (4).

³⁵ Cf. Camp’s (2007) and Maitra’s (2007) discussion of Cappelen and Lepore (2005), and García-Carpintero’s (2013) of Borg (2012).

It is my impression that what separates minimalists from contextualists is their attitudes about (L). Minimalists – as much so as so-called indexicalists like Stanley (2000) or King (2014), see again Borg and Fisher’s contribution (Chapter 9) – feel the pull to stick to (L); contextualists just dismiss it without much worrying. I am fully sympathetic to the former here, for there are good reasons to retain (L). As I mentioned earlier, the main initial data that semantic theories aim to explain concern locutions. (L) supports the view that there is a metasemantics proper for utterances (uses of sentences in context) in addition to the one that there undoubtedly is for sentence-types.³⁶ Constraint semantics rejects the need for it. On that approach, there might be a metasemantics for utterances to the same extent that there is one for conversational implicatures, but there is none when it comes to the semantics of natural languages proper: utterances (or sentences-in-context) do not have a distinctive one, i.e. any one beyond that for the sentence-types they instantiate.

This, however, is perhaps too cavalier an attitude to take.³⁷ Even if semantic content reduces to character, we do need to define characters, and this requires a well-supported view on what the contents they determine relative to utterance contexts are. To illustrate this with the sort of case we have been discussing, Nunberg (1993) offers compelling examples of indexicals – “I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I like for my last meal” uttered by a condemned prisoner – that do not seem to contribute objects to what is communicated, but rather properties. Why are these cases irrelevant to the semantic content of the relevant sentences, if indeed they are? Why do writers like Nowak who reject (L) nonetheless assume that characters for demonstratives assign them objects in context?³⁸ What do they mean when they give an important theoretical role in their accounts to a notion of *literal* content (Harris, 2017: 338; in press)? It seems that to answer such questions we need locuted contents along the lines of (5), not just (4).³⁹

I will conclude this section by briefly outlining recent developments on the two more popular proposals to sustain (L) for the case of indexicals and demonstratives, and hence on their (utterance-)metasemantics. There is a debate between *intentionalist* and *conventionalist* views; Kaplan himself (1989a) initially defended the latter, before moving later to the former (1989b). *Conventionalists* hold that the semantic value of a demonstrative in context is

³⁶ Cf. Stanley and Szabó (2000), Glanzberg (2007).

³⁷ Cf. Stojnić (2017: 169), García-Carpintero (2006: 59, 62). Rabern (2017) suggests that he, like Nowak, Harris, or Yalcin (2014: 24), would be happy to reduce semantic content to character content. He offers in support the “minimalist” suggestion that contents like (4), or rather corresponding “diagonal” contents, are what we literally convey, and hence (L) can be after all met (Rabern, 2017): 196fn, 202–205). The determination of contents like (5) intuitively closer to what is literally communicated is left to “postsemantics,” i.e. pragmatics.

³⁸ King (2001) argues, however, for a quantificational account of complex demonstratives; cf. Hawthorne and Manley (2012) for a more general related view.

³⁹ Heck (2014: 355) puts it nicely: “the most natural explication of the notion of what a sentence means is in terms of how it constrains the linguistic acts that can be performed by uttering it, and ... these acts must be characterized not in terms of what is meant but in terms of what is *said*.” (It is passages like this that suggest to me the interpretation in fn. 33.)

given by cues in the conversational context, paradigmatically pointing gestures, but more in general *salience* or *attentional prominence*.⁴⁰ Wettstein (1984), Reimer (1991), Gauker (2008, 2018), and Stojnić, Stone, and Lepore (2013, 2017) defend views of this sort. *Intentionalists* appeal instead to what speakers “have in mind,” along the lines suggested by Donnellan (1970) for proper names. Intentionalists base their view on cases in which the demonstrative succeeds in referring without any apparent cues (cf. Speaks 2016). Let us now see how these issues play out in the case of force-indicators.

22.4 Force-Indicators and Speech Acts

The declarative, interrogative, and imperative moods are identified by morphosyntactic paradigms and functional roles (König and Siemund, 2007: 282–284).⁴¹ They appear to be universal in human languages (Roberts, 2018: 319). There are distinctive traces of the three moods under embeddings (*John said that he was happy*, *John wondered whether he was happy*, *John told him to be happy*, Roberts, 2018: 321). This is an initial reason to think that the distinction has compositional significance, and hence that each of the three moods make a distinctive contribution to locutions (Pendlebury, 1986; Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet, 1990: 4.3). On a proposal, sentences of each of those three types are assigned three allegedly different types of semantic object: a proposition to declaratives, a set of sets of propositions to interrogatives (intuitively, encoding the class of possible answers), and a “to-do list” for conversational participants to imperatives (Portner, 2018: 180–181; Roberts, 2018: 320).

The determination of the actual illocutionary force of an utterance of a sentence of any of these types is then left to the “postsemantics,” given a *force-linking* principle that connects their distinctive semantic values with “default,” “typical” speech acts made with them (Roberts, 2018: 320–321, 327, 349). This plays the role of (L); how does it fit the bill? Such default speech acts are characterized by means of a generalization of Stalnaker’s (1978) influential account of assertion and presupposition. On Stalnaker’s view, contexts are understood as a common ground of accepted propositions. The proposal generalizes this, including in addition questions under discussion (the questions mutually adopted for the conversation), and “to-do lists” for the participants in the conversation – for each agent, the properties it is mutually assumed that the agent is to make true. The three default speech acts are then understood as proposals to update the relevant “parts” of such contexts.

⁴⁰ Conventionalists hold something like Neale’s (2016: 229) thesis (TCS), which supports (L). Intentionalists like King also endorse a version of it in which a speaker’s intentions play a decisive role; others like Bach and Neale reject (L).

⁴¹ Speech acts like assertions can be made with subsentential utterances (Stainton, 1995). They can be regarded as either elliptical for a full declarative (Merchant, 2004), or pragmatically enriched into the content of one along the lines that Stainton suggests.

As Murray and Starr (2020: §§2.2, 2.3) forcefully argue, it is very doubtful that this “force-linking” principle achieves its goals. In the first place, from the perspective on contents I have been assuming there is no significant difference between the contents ascribed to declaratives and imperatives in these proposals: all of them are just properties of verifying situations. How is it secured that they are to update different “parts” of contexts? “On examination, it is somewhat mystifying to articulate how a set of worlds could intrinsically encode a representational function” (Murray and Starr (2020: §2.2). Gutzmann (2015: 177–183) illustrates the qualm with some nice examples from German – sentences to which the account should ascribe the same sort of semantic objects but nonetheless are understood to (literally, conventionally) indicate speech acts of different kinds.

There are deeper problems. Even if the three types are universally represented in natural languages, they are not the only types of speech acts that languages conventionally, literally, and *systematically* encode. For starters, there might be others that have similar claims to universality. Searle (1969: ch. 4) took reference to be a subordinate speech act, and I have argued for a similar view about presupposing (which in fact I take to be also involved in referring) (García-Carpintero, 2020; in press a). There are also exclamatives, like *Ouch!* which cannot be easily dismissed from the semantic purview if, as Marques and García-Carpintero (2020) argue in line with Kaplan’s (1999) views, pejoratives and slurs like *damn* or *Boche* have a (presuppositional) meaning-component.

A stronger problem lies in that, even assuming that an explanatorily acceptable story can be told about how the three speech acts are semantically conveyed, they are too generic to be what is intuitively conveyed by utterances. The declarative can be used to make many different specific speech acts, including guesses and suppositions, for instance. The imperative can be used for commands, requests, invitations, to give permission, and so on. As Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (1990: 173) contend, there is nothing nonliteral or indirect about these uses. Moreover, the compositional grammar appears to serve to indicate them, in English, Spanish, and other languages by means of appositive hedges like *I guess*, *I suppose*, or *I beg you* (Benton and van Elswyk, 2019); and these hedges appear to be semantic counterparts of evidentials in languages that have them, in which they clearly *are* part of the compositional machinery. Finally, we find conjunctions, conditionals, or disjunctions combining declaratives and imperatives (Murray and Starr, 2020: §2.3).

In response to these issues, Murray and Starr (2020) provide a more refined dynamic semantics for sentence force. But it is not clear that it fully deals with these issues. I will now outline in conclusion an alternative which is otherwise congenial to their concerns about achieving a good fit between sentence and utterance force, and also to their social view of the latter, by relying on Gutzmann’s (2015) semantic system for “use-conditional” meanings.

The objection to the Portner–Roberts view is analogous to the ones raised above for the Bach–Harris–Nowak view of demonstratives, i.e. that they fail to satisfy (L) and thereby have difficulty in explaining how the semantics properly fixes the literal, conventional meaning of utterances of sentences in context. Ideally, the semantics should provide more specific constraints on the objects that are the values of characters in context. Similarly, the objection here is that the semantic objects ascribed to force-indicators should do better at individuating specific forces conveyed by literal, conventional utterances. This is what writers in the speech act tradition have been offering, either in a Gricean, descriptive-psychological setting (Bach and Harnish, 1979) or in an Austinian, normative one (Alston, 2000; Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

In a recent development of the latter, Williamson (1996) also makes Roberts' assumption that the three universal moods have “default” meanings: “In natural language, the default use of declarative sentences is to make assertions” (1996: 258). However, Williamson thinks that there is a very specific speech act that is default-conveyed; he refers to it as *flat-out* assertion (1996: 246), and he offers an account that distinguishes it from other specific speech acts that we also make in conventional, literal uses of declarative sentences, like guesses, swearing, or suppositions. The account is provided in the Rawlsian tradition of *constitutive rules* (García-Carpintero, 2004). Williamson claims that the following norm or rule (the *knowledge rule*) is constitutive of assertion, and individuates it:

(KR) One must ((assert *p*) only if one knows *p*).

We can similarly think of corresponding default uses for the imperative (say, cases in which someone with authority tells somebody under her authority to do something) and the interrogative (requests for flat-out assertions, cases in which somebody asks for information). These are precisely the sorts of circumstances proffered to give the functional roles of the three moods in standard typological research (König and Siemund, 2007: 282–284).

Gutzmann (2015) offers a revision of Potts's (2005) multidimensional semantics, with the goal of providing a compositional formulation of Kaplan's (1999) ideas on expletives and pejoratives such as *damn*. The idea is that a literal utterance of a sentence like *that damn Kaplan was promoted* contributes to “at-issue” locuted content of the non-evaluative proposition *that Kaplan was promoted*, but it also conventionally contributes a condition on felicitous use: that the utterance context is such that the speaker has a derogatory attitude regarding Kaplan. In addition to preserving compositionality,⁴² Gutzmann's system has the great virtue of allowing for the semantic interaction between the two systems.

⁴² Understood in the sense that I think is needed for the explanatory purposes for which the notion is deployed, cf. the references in fn. 34 above.

Gutzmann's proposal has in my view two shortcomings. In the first place, Gutzmann offers psychological conditions along Gricean lines to characterize forces, inadequate to capture the proper normative conditions on the felicitous use of the relevant sentences. For a declarative like *Homer is bald*, for instance, Gutzmann (2015: 203) has the condition that the speaker wants the hearer to know that Homer is bald. However, as it has been frequently pointed out, a literal utterance of that sentence can be perfectly felicitous even if the speaker does not care in the least whether the hearer comes to know that Homer is bald, and it can be infelicitous even if the speaker does want that (say, if he lacks the knowledge).⁴³ Marques and García-Carpintero (2020) make the corresponding point for slurs. Use conditions should rather concern a normative conversational scoreboard of the kind envisaged by Lewis (1979) and Thomason (1990). The default use condition for felicitous declaratives is that the speaker meets the specific norm that defines the illocutionary force of flat-out assertion. Hedges like *I guess* or *I think* may modify this, weakening the commitment.

I will just indicate how I think Gutzmann's proposal should be modified.⁴⁴ Use conditions refer to elements of a normative conversational scoreboard of the kind envisaged by Lewis (1979) and Thomason (1990). A distinctive part of it includes the propositions to whose truth participants are committed. An adequate pragmatic "force-linking" principle then tells us that what happens when a speaker felicitously utters a declarative in a default context is that she becomes thereby beholden to the specific norm that defines the illocutionary force of flat-out assertion – say, Knowledge Rule (KR). ~~Hedges like *I guess* or *I think* may modify this, weakening the commitment.~~

Second, Gutzmann leaves for future work how to handle presuppositions, but it is essential for my proposals here that we preserve the benefits on this score of dynamic approaches. A distinctive part of the scoreboard should have the propositions to whose truth participants are committed as a result of previous utterances accepted as felicitous. Accepted declaratives (*Homer is bald*) update this scoreboard constituent; presuppositions down the conversational line may then felicitously target it (*Homer regrets that he is bald*).

The sort of view I envisage would be, for the case of moods, closer to contextualist metasemantic proposals, on which the locutionary meanings are (in comparison with the Roberts–Portner view) closer to satisfy (F), along the lines that demonstratives and context-dependent expressions obtain semantic values in context – in contrast with the pure character views defended by Nowak and Harris. The debates confronting

⁴³ Cf. Vlach (1981), Alston (2000: ch. 2), and Green (2007: ch. 3).

⁴⁴ I find also congenial the sort of architecture outlined by Geurts (2019a), although in my view Geurts' blanket appeal to commitments should be made more specific, distinguishing the specific commitments resulting from different speech acts. Manfred Krifka's recent work is also highly pertinent.

conventionalists and intentionalists would reproduce here, aimed to establish in this case how specific forces are literally conveyed in context, whether just on the basis of “objective” contextual features, or on the basis instead of speakers’ intentions, perhaps constrained in ways analogous to those that King (2014) advances – as Bianchi (2014) suggests. It is reasonable to assume that abductively acceptable proposals should be able to deal in similar terms with all these cases, and hence I conclude by recommending (as Bianchi, 2014 and Recanati, 2018 have also done) that researchers keep in mind the case of mood-indicators.

22.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have updated a previous review of proposals on Kaplan’s and Stalnaker’s distinction between *semantics* and *metasemantics*. While in the previous work I examined the most basic issue of the metasemantics of expression-types, here I have examined the metasemantics of their tokens in contexts of literal use. I have focused on the metasemantics of mood-indicators, contrasting it with recent discussion of other context-dependent expressions, in particular demonstratives. Some views simply reject that there is any other semantics, and hence metasemantics, than that of the expression-types, which then put constraints on the “postsemantic” or pragmatic determination of meanings in context. Other views agree that expressions in context also get semantic values but diverge when it comes to the respective role of intentions and conventions in fixing them.