

Logical Nihilism in Contemporary French Philosophy

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RESUMEN

Recanati da por sentada la concepción de la comunicación lingüística como transmisión, aunque no es muy claro donde se sitúa él en el espectro de las posibles variaciones. Incluso si rechazamos todas esas concepciones de la comunicación lingüística, quedará un lugar para una teoría semántica que articule conceptos normativos tales como el de consistencia y validez lógicas. Un enfoque de la semántica que se concentre en tales conceptos normativos se ilustra usando el ejemplo de “Está lloviendo”. Se argumenta que la concepción de Recanati de la semántica como algo que involucra la pragmática de la saturación y la modulación, no puede dar cuenta de las propiedades lógicas de “Está lloviendo”.

PALABRAS CLAVE: comunicación lingüística, semántica normativa, relatividad con relación al contexto, aseverabilidad en un contexto, validez lógica, saturación, moderación.

ABSTRACT

Recanati takes for granted the conveyance conception of linguistic communication, although it is not very clear exactly where he lies on the spectrum of possible variations. Even if we disavow all such conceptions of linguistic communication, there will be a place for semantic theory in articulating normative concepts such as logical consistency and logical validity. An approach to semantics focused on such normative concepts is illustrating using the example of “It’s raining”. It is argued that Recanati’s conception of semantics as involving the pragmatics of saturation and modulation cannot account for the logical properties of “It’s raining”.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic Communication, Normative Semantics, Context-Relativity, Assertibility in a Context, Logical Validity, Saturation, Modulation.

OK, the title is a joke. François Recanati is French, and therefore a good cook, but his philosophy of language is not any kind of nihilism. Still, I think he does not give enough thought to the role of semantics in explicating the logical relations between sentences. Rather, he sees semantics and pragmatics as wholly aimed at a theory of linguistic communication. If instead we saw semantics as aimed at an account of logical relations between sentences, then, I

will argue, we would divide the labor between semantics and pragmatics very differently than he does. According to my way of doing it, we will not need categories like saturation and modulation at all. But even if we meet Recanati half way regarding the aims of semantics, we will have to countenance a kind of context-relativity that does not show up in Recanati's taxonomy.

I. RECANATI'S CONCEPTION OF LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION

Here is a commonplace conception of linguistic communication: A speaker has in mind a certain thought. This thought may be a judgment, or a question, or a wish, but let us focus on the case in which it's a judgment. The speaker chooses certain words with the intention of communicating his or her judgment. The content of that intention is that as a consequence of speaking those words the hearer will recognize that the speaker has in mind that judgment. Call this the *conveyance* conception of communication. It seems clear that Recanati takes for granted that something like this is correct, but I am having trouble placing him in the spectrum of possible variations on this theme.

Different versions of the conveyance conception will differ over how the speaker expects the hearer to recognize the judgment that the speaker has in mind and what the hearer has to do in order to play his or her part. More precisely, there are two questions that have to be answered: What is the hearer's objective in the process? (Presumably the speaker will intend the hearer to have that objective.) And what is the means by which the hearer aims to achieve that objective?

One view would be simply that the hearer's objective is to draw a conclusion to the effect that the speaker has in mind a certain judgment, or perhaps, that the speaker *intended* the hearer to recognize that the speaker has in mind that judgment. Moreover, the means by which the hearer is to reach that conclusion is specifically by thinking about the speaker's state of mind. The speaker's speech serves merely as evidence for the speaker's state of mind. The conventional meanings of words are relevant only insofar as the speaker exploits them to enable the hearer to do this. From this point of view, there is no difference at all between what the speaker *said* and the content of the judgment that the speaker intends the hearer to recognize. Call this the *direct* version of the conveyance conception. I am not sure whether any living philosopher of language believes this.

A different version would interpose a distinction between the content of the judgment that the speaker had in mind and what the speaker *said*. What the speaker said is something that can typically be identified on the basis of the conventional semantic properties of the speaker's words and features of the circumstances of utterance. Normally, the hearer's primary objective is to

identify what the speaker said. Call this the *indirect* version of the conveyance conception, because the hearer grasps the content of the speaker's thought at best indirectly, by grasping the content of speaker's words. A very *pure* kind of indirect version holds that what the speaker said is *entirely* determined by convention and circumstance without regard for what the speaker had in mind in speaking. But there are also *impure* indirect theories that allow that some aspects of what the speaker said are directly determined by the content of the judgment that the speaker had in mind. One kind of impure indirect view holds that if a speaker says, "That is a cat", then what is said has to predicate the property of being a cat, because that is what the word "cat" conventionally refers to, but what it is predicated of is entirely a matter of what the speaker has in mind. Moreover, within the range of impure indirect theories, we can distinguish between versions that give the speaker's actual intentions authority in determining those aspects of what is said that depend on speaker's intention and versions that treat the hearer's properly drawn conclusions about the speaker's intention as constitutive.

Within any indirect version of the conveyance conception, pure or impure, we could still distinguish between two varieties, according to what the hearer was supposed to do next. One view would be that the hearer has entirely met his or her obligation in identifying what the speaker said. If the speaker intends that the hearer recognize the content of the judgment that the speaker had in mind, then it is entirely the responsibility of the speaker to make sure that what is said matches that content, so that in identifying what the speaker said the hearer will have at the same time entirely discharged his or her obligation to try to discover the content of the speaker's judgment. Call this the *undemanding* version of the conveyance conception.

A different view would be that the hearer is to regard the recognition of what the speaker said as only a stepping stone. Having identified what the speaker said, the hearer is obligated to take another step and, on the basis of what the speaker has said, work out the content of an underlying judgment in the mind of the speaker. Usually the content of what the speaker had in mind will match what the speaker said, but sometimes it will be something different, and the hearer may be expected to always check for a discrepancy and draw a conclusion about the speaker's judgment. We can call this the *demanding* version of the conveyance conception. Various positions between the least demanding and the most demanding might be defined in terms of various conceptions of the hearer's further obligation. (For instance, how deeply must a hearer see past insincerity in order to count as understanding the speaker?)

While we are taxonomizing conceptions of communication, I should mention two other conceptions that are not versions of the conveyance conception at all. An essential feature of all versions of the conveyance conception is the assumption that the content of the speaker's judgment is not

simply defined in terms of the conventional meaning of the words used to express it and the circumstances of expression. But this could be denied. Suppose we identify conceptual thought with a kind of talking to oneself in the very language one speaks. There will be a thought process that generates speech, and that will not itself be the kind of conceptual thought that consists in talking to oneself, and it will not be a process of choosing words in order to convey the content of a judgment. Then we might countenance no distinction between judgment content and speech act content. From this point of view, we could go on to say several different things about communication.

We could say that communication is successful when the hearer succeeds in grasping the content of what the speaker said. Some mental process leads the speaker to speak some words. Those words, as a consequence of the conventional semantic properties of words and the circumstances of utterance, express a proposition or in some other sense *say something*. Communication is successful when the hearer succeeds in grasping what the speaker has in the pertinent sense said. No thinking about one another's mental states is typically involved. But we still have to explain what it means for a hearer to grasp what the speaker has said. This might consist in tokening a sentence in thought (in the same language one speaks) that says the same. While this conception dispenses with the distinction between thought content and speech act content, it still conceives of successful communication as a matter of mutually grasping a content. For this reason we might call it the *single content* conception of linguistic communication.

Alternatively, we might abandon altogether the idea of defining a content that is shared when communication is successful. The function of language is to facilitate interpersonal cooperation. The practice of speaking is successful to the extent that it effectively facilitates interpersonal cooperation. On some occasions it may be clear to us that a particular act of speech was the key move in a successful cooperative interaction, and in such cases we can say that that act of speech was successful communication. But normally there will many causally relevant factors and we will not be able to lay special credit or blame on any particular act of speech. Call this the *no content* conception of linguistic communication.

Where exactly does Recanati place himself on this spectrum of views? I am not entirely sure where Recanati stands, because I don't think he ever tells us what is the standard of correctness in the execution of free pragmatic processes. The meaning of an utterance cannot be simply composed in a bottom-up way from the given meanings of its component parts in light of the grammatical structure of the sentence. Rather, interpretations have to be modulated in light of the verbal and nonverbal situation. But is a hearer's interpretation correct only insofar as the hearer interprets the speaker as having the judgment that the speaker really did intend the hearer to recognize in the speaker or insofar as the hearer makes reasonable judgments about the speaker's inten-

tion? Or is a hearer's interpretation correct so long as the hearer follows certain pragmatic rules of interpretation that make no reference to the speaker's state of mind (even if those rules demand a delicate balancing act)?

For example, if someone says, "I'm parked out back", what makes it correct to interpret that utterance as true if and only if the speaker's *vehicle* is parked out back [Recanati (2010), p. 167]? Is it, on the one hand, either that that is what the speaker had in mind or that that is what the speaker may properly be taken to have in mind? Or is it, on the other hand, that ascribing the property of being parked to a person would be a category error? If something is said to be relevant to the interpretation (such as the fact that a person cannot literally be parked), is that only because it provides some clue as to what the speaker must have had in mind? Or is it constitutive of meaning in such a way that a speaker must strive to conform his or her intentions to it? If a relevant factor can be overridden by other considerations, then that might seem to make of it only a clue regarding the speaker's state of mind. Alternatively, we might hold that the meaning of an utterance constitutively *is* the product of some kind of delicate balancing of competing considerations.

My hunch is that Recanati's view is an *impure indirect* version of the conveyance conception. I believe that Recanati holds that conventional meanings impose some constraint on what is said quite apart from whether the speaker exploits them [(2004), p. 68]. The speaker's immediate objective is to bring the hearer to grasp what he or she has *said*. So Recanati's is not a direct version of the conveyance conception; it is an *indirect* version. Various references to speaker's intention in Recanati's oeuvres [e.g., (2004), pp. 13-14, p. 55; (2010), p. 184, p. 191] suggest that his view is not a pure indirect version of the conveyance conception either; it is at most an *impure* indirect version. Some aspects of what the speaker said are directly determined by the content of the judgment that the speaker aims to convey or, perhaps, by the content of the judgment that the hearer may reasonably take the speaker to aim to convey. But sometimes Recanati seems to suggest that pragmatic processing may proceed without the hearer's contemplating the speaker's intention [(2004), pp. 30-32]. And even if his view is an impure indirect version, that leaves open whether it is the speaker's intention itself that fills the gaps that conventional meanings leave behind or only what a hearer might reasonably take to be speaker's intention. (Remarks in his (2004), p. 19, suggest that Recanati takes the latter option, but I am not sure he sticks to that.) Finally, I cannot tell whether Recanati's theory is also a *demanding* version of the conveyance conception. That is, I cannot tell whether he thinks that the speaker expects the hearer to go on to use his or her interpretation of what the speaker has said to draw a conclusion about the potentially distinct content of a judgment that underlies the speaker's act of speech.

II. NORMATIVE SEMANTICS

All versions of the conveyance conception have several liabilities. Their proponents owe us an explanation of the kind of thing that the thoughts whose contents words express are supposed to be. How can the contents of thoughts have the kind of independence from the meanings of words that they need to have if it is to make sense to explain linguistic communication in terms of them in the manner of the conveyance conception? This is both a constitutive question and a genetic question. The constitutive question is, what are the facts about a thing in the brain that make it the case that it qualifies as a thing having a certain content? The genetic question is, what is the process by which a thing with such a content arises in the mind? Moreover, authors who appeal to speaker's *intentions* as determinants of utterance content have an infuriating aversion to telling us exactly what it is that speakers intend to happen.

What I have called *direct* and *impure indirect* versions of the conveyance conception have two further liabilities. First, they need to show that the capacity for thoughts to bear a complete content is somehow better than the capacity for spoken words to do so, so that the content not explicit in the spoken words can show up in the content of the underlying thought. Second, they need to explain how hearers might have access to the content of a speaker's thought apart from the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's words so that the hearer might use that content to complete his or her interpretation of the speaker's words.

I myself have concluded that these liabilities cannot be met and have abandoned altogether the conveyance conception of linguistic communication. My own theory of communication is a version of the no content conception (hence the title of my 2003 monograph, *Words without Meaning*). In my view, spoken language is the very medium of all conceptual thought. Creatures lacking language can still think, but theirs is a kind of nonconceptual thought, which I call *imagistic cognition*. Language is a tool whose nature is best understood in light of its role in facilitating interpersonal cooperation. It is *imagistic cognition* that allows language speakers to use this tool – to choose words, to respond appropriately to speech, and to learn a language in the first place. (For a theory along these lines, see my (2011).) To explain exactly how all of this works is a liability as great as any faced by the conveyance conception. My advantage is only that it is not already obvious that the liability cannot be met.

The no content conception need not entirely dispense with all concepts of meaning, though. Ordinary language contains semantic terminology that speakers can use in policing their own and others' speech. They can accuse one another of *inconsistency*. They can insist that a conclusion *follows* from some premises. In this way, semantic concepts play a role in instilling in the

community normative rules of discourse. The work of a philosopher of language is in part to bring clarity to this semantic terminology; to introduce well-motivated refinements to those normative tools. So we might try to define various logical concepts, such as logical inconsistency and logical validity. In so doing we may introduce various concepts that look like concepts of meaning or content. My own proposals in this direction center on something I call *assertibility in a context*. I say, a set of sentences is logically inconsistent if and only if there is no context in which every member of the set is assertible. I say, an argument is logically valid if and only if, for each context, if the premises are assertible in it, then the conclusions is assertible in it as well. Ordinary language also has a use for talk of *meaning*, and this will have to be brought into the no content theorist's theory as well. But it cannot be assumed that our account of the role of this kind of talk will license its use in explicating logical properties.

So a semantic theory, according to me, takes the form of a definition of assertibility in a context. A context is a formal structure of a certain sort – a set. We model natural languages by means of artificial languages that approximate to natural languages with respect to the properties we wish to model. Every time we add something interesting to the artificial language with which we do our modeling, we correlatively add something to the definition of a context. For example, if the language contains quantifiers, then a context will have to specify one or more domain of discourse. If we want to add a predicate like “ready”, then we will have to add something that in some sense provides a completion when “ready” occurs incomplete in a sentence such as “Tipper is ready”. Given a definition of the set of contexts, and a recursively defined set of sentences, we can give a recursive definition of the assertibility of a sentence in a context.

Assertibility in a context is a relation between one kind of linguistic entity, a sentence, and another kind of linguistic entity, a context. To say that a sentence is assertible in a context is not yet to say anything about any actual utterances. To say something about actual utterances, we have to say something about what it takes for a context, one of these formal structures, to be the one that *pertains* to a given utterance. An *utterance* of a sentence is *assertible* (simpliciter) if and only if the sentence uttered is assertible in the context that *pertains* to the utterance. Our theory of the pertaining relation will not be a formally precise theory. In explicating it, we will have to say a lot about how speech drives behavior. We will try to identify the context that pertains to an utterance in terms of the ways in which speech would drive behavior if the several interlocutors all acted *as though* that context were the one that pertained to their conversation. If we want to go on using the terms “semantics” and “pragmatics”, to semantics we can assign the task of defining the relation of assertibility between sentences and contexts, and to “pragmatics” we can assign the task of explaining what it takes for a context

to pertain to a given utterance. The closest thing we will find to Recanati's saturation and modulation is the process of figuring out which context pertains to a given utterance.

In terms of contexts and assertibility, we can explain why sentences such as the following strike us as somehow inconsistent.

- (1) It is raining and it is not raining.
- (2) Every student is happy and some student is not happy.
- (3) Tipper is ready and Tipper is not ready.
- (4) Tiny is big, Dumbo is small, and Dumbo is bigger than Tiny.
- (5) France is hexagonal, and Italy is not boot-shaped.
- (6) The ham sandwich wants his check, and the ham sandwich is only half-eaten.
- (7) Sam knows that his car is in his driveway, but he doesn't know that it hasn't been stolen.

Of course, for each of these sentences one can tell a story in which someone might utter it, but I hope it will be evident that they share a property of being wrong in some way that we might try to capture in a theory. My theory is that each of these sentences is inconsistent in the sense of being assertible in no context. I have dealt with (2) in detail in my (2010), and I have dealt with (3) in detail in my (2012). Since weather reports are the subject of chapter 3 of Recanati's *Truth-conditional Pragmatics*, I can here use a treatment of (1) to compare my conception of semantics to his.

III. WEATHER REPORTS

For a language containing weather reports, contexts will be structures containing at least two elements. One element will be a *base*, consisting of a consistent set of atomic sentences and negations of atomic sentences (i.e., a consistent set of literals). The base is *consistent* in the sense that for no sentence do both it and its negation belong. The literals in the base of a context might be of the form, "It is raining in d " and "It is not raining in e ". Another element will be a specification of a *default location*. Then we can say that the sentence "It is raining" is assertible in a context Γ if and only if, where d is the default location in Γ , "It is raining in d " is a member of the base of Γ . "It is raining" is deniable in Γ if and only if, where d is the default location in Γ , "It is not raining in d " is a member of the base of Γ .

What I am calling the “default location” will actually be a term, not a physical location. So there are no use-mention errors in the definitions I have just given. The quotation marks are to be treated as Quinean selective quotes. Actual locations come into play only at the point where we want to say that a given context is the one that pertains to a given utterance. We should expect that frequently the default location of a context will be a term that denotes the location in which the utterance takes place. But sometimes it may not be, for example, when someone on the telephone is talking about the location of the interlocutor on the other end (as Recanati too points out, (2010), p. 189).

In this light, we can see why (1) will not be assertible in any context. Suppose, for a reductio, that (1) is assertible in context Γ . Then, by the assertibility conditions for conjunctions, both conjuncts in (1) are assertible in Γ . Since the first conjunct is assertible in Γ , it follows that, where d is the default location in Γ , “It is raining in d ” is a member of the base of Γ . Since the second conjunct is assertible in Γ , it follows that, where d is the default location in Γ , “It is raining in d ” is deniable in Γ , which means that “It is not raining in d ” is a member of the base of Γ . But, by hypothesis, the base of a context is a consistent set of literals. Contradiction! So, (1) is not assertible in any context.

In order to account for the quantificational binding of weather reports, we need to revise the account somewhat. First let us suppose that contexts include domains of discourse conceived as sets of singular terms (not objects such as terms might be thought to denote). A context may include several domains of discourse; let one of them be the *location domain*, which is a set of terms that we think of as denoting locations. Further, let us suppose that to each pair whose first member is either a sentence or a common noun and whose second member is a context we associate what we may call the sentence’s, or common noun’s, *positive extension* in the context, which is a subset of the location domain. In the case of “It is raining” and the context Γ , the positive extension is the set of location names d such that d is in the location domain of Γ and “It is raining in d ” is in the base of Γ . In notation:

$$+[\text{It is raining}]_{\Gamma} = \{d \mid d \in \text{the location domain of } \Gamma \text{ and “It is raining in } d” \in \text{the base of } \Gamma\}.$$

Similarly, we can say,

$$+[\text{city}]_{\Gamma} = \{d \mid d \in \text{the location domain of } \Gamma \text{ and “}d \text{ is a city”} \in \text{the base of } \Gamma\}.$$

And then we can add:

$$+[\text{In every city, it is raining}]_{\Gamma} = \{d \mid d \in \text{the location domain of } \Gamma \text{ and } +[\text{city}]_{\Gamma} \subseteq +[\text{It is raining}]_{\Gamma}\}.$$

So if $+[city]_{\Gamma} \subseteq +[It\ is\ raining]_{\Gamma}$, then $+[In\ every\ city,\ it\ is\ raining]_{\Gamma}$ will consist of the entire location domain for Γ ; otherwise, it will be the empty set. Finally, given these context-relative “interpretations” of sentences and common nouns, we can say that in general a sentence s is assertible in a context Γ if and only if the default location for Γ is a member of $[s]_{\Gamma}$. In particular,

“It is raining” is assertible in Γ if and only if, where d is the default location in Γ , $d \in +[It\ is\ raining]_{\Gamma}$.

“In every city, it is raining” is assertible in Γ if and only if, where d is the default location in Γ , $d \in +[In\ every\ city,\ it\ is\ raining]_{\Gamma}$.

To extend this account to negations, we need to assign to each pair whose first member is either a sentence or a common noun and whose second member is a context a *negative extension*. Thus,

$- [It\ is\ raining]_{\Gamma} = \{d \mid d \in \text{the location domain of } \Gamma \text{ and “It is not raining in } d” \in \text{the base of } \Gamma\}$.

And then we can say that the positive extension of a negation is the negative extension of the sentence negated.

The positive extension of a conjunction will be the intersection of the positive extensions of the conjuncts. Since the base of a context is by stipulation consistent, the positive extension of (1) will be empty for every context. So (1) will not be assertible in any context. Obviously, quite a lot of work would have to be done to extend this approach to a reasonably large fragment of English.

There are other logical properties of weather reports to account for as well. I would say that the following argument is logically valid:

Weather Up

It is raining.

Therefore, it is raining somewhere.

But I would say that the following argument is not logically valid:

Weather Down

It is raining somewhere.

Therefore, it is raining.

Weather Down is invalid because, roughly, though it may be raining somewhere, it may not be raining in the place that matters in the context relative to

which we evaluate the conclusion. To capture these facts, it suffices to add the following clause to our semantic theory:

+[It is raining somewhere]_Γ = { d | $d \in$ the location domain of Γ and for some $e \in$ the location domain of Γ , “It is raining in e ” \in the base of Γ }.

So, if for some $e \in$ the location domain of Γ , “It is raining in e ” \in the base of Γ , then +[It is raining somewhere]_Γ will equal the entire domain of Γ ; otherwise, it is empty.

Incidentally, we can avoid positing many of Recanati’s “context shifts”. Our account of the pertaining relation will entail that usually a context pertains to an utterance only if the location that “here” pertains to is the location of the utterance. (From this statement one should not infer that “pertains” is an Ersatz for “denotes”.) But if one points to a spot on a map and says “here”, then “here” may pertain to the location that the spot on the map represents. So for a context to pertain to an utterance it is not necessary that the “here” pertain to the location of utterance. Something will have to be said about why the one sort of context rather than another pertains to a given situation. But there is no sense in which the referent of “here” is always *really* the location of the utterance. Similarly, there is no sense in which the referent of “I” is *really* always the speaker. So contrary to what Recanati says at several points in chapter 6 of *Truth-conditional Pragmatics* [(2010), pp. 197, 209, 211], there is no need to suppose that the speaker is pretending to be at that other location. (He also considers an alternative analysis of “here” and “now”, according to which they are “perspectivals”, not indexicals, in (2010), pp. 206-210.)

IV. RECANATI’S PROBLEM WITH LOGIC

Can Recanati’s theory of weather reports account for their logical properties, viz., the inconsistency of (1), the validity of Weather Up and the invalidity of Weather Down? I think it cannot. The problem is that his categories of saturation and modulation just do not exhaust the possible varieties of context-relativity. (In his (2004), Recanati tended to use “modulation” to mean specifically modulation of lexical sense. In his (2010) it has become his catch-all term for all varieties of primary pragmatic processing beyond saturation, including free enrichment, metonymic transfer, loosening, etc. See his (2010), p. 19.)

A first question for Recanati would be: How should we define logical consistency and logical validity? Here are two possibilities for logical consistency:

A sentence is logically consistent in the *saturation sense* if and only for some way of saturating it, it is true.

A sentence is logically consistent in the *modulation sense* if and only if for some way of saturating *and* modulating it, it is true.

Similarly, he could define logical validity in either of two ways:

An argument is logically valid in the *saturation sense* if and only for each way of saturating the sentences in the argument, if the premises are true on that way, then so is the conclusion.

An argument is logically valid in the *modulation sense* if and only for each way of saturating *and* modulating the sentences in the argument, if the premises are true on that way, then so is the conclusion.

I do not think we need to ask Recanati to choose. He could just say that we should countenance both kinds of consistency and both kinds of validity. My objection will be that *neither* the saturation versions nor the modulation versions capture the logical facts.

According to Recanati, “It is raining” just means *a rain event is occurring*. It does not *say* that a rain event is occurring *somewhere*, although as a matter of metaphysical fact, whenever a rain event is occurring, a rain event is occurring somewhere [(2010), p. 89]. There are no hidden indexicals in the deep structure of this sentence and so saturation simply has no work to do. If we sometimes interpret an utterance of “It is raining” as expressing the proposition that a rain event is occurring in Palo Alto, then that is a matter of pragmatic modulation. The point of his Monitoring Room example [(2010), pp. 81-82] is to show that such pragmatic modulation is optional. It can happen that, even after all pertinent modulation has been taken account of, the proposition that an utterance of “It is raining” expresses is only that is raining – no location is specified, and there is no quantification over locations.

Consider first the logical relations we can define in terms of saturation. We might very well find that (1) is inconsistent in the saturation sense. Just as “It is raining” means merely *a rain event is occurring*, “It is not raining” will mean *a rain event is not occurring*, and whatever those two propositions amount to, they cannot both be true. Moreover, we might find that Weather Up is valid in just the way Recanati says: If a rain event is *occurring*, then as a matter of metaphysical necessity, due to the nature of rain events, a rain event is occurring *somewhere* [(2010), p. 89]. The trouble is that Weather Down will be valid for precisely the same reason. If a rain event is occurring somewhere, then a rain event is certainly occurring. Recanati explicitly says that these two propositions are truth-conditionally equivalent. So apparently,

he thinks that Weather Down really is in some sense valid. But then he should countenance some other kind of validity in addition, because there is surely something wrong with Weather Down as well.

Recanati might plausibly maintain that what is wrong with Weather Down is that it is invalid in the modulation sense. There is a way of modulating the premise and the conclusion such that what the premise says on that modulation is true while what the conclusion says on that modulation is not true. The conclusion, "It is raining", may be modulated to express the proposition that it is raining in Palo Alto. Suppose that proposition is false. Still, even on that way of modulating meanings, the premise, "It is raining somewhere", still means that it's raining somewhere, which we can suppose to be true. The problem is that (1) is not inconsistent in the modulation sense. Nothing prevents us from modulating the first conjunct to mean that it is raining in Palo Alto and modulating the second conjunct to mean that it is not raining in Lincoln, Nebraska; so on that way of modulating, both conjuncts may be true.

Incidentally, this last observation points to a problem in Recanati's attempt to respect the letter of compositionality in chapter 1. What he says there is that in order to preserve the idea that the meanings of compound expressions are composed of the meanings of their components, despite the fact that the meanings of components may have to be modulated in light of the sentential context to which they belong, we could introduce a modulation function that applies to the components and then maintain that the modulated meaning of the compound is a function of the modulated meanings of the parts. This will not serve as a defense of the psychological hypothesis that the meanings of compound expressions are computed from the previously computed meanings of the components, which Recanati denies. But it might, although Recanati does not say this, allow us to define logical consistency and logical validity in the modulation sense.

The trouble is that what Recanati takes for granted about modulation in his discussion of compositionality differs from what he seems to assume everywhere else. In this setting, modulation is represented as a function that takes *expressions* as inputs. So in computing the modulated meaning of any one sentence from the modulated meanings of its components, if any single expression occurs twice, it will have to be modulated in the same way in both places. But that just does not seem to conform to the conception of modulation that Recanati describes elsewhere. The answer to this is certainly not to say that the inputs to the modulation function should be tokens instead of types. A recursive semantics has to operate on types not tokens, because a recursive definition can only define a property over the members of a recursively defined set, and only the set of expression types, and not the set of tokens, constitutes a recursive set. (For example, though an existential quantification, such as "Someone is flapping", is tokened, the formula that the quantifier binds, such as "s/he is flapping", may never have been tokened.)

Returning to the question of how to define validity, could Recanati not account for our intuitions by saying that Weather Down is valid in the saturation sense and invalid in the modulation sense, while (1) is inconsistent in the saturation sense but consistent in the modulation sense? Well maybe, but I think we also have the intuition that the reason why (1) is inconsistent is basically the same as the reason why Weather Down is invalid. That reason is that when we say “It is raining”, a location in some sense stands in the background. (1) is inconsistent because the same location is in the background for both conjuncts, and Weather Down is invalid because even if it is raining somewhere, it may not be raining at the location in the background.

The problem, in sum, is that there is a kind of context-relativity that does not show up anywhere in Recanati’s taxonomy. When we evaluate an utterance, we may do so by evaluating the sentence uttered relative to a certain background. The relevance of that background is not merely that it supplies values to indexical or demonstrative elements in the sentence or its deep structure or even that it modulates the meanings of tokens of expressions. Rather, it provides values to various parameters that have to be evaluated in order to decide which context pertains to the utterance of a sentence.

V. CONCLUSION

Daring souls will survey the conveyance conception’s long history, deplore its forever failing to pay its debts, and decide to invest in more promising start-ups. But one would not have to go so far as the no content conception in order to take logic more seriously. Unlike me, one might still think that various notions of content may be drawn from a theory of linguistic communication and that logical relations ought to be defined in terms of those. Perhaps my approach to weather reports could be reconstructed within the framework of the conveyance conception of communication. In any case, we will have to find a kind of content that goes beyond what saturation yields but falls short of what modulation creates.

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Reply to Gauker

François Recanati

Gauker distinguishes between two broad families of approaches to communication. The first family, which he dislikes, he calls the *conveyance conception*. On that sort of view, the speaker intends to communicate a certain thought content which is somehow *given*, independently of the utterance, and is not simply defined in terms of the conventional meaning of the words used and the context. Of the ‘direct’ version of the view, according to which what the speaker says *is* the content of the thought he intends to communicate by his utterance, Gauker says that he is not sure whether any living philosopher of language holds it. (I think Stephen Neale does.) The indirect version is more widespread, and Gauker ascribes it to me. On that version what is said is defined, *inter alia*, in terms of the conventional meaning of the words used and the context and may therefore be different from the content the speaker intends to communicate by his utterance (even though what the speaker intends to communicate may be *one* of the factors that determine what is said — that’s what Gauker calls the ‘impure’ variant of the indirect version).

According to the *other* family of approaches, *there is no thought content that preexists to linguistic articulation*: thought content comes into being through linguistic articulation, so there is no basis for a distinction between the thought content one intends to communicate and the thought content one actually expresses. (Or so Gauker thinks.) Here also Gauker distinguishes between several versions of the approach. On the ‘single-content view’, communication succeeds when the hearer grasps the content which the speaker expresses by his utterance (what he says). On the ‘no-content view’, which Gauker favors, no content needs to be shared for communication to succeed. Communication is the use of language to facilitate interpersonal cooperation, and that need not involve content sharing.

Which view exactly do I hold, asks Gauker? Well, there are ingredients I like on both sides of the divide he describes. Like him, I don’t believe that communication necessarily involves content sharing (because indexical thoughts often can’t be shared). Communication, rather, involves some form of coordination of thoughts [Recanati (2012)]. Like Gauker also I am sympathetic to the view that conceptual thought is *not* independent of linguistic articulation.

Still, I want to retain a distinction between the thought the speaker attempts to communicate, and the content he actually expresses (what he ‘says’).¹ To that extent Gauker is right to ascribe the indirect version of the conveyance conception to me. He is right also to describe the version I hold as ‘impure’ since I take the speaker’s intentions to contribute to determining what is said. But — to answer a question he asks repeatedly — it is not the speaker’s actual intention that matters; what matters is the intention which it would be reasonable to ascribe to the speaker in the speech context.

Gauker insists that semantics and pragmatics should be aimed not merely at a theory of linguistic communication, but also at an account of the logical relations between sentences. He acknowledges that one can, in my framework, characterize various notions of validity and consistency: validity/consistency in the saturation sense and in the modulation sense, as he puts it. But, he objects, neither the saturation versions nor the modulation versions fill the bill, as there are logical facts which we can’t capture using these notions.

Among the logical facts that can’t be captured in my framework is the invalidity of the following argument, which Gauker calls ‘Weather Down’:

It is raining somewhere

Therefore it is raining

According to Gauker, the only way I could account for the intuitive invalidity of Weather Down is in terms of ‘validity in the modulation sense’ (because, in the saturation sense, the argument *is* valid, given my semantic analysis of ‘it is raining’ as saying merely that a rain event is occurring). But validity in the modulation sense can’t be the right notion to use because if it were, we could not account for the intuitive inconsistency of

(1) It is raining and it is not raining.

In the modulation sense, indeed, that sentence is consistent (since nothing prevents us from modulating the two conjuncts differently so as to mean that it’s raining in Paris and not raining in Palo Alto). Of course, I could say that Weather Down is invalid in the modulation sense, while (1) is inconsistent in the saturation sense; but Gauker feels that ‘the reason why (1) is inconsistent is basically the same as the reason why Weather Down is invalid’:

The reason is that when we say ‘it is raining’, a location in some sense stands in the background. (1) is inconsistent because the same location is in the background for both conjuncts, and Weather Down is invalid because even if it is raining somewhere, it may not be raining at the location in the background [this volume, p. 78].

Let us assume that this is right, i.e. that Weather Down is invalid and (1) inconsistent for the reason Gauker gives. He concludes that to account for the logical facts, we need to countenance ‘a kind of context-relativity that does not show up anywhere in Recanati’s taxonomy’. I find this conclusion puzzling, for (it seems to me) I do make room for that extra form of context-dependence, distinct from both saturation and modulation, even though I only mention it incidentally in *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*, (pp. 23-24, 112, 114). That third form of context-dependence I call ‘circumstance relativity’ [Recanati (2007), pp. 3-6]. The idea is that whenever we say (or think) something, what we say or think (the ‘lekton’) is to be evaluated with respect to a situation which our thought or speech concerns. The situation of evaluation (the place of rain in the case of ‘it’s raining’) is determined by contextual factors, but the contextual determination of the relevant situation is *neither saturation nor modulation*. I draw a distinction between two levels of meaning: the lekton and the Austinian proposition (i.e. the lekton *plus* the contextually relevant situation of evaluation). Notions like saturation and modulation only apply at the level of the lekton [Recanati (2010), p. 114n]. I say that the location ingredient in ‘it is raining’ can be accounted for in terms of circumstance-relativity, i.e. at the level of the Austinian proposition (rather than in terms of saturation or modulation at the lekton level), and I even say that ‘deep down, that is the account I favour’ [Recanati (2010), p. 112]. So I think I could account for the logical facts Gauker talks about (assuming they are facts) in much the same way as he does: by pointing out that if we evaluate the whole of (1) with respect to a single situation of evaluation (instead of a varying the situation for each of the conjuncts) we get an inconsistency, and similarly for Weather Down — if we evaluate the whole argument (premise and conclusion) against the same situation *s*, we find that the premise can be true (if there is a situation *s*’ ≠ *s* which is rainy) and the conclusion false (if *s* itself is not rainy). That means that the argument is invalid.

NOTES

¹ According to me, it’s perfectly possible to hold (with Gauker) that thought is inner speech and still distinguish between the thought in one’s mind and the thought one expresses in overt speech. These issues are discussed (to a certain extent) in chapter 4 of *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*.

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