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Radical Minimalism and the Possibility of a Context-Free Semantics

By

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Supervisor: Dr. James Levine.
Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University. This thesis is entirely my own work.
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Abstract.

This thesis explores the nature of the distinction between two types of meaningful content associated with human language: context-free linguistic content and pragmatically enriched communicated content.

It is concerned with questions such as: What kind of information does a sentence, independent of its actual use, express about the world? What is the relationship between certain levels of meaningful content and truth-conditions; that is, is truth-conditional content strictly a function of formal linguistic meaning, or is it a matter of utterance meaning? Furthermore, how do we account for the seemingly compositional, systematic and recursive aspects of human language, while also appreciating the ambiguous, vague and creative nature of communication? Also, what are the implications of certain approaches to language-study found in cognitive science and linguistics for the philosophy of language?

Traditionally within the philosophy of language, the distinction between context-free linguistic content and pragmatically enriched communicated content is known as the distinction between "semantic" content and "pragmatic" content. However, it is now the case within contemporary philosophy of language that the precise definition of these terms is a matter of much contention.

Ultimately, I argue that "semantic" content is context-free content: that which is fully determined by the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence independent of context, except where syntactically mandated (i.e. indexicals, demonstratives, etc.). However, in a break from tradition, I also argue that this level of content does not express truth-conditional content. In this way "semantics" is concerned with the systematic, recursive and theoretically tractable characteristics of natural language: aspects amenable to a scientific analysis. Pragmatic information remains that which is concerned with utterances and speech acts and, ultimately, truth-conditional content. Pragmatic information is information not traceable to the formal, lexico-syntactic elements of sentence-type, which nonetheless contribute to what is meant and communicated by speakers in conversation.

The unique and original claim of this research, however, is that semantic content, while lexico-syntactically determined, does not express truth-conditional content. In order to reach a level of content that is truth-conditional, it is necessary to take account of more than what is found in the formal constituents of a sentence; that is, some aspect of pragmatic information is necessary. In this way, I argue, contra the dominant perception with the literature, for a less-than-truth-conditional, or sub-propositional semantics. This view is known as Radicalism\(^1\); called such because of the claim that the formally determined context-free content of sentences express only propositional "radicals" rather than fully truth-conditional contents.

The thesis is divided into four main chapters, and a conclusion. In the first chapter I focus on a view known as Contextualism. This is one of two dominant theoretical standpoints within contemporary literature. Contextualists argue that "semantic" content is defined as the first, consciously available truth-conditional proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence. Hence for them, there is pragmatic and contextual information involved in the determination of "semantic" content. I argue that Contextualists, while correct in claiming

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\(^1\) The name "Radicalism" is taken from the work of Kent Bach (2004, 2006).
that there is context involved in the expression of truth-conditional content, are mistaken to
neglect a level of context-free, linguistic content simply because it does not express truth-
conditional content.

The second chapter examines the opposing view: Semantic Minimalism. Minimalism
holds that all context-free sentences do necessarily express truth-conditional content, and for
them, this content is "semantic" content. Hence, Minimalism remains loyal to the traditional
Gricean approach to the strict divide between "semantics" and "pragmatics". They do revise
this traditional picture somewhat, however, by allowing that this context-free content is not
usually what is communicated by a seemingly "literal" use of a sentence. Ultimately, I argue
that Minimalists are mistaken in their commitment to a fully truth-conditional, context-free
"semantics" and argue that it is possible to maintain the integrity and autonomy of a context-
free level of content, without claiming this level of content is also truth-conditional.

Chapter three is a statement of the view I argue is the correct approach to this analysis
of levels of meaningful content: Radical Minimalism. Radicalism splits the difference
between the two aforementioned approaches. It does this by holding (with Contextualism)
that context-free linguistic content is not truth-conditional content, while also holding (with
Minimalism) that context-free linguistic content is the proper domain of semantics, thus
holding (as against both positions) that semantic content is not truth-conditional content.

The fourth chapter then draws on work from cognitive science and linguistics to shed
light on the issues within this debate. Specifically, it makes the case that if it is the case that
our linguistic abilities are underpinned by a dedicated mental module, then Radicalism is the
best approach to issues surround the semantics/pragmatics divide. Furthermore, it examines
the methodological framework of Internalism in linguistics. I conclude, again, that
Radicalism is the approach best suited to accommodate the claims of Internalism: the
meaning of linguistic items, independent of use, is not defined by their relations to things out
in the world (i.e. a scientifically respectable theory of linguistic meaning will not be a theory
of reference or truth-conditions).

Finally, in my conclusion I restate the arguments in favour of a Radicalist approach to
issues of linguistic meaning and truth-conditional content and respond to a number of
criticisms of this view (e.g., that it is just Contextualism by another name, that you cannot
have a context-free semantics without truth-conditions, etc.). I also argue that while
Radicalism is best suited to accommodate claims from Internalism in linguistics, Internalism,
in turn, can help bear some of the explanatory burden of a context-free "semantics" that is not
truth-conditional.

Radicalism accounts for the dual nature of human language: that it is at once
compositional, systematic and recursive, while also being fluid, creative and richly dynamic.
Linguistic meaning is ambiguous, yet constrained, and I argue that Radicalism is the view
that best situated to accommodate these traits.
Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the nature of the distinction between two types of meaningful content associated with human language: context-free linguistic content and pragmatically, enriched, communicated content. Traditionally, this distinction was known as the distinction between “semantic” content and “pragmatic” content. However, it is now the case within contemporary philosophy of language that the precise definition of these terms is a matter of much contention. This thesis is concerned with the debate over how exactly to define the relationship between these types of content and how, in turn, they relate to the determination of truth-conditional content.

Ultimately, I argue that “semantic” content is context-free content: that which is fully determined by the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence independent of context. However, in a break from tradition, I also argue that this level of content does not express truth-conditional content. In this way “semantics” still captures the systematic, recursive and theoretically tractable characteristics of natural language. Pragmatic content remains that which is concerned with utterances and speech acts and ultimately truth-conditional content. Pragmatic information is information not traceable back to the formal, lexico-syntactic elements of sentence-type, which nonetheless contributes to what is meant and communicated by utterances. Further, I hold that context affects this context-free semantic content only when syntactically mandated, as in the case of genuine context-sensitive expressions (indexicals, demonstratives, etc). Any other contextual effects on linguistic content are concerned with speech acts and intentional communication, thus as per tradition, semantics and pragmatics are kept separate.

The unique claim of this research, however, is that semantic content, while still lexico-syntactically determined, does not express truth-conditional content. In order to reach
a level of content that is truth-conditional, it is necessary to take account of more than what is
found in the formal constituents of a sentence; that is, some aspect of pragmatic information
is necessary. In this way, I argue, contra the dominant perception with the literature, for a
less-than-truth-conditional, or sub-propositional semantics. This view is known as
Radicalism; called such because of the claim that the formally determined context-free
content of sentences express only propositional ‘radicals’ rather than fully truth-conditional
contents.

*The Semantics-Pragmatics Tradition.*

Issues concerning the precise characterisations of semantic and pragmatic content
have their roots in the work of Paul Grice. Grice’s work was largely in response to the claims
of the Ordinary Language Philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, Austin, and Strawson. They
argued that “meaning is use”; that the meanings of words were nothing more than the uses to
which they were put in ordinary conversation. In reaction to this, Grice sought to mark a
distinction between content that is traceable to the meaning of the context-independent
sentence type, and content that is due to aspects of our *intentional* usage of words and
sentences.

Thus Grice developed the semantics-pragmatics distinction to deal with the difference
between these types of meaning. For example, the *sentence* “He is poor, but honest” means,
semantically, that the man in question is poor *and* he is honest. However, a speaker who
uttered it would be taken to have pragmatically implied that there is some reason to believe
poor people are not honest. Grice argued that it was important to have the semantics-
pragmatics distinction to talk about such phenomena; that is, the difference between saying
something and thereby meaning or communicating something else. He states: “the precept

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2 The name “Radicalism” is taken from the work of Kent Bach (2004, 2006).
that one should be careful not to confuse meaning and use is perhaps on the way toward being as handy a philosophical vade mecum as once was the precept that one should be careful to identify them” (Grice, 1989, p. 4).

Furthermore, Grice also intended the context-free sentence meaning to capture the truth-conditional content expressed by the sentence. This truth-conditional semantic content he labelled the “what is said” by the sentence and this was to be “closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) one has uttered” (Grice, 1989, p. 25). As Neale states in his essay on Grice, “...it is clear upon reflection (from scattered remarks) that what is said is to do duty for the proposition expressed by U. Where the sentence uttered is of the type conventionally associated with the speech act of asserting (i.e. in the indicative mood) what is said will be straightforwardly truth-conditional” (Neale, 1992, p. 11).

Truth-conditional content here is content that is capable of being either true or false. The truth-conditions of a proposition\(^3\) are the conditions that would have to obtain in order for the proposition to be true. Classically, the idea of truth-conditional analysis was that identifying the meaning of a sentence requires identifying its truth-conditions. Hence, it was often held the knowing the meaning of a sentence requires knowing its truth-conditions.

On the traditional Gricean view, context-free, linguistic content—the “literal meaning” of a sentence—was assumed to be truth-conditional content, which was, in turn, assumed to deliver the intuitive proposition expressed by uses of such sentences. This level of content was called “semantic” content by Grice. It was lexico-syntactically determined, and it expressed truth-conditional contents. Pragmatics on the other hand was considered a separate

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\(^3\) A “proposition” here is something that necessarily has truth-conditions. That is, a level of content that is capable of being true or false. This is not, however, to identify or equate a proposition with its truth-conditions. While some have adopted a “wide-grained” view of individuating propositions so that a proposition is identified with truth-conditions, others have held that while propositions have truth-conditions, they are not identified with truth-conditions. For the purposes of this thesis, it is assumed only that propositions have truth-conditions; no account of the individuation of propositions is assumed.
field that dealt with departures from "literal" usage and meaning not traceable to the context-
free content of a sentence. Such departures, however, were treated as an obvious, specialized
class of usage rather than the norm. This is seen in Grice's work on the cooperative principle
and his conversational maxims (Grice 1975, 1989).

However, it is now relatively commonplace to accept as a platitude the presence of
the ubiquitous phenomenon of semantic-underdetermination and incompleteness arguments.
These arguments pertain to the fact that what the grammar plus the lexicon delivers as the
meaning of a sentence does not seem to express truth-conditional content. Further, it also fails
to capture what we would intuitively characterize as what the speaker means in uttering it,
even when being used "literally". That is, the context-free content seems to fall short of
capturing what we mean when we use sentences, and this seems to apply even in cases where
the sentence is to be used in a genuine, literal manner and is devoid of obvious ambiguity or
vagueness. This seems to render Grice's maxims of little help in reconciling the gap created
between sentence meaning and intuitive communicated meaning. That is, it is not only in
typical or obvious cases of implicature (sarcasm, metaphor, irony, etc.) that context-free
sentence meaning underdetermines truth-conditional, communicated meaning.

For example, take the sentence "I haven't eaten" spoken by someone at around 7pm
on a Monday evening. This seems a common, straight-forward sentence that people often use
without confusion or implication, and use it in a genuine and literal fashion (in that they are
not attempting to be sarcastic, or metaphorical etc.). Yet, even in such an uncomplicated
sentence it seems that the compositional sentence meaning does not quite fully determine
what the speaker is trying to convey, even though it is being used literally. For, the strict,
lexico-syntactic elements of the sentence express the claim that the person has *not* eaten,
period.
But, obviously, it seems that this sentence is used to mean that the person has not eaten yet that evening. Yet, this extra information – that evening – is not contained in any of the formal elements of the sentence itself. By highlighting the fact that this notion of context-free sentence meaning seems to fall short of fulfilling its intended role, one can see here the nature of semantic-underdetermination, and the problem it poses for the division between different types of meaningful content. For it seems that even if we know the standing linguistic meaning of all the words in a sentence, and understand the grammar of that sentence, there is still a gap between that knowledge and the information about the world it conveys when uttered, and some argue this is the case for the majority of sentences we utter, not an exception.

It seems, then, that the level of context-free content does not do the job it was once assumed it did, i.e. fully determine the truth-conditional meaning of a sentence. That is, given the acknowledged presence of phenomena such as semantic-underdetermination, it is not at all clear whether truth-conditions can be specified with reference only to the formal, lexico-syntactic features of the linguistic items in play, or whether contextual influence needs to be taken into account before truth-conditional content is expressed. This very issue – whether truth-conditional analysis can be informatively carried out before or after pragmatic influence – is a key element with which this thesis is concerned.

Take another example: the fully grammatical sentence “Jeff can’t continue” seems lacking in terms of the possibility for truth-conditional analysis. There is a felt need to ask “what is it that Jeff can’t continue?” before one could grasp the conditions under which it is true; that is, it seems propositionally incomplete. Again, this shows that the lexico-syntactic content of a sentence-type seems to fall short when it comes to the determination of truth-conditional meaning.
The question then becomes, how best to deal with this phenomena of semantic underdetermination and incompleteness? Does "semantics" remain the label for formally constituted, compositional content? Or should it capture the intuitive truth-conditional content expressed by the *utterance* of a sentence? These are the questions that motivate contemporary debate around semantic and pragmatic content, and it is with such questions that this thesis is concerned.

*Structure of Arguments.*

This thesis is divided into four main chapters and a conclusion. The first two chapters frame the debate by examining each of the currently dominant theories of how best to construe the relationship between context-free content, and truth-conditional content. The third chapter is an articulation of the view I endorse in this thesis: Radicalism. The fourth chapter draws on work in cognitive science and linguistics in order to further support a Radicalist framework.

Chapter 1 then examines and critiques Contextualism. Contextualism is the view that, in the light of semantic underdetermination and incompleteness arguments, we should abandon the idea that context-free content is necessarily truth-conditional. And further, since "semantic content" for Contextualists must trade in truth-conditional contents, there is necessarily pragmatic information involved in the determination of "semantic content". That is, semantic content is no longer defined as the compositional content of a context-free sentence. For Contextualists, it is the truth-conditional content expressed by an *utterance* of a sentence. Thus, they dissolve the traditional border between the "semantic" and the pragmatic; for on their view, there is pragmatic information necessarily involved in the determination of semantic content. Furthermore, for them, the formal, lexico-syntactic content of a sentence-type is an "idle wheel in linguistic comprehension" and thus of little
theoretical interest. For Contextualists, the real item of theoretical interest is the pragmatically enriched truth-conditional content of an utterance.

Chapter 2 examines the opposing view to Contextualism. This is known as Semantic Minimalism. Minimalism argues that context-free content is in fact necessarily truth-conditional, even in the face of the aforementioned underdetermination and incompleteness arguments. That is, they are loyal to the traditional Gricean approach that “semantic” content is both context-free and propositional, i.e. truth-conditional. However, in order to accommodate the claims of semantic underdetermination and incompleteness, Minimalists allow that this content is often not what is communicated by an utterance of a sentence, even when being used “literally”. Yet, the context-free sentence-type meaning itself is still properly truth-conditional, even if it is not what is communicated.

Each of these views is explained and then criticised, in chapters 1 and 2, thus creating the space in which Radicalism can exist. With this in mind, chapter 3 is an argument for and exegesis of, Radicalism. This chapter explains the precise characterisation of Radicalism as splitting the difference between the aforementioned views Contextualism and Minimalism. That is, Radicalism accommodates the driving motivations of each view, while ridding them of the unnecessary adherence to a truth-conditional semantics. It does this by holding (with Contextualism) that context-free linguistic content is not truth-conditional content, while also holding (with Minimalism) that context-free linguistic content is the proper domain of semantics, thus holding (as against both positions) that semantic content is not truth-conditional content.

Chapter 4, then, takes the discussion in a slightly different direction by drawing on work in cognitive science and linguistics. The motivation for this section comes from the work of a specific theorist: minimal semanticist Emma Borg. In her book *Minimal Semantics*
Borg, after putting her case forward for Minimalism, also articulates the following conditional statement: *if* it is the case that our linguistic abilities are underpinned by a dedicated mental module, *then* Semantic Minimalism is the most complimentary theory to go with such an account of the architecture of our minds. Borg goes on to argue that there is in fact good reason to suppose our linguistic abilities are underpinned by such a module, and this, she argues, lends support to her minimal account of semantics.

Human abilities that are governed by such modules are defined by certain characteristics: they are fast, automatic, autonomous, encapsulated, domain specific, etc. Further, they usually involve processes which do not require access to the complete range of information possessed by the individual, that is, it does not require access to typically contextual information (background, intentions, etc.) (Borg, 2007, p. 7). These are the type of characteristics that Minimalists argue define their version of "semantic" content, particularly as opposed to the Contextualist claims that there is rich, abductive, pragmatic information involved in the determination of "semantic" content.

However, another defining claim of Minimalism is that such content is necessarily truth-conditional. It is on this point that I depart from Borg. I argue that such a modular account of our linguistic abilities does not go any way to establishing that this autonomous, computational level of content is necessarily truth-conditional. Hence, Radicalism is in fact a better "fit" with modularity than her Minimalism is. In fact, I argue, such a modular or "internalist" approach to our linguistic abilities suggests that it is unlikely that a theory of formal linguistic meaning will be a theory of truth-conditions.

This brings us then to the second part of Chapter 4. In this section I draw on the work of Internalism in linguistics, as developed by Noam Chomsky, among others. The question being asked here is: if it is in fact the case that our linguistic abilities are governed by a
specific module, in the brain, what are the implications of this for a truth-conditional theory of meaning? Thus, I explore the I-language approach as developed by Chomsky and conclude that Radicalism is again, best equipped to accommodate the claims made in such an approach. Furthermore, the combination of Radicalism and Internalism helps to assuage some of the doubts about the possibility of a context-free semantics that is less than truth-conditional. That is, the Internalist approach helps to bear some of the explanatory burden of a theory of meaning, post-truth-conditions.

The conclusion then, re-caps on the arguments of the previous four chapters, while acknowledging and responding to some recent attempts by Minimalists to deal with the issues arising from an Internalist account of semantics. Most notably, by Borg, in her very recently published book *Pursuing Meaning* (2012).

Ultimately, I argue in this thesis that the guiding principle behind a proper linguistic analysis is to do with different types of information: context-free, compositional linguistic content, and contextualised, pragmatic, communicative content. It is acknowledgment of this dual nature of human language that structures the arguments of Radicalism. Language is at once both systematic, recursive and compositional, as well as dynamic, creative and intentional. A proper analysis of our linguistic abilities should thus take account of these characteristics, and Radicalism achieves this.

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4 This book was only published in June of this year (2012), hence I only became aware of it after much of this thesis was written. I have, however, tried to accommodate any new or updated arguments she presents.
Glossary of key terms:

Give the subtly complex nature of the issues with which this debate is concerned, discussion can, if one is not careful, become somewhat terminologically opaque. This is due to the fact that it is the very definition of certain terms that is precisely what is at issue throughout this analysis. Thus, it is necessary to make clear, at the beginning, that there is not univocal agreement on the definition of certain key terms.

Problematic Terminology.

- **Truth-conditional**: a level of content is considered truth-conditional if it is capable of being true or false. The question for this thesis is whether context-free linguistic content is truth-conditional, or whether pragmatic or contextual information is necessary before such a level of content is expressed.

- **Propositional Content**: Propositional content, for our concerns, is a level of content that can be true or false, i.e. truth-conditional. Thus, unless stated otherwise, “truth-conditional content”, and “propositional content” will be interchangeable.

- **Semantic Content**: There is no single definition of “semantic content” that will be accepted by all parties to the dispute. Traditionally, according to Grice, “semantic” content was assumed to be context-free content and this content was truth-conditional.
  - Minimalists accept this traditional view that “semantic” content is both context-free and truth-conditional.
  - Contextualism, on the other hand, disputes this definition. For them, context-free content is not truth-conditional and since they wish to maintain the idea of a truth-conditional semantics, they argue that “semantic” content must be in part determined by contextual factors.


- **Literal content**: The literal content of a sentence is two ways ambiguous. It is used by some (i.e. Minimalism) to refer to the context-free meaning of a formal sentence-type. It is used by others (i.e. Contextualism) to refer to the intuitive, consciously available proposition expressed by an *utterance* of a sentence.

- **"What is Said"**: The technical phrase "what is said" was traditionally defined as content that was context-free, literal content, as well as the proposition (truth-conditional content) expressed by the sentence.
  
  - Contextualists now argue that "what is said" is not composed of context-free content alone, and is in fact the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence.
  
  - Semantic Minimalists also argue that "what is said" is not syntactically constrained and is a matter for pragmatics.
  
  - Radicalism disagrees with both views, and argues, that "what is said" is determined by the lexico-syntactic content of a sentence and thus, does not capture the proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence. Instead, it captures the context-free meaning of a *sentence* when uttered.

**Key Positions.**

- **Contextualism**: Contextualism is the view that context-invariant sentence meaning falls short of expressing truth-conditional content, and since, on their view, semantic content trades in truth-conditions, there is pragmatic information involved in the determination of "semantic content". For them *semantic* content is the first intuitive proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence that is consciously available to listener.
- **Semantic Minimalism**: Semantic Minimalism, is the view that context-free content is properly truth-conditional. Thus, "semantic content" for them is that which is determined by the formal, lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence-type and this level of content is necessarily truth-conditional (or propositional).

- **Internalism**: 'Internalism' labels a specific approach to analysis of language. As developed by Chomsky, the internalist denies an assumption common to all most other approaches: the assumption that in giving the content of an expression, we are primarily specifying something about that expression's relation to things in the world, which that expression might be used to say things about. Internalism then, marks a shift from "the study of language regarded as an externalized object to the study of the system of knowledge attained and internally represented in the mind/brain" (Chomsky, 1986, p. 24)

- **Externalism**: Externalist theories of linguistic meaning, on the other hand, define meaning as constituted by an expressions relation to things in the world, i.e. referential theories of meaning, and truth-conditional theories of meaning.

- **Modularity of Mind Thesis**: The Modularity thesis of mind states that the human brain is composed, at least in part, of discrete, relatively autonomous modules that govern specific abilities (usually the 5 senses and language). There are certain characteristics of modular abilities as outlined by Jerry Fodor: automatic, autonomous, encapsulated, domain specific, mandatory

- **Referential Theories of Meaning**: Referential theories of meaning are externalist theories of meaning that state the meaning of a term can be given in terms of what object or entity in the world it refers to.
Chapter One: Contextualism

1.0 Introduction

The following chapter takes the form of an exegesis and critique of a view known as Contextualism. Within debate over how exactly to construe the division of labor between “semantic” and “pragmatic” content, Contextualism occupies an important position. As the name suggests, Contextualism argues that contextual information, or pragmatic content, has a far greater role to play in the determination of propositional linguistic meaning than traditionally thought. In fact, according to Contextualism, “semantic” content is no longer determined exclusively through the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence, but necessarily requires pragmatic information.

This is because, according to Contextualism, “semantics” is primarily the study of truth-conditional content, and sentences, independent of context, do not express such a level of content. It is the utterance, in context, that expresses propositional content. In order for propositional, or truth-conditional, contents to be expressed, pragmatic information must necessarily be involved. Thus, there is no longer a clear border between the “semantic” and the “pragmatic”, for Contextualists, as there is pragmatic information necessarily involved in the determination of “semantic” content.

In this chapter I will analyze Contextualism, first through a number of key arguments that are held in common by theorists aligned with this view. Namely: context shifting arguments and underdetermination arguments.

Secondly, I will concentrate on Francois Recanati as one of its major proponents and examine Recanati’s attempt to construct a positive processing model that highlights the
pragmatic nature of linguistic meaning. I will then critique both Contextualism in general and Recanati's instantiation of contextualism specifically.

In order to do this, I will draw on the work of Kent Bach, among others to show that while Contextualism does account for some important and influential facts about natural language, it goes too far in dismissing the importance of a context-independent level of content. It does this because it takes the ability of linguistic constructions to deliver truth-conditional content as the arbiter for whether that construction has meaningful content or not. This is where Contextualism is mistaken. Literal sentence meaning – that which is exhausted by the syntactic constituents of a sentence together with their mode of composition – while certainly more constrained that traditionally thought, is an essential aspect of linguistic analysis and must not be disregarded due to its inability to be analysed in terms of the concept of truth. It captures the systematic, recursive and theoretically tractable aspects of language that are just as important as its flexibility and contextual nature.

1.1: The Traditional Picture

Traditionally, the division between “semantic” and “pragmatic” content was considered to be clear and well defined. “Semantics” dealt with information “encoded in...the stable linguistic features of the sentence, together with any extra linguistic information that provides semantic values to context sensitive expressions in what is uttered” (Bach 2001, p. 6). Pragmatics, on the other hand, is concerned with information generated or made relevant by the act of uttering. That is, pragmatics “provides an account of how sentences are used in utterances to convey information in context” (Kempson, 1988, p. 139).
In analyzing our communicative behavior, Grice was one of the first to systematically draw the distinction between “what is said” and “what is implicated”; that is, between *saying* something and *meaning* something else. Reacting to the work of the Ordinary Language Philosophers, Grice saw this distinction as necessary in order to separate the meaning of a word or sentence, from how it is used and what it is used to communicate. Neale says in his essay *Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language* that while ordinary use of language is an important aspect of philosophy, “to claim the meaning of an expression is a function of what its users do with it is not to claim that we must identify meaning and use” (Neale, 1992, p. 9). The semantic/pragmatic distinction was used to talk about such linguistic phenomena.

For Grice, “what is said” – a technical term which will become central to the analysis that follows, particularly with Recanati – was constrained in such a way that it must be ‘closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) one has uttered” (Grice, 1989, p. 25). Bach calls this the *Syntactic Constraint* as, on Grice’s view *what is said* must correspond to the “elements of the sentence, their order and their syntactic character” (1989, p.87). This level of content was a combination of sentence meaning plus any overt context sensitive expressions; also the resolution of ambiguity was acknowledged.

“What is implicated” is anything beyond what is said that is intentionally meant by the utterer to be recognized by the listener. For example, in the sentence “the apple looks red to me”, the Ordinary Language Philosophers argued that what was implicated here was that there is some doubt over the colour of the apple, thus implying a blending of saying and meaning. If one knew the apple was red it would seem strange to utter “the apple looks red to me”.

However, Grice argued that while it would be odd to utter the former if one had no doubts about the colour of the apple, it is still important to recognize that the sentence still
has a certain meaning that does not necessarily entail doubts about the colour. Again, this example shows why Grice thought it important to have a sharp distinction between semantic and pragmatic content. It is for pragmatic reasons that we interpret such a sentence as implying doubt about the apple’s colour; it is not part of the linguistic meaning of the sentence that this is the case.

Grice then systematized the recognition of such implicatures through his cooperative principle and maxims for successful conversation. This was not done in a prescriptive sense (as in he was not saying “this is how we should speak”), but in the sense of rational reconstruction. Briefly, truthfulness, informativeness, relevance and clarity were the central maxims to which we subscribe during conversation and any blatant departure from these was to be recognized as an implicature: determined through the act of saying something a certain way.

A key point to be taken for our present discussion of Contextualism is, however, that Grice and the traditional view of “semantics” in general assumed the “what is said”, being closely related to conventional sentence meaning, was a properly truth-conditional entity. That is, this level of content, which is closely associated with the conventional sentence meaning, would deliver truth-conditional entities, or propositional contents. As Neale (1992), says,

…it is clear upon reflection (from scattered remarks) that what is said is to do duty for the proposition expressed by U. Where the sentence uttered is of the type conventionally associated with the speech act of asserting (i.e. in the indicative mood) what is said will be straightforwardly truth-conditional, (p. 11).

Grice defines the indicative mood here in contrast to the interrogative and imperative. The point to be highlighted, though, is the coincidence of “what is said”, governed by the
syntactic constraint, with the truth-conditional proposition expressed by a literal use of a
sentence. It is this connection that has recently been called into question by Contextualism
through incompleteness and underdetermination arguments.

They argue that such a notion of “what is said” as closely related to conventional
meaning, and as expressing truth-conditional content, is empirically unmotivated and
theoretically useless. Essentially, they argue that there is no level of linguistic content that is
at once lexico-syntactically determined, and fully truth-conditional. The main reason for such
claims is due to the recognition of the ubiquitous phenomenon of semantic-
underdetermination and incompleteness. That is, sentences, independent of context, seem to
fail to express complete truth-conditional content even when all indexicals are assigned
references and ambiguities are resolved.

A secondary reason is that many seemingly propositionally complete sentences
intuitively express a different proposition\(^5\) to that which is comprised by the linguistic
meaning of the words and their mode of composition. This is the case even when the
sentences are not being used ironically or metaphorically. That is, even in cases where the
sentences are used in a genuine, straight-forward fashion, the standing linguistic meaning
fails to express what the sentence is used by the utterrer to express.

Finally, some Contextualists, such as Recanati see the syntactically constrained notion
of “what is said” as playing no cognitive role in the interpretive processes involved in
understanding utterances. Recanati (2004) goes as far as to take these criticisms to mean that
the very notion of “what the sentence says” is incoherent (2004, p. 8). This chapter will
analyse the above arguments from Contextualists with the hope of showing that while they do
highlight an important constraint on sentence meaning – that it is not necessarily truth-

\(^5\) According to Recanati, a proposition is simply a truth-conditional expression.
conditional- they go too far by taking this to mean such content has no role significant to play in linguistic analysis.

1.2: Context-Shifting and Underdetermination Arguments.

Contextualism takes the prevalence of phenomena such as semantic-underdetermination to show that sentence meaning, independent of context, does not necessarily express truth-conditional contents. This calls into question the traditional definition of "semantic" content as capturing the literal sentence meaning and the truth-conditional proposition expressed by a literal utterance of it.

Thus, they argue that the influence of context, or pragmatic factors, is necessary in the determination of semantic content. Essentially, contextualists claim that the compositional elements of a sentence rarely, if ever, deliver a determinate proposition. It is the utterance or speech act that is the proper unit of linguistic analysis according to contextualists, for it is only at the point of use that propositional content is expressed.

By a determinate proposition here, it is meant something that is truth-conditional. That is something for which one can imagine the conditions under which it is true. In fact, contextualists, such as Francois Recanati, say that the notion of 'what the sentence says' is downright incoherent. What Recanati means here is that sentences when taken in abstraction are simply not fully understandable to the normal interpreter without some contextual provision. It is speakers, not sentences, that say things and it is only the speaker that can express fully truth-evaluable propositions.⁶

⁶Note here the obvious influence of the Ordinary Language Philosophers, such as Austin, Strawson etc. who saw that language should be analysed in terms of use, as opposed to a autonomous system.
It is clear then, that contextualists deem it necessary to situate sentences within contexts in order to form utterances in order to capture truth-conditional contents. It is this level of propositional content that is labeled "semantic". At least, this is the reasoning of the Contextualists. In this way contextualists attach great importance to the dynamic and creative adaptability of our linguistic behaviour as a human activity rather than a formal system of rules.

The implications of this kind of view are many. For example, a strict division between semantic content and pragmatic content no longer seems necessary for many contextualists. On their view, pragmatic information (information not traced back to the lexico-syntactic elements of the sentence) is involved in the determination of semantic content. Furthermore, if this minimal level of formal sentence meaning can no longer express literal meaning, it seems obsolete and, to borrow Jason Stanley's characterization of Recanati's criticism, "an idle wheel in an explanation of linguistic practice" (Stanley, 2005).

The primary motivations for such a Contextualist orientation generally come in two main forms: context-shifting arguments and underdetermination arguments (Borg 2007, p. 26, C&L, 2005, p. 17). Context shifting arguments state that the truth-conditions of a given sentence can vary, i.e. be either true or false, when analysed in different contexts. That is, they deny the possibility of a sentence expressing truth-conditions independent of reference to a context. Context here is basically the conversational setting. As defined by Bach (2005), it is:

...the mutual cognitive context, or salient common ground. It includes the current state of the conversation (what has just been said, what has just been referred to, etc.) the physical setting, salient mutual knowledge between conversants and relevant broader common knowledge. (p. 7).
Contextualists argue, by altering and adapting such contextual information, we can vary the relative truth-conditions for a sentence. This shows that when examined alone, sentences, independent of context do not express determinate truth-conditions. Therefore, pragmatic information is needed to determine propositional, “semantic” content.

These arguments are constructed by drawing attention to hypothetical situations where one and the same sentence can seem intuitively true in one context yet false in another. Therefore, “semantic” content can no longer lay claim to labeling a level of content that is both propositional and lexico-syntactically determined. It is only when the salient contextual information is taken into account that a determinate truth-condition can be given and thus pragmatic information is relevant to the determination of semantic content.

The following is an example of a context-shifting argument: imagine a situation where there is a small puddle of milk on the bottom of some contextually salient fridge. Someone utters the straightforward sentence, “There is milk in the fridge”. Now, intuitively, this seemingly simple sentence would be false if said to a person wishing to have a bowl of breakfast cereal, but true if said to someone who was supposed to have cleaned the fridge (Travis, 1989). What then is the truth condition for that sentence? What conditions must pertain in the world for that sentence to be true? Well, it seems that it can be both true and false, depending on the context. According to the contextualist, the sentence in itself does not have truth-conditions; only when analyzed in context as a speech act can the conditions for its truth or falsity be made clear.

Furthermore, contextualists, such as Recanati and Travis, argue that context-shifting arguments are not just carefully crafted and specifically tailored hypotheticals. They are in fact pervasive right through our linguistic usage. They point to our use of comparative
adjectives: rich, tall, dangerous, small, etc as archetypal examples. It is not hard to be convinced that such words seem context-sensitive, in that the context “provides the adjective with a parameter necessary for it to determine an extension” (Richard, 2004, p. 218).

Take for example the sentence “John is small”. It seems that the truth-conditions for this sentence will depend on the comparison class to which the speaker is referring in uttering the sentence. That is, if John is 5 feet 10 inches tall, the sentence may be true if the speaker utters the sentence while discussing John’s basketball team, but false if it is uttered while comparing John to the rest of his 13 year old friends who are all still less than 5 foot 5 inches.

The key point here for contextualists, is that the lexico-syntactic elements of the sentence alone are not enough to settle the question of truth or falsity. Relatedly, it seems that one cannot fully understand what is being communicated by this sentence unless some contextual input is taken into consideration, even when it is being used literally. In other words, the formal constituents of the sentence alone are not enough to fully describe the world in a way that allows us to imagine the conditions under which it is true. Context must step in to flesh out the minimal sentence meaning to create an expression that offers a more complete and determinate description of some aspect of the world. The idea then, is that the proposition expressed by an utterance of the sentence – which one must grasp in order to understand it – is heavily dependent on contextual elements.

An analogous argument arises when one considers the status of knowledge claims and moral attributions. This is known as Epistemic Contextualism. Through the work of theorists such as Keith De Rose, epistemic contextualism takes the general structure of context-shifting arguments and applies them to uses of the word “knows”. There are many classic

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8 Alternatively, such examples can be construed as varying the ‘what is said’, or ‘proposition’ instead of truth-conditions, expressed by the utterance. As in, in one case “John is small for a basketballer” is said, and in the other “John is small for a 2nd year student” is said.
examples (De Rose 1992, p. 920, C&L, p. 27-28). But the essential notion is that in different conversational contexts, the standard for claims of knowledge changes.

So say in a graduate philosophy class, one can barely claim to know they have a hand without brisk retort from the skeptic, yet in more ordinary settings, such truths are accepted without a moment’s hesitation (De Rose, 1995, p 2).

Similarly, contextualists use moral attributions – such as applications of the word “good”; weather reports, such as “it’s raining”, and more, to reinforce their argument (C&L, 2005, p. 30-32).

One can see from such examples that context shift is a powerful weapon in the arsenal of the contextualist, and some, such as Travis and Recanati, would go as far as to say all sentences, by the very nature of linguistic usage, display such characteristics. Those who hold such views are labeled “Radical Contextualists” as they see the relationship between the specification of propositional content and context as a necessary one. That is, without reference to a specific context sentences alone do not deliver a determinate content, as shown by the fact that context itself can change the very truth-value of a sentence.

The second type of argument which contextualists invoke in order to highlight the inadequacies of the traditional semantic-pragmatic divide, and triumph the role of context in an analysis of meaning, is known as the Underdetermination or Incompleteness argument. Underdetermination arguments, while closely related to context-shift, are more concerned with the actual proposition that is expressed by an utterance as opposed to the truth-conditions of an utterance. A proposition is defined here as the meaningful, determinate truth-conditional content of a sentence or utterance. So essentially, underdetermination arguments state that there are a vast range of examples for which “appeals to the context of utterance

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9 Determinate is used here in the sense of fully describing some situation in the world, i.e. truth-conditional.
must be made in order to grasp the meaning of the sentence produced, but where such appeals
to context are not apparently required by any formal element of the sentence itself” (Borg,
2007, p. 34). These arguments try to show that depending on contextual influence, the very
proposition, the communicated meaning, expressed by a sentence can change.

It is important to note that there are two different types of underdetermination
argument, each varying in the strength of their criticism of the ability of lexico-syntactic
content (formal sentence meaning) to express propositional meaning.

The first, or weak, underdetermination argument relies on the presence of everyday
sentences in which the grammar plus the lexicon (i.e. that which is recoverable through
purely formal means) does not seem to express what we would intuitively characterize as the
proposition communicated. That is, the formal sentence meaning may express a determinate
proposition, i.e. something truth-evaluable, but it is in some sense the wrong proposition.
Usually, the problem here is that the formally recoverable, that is, purely lexico-syntactic,
content is far too general and vague and fails to coincide with our intuitive judgments of what
the utterance of certain sentences express. It is vague or ambiguous, even though the sentence
is not flouting one of Grice’s maxims of conversation.

For example, to borrow from Kent Bach, take the sentence “You are not going to die”
as uttered by a reassuring mother to a child crying because of a minor cut (1994, p. 134). It is
intuitively clear that what is meant by the mother is: “You are not going to die from that cut”.
But again, if taken without contextual influence, and in a strictly literal reading, the sentence
expresses the proposition that the child will not die at all, as if the child were immortal. ¹⁰ So
here we have a sentence, that when taken in isolation seems to express an absurd proposition

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¹⁰ This example is a variation on the underdetermination example expressed in the first part of this essay to
show the general motivation for contextualism. Here it is invoked as a more systematic criticism of
literalism/minimalism.
that is far from what one would take the mother to be communicating in a normal conversational setting.

Also, it seems that this extra contextual element (from that cut) does not correspond to any formal component of the actual sentence itself. In that there does not seem to be any constituents that demand, somehow, this extra meaningful element of the utterance to be included. Constituents, in this sense, refer to certain elements in a linguistic construction that, while not being evident on the surface, demand some extra-linguistic information to complete a proposition. Contextualists, such as Recanati, take this to show that free (not syntactically mandated, like indexicals) pragmatic effects are endemic throughout the determination of "semantic" content. Further, that the traditional notion of "semantics" as the study of literal meaning, based on the grammar and lexicon, is mistaken. It seems, on this reading, that context-free content again falls short of managing to delimit the intuitive meaning of the sentences we utter.

Further examples of this type of weak underdetermination come in discussion concerning quantifier restriction. That is, if you were asked how a certain college course went and you responded "Everyone got an A". It is clear that the proposition you wish to express is true if everyone on the course got an A, not if everyone in the world did. In fact, it is assumed by Contextualists, and with certain merit, that no one would ever accuse you of stating that everyone in the world got an A. It just would never be processed as part of the communicative exchange. Thus the technical, yet intuitively determined, phrase "what is said" seems to be sensitive to pragmatic influence. That is, it seems correct to report of the utterer of the above sentence as saying that "everyone in the course got an A" without being accused of misunderstanding their communication, even though the reference to "the course" is not mandated by any part of the original sentence. This is the "semantic" content for Contextualists, complete with free pragmatic enrichment.
It is clear in such examples that even though a proposition may sometimes be expressed by the lexico-syntactic elements of the sentence, it is not always the right proposition. This is further evidence that context-free linguistic content seems to fall short of determining intuitive literal meaning, and pragmatic or contextual elements must be taken into account even at this basic level. It is certainly not the case, for contextualists, that lexico-syntactic content gets processed first with pragmatic factors coming into play afterwards when necessary for implication, irony or metaphor.

However, it is the stronger underdetermination argument that causes most problems for the traditional picture. Such arguments make the claim that not only does the literal meaning of many sentences not deliver the appropriate proposition, but in fact fails to deliver a proposition at all. Thus, without pragmatic and contextual information the utterance is simply not truth-conditional and the sentence by itself just forms a vague, or general framework, onto which contextual elements must connect in order to create truth-conditional content. This is a further argument against the idea that "semantic" content labels both the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence as well as the literal meaning of a use of such a sentence. For them, "semantic" content is propositional and thus is composed of, in part, pragmatic information.

Thus, at the very basic level of literal propositional meaning, pragmatic or contextual factors are playing an essential role. Hence, there seems to be no need to divide meaningful content in the traditional way. Pragmatics has influence right at what was assumed to be the "literal" level. The idea that "semantics" takes care of the basic literal meaning, and pragmatics steps in afterwards to take care of implicatures is no longer tenable, according to the Contextualists, as pragmatics is needed to complete truth-conditional "semantic" content.
Take, for example, the sentence, “Jane can’t continue”. According to the contextualists, say Recanati or Carston, this sentence does not express truth-conditional content because when taken out of conversational context it is not possible to evaluate the circumstances under which it could be true or false (Carston, 2002). One would immediately have to ask the question, “What is it that Jane can’t continue?” before they could imagine the truth-conditions of the sentence. In this case, what the speaker means can’t be just what the sentence means since it is not a proposition. It seems to suggest that there maybe be something that Jane cannot continue, but one cannot really grasp the complete meaning of the sentence without having some idea of the context in which it was uttered. It may mean that Jane can’t continue to walk, or can’t continue to sing, but there is something wrong with taking the utterance of it to mean that Jane can’t continue, period. The sentence without contextual information does not offer a complete, determinate description of reality, i.e. we cannot seem to imagine the specific situation that would make this true.

So the contextualist argues that in order for this sentence to express truth-conditional content, context must supply the salient details which make truth-evaluation possible. For example, if those involved in the conversation are playing a football match with Jane and she had just been hurt in a tackle, it would be more or less clear that the intuitive proposition being expressed is “Jane can’t continue the match”. Thus, for the Contextualist, “what is said” by the sentence or the truth-conditional content is influenced and affected by pragmatic concerns. Hence there is no clear border between the two. “What is said” by this sentence, for Contextualists, would be something like “Jane can’t continue the match”, with the extra information (the match) being supplied by the context.

It seems clear now that there is strong criticism from Contextualists of the traditional Gricean picture of linguistic understanding. That picture assumes that context-free linguistic content expresses the literal meaning of a sentence, based on its formal components, with
pragmatics supplementing this content with implicatures. The above arguments show this to be a mistake. No longer, according to the Contextualist, is it enough to assume we simply understand the words used and their mode of composition in order understand meaning and to partake in a successful communicative exchange. It now seems that even at the most basic and ‘literal’ level of communication, pragmatics is necessary.

If this is the case, how does successful communication occur, according to the contextualist? It seems that there is much to say about the flaws of traditionally conceived picture of levels of linguistic content, yet if this is the case then a positive account of how pragmatics steps into fill the gaps is necessary. That is, it seems more is needed than the general idea that context somehow needs to be more involved in the analysis of linguistic meaning. What is needed is some theoretical explanation for how exactly context is invoked when partaking in communicative exchange. Or is such a theoretical explanation possible, given the nebulous nature of how we rely on context to inform communicative content? Are Contextualists neglecting the one aspect of human language that is in fact systematizable or theoretically tractable (lexico-syntactic content) simply because it fails to express truth-conditional content?

For an attempt at systematizing the effect of context on meaning, we turn to one of the most prominent proponents of contextualism, Francois Recanati. Not only is Recanati a staunch supporter of contextualism, but he also is one of the only theorists that attempts to “provide an alternative positive account of the data that goes beyond such pragmatic magic tricks” (Stanley, 2005, p. 1). Stanley continues to say, in a review of Recanati’s Literal Meaning that if we, as a discipline, are to make progress in our understanding of natural language then those who criticize certain positions should follow Recanati’s lead “in assuming the obligation of providing and defending alternative explanations” (2005, p. 1). For these reasons, then, it is apt to examine Recanati’s account of linguistic communication,
and see whether he establishes contextualism as a coherent account of meaning in natural language.

1.3: Recanati's Contextualism: What's involved in "what is said"?

Central to Recanati's exposition of contextualism is the previously referred to notion of "what is said". Within the literature this is considered a technical term, introduced to label a certain level of meaning. It originates from the everyday intuitive sense of determining what someone "says" when uttering a certain linguistic construction. This concept is opposed to two other levels of meaning – formal sentence meaning and 'what is implicated' – which comprise, what Recanati calls, the basic triad.

He uses the simple example of the sentence "I am French" to illustrate the nature of this basic triad. The meaning of the first level of meaning, or the literal sentence meaning in this example is the context-independent idea that the speaker of this sentence is French. This literal sentence meaning does not vary from context to context; it always expresses the notion that whoever utters the sentence is French. This is opposed to the context-dependent proposition (the "what is said"), that gets expressed within particular contexts of use. For example, if Recanati utters the sentence it expresses the proposition that he is French, but if I were to say it, it would be a different proposition, namely, that I am French. Finally then, there is the distinction between "what is said" and "what is implicated". Recanati supposes a context in which he is asked whether or not he is a good cook. He responds: "I am French". Clearly in this case, his utterance expresses not only that he is from France, but it also implicates that he is indeed a good cook.
In general, it is acknowledged that the first level of strict literal sentence meaning falls short of comprising a complete, determinate proposition, or something which is truth conditional (Recanati, 2004, p. 6). According to Recanati then, the “what is said” results from a process of “fleshing out the meaning of the sentence so as to make it propositional” (2004, p. 25). So, “what is said” is somewhat tied to the literal sentence meaning, in that the content expressed by “what is said” is constrained by the meaning of the words used and their combination. This is in contrast to “what is implicated” which, with enough background information, can essentially express anything.

According to Recanati, however, tension arises between contextualism and others, such as Semantic Minimalists, when one tries to specify just how closely “what is said” is tied to the literal sentence meaning. That is, how exactly should one organize the basic triad, in terms of syntactic constraints and contextual influence?

On the traditional Gricean view, the level of “what is said” was very closely tied to the literal sentence meaning. That is, it only departed from this level of meaning when something in the construction itself mandated such a departure (obvious indexicals, e.g. “I”, “here”, “now”). That is, the literal proposition expressed was fully determined by the lexicosyntactic elements of the formal sentence. The process by which this minimal departure from literal sentence meaning is carried out is known by Recanati as saturation. He defines it as the process by which “the meaning of the sentence is completed and made propositional through the contextual assignment of semantic values to the constituents of the sentence whose interpretation is context dependent” (2004, p. 41)\(^\text{11}\)

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\(^{11}\) Recanati includes in this mandatory process the possibility of contextual provision for unarticulated constituents in order to make a sentence-type propositional. Unarticulated constituents are a controversial topic in the semantic-pragmatic border disputes.
Recanati here is attempting to construct a processing model that deals with how exactly contextual influence works. The important point to note about saturation is that, semantically, it is a *mandatory* process. It occurs whenever it “is necessary for the utterance to express a complete proposition” (Recanati, 2004, p. 7). On the traditional Gricean view, or for some contemporary minimalists, it is in this way that the level of “what is said” is reached. Furthermore, this process of saturation is defined in contrast to alternative *optional* processes that occur in order to generate implicatures; however, these optional processes are “dispensable” in that without them the utterance would still express a proposition.

Optional pragmatic processes occur over and above the “what is said”. An important implication of limiting contextual influence on “what is said” only to such *mandatory* processes as saturation is that in this way the fundamental notion of “what is said” still falls under the domain of syntactically mandated content. That is, contextual or pragmatic factors are kept to an absolute minimum and only allowed influence when something in the lexico-syntactic structure of the sentence calls for such influence.

Take the example of “I am French” referred to earlier. Without any contextual provision, it is not possible for one to know what state of affairs would have to occur for this sentence to be true or false. One would need to know the reference of the indexical “I” before they could determine its truth-value. Therefore, it does not express determinate truth-conditional content when taken at this very basic, literal level. However, with saturation, it becomes truth-conditional, as the referent of “I” is brought into consideration.

It is possible for the traditional view to accommodate some of this type of contextual provision because the very nature of indexical terms such as “I” (or he, she, tomorrow, here, now) signify a rule for their use. That is, the *meaning* of the personal pronoun “I” is a rule that refers one automatically to *the speaker of the sentence*. In this way, the full truth-
conditional meaning of certain constructions is still part of the level of context-free linguistic content.

Saturation confronts the aforementioned problem of strong underdetermination in cases such as “I am French”. That is, prior to the process of saturation the lexico-syntactic content of the sentence underdetermines the intuitive meaning of the sentence to such an extent that the lexico-syntactic content alone does not even deliver something truth-conditional. In this sense, the process of saturation seems to allow the traditional semantic-pragmatic divide to deal with semantic-underdetermination. This is the case at least in this strong sense, by maintaining that the intuitive meaning of a sentence (what is said) is still equated with formally constituted linguistic content. There is some contextual provision, but this is syntactically mandated.

However, Recanati disputes this picture of how linguistic communication occurs and goes on to argue for a different categorization, where the level of “what is said” belongs primarily in the realm of pragmatics. He hopes to show that optional pragmatic information is a necessary and essential part of expressing truth-conditional contents. He does this by concentrating on a multitude of examples of what I have referred to as weak-underdetermination. In such examples, the context-invariant sentence-meaning content may express a proposition, but it is, in some sense, the wrong proposition.

Again, his justificatory evidence for his pragmatically oriented approach is highly reliant on the use of common, everyday phrases in which our intuitive sense of meaning does not equate with the formal, lexico-syntactically determined meaning. By drawing attention to this gap between our intuitive sense of meaning and what is delivered by formal linguistic content, even when this seems truth-conditional, Recanati attempts to show that in order to

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12 Recall the example outlined earlier of the sentence ‘You won’t die’ as uttered by a mother to her child in reference to a particular small cut the child has suffered. This is the type of case Recanati is referring to.
signify “what is said” we must move beyond purely formal content, and do so in a more robust sense than the minimal departure allowed by the traditional account. It is more than mandatory contextual influence that is involved in establishing “what is said”, according to Recanati.

Take the well known example from John Perry of “It is raining” (Perry, 1986). Perry, among others, argues that even though nothing in the literal sentence denotes a time or a place, these elements are necessary in order to make the expression truth-conditional. Perry states that in a given place it doesn’t just rain or not, but it rains at some times while not at others, and at a given time, it rains at some places and not others (Recanati, 2004, p. 9). So, in order to evaluate, or understand, a statement of rain as true or false both a sense of time and place are necessary. From the sentence itself we get the fact it is raining, plus the temporal argument, which is indexically supplied by use of the present tense. Hence, the locational element, or place must be contextually supplied. But since, as Perry argues, this element is necessary in order to make this a complete proposition (without it, it would be less than truth-conditional), then this can be seen as an instance of saturation. Thus, maintaining the minimalist constraint on contextual influence. That is, pragmatic influence on “what is said” is only needed when syntactically mandated.

However, Recanati disagrees. He argues that for Perry to be correct in his judgment that the above is an instance of saturation, then it would have to be the case that every token of “It’s raining” would be unevaluable (in terms of truth) without some specification of place. In this sense the extra contextual element of location becomes necessary to form a proposition, and thus is an instance of saturation. Yet, in his paper “Unarticulated Constituents” Recanati posits a counter example to Perry’s claim by describing a situation in which the above sentence – “It’s raining” – is fully understandable and evaluable without the
contextual assignment of place. Therefore, the assignment of location is optional and thus cannot be accommodated by the lexico-syntactic elements of the sentence.

The situation imagined is as follows: Rain has become extremely rare and important, and rain detectors have been placed all over the territory. In the imagined scenario, each detector triggers an alarm bell when it detects rain. There is a single bell; the location of the rain is indicated by a light on a map in the Monitoring Room. After weeks of total drought, the bell eventually rings and the weatherman in the next room shouts: “It’s raining!” His utterance is true iff it is raining (at the time of utterance) in some place or other. (Recanati, 2002, p.317).

Recanati is trying to show here that it is for pragmatic or optional reasons that a particular place is singled out in certain contexts; it is not linguistically required. His point is that “if it were linguistically required, in virtue of semantic properties of the sentence type, then it would be required in every context” (2004, p. 10). Thus, the fact he has shown an instance in which it is not required is proof of its pragmatic nature and that it is not an instance of saturation, i.e. it’s not mandatory, but is an optional process of free enrichment.

The implications of this example are interesting. According to Recanati, the “place” element is not part of the literal meaning of the utterance, and thus when someone utters “It’s raining” it can be literally true if it is raining somewhere in the world. Yet this is not what the speaker usually means upon uttering this sentence, nor is it what the speaker would be taken to mean upon an utterance of the sentence. They usually mean it is raining in some specific place at the time of utterance. The type of enrichment process through which we manage to understand what is actually being communicated is not, on Recanati’s view, linguistically mandated, it is optional and free. The reason for this, as shown, is that “if we don’t enrich, what we get is an already complete proposition (albeit a pretty absurd one)”: the proposition
that it is raining somewhere or other. Similarly for examples such as "Everyone went to Paris" where on a literal reading it would express the full proposition that everyone in the world went to Paris. However, when contextually enriched, it is understood as expressing the proposition that everyone in some particular group went to Paris.

The lesson here that Recanati wants to leave us with is that the proposition literally expressed, even when fully truth-conditional, is different from the one actually communicated; and this is not an exception, but a common trait of our language use and this implies the need for strong pragmatic effects on the basic level of truth-conditional meaning: what is said. It is this intuitive proposition expressed that constitutes the "semantic" content for Recanati. There are optional (as in not syntactically mandated) contextual effects on "what is said" and thus, it cannot be accommodated in the traditional Gricean picture and calls for a radical revision of the relationship between context-free content and truth-conditional content. The syntactic constraint is broken here, according to Recanati. There are optional, free pragmatic processes involved in the determination of truth-conditional content.

1.4: Two Contextualist Criteria for "What is Said".

Further support for this Contextualist position comes from the fact that the conversational participants are each only aware of the enriched proposition being expressed and used in conversation. That is, the pragmatically enriched proposition is the only one that the interlocutors are consciously aware of discussing within the conversation. This is a further condition for genuine "semantic" content, according to Contextualism. The "semantic" content must be consciously available to the speakers.
Let us return to the example of “Everyone went to Paris”. The speaker of this sentence, when conversing with a friend who shares a social group, would, in a normal conversational setting, admit only to saying that everyone in their common group went on a trip to Paris. In fact, according to Recanati, both the speaker and the hearer would deny having said or even entertained the minimal proposition that everyone in the world, or in some other group, went to Paris. The ‘what is said’ for normal interpreters then, must be the pragmatically enriched proposition as that is what is consciously available to them. This is an essential point in the construction of Recanati’s contextualism and it is known as the “availability constraint”. This states that “what is said” must be consciously available to the conversational participants in the speech situation (2004, p. 13).

Recanati has now drawn attention to two specific criteria that must be met in order for something to constitute “what is said”. First, it must be truth-conditional. That is, the content must be determinate enough so that one can imagine the conditions under which it would be true. In his words, it must be propositional. Secondly, as mentioned, it must be consciously available to the conversational participants. Recanati, by highlighting the nature of semantic-underdetermination, tries to show the pragmatic nature of “what is said” and that there is optional pragmatic processes involved in the determination of “literal” utterance content.

However, is this enough to wrestle the notion of “what is said” out of the hands of traditional notions of formal “semantics”? A Gricean account could simply explain such phenomena away by appealing to notions of implicatures, both generalized and conversational. Then “what is said” remains a part of traditional, formal context-free content, but the actual proposition that gets communicated is an implicature, over and above “what is said”.
The minimalist, as Recanati describes him, would state that truth-conditional content is expressed by whatever is found in the formal elements of the sentence itself, and the more specific communicated proposition expressed – that everyone in the class went to Paris – is an implicature. However, Recanati responds by comparing the above example of “Everybody went to Paris” with the earlier example of “I am French” which was used to convey that Recanati was a good cook. By doing so, one can highlight the essential difference between pragmatic enrichment leading to implicature and pragmatic enrichment that contributes to the delivery of the primary truth-conditional content.

In the latter example (I am French), both speaker and listener are aware of both levels of communication. That is, they are fully aware that the speaker says he is French and thereby implies that he is a good cook by the very fact of saying this in response to the question “Are you a good cook?”. However, in the example of “Everybody went to Paris” both speaker and hearer are “not only unaware of the proposition literally expressed (that everyone in the world went to Paris) but would strongly deny having said what the minimalist claims was actually said” (Recanati, 2004, p. 11). Here, Recanati is once again relying on the notion of availability. There seems to be a difference in kind between the two aforementioned examples, with the property of conscious availability being the essential distinction. It is the fact that in the Paris example the speakers are simply unaware of this minimal, absurd proposition that Recanati uses to support his claim that “what is said” is an inherently pragmatic notion.

Pragmatic processes, in this example, occur before the relevant truth-conditional content is complete. This shows, according to Recanati, that this level of linguistic content – “what is said” – is beyond the confines of the traditional, literal content (lexico-syntactically determined) it was once associated with. Essentially what Recanati is doing here is making a move away from a narrow, linguistic approach that associates “what is said” with the
minimal content that is arrived at via saturation and instead taking a more psychological stance and equating it with "the conscious output of the complex train of processing which underlies comprehension" (2004, p. 16). The "what is said" must correspond to the "primary truth-evaluable representation made available to the subject" (2004, p. 17).

1.5: Primary and Secondary Pragmatic Processes

Underlying much of Recanati's expostulation of contextualism is a distinction he draws between primary and secondary pragmatic processes. This distinction is concerned with analyzing the precise (contextual) elements involved in the expression intuitive truth-conditional content and further processes that come after this level of content is reached.

Primary pragmatic processes are pre-propositional. That is, they contribute directly to the determination and expression of truth-conditional content. On Recanati's view, primary processes work on the interpretation of the logical form of the sentence in order to reach the proposition expressed by an utterance of that sentence, i.e. "what is said".

Furthermore, primary processes need not be consciously available to the speakers as such processes are involved in reaching a level of content which is, by definition, consciously available. Recanati here is attempting to explicitly and systematically state how it is contextual factors come to influence linguistic meaning.

Saturation is a primary processes. It is concerned with "the contextual assignment of values to indexicals and free variables" that are found in the formal construction itself. In this sense, it is a bottom-up process. That is to say it is syntactically mandated by certain elements in the sentence itself. However, as one can see now from the above exposition, Recanati wants to say that there is more than just saturation involved in the primary processes resulting
in the establishment of truth-conditional content. As saturation is a mandatory and syntactically motivated process, those opposed to contextualism can embrace saturation as the minimal pragmatic influence, without being accused of advocating contextualism.

Thus, Recanati wants to argue that there is more than just a syntactically mandated contextualist influence involved in determining truth-conditional content. He wants to show there is optional pragmatic influence – that is external to anything in the formal structure of the sentence – on the determination of truth-conditional content. For Recanati, there are top-down (optional) processes involved even at the primary, pre-propositional stage.

In order to show this, he describes three further primary pragmatic processes: free enrichment, loosening, and transfer. Each of which is defined by the fact that they are top-down, or optional context-driven processes that are involved in the primary interpretation of linguistic utterances. This all goes to support the idea that when it comes to establishing the intuitive truth-conditional content expressed by utterances of sentences, there are optional processes involved.

_Free-enrichment_ essentially consists in “making the interpretation of some expression in the sentence contextually more specific” (2004, p. 24). The principle example on which Recanati relies is as follows: *Mary took out her key and opened the door*. The idea here is that upon hearing such a sentence a “normal interpreter” would assume that the expression means that Mary opened the door *with* the salient key. Yet, there is no constituent in the sentence itself that articulates this fact. When taken on a strict, literal reading, one could argue for two independent conjuncts: *Mary took out her key; Mary opened the door*.

Recanati’s point then, is that if one assumes that the proposition expressed by an utterance of this sentence includes the bridging inference – that Mary opened the door *with* the key – then one must acknowledge the contribution of certain top-down, contextual...
processes that are without correlate in the formal construction itself, i.e. optional. Another example of enrichment is when terms such as “rabbit” can be used to mean rabbit-fur in the context of “He wears rabbit” and, alternatively, as meaning rabbit-meat in the context of “He eats rabbit” (2004, p. 24). In fact, Recanati argues that with enough background there is “no limit to the number of interpretations one can imagine in such a way” (2004, p. 24).

Loosening is described as the converse of enrichment, as it is concerned with relaxing the conditions of application as opposed to tightening them. Again, examples abound. In the sentence “the ATM swallowed my credit card”, it is obvious that a bank machine is not the kind of thing that can actually swallow anything; swallowing is something done by living organisms. Yet, by loosening the criteria of use for the term “swallowing” one can easily understand the truth-conditions for this sentence. Also, there is, again, nothing in the sentence itself that explicitly permits this loosening to occur; it is top-down. Another example of loosening can be seen in the sentence “the city is asleep”, where the meaning of “sleep” is relaxed in order to portray a certain characteristic of a quiet city.

The third primary pragmatic process, of the optional variety, to which Recanati refers is known as semantic transfer. An example of transfer is found in the utterance “The ham sandwich left without paying”, as uttered by a waitress, about a man who had just eaten a ham sandwich and left the restaurant (2004, p. 26). It seems that, through no syntactic or linguistic mandate, the meaning of “ham sandwich orderer” is transferred on to the phrase “ham sandwich”. The idea here is that one concept is replaced with another one which bears a “systematic relation to it”. A similar example would be to refer to oneself as “parked out back”, when it seems more accurate and literal to say one’s car is parked out back.

At this point in his discussion of contextualism Recanati points out that his particular categorization of the optional processes (enrichment, loosening, transfer) is not necessarily
the only way in which to organize the influence of context on “what is said” and it is possible that they could be rearranged to all fall under enrichment, for example, if one chooses to define it in such a way (2004, p. 27). But this is not a problem for his contextualism, for the division of such processes into specific and particular categories is tangential to his main point: which is, there are optional, top-down, and context-driven processes involved in the pre-propositional stage of linguistic interpretation and such processes are necessary in order to arrive at the fully-truth-conditional content. However, it does point to the difficulty in theoretically explaining how exactly context effects meaning. Again, such a theory may not be possible given the infinite range of possible influencing factors.

As has been stressed throughout this essay, this Recantian triumph of pragmatic influence is in contrast to the traditional Gricean view, where “disambiguation and saturation suffice to give us the literal interpretation of the utterance – what is literally said” (2004, p. 27). On this traditional view, any other pragmatic processes, of the optional variety, are secondary and already presuppose the identification of truth-conditional content or “what is said”. On the traditional view, interpretation starts with computation of all the formal constituents of the sentence in context and then the output of this process yields the proposition literally expressed. This proposition is then interpreted in the light of general conversational principles and certain inferences can be made from the fact it was said in the context in which it was said.

While Recanati also presents a two-tiered system of interpretation, the difference is that he does not restrict primary pragmatic processes (those involved in determining “what is said”) to only saturation or syntactically mandated contextual influence. Recanati argues that there are some optional processes – enrichment, loosening, and transfer – that combine with the strict literally encoded meaning to express the literal proposition expressed by an utterance.
In terms of actual linear interpretation, Recanati wants to say that it is wrong to assume one must first interpret the formal, lexico-syntactic values of the sentence and then move on to derived interpretation “only when this is required to make sense of the speakers utterance” (2004, p. 28). He clearly states that “there is no need to antecedently compute the proposition literally expressed”. If Recanati is correct in this claim, he hopes it will show that the traditional conception of the context-free, compositional content of utterances plays no role in the actual process of linguistic interpretation. As he states towards the end of Literal Meaning, “As I have been at pains to emphasize, the minimal proposition is not computed and does not play a role in the actual process of interpretation.” (2004, p. 161). The very first “available” proposition that is understood from an utterance of a sentence is, on Recanati’s view, one which is already composed of pragmatic processes.

This may seem like an unusual claim – that literal meaning is not processed before derived meaning. For surely it must be the case that if something is derived from something else, it comes after it. How else can we get to derived meaning if we first don’t compute and understand the input that is literal meaning? Recanati acknowledges the fact that literal interpretation “must come first insofar as the derived interpretation is derived from it through enrichment, loosening or transfer” (2004, p. 28). Yet he still maintains that in a certain sense “that is relevant to the debate” literal interpretation is not processed first but is processed in parallel with derived meaning.

For Recanati, the literal meaning of an expression is accessed first and this then triggers the activation of “associatively related representations”. He says that this results in a situation where there can be a number of candidates, both literal and derived, that compete for interpretation and whatever one best fits the broader context is selected, while the others are suppressed.
It seems that the essential distinction which Recanati relies upon to make this unusual claim is between *associatively* derived meaning and *inferentially* derived meaning, where the derived meaning (involving pragmatic processes) is associatively, not inferentially, derived from literal meaning (2004, p. 29). The difference is that inferential derivation involves the "computation of the literal value of the *global* sentence" as opposed to associative derivation which is a *local* process. (Recanati, 1993 p. 263-6).

Essentially, what he is trying to say here is that we reinterpret words and phrases (locally) as we hear them as opposed to stalling our judgment until the entire (global) literal sentence is interpreted. In this way, the "literal meaning has no compositional privilege over derived meaning", for the literal meaning of the sentence may never be fully computed by the listener (1993, p. 266). So, as Recanati has been arguing all along, the primary intuitive interpretation of an expression – *what is said* – is one which has already been subject to pragmatic effects, eg. enrichment, loosening, transfer, etc.

Given the obvious subtleties and nuances of this particular account of a processing model for linguistic interpretation, an example may help to clarify what claim Recanati is making. He takes the example of a waiter who says "The ham sandwich left without paying". According to Recanati, on a Gricean view\textsuperscript{13} one would first entertain the somewhat ridiculous proposition that an actual sandwich left a restaurant without paying, and then, realizing this doesn’t make any sense, one would invoke pragmatic or contextual information and search for something that makes a better fit, i.e. the person who recently ordered the ham sandwich, left without paying.

\textsuperscript{13} Although Bach disputes this characterization of Grice and I agree, Recanati frames Grice as offering a processing model, as he himself is doing. However, it seems Grice’s account of linguistic interpretation is more of a rational reconstruction of the elements involved than an account of the temporal order of interpretation.
However, Recanati disputes the idea that one first entertains the absurd proposition that the sandwich left without paying. He argues that upon hearing the phrase “the ham sandwich” a representation of a ham sandwich is activated and then this “spreads to related representations, including a representation of the man who ordered a ham sandwich” and all these are potential candidates for contributing to the ‘what is said’. Finally, since the ham sandwich orderer is a better candidate than the sandwich itself to complete the phrase “...left without paying” it is this that is used as input to the global interpretation. Essentially, what Recanati is saying is that it is possible for the derived proposition to be interpreted without ever having to compute the literal interpretation.

An important aspect of this processing model is that the arrival at the derived interpretation (The ham-sandwich-orderer left without paying) is achieved through a “blind, mechanical process” (Recanati, 2004, p. 32). That is, there is no reflective inference on behalf of the interpreter. If there was, then Recanati would have to admit that the literal interpretation is arrived at first, and then upon reflection of its absurdity, the derived one is chosen. Recanati states that the pragmatic effects that lead to the derived interpretation or automatic and instantaneous.

Recanati spends much of the rest of *Literal Meaning* performing a number of critiques on various other positions within the literature relating to the effects of context and linguistic meaning on truth-conditional content. However, what we are concerned with here is his positive theory of Contextualism, which offers an account of the precise role played by pragmatic processes in the determination intuitive truth-conditional content, which for them is “semantic”. For Recanati, context-invariant sentence meaning alone does not deliver truth-conditional content and if it does, it is not the intuitive communicated content. “Semantic” interpretation, on this view, occurs, not only a result of mandatory contribution of context
through "saturation" but also as a result of optional pragmatic processes such as free enrichment, loosening and transfer.

The point here is that pragmatic information is an essential part of truth-conditional interpretation for Recanati – the linguistic interpretation of the intuitive proposition expressed by sentences. He relies throughout his work on examples of common, everyday sentences that simply could not be intended to express what their compositional literal meaning expresses. Thus some pragmatic content must be taken into account in order to reach the basic, primary level of truth-conditional content: what Recanati has labeled, "what is said". Furthermore, Recanati states that even if it were the case that a complete, but minimal, proposition was delivered through purely lexico-syntactic content, this would play no role in utterance understanding, for it would not be calculated or entertained by the listener. As Bach puts it in a review of *Literal Meaning*, "the first proposition that comes to the mind of a speaker in uttering or hearing a sentence transcends that formal content" (Bach, 2007, p. 3).

1.6: The Criticisms.

The implications, broadly construed, of Recanati’s contextualism are both interesting and controversial. He argues that because many of the common, everyday sentences that we use (e.g. Tom is finished, I haven’t had breakfast, Bill is tall etc.), fall short of fully expressing what we mean by using them, then the traditional idea that context-free linguistic content expresses "literal" truth-conditional meaning and pragmatics steps in after to create implicatures, is wrong.

Recanati and many others involved in this debate rely on the ability of linguistic constructions to deliver truth-conditional content as the arbiter for whether such content has a
role to play in the interpretation process. That is, contextualists argue that if the lexico-syntactic content of a grammatical sentence does not express truth-conditional content, it does not have a role to play in the interpretation of utterances, and that it is the pragmatically enriched truth-conditional content that is of interest to analysis.

However, it seems that Contextualism makes such claims based on a certain definition of “semantic content”. That is, Contextualism focuses on the idea that, primarily, “semantic” content is to capture truth-conditional, intuitive meaning. However, this view of semantics – that it gives truth-conditions – is not the only conception of semantics, traditionally speaking. The other fundamental notion associated with “semantics” is to do with the interpretation of logical forms (Bach, 2004, p. 2).

It was at one time assumed that these two conceptions worked hand in hand: “semantic” content captured the literal proposition expressed by a declarative sentence, based solely on the logical form of that sentence as a function of the compositional nature of the constituents and their syntax. However, since the presence of semantic-underdetermination has been acknowledged to a greater extent, this is no longer the case and thus we are left with a tension between these two notions of what “semantics” is. Contextualists are of the view that the former function of “semantics” is most important, and, thus, since the formal, compositional content can no longer perform this important function (expressing truth-conditions), then pragmatics becomes much more central to a proper linguistic analysis. That is, for Contextualists, pragmatic information becomes involved in the determination of “semantic” content.

However, by viewing the semantic-pragmatic divide in this way, contextualism is neglecting a more fundamental distinction between two different kinds or types of meaning found in human language; a distinction that should be central to any analysis of human
language. That is, a certain level of content that is compositional, systematic, recursive (i.e., capable of displaying mechanical characteristics), and another level of content that is invoked through the act of speaking or the use of utterances. By emphasizing the presence of top-down, strong pragmatic effects on communicated meaning, contextualists ignore and disregard as “incoherent”, the rule-governed and convention-bound nature of language (Recanati, 2004, p. 4). A proper and complete analysis of human language would aim to accommodate both of these characteristics of linguistic meaning.

Jason Stanley, in reply to the Contextualist onslaught, develops an example to highlight the importance of this rule-governed nature of linguistic meaning. Take this simple example:

(1) Every Frenchman is seated
(2) Every Frenchman in the classroom is seated
(3) Every Frenchman or Dutchman is seated

An utterance of the first sentence, with some pragmatic enrichment, can be used to express what an utterance of (2) would express. This is a classic case of weak-underdetermination. But the same cannot be said for the relationship between (1) and (3). That is, for some reason, (1) cannot be used to express the content of (3). Stanley notes that this must be due to some “mechanism underlying the phenomenon of domain restriction” (2005, p. 7). Basically, the rules of language do not allow it, regardless of top-down effects.

If, as per Recanati, free pragmatic enrichment was all that mattered, speakers could use (1) to express (3). But they cannot. The point here is that the lexico-syntactic content (the content of the sentence-type) plays a key role in contributing to the determination of what can possibly be expressed by the use of sentences. Even if this formal, context-free content may not always be truth-conditional, there is still meaningful content there that should not be
ignored. It is essential to the study of language not to dismiss literal notions of sentence-meaning as “incoherent” simply because it does not express truth-conditional content.

One specific implication of acknowledging this dual nature of language is concerned with the distinction between saying and meaning. Essentially, according to Recanati’s view, the presence of semantic-underdetermination implies that there is no real workable distinction between saying and meaning. He states: “According to Contextualism the contrast between what the speaker means and what she literally says is illusory” (2004, p. 4). For, on his view, “what is said” is defined by the first intuitive proposition that comes to mind, i.e. what is meant by the utterer. The very notion of “what is said” is defined as content that is composed of more than what the person strictly says (by says here I mean the actual sounds the person utters). This enriched notion of said is the primary, available, truth-conditional content. Thus on his view, what one says is equated with what one usually means by uttering a certain sentence. This is in contrast to the traditional notion that there is a marked distinction between strictly literal and figurative meaning. While Recanati is correct to state that what we mean by our utterances of sentences is usually a pragmatically enriched notion, he fails to appreciate that it is necessary to retain the ability to distinguish this meaning from the meaning of the sentence itself.

It was this issue that, in part, motivated Grice to articulate the distinction between “what is said” and “what is meant”. That is, he wished to temper the claims of the Ordinary Language Philosophers (that identified meaning and use) and acknowledge that there is a distinction between the meaning of words and sentences, and the meaning of our uses of them. However, it is not only traditionalists that still feel this is an important distinction to maintain. It has found contemporary expression in, among others, the work of Kent Bach. Bach argues against the idea that the now acknowledged presence of semantic-underdetermination automatically leads to contextualism, or truth-conditional pragmatics. He
maintains that although the presence of underdetermination does require a refined notion of
the “semantics-pragmatics” distinction. The essential divide between different types of
meaning should remain the same: “semantics” should deal with formal, compositional,
linguistic meaning, and “pragmatics” should deal with extra-linguistic, contextual
information. “What is said”, according to Bach, is limited to the strict, meaning of the
sentence-type that is spoken by the speaker; that is, it is syntactically constrained. In this way
he maintains the ability to speak about the difference between what a person means by an
utterance of a sentence and what they strictly and “literally” say.

He accuses Recanati, specifically, of assuming that “what is said” by an utterance is
what the utterance is usually taken to mean. That is, Recanati relies on the fact that we use
short, convenient sentences to express certain propositions that go beyond their literal
meaning. But this is an efficiency of communication that calls for careful analysis and the
delicate separation of types of meaning, rather than a blurring-over of the interesting
difference between what a sentence means and what it is used to communicate. To highlight
the mistake Recanati makes here let us look at some examples, similar to those used in his
Literal Meaning.

(1) I haven’t had breakfast

As far as contextualism is concerned, “what is said” by an utterance of this sentence in a
normal context is that the person did not have breakfast that day, with this extra element
being provided for by context via a pragmatic process such as free enrichment. This is the
proposition that would be entertained by both speaker and hearer in a normal everyday
exchange. Yet, as pointed out by Bach in his paper “Context Ex Machina” (2005), if this
were the case then there would be no difference in someone uttering the following sentence
instead
(2) I haven’t had breakfast today

However, there seems to be a quite obvious difference between these two sentences. One of them says that the utterer didn’t have breakfast, and the other says the utterer didn’t have breakfast today. Of course, it is clear that the speaker of (1) probably meant that they did not have breakfast that day, but there seems no reason to suppose that this is what is said (Bach, 2005, p. 23). Furthermore, it is also wrong to assume that this type of analysis implies that the utterer of (1) is saying that they have never had breakfast, or they haven’t had breakfast previously. This is to make the same mistake again. The person simply says they haven’t had breakfast. That is it; anything after that is to do with our interpretation of what the speaker may mean, not the sentence itself. The sentence does not demand that context affect it in a certain specific way; we use context to try understand what another person is attempting to communicate to us. The context-free sentence meaning is that the utterer did not have breakfast. This certainly does seem lacking in something to make it truth-conditional, or understandable in a normal conversational exchange but this should not distract from the fact that there is a certain level of meaning contained in the formal elements of the sentence, truth-conditional or not.

Bach goes on to further reinforce his accusation that Recanati’s vision is being obscured by concentrating on the short, habitual sentences we use. He does this by comparing (1) with the following sentence: I haven’t filed my tax returns. In uttering this sentence the speaker would not be saying they didn’t file their tax returns that day, nor would anyone take them to be saying such.

It seems from these examples that the inclusion of “today” in (1) is just due to the fact that that sentence is usually used to mean the utterer didn’t have breakfast that day. But this is no reason to assume that is what is said, because it isn’t. The point here is that we should not
be misguided by concentrating on particular sentences that usually carry a certain meaning that goes beyond its lexico-syntactic construction; this is precisely what Recanati does.

A further argument against this conflation by Recanati comes from Grice. This is to do with the notion of *cancellability*. This is a type of test that can account for the distinction between saying and meaning. It states that contextual or pragmatic information is *not* part of “what is said” by a sentence if it can be taken back without contradiction (Bach, 2001, p. 5). Take for example the sentence “Paul and Rachel are engaged”. A contextualist would argue that “what is said” by this sentence is that *Paul and Rachel are engaged to each other*. This, of course, may be what is meant by the typical utterance of such a kind of sentence. However, Grice states (1989, p. 44) that one could easily say “Paul and Rachel are engaged, but not to each other”. Even though this may be slightly confusing in conversation, or even frustrating to the listener, it is not contradictory. It is still a perfectly meaningful sentence to utter. This shows that the extra pragmatic element – *to each other* – while often left implicit in an utterance, is not part of “what is said”.

1.7: Conclusion

One can see from arguments such as those outlined above, that Contextualists fail to appreciate a level of formal linguistic content that is independent of context. Simply because this level of content may not always express truth-conditions, this does not mean it is not an essential aspect of linguistic analysis. That is, by defining “semantics” as the intuitive truth-conditional content of utterances, Contextualists are neglecting what may be the theoretically tractable or scientifically explainable aspects of linguistic content. I argue that this is an essential characteristic of the “semantic” as opposed to the “pragmatic”. For, it may be the case that there is a theory of the ways in which context contributes to linguistic content is not
scientifically theorizable in the same way as the compositional aspects of context-free linguistic content. This level of content should be central to linguistic analysis, regardless of whether it is truth-conditional or not.

Contextualists may respond to such a line of reasoning by saying “Yes, we agree that there exists a level of context-free content but it is not even accessed in the process of interpretation”. This refers back to Recanati’s notion of conscious availability and how the fact that the first available proposition to a hearer is an already pragmatically enriched one. This implies that context-invariant sentence meaning has no role in the interpretation process and is just an idle wheel in linguistic comprehension.

However, just because this level of content is not directly accessed during snappy conversational exchanges, does not mean it is not accessible (Bach, 2001, p. 9). That is, like the “Paul and Rachel” example above, the expansions on the strict sentence-meaning are cancellable. Even if the context-free sentence meaning “is not actually computed and plays no role in the interpretation process” it still plays a role in that the listener implicitly assumes it is not what is meant (2001, p. 9). As Bach eloquently puts it, these literal meanings “lurk in the background, waiting to be taken into account when there is special reason to do so” (2001, p. 9). While we may immediately acknowledge a pragmatically enriched proposition, this does not preclude the possibility for a rational reconstruction of the different types of meaning involved in human language.

I have argued that Recanati, while making positive strides to account for the role played by context in the interpretation of meaning, has neglected the role of a formal, compositional, systematic, recursive, computational linguistic content; i.e. a theoretically tractable level of content. This may no longer suffice to capture the truth-conditional expressions we communicate in, but it is still an essential aspect of how we learn and use
language. As shown by Bach and Stanley, among others, Recanati, takes our habitual use of certain short, idiomatic sentences to show that “what the sentences says” is incoherent and consequently glosses over the interesting distinction between saying something and meaning something.

This is based on the fact that, firstly, what the sentence says is not always truth-conditional, and secondly, what the sentence says is not always computed in the interpretation of meaning. However, Recanati must realize that while both these facts may be true, this is no reason to neglect the domain of context-free linguistic content. Such conceptions of linguistic content are necessary in that they capture what we seek to preserve when we communicate with others in different contexts.

Ultimately, language has a dual nature, it is both ambiguous, yet constrained. It is both flexible, yet systematic. Each of these fundamental characteristics must be accounted for in any linguistic analysis and it is possible to do so through the traditional picture of semantics and pragmatics. Motivated by underdetermination, Recanati concedes too much to top-down, strong pragmatic effects. While admittedly these are important aspects of the interpretation of meaning, they do not mean the end for an interesting distinction between context-free notions of “saying” and richly pragmatic concepts of “meaning”.


Chapter Two: Semantic Minimalism.

2.0: Introduction

The previous chapter showed how Contextualism has launched a rather comprehensive attack on the traditional Gricean view of the roles of, and relationship between, “semantic” and “pragmatic” content. Essentially, Contextualists argued that given the prevalence of semantic-underdetermination, context-independent sentence meaning (as determined by the lexico-syntactic elements of the sentence) does not express truth-conditional levels of meaning. Nor does such a level of content express the intuitive proposition expressed by a seemingly “literal” utterance of a sentence. That is, traditional conceptions of “semantic” content, as defined as the purely formal, context-invariant, meaning of a sentence, do not seem to express truth-conditional content. Thus, they argue, in order for truth-conditional content to be expressed, contextual information and pragmatic processes must be involved. There are pragmatic processes involved in the determination of “semantic” content, as defined as the intuitive proposition expressed by an utterance.

Specifically, Recanati argued that there are top-down, optional pragmatic processes (that is, processes not demanded by the syntax) involved in the determination of truth-conditional content, i.e. involved in the pre-propositional stage of the interpretation of a linguistic item. Pragmatic information is involved in the determination of literal truth-conditional content; a level that was traditionally assumed to be the domain of “semantics”.

The implications of this argument are that if, as traditionally accepted, “semantics” is supposed to deal with truth-conditional contents, we must allow that pragmatic processes are necessary prior to “semantic” evaluation (Borg, 2007, p. 225). Furthermore, as Recanati
points out, there is no real tangible role for context-free linguistic content to play in the interpretation process, as the context-free meaning of sentences is not always consciously available to the interpreter. That is, we don’t even acknowledge the context-free, sentence meaning on our way to a fuller, more contextualized, truth-conditional meaning: what Recanati calls “what is said”. In essence, contextual information is far more central to the expression of truth-conditional content than once assumed.

The Contextualist offensive was structured around a number of key empirical observations. First they highlighted cases where the truth-conditions (i.e. under what circumstances the sentence would be judged as true or false) of a given sentence can vary. That is, be either true or false, depending on what context is described. This is known as the context-shifting argument.

Secondly, it was argued that the sentence meaning did not seem to equate with the intuitive meaning of the expression for sentences, even when not being used ironically, or metaphorically, etc. This, I have labelled weak-underdetermination. Furthermore, they drew attention to cases where the context-independent sentence meaning seemed not to amount to truth-conditional content at all (strong-underdetermination) e.g. “Tom can’t continue”. These examples were designed to show that context-free sentence meaning alone does not express truth-conditional contents and that contextual information is necessary in the expression of truth-conditional content, and not just a secondary process of implication, as was once assumed.

In reaction to this comprehensive attack from the contextualists, a number of theorists have launched serious defences of the role of context-free linguistic content in linguistic analysis and interpretation. They argue, in opposition to the Contextualists, that the compositionally determined lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence do express fully truth-
conditional and therefore propositional contents. Without the need for recourse to contextual or pragmatic information, apart from that which is syntactically mandated (indexicals, demonstratives), the sentence meaning can be analysed in terms of the conditions under which it is true. This is the claim of the Semantic Minimalists.

However, it seems that for Minimalists to deal with the Contextualist offensive, some concessions must be made. In this way, while defending aspects of the Gricean view of "semantics", they also modify it. Hence, while arguing that context-free sentence meaning is truth-conditional, Minimalists also argue that the role played by such content in communication and interpretation is far more constrained than traditionally conceived.

This means that traditional conceptions of "semantic" content as both expressing truth-conditional content, and expressing the intuitive meaning of utterances, or the "what is said" no longer hold. Minimalists concede the latter, while maintaining the former as an essential characteristic of their definition of "semantic" content. For them, "semantic" content may no longer label the intuitive proposition actually communicated by an utterance of a sentence, but it does label the lexico-syntactically determined meaning, and for them, this meaning is necessarily truth-conditional (even if the context-free proposition is not what is meant by an utterance of the sentence).

How do they do this? Well, in order to show this, it seems they need to respond to the arguments, mentioned above, from Contextualists and, in a positive sense, articulate what it is for sentences independent of context to be truth-conditional, even when it seems intuitively natural to say they are not. This is exactly what Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore attempt to do in their seminal work on minimalism: *Insensitive Semantics: A Defence of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism* (2005). Emma Borg in her book, *Minimal Semantics* (2007), also attempts to defend this position and while she does fundamentally agree with
Cappelen and Lepore there are important differences in her account. This chapter will explore and examine the work of Cappelen and Lepore, along with Borg, and evaluate whether or not they succeed in establishing a coherent account of “semantic” content as both compositionally determined by the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentences, and fully truth-conditional.

Upon conclusion of said analysis, I hope to again show not only the positive response of Minimalists to the Contextualist onslaught, but also show how they too fall prey to an over reliance on truth-conditional content as an arbiter for meaningful content.

2.1: Cappelen and Lepore’s “Simple and Naive” View.

Firstly then, let us examine the “simple and naive” view, as they refer to it, from Cappelen and Lepore (from now on C&L). Basically, their argument is that all sentences, independent of context are truth-conditional and that “semantic” context sensitivity is limited to what they call the “Basic Set” of indexicals. That is, all contextual influence on truth-conditional content is syntactically mandated. This is in direct opposition to Recanati’s claim that there are free-pragmatic processes effecting truth-conditional content.

Taken from Kaplan’s (1977) seminal work, *Demonstratives*, the basic set of indexicals include what C&L refer to as the “obvious context sensitive expressions” that any “pure, uncontaminated students” would list if asked to name “a few incontrovertibly context sensitive expressions”; hence, their simple and naive view (C&L, 2005, p. 1-2).

For example, personal pronouns like “I”, “you”, “he”, “she”; demonstrative pronouns, such as “that” and “this”; the adverbs, “here”, “now”, “today”, and so on. In this way, they
argue, context sensitivity is grammatically, or syntactically triggered – thus capable of theoretical, or systematic analysis – and that is the only effect context has on the "semantics" content of a sentence. Words like "tall", "know" or "red" as used by some contextualists are of a different kind to these basic indexicals, and thus are not properly context-sensitive.

Furthermore, in order to accommodate the clearly substantial arguments made by Contextualists, they combine this minimal view of "semantics" with what they call Speech Act Pluralism. Essentially, this is the claim that the meaning expressed by the context-invariant sentence meaning (while always truth-conditional) is not necessarily the same as what is communicated by the utterance of said sentence. In fact, it is often the case that this minimal context-free content is not what is communicated by an utterance of a sentence, even when it is being used "literally". It is in this way that contemporary minimalists modify the traditional Gricean position; by acknowledging the gap between a context-free content (that is truth-conditional) and what is communicated by an utterance of a sentence.

Speech Act Pluralism is the view that "indefinitely many propositions can be said, asserted, claimed, stated" by any utterance (C&L, 2005, p. 4). What is communicated by an utterance depends on infinitely many different factors beyond the compositional sentence-meaning of the expression (background knowledge, intentions, place and time, etc.). This is their concession to the Contextualists; so Recanati, for example would agree about the effects context has on communicated meaning. However, Minimalists would argue that a theoretical or systematic analysis of those factors may be impossible as it is subject to the "frame problem", where the possible search space for relevant factors is infinite, and, thus, verges on a theory of everything. This, however, does not mean the sentence used does not have a clear and determinate level of truth-conditional meaning, even if it does not equate with what the sentence is used to communicate in a real-time conversational exchange.
Speech Act Pluralism has been accused of being very similar to some extreme forms of Contextualism, however, it must be made clear what exactly the difference is. Contextualism argues that context is freely (as in, not syntactically mandated) involved in the determination of truth-conditional content, as the lexico-syntactic sentence meaning alone fails to deliver truth-conditional propositions. Semantic Minimalists directly disagree and state that there is a truth-conditional content expressed by the context-free elements of every sentence, but this is not always what is communicated; hence, the combined theoretical stances of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism. In this way, according to minimalists, they remain loyal to traditional conceptions of "semantics" as labelling a certain kind of linguistic information encoded in the words used and how they are combined, which is analysable in terms of truth-conditions. By making this claim, Minimalists give up the idea that "semantics" should also capture the intuitive meaning of speech-acts and utterances; they leave this level of meaning to pragmatics.

2.2: The Arguments against Contextualism.

C&L structure their argument in Insensitive Semantics as follows. There are two types, or degrees, of Contextualism: Radical and Moderate. Radical contextualists, being more extreme than Moderates, claim that every expression of a natural language is context sensitive, and there is no such thing as truth-conditional sentence meaning (2005, p. 5-6). Proponents of this view include Charles Travis, John Searle, Robyn Carston and Recanati. As Robyn Carston puts it

Underdeterminacy is an essential feature of the relationship between linguistic expression and the propositions (thoughts) they are used to express; generally
for any given thought/proposition there is no sentence which fully encodes
it...Underdeterminacy is universal.... (2002 p. 29).

Moderate contextualists, on the other hand, claim that only some expressions of a
natural language, which are not obviously context sensitive, are in fact context sensitive.
Moderates include those who argue for the context sensitivity of, for example, quantified
phrases (e.g. Stanley and Szabo, 2000), belief statements (e.g. Richard, 2004, and Perry,
1986) and epistemic claims (e.g. DeRose, 1992). Essentially, moderates want to expand the
basic set of indexicals to include certain specific constructions.

With this categorisation in mind C&L have two goals: first to show that Moderate
Contextualism inevitably collapses into Radical Contextualism and, second, to show that
Radical contextualism is “empirically flawed and ultimately incoherent” (2005, p. 12).
Ultimately, they argue, contextual influence has been greatly exaggerated in recent work in
the Philosophy of Language, and in Philosophy in general (epistemology, ethics,
metaphysics, aesthetics, etc) and they wish to defend a traditional conception of “semantics”
as compositionally determined truth-conditional content.

How does moderate contextualism inevitably collapse into radical contextualism?
This question must first be answered before one can fully appreciate how these minimalists
hope to counter the overall Contextualist arguments. Moderate contextualism (MC), as
mentioned, is the view that there are a certain number of specific types of expressions which
should be added to the basic set. This is due to the fact that they exhibit context-sensitive
characteristics. As shown above, and in the previous chapter, there are a variety of such
examples: comparative adjectives, propositional attitude ascriptions, counterfactual
conditionals, knowledge attributions, moral attributions, weather reports. Moderates,
according to C&L, argue that sentences which contain one or more of the listed expressions
display context-sensitivity, and thus require contextual completion in order to express truth-conditional content.

Radical Contextualists on the other hand go further in that they argue that “every single expression in every single sentence in the language is subject to context shifting” (2005, p. 31). Some of the main proponents of this extreme contextualist position are, according to Cappelen and Lepore, Charles Travis, John Searle and Francois Recanati. Each of these philosophers has stated, in some form or another, that sentences, universally, have no truth-conditions without taking account of background assumptions, contextual expectations, world-knowledge, or some necessary pragmatic information (Travis 1996, p.451, Searle 1980, p.227, Recanati 2004, p. 92). This view is reminiscent of the Ordinary Language Philosophy of J.L. Austin who said “the question of truth and falsehood does not turn only on what a sentence is, nor yet on what it means, but on, the circumstances in which it is uttered; sentences are not, as such, either true or false” (Austin 1962, p. 110-11). This statement goes a long way to summing up the Radical Contextualist position: that context-free sentence meaning simply does express truth-conditional content.

Given such a categorisation, C&L want to show that any theorist claiming to be a moderate contextualist is really just an unimaginative radical contextualist. If one can imaginatively describe a situation in which some specific expression, e, is context sensitive, then with sufficient ingenuity such an argument can be provided for any sentence or expression whatsoever.

However, not all Minimalists are in complete agreement with how Cappelen and Lepore categorise the different types of Contextualists. Emma Borg, for example, agrees with the overall motivation and outlook of Insensitive Semantics but suggests that there are some problems with the way in which they “frame the debate (Borg, 2007, p. 339). In order to
offer a more complete and comprehensive picture of Minimalism, it is necessary to acknowledge Borg’s criticism.

Borg argues that few, if any, of the theorists labelled “radical” by C&L actually fit the definition they give for this position. For it seems that many of the “radicals” talked about in *Insensitive Semantics* run weak-underdetermination or, “inappropriateness” arguments against Minimalism.

Inappropriateness arguments state that *some* sentences do express truth-conditional contents independent of context, but such propositions are not the ones speakers wish to express by uttering those sentences (Borg, 2007, p. 341). This is an argument designed to show that “what is said” necessarily involves pragmatic information, and is not, as Grice would have it, a product of context-free compositional, interpretation. Recall, Recanati in the last chapter who mentioned the role of weak-underdetermination arguments, where a context-invariant sentence meaning expressed the wrong intuitive proposition.

However, as Borg points out, this argument no longer applies to contemporary minimalism, such as that of C&L. By combining their minimalism with Speech Act pluralism, Minimalism acknowledges that the compositional sentence content is often *not* what is expressed by a speaker. Yet, the point is, according to C&L’s definition, the likes of Carston and Recanati should not even be entitled to run such an argument. Therefore, the definition C&L give for radicals – as those that see *every* expression in natural language as context-sensitive – is mistaken.

By making this mistake Cappelen and Lepore’s analysis misunderstands the issue at the centre of the debate over the role of context in the determination of truth-conditional content. C&L base their division of contextualists on *the number* of terms each claim to be
context-sensitive. As outlined earlier in this chapter, moderate contextualists are those, according to C&L, that claim there are *some* specific expressions (which are not obviously context sensitive) that are in fact context sensitive (C&L, 2005, p. 7). Radical contextualists are those that claim *every* expression of a natural language is context sensitive.

Essentially, C&L divide up contextualists in terms of the number of context sensitive expressions that each are committed too: *how many* expressions should be added to the basic set: *some* or *all*? This is a mistake. It is not about how many terms should be added to the ‘basic set’ list of context-sensitive expressions; it is about the *mechanism* by which context affects literal content.

The point Borg wishes to make, and I agree, is that the difference between the two types of contextualists is not to do with the *number* of context sensitive expressions, but to do with the *way* in which context effects truth-conditional meaning. Moderates, such as Stanley and Szabo, argue that there are certain terms (quantified phrases for them) that are, in fact, like indexicals. That is, they argue that “every common noun cohabits at the syntactic level with a hidden indexical” (Borg, 2007, p. 344). For them, what makes a word like “man” context sensitive is the presence in the term’s basic syntactic structure of a genuinely indexical element just like “I” or “now”.

Contextualists like Travis, Recanati or Carston, on the other hand, disagree with this model for contextual influence. They (Carston, Recanati, Travis) argue that context is *freely* involved in the determination of truth-conditional meaning. Carston allows “that pragmatic processes can supply constituents to what is said without any linguistic pointer” (Carston 2002, p. 23). This is the difference between the two.
By defining the different categories of contextualism in this way, one can accept that certain Radicals are entitled to use inappropriateness arguments. For they are not saying that every single expression in human language is context sensitive; they are saying that context does not have to be syntactically mandated in order to affect truth-conditional meaning. It can do so pragmatically and freely. The most important question to ask when analysing certain contextualist arguments is not how many expressions they think are context sensitive, but what do they think are the mechanisms of context sensitivity (Borg, 2007, p. 358). Does the theorist in question allow the context of utterance to act on the semantic content even when such an action is not demanded by anything in the syntax of that sentence?

Although this does not change the list of names that belong in each camp (Carston, Recanati, Travis and the relevance theorists are still more “radical” contextualists than Stanley, Szabo, De Rose, Richard & Perry), it does bring to the fore a more accurate criteria for the separation of types of contextualism. Furthermore, this new definition from Borg, avoids the inconsistency that came from assigning inappropriateness arguments to “radical” contextualists. On the new definition, they are perfectly entitled to use such arguments, while still maintaining a radical-contextualist standpoint by arguing for free, non-syntactic pragmatic effects.

Now that a more comprehensive picture of the difference between Radical and Moderate Contextualists is established, it is apt to return to Cappelen and Lepore’s arguments against Contextualism.

They focus on the two main forms of arguments used by contextualists: context shifting arguments and underdetermination (incompleteness) arguments. They make the claim that for every context shifting argument, and incompleteness argument made by

\[14\] Note that Cappelen and Lepore prefer the term ‘incompleteness’ to underdetermination. However, since I used underdetermination in the previous chapter, and they refer to the same phenomenon, it is apt to continue using it.
moderate contextualists in reference to some specific expression, this argument can be extended to include all expressions. Hence, moderate contextualism collapses into radical contextualism. On Borg's terminology, they are arguing that for every expression claimed by moderates to exhibit some syntactically mandated context-sensitivity, the same can be applied to expression with seemingly no such characteristics. That is, the intuitive sense that expressions like "tall" or "red" are context-sensitive, can in be applied to any expression; not just the specific ones some moderate contextualists talk about. Once one claims context sensitivity for some expressions, they must claim it for all expressions.

2.3: The Response to Context-shifting and Underdetermination Arguments

Context shifting arguments, familiar from the previous chapter, deny the possibility of a sentence expressing truth-conditions independent of reference to a context or some pragmatic factors. This is done by showing that the truth-conditions of a given sentence can vary, i.e. be both true and false, depending on the context in which it is analysed. (Recall the example of "There is milk in the fridge" from the previous chapter). Thus there are no definite context independent truth-conditions of the sentence itself. These thought-experiments produce the data by which contextualists test their grasp of truth-conditional content, and if the results of these tests vary when imagined in different contexts, this is meant to show that the expression is sensitive to context.

For example, according to Cappelen and Lepore, many moderate contextualists invoke expressions that contain quantifiers to show that either the truth-conditions, the proposition expressed by an utterance, or "what is said" by the utterer, varies when the sentence is imagined in different contexts. A commonly used example concerns the word "every".
Many contextualists argue that sentences such as “every bottle is on the table” are strong examples of the ubiquitous presence of context-sensitivity. Again, the idea here is that the domain of the quantifier “every” shifts from context to context. If uttered at a house-party the domain of the phrase “every bottle” would be all the bottles at the party, not every bottle in the universe. The semantically relevant feature here is concerned with what the quantifier ranges over and the contextualist intuition is that what it ranges over varies depending on context, and this, in turn, alters the truth-conditions of this very same sentence.

They go on to enumerate a number of such examples: comparative adjectives, propositional attitude ascriptions, counterfactual conditionals, knowledge attributions, moral attributions, weather reports, etc. All of which have been used by various moderate contextualists as examples of context-shift.

In response, Cappelen and Lepore make the following conditional claim: If it is the case that context shifting arguments show that Moderate Contextualism is true, then Radical Contextualism must follow. They are not saying that context-shifting arguments are valid (they explicitly deny they are valid); only that if one admits them for some expressions, they must admit them for all. If one can imaginatively conjure up a situation in which some specific expression, e, is context sensitive, then with a little more imagination, such an argument can be provided for any sentence or expression whatsoever. The foundation or motivation for such a claim comes from how Cappelen and Lepore understand context shift to work. They describe it as a thought experiment in which one places oneself imaginatively into the shoes of a participant in an alternative scenario. They argue this can be done for literally any sentence.

It seems the only way to prove such a claim is to offer a representative sample of certain examples wide enough in range to satisfy the criteria of universality. Also, one must
ensure that the examples cannot be accommodated by the moderate contextualist in terms of ambiguity, vagueness, metaphor, polysemy, etc. That is, they must be careful to select examples that are genuine cases of the same expression being used in the same way in two different scenarios, and having different truth-conditions due to contextual factors involved in each scenario.

One such example that seems to have no particularly obvious context sensitive elements (like the ones listed above: comparative adjectives, knowledge or moral attributions, etc.) is the sentence “Jill didn’t have fish for dinner” (2005, p. 45). Yet, Cappelen and Lepore argue that with sufficient hypothetical posturing one can describe a situation in which this sentence is used in the same way, but is true in one instance and false in the other.

As good scientists do Cappelen and Lepore, in Insensitive Semantics offer a number of such examples in order to achieve a representative sample, here, however, for the sake of clarity and brevity, I will limit my discussion to just a single case that can be generalized. So, in the example of Jill and the fish, the context is as follows: Jill is at a restaurant and orders the salmon but when it arrives she decides she no longer wants it and proceeds to just eat the vegetables that come with the salmon. In scenario one Jill gets food poisoning and the doctor asks her what she ate for dinner. In such a context an utterance of the above sentence would be intuitively true as she did not have the fish in the relevant sense of the doctor’s question.

The second scenario again begins with the fact that Jill ordered the salmon but ate only the vegetables. However, in this case there is a debate over the bill. Someone utters the sentence in question, and this time it seems intuitively false. That is, what is at stake here in the second scenario is what someone ordered, not whether they ate it all or not. Here it seems is a case where the same sentence used, with no indexical components, but with differing
truth-conditions due only to the surrounding context: hence, according to the hypothetical Radical Contextualist, it is context sensitive.

The conclusion from the above example, along with several others discussed by Cappelen and Lepore, is that context-shifting arguments can be stated for any sentence, not just those intuitively compelling ones described by the Moderate Contextualists (comparative adjectives, quantifiers etc.). In the example of Jill and the fish, there are no specific words that seem to be in anyway context sensitive, or have any characteristics in common with the basic set. Thus, they argue, “if you start down the slope of MC, there’s no stopping short of RC” (2005, p. 48). Essentially, they are saying that once you claim that context sensitivity exists outside of the Basic Set, then you are a Radical Contextualist.

The same goes for underdetermination/incompleteness arguments. If one wishes to argue that there are certain specific types of sentences that are not capable of expressing truth-conditions, then Cappelen and Lepore claim that the same can be said for all sentences. Take for example the sentence “Steel isn’t strong enough”. This sentence, it has been argued by a number of theorists, is in need of some contextual information – namely, what it is that steel isn’t strong enough for – in order to express truth-conditional content.

Otherwise, it seems there is not enough information to judge what it would take to state whether it is true or false; it does not seem to offer a complete and determinate description of an external, real-world situation. There is no such thing as steel not being strong enough simpliciter (2005, p. 61). It seems the sentence, intuitively, cannot be evaluated as true or false without knowing what it is steel isn’t strong enough for. One cannot imagine the scenario under which it would be true or false without knowing more information.
For the likes of the so-called Moderate Contextualists, this sentence is in need of completion, by context, in order reach the truth-conditional level. However, Cappelen and Lepore, want to show that even the proposed completion can, under the right imaginative circumstances, be construed as incomplete. They argue, if you support incompleteness at all, then you support it for all. A suggested completion of the above sentence would be something like, “Steel isn’t strong enough to support the roof”. This, the moderates argue, is complete, has truth-conditions and is propositional.

Yet, say Cappelen and Lepore, why is this complete? What exactly is the criterion by which this supposed completion is fully truth-conditional, or propositionally complete in comparison to the original sentence? It does not state for how long the steel needs to support the roof, or at what temperature it can sustain support, or the amount of steel, and so on. Their point is that one can keep claiming to need extra information in order to signify more and more specific truth-conditions for any sentence. Essentially, there will always be space within linguistic meaning for further description of reality and Moderate contextualists are just stopping at an arbitrary point and claiming determinacy; often based on what we usually mean by the use of certain expressions.

C&L argue that these examples show that MC is an unstable position and ultimately leads to radical contextualism. The reason that context-shifting arguments and incompleteness arguments are misused so often by certain Contextualists is that there exists a fundamental confusion between context-free sentence content and speech act content. That is, Contextualists confuse the content of what we intuitively grasp as what a person says or states or asserts by the use of a sentence, with what the sentence, independent of use, says. Minimalists wish to maintain the definition of “semantic” that captures this formally constituted sentence meaning. This, again, is where Cappelen and Lepore refer to the distinction which they argue underlies much of the debate surrounding the role of context in
the determination of linguistic meaning. Essentially, they wish to advise all theorists that when examining the compositional elements of a sentence, they should ignore intuitions regarding what someone *usually* means or expresses by a use of that sentence: keep speech act content separate from sentence content.

This is reminiscent of the criticisms I outlined in the previous chapter in reference to Contextualism. C&L are correct, then to question the idea that one can limit the effects of context-sensitivity to certain specific expressions. "Moderate" contextualist and indexicalist positions are inherently unstable.

Similarly, in Borg's terminology, the mistake of the moderates is to assume that one can just impose hidden indexicals or unarticulated constituents, just on the basis of an intuition of "semantic" incompleteness. That is, it seems that moderate contextualists only seek to posit some indexicality for expressions that exhibit some intuitive incompleteness in the first place. However, this is a circular argument. For, on the moderate contextualist picture, the argument is that "semantic" content is still determined by syntactic elements; there is just more of them than once assumed (enough, ready, tall, knows, etc.) Yet, for moderate contextualists it is "semantic" intuitions of incompleteness that determine their syntactic claims of indexicality, (Borg, 2012, p. 88). That is, they are guided by their "semantic" intuitions of incompleteness when proposing where to posit syntactically context-sensitive expressions; yet it is syntax that should determine semantics on their view. Thus, along with C&L, Borg argues that if you allow context-sensitivity at all for some specific expressions, you might as well be a Radical Contextualist and admit, like Recanati, that there are free pragmatic processes involved in the determination of truth-conditional content.

Both Borg and C&L rightly agree that moderate contextualism is an untenable position. Now they have shown Moderate Contextualism inevitably collapses into Radical,
they have a clearly defined opponent: Radical Contextualists. How do they show radical contextualism to be ultimately flawed and incoherent?

In a systematic style, Cappelen and Lepore set out a number of ways to show how Radical Contextualism fails and is ultimately false in its claim that sentence, independent of context do not express truth-conditional content. Essentially, they set up a number of tests to highlight the difference between the obvious context sensitive expressions which are members of the basic set, and those less obvious expressions invoked in contextualist arguments. The idea is that they want to create tests that only members of the basic set can pass; tests that highlight the specific context-sensitive aspects of the basic set. Thus when they apply these tests to other words and phrases, they fail, showing that they are not truly context sensitive.

The first of these they call the “Context Sensitivity Test” (2005, p. 88). This is a test which, they argue, determines whether or not an expression is truly sensitive to context. They appeal to the Basic Set of indexicals as the standard for genuine cases of context sensitivity. The test they construct is as follows: “if the occurrence of an expression, e, tends to block disquotational indirect reports (i.e. render such reports false) then you have evidence that e is context sensitive”. Take for example words like “I” or “now” – archetypal indexical expressions. The idea is that such words – such obviously context sensitive words – cannot be disquotationally indirectly reported (unless by self-reporters in the case of “I”, or by simultaneous reporters in the case of “now”).

Consider an utterance by Jack, on Tuesday, of “Tom has to leave now”. If someone attempts to report, on Wednesday, what Jack said with an utterance of “Jack said that Tom has to leave now”, his report would be false (2005, p. 89). This is because the expression “now”, as a member of the basic set, fails to pick out, or refer to, what it referred to in the
original utterance. The argument from Cappelen and Lepore goes that only true context
sensitive expressions “block inter contextual disquotational indirect reports” (2005, p. 89).
The “semantic” value of “now” shifts from one context to another; the same goes for “I”,
“here”, “tomorrow”, and all the members of the basic set.

They wish to argue that contextualists postulate context sensitivity for expressions
that do not pass this test. Take the much-used contextualist example of the use of the
expression “ready” in an utterance such as “John is ready”. Cappelen and Lepore attempt to
go through the contextualist motions by laboriously offering details of some context in which
this was uttered (2005, p. 90). They imagine a scenario in which the sentence is uttered in a
conversation about exam preparation, as well as a scenario in which the sentence is uttered as
people are preparing to leave a house.

Their point is that regardless of which scenario someone is referring to the next day,
each sentence can be disquotationally reported. One can say, “In each context, the speaker
said that John is ready” and utter something true. This is a problem for contextualism. If
contextualism were correct this disquotational report would not be possible for each utterance
of “John is ready”, on the contextualist view, expresses a different proposition (i.e. John is
ready for the exam or John is ready to leave the house). If this was the case it would not be
possible to say “In each context, the speaker said that John is ready”, for there is only one
proposition expressed in the complement clause of that report. It is this proposition,
according to the minimalist, that is expressed by any utterance of “John is ready”.

Essentially then, they wish to make the point that every expression not in the basic
set, fails this test. They go through a number of well-trodden examples and claim that they
can all be disquotationally reported. This fact implies that Radical Contextualism must be
false. For on the radical contextualist view, if such expressions were really context sensitive they should block such reports.

The second specific objection to contextualism made by C&L occurs when they argue that real context sensitive expressions block collective descriptions. Again, the idea here is that if there are two different contexts in which the sentences “Yesterday John left” and “Yesterday Bill left” are true, this does not automatically mean that there is a context in which “Yesterday John and Bill left” is true. The same goes for all of the expressions in the basic set. However, they argue, the same cannot be said for many other expressions which are used by contextualists as examples of context sensitivity.

They use the example of the utterance, “Both Smith and Jones weigh 80kg”. The standards for weighing differ in each case: Smith is an astronaut on the moon being weighed in a full suit, and Jones is naked before breakfast at home. Cappelen and Lepore argue that it is still possible to collectively describe them both as weighing 80kg. They see no problem with the sentence, “Both Smith and Jones weigh 80kg”. Therefore, the expression is not context sensitive. Again, they go through a multitude of similar examples.

Cappelen and Lepore devise these tests in order to highlight the specific difference between genuine context sensitive expressions (members of the Basic Set) and those multitudes of varying expressions used by Contextualists. Their point is that there is a marked difference, a provable difference, between such obvious context sensitive expressions, as found in the basic set, and those as claimed by Contextualists to display context sensitivity. What this shows is that words like “ready” or “enough” do not display the same systematic type of rule-based context-sensitivity as we find in the words “now” or “here”.

As a supplementary point against Contextualism, the Minimalists argue that if contextualism were true, then it would seem impossible to explain how people succeed in
communicating across contexts. That is, if context is so essential to interpreting linguistic meaning, then what happens when speakers do not share a context yet still manage to communicate?

Many contextualists (such as Recanati) claim that “what is said” or the “semantic content” of an expression is heavily dependent on pragmatic and contextual information. That is, the proposition expressed in a communicative exchange relies on a psychological process that invokes background information, perceptual knowledge, cultural norms, conversational maxims, etc; things that cannot be traced back to the syntactic elements of the sentence. The question Minimalists want to ask is, without such information how could communication succeed? When communicating with someone with whom you do not share any such background information, it seems that it would be “miraculous” if communication were to succeed because so much necessary information is missing.

Yet, it seems that people do consistently succeed in such endeavour, with ease. It succeeds, according to the Minimalists, because there is a level of linguistic meaning expressed by words and sentences that language knowers have access to, that constrains and guides, without fully determining, what we can mean by uttering them. For Minimalists, this content is “semantic”. While it may not be what is usually communicated by the use of a certain expression, it still remains as “fall back content”. Again, this minimal literal meaning is accessible, even if it is not usually accessed in normal conversation.

However, while the above arguments go some way to establishing that Contextualism may have gone too far in disregarding a context-free level of content, the Minimalists still have some way to go in order to show that this context-free content is truth-conditional. Thus, a positive statement of Semantic Minimalism is called for.
Now that the central criticisms aimed at Contextualism have been outlined, it is necessary to articulate, in a positive sense, the precise nature of a minimal version of "semantics", and how it, in combination with speech act pluralism, offers a coherent and accurate picture of how we use and understand language. What is Semantic Minimalism and how does it fit together with speech act pluralism to give an accurate picture of the role of contextual information in the determination of linguistic meaning? What is the relationship between linguistic meaning and truth-conditions on a minimalist account?

Semantic Minimalism is the view that there is a determinate, truth-conditional content expressed by the compositionally constituted, lexico-syntactic content of sentences (Borg, 2012, p.4). This minimal, truth-conditional content is the "semantic" content of sentences. It is the content which all utterances of a particular sentence share, regardless of the differences in background information or context, i.e., it is the context-invariant content. It is this minimal determinate content that can be grasped and reported by someone even if they are ignorant of the relevant characteristics of the context in which the utterance took place (C&L, 2005, p. 143-144).

Even though Minimalists argue against Contextualists in terms of the extent to which context is involved in linguistic meaning, they do recognise a small subset of expressions that interact with contexts of utterance in privileged ways: what they call genuinely context sensitive expressions. Recall Kaplan’s (1989) list from Demonstratives. Minimalists point out that all competent speakers are familiar with use of these expressions and they exhaust the extent of contextual influence on "semantic" content, therefore, claiming that all "semantic" context sensitivity is grammatically or syntactically triggered (Borg, 2012, p. 4). In other words, for Borg and C&L, context affects truth-conditional content in a bottom-up, recursive
and systematic way. This is in direct disagreement with, for example, Recanati, who stresses that there are top-down, optional pragmatic processes, such as free enrichment, involved in the establishment of truth-conditional content.

It was mentioned at the outset of this chapter that while Minimalists disagree with much of the Contextualist criticisms of traditional characterisations of truth-conditional content, they also modify the traditional position in their own way. The primary way in which they do so is through the combination of Semantic Minimalism with a type of Speech Act pluralism. They no longer maintain, as was traditionally assumed, that context-free sentence content equates with what is communicated, or that it is in some sense the intuitive proposition expressed, onto which pragmatic information adds to create implicatures etc. They argue that this context-independent linguistic content does not exhaust the speech act content of an utterance, and, in fact, is usually not the proposition that a speaker wishes to communicate. “An utterance of a sentence S typically says, asserts, claims a wide range of propositions in addition to the one semantically expressed” (C&L, 2005, p. 145). This is speech act pluralism.

When it was mentioned above that Minimalists claim that the only contextual effect on the truth-conditional content of a sentence is through members of Kaplan’s basic set (indexicals etc.), this does not mean they do not allow optional, rich pragmatic processes to effect the speech-act content. This is a subtle but key point to make when establishing the precise differences between a Minimalist and Contextualist approach to meaning. For Minimalists, there is a clear separation between minimal linguistic content and speech-act content. Contextualists, on the other hand, claim that there exists no truth-conditional lexico-syntactically determined content and that pragmatic, speech-act processes are involved in establishing the truth-conditional content.
This is a mistake, according to Minimalism: "intuitions about, and other evidence for, speech-act content are not direct evidence for semantic content" (C\&L, 2005, p. 145). Also, attempting to theorize about the factors that influence speech act content brings up the frame-problem once again. That is, there seems to be an endless number of factors involved in establishing speech act content. Thus, on such a view there can be no systematic or theoretical account of speech-acts; there is simply too much potential information involved in interpreting what someone is intending to mean by an utterance.

Minimalism, up to this point, seems to paint a relatively clear picture of how context affects linguistic meaning. They maintain their roots in the traditional conceptions of "semantic" and "pragmatic" content. There is context-free, truth-conditional content, that is only effected by context where syntactically mandated (i.e. in a bottom up, systematic way). Then there is speech-act content, which is what people intend to communicate through the use of specific sentences.

It is unlikely that there can be a theory, as such, for speech act content. Again, as it simply seems that the potential information that is relevant to understanding an utterance, is infinite in scope. The basic idea is that "no one thing is said (asserted, claimed) by any utterance: rather, indefinitely many propositions are said, asserted, claimed, etc" (2005, p. 199). When reporting what someone else said, there is no single unique way to put it together to establish a correct description of what is communicated.

For example, take the simple sentence "The table is not sturdy anymore" uttered by you a few days ago. If the table referred to is now in your friend’s room, is it wrong to describe you as having said "the table in John's room is not sturdy anymore"? It seems that this is an accurate representation of what you meant by your utterance. This becomes even more apparent when analysing real-world conversations, full of vagueness and ambiguity,
half completed sentences, etc. In fact, it seems not even the speaker has privileged access to all the propositions asserted by use of a sentence.

However, what Minimalists wish to stress is that if a context is not shared by communicators, and it is unclear what the intention is, the minimal context-free content is always there as a fall-back interpretation for some idea of what is being said. It is this content that allows audiences in radically different contexts to “understand each other, to agree or disagree, to question and debate with each other” (2005, p. 152). And this content, according to Minimalists, is properly truth-conditional.

2.5: Context-Free Truth-Conditional Content.

Throughout this discussion, this aspect of Semantic Minimalism has needed explanation: how is it that sentences, independent of context, necessarily express truth-conditional content, even when it seems intuitively compelling to admit they do not? The entire Contextualist offensive is organised around showing that many sentences we use do not describe the world to a sufficient degree for us to know the conditions under which they would be true, i.e. they are not determinate enough to express truth-conditional content. Contextualists rely on examples of sentences that are intuitively incomplete, and that do not seem to have enough information to be truth-conditional. How exactly can Minimalists say that “Jake is tall” or “Jill is ready” express fully determinate truth-conditional content, when it seems they lack enough information to grasp the conditions under which they would be true? Without defending this claim, it seems that their Minimalism is just a series of criticisms of Contextualism; but pointing out the flaws of Contextualism does not suffice to show that minimal sentence meaning is necessarily truth-conditional. It is incumbent upon them to give a clear account of how context-free content is truth-conditional.
On this question, Cappelen and Lepore, on the one hand, and Borg, on the other, offer slightly different answers. Firstly then, Cappelen and Lepore in answering this central question turn to metaphysics and its relation to “semantics”. In what seems like an unusual topic to invoke in a linguistic discussion, C&L make the claim that many of the objections to their view, raised by Contextualists, are in fact metaphysical objections, not semantic.

Take the classic example of “Jill is ready”. C&L are committed to the following: (1) An utterance of ‘Jill is ready’ expresses the proposition that Jill is ready and is true just in case Jill is ready” (2005, p. 155). This type of T-sentence could be used for any sentence and it shows the truth-conditions of the sentence in question.

The typical objection to this type of claim – that such a sentence is properly truth-conditional – states that there is just no such thing as being ready simpliciter. To express truth-conditional content this sentence would have to include what it is that Jill is ready for. What is the state of affairs that the proposition that Jill is ready picks out? Intuitively, there does not seem to be enough information in the lexico-syntactic meaning of the sentence to offer a “full” or “complete” description of the external world. The same goes for expressions like “enough” or “continue” and adjectives like “tall” or “small”. Sentences containing these expressions, while fully grammatical, seem to be in need of contextual provision in order for a hearer to know the truth-conditions of the sentence.

C&L respond to this by arguing that the difficulty theorists have in accepting such sentences as truth-conditional, is a metaphysical difficulty about the possibility of different situations having something in common, e.g. “readiness”. That is, the question of “readiness” and what makes a thing “ready” is a question for metaphysicians to answer, not semanticists. It is a question about how objects can “can share the same property or engage in the same activity” (2005, p. 157). When Contextualists spend so much time pouring over whether or
not *Jill is ready* is a truth-conditional expression, they are really asking, “what is it to be ready?” and this is not a question for semantics.

People can be ready for a lot of things: an exam, a game, marriage, bed, death, an attack, etc. But what is it that all these different cases have in common? Those people are all *ready*. For C&L, someone is ready if someone is in a state of readiness. That is it. The sentence “A is ready”, is true just in case A is ready. This may make it the case that in some sense, everyone is ready all the time, and the sentence will always be true, in a trivial sense. But Minimalists are OK with that as long as the minimal, context-free linguistic content expresses truth-conditional content.

Again, for Cappelen and Lepore, the sentence “A is ready” means that *A is ready* and is true if and only if A is ready. To ask what this consists in, is to ask a “*what-do-they-have-in-common question*” and such a question is the domain of metaphysics. It is not, C&L argue, a question about language. If one is investigating consciousness or causation, you ask “what do all conscious things have in common?” and again, they argue this is nothing to do with “semantics” but to do with the property of consciousness.

The issue here, argue Cappelen and Lepore, is to show that once one attempts to delimit and define the precise point at which a sentence becomes truth-conditional, they open themselves up to a slippery slope of metaphysical investigation. That is, it is not possible to pin-point the precise point at which a sentence becomes truth-conditional, and once you start adding bits of context here and there, you are essentially admitting that context is freely involved in the establishing of truth-conditional content.

For example, take, once again, the sentence “Jill is ready”. Contextualists argue that for this to be truth-conditional some extra information, provided by the context in which it is used, is needed: something like *for the exam*. However, C&L argue that even the sentence

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“Jill is ready for the exam” can be exposed to metaphysical enquiry as to what it is to be ready for an exam: to give an exam, write an exam, grade an exam, fail an exam, etc. They say:

What was thought problematic with respect to readiness simpliciter, that it seems impossible to get a grip on what these people all have in common, i.e. readiness, can be easily regenerated with respect to being ready for an exam. (2005, p. 169)

The same process applies to the supposed completed sentence. It is about, they say, people having things in common, so if you worry or deny that a group of people can all be ready simpliciter, the worry recurs with ready for an exam. Thus, it is nothing to do with semantics. It is a metaphysical worry.

Thus, for C&L all sentences have truth conditions, whether or not we intuitively feel they are missing something or lacking extra information to more fully describe external reality. They are also careful to point out that this does not imply they believe that the sentence “A is ready” really means that A is ready for something. This would imply that there is some argument place in the logical form of the sentence that refers to a way of being ready. This would go against their strict reading of the formal content of sentences.

Emma Borg, however, is not so strict and takes a slightly more flexible approach to defending the truth-conditional nature of sentences independent of context. She, like Cappelen and Lepore, is aware of the serious threat that semantic-underdetermination poses for a systematic study of context-free linguistic content, and that many sentences seem truth-conditional only after the “provision of some contextually supplied information – information that is not triggered by anything in the syntax of the sentence uttered” (Borg, 2007, p. 225).

And in response to this, she too wants to maintain the autonomy of a compositionally determined and truth-conditional “semantics”.

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However, she allows for the possibility of certain extra information within the logical form of expressions in order to close the gap on incompleteness. That is, Borg responds to this attack by introducing the notion of “liberal truth-conditions” (2007, p. 225). That is, she allows for extra information to be found in the sub-syntactic basement of certain words and phrases, in order to allow that sentences, free of contextual provision, can express truth-conditions.

What this means is that for a sentence like “Jane can’t continue” the truth-conditions would be as follows: “Jane can’t continue” is true iff Jane can’t continue something. Similarly, the sentence “Steel isn’t strong enough” is true iff steel isn’t strong enough for something. In an utterance of “Jane can’t continue” what is recoverable on the basis of formal features alone is “the complete proposition Jane can’t continue something, with the argument place for the object being syntactically marked at the level of the lexical entry for ‘continue’” (2007, p. 226). In this way, Borg claims that it is possible to retain a formally constituted truth-conditional level of context-free content, as any extra information needed for a truth-conditional analysis is mandated in the syntax (or syntactic basement) of the expression.

This is a direct response to the likes of Recanati, who argued that in order to establish truth-conditional content, free and optional pragmatic processes were required. By paying attention to the sub-syntactic features of certain expressions, Borg maintains that truth-conditional content is expressed thoroughly purely formal, syntactically mandated means.

These conditions are liberal in that they “clearly admit of satisfaction by a range of more specific states of affairs” (2007, p. 230). That is, these liberal truth-conditions do not seem to “tie the world down” to a unique set of conditions which must be in order for a sentence to be true. There are many situations which could exist to make the sentence “Jane cant continue something” true, e.g. Jane cant continue sleeping, Jane cant continue working,
playing, etc. In this way, Borg, is making a similar claim to Cappelen Lepore in terms of truth-conditional content: we do not need access to or grasp of the conditions that would make a sentence true. Sentences have truth-conditions necessarily, even if we do not have access to these conditions through interpretation of the context-free sentence-type alone. The only difference between their accounts is that Borg allows that there may be some syntactically mandated extra information in the logical form of the sentence.

Both Cappelen and Lepore along with Borg here attempt to respond to the core Contextualist claim of semantic underdetermination. However, it seems their responses lead one to question the role of truth-conditions in the determination of linguistic content. The idea that one should assume all context-free sentences are truth-conditional just because there is no established criterion for labelling contents that are truth-conditional from those that are not, is a mistake. It is true that Contextualist attempts to precisely establish truth-conditions by adding certain elements from context is not a scientifically respectable endeavour. However, this does not imply that therefore all context-free sentences necessarily are truth-conditional.

2.6: An Idle Wheel?

There is another Contextualist point that must be acknowledged here. That is that minimal, literal content is "an idle wheel in linguistic comprehension" (Stanley, 2005). Recanati, as well as Carston and the Relevance Theorists, argue that even if there is this minimal literal content, it has no significant role to play in the interpretation or comprehension process. Recall Recanati in *Literal Meaning* when he stated, "the minimal proposition is not computed and does not play a role in the actual process of interpretation." (2004, p. 161). Given that it is only the context-enriched implicature that is intended by the
speaker and acknowledged by the audience, and the actual minimal content is never acknowledged, since we re-interpret as the sentence is processed, what is the use of this minimal content?

Again, as Recanati puts it: “that minimal notion of what is said is an abstraction with no psychological reality, because of the holistic nature of speaker’s meaning” (Recanati, 2001, p.88). This is troubling for Semantic Minimalists as they admit, unlike Grice and the traditional view, that the minimal context-free content is often not what is said or asserted or communicated by a speaker. So it would seem Recanati, Carston and others have a point when they claim that this minimal content has no clear role to play in the interpretation process.

It is true that Borg, along with C&L, in a departure from Gricean minimalism, agrees with the Contextualists that the proposition communicated is usually a contextually enriched proposition. This is a key part of C&L’s speech act pluralism: that the minimal sentence content does not exhaust the speech act content of an utterance, and, in fact, is usually not the proposition that a speaker wishes to communicate. There are many propositions expressed by an utterance. The minimal content is but one of them. However, this minimal compositional content does have a cognitive role to play. It plays the role of a “shared fall-back content”. That is, it is the content that “the speaker can expect the audience to grasp even if they have mistaken or incomplete communication-relevant information” (C&L, 2005, p. 184). This is its role in the interpretation process.

Contextualists argue that there is a significant amount of pragmatic information that is essential to understanding speaker’s language use, even in cases of seemingly “literal” intention. This means that there are many ways in which both speakers and audiences can be mistaken about what is said, or meant. In fact, this happens all the time in normal
conversation. The question “what do you mean?” being one of the most common conversational pit-stops. It is an understanding of the minimal, lexico-syntactic, compositional content that allows speakers and audiences to move past this confusion and have some common ground on which to understand one another; similarly for situations in which participants do not share a context at all. It acts a starting point. Even if minimal lexico-syntactic content of a sentence like “She is happy” is all we understand in a conversation; we have no idea who she is, why she is happy, etc. At least we can understand that we are not talking about pies, or tables, or Japan, or sadness, etc. It is a starting point. In fact, it is only in this way that both the speaker and the audience can guarantee a shared content for the sake of communication.

2.7 Conclusion

Ultimately, then, what defines Semantic Minimalism? There are a number of key features that are common to both C&L and Borg that form the central tenets of a minimalist approach to “semantics”.

Firstly, there is the idea that contextual influence on linguistic meaning is syntactically triggered. Again, there are certain differences between specific theorists when it comes to the details of this point, however, it is essential to a minimalist notion of linguistic content that pragmatic effects are not freely involved in the determination of truth-conditional content. All contextual effects on this level of content of an utterance must be triggered somehow by something in the sentence itself.

This is connected to another defining feature of Minimalism: formalism. This, as articulated by Borg in her minimalist manifesto *Minimal Semantics* states that formalism is a
commitment to a perfectly general and systematic theory of literal meaning (Borg, 2007, p. 18). C&L also subscribe to such a view. They state:

Semanticists disagree on what the central semantic features are (truth-conditions, intensions, extensions, etc) but they do tend to agree that semantics is a discipline that aims to characterize systematically certain features of linguistic expressions and do so in a way that captures general truths about languages, and not just truths about particular speakers in specific contexts. (2005, p. 58).

In fact, it is to protect the formal nature of certain aspects of human language that motivates much of the Minimalist defence against Contextualism. They argue that it is important that there is an entirely formal (syntactic) route to “semantic” content. This accounts for the computational, recursive and compositional aspects that seem to be an inherent part of language. Contextualists, they argue, sacrifice this formal aspect of “semantics” by denying the possibility of a context-free, truth-conditional content.

Then there is a key distinction, mentioned throughout this chapter, between two separate types of information: sentence content and speech act content. Maintaining this distinction is a necessity for Minimalists to combat much of the criticisms aimed at them from Contextualism. By keeping these separate, Minimalists can allow that, often times, the minimal content expressed by a sentence-type, is not what we take to be conveyed in an ordinary communicative exchange; thus maintaining a distinction between saying and meaning. C&L go on to argue that this minimal, context-invariant sentence meaning, is also a proper part of speech act content. That is, even if it is not what is communicated, or acknowledged by speakers, it exists there in cases of communicative breakdown. They do this in order to secure a role for their minimal level of content in the processing model of linguistic interpretation; that is, of minimal fall-back content.
Finally there is propositionalism. I leave this until last because it is disagreement over this point that, I argue, causes Contextualism and Minimalism to seem in complete opposition when it comes to theorising the nature of linguistic meaning, when in fact they need not be. It is this very issue – whether truth-conditional contents are expressed with or without contextual input – that essentially separates Minimalists from Contextualists.

Propositionalism is the idea that “every indexical free declarative sentence expresses a proposition” (Bach 2006, p. 1). Proposition here simply means content that is truth-conditional. Contextualists argue that sentences alone do not express truth-conditional content (i.e. propositions) and they take this as their starting point for showing how important pragmatic information is to the determination of truth-conditional content. Minimalists, conversely, argue that all sentences, independent of context or use, do express truth-conditional content, regardless of the intuition that some do not.

Why are Minimalists committed to propositionalism? It seems, Minimalists are committed to propositionalism because they feel it is only in this way that they can maintain a formal route to “semantic” content; and thus capture the compositional and systematic nature of natural language. Hence, they argue that sentences independent of context, express truth-conditional contents. It seems they worry that if you give up on the idea that context-free content is truth-conditional, you capitulate to a radical use-based contextualism.

Furthermore, as C&L argue, maintaining that such minimal propositions are expressed without recourse to context, is important for securing the role of this level of content in the interpretation process. That is, by stating that context-free contents express truth-conditions, Minimalists can argue that there is a clear role for this formal content in the interpretation process. It is this “minimal proposition” that has the role of shared fall back content and is not merely an idle wheel in the comprehension process, as argued by Recanati.
Criticisms.

The question this thesis wants to ask, however, is whether these aforementioned motivating factors (formalism, systematicity, fall-back content) are dependent on this minimal sentence-content being truth-conditional? Could the systematic nature of language be captured even if context-free content fell short of offering a fully truth-conditional description of the world? Could sentence-meaning still play the role of shared fall back content without such content having determinate truth-conditions? I, along with the likes of Kent Bach, argue that yes, it could.

It seems that in their analysis, C&L assume, like Contextualists, the following conditional: if a sentence, independent of context is less than truth-conditional, then a context-free semantics is not possible. So, whereas Contextualists argue that many sentences are (less than truth-conditional) and take this as proof that a context-free, “semantics” is not possible, Minimalists react by arguing that all sentences express truth-conditional content. Thus they can maintain the possibility of a theoretically viable notion of a context-free semantics.

Cappelen, Lepore, and Borg, fear that by admitting some sentences to be less than truth-conditional would lead them down a “slippery-slope” that only stops once one reaches extreme Contextualism. In order to avoid Contextualism, they are forced to argue that all sentences (including “A is ready”, or “B has had enough”) express truth-conditional content.

However, I wish to argue that they are each mistaken in this adherence to propositionalism (that if sentences are sub-propositional, then a context-free semantics is not possible). As shown in the previous chapter, this mistake causes Contextualists to ignore the significant role played by a level of context-independent formal content in linguistic interpretation. For Minimalists, this mistake leads them to maintain that sentences like “Jill is
ready”, or “Steel isn’t strong enough” and in fact all grammatical sentences, necessarily have
truth-conditions. They are forced into arguing this point, regardless of intuitions, because of
their belief that without context-free, truth-conditional content the game is lost to use-based
accounts.

However, the flaws of Contextualism, coupled with their desire to maintain a context-
free “semantics” does not justify their claims that all sentences (particularly the seemingly
incomplete ones) necessarily express truth-conditions.

Cappellen and Lepore devote a number of sections of their book to the claim that all
sentences express truth-conditional content. They exemplify their claim by issuing T-
sentences. Recall that T-sentences are sentences that state something like this: “Jill is ready”
expresses the proposition that Jill is ready and is true just in case Jill is ready. This is as far as
they go in their explanation.

However, as Bach puts it, use of T-sentences just begs the question; if the sentence is
less than truth-conditional, then the T-sentence will also be less than truth-conditional. There
is no new information or clarifying aspect to a T-sentence in this case. Placing the words “is
true if and only if” between two statements does not go any way to proving or showing how
these controversial sentences in fact do express truth-conditional content; which, as outlined
at the beginning of this thesis, is determined by grasp of the conditions under which a
sentence would be true.

Cappelen and Lepore, seemingly aware of the need to explain how these intuitively
“incomplete” expressions are nonetheless truth-conditional, go on to talk of metaphysics and
how the real answer to the question of what makes something truth-conditional is one for the
metaphysicians to answer. While this may be true – that defining when a sentence becomes
truth-conditional and fully describes a relevant situation is a contentious issue that calls for
analysis from metaphysicians – this does not mean that one should therefore just assume that all sentences do in fact express truth-conditional content. It just means that it is difficult to tell and possibly the case that there is no clear and obvious point at which it occurs. That is, that the precise determination of truth-conditional content is vague.

However, the point I wish to make is that a defence of a context-free “semantics” and all that comes with it, does not require a definitive answer to the question of what makes an expression truth-conditional (Bach, 2007, p. 3).

Firstly, the fact that there is no clear criterion for specifying at what point content becomes truth-conditional, does not imply that therefore all sentences must be truth-conditional. That is, Cappelen and Lepore seem to insist that we are faced with a choice between two options regarding the truth-conditional status of sentences: (1) find a principled basis for distinguishing sentences that are propositional from ones that are not, or, (2) endorse the view that all sentences express propositions (Bach 2007, p. 3). They argue that because there is no clear way to determine at what point sentences clearly express truth-conditional content, coupled with their “abhorrence” of radical contextualism, the sole option is that all sentences must express truth-conditional content. This is fallacious reasoning. Just because there is no general criterion for determining when linguistic meaning is truth-conditional, does not mean that the distinction does not exist. There is no criterion, or principled basis for distinguishing men who are bald from those who are not either. But this does not lead one to accept that all men must be bald. C&L are mistaken to jump from a lack of a general criterion to a commitment to propositionalism.

The same can be said for Emma Borg’s argument for a fully truth-conditional formal linguistic content. Borg defends a notion of “liberal truth-conditions”; “liberal” in that they admit of satisfaction by a range of more specific states of affairs. Recall the example of “Jane
can’t continue *something*”; with the extra information (something) coming from the sub-syntactic basement of the lexical entry “to continue”. Again, by allowing the additional argument place, marked by lexical entry, Borg attempts to go further than Cappelen and Lepore’s strict minimalism while maintaining a syntactic route to truth-conditional content.

However, the problem for Borg is that even with this extra information the sentence does not allow one to actually grasp determinate truth-conditions. Say if I were shown an array of specific situations in which Jane could not continue certain things: the match, the book, life, running, coping with a bully, etc. Based on the information from the formal constituents of the above sentence, and even allowing for the extra argument place, it seems I would be no closer to telling whether that sentence was true or false; and if you cannot tell the conditions under which some expression would be true or false, then you do not have truth-conditions. If this is the case, and it seems so even by Borg’s own admission, then in what sense can I be said to have grasped the truth-conditions of the sentence? Further, Minimalists criticise contextualist attempts to add certain specific elements from context in order to mark the truth-conditional content expressed. The same criticism can be applied to Borg: even if the extra information is in some sense syntactically mandated, this does not automatically guarantee truth-conditional status.

The case is the same for Borg’s work on demonstratives. Robyn Carston in her review of *Minimal Semantics* says this:

Suppose you utter ‘That’s green’; then the semantic content (i.e. the truth-conditional content) of your utterance, according to Borg, is [$\mu$ is GREEN]], where GREEN is a general concept and $\mu$ is a singular concept, but where the object that constitutes the semantic content of that singular concept has not been identified (that being a post-semantic, properly pragmatic matter). It seems to follow that if I, grasping just this
Carston is saying here that even if you allow for demonstratives to refer to some singular object, this still does not seem to provide enough information for a hearer to grasp the conditions under which the utterance is true. It seems liberal truth-conditions go no further to establishing a context-free truth-conditional “semantics” than Cappelen and Lepore’s metaphysical arguments.

Borg is willing to accept that the formally constituted meaning of many sentences does not fully describe situations in the world which we can judge as true or false, but she does not see this as a problem for a context-free and properly truth-conditional “semantics”. She states that “the fact that liberal truth-conditions don’t specify a unique set of conditions...doesn’t itself seem to be a problem since it seems that very few (if any) truth-conditions are that restrictive.” (2007, p. 232)

She goes on to articulate a paragraph that could almost be taken as an argument for Contextualism: “What is becoming clear here is that although it might be suggested that if a putative truth-condition allows a range of more specific conditions then it itself must be providing only a truth-conditional schema or propositional radical, this claim is in fact unwarranted. For no (contingent) proposition graspable by the human mind could be maximally specific about the world, thus every proposition will allow some more specific conditions to be provided” (2007, p. 233).

But instead of accepting that this means that context-free content is clearly not truth-conditional – as done by Contextualists, Kent Bach and also in this thesis – she allows that
this is all that any truth-conditions should be expected to do: to specify a *range* of situations, sometimes so vast that the sentence would be true in all possible worlds; that is, trivially true.

However, if the truth-conditional content expressed by sentences, independent of context, does not tie the world down to a specific set of conditions that we can imagine in order to tell if the sentence is true or false, then they become only trivially true and explanatorily redundant.

The problem is that Borg, along with Cappelen and Lepore, seem to assume that the only way to avoid slipping into a radical contextualist position is to maintain that minimal, context-free content is truth-conditional. This is, I assume, so that the Minimalists can maintain a distinction between literal meaning and communicated meaning, and so that the systematic, compositional and recursive nature of natural language can be theorized and so communication across contexts is possible. Yet, all of these can be accommodated within a semantics-pragmatics picture, without the output of formal linguistic meaning necessarily expressing truth-conditional content. As Carston says again:

But why is it so darned important that the semantics of a natural language sentence-type (relativized to a formal context) should be a truth-evaluable entity? Borg repeatedly and rightly emphasises the differences between a theory of linguistic meaning and a theory of communication, and what we should and should not expect from each of them. It seems right that we should expect truth-evaluable thoughts (propositions) as the output of communication (and, of course, not just any such but thoughts that are appropriately relevant, informative, etc) – it is these that we agree or disagree with, believe or doubt, hold people to, act on the basis of, etc. - but why should we expect them from a theory of the meanings encoded by sentence-types, meanings which function as multiply reusable tools in communication and are
virtually always supplemented, enriched or otherwise adjusted when so used. What purpose(s) would their being propositional (truth evaluable) serve? (2008, p. 9).

Ultimately, I am arguing that Semantic Minimalism does not need to be committed to truth-conditional context-free content in order for them to secure the systematic, recursive and compositional nature of language. Nor are truth-conditions necessary for context-free content to play the role of shared fall-back content. A level of compositionally determined, lexico-syntactic content can do all the things that minimalists want it to do, without being saddled with having to be truth-conditional. C&L say, "the semantic content of S is the content that all utterances of S share no matter how different the contexts are" (C&L, 2005, p. 6). I agree, but this notion of "semantic" content does need to be encumbered with the assumption that it always expresses truth-conditional content. It can still be the content that speakers can fall back on if they are in an unfamiliar context and it can still suffice to capture the rule-governed nature of human language, as opposed to its dynamic and creative aspects.
Chapter 3: Radical Minimalism.

3.0: Introduction

So far in this thesis, I have explored the literature surrounding the role of context-free content in the determination of linguistic meaning and how that influences the relationship between linguistic meaning and truth-conditions. More specifically, I have examined the effects that the phenomenon of semantic-underdetermination has had on the traditional conception of the semantic/pragmatic distinction.

Chapter 1 looked at the Contextualist position, and outlined its motivations and central arguments. Contextualism took the prevalence of semantic-underdetermination to mean that context-free sentence meaning does not express truth-conditional content. Thus, the traditional notion of “semantic” content as being determined by the formal, compositional meaning of sentences which, in turn expressed the truth-conditional proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence, no longer holds. For Contextualism, there are pragmatic factors involved in the expression of truth-conditional content; i.e., the intuitive, proposition, “semantically” expressed.

Further, a level of lexico-syntactically determined meaning is not explicitly represented at any level of linguistic interpretation and it has no significant role to play in the process of linguistic interpretation. We understand and interpret ‘on the fly’ and only ever acknowledge a pragmatically established proposition in normal communication.

Ultimately, however, I concluded that Contextualism was flawed in its response to semantic-underdetermination and incompleteness. They were wrong, I argue, to disregard the role of context-free, formal, lexico-syntactic content just because it seems to fail to
express truth-conditional content. While Contextualists were correct to argue that context and pragmatic information do have a larger role to play than traditionally conceived in establishing truth-conditional content, this does not mean that there is not a distinct, context-independent level of meaning expressed by sentences, that should play a significant role in a theory of linguistic meaning. This context-independent level of meaning captures the recursive, systematic and productive nature of natural language.

The second chapter of this thesis turned its focus to the opposing end of the spectrum: Semantic Minimalism. This view, as exemplified by Cappelen and Lepore, as well as Emma Borg, states that all sentences, independent of context, do in fact express fully determinate, truth-conditional contents. “Semantic” content, for Minimalists, is both lexico-syntactically determined, and fully truth-conditional. Thus, Minimalists, following in the Gricean tradition, argue that “semantics” is context-free and truth-conditional. I outlined the reasons behind such a view, but concluded that these Minimalists also were held hostage by a notion of propositionality (the idea that all sentences necessarily express truth-conditional content).

Minimalists were motivated by the belief that if all sentences do not express truth-conditional entities, then this would lead down a slippery slope to use-based accounts of linguistic meaning, i.e. Contextualism. This, they feared would mean that the recursive and systematic nature of natural language would be neglected, to the detriment of linguistic analysis. This, they could not accept. Therefore, they set about arguing that all sentences have truth-conditions, even when it seemed intuitively compelling to admit they do not. This, again, is a mistake.

What I want to put forth in this chapter is a reframing of the debate. By removing the focus from questions concerning what it takes to express truth-conditional content, I intend to show that Contextualism and Minimalism both account for important characteristics of
natural language, but appear at odds due to the issue of truth-conditional content. The positive view that encapsulates this claim is called Radical Minimalism, or Radicalism, for short. It acknowledges the driving motivations behind each of the aforementioned theories, while ridding them of an unnecessary adherence to propositionalism. The concentration of the debate on whether or not context-independent linguistic content can express truth-conditions, or whether it needs optional-pragmatic processes, or hidden indexicals, or unarticulated constituents, has caused opposition and distance between theorists where it need not be.

Both Contextualists and Minimalists agree that context has a larger role to play in the determination of communicated meaning than traditionally assumed. Further, they acknowledge that there is some content expressed by sentences, whether truth-conditional or not, that is determined by the lexical and syntactical elements of sentences (even if Contextualists argue this is an idle wheel in linguistic interpretation) (Recanati, 2004, p. 5-6). Radical Minimalism takes this as a starting point, and shows that a large percentage of the dispute between these two theories is concerned with the complex relationship between linguistic meaning and truth-conditional content, and this distracts from the clear points of agreement between theorists involved. Furthermore, I wish to argue that much of the confusion arising from debate among aforementioned theories stems from a certain level of terminological ambiguity. That is, the two views are not as far apart as they seem but have come to appear so, due to a lack of clarity over the core definitions of this debate, particularly when it comes to the notion of "what is said".

Radical Minimalism seeks out common ground and admits, along with both Contextualism and Semantic Minimalism, that in communication our sentences usually fall short of determining fully what we mean in using them; hence Contextualism is correct to point out that there is a gap between compositional, formal content, and communicated, speech act content. However, along with Semantic Minimalism, Radicalism, wants to account
for the lexico-syntactically determined aspects of natural language (recursivity, systematicity, etc.). Essentially, Radicalism states that this minimal, formally constituted context-free, content can do all the work Minimalism wants it to do, without it being burdened with the claim that it also necessarily expresses truth-conditional content.

I will show that while each view does attempt to capture important linguistic phenomena, they fall short of a fully comprehensive picture of linguistic meaning and use.

3.1: Why a Distinction Between “Semantics” and “Pragmatics”?

The central framework within which Radicalism operates is that there are two types of meaningful content present in language use. One level of meaning that is expressed through interpretation of lexico-syntactic content of sentence-types, and another type of meaning that is elicited by use and act of making utterances in communication with others. Regardless of the relationship between linguistic meaning and truth-conditions, real-time processing models, “intuitions” about what a speaker was intending to communicate, or even what they usually use certain sentences to communicate, the fact remains that there are two different types of meaning present in a conversational exchange: sentence meaning and speech act meaning. And this is a relevant and interesting fact for those involved in analysing human linguistic ability and communication. By attempting to articulate what it takes to make an utterance truth-conditional, Contextualism ignores this fundamental distinction.

While Radicalism does acknowledge the greater role of context in determining what is communicated by an utterance, or what was intended by a speaker, it also acknowledges the Semantic Minimalists when it comes to articulating the important characteristics of a distinct, autonomous level of compositional content. For Radicalism then “semantic” content is that
which is determined compositionally by the meanings of the words used in a way that is predictable from how they fit together syntactically.

While this level of content may not determine truth-conditions (at least, we should admit, the question of truth-conditionality is a complex issue possibly subject to the frame problem\textsuperscript{15}) this should not mean that the important characteristics of human language it aims to label are neglected in a linguistic analysis. “Semantic” content is context-invariant content; the content that all utterances of a sentences share, no matter how different the contexts are. It is the minimal shared fall back content that can be literally interpreted in case of misunderstanding, even if it is less than propositional. Along with syntax, it characterises the systematic, compositional and recursive nature of human language.

Ultimately the distinction made in the early twentieth century, by Grice, between semantics and pragmatics is to do with types of information, or types of meaning. This is so regardless of whether the sentence is an “everyday” sentence we are used to uttering or a long-winded complicated sentence that is rarely used. A sentence has a certain content and it is determined by the meaning of the words together with their mode of composition. However, as soon as it is uttered in a real time and place, pragmatic information is invoked. That is information relevant to what the speaker intentionally means in using such a sentence, why he or she used such a sentence when they did, in the way they did and what the audience can reasonably take the speaker to mean. This pragmatic effect applies even if the sentence is being used literally, for, as Bach points out, the fact it is being used literally is a pragmatic fact. Sentences do not have to be used literally (Bach, 2002)

\textsuperscript{15} This is the idea that the potential search space for what makes something truth-conditional is infinitely large.
3.2: Radicalism and Contextualist Arguments: Context-shift

What is Radical Minimalism and how does it solve the problems with Contextualism and Minimalism as outlined in this thesis? How does it deal with the arguments of Contextualism, such as context-shift or incompleteness?

Firstly then, let us look at context-shifting arguments. Context-shifting arguments ask us to consider two utterances of an unambiguous, non-vague, non-elliptic sentence S. If the consensus intuition is that what’s said, expressed or the truth-conditions of these utterances differ when described in different contexts, then one is led to conclude that the particular expression in question is context sensitive. The point that those who invoke such arguments wish to make is that a sentence, independent of a contextual setting, does not express truth-conditions. It is only in a conversational setting that the meaning of the utterance becomes truth-conditional. The argument goes that pragmatic and contextual information is relevant to the determination of truth-conditional content and not just a post-propositional, phenomenon of implicature.

These particular arguments are constructed by drawing attention to hypothetical situations where one and the same sentence can seem intuitively true in one context yet false in another. There are many examples in which Contextualists use quantifiers, comparative adjectives, propositional attitude ascriptions, counterfactual conditionals, knowledge attributions, moral attributions, weather reports.

In order to show the difference between Radicalism and the two dominant theories, let us take the classic example of the use of the comparative adjective expression

“Michael Jordan is tall”.
This type of sentence is one of the most discussed examples within the Contextualist literature. The central motivation behind this example is that uses of comparative adjectives, such as “tall”, “rich”, “bald”, etc., are necessarily sensitive to context. That is, the truth or falsity of expressions that contain the word “tall” are determined, in part, by the contextual setting in which they are used. The meaning of these words is such that they seem to require extra-linguistic information in order to express a full description of some situation in the world, i.e. express truth-conditions.

If someone says “Jordan is tall” when intending to compare him to the general public, the Contextualist would argue that the proposition this expresses or the ‘what is said’ by the utterance is *that Jordan is tall for an average human adult*. For without this extra information the sentence is not evaluable in terms of truth. Furthermore, with the extra information this sentence would be considered true.

However, if this same sentence was uttered by an NBA talent scout seeking out a player to go up against Shaquille O Neal, who is over 7 feet tall, in a big game, then the utterance would appear to be false, even though the content of the sentence-type remains the same. This is due to the shift in contextual setting. Jordan is not particularly tall for an NBA player, and especially not so in comparison to players like Shaq. The implication of this argument for Contextualists is that the sentence without context does not say anything determinate about the world. Context is necessary for sentences like this to reach a level at which one can evaluate it for truth and falsity, i.e. pragmatic information is necessary to produce a truth-conditional entity. Thus, they argue for a re-evaluation of the roles of context-free content and context in our linguistic usage.

In response to this, Semantic Minimalists, including Borg, accept that a sentence can be used to communicate many different propositions. Cappelen and Lepore call this aspect of their view Speech Act Pluralism, and this allows them to accommodate certain aspects of
semantic underdetermination arguments: “An utterance of a sentence S typically says, asserts, claims a wide range of propositions in addition to the one semantically expressed” (2005, p. 145). For example, under their view it is possible for one and the same sentence, say “Jordan is tall” to be used to communicate the proposition \textit{that Jordan is tall for an average human} and the proposition \textit{that Jordan is tall for an NBA player}. This is fine for Minimalists, as long as their remains a minimal truth-conditional content expressed by the sentence. Also, on their view, there can be no systematic theory of speech acts. Thus, by retaining a notion of context-free truth-conditions, Minimalists have a theoretically tractable level of linguistic content.

The key point to be made here is that while Contextualists argue that context shifting arguments imply that the sentence, independent of context, fails to express truth-conditional content, Minimalists are adamant that even though it is used to communicate different propositions, the \textit{sentence} itself expresses a minimal content that has truth-conditions. This is so even if the minimal content is not intentionally expressed or even if it seems somewhat absurd.

In the case of the above example, then, the difference between the two opposing positions is that Minimalists maintain the compositional, lexico-syntactic content of the sentence “Jordan is tall”, stripped of its contextual setting, still expresses a fully truth-conditional content and this is the “semantic” content of the sentence. Contextualists say it does not; drawing on the intuitions of a “normal interpreter” they argue that one cannot evaluate that sentence, independent of context, for truth or falsity; context is thus needed to establish truth-conditional content for Contextualists. Minimalists dispute this and say that while it may not be a proposition that is ever used as communicative content, there still remains a complete and determinate content expressed by the context-free content of that
sentence. Recall their use of T-sentences to formalise this claim: An utterance of "Jordan is tall" expresses the proposition that $Jordan$ is tall and is true just in case Jordan is tall.

Here I have outlined, briefly, how each of the two dominant views within contemporary literature on semantics-pragmatics debates has dealt with the issue of context-shift. It seems that while they both agree that we can use sentences to communicate lots of different contents, they differ when it comes to the status of the sentence itself, independent of context. Minimalists wish to retain a determinate level of truth-conditional formally constituted semantic content, and contextualists say there is no such thing. What does Radical Minimalism have to say about this?

Radicalism, as mentioned throughout this thesis accommodates the driving motivations of both views: from Contextualism, it accepts that the literal, minimal content often falls short of expressing truth-conditional content and from the Minimalists it acknowledges the importance of maintaining a distinct, autonomous domain of context-free linguistic content. In this way, Radicalism attempts to dissolve, rather than solve, the problem between them. It states that sentences (particularly short, every day sentences that are so often used as examples by contextualists) do not express truth-conditional contents. This point is in agreement with a key aspect of the contextualist position.

However, it also states that this does not mean that context must be automatically invoked to fill the gap between sentence meaning and speech act meaning. In fact, Radicalism states that there is no "gap" to be filled, in terms of linguistic meaning. There is only a gap in understanding that a listener must try fill. The meaning of the sentence remains that which is determined by its lexico-syntactic elements and for Radicalism, this is "semantic" content. These contents are often not truth-conditional. This is not a lack on
behalf of linguistic meaning that must be supplemented by either context, or, conversely, by adamantly arguing that it is in fact truth-conditional. This compulsion to either invoke context, or aggressively fend it off, comes from the idea that truth-conditions must be arbiter for meaningful content. However, there is meaningful content, composed of certain type of information, without it being truth-conditional.

That is, underdetermination does not imply that these sentences are context-sensitive, similar to indexicals. It simply means that sentence meaning is less than truth-conditional, and that in order to fully understand what a speaker is trying to communicate, an audience must use contextual information to reach a truth-conditional level. But this should not affect how we categorise levels of meaning independent of use. There is a difference between sentence meaning and what we use sentences to communicate and Radicalism acknowledges this.

Kent Bach calls these minimal contents “propositional radicals”. He calls them such because that they form an underlying framework or fundamental structure of meaning that we can understand to a certain degree. Scott Soames, similarly, refers to them as “propositional matrices” which are in need of completion (Soames, 2004, p. 356). “Semantic” content, then, according to Radicalism, retains all the qualities that Minimalists have imbued it with: it is systematic, it is the content that all utterances of the sentence share, it is fall-back content, etc. The only difference is that according to Radicalism, unlike Semantic Minimalism, this content is not necessarily burdened with the claim that it is truth-conditional, especially when it seems intuitively compelling to accept it is not. Furthermore, there doesn’t seem to be any independent reason why we should necessarily expect the output of a minimal formal linguistic theory to be stated in terms of truth-conditional contents.

Here is a brief summary of Radicalism from Kent Bach:
Like Contextualism it [Radicalism] rejects Propositionalism, the conservative dogma
that every indexical-free declarative sentence expresses a proposition. Unlike
Contextualism, it does not invoke context to fill semantic gaps and, indeed, denies
that filling those gaps is a semantic matter. Like Cappelen and Lepore’s brand of
Semantic Minimalism, it rejects the very idea of pragmatic intrusion into semantic
content. However, in rejecting Propositionalism, it is more radical, indeed, more
minimalist than their version of Semantic Minimalism. It does not imagine that
sentences that intuitively seem not to express propositions at least express ‘minimal
propositions.’ Radical Semantic Minimalism, or simply Radicalism, says that the
sentences in question are semantically incomplete – their semantic contents are not

Given this notion of Radicalism, how does it respond to the Semantic Minimalist’s
response to context shift, i.e. their staunch defence of the truth-conditional nature of sentence
meaning?

Minimalists, in what seems to most a counter-intuitive move, assume that the sentence
“Jordan is tall” expresses truth-conditional content. When pressed to articulate what exactly
this means, and to avoid proposing a *reductio* of minimalism, they refer to metaphysics. As
outlined, they state that it is not for the semanticist to answer the question “what is it to be
tall?” (or ready, or to continue, etc.) and they show their T-sentences as proof of this. In a
way, they simply operate under the fundamental *assumption* that sentences express truth-
conditional content, even when we have no grasp of what conditions in the world would
make the sentence true.

Firstly, according to Radicalism, the use of T-sentences merely begs the question. For,
if the original sentence is propositionally incomplete, then the T-sentence will also be
incomplete. There is no new information or clarifying aspect brought to bear by the T-sentence in this case.

Further to this, it is necessary to closely examine their invocation of metaphysics as a response to claims that “Jordan is tall” is not truth-conditional. Passing the buck to metaphysicians does not solve their problems. For, while it may be true that defining when a sentence becomes truth-conditional is a contentious issue that calls for analysis from metaphysicians, this does not automatically mean that one should therefore just assume that all sentences necessarily are propositional. It simply means that it is a difficult and complex claim to clarify. Essentially, one must intuitively understand whether or not the sentence offers a complete description of a certain external situation. It seems this may be a matter of degrees rather than a binary or yes/no phenomenon. Yet, Cappelen and Lepore seem to insist that we have a choice between two options regarding claims about the propositionality of sentences: (1) find a principled basis for distinguishing sentences that are propositional from ones that are not, or, (2) endorse the view that all sentences express propositions (Bach, 2007, p. 3).

That is, they argue that because there is no clear way to determine at what point sentences become propositional, coupled with their “abhorrence” of radical contextualism, the sole option is to admit that all sentences necessarily express truth-conditional content. This, however, is mistaken reasoning. Just because there is no general criterion for determining when a sentence expresses truth-conditional content, this does not mean that the all of them must. C&L are mistaken, therefore, to assume that because there is a lack of a general criterion therefore all sentences, independent of context express truth-conditional content.
The point that Radicalism wishes to make here is that a defence of a context-free version of "semantic" content, does not require a definitive answer to the question of what makes a sentence truth-conditional.

Further, the sentence "Jordan is tall" can still serve as shared fall-back content for those communicating across contexts (which is a cornerstone of Cappelen and Lepore's minimalism). While one may not fully understand what is being said by the sentence, they know enough to know that some person is considered to be greater in height than some group or other. The context-free linguistic content of a sentence constrains the possible truth-conditions of this sentence when uttered, but it does not determine them. The audience will know the conversation is not about agility, or weight or a myriad of other issues. Essentially, simply because the elusive truth-conditional proposition may not be clearly expressed, does not mean that nothing at all is said.

The context-free content of the sentence "Jordan is tall" is the information that a person named Jordan, has the property of tallness; this is the same as what C&L would say, except Radicalism disputes the fact that this level of content is truth-conditional. There is not enough information expressed by the lexico-syntactic elements of the sentence to know the conditions that would make it true.

But is this not just Contextualism by another name? No. Radicalism does make a large concession to Contextualism; that is, it allows for sentences like "Jordan is tall" to fall short of expressing truth-conditions, but it does so without this implying that it is therefore context-sensitive or that it demands a specific element of context to establish its proper meaning. This is a subtle but important distinction to make between Contextualism and Radicalism. Contextualism subscribes to the following conditional: if it is the case that a sentence, independent of context, does not express truth-conditions (is incomplete) then that
sentence is context sensitive. That is, they argue that if a sentence falls short of expressing truth-conditional content, then context must automatically step in to fill this gap, thus creating a pragmatically enriched propositional content they refer to as "what is said". In the above example, Recanati would argue that the proposition expressed by the sentence "Jordan is tall" is *Jordan is tall for an average human*. Radicalism disagrees, for this is not the content of this sentence; it is the proposition expressed by the *utterrer* of the sentence. That is, it is the communicative intentions of the speaker that determine what proposition is expressed through the use of any particular sentence. Context merely enables the hearer to grasp this proposition through shared background information, contextually salient surroundings etc.

The mistake here is to assume that the proposition expressed is determined by context, as opposed to simply in context (Bach, 2005). For example, as mentioned, Contextualists would take the aforementioned sentence to say that Jordan is tall for an average human and the additional element (for an average human) is supplied by the context. If this were correct, then it seems there would be no difference between uttering "Jordan is tall" and uttering "Jordan is tall for an average human". However, there seems to be a clear and distinct difference between these two sentences: the speaker of the first sentence did not say that Jordan was tall for a human. He just said that Jordan was tall. Of course, this may be what he meant by an utterance of the sentence, and it may be what people usually mean when they utter similar sentences; but it is not what he said. He left the additional information for inference to be (hopefully, but not necessarily guaranteed) picked up on by the audience. It is clear here why it is important to retain the distinction between context-free linguistic content and pragmatic content; otherwise there is a danger of losing the ability to speak coherently about the difference between saying something and meaning something.

Part of the mistake made by Recanati and other contextualists is to be distracted by what these short idiomatic sentences are usually used to mean. In doing so Contextualism
posits some kind of necessary connection between sub-propositional (propositional radicals/matrices) sentences and the context in which they are used. However, this necessary connection is illusory. The sentence stands alone, in a context, and the connection is made by the hearer. In the example above Contextualists suppose that “what is said” is defined by what the speaker “would normally assert in uttering the sentence” (Bach, 2005, p. 15). But just because a certain sentence is normally used in such a way does not mean that the meaning communicated in use is the same as the meaning of the sentence. As Bach says in his “Context Ex Machina” “What we think is expressed by a given sentence is coloured by what we know a speaker is likely to mean in uttering it” (2003, p. 15). This leads to the supposed mixing of “semantics” and “pragmatics” that Contextualists focus on in their criticisms of the traditional divide between the two.

Radicalism accepts that Contextualism has put forth convincing arguments that state there is often a gulf between literal linguistic meaning and truth-conditional content. However, it denies that this gulf must necessarily be filled by context in order to establish “semantic” content. Radicalism is OK with the idea that sentences, at times, are simply sub-propositional. It is important for Radicalism that a recognizably traditional conception of the semantic/pragmatic border is retained; “semantic” competence is still a distinctive, tractable phenomenon, which plays a major role in interpretation; further, there is still a difference in kind between literal and non-literal usage and between saying something and meaning something.

In sum, context-shift poses no problem for Radicalism. In this way it concedes to the Contextualists that sentences often do not express truth-conditional content. However, it denies the implications that Contextualists take from this. It denies that this implies that context steps in to create a pragmatically enriched “what is said”. Audiences use context to understand speakers, but the meaning of the sentence stands alone, truth-conditions or not.
3.3: Radicalism and Contextualism Arguments: Incompleteness

The case is essentially the same for the ubiquitous incompleteness arguments. Again, these are a major weapon in the Contextualist arsenal. They are used to show that sentences, without context, are not truth-conditional, and if one expects "semantics" to trade in truth-conditional contents, the traditional pictures needs to be revised. Further, they attempt to show that pragmatics is necessarily involved in pre-propositional, literal analysis of linguistic items. As detailed in chapter one of this thesis, they aim to directly show that the meaning of sentences independent of context consistently falls short of determining the "literal" communicated content, and often times fall short of expressing truth-conditional contents at all. Classic examples are those like "Jane can't continue", "Steel isn't strong enough", "Tom is ready" and so on. The idea being that these particular sentences make explicit that there is some constituent or other missing in order for one to have enough information with which to imagine the conditions under which it is true.

Radicalism, again, has no problem accommodating incompleteness arguments. It is not a problem for Radicalism, or its affirmation of the clear distinction between context-free "semantics" and pragmatic content, that sentences fall short of expressing truth-conditional content. In this way, it disagrees with Cappelen and Lepore's minimalism, which states that sentences such as those mentioned above do express truth-conditional content. Hence, it grants another victory, of sorts, to Contextualism. However, it is essential to note that whereas Contextualism takes the lack of truth-conditions to imply "semantics" is inherently context sensitive, Radicalism does not. Contextualists focus on establishing what is truth-conditional to the detriment of the context-free-linguistic content; Radicalism acknowledges the different types of meaning at work in human language and aims to capture these different types of meaning, regardless of their relationship to truth-conditions.
For Contextualists, the “what is said” or the proposition expressed by an utterance of “Tom is ready” would be something like: Tom is ready for the exam. For, on their view, context automatically steps in to fill the gap in meaning to create a fully truth-conditional proposition that is expressed at the level of the utterance. But this focus on the level of the utterance is a mistake.

Again, the mistake is born out of a conflation between what a sentence says, and what it is usually used to communicate. Take the aforementioned example of “Tom is ready”. Contextualists would say that the proposition expressed by an utterance of this sentence is “Tom is ready for the exam”, with the extra element provided by the context. But again, this would imply that the sentence “Tom is ready” and the sentence “Tom is ready for the exam” say the same thing. This is a confusion of different types of information. It is true that often times, when such a sentence is used, the speaker intends to communicate such a proposition; but this does not mean that it is what is said. There needs to be a way to talk about, examine and analyse the difference between saying and meaning.

The speaker says the words “Tom is ready” and in doing so, hopes to communicate to the listener something more specific; e.g. that he is ready for an exam. But he may fail. That is, he may fail in communicating that particular proposition to the listener. The listener may not pick up on this for whatever reason. This happens often in communication and it is an important point to make in the face of the Contextualist onslaught. For, if they assume that there is a level of a specifiable utterance where what is said is a pragmatically enriched proposition, then how do they explain failures in communication? If a pragmatically enriched proposition is “what is said” by an utterance of the sentence, then how is it that misunderstandings take place all the time?
Such failures occur when the speaker means one thing by the utterance of some sentence, but the audience thinks he means something else. This type of failure (how often are the words ‘what do you mean?’ spoken in conversations?) can only be explained on a model in which there is a clear distinction between saying and meaning; where there is a specifiable level of context-free content that labels the sentence-meaning (truth-conditional or not) and there is also a level of pragmatic content that is concerned with the influence of extra-linguistic contextual factors on meaning.

It is true that often times the speaker-intended meaning (communicated content) is picked up on by the listener, and successful communication occurs. But this is not because there is some contextually enriched truth-conditional entity passed from one mind to another. This is an illusion of successful communication.

What happens is that the speaker utters certain sounds, that is, a certain sentence (Tom is ready). Often times this sentence is not truth-conditional, or less than propositional; that is lacking in enough information for a listener to fully understand what is meant. The listener hears this minimal, literal sentence and then infers from the contextual setting that there is some specific thing that Tom is ready for. At no time does something called “context” step in to create a particular pragmatically enriched “what is said”. Contextualists make this mistake because we are so used to using sentences like “Tom is ready” to express more elaborate propositions. But the Contextualist “what is said” (Tom is ready for the exam) is actually the linguistic content of a different sentence. Without a clear distinction between types of linguistic content, we cannot speak coherently about such phenomena.

Radicalism accepts the Contextualists underdetermination arguments as valid. That is, the traditional roles of “semantic” and “pragmatic” content need to be revised in the face of context-shift and incompleteness arguments. No longer can there be a context-free and truth-
conditional level of content that captures the proposition expressed by a "literal" utterance of a sentence. Context-free, compositional content has a more minimal role to play that once assumed.

However, it is the implications that Contextualists take from these arguments with which Radicalism finds fault. Contextualists take such arguments to mean that minimal, literal, sentence meaning has no significant role to play in the interpretation of utterances. Once they realise that it takes pragmatic or contextual information to express truth-conditional content, they take this as their starting point and ignore the distinction between two types of information. That is, they argue that there is no real interesting border between "semantic" and "pragmatic" content since pragmatic content is now involved in the determination of truth-conditional content. It is on these points that Radicalism departs from Contextualism.

Radicalism severs the necessary connection made by Contextualists between sub-propositional sentences and context. It admits that this connection is consistently made by speakers and hearers in communication, but denies that it exists necessarily to create a pragmatically enriched "what is said": there is no theoretically viable notion of a pragmatically enriched "what is said". Furthermore, it denies the minimalists claim that all sentences express truth-conditions. However, it is essential to Radicalism that the minimal context-free content of a sentence has a significant role to play in the interpretation of utterances as the minimal shared fall back content. Radicalism maintains commitment to a compositionally determined, formal "semantics".
3.4: Radicalism and “What is said”

It is evident throughout this thesis, and from the above articulation of Radicalism, that the term “what is said” plays a significant role in this debate and is a point of consistent tension between those involved. Some, like Bach, argue that it is a purely context-invariant level of content, whereas, others, such as Recanati, argue that it is inherently pragmatic. What is the source of this tension, and can it help clarify what is at issue in this debate? Ultimately, I argue here that debate over the term “what is said” can be construed as one that is largely terminological. That is, different theorists choose to define it a certain way that best reflects their underlying motivations. Clarification on this point will serve to highlight that at times theorists involved in this debate are talking past each other, about different types of phenomena.

The term itself was originally conceived, like much of the terminology within this literature, by Grice in his Logic and Conversation. Grice formulated the term in order to distinguish it from another level of meaning: what is implicated. He defined “what is said” as follows: “I intend what someone has said to be closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered” (Grice, 1989, p. 25). Bach calls this the Syntactic Constraint, in that what is said is constrained by the linguistic meaning of the words used and their mode of composition. In this way, “what is said” for Grice is compositional, and is essentially determined by the constituents of the sentence and their syntactic relationships (Bach, 2001, p. 2). This level of content was a combination of sentence meaning plus any overt context sensitive expressions; also the resolution of ambiguity was acknowledged. “What is implicated”, then, is anything beyond the meaning of the actual sentence, that is intentionally meant by the utterer to be recognized by the listener.
Recall, however, that Grice and the traditional view in general assumed that "what is said", is both closely related to conventional sentence meaning, and a properly truth-conditional entity. That is, this level of content, which is closely associated with the conventional sentence meaning, would deliver the proposition literally expressed by the sentence. As Neale says in his paper on Grice's contribution to the Philosophy of Language,

...it is clear upon reflection that what is said is to do duty for the proposition expressed by U. Where the sentence uttered is of the type conventionally associated with the speech act of asserting (i.e. in the indicative mood) what is said will be straightforwardly truth-conditional (Neale, 1992, p. 11)

As discussed, given the recent acknowledgment of the phenomenon of semantic-underdetermination this traditional picture has been put under severe scrutiny. This resulted in a situation where the scope of "what is said" was in need of modification: either it maintained a close connection to the sentence meaning (i.e. retained the Syntactic Constraint), OR it was defined by being an expression of the first literal propositional/truth-conditional content expressed by an utterance. But, given the many arguments stemming from semantic-underdetermination, it cannot be both.

Contextualists, such as Recanati, emphatically argue that this level of content is truth-conditional, and, is necessarily influenced by optional, top-down pragmatic processes, and expresses the intuitive propositional content of utterances. They directly disagree with Grice that "what is said" must be closely tied to conventional meaning, i.e. they deny the presence of the Syntactic Constraint and place emphasis on the intuitive nature of what is said as being consciously accessible to the speakers. "What is said" is truth-conditional, for Contextualism, but in becoming so, it is inherently affected by rich pragmatic processes. This has the further implication that "what is said" belongs primarily in the realm of pragmatics, which, as
mentioned, is a break from the traditional view, where pragmatic processes were limited to the generation of implicatures.

Recanati argues that ""what is said' should be individuated according to the intuitions of normal interpreters" (Recanati, 2004, p. 15). Such intuitions, he insists, can be elicited by providing subjects with scenarios describing situations and asking them to evaluate the target utterance as true or false with respect to said situations (2004, p. 15). Recanati does not actually perform such experiments, but relies on his own intuitions as exemplary of a normal interpreter. His method for establishing this level of content – what is said – is through his availability-based approach.

In a sense, he replaces the Syntactic Constraint, present in Grice, with his Availability Constraint. As outlined in the earlier critique of Contextualism, this means that Recanati arrives at this level of content by acknowledging the first intuitive proposition (truth-conditional content) that comes to mind, or is recognised or available, upon hearing an utterance; that is, "the conscious output of the complex train of processing which underlies comprehension" (2004, p. 16). For Recanati, it is this level of content that a theory of language understanding must capture and it is the level of "what is said".

Interestingly, Cappelen and Lepore in their Insensitive Semantics agree with Contextualism on the definition of "what is said", but for different reasons. They also define "what is said" as equal to the proposition communicated by an utterance of a sentence. They no longer maintain, as traditionally established by Grice, that what is said by a sentence is closely related to the context-free content of a sentence. They break the syntactic-constraint on "what is said".

Borg, Cappelen and Lepore – the Minimalists – still maintain that the minimal literal content of sentences is truth-conditional. However, they acknowledge that this minimal
content is often not the proposition *communicated* or the “what is said” by an utterance of a sentence. They thus adopt a definition of “what is said” that is defined by *indirect quotation*. That is, if Richard, while pointing to a table in his study, uttered the sentence “that table is covered in books”, he could, according to Cappelen and Lepore, be accurately reported as *saying* at a later time that “the table in Richards study is covered in books”. So, even though this has a different minimal semantic content from the original sentence, what is important for “what is said”, according to Cappelen and Lepore, is the proposition that is communicated.

Thus, they argue that this context-independent content does not exhaust the *speech act* content of an utterance, and, in fact, is usually *not* the proposition that a speaker wishes to communicate. “An utterance of a sentence S typically says, asserts, claims a wide range of propositions in addition to the one semantically expressed” (C&L, 2005, p. 145). This is their speech act pluralism.

Both Contextualists and Minimalists agree, for different reasons, that “what is said” labels the intuitively expressed proposition and is rich in optional pragmatic effects. However, not everyone engaged in these debates is of agreement with these two onetime opponents. It is Bach, in his article *You Don’t Say* that disputes this definition. The aforementioned article, in fact, is devoted to defending a syntactically constrained notion of “what is said”.

Bach argues that retaining such a notion (as it was under Grice: syntactically constrained) is essential if we are to “account for the linguistically determined input to the hearer’s inference to what, if anything the speaker intends to be conveying in uttering the sentence” (Bach, 2001, p. 1). Bach, then, admits that “what is said” is not necessarily truth-conditional, but maintains the Syntactic Constraint as an essential feature of “what is said”.

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What I wish to argue in this section is that this disagreement is largely terminological. That is, the concerned parties are not actually empirically arguing over what constitutes some objective level of content called “what is said”, but are in fact choosing to define it in different ways. Recanati wants to define it as the first intuitive proposition expressed by an utterance; Bach wishes to define it as that which is constituted by the literal meanings of words used and mode of composition. However, it is not a discoverable fact in nature; depending on one’s predilections, each of these levels of content can be described within the framework of linguistic analysis. It is just a question of how to divide up the levels of meaning: according to the specific types of information involved or according to what it takes to establish a truth-conditional level of content? This confusion further contributes to the perception that there is conflict between theorists where there is not.

It seems the divergent categorisations of levels of meaning are born out of the ambiguous manner in which the words say/said can be used. It can be used in two ways: one way of using the word “say” (or said) is to refer to the actual, literal, sounds made by a speaker, that is, the words uttered. In this way, one can define “what is said” by issuing a direct and literal quotation of the sentence in question.

The other use, however, is more closely associated with the intentional meaning of the sentence used. Using it this way is more or less synonymous with what someone means by an utterance of a sentence. “What is said” by a sentence in this sense is the intuitive communicated content.

Marga Reimer, in her paper, “What is meant by ‘What is said’? A Reply to Cappelen and Lepore”, describes the different uses of the phrase as follows. The latter use of the phrase, she describes as “corresponding to our ordinary, everyday notion of ‘saying’ something” (Reimer, 2002, p. 599). This is a more relaxed and informal use of the word
where the question “what did you say?” used in conversation would be seeking the general gist of the communicative intentions. The former use, however, she describes as a term of art or a technical term that is “constrained by the conventional meaning of the words uttered”. This is a more specific meaning where the literal repetition of the words uttered is sought.

Each of the two uses of “said” can be construed as intuitively legitimate. The point of this section, however, is to establish the fact that when Bach, in his paper, “You Don’t say”, defends a syntactically constrained notion of “what is said” against the notion that “what is said” is inherently pragmatic, he is merely choosing to define the term in a different way. In their articulations of “what is said” they presuppose what features are relevant: for Recanati, its availability, and for Bach its syntactic constraint. Yet, any such presuppositions could not be evidence for a semantic theory, since, as Reimer puts it “they would be conditioned by the very theory they are invoked to support” (2002, p. 601).

Making this point clear is important as it seems much time has been wasted back and forth between theorists arguing over the true nature of “what is said” and using this as evidence for the particular theory in question (contextualism, minimalism, radicalism, etc.). Recanati himself in his work on Contextualism called *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics* admits as much. He says

Insofar as this argument for Minimalism is based upon a certain understanding of the phrase ‘what is said’ (or ‘what is literally said’), one wonders whether the quarrel between TCP (Truth Conditional Pragmatics) and Minimalism may not be verbal rather than substantive. There is no doubt that one can define ‘what is said’ in such a way that only weak pragmatic effects can affect what is said. (2010, p. 12).

On this reading, he admits that there is no substantive disagreement between Minimalism and TCP. Recanati does attempt to avoid the dissolution of the debate on the grounds that he
alludes to above by going on to articulate another, very specific type of Minimalism with which his TCP does have a substantive disagreement. This he labels I-Minimalism and is defined as minimalism which posits that the intuitive proposition expressed by the utterance of a sentence is affected only by the bottom-up process of saturation but not by top-down processes such as free-enrichment (2010, p. 14). That is, I-Minimalism argues that “what is said” is both closely tied to the conventional meaning, and properly truth-conditional. It is this form of Minimalism with which Recanati wishes to engage in debate. However, this is not the type of minimalism being discussed in this thesis. In fact, this seems more along the lines of the traditional Gricean position, which most theorists, on either side of the debate, admit is in need of revision. For, as has been shown, Radicalism and Minimalism both accept that the communicated proposition expressed by most utterances is affected by pragmatic processes. Therefore, it seems that when it comes to “what is said” the debate can be dissolved as largely terminological.

However, it is true that the choices of how to define the term do indicate the underlying priorities for each account of linguistic meaning. It is as if, “what is said” represents the primary or most important level of content to linguistic analysis. Instead of an empirical debate over what constitutes “what is said” based on evidence, the debate can be more accurately described as being concerned with what definition best fits “what is said” and why? That is, the question really being asked here is what should we define as “what is said”? Given the ambiguous meaning of the term, the choice exists to maintain a Gricean syntactic constraint on the definition, or else prioritise the intuitive nature of the term and hence include free pragmatic enrichment as an essential part of its composition.

When read from this perspective it is easier to separate out the motivations of each side. The question is no longer “what characterises the level of content labelled “what is
said?” but now is “what should characterise the level of content labelled ‘what is said’?”.

Which description is more beneficial to a proper analysis of linguistic meaning?

With this in mind, I now turn to Bach and argue, alongside him, that it is beneficial and necessary to have a level of context-free, sentence-content that is “what is said” by a sentence. Why is it important for “what is said” to maintain its status as syntactically determined content? Or more accurately, why do the attacks and objections of Contextualism fall short of showing the need for a pragmatically enriched notion of “what is said”?

One of the major criticisms that have been levelled at syntactically constrained notion of “what is said” is its lack of psychological reality. That is the argument that it plays no significant role in the real-time interpretation processes. Recanati, once again, is the most prominent proponent of this type of criticisms. The idea, as outlined in chapter one of this thesis, essentially states that we do not ever acknowledge the literal, minimal compositional content of a sentence during a conversation; we interpret on the fly and include pragmatic processes in reaching the proposition communicated. Recall that Recanati makes several distinctions (primary/secondary processes and mandatory/optional processes) in order to articulate this point and construct a kind of processing model for interpretation. He claims, in support of Contextualism, that a process can be primary without being mandatory as the proposition that a hearer actually arrives at might not be the one expressed by the sentence.

This is the case even if the sentence meaning seems to express truth-conditional content. For, even if a sentence is intuitively truth-conditional, it is often not the intuitive proposition that we recognise as being communicated by the speaker. Hence, he argues, it is not what is said by the speaker. However, this is not reason to discount a syntactically constrained notion of “what is said”. Firstly, just because something is not accessed or explicitly acknowledged in interpretation does not mean it does not exist or that it has no role
to play. That is, just because minimal content is not accessed, does not mean it is not accessible. This is especially evident from the point previously made regarding cancellability.

To borrow Bach’s example, if you hear the sentence “Jack and Jill are engaged”, you might assume that what was said here was that they are engaged to each other. However, if it was added to it “...but not to each other” while it may be frustrating and misleading, it is not a contradiction. Hence, the minimal content, while potentially overlooked in real-time processing, still remains accessible as fall back content. Also, if a hearer doesn’t explicitly represent what is said by an utterance, it can still play a role for the hearer makes the implicit assumption that it is not what is meant. The point here is that even though minimal meanings may not be explicitly represented they still have a role to play. As put by Bach: “They lurk in the background waiting to be taken into account when there is special reason to do so” (2001, p. 9).

It seems Contextualists concentrate much of their analysis of language on the cognitive and interpretative processes of hearers. However, much work is needed from them in order to motivate why the interpretative processes of a hearer should have any bearing on the legitimacy of a syntactically constrained, notion of “what is said”. That is, employing this lexico-syntactically determined notion of what is said does not commit one to a certain account of the temporal order of the communicative processes of understanding. It is to do with a certain type of information that is made available to the hearer, regardless of the real-time process of interpretation.

Another brief point, previously mentioned, but relevant to the question of “what is said”, is as follows. Take the following two grammatical sentences.

(a) Carrie had nothing to wear.

(b) Carrie had nothing suitable to wear to the Christmas party.
According to Contextualism, *what is said* by the (a) sentence would be something along the lines of sentence (b), with the extra italicised elements being added by the context. The only difference between the two is that the second sentence makes what is said more explicit. However, if this were the case, then *what is said* by each sentence would be the same. But this seems obviously untrue. They both may be used to mean the same proposition, but clearly the speaker of each sentence would be *saying* something different in each case. Without a syntactically-constrained notion of “what is said” it would be difficult to navigate, theoretically, around such issues.

3.5: Levels of Content

According to Radicalism, “what is said” by a sentence is determined by the context-free elements of a sentence together with their mode of composition. This helps further to maintain the idea that this level of content is an autonomous and important level of meaning within an analysis of linguistic communication, regardless of the fact it may not be truth-conditional. Radicalism revises the Gricean picture of meaning by removing the burden of truth-conditions from sentences independent of context. In doing so Radicalism accepts the driving motivations of both Contextualism and Minimalism. For Contextualism it accepts that sentences, independent of context, are often times less than truth-conditional. For Minimalism it acknowledges the need for a context-free “semantics” that is determined compositionally by the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence and plays an important role in understanding and interpretation as shared fall-back content and that which allows communication across contexts.

A question remains, however, of how Radicalism articulates or categorises the different levels of content that are truth-conditional. That is, while it is important to
categorise types of meaningful information as "semantic" and "pragmatic", the debate between Contextualism and Minimalism is also about more than that: it is about the different ways in which context does affect meaning. Recall Recanati, who not only critiqued the traditional picture of how context affects meaning, but also offered a positive account of the different ways in which it did (loosening, enrichment, transfer). And while this thesis disputes Recanati's categorisation, the same question must also be asked of Radicalism. For, while it does seem that a fully systematic explanation for the ways in which we use context to understand intentional meaning is potentially impossible, there does seem to be certain specifiable ways in which context affects meaning.

All involved in this debate are in agreement that there are various ways in which what is communicated in an utterance goes beyond the meaning of the sentence; the question is whether it is possible to offer any systematic descriptions of this phenomena.

As outlined, Radicalism retains a clear and distinct border between context-free semantic content and truth-conditional, pragmatic content. “What is said” by a speaker is syntactically constrained; that is, nothing more than the meaning of the words used together with their mode of composition, allowing for the resolution of ambiguity and syntactically mandated indexicals. This content is not truth-conditional, nor is it usually what is communicated by a speaker. This definition of “what is said” is unique to Radicalism. However, it does not offer much in the way of explanation for the interesting ways in which we can use context, in different ways, to interpret sentences and communicate propositions.

Contextualists have been at pains to show, through the arguments of semantic-underdetermination and incompleteness, that the Gricean categories of “what is said” and “what is implicated” are incorrect. That is, there seems to be pragmatic processes involved in establishing levels of content that are not easily lumped in with obvious implicatures
Grice simply characterised any contextual involvement in the determination of a proposition—beyond indexicals—as conversational implicature. However, as shown throughout this thesis, Contextualists disputed this and responded by altering the categorisations and widening the scope of "what is said" to include free pragmatic processes. For Contextualism, "what is said" is defined not by lexico-syntactic content, but by intuitive availability and is constituted necessarily by pragmatic processes.

This thesis disputes both categorisations. It maintains that "what is said" should be syntactically constrained and equated with the lexico-syntactic content of sentences. However, Bach, in his articulation of Radicalism does establish an intermediary level of content called "implicature" (as opposed to implic-a-ture) to deal with levels of content that need some sort of pragmatic processes in order to express propositions, but are very closely tied to the linguistic meaning of the sentence (i.e. not conversational implicatures). That is, this level of content acknowledges that pragmatic processes, while they do not effect "what is said" (contra contextualism) are also not limited to obvious conversational implicatures (figurative or metaphorical speech).

This intermediary level of content is explained in detail by Bach in his essay "Conversational Impliciture" (1994). Bach concentrates on the two familiar forms of argument: underdetermination, where no truth-conditions are expressed by a sentence, and incompleteness, where the wrong intuitive proposition is expressed by a sentence.

In obvious cases of Gricean conversational implicatures, one says one thing and thereby communicates something else in addition, whereas, impliciture is a matter of "saying something but communicating something else instead, something closely related to what is said." (1994, p. 2).
Bach points to two pragmatic processes that establish implicitures: completion and expansion. These are specific pragmatic processes that yield communicative propositional content, without straying too far from the context-free meaning of the sentence. In these cases, what is communicated is *implicit* in what is explicitly expressed (what is said), hence the name impliciture.

Take the example of the sentence: “Steel isn’t strong enough”. While grammatically, or syntactically complete, it seems to be lacking something for it to express truth-conditional content. In order to understand the sentence, we need to know what it isn’t strong enough for. Nothing obvious in the sentence calls for an additional element. It seems that free pragmatic processes are needed to establish a proposition that is still closely related to the lexico-syntactic content, or “what is said”. For example, “Steel isn’t strong enough *to resist the heat of an exploding plane*”. The speaker could have chosen to make the additional material explicit by including the corresponding words in the utterance, but left it implicit instead.

Briefly, Minimalists would consider the original sentence fully truth-conditional, even though most agree it is missing something. Contextualists agree it is less than truth-conditional, but argue that the additional contextual elements establish “what is said”. Further, the sentence meaning (the propositional radical) has no role to play in understanding for we interpret and reinterpret locally.

Radicalism, however, acknowledges that the sentence, the “what is said”, is a propositional radical and is need of *completion* (performed by the hearer) in order to establish a determinate and understandable proposition.

For cases of incompleteness then, there is a similar processes called “expansion”. This occurs where the minimal compositional content does seem to express a truth-conditional entity, but it is clearly an inappropriate proposition in terms of what is communicated. For
example, a mother saying to her son after a fall, “You are not going to die”. She is likely to mean, or wish to communicate that he is not going to die from that cut, not that he is immortal. This is a case of impliciture because the mother does use each of the words in a literal sense, but is omitting an extra phrase that could have made what she said explicit. As Bach says: “it is unlike metaphor, metonymy and other sorts of nonliterality, for it does not involve the figurative use of any particular word or phrase” (1994, p. 9). It is left implicit and it is up to the listener to make use of context in order to understand the communicated content. In these cases, as with completion, what is meant is very closely related to “what is said”, but is not identical to it. There is still an interesting distinction to draw.

It is clear that the above examples differ from Grice’s illustration of conversational implicature. Recall his famous example of a teacher writing a reference for a student and saying “he has good handwriting and is always on time”; thereby implying that he does not hold the student in very high regard. The implicature in this case has little connection to the literal content of the sentence; completely distinct, in fact. Both implicitures and implicatures go beyond what is explicitly said, but in different ways.

Implicitures are, as the name suggests, implicit in what is said, whereas implicatures are implied by the saying of “what is said”.

The examples of underdetermination and incompleteness seem to call for an intermediary level of content. For while a fully systematic account of contextual effects on interpretation may be difficult, it does seem at least there are distinctions between certain ways context effects meaning. In response to this, Radicalism offers the impliciture. This level is distinct from both the sentence meaning (what is said) and conversational implicatures. Contextualists (Recanati, Carston, Sperber and Wilson) suppose that “what is said” should be expanded to include these types of phenomenon, but this is to the detriment
of linguistic analysis as minimal compositional content gets lost in their attempt to capture truth-conditional content.

3.6: Conclusion

Radicalism presents itself as an alternative to the dominant theories of Contextualism and Minimalism. Both of these views established themselves against the backdrop of problems with the Gricean picture of "semantic" and "pragmatic" content. Underdetermination and incompleteness arguments show that context-free linguistic content does not express the intuitive truth-conditional proposition expressed by the same sentence. Contextualists maintained that this meant that context-free content has no role to play in the interpretation process and further, that free pragmatic processes were involved in establishing truth-conditional "semantic" content. Thus, they argued that there is no real interesting distinction between "semantic" and "pragmatic" content as both are necessary before a truth-conditional content is expressed. Minimalists defended the importance of a context-free compositionally determined "semantic" content by arguing that it could still express truth-conditional entities, even when it seemed intuitively compelling to admit it did not.

In effect, each of these views subscribed to the following conditional:

If (P): it is the case that sentences independent of context do not express truth-conditional content, then (Q): There cannot be a semantics that is free of contextual influence.

For Contextualists this is a clear case of Modus Ponens:

If P, then Q,
P,

Therefore, Q.

Sentences do consistently fall short of expressing truth-conditional content, or express the wrong (intuitive communicative) content, and thus there is necessarily contextual and pragmatic information involved in the determination of "semantic" content; i.e., a context-free semantics is impossible.

For Minimalists, on the other hand, this is a case of Modus Tollens:

If P, then Q,

~Q,

Therefore, ~P.

Cappelen and Lepore, along with Borg submit to the notion that if sentences are not necessarily truth-conditional – that is, cannot be evaluated for truth and falsity – then Contextualism is inevitable and there can no longer be a theoretically useful notion of context-free "semantic" content. Thus they set about staunchly defending the truth-conditional nature of sentence-content. They allow that this content may not be that which is communicated, but hang on to the fact that it is fully determinate and truth-conditional, as they feel that if sentences do not necessarily express truth-conditional content, then it is a slippery slope to use-based theories.

Radicalism does not subscribe to the above conditional. It denies the fact that because a sentence is not truth-conditional, or missing some element which would make it truth-conditional, one cannot have a context-free semantics that is free from pragmatic influence. Sentence meaning often falls short of expressing truth-conditional content but this should not
mean this level of content is not a distinct and autonomous level of meaning that captures the distinctly compositional characteristics of natural language. It can do this without being truth-conditional.

Again, Radicalism accepts the arguments of Contextualism against the traditional picture but disagrees with its conclusions. It is not held hostage by the notion of propositionality. Radicalism seeks to identify different types of meaning involved in our linguistic usage: context-free linguistic content, and pragmatic, context-saturated meaning. From this categorisation it attempts to explain the relationship between the words and sentences that make up language, and how we use them to understand one another.

The question of truth-conditions is of course interesting, given the supposition that we communicate in propositions, but it should not distort the importance of carving up linguistic content according to types of information involved.
Chapter Four: **Radicalism, Modularity and Internalism**

4.0: Introduction

The exposition of Radical Minimalism in the previous chapter went some way to establishing it as a legitimate and worthy theoretical stance on the nature and roles of "semantic" and "pragmatic" content within a linguistic analysis. Each of the first two chapters examined and critiqued the existing literature through an analysis of the two most prominent viewpoints: Semantic Minimalism and Contextualism. By articulating and highlighting the problems with each view, the space in which Radical Minimalism could exist was created.

While Radicalism accepts the Contextualist platform that context is far more important to the determination of *truth-conditional* content than once assumed, it denies that this implies the dissolution of an interesting difference between sentence meaning independent of context and pragmatically enriched content. There still remain two distinct levels of content. Without such a distinction, it would be difficult to talk about and examine how it is we can say one thing, while meaning something else.

Secondly, there was Semantic Minimalism. This view was established, for the most part, in response to the onslaught from Contextualists. Semantic Minimalists defended the truth-conditional nature of minimal context-free content. That is, they argued that sentences, independent of a context of use, do in fact express truth-conditional entities, even when it seems intuitively compelling to admit that they do not. They did acknowledge that this minimal content was often not what was intuitively meant or communicated by an utterance of a sentence, but this was as far as their concessions to Contextualism went.
The fatal mistake of Minimalism was to assume that the only way to rescue minimal compositional, content from its insignificant role in Contextualism was to stubbornly maintain that every single grammatical sentence expressed a truth-conditional entity, even in the face of persuasive argument that said otherwise. Radicalism, the view put forth here, allows for sentences to be less than truth-conditional, while maintaining that this level of context-independent sentence meaning is "semantic" content. Such a level of content issues propositional radicals or blueprints, as opposed to fully propositional truth-conditional contents.

Through the process of highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the views above, this thesis has put forth Radicalism as the most accurate and fecund categorisation of the roles of and relationship between "semantic" and "pragmatic" content. It accepts the driving motivations of both of the dominant theoretical stand points: contextual factors are involved in establishing truth-conditional content, context has a larger role to play in communication, but the compositional context-independent content remains an autonomous level of meaning with a role to play in linguistic interpretation.

The fundamental basis for Radicalism's categorisation and organisation of types of meaning comes from the acknowledgment that there are, at root, different types of information involved in linguistic interpretation. It is this fact that should guide the discussion of their roles within a linguistic analysis. There is context-free linguistic content and there is contextualised, truth-conditional content. According to Radicalism, the context-free meaning is meaning that is determined by the formal features of a linguistic item – lexicon and syntax. Meaning that is pragmatic, on the other hand, is meaning that is invoked by the use of language; this type of meaning is susceptible to influence from the whole range of background and contextual factors that relate to a communicative exchange. Radicalism defends a context-free "semantics" that is not truth-conditional.
This is opposed to the starting point of both Contextualism and Minimalism. They both are of the view that “semantics”, whatever else it is, must trade in truth-conditional contents. This is an intuitive concept based on our ability to grasp the conditions under which a sentence or utterance can be considered true or false. However, given the fact that a truth-condition can always require more and more specific information, it does not seem to be a matter of pure bivalence: that is, it does not seem that a level of content either reaches propositionality, or doesn’t. Borg herself points out that “it is not as though we have a clear criterion for proposition-hood waiting in the winds and by whose lights Flinton is ready is ruled clearly propositional while Flinton is ready to bowl is ruled clearly not propositional” (Borg, 2012, 105).

It seems that grasp of truth-conditions is more likely a matter of degrees, with the possibility for greater specificity always present. One can always include more information about a situation in order to get more and more specific; to get closer and closer to an accurate description of the world. Is it possible to produce a maximally specific sentence, where nothing is left to guess or interpret on behalf of the listener; a sentence that perfectly describes the world? It seems doubtful, but even if it is possible, it seems unlikely that we use these sentences in ordinary conversation.

The issue of what makes a sentence or utterance truth conditional is certainly an interesting and important aspect of linguistic analysis. It is relevant to how we communicate with one another and how we grasp determinate meaning through conversation. However, it should not cause theorists to disregard a type of meaning (what contextualists do to context-free content), or theorists to assume all sentences necessarily have truth-conditions, when it seems they do not.
However, given the fact that Radicalism does accept the main criticism put forward by Contextualism – that sentences independent of context do not express truth-conditional content – some work must go in to showing the precise difference between Contextualism and Radicalism. That is, it is necessary to show that context-free content is still an autonomous and theorizable level of meaning, even when one gives up the Minimalists claim that this minimal content is necessarily truth-conditional. It is necessary to show that while Radicalism agrees that sentences do not express truth-conditional content, this does not imply that Contextualism is the only available option.

It is with this goal in mind I return to Emma Borg. In her book *Minimal Semantics* she puts forth a lucid and persuasive argument for Minimalism. As shown in chapter 2, Borg argues along with Cappelen and Lepore that context-free content, while far more constrained and minimal than traditionally thought, does still express truth-conditional content, even if this is usually not the proposition communicated. Borg establishes the notion of liberal truth-conditions in order to combat arguments such as underdetermination and incompleteness. In this way she departs from the Minimalism of Cappelen and Lepore.

However, Borg also takes the debate in a new direction. She attempts to draw on work in cognitive science to support her Semantic Minimalism by looking at the architecture of our minds and how we process information. This type of analysis, she argues, can shed light on the relationship between language, meaning, truth-conditions and understanding. Through an understanding of how the brain processes different types of information we can attempt to make clear whether the traditional distinction between semantic and pragmatic content has any validity. Are these different types of meaning underpinned by different types of mental processes? Or is it the case that there is no real interesting distinction, as per Contextualism?
In *Minimal Semantics* (2007) Borg argues that these types of interpretation (context-free linguistic interpretation and pragmatic, contextual intentional communication) are in fact governed by different mental processes, and that further reason for adopting a minimalist account of semantics is that it seems to “fit” well with the modularity thesis of mind: better, at least, than the contextualist view does. By “fit” here it is meant that a formal approach to semantics is most explanatorily consistent with a modular account of mind. The characteristics or traits of “semantic” content that are captured by a formal account are also the type of traits one would expect language to have, given the modularity thesis. This is so in contrast with the type of characteristics expressed by a Contextualist account of linguistic meaning.

The modularity of mind thesis claims that the mind is composed, at least in part, of discrete, relatively autonomous modules each with their own specialized bodies of information and rules of operation. That is, there are specific areas of the brain that deal specifically with certain types of information and do so in a relatively automatic or reflexive way. Linguistic competence is a potential candidate for such a modular explanation.

Borg’s claim is that if it is the case that our linguistic abilities are in fact worthy of modular explanation, then her Minimal Semantics approach is most suited compliment this claim. That is, “a formal theory of meaning is worth pursuing since it allows linguistic meaning to be treated as a proper part of a modular language faculty” (2007, p. 74). Of course, it must be mentioned that the output of this formal, context-free content, for Borg, is necessarily a truth-conditional entity and it is on this point we disagree.

This next section of my thesis will examine Borg’s modularity-plus-formal-semantics theory. The reasons for this examination are twofold. Firstly, I wish to argue, alongside Borg, that our linguistic abilities do seem to be explainable on a modular account of mind. Further,
by showing aspects of our linguistic abilities to be underpinned by a specific modular process, it helps secure this content as an autonomous level of content (contra Contextualism) that is distinct from the general intelligence that is used when interpreting pragmatic information. This argument from Modularity is in support of the idea that at root, “semantic” and “pragmatic” content should be kept separate when analysing and thinking about types of meaning (even though it may take a mixture of both to establish truth-conditional content). A modular account of mind supports the idea that there are two types of information relevant to linguistic behaviour: context-free linguistic meaning and pragmatically determined speaker-meaning. And each one is underpinned by a different type or kind of mental process.

Secondly, however, I wish to depart from Borg’s analysis by arguing that such a language module does not exclusively deal only in truth-conditional entities. That is, minimal content, that is not necessarily truth-conditional, can do all the things that Minimalists want it to do, including being governed by a distinct linguistic module, without the need to maintain that it expresses truth-conditional or propositional contents. Thus Radicalism is, in fact, better suited to compliment the modularity of mind thesis, than is Borg’s Minimalism.

4.1: Modularity of Mind and Formal Semantics

Firstly then, we must answer the following question: what exactly is the modularity of mind thesis and why does Borg argue that her Semantic Minimalism is the approach best suited to fit with it?

The basic idea behind the modularity of mind thesis is that within our cognitive architecture there exists a number of “discrete, relatively autonomous cognitive units each
dedicated to dealing with a smaller, specific task, and each of which ultimately contributes to the intelligent behaviour of the complete organism” (2007, p. 75).

Borg describes the kind of module she has in mind in terms of two characteristics. Firstly, in line with Noam Chomsky (2000) she states a module is a kind of proprietary body of information. This information is possessed innately and it is said to underpin a particular human capacity (2007, p. 76).

Describing a module as such is motivated in part by poverty of stimulus arguments. Essentially, poverty of stimulus arguments state that the linguistic input received by young children is in itself insufficient to explain children's detailed knowledge of their first language. Without some kind of innate body of information, poverty of stimulus arguments would arise for our linguistic capabilities. Therefore, there must be some sort of information already within the cognitive architecture of the mind to explain the advances children make in learning a language.

Secondly, she describes a module as a proprietary set of rules or processes operating over some limited range of all the things an agent knows. This is a kind of framework of operations that only deals with or acts on very specific types of experience or information, i.e. words and sentences, for a linguistic module. In this way, a module is an 'encapsulated' processor, relatively distinct from general operations of the brain on the whole.

Borg describes a module as a combination of the above two characteristics: “an innate and dedicated cognitive processor” (2007, p. 76). That is, a “special-purpose information-processing device that operates more or less autonomously with respect to the system in which it is embedded” (Robbins, 2008, p. 305).

It seems then, based on this type of description of a module that there would be lots of facets of human intelligence and behaviour that are obviously not modular. Our general intuitive intelligence is clearly not a special purpose or autonomous type of process. For
example, deciding what to eat for lunch, or picking out what clothes to wear are not processes which have a privileged body of information to appeal to. In principle, anything one knows could be relevant to these decisions.

However, it is worth noting that some advocates of modularity see the above description of a module as “far too pessimistic” (Borg, 2007, p. 77). There still remains an ongoing debate within Cognitive Science and philosophy of mind over how many such modules exist within the human mind and what aspects of human intelligence, if any, are non-modular.

The essential difference is between those, like Jerry Fodor, who argue that the mind is in part modular, that is, limited to the low-level systems underlying perception (five senses) and language. Hence, on his view, large parts of the mind are non-modular. On the other side are those, such as Carruthers (2006), who argue that the mind is modular through and through; that is, it is entirely composed of modules up to and including high-level systems responsible for thought. This is known as Massive Modularity.

Attempting to enter this debate in any significant way would take our current project too far off course. However, it is worth noting the differences between these two types of modularity, for their difference highlights the distinct characteristics this analysis is seeking to examine. That is, given our goal here, which is to show that our linguistic competence is governed by a different kind of process than that which governs our general intelligence, it seems Fodorian modularity is best suited to our analysis.

Firstly, the definition of a module according to Massive Modularity is quite different to the one outlined previously. It is a much looser and relaxed definition and does not demand the same kind of encapsulation that a Fodorian module would envisage. This obviously allows the proponents of MM to extend the scope of modularity to more central cognitive capacities, i.e. our mind-reading, intentional explanations (Robbins, 2010). And thus would
neglect the distinction between different types of information – context-free linguistic information and richly, intentional pragmatic information – that we are interested in.

It is this distinction (between encapsulated, computational processes and general intelligence processing), that we are precisely trying to draw out and delimit. As Borg puts it, “…it is precisely because of this potential global sensitivity that a modular explanation can’t be given” for certain processes, according to Fodor (Borg, 2007, p. 78). That is, what Fodor is trying to distinguish is two different kinds or types of processes, one encapsulated and computational, and one not. And by allowing any or all types of mental processes to fall under the modularity explanation, MM is washing over an important distinction between different kinds of information and processes; the very distinction being drawn in this thesis between semantic and pragmatic information and processing.

A further issue with Massive Modularity, and its attempt to deal with “global processes”, is known as “the frame-problem”. This is well known throughout artificial-intelligence studies (AI). Basically it arises for processes where “the potential search space for features which could be taken into consideration prior to arriving at an interpretation or solution ranges to the full extent of what the agent knows” (2007, p. 78). Borg uses the example of you witnessing Sally filling a glass of water from the tap. You might assume, upon seeing this that Sally is thirsty, and that is why she is filling a glass with water. While this may be a good explanation, it is clearly defeasible and can be influenced by a range of contextual factors. So, say for example you see that Sally was out with her friend Jeff, and he is sweating and wearing running gear; with this information, the best explanation may be that Sally is getting water for him.

Or even imagine that Sally was looking intently at her potted plant. Now it may seem that she is getting water so she can water her plant. The point here is that for global reasoning processes an infinite range of contextual factors can be of relevance. Another way of saying
this is that such processes are distinctly unencapsulated. According to a Fodorian picture of modularity then, MM is mistaken because it seeks to give a modular explanation to global and abductive reasoning processes; which by definition are not encapsulated or computational.

Finally then, even if it is the case that the mind is Massively Modular it would still be useful to examine whether any of the modules, in particular, "met the more stringent conditions for being Fodor-style modules", specifically our linguistic comprehension (2007, p. 80).

In sum, a module is probably an innate, encapsulated body of information, together with processes operating only over that information which is responsible for realizing a given cognitive function. The question now becomes: how does Semantic Minimalism fit with a modular explanation for our linguistic comprehension?

Let us briefly revisit the specifics of Borg’s Semantic Minimalism. “Semantic” content, on her view, is exhausted by the contributions made by the syntactic constituents of a sentence together with their mode of composition. This is the primary characteristic of semantics for Borg and Cappelen and Lepore, along with the claim that this content is truth-conditional. That is, she argues that there is a distinct level of propositional or truth-conditional content, expressed by “sentence meaning”, that is, that which can “be delivered through interpretation of the formal features of the expressions in play” (2007, p. 75).

This is the corner stone of Semantic Minimalism: the expression of truth-conditional content without recourse to free pragmatic or contextual information. Of course, she admits, literal sentence meaning is usually not what is communicated by an utterance of the sentence; Borg agrees that the role of context-free content is quite minimal and that communicated
content is usually rich in pragmatic effects. This is OK for Minimalists, as long as a minimal truth-conditional context-free content is acknowledged.

In this way, the expression of truth-conditional content is a computational process that can be grasped through knowledge of a proprietary body of information, the lexicon (words) and, knowledge of a set of rules operating only on that information, i.e. syntax (their mode of composition). It is these characteristics that make Semantic Minimalism seem like a good fit with a modular explanation of our linguistic competencies. On the Contextualist, or ‘dual-pragmatic’ account things look quite different. For those, such as Recanati, or Travis, context-free sentence meaning is not truth-conditional. Hence, “semantic” content is defined as the intuitive truth-conditional content of an utterance, and this, they argue, is saturated by contextual factors. Without contextual factors, they argue, you do not get truth-conditional content.

Not only that, but on Recanati’s view it is free and non-mandatory contextual processes that are involved in the expression of truth-conditional content. That is, it is not only syntactically mandated contextual involvement as with obvious indexicals. Such free pragmatic processes (enrichment, loosening, transfer) are typical examples of global processes: processes which have an unlimited body of data to draw on and are thus subject to the frame problem outlined previously. These kinds of processes, which underlie the establishment of truth-conditional content for Contextualists, cannot be treated as simple computational processes and therefore do not, it seems, fit with the idea of an encapsulated modular language faculty.

The central issues have been laid out: Borg’s Semantic Minimalism characterises semantic content as computational and operating over limited information. This fits well with the idea that language is rooted in a module in the mind, especially in comparison to the
picture of "semantic" content painted by Contextualists. In order to properly examine the connection between a Borg's view and a modular account of linguistic comprehension it is necessary to examine the features indicative of typically modular processes (vision, for example) and see if our linguistic competence displays such features.

To do this I will examine the kind of features which are considered "hallmarks of modular processes" and see if context-free linguistic comprehension fits the bill. Note that a cognitive system counts as modular in Fodor's sense if it is modular "to some interesting extent," meaning that it has most of these features to an appreciable degree (Fodor, 1983, p. 37). For the sake of brevity, I will group the characteristics thematically, where ones that are strongly related will go together.

Before launching into this examination, it is essential to my argument that I draw attention to the second point I outlined at the start of this chapter. I want to show that throughout this examination of Semantic Minimalism and modularity, nowhere does the evidence suggest that a language module must deal with or process truth-conditional entities only. That is, while I agree with Borg that it seems context-free linguistic information has certain traits that seem to fit well with a modular account, her claim that this content is necessarily truth-conditional is not supported by a modular account of language. Hence, given the criticisms already made of Semantic Minimalism I hope to show that Radicalism is a better fit for a modular account of mind than Semantic Minimalism is. Thus, throughout the following discussion of the features typical of cognitive modules, I will be highlighting the fact that truth-conditional contents are in no way a pre-requisite for the combination of formal linguistic interpretation and modularity.
4.2: The Characteristics of a Modular Domain

Domain Specificity.

The first characteristic outlined by Fodor in his 1983 work *The Modularity of Mind: An Essay on Faculty Psychology*, is domain specificity. This is the idea that only a very small amount, and a very particular type, of the information we encounter in our daily experience will activate the processes of a particular module, e.g. for our concerns, linguistic interpretation. For example, when we hear the noise of traffic on the roads, or the wind whistling through the trees, we do not get confused that the traffic is talking to us or the wind is trying to tell us something. Similarly, we do not read ornate designs on a church, or the trail of a snail, as writing, even though it may be very similar at times.

The point here is that only in a very “defined set of circumstances” does the module for semantic interpretation “switch on” (Robbins, 2010). And while we may designate as meaningful various types of non-linguistic items (e.g. him buying her flowers means he loves her), there seems to be no way of determining a unique or accurate interpretation in such a case. This is defeasible reasoning: did he really love her forever, was it just an act, was it an apology, etc. In comparison, for linguistic items there is a “level of conventional meaning or content which can be recovered without appeal to the speaker” (Borg, 2007, p. 88). Similarly again, when confronted with a written English sentence, a speaker will be able to recover the meaning of that sentence, without necessarily knowing anything about who produced it or when it was produced. This, as Borg says, “gives us a very special stimulus set for semantic interpretation” (2007, p. 88).

Furthermore, the fact that someone can interpret a written sentence with no prior knowledge of its utterance, shows that the process underlying this interpretation need not be sensitive to global, abductive reasoning processes. This is especially so in comparison to
more general communicative concerns. For example, a cough, a raised eyebrow, or a hand gesture, can mean almost anything if the context in which it is produced are understood. Since the same type of gesture (a cough, raise of eyebrow) can be meaningful in one context, yet meaningless in another, it seems there is no specialized class of stimulus underpinning general communicative interpretation. This is a marked difference from linguistic interpretation.

Notice that for “domain specificity” the specialized class of stimulus – context-free linguistic content – need not be truth-conditional in order for it to reaffirm the status of linguistic interpretation as modular. We still see sentences and hear words, independent of context as meaningful, regardless of whether we can grasp the conditions under which they are true, i.e. regardless of whether they are propositional or not. It is the compositional sentence meaning that is processed, by the linguistic module. Contextualists have put forth, and this thesis has discussed, many examples of sentences that do not have obvious truth-conditions when taken out of context (Jane can’t continue. Steel isn’t strong enough, etc.). Yet such sentences still fall under the description, given by Borg above, of context-free linguistic meaning as domain specific. It is not the case that our hypothesised linguistic module only “switches on” when a truth-conditional level of content is expressed.

**Informational Encapsulation and Inaccessibility.**

Articulated by Fodor, informational encapsulation is equivalent to the claim that “the data that can bear on the confirmation of a perceptual hypothesis, include, in the general case, considerably less than the organism may know” (Fodor, 1983, p. 69). So a system of cognition is encapsulated to the extent that in the course of processing a given set of inputs, it cannot access information stored elsewhere. Essentially, all it has to work with is whatever
information is contained in the input (e.g. sentence meaning) plus whatever is stored within the system (e.g. understanding of grammar).  

In other words, we see and hear sentences as meaning what they do mean, regardless of other information I have or things I believe or what I assume about the speaker (Borg, 2007, p. 89). This kind of autonomy, according to Fodor, is exactly what one would expect from an encapsulated input system; we want it to convey information about our surroundings regardless of the other things we believe or expect to be the case. It is information cut off from all other contextual cues. Take for example the following: I am sitting in the library in Trinity College writing my thesis, when suddenly someone cries out “A tank and an elephant have jumped through the window”. So, even though there is no way I really believe that this sentence is true, or that it is remotely likely for anything like this to happen, I still understand what the sentences means, and may have glance at the window to be sure. The point is that formal linguistic comprehension, to a certain degree, is independent of, and autonomous from, one’s expectations of beliefs about the world.

Again, this is substantially different from the case of communicative acts in general. These are as Borg puts it, “about as informationally unencapsulated as you can get” (2007, p. 90). Understanding a communicative act is a direct function of what one thinks and believes about the situation they are in. Without any such information, it can be hard to tell what a nod or wink means, but for semantic content, this is not the case. This is a notable distinction between traditional conceptions of “semantic” and “pragmatic” information. It is also important as Fodor himself acknowledges that informational encapsulation is one of the most important characteristics for a modular explanation. And since modularity may be a matter of degree, securing context-free linguistic content as informationally encapsulated goes a long

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17 Fodor uses the example of the Muller-Lyer visual illusion: Two lines with arrows on either end, each pointing a different direction. We perceive one of them as longer than the other, even when it is explained to us that they are the same length. Regardless of our beliefs and expectations, our interpretation occurs as it does.
way to supporting the claim for this section. Note, however, once again that the truth-conditional status of sentence meaning is not a necessary aspect of this encapsulated understanding.

Relatedly, a system is inaccessible if the intermediate levels of representation that it computes prior to producing its output are consciously inaccessible. In our case, what an agent consciously retains from an utterance is usually not a perfect replica of exactly what is uttered, but a gist of the general meaning. Recall Recanati’s similar point about availability. For example, if I hear someone say “I’m not going out”, I will immediately entertain the proposition that the speaker is not going to go to the pub or nightclub tonight. Not that they are locking themselves in their house. This kind of phenomena, however, fits the profile of a modular process.

Take the analogous process of sight: also a process deemed to be governed by a modular process in the brain. When we see a scene involving a person we automatically give the scene an intentional description. If I see someone walking by the library at 5:30, I assume they must be done studying for the day, or are going to get dinner. We do this even though these explanations go beyond the strict sensory experience delivered by the vision module I have of a human walking through a building. Similarly if I hear what we call ‘footsteps’ I assume a person must be nearby. But, strictly speaking, all I hear is individual taps on the ground: we create the intentional story that links the sounds together to form an explanation for the experience.

It seems that, as Borg says, “there must be some non-intentional, more coarse-grained, representation which serves as the genuine delivery of the vision module to the agents central cognitive system” (2007, p. 95). It is then “outside” this module that an intentional
explanation is given; similarly for context-free linguistic interpretation and more general communicative, pragmatic interpretation.

*Mandatory, Fast and Shallow.*

Mandatory, in this sense, is to do with the idea that you can’t help but hear or even see a sentence – in a language you understand – as a meaningful utterance. As Fodor puts it: “You just can’t hear speech as noise, even if you wanted to” (Fodor, 1983, p. 53). It is almost a reflex action to hear words and sentences as meaningful. Basically, whether we like it or not, the operations of the system are switched on when you experience the relevant stimuli and those operations run to completion. This automatic and almost mechanical move from hearing words to grasping meaning – without conscious control – is a central feature of processes which are taken to be under a modular mechanism.

When looked at in comparison to the general act of communication, this again seems quite different and far from immediate or mandatory. There is a much greater degree of conscious control over whether or not one interprets irony and metaphor. One has to “get it” in order to understand these higher levels of meaning; and if feeling uncooperative, one can choose not to and only acknowledge the minimal literal sentence meaning.

The fast nature or speed of the system is a relatively straight-forward point. The idea is that modular processes are characteristically fast. Semantic interpretation is similarly fast. In certain tests, it was shown that subjects can repeat what they hear, as they hear it, with a quarter second latency (Fodor, 1983, p. 61). For those who practice such “shadowing” there can be as little as a 250 millisecond delay between production of the auditory stimulus and production of the oral response (Borg 2007, p. 96). One need only observe a conversation between two teenage girls to know that there is simply no gap between hearing words and sentences and hearing meaningful utterances.
Finally, the idea that the output of a process is shallow is essentially to do with the notion of how much computation is required to produce it (i.e., shallow means computationally cheap) and also how constrained or specific its informational content is. There is little-to-no appeal to speaker intentions when interpreting the context-free content of a sentence.

Notice, also, that each of these three features is closely related to encapsulation (which is the primary feature of module for Fodor). Basically, a mandatory, and fast system that produces shallow output must be informationally encapsulated; in a way, they are explicable in terms of an informationally encapsulated process.

Dissociability, Localizability, and Innateness

Each of these characteristics state that a modular system is associated with a fixed neural structure. Evidence for this comes from incidents of specific patterns of break down. That is, such a system can become selectively impaired, damaged, or disabled without effecting, to any significant extent, the operation of other systems. Some standard examples from the study of vision include prosopagnosia (impaired face recognition), achromatopsia (total colour blindness), and akinetopsia (motion blindness). Examples from the study of language include agrammatism (loss of complex syntax), jargon aphasia (loss of complex semantics), alexia (loss of object words), and dyslexia (impaired reading and writing). Each of these disorders has been found in otherwise cognitively normal individuals, suggesting that the lost capacities are subserved by functionally dissociable mechanisms (Robbins, 2010).

However, for our own interests here, we need to be more specific about the exact type of language impairment. For, the argument we are making is not just that there is a general “language” module, but that this language module deals with linguistic interpretation but not all of our general communicative abilities. In this way, we need to look for examples that
isolate formal linguistic break down while pragmatic understanding, or general 
communicative abilities remain intact, or vice versa.

The first example Borg uses in her discussion is Dysphasia. For those with this 
disorder, partial syntactic damage or loss can be combined with semantic preservation, which 
is exactly what we are looking for. Dysphasics are usually of standard intelligence and their 
pragmatic abilities seem intact: they tell jokes, tease and understand implicit information 
(Borg, 2007, p. 102). They also exhibit normal literal, linguistic ability, engaging in flowing 
conversation. The damage they suffer seems to be concentrated on their knowledge of 
grammar, e.g. often their use of plurals or past tenses will be impaired. This seems to indicate 
some separation of sub modules within the frame work of our linguistic abilities.

However, it is also necessary to find cases where general communicative abilities are 
retained, i.e. pragmatic interpretation, while the language faculty is lost, or when the language 
faculty is retained but other non-linguistic skills are lost. There seems to be substantial 
evidence for this with stroke victims that suffer certain types of Aphasia. This is characterised 
by victims displaying clear evidence of social and communicative abilities, even when their 
entire language faculty seems damaged. They struggle to “put what they want into words” 
and instead, it seems, are left to communicate through gestures and hints. This type of case, 
where the language faculty seems to be lost while global communicative skills and 
understanding are retained gives us “one part of the evidence for a separation between the 
language specific module and the cognitive underpinnings of communication” (Borg, 2007, 
p. 103).

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18 Note that if the loss of syntactic processing were complete, then the condition would be of no use here; for 
complete loss of syntax would render whatever remaining semantic competence entirely idle, having no input to 
deal with.
Of course, we should note that this by itself does not prove that our specific linguistic capacities are rooted in a separate cognitive domain than our non-linguistic skills. It also could be the case, as per the Relevance theorists Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1986), that we have a larger more holistic communication module, of which our linguistic capacities are a sub module. This would allow for the linguistic sub-module to be selectively impaired while general communicative abilities are preserved. Thus, what is needed for our goal is cases where compositional, linguistic skills are retained, while general communicative or pragmatic abilities are lost. Imagine a case where someone can rattle off grammatical sentences, hold a literal conversation, but miss out on irony, metaphor, sarcasm and other abductive-reasoning based interpretation.

Examples of this type of scenario come from patients with certain frontal lesions, as well as those who suffer from Autism, Aspergers, and schizophrenia. In these cases, comprehension of literal meaning seems to be normal, yet beyond this, communication becomes stilted and difficult. That is, there is difficulty in comprehension of implicatures, irony and metaphor. Borg quotes from a paper by Langdon, Davies and Coltheart (2002) called: “Understanding Minds and Understanding Communicated Meanings in Schizophrenia”. In it, these theorists examine “the putative functional dependence of pragmatic language skills on general mind-reading capacity by testing theory-of-mind abilities and understanding of non-literal speech in patients with schizophrenia” (2002, p. 1). They report that patients with frontal lesions exhibit “pervasive pragmatics deficits including (a) difficulty with formulating hints...(b) impaired ability to provide adequate information...(c) failure to take account of a listener's interest when conversing and (d) literal misinterpretations of sarcastic utterances”.

The key point to pay attention to here, for our purposes is that while these patients suffer impairment with respect to their abilities to explain the intentional behaviour of others,
their ability to cope with literal sentence meaning seems untouched. This inability to grasp or infer the contextually richer meaning is explainable on the assumption that "language users have a discrete faculty for computing meaning up to and including bare literal meaning but which requires the operation of a different kind of processes to grasp what is communicated by the use of an utterance" (Borg, 2007, p. 104). This tendency towards a separation of skills supports the possibility of a module that underpins our context-free linguistic interpretation.

It is worth mentioning Williams syndrome also. This is a rare genetic disorder in which sufferers display a particularly high level of linguistic functioning together with high degrees of impairment across a range of other abilities. Essentially, patients with Williams syndrome are significantly mentally retarded; they experience challenges in visual-motor skills and visuo-spatial construction. Most affected individuals cannot spatially orient themselves in a place, or perform tasks like reconstructing an object from smaller parts. Many adults with Williams syndrome cannot complete a simple six-piece puzzle designed for young children, for example. They require a high degree of supervision, and often need help dressing themselves. However, despite such severe difficulties their verbal and linguistic abilities remain unaffected and, often times, is notably advanced.

In his book, *The Language Instinct* (1994) Steven Pinker describes a girl, who was able to talk in detail about some problems she experienced with a joint bank account, even though her cognitive disability meant she never had a bank account, could not read or write or handle money. (1994, p. 50). Other examples include cases where children with Williams syndrome were asked to name an array of animals, they would list such a wild assortment of creatures as a koala, saber-toothed tiger, vulture, unicorn, sea lion, yak, ibex and "Brontosaurus rex", a far greater verbal array than would be expected of children with IQs in the 60s. There are many examples of this kind of advanced and unusual vocabulary, coupled with what seems a proper understanding of the words used. Those who suffer from Williams
Syndrome are interesting because they have high levels of cognitive impairment across a range of areas yet their linguistic understanding, including semantic comprehension seems relatively untouched, if even somewhat advanced. This again provides further support for the existence of a separate language faculty which includes semantic processing.

Finally, there is the property of innateness. This is understood as the property of “developing according to specific, endogenously determined patterns under the impact of environmental releasers” (Fodor, 1983, p. 100). This is the idea that modular systems develop or come on-line primarily as the result of a specified causal process like triggering, rather than an intentional process like learning. The case for language is strong here. For, the acquisition of language occurs in all normal individuals in all cultures on more or less the same schedule: single words at 12 months, telegraphic speech at 18 months, complex grammar at 24 months, and so on. Poverty of stimulus arguments, mentioned earlier, also go some way to supporting the idea that there is some level of innate knowledge of language in the human brain that allows children to learn language at this rate.

It seems that an examination of the main properties that Fodor would expect a module to exhibit, reveals that our grasp of formal context-free linguistic content possesses the majority of them to some significant degree or other. Again, we must note that it is very difficult to verify the exact skills and abilities that are affected in these cases because of the interconnected nature of our intelligence and the flexibility of our neural structure; even the most advanced neuroscience finds it difficult to pinpoint precise causal associations. As Fodor says, these properties are “susceptible to a ‘more or less’ sort of answer. One would thus expect that the notion of modularity ought to admit of degrees”. When Fodor speaks of a system as modular, he means so “to some interesting extent” (1983, p. 37).
Thus, cases where patients do exhibit the aforementioned combination of deficit and preservation of literal, linguistic and pragmatic skills, while not absolute, do serve as support for the view that literal, linguistic abilities are underpinned by different processes than those that govern our general communicative and reasoning abilities, i.e. pragmatic interpretation. There seems to be a level of content recoverable from sentences that is domain specific, encapsulated and mandatory. As Borg puts it: “We grasp literal sentence meaning in a vacuum as it were, free from the vast range of other things we know” (2007, p. 106).

If this is the case – that some aspects of our linguistic abilities are governed by a modular process – then it seems, according to Borg, that Semantic Minimalism would be the right kind of theory of meaning. For, on such an account of meaning, grasp of literal linguistic meaning is an essentially computational process, that is, it can be calculated by “processes which are sensitive only to the local properties of syntactic representations”; as opposed to sensitivity to abductive reasoning or global features of context (2007, p. 107).

4.3: Modularity and Truth-Conditional Content

However, what about truth-conditions? Much of the Minimalist programme is concerned with defending the idea that context-free sentence meaning is necessarily truth-conditional. It would seem that this relationship with modularity should shed some light on this fact. Is there some interesting relationship between the above picture of linguistic modularity and truth-conditions? Does the possibility that our formal linguistic interpretation is modular, have anything to say about whether this content is also truth-conditional?

It is on this point that I depart from Borg’s articulation of the combination of Semantic Minimalism and modularity. While I agree with her that there is a level of context-
free content which is recoverable by normal users of language, "the grasp of which displays all the properties which are taken to be characteristic of genuinely modular activities", I disagree that this level of content is truth-conditional.

I wish to argue here that none of the features of modularity outlined above require, or even imply the requirement that our literal interpretation of sentence-types is of truth-conditional contents. In fact, in an interesting foot note towards the end of Borg’s section on modularity, she seems to acknowledge this fact herself. She states:

We need to be clear about exactly what these arguments establish. I take it that what concerns of modularity per se show is that the only kind of semantic processing which could take place within the language faculty would involve formal processes. They do not on their own suffice to show that those semantic processes must also involve the derivation of truth-conditional or propositional content; that is to say they allow that the language faculty could contain a formal fragment of a semantic theory...even though derivation of truth-conditional content would then be relegated to a point outside the module (2007, p. 108).

I italicised the particular sentences above, as they indicate the point this chapter wishes to make: context-free content can do all the work that Minimalists wish it to do, without being distorted by the further role of necessarily expressing truth-conditional content. Under Radicalism, whether or not a sentence expresses truth-conditional content is entirely dependent on the particular construction, as well as on the subjective grasp of the interpreter; it is not a systematically describable phenomenon, nor a matter of bivalence.

Radicalism does state, however, that many of the common-usage sentences used in context-shifting and underdetermination arguments, do not seem to express truth-conditions; that is, they are propositional fragments or radicals. Even so, interpretation of such "radicals"
or propositional fragments, still seems to be fast, domain specific and often (as per Recanati) not consciously available prior to reflection. Issues of acquisition, loss and impairment also apply to this level of content. Thus, given the criticisms already made of Borg’s (along with Cappelen and Lepore) version of Minimalism, it seems that Radicalism is an even better “fit” with modularity than her own view.

This argument from modularity provides further evidence that Radicalism is a preferable option to both Contextualism and Minimalism, for it establishes a separation of two types of content. One which is underpinned by a specific linguistic module and serves to output a level of meaning that is not necessarily truth-conditional, but captures the recursive, systematic and theoretically tractable aspects of language. The second type of content – pragmatic – combines with this compositional content and is exploited by interpreters in order to try to understand what is meant by a speaker.

4.4: Modularity and Internalist Approaches to Linguistic Analysis

As outlined above, Borg sought out new ground to support her “formal semantics” approach to linguistic analysis. She invoked the hypothesis that our linguistic abilities are governed by a language module and argued that, if this is the case, and she seemed to think it was, then her Semantic Minimalist account of linguistic meaning would be the best candidate to compliment the underlying modularity framework. That is, it would be the theory that is most explanatorily consistent with the hypothesis that humans have a specific language faculty. Context-free sentence processing is encapsulated, mandatory, fast, etc. and the conception of context-free “semantics” outline by Minimalists (Borg, Cappelen, Lepore) corresponds with this, unlike the Contextualist account of pragmatically enriched intuitive-meaning.
However, a key (if not the key) aspect of their approach view is that, along with context-free content processing being compositional and encapsulated, it is also necessarily truth-conditional. That is, according to Minimalists, the context-free content of a declarative sentence expresses – always – a truth-conditional entity.

Thus, I have shown that while Borg may be correct to hypothesize that our formal linguistic processing falls under the domain of a linguistic module or faculty, this association does not imply or mean that such processes must output truth-conditional entities. I argued that the view put forward in this thesis, Radicalism, is in fact better suited to a modular account than Semantic Minimalism. The reason for this is that Radicalism retains the idea that context independent linguistic content is an autonomous level of meaning, separated from our general pragmatic and communicative abilities, without burdening such content with the idea that it is necessarily truth-conditional. Borg herself admits that her argument from modularity does not, in itself, go any way to establishing this level of content as necessarily truth-conditional.

However, there are several further points of interest, relevant to the argument of this thesis, stemming from this cognitive science approach to linguistic analysis that are need of examination. By drawing on the modular account of our language faculties and thus locating part of our linguistic abilities within our brains, one is acknowledging or at least opening up the question of an internalist account of human language.

This is interesting for our purposes in this thesis because on an internalist account of human language, linguistic meaning is, by definition, not analysed in terms of the notions of truth-conditions and reference. The reason for this is that reference and truth are externally constituted relations between linguistic meaning and things out in the world and an internalist account eschews such relations, and accuses them of being theoretically uninteresting.
Thus, I wish to argue that an internalist approach to linguistic analysis supports the argument of this thesis: that establishing and theorising over a level of context-free content is possible without this content being truth-conditional.

Internalism is far and away the most dominant approach within the field of linguistics for the past sixty years. It is a view largely motivated by the work of Noam Chomsky. Basically, on such an account, linguistic meaning is an internalist enterprise concerned with linguistic expressions and the minds that generate them, not the study of symbol to world relations. According to Paul Pietroski, “sentences are products of innate, modular systems and have truth-conditions only by virtue of their relation to other cognitive systems and the environment” (Pietroski, 2003, p. 1).

In this next section I intend to draw out and articulate this conception of linguistic meaning. I hope to show that such a view of our linguistic abilities – the modular/language faculty view – provides further support for the underlying argument of this thesis: that context, free, compositional linguistic content can be theoretically encapsulated without it being truth-conditional. Sentences independent of contextual setting are not necessarily truth-conditional, but they do act as “propositional radicals”; these propositional radicals constrain the possible meanings and truth-conditions of utterances without fully determining them. One can see the complementary nature of Radicalism and the internalist approach suggested throughout the following paragraph direct from Chomsky (1996):

We cannot assume that statements (let alone sentences) have truth-conditions. At most they have something more complex: ‘truth-indications’, in some sense. The issue is not ‘open-texture’ or ‘family resemblance’ in the Wittgensteinian sense. Nor does the conclusion lend any weight to the belief that semantics is ‘holistic’ in the Quinean sense that semantic properties are assigned to the
whole array of words, not to each individually. Each of these pictures of the
nature of meaning seems partially correct, but only partially. There is good
evidence that words have intrinsic properties of sound and meaning; but also
open-texture, which allows their meanings to be extended and sharpened in
certain ways; also holistic properties that allow some mutual adjustment. The
intrinsic properties suffice to establish certain formal relations among
expressions, interpreted as rhyme, entailment and in other ways... (p. 52).

The point made by Chomsky here is that sentences independent of context do not determine
truth-conditions, but they do impose constraints on the possible meaning of utterances.
Context-free linguistic content guides and constrains the possible meanings of utterances in
subtle and complex ways. In this way context-free content is seen has having a very definite
role in our linguistic understanding. Chomsky's notion of "truth-indications" is essentially the
same as Bach's idea of propositional radicals: a level of meaning, not necessarily
determinant, based on which listeners can seek contextual clues, in all sorts of ways, in an
attempt to understand utterances. Such truth-indications constrain the range of possibilities
for truth-conditions; much like the idea of propositional radicals, that act as a framework
from which one seeks contextual information to try understand a speaker.

In order to fully understand this point, it is necessary to examine in more detail the
precise aspects of Chomsky's internalist program and how exactly such a program supports
the possibility of a context-free, less-than-truth-conditional semantics. Furthermore, it is
important to attempt to establish what a study of context-free sentence-meaning, from a
philosophical perspective, should do if it is no longer defined by its connection to truth-
conditional content.
4.5: Chomsky’s Internalist Programme

Briefly, Chomsky’s framework for linguistic analysis was first outlined as a response to the dominant and almost unquestioningly accepted notion that language was a publicly shared, *external* object or entity; something non-psychological, outside human minds, that was used, shared and participated in.

Chomsky comprehensively responded to this conception of language, when he outlined his new paradigm of linguistic inquiry. He argued that mastery of language is not just a matter of being trained in what to say in certain circumstances or having some set of behavioural dispositions, but in fact involves a wealth of pragmatic, semantic and syntactic knowledge (Scholz, 2011). Children do not, Chomsky argued, learn through the meticulous care of their parents, or by picking up on what they hear in their environment. In fact, it seems there is simply not enough data found in what children hear to explain the advances children make in learning a language. This idea is the essence of one of Chomsky’s foundational claims about the nature of human language: the poverty of stimulus argument. This argument formed the basis for the idea that there must be some *internal*, as in innate, aspects to our linguistic abilities and knowledge.

Chomsky postulated that there exists a gap between what speakers know about language (e.g. aspects of grammar) and the data they have access to during learning and that this is just too wide to be explained by any process of learning alone. For example, the set of sentences that a child is exposed to when learning language is finite, yet the knowledge that a child attains once they have learned the language “extends over an unbounded domain of sentences” (Hornstein and Antony, 2003, p. 2). That is, human language is recursive, and kids seem to know this without explicit instruction.
Further, in normal households, children are mostly exposed to imperfect utterances: half sentences, slips of the tongue, mispronunciations, etc. Also, the data to which children are exposed does not contain "negative data" or information about the many possibilities for ill-formed or unacceptable sentences, i.e. what is not appropriate. Such information, Chomsky (2000) argues in *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* could not be learned, and, thus, "unless the mind already possesses the basic principles, no amount of evidence could provide them" (p. 4).

Given that children do obviously and consistently learn language at a young age with relative ease, then it seems they are not "blank slates" when it comes to linguistic abilities. They come equipped with a rich innate system that seems to guide the process of constructing a complex grammar. This system is "supple enough to allow for the acquisition of any humanly natural language grammar, yet rigid enough to yield results even in the face of the deficiencies of the [primary linguistic data]" (Hornstein and Antony, 2003, p. 3).

Chomsky referred to this innate knowledge as the "Universal Grammar"; a theory describing the most fundamental underlying properties of all natural languages. Learning a specific language (English, Japanese, etc.) thus becomes the comparatively straight-forward matter of building upon this innately possessed knowledge, and hence appears a much more manageable task for young children to achieve, universally. Linguistic analysis, on this view, seeks to describe both the final state of language attained, as well as the actual structure and contribution made by the innate capacity that makes possible the final state of our language competencies.

Chomsky characterizes the initial state of the language faculty as a set of "principles and parameters". Acquisition then consists in the setting of these open parameter values on the basis of linguistic data available to the child. In this way Chomsky explains both the
commonalities and the differences among humanly natural languages. That is, the principles and parameters approach seeks to explain how languages seem so different on the surface, yet share certain underlying characteristics.

Language, for Chomsky, is a “product of biological evolution” which can be regarded as a “language organ in the sense in which scientists speak of the visual system or immune system, as organs of the body” (2000). He is careful to point out that this does not necessarily mean that such an organ can be removed from the body, while leaving the rest intact, but that it is a subsystem of a more complex structure.

Essentially, this research programme inspired and led by Chomsky marks a major shift in the focus of theory and research in linguistics: from treating language as a disembodied, human-external entity, based on a set of behaviours or a corpus of texts, to cognitive bio-linguistics. That is, the study of language as a human cognitive system embedded within the mind/brain of every individual (Isac & Reiss, 2008, p. 6). Language, in this way is described by Chomsky as internal, individual and intensional; he uses the term I-Language as acknowledgment of these defining characteristics.

An I-language is strictly a property of individual human beings, not groups or nations or communities. An I-language is a computational system that is encoded in or a property of an individual brain. In this way it is an internal system of representations and rules in the mind of a person. It is intensional in the sense that it defines language as a system of rules and patterns. This is opposed to an extensional definition. For example, in mathematics, a set can be defined extensionally by listing its members (e.g. 2,4,6,8). Or, it can be defined intensionally by providing a formula or description that characterizes all and only the members of the set (e.g. ‘even numbers less than 10’). Similarly human language can be identified with the set of all and only its words, sentences, texts, etc., which is the extensional
view; but it can also be identified intensionally by means of a systematic or formal specification of some kind that reflects its rule-governed nature (Chomsky, 2000).

The study of language under this approach becomes the study of individual mental grammars; entities that are internal to each person. The goal of such study is to infer, understand and describe the shared properties of all I-languages, that is, the Universal Grammar.

This conception of language as individual may seem somewhat counter-intuitive. If language is something that is internal to each individual, not something outside our minds that we share, or participate in, then how is communication possible? Furthermore, what is to be made of traditional notions of language, where ‘English’ is a language spoken in England and Australia, and is different from ‘French’, which is spoken in France and Quebec? Or the fact that The New York Times in the USA, The Irish Times in Ireland, and The Guardian in the UK publish in the same language? If language is internal and individual, why is it we speak and navigate our way through the world under the impression that it is external and there are many different languages all over the planet?

In answer to this, Chomsky states that while the above descriptions of language are fine for common, everyday usage, such entities as “English” or “French” are not objects of scientific enquiry. Chomsky labels such common-usage, or traditional approaches, E-languages, where the “E” stands for: “extensional” – concerned with which words and sentences happen to satisfy a definition of a language, rather than with what the definition says – and ‘external’; that is, external to the mind, or non-mental.

Such notions of language are usually defined by some body of linguistic corpora. That is, recorded utterances, text collections, newspaper articles, from “English” or “Italian” or the many other “languages” we speak of around the world. E-language conceives of a natural
language as a public, intersubjectively accessible system used by a community of people, often millions of them spread across different countries. (Scholz, Pelletier, and Pullum, 2011)

Again, the main objection to such conceptions of language from Chomsky and those supporters of I-Language, is that E-languages do not lend themselves to scientific examination. They have no clear criteria of individuation in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions for what, say, “English” is. On such conceptions of language, “languages” are actually historico-geographical entities that change as they are passed along over generations, and across land and sea. They spread and shrink on the backs of military, cultural and economic conquerors.

Take for example, a common phenomenon found in different parts of the globe. In a part of southern Europe, there is a gradual valley-to-valley change in the language spoken between south-eastern France and north-western Italy. It is such that each valley's speakers can understand the next, but the far north-westerners clearly speak French and the far south-easterners clearly speak Italian. This shows that the motivating reason for calling one French and one Italian is more a case of the politically defined geographical border, rather than the specific properties of the individual dialects. It is such cultural and political influences that lead to viewing these extremes as two different languages and such influences are not appropriate for scientific inquiry.

Similarly, Italian and Spanish are commonly known as two different languages in everyday usage, yet the speakers of the standard languages feel like they can communicate with each other quite well. However, there are various Italian dialects that are mutually incomprehensible; they are called dialects of the same language because they are spoken within the political boundaries of Italy (Reis and Isac, 2008, p. 16).
Chomsky and others opposed to an externalist approach object that a *scientific* linguistics cannot and should not individuate French and Italian in a way that is subject to historical contingencies of wars and treaties. Thus, he shifts focus to the individual minds that process and use language. And when one acknowledges the universality of human language, and poverty of stimulus arguments, a picture begins to emerge of the potential for scientific investigation into language from the perspective of the individual.

For the concerns of this thesis, this approach to linguistic meaning calls into question the idea that one should be able to give an analysis of meaning in terms of truth-conditions. Truth-conditional analysis is inherently constituted as a symbol-world relation; where sentences (symbol) pick out some scenario or conditions in the *world* that would have to hold for the sentence to be true. Thus, if there is reason to suggest that language is an internal, individual characteristic of humans, then it seems unlikely a theory of meaning will be a theory of truth and reference.

One obvious question here, if there is no longer a scientifically viable notion of English, French, Japanese and so on, is why is it that, as Isac and Reis put it, “two speakers of English or Japanese communicate with each other so well, whereas speakers of two different languages, one English speaker and one Japanese speaker, say, have great difficulty in communicating?” (2008, p. 72). What is the mechanism by which we can understand certain speakers with ease, others with more difficulty, and others not at all? Essentially, the question is, how does communication occur on an I-Language account?

The simple answer to this question is that people who live in the same geographical area tend to have I-languages, or mental grammars that are extremely similar to each other and thus they converge on most symbol-meaning relationships. This is for two reasons: the first being that they both share very similar physical and cognitive resources, i.e. they are
both humans with brains. Secondly, people who grow up in a similar environment (country/region) will have very similar experiences during language acquisition and be exposed to similar sound-meaning correlates.

This explanation does away with the idea that it is necessary to posit the existence of languages as entities that exist apart from the existence of speakers, thus avoiding the seemingly impossible task of articulating the necessary and sufficient conditions of “English” or whatever common-usage “language” you wish to talk about. People who speak the same “language” in this sense just happen to have a very similar mental grammar to each other, which makes communication a lot easier. But there is no perfect use of English that results in perfect understanding of users. There is no such thing as perfect communication even between two speakers with a very similar mental grammar: it is a more-or-less game, where we do our best to guess and grasp what someone is trying to tell us. Breakdowns in communication (what do you mean?, what are you trying to say?) occur often in normal, everyday conversation. This is because we are constantly trying to fill in gaps and gesture at concepts in the hopes of relating the thoughts, ideas or concepts we wish to communicate and understand.¹⁹

It is worth noting also that Chomsky is at pains throughout much of his writings on I-language to point out that much of our approach to matters of scientific understanding are extremely counter-intuitive and removed from our “everyday” talk about the world. Thus, such a disconnect between common parlance about “languages” and the scientific hypothesis of I-language, should not discourage linguists from exploring certain avenues of understanding. The world of quantum physics, for example, is far removed from our normal

¹⁹ There are some who disagree with Chomsky’s program (See: Elizabeth Bates, Michael Tomasello), but to enter into the detailed and nuanced debates about whether Chomsky is ultimately correct, would take us too far off course here. Regardless, there is a multitude of interesting questions raised by internalism (innateness, learnability, systematicity, recursivity, etc.), all of which raise interesting questions for the concerns of this thesis.
sensory experience, yet offers insight into the fundamental nature of reality; it is the same with an internalist approach to language. In everyday use, language is no mystery, we use it to communicate, write, complain, joke, etc. But this should not mean that explanations for what it is, and how we come to have it must reside safely within the descriptive arena of common usage. The point here is to not discount possible lines of inquiry because they seem counter-intuitive, e.g. I-language.

4.6: The Implications of Internalism.

To recap: the above discussion of Chomsky’s Internalism was motivated by Borg’s invocation of the Modularity thesis in her book Minimal Semantics. In it, she argued that a good reason to adopt a Minimal Semantics approach to linguistic meaning, was how well such an approach seemed to “fit” with a modular explanation of our mental architecture. Again, this was a conditional claim: if it is the case that our minds were composed of modules, and one such module deals with our linguistic competence (as she argues is the case), then a Minimalism based approach was the most explanatorily consistent philosophical approach (particularly in comparison to Contextualism and its focus on rich pragmatic effects).

However, I argued that Borg, while she may be correct to argue that some aspects of context-free linguistic content (computation, systematicity, recursion) are well suited to a modular explanation, she is mistaken in her attempt to maintain that such a level of content is necessarily truth-conditional. Nowhere in a modular/biological/internalist description of language is there any requirement or even implication that it must process, or deal in, truth-conditional entities. Now, I wish to go further and argue an internalist conception of human
language actually precludes, or at least suggest a move away from, truth-conditional linguistic content, and this supports the claims of Radicalism.

By incorporating a certain conception of the internalist or modular approach to linguistic ability and meaning, one is inadvertently impugning a truth-conditional analysis of language; at least any systematic or theoretical analysis of truth-conditional content. Ultimately, the internalist perspective argues that truth-conditions seem to be context-dependent in a way that meaning is not; and that context-free levels of content are compositional in a way that truth-conditions are not. That is, expressing things that are true or false is subject to a whole range of factors (recall the frame problem from artificial intelligence) that make a scientific, or systematic analysis difficult.

The idea, essentially, is a fundamental one that is concerned with the underlying framework in which we conceive of linguistic meaning. According to Chomsky in his book *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, on an internalist account of our linguistic abilities, meaning is simply no longer construed as a language-world, or symbol-world, relation. As shown above, human language is characterised and defined as a purely internally-constituted system, located within the minds of individuals, and hence part of an agents psychology; not a public language that is external to the mind brain or a kind of social object. The properties of an I-language (syntax, *semantics*, etc.) are therefore individualistic; they are properties that hold of the individual in isolation (Ludlow, 2003, p. 143). This is in direct contrast to the properties of a referential or truth-conditional semantics – truth and reference – appear to be anything but individualistic. The properties of truth and reference express relations between linguistic representations and aspects of the world external to the agent, and hence cannot be part of an individual’s I-language.
The internalist view of language breaks the assumed inherent connection between human language and the things we happen to use language to talk about. It detaches the idea that speakers use names to perform acts of rigid reference (or use sentences to say something true) from the idea that names have referents rigidly, (or sentences have truth-conditions independent of use). This is exactly the distinction that this thesis is attempting to protect: the distinction between saying and meaning, or between the content expressed by formal linguistic constructions, and the content we wish to communicate through use of such constructions. It is this distinction that Contextualists fail to acknowledge in their discussion of linguistic meaning and interpretation.

Internalism denies an assumption common to much of the traditional work in the theory of meaning. This is the assumption that in giving the meaning of an expression, we are first and foremost specifying something about that expression’s relation to things in the world. We use names to refer to things. Sentences, by themselves do have a meaning, but are not true or false. On this sort of view, we use sentences to say true or false things about the world, and occasionally use names to refer to things; but this is just one of the things we can do with names and sentences, and is not a claim about the meanings of those expressions.

Human language, according to Chomsky, does not map perfectly onto our reality, like some Wittgensteinian picture-theory, in a way that allows us to talk of a theory of meaning in terms of reference and truth. As Pietroski puts it: “making truth-evaluable assertions is one of the things we can do with sentences, in contexts, though uses of this kind are highly variable; while people refer to things, words don’t; and sentence use may not be a theoretically tractable phenomenon” (2005, p. 2).

Pietroski, a linguist who examines the implications of internalism for philosophy, states that “the fact that an utterance of a sentence has a truth-condition is a massive
interaction effect whose determinants include (i) intrinsic properties of the sentence that we can isolate and theorize about and (ii) a host of facts less amenable to theorizing about how reasonable speakers use sentences” (Pietroski, 2003, p. 1). An important point to note here is that, if the study of linguistic meaning is not the study of symbol-world relations, then one cannot theorize about meaning in terms of truth-conditions and reference. This is not to say that there is no such thing as a theory of meaning. It is just that such a theory is not a theory of truth-conditions.

“Semantics”, on an Internalist account of language, like syntax and phonology, deals with compositional, systematic and intrinsic features of sentences. These constrain and guide truth-conditions by constraining how sentences can be used. But they don’t determine truth conditions, which depend on many factors, including unsystematic and extrinsic properties of sentences. Sentences, in this way, are products of an innate, modular system and only have truth-conditions by virtue of their relation to other cognitive systems and the environment.

4.7: Internalism and the Referents of Proper Names.

One way of illustrating this claim, is through an examination of the referents of proper names. The idea here is to show that common assumptions about the meanings of even our most simple words are mistaken; and this mistake reveals a much more complex and subtle notion of linguistic meaning. By closely looking at how we use proper names, it becomes clear that the meaning of these expressions is far more subtle and complex than it appears on a referential account of linguistic meaning.

First, there is the obvious case of fictional words, like “unicorn” or “Hamlet”. Such names invite treatment in terms of the hypothesis that the meaning of a name should not be specified by association with some external entity. Clearly, in these cases, there is no
corresponding entity to which to refer. Further, we can utter sensible and understandable sentences like the following, (say if you were in a toy store with a child): “The Unicorns are over there, but there are no such things as Unicorns”. Such examples do not necessarily show that no words or phrases refer to things in the world, but they do show that some words fail to refer in a simple, straight-forward way. Instead, the argument will be made that words should be associated with some array of features that the name makes available for a variety of uses. These uses are rich, subtle and complex.

Let us take some more relevant examples from Peter Ludlow, who outlines three types of examples against referential semantics in a dialogue with Chomsky about the possibility for a referential semantics. These examples are designed to show that adopting a referential semantics “forces us into some uncomfortable, if not implausible metaphysical positions” (2003, p. 131).

An example often used by Chomsky is phrases like “the flaw in the argument...” or “the average man is worried about his job prospects” (Chomsky, 1981 p. 324). The point of these examples is to draw attention to the fact that a referential theory of meaning would imply that there are things in the world that are “flaws” or “the average man”, for the meaning of words on this view is what they refer to.

Hornstein agrees with Chomsky here and states that “no one wishes to argue that there are objects that are average men in any meaningful sense” (2003, p. 147). These examples are designed to show that a referential theory of meaning implies a somewhat strange and absurd ontology where every word we have refers to some real thing in the world. I-language denies that this is the structure of our meaningful expressions. Instead, the context-free linguistic content of our words and sentences provide us with a certain range of perspectives for viewing what we take to be the things in the world (Chomsky, 2000). This range of
perspectives constrains what we can use certain words and phrases to refer to, but it does not fully determine it. In this way, it seems linguistic meaning is ambiguous, but constrained.

Take another example: our word “water” is often assumed to refer to the chemical substance H2O (Putnam, 1975). As in, many would say that, at least in common parlance, water refers to H2O; this is what the word means. However, a closer examination of this reveals the meaning of ‘water’ to be more complex and subtle than it first appears. In fact, when we use the term water, more often than not, the substance we refer to is (chemically) something else entirely, not pure H2O. We would rightly and truly say that it is water that constitutes the River Liffey flowing through Dublin city. Yet, the brown substance that we see can hardly be considered H2O.

Similarly, Chomsky has pointed out that a substance like ice-tea is chemically a lot closer to H2O than River Liffey water. Yet, if we do not call such substances water, and would confuse people if we did.

It must be made clear that this is not to say that we are using the word “water” wrongly, or that our semantics commitments lead us to contradictory beliefs. It is merely to point out that our words do not refer, or connect to the world in an isomorphic way. Word meaning is complex and flexible in a way that denies the possibility of a properly referential semantics. The meaning of a word as simple as “water” seems, when inspected closely, to be rather rich and complex; thus theorizing about linguistic meaning in terms of reference fails to do justice to this rich and complex meaning.

Chomsky has many examples of this sort littered throughout his writings. Briefly, here are some: If I painted my house brown, you will understand me to mean I painted it brown on the outside. That's the default or unmarked case. But I can also say that I painted my house brown on the inside. Again, the meaning of “brown” is not as simple as one would have thought.
Chomsky continues: To climb a mountain is to go up, but you can also climb down the mountain. If I am inside my house I cannot see it (except perhaps through a window if an exterior surface is then visible). I am not near my house if I am inside. One can say “The book I just took out of the library has a red cover, took four years to write, weighs two pounds, and has been translated into several languages”. Or, I can paint the door brown and then walk through it. Further, one can talk of how after the bank lowered interest rates, it burned down and was rebuilt across the street. (Chomsky, 2000).

The point is to highlight the nature of context-free linguistic content. That is, word meanings out of context can offer conflicting perspectives; there is no set of determinate singular referents for our words, even the simplest ones. It seems we have an extremely rich and diverse conception of the things our words refer to and that “infects reference itself making it a highly mediated and contextual notion” (Bilgrami, 2002, p. 2). This tells against the possibility for a useful and theoretical referential semantics.

4.8: Internalism and Truth-Conditional Content

In terms of word meaning Chomsky’s I-language perspective denies the possibility of a systematic referential semantics due to the subtle and complex nature of word meaning. This same point applies analogously to compositional sentence meaning, and thus truth-conditions. Just as word-meaning has been defined by much philosophical work in terms of referents, so too has sentence-meaning been analysed in terms of truth-conditions as an extension of this referential theory of meaning. Words, according to referential theories pick out referents, or things in the world to which they attach; similarly, sentences ‘pick out’ situations that they describe.

Much philosophy of language assumes a direct and necessary connection between the meaning of sentences, and the situations in the world that such sentences describe. Inspired
by Davidson, this is the view of the contemporary Semantic Minimalists (Borg, Cappelen, Lepore), who all argue that complete, declarative sentences, express truth-conditional content. This is the cornerstone of their Minimal Semantics: context-free linguistic meaning is truth-conditional. However, if, as pointed out above, words do not have clear referents, it seems that sentences similarly do not determine truth-conditions. This is because satisfiers for each word would be needed to compositionally construct a truth-conditional analysis of a declarative sentence.

For example, Pietroski mentions the use of phrases like “There are 100 bald men in Dublin” (as well as other predicates, tall, small etc.). What are the truth conditions of this sentence? What external situation does it describe? Well, it seems there is “no single all-purpose standard for what counts as bald”. That is, there is no specific set of bald people. There is a clear and well defined set of all primes less than 1000, but “there is no set of bald things” (Pietroski, 2003, p. 10). The point here is that if there is no clear set of things that are bald, there cannot be a truth-condition for a sentence that contains that word. This is not to take the Contextualist route and disregard a level of minimal context-free content. There is a definite level of compositional linguistic content that guides and constrains what the sentence can mean; we know the sentence is not about long hair, or ice cream. We just don’t know enough, without context, intention, etc., to know what makes it true.

Pietroski also explores a slightly different example in the form of the sentence: “France is hexagonal and it is a republic” (2005, p. 254). Pietroski uses this example to show the interesting interaction of lexicalisation and compositionality on an internalist account of context-free semantics. This is the idea that, since words do not have corresponding referents, they can and do often fit together in ways that the corresponding concepts by themselves do not. Because of the particular meaning of the words “France”, “hexagonal” and “republic” we can construct a true sentence by combining these words even though, when taken out of
context, it may seem quite unusual to refer to something-in-the-world that is both hexagonal and a republic. This nature of lexicalisation and compositionality is a ubiquitous feature of natural language, and one that serves to further draw into question the idea that every sentence has a truth-condition, independent of use. The motivation behind such examples is to show the disjuncture between the meaning of sentences (independent of use/context) and the situations in the world we use them to describe and talk about.

Utterances of the above sentence can be true. Say if someone is discussing the strange idea that the general shape of a country determines its form of government. For this sentence to have determinate truth-conditions there would have to be something in the world that is both hexagonal and republic. Yet, this seems to be odd. Even if one allows that the terrain of France is actually hexagonal, which is debatable, one “might deny that the French terrain is the French republic” (Pietroski, 2005, p. 267). Our words do not match up with reality in a neat and tidy manner as assumed by truth conditional “semantics”; and this is what we would expect given a conception of semantics as a property of an internal language faculty.

Again, the idea is that on a truth-conditional “semantics”, sentences would have elementary implications that competent speakers evidently do not recognise. If we just take it that “France” refers to some physical object and this is the extent of its semantic properties, then we may obscure significant distinctions that a semantic theory should highlight.

Similarly, if we focus on the state of affairs the sentence describes in the world, we may miss out on the subtle nature of linguistic meaning. The point is, we should stop focusing on the referent or truth-conditions of words and sentences and focus more on “the things we use ‘France’ to talk about and more on what properties of ‘France’ make it possible for us to use a name of this sort in the ways we do use such names” (Pietroski, 2005, p. 269).
4.9: Conclusion: Internalism and Radicalism

Ultimately, the purpose of this section was to add further support to the idea that context-free, linguistic content is *not* truth-conditional. This section focused on supporting this separation of context-free linguistic meaning from truth-conditional content by drawing on the perspective of cognitive science and linguistics.

It was Borg who took the Contextualism/Minimalism debate in a new direction when she invoked the modularity of mind thesis. She stated that further reason for adopting her version of Minimalism was because it was best suited to fit with a modular account of our linguistic abilities, particularly in comparison to Contextualism. However, there was a problem with Borg's combination of Minimalism and modularity: she maintained that context-free, compositional linguistic content was truth-conditional, yet nowhere in a modular account of mind does it state or imply that such a module must deal only in truth-conditional entities. Borg stated when discussing the connection between modularity and truth-conditional content: "They (arguments for modularity) do not on their own suffice to show that those semantic processes must also involve the derivation of truth-conditional or propositional content" (2007, p 108).

Furthermore, if our language abilities are indeed governed by such a module, or at least a specific part of our brains, what does this say about the connection between linguistic meaning and truth-conditions? What does the internalist conception of human language have to say about the relationship between context-free compositional linguistic content and truth-conditions?

It was with these questions in mind that I explored further the idea of an internalist conception of language and what it means for truth-conditional content. Thus, building on Borg's invocation of modularity, it was necessary to examine properly what is entailed in an
internalist conception of language, how this conception was different from the traditional philosophical approach.

The conclusion I reached was that from an I-language perspective, formal linguistic meaning is simply not characterised as a language-world relation. That is, the meanings of our words and sentences have traditionally (particularly within the philosophical tradition) been defined in terms of referents and truth-conditions; i.e., in terms of their relation to things out in the world. However, once one adopts an I-language approach and acknowledges the possibility that human language is internal and individual it becomes clear that it is a mistake to assume that compositional linguistic meaning would "match-up" with our grasp of truth-conditions in such a systematically theorizable way. A close examination of certain uses of words and sentences shows that their meanings are far more subtle and complex than would need to be the case if they were to attach to things (or situations) in the world in a one to one manner.

Thus, approaching the issue of whether context-free, linguistic content is truth-conditional from an I-language/Linguistics perspective offers further evidence that it seems unlikely. For this thesis, it means that the Contextualists were right to be sceptical about a fully systematic and truth-conditional formal "semantics". This is not to say that Contextualism is the correct approach to studies of linguistic meaning, however. As stated by Chomsky and Pietroski, the criticism of a referential, or truth-conditional "semantics" does not imply pessimism for the possibility of a context-free theory of linguistic meaning. It just means that such a theory will not be a theory of truth-conditions. Like Radicalism, Internalism argues that this level of recursive, compositional content is an essential characteristic of human language and is in need of examination. Words and sentences, independent of use, have meanings, even if these meanings do not seem to be fully determinate in terms of truth-conditional analysis.
Conclusion.

The previous four chapters of this thesis have been an attempt to establish an argument for a certain view of the roles of and relationship between semantic and pragmatic content in the determination of linguistic meaning. That view I have labelled Radicalism. The argument was broadly structured around two sections.

The first section (Chapters 1-3) was a critical analysis of the two dominant theories within the existing literature: Contextualism and Minimalism. Through this critical analysis, while appreciating the fact that each view does account for some important characteristics of human language, I highlighted the mistakes each makes and thus, created the space for Radicalism to exist. I then articulated what exactly constituted Radicalism’s position within the semantics/pragmatics debate.

The second section (Ch 4, Part I, and II), inspired by Emma Borg’s attempt to support her Semantic Minimalism by appeal to the Modularity of Mind thesis, argued that Radicalism is in fact the most explanatorily consistent view with a modular account of our brains; even more so than Borg’s Minimalism. This then raised questions about Internalist accounts of human language and how such accounts relate to this debate within the philosophy of language. Further examination of Internalist accounts of human language, found in linguistics and cognitive science, revealed that such an approach also compliments, to a high degree, the picture of semantics/pragmatics articulated by Radicalism.

Radicalism retains a clear boundary between a context-free semantics and a use-based pragmatics. Semantic content, for Radicalism, is determined in full by the lexical elements of a sentence, together with their syntactic mode of composition. In this way, semantics remains
the study of the compositional, systematic, recursive and theoretically tractable aspects of human language. Pragmatics then, remains the study of that meaning which is invoked at the point of use. That is, it is meaning expressed by the act of speaking, in a certain context. However, Radicalism departs from traditional approaches to semantic/pragmatic issues by allowing that context-free sentence meaning often falls short of fully determining what we mean, or wish to communicate when we use sentences; even when such sentences are being used literally. Thus, according to Radicalism, pragmatic information (information not found in the lexico-syntax of a sentence) is far more central to establishing truth-conditional content than once assumed.

Ultimately, then, this brings us to the defining claim of Radicalism. That is, the one particular claim that sets it apart from the other views found throughout the literature, from Minimalism to Contextualism. That claim is the following: that semantics, while fully determined by the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence, is not truth-conditional. Radicalism supports the idea of a sub-propositional semantics.

Both Contextualists, and Minimalists, are adamant that "semantics" – whatever else it is – is truth-conditional. That is, they both argue that a "semantic" theory deals in propositional contents.

For Contextualists, the desire to uphold a "truth-conditional semantics" leads them to dissolve the clear border between the "semantic" and the "pragmatic" and neglect the theoretically tractable, systematic level of context-free content. For them, there is pragmatic information – non-syntactically mandated information – involved in establishing truth-conditional "semantic" content. Thus, for them, "semantic" content is defined as the first intuitive literal proposition expressed by an utterance of a sentence that is consciously available to the hearer.
Minimalists, on the other hand, subscribe to the idea that the context-free linguistic content of sentence is properly truth-conditional. Thus, they maintain the traditional idea of “semantic” content as being context-free, compositional content and truth-conditional. That is, even in the face of underdetermination and incompleteness arguments (sentences containing expressions such as “ready”, tall’, “enough”, “continue” etc.), Minimalists argue for a full and complete truth-conditional level of context-free content. They do allow that this minimal content is often not what is meant or communicated by the utterance of a sentence, but nonetheless maintain its autonomy as a fully truth-conditional level of meaning.

Radicalism disagrees with both Contextualists and Minimalists on this issue. It maintains the traditional conception of a context-free “semantics”, but rejects the idea that this content is truth-conditional. Thus, according to Radicalism, the output of a semantic theory does not provide a set of truth-conditions for every declarative sentence in some language. This is not to say that there is no such thing as a theory of context-free linguistic meaning; it is only to say that such a theory is not a theory of truth-conditions.

**Radicalism Vs Contextualism.**

In terms of Contextualism, the dispute between it and Radicalism has been described by some (Borg, 2007, 2012, Cappelen and Lepore, 2005) as merely terminological, or that they are the same views with differing goals and interests. This is due to the fact that each view seems to essentially be in agreement over the particular levels of content, even if they label them differently and differ on the roles of such content in the interpretation process. They both agree that there exists some level of content purely determined by the formal elements of a sentence, that is, the lexico-syntactic components of an expression. They both agree that this level of content often times falls short of expressing truth-conditional content. Thus, they are in agreement that in order to establish the truth-conditional content expressed
by an utterance of a sentence, pragmatic information is needed. Finally, they agree that post-propositional implicatures (metaphor, irony, sarcasm, etc.) are a matter of pragmatics.

However, they disagree on how exactly to label such levels of content. As mentioned, Contextualists wish to label the second level of content “semantic” content as it is the first fully truth-conditional level of content available to the interlocutors. Radicalism maintains instead that it is the first, compositionally determined, context-free level of content that is “semantic”, with what comes after being a matter of pragmatics.

Yet, this disagreement over how to label certain levels of content belies a more fundamental disagreement between the two over the nature of linguistic meaning and our ability to perform a theoretical analysis of such meaning.

The problem with Contextualism is that they disregard the context-independent level of content simply because it fails to express truth-conditional content. By “disregard” I mean that they state that such a level of content “is an idle wheel in the overall theory of language and communication” (Recanati, 2006, p. 72). Further, they claim that “the notion of ‘what the sentence says’ incoherent” (Recanati, 2004, p. 4). The Contextualists then are interested in examining what exactly the contributions of context are in the process of establishing truth-conditional content. They look at certain sentences and say that the real “semantic” content (what is said) is established by adding some piece of information, by a process of loosening, enrichment, transfer, etc. To this end, they do away with the conventional, compositional aspects of linguistic analysis.

Radicalism, along with Minimalism, disagrees with this approach to the study of human language and accuses Contextualism of mistakenly trying to systematize something that is unsystematizable. Fundamentally, Radicalism disagrees with the idea that just because the context-invariant level of content is less than truth-conditional, it should be disregarded as
an idle wheel or that notions of conventional sentence meaning are incoherent. It is inherently characteristic of human language that it displays certain characteristics and it is essential that an analysis of our language accounts for these characteristics. The characteristics I am referring to are things like productivity and systematicity. That is the idea that we, as normal speakers, can understand an indefinite number of novel sentences and that our linguistic understanding has a systematic character. This is evident in the fact that, in the words of Borg:

A subject who understands ‘Bill loves Jill’ will also, ceteris paribus, understand ‘Jill loves Bill’. This ability to understand sentences we have never encountered before and to manipulate and reconstruct words to form novel yet meaningful arrangements would be explained if the semantic content of sentences was fully determined by the meanings of words and their modes of syntactic composition. This is the constraint of compositionality and although exactly how it should be spelt out is a tendentious matter, still it seems to point to a need for a discrete, recursively definable and essentially context-independent level of semantic content. (2012, p. 6).

The idea that this level of meaning should be captured in linguistic analysis is a fundamental difference between Radicalism and Contextualism. Also, the possibility that such a level of content is underpinned by a specific module in our brains further suggests that it exists as an autonomous level of meaningful content.

However, there are some further points of direct disagreement between the two; enough to clearly show that their differences are, ultimately, more than terminological. As discussed in Chapter 1, Contextualists destroy the distinction between saying something and meaning something. They do this because they take the intuitive truth-conditional content of
an utterance (what it is usually used to mean) as “what is said”. While they are correct to state that the sentence “Jane can't continue” is usually used to mean something more specific, like “Jane can’t continue University”, this does not mean that there no longer exists a distinction between two levels of content. A person says one thing, and thereby communicates something else. This, it seems, is how we use sentences to communicate and such a distinction (saying/meaning) should be accounted for in a theory of human language.

Also, the very idea that one can establish the difference between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional content is questionable. That is, while Contextualists are right to argue that many grammatical sentences do not seem truth-conditional, they are wrong to assume that adding some piece of contextual information suddenly makes them so. For, as shown by Cappelen and Lepore, there can always be extra information added to a sentence, or its completion, in order to establish a more fully descriptive level of truth-conditional content. That is, even the Contextualists supposed “completions” can be completed further. Borg also agrees when she states that “it is not as though we have a clear criterion of proposition-hood waiting in the wings by whose lights that Flintoff is ready is ruled clearly sub propositional while the Flintoff is ready to bowl is ruled clearly propositional” (2012, p. 105).

This is the nature of truth-conditional meaning. It is a word-world connection that can always be made more specific. There is no such thing as a maximally specific proposition, regardless of whether or not there are free pragmatic processes involved.

This brings us to the idea that what Contextualists are attempting to do – theorize and systematize the influence of context on linguistic meaning – may not be possible. This line of criticism comes from Wittgenstein originally, and is then taken up by Chomsky. The idea is that attempting to theorize over how we invoke contextual information in the interpretation process borders on attempting a theory of everything. It seems that the complex, holistic and
perhaps rather nebulous nature of pragmatics does not lend itself to a scientific analysis. Nor does the nature of truth-conditions; for as shown, there are no clear criteria for individuating when content becomes truth-conditional, and when it is not. Thus, Radicalism wishes to separate out those aspects of language that do seem candidates for a theoretical analysis and those that do not. Contextualism runs over this distinction in pursuit of truth-conditional content, and this is a mistake.

While there are points of agreement between Radicalism and Contextualism (as there are between all the views within this literature), there are significant fundamental differences; certainly enough to warrant them being considered independent approaches to issues of linguistic analysis.

Radicalism Vs Semantic Minimalism

When it comes to Minimalism, however, the dispute becomes more interesting, and directly confrontational. Again, as with Contextualism, there are large points of overlap between Radicalism and Minimalism. In fact, Radicalism agrees with all but one of the four pillars of Minimalism as outlined by Borg (2012, p.4), but also found, more or less, in the work of Cappelen and Lepore.\(^{20}\) The four pillars of Minimalism are as follows:

(i) Semantic content for well-formed declarative sentences is truth-evaluable content.

(ii) Semantic content for a sentence is fully determined by its syntactic structure and lexical content: the meaning of a sentence is exhausted by the meaning of its parts and their mode of composition.

(iii) There are only a limited number of context-sensitive expressions in natural language.

\(^{20}\) Cappelen and Lepore decline to use the terminology of 'propositions' in their account, and stick with 'truth-conditional'. Borg, however, equates a proposition with that which has truth-conditions.
Recovery of semantic content is possible without access to current speaker intentions (crudely, grasp of semantic content involves 'word reading' not 'mindreading').

Radicalism is on board with all but the first of these principles. That is, it disagrees that the context-free content of sentences is truth-evaluable content. This is, essentially, the only substantial difference between Minimalism and Radicalism: whether or not the conventional, context-independent meaning of a sentence is truth-conditional.

On an intuitive first glance, or to an outside observer, it seems that the idea of relaxing the claim that sentences necessarily express truth-conditional content (as Radicalism does) would solve a lot of problems for Minimalism. It would maintain a context-invariant "semantics" free from contextual or pragmatic effects not syntactically mandated. Thus, preserving the clear distinction between two types of linguistic content. It would allow for the recursive, systematic, and compositional aspects to be theoretically captured and so on.

It seems that Borg herself in "Semantics without Pragmatics" is even aware of this fact. She states that

many of the motivations we gave for wanting a context-free semantics at the start of this chapter seem to require only that there be some element of linguistic meaning which is context-insensitive, not that that context-insensitive element take us all the way to a truth-evaluable proposition. Or again, we might think that concerns about needing a context-insensitive, literal content to serve as 'fallback' content points only to the need for some context-insensitive content, not necessarily for that something to be as rich as a complete proposition (2011, p. 525).
However, even in the face of this seemingly attractive solution to a number of issues, Minimalists are adamant that a sub-propositional, or non-truth-conditional semantics is simply not a viable option.

The question then becomes, why do Minimalists maintain that a non-truth-conditional, formal "semantics" is not a viable option? In other words, why is it that Minimalists argue that in order to capture, or theorize over a context-invariant level of content, this level of content must necessarily express truth-conditions?

Firstly, it seems that to a large extent the reason Minimalists give for defending this view in the face of semantic-underdetermination and incompleteness arguments is that it is an assumption inherited from their ancestors in the Formal Semantics tradition: the likes of Frege, Russell, Davidson, and Grice. As Borg states in the preface to Pursuing Meaning: “The minimalist wants to preserve the idea that semantics trades in truth-evaluable content” (my emphasis) (2012, p. X), and how this assumption of truth-conditionality is one of two claims “directly inherited from the general school of formal semantics (to which minimalism belongs)” (2012, p. 2). She goes on to say also that the truth-conditional approach is, according to her, “simply that already enshrined in the general formal approach to semantics extant in the work of theorists like the early Wittgenstein, Frege, Russell, Carnap, Davidson, and Kaplan (among many others)” (2012, p. 5).

Kent Bach also characterizes this claim of truth-conditional formal semantics as such an assumption when he states, about Radcialism that “like Contextualism it rejects Propositionalism, the conservative dogma that every indexical-free declarative sentence expresses a proposition” (2006, p. 1).

Radcialism starts out its investigation into the role of different types of content in human language and communication without making this assumption. That is, without just
simply assuming that the output of compositionally determined sentence meaning must be a level of content that is truth-conditional. It seems the Minimalists, in staying loyal to the tradition of formal semantics, take the idea of a truth-conditional minimal semantics as their starting point and then go about defending this claim from various attacks.

Radicalism rejects this starting point and opts for another. Radicalism takes as its guiding motivation the idea that in a proper analysis of human language, from a philosophical perspective, we need to account for two things: (1) a level of context-invariant content that is determined simply by word meaning and structure, and, (2) a level of significantly pragmatically enriched propositional content to deliver what the speaker actually conveys in a given context. With this in mind, it takes the explanada of “semantic” theory to be that level of context-invariant, compositional content. It is this most fundamental assumption about the motivation for discussing phenomena related to “semantic” and “pragmatic” content that Radicalism takes as its starting point: “semantic” theory targets invariance in linguistic structure.

After this, in the words of Kent Bach, Radicalism lets “the propositional chips fall where they may” (Bach, 2006, p. 9). That is to say, again, that it does not assume certain levels of content express truth-conditions.

Let us remove the dogmatic assumption that every sentence expresses a proposition and look at linguistic meaning independently of this claim. The idea then is for “semantic” content to have all the qualities the Minimalists wish it to have, without the burden of being truth-conditional.

This then, brings us to the second, more prominent, motivation Minimalists have for defending a notion of a truth-conditional, context-free semantics. That is, they argue that
without maintaining a fully truth-conditional account of context-free content, we risk descent into a total use-based account of meaning, and this is unacceptable.

Cappelen and Lepore call this their “argument by elimination”. This is the idea that there are only two options available: Radical contextualist, use-based accounts, or their Semantic Minimalism. And since they are convinced that they have shown Radical Contextualism to be mistaken, their account is the only game in town. They state also: “That there is a proposition semantically expressed is presupposed by any coherent account of linguistic communication, i.e., accounts which fail to recognize a semantically expressed proposition . . . are incoherent’ (2005, p. 144).

Similarly, Borg argues that “without propositionalism, minimalism risks imminent collapse into one of its competitor accounts, for the claim becomes the weak one that while some element of content is recoverable on the basis of lexicon and syntax alone, there is no reason to think that what this determines is a complete proposition” (2012, p. xiv). She goes on to describe how it is essential for minimalism to “hold-fast to the idea that what a semantic theory trades in is truth-evaluable, propositional items” in order to offer a genuine alternative to competitors.

On this view, they are forced into defending a truth-conditional account of context-invariant semantics because without it they believe they will be left “all at sea in pragmatic space”. In this way, I argue, that Minimalists conflate two separate points: the capturing of a theoretically tractable level of compositionally determined linguistic content, and the ability of such a level of content to express truth-conditional content. They disregard the possibility of capturing this theoretically tractable level of content if it is not also truth-conditional. Without such truth-conditional content, they say, the only option is use-based radical contextualism. In this way, one of the main reasons they give for upholding a truth-
conditional, minimal semantics is a negative one: the (supposed) only alternative is unacceptable.

Logically, this is clearly not a good reason to think that the lexico-syntactic content of sentences is necessarily truth-conditional. Borg herself is aware of this fact when she states: “However, this kind of ad hominem argument is clearly no objection to the move to treat semantics as truly context-free but also as sub-propositional” (2011, p. 526). However, it does force those who support Radicalism to explain – that is, to provide an account of – a context-invariant level of content that is not truth-conditional. That is, a sub-propositional, sub-truth-conditional semantics. Does a sub-truth-conditional formal semantics suffice to capture and theorise over the autonomous, rule-governed, compositional aspects of natural language?

Recall, firstly, the arguments from the previous chapter concerning the Modularity thesis of mind. What I showed with such arguments was the following conditional statement: *If* it is the case that our linguistic abilities are underpinned by a specific mental module (and there is good reason to think this might be the case) then all this guarantees is that there exists *some* level of compositionally determined lexico-syntactic content; not that this level of content is necessarily truth-conditional. The argument from Modularity, used by Borg in an attempt to support her Minimal Semantics, actually serves to support Radicalism. For what the modularity argument shows is that it is likely there is distinctly formal aspect to our linguistic abilities, but it is unlikely this ability only trades in truth-conditional content. For, it seems truth-conditions and the expression of propositions in communication is the exact type of thing that is not modular, i.e. it seems to be more global, abductive reasoning. So this supports the claim of a sub-truth-conditional formal semantics.
However, once the definition of “semantic” content gives up on the idea of trading in truth-conditional contents, it loses the tidy and convenient idea of an encapsulated, specifiable theory of meaning. That is, a theory which for every sentence there is a truth-condition that gives its meaning (“Jane can’t continue” is true iff Jane can’t continue). If this is no longer what a “semantic” theory does, then the question Radicalism must answer is: what is a “semantic” theory without truth-conditions?

The answer to this question comes from the confluence of Radicalism and Internalism: an approach to linguistic analysis found in linguistics and cognitive science. By drawing on work being done in Internalism, it is possible for Radicalism to flesh out the possible work a sub-truth-conditional semantics might do. In this way, Radicalism can highlight how such an approach to context-free linguistic content can bear the explanatory burden that a “semantic” theory should.

As outlined in the last chapter, Internalism takes a view of semantics that separates it from the externalist notions of truth and reference; it severs this once long assumed connection between meaning and the world. Of course, it does not deny that we use words and sentences to refer to things in the world and say things that are true and false, but it does deny that the concepts of reference and truth are fundamental to a theory of meaning. On such a view, “semantics” is an internalist enterprise concerned with linguistic expressions and the minds that generate them, not the study of symbol to world relations. According to Paul Pietroski, “sentences are products of innate, modular systems and have truth-conditions only by virtue of their relation to other cognitive systems and the environment” (2003, p. 2). So on such a view, “To think that content is only genuinely semantic if grasp of it brings substantial, non-disquotational knowledge of worlds is, the response might go, to impose a condition on semantic theory it is constitutionally unable to meet” (Borg, 2009, p. 35).
This view of semantics can be accommodated by Radicalism alone, for it too states that semantic content attaches to sentences and is determined exclusively by lexico-syntactic content and is free from optional pragmatic effects and intentional description, and is not necessarily truth-conditional. Internalists agree with Radicalism that the output of a semantic theory will be something like a propositional fragment or “truth-indication” (Chomsky 1996, p. 52). A truth-indication here, like Bach’s propositional radical, is that which constrains and guides the possible truth-conditions of a sentence without fully determining it. This is the contribution such content makes to truth-conditional content.

Beyond these fundamental similarities, however, Internalism can also bear the explanatory burden of a “semantics” without truth-conditions. How does it do this? It does so by pointing out the specific facts that a semantic theory should be concerned with explaining. That is, on an internalist approach to semantics there are certain facts and phenomena that are in need of explanation; and these facts are not concerned with truth-conditions or issuing T-sentences. Internalism shows a semantic theory can do work without being concerned with how words and sentences hook up to the world.

For example, there are what Chomsky calls “negative facts” (Chomsky, 1970, 1977, 1981, 1986). Negative facts refer to the idea that there are certain interpretations that a linguistic construction cannot have. This is the case even though ambiguity is ubiquitous in natural language. Such negative facts – the specific interpretations that constructions cannot have – require semantic explanation. For, it is an interesting aspect of some sentences that while they can be interpreted in various ways, it is clear that some ways are simply off limits. This is a concern about how certain lexical items interact with one another, not about how these items interact with the world or how we use them.
Take the example, from Chomsky where we examine the contrast between (4) and (5),

(4) John is easy to please

(5) John is eager to please

which can be paraphrased with (4a) and (5a), but not with (4b) and (5b).

(4a) It is easy for us to please John

(4b) #It is easy for John to please us

(5a) John is eager that he please us

(5b) #John is eager for us to please him

Speakers are aware of these possible interpretations for these sentences, and the fact that people are aware that seemingly similar sentences have very specific possible interpretations is interesting, semiantically. For, there is no “general prohibition against ambiguity in natural language. Lexical ambiguity is ubiquitous” (Pietroski, 2005, p. 256). There must be something within the lexico-syntactic content of these sentences that determines how they can be used: they are ambiguous, yet constrained. And this is a semantically interesting fact for linguistic analysis.

A proper semantic analysis should capture the idea that the meaning of “easy” is lexicalized so that when this word combines with “to please” and “John” certain constraints on grammatical structure and compositional semantics conspire to ensure that John is said to be an individual who is easily pleased; while the meaning of “eager” is lexicalized such that when it combines with the same, John is said to be an individual who is eager to be a pleaser (Pietroski, 2005, p. 263-4). These are the types of facts that a semantic theory should be
interested in analysing: how lexical items interact with syntactic composition in natural language. The externalist, truth-conditional approach of stating that “easy means EASY” or “x satisfies easy iff x is easy” or even “John is easy to please” is true iff John is easy to please offers nothing in the way of an explanation of the subtle differences between these terms. Again, it is not to say that such axioms are untrue; only that they serve to gloss over the interesting, yet subtle facts about context-free content.

Furthermore, there is the behaviour of verbs, surveyed by another prominent internalist, Steven Pinker (2007, p. 103-107). The idea here, again, is to give some examples of specific linguistic phenomena that can analysed and explained with recourse to a referential or truth-conditional semantics. One such example is conative constructions, such as “Jill cut at the rope”. Some expressions can “participate in the conative form, while others resist it” (Borg, 2012, p. 169). For example, “I kicked at the dog”, or “He hit at the cat” whereas, some do not, such as “Nancy touched at the cat”. It seems that some verbs can take the conative form (combining the verb with “at”) and some cannot. Pinker states that this is because “the eligible verbs signify a kind of motion resulting in a kind of contact” (2007, p. 103). That is, it matters to verbs like “hit” or “kick” that there is a kind of motion before the contact, whereas verbs like “touch” or “break” are not sensitive in this way.

The idea behind examples of this sort is to show that there are certain linguistic phenomena for which the notions of reference and truth-conditions offer nothing in the way of explanation. Not only are such externalist notions (truth, reference) unnecessary for analysis of these linguistic phenomena, but an externalist semantics would be incapable of revealing the complex interactions of lexical items.

That is, there are non arbitrary patterns of syntactic distribution for natural language expressions and these are the kinds of things that we expect a semantic theory to explain:
phenomena concerned with the interaction of lexicalisation and compositional syntax. And, a theory that treats the meanings of words and sentences as exhausted by their denotational or truth-conditional contents will not be capable of capturing these specific, subtle patterns. Again, it seems for these examples that a less-than truth-conditional, context-free semantics is not only capable of doing "semantic" work, but is better equipped than a truth-conditional account to deal with certain linguistic phenomena.

There are also the intuitively semantic relations of synonymy, polysemy, and analyticity. One would expect a semantic theory to have something to say about such phenomena. Take synonymy, for example: showing that "bachelor" means the same as "unmarried man". When two terms are synonymous we should expect a semantic theory to be explanatory. Yet, again, an externalist theory of word-denotation pairs offers little in the way of explanation here. For, two words can have the same extension (as synonyms necessarily do) and still not be synonyms, e.g. cordate and renate. Again, an externalist explanation misses the interesting aspects of interesting linguistic relations.

The point of these examples is not to exhaust all the possible lines of inquiry for a semantic theory. It is, however, to show that a context-free semantics is capable of examining how these elements interact to give specific, meaningful interpretations, without recourse to whether or not these constructions are truth-conditional. It is to show that there are "semantic" facts in need of explanation, and such an explanation need not concern itself with whether or not certain constructions match our intuitive grasp of truth-conditions.

By combining the philosophical approach of Radicalism with Internalist linguistics, there emerges a picture of the semantics/pragmatics divide that captures and respects the aspects of language that are formal, compositional and systematic, while also appreciating the role of context in the determination of propositional or truth-conditional meaning. In this
way, Radicalism accommodates the driving motivations of both Minimalism and Contextualism while also appreciating the work of linguistics when it comes to analysis of human language.

*Borg’s Responses.*

Borg does attempt to respond to a number of these criticisms in her new book *Pursuing Meaning*. Like her previous book *Minimal Semantics*, this too is an argument for her version of a lexico-syntactically determined truth-conditional semantics. However, this time she is aware of the internalist arguments and attempts to respond to them. I will argue in the closing section here that her responses fail.

*The Proper Condition on Truth-conditional Content.*

Firstly, in response to the overwhelming number of incompleteness arguments found throughout the literature, Borg attempts to articulate what exactly is the *proper* condition on truth-conditional content. This is a necessary move from the Minimalist because, throughout the literature, the overwhelming intuitive response to sentence like “Jane is tall/can’t continue/has had enough” is that they do not express truth-conditional content, i.e. they are propositionally incomplete. Yet, Minimalists are alone in defending the idea that sentence meaning is necessarily truth-conditional. She asks, what exactly is the condition on “genuine” semantic content? By “genuine” here she means propositional or truth-conditional. Let’s leave the dispute over the term “semantic” to one side and take it that Borg is seeking to examine what is the condition on minimal truth-conditional content.

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*I take “genuine” for Borg to mean truth-conditional. For me, genuine semantic content is simply that which is exclusively determined by the lexicon and syntax.*
She outlines three possible options. The first is the simple idea that a genuine proposition must be such that someone who grasps it must know, for any possible world, whether it is satisfied (true) in that world.

However, it seems that, at first glance, this criterion is too strong, for no sentence, no matter how long or informative could ever reach such a standard. That is, only a maximally specific content, one that describes the world with no room for ambiguity or vagueness, could do such a thing. And, we have no reason to think that the literal meanings of sentences express maximally specific propositions.

Secondly then, Borg proffers a weaker version of the link between grasp of content and ability to sort worlds. This time, she states that "a genuine proposition, \( p \), must equip someone who grasps it with the ability to tell for some large number of possible worlds whether or not \( p \) is satisfied in those worlds" (2012, p. 108). "Some apple is red" would sort worlds into those in which some apple is red in some way, and worlds where every apple is not red in any way. On this example, one can see we would have quite a large number of worlds on either side. If the sentence was changed to "Some apple is red on its skin only", then we would have a more "fine-grained" sorting of worlds, and so on the more specific the sentence gets.

However, one might worry that such an approach wrongly attempts to ground a difference in kind – between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional – on a difference in degree, i.e. the number of possibilities it allows a subject to evaluate. Borg states how we would really need strong independent evidence to pick a specific point on the degree axis and assume it separates the truth-conditional from the non-truth-conditional, and since intuitions obviously vary so much within this debate, settling on a specific point does not seem likely.
So far, Borg rejects the aforementioned possible conditions on proper or genuine truth-conditional content as being too strong, or too arbitrary. However, she puts forward a third condition in the hopes of thusly allowing her minimal contents to express said content. This third condition is different from the other two for this condition is "not one concerned with what it tells the subject (i.e. not one about the world sorting abilities it endows on someone who grasps it)" (2012, p. 108). Instead this condition is concerned exclusively with whether or not the minimal content sorts worlds appropriately, regardless of whether or not a subject has the ability to track this sorting in every case.

On this approach "a proposition p must suffice to determine for every possible world whether p is true or not in that world", regardless of whether the hearer grasps such conditions (2012, p. 108). Now Borg admits immediately that this condition is also too strong, for even if you remove the connection between knowledge of meaning and knowledge truth-conditions, there is still the issue of vagueness in word meaning that simply make it impossible for a context-independent sentence to sort worlds to such a maximally specific degree. However, putting this fact to one side, she proceeds to argue that the basic idea is one the Minimalist should embrace. For, she argues, minimal contents (literal sentence meanings) do sort worlds effectively even though a subject who grasps such content "may have to do more work to tell which worlds are sorted in which way" (2012, p. 109).

Recall, this is quite similar to the approach advocated by Cappelen and Lepore in their minimalist manifesto Inertive Semantics. For they too stated that questions of truth-conditionality are, at root, metaphysical questions. In that it is not an issue of "grasp" or "knowledge" of conditions. That is, sentences just have truth-conditions necessarily, and any intuition of incompleteness we may have is to do with the metaphysics of how things can share a common property. For example, "Todd is ready" is true iff Todd is ready gives the truth-conditions for that sentence. Any felt inability to evaluate this content for truth-
conditions is a metaphysical worry, not a semantic one. That is, the question of ‘readiness’
and what makes a thing ‘ready’ is a question for metaphysicians to answer, not semanticists.
It is a question about how objects can “can share the same property or engage in the same

This kind of reasoning from Borg and C&L is akin to Williamson’s work on vague
predicates, where he argues that there is an actual fact of the matter about what constitutes
people who are bald from those who are not, but such facts are epistemically closed to us.
Similarly, there is a fact of the matter about the truth-conditions for the sentence “Jane can’t
continue” (it determines worlds where it is true and worlds where it is not) but, Borg’s
approach allows that this fact of the matter may “be unknown to an agent who both fully
comprehends the literal meaning of the sentence and is in a position to assess the relevant
state of affairs” (Borg, 2012, p. 109).

Unlike Williamson’s theory on vague predicates, however, on Borg’s view one can in
principle discover what the fact of the matter is by further investigation the meaning of the
expressions involved, e.g. seeking out what exactly is meant by “continue” in this case, etc.
In this way, Borg argues, minimal contents are fully truth-conditional. For while they may
fail to give the hearer a grasp of the conditions that would make them true or false, they
nonetheless sort worlds accordingly. In this way, Borg responds to incompleteness arguments
and argues that it doesn’t matter about our intuitions or “grasp” of the content, for sentences
just sort worlds (determine truth-conditions) regardless of what we know, and this is a
sufficient condition on genuine propositional content to make minimal contents necessarily
truth-conditional.

The problem here is that Borg simply eschews the very notion of truth-conditions that
is at issue within this debate, and as used by Contextualists and others. In a bid to show that
minimal contents do in fact have truth-conditions, she, essentially, loosens the criterion for truth-conditionality until minimal contents fit the bill, by removing any condition of “grasp of content”. That is, she severs the connection between knowledge of truth-conditions and knowledge of meaning.

What seems to be at issue is whether a theory of meaning, taken as (involving) a theory of truth-conditions, should also be a theory of understanding—that is, should be a theory of what one needs to know in order to understand a sentence. In her commitment to taking the theory of meaning to provide a theory of truth-conditions, Borg no longer holds that such a theory provides us with a theory of understanding (since she seems to hold that we can, and in general do, understand the sentences in question without knowing or grasping their specific truth-conditions).

Fundamentally, Borg’s argument above is as follows: minimal contents just have truth-conditions whether we can grasp them or not. However, it is our very grasp of them that is up for debate in the first place.

The central idea of a truth-conditional semantics is the idea that “if we know the truth-conditions of a sentence, then we know which state of affairs in the world must hold for the sentence to be true, and that means we are able to specify that state of affairs” (Recanati, 2004, 92-3). To know what a sentence means is to know what it is for that sentence to be true. This is the conception of truth-conditions that has motivated the entire Contextualist offensive against traditional views of “semantics” and “pragmatics”. For it is the exact intuition that many sentences seem to fall short of expressing this kind of content that motivates the desire to re-examine the border between the types of content. It was assumed traditionally that one could grasp truth-conditions through formal means, but semantic underdetermination brought this connection into question. Borg is fully aware of the inability
of the minimal context-free content to express this kind of determinate content. As she says, “conditions based on what grasp of a proposition or truth-condition ought to allow a subject to do will be ones which minimal contents runs the risk of failing to meet” (2012, p. 110).

Instead of accepting that there may be a gap between context-free linguistic meaning and truth-conditional content, she alters the idea of what truth-conditions are supposed to do. Of course, if one chooses to define truth-conditions as something that sentences have, no matter what our intuitions, then it is difficult to disagree. By Borg’s definition of truth-conditions, the truth-conditions of a sentence transcend our understanding and interpretation of that sentence; they exist, out there in metaphysical space but are closed to our understanding until we seek out further contextual clues.

Jason Stanley accuses Minimalists of the same when he says, “Speaker intuitions about truth and falsity of sentences relative to contexts are the evidential basis for hypothesis about meaning. Minimal semantics severs the data of the theory of meaning from its hypotheses, rendering the semantic project a tapestry of idle speculation” (2007, p. 11).

This does seem to be the kind of move one would make if one’s goal was to defend a certain assumption (minimal truth-conditional semantics) inherited from previous theorists. Again one wonders, if Borg approached this question of truth-conditions without such an assumption, would she have articulated the same condition for genuine truth-conditional content? It is doubtful.

Ultimately, the move by Borg to sever the connection between knowledge of meaning and knowledge of truth-conditions is untenable: for, they become trivial and explanatorily redundant.
Truth-conditions and a Scientific approach to Linguistic Analysis.

The second response Borg puts forward in her new book is a response to the argument from Internalism that externalist notions of truth and reference cannot figure in a proper science of language. As mentioned, Internalism defines semantic content as that which is determined by the lexico-syntactic elements of a sentence independent of context. However, like Radicalism, Internalism also states that this level of content is not truth-conditional, as truth is something that occurs at the point of use and is subject to a range of factors that do not lend themselves to scientific or theoretical analysis. As Pietroski puts it: “making truth-evaluable assertions is one of the things we can do with sentences, in contexts, though uses of this kind are highly variable; while people refer to things, words don’t; and sentence use may not be a theoretically tractable phenomenon” (2005, p. 2). Thus, Internalism, like Radicalism, also supports a context-free semantics, that does not express truth-conditional content.

Borg attempts to confront this point by arguing that Minimalists can agree with Chomsky about how a purely scientific account of such common sense categorisations (truth and reference) is impossible and yet “still hold that that the vocabulary of common sense could play a role in a genuinely scientific explanation of linguistic abilities” (2012, p. 44). She goes on again to state that an externalist can “accept Chomsky’s claims about the requirements of science and the nature of ordinary objects of reference without being forced to accept the conclusion that a science of language must be blind to commonsense categorisations” (2012, p. 44).

She does this by “bracketing” the properties appealed to by common sense categories separately from issues about what makes something instantiate this property (with this latter issue being a potentially non-scientific, interest-relative matter) (2012, p. 45). The idea here is that a compositional semantic theory may trade in our common sense categories, but do so
without having to enter into explanation about what constitutes these categories. So, the axiom "London buses are red" means that London buses are red, is a perfectly acceptable theory of meaning; but the theory does not need to enter into an explanation of what it is to be London, or to be red. Essentially, Borg wants to say that there is room for talk about common sense objects in a science of language if we put them to one side.

The problem here, as outlined by John Collins in his response to Borg is that no one from an internalist perspective wishes to "be blind to" common sense categorisations, or to deny that they exist. In this way, Borg misappropriates the internalist claims about word meanings. The only point that internalists wish to make is that referential objects and truth-conditional contents, do not enter into a theory of meaning. As Collins puts it: "data are not part of the theory" (Collins, 2009, p. 62). Of course, we use words to talk about things and say things that are true, and intuitions surrounding these facts help to inform our creation of a theory of meaning, but this does not mean that the referential relation is fundamental aspect of the theory of meaning. Collins goes on to recall how Newton dispelled common sense but he didn't dispel apples and trees.

In response to Borg's original claim that a theory of meaning need not "be blind to" commonsense categories, the internalist is in agreement. No one wishes to eschew any kind of talk about reference or propositions. However, these claims do not enter into a scientifically respectable theory of meaning because such objects are far too complex, subtle and changeable to be part of such a theory. The fact that "London" is used at times to refer to a place is a legitimate observation about the meaning of the word, in the same way as the observation about some particular apple falling from a tree is a legitimate observation about gravity. Yet the geographical area around the south east of England, does not constitute a scientifically respectable aspect of the meaning of the term "London"; in the same way as the actual apple that fell does not constitute part of the theory of gravity.
Borg misappropriates the force of the Internalist critique. Her claim that common sense categories can “play a role” in a science of meaning is just vague enough to seem intuitively compelling (for how can we just ignore the fact we refer to things?). Yet it does not confront the issue Internalism is interested in: a scientifically respectable theory of meaning.

Borg, in the same response to internalist criticisms, also refers to the notion of “semantic error” as evidence of the legitimacy of an externalist theory of meaning. This is the idea that speakers often find themselves wrong about the correct meanings of words and will accept correction from a dictionary or some authority figure. For example, someone may learn that “contract” means mutual agreement rather than, say, written agreement. This behaviour, according to Borg, “only makes sense given the externalist perspective that what matters for word meaning can lie outside the individual” (2012, p. 46). The idea being that there is some correct meaning out there in the world that we as speakers grasp rightly or wrongly.

However, this kind of phenomena can be explained away on an internalist perspective. For, it seems that our desire to use words correctly “reflects a more general psychological interest in cohering with one’s fellow speaker, rather than a fact about semantic competence” (Collins, 2009, p. 63). That is, communication on an internalist perspective is about individual i-languages matching up in similar ways. So two people born in Ireland will both have similar exposure to linguistic phenomena and thus will use words in a similar way. But the fact that this does not work at times and people fail cohere is not proof of some third element out there in the world that a person fails to grasp. It merely means that someone does not match up with the majority in some linguistic community. Either way, semantic error is explainable on internalist terms and does not suffice as proof of an externalist conception of human language.
The arguments of this thesis have shown that a notion of context-free semantic content is possible without it having to be necessarily truth-conditional. This level of content does all the work that Minimalists so often associate with a formal approach to semantics, without being burdened with the claim that such minimal contents necessarily express truth-conditional content. On this view, "semantic" and "pragmatic" content are kept separate; each one labelling a certain level or type of linguistic meaning. This is worthwhile for it allows us to speak coherently about the distinction between saying and meaning; about how we can "say" something with the utterance of a sentence, but mean something else.

Borg herself towards the end of Pursuing Meaning states the following: "The Minimalist claims that it is not the job of semantics to capture intuitive judgements about speech act content. Rather a semantic theory should be in the business of capturing rule-based, recursive literal linguistic meaning (the kind of meaning which provides input to, but certainly does not fully determine, judgements about speech act content)" (2012, p. 205). This statement, in many ways, is more fitting for Radicalism than it is for Minimalism. For Radicalism retains the same fundamental goal, without attempting to capture and truth-conditional or propositional content.

Radicalism also accommodates certain claims from cognitive science and linguistics into its picture of a theory of linguistic meaning: our context-free semantic abilities may be underpinned by a specific module, and it seems a theory of meaning will not necessarily be constituted by the externalist relations of truth and reference.

When it comes to truth-conditions and propositions, Radicalism takes the following approach from John Collins’ paper where he discusses the internalist response to externalia (truth and reference). He states that the unifying theme of internalist arguments is that "linguistics neither targets nor presupposes externalia" (2009, p. 62). Similarly, Radicalism
neither targets nor presupposes truth-conditional content. It does not begin inquiry into levels of content under the assumption that context-free linguistic content is necessarily truth-conditional, but it also does not state that truth-conditional analysis is not a useful and legitimate approach to certain issues (actual human communication). It simply argues that a theory of meaning for natural language is not a theory of truth-conditions.

Ultimately, a proper linguistic analysis needs to accommodate a level of content that is context-invariant and theoretically tractable; for Radicalism, this is semantic content. However, it also accepts the thrust of ubiquitous underdetermination and incompleteness arguments and, thus, acknowledges the role of contextual factors in communication. In this way, Radicalism establishes itself as an approach that accommodates the driving motivations of both dominant theories within semantics/pragmatics literature, while ridding them of their adherence to propositionality and truth-conditional contents.
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