語意理論與可及原則

古秀鈴[*]

摘　要

　　本文試圖替 François Recanati 回應以 Emma Borg 為主的兩面向批評，而得以闡明並辯護其所主張的可及原則：其一面向是關於可及原則所預設的「直覺內容」與「意識到」兩概念，其二面向是關於是否滿足可及原則會使的語意理論無法滿足語言的規範性與組構性。我將引導此爭論至問題核心──即語意內容的承載者──重新審視何以一般咸認為語句本身有其客觀、不受脈絡影響而改變的語意內容，並論證若我們顧及意義的經驗基礎，則可及原則是恰當的。

關鍵詞：Recanati、可及原則、Borg、語意理論

---

[*]　古秀鈴，中國文化大學哲學系助理教授。

The Semantic Theory
and the Availability Principle

Hsiu-Lin Ku[*]

Abstract

This paper aims to defend François Recanati's Availability Principle approach to semantics by illuminating and responding to two major challenges from minimalists, in particular from Emma Borg: the first concerns the notion of intuitive content and "awareness-of" presupposed in the Availability Principle, and the second concerns whether the principle makes a semantic theory unfit with normativity and compositionality. I lead the discussion toward the kernel question--the bearer of the semantic content--and show that the Availability Principle is appropriate if we respect the empirical basis of meaning.

Keywords: Recanati, Availability Principle, Borg, semantic theory

[*] Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Chinese Culture University.

The Semantic Theory and the Availability Principle[*]

Hsiu-Lin Ku

I. Introduction

The present paper focuses on the Availability Principle, proposed by François Recanati, who uses it to support his pragmatic approach to the interpretation of "what is said" by an utterance. "What is said" by an utterance has long been viewed as stipulating, in an anchored fashion, an uttered sentence's conventionally encoded semantic meaning. Advocates of this view are called minimalists. Their main tenets are the following: (i) there is a *minimal proposition* intruded upon in any significant degree by little or no contextual constituents; (ii) the contribution of context to "what is said" by an utterance should be maximally constrained, or in Recanati's description, "the distance between sentence meaning and what is said is kept to a minimum" (2004: 7). Contextualists,

by contrast, argue that the semantic content is thoroughly pragmatically saturated. As Recanati puts it, no level of meaning is both propositional (truth-evaluable) and unaffected by pragmatic or contextual factors. Many cases have been presented to show how conventional semantic meaning and syntax cannot determine the semantic content of utterances without appeal to contextual factors (Bezuidenhout, 1997; Carston, 1988; Crimmins, 1992). Minimalists respond, however, that extra constituents of meaning are not needed for propositionality and thus are external to what is said. At most, they allow only some important contextual information to permeate the minimal proposition (Borg, 2004; Cappelen & Lepore, 2005; Stanley, 2000; etc.). The debate continues. However, in this paper, I note that behind contextualists' focus on contextual factors is the cornerstone of Recanati's position, the Availability Principle:

> "[W]hat is said" must be analyzed in conformity to the intuitions shared by those who fully understand the utterance—typically the speaker and the hearer, in a normal conversational setting. (Recanati, 2004: 14)

> What is said must be intuitively accessible to the conversational participants (unless something goes wrong and they do not count as "normal interpreters"). (Recanati, 2004: 20)

In Recanati's view, the content that we intuitively understand or make sense of in a linguistic exchange is an adjusted or modulated product (through the relevant contextual factors) rather than the so-called minimal proposition that is strictly a function of the syntax and literal meanings of the expressions.

The minimalist approach is thus ruled out because a minimal proposition is consciously unavailable to communicators, regardless of the role that contextual factors play in the determination of semantic content.

This root principle is challenged by the minimalists by way of two considerations: first, that the notion of intuitive content and "aware of" presupposed in the Availability Principle lacks clarity (Borg, 2006b; Bach 1994); and second, that the Availability Principle makes a semantic theory unfit with normativity and compositionality (Borg, 2004; Stanley, 2000). I will examine these challenges, especially as expressed by Emma Borg, in section III and IV, after scrutinizing the justification for the Availability Principle in section II. I will then defend Recanati's position; most part of the defense will be indicating the misconstrual of the Availability Principle inherent in the minimalists' objections. My aim in section V is to lead the debate back to the issue of the primary bearer of semantic content. The minimalists' challenges to the Availability Principle are based on the belief that it is sentence meaning *per se* that should be the subject of semantic theory. However, I show that respect for the empirical basis of meaning requires a semantic theory treat intuitive content as the bearer of semantic content, that is, as the main subject of a semantic theory, as the Availability Principle requires.

II. The Availability Principle

There are many cases of pragmatic intrusion -- for example, enrichment, loose use, and transfer[1] -- where contextualists try to argue that pragmatic factors contribute to semantic interpretation. They argue that, without contextual

---

[1]   As to these cases of pragmatic intrusion, please see Ku (2014: 37) for brief introduction.

factor intrusion, in a non-minimalist way, we cannot adequately attribute a truth-evaluable proposition to an utterance. With respect to such pragmatic intrusions, Recanati emphasizes a more fundamental fact to challenge the minimalist approach: that the literal truth-conditions analyzed by minimalists differ from the intuitive truth-conditions that interlocutors ascribe to utterances based on pragmatic intrusions. Intuitive content is grasped not only through syntax and conventional meanings of expressions but also through "modulation" of the meaning of expressions, as in the cases of pragmatic intrusion noted above. Modulation is the process whereby the meaning of a given word is affected by the meanings of other words in the same sentence, where the interaction between word meaning and the situation the words depict guides the direction of modulation.[2] In this guidance, the interpretation is no longer simply bottom-up (from the meanings of constituents to the meaning of the whole sentence), but top-down. In Recanati's description, this is a "Gestaltist" approach to compositionality (2004: 132). The syntax and conventional meaning of an expression do not on their own suffice to generate a definite proposition or proposition recovered by language users. The essence of the Availability Principle (henceforth, AP) is this: "'what is said' corresponds to

---

[2] John Searle's "cut" cases give us the insight. Let's consider the following ordinary sentences containing the word "cut" ,

  John cut the grass.
  The barber cut John's hair.
  John cut the cake.
  John cut his skin.
    ….

The occurrence of the word "cut" in these contexts is literal and not ambiguous, but it obviously contributes different truth conditions to the sentences. To cut the grass is quite different to cutting a cake; to cut hair is also different to cutting the skin. As Searle (1980) suggests, multiple unstated facts and assumptions ("the Background") about various activities have directed us towards different ways to make sense of the word's contribution.

the primary truth-evaluable representation made available to the subject (at the personal level) as a result of processing the sentence" (2004: 17).

Why the AP? Why is the semantic content of the utterance the intuitive truth conditional content? Recanati's argument can be demonstrated as follows. The principle follows from Grice's idea that saying is itself a variety of non-natural meaning, whose distinguishing characteristic is its essential overtness—openly expressing one's primary intention verbally so as to make it graspable. Such a characteristic entails that "what is said" must be open to public view: "what is said" depends on the speaker's publicly recognizable intentions (cf. Recanati, 2004: 14).

In addition to the dependence on the speaker's intentions, Recanati emphasizes that participants in a conversation are aware of the circumstances in which a sentence uttered would be true, and the intuitions of the conversational participants concerning what is said are revealed by their views regarding the utterance's truth-conditions. In Recanati's words,

> [N]ormal interpreters have intuitions concerning the truth-conditional content of utterances. On my view, those intuitions correspond to a certain "level" in the comprehension process--a level that a proper theory of language understanding must capture. That is the level of "what is said". (2004:16)

According to the AP, the shared intuitive content of the sentence is an intentional -directed interpreted product in the sense that interlocutors are attempting to make sense of the sentence used. A "normal conversational setting" indicates maintenance of the convention or intersubjectivity that should be captured by

a semantic theory. This implies that the intuitive content is on a par with the truth conditions and that this content is not generated without any normative regulations of the interpretation process.

Recanati also emphasizes the role of "conscious" availability in the AP. Intuition in locutionary comprehension processes is more closely related to experience than to instinct. In his words,

> Understanding what is said involves entertaining a mental representation of the subject-matter of the utterance that is both determinate enough (truth-evaluable) *and* consciously available to the subject. This suggests a criterion, distinct from the minimalist criterion, for demarcating what is said. Instead of looking at things from the linguistic side and equating "what is said" with the minimal proposition one arrives at through saturation, we can take a more psychological stance and equate what is said with (the semantic content of) the conscious output of the complex train of processing which underlies comprehension. (2004: 16)

The AP reminds us that if a semantic theory models the truth conditional content of the sentence used, then that will be the level of "what is said" that corresponds to the primary truth-evaluable representation made available to the subject (at the personal level) as a result of processing the sentence. In other words, a semantic theory should model the contents that are evaluable rather than those contents that language users cannot access.[3]

---

[3]　If AP is right, then what is at stake is "how the external context of an utterance can affect the meaning of component parts of the uttered sentence and, thereby, its whole meaning, delivering different

Minimalism is thus the main target of attack, as it maintains that a semantic theory should model the minimal proposition expressed by the sentence *per se*, where the content of the sentence is given by the conventional meanings of its constituent parts and the rule of its composition. However, such minimal propositions are not consciously available in many cases, for example, those cited above. In an AP-based approach to a semantic theory, the intuitive content consciously accessible by normal interlocutors in a conversational exchange should be regarded as the semantic content of sentences uttered rather than the so-called encoded conventional meanings (the minimal propositions), which are not always accessible and are not very relevant to an account of the communicative success of ordinary interlocutors.

III. How Intuitive is the Intuitive Content?

The notion of intuitive content mainly challenges the traditional distinction between sentence meaning and speaker meaning. If what we obtain from a declarative sentence uttered is not the traditional truth conditional analysis but shared intuitive content, then it appears that the role of sentence meaning has been over-emphasized, and the notion of speaker meaning has been misunderstood. Recanati's suggestion is that sentences have type-meaning, which is not the same as literal meaning, or the minimal proposition; it is closer to a kind of schemata, whose constituents have semantic potentials, flexible for a variety of possible uses in different contexts.[4] Whereas speaker

---

truth-conditions for different utterances of the same sentence-type" (Falcato, 2010: 258).
[4] In Recanati's words, "the semantic potential of a word is the collection of past uses on the basis of which similarities can be established between the source situations (that is, the situations such uses concerned) and the target situation (the situation of current concern)" (2004: 152). As to the

meaning includes "what is said" and "what is implicated," the former is arrived at through *primary* interpretation processes, while the latter is obtained through *secondary* interpretation processes. Intuitive content corresponds to primary interpreted content. In Recanati's construal, such intuitive content arises from modulation, that is, from optional pragmatic interpretations based on loose use, enrichment, and transfer, or from mandatory interpretations (such as saturation), which enables users to assign values to expressions interpreted in a bottom-up or top-down fashion. He calls such pragmatic interpretation processes "primary." However, there is another, secondary, interpretation process involved in the usual contextual factors. The secondary interpretation process takes the outcome of the primary interpretation as the input in forming inferences such as implicature, jokes, sarcasm, irony, etc. This additional inferential step distinguishes the secondary interpretation from the primary one: interpreters are aware of the inference from the original propositions to the new proposition, which is a secondary interpretation. This distinction between primary and secondary interpretations based on the notion of intuitive content, however, incurs questioning.

The first question one might ask about such a distinction and the notion of intuitive content concerns the criterion of "awareness-of." Let us consider, for example, Borg's skeptical view of this distinction:

> Recanati holds that primary pragmatic processes are "unreflective", that is to say, they are akin to basic perceptual judgments and *are not*

---

semantic potential of an expression, there are different characterizations (see, Sperber & Wilson, 1998; Carston 2002). I shall address them in another paper. Here, it suffices to mention Recanati's proposal on it.

dependent on inferential moves concerning speaker intentions. …… However, as Recanati himself stresses, saturation almost always requires consideration of speaker intentions. Furthermore, the kinds of elements which an agent needs to take into consideration to ascertain a speaker's referential intentions are potentially pretty complex. Thus it is not clear that the kind of pragmatic reasoning required for saturation to take place can or should, in general, be characterised as *unreflective* in the way Recanati suggests. Nor, on the other hand, is it clear that secondary pragmatic processes should always be viewed as *reflective or consciously accessible.* At least sometimes a hearer comes to grasp an implicature immediately, without consciously inferring it from what has been said. Recanati recognises this last point and does allow that an implicature may not always be the result of a conscious inference on the hearer's behalf. What is important, he suggests, is that the hearer could reconstruct the relevant inferential moves if asked; thus it satisfies his availability condition. But again, this seems to blur the distinction between primary and secondary processes, since it seems likely that, on many occasions, a hearer could also, if asked, reconstruct the reasoning which led them to take… *That is to say, with both primary and secondary processes it seems that they may, at least sometimes, be unconscious initially, yet in both cases an agent may be able to reconstruct their reasoning if asked.* Thus we might wonder whether the evidence concerning linguistic comprehension really supports the two different kinds of pragmatic processes Recanati posits. (emphasis added, 2006b: 461-2)

We can abstract two main points from Borg's challenge, which is representative of many possible misgivings regarding Recanati's Availability Principle. First, Borg appears to argue that Recanati claims that the primary interpretation need not involve the speaker's intention, while acknowledging saturation (which always need involving speaker's intention) as primary interpretation, rendering his position inconsistent. I have a different construal here. When Recanati describes the primary processes as unreflective, he emphasizes the *determination* of what is said that takes place at a sub-personal level; that is, "[n]ormal interpreters need not be aware of the context-independent meanings of the expressions used, nor of the processes through which those meanings are enriched or otherwise adjusted to fit the situation of use. … they are aware only of the *output* of the primary processes involved in contextual adjustment" (emphasis added, 2004: 23). The interpreter is not aware of the underlying data processing but only of the result of that processing. However, does this "unreflectiveness" entail that the primary process does not involve consideration of the speaker's intentions? I believe Recanati would not accept this construal. For him, the speaker's intention plays a modulating role in interpretation. His argument for semantic underdeterminacy utilizes examples to show that we must appeal to the speaker's intention to assign values to demonstratives or indexicals. For example, we might believe that expressions such as "here" and "now" are pure indexicals, whose values are the respective places or times inherent in the context. "But what counts as the time and place of the context? How inclusive must the time or place in question be? It depends on what the speaker means….As is well known, 'here' can refer to this room, this building, this city, this country, and so on…"(Recanti, 2004: 57-58). This

is why saturation must appeal to the speaker's intention, and this appeal, which partly determines the content grasped (what is said by the utterance), is not vivid in one's consciousness. We are aware of the consequence of this appeal. In contrast to secondary interpretation, the relationship between the speaker's intention and what is said is not inferred from one proposition to another.

The second problem Borg raises concerns the complexity of the speaker's meaning, which may cause primary and secondary interpretations to be inaccurately construed as unreflective or reflective, respectively. Borg believes that it is possible to grasp implicature without awareness of an inferential process. And if Recanati appeals to reconstruction of the inferential relation to satisfy the AP, then it is possible that the primary interpretation is initially unconscious but reconstructed upon reflection; this weakens the need for Recanati's distinction between primary and secondary processes. In other words, one may directly grasp the content of an implicature *without reflection,* or one can *reflectively* reconstruct the route of adjustment in the primary interpretation, as with saturation or enrichment.

Two points can be made in reply: the first concerns the role of conscious inference in secondary interpretation processes; the second concerns reconstruction of the reasoning involved in primary processes. These points focus on different loci. In Recanati's own elucidation, the inference that gives rise to secondary processes is available to interpreters in a way that "need not be cashed out as requiring on the part of the subject a CEO-inference" (2004: 50); a tacit inference may be okay. A CEO-inference is a conscious, explicit, occurrent inference, referring to "reasons which we make by carefully going through their steps" (2004: 49). A tacit inference implies that the agent is *capable of*

making the inference explicitly and of rationally justifying whatever methods are used in arriving at the inference. Such tacit reflective capacity is constitutive of a secondary interpretation. However, in the primary interpretation, one can also utilize reflective capacity, although this is not constitutive of the primary interpretation. In the first place, what one reflects upon is not an inference but the output or result of modulation; in the second place, even if one cannot reconstruct the uses of linguistic tools or explicitly justify one's interpretations, the content of the primary interpretation will not fail, just as we will not deny what one perceives simply because one cannot reconstruct how one utilizes one's perceptual abilities or processes.

The essential difference between primary and secondary interpretations is that, as Recanati emphasizes, no matter how fast or weak/strong the reflective capacity is, one grasps the intuitive primary content without assuming *another* proposition as an input, but grasping the secondary interpreted content requires a "jumping board," even if the processing is too quick to be reflective. Borg's misgiving is that she gives the example of the reconstruction of inference that she takes it as performed by primary interpretative processes in order to challenge Recanati's notion of secondary interpretative process. However, the reconstruction she identifies occurs at the level of expressions, which is intended to compose a proposition expressed by that sentence, while secondary pragmatic process Recanati proposes occurs at the level between proposition and proposition. Secondary pragmatic processes proceed through inferential derivation of some further proposition q from the fact that p has been expressed. Primary pragmatic processes do not presuppose a prior proposition as an input to the process.

IV. The Availability Principle vs. Normativity and Compositionality

In addition to the criterion of awareness, the complexity of the speaker's meaning results in another disagreement between contextualism and minimalism over the role of intention in accounting for semantic content. It appears that when we focus on the language user in constructing a semantic theory, nothing is anchored and nothing can be normal, for too many psychological factors must be considered in interpretation. Worse, a focus on intention may threaten compositionality. Thus, if the AP is correct, the task of semantics fails, which in turn implies that the AP is not useful in the construction of a semantic theory. The following section addresses the anchoring problem, while next section addresses the compositionality problem.

A. The Anchoring Problem

The first issue concerns anchoring the semantic contents of sentences. On the one hand, there appears to be no constraints regarding intuitions about what is said. This implies that the semantic content of a single sentence uttered in a given context is likely to have two or more interpretations. However, which interpretation corresponds to what is said by the utterance (Borg, 2006b; Bach, 2001)? Borg's worry is that as long as the pragmatic interpretation processes are optional rather than mandatory, it is possible for a single utterance to be quite enriched and behave like an implication rather than "what is said". For example, consider the utterance, "I've had breakfast." In uttering this sentence, one may have in mind contextually refined and intuitive content such as "She

has had breakfast today". But it is also possible to have in mind a different intuitive content, for example, "She has had breakfast recently enough to make eating currently undesirable". Borg notes that "it looks as if something which counts as an implicature to one hearer might count simply as what is said to another, in which case we don't seem to have anything like a determinate notion of the literal meaning of an utterance" (Borg, 2006b: 463). So, to what extent can an utterance be said to have "intuitive" content?

On the other hand, if the intuitive content of an utterance is a function of all possible contextual factors, does semantic theory have the burden of making each of these possibilities explicit? Borg takes a negative view on this multiple propositions problem. Although contexts contain clues that affect our interpretations of utterances, and although the truth conditional analysis of meaning may not be operative in *actual* interpretative processes, we cannot permit a simple subject-predicate sentence to have an indefinite number of reported contents.

> [W]e don't want to countenance all of them as semantically informative as to the meaning of the original sentence ….Such multiplying of meanings is an anathema to any kind of generalized semantic theory and would make entirely opaque how we ever learn or use a language… It is no job of a successful semantic theory to tell us everything which a sentence may be used to say on a given occasion of utterance. (Borg, 2002: 10)

However, underlying the challenges reflected in this concern about the anchoring of semantic content may be mistaken assumptions about Recanati's

AP-based approach. Borg appears to insist that each sentence has a determinate content or expresses a single proposition, given appropriate contextual information, yielding the AP-based approach untenable.[5] However, Recanati may not agree that each sentence can independently and exhaustedly have its own determinate content. In the absence of contextual factors, a sentence has at most schemata and semantic potential but cannot express a truth-valued proposition. Most importantly, Recanati would not claim that each possible interpretation of a proposition is *the* semantic content of the expression, as it is useless to consider the meaning of an expression *per se* but only the semantic potential it may have. The multiple propositions problem is a pseudo-problem for the AP-based approach.

Another problem concerns how to anchor the semantic content of a sentence *when there are, as contextualists suggest, many relevant contextual factors that affect an interpreter's interpretation; in particular, what if there are two interpreters separately interpreting in different ways?* Indeed, when contextual factors play a vital role in generating the semantic content of an utterance, rule-like processes disappear, and there appears to be no normativity. Borg maintains that the correct use of linguistic expressions shows that we ascribe the normal, adequate, and correct semantic content to expressions in use but that the AP-based approach cannot account for this fact and thus cannot usefully complement semantic theory.[6]

5　The issue about minimal proposition will not be discussed in this paper, but indeed it is important, worth of another paper to discuss.

6　"[W]e need a context-invariant element to capture the apparently normative dimension to linguistic meaning: the fact that there is such a thing as using a sentence correctly or incorrectly." (Borg, 2012: 514).

However, what is the "correct semantic content"? Does the AP-based approach dismiss normativity? Recanati's position reflects a different view of these assumptions. He responds:

> We have equated what is said with what a normal interpreter would understand as being said, in the context at hand. A normal interpreter knows which sentence was uttered, knows the meaning of that sentence, knows the relevant contextual facts (who is being pointed to, and so on). …But there are situations…where the actual users make mistakes and are not normal interpreters. In such situations their interpretations do not fix what is said. To determine what is said, we need to look at the interpretation that a normal interpreter would give. This is objective enough, yet remains within the confines of the pragmatic construal. (2004:20)

It is possible that an audience misunderstands what a speaker says or that two interpreters have different interpretations. If we allow every type of contextual factor to affect semantic content without constraint, what is said is no longer objective. However, this concern misconstrues Recanati's position in interpreting him as equating what is said by an utterance with the interpreter's personal understanding of what is said. No! Recanati equates what is said with what *a normal interpreter* would understand. Most importantly, convention or normativity is never dismissed in pragmatic interpretation but is construed differently from the way minimalists construe it. Recanati's response reminds us to rethink *where* normativity comes from. We have agreement regarding the correct uses of expressions, but this does not entail that the meanings of

expressions or sentences *per se* are fixed, invariant, or independent of contextual factors. Appropriate uses of linguistic expressions are not determined by the expressions themselves but from how we conventionalize and evaluate them in different contexts. The notion of normativity is a product of communal linguistic activity—the need for easy communication within a community—but it does not change the semantic flexibility of the linguistic tools: sentences or expressions have schemata or semantic potential that enable them to generate different contributions in different contexts. Those evaluations of correctness are not based on the fixed, invariant minimal proposition of a sentence but on the history of one's learning from and interacting with one's community; the evaluation itself always involves the current context, the speaker's intention, and the proper role of convention.[7] Thus, even if we do have some conventional normative uses of expressions, this does not mean that these normative uses exhaust all determinants of the semantic content of an utterance.

B. The Role of Intention in Semantics

Another issue, the problem of compositionality, challenges the AP-based approach to semantic theory from a different angle—modularity. In Borg's view, the AP-based approach cannot match the features of a language module—domain specificity and compositionality—as the AP-based approach

---

[7] A further picture on the notion of normativity can be seen in Peregrin (2011), who gives the notion of normativity a new face from a use-theory style: "[T]he normatic version of the use-theory we have reached does not literally identify meaning with a *way of usage*, but rather with *a role conferred by rules*. ……what meaning here consists in is not so much ways of employment of our expressions, but rather the ways of assessment of such employment, the ways we take those employments for right and wrong. It is precisely these takings for right or wrong, these normative attitudes, that provide for the existence of the kind of rules which govern our language games and thus open up the space of reasons in which the expressions may become meaningful" (2011: 202).

relies too heavily on the languages user's intention or mental state (cf. Borg, 2006a).

No one would deny that intentional uses of words are a *prerequisite* to linguistic meaning. Without intentional agents attributing meanings to symbols, language could not be used to communicate. However, whether intention *determines* sentence/word meaning can be debated. Borg has suggested that "speaker intentions play a preconditional role in determining linguistic meaning, though this does not necessarily *entail* anything about the route by which a current interlocutor recovers literal meaning" (2006a: 257). The prerequisite condition, in Borg's view, is an answer to a *constitutive* question concerning the nature of linguistic meaning: to recover the semantic content of an expression, it is not necessary for interpreters to have access to the mental state of the speaker. What then is required for the recovery of semantic content? In Borg's view, one does not require access to the speaker's state of mind to obtain semantic content; one recovers semantic content through the natural use of our semantic ability, that is, in accordance with the cognitive architecture that underlies linguistic comprehension—the module.[8] A semantic theory is thus a theory that delineates the form and content of the language faculty.[9]

---

[8] A module means, according to Jerry Fodor, an encapsulated body of information with deduction, computational rules operating only over that information. In Borg's view, our literal linguistic comprehension displays the characteristics of a module, including domain specific and informationally encapsulated. For instance, "linguistic comprehension is "switched on" only by a very specialized kind of input, grasp of meaning is incredibly fast and it does indeed seem to be mandatory" (Borg, 2006a: 262). Or, patients with Asperger's syndrome though often fail to grasp the speaker's intention conveyed by their utterances, show normal abilities in understanding literal sentence meaning.

[9] What this formal approached semantic theory specifies is then "[T]he content a competent language user is guaranteed to be able to recover, given adequate lexical resources *plus* the provisio that attentional resources are not diverted from processing literal meaning, and agents are guaranteed the possibility of recovering sentence-level content because the theory they have cognized is one which trades, ultimately, in sentence-level meanings"(Borg, 2010: 33).

By contrast, in Borg's view, AP requires a theory of conscious content or concurrent mental states involved in given acts of linguistic processing. A theory that fits with modularity is deductive or computational, whereas the AP-based approach is abductive with respect to speaker intentions. Speaker intentions are potentially unrepeatable, rich, nebulous features of the context and as such are formally intractable—we simply cannot formally model comprehension of a speaker's intentions (cf. Borg, 2004: 15). Borg emphasizes that "if all aspects of linguistic meaning are in constant contextual flux it is entirely unclear how anyone could ever come to acquire a language in the first place" (2012: 514), given the absence of compositionality and systematicity. The constraint of compositionality points to the need for a discrete, recursively definable and essentially context-independent level of semantic content.[10]

There are two points of response: (i) appeal to speaker's intentions does not mean that speaker's intentions randomly determine the contents of the utterances —norms and conventions are still relevant to pragmatic interpretation; (ii) what is composed in compositional interpretation are the modulated meanings of the constituents of sentences, not the alleged conventionally fixed meanings.

We presently return to the source of the challenge: what is the role of intention in semantics? Borg believes that intention is too irregular to be modeled on or determinative of deductively composed semantic content. Contextualists must correct this common misconstrual. For most contextualists, the speaker's intention is one of the parameters of context that may affect the

---

[10] In Borg's construal, "acts of communication..require all-things-considered-reasoning", and "judgments of speech act content are massive interaction effects which might, in principle, call on anything the hearer knows, ...judgments of speech act content are too variable and various to help in isolating a notion of genuinely semantic content", but a semantic theory has no burden on this. (2012: 521)

intuitive truth conditional content of an utterance. Yet this parameter differs from other parameters, such as time, location, and demonstratives. It was shown in section III that the semantic values of indexicals such as "here" and "now" depend on what speakers intend to mean. For example, "here" can mean this room, this building, this city, and so on. (cf. Recanati, 2004: 57)[11] It would be difficult to maintain that the semantic values of these terms are independent of the speaker's intention. "The speaker's intentions are required both to determine *what* the speaker is demonstrating (index), and to determine the relevant relation R such that the referent is the object, or an object, which bears R to the index" (Recanati, 2010: 184).

However, this dependency is misconstrued, giving rise to Borg's concerns: the fundamental misunderstanding lies in her construal of speakers' intentions as both the only source of semantic content of expressions and a random determinant of semantic content. Specifically, Recanati views speaker intention not as the *semantic potential* of linguistic expressions but as a determinant of the *values* of linguistic expressions *in* specific contexts; that is, the speaker's intention does not always assign new roles to linguistic tools—constraints of the semantic schemata associated with expressions remain in force. In particular, it would be curious to say: "to model the interpreter's comprehension of a speaker's intention". What is modeled is not the language user's intention but the relationship between the user, language, and context.

At the same time, other contextual elements are required for interpretation of a sentence and to respect the established uses of expressions, convention

---

[11] In his words, "the (narrow) context with respect to which an utterance is interpreted is not given, it is not determined automatically by objective facts like where and when the utterance takes place, but it is determined by the speaker's intention and the wide context" (Recanati, 2004: 58).

still plays a role in interpretation. In other words, the speaker's intention cannot randomly determine the semantic content of a sentence.[12] One may ask: if this is the case, cannot speaker's intentions be dismissed, as linguistic constraints still mandate how sentences contribute to interpretation? To repel this doubt, I suggest a better way of describing the role of intention in interpretation: the speaker's intention *guides* one in making sense of a sentence. It is evident that when one uses indexicals, the listener must track the speaker's intention; when one uses ambiguous expressions, the hearer must track the speaker's intention to remove ambiguity; when one states a simple sentence, what the hearer grasps is not simply the sentence meaning *per se* but what the speaker intends to convey, directly or indirectly. Intention-recognition constitutes an essential part of how we interpret utterances.

If the speaker's intention plays the guiding rule of interpretation, a second concern arises: whether the AP-based approach is inconsistent with compositionality. Recall the basis for Borg's argument that the AP approach threatens compositionality: because speaker's intentions are too nebulous to be modeled and are abductive rather than deductive, it is unclear how intentions can accommodate compositionality. The notion of compositionality described here is the minimalist's one, which says that a semantic interpretation is one-way bottom-up, that is, from the meanings of constituent parts to the meaning of the whole sentence. So the charge against the AP-based interpretation is that it lacks both order (the order of interpretation is unclear) and norms (interpretations are unconstrained by intentions), such that if too much semantic flexibility is allowed, compositionality is excluded. Two points

---

[12] See also Elbourne (2008) and Hall (2008) try to argue that modulation is not totally unconstrained.

can be made in response to this challenge: (1) semantic interpretations are not, as the minimalists maintain, limited to bottom-up determination; and (2) what matters for compositionality is not literal or conventional meaning but modulated meaning. As shown above, appeal to the speaker's intention does not imply that there is nothing conventional or normative in the pragmatic interpretation. Although contextual modulation allows for *potentially* unending meaning variation, it does not occasion *actual* unending meaning variation. "Meaning eventually stabilizes, making compositionality possible, because the (linguistic as well as extralinguistic) context, however big, is always finite" (Recanati, 2012:190-191). In contextualism's delineation of interpretation, compositional work still occurs, but what is composed is not a standing or fixed meaning but a modulated meaning. In Recanati's words,

> ..we can say that it is a function of the modulated meanings of the parts (and the way they are put together) *plus, in addition, the context which determines how the content of the whole itself is modulated.* (2010: 46)

To dispel the minimalists' concern, one point should be reiterated: semantic interpretation is never constrained to bottom-up determination, and thus, semantic flexibility never excludes compositionality. Recanati provides many illustrations of top-down/lateral interpretation, demonstrating how modulation works without excluding compositionality. For example, let us take the word "cut". The senses of "cut" in "cut the grass" and "cut the cake" differ; the former is like MOW, while the latter is like SLICE. Its variant sense will depend on the complement noun-object. This means that we may need to process the

end of the sentence to determine the interactions between constituents and then make modulations as necessary. To make sense of an utterance, we need many linguistic or extra-linguistic features to determine the most consistent and harmonious modulated meanings of the constitutive parts of the sentence. The compositional work continues until these modulations are achieved.[13]

V. The Bearer of Semantic Content

The above challenges focus on the consequences of the AP: they question whether the notion of intuitive content enables definite semantic content of an utterance and whether the AP-based approach can match the features of modularity. In general, the minimalist's challenges to the AP are based on the belief that a sentence has its own minimal proposition and that the bearer of semantic content is the sentence *per se*. In this final section, I will partially address this basic belief: I will focus on the identity of the bearer of semantic content and leave the notion of a minimal proposition for another paper.

A. A Break with Tradition

Borg proffers several reasons why the sentence *per se* should be the subject of semantic theory; that is, she maintains that the bearer of semantic content is undoubtedly the sentence itself. First, there is a difference between utterance-level and sentence-level content, where the former is cancellable and the latter is not. Furthermore, sentence-level content is important in grasping the meaning of a written sentence abstracted from its context. Most importantly,

---

[13] Fodor thinks that the modulated meaning of an expression depends on the meaning of its complex host, yet the host is liable to vary, so the meaning of the expression will never stabilize, such that there is unending equivocation, and it undermines the compositionality (Fodor, 2003: 99).

although linguistic acts belong to a much wider group of communicative acts, they are distinguished in that they "have a crystallized component to their meaning, an element which they carry with them across all contexts and which may be accessed by a competent language user even if she has no access at all to the speaker's original intentions" (2006a: 261).

All of these considerations are based on the belief that there is the minimal proposition or sentence meaning for each well-formed sentence *per se*—conventional meaning that is independent of language users and context and so is non-cancellable. However, where do the solid meanings of sentences come from? Addressing the notion of the minimal proposition and whether it is justified would require another paper. Let me address this problem from a different perspective. If, before accepting the notion of a minimal proposition, we consider in more detail what constitutes meaning transmission in communication, perhaps these considerations will lead us to a different conclusion regarding the existence of such minimal proposition in minimalist's sense.

The existence of implicature is deemed a plausible basis for separating sentence meaning from speaker meaning. Accordingly, it is widely accepted that what is said by a sentence constitutes genuine semantic content or "timeless meaning" that is determined by the conventional meanings of expressions and syntactic rules, while speaker meaning belongs to pragmatics. The Gricean tradition suggests this, and the minimalists follow. A similar consideration plays into Borg's characterization of non-cancellable content: we grant there are two levels, one of them is the original level, and the other is application level. However, this distinction tells us nothing about the nature of the meanings we grasp; we simply *impose* this distinction. The separation conveniently

indicates the existence of implicature, which does not reasonably justify what is said as determined in the way claimed by the minimalists. I suggest here that we can divert our course of thought: we find that we can use a sentence to perform a task that was not originally ascribed to that sentence! We use a sentence to convey meaning, but we can also use a sentence to achieve different effects on our audience through implicature. We use "cut" to denote slicing a cake, and we use it to denote mowing grass. That is, we use the same term to achieve different effects. The purpose of this diversion is not simply to create two catalogs of effects, but to ask how these differing effects are possible.

Moreover, recall that the minimalists also accept a truth conditional theory of meaning. A safe and common account of the truth condition of a sentence is that the truth condition is the condition under which the sentence is true. Thanks to Davidson's explication of the relationship between meaning and truth, we recognize that what a sentence expresses is the condition that makes it true. Davidson reminded us that this truth conditional theory of meaning has its empirical basis in the notion of radical interpretation, which has two key aspects: the attitude of holding true and the principle of charity, where the former indicates the connection between content and the assignment of symbols and the latter emphasizes the necessity of *making sense of* others in interpretation. In addition, such a theory demonstrates how a recursive process of meaning determination is possible, so that all issues of compositionality and productivity are well settled. However, Davidson does not describe how we obtain the truth condition that is involved in the production of meaning. Until the appearance of his influential paper "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (Davidson, 1986), meaning-assignment and meaning-production were misplaced.

The recursive operations of a semantic system cannot exhaustively take on the burden of determining the meaning of each sentence, since what one really grasps is not what the system tells us but the convergence of each other's passing theories. Thus, what interests us here is how passing theories are constructed and what contribution is made by language. These reflections lead us to the original neglected question: how do we obtain the content as we think we do?

The truth condition of a sentence does not simply refer to satisfaction of the formal rules of compositional semantics; it concerns how we *make sense of* sentences. Moreover, the truth condition of a sentence is arrived at through convergence between interlocutors' passing theories. A later Davidsonian would show that the meanings we receive from each other are the converged content of our passing theories. Based on this reflection, if a semantic theory aims to explain how language works and, at the same time, provide us with explanations that fit the way we grasp language, then that theory should take converged meanings as the subjects to be modeled, as that is what we do with language. This is consistent with what the AP suggests: that there exists a level of semantic content that directly connects with our understanding of language and that should be the subject of semantics, as the latter is concerned with the apprehension of meaning in using language. In Recanati's view of truth-conditional semantics:

> The central idea of truth-conditional semantics (as opposed to mere "translational semantics") is the idea that, via truth, we connect words and the world. If we know the truth-conditions of a sentence,

we know which state of affairs must hold for the sentence to be true. T-sentences display knowledge of truth-conditions in that sense only if the right-hand side of the biconditional is used, that is, only if the necessary and sufficient condition which it states is transparent to the utterer of the T-sentence. (2004: 92-93)

If the meanings that we communicate are nothing but convergences of our passing theories, then what we call meaning, semantic content, or what is said by a sentence is nothing but the impacts we have on our audience through the use of linguistic tools. In this sense, implicature is not a deviation from the original *sentence meaning* but simply illustrates that the linguistic tools, except the conventional established meaning, have something more to be fathomed, something that we use to bring about effects on our interpreters. The linguistic tools must therefore have certain characteristics that make possible uses of them. I suggest that the features, such as semantic flexibility and modulation, that the minimalists ignore, are what we are looking for.

B. Empirical Basis of Meaning

Modulation manifests semantic flexibility, and the notion of semantic flexibility is empirically based on the senses of linguistic expressions. What is the empirical basis for the flexible use of expressions?[14]

First, if our comprehension of the meanings of terms could potentially be reproduced in different contexts, even slightly different contexts, the

---

[14] The following is a phenomenal analysis, but a deeper analysis is possible. I do not mean to give the whole face and features of the empirical basis of meaning, but simply extract some to respond minimalists' approach.

reproduction must originate from certain expressing-learning/using practices—an *experiential basis scenario,* or *baptism*—where the sense of the type of expression is found. Subsequent uses of expressions then stand in a certain transmission relation with the original basis, a certain scenario, or an accepted practice.[15] A similar idea appears in François Recanati's paper. For Recanati, "the learning phase for Tom consists in noting a sufficient number of situations which, like S1, legitimate the application of P, as opposed to those, like S2, which do not legitimate it. The semantic potential of P for Tom at the end of his learning phase can thus be thought of as a collection of legitimate situations of application; that is, a collection of situations such that the members of the community agree that P applies in or to those situations" (Recanati 2003: 190). Thus, for him, the semantic potential of P is a collection of source-situations, and the conditions of application of P are a set of features that a given target-situation must possess to be *similar* to the source-situations.

Second, it is reasonable to infer that, because every evaluation of each use of a word in different situations reveals different foci or saliences, the original comprehension of the sense must involve certain characteristics that support the latter applications. In what consist those characteristics? A clue is found in Dummett's notion of proto-thought, an account of what is involved in the formation of meaning:

---

[15] The term "baptism" is from Kaplan, and thanks to Mark Sainsbury for the notion of transmission. His cases about inference validity, the transition functional role of sense could be more or less illuminated by his analysis of the transition of a name. It seems that if we could understand some sentences where a name occurs in each of them, there must be some relation between those senses of tokens of that name, and there must be knowledge of their sense-identity. A simple way to formulate the relation is as follows: "For all persons *P*, and tokens *t*, *P* grasps *t*'s sense iff *P* could produce a token *t**, distinct from *t*, such that he or she knows that *t** has the same sense as *t*, or *P* would recognize of potential tokens of kind k that they have the same sense as *t*" (Sainsbury, 1998).

(i) *Spatiality*: The sub-linguistic level of grasping sense is essentially spatial; what we perceive has a three-dimensional shape and occupies a three-dimensional position.

(ii) *Dynamic*: Grasping sense involves apprehension of the possibilities and probabilities of movement and the effect. For this reason, it incorporates not only perceptions of position, shape and movement but also recognition of the gross properties of material things. The reason we use visual clues to project these properties is precisely that they bear on the dynamic possibilities (cf. Dummett, 1993: 124).

We arrive at a simple view of semantic flexibility in our use or comprehension of expressions, though there is no intention to exhaust all possibilities. (i) Each employment of sense reveals the *salience* of the original comprehension of it, and each reproduction adopts different saliences from the original comprehension. Grasping the sense of a given object is unavoidably more focused on certain aspects or features of the object. (ii) There must be a *vital* feature in one's grasping a sense such that, through different possible usages, the original features grasped are not dismissed. (iii) Sense-grasping is also possibility-carrying. That is, we are aware of the possible inferences of a given term. (iv) Personal interests, emotions, or feelings produce differing non-physical representations of the object; that is, the sense grasped is colored by the beliefs of the interpreter. This is an important part of sense-comprehension, which Frege calls *Farbung*, Dummett calls tone, and Eva Picardi (2007) calls the *aura* or effective tone of an expression. All these sources of semantic

flexibility create space for modulation through utilization of our linguistic tools. A semantic theory must accommodate this empirical basis of meaning comprehension.

One interesting aspect of communication, noted by Quine, shows us much more about the nature of the semantics of a language. Communication is possible and mostly successful, even though interpretation is indeterminate, and Quine reminds us that this is the case even when we are unsure whether our interlocutors share our understandings of utterances. In this sense, what enables communication are not expressions *per se*: if it is meaning that enables communication, then meaning is not generated by expressions themselves but is co-produced by users, language, and the world. Then the bearer of semantic content may not be the sentence *per se*. Minimalists believe that dependence on contextual factors or speaker's intentions entails that sentences do not have the determinate contents, giving rise to a catastrophe of semantics. Contextualists, by contrast, are optimistic on this point because, if language's contribution to meaning is not independent of users and the world, *the* determinate content of sentences may not be relevant to an account of language's contribution. The determinate minimal proposition for each sentence *per se* perhaps is simply an expectation, *post-semantically*.

We have arrived at one of the gradations in the debate between contextualism and minimalism: whether the AP shall be followed by a semantic theory. The work in this paper is to give a positive answer. The AP requires a semantic theory takes the intuitive content as the subject of semantics. For the meanings that we associate with or attribute to linguistic expressions are not unavailable,

non-sensitive, or irrelevant to the context or the original baptism, as "meaning" is by nature effective, intention-motivated, and user-directed. Specifically, a semantic theory of language comprehension must consider features of language comprehension such as flexibility, modulation, and tone involvement, for these are the empirical basis for the intuitive content. Or say, in view of these varieties of characteristics involved in our interpretation of semantic contents of sentences and in view of modes of comprehension, we are doing much more with language than the minimalists suggest. An empirically based account of meaning provides a semantic theory with more varied, but also more accurate, tools to interpret language production and use. A semantic theory is thus supposed to articulate, in a systematic fashion, how such abilities of abstraction are manifested rather than pursue perfect but non-available language tools. I suggest the AP approach to semantics in this sense heads towards the right direction.

References

Bach. K, (1994). "Conversational Impliciture." *Mind and Language,* 9: 124-162. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0017.1994.tb00220.x

--- (2001). "You Don't Say?" *Synthese,* 128: 15-44. doi: 10.1023/A:1010353722852

Bezuidenhout, A. (1997). "Pragmatics, Semantic Underdetermination and the Referential/Attributive Distinction." *Mind,* 106: 375-410. doi: 10.1093/mind/106.423.375

Borg, E. (2002). "The Semantic Relevance of What is Said." *Protosociology 17: Semantic Theory and Reported Speech*, 6-24

--- (2004). *Minimal Semantics*. New York: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/0199270252.001.0001

--- (2006a). "Intention-Based Semantics." E. Lepore & B. Smith (eds.). *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language* (250-267). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

--- (2006b). "Review: Literal Meaning." *Mind,* 115: 461-465. doi: 10.1093/mind/fzl461

--- (2010). "Semantics and the Place of Psychological Evidence." S. Sawyer (ed.). *New Waves in Philosophy of Language* (24-40). London: Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

--- (2012). "Semantics without Pragmatics." K. Allen & K. Jaszczolt (eds.). *The Cambridge Handbook of Pragmatic* (513-528). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9781139022453.028

Cappelen, H & Lepore, E. (2005). *Insensitive Semantics*. Oxford: Blackwell. doi: 10.1002/9780470755792

Carston, R. (1988). "Implicature, Explicature, and Truth-Theoretic Semantics." R. Kempson (ed.). *Mental Representations* (155-181). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

--- (2002). *Thoughts and Utterances*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Crimmins, M. (1992). *Talk About Beliefs*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT. doi: 10.2307/ 2219867

Davidson, D. (1986). "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs." E. Lepore (ed.). *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (433-446). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Dummett, M. (1993). *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. doi: 10.1017/S0031819100046921

Elbourne, P. (2008). "The Argument from Binding." *Philosophical Perspectives,* 22: 89-110. doi: 10.1111/j.1520-8583.2008.00142.x

Falcato, A. (2010). "The Contextualist Fight Against Minimalism " L. Baptista & E. Rast (eds.). *Meaning and Context* (255-268). Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers.

Fodor, J. (2003). *Human Variations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/ acprof:oso/9780199287338.001.0001

Hall, A. (2008). "Free Enrichment or Hidden Indexicals?" *Mind and Language*, 23: 426-456. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0017.2008.00350.x

Ku, H. (2014). "What is Said by Metaphor." *Soochow Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 30: 35-53.

Picardi, E. (2007). "On Sense, Tone, and Accompanying Thoughts." R. E. Auxier & L. E. Hahn (eds.). *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett* (491-520). La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publish.

Peregrin, J. (2011). "The Use-Theory of Meaning and the Rules of Our Language Games." K. Turner (ed.). *Making Semantics Pragmatic* (183-204). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. doi: 10.1108/S1472-7870(2011)0000024010

Recanati, F. (2003). "Literalism and Contextualism: Some Varieties." G. Preyer (ed.). *Contextualism* (171-198). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

--- (2004). *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511615382

--- (2010). *Truth Conditional Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199226993.001.0001

--- (2012). "Compositionality, Flexibility, and Context-Dependence." W. Hinzen, E. Machery and M. Werning (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Compositionality* (175-191). Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199226993.003.0002

Sainsbury, R. M. (1998). "Fregean Sense." The Seminar Lecture at NYU. <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/concepts/sainsburyfrege.html>.

Searle, J. (1980). "The Background of Meaning." J. Searle, F. Kiefer and M. Bierwisch (eds.). *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics* (221-232). Dordrecht: Reidel. doi: 10.1007/978-94-009-8964-1_10

Stanley, J. (2000). "Context and Logical Form." *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 23: 391-434.

Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1998). "The Mapping between the Mental and the Public Lexicon" P. Carruthers & J. Boucher (eds.). *Language and thought* (184-200). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.