

### 0. Big Picture

Here is an inconsistent set of commitments:

1. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is an object of semantic study, then  $x$  is a sentence meaning.
2. For some  $x$ ,  $x$  is a sentence meaning, but  $x$  is not a set of truth-conditions.
3. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is an object of semantic study, then  $x$  is a set of truth-conditions.

Different positions in the debate negotiate this inconsistency in different ways.

	Accept 1?	Accept 2?	Accept 3?
<b>Minimalists</b>	Yes	No	Yes
<b>“Pragmatic overlay” [(i) on p. 4]</b>	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Contextualists [(ii) on p.4]</b>	No	Yes	Yes

0.1. *Minimalism*

1. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is an object of semantic study, then  $x$  is a sentence meaning.
- ~2. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is a sentence meaning, then  $x$  is a set of truth-conditions.
3. ∴ For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is an object of semantic study, then  $x$  is a set of truth-conditions.

0.2. *Overlay Views*

1. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is an object of semantic study, then  $x$  is a sentence meaning.
- ~3. For some  $x$ ,  $x$  is an object of semantic study, but  $x$  is not a set of truth-conditions.
2. ∴ For some  $x$ ,  $x$  is a sentence meaning, but  $x$  is not (just) a set of truth-conditions.

0.3. *Contextualism*

3. For all  $x$ , if  $x$  is an object of semantic study, then  $x$  is a set of truth-conditions.
2. For some  $x$ ,  $x$  is a sentence meaning, but  $x$  is not a set of truth-conditions.
- ~1. ∴ For some  $x$ ,  $x$  is an object of semantic study, but  $x$  is not sentence-meaning.

0.4. *Four Questions*

We can make finer-grained distinctions in this debate. The four questions in the top row strike me as the key questions that tease out further differences between the positions in the debate:<sup>KEY</sup>

	<b>Do sentences have truth-conditions independently of their contexts of utterance?</b>	<b>Are lexical and structural meanings sufficient to determine sentence meanings?</b>	<b>Do lexical and structural meanings have implicit “slots” that pragmatics must fill to determine truth-conditions?</b>	<b>Can pragmatics contribute to truth-conditions through anything other than these “slots”?</b>
<b>Syncretic-minimalists (Cappelen, Lepore, Borg)</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Grice (Portner, Kearns)</b>	Mostly	Mostly	Rarely	No
<b>Slot-minimalists (Stanley)</b>	Mostly	Yes, because...→	Yes	No
<b>Levinson</b>	Yes, because presumptive meanings are context-insensitive	No; also need presumptive meanings	Sometimes	Yes
<b>Bach</b>	No	No; also need implicit meanings	Sometimes	Yes

<sup>KEY</sup> Minimalists are in light gray; overlay are in dark gray; contextualists are unshaded; eliminativists are so radical that they might not even accept truth-conditions.

<b>Default semanticists (Jaszczolt)</b>	No	Rarely; also need CPI, CD, SCD	Sometimes	Yes
<b>Relevance theorists (Sperber, Wilson, Carston)</b>	No	No; also need to infer speaker's intentions	Sometimes	Yes
<b>Truth-conditional pragmaticists (Recanati)</b>	No	No; also need saturation and modulation	Sometimes	Yes
<b>Meaning eliminativists (later Wittgenstein)</b>	No	No, because meanings don't exist!	Always, because lexical and structural "meanings" are nothing but pointers to context-dependent factors	Yes

## 1. Do sentences have truth-conditions independently of their contexts of utterance?

### 1.1. Arguments for an affirmative answer

Portner's critiques of the idea theory (Twin Earth, communication objection) can be repurposed as arguments against SU. Because contextualists frequently appeal to psychology, they often have fairly compelling rebuttals to the communication objection based on considerations of more and less efficient ways of processing information.

### 1.2. Arguments for a negative answer

Those who answer this question negatively subscribe to *semantic underdetermination* (SU). Arguments for SU typically begin with examples in which the literal meanings of sentences either are quite far from how they are typically used, admit of multiple interpretations that are readily picked out by context, or are incomplete without context-specific background information.

There is some debate as to whether certain "obviously" context-sensitive terms (such as indexicals) should be included as evidence for SU, partly because their truth-conditions can be specified without any appeal to special pragmatic inferences that addressees must make. (See Section 3 for details.)

### 1.3. What's at stake?

Partly, what's at stake is whether a formal approach to semantics (see Portner) is too much of an abstraction from natural languages. Does it have too many idealizations and abstractions to shed any real light on things? Must we appeal to *people* and how they *think* about language in order to do semantics properly? It is also often thought that a negative answer to this question makes sentence meaning an uninteresting target of linguistic explanation. However, Levinson and Bach both suggest that this only follows if one *also* insists on explaining sentence meaning in terms of truth-conditions alone.

## 2. Are lexical and structural meanings sufficient to determine sentence meaning?

### 2.1. Arguments for an affirmative answer

On the kind of semantic picture we've seen in previous classes, a sentence's meaning can be comprehended simply by understanding its constituent words and their arrangement.

This is important for capturing the *compositionality* of meaning, which explains how finite beings, such as ourselves, can understand and produce a seemingly infinite combination of meaningful sentences. Hence, considerations about compositionality are often cited as reasons to answer this question affirmatively.

This also highlights what is at stake: contemporary formal semantics has a nice explanation of compositionality; it is unclear whether contextualist approaches fare nearly as well.

### 2.2. Arguments for a negative answer

If one accepts the argument for SU, then it is fairly easy to argue for a negative answer to this question as well:

- SU1. Sentences' truth-conditions depend on their contexts of utterance. (SU's core idea)
- SU2. If sentences' truth-conditions depend on their contexts of utterance, contexts of utterance (partly) determine sentence-meanings.
- SU3. Contexts of utterance are not (exhausted by) lexical and structural meanings.
- SU4. ∴ If sentences' truth-conditions depend on their contexts of utterance, then lexical and structural meanings are not sufficient to determine sentence meanings.
- If one does not accept arguments for SU, then some other argument will need to be presented.

### 3. Do lexical and structural meanings have implicit "slots" that pragmatics must fill to determine truth-conditions?

This one requires a little clarification. Take a sentence such as "I am hungry." An expression such as "I" has its context-sensitivity "built-in" so to speak. In other words, for any sentence which uses the first-person pronoun, "I," we know that we can replace it with the name of the speaker. So, any sentence with "I" has a "slot" for the speaker's name.

#### 3.1. Arguments for an affirmative answer

This appears to make good sense of a number of linguistic phenomena, e.g., indexicals, anaphors, gradable adjectives, domains of quantifiers.

#### 3.2. Arguments for a negative answer

This can quickly become *ad hoc*: whenever any putative counterexample to one's preferred semantic theory arises, one can simply explain it away using a hitherto-unnoticed slot.

#### 3.3. What's at stake?

With the previous two questions, allowing pragmatics to play a more prominent role meant that phenomena typically regarded as things that semanticists ought to explain were being ceded to pragmaticists. In this case, the opposite seems to be happening: if lexical and structural meanings have these slots, then things like indexicals, anaphors, etc. are actually part of semantics, not pragmatics.

### 4. Can pragmatics contribute to truth-conditions through anything other than these "slots"?

#### 4.1. Arguments for an affirmative answer

There are two kinds of arguments for why pragmatics contribute to truth-conditions in ways that go beyond implicit slots in lexical and structural meanings.

##### 4.1.1. Linguistic evidence

This strategy consists of sentences or short conversations that are not easily explained by slot minimalism. (Ex. The "girlfriend example.")

##### 4.1.2. Theoretical considerations

Relevance theorists frequently begin with some plausible and powerful assumptions about human cognition that indicate that communication requires inferring speakers' intentions. Once that point is taken on board, it is easy to see that not every inference of a speaker's intention must be an instance of slot-filling. Of course, some contextualists have different theoretical orientations. Their theoretical considerations may also suggest analogous sorts of possibilities.

#### 4.2. Arguments for a negative answer

As before, it is unclear how a contextualist answer to this question lines up with an explanation of compositionality.

Furthermore, the theoretical considerations will not be convincing to those who reject the importance of those theories to the relevant linguistic phenomena.

#### 4.3. What's at stake?

Much of what is at stake is derivative of what's at stake in the three previous questions. However, different affirmative answers to this question also distinguish different brands of contextualism.