

Andrei Moldovan

## **The Availability Principle and Truth-Value Judgements**

### **1. NEO-GRICEAN PRAGMATICS AND COGNITIVE PRAGMATICS**

According to Grice (1989), if an utterance of a sentence carries a certain conversational implicature, then the implicatum must fulfil the condition of being *calculable*. This is a necessary condition for the presence of a conversational implicature. Neale (1990: 78) calls it “the Justification Requirement”. The derivation of an implicature, Grice maintains, has the following structure: a speaker can be said to have implicated that *q* when saying that *p*, if:

(1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims; [...] (2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, *q* is required in order to make his saying [that *p*] [...] consistent with this presumption; and (3) the speaker thinks (and would expect the hearer to think that the speaker thinks) that it is within the competence of the hearer to work out, or grasp intuitively, that the supposition mentioned in (2) is required (Grice 1989: 30-31).

Literature devoted to the issue of interpreting linguistic utterances is replete with discussions concerning the nature of this derivation process. The neo-Griceans interpret the calculability requirement as a *normative* requirement on implicature (Saul 2002b: 228), in the sense that the conclusion that the speaker implicated that *q* by saying that *p* must be warranted by an argument that has the structure that Grice mentions. On this view, the requirement is not that hearers actually go through the steps of the argument in their interpretation of the speaker’s utterance. That is, Grice’s derivation scheme is not understood as having psychological reality. Kent Bach makes this point forcefully in the following passage:

Grice did not intend his account of how implicatures are recognized as a psychological theory or even as a cognitive model. He intended it as a rational reconstruction. When he illustrated the ingredients involved in recognizing an implicature, he was enumerating the sorts of information that a hearer needs to take into account, at least intuitively, and exhibiting how this information is logically organized. He was not foolishly engaged in psychological speculation about the nature of or even the temporal sequence of the cognitive processes that implements that logic (Bach 2005: 8).

The neo-Griceans — and by “neo-Gricean” I mean the normative interpretation of Grice’s account of implicature derivation that Bach outlines here — argue that this must be so inasmuch as hearers rarely go through the derivation scheme consciously and explicitly in the course of the actual interpretation of utterances carrying implicatures. Given that derivation is a necessary condition, insisting on the psychological reality of the derivation would make implicature implausibly rare. Furthermore, the neo-Gricean argues, it is not obvious why facts about the *hearers’* cognitive processes of interpretation should be relevant to what the speaker means in the first place.<sup>1</sup> Instead of aiming at reconstructing the actual hearer’s interpretation of an utterance, the neo-Gricean seeks to offer a reconstruction of the *speaker’s* communicative intentions. On this view, if the speech act *could* be reconstructed in such a way that the speaker must have intended to convey that *q* when asserting that *p*, then we have a reason to conclude that the speech act carries the implicature that *q*.

An alternative interpretation of Grice’s calculability is to be found in Sperber and Wilson (1995), Bezuidenhout (2002), Carston (2002), and Recanati (2004), among others. According to this approach — known as *truth-conditional pragmatics* or *cognitive pragmatics* — the implicature derivation scheme is relevant only inasmuch as it can offer an insight into the actual cognitive processes of implicature calculation. The cognitivist approach is interested in making predictions and giving explanations of real psychological processes of utterance interpretation. From this perspective, the Gricean derivation scheme is a hypothesis that needs to be tested against the relevant data so as to see if it has psychological reality and to discard it if it does not. It is not sufficient to take it on board as a mere possibility of deriving the implicature.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, an excessively normative understanding of implicature deriva-

<sup>1</sup> For instance, Bach (2001: 24-25) and Saul (2002a: 358). A version of this objection can be found in Cappelen and Lepore (2005: 216). Davis (1998: 122) makes the same point when discussing the nature of the derivation requirement: “What S implicates cannot be due even in part to what others presume or know about S. To implicate something is to mean or imply it in a certain way. And as Grice [...] correctly observed, to mean or imply something is to have certain intentions. But S’s intentions do not depend on what anyone else presumes. [...] My having certain intentions cannot be constituted or generated by any fact about you”.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Devitt, who is sympathetic to the pragmatist camp, also sees this way of conceiving a pragmatic theory as intuitively the correct one. He comments: “It is obviously not enough that *we theorists* could provide the derivation, which amounts to requiring just that there be a derivation. [...] We need *the speaker and hearer* to be somehow involved with the derivation” (Devitt 2007: 15).

tion leads, according to these authors, to unacceptable consequences. If the conclusion that an implicature has been generated is derived from idealized considerations of rationality and cooperation, independently of considerations regarding the speaker's actual mental processes, then we might conclude that the speaker's utterance carries the implicature that *q* even if this conclusion is psychologically unreal (i.e. the speaker lacks the communicative intention to convey that *q*). That is to say, psychological reality must be among the explanatory goals of a theory of implicature.

Important differences between the two kinds of theory become manifest in their approach to the semantics–pragmatics distinction. A notorious problem that Grice's account of implicature raises is how to delimit *what is said* (the literal content of an utterance, or its semantic content) from the *implicatum*. In general, the challenge is to draw the semantics–pragmatics boundary in such a way as to fulfil different, and sometimes divergent, theoretical desiderata. The following examples might help get a feel of the problems involved:

1. The princess is late (Bach 1994: 128).
2. Tipper is ready (Bach 1994: 128).
3. I've had breakfast (Recanati 2004: 8).

Consider a scenario in which the speaker, in uttering 1, intends to convey the proposition that the princess is late *for the party*; the speaker of 2 intends to communicate to her audience that Tipper is ready *to dance*; and the speaker of 3 — that she had breakfast *on the day of the utterance*. The phenomenon exemplified here is very common. It could be described in plain terms as consisting in “saying more than what the words literally convey”. Indeed, on a plausible assignment of semantic values to the words uttered (in virtue of their conventional linguistic meaning), the content that results from the compositional calculation of the semantic value of each of the above sentences is not identical to the proposition the speaker intends to convey. Intuitively, what the speaker of 2 intends to say — and what a normal hearer takes her to have said literally — is that *Tipper is ready to dance*, not just that *Tipper is ready*. Which one of the two contents should be identified with what is said (in Grice's technical sense of the term)?

Grice writes that what is said is “closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) [the speaker] has uttered” (Grice 1989: 25). He also says that it corresponds to “the elements of [the sentence], their order, and their syntactic character” (Grice 1989: 87). This is what Bach (2002) calls the Syntactic Correlation Constraint. If we decide to equate what is said with the content that results from the compositional calculation of the semantic values of the constituents of the sentence (as determined by their conventional meaning), then what is said by 2 is (roughly) the “minimal” content that *Tipper is ready*. Recanati (2001, 2004, 2010) calls such strict conceptions of what is said “minimalism” and argues forcefully against them.

In the next section I briefly mention some of these arguments and point out the main tenets of Recanati's framework.

## 2. RECANATI'S FRAMEWORK FOR COGNITIVE PRAGMATICS

Let me start by saying a few words about Recanati's rejection of minimalism. If we follow Grice in using the notion of what is said in a minimalist sense (or what is said<sub>min</sub>), Recanati argues, it turns out that, for many utterances of sentences, what is said is not a full-blown proposition (i.e. not a truth-evaluable content). For a wide range of cases what is said<sub>min</sub> is only a propositional schema (Recanati 2004: 36). Indeed, at least on some construals of the syntactic constraint, what is said<sub>min</sub> by an utterance of sentence 1 is: *the princess is late* (with no specification of what she is late for). In that case, the utterance of 1 is neither true nor false, as the princess may be late for one thing but not for another. That is, 1 does not express a complete proposition. And this is a problem for the minimalist due to a further feature which Grice assigns to what is said (apart from the syntactic constraint): in Grice's derivation scheme what is said is the input to implicature calculation; the scheme of derivation requires that we attribute to the speaker certain *propositional* attitudes; thus what is said must be a propositional content. The input of the calculation of any implicature that an utterance of 1 may carry is, arguably, the proposition that *the princess is late for the party*. It is this proposition that is relevant in calculating the implicature that, for instance, *the party may start without the princess*. By contrast, if what is said<sub>min</sub> is not propositional, it cannot play the role of being the input to implicature calculation.

A further problem for the minimalist, Recanati argues, concerns those sentences for which compositional calculation of the conventionally determined semantic values of the constituents of the sentence *is* a full-blown proposition. On the minimalist construal, the proposition literally expressed by 3 might turn out to be (roughly) that *there is a moment t in the past such that the speaker has had breakfast at t*. The problem is that *intuitively* this is not the proposition literally expressed by the sentence. Intuitively, the proposition literally expressed is (roughly) that *the speaker has had breakfast that morning* (of the day of the utterance). Therefore, the minimalist hypothesis about what is said contradicts our intuitions about the literal meaning of the utterance.

But why should these intuitions (pre-theoretical judgements) matter at all? From the perspective of Recanati's framework for cognitive pragmatics (1993, 2001, 2004, 2010), they provide relevant data. The reason is that this approach regards the Gricean derivation of implicatures as a hypothesis about the actual cognitive processes specific to utterance interpretation (e.g. Recanati 2004: 22). This means that the proposition literally expressed is actually entertained in the process of calculating the implicature, so that language users must have cognitive access to what is said. Since intuitions about literal meaning make use of the interlocutors' ability to access

what is said, they provide relevant data. Recanati (2004: 21) calls this methodological claim the Availability Principle (AP): “What is said must be intuitively accessible to the conversational participants (unless something goes wrong and they do not count as »normal interpreters«”.

If we take this principle seriously, he argues, some of the cases that have been traditionally treated as involving implicature generation are not of this kind. Consider sentence 4:

4. John has three children.

The Gricean traditional view (i.e. the minimalism position) has it that the proposition literally expressed is that *John has at least three children*. At the same time, it claims that the utterance of the sentence introduces a generalized scalar implicature that *John has no more than three children*. The result of combining what is said<sub>min</sub> and the implicature is the proposition globally communicated, namely, that *John has exactly three children*. But this account is incorrect, because it violates the Availability Principle: the only proposition available in the process of interpreting an utterance of 4 is the latter proposition. Therefore, according to Recanati, this is the proposition which is to be identified with what is said by 4.

As a result of this methodology, the notion of what is said<sub>min</sub> — the output of semantic composition that operates on the semantic value of the words uttered *as determined by their conventional meaning* — does not play any role at all in Recanati’s framework. What is said<sub>min</sub> is either infra-propositional (i.e. merely a propositional schema), or not the right proposition (i.e., intuitively, not the literal proposition). In both cases what is said<sub>min</sub> violates AP.

If the correct notion of semantic content is what is said<sub>max</sub>, how is it calculated? Recanati’s proposal is that the cognitive computation of what is said<sub>max</sub> includes what he calls *primary pragmatic processes* (PPPs). He differentiates them from secondary pragmatic processes (SPPs), which are the conscious cognitive processes involved in the recovery of implicature. PPPs contribute to semantic content (i.e. what is said<sub>max</sub>), but they are nevertheless pragmatic, because they are *not always* triggered by the conventional meaning of the words uttered. Sometimes they are triggered by conventional linguistic meaning, as in the case of saturation (i.e. determination of the referent) of indexicals and demonstratives. Yet in other cases they are not triggered by conventional meaning but are *free*. One example is *free enrichment*, which consists in enriching the conventional semantic value of an expression, such as completing the interpretation of “the beer” in 5 into *the beer that was part of the picnic*:

5. The picnic was awful. The beer was warm (Recanati 2004: 44).  
 6. The ATM swallowed my credit card (Recanati 2004: 26).  
 7. The ham sandwich left without paying (Recanati 2004: 26).  
 8. I am parked out back (Recanati 2004: 26).

Sentence 6 is an example of the PPP of *loosening* the meaning of “swallow”: “By relaxing the conditions of application for »swallow«, we construct an ad hoc concept with wider application” (2004: 26). The phenomenon of *predicate transfer* (traditionally known as metonymy), exemplified by 7 and 8, also involves PPPs. As Recanati (2004: 26) characterizes it, “in transfer the output is neither an enriched nor an impoverished version of the concept literally expressed by the input expression. It’s a different concept altogether, bearing a systematic relation to it”. A PPP takes as input the property linguistically encoded by “ham sandwich” and gives as output the derived property *ham sandwich orderer*. The same goes for “parked out back”: a PPP gives as output *car owner whose car is parked out back*. It is this pragmatically modified semantic value that is subsequently the input of the compositional calculation of what is said.

To sum up, there are three fundamental characteristics that Recanati attributes to PPPs:

(1) PPPs include not only processes mandated by the conventional meaning of the words uttered but also processes which are free, or *optional*.

(2) PPPs are *pre-propositional*, in the sense that they “operate locally, in contrast to secondary pragmatic processes, which can only operate when the truth-conditions of the sentence have been worked out” (Recanati 2004: 17). The input of a PPP is a less than propositional semantic content. The output of PPPs is the input of the compositional calculation of the semantic value of the sentence, which consequently delivers what is said<sub>max</sub>. The latter is the input of implicature calculation, an SPP.

(3) PPPs take place at the *sub-personal level*, in the sense that they are not conscious inferential processes (the kind of processes that are to be attributed to the brain or the person as a whole) but unconscious processes which need to be explained as the result of the activity of a certain module or specialized structure of the brain. PPPs are “blind, mechanical process[es], involving no reflection on the interpreter’s part” (2004: 32) and “associative processes, governed solely by accessibility considerations” (2004: 49). By contrast, secondary pragmatic processes (e.g. processes of implicature calculation) take place at the personal level. That is why they are explained in terms of “properly inferential processes operating over propositions, and governed by Gricean-type maxims, in the case of implicatures” (2004: 49).

### 3. THE AVAILABILITY PRINCIPLE REVISITED

In this section I focus on Recanati’s motivation for introducing PPPs and, in particular, his Availability Principle. AP plays the methodological role of drawing the boundary between two kinds of cognitive explanations of our ability to interpret utterances of sentences. It establishes the dividing line between processes of interpretation that should receive a sub-personal, associative, and pre-propositional explana-

ation, and those that should be explained in inferential, personal, and post-propositional terms.

In *Direct Reference*, Recanati formulates the principle in slightly different terms:

In deciding whether a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning is part of what is said, that is, in making a decision concerning what is said, we should always try to preserve our pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter (Recanati 1993: 248).

This sounds like a more moderate claim than the more recent formulation quoted above (Recanati 2004: 21), which requires that what is said “must be intuitively accessible”. Yet Recanati immediately adds that “what is said and what is implicated [...] are consciously available as distinct” (Recanati 1993: 248). This suggests that both accounts are very similar.

Notice that AP is a claim about what competent speakers are *able* to do. In particular, the claim is that they are able to intuitively recognize these two propositions. AP does not require that they actually *access* those propositions during the interpretation process. Therefore, it is irrelevant to the availability claim whether there is actual access during the interpretation process or not. But when Recanati goes on to apply this methodological strategy to determining the contents that correspond to what is said<sub>max</sub> and to the implicatum, he does not seem to take this point seriously.<sup>3</sup> Consider again sentence 4, repeated here as 9:

9. John has three children.

Recanati comments that the traditional scalar implicature strategy fails because it postulates that what is said is that *John has at least three children*. Instead, we should take the proposition that *John has exactly three children* to be what is said. He comments:

Now *this is the only proposition I am conscious of expressing by my utterance*; in particular, I am unaware of having expressed the “minimal” proposition that John has at least three children (Recanati 2004: 11).

This is intuitively correct. But it is not an application of AP, as the principle refers to the contents that are *available* to normal interpreters, and not the contents that are actually entertained in the process of interpretation.<sup>4</sup> Consider another application of AP, this time the explanation of the domain restriction of the quantifier in 10:

10. Everybody went to Paris (Recanati 1993: 248).

<sup>3</sup> García-Carpintero (2006: 58) makes a similar observation concerning Recanati’s use of his AP.

<sup>4</sup> Recanati is not the only author in the cognitive pragmatics camp who shifts between conscious availability and conscious access. Bezuidenhout (2008) calls “the dual availability assumption” the claim that in interpreting metaphors we are *accessing* both the literal meaning of the sentence and its metaphorical meaning. She goes on to discuss the question about the order in which the two contents are accessed.

A speaker uttering 10 normally does not mean that *every person in the world went to Paris*, but that, for instance, *every member of our company went to Paris*. The minimalist position is that the proposition literally expressed is the former, and the latter is derived as an implicature. Again, it is plausible to suggest that normal interpreters do not consciously entertain the former, absurd proposition. But is it not *available* to them? It is not at all clear that competent speakers, if asked to form a judgement about what is literally said by 10, would not say that it is the absurd proposition involving unrestricted quantification. In the case of loosening (sentence 6) and predicate transfer (sentences 7 and 8) the absurd “minimal” what is said is easily available to competent speakers. Therefore, if we stick to the formulation of AP involving availability considerations, it is not clear whether it leads to the consequence that the minimalist approach is incorrect.

Now, from the point of view of the cognitive pragmatist’s theoretical aims, it makes much more sense to draw the distinction between what is said and what is implicated by relying on facts about actual utterance interpretation, and not about judgements reached by interlocutors after *reflecting* upon their own interpretation. It is such facts about what propositions are accessed and consciously entertained that are relevant to the hypothesis that implicature calculation “rests on a process of *conscious* inference” (2004: 41). So let us reformulate Recanati’s principle in these terms, as the Access Principle (ACP):

(ACP)           What is said must be consciously accessed by the conversational participants in the interpretation process (unless something goes wrong and they do not count as “normal interpreters”).<sup>5</sup>

ACP has a better chance than AP of supporting the conclusion that the minimalist hypothesis about what is said is incorrect. The proposition that *John has at least three children* is intuitively not accessed in interpreting an utterance of 4/9, and also the proposition that *every person in the world went to Paris* is not consciously entertained when interpreting 10. At the same time, in many of Grice’s paradigmatic examples of implicatures we do intuitively access both the proposition literally expressed and the implicatum, and we are aware that they are different. Consider, for instance, the bank employee example (1989: 24): when A asks B how their friend C is getting on in his new job at a bank, B replies: “Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn’t been to prison yet”. The implicature, Grice writes, might be

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is this principle that Recanati had in mind all along. He writes, for instance, that in the case of primary pragmatic processes, “the interpreter is *not aware* that his judgment, to the effect that the speaker has said that *p*, is inferentially derived from a prior judgment” (2004: 43, emphasis added). But it is difficult to tell, since Recanati switches back and forth between talk of conscious access and talk of availability. For instance, consider his definition of conscious inference, which requires that the premise and the conclusion, as well as their relation, be “available (consciously accessible)” (2004: 42); yet in another place “availability” is defined as a reflective capacity (cf. Recanati 2004: 50).

that *C* is the sort of person likely to yield to the temptation provided by his occupation. Grice comments on this case: “It is clear that whatever B implied, suggested, meant in this example, is distinct from what B said, which was simply that C has not been in prison yet” (1989: 24).

However, ACP is not devoid of problems. Even if intuitions usually distinguish between what is said and what is implicated, this is not uniform across the entire population of competent language users. I shall call this the *problem of the variability of intuitions*. The intuitions about what is said and about what is implicated are dependent on the peculiarities of the context of utterance and of the interpreter considered. Let us look again at the ham sandwich example (sentence 7). The waiter’s communicative intention in saying “The ham sandwich left without paying” is to convey that *the ham sandwich orderer left without paying*. It is plausible to hold — as Recanati does — that in the course of interpreting the utterance the waiter’s colleague never entertains the minimal proposition that the ham *sandwich* left without paying. This may be true with respect to the audience consisting of waiters in general. But what about a different type of audience? Someone who is unfamiliar with the variety of predicate transfer employed by waiters, may entertain the “minimal” proposition and, upon realizing its absurdity, make a conscious inference to the conclusion that the waiter must have meant that *the person who ordered the ham sandwich* left without paying. This interpreter does access the minimal absurd proposition. So, who is the relevant audience?

Recanati adds to the principle the provision that we should only consider *normal* interpreters when using it to determine what is said by an utterance of a sentence. However, this does not help us with the variability problem because it is not the case that the customer overhearing the waiter’s remark is a less normal interpreter than the waiter’s colleague who was the addressee of the remark. The customer is simply an interpreter with a different background. What a particular audience may take to be literally asserted, on the basis of *their* intuitions, a different audience may regard as having been merely implied, or somehow indirectly conveyed. And the same applies to the question whether speakers consciously entertain the minimal proposition or not.

It might be suggested that ACP should be relativized to populations of language users. For some audiences the interpretation of an utterance involves PPPs while for other audiences it is more accurately explained as a matter of implicature derivation, i.e. in terms of SPPs. After all, the cognitive processes an audience goes through when interpreting an utterance need not be identical with the cognitive processes a different audience relies on. But the problem of the variability of intuitions is too pervasive to be avoided by simply relativizing ACP to a population of language users. There is a variability of what is consciously accessed in the process of interpretation within the same population, and even for the same hearer. The same person may interpret two utterances of the same sentence differently — with or without accessing the minimal proposition. This seems to be the case at least from an introspective, phenomenological perspective.

As an illustration of this point, consider saturation, the cognitive process hearers go through in identifying the referents of demonstratives. In line with Recanati's considerations, this is normally a fairly automatic process that does not require conscious inference and should be explained as involving PPPs. But scenarios such as the one imagined by Kaplan (1970: 396) are by no means implausible or uncommon: the speaker points at the place on the wall behind him on which a picture of Rudolf Carnap used to hang and says: "That is a picture of one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century". But the speaker is not aware that someone has replaced the picture of Carnap with one of the actor Spiro Agnew. In interpreting the utterance and, in particular, in identifying the referent of the demonstrative, the hearer (assuming she realizes it is not Carnap in the picture) must rely on conscious inference. The explanation in cases such as this cannot exclusively rely on automatic processes of association but must include attributing to the hearer an inference to the best explanation. Therefore, conscious inference is sometimes relied on at the pre-propositional level as well, in order to grasp propositional constituents.

Now, Recanati admits that there are cases in which even the recovery of what is said involves inferential processes, but he claims that they are not cases of *normal* utterance interpretation. He writes:

According to me, the primary pragmatic processes involved in comprehension are not "inferential". Only when the unreflective, normal process of interpretation yields weird results does a genuine inference process take place whereby we use evidence concerning the speaker's beliefs and intentions to work out what he means (Recanati 2004: 38).

Here, instead of mentioning normal *interpreters*, as AP/ACP does, Recanati speaks of normal *processes of interpretation*. But the concept of normal interpretation is hopelessly vague. Is the customer who overhears the ham sandwich sentence not going through a normal process of interpretation? In general, in cases of predicate transfer, hearers may sometimes, but not always, need to go through conscious inferences in order to recover the intended meaning.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the use of conscious inference may step in not only when the unreflective process of interpretation yields weird results, as Recanati suggests. We may consciously *decide* to be more reflective in interpreting an utterance. We usually do this in talking to people we just met. Lack of familiarity with the speaker may be a reason to be more reflective and to appeal to conscious inferences in interpreting her statements.

I conclude that ACP does not draw a systematic line between two kinds of contents, as Recanati claims, i.e. what is said<sub>max</sub> and the implicatum. It is not possible to systematically map the kinds of *contents* that are consciously accessed during interpretation onto the kinds of *processes* by which they are reached. Interpreters may

---

<sup>6</sup> Also, as Cappelen and Lepore (2005) point out, "a lot of situations have no »normal« set of expectations associated with them. Suppose you meet someone in a cafe on a hot New York City summer day. What »normality« are we looking for? Normal for you when talking to strangers in a cafe in New York City on a hot summer day? There's no such thing!" (2005: 218).

rely on either PPPs or SPPs to arrive at the same propositional or sub-propositional content. Which of them they rely on in a particular case depends on many factors, including varied, even idiosyncratic, contextual facts, as well as the hearer's exposition to a certain kind of language use.

Now, this is not to say that there is no such thing as a PPP, that is, an automatic, unconscious process, governed by facts about saliency, relevance, etc. As García-Carpintero suggests, "many fine-grained semantic facts can only be adjudicated on that basis; I am thinking, for instance, of facts about binding constraints" (2001: 124). What I am arguing for is that we should not rely on the answer to the question about what contents interpreters consciously access (that is, on ACP) in drawing the distinction between semantic content (or what is said) and pragmatic content (the implicatum). ACP should not be seen as providing data that is relevant to the question of how to divide the theoretical labour between semantics and pragmatics.

#### 4. NEO-GRICEAN PRAGMATICS AND ACP

Since the neo-Gricean approach to pragmatics does not rely on ACP as a methodological principle, it avoids the objection of the variability of intuitions voiced against ACP in the previous section. As already pointed out, on this approach the inferential scheme for implicature derivation is not meant to have psychological reality but to be a rational reconstruction of the speaker's communicative intentions. It is a normative account inasmuch as it portrays an idealized reasoning process that a rational and cooperative hearer goes through in interpreting the utterances. It is not meant to be an account of the actual reasoning process that any "normal" interpreter instantiates. However, it does have explanatory power, as it identifies those cases in which it is rational to interpret the speaker as meaning (or suggesting, or implying) that  $q$  by saying that  $p$ . It is an idealized model of a real phenomenon.<sup>7</sup> This model of reasoning helps us *make sense* of what both speakers and interpreters are doing when they are successfully using implicatures in communication. The actual interpretation process is often implicit, intuitive, automatic, and does not always have the phenomenological features of inferential reasoning. But it is not less rational, precisely because it is governed (in a normative sense) by the idealized model of reasoning. David Lewis (1975) makes this point with respect to action in general:

An action may be rational, and may be explained by the agent's beliefs and desires, even though that action was done by habit, and the agent gave no thought to the beliefs or desires which were his reason for acting. A habit may be under the agent's rational control in this

---

<sup>7</sup> This brings to mind the following remark Russell made in 1957 about the theoretical aims he had when formulating his theory of descriptions in 1905: "My theory of descriptions was never intended as an analysis of the state of mind of those who utter sentences containing descriptions; [...] I was concerned to find a more accurate and analysed thought to replace the somewhat confused thoughts which most people at most times have in their heads" (Russell 1957: 388).

sense: if that habit ever ceased to serve the agent's desires according to his beliefs, it would at once be overridden and corrected by conscious reasoning. Action done by a habit of this sort is both habitual and rational (Lewis 1975: 25-26).

Consider again the case of predicate transfer. It may be argued that the waiter does not consciously infer the intended meaning because she is accustomed to that use of language. Her interpretation of it is carried out in virtue of a habit. The cognitive explanation, in that case, may very well involve reference to PPPs, that is, "blind, mechanical process, involving no reflection on the interpreter's part" (Recanati 2004: 32). For this interpreter, Recanati's account may be correct. The description "the ham sandwich", he writes,

first receives its literal interpretation, in such a way that a representation of a ham sandwich is activated; activation then spreads to related representations, including a representation of the man who ordered a ham sandwich. [...] Now the ham sandwich orderer is a better candidate than the ham sandwich itself for the status of argument for '... has left without paying'. It is therefore [...] retained, while the literal interpretation is discarded (Recanati 2004: 29).<sup>8</sup>

In general, a neo-Gricean may agree that the process of utterance interpretation often has the features that Recanati ascribes to PPPs. That is to say, they may be (1) optional; (2) local or pre-propositional; and (3) take place at the sub-personal level. The neo-Gricean may agree with (1), that predicate transfer is not mandated by the conventional linguistic meaning of the words uttered. She needs not disagree with (3) either: at least for some cases of predicate transfer, there is no reason to rule out the possibility of a correct sub-personal account of the cognitive processes that underlie the interpretation. Yet the same is true of any implicature calculation: at least for certain audiences, the process of interpretation may be blind, mechanical, involving no reflection. As a consequence, she might accept (2) as well: in many cases the *actual* cognitive process of interpretation may not be sensitive to the minimal proposition. It may take as input a less than propositional content. Of course, in other cases, when the minimal proposition *is* intuitively accessed, the actual process of interpretation is better accounted for as an instance of inferential reasoning.

In rejecting ACP the neo-Gricean should not at the same time deny that a fruitful explanatory strategy along these lines is available for some instances of interpretation of predicate transfer. But she *does* reject the claim that these cognitive explanations of actual processes of interpretation have anything to do with the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. On the neo-Gricean view, the cases of predicate transfer discussed above (sentences 7 and 8) are to be explained as involving an implicature generation. On this account, the semantic content of the utterance is the minimal proposition that *the ham sandwich left without paying*. This proposition is

---

<sup>8</sup> It may be objected that what Recanati described here is not clearly a sub-personal process. Why is the ham sandwich orderer a *better candidate* than the ham sandwich itself for the status of the argument of the predicate? Isn't it because of considerations of relevance and truth, in which case the process is inferential?

absurd, it violates the maxim of Quality, so it cannot be the intended speaker meaning. Given that the speaker is sensitive to the conversational interests and observes the maxim of Relevance,<sup>9</sup> there must be a relevant property in the context that would allow to preserve the assumption that the speaker is observing the maxim of Quality at the level of speaker meaning. A salient property that is fit for this purpose is that of *ham sandwich orderer*. Thus we reach the implicature that *the ham sandwich orderer left without paying*.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. THE AVAILABILITY PRINCIPLE RESCUED

So far I have argued that Recanati seems to understand the notion of “availability” that occurs in the formulation of AP as involving a conscious access. I have reformulated AP as ACP to bring out this fact and suggested that ACP is in line with the theoretical aims of truth-conditional pragmatics, even more so than AP. I have criticized ACP for failing to draw a systematic distinction between two kinds of content — semantic content and pragmatic content. I have also pointed out that neo-Gricean pragmatics does not rely on ACP, so that it is free of specific problems that the latter encounters. At the same time, it is able to offer a plausible account of pragmatic phenomena such as predicate transfer.

Let me now turn to a brief discussion of the methodological upshot of the above criticism of ACP. Does rejecting ACP mean that we should entirely exclude intuitions from our methodology for doing natural language semantics? And if we do rely on intuitions, what principle should replace ACP?

Traditionally, native speakers’ truth-value judgements have been regarded as an important source of data for testing theories in natural language semantics (see e.g. García-Carpintero 2006: 132, Kölbel 2011: 62 and ff.). Some authors take this kind of intuitions to provide solid data for testing theories in natural language semantics. For instance, Stanley (2007: 6) writes:

As native speakers of the language, we have robust intuitions about the truth and falsity of what is said by an utterance of English relative to different possible situations; [...] if we did not have robust intuitions about the truth-conditions of our utterances, it would not be clear how to test such hypotheses [about meaning].

<sup>9</sup> (Nunberg 1995) is the *locus classicus* concerning predicate transfer. He maintains that it is relevance that drives the interpretation process: “predicate transfer is only possible when the property contributed by the new predicate is »noteworthy«”, and remarks that “noteworthiness can be thought of as a special case of relevance” (1995: 114).

<sup>10</sup> As the anonymous referee points out, my portrayal of the neo-Gricean and the cognitive pragmatists makes these views seem complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Indeed, I think they are complementary to an important extent. They are different research projects that emerged out of Grice’s original and immensely influential work. What I am arguing for is that the cognitive pragmatics research programme (or rather a certain version of it) faces certain methodological problems avoided by the neo-Gricean programme.

Other authors insist that intuitions about literal truth-value are not indicative of semantic content (or what is said). For instance, according to Soames (2012: 171):

Speakers are mostly reliable judges of what *they*, as well as others, mean, assert, and convey by particular utterances. But they aren't able to reliably distinguish information contributed by sentence meaning from that added pragmatically.

Neo-Griceans such as Bach also embrace this point. Bach (2002) argues that our intuitions about what is literally expressed are not a reliable criterion for semantic content.<sup>11</sup> Speakers are sensitive to the contents *communicated* by utterances of sentence but not to semantic content (cf. Pagin 2005: 334-335).

Now, even if the latter observations are correct, intuitions about literal truth-value provide a kind of data that is *relevant* in drawing the distinction between the semantic content and contents which are pragmatically conveyed. The question concerning the extent to which such intuitions are sensitive to semantic content is a very complex one, and I am not addressing it here. I only want to point out that, inasmuch as a semantic theory appeals to this kind of data — and, as Stanley points out, it is difficult to see how it could do without it — it is the Availability Principle in its initial formulation (not ACP) that the semanticist should rely on. That is to say, she should appeal to the formulation involving *availability* instead of a conscious *access* during the interpretation process. It does not matter how the speaker normally interprets the utterance, by accessing, or not, certain contents. What is relevant is what the native speaker judges to have been literally said. And there is no reason why the speaker should not be allowed to *reflect* upon the utterance of the sentence in settling on a particular judgement concerning its literal truth-value. The requirement that the truth-value judgement must be pre-theoretical does not entail that what is judged to be true or false must be identical to what is first accessed in the interpretation process. It is the *availability* of such a judgement — in proper conditions that need to be carefully considered — that should feature in the formulation of a methodologically useful principle. It means that AP *is* a valuable methodological principle if correctly interpreted, i.e. if “availability” is not understood as a conscious access.

I pointed out above that ACP fits neatly into the cognitive pragmatics approach. On the other hand, AP fits well with a neo-Gricean approach to pragmatics. In fact, the neo-Gricean needs to rely on a principle such as AP, according to which what is said is available to the interlocutors, and they *could* recognize it as such (at least under idealized conditions). It is so because the implicature derivation scheme requires attributing propositional attitudes to the speaker, the content of which is what is said, as well as the implicatum. So both these propositions must be available to the speaker. Moreover, AP

---

<sup>11</sup> Bach (2002: 23) writes: “It is the central aim of semantics to account for semantic facts, not intuitions. People’s spontaneous judgments or »intuitions« provide data for semantics, but it is an open question to what extent they reveal semantic facts and should therefore be explained rather than explained away. Since, as I am suggesting, they are often responsive to non-semantic information, to what is implicit in what is said but not part of it, they should be treated cautiously”.

(i.e. native speakers' reflective truth-value judgements) supports the neo-Gricean account of predicate transfer sketched above. It is to be expected that a native speaker would not judge sentence 7 (i.e. the ham sandwich sentence) as *literally true* with respect to the situation in which the ham sandwich orderer left without paying. And this holds both for the speakers that Recanati would not count as "normal" and for those waiters who count as normal speakers in the context in which the sentence is uttered. With respect to this particular use of 7, the intuition concerning its literal meaning is strong: the sentence is about a ham sandwich, not a ham sandwich orderer.

The tentative conclusion that I draw from the present discussion is that AP is a reasonable methodological principle, in accordance with the traditional view concerning the relevance of truth-value intuitions to semantic theorizing. Moreover, AC fits well with the neo-Gricean approach to pragmatics and supports the neo-Gricean account of predicate transfer. In addition, I have argued, AC is free of the problems faced by ACP (that is, Recanati's understanding of the Availability Principle).

## REFERENCES

- Bach K. (1994), *Conversational Implicature*, „Mind and Language” 9(2), 124-162.
- Bach K. (2001), *You Don't Say?*, „Synthese” 128(1-2), 15-44.
- Bach K. (2002), *Seemingly Semantic Intuitions* [in:] *Meaning and Truth. Investigations in Philosophical Semantics*, J. K. Campbell, M. O'Rourke, D. Shier (eds.), New York, NY: Seven Bridges Press, 21-33.
- Bach K. (2005), *The Top 10 Minconceptions about Implicature* [in:] *A Festschrift for Larry Horn*, B. Birner, G. Ward (eds.), Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bezuidenhout A. (2002), *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*, „Nous” 36(16), 105-134.
- Bezuidenhout A. (2008), *Metaphorical Singular Reference. The Role of Enriched Composition in Reference Resolution*, „The Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition, Logic and Communication” 3 [*A Figure of Speech*], 1-22.
- Cappelen H., Lepore E. (2005), *A Tall Tale. In Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism* [in:] *Contextualism in Philosophy. Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, G. Preyer, G. Peter (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 197-220.
- Carston R. (2002), *Linguistic Meaning, Communicated Meaning and Cognitive Pragmatics*, „Mind and Language” 17(1/2) [*Special Issue on Pragmatics & Cognitive Science*], 127-148.
- Davis W. A. (1998), *Implicature. Intention, Convention, and Principle in the Failure of Gricean Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Devitt M. (2004), *The Case for Referential Descriptions* [in:] *Descriptions and Beyond*, M. Reimer, A. Bezuidenhout (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 234-260.
- Devitt M. (2007), *Referential Descriptions and Conversational Implicatures*, „European Journal of Analytic Philosophy” 3(2), 7-32.
- García-Carpintero M. (2001), *Gricean Rational Reconstructions and the Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*, „Synthese” 128(1-2): 93-131.
- García-Carpintero M. (2006), *Two-Dimensional Semantics. A Neo-Fregean Interpretation* [in:] *Two-Dimensional Semantics*, M. García-Carpintero, J. Macià (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 181-204.
- García-Carpintero M. (2007), *Recanati on the Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*, „Crítica” 38: 35-68.

- Grice H. P. (1989), *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kaplan D. (1970), *Dthat* [in:] *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, P. A. French, T. E. Uehling, H. K. Wettstein, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 383-400.
- Kölbel M. (2011), *Objectivity, Relativism and Context Dependence*, Fernuniversität in Hagen.
- Lewis D. (1975), *Languages and Language* [in:] *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, K. Gunderson (ed.), Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 3-35.
- Neale S. (1990), *Descriptions*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Neale S. (1992), *Paul Grice and the Philosophy of Language*, „Linguistics and Philosophy” 15(5), 509-559.
- Nunberg G. (1995), *Transfers of Meaning*, „Journal of Semantics”, 12(2), 109-132.
- Pagin P. (2005), *Compositionality and Context* [in:] *Contextualism in Philosophy. Knowledge, Meaning, and Truth*, G. Preyer, G. Peter (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 303-348.
- Recanati F. (1993), *Direct Reference. From Language to Thought*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Recanati F. (2001), *What Is Said*, „Synthese” 128(1-2), 75-91.
- Recanati F. (2004), *Literal Meaning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Recanati F. (2010), *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reimer M. (1998), *Donnellan's Distinction / Kripke's Test*, „Analysis” 58(2), 89-100.
- Ruhl C. (1989), *On Monosemy. A Study in Linguistic Semantics*, New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Russell B. (1957), *Mr. Strawson on Referring*, „Mind” 66(263), 385-389.
- Saul J. M. (2002a), *What Is Said and Psychological Reality. Grice's Project and Relevance Theorists Criticisms*, „Linguistics and Philosophy” 25: 347-372.
- Saul J. M. (2002b), *Speaker Meaning, What Is Said, and What Is Implicated*, „Noûs” 36(2), 228-248.
- Soames S. (2012), *Philosophy of Language*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sperber D., Wilson D. (1995), *Relevance. Communication and Cognition*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Stanley J. (2007), *Language in Context. Selected Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.