

Prepragmatics: Widening the Semantics-Pragmatics Boundary

Isidora Stojanovic

► **To cite this version:**

Isidora Stojanovic. Prepragmatics: Widening the Semantics-Pragmatics Boundary. *Metasemantics: New Essays on the Foundations of Meaning*, Burgess, Alexis and Brett Sherman (Eds.), pp.311-326, 2014. <ijn_00843898v2>

HAL Id: ijn_00843898

https://jeannicod.ccsd.cnrs.fr/ijn_00843898v2

Submitted on 19 Dec 2013

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Prepragmatics

Widening the Semantics/Pragmatics Boundary

draft of July 11, 2013

Isidora Stojanovic
isidora.stojanovic@upf.edu
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Abstract

One of the most important and, at the same time, most controversial issues in metasemantics is the question of what semantics is, and what distinguishes semantic elements (features, properties, phenomena, mechanisms, processes, or whatever) from the rest. The issue is tightly linked with the debate over the semantics-pragmatics distinction, which has been vibrant for a decade or two, but seems to be reaching an impasse. I suggest that this impasse may be due to the failure to recognize a distinct realm that should not be subsumed either under semantics or pragmatics, but may be labeled "prepragmatics". My ultimate goal is to put forward and defend a novel picture of our language architecture, according to which: semantic content is strictly poorer than the lexically encoded content (and therefore does not involve any contextually determined material – not even the reference of demonstratives); pragmatic mechanisms require being able to reason about one's beliefs and intentions and do not affect truth-conditions or truth-value; and, finally, there is a distinct prepragmatic level, which takes into account various kinds of contextual information and makes it possible to evaluate a sentence (as used on a particular occasion) for a truth value. I shall take as a case study, one of the "stumbling stones" in the semantics-pragmatics literature: the case of demonstrative reference. The upshot will be to show that if there is indeed room for a family of linguistic phenomena that are neither semantic nor yet fully pragmatic, the resolution of demonstrative reference is a candidate *par excellence* to belong there.

1. Semantics vs. pragmatics: what is at issue?

One of the central tasks for metasemantics is to characterize what semantics is. The more specific problem of where to draw the line between semantics and pragmatics has received considerable attention among philosophers of language in the past decade.¹ The source of the problem is that there seem to be several equally plausible criteria for distinguishing "semantics" from "pragmatics" that converge often, but not always. Those cases in which they fail to converge have been of greatest interest to the different parties in the debate, but equally well to linguists working at the semantics-pragmatics interface. In this section, I start by laying down three main criteria that have emerged from the literature, and then raise the issue of what the debate about the semantics-pragmatics distinction is really about. In section 2, I propose to overcome the impasse posed by the semantics-pragmatics dichotomy by recognizing a distinct, third area, which I call *prepragmatics*. The last section aims to probe this proposal on the phenomenon of demonstrative reference.

It is believed that the first attempt of carefully distinguishing semantics from pragmatics goes back to Morris (1936), who took the former to be the study of "the relation of signs to objects which they denote and whose properties they truly state" and the latter, the study of "language as a type of communicative activity, social in origin and nature, by which members of a social groups are able to meet more satisfactorily their individual and common needs" (p. 10).² Since then, this broad distinction between semantics

1 A number of collections of articles specifically on this issue may be mentioned: Turner (ed.) 1999, Bianchi (ed.) 2005, Szabó (ed.) 2006, Stojanovic (ed.) 2008, Ezcurdia and Stainton (eds.) 2011, to mention only a few.

2 I am borrowing the quotation from McNally (forthcoming), p. 3.

and pragmatics has been seconded by more refined ones. Three main criteria appear to have crystalized through the literature. Let us formulate them along the following (admittedly rough) lines.³

- (i) The semantic stuff is lexically encoded in the linguistic expressions themselves; the pragmatic stuff need not be (and typically is not) lexically encoded.
- (ii) The pragmatic stuff is sensitive to various contextual factors; the semantic stuff does not vary from one context to another.
- (iii) The semantic stuff determines the truth conditions; the pragmatic stuff is truth-conditionally inert.

To get a better understanding of the motivations behind the three criteria, suppose that in reference to Aisha, I tell you:

- (1) She is obnoxious.

Suppose that Aisha's behavior makes it obvious that she is obnoxious, so that by telling you that she is obnoxious, I am not saying anything informative. Presumably, then, the reason for telling you (1) is not to *inform* you that Aisha is obnoxious. Rather, I might say (1) in order to *convey* something along the lines of:

- (2) I suggest that we avoid Aisha for the rest of the evening.

What I would thus convey with (1) – which is what I would have *expressed* had I uttered the sentence in (2) – is uncontroversially something that is only *pragmatically* associated with my utterance of (1). And indeed, it falls on the pragmatic side according to all three criteria:

- (i) the suggestion that we avoid Aisha for the rest of the evening is not lexically encoded in the meaning of the sentence uttered in (1);

³ I shall formulate the criteria as distinguishing semantic "stuff" from pragmatic "stuff": the reason for choosing such a jargon term is that at this stage, I would like to stay neutral on what it is precisely that the distinction bears upon, and in particular, whether it is abstract entities such as elements, features or properties, or rather, more concrete entities such as interpretation mechanisms and processes. I shall return shortly.

(ii) in order to convey that suggestion, I must rely on various contextual factors; my interlocutor must reason about what my intentions were in uttering (1), etc.;

(iii) the suggestion has no bearing on (1)'s truth conditions or truth value: (1) is true if Aisha is obnoxious and false if she isn't;⁴ and this is so regardless of how one feels about the question of whether she is to be avoided or not.

So far so good: implicatures fall out as uncontroversially pragmatic. But now, what would be uncontroversially semantic in our example? Let *t* be the time at which (1) is uttered. One might think (as Grice himself did) that the proposition *that Aisha is obnoxious at t* is what semantics delivers: the semantic content, or 'what is said'. After all, the implicature that we'd better avoid Aisha is arguably derived from the proposition that she is obnoxious, together with the general assumption that obnoxious people had better be avoided.

Despite the fact that this view, on which pronouns such as 'she' contribute their reference to the semantic content, had been implicitly assumed for a long time and then became part of our philosophical heritage with David Kaplan's influential *Demonstratives*, I submit that the view is far from uncontroversial. Indeed, it takes little to see that only on the third of the above criteria does Aisha, *qua* the referent of 'she', fall on the "semantic" rather than "pragmatic" side. For one thing, it is not part of the lexical meaning of 'she' that the word should stand for Aisha. (If it did, then every time I used the pronoun 'she' I would be talking of Aisha, which is absurd.) For another, one clearly needs context in order to select Aisha, rather than some other female, as the person relevant to the truth of (1).

Many philosophers' strategy has been to suitably amend those two criteria in order to maintain the reference of demonstratives on the semantic side.⁵

⁴ I am ignoring here the fact that "obnoxious" may be an evaluative predicate, hence that the truth value of (1) may depend not only on whether Aisha is obnoxious *simpliciter*, but also on from whose point of view her obnoxiousness is being judged.

⁵ Roughly, as for the 1st criterion, the idea is to say that the mere fact that there is a *word*, 'she', that appears to stand for Aisha and that the lexical meaning of this word "invites" the interpreter to search for some female referent are sufficient to render Aisha "linguistically encoded" in the sentence in (1). As for the 2nd criterion, the amendment was to make room for "semantic contextuality"; that is, for the possibility of appealing to the context in the course of semantic interpretation. Indexicals are taken to be those expressions whose characteristic

One could speculate that the reason why people have been so reluctant to give up the semantic status of demonstrative reference is that the only alternative they could envisage is a view on which it would belong to pragmatics. But that was a mistake. The reason why the distinction between semantics vs. pragmatics raises a problem is, I suggest, because it comes with the underlying assumption that, for a range of phenomena, the phenomenon is either semantic or pragmatic, *tertium non datur*. It is that very assumption that I suggest had better be rejected. Before I present my own proposal (sect. 2), there is a more pressing concern that I would like to address: what does it even mean to say that something (phenomenon, property, process, whatever) is semantic, pragmatic, or yet something else? In other words, what is the semantics-pragmatics debate really about?

There are at least three ways of understanding the question of what the semantics-pragmatics distinction is. The first would be to see it as a purely terminological question. If so, when faced with the fact that our initial criteria fail to converge, it becomes a matter of terminological decision which criterion to give preference to (if any). Thus if one decides to focus on semantics as a study of how linguistic expressions relate to “objects whose properties they truly state” (cf. Morris 1936: 10), hence as having to do primarily with how language relates to the world and to truth, then one will locate demonstrative reference on the “semantic” side, but also many other contextual phenomena that affect truth value and that are traditionally not seen as “semantic”. Thus consider a case of what, depending on one's views, may be seen as a case of enrichment or of coercion.⁶ Consider a situation in which Byeong has been

feature is precisely that they contribute contextually determined referents to *semantic* content.

⁶ The notion of pragmatic enrichment has its origin in the Relevance theory (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1986); for a recent survey, see Recanati (2013). As for coercion, see Pustejovsky (1995), as well as Egg (2003) for an alternative to Pustejovsky's proposal.

doing some works in our house, and I say:

(3) Byeong hasn't finished the bathroom yet.

Whether (3) is true or false will depend not only on the state of the world and on what Byeong has or hasn't done, but also on what is at issue in the context of (3). If we are talking about how far the plumbing work has gone, and Byeong has finished all the plumbing instalations in the bathroom, then (3) will be true, but if we are talking about how far the overall refurbishing has gone, and he hasn't finishing putting the tiles and painting the bathroom, then (3) will be false. The upshot of the example is that the sentence in (3) is context-sensitive in a way very different from that in which demonstrative pronouns are context-sensitive. But if one takes any form of context-sensitivity that affects truth value to pertain to "semantics", then the context-sensitivity of "finishing the bathroom" will be a semantic, not a pragmatic phenomenon.

On the other hand, if one privileges the idea that semantics is about the expressions' stable lexical meaning, then one will locate all those contextual phenomena – demonstrative reference, enrichment, coercion, vagueness and the like – on the "pragmatic" side. And to the extent that it would be a merely terminological choice, there would be hardly any point for the two parties to argue about who got it right.

Although I believe that the debate on the semantics-pragmatics distinction may have been to a certain extent a terminological debate, I also believe that there is more to it. The second way of interpreting the idea of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics would construe it as a concrete cognitive distinction, namely between two types of cognitive processes that occur in our

linguistic practice, or perhaps even as a distinction between two cognitive "modules". Putting the idea of modules aside to forestall any controversy, and focusing on the idea of two different types of cognitive processes, what would the divergence of our initial criteria show? It would simply show that the binary distinction between "semantic" vs. "pragmatic" processes is too simple, and that the architecture of the different cognitive processes is more complex.

What is more, it would come as little surprise that the processing of a given expression, such as a pronoun like 'she', could trigger at the same time two different types of processes, such as, for instance, a "semantic" mechanism that deals with lexically encoded information and a "pragmatic" mechanism that deals with context-dependence. After all, it is taken for granted that such a pronoun is also processed phonologically and syntactically, which has never been seen as competing with its being also processed "semantically". The idea that there is a conflict between an expression's requiring both semantics and pragmatics only arises if one assumes that once a given expression has been semantically processed, it can't require further pragmatic processing.⁷

The third way of understanding the question of the semantics-pragmatics distinction is the most relevant to the debate that has occupied philosophers for the past two or three decades. It starts from the assumption that semantics and pragmatics are two distinct and separate disciplines, with distinct objects of study and distinct theoretical sets of problems that they aim to resolve. Then the question of how to draw a line of division between those two disciplines becomes the question of which are the primary objects of study for

⁷ Such an assumption is arguably part of the mainstream view, to the extent that it holds that the input to pragmatic processing is the content that results from the semantic processing (plus whatever other assumptions about the context and the speaker's belief and intentions).

semantics and pragmatics and which are the theoretical and the empirical questions that they respectively aim to answer. These are *metasemantic* questions, and indeed, among the main questions in metasemantics.

There is thus a neat contrast between the second and the third way of understanding the question of the semantics-pragmatics distinction. If seen as primarily a question about the cognitive mechanisms at play in processing and interpreting language, then the issue of deciding which phenomena require "semantic" processing and which require "pragmatics" would rely for its answer on psycholinguistics (and more broadly on cognitive science and its recently emerged disciplines such as experimental pragmatics); on the other hand, if seen as primarily a theoretical question, then it belongs to philosophy of semantics and linguistic theory.

If we understand the question of the semantics-pragmatics distinction in this third way, should it come as a surprise that one and the same expression exhibits a behavior that according to some criteria pertains to semantics and according to other criteria to pragmatics? Presumably not. Take pronouns again. It is well-known that their linguistic behavior is of great interest to morphology and syntax, and this has never been thought to be incompatible with the idea that it should also be of interest to semantics. There is no *prima facie* reason why the relevance of pronouns to pragmatics should conflict with their being an object of study also for semantics (as well as morphology and syntax). One might thus conclude that the reference of pronouns pertains to semantics to the extent that it affects the truth value and that it pertains to pragmatics to the extent that it involves context-dependence; to think that it

pertains exclusively to the one or to the other was a wrong thought to begin with.

I believe that a conclusion along those lines is on the right track. My own proposal, though, locates the context-dependence of demonstrative reference in *prepragmatics* rather than pragmatics, but despite this difference, it shares the spirit of the above conclusion. However, I'd like to point out that such a conclusion remains in tension with the mainstream view. Recall that on the view that we have inherited from Kaplan, the reference of a pronoun is part of the semantic content of a sentence in which the pronoun occurs. But the mainstream view also embraces the Gricean assumption that the input to pragmatics are semantic contents (or 'what is said'). We thus get something of a circle: the semantic content needs to be determined for the pragmatics to get started, but at the same time, we need pragmatics in order to determine some of the constituents of the semantic content.⁸ One might think that the obvious way out of the circle is to reject the Gricean assumption. Whether or not we might eventually want to reject it anyways, my goal in the remainder of the paper will be to set out and defend a different proposal. In a nutshell, the idea is that there are phenomena that (typically) involve context-dependence and (typically) affect truth value, such as the resolution of pronouns' reference, but also coercion, enrichment and quantifier domain restriction, that neither semantics nor pragmatics (as they are about to be characterized) fully account for. Rather, these phenomena motivate recognizing a third, separate field, which I shall call *prepragmatics*. The next section's aim is to explain what this field is and situate it vis-à-vis semantics and pragmatics in a larger picture of

⁸ For a similar point, see Korta and Perry (2008).

our language architecture. In the third and last section, I shall return to the topic of demonstrative reference, which I see as a prepragmatic phenomenon *par excellence*.

2. Getting out of the impasse: Prepragmatics

One of the main point of this paper is that the debate over the semantics-pragmatics distinction rests on a false dichotomy. If distinctions are to be made, then we should look for (at least) a tripartite distinction, one that makes room for a separate level of phenomena that, as it were, fall somewhere in between semantics and pragmatics, which I call prepragmatics. Thus if we look back at the initial criteria for the semantic-pragmatics distinction, it will come as little surprise that in some cases, they fail to converge. The reason is, I suggest, that some criteria track the semantics vs. prepragmatics(-cum-pragmatics) distinction, while others track the prepragmatics(-cum-semantics) vs. pragmatics distinction. Here is an attempt of reformulating the criteria in such a way as to regain consistency:

- (i) The semantic stuff is lexically encoded in the linguistic expressions; neither the prepragmatic nor the pragmatic stuff need be lexically encoded (and typically is not).
- (ii) The semantic stuff does not vary from one context to another, while the prepragmatic and the pragmatic stuff deploys various contextual factors (although in different ways and to different degrees).
- (iii) The semantic as well as the prepragmatic stuff may affect truth value and is relevant to determining truth conditions, whereas the pragmatic stuff is truth-conditionally inert.⁹

⁹ To be sure, in some cases the interpreter might need to go through a process of elaborate inferential reasoning before she or he can arrive at something truth-evaluable. Consider a

In the resulting picture, the output of semantics, or what, for simplicity, we may call "semantic content",¹⁰ is strictly poorer than it is on the mainstream picture. Interestingly, it is also strictly poorer than the lexical meaning. There may be constraints that are encoded in the lexical meaning that need not reach into the semantic content. As we will see in the next section, the constraints encoded in the meaning of demonstratives are precisely such. More generally, I suggest that the features of number and gender, and other syntactico-lexical categories such as tense or mood, are features of lexical meaning that do not reach into the semantic content. The criterion (i) thus gives us only a *necessary* condition on what may get into the semantic content.

The criteria (i) and (ii) jointly differentiate the level of semantics from levels that are "further up" – that is, from both prepragmatics and pragmatics. But what differentiates those two? Under its current formulation, the criterion (iii) may be used to test whether some linguistic phenomenon that lies beyond the scope of semantics is merely prepragmatic or genuinely pragmatic: if it does not affect the truth value at all, as in the case of conversational implicatures (as illustrated in the beginning of the paper), then that can serve as evidence that that the phenomenon at stake is pragmatic.

However, it should be pointed out that the criterion (iii) is fairly fragile. Firstly, in many cases, there need not be any consensus as to whether some phenomenon affects the truth value or, rather, is truth-conditionally inert.

speaker who says "She is obnoxious" in a situation in which there is no obvious salient female referent. Still, by reasoning about the speaker's possible reasons for saying what she said, the hearer might come to the conclusion that she must have been talking about, say, Aisha.

¹⁰ Although I continue speaking of "semantic content", I do share certain people's misgivings about this notion (see e.g. Yalcin, this volume), which I have myself voiced e.g. in Stojanovic (2012): 633-5.

Controversial cases of this sort are familiar from the debate on unarticulated constituents, and more generally from the contextualism-minimalism debate. Thus, for instance, if the speaker says "Everyone is tired", most authors hold that the truth value of her utterance depends on whether everyone in some contextually restricted domain is tired – but there are also authors who hold that, strictly speaking, the utterance is true iff everyone *tout court* is tired, and that the contextual restriction on the quantification domain only affects what is conveyed. Secondly, there may be cases in which the interpreter needs to engage in a conscious inference, hence in a genuinely pragmatic reasoning, in order to arrive to anything truth-evaluable. Thus, for instance, although disambiguation often goes unnoticed, in most cases in which we are aware of ambiguity, it is precisely because we will have disambiguated the sentence by means of explicit reasoning (e.g. by inference to the best explanation).

On a more positive note, I submit that whether some phenomenon affects truth value or plays a role in determining truth conditions is not the only and probably not even the most crucial aspect in which prepragmatics differs from pragmatics. Unlike prepragmatic phenomena, such as reference resolution for pronouns, pragmatic phenomena, such as conversational implicatures, require having the concepts of belief, desire, intention, and being able to reason explicitly about the speaker's communicative intentions, in a way that transpires, for instance, from Gricean maxims. On the other hand, although prepragmatic phenomena also require a certain capacity of accessing and using contextual information, they do not require any similar higher-level metarepresentational capacities.

The growing research in psycholinguistics and other areas in cognitive science, as, for instance, “clinical pragmatics”(cf. Cummings 2009) suggests indeed that different cognitive mechanisms are at play when using context and contextual cues in determining the reference of pronouns as opposed to processing full-fledged pragmatic phenomena such as indirect requests or sarcasms. Thus, for example, individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders are generally competent with pronouns but, because of an impaired capacity for mind-reading, their communicative skills are also relevantly impaired, and they are generally unable to grasp contents conveyed over and above what is literally said, let alone be able to convey any such contents themselves.¹¹

Evidence from language acquisition (cf. e.g. Clark 2009) also speaks in favor of there being (at least) two different types of cognitive mechanisms that enable us to exploit the context for the purpose of linguistic exchange. Thus children develop certain skills for using context in communication, such as the capacity for joint attention, which is crucial for demonstrative reference, much earlier than they are able to understand implicatures or irony and to master other pragmatic phenomena of the same ilk.

To drive the point home, there are both theoretical and empirical reasons to abandon the simple model of our language architecture on which once we have gone beyond the morpho-syntactic level, everything is either semantic or

¹¹ See for example De Villiers et al. (2010) or Kissine (2012), and the references therein for the empirical results. Kissine argues that the impairment of the communicative skills of ASDs stems from the impaired capacity of taking their interlocutor's perspective. Whatever the correct explanation is, what matters to the present discussion is that there seem to be two different types of cognitive processes, only one of which is impaired in children with autism spectrum disorders and which consequently makes them unable to process indirect requests, irony and similar fullblown pragmatic phenomena.

pragmatic, *tertium non datur*. To the contrary, I have tried to motivate the idea that there is, so to speak, a "third level", which, for lack of a better term, I have called prepragmatics. The aim of the next section will be to motivate the idea that demonstrative reference belongs there. But demonstrative pronouns are not alone in that respect: many other phenomena that have been of interest to those linguists working at the semantics-pragmatics interface – for instance, sensitivity to comparison classes (which we find with gradable adjectives such as 'tall'), coercion (which we find with 'finish'), or quantifier domain restriction – are also prepragmatic rather than fully pragmatic. However, the idea that an expression's behavior pertains to prepragmatics doesn't preclude it from also being relevant to semantics as well as to pragmatics. Consider the following utterance in reference to Aysha's 8 year old son while he is standing among his classmates:

(4) He is tall.

Just as the context-sensitivity of 'he' and the fact that the speaker of (4) uses this pronoun to refer to Aysha's son are to be dealt with at the level of prepragmatics, so are the context-sensitivity of 'tall' and the fact that (4)'s truth value depends on how Aysha's son's height compares to the height of his classmates. But of course, the adjective 'tall' fully contributes to the semantic content of (4): it contributes a certain (relational) property: roughly having a height significantly above the average height of the comparison class. What is more, imagine that (4) is uttered in the discussion of what sport Aysha's son should practice. Then the adjective 'tall' is likely to trigger the implicature that he should practice basketball. In such a case, one and the same word 'tall' will

trigger semantic, prepragmatic and pragmatic processing (plus phonological and morpho-syntactic processing). To make room for prepragmatics alongside semantics and pragmatics is thus not to think of them competing, but rather, as coexisting in happy harmony.

3. Pulling Demonstrative Reference out of Semantic Content

Let me take stock. I started by presenting three criteria that may be seen as having emerged from the linguistic and philosophical literature and that were supposed to track the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. For a long time, it was assumed that these criteria lined up, shaping up one and the same line of division between the two disciplines and, relatedly, between two classes of phenomena that are the objects of study of those disciplines. But as inquiry progressed and as various phenomena involving context-dependence came to be studied in greater detail, the criteria started breaking apart. In the previous section, I proposed a novel explanation of this divergence: the different criteria do not track a single bipartition between semantics and pragmatics. I argued that there are phenomena that are neither semantic nor yet fully pragmatic, and that are best explained by recognizing a distinct level, or a distinct type of phenomena, which I have labeled "prepragmatic".

My aim in this last section is to provide further support for this idea by demonstrating how the phenomenon of demonstrative reference fits into this picture. Recall that on the mainstream, Kaplanian view (briefly recorded in sect. 1), indexical and demonstrative pronouns, such as 'I' or 'she', are taken to contribute a contextually determined reference to the semantic content (of the

sentence, as used in a context, in which the pronoun occurs). My proposal, in a nutshell, it to drop this idea altogether. On the alternative that I am offering, reference does play a role in determining the truth value (of a sentence, as used in a context, in which the pronoun occurs). However, the mechanisms that handle reference (and, relatedly, the discipline that studies it) are neither semantic nor genuinely pragmatic. Let me start by discussing the very notion of direct reference, to then turn back to the question of how demonstrative and indexical pronouns work and how they fit into our language architecture.

It is something of a platitude that successful communication requires that people should be able to convey information about other people, about the things around them, about events and places. This, in turn, strongly suggests that a person should be able to *refer* to those things *directly*. Here are some examples of what I'd like to propose that we view as paradigmatic cases of direct reference. Imagine that we are at a soccer match Barça-Madrid and that we have just witnessed Messi scoring a goal. I say:

(5) Amazing.

I will be referring to the very event that we have just witnessed, viz. Messi's scoring of the goal, and I will be saying *of that event* that it is amazing. To give another example of the same phenomenon of referring directly, imagine that you've just taken a sip of a soup and you say:

(6) Burning hot!

You will be referring to that very soup and saying *of it* that it is burning hot. Here is yet a third example. A person says:

(7) I am ready.

To determine the truth value of (7), one must know who spoke, and one must know what the world is like, viz. whether that person is ready – but of course, one must also know which action or event (7) is about; e.g. if the person at stake is ready to go for lunch, but not ready to send off her job application, it is crucial to know whether it is the lunch or the job application that she is talking about in (7) in order to know whether she is speaking truly or not. And this action or event, I take it, is something that has been referred to directly.

Examples such as (5), (6) or (7) illustrate a form of reference that makes it possible to talk about a particular thing or event without having to use any expression for it, reference that relies heavily on the non-linguistic contextual setting in which communication takes place. It is this form of reference that I suggest that we view as direct reference *par excellence*.

Note that in these "paradigmatic" examples, there was nothing in the sentence uttered that corresponded to the thing or event referred to. However, I do not want to suggest that referring is direct only when it is covert or "unarticulated".¹² To the contrary, when people are using pronouns, names, or even descriptions, most often they are still referring directly. Importantly, I would like to suggest that in such cases, the "referential" use of the pronoun, name or description is parasitic, so to speak, on a more basic mechanism of direct reference, which is not brought about by any linguistic, or at least, any

¹² Perry (1986) famously introduced the notion of "unarticulated constituents". Although Perry's main concern is thought rather than language, and in particular the question of how our thoughts may guide our actions that bear directly upon objects even when these are not represented, several of the cases that he discusses would qualify, or so I believe, as examples of paradigmatic direct reference.

semantic device. Now, the relationship between direct reference and the use of demonstratives may easily lead to confusion. A possible explanation of why demonstratives are so often thought to be devices of direct reference is that in theorizing about them, philosophers have often focused on uses in which a demonstrative pronoun does no interesting semantic or pragmatic work but merely appears to “articulate” the reference. Suppose that the following are uttered in the same situations in which (5), (6) and (7) were uttered:

(5*) That was amazing!

(6*) This soup is burning hot!

(7*) I'm ready for it.

These appear to be equivalent ways of expressing the same thing as in (5), (6) and (7). Note, though, that (7*) sounds rather odd in situations in which the bare “I'm ready” is fine; that is, situations in which there is no antecedent for the pronoun 'it' and no event to be contrasted with the one for which the speaker claims to be ready. On the other hand, the uses of 'that' in (5*) and of 'this soup' in (6*) come more naturally, since they are justified from a purely grammatical standpoint.

To bring the point home, I propose that we view direct reference as, first and foremost, the event of *referring directly*, an event in which the referring is done by the speaker and does not require using any expression that would stand for the thing referred to. But when direct reference comes accompanied by the use of a demonstrative, the speaker typically uses the latter in order to help her audience figure out what it is to which *she, qua* speaker, is referring. The way in which the meaning of demonstratives helps figuring out what is

being referred to is by constraining the range of potential referents by means of the lexically encoded constraints. To illustrate the idea, imagine that we are at a gathering and that there arrives a couple, Tareq and Aysha. I say:

(8) She is obnoxious.

The 3rd person pronoun 'she' has only a very poor lexical meaning. All that is lexically encoded is that the person referred to should be *female*. But even this information, rather uninteresting in itself, is doing something useful in communication. It helps the audience figure out that it is Aysha rather than Tareq that I am referring to, since she is the one who among the things and the people to whom I *might* be referring in the situation at stake satisfies most saliently the gender constraint associated with the pronoun 'she'.

The question becomes how such lexically encoded constraints contribute to or interact with the semantic content. Recall the example of (5) in which, referring to the scoring of a goal that we have just seen, I say "amazing." My suggestion is that the semantic content in this case is simply the property of being amazing.¹³ The event to which that property is attributed, i.e. the goal scored by Messi, is not part of the semantic content. Rather, it is that with respect to which the content will be normally evaluated for a truth value, just as it will be evaluated at a time and at a possible world.

On a first approximation, the same story may go for the case in which, in reference to Aisha, I say:

¹³ Let us, for the sake of simplicity, pretend that there is indeed such a property, and that 'amazing' is a one-place predicate that applies to the object, person or event said to be amazing and does not require any other argument. Beware, though, that this simplification obliterates the fact that what is amazing for one person need not be amazing for another. In other words, it may be more accurate to think of it as a *relational* property: A football match may be amazing for some people without being so for others.

(9) She is obnoxious.

The semantic content associated with (9) would correspond to the property of being obnoxious, which, in turn, corresponds to a function that takes an individual, a time, a world (and maybe even other parameters, such as e.g. a comparison class), and returns True if that individual is obnoxious at that time and in that world, and False otherwise.

But a question immediately arises: what is then going to be the difference between the semantic content associated with (9) and that associated with (10) below?

(10) He is obnoxious.

The answer that I shall give is simple: there is no difference! Or, more precisely, no *semantic* difference. For there is obviously some difference in the meaning, given that 'she' lexically encodes the requirement that the pronoun be used for female individuals and 'he', for male individuals. My suggestion is that these lexically encoded constraints need not be *ipso facto* built into the semantic content.¹⁴ To give a less controversial example of lexically encoded constraints that we do not necessarily want to view as *semantically* relevant, consider formality constraints. For example, in Spanish, the pronouns 'tu' and 'Usted' are both used for one's addressee, but it is part of the lexical meaning of the latter that one uses it to address one's interlocutor formally. However, this lexical difference need not be reflected in semantics: from the point of

¹⁴ Alternatively, one could hold that pronouns do contribute such lexically encoded constraints to the semantic content. However, there are a number of complications for such proposals, which have to do with embedding a sentence containing an indexical or a demonstrative pronoun under intensional operators (such as various modal, temporal and epistemic expressions) or under negation. See Stojanovic (2008): 33-45 for discussion and Appendix (pp. 173-177) for a way of implementing such a proposal formally.

view of semantics, 'tu' and 'Usted' are interchangeable. The difference may still play a useful role in communication. Consider a speaker with two interlocutors, only one of whom she addresses formally. Whether she uses the formal or the informal pronoun has no impact on the semantic content that she expresses, but the choice of pronoun may help her interlocutors to figure out whom she is addressing and about whom she is expressing that content.¹⁵

Going back to (9), I suggest that its semantic content is simply the property of being obnoxious. This content, if evaluated at Byeong, would thus return True in case Byeong is obnoxious, even though he is male, not female. To some, this may seem undesirable. For some might think that it should not be possible to say something true about Byeong, who is male, using the sentence "She is obnoxious", even if he is obnoxious. While I agree that it is not correct to utter (9) in reference to Byeong to say that he is obnoxious, I believe that this incorrectness need not be a matter of truth or falsity, or a semantic matter at all. I suggest that the lexical meaning of 'she' in (9), that is, the gender constraint, intervenes at a different level: the prepragmatic level, at which the semantic content may be assessed for a truth value. The role of the gender constraint would then be to indicate that only individuals who satisfy it (i.e. only females) may be plausibly taken as values for the parameters at which the content of (9) is to receive its truth value.

By way of an analogy, suppose that I say (9) in a situation in which, as we have been talking about Deeti, Aisha comes in. To determine whether what I say is true, you need to evaluate the semantic content associated with (9) – i.e.

¹⁵ The idea that there may be sentential constituents that, while endowed with a lexical meaning, need not contribute to the semantic content, has been received with great sympathy in the case of *expressive* meaning, e.g. for expressions like 'damn'. Cf. Potts (2005).

the property of being obnoxious – at an individual, and you have narrowed down your choices to Deeti and Aisha, but you still don't know which one to give preference to – for you don't know whether I'm talking about Aisha or Deeti. Now suppose that, as I say (9), I also make a pointing gesture towards Aisha. Then this gesture serves as a device to indicate that it is Aisha, rather than Deeti, at which I want you to assess this content for its truth value. So then, just as such pointing gestures do not pertain to semantics but intervene at a different level, the prepragmatic level, in order to help deciding at whom one may plausibly evaluate a content for its truth value, so do the constraints lexically encoded in demonstratives and indexicals.

4. By way of a conclusion

Philosophy of language and philosophy of linguistics have been concerned, for the past couple of decades, with the issue of what demarcates semantics from pragmatics, an issue tightly concerned with understanding how context impacts on meaning, truth and communication. Despite an engaged debate in philosophy, as well as considerable advances when it comes to understanding various phenomena that lie at the semantics-pragmatics interface (vagueness, coercion, scalar "implicature", quantifier domain restriction, and so on), there does not seem to be any consensus reached on how and where to draw a line of demarcation between semantics and pragmatics. My main aim in this paper has been to suggest that this should not come as a surprise, because there is more than one line to be drawn. More precisely, I suggested that many among the phenomena that have been seen as problematic for the various attempts of

pinning down the semantics-pragmatics distinction are precisely not to be subsumed either under semantics or under pragmatics. My proposal is that we make room, in addition to those two, for what I have called (for better or worse) *prepragmatics*. In the last part of my paper, I used the phenomenon of demonstrative reference to probe this idea, arguing (against the mainstream view) that reference is not part of the semantic content, yet at the same time rejecting the thought that the resolution of reference would be a genuinely pragmatic phenomenon, the way that e.g. the derivation of implicatures or the interpretation of metaphors are.

In the course of motivating my proposal about prepragmatics, I touched upon another important metasemantic question, namely, what the debate about the semantics-pragmatics distinction is really about. Beside possibly being merely a terminological debate, I pointed out two main ways in which the distinction may be understood: on the one hand, as a distinction between different kinds of cognitive processes deployed in the use of language, and on the other, and a distinction between different disciplines as well as different theoretical and empirical questions that they aim to answer. Now of course, if prepragmatics is to be added to the picture, there will again be two ways of understanding how it differs from semantics and from pragmatics. Starting from the latter way, the plea for recognizing a discipline that, as it were, sits in between semantics and pragmatics should not be received with hostility, as there is a growing tendency to use labels like "semantics and pragmatics" or "the semantics-pragmatics interface" for a field in its own right. As for the former way of understanding the distinction(s), the question whether there

are indeed cognitive processes that are quite different from those deployed in semantic and pragmatic processing becomes a question for psycholinguistics and cognitive science. I believe that there already exists significant evidence to the effect that certain phenomena, such as the resolution of demonstrative reference, pattern differently both from semantic phenomena, such as mastery and retrieval of a word's stable lexical meaning, and pragmatic phenomena, such as sarcasms, metaphors, implicatures. For one thing, certain findings in clinical pragmatics point in that direction;¹⁶ for another, research in language acquisition suggests similar demarcations. While I am confident that further research in those fields will eventually corroborate the present proposal, my more modest hope at this stage is to have offered some theoretical motivations for widening the semantics-pragmatics boundary.

Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of this material were presented at the Philosophy of Linguistics conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia, in September 2011; at the CPR seminar at Jean-Nicod, Paris in June 2012; at the Language, Context and Cognition (LCC) conference in Pisac, Peru, in July 2012; at the ESPP meeting in London in August 2012; and at the Semantic Content Workshop in Barcelona in November 2012. I would like to thank the audiences at those events for feedback and comments. I would also like to thank Alexandra Arapinis, Alexis Burgess, Alex Radulescu, Eduardo Villanueva (who commented on my paper in Pisac), Louise McNally, Rob Stainton, Seth Yalcin and Zsófia Zvolenszky. I am particularly grateful to Brett Sherman for his comments on the two previous drafts and helpful suggestions. This research was supported by a Marie Curie Intra European Fellowship within the 7th European Community Framework Programme under the grant agreement n° 302596, project "Lexical Meaning and Logical Inference". I would also like to acknowledge partial funding from the EC-FP7 grant n° 229441 and from the MICINN grant n° CSD2009-0056.

¹⁶ See Cummings (2009), De Villiers et al. (2010), Kissine (2012), and the references therein.

References

- Bianchi, Claudia (ed., 2005). *The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Clark, Eve V. (2009) *First Language Acquisition*. 2nd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cummings, Louise (2009). *Clinical Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Villiers, Jessica, Brooke Myers and Robert J. Stainton (2010). Differential Pragmatic Abilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders: The Case of Pragmatic Determinants of Literal Content. In Macaulay, M. and P. Garces-Blitvich (Eds.). *Pragmatics and Context*. Toronto: Antares.
- Ezcurdia, Maite and Robert Stainton (eds., 2011). *The Semantics-Pragmatics Boundary in Philosophy: A Reader*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Egg, Markus (2003). Beginning Novels and Finishing Hamburgers: Remarks on the Semantics of *to begin*. *Journal of Semantics* 20: 163-191.
- Kaplan, David (1979). On the Logic of Demonstratives. *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8: 81-98.
- (1989). Demonstratives, in Almog et al. (eds) *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 581-563
- Kissine, Mikhail (2012). Pragmatics, Cognitive Flexibility and Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Mind & Language* 27: 1–28.
- Korta, Kepa and John Perry (2008). The Pragmatic Circle. In Stojanovic (ed., 2008): 347-357.
- Morris, Charles (1938). Foundation of the theory of signs. In Neurath O., Carnap R., Morris C. (eds.) *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, Vol. 1, No. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McNally, Louise (forthcoming). *Semantics and Pragmatics*. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science.
- Perry, John (1986). Thought without Representation. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 60: 137-151.
- Potts, Christopher (2005). *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures*. Oxford University Press.
- Pustejovsky, James (1995). *The Generative Lexicon*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Recanati, François (2004). *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—— (2013). Pragmatic Enrichment. In Graff Fara, D. and Russell, G. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy*. Routledge: 67-78

Sperber, D. and Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Stojanovic, Isidora (2008). *What Is Said: an Inquiry into Reference, Meaning and Content*. VDM Verlag.

—— (ed., 2008). *The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction*. *Synthese* 165: 317-401

—— (2012). On value-attributions: Semantics and beyond. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 50(4):621–638

Szabó, Zoltan (ed., 2006). *Semantics versus Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Turner, Ken (ed., 1999). *The Semantics-Pragmatics Interface from Different Points of View*. Oxford: Elsevier.

Yalcin, Seth (2013). Semantics and Metasemantics in the Context of Generative Grammar. In Burgess, A. and Sherman, B. *New Issues in Metasemantics*. Oxford: OUP.