

## **BORG: SEMANTICS WITHOUT PRAGMATICS?**

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Detta material är översiktligt: läs sidorna i Borgs artikel som är indikerade i den löpande texten.

#### **Semantics**

Semantics deals with literal meaning that is context-independent.

It explains indexical expressions by setting contextual parameters and determining the rules that operate over the parameters. However, the explanation fails.

First, **linguistic rules** sometimes **are incomplete** as in the case of demonstratives, where speaker intention seems to play a decisive role for **reference determination**.

Moreover, the semantic content recovered by the meaning of words and their mode of composition **seems underdetermined**: the **speaker's literal meaning** is more specific.

This means context-independence is pervasive, a core feature of language.

**Unarticulated constituents**, unmarked in syntax and lexicon, provide additional content that needed to determine truth-value.

Consider

(1) Ted is tall

In case Ted is 3 ft tall, (1) will be true in the context of 6year-olds but not in the context of basket-ball players. Although the truth-value changes, the content of the sentence apparently does not change.

Certain sentences seem to fail to determine propositions. Consider

(2) Alfie is ready

To evaluate the sentence we need to know what Alfie is ready for.

In both cases unarticulated constituents seem to contribute to determine the content.

To conclude, pragmatics plays a larger role in determining content than hitherto recognized.

### **The challenge of radical pragmatics is met in four major ways**

**Indexicalism** p.518

**Contextualism** p.519

**Semantic relativism** p.519

**Occasionalism** p.520

Nevertheless, pragmatics is not systematic to the same extent as semantics.

There is a reason to keep them apart.

## **Minimal semantics**

Sentences express minimal contents recoverable via word meaning and sentence structure alone (i.e. syntax and lexicon) and context plays a negligible role in this.

Radical pragmatics and minimal semantics agree that minimal contents do not capture what is said by the speaker in uttering a sentence: speaker content is more fine-grained and informative. The idea is that it is not the task of semantics to account for what the speaker had in mind, but the task is to explain how language works.

Borgs states **four conditions for minimalism** p.521

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## **Three problems with minimal semantics**

Inappropriateness p.522

Conclusion: minimal propositions exist but cannot explain communication and so has no place in the theory; they are idle.

Incompleteness p.523

There is no proposition to be recovered prior to pragmatic processing.

Conclusion: minimal propositions do not exist.

There are no referential axioms of the kind required by the semantic lexicon p.523f

Conclusion, the lexicon cannot yield propositional content.

One reply to these challenges is to accept them and modify the claim of minimal semantics:

## **Non-propositional semantics**

To explain learnability, productivity etc., rudimentary, partial propositional (context-insensitive) content is sufficient.

As a result, on this view because semantic content is incomplete, it is not truth-evaluable.

If propositions are gappy, or proposition radicals, then the distinction between semantics and pragmatics seems to disappear. The content needs to be filled in, and we – still – do not know which contextual features the speaker will be committed to and which not.

Hence, the issue remains what belongs to semantics and pragmatics respectively, and their respective roles wait to be determined.