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MACIEJ WITEK

A CONTEXTUALIST ACCOUNT OF THE LINGUISTIC REALITY¹

In this paper I consider the idea of external language and examine the role it plays in our understanding of human linguistic practice. Following Michael Devitt, I assume that the subject matter of a linguistic theory is not a psychologically real computational module, but a semiotic system of physical entities equipped with linguistic properties.² What are the physical items that count as linguistic tokens and in virtue of what do they possess phonetic, syntactic and semantic properties? According to Devitt, the entities in question are particular bursts of sound or bits of ink that count as *standard linguistic entities*³ — that is, strings of phonemes, sequences of words and sentences — in virtue of the conventional rules that constitute the structure of the linguistic reality. In my view, however, the bearers of linguistic properties should rather be understood as complex physical states of affairs — that I call, following Ruth G. Millikan, *complete linguistic signs*⁴ — within which one can single out their *narrow* and *wide* components, that is, (i) sounds or inscriptions produced by the speaker and (ii) salient aspects of the context of their production. Moreover, I do not share Devitt's view on the nature of linguistic properties. Even though I maintain the general idea of convention-based semantics — according to which semantic properties of linguistic tokens are essentially conventional — I reject the Lewisian robust account of conventionality. Following Millikan, I assume that language conventions involve neither regular conformity nor mutual understanding.⁵

In short, my aim is to develop a Millikanian version of realism about external language. My contention is that Millikan's biological model of language⁶ provides a sufficient basis for explaining human linguistic communication. In my paper "Naturalizing Illocutionary Rules"⁷ I argue, for example, that speech acts are best understood as complete linguistic signs and, as a result, can be represented as ordered pairs " $\langle X_n, C_n \rangle$ ", where X_n is an expression token the speaker utters and C_n is the context of its utterance. The contextual component of a complete linguistic sign is defined as a set of locally recurrent natural signs that are available to the speaker and the hearer. Next, using the Searlean formula " X_n counts as Y in context C_n ", I define speech act type Y as a *conventional lineage* of ordered pairs of the form " $\langle X_n, C_n \rangle$ ". In the present paper I offer a more detailed analysis of the structure of speech act tokens. In particular, I argue that the Underdeterminacy Thesis — according to which linguistic meaning underde-

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² See Devitt 2006, especially chapter 2.

³ The term "standard linguistic entity" was coined by Georges Rey (see Rey 2006); for a critical discussion of Rey's conception see Devitt 2006: 184–189.

⁴ See Millikan 2004: 147.

⁵ For a detailed exposition of Millikan's views on language conventions see Millikan 1998 (reprinted as Chapter 1. of Millikan 2005).

⁶ See Millikan 1989, 1998, 2004 and 2005.

⁷ See Witek 2008.

termines communicated meaning⁸ — identifies an essential structural property of the linguistic reality. In other words, the theory I develop here is a form of Contextualism.⁹ Nevertheless, contrary to the received cognitive conception of pragmatics¹⁰, I take the contextualist position to characterise the structure of a speech situation rather than the architecture of cognitive processes underlying verbal comprehension.

My paper has the following structure. In the first section I distinguish between two readings — the internalist and the externalist — of the underdeterminacy thesis as well as the contextualist view it supports. Viewed from the internalist perspective, the linguistic underdeterminacy is a structural property of cognitive processes that underlie verbal communication. On its externalist reading, in turn, the Underdeterminacy Thesis concerns the structure of the linguistic reality. In the second section of my paper I offer a brief presentation of Devitt's realistic methodology. I also assume — in agreement with the Respect Constraint he formulates — that the linguistic underdeterminacy is an essential structural property of the external linguistic reality and as such has to be respected by the processing rules postulated by the adequate theory of a communication competence. In the third section I argue for realism about external languages. I discuss Devitt's convention-based account of linguistic properties and develop the Millikanian alternative to it. I argue that it is the latter, not the former, that allows for the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy and, as a result, offers a better explanation of the structure of linguistic reality.

1. The Underdeterminacy Thesis and Contextualism

1.1. The standard Gricean model and the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy

Consider the following scenario: *A* and *B*, who have just bought a new apartment, are organizing a house-warming party for their department colleagues; the following talk-exchange takes place:

- (1) *A*: Do we need more chairs?
B: Well, everybody is coming.

According to the Gricean model of communication, what *B* communicates comprises two components or aspects: (i) the proposition to the effect that everybody in *B*'s department is coming to *B*'s house-warming party and (ii) the affirmative answer to *A*'s opening question. Component (i) is communicated directly and as such can be regarded as the primary meaning of *B*'s utterance or, to put it in other terms, what *B* says as opposed to what she merely implies. Component (ii), by contrast, is communicated indirectly and as such constitutes the secondary meaning of *B*'s utterance, that is, what *B* conversationally implicates. What is more, component (ii) does not contribute

⁸ For a characterization of the phenomenon of linguistic or semantic underdeterminacy see Carston 2002b: 19–30.

⁹ For a characterization of Contextualism see Récanati 2004: 90–91.

¹⁰ For a characterization of the cognitive conception of pragmatics see Carston 1999, 2002a and 2002b; see also Sperber and Wilson 2002.

to the truth-conditional content of *B*'s utterance. The latter is wholly determined by what she says.

For Grice, the primary meaning of an utterance is

closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) [the speaker] has uttered. (...) Given a knowledge of the English language, but no knowledge of the circumstances of the utterance, one would know something about what the speaker has said, on the assumption that he was speaking standard English, and speaking literally.¹¹

In other words, to arrive at the primary meaning of the speaker's utterance — and thereby determine its truth conditional content — the hearer has only to exploit his knowledge of the language the speaker speaks. What the speaker says results from the semantic interpretation of the sentence he utters. By contrast, to work out the secondary meaning of the speaker's utterance, the hearer has to exercise a different kind of faculty, namely his pragmatic inferential competence.

It turns out, however, that the original Gricean model requires revision. The point is, namely, that the primary meaning of *B*'s remark — that is, component (i) — contains constituents that are not linguistically specified. What *B* directly communicates is the proposition *EVERYBODY IN B'S DEPARTMENT IS COMING TO B'S HOUSE-WARMING PARTY*, where the italicized phrases stand for linguistically unarticulated concepts.¹² In other words, to determine such constituents as *IN B'S DEPARTMENT* and *TO B'S HOUSE-WARMING PARTY*, the hearer has to consult the context of *B*'s utterance and exploit his pragmatic competence. To cut a long story short, "linguistic meaning underdetermines what is said."¹³

We arrive, therefore, at the Underdeterminacy Thesis. It says that normally there is a gap between the linguistically specified meaning of an utterance and its primary meaning.

1.2. The Internalist Underdeterminacy Thesis

It is worth noting that most linguists and philosophers take the linguistic underdeterminacy to be a structural property of cognitive processes underlying verbal comprehension. For example, Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson claim:

The central problem for pragmatics is that the linguistic meaning recovered by decoding vastly underdetermines the speaker's meaning. There may be ambiguities and referential ambivalences to resolve, ellipses to interpret, and other indeterminacies of explicit content to deal with. There may be implicatures to identify, illocutionary indeterminacies to resolve, metaphors and ironies to interpret. All this requires an appropriate set of contextual assumptions, which the hearer must also apply.¹⁴

Robyn Carston, who advocates and develops the relevance-theoretic model proposed by Sperber and Wilson, defines the underdeterminacy view as saying that:

¹¹ Grice 1989: 25.

¹² I adopt the convention of using words written in capital letters to designate concepts these words normally express or encode. See, for example, Récanati 2004: 23–27.

¹³ Carston 2002b: 19.

¹⁴ Sperber and Wilson 2002: 3.

the linguistic form employed by a speaker inevitably underdetermines the proposition she explicitly expresses because natural language sentences do not encode full propositions but merely schemas for the construction of (truth-evaluable) propositions.¹⁵

In her later paper she claims:

According to [the 'semantic underdeterminacy' view of verbal utterances], the discrepancy between the explicit content (what is said) of an utterance and the conventional (or 'encoded') meaning of the linguistic expression employed is far greater than that presented by ambiguous words and overtly indexical expressions, and pragmatic inference (that is, maxim-guided inference) is required to make up the shortfall.¹⁶

According to the relevance theory, therefore, the Underdeterminacy Thesis concerns the structure of the communication competence, that is, the architecture of the cognitive system whose job is to interpret utterances conceived as verbal ostensive stimuli. It says that there are two kinds of cognitive processes — that is, decoding and inference — that are involved in the identification of the explicit content of an utterance. Consider once again example (1). What results from decoding the linguistic form used by *B* is a structured string of concepts EVERYBODY IS COMING that cannot be identified with the primary meaning *B* communicates. The decoded meaning of *B*'s utterance — which the relevance theorists call 'logical form' — triggers the process of pragmatic inference that is geared at the identification of the truth-evaluable proposition *B* communicates, that is, the proposition EVERYBODY IN *B*'S DEPARTMENT IS COMING TO *B*'S HOME-WARMING PARTY. What is more, according to the relevance theory the linguistic underdeterminacy is an essential and inevitable feature of interpretative process, since for any proposition that can be communicated "there is no sentence that fully encodes it"¹⁷.

Another proponent of the linguistic underdeterminacy view is François Récanati, who claims that

(...) semantic interpretation by itself cannot determine what is said by a sentence containing [a semantically underdeterminate] expression: for the semantic value of the expression — its own contribution to what is said — is a matter of speaker's meaning, and can only be determined by pragmatic interpretation.¹⁸

In short, he accepts the general idea that verbal comprehension inevitably involves two kinds of interpretation: semantic and pragmatic. He also states that the former fails to determine the primary meaning of an utterance. Contrary to the relevance theorists, however, he claims that pragmatic processes that contribute to the determination of what is said are not inferential. They are — he maintains — associative and local, that is, involve no premises and operate on single concepts rather than on full propositions. Consider example (1). According to Récanati, the cognitive process whereby *A* arrives at the determination of what *B* says necessarily involves free pragmatic enrichment, a procedure that can be described either as modulation of encoded concepts

¹⁵ Carston 1999: 105.

¹⁶ Carston 2004: 67.

¹⁷ Carston 2002b: 29.

¹⁸ Récanati 2004: 57.

or as supplying linguistically unarticulated constituents. If the former, what *B* says is represented as the proposition EVERYBODY* IS COMING*, where the asterisked words stand for pragmatically adjusted concepts EVERYBODY-IN-*B*'S-DEPARTMENT and COMING-TO-*B*'S-HOME-WARMING-PARTY, respectively. If the latter, the primary meaning of *B*'s utterance is represented as the proposition EVERYBODY IN *B*'S DEPARTMENT IS COMING TO *B*'S HOME-WARMING PARTY, where the italicized phrases stand for unarticulated constituents. It should be stressed that what Récanati calls free enrichment — no matter whether it is spelled out as concept modulation or provision of unarticulated constituents — is not an inferential process. This is what makes his position different from the one offered by Carston, Sperber and Wilson. Despite this difference, however, Récanati also takes the linguistic underdeterminacy — the fact that decoded meaning underdetermines primary meaning — to be a structural feature of cognitive interpretative processes.

Let me call the Underdeterminacy Thesis formulated by cognitive pragmatists — that is, by Récanati, Carston, Sperber and Wilson — the Cognitive or Internalist Underdeterminacy Thesis. It says that (a) the semantically or conventionally specified meaning of an utterance underdetermines its primary meaning, and (b) what bridges the gap between the former and the latter is a pragmatic, context-sensitive process. The thesis is internalist and cognitive because it concerns the structure of inner processes that underlie linguistic communication. It says nothing on the nature of external speech situations.

The Internalist Underdeterminacy Thesis lies at the core of the contextualist view on the nature of verbal comprehension or, more accurately, at the core of the cognitive or internalist variant of the view. According to Internalist Contextualism, the processes whereby the hearer determines the truth conditional meaning of the speaker's utterance are essentially context-sensitive. Récanati, who advocates such a position in *his Literal Meaning*, states:

According to Contextualism (...) there is no level of meaning which is both (i) propositional (truth-evaluable) and (ii) minimalist, that is, unaffected by top-down [that is, contextual] factors.¹⁹

What he has in mind, it seems, is the following idea: there is no room for the minimalist level of meaning in the adequate model of verbal comprehension. In short, Récanati depicts Contextualism as a view on the structure of interpretative processes. In the similar vein, Carston defines Contextualism as the position according to which

processes of 'free pragmatic enrichment', that is, processes that are not dictated by elements of logical form, mediate the transition from linguistic meaning to explicit propositional content.²⁰

To sum up, despite their disagreement on the nature of primary pragmatic processes, Récanati and Carston accept the Internalist Underdeterminacy Thesis which lies at the core of the contextualist position they advocate. Note that on its internalist reading the Underdeterminacy Thesis concerns the structure of the cognitive processes that underlie the identification of what is said. It turns out, however, that it can be given a different interpretation which I call externalist. Let me explain my point.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 90.

²⁰ Carston 2007: 18.

2.3. The Externalist Underdeterminacy Thesis

Consider the following two states of affairs: (i) the label “poison” put on a bottle and (ii) a tourist waving her arm across the landscape before her and exclaiming “Wow! Breathtaking!”²¹ The inscription “poison” and the sounds produced by the tourists are two distinct linguistic tokens that possess semantic properties. Their job is to attribute certain properties to the bottle and the landscape, respectively. Note that both the bottle and the landscape are not linguistically articulated objects. Nevertheless, they do contribute to what states (i) and (ii) signify.

Following Millikan, I call states (i) and (ii) *complete conventional signs* or *complete linguistic signs* (henceforth “CLSs”).²² Within every CLS one can distinguish its narrow and wide aspect. The narrow aspect of a CLS is a linguistic token, that is, an inscription or a burst of sound equipped with phonetic, syntactic and semantic properties. Its wide aspect is a complex of objects that are salient to the communicating partners. Note that state (i) involves not only the token “poison”, but also the bottle and the time and place of its perception. What it signifies is a complex state of affairs whose components are the time and place of its occurrence, the bottle, and the poison it contains. In other words, state (i) is a CLS whose meaning is the worldly state it signifies. Similarly, state (ii) involves the token “Wow! Breathtaking!”, the time and place of its production, the tourist waving her arms, and the landscape before her; what it signifies, in turn, is the state that the landscape before the tourist is breathtaking at the moment of the utterance. Like state (i), state (ii) is a CLS whose meaning is the state it signifies.

By analogy, consider the following talk exchange:

- (2) Ann: Shall we go for a walk?
John: It's raining!

Assume additionally that uttering the token “It's raining” John is looking out of the window. It is reasonable to assume that part of what John communicates is the proposition that he does not want to go for a walk at the moment of the utterance. The proposition in question constitutes the secondary meaning of John's utterance. But what constitutes the primary meaning of his words?

I assume that what is the bearer of the primary meaning John communicates is not the linguistic token he utters, but a CLS to which the token contributes. The CLS John produces — call it “state (iii)” — involves the token “It's raining”, the time and place of its production, as well as certain environmental facts John demonstrates by his looking out of the window. Note that the time is specified by the present continuous form. The place, by contrast, is linguistically unarticulated.²³ Nevertheless, it contributes to what John communicates, that is, to the state signified by state (iii).

²¹ These two examples come from Millikan 2004: 147–149.

²² See Millikan 2004: 147.

²³ The term “unarticulated constituent” used here does not stand for a non-encoded, pragmatically determined concept that contributes to the mental representation constituting the primary meaning of utterance. Rather, it stands for an aspect of a signified worldly state. It turns out, therefore, that there are at least two notions expressed by the term “unarticulated constituent”: internalist and externalist. The former comes from Récanati (see Récanati 2004: 9, 24–25), whereas the latter is used by John Perry in his theory of referential content (see Perry 2001: 47–48).

The crucial point here is that normally the narrow aspect of a CLS fails to signify its primary meaning. In other words, only in the context of a CLS do linguistic tokens possess their semantic properties (that is, they refer to or describe actual or possible states of affairs). Consider once again states (i) and (ii). The token “poison” describes the content of the bottle that contributes to state (i), whereas the token “Wow! Breathtaking!” produced by the tourist describes the landscape that contributes to state (ii). Similarly, the token “It's raining” uttered by John describes the state of affairs whose location contributes to the CLS he produces.

In short, we arrive at an interesting position that I call Externalist Contextualism, the main idea of which is expressed by Millikan in her *Varieties of Meaning*:

It is a serious mistake to suppose that the architectural or compositional meaning of a complex sign is derived by combining the prior independent meanings of its parts or aspects. Rather, the meaning of the various significant parts or aspects of signs are abstracted from the prior meanings of complete signs occurring within complete sign systems.²⁴

According to the externalist contextualist position, primary communicated meaning has to be attributed to CLSs. Within a CLS one can single out its narrow component and its wide component. The former is the linguistic token the speaker produces. The latter, in turn, is best understood as a complex of objects or environmental aspects that are salient to both the speaker and the hearer. Semantic or semiotic properties of narrow and wide aspects of a CLS have to be analysed in terms of what they contribute to the meaning of the CLS or, in other words, in terms of how they affect the relation between the CLS and what it signifies. It remains to be explained, however, what it is for an item to be salient for a given agent and how the wide and narrow components of a CLS function in order to ensure the semiotic relation it bears to an actual or possible state of affairs. I come back to these issues in section 3.2. of this paper.

For now, it suffices to note that according to Externalist Underdeterminacy Thesis the meaning of the narrow aspect of every CLS underdetermines its primary meaning. In other words, when viewed from the externalist perspective, the linguistic underdeterminacy turns out to be an essential structural property of the linguistic reality. Unlike its internalist counterpart, Externalist Underdeterminacy Thesis says nothing on the structure or nature of processes whereby the hearer arrives at the recognition of what the speaker says. Nevertheless, it puts some constraints on an adequate cognitive account of verbal communication. I come back to this issue in the next section.

2. The Realistic Methodology

In his *Ignorance of Language* Devitt argues in favour of the *linguistic conception* of linguistics. He claims, namely, that what linguistic theories are about is the external system of linguistic tokens that are nothing but physical entities — inscriptions left on a paper or sounds produced by the human vocal articulatory system — possessing phonetic, syntactic and semantic properties. In other words, he rejects the *psychological conception* according to which the job of linguistic theories is to provide a detailed description of

²⁴ Millikan 2004: 50–51.

the linguistic competence, that is, the system of processing rules the mastery of which allows the agent to produce and interpret linguistic tokens. What grammar describes — Devitt claims — is not a linguistic competence but the structure rules that govern its inputs and outputs or, to put it in another way, that constitute the external, mind-independent system of linguistic tokens.

It is Noam Chomsky who advocates the psychological or internalist conception of linguistics.²⁵ The discussion in the previous section makes it clear, I hope, that it is also adopted by those who take a cognitive perspective on pragmatics. The proponents of the relevance theory, for example, define pragmatics as exploring and describing “a kind of information-processing system (...) for interpreting (...) human communicative behaviour”²⁶. That is why I take Devitt’s critical remarks to apply not only to the Chomskian view, but to the cognitive pragmatics as well.

According to Devitt, the proponents of the internalist conception of linguistics fail to notice three important distinctions: (D₁) between the theory of competence and the theory of its outputs/products or inputs, (D₂) between the structure rules governing the outputs of a competence and the processing rules governing the exercise of the competence, (D₃) between the respecting of structure rules by processing rules and the inclusion of structure rules among processing rules.²⁷ According to distinction (D₁), there are two distinct aims one can pursue while theorizing about human linguistic practice: one can either aim at describing structural properties of linguistic tokens — inscriptions or sounds produced by speakers and interpreted by hearers — or at exploring the cognitive system whose job is to produce and interpret such tokens. These two tasks — the linguistic and the psychological — should not be conflated with each other. Moreover, one should not attempt to eliminate one of them in favour of the other.²⁸ According to distinction (D₂), to describe structural properties of linguistic tokens is to specify the structure rules that constitute the linguistic domain, whereas to account for psychological processes underlying verbal communication is to specify the processing rules that govern the exercise of the linguistic competence. Distinction (D₃), in turn, does justice to the fact that the two tasks in question, though distinct, are intimately related to each other. The linguistic competence is a competence to produce and process linguistic tokens. Linguistic tokens, in turn, are outputs and inputs of the linguistic competence. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that the processing rules are somehow adapted to the structure of the stimuli they are designed to interpret or produce. To say this, however, is not to say that the structure rules as such are included among the processing rules. It is to say, rather, that the former are somehow respected by the latter.

²⁵ See Chomsky 2000, especially chapter 2. “Explaining language use”, chapter 6. “Language from an internalist perspective” and chapter 7. “Internalist exploration”. For a characterization of the internalist conception of language see also Carston 1999: 88–94; Carston observes that according to the internalist conception “[language] is not a set of sentences (mind-external well-formed formulas) that are taken to be the objects of linguistic study, but the cognitive computational structures which constitute a native speaker’s tacit knowledge of her language (her idiolectal competence)” (Carston 1999: 88).

²⁶ Carston 2002a: 128; see also Carston 1999 for a discussion of the relation between the relevance theory and Chomsky’s theory of I-languages.

²⁷ For a discussion of these distinctions, see Devitt 2006: 17–23.

²⁸ The eliminativist position can be ascribed to Chomsky, who criticises the idea of an external and public language as non-scientific and ill-defined; see footnote 25.

Here we arrive at the main ‘realistic’ methodological principle, that is, the Respect Constraint:

A theory of a competence must posit processing rules that respect the structure rules of the outputs. Similarly, a theory of the outputs must posit structure rules that are respected by the competence and its processing rules.²⁹

The Respect Constraint, in turn, leads to the following methodological point:

a grammar as a theory of language has a certain epistemic and explanatory priority over a theory of the psychological reality underlying language. We cannot make any significant progress studying competence in a language until we know a good deal about that language.³⁰

In other words, the linguistic task has an “epistemic and explanatory priority” over the psychological one. In order to arrive at a complete theory of verbal communication, therefore, we should begin with studying the structure of the linguistic reality and then study the nature of the linguistic competence.

Consider once again the nature of linguistic underdeterminacy discussed in the previous section. My hypothesis in this paper is that the property in question is best understood as a structural property of the linguistic reality rather than of cognitive processes underlying verbal comprehension. What is linguistically underdetermined, I assume, is the primary meaning of a CLS, that is, the actual or possible state of affairs the sign signifies. In other words, only in the context of a CLS do purely linguistic tokens — concrete words, structures and sentences — possess semiotic properties. The Externalist Underdeterminacy Thesis formulated in the previous section says nothing on the structure of processes underlying verbal comprehension. My point is, however, that it puts some constraint on the cognitive adequate account of verbal communication. Note that it is the Respect Constraint formulated by Devitt that makes the above hypothesis plausible. If the linguistic underdeterminacy is a structural property of the linguistic reality, it should be respected by the processing rules posited by the cognitive theory of linguistic communication. To say this, however, is not to say that the structure of a CLS is directly reflected in the structure of the cognitive processes responsible for the identification of primary meaning.

3. Convention-based Realism about External Language

In what follows I discuss two versions of the Linguistic Realism. The first one comes from Devitt’s *Ignorance of Language*. The second version — which I call Millikanian — results from applying Millikan’s biological model of language³¹ to the analysis of various pragmatic phenomena. My contention is that it is the latter, not the former, that offers a better explanation of verbal communication. The point is, namely, that the Millikanian view — unlike the conception developed by Devitt — allows for the

²⁹ Devitt 2006: 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 37–38.

³¹ See Millikan 1998, 2004 and 2005.

phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy, which I take to be an essential structural property of the linguistic reality.

Before I get into the details, let me consider what these two views under discussion have in common.

First, both Devitt and Millikan combine realism about the external language with the conception of token semantics.³² They assume, namely, that natural languages are systems of linguistic tokens, that is, concrete physical entities that are equipped with linguistic properties; in particular, they take linguistic tokens to be primary bearers of such semantic properties as truth conditions and reference. In short, Devitt and Millikan go beyond the dilemma between two popular positions in the philosophy of linguistics: the conceptualist view supported by the Chomskians and the Platonist view formulated by Jerrold Katz³³. According to the conceptualist position, the only linguistic reality amenable to scientific inquiry is a computational–representational system conceived as a natural property of the human brain. According to the Platonist view, in turn, natural languages described by linguistic theories are best understood as sets of abstract sentence types. Devitt and Millikan reject these two views. They claim, instead, that what linguistic theories describe are mind-independent realms of linguistic tokens.³⁴

Second, both Devitt and Millikan accept their respective versions of convention-based semantics, thereby rejecting the Chomskian idea that “the linguistic properties of utterances [are] inherited from features of the language processor”³⁵. They assume, namely, that concrete linguistic tokens possess semantic properties in virtue of linguistic conventions that are followed by those who produce and interpret them.

Despite these similarities, however, there are important differences between the two views in question. According to Devitt, natural languages are sets of standard linguistic entities (henceforth “SLEs”), that is, inscriptions or bursts of sounds that possess phonetic, syntactic and semantic properties. According to the Millikanian view, in turn, the primary bearers of semiotic properties are CLSs that cannot be reduced without residue to their narrow, properly linguistic aspects. Another difference concerns the concept of a linguistic convention. Devitt offers a robust conception of language conventions; he maintains, namely, that one should analyse language conventions in terms of shared and mutually understood dispositions to associate certain expressions with certain concept meanings. Millikan, by contrast, claims that natural conventions in general and language conventions in particular involve neither shared dispositions nor mutual understanding.

³² For a characterization of token–semantics see García–Carpintero 1998 and 2004; García–Carpintero defines natural languages as “classes of actual and possible concrete utterances” (García–Carpintero 2004: 143). Following Perry (2001: 37–39), however, I draw a distinction between utterances (linguistic acts) and tokens (linguistic products) and define natural languages as sets of concrete tokens rather than utterances.

³³ See Katz 1981; for a discussion of this issue see also Devitt 2006: 26 and Carston 2002b: 32.

³⁴ García–Carpintero (2007: 41) ascribes the Platonist view to Devitt. Note, however, that Devitt explicitly rejects the Platonist perspective on language. He acknowledges that it “is often convenient to talk of the objects posited by [linguistic] theories as if they were *types*, not tokens, as if they were abstract Platonic objects” (Devitt 2006: 26). He adds, however, that “this need be nothing more than a manner of speaking: when the chips are down the objects are parts of the spatio–temporal physical world” (*ibid.*) He also claims that “what matches the thought for meaning is not the sentence *type* but the sentence *token*” (*ibid.*: 128). For a critical discussion of Devitt’s version of token–semantics see Bach 1987: 85–88.

³⁵ Laurence 1996: 282.

3.1. Devitt: The Literalist Account of the Linguistic Reality

According to Devitt, natural languages are sets of “actual and possible idealized outputs”³⁶ of a linguistic competence, that is, sets of actual and possible linguistic tokens that form semiotic systems constituted by the structure rules. Every linguistic token — or, in other words, every SLE — is a physical entity that possesses linguistic properties. For example, it is a sound that counts as a phoneme or an inscription that counts as a sentence. In short, every SLE possesses both physical (for example, acoustic) and linguistic (for example, phonetic) properties. Devitt’s point is that the latter do not reduce to the former. “Linguistic properties — he claims — are both relational and supervening.”³⁷ It turns out, therefore, that Devitt’s realism about external language comes down to realism about linguistic properties — phonetic, syntactic and semantic — that are instantiated by concrete linguistic tokens. It remains to be considered, however, in virtue of what linguistic entities possess their characteristic properties. In order to settle this issue — Devitt claims — one has to employ the conception of language conventions regularly followed by the members of a linguistic community. In particular, in order to account for semantic properties of linguistic tokens, one has to employ the Gricean idea according to which natural languages are sets of conventional devices for expressing thoughts.

According to Devitt, something counts as a linguistic token (a phoneme, word or sentence) “only if it has a place in the linguistic structure defined by [relevant] structure rules”³⁸. The structure rules, it seems, perform a constitutive function: they determine the conditions under which an entity possessing such and such brute–physical properties *counts as* a linguistic token.³⁹ It is not clear, however, whether Devitt takes phonetic and syntactic constitutive rules — that is, the rules that define phonetic and syntactic linguistic structures — to be conventional. Let me therefore focus on a less controversial issue, that is, the question of conventional rules that constitute the semantic properties of linguistic tokens.

Devitt adopts the general Lewisian approach, the core idea of which is that language conventions are best understood as mutually believed regularities in linguistic behaviour. He also embraces the Gricean idea according to which speaker meaning is explanatory prior to linguistic meaning. The speaker meaning of an expression is defined in terms of the meaning of the concept that the speaker intends to express by uttering the expression. Next, Devitt distinguishes between two kinds of linguistic meaning: literal and conventional. The literal meaning of an expression is the meaning it has in an individual person’s idiolect:

the expression has that meaning in virtue of that person being disposed to associate the expression with that meaning in the production and comprehension of language: she is disposed to use that expression to express a concept (a part of thought) with that meaning; and she is disposed to interpret that expression by assigning a concept with that meaning to it.⁴⁰

³⁶ Devitt 2006: 31.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 188, footnote 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*: 24.

³⁹ The idea of linguistic constitutive rules comes from John R. Searle; see chapter 2. of Searle 1969; for a critical discussion of Searle’s conception of constitutive rules see Witek 2008.

⁴⁰ Devitt 2006: 179.

In short, the expression inherits its semantic properties from the concept it is regularly associated with. The conventional meaning of an expression, in turn, is the meaning it has in a community language:

Suppose that speakers in the community share a disposition to associate the expression with a certain concept meaning, thus generating a regularity of so associating it. Then the speakers share a literal meaning. If this sharing is partly explained by the appropriate causal relations between the speakers' dispositions, then that literal meaning will be the conventional one in the community.⁴¹

Literal meaning *Z* of expression *e* is its conventional meaning in a given linguistic community, if the disposition to associate *Z* with *e* is shared by the community members for a reason. In other words, to say that a certain literal meaning is conventional is not only to say that it is shared by the community members, but also to say that it is somehow *mutually understood* as shared.

It is not my aim here to consider whether Devitt's account of conventionality is adequate.⁴² Nevertheless, let me end this section with two critical comments on it.

Note, first, that there seems to be a gap — or even a mismatch — between the convention-based semantics proposed by Devitt and his version of token semantics. I do not want to say that there is a direct conflict between these two positions. My point is, rather, that Devitt's account of semantic conventions says nothing on such semantic properties of linguistic tokens as reference and truth conditions. In particular, it fails to explain what it is for them to be conventional. According to Devitt, semantic conventions are best understood as mutually understood regularities in the use of certain expressions identified by their superficial properties (that is, acoustic or inscriptive) to express certain conceptual meanings.⁴³ Therefore, what a semantic convention seems to establish are stable or recurrent relations between certain linguistic forms and certain mental contents or, more accurately, between expression types and mental content types. In other words, according to Devitt, it is linguistic types, not tokens, that are the primary bearers of *conventional* semantic properties. Note, moreover, that there is a striking similarity between Devitt's conception of conventional semantics and what Carston calls the *translational* or *linguistic semantics*, whose aim is to describe

a direct semantic mapping from a natural-language form to a Mentalese form, such that with the recognition of a particular linguistic element, for instance, the morpheme 'cat', comes the activation of a particular concept, say CAT.⁴⁴

According to the conception of token semantics, in turn, such semantic properties as truth conditions and reference pertain to linguistic tokens rather than types. What makes them conventional? The question, it seems, remains open.

My second objection is that Devitt fails to notice one important structural property of the linguistic reality, that is, the linguistic underdeterminacy. In other words, he

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² The Lewisian conception is defended by the Griceans (see García-Carpintero 2001) and attacked by the Chomskians (see Laurence 1996). For a non-Chomskian criticism of the Lewisian account see Millikan 1998.

⁴³ See Devitt 2006: 188.

⁴⁴ Carston 2002b: 58.

seems to adopt a position that can be called Externalist Literalism.⁴⁵ According to the externalist literalist position, the primary bearers of such semantic properties as reference and truth conditions are SLEs, that is, concrete expression tokens produced by communicating agents. My contention is that SLEs are best understood as narrow and semantically incomplete aspects of CLSs. I also take CLS tokens to be the primary bearers of conventional semantic properties. Provided the linguistic underdeterminacy is a genuine phenomenon, it is Externalist Contextualism, not Externalist Literalism, that offers the adequate account of the nature of linguistic reality. In the next section I develop this idea into what I call the Millikanian account of the linguistic reality.

3.2. Millikan: The Contextualist Account of the Linguistic Reality

In what follows I propose a contextualist account of the linguistic reality. The account is based on the biological model of language developed by Millikan⁴⁶. That is why I call it Millikanian. It is worth stressing that the innovations I make in this section are modest. First, I articulate explicitly the contextualist ideas that are, I think, inherent in Millikan's conception of CLSs. Second, I apply the resulting model to the analyses of such pragmatic phenomena as allegedly non-conventional indirect speech acts and subsentential utterances.

3.2.1. An Outline of the Contextualist Model

Note, first, that Millikan defends a form of realism about public or external language. What she proposes, however, is not the Platonist position according to which natural languages are sets of abstract sentence types. Rather, she takes public languages to be semiotic systems of actual linguistic tokens that form conventional crisscrossing lineages. It is not clear, however, what kind of entities are the tokens that she regards as making up the linguistic reality. In her *Language: A Biological Model* she claims:

A public language is a huge web of crisscrossing lineages of reproduced patterns consisting of tokens of linguistic forms and responses to them.⁴⁷

At first sight it may seem that what Millikan offers is a literalist model of language, that is, the model according to which it is linguistic forms — words, phrases, structures, moods — that are the primary bearers of conventional linguistic properties. This impression becomes stronger when coupled with Millikan's claim to the effect that the conventional function of an imperative mood is to get the hearer to comply with what he is told and that the conventional function of an indicative mood is to get the hearer

⁴⁵ Note that Devitt accepts the internalist literalist or minimalist position as well. According to Minimalism, "the distance between sentence [conventional] meaning and what is said [that is, speaker meaning] is kept to a minimum" (Récanati 2004: 7). Devitt states "that the mismatch between speaker and conventional meaning (in the context) is [not] as common as some think" (Devitt 2006: 128, footnote 5.)

⁴⁶ See Millikan 1989, 1998, 2004 and 2005.

⁴⁷ Millikan 2005: 60.

to believe what he is told.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Millikan's remarks on conventional properties of moods and linguistic forms are only part of the whole picture and need to be seen in a holistic context. According to her conception of CLSs the primary bearers of conventional semantic properties are structured states of affairs one aspect of which is a linguistic token narrowly conceived (that is, what Devitt calls a SLE), the other aspect being the context of its occurrence.⁴⁹ The crucial point here is that the linguistic component of a CLS does not possess its conventional semantic properties on its own. Rather, only in the context of a CLS does a linguistic form mean something. Note, moreover, that the same holds for contextual components of CLSs, that is they possess conventional properties as well. "There are — Millikan claims — many conventional ways of using context as a proper part of a linguistic sign."⁵⁰

In short, according to Externalist Contextualism developed here it is CLS tokens that are the primary bearers of conventional semantic properties. Linguistic tokens narrowly conceived — that is, what Devitt calls SLEs — are semantically incomplete symbols. Only in the context of a CLS does a word signify something. The conventional meaning of a purely linguistic token should be analysed in terms of what it contributes to the conventional meaning of its encompassing CLS. Viewed from the contextualist perspective, therefore, the linguistic reality is a web of crisscrossing lineages of conventional patterns consisting of CLS tokens and responses to them.

This is my general view on the nature of linguistic reality. Now let me get into its details. Consider the following questions: (a) What is the structure of a CLS? (b) What is it for a CLS to be conventional? (c) What is it for two CLS tokens to belong to the same lineage?

Consider first question (a). In my paper "Naturalizing Illocutionary Rules" I have argued that every CLS can be represented as an ordered pair of the form " $\langle X_n, C_n \rangle$ ", where " X_n " stands for the expression token the speaker produces — that is, for the purely linguistic component of a CLS — and " C_n " stands for the context of its utterance. In this paper I make a few further points about the nature of the contextual components of CLSs. In particular, I consider how it is possible for natural environmental items to perform conventional functions.

My crucial point here is that the contextual component of a CLS is best understood as the set of objects that are salient for the speaker and the hearer. Following John Perry, I define salience as a property of objects that play epistemic and/or pragmatic roles in our lives.⁵¹ More precisely, an object is salient for me if I am in a position to find out about it, or I can affect it or use it to affect other things. Normally, whether a given object that belongs to my environment is salient or not is an objective feature of the situation I find myself in.

Let me now analyse the notion of salience in terms of locally recurrent natural signs that are available to the communicating agents. The concept of a local recurrent natural sign (henceforth "LRNS") is defined by Millikan in her *Varieties of Meaning*.⁵² In chapters 3. and 4. of this book she considers how it is possible for an organism that inhabits a certain domain to find out about one of its elements from the other. For example,

⁴⁸ See Millikan 1998: 166.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of this idea see Chapter 12. of Millikan 2004.

⁵⁰ Millikan 2004: 139.

⁵¹ See Perry 2006: 324.

⁵² Millikan 2004.

consider a fox that perceives a certain track left on a muddy ground — call it, following Millikan, an ϵ -track⁵³ — and realizes that there has been a quail passing through this place a short moment ago. Consider, next, a beaver that splashes the water with its tail to signal the presence of a predator. Other beavers that can hear the splash find out that there is a predator in their vicinity and flight.⁵⁴ At first approximation, one may say that both the ϵ -tracks left by quails and the splashes produced by beavers are LRNSs. In other words, they carry local natural information about the objects they signify.

Note, however, that the LRNS to which the fox reacts is not an individual ϵ -track as such, but the structured state of affairs ϵ -track-of-size- S -at- P -and- T , where " S ", " P " and " T " are individual terms standing, respectively, for the size of the ϵ -track and the place and time of its perception. By the same token, what the state signifies is not an individual quail as such, but the structured state of affairs quail-of-size- Z -at- P -and-the-moment-preceding- T . The signifying state is a LRNS token. The type it exemplifies is best understood as a class whose elements are states of the form " ϵ -track-of-size- s -at- p -and- t ", where " s ", " p " and " t " are variables of appropriate sorts. The signified state, in turn, exemplifies a class whose elements are states of the form "quail-of-size- z -at- p -and-the-moment-preceding- t ". Note that there is an isomorphism between the class of signifying states and the class of signified states: the size of every ϵ -track varies systematically with the size of the quail it signifies and the time and place of every ϵ -track is a function of the place and time of the signified quail. In other words, there is a semantic function that maps the signifying states of the form " ϵ -track-of-size- s -at- p -and- t " to the signified states of the form "quail-of-size- z -at- p -and-the-moment-preceding- t ". The same holds for the beavers' semiotic system. The LRNS the beaver produces is a structured state splash-at- P -and- T . What it signifies, in turn, is the state predator-at- P -and- T . Note, that the signifying state is a LRNS token that exemplifies a class of states of the form "predator-at- p -and- t ". Again, there is an isomorphism between the class of signifying states and the class of signified states. Note, namely, that the place and time of every splash is a function of the place and time of the predator the splash signifies.

Now consider the question posed by Millikan: how is it possible for an organism that inhabits a certain domain to learn about one of its elements from the other? In particular, how is it possible for the fox that inhabits a certain wood to find out something about quails from ϵ -tracks it perceives? Similarly, how is it possible for the beavers to learn about the presence of a predator from splashing signals produced by their conspecifics? Note, first, that in the local domain the organism inhabits there has to be a recurrent correlation between the signifying states and the signified ones. Second, the correlation has to extend from one region of the domain to another for a reason. Third, the organism's cognitive system has to have become sensitive — by learning or natural selection — to this recurrent correlation, that is, the organism has to be able to keep track of it.

Here we arrive at the analysis of salience in terms of LRNSs. The point I want to make is that X is a salient object for A if and only if X is either a LRNS token that A is able to interpret or X is what is signified by a LRNS token that A is able to interpret. From the fox's perspective both the state ϵ -track-of-size- S -at- P -and- T and the state

⁵³ Ibid.: 38.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of this example see Millikan 1989: 288.

quail-of-size-Z-at-P-and-the-moment-preceding-T are salient aspects of its local environment, that is, they play important epistemic and pragmatic roles in its life. If the fox was not able to read ϵ -tracks left by quails in its local wood, it would have little chances to survive. The same holds for the splashes produced by the beaver and the predators the splashes signify. From the beavers' perspective, both the former and the latter are salient aspects of their local environment, that is, the splashing signals and the predators do play important epistemic and pragmatic roles in the beavers' lives.

What I take to be a salient object is a LRNS token or what it signifies. One can, however, attribute a derived form of salience to such abstract aspects of LRNS tokens as the time and place of their occurrence or perception. Note also that size S is a salient aspect of the state ϵ -track-of-size- S -at- P -and- T , since the fox that encounters it is able to infer the size of the signified quail from the size of the perceived ϵ -track.

The second point I want to make is that the theory of LRNSs seems to justify the Respect Constraint formulated by Devitt. One can ask, namely, why the processing rules posited by the theory of a competence must respect the structure rules governing the semiotic inputs. The answer seems to be quite obvious. As part of its adaptation to its environments, the cognitive system of an organism has adapted to the semiotic structure of the local domain it inhabits. In other words, the processing mechanisms that are responsible for the interpretation of LRNSs must respect the recurrent correlations that are characteristic to the organism's local domain.

Consider now question (b): What is it for a CLS to be conventional? According to Millikan, natural conventions in general and language conventions in particular consist of patterns of activity that (i) are reproduced and (ii) whose forms are arbitrary in relation to their functions.⁵⁵ What makes a CLS a conventional form of activity, therefore, is (i) the fact that certain aspects of its form are copied from other CLS tokens and (ii) its form is arbitrary in relation to its function.

Let me focus on condition (i). According to Millikan, linguistic conventional patterns are typically copied by counterpart reproduction. Within every counterpart-reproduced pattern, namely, one can distinguish two complementary parts whose reproduction is guided by the need to fit in with one another. Almost every linguistic pattern, therefore, involves two parts: the speaker's portion and the hearer's portion. The speaker's portion initiates the reproduction of the pattern, whereas the hearer's portion completes it. The conventional function of the speaker's portion is to evoke the hearer's co-operative response. In the case of assertives, for example, the speaker's portion typically involves the utterance of an indicative sentence token. The hearer's complementary part, in turn, is to believe what the speaker says. If hearers never responded in such a way, the speaker would stop using indicative forms to impart beliefs to their interlocutors. In the case of directives, in turn, the speaker's portion typically involves the utterance of an imperative sentence token, whereas the hearer's co-operative part is to comply with what he is told. Again, if hearers never responded in such a way, speakers would stop using imperative forms to get their interlocutors to perform certain actions.

Millikan's point is that every illocutionary act can be described as the speaker's portion of some linguistic conventional pattern.⁵⁶ Speech acts can be therefore typed in

⁵⁵ For a detailed presentation of Millikan's naturalistic account of language conventions see Millikan 1998; see also Witek 2008.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 8. of Millikan 2005.

terms of their conventional outcomes, where the conventional outcome of an act is to be analysed in terms of what counts as a co-operative response to it. In what follows I assume that Millikan's account of illocutionary is adequate.⁵⁷ Note, however, that from the contextualist perspective adopted here illocutionary acts are best understood as CLSs and represented as ordered pairs of the form " $\langle X_n, C_n \rangle$ ".

Finally, consider question (c): What it is for two CLS tokens to belong to the same lineage? Observe, first, that it can be paraphrased as follows: What is it for two CLS tokens to exemplify the same illocutionary act type Y ? I assume that using the Searlean formula " X_n counts as Y in context C_n " one can describe conventional lineage Y — or, in other words, illocutionary act type Y — as a sequence of ordered pairs of the form " $\langle X_n, C_n \rangle$ ".⁵⁸ Note, however, that it is not required that every two CLSs that belong to Y have identical linguistic components. What matters here is that two linguistic conventional tokens are of the same type if the linguistic community members are inclined to take them to be modelled — *via* counterpart reproduction — on *the same* historical antecedents and, as a result, to have *the same* conventional outcomes.⁵⁹

CLSs can be copied *either* holistically *or* compositionally, that is, *either* by taking them as wholes *or* by combining linguistic items — structures, moods, words and phrases — that come from different conventional lineages.⁶⁰ For example, a concrete token of "Can you pass the salt?" can be considered as belonging to one of two lineages: the interrogative, provided it is reproduced compositionally, or the directive, provided it is reproduced holistically by one of the agents having lunch at one table. In short, conventional lineages criss-cross, thereby producing ambiguities.

Consider, for example, state (ii) discussed in section 2.3.: a tourist waves her arm across the landscape before her and exclaims "Wow! Breathtaking!". The state under discussion is a CLS whose structure can be represented as $\langle X_{ii}, C_{ii} \rangle$, where X_{ii} is the linguistic token "Wow! Breathtaking!" and C_{ii} is the context of its production that involves the tourist, her waving her arms and the landscape before her. For comparison consider state (iv): a tourist who has just climbed to the summit of a mountain exclaims "Wow! The landscape is breathtaking!" State (iv) is a CLS whose structure can be represented as $\langle X_{iv}, C_{iv} \rangle$, where X_{iv} is the linguistic token "Wow! The landscape is breathtaking!" and C_{iv} is the context of its production that involves the tourist and the landscape before her. Assume that states (ii) and (iv) signify the same state of affairs, that is, the state to the effect that the landscape before the tourist is breathtaking. In other words, state (ii) and (iv) are equivalent with respect to their truth conditions.⁶¹ My point is that they are also equivalent with respect their conventional outcome — that is, the hearer's believing that the landscape is breathtaking — and, as a result, exemplify the same conventional lineage.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of Millikan's theory of illocutionary acts see Witek 2008.

⁵⁸ See Witek 2008.

⁵⁹ As John L. Austin has put it, "'the same' does not always mean the same. (...) it is a (the typical) device for establishing and distinguishing the meanings of ordinary words. Like 'real', it is part of our apparatus in words for fixing and adjusting the semantics of words." (Austin 1961: 88, footnote 2)

⁶⁰ See Chapter 10 of Millikan 2005. Note, moreover, that the process of semantic composition operates on both narrow (purely linguistic) and wide (contextual) aspects of CLSs.

⁶¹ Note, however, that states (ii) and (iv) involve two different forms of demonstration: state (ii) involves the tourist's waving her arm, whereas state (iv) involves her uttering the phrase "the landscape". The latter demonstration is a lexicalized form of the former. I am inclined to think, however, that both state (ii) and state (iv) involve conventional forms of demonstration.

So much for the contextualist model of communication. Now let me test it against a number of examples.

3.2.2. Testing the Contextualist Model

3.2.2.1. Indirect illocutionary acts

Consider the following speech situation: *A* is standing by an obviously immobilized car and is approached by *B*. The following exchange takes place:

- (3) *A*: I am out of petrol.
B: There is a garage around the corner.⁶²

According to the standard Gricean model of communication, speaker *A* conventionally says that she is out of petrol and non-conventionally asks for help with finding petrol for her car; speaker *B*, in turn, conventionally says that there is a garage around the corner and non-conventionally implies that the garage is open and selling petrol. In my view, however, the act that *A* performs is a direct and conventional request. I am also inclined to say that what *B* conventionally communicates is not only the proposition that there is a garage around the corner, but also the assumption that the garage is open and has petrol to sell. Let me explain my point.

Roughly speaking, speech situation (3) can be summarized as follows: *A* asks *B* for help and *B* responds co-operatively. My claim is that the interaction between *A* and *B* is entirely conventional. I assume, namely, that *A* initiates — and *B* completes — the counterpart reproduction of a conventional linguistic pattern. *A*'s portion of the pattern is a CLS whose purely linguistic constituent is the token "I am out of petrol" (let me call it " X_3 "). Its contextual constituent, in turn, is a complex state of affairs that involves *A*'s standing by her immobilized car. I assume, next, that in the traffic domain there is a recurrent correlation between states of the form "*y*-stands-by-car-at-*p*-and-*t*" and states of the form "*y*-needs-help-with-car-at-*p*-and-*t*" (where "*y*", "*car*", "*p*" and "*t*" are variables of appropriate sorts). *B*, who is able to keep track of this correlation, perceives the state *A*-stands-by-CAR-at-*P*-and-*T* (let me call it " C_3 ") and realizes that *A* needs help with her car here and now. In other words, C_3 is a LRNS that signifies the state *A*-needs-help-with-CAR-at-*P*-and-*T*. Note that both C_3 and the state it naturally signifies play epistemic and pragmatic roles in *B*' life. From *B*'s perspective, therefore, the state *A*-stands-by-CAR-at-*P*-and-*T* and the state *A*-needs-help-with-CAR-at-*P*-and-*T* are salient aspects of the speech situation he finds himself in.

The general idea behind my account can be formulated as follows: what plays a decisive role in determining the illocutionary force of most *primary* or *non-explicit* illocutionary acts are their contextual rather than purely linguistic components. Observe, namely, that the sign to which *B* co-operatively responds is neither X_3 nor C_3 , but the complex state $\langle X_3, C_3 \rangle$. *A*, who produces the state, initiates the counterpart reproduction of a complex speaker-hearer pattern, thereby making a direct and conventional request. The point is, namely, that what determines the illocutionary force of the CLS

⁶² The example comes from Grice 1989: 32.

produced by *A* — that is, the illocutionary force of the state $\langle X_3, C_3 \rangle$ — is not only its purely linguistic component X_3 , but also its contextual component C_3 . Note that what C_3 naturally signifies is *A*'s need for help. That is why the conventional outcome of $\langle X_3, C_3 \rangle$ is *B*'s co-operative and helpful response. In sum, contrary to what the Gricean model suggests, the speech act that *A* performs is a direct and conventional request.

Let me now consider *B*'s utterance. What does his token "a garage" stand for? My hypothesis is that the object it signifies must be somehow salient to *A*. In particular, the object must play — or must be capable of playing — an important pragmatic role in *A*'s life. Otherwise, *B*'s response can hardly be regarded as helpful and co-operative. Recall that *A* needs help with finding petrol for her car. Therefore, provided *B*'s response is co-operative and helpful, the garage *B* refers to must be open and have petrol to sell. In short, what *B* conventionally communicates — that is, what he communicates by doing his part of the presently reproduced speaker-hearer pattern — is the assumption that the garage around the corner is open and has petrol to sell.

Consider the next speech situation: *B* enters *A*'s office and visibly looks around for something. The following exchange takes place:

- (4) *A*: Do you want something?
B: Yes. I've run out of paper.

According to the relevance-theoretic model of communication, *B* non-conventionally communicates that she wants some paper.⁶³ In my view, however, *B*'s utterance is best understood as a direct and conventional request. More accurately, her utterance completes the production of a CLS that can be represented as an ordered pair $\langle X_4, C_4 \rangle$, where X_4 is the token "I've run out of paper" produced by *B* and C_4 is the state *B*-enters-*A*'s-office-at-*T*-and-looks-around-for-something. I assume, namely, that there is a locally recurrent correlation between states of the form "*y*-enters-*A*'s-office-at-*t*-and-looks-around-for-something" and states of the form "*y*-wants-something-from-*A*-at-*t*". Speaker *A*, who is able to keep track of this correlation, realizes that *B* wants something from him here and now. That is what motivates him to ask the question "Do you want something?" (Assume that here is a polite convention to utter the form "Do you want something?" in order to query what the addressee wants.) By uttering the token "Yes. I've run out of paper", speaker *B* supplements the local natural information communicated by C_4 , thereby completing the production of the state $\langle X_4, C_4 \rangle$. Note, however, that what plays a decisive role in determining the illocutionary force of the state $\langle X_4, C_4 \rangle$ is its contextual rather than purely linguistic component.

3.2.2.2. Subsentential utterances

Consider the following speech situation:

- it's breakfast time and, coming into the kitchen, I see my companion searching around in the lower reaches of a cupboard; knowing his breakfast habits, I guess that he's looking for a jar of marmalade and I utter:
- (5) On the top shelf.

⁶³ For the relevance-theoretic account of this example see Carston 2002a: 145.

Although the proposition I have expressed is something like *The marmalade is on the top shelf*, the linguistic semantic input to the pragmatic processor is, arguably, just whatever meaning the language confers on the prepositional phrase, that is, a far from fully propositional logical form, one which consists of just a location constituent (which denotes a property).⁶⁴

The narrator of the story — call her “C” — utters a subsentential phrase “On the top shelf”, thereby communicating the proposition that the marmalade is on the top shelf. The problem is, however, that the linguistically specified meaning of utterance (5) underdetermines its primary meaning. Therefore, how is it possible for C’s companion — call him “D” — to determine what she communicates?

According to the relevance-theoretic model of communication, the cognitive process whereby D arrives at the identification of what C says involves a mixture of decoding and inference. The decoded meaning of utterance (5) — that is, the structured string of concepts ON THE TOP SHELF — triggers an inferential process whose job is to determine the truth-evaluable proposition C communicates. The output of the process is the proposition *THE MARMALADE IS ON THE TOP SHELF*, where the italicized phrase *THE MARMALADE* stands for a pragmatically determined constituent. In short, according to Carston the primary meaning of utterance (5) comprises two components: the conventionally communicated logical form ON THE TOP SHELF and the linguistically unarticulated constituent *THE MARMALADE*.

Contrary to Carston I am inclined to say that the primary meaning of utterance (5) is conventionally determined. I assume, namely, that what C communicates is a complex state of affairs that involves the marmalade jar and the property of being on the top shelf. What signifies the state is a CLS whose structure can be represented as $\langle X_5, C_5 \rangle$, where X_5 is the token “on the top shelf” and C_5 is a contextual component whose function is to make certain environmental aspects salient. What makes the state $\langle X_5, C_5 \rangle$ conventional is the fact that it comes from a conventional lineage of CLSs that are regarded as having the same conventional outcome.

Consider, first, what it is for C to know D’s breakfast habits. My hypothesis is (i) that in the ‘kitchen at breakfast time’ domain there is a locally recurrent correlation between states of the form “D-is-searching-a-cupboard-at-t” and states of the form “D-wants-marmalade-at-t”, and (ii) that speaker C is able to keep track of it. Namely, she perceives the state D-is-searching-a-cupboard-at-T and realizes that her companion wants marmalade here and now. Observe, next, that the state D-is-searching-a-cupboard-at-T is a salient aspect of the described scene. The same holds for the signified state D-wants-marmalade-at-T and, importantly in this case, for its constituents. In particular, the marmalade becomes a salient aspect of the speech situation C finds herself in. Observe, finally, that the signifying state D-is-searching-a-cupboard-at-T contributes to the state $\langle X_5, C_5 \rangle$ as its contextual components. Its function is to contribute to the communicated state the object it makes salient (that is, the jar of marmalade). As a result, the CLS produced by speaker C — that is, the state $\langle X_5, C_5 \rangle$ — signifies the state that involves the jar of marmalade and the property of being on the top shelf.

My contention is that the state $\langle X_5, C_5 \rangle$ is a conventional sign. The point is, namely, that it comes from a conventional lineage of CLSs that are equivalent with respect to

their conventional outcomes. Consider, for example, the following talk exchange that takes place in the same ‘kitchen at breakfast time’ domain:

- (6) E: Where is the marmalade?
F: On the top shelf.

What speaker F communicates is the state of affairs that involves the jar of marmalade and the property of being on the top shelf. The structure of the signifying state — that is, the structure of the CLS produced by F — can be represented as $\langle X_6, C_6 \rangle$, where X_6 is the token “On the top shelf” and C_6 is the state that involves speaker E and the token “Where is the marmalade”. The function of the question posed by E — call it “Q” — is to make the marmalade the most salient environmental object. The conventional function of the state C_6 — that is, the role Q plays as a component of the state $\langle X_6, C_6 \rangle$ — is to contribute to the communicated state the object it makes salient (that is, the jar of marmalade).

In sum, states $\langle X_5, C_5 \rangle$ and $\langle X_6, C_6 \rangle$ are equivalent with respect to their truth conditions; that is, they signify the same state of affairs. Moreover, they seem to be equivalent with respect to their conventional outcome too. The point is, namely, that speakers C and F can be both regarded as *informing* that the jar of marmalade is on the top shelf. That is why states $\langle X_5, C_5 \rangle$ and $\langle X_6, C_6 \rangle$ can be *counted as* exemplifying the same illocutionary act type or, in other words, *as* coming from the same conventional lineage.

I hope that the arguments presented in this paper make it clear that the linguistic underdeterminacy is an essential structural property of a natural language. I take every complete linguistic sign to be a structured state of affairs that comprises two complementary components: purely linguistic and contextual. The purely linguistic aspect of a complete linguistic sign is the concrete expression produced by the speaker. Its contextual component, in turn, is best understood as the set of objects that are mutually salient to the speaker and the hearer. Hence the Externalist Underdeterminacy Thesis: the purely linguistic aspect of a complete linguistic sign underdetermines its primary meaning.

Nevertheless, the Externalist Underdeterminacy Thesis does not imply that the primary meaning of a complete linguistic sign — that is, what the sign primarily signifies — is *conventionally* underdetermined. On the contrary, almost every complete linguistic sign is a conventional item that results from combining purely linguistic tokens with salient environmental objects. To call it conventional is to say that it comes from a conventional lineage of complete linguistic signs that are equivalent with respect to their conventional outcomes.

Moreover, the externalist contextualist position as such says nothing about the structure of the cognitive processes that underlie conventional verbal communication. Note, however, that the linguistic underdeterminacy — conceived as an essential structural property of complete linguistic signs — must be respected by processing rules posited by the theory of a semiotic competence. It does not mean, however, that the structure of linguistic tokens must be directly reflected by the structure of the cognitive system specialized for comprehending and formulating language.

⁶⁴ Carston 2002a: 130. See also Carston 2002b: 17.

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