HOW TO CUT THE CONTEXTUALIST GRASS.
A NOTE ON SEMANTICS AND SPEECH ACT CONTENT

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Abstract: This essay responds to an influential contextualist challenge against the traditional view of the relationships between meaning and truth. According to that challenge, meaning fails to determine truth conditions for reasons unrelated to the customary forms of contextual influence, having to do with so-called 'pre-semantic' issues and with indexicality. As a response to the contextualist, I argue that the examples they present are naturally analyzable from the traditional viewpoint, and that the forms of contextual dependence they highlight are by no means novel or problematic.

Keywords: Minimalism. Contextualism. Meaning. Truth. Context-Sensitivity.

COMO CORTAR O GRAMADO CONTEXTUALISTA. UMA NOTA SOBRE SEMÂNTICA E CONTEÚDO DE ATO DE FALA

Resumo: Este artigo responde a um influente desafio por parte do contextualismo à visão tradicional da relação entre significado e verdade. De acordo com este desafio, significados falham em determinar as condições de verdade por razões diferentes das formas usuais de influência contextual, que têm a ver com questões assim chamadas 'pré-semânticas' e com indexicalidade. Como resposta aos contextualistas, eu argumento que os exemplos apresentados pelos mesmos são naturalmente analisáveis do ponto de vista tradicional, e que as formas de dependência contextual que eles enfatizam não são, de forma alguma, novas ou problemáticas.

Palavras chave: Minimalismo. Contextualismo. Significado. Verdade. Sensibilidade contextual.

So-called 'contextualist' philosophers and linguists have recently developed a variety of ideas of interest from the viewpoints of the theory of communication, of speech act theory, of cognitive linguistic, and of psycholinguistics. Occasionally (though not inevitably), their investigations have been presented as providing an important challenge to a certain program in semantics, one which has come to occupy a rather central position in the philosophical understanding of the relationships between meaning and truth.[1] The aim of this essay is that of presenting the main contextualist theses about the role of the semantic analysis of linguistic expressions within an account of speech act content, and of explaining why these theses remain ineffective as an attack against the traditional approach to meaning.

In section one, I introduce the idea of a 'fully articulated semantics', and what I call the 'Simple View' of the relationships between semantics and speech act content. In section two, I present fully articulated semantics in greater detail, focusing on its understanding of the interface between conventional meaning and truth-conditions. Section three presents the contextualist challenge against the conjunction of fully articulated semantics and the Simple View. Section four discusses some aspects of so-called 'speech act pluralism', that is, a defense of fully articulated semantics grounded on the rejection of the Simple View. Section five explains my reply to contextualism: even when conjoined with the Simple View, so I argue, fully articulated semantics has the resources for a correct analysis of the contextualist examples.

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[1] For different versions of contextualism (and occasionally contrasting views about its relevance for semantics) see among others Bezuidenhout 1997, Carston 1988, Recanati 2004, and Travis 1985, 1996, and 1997.

1. PRELIMINARIES

Suppose that Jones utters

(1) the cat is on the mat.

Given appropriate conditions (say, that Jones is a competent English speaker, that he intends to employ (1) as an English sentence, and that he aims to represent a certain way things happen to be) Jones has apparently asserted that the cat is on the mat. In what follows, I say that Jones' assertion *of* the sentence (1) *encodes* that content, and *a-fortiori* is *associated with* corresponding the truth-conditions, yielding truth just in case the feline is question is on the relevant rug.

The idea of 'content' is notoriously controversial. What is pretty much uncontroversial is that content, in any sense relevant here, must be determined at least in part along truth-conditional lines—indeed, in a traditional approach, that content is the *bearer* of truth-conditions. What this assumption fails to address is the question whether contents may be *identified* truth-conditionally, i.e., roughly, whether there exist distinct but truth-conditionally equivalent contents. Fortunately, these delicate questions are of no immediate relevance for my aim in this essay, since the debate I am about to address may appropriately be framed in terms of a fairly coarse-grained understanding of content in terms of truth-conditions. Accordingly, little is lost by focusing directly on the latter notion, and by assuming a sense of content fully accountable in truth-conditional terms.

It is relatively uncontroversial that Jones' assertion of (1) may communicate information distinct from the truth-conditional content it encodes, having to do with the relative position of cat and mat. For instance, if uttered in reply to the question 'do we need to feed the cat?', Jones' assertion, coupled with the background assumption that hungry felines never peacefully rest on their mat,

may well successfully convey his belief that the cat has already been fed.[2] Still, there is a fairly intuitive and pre-theoretically acceptable sense in which Jones merely 'hinted' at his belief pertaining to the cat's lack of hunger, and that 'what he strictly and literally said' by uttering (1) was something having to do with that animal's whereabouts. Directly focusing on the truth-conditions associated with Jones' assertion provides further pre-theoretical support for this methodological stance. After all, Jones' assertion is intuitively judged as true as long as the cat is on the mat, even if, in contrast with the behavior expected from felines, he had not been fed. Be that as it may, it is an undisputed fact that the identification of the content conveyed by a speaker on a particular occasion also depends on a variety of pragmatic and 'contextual' factors, over and above the mechanisms responsible for the selection of the truth-conditional content strictly encoded in the speech act in question. The sense in which context has a role to play with respect to this latter sort of content, on the other hand, is the fundamental point I am about to address is this essay.

It is natural to suppose that the truth-conditions encoded in Jones' assertion are determined at least in part by certain properties of the expression he uttered, namely (1), understood as an English sentence. Since the study of the relationships between expressions on the one hand, and truth-conditions and content on the other, is the domain of what is commonly called 'semantics', it follows that the study of the semantic profile of (1) must play some important role in the interpretation of Jones' assertion. The details in the semantic analysis of this or that example, including exceedingly simple instances such as (1), are notoriously controversial. Yet, a certain family of semantic theories, those I gather (for reasons I explain later) under the label of 'fully articulated semantics' (FAS) agree at

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[2] See in particular Grice 1989.

least on the general aspects of any appropriate semantic analysis of expressions in a natural language, including (1). The philosophical debate I intend to discuss in this essay, ultimately concerned with the fundamental question about the relationships between *meaning* and *truth* (and content), may then profitably be approached by considering the scope and significance of the semantic analysis of certain expressions, developed according to the guidelines of FAS, and the intuitive content encoded in assertions in which they are involved.

A terminological confusion ought to be swept aside from the outset. On a certain understanding of 'semantics', semantics *is* the study of content and truth-conditions. In this sense, for instance, we may speak of the semantic profile of non-linguistic entities, such as mental states. By the same token, to cite a case more relevant for my purpose here, we may speak of the content and truth-conditions of Jones' assertion as the *semantic* properties of that speech act, keeping an open minded attitude with respect to the role played by this or that expression in determining those properties, and in particular, keeping an open minded attitude with respect to the tenability of what I called 'fully articulated semantics'. In this sense, of course, the relationship between the output of semantic inquiry and the content of Jones' assertion is trivially one of identity, and the topic of contention pertains to the claim of fully articulated semantics to serve as an adequate semantic account.

On an alternative understanding of the term, semantics is first and foremost the study of certain properties of expressions, that is, of linguistic items. In this sense, then, the relationships between the semantic profile of, say, (1), and the content encoded in Jones' assertion remains open to assessment, and intuitions pertaining to the latter fail to provide an *immediate* constraint for the structure and make up of semantic inquiry. Nothing of substance hinges on the choice of this or that terminology. For the purpose of my essay,

however, greater clarity is achieved by focusing on the sense of 'semantics' presented in this paragraph. Semantics, in my understanding of the term, has thus to do with the systematic association of expressions with extra-linguistic items, such as, possibly, contents and truth-conditions. Accordingly, the result of a fully articulated semantic analysis of (1) may be compared with our intuitive assessment of the content and truth-conditions encoded in Jones' assertion only on this assumption of this or that view pertaining to the relationships between the study of linguistic expressions, and the analysis of speech-acts.

One view in this respect is of interest from my viewpoint here. According to the *Simple View* of speech act content, the relation in question is straightforward: in some appropriate sense of the term (to be discussed in greater detail later on), the semantic analysis of the uttered expressions may be *applied* to the speech act in which they are involved. So, for instance, Jones asserts what he does precisely because the apparatus of semantic analysis, when applied to Jones' case, yields a conclusion of that sort. Since the contextualists propose particular examples of speech acts, whose content and truth-conditions are allegedly incompatible with the verdicts yielded by an analysis of the uttered expressions along the lines of FAS, their conclusions, if correct, would thus provide a challenge not against FAS alone, but against the conjunction of FAS and the Simple View. In this sense, an important defense strategy remains open for the defender of FAS, so called 'speech act pluralism' (or, more generally, a denial of the Simple View). I briefly discuss some aspects of speech act pluralism in section four. Still, a more detailed analysis of this position is not necessary for my purpose: as I argue in section five, the contextualist cases remain ultimately ineffective against FAS even on the *assumption* of the Simple View.

2. MEANING AND TRUTH

According to all parties involved in the debate under consideration, expressions of a natural language are endowed with a certain *meaning*, by virtue of the conventions regulating that language. According to everybody, moreover, the meaning of an expression plays at least *some* role in the establishment of the truth-conditions of sentences in which it occurs. FAS is a particular hypothesis about what the relationship between meaning and truth-conditions entails, and about the role meaning plays in a semantic theory.

Although the details of this or that version of FAS do not matter for my purpose here, it is pedagogically convenient to focus on a certain well-known approach to meaning and truth consistent with the dictates of a fully articulated treatment of a language.[3] According to this approach, an expression is associated with a *semantic value* of a kind appropriate for the syntactic category to which that expression belongs. In particular, certain complex expressions of that language, its *sentences*, are interpreted as bearers of *truth-values* as their semantic values. Such an assignment is typically relativized to parameters of a particular type, for instance, in a standard approach, to what are commonly (but, as I explain below, possibly misleadingly) called *possible worlds*. So, taking English as paradigmatic, a sentence such as (1) is evaluated as true or false with respect to this or that possible world—in brief, writing $[[e]]_w$ for 'the semantic value of an expression e with respect to the possible world w', and harmlessly assuming bivalence, either $[[(1)]]_w$ = T(ruth) or $[[(1)]]_w$ = F(alsehood). Informally (and imprecisely, for

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[3] The general guidelines in this respect are characteristic of what is commonly called 'Montague semantics', in particular as developed in David Kaplan's approach to indexical languages (Kaplan 1977, see also Lewis 1980).

reasons that will transpire later), this sort of relativization reflects the intuition that the evaluation of a sentence such as (1) ought to yield the truth with respect to possible worlds of a certain sort, presumably those in which the cat is on the mat, and falsehood with respect to possible worlds of a different kind, those in which that animal is elsewhere.

As is well known, a further sort of relativization is required by languages such an English, which contain *indexical* expressions. So, for instance, the sentence

(2) I am on the mat

intuitively depends for its truth-value not only on how things happen to be with an individual's position in relation to the mat, but also (roughly) on the identity of the speaker. The sort of *relatum* appropriate for the interpretation of an indexical expression is commonly called a *context*, in turn understood as a collection of parameters, such as an individual, a time, and a possible world. For this reason, what is required is a richer format for the assignment of semantic values to expressions: $[[e]]_{c,w}$ is the semantic value of the expression e with respect to the context c *and* the possible world w. Accordingly, $[[(2)]]_{c,w} = T$ iff the agent of c is on the mat with respect to w, and $[[(2)]]_{c,w} = F$ otherwise.

The idea that contexts include a possible-world parameter is motivated not only by the possible inclusion in the language of indexical expressions whose meaning addresses that co-ordinate, such as modal indexical operators (arguably corresponding to at least some uses of 'actually'). For, on top of providing the resources needed for the interpretation of these expressions, the possible-world parameter also allows for an 'absolute' definition of truth, relativized to a context alone. Formally, the idea is that truth-with-respect-to-a-context ($true_c$) may be defined by means of the double relativized

idea of semantic value, by taking as privileged the possible world parameter determined by context: given a sentence S, $true_c(S)$ iff $[[S]]_{c,w} = T$, where w is 'the possible world of the context'. Intuitively, this definition reflects the notion that, say, my utterance of (2) may be evaluated as true in a context *simpliciter* iff it is true 'here and now', that is, with respect to the possible world which I happen to inhabit. The singly-relativized notion of $truth_c$ may in turn be employed in a classic definition of logical properties and relations: for instance, S may be said to be 'analytically true' iff $true_c(S)$ for all c, and S may be said to entail T iff T is $true_c$ for all c such that S is $true_c$.[4] In this sense, the results of semantic enquiry may be tested by considering the logical verdicts they yield, and their relationships to what we intuitively deem to be appropriate conclusions of validity and entailment.

       The assignment of semantic properties to a sentence, and more generally to a complex expression, must fairly uncontroversially depend upon the semantic contributions offered by its components. It is the characteristic tenet of FAS that these semantic contributions *determine* the semantic values of those complex expressions. So, for instance, whether a sentence S containing occurrences of $e_1 ... e_n$ is true or false (with respect to the aforementioned parameters) depends *solely* on the semantic values of $e_1 ... e_n$, and on the semantic effects associated with the syntactic structure appropriate for S. It is in this sense that the semantic approach under discussion is 'fully articulated': only syntactic items suitably occurring in the analysis of S may be taken as possible sources for the establishment of the content and truth-conditions of S. When it comes to the non-analyzable expressions in the language, roughly its lexical items, the aforementioned compositional reduction is by definition no longer achievable: the semantic value

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[4] See Kaplan 1977.

of a simple expression *e* must be determined 'by brute force', i.e., as a result of the conventions regulating the meaning of that expression (or at least the truth-conditionally relevant aspects of its meaning) in a language. In this sense, according to this picture, meaning *determines* truth-conditions (and content).

As explicitly recognized by my summary, FAS makes allowances for 'contextual interventions': nobody in his or her right mind would question the triviality that 'I' may be assigned a referent (and hence a truth-conditional contribution) independently of questions having to do with the identity of the speaker. Note however that, in the picture sketched above, this appeal to context is strictly 'meaning governed': the reason why a speaker has to be identified, for instance, is supposed to be related to the fact that such an identification is required by the conventional meaning of certain expressions, such as 'I'. Once the meanings of the component expressions in *S* have been determined, and the contextual factors required by those meanings have been fixed, so FOS insists, a univocal result of truth-conditions (and content) may be obtained for *S*, in the sense of truth-conditions explained above.

Of course, the considerations presented thus far assume a sense of 'expression' and 'sentence' distinct from the everyday sense of these expressions. After all, uncontroversially, English sentences may be (syntactically or lexically) ambiguous, so that no univocal semantic conclusion may be appropriate for their analysis. As long as FAS is applied to the study of particular communicative instances, along the lines of the Simple View, it must be recognized that the relationships between a 'surface structure' (an English sentence, in the everyday sense of the term) and an appropriate semantic input, is importantly 'context dependent'. So, if Jones were to utter

(3) I went to the bank

our choice of one disambiguation for 'bank' may well depend upon contextual (in the sense of extra-linguistic) considerations, involving hypotheses about Jones' intentions, the topic of conversation, and the like. It is uncontroversial that this sense of 'contextual dependence' is not meaning-governed, and that no amount of purely linguistic competence suffices for the choice of the disambiguation appropriate on this or that occasion. Being uncontroversial, however, this sort of contextuality remains harmless with respect to the debate under discussion. Note in particular that the results yielded by an analysis in the spirit of FAS remain applicable to ambiguous structures such as (3), on the assumption of the familiar warnings against equivocation and amphiboly. So, on any reasonable application of FAS to (3), this sentence may be understood as 'entailing'

(4) it is not the case that I did not go to the bank,

in the sense that a result of truth is obtainable for any disambiguation of the latter also appropriate for the former. Scare quotes are of course appropriate here: surface structures do not strictly speaking bear semantic values, and hence they fail to enter entailment relations. But the study of the semantic properties of disambiguated structures remains intuitively testable with respect to our intuitions pertaining to surface structures, as long as sufficient care is taken with respect to the choice of their 'logical forms'. By the same token, then, the outputs of FAS may be applicable to the study of the semantic properties of speech-acts, in accordance with the Simple View, taking for granted the choice of disambiguations (and for that matter, ellipsis unpacking and similar phenomena) appropriate on this or that occasion.

On any reasonable view, then, the role of semantic inquiry in the analysis of speech act content is sandwiched between clearly

extra-semantic, and in all likelihood contextually sensitive considerations. Common sense and a variety of non-meaning governed hypotheses may be involved in the assignment of a logical form to a surface structure; similarly, non-meaning governed appeals to context may be appropriate *at least* for the establishment of certain 'post-semantic' communicative effects. Yet, it is customarily granted that, once these uncontroversial contextual factors are put aside, it is a consequence of the Simple View that an application of the semantic analysis of the asserted expressions determines the content encoded in the assertion in question, so that, on the assumption of an approach to semantics in the spirit of FAS, indexicality exhausts the contextual features that need to be taken into consideration. It is on the basis of this conviction that, as I explain in the next section, contextualists present instances of non-indexical, truth-conditionally relevant contextual dependence, thereby aiming at challenging the very core of the understanding of meaning and truth embedded in a fully articulated approach.

3. A CONTEXTUALIST TALE

According to widespread consensus, the conjunction of FAS and the Simple View entails that the content and truth-conditions encoded in an assertion depend solely on the following factors: (i) possibly context-determined factors pertaining to the choice of the appropriate input of semantic evaluation, say, the choice of this or that disambiguation D for the asserted expression (sentence) S; (ii) the contextual factors c required by the interpretation of the indexicals occurring in D; and (iii) the syntactic structure of D and the meanings of the simple expressions in S. On this approach, then, one way of contesting the empirical tenability of FAS, coupled with the Simple View, consists in proposing particular examples of speech acts encoding a content and a set of truth-conditions that fail to be determined along the foregoing lines.

In the contextualist hands, this strategy is typically implemented by focusing on pairs of speech acts, intuitively encoding contrasting truth-conditions, which involve an unambiguous (or at least not relevantly ambiguous) and non-indexical (or at least non relevantly indexical) sentence. After all, so the story goes, if ambiguity (and ellipsis and the like) are kept at bay, and if indexicality is assumed to play no interesting role, what is to be expected from the conjunction of FAS and the Simple View are identical conclusions with respect to the speech acts in question, in contrast with the intuitive demand that they be distinct.

Consider the sentence

(5) Jones cut the grass.

Since nothing relevantly ambiguous or elliptical seems to be at issue here, it may safely be assumed that (5) may itself be provided as the input for an analysis consistent with the dictates of FAS. At least the verbal tense in (5) is plausibly analyzable along indexical lines, but since questions pertaining to the temporal profile of (5) have no bearing on the case I am about to discuss, indexicality may also safely be left out of the picture. Given these simplifications, then, it follows from FAS that (5) is inevitably associated with a certain set of truth-conditions, that is, that with respect to any context c, $[[(5)]]_{c,w} = T$ iff, in w, Jones cut the grass, and accordingly that $true_c(5)$ iff, in the possible world of c, he performed those actions. If this conclusion is coupled with the Simple View, it would seem to follow that any assertion of (5) is associated with the same set of truth-conditions: truth is obtainable exactly on the condition that Jones did indeed cut the grass. Yet, so contextualists object, this does not appear to be inevitably the case: distinct assertions of (5), taking place in different 'contexts', are apparently associated with contrasting truth-conditions.

Imagine that Jones carved long parallel incisions on the lawn with a sharp knife. In normal circumstances, in which grass cutting is understood as shortening the grass blades, an assertion of (5) in this scenario strikes us as intuitively false: Jones actions do not qualify as the relevant type of grass cutting. On less typical circumstances, however, an assertion of (5) may well intuitively be accepted as true, say, during a discussion at a gardening centre where strips of grass are being sold.[5] If these intuitions are taken seriously, it apparently follows that the assertions in question have distinct truth-conditions: the former is false, but the latter is true, given one unique way the world happens to be with respect to Jones' actions. Yet, so contextualists object, there simply is no way in which this conclusion may be explained from the viewpoint of an analysis of (5) in the spirit of FAS: if the Simple View of the relationships between semantics and asserted content is correct, FAS must be abandoned.

There is an obvious sense in which our contrasting intuitions about the truth-conditions of the assertions described above depend on 'contextual factors'. Yet, context does not seem to intervene in the harmless 'pre-semantic' sense discussed in section one. Note in particular that what is at issue is arguably not the resolution of a lexical ambiguity: 'cut the grass' is not *ambiguous* between one or another sense of cutting, at least in the relevant sense of ambiguity, according to which that verb-phrase is conventionally associated with a multitude of meanings. Indeed, since with some ingenuity a variety of alternative understandings of grass cutting may brought to our attention, and since similar conclusions seem appropriate for examples involving sentences other than (5), an ambiguity based response to contextualism would require a rather questionable postulation of widespread lexical ambiguities.

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[5] For the grass example, see Searle 1980.

By the same token, context does apparently not play any interesting role in our scenarios when it comes to indexical interpretation. Note in particular that an analysis of (5) aimed at accounting for the aforementioned contextual dependence in terms of indexicality would rest on the assumption that, by virtue of its meaning, a predicate such as 'cut the grass' determines distinct extensions (at a possible world) with respect to distinct contexts. For this reason, then, contexts would need to provide, side by side with an agent or a location, something roughly corresponding to a 'contextually relevant way of grass cutting', in turn involved in the decision of what counts as cutting the grass on this or that occasion. The possibility of replicating the contextualist point by means of a variety of different examples would yield a methodologically and empirically dubious multiplication of indexicality.

The suggestions I swiftly dismissed in the foregoing paragraphs, appealing to ambiguity (or ellipsis) and indexicality, may well deserve closer attention.[6] Still, according to the view I defend in section five, these strategies are not *necessary* for the defense of the Simple View and FAS, and I may here afford simply to *grant* the contextualist assumption that none of them provides an independently plausible response. But if the assertions of (5) described above involve one and the same non ambiguous and non indexical sentence, and if they elicit contrasting intuitions of truth-value with respect to one fixed way things happen to be with Jones, so contextualists insist, FAS must be relinquished by anyone willing to subscribe to the Simple View of speech act content. In particular, for a contextualist, the tale of (5) indicates that contextual elements, such as the choice of a 'way of cutting' relevant on this or that occasion, must partake in the process of content determinations at a

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[6] For a sophisticated approach along syntactic lines, see in particular the 'hidden variable' strategy promoted in Stanley and Szabo 2000.

level fully articulated semantics fails to envision. These elements are thus aptly labeled as effects of a pragmatic process of *free enrichment*—free in the sense of being disentangled from the control of conventional meaning.

4. A NOTE ON SPEECH ACT PLURALISM

One obvious reply to the contextualist attack against FAS rests satisfied with the denial of the Simple View. On this view, sometimes called 'speech act pluralism', a variety of contextual elements may well play a role in determining the content and truth conditions of a speech act, even though they fail to be recognized by the clauses responsible for the assignment of truth-conditions to the meaning-endowed items involved in it.[7] In this sense, in other words, the semantic analysis of a language fails to be *directly* accountable in terms of our intuitions about speech acts: that *S* is associated with this or that semantic property does not entail that parallel conclusions may inevitably be applicable to speech acts such as an assertion of *S*.

Note that this suggestion is not equivalent to the notion that the intuitive content(s) required in cases such as Jones' be derivable merely by virtue of the customary processes responsible for the selection of conversationally imparted information. In particular, the denial of the Simple View may consistently grant that the mechanisms responsible for the establishment of conversational implicatures operate on items already enriched with the contextual parameters presumably appropriate in this or that case. This may well be as it should be. Consider for instance a conversation aimed at establishing whether Jones ever employs gardening tools. In this

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[7] See Cappelen and Lepore 2005. For defenses of FAS alternative to the one I defend in section 5, see also Berg 2002, Borg 2004, and Sainsbury 2001.

setting, an assertion of (5) may impart the information that Jones is occasionally well disposed towards those artifacts, on the basis of the assumption that what it encodes is a content pertaining to Jones' cutting the grass 'in the normal way', that is, by means of a lawnmower, rather than a knife. If the denial of the Simple View is to suffice as a reply to the contextualist challenge, it must thus be granted that allusion to a certain procedure for cutting the grass does not itself result from the classic processes responsible for the calculation of an implicature, and that it plays a role at the level of 'what is said'.

Is this reply sufficient as an answer to the contextualists? Of course, if contextualism merely amounts to the thesis that speech act content is pragmatically determined, i.e., that it may be established only by appealing to non meaning-controlled items, then the denial of the Simple View merely reiterates the contextualist point. But this understanding of contextualism strikes me as eminently uninteresting, and is surely idle with respect to the topic under discussion in this essay, having to do with the tenability of FAS. Yet, contextualists may well insist that the denial of the Simple View fails to suffice even as a defense of FAS: in the absence of any direct connection with our intuitions about speech act content, so it may be objected, the output of semantic analyses in the spirit of FAS remains theoretically idle.[8]

My aim in this essay is more ambitious than the denial of the Simple View: nothing in the contextualist examples, so I argue below, entails the abandonment of either the Simple View or an approach to semantics in the spirit of FAS. Still, a reply to the objection entertained above is instructive also for my aims. What, then, would be the point of insisting on FAS even on the

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[8] See Recanati 2004.

assumption that its output fails to be directly translatable in terms of speech act truth-conditional content?

As I explained in section two, FAS entails a certain understanding of the relationships between the conventional meaning of certain expressions, and the truth-conditions of sentences in which they occur. In particular, by virtue of the meaning of their components, sentences end up being associated with distributions of semantic values across appropriate parameters—say, with the conclusion that $[[S]]_{c,w} = T$ with respect to this or that c and w, and that $true_c(S)$ for some c, but not for others. This does in turn immediately entail conclusions pertaining to the 'logical' profile of S, such as the idea that S is analytically true (i.e., true in virtue of meaning alone) or that S entails T.

It should be clear that results of this sort remain indifferent to the point of the contextualist example, and *a fortiori* to the tenability of the Simple View. Take the obvious idea that (5) is mutually entailed by itself, easily reflected by the notion that, for all c, $true_c(5)$ iff $true_c(5)$. This much is hardly at odds with the idea that different assertions of (5), taking place on occasions equally representable by means of c, end up intuitively conveying contrasting contents: the aforementioned logical relation guarantees certain results about speech acts, on the basis of, as usual, appropriate assumptions of uniformity. So, just as the rule of repetition is not challenged by instances of equivocation, the trivial instance of equivalence to which I just alluded is hardly incompatible with the notion that an assertion of (5) ends up being true on a certain occasion (say, at the gardening centre), but that an assertion of (5) on a different occasion (say, at home) is intuitively false. After all, if the evaluation of a speech act depends not only on questions of disambiguation, ellipsis resolution, or indexical interpretation, but also on questions pertaining to what 'counts as cutting', it seems natural to assume that, not unlike parameters of the former type, these 'ways of

cutting' be kept constant as we move from premise to conclusion. In this sense, so this defense of FAS concludes, the resources of fully articulated semantics remain of relevance, and continue to be assessable for their empirical correctness, even if disentangled from the immediate evidence provided by our intuitions about speech act content.

As I hinted above, my aim in this essay is that of defending the conjunction of FAS and the Simple View from contextualist arguments grounded on cases such as (5). The notion that FAS may well provide an empirically testable output of truth-conditions even without being directly accountable for verdicts of speech act content is thus not the sort of strategy with which I may rest satisfied. Still, the comments in the foregoing paragraphs also indirectly indicate the shape for a satisfactory defense of FAS, which fails to entail the denial of the Simple View.

5. THE SIMPLE VIEW AND APPLIED SEMANTICS

Thus far, the Simple View has remained a rather vague affair: what it holds is that the output provided by fully articulated semantics be 'applicable' to the study of the content and truth-conditions of the speech act in question. This idea of an 'application' may however not naively be understood as the notion that the properties and relations yielded by FAS are attributable to a speech act. For what is appropriate for a speech act is the idea that it be true or false, given a certain way things happen to be; what semantics yields are rather verdicts of truth-value with respect to a possible world and a context, in turn understood along semantically relevant lines.

As I insisted above, the contexts with respect to which semantic interpretation is concerned are not the sort of non meaning-governed, pragmatic affairs to which contextualists call our attention. If, say, this or that 'way of cutting' did partake as a (non

trivial) parameter admitted within what *c* is supposed to indicate, the
divide between the occasions in which (5) may be spoken would
after all turn out to be accountable in terms of indexicality, thereby
rendering the contextualist point ineffective. Indeed, the relationship
between semantic contexts and contexts in an everyday sense of the
term is by no means obvious and inconsequential: the role *c* is
supposed to play within fully articulated semantics is that of
providing parameters suitably representing this or that occasion, on
an independently (and surely non meaning-governed) reasonable
understanding of what such representation may require. The very
application of semantic conclusion thus ends up being
uncontroversially extra-semantic, for exactly the same reasons in
which, say, questions of ambiguity resolution or unpacking of
ellipsis must be presupposed by the process of semantic
interpretation, rather than motivated by it.

This point is obvious even with respect to questions of
indexicality, that is, with respect to issues not directly involved in
the debate under study. So, what semantics indicates is that, say, an
indexical sentence such as (2) is true$_c$ for all *c* such that the agent of *c*
is on the mat at *c*'s possible world. Nothing in this conclusion
provides indications for identifying an agent and a time, on a
particular occasion of speaking, for reasons that should be obvious
in light of my discussion of the denial of the Simple View a few
paragraphs ago. After all, regardless of whether the agent is the
speaker or his dog, the semantic apparatus's conclusions about the
truth-conditional role of meaning may well remain valid, as long as
the required relations of analyticity or entailment continue to hold,
in turn established on the uncontroversial assumption of a fixed
choice of the contextual parameter.

Cases involving recorded messages or other relatively non-
standard scenarios have occasionally been out forth, in order to
stress that, for instance, the choice of an agent is not inevitably

constrained by the identity of the speaker.[9] These considerations provide a useful pedagogical background for my point, but are by no means necessary. For even if the speaker turned out to be *inevitably* the individual playing the role of contextual agent on any reasonable application of the semantic machinery, this identification would nevertheless remain semantically idle, unless it were antecedently encoded in the very meaning of the indexicals addressing that parameter, such as the first person pronoun 'I'.[10]

The question pertaining to the choice of an agent for 'I' (or a time for 'now' or a location for 'here') is not immediately relevant for my purpose. The reason why I mentioned it has to do with the fact that, for reasons utterly independent of contextualism, the application of the conclusions of semantic inquiry remains as importantly pragmatically driven as the choice of a representation for the input of that semantics. Recall that, according to anybody, a speech act such as Jones' assertion of (1) is amenable to semantic analysis only on the basis of 'pre-semantic' questions, having to do, for instance, with the choice of an appropriate representation of the expression relevantly involved on that speech act. It should then not be surprising if parallel considerations were applicable to the other items relevantly involved in the establishment of truth-conditional results, in particular, with respect to the choice of an appropriate context, in the semantically relevant sense of the term. It is true, of course, that, since issues of indexicality are assumed to be irrelevant for the case of (5), no detail pertaining to the choice of this or that *relatum* for the interpretation of 'I', 'here', or 'now', matters for my purpose. Yet, as explained above, the role of contexts within FAS is by no means limited to the selection of the parameters required by the meaning of the indexicals under analysis. What context also

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[9] See among others Corazza et al. 2002 and Predelli 1998 and 2005.
[10] See my Predelli 2008.

provides, by virtue of including a possible world parameter, is also a privileged index, relevant for the establishment of truth-conditions. And if it is independently plausible to suppose that the choice of agent or location appropriate on a given occasion is at least in part a 'pragmatically driven', non meaning-governed process, it should by no means be surprising if a similar conclusion were appropriate also for the choice of 'possible world'.

To complain that, in the case of the assertions of (5) discussed above, the 'possible world' in question is one and the same, the actual world, is thus not only irrelevant, but also at odds with the pragmatically impregnated relations between speech acts and semantics on which contextualists rightly insist. There is of course an obvious sense in which the commentaries about Jones and the grass take place 'in' a certain possible world, in some metaphysical sense of the term: as we shift from one scenario to the other, nothing, by assumption, is changed with respect to Jones' actions, and to his relationships to grass. But it is illegitimate to assume that this 'inert' sense of how things happen to be entails that suitable representations of either assertion must involve one and the same possible world, and *a fortiori* one and the same context, in any semantically relevant sense of these terms.

Since fully articulated semantics provides *determinate* assignments of semantic values with respect to contexts, it must be the case that the possible worlds they encompass be understood as parameters able to provide a similarly determinate decision to questions of contingency. But if this is the case, the conclusion that possible worlds, in the semantic sense of the term, fail to be immediately identifiable with 'ways things happen to be' is indeed an immediate consequence of the contextualists examples. After all, given a fixed exhaustive description of Jones' actions, we remain undecided as to the truth-value of certain assertions, and we proceed to inquire about what 'way of cutting' is to be taken as relevant. So,

if the contextualist intuitions are indeed on the right track, the way things happen to be fails to yield a univocal decision pertaining to, for instance, the extension of 'cutting', and thereby fail to be admissible as satisfactory parameters for the purpose of semantic evaluation. That it takes a great deal of common sense and non-linguistic competence in order to determine what that extension ought to encompass on this or that occasion, is not only compatible with the methodology promoted by FAS, but is indeed required by it.

My warnings about the possible confusions between the semantically relevant senses of 'context' and 'possible world', and more colloquial understandings of those expressions, immediately yield a parallel warning with respect to truth-conditions, and, indirectly, motivate a non-naive, more appropriate sense in which the conclusions of FAS may be 'applied' to speech acts, along the lines suggested by the Simple View. Let me refer to our intuitive assessment of the truth-value of a certain speech act on a given occasion in terms of a judgment of 'truth-conditions$_1$'. In this sense, if the contextualist intuitions are at all on the right track, my assertions of (5) respectively at the garden center and at home are undoubtedly associated with distinct truth-conditions$_1$: one is true, and the other false, given one fixed story about what Jones did. But of course nothing within the results provided by FAS is *immediately* understandable in terms of truth-conditions$_1$. What fully articulated semantics yields are conclusions of distributions of truth-values across contexts, and *a-fortiori* across possible worlds—that as, conclusions of what I shall call 'truth-conditions$_2$'. Given the aforementioned warnings about alternative senses of 'context' and 'possible world', it should by now be clear that conclusions of truth-conditions$_2$ may be applied to speech acts, and hence, in consonance with the Simple View, be interpreted in terms of truth-conditions$_1$, only on the basis of appropriate independent hypotheses. That such

hypotheses may well end up being meaning-independent, pragmatically driven, and 'contextual', is hardly a surprising result: on one occasion, Jones' actions 'count as' an acceptable way of cutting the grass, on another they do not. Accordingly, one and the same 'way things happen to be' may well end up being represented by means of alternative decisions regarding the extension of 'count as' with respect to this or that parameter. And, of course, that contrasting truth-values be obtainable with respect to distinct parameters hardly amounts to the conclusion that, unlike FAS, any adequate semantic account ought to yield distinct truth-conditions₂ for the cases under discussion.

6. CONCLUSION

Are the contextualists right in their assessment of cases such as Jones? That may well be an independently interesting question, which will need to address the reliability of our intuitions about truth-value in cases such as (5), and the tenability of the denial of any appeal to ambiguity, ellipsis, or indexicality. But these issues may safely be left on the side in a discussion of the significance of the contextualist conclusions with respect to the conjunction of FAS and the Simple View. As I argued, even on the assumption of the contextualist premises, nothing of significance follows with respect to the aims and scope of a fully articulated approach to meaning and truth.

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