Metaphor and minimalism

Josef Stern

Abstract   This paper argues first that, contrary to what one would expect, meta-phorical interpretations of utterances pass two of Cappelan and Lepore's Minimalist tests for semantic context-sensitivity. I then propose how, in light of that result, one might analyze metaphors on the model of indexicals and demonstratives, expressions that (even) Minimalists agree are semantically context-dependent. This analysis builds on David Kaplan's semantics for demonstratives and refines an earlier proposal in (Stern, Metaphor in context, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2000). In the course of this argument, I also discuss some new examples of linguistic phenomena that motivate a semantic structure underlying metaphorical interpretation, phe-nomena I argue that neither Minimalists nor Contextualists can explain.

Keywords   Metaphor · Semantics · Pragmatics · Minimalism ·
Context-dependence

One striking fact about recent debates over the semantics/pragmatics interface is their focus on intuitive non-literal meaning. By 'intuitive non-literal meaning' I mean the *intuitive* truth-conditions of *utterances* that differ from the meanings of their respective *sentences* insofar as the latter are compositionally computed from the conventional meanings of their concretely realized constituents. Examples of intuitive non-literal meaning of this kind are the different meanings of color-terms and attributive adjectives ('tall,' 'good') on different occasions of utterance and utterances containing so-called "unarticulated constituents" whose intuitively communicated truth-conditions are the asterisk-ed counterparts of sentences like (1)–(3):

J. Stern (✉)
The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA
e-mail: j-stern@uchicago.edu

(1) I had breakfast

(1*) I had breakfast (today/on some contextually indicated day)

(2) It's raining

(2*) It's raining (here/at some contextually indicated location l)

(3) You are not going to die (as spoken by a mother to her son who just cut himself)

(3*) You are not going to die (now/in the immediate future).

Everyone agrees that *a* determinant of these *intuitive* truth-conditions is context—not only classical indices (or Kaplanian contexts, e.g., speakers, times, locations of utterances) corresponding to demonstratives and indexicals but also extra-linguistic interests, foci, presuppositions, and other information. But intuitions do not tell us whether these truth-conditions are semantic or pragmatic; that can only be settled by theory. Parties therefore disagree over two further questions, one descriptive, the other explanatory. The descriptive question is whether what varies pervasively and ubiquitously over relevantly different contexts are really *truth*-conditions. The explanatory question is whether the intuitive truth-conditions are generated (entirely) through extra-linguistic processes like loosening, enrichment, or transfer or whether all contextual inputs are filtered through an underlying level of semantic representation which requires an abstract—i.e., not necessarily phonologically realized but syntactically real—vehicle (e.g., logical form) that either triggers the contextual input, determines its contribution, or constrains it.

There are three parties to the dispute. (1) Semantic Minimalists answer the descriptive question negatively: they deny the descriptive claim that what varies over context are *truth*-conditions; it is true that what varies is entirely determined by pragmatic, non-linguistic factors, but that content is speech-act content in addition to *in*variant semantic truth-conditions that the utterances inherit from their sentences.[1] (2) Contextualists affirm the descriptive claim that what varies over context are truth-conditions but go onto explain that variation entirely in terms of extra-semantic principles; indeed they take the pragmatically generated, contextually varying truth-conditions to be evidence against compositional semantics.[2] (3) Like the Contextualists, Literalists answer the descriptive question positively: it is the *truth*-conditions of the utterances that vary with context. However, they explain that variation in terms of underlying semantic structure in accordance with the principles of compositional semantics.[3] Thus Minimalists and Contextualists agree on the explanatory issue that what accounts for the *intuitive* content is pragmatic but disagree over whether that content is truth-conditions or pragmatic speech content. The Contextualists and Literalists agree over the descriptive claim that it is *truth*-conditions that vary over context; they disagree over their explanation.

These intuitive truth-conditions are said to be 'non-literal' because they are not *of*, or uniquely determined *by*, the letters or words explicitly and concretely

---

[1] See Cappelan and Lepore (2004) and Borg (2004).

[2] See Recanati (2004), Sperber and Wilson (1995), Carston (2002), Bezuidenhout (2001), and Travis (2000).

[3] See Stanley (2000), Stanley and Szabo (2000), and King and Stanley (2005).

articulated in the sentence uttered on the occasion.[4] However, there are other kinds of non-literal meaning that do not fall under this characterization, such as metaphorical interpretation to which relatively little attention has been paid in these debates even though, as Recanati (2004, p. 76) says, it is "the paradigm case of non-literal meaning." The one exception to this rule is Relevance theory, notwithstanding its reductive analysis on which metaphor "is not a theoretically important notion."[5] But if metaphor does not get its due, the one literally non-literal kind of meaning has been left out of the story.

In earlier work (Stern 2006, 2009) I have critically discussed Contextualist explanations of metaphor, by Recanati, Sperber and Wilson, Carston, and Bezuidenhout, and Literalist maneuvers by Stanley. Here I begin with the Minimalists and, in particular, Herman Cappelan and Ernie Lepore (henceforth: HE). My first aim is to show that metaphor is an interesting test case for their theory, hence, a linguistic phenomenon they ought to take seriously. I will then suggest one way they might treat metaphor, though that way may lead them further than they wish to go in the direction of Literalism, and some outstanding problems for that approach.

1 Two problems for Minimalism

According to HE's general account of "Semantic Minimalism":

1. The only semantically context-sensitive expressions are the Kaplanian demonstratives and indexicals such as 'I', 'here', 'now', 'that', and so on (Kaplan 1989, p. 489). These, and only these, expressions pass certain tests for *semantic* context sensitivity, the only way context affects semantic content.
2. All semantic context sensitivity is grammatically (i.e., syntactically or morphemically) triggered.
3. Beyond fixing the semantic values of these obviously context sensitive expressions, the context of utterance has no effect on the proposition semantically expressed or the semantic truth conditions. Thus the semantic content of a sentence S is that proposition that all utterances of S express—modulo fixing and keeping stable the semantic values of demonstratives and indexicals in S.[6]

HE's austere conception of semantic content is complemented by a very liberal doctrine of "Speech Act Pluralism." Details aside, the general idea is that even propositions usually characterized as 'said,' 'asserted,' 'claimed,' or 'stated' by utterances are speech act contents that need not be logically implied by and can even be incompatible with the semantic content. Furthermore, these speech act contents may depend on factors not only of their contexts of utterance but also of the contexts

---

[4] This is close to the medieval sense of the term 'literal' according to which literal meaning is that of the *word* as opposed the (so-called spiritual) meaning that is a property primarily of the referent or thing signified by the word. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Q1 A10.

[5] Diedre Wilson, unpublished lecture, 2007.

[6] This conception of semantic content has deep Davidsonian roots which, surprisingly, go unexplored by HE.

of those who report on (or think about) them. And because our evidence typically consists of intuitions about speech act content, nothing directly follows for semantic content per se. Additional tests are necessary to isolate the semantic content from the plurality of speech act contents.

Where does metaphor fall in this division of labor? While it is obviously context-dependent in one way or another, a metaphor is not one of the explicit Kaplanian context-dependent expressions. Nothing morphological or syntactic in the concrete utterance triggers a metaphorical interpretation. And metaphorical interpretations, at least at first appearance, seem to vary widely from one occasion to another, often for unpredictable reasons. One would naturally think that metaphor belongs with speech act content. However, when we apply the specific tests HE propose to determine whether a purportedly context-dependent expression is a genuinely *semantically* context-dependent expression, matters are not so clear. I will discuss two tests in particular:

Test #1: The Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Report Test:

Take an utterance u of a sentence S in a context C. Let C* be a context relevantly different from C. If there is a true disquotational indirect report R of the utterance of S in C*, that is evidence that S is context-*in*sensitive. For example, Ernie says in C (say, New Brunswick on April 20, 2009)

(S) I am too ill to go to Riga.

Herman then reports Ernie in a significantly different context C*—where the relevant contextual difference is the speaker (agent) of the context. If he uses for his report (R) the same sentence S Ernie used,

(R) Ernie said that I am too ill to go to Riga.

Herman obviously speaks falsely because 'I' fails to pick out the individual it picked out in Ernie's mouth. 'I' blocks inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports because it shifts semantic values between relevantly different contexts of utterance; 'I' is therefore semantically context-sensitive; and the contextually fixed truth-conditions

<Ernie, Being too ill to go to Riga>

are semantic truth-conditions. Note as importantly, and as Frege was perhaps the first to observe, we also have systematic conversion rules to replace one indexical by another in order to preserve semantic content over contexts. Therefore, we need not abandon the indexical mode to report the ur-utterance; we merely need to make the appropriate conversion—and failure to do so reflects not only on the truth-value of the report but also on the reporter's semantic competence.

In contrast to 'I,' most of the other Contextualist data, examples like (1)–(3), can be indirectly reported according to this test. Hence, HE take that as evidence that they are *not* semantically context-sensitive.

How does metaphor fare on this test?

To answer that question we first need to say what counts as a significantly different context for purposes of metaphor. Let me introduce some terminology. The word or

expression with its literal meaning, which in turn is used or interpreted metaphorically on the occasion, I call (following I. A. Richards) its 'literal vehicle.' I shall have more to say about the literal meaning of a *word* as we go on, but for now take it to be whatever meaning the semantics or lexicon (i.e., I-language, not a dictionary) assigns to the word.[7] Now, the metaphorical interpretations of one literal vehicle such as 'is the sun' vary with significant regularity from one occasion of utterance to another: Consider Romeo's utterance of

4.   Juliet is the sun.

which on the occasion depicted in Shakespeare's play expresses her peerlessness, the fact that Romeo's world revolves around her, that he cannot live without her, and so on. Contrast that to a poor Trojan's utterance of (5) facing the Achaian army

5.   Achilles is the sun.

which expresses his devastating anger or brute force, or to

6.   Before Moses' sun had set, the sun of Joshua had risen (BT *Qedushin* 72b)

where it expresses the continuous chain of righteous figures who preserve the world; or to

7.   "The works of great masters are suns which rise and set around us. The time will come for every great work that is now in the descendent to rise again." (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*)

in which 'sun' expresses the cyclicity and eternal recurrence of greatness, that things once great will be great again; that descent will be followed by ascent, by descent, and so on. Or the pairs of (8)–(9) and (10)–(11)

  8.   Life is a bubble
  9.   The earth is a bubble.
10.   A great diamond is like a perfect martini—cool and sexy. (Timothy Green, *The World of Diamonds*)
11.   The University of Chicago is like a martini. There are some people who find it an acquired taste.

Ignoring details, we should all agree, first, that there is *some* difference between the metaphorical interpretations of the members of each of these sets; and, second, that these differences seem to correspond to a difference in a feature of their respective contexts. One might think the relevant difference in context is linguistic: the different subject noun phrases with which the metaphor, in predicative position, co-occurs. However, similar differences of metaphorical interpretation also arise where different tokens of one sentence (type) occur on different occasions with

---

[7] In addition, there is the literal meaning of a *sentence*: the compositionally determined meaning of the sentence as a function of the meanings of all its *articulated* parts. I do not discuss this notion of sentence-literality in this paper.

different beliefs or attitudes associated by the speaker-hearer with the same noun phrase (or frame). In contrast to Romeo's utterance of (4) in the context depicted in Shakespeare's play, imagine an utterance of (4) in a context in which Paris complains that Juliet is the kind of woman who destroys admirers who try to come too close to or become too intimate with her. In that context, 'is the sun' would express the property of being someone who consumes those who approach too closely, and (4) might be used (in a speech act) to warn Romeo to keep his distance from Juliet. The relevant difference in context here includes extra-linguistic, and non-verbalized, attitudes, presuppositions, beliefs, encyclopedic knowledge, and so on. There is much to say about these presuppositions, and ways of delimiting them for purposes of metaphorical interpretation, but for now let this blanket claim suffice: The difference that makes a difference in context for purposes of metaphor are various sets of presuppositions both related to the literal vehicle and to the other linguistic elements in the context of the metaphor.[8]

Let's return now to the first test for semantic context-sensitivity. Suppose we are in the midst of the hearings after Watergate; Congress is trying to pin down a case against Nixon. In response to a journalist's question about how the hearings are going, Tip explains:

12. Nixon is a fish.

in a context C in which it is commonly presupposed that fish are slippery, slimy, and hard to catch. The truth-conditions for (12) in C, interpreted metaphorically, would be:

(12.1) <Nixon, Being slippery, slimy, and hard to catch>

Days later, in Alaska, an experienced fisherman John is listening to the radio, say, out on a fishing trip, and hears Tip respond to the journalist. In John's context 'is a fish' has associated with it the salient presupposition that fish are easy to catch with a little patience and bait. Asked by his concerned fisher-friend how Congress is dealing with Nixon, John answers, reassuringly.

13. Tip said that Nixon is a fish.

That is, in John's context, given his presuppositions associated with 'is a fish,' the truth-conditions of the embedded complement in (13), interpreted metaphorically, are:

(13.1) <Nixon, Being easy to catch with a little patience and bait>.

But Tip did not say that. What Tip said was the content of (12.1). Thus expressions interpreted metaphorically also block inter-contextual disquotational indirect reports because they too shift semantic contents between relevantly different contexts of utterance.

---

[8] On these examples and the metaphor-relevant notion of presupposition, see Stern (2000). Following Stalnaker (1972), we can represent the metaphor sets of presuppositions as sets of possible worlds in which the presuppositions are true.

One may disagree with these descriptions of the truth-conditions of Tip's and John's utterances in their respective contexts, but it is difficult to deny that the expression 'is a fish' fails to pick out in John's mouth what it picked out in Tip's in a relevantly different context. If the indirect discourse statement is a *report* of what the subject uttered, John's utterance is false because the semantic values of the terms in the content-clause must be the same as (or close enough to) those in the reported utterance. Hence, either the reporting context must be the same as (or close enough to) the ur-context of the reported utterance—i.e., same in the metaphorically relevant way—so as to generate the same content, or the reporter must adopt another mode of expression—use different words, literal or metaphorical—which themselves express the content of the ur-utterance. Or, one might argue, following David Lewis' (1979) rule of accommodation, in order to fulfill the function of a report, which requires that we preserve the same content as the ur-utterance, the metaphorically-relevant presuppositions that determine the content of 'is a fish' will ipso facto shift to those of the original context. No matter which of these scenarios is the case, they all presuppose that metaphors, no different from the Kaplanian demonstratives, are semantically context-dependent expressions.[9]

To be sure, even if metaphor passes the test for semantic context-sensitivity, it does not pass with the same flying colors as demonstratives and indexicals. Unlike indexicals, metaphors have no systematic conversion rules to preserve their semantic values; therefore, where the report uses the same words as the ur-utterance we take that to be sufficient, overlooking or forgiving differences of context-dependent content. Or we read (13) as saying

(13.2)   Tip said something-true metaphorically expressed by 'Nixon is a fish.'

I.e., recognizing the predicament of the reporter who may not know the metaphorically relevant presupposition in the ur-context, it suffices to report *that* the subject said something metaphorical (and true) even if we cannot say *what* he said.

An additional difficulty is that indirect disquotational reports themselves admit multiple readings. On the least problematic reading, the metaphor in (13) is only the speaker John's; the metaphorical mode of expression is *his* way of expressing a property in his own context (i.e., relative to his presuppositions), without imputing that the subject (Tip) would himself have expressed that property in those metaphorical terms. On other readings, the metaphor used is also ascribed to the subject. What is ascribed to Tip is not only *what* he believed or asserted—the (semantic) content of his belief—but also *how* he believed or asserted that content, its metaphorical character. And in some cases, like (13.2), because the reporter-speaker does not know the subject's presuppositions, he may not be in a position to report *what* he said although he may know that the words the subject used—*how* he expressed his intended content—are significant and even metaphorical.[10] With

---

[9] Cf. Camp (2007) for further discussion of indirect discourse reports of metaphors on HE's account.

[10] In cases like this, Reimer (Forthcoming) argues that the reporter is directly quoting the subject.

indexicals like 'I' these problems typically do not arise and the conversion rules enable us to preserve not only their content but also their character. But even with 'I' the shift to other indexicals can involve a loss of information that may be associated with the indexical character of the first-person pronoun, the kind of information that Castaneda (1967) and Perry (1979) try to capture with He* and essential indexicals. So, even with indexicals the situation is not as different from metaphor as one might initially think.[11]

Notice, however, that this argument assumes that the semantic value of the predicate 'is a fish' in (12) and (13) is its metaphorical interpretation. In order to complete this argument, I must show that there is no other semantic content that (12) and hence (13) could have other than the metaphorically fixed one.[12] I will return to this assumption after I discuss HE's second test: "Context sensitive Expressions Block Collective Descriptions."

Suppose some expression, here a verb phrase, is semantically context sensitive, changing its semantic value from context to context.[13] And suppose there are two contexts of utterance in which 'A v-s' and 'B v-s' are true respectively. Nonetheless, we cannot infer that there is one context in which one occurrence of 'v' can be used truly to describe what A and B have each done because there is no guarantee that the semantic value of 'v' in the *collective* sentence, determined in one context, is identical with the semantic values of the independent occurrences of 'v' in the two original contexts.

Conversely, if for a range of true utterances of the form 'A v-s' and 'B v-s' we can infer 'A and B v', then that is evidence in favor of the view that 'v' in these different utterances has the same semantic content, hence, is not context sensitive.

For example, consider the context-sensitive 'yesterday': Suppose we know of two contexts in which 'Yesterday John left' and 'Yesterday Bill left' are true, respectively (though we don't know the days of these contexts). It does not follow there is one context in which 'Yesterday John and Bill left' is true. And again, HE claim, all Kaplanian context-sensitive expressions block collectivity, showing that they are semantically context-sensitive, in contrast, say, to 'know' or 'is tall.'

What about metaphor?[14]

Suppose that we know that 'is a gorilla' *stereotypically* means that the subject is fierce, aggressive, and violent, but we also know, as gorilla-anthropologists, that gorillas (despite their appearances) are shy, timid, and sensitive. With the appropriate prompting and priming in a context, 'is a gorilla' can be used to

---

[11] See Camp (2007) who argues that our judgments that metaphor is semantically context-sensitive are much clearer when we use 'claim' rather than 'say' as the reporting verb.

[12] After writing and delivering this paper I learned of Marga Reimer (forthcoming) where she also argues that metaphors pass HE's Inter-Contextual Disquotational Indirect Report Test for semantic context-sensitivity. (I wish to thank Reimer for sharing her paper with me.)

[13] Here I follow HE in stating this test using verb phrases (presumably because they have in mind Contextualists who claim that verbs like 'know' are context-dependent), but their own best examples employ singular indexicals.

[14] The following example is contrived but mimics HE's example.

metaphorically express one *or* the other (but not both) of these personality types. Suppose too that we are told that one of Bill and Harry is fierce, aggressive, and violent and that the other (despite his appearance) is really shy, timid, and sensitive. However, we are not told which one of them is which. But we are told that in one context c 'Bill is a gorilla,' interpreted metaphorically in c, is true in c and in another context c* 'Harry is a gorilla,' interpreted metaphorically in c*, is true in c*. That is, we know that in c 'Bill is a gorilla,' interpreted metaphorically, expresses a truth although we do not know what truth it expresses, and similarly for 'Harry is a gorilla' in c*. Still, it does not follow, on the basis of knowing those prior claims about the utterances in c and c*, that there is a context c** where the predicate 'is a gorilla' is known to be interpreted metaphorically, in which 'Both Bill and Harry are gorillas' is true. Knowing what we do know, namely, that each was originally uttered in c and c*—which we know differ in a particular way even though we do not know what the particular way in each of them is—if 'is a gorilla' or 'are gorillas' is used metaphorically in c**, it would be impossible in that same context for the very same predicate to express the two incompatible personality types. Therefore, metaphors also block collective descriptions.[15]

 In sum, the Minimalist's two tests suggest that metaphors, no less than indexicals, are semantically context-dependent expressions, contrary to what we would prima facie think. But in order to complete this argument, we still need to show that there is no other semantic content for (4) on which the Minimalist could fall back. What other candidate could the Minimalist say, then, is the semantically expressed proposition, or the semantic content or truth-conditions, of, say, the metaphorical utterance of the sentence

---

[15] Nat Hansen (p.c.) observes that HE don't think that Travis-style 2000 changes in content block Indirect reports. For example:

    C1: Romeo: "Juliet's coat is green" [green on the outside, with a red lining]

    C2: Nat: "Romeo said that Juliet's coat is green" [has a green lining]

    They'd say that C2 is true, because Romeo did say that her coat is green. But if that is the case, then they would also reply that the report 'Romeo said that Juliet is the sun' is true (full stop). C2 might not capture the content of Romeo's metaphor, but it gets what he said right. But this is only, as I said above, in the direct-discourse sense of 'said,' by playing on mention of 'is green.' If Tom challenged Nat's report of Romeo by citing another utterance of Romeo's that the lining is red, Nat could not defend himself by referring back to C1.

    Similarly, if metaphors like 'is a gorilla' do not pass the second (collective description) test (and therefore are semantically context-sensitive), why do Travis cases seem to pass the test?

    D1: Lake Michigan is blue [as seen from Lake Shore Drive]

    D2: Gatorade 'Frost' is blue [in the bottle]

    D3: So Lake Michigan and Gatorade 'Frost' are both blue

    D3 should not follow, because the sense of 'blue' in D1 is not that Lake Michigan looks blue in the bottle and the sense of 'blue in D2 is not as seen from Lake Shore Drive. Hence HE ought to concede that 'blue' is also semantically context-sensitive.

    In these utterances, (and in the C utterances as well) it is arguable that the predicate does not change meanings or contents at all: green is green and blue is blue. It is the subject nounphrases in the strings that admit multiple (ambiguous) readings, 'Lake Michigan' is short for its appearance which is necessarily from (an unstated) perspective, and "Gatorade 'Frost'" is elliptic for "Gatorade 'Frost' in the bottle." (Likewise, 'Juliet's coat' can elliptically mean either the outside of her coat or its lining.) These kinds of half-elliptic nounphrases are standard and pose no problem for semantics.

(4)   Juliet is the sun?

Well, how about:

(14)   'Juliet is the sun' is true just in case Juliet is the sun (full stop), and expresses
        the proposition that Juliet is the sun (full stop).

That is, the semantic content of the truth-conditions of the metaphorical utterance of
(4) is the same as that of its literal utterance.

   One reason to think that (14) is the semantic content of utterances of (4) would be
that its individual *words* have, or retain, their respective conventional meanings
(even when interpreted metaphorically). Nonetheless, it does not follow that the
sentence has the semantic content that would be compositionally determined from
those conventional meanings, at least if the semantic content of a sentence is, as the
Minimalist claims, its truth-conditions or a proposition. I say this for three reasons.
First, what work does the semantically expressed proposition do? According to HE,
"the proposition semantically expressed is that content the speaker can expect the
audience to grasp (and expect the audience to expect the speaker to expect them to
grasp) even if they have mistaken or incomplete communication-relevant informa-
tion" (Cappelan and Lepore 2004, p. 184), i.e., information about the speaker's
intentions, the speech act content, etc. Although this "definition" of the semantic
content must be qualified to take into account (even classical, Kaplanian) context-
sensitive expressions, no one who takes a metaphorical utterance (e.g., Romeo's) of
(4) to express (14) has met the speaker's minimal expectations. She may not know
enough to fully fix the property that is metaphorically expressed on the occasion, but
she will know that it is a property that is metaphorically expressed by 'is the sun,'
not its literal meaning. Someone who takes (4) to express (14), or its literal meaning,
does not just have incomplete information or makes a mistake; she has missed the
whole point of Romeo's utterance, she has misidentified the type of utterance it is.
Second, the Minimalist focuses on truth-conditions to begin with because that is
what must be known in order for the sentence to be understood, or grasped,
which, in turn, is necessary in order for there to be the minimal shared
understanding that constitutes communication. Although grasp comes in degrees,
it does require a minimal understanding of the proposition or truth-conditions. But
it is arguable that we do not understand, or know, what must be the case for the
sentence (4), or the literal meaning of an utterance of (4), as spelled out in (14), to
be *true*, namely, the conditions in which Juliet, a human being, is the sun, a star.
There is, of course, a sense in which we know that the sentence is *false*—namely,
the sense of external negation, in which we know that it is not the case that Juliet
either is or is not the sun—but knowledge of truth-conditions requires that we also
know what the world would have to be like for the sentence to obtain. That we do
not know. Therefore, (14) cannot be the semantic content of a metaphorical
utterance of (4), which opens the door for a metaphorically expressed proposition,
as we have argued.

   This objection was first raised against Davidson (1984) (cf. Margalit and
Goldblum 1994; Roger White 1996; Jerrold Levinson 2001; Stern 2000) who shifts
from talking of the ordinary literal meaning of the *words* that occur in a metaphor to

that of the *sentences* those words constitute.[16] What metaphors achieve, he wrote, "depends entirely on the ordinary meanings of those *words* and *hence* on the ordinary meanings of the *sentences* they comprise" (Davidson 1984, p. 247, my emphasis). Now, it is true, and important, that a metaphorical use or interpretation depends on the literal meaning of the *word*(s) so used, i.e., the literal vehicle, but it does not depend on the literal meaning—the truth-conditions—of the *sentence* composed by those words. This holds for the third reason why the semantic content of a metaphorical utterance cannot be the (compositionally determined) proposition or truth-conditions of the (literal) sentence uttered: those truth-conditions (propositions, sets of possible worlds, intensions, etc.) are not fine enough to capture the notion of the literal on which metaphorical interpretations depend. Even if there are so-called twice-true metaphors (Cohen 1976), strings that are true both literally and metaphorically in the very same context, such as

15.   Man is not a tree and humanity is not a forest. (Levinas)

or, in a context in which we are discussing pros and cons of nuclear power plants after Chernobyl,

16.   Japan, the land of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, sees no alternative.

the (literal) semantic content of the *sentence* does no work in determining the metaphorical interpretation beyond the work which is already done by the non-composed meanings of its individual *words*. Furthermore, the presuppositions that generate the metaphorical interpretation are sensitive, not to the content (property, intension, referent, extension—whatever you take to be the appropriate propositional constituent) of the literal vehicle but to the literal vehicle itself or its meaning in a sense of meaning that is finer than content—a notion of meaning that distinguishes between, say, 'sweat' and 'perspire' or 'cur' and 'mongrel.' (See, e.g., (32) below.) Hence, the metaphorical interpretation of an occurrence of a sentence S in a context c does not depend on the literal *proposition* (or truth-conditions) expressed by S (in any of standard ways of individuating propositions).[17] If there are (literally determined) propositions expressed by sentences interpreted metaphorically, those propositions do no work in metaphorical interpretation.

   This also distinguishes metaphorical interpretations from Gricean implicatures that do depend on what is said, the (literal) proposition expressed. Hence, a similar objection holds against a Gricean analysis of metaphor. Similarly, because either there is no literal semantic content to a metaphor like (4) or its propositional content is irrelevant to or not fine enough for determination of its metaphorical interpretation, metaphor also differs from examples like (1)–(3) for which it is

---

[16] In addition to Davidson, the same objection applies to Griceans who distinguish what is said from what is meant by the metaphor, and also to Recanati's 2004 contextualist account. See Stern (2006). So, Minimalists are in good company, though they may not be happy with their newfound bedfellows.

[17] The literal content of a metaphorically interpreted utterance, or the lack of one, may, however, enter into *identification* of an utterance *as* a metaphor, i.e., the recognition that an utterances is to be interpreted metaphorically, or (in the terminology I shall later introduce) that the token in question is to be typed as a metaphorical expression. But the task of identification is entirely distinct from that of interpretation. On this, see Stern (2000, pp. 2–7).

arguable that there is something like a minimal semantic proposition distinct from the intuitive truth-conditions in any context. Thus the Minimalist can agree that the only semantic content of a metaphor is its metaphorical interpretation without conceding that claim for every non-literal interpretation (for any string).

2 More on the semantic content of metaphorical utterances

In this section, I take up two arguments in the literature that might be enlisted to defend the assumption that (14) is the semantic content of (4).

First, consider the cross-categorical predications such as

17. Odysseus was a pig while on Circe's island.
    The prison guard was an iron statue.
    Caesar is a prime number.

According to Camp (2004), these must express significant, truth-valued (though false) propositions because only on that assumption can we explain how speakers employ them to reason and draw material inferences. Hence, all that is necessary for a string to express a truth-evaluable proposition is that it consist of meaningful words and is syntactically well-formed.

Of course, it is necessary that a truth-evaluable proposition consist of meaningful words and be syntactically well-formed and, as Camp also points out, syntax makes a difference to metaphorical interpretation. 'A man is a wolf' metaphorically expresses something different from 'A wolf is a man,' and 'Wolf a is man a' expresses nothing. A metaphorical interpretation is never a function simply of the individual isolable literal meanings of its component expressions, regardless of their syntax, as if they were no more than brutely concatenated (as suggested by Davidson 1984; cf. Stern 2000, p. 48ff.). However, being a syntactically well-formed string of meaningful words is not a sufficient condition to express a proposition or have truth-conditions. Camp gives as an example of the material reasoning that is meant to support this claim that competent speakers "reason… from the hypothetical truth of

(18.1)   Caesar is a prime number

to the conclusion

(18.2)   Caesar is an abstract object."

And from (18.2) to

(18.3)   Caesar lacks (causal) efficacy

From which they "would be entitled to infer that

(18.4)   Caesar could not be an effective emperor." (Camp 2004, p. 219).

Of course, if one does not believe that 18.1 expresses a proposition, she will also not believe that 18.2 does or, for that matter (18.3) (which requires considerable

more than linguistic understanding, e.g., knowledge that abstract objects do not enter into causal relations). Thus the fact that one can "reason" from one to the other begs the question. Second, the sense in which one can "infer" (18.4) from (18.3) is surely different from the sense in which we can infer (18.2) from (18.1), however one characterizes the former inference. Only for a metaphysician would the fact that something/one does nor does not have causal efficacy bear on the question of whether she can be effective as an emperor or in some other role.

Camp's neo-Gricean position needs a proposition expressed by the *sentence* because she needs a notion of what is (literally) said to ground her metaphorical implicatures; this may also be what motivates her turn to inferential role meaning. But if one does not share her Gricean project, it is less clear why one would use inferential role as a measure of propositionality. Furthermore, as we said, it is also unclear what work the literally expressed proposition or truth-condition does. If one begins from the assumption that the speaker lacks understanding of the literal vehicle, there is no reason here to force understanding.

The second argument for taking the semantic content of (4) to be (14) rests on a strategy that is deployed by HE to rebut an objection to their semantic minimalism, i.e., their claim that

(19)   An utterance of 'A is red (is tall/is ready)' expresses the proposition that A is red (is tall/is ready) and it is true just in case A is red (is tall/is ready).

HE envision an objection against taking (19), or <A, being red/tall/ready>, as the semantic content of an utterance of 'A is red (is tall/is ready)' on the grounds that for the Minimalist

> this proposition is not the same proposition as the proposition *that A is red on the outside*, or as *that A is red when looked at through red sunglasses,* or as *that A is red in normal light*. It's just the proposition *that A is red*. But which proposition is that? What, for example, is it just to be red? What is it that all these things (those that are red when seen through red sunglasses, red on the inside, red in the dark, red on the outside, red when washed, etc.) have in common? What is the state of affairs that the proposition *that A is red* picks out? (Cappelan and Lepore 2004, p. 158)

According to HE, this is a good question but it is a question that can be asked of every property and, more important, it is question of metaphysics—*what is it to be* red or, more generally, for any property P, *what do all things that are P have in common?* There is nothing specific to language or to semantics or to Contextualism about this question, and once the semanticist has laid down the truth-conditions for, say, an utterance of 'A is red' as (19), his work is done. Similarly, for (14) as the semantic content of (4). What is it for something, say, Juliet *to be the sun*? Or what do all things that are the sun (Juliet, Achilles, the largest blob of gasses at the center of the universe) have in common? Good question, wrong addressee. That's Metaphysics, not Semantics, and the one should never be forced on the other.[18]

---

[18] There has been relatively little discussion of HE's Metaphysics argument; one exception is Taylor (2007).

I agree with HE's methodological moral—metaphysical questions need not bear on semantics—but that is not the issue when the question is the semantic content of an utterance of (4). Our question is not: What is it to be the property that is semantically expressed on that occasion? Our question is: Which property is semantically expressed on that occasion? And according to HE's five-step procedure, this is how we determine which property (or proposition) is semantically expressed by an utterance of a sentence S: (i) Specify the meaning or semantic value of every expression in S (choosing your favorite semantic theory); (ii) specify the compositional meaning rules for the language, say, English; (iii) Disambiguate every ambiguous/polysemous expression in S; (iv) Precisify every vague expression in S; and (v) Fix the semantic value of every context-sensitive expression in S. The first crucial step for us is (iii): Disambiguation. One kind of disambiguation involves the assignment of a type to a sound pattern I hear on an occasion (granting that I know the language to which it presumably belongs). Thus, if I hear the sound pattern '…i…,' I must assign it to the type '… eye …,' '… I…' or '… aye…' If it is 'aye,' I must in turn disambiguate the two senses of the word type (that yield two expressions where an expression is a word + meaning): the familiar sense of 'yes' or the affirmative vote or the archaic sense of 'forever or always.' And if the type is the first-person indexical 'I' in turn I must go on to step (v) and assign it a contextually fixed semantic value.

As I will show in a moment, disambiguation plus contextual assignment of a semantic value are also the crucial elements in determining the semantic content of a metaphor. Given an utterance with the sound pattern (assuming the language of the speaker is English)

20.   jul-le-'et iz the sen

we must assign it to a type (as a word in a language with a meaning), and among the types—linguistic types, as I will argue in the next section—are metaphorical ones:

(21a)   Juliet is the sun.
(21b)   Juliet (Metaphorically speaking) 'is the sun.'
(21c)   Juliet is the son
(21d)   Juliet (Metaphorically speaking) 'is the son.'

The metaphorical types, in contrast, to their literal vehicles are context-dependent and therefore have different semantic values (contents, e.g., properties) in different contexts. So, once we have assigned the words a "metaphorical meaning," their semantic value, like that of indexicals and demonstratives, must be fixed in content. This proposal requires explanation but, in order to motivate it, let me turn back to one more Minimalist desideratum.

3 A literalist account of metaphor

I have argued that metaphor passes two of the Minimalist's tests for semantic context-sensitivity. I also have challenged the prima facie assumption that the semantic content of, or what we minimally understand by, a metaphor like 'Juliet is

the sun' could be (the proposition, content, truth-conditions) that Juliet is the sun. Some may take this as a reductio of the idea of pragmatics-free truth-conditions and proof of Contexualism (at least on metaphor).[19] However, this conclusion, in my view, is also the wrong one to draw. The reason, as I shall illustrate in a moment, is that there are constraints on metaphorical interpretation that cannot be treated by pragmatic principles and therefore call for a semantics. Contextualism cannot be the solution.

There is a second side to this same coin. Notwithstanding the fact that the Minimalist's proposition is not part of the semantic content of an utterance interpreted metaphorically, the metaphorical depends on the literal in the strong sense that the literal vehicle (type) plays a crucial role in and is 'active' in metaphorical interpretation. It is not just that the literal vehicle retains its literal meaning even while being interpreted or used metaphorically. The metaphorically relevant contextual presuppositions, the various families and networks of expressions relative to which metaphors are interpreted, the implicative resonance of the metaphor, its perspectival information and cognitive significance, the sense in which it furnishes speakers with a way of thinking of its content, how it makes us *see* x *as* F, and its potential for further interpretations, both extended interpretations and disjoint alternative interpretations—all of these are sensitive to and dependent on the literal vehicle.[20] The individuation of the literal vehicle may itself be more complicated than first appears, but nothing not at least as fine-grained as the literal vehicle, with its so-called literal meaning, will do to individuate the associated network and sets of metaphorically relevant presuppositions. Thus the least difference between even purported synonyms such as 'sweat'/'perspire', 'tully'/ 'cicero', 'cur'/'mongrol' can generate different networks and, hence, lead to different metaphorical interpretations. This is the full sense of the truism that the metaphorical depends on the literal: it is not just that there must be some notion of literal for the possibility of metaphor, or that knowledge of the literal meaning of Ø is necessary for its metaphorical use, or that presuppositions or encyclopedic knowledge about literal Ø's are the stuff of metaphorical interpretations. The literal vehicle is what directs or controls the interpretation of a metaphor. Any account of the semantics of metaphorical interpretation must, then, 'capture' or represent the literal vehicle, with its meaning, within its interpretive structure.[21] Furthermore, no other example of non-literal intuitive truth-conditions—all the other data to which the Contextualists appeal—exhibits this same kind of literal-dependence; hence, there is a principled difference between them that motivates different treatments.

---

[19] See Reimer (forthcoming).

[20] The idea that metaphors are interpreted, not as isolated expressions, but in units of families and networks of expressions has become an important theme in metaphor research in recent years. Goodman (1976) should get credit for first seeing this, but Lakoff and Johnson (1980, Gentner (1982), Tirrell (1989), White (1996), Stern (2000), and Camp 2008 all develop the idea, each in different ways.

[21] One caveat: not every metaphorical interpretation depends *directly* on a literal vehicle. In "We will do better in our philosophical analysis if we keep a foot near to the brakes of common sense before we roar ambitiously forward." Wilson (2006, p. 12), we have an example of a metaphorical interpretation 'of' a prior metaphorical use/interpretation, not directly of a purely literal application.

The problem facing the metaphor theorist is making room for this metaphorical-literal dependence without positing a literal, semantically-purified, pragmatics-free proposition or truth-conditions like the Minimalist's semantic proposition. The solution to this problem, it turns out, is closely related to another desideratum raised by the Minimalist conception of semantic context-sensitivity: the requirement that it be grammatically (i.e., syntactically or morphemically) triggered. Where is the grammatical trigger for a metaphor?

At this point I want to propose an analysis of metaphor in which it is grammatically—lexically or morphemically—triggered, that will explain why metaphor passes HE's tests for semantic context-sensitivity, and that gives us a way to capture metaphorical-literal dependence. The proposal begins from two assumptions.

First, the account assumes that there are an unbounded number of contexts in which the same word can be used metaphorically to express an unbounded number of different interpretations. Each such content is the product (in part) of extra-linguistic skills (e.g., the ability to see similarities or what is exemplified by an object) and presuppositions. Treating each content (or truth-conditional factor) of a metaphor in a context as another meaning of a multiply polysemous expression would therefore both set off an explosion of meanings and fail to mark what the speaker knows specifically in virtue of his linguistic knowledge as opposed to all his extra-linguistic beliefs, skills, and so on. It follows that *if* there is a semantic notion of meaning for metaphors, it cannot be the *contents* of individual metaphors in contexts. We need some other kind of meaning.

Second, the history of empirical research into language over the previous half-century has shown that not only concrete utterances of sentences or structures close to the surface of utterances, but also abstract linguistic structure (i.e., phonetically unrealized elements and structure) is necessary in order to explain speakers' knowledge of the principles of meaning in virtue of which they are able to communicate.[22] The same methodological assumption, on this proposal, ought to guide us in seeking an explanation of metaphor. In this respect this proposal, at least in practice, differs from both Contextualist and Minimalist explanations that typically take into account only linguistic structure whose meaning lies on the surface of the concrete sentence uttered. The point of the Literalist approach that posits abstract underlying linguistic structure is not to insist, come what may, that linguistic meaning exhausts propositional content or what is intuitively said by an utterance. Rather, linguistic structure is necessary both to constrain the expression of speakers' intentions and to enable the expression of more information than is conveyed in the truth-conditions of what is explicitly articulated in the actual sentence uttered.

This conception of the role of linguistic structure in metaphorical interpretation orients my proposal for metaphor. Its central idea is that metaphorical interpretation is a kind of systematic and regular though context-dependent interpretation on the classical model of demonstratives and indexicals. Following David Kaplan (1989),

---

[22] It is not obvious that Contextualists share this assumption; see, e.g., the discussion of Travis' examples in Récanati (2004, p. 149, n. 46).

we distinguish two elements in the pre-theoretical notion of meaning: *content*, the propositional or truth-conditional factor (as fixed in a context) corresponding to each expression, and *character*, the rule (or function) that determines for each expression in each context of utterance what the content of the expression is in that context. The contents of demonstratives and indexicals vary from context to context, but the variation is systematic, constrained, and regular—determined by the character and its rule of meaning. Furthermore, by analogy to David Kaplan's (1989) Dthat-descriptions that "lexically" represent the demonstrative interpretations or uses of (of non-demonstrative and non-indexical) definite descriptions, I propose that an expression Ø interpreted or used metaphorically be represented by (to introduce a term of art) the "metaphorical expression" 'Mthat[Ø].' The metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]' "lexicalizes" the metaphorical interpretation or use of Ø. The semantic rule for 'Mthat' is (M):

(M) 'Mthat' is a lexical operator (i.e., a term forming operator on terms) at the level of logical form which, when prefixed to a (literal) expression Ø, yields a context-sensitive expression 'Mthat[Ø]' whose tokens in each context c express a set of properties presupposed in c to be m(etaphorically)-associated with the expression Ø, such that the proposition <…{[Mthat[Ø]]}(c)…> is either true or false at a circumstance.

(For each expression Ø, {Ø} denotes the character of Ø; {Ø}(c) denotes the content of Ø in the context c; and {Ø}(c)(w) the extension (referent, truth-value) of Ø uttered (and interpreted) in c and evaluated at the world w. Thus, if Ø is a predicate, then {Ø}(c) denotes a property and {Ø}(c)(w(c)) denotes the extension of Ø uttered in the context c at (the world of) that context.)

There is much to spell out in (M) but, in brief, the set of properties presupposed to be m-associated with Ø can be associated in a variety of ways, either as stereotypical or normal properties, through exemplification or a similarity relation, or in more idiosyncratic ways. From the perspective of the semantics, all that is significant is *that* they are presupposed, abstracting away from their psychological sources. However, the presuppositions are individuated by the *expression* Ø, not by its content or referent (even though the properties in question may be properties of Ø's).

On this account, (4) in which 'is the sun' is interpreted metaphorically will now be represented at the level of its logical form as containing the corresponding metaphorical expression:

22.   Juliet Mthat['is the sun']

The metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]' has a non-constant character, i.e., a meaning or rule (or function) that in different contexts yields different contents, i.e., different truth-conditional factors (for predicates, properties). Thus, knowing the character of a metaphor is like mastering a general skill of interpretation. It is a rule or function that enables speakers, for each expression Ø that can be interpreted metaphorically in a sentence S, to map the properties presupposed to be metaphorically associated with the expression Ø in c into a subset of properties that determines the truth-value of utterances of S in c. Exactly how that rule is applied in each context (including identification of the relevant m-associated

properties) is not specified in the semantics but in the pragmatics. So, like Kaplan's 'Dthat,' 'Mthat' is a lexical—not syntactic or even semantic—operator that articulates a general skill at metaphorical interpretation of any expression. Also like 'Dthat,' metaphorical expressions are lexically complex though syntactically simple. 'Mthat" does not, then, generate a new (syntactic or semantic) category of expression called "metaphorical phrases"; it simply lexicalizes the interpretation or use of all expressions that can (grammatically) be interpreted metaphorically.[23] However, *unlike* 'Dthat' and *like* the indexicals (like 'I'), the content of a metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]' is not a function of the semantic value of Ø (e.g., what it denotes), but of a contextual parameter, namely, the presuppositions associated with the expression or word Ø. Thus metaphorical expressions are a hybrid of 'Dthat' and indexicals.

As we mentioned earlier, a primary motivation for positing the additional abstract structure of metaphorical expressions is in order to capture constraints on which intentions speakers can succeed in expressing in metaphorical contents of their utterances. In particular, the meaning, or character, of the metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]' enables us to distinguish the *generation* of the content of the metaphor in, or relative to, its context of utterance (or interpretation) from the *evaluation* of the truth of the (content of the) metaphor at, or relative to, a circumstance or world. Equally important, the meaning constrains the interaction between the context and its circumstance of evaluation. Metaphorical expressions are the linguistic vehicles whose meanings embody these constraints. This is the real work the operator 'Mthat' does; its function is not simply to "direct the hearer to find the most relevant interpretation of the expression" (Wearing 2006, p. 319). While the operator does 'sensitize' the expression to its context, it does *not* rank possible interpretations according to their relevance, picking out the most relevant one. It encodes the fact that the metaphorical expression (or the metaphorical interpretation of the vehicle) is context-sensitive (to its metaphorical parameter), but it also constrains the range of possible interpretations that can be contextually generated. Many of these constraints concern the interaction between the metaphorical expression (or expression being interpreted metaphorically) and other sentential operations (e.g., modals and quantifiers; see Stern (2000).

Consider, for example, the behavior of metaphors in quantificationally bound or subordinate clauses:

(23a) Every lover remembers *that first sun of his*
(23b) Every lover remembers *that first sun whose bright light shined on him*

(in which the italicized phrase is interpreted metaphorically). The complex demonstrative containing the metaphor is non-rigid; its referent will co-vary with the value of the quantified variable. But we can also imagine different contexts in which the metaphor has different interpretations. E.g. suppose (23a/b) was uttered in a context in which we had been discussing Juliet, how, as the sun, she nurtures

---

[23] I.e., any expression that admits a metaphorical interpretation. Although the matter requires more research, there may well be linguistic constraints on which expressions or on which syntactic positions allow metaphorical interpretation. For preliminary thoughts, see Stern (1983) and Glanzberg (2008).

Romeo's life and is someone without whom he can't live. In that context (23a/b) would be interpreted to say that every lover remembers that first beloved without whom he couldn't live and so on. But who the beloved is will vary with the lover, thus Mary with John, Sally with Bill, and so on. Alternatively suppose that (23a/b) was uttered in a context in which we were discussing how Juliet, as a bright sun whose light was too much for him, burned and consumed Romeo. Different contexts, different interpretations. In that context (23a/b) would mean that every lover remembers that first beloved who burned him up. Again, the beloved will vary with the lover: Brittany with Tom, Jane with Dick, and so on. Thus the content of the complex demonstrative that contains the metaphor is fixed by its context; yet its referent, the thing that fits that content, will nonetheless co-vary with the quantified variable. But what you do *not* get is a co-varying interpretation where (23a/b) is true just in case one lover-value remembers a beloved without whom he cannot live and a second lover-value remembers someone who burned him up, and so on—even though both beloveds are suns. That interpretation of (23a/b) is impossible.[24] Why? The Contextualists' explanatory principles like loosening, broadening, or transfer do not bear on these kinds of constraints, showing that the interpretation of the metaphor cannot itself co-vary with the bound variable. Nor is it clear how we could tell a story employing Gricean conversational maxims, violations, and implicatures. To the contrary, one might think that (23a/b) is a concise general structure to convey maximal information in conformity with a maxim. What we need in order to rule out the mixed interpretation of (23a/b) is some sort of semantic structure that distinguishes the interpretation of the metaphor relative to its *context* from its (referential) evaluation which is relative to *circumstances*. The relevant constraint that attaches the interpretation to its actual context regardless of the circumstances of its evaluation might be called the Actual Context Constraint, a constraint that also holds for the classical demonstratives and indexicals (Stern 2000, 2006). The character of the metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]' is intended to mark that kind of structural constraint.

This does not exhaust the semantic or cognitive work done by the character of the metaphor. In addition to constraining the contents of metaphorical interpretations, the character of the metaphorical expression (or the metaphorical character of the expression used metaphorically) also "bears" various kinds of extra-propositional information that a metaphor conveys in addition to its truth-conditions as fixed in its context of utterance. When one knows the non-constant character of the metaphorical expression one knows that its content will vary with different contexts, i.e., different sets of contextual presuppositions. One knows, given knowledge of those alternative contexts, what the content would be were it to occur in one of those contexts—directions for the interpretation of tokens of that metaphorical expression type. One also knows, because it is mentioned, the literal vehicle of the metaphor which furnishes one, largely through the networks or

---

[24] Cf. King (2001). Notice that much worse than (23a/b) is the mixed metaphorical/literal interpretation of
(23c) Every romantic astronaut remembers that first sun he gazed upon.
which cannot be interpreted to be true just in case Jim the astronaut remembers the sun of Uranus he first saw; Bill the astronaut, Mary, the woman without whom he cannot live, and so on.

families of expressions to which it belongs, with the perspective by which the metaphor presents its content, the "character-istic" information that provides the cognitive significance of the metaphor, its pictorial quality, the way of *seeing* the content *as* the metaphor has it. Without going into more detail, it should be emphasized that all this information, and the relevant networks for the metaphor, are sensitive to the very expression—the literal vehicle—that is interpreted metaphorically. It is in this way that the literal remains "active" in the metaphorical interpretation.[25] This may also explain Cavell's remark that the "meaning of a metaphor is bound up with the very words that are used" (1967, p. 79) and it may have been Jakobson's (1981/1957) point when he said that metaphor has a meta-linguistic dimension. It is not simply a technical detail that the vehicle is mentioned—"quoted" in some sense—as the operand of 'Mthat.' The contextual parameter for the metaphor is sensitive not just to its literal content, but to the meaning of the very expression.

We are now in a position to pay up the promissory note we floated in the last section in response to HE's defense of (14) as the semantic content of (4). According to HE, those who question how the proposition that Juliet is the sun (full stop) could possibly be the semantic content of a metaphorical utterance of 'Juliet is the sun' on the grounds that there is no such property *to be the sun*, or that we do not know what it is *to be the sun*, are doing metaphysics, not semantics. We responded that the issue is not *what* the property in question is, but *which* property is expressed on the occasion. And that is a semantic issue on the order of disambiguation (plus contextual determination, when the product of disambiguation is semantically context-sensitive such as an indexical or a metaphorical expression). Let me now spell out this idea of disambiguation. For each string S, let the grammar "generate" a set of logical forms that correspond to every possible combination of terminal nodes filled by lexical items containing all the (grammatically) possible Mthat-expressions in the string. (Among these logical forms is the (metaphorically) bare one that contains no metaphorical expressions. You can think of that as the literal logical form of the string.) In saying that one's grammar, or I-language, *generates* this "metaphor set" of logical forms, what we mean is that the speaker knows as part of his linguistic competence all the (combinations of grammatically) possible metaphorical expressions—expressions that grammatically admit metaphorical interpretations—that might occur as part of his utterances.[26] On a given occasion, then, when he hears some phone sequence, the agent must determine which member of the metaphor set (including its purely 'literal logical form') is the logical form with which to type the token. That is, the agent must decide whether the string is to be interpreted literally or metaphorically and, in the latter case, which elements in the string are to be typed as metaphorical expressions. This task is a matter of disambiguation, and he exploits the (pre-semantic) context to make his determi-

---

[25] See Stern (2000, pp. 108, 221, 293–294). Although the m-associated presuppositions for exemplificational metaphors involve properties presupposed to be exemplified by the referent of the literal vehicle, which property is exemplified also depends on how the referent is (qualitatively) presented by the literal vehicle (Stern 2000, p. 155).

[26] This is not a vacuous qualification; see above no. 21.

nation. But once the agent has assigned, for whatever reason, a given logical form to the utterance, then if that form contains a (semantically) context-sensitive constituent, there remains an additional (semantic) role for the context in fixing its semantic value. In the case of metaphor, this last role of the semantic context is triggered by the (covert) presence of a metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]'.'

According to Francois Recanati 2007, 2010, all this amounts to nothing more than a "deflationary syntactic construal of free pragmatic processes". He agrees that there is a "bare" logical form for each uttered sentence or string, i.e., a level of syntactic representation that is (1) determined by sentence grammar and (2) directly feeds into semantic interpretation. In the case of metaphor, the bare logical form would be, say, the logical form underlying (4) that contains no abstract 'Mthat' operators. Where our theories differ, according to Recanati, is only in that where he posits a modulated semantic interpretation, or truth-condition, that results from applying free pragmatic processes (and extra-linguistic information) to the bare logical form, I posit multiple logical forms—all in the language system—that contain "covert optionals" like 'Mthat' that are semantically saturated (like indexicals). Recanati's modulated, pragmatically determined interpretations or truth-conditions are *either* syntactically *or* meta-linguistically (but not syntactically) represented—but in either case they belong to the conceptual system, either exclusively or in addition to the language system. "Mthat" is covert because it is not phonetically realized; hence, the two logical forms underlying

24.   Jack is our quarterback.

namely,

(24a)   Jack is our quarterback.

and

(24b)   Jack Mthat[is our quarterback].

are phonetically indistinguishable. And 'Mthat' is optional "because it is always possible for what looks superficially like the same sentence not to carry that covert element and therefore not to have the meaning that results from its addition." (ibid.) Thus the only difference between my account and Recanati's is that mine does "everything" in the semantic or linguistic system by freely generating abstract elements in the covert syntax, while Recanati's involves free pragmatic processes that involve extra-linguistic elements.

Recanati is correct that 'Mthat' is covert, although, as we shall see, there is a way of optionally spelling it out. However, the only sense in which the metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]' is "optional" holds for every expression type. Encountering *any* sound event or inscription, our first task is to assign it as a token to a (sentence) type corresponding to a syntactic representation (for both bare logical forms and those that contain metaphorical expressions). In some cases, there may only be one potential type for the token, in other cases, the token may be ambiguous in that it can be assigned to either or both of two or more types, and in some cases, the question is

whether or not to assign the utterance to a literal (bare) or metaphorical expression type. In general nothing *forces* us to assign one or another sound or shape to a particular type as a token. Both bare logical form types or richer metaphorical types are typically live options. In making the assignment we exploit all sorts of contextual cues, but this role of the context is pre-semantic. So, in this sense Recanati is right that 'Mthat' is optional but that only has to do with the identification of an utterance as a metaphor, deciding or knowing that the utterance is to be interpreted as a metaphor, and it holds for all typing of utterances, metaphorical or literal. Contrary to Recanati, there is nothing optional about 'Mthat' itself or about the functioning of the metaphorical character once the type has been assigned.

There is a second difference between Recanati's account and mine. Recanati countenances two levels of logical form: the bare logical form and that of the modulated proposition that is shaped by extra-linguistic information and pragmatic processes (whether it is syntactically or meta-linguistically represented). I countenance three levels: the bare logical form that is part of the language system, the modulated logical form that includes the covert metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø]' and that is also part of the language system, and, finally, a semantic representation that is exclusively or jointly conceptual that bears the traces of non-linguistic input, pragmatic processes and skills, context, and extra-linguistic presuppositions. (The first corresponds to a Kaplanian character in the classical sense, the second to a character including that of metaphorical expressions, and the third to a content in context.) The real difference between my account and Recanati's turns on the work done by the second level of logical form that contains metaphorical/Mthat-expressions rather than the contents their tokens yield in context. If my argument is on track, this level of semantic structure that displays the character of a metaphorical expression enables us to explain constraints that govern metaphorical interpretation, like those that affect the interpretation of (23) and other ways in which metaphors interact with quantifiers, modals, complex demonstratives, VP anaphora, and so on. These constraints are not optional, and they cannot, for all I know, be explained by pragmatic processes. Insofar as they are entirely general and involve configurational features that interact with other syntactically represented semantic factors, the bearers of those constrains on metaphorical interpretation look like prime candidates for semantic status.

Another kind of objection to the proposal that the grammar generates a "metaphor set" of possible logical forms for each string is that it "requires a substantial increase in the linguistic work that must be performed in order to interpret any utterance." (Wearing 2006, p. 317). It is also objected that the proposal overgenerates, yielding many more possible interpretations than we ever in fact recognize, among them some that "look more like theoretically generated artifacts than distinct readings of the sentence in question" (ibid.).[27] Now, some 'artifactual'

---

[27] Wearing objects that the proposal overgenerates for "sentences that do not have any obvious metaphorical reading, such as 'Juliet is tidy.'" (317) In fact, however, it is easy to imagine contexts in which 'Juliet' is being used metaphorically to refer to, say, Cathy, contexts in which we have been praising her peerlessness and the fact that she is the center of the speaker's world. We can also imagine a context in which we are evaluating, say, musical compositions, Bill's, Tom's, and Juliet's. I say: "John there is a mess, Bill too convoluted, but Juliet is tidy."

offshoots of this sort may be a consequence but that is unavoidable, however undesirable, with most theoretical proposals. Better, however, that we be prepared for all possible interpretations than there be interpretations for which no structure exists to bear them. Yet, this is, admittedly, a cost and, in evaluating alternative proposals, it should surely be taken into account together with benefits. But until we have a number of elaborated alternatives to compare, the verdict over which is most beneficial and which most costly seems to me to be out.

As for the objection that the proposed account increases "the linguistic work that must be performed in order to interpret any utterance," the issue of processing time and cognitive effort relative to utterance complexity is, as a matter of empirical fact, a complex one to which there is no simple answer. There have been no studies that suggest that number of possible interpretations per se increases processing time and effort; given a large set of possible interpretations for an utterance, it may also not be necessary to go through all of them to arrive at the most reasonable one(s) in context.[28] We might even adopt the Relevance-theoretic proposal that the presumption of optimal relevance serves as a useful heuristic for the task of *identification* of an utterance as a metaphor, even if we do not employ it in the task of metaphorical *interpretation* itself.

4 'Metaphorically speaking' and 'Literally speaking'

I have argued that (1) the Minimalist can treat metaphor consistent with his account by subsuming it in the same class of classical context-dependent expressions as the Kaplanian demonstratives and indexicals; (2) that the metaphorical interpretation of an expression is its (only) semantic content, hence, that metaphor differs from the standard examples used by Minimalists against Contextualists to argue that non-literal meanings are speech-act contents; and (3) that the semantically context-dependent interpretation of a metaphor is grammatically triggered by the non-constant character of its underlying metaphorical expression 'Mthat[Ø].' Another way to think of 'Mthat' is as an underlying abstract operator optionally spelled out phonetically by the expression "Metaphorically" or "Metaphorically speaking." For example, (4) which corresponds to the underlying (22), in turn, corresponds to

25.   Juliet, metaphorically speaking, 'is the sun.'

Whether 'metaphorically speaking' is phonetically realized or not, the strings (4) and (25) are equivalent content-wise. In (25) 'is the sun' occurs in single quotes, as in mixed quotation. I am both using and mentioning the quoted words. I am using them metaphorically to express a content or property and I am demonstrating how that property is expressed metaphorically by that literal vehicle. To be sure, in the course of making the metaphorical use or interpretation explicit, the words "Metaphorically speaking" may ruin its force, like the way that the figurative hedge 'like' can weaken a metaphor. But this way of speaking can sometimes be communicatively valuable. For example, in a recent Time Magazine article (April 9,

---

[28] R. Gibbs, personal communication; cf. also Gibbs and Tendahl (2006).

2007) on Mike Rowe, host of the television show "Dirty Jobs," Rowe quotes Don Cicoletti, an avian vomitologist who collects owl vomit to retrieve the animal skeletons within them:

26. As Cicoletti, the avian vomitologist says, 'Hey, as long as I am bent over I might as well pick something up.' [Rowe then adds:] That's great advice. We are all bent over metaphorically one way or another. If we took the time to pick up whatever's in front of us, hey, who knows? It could turn into gold. (Time Magazine April 9, 2007).

Rowe's own utterance is not quite right. What he should have said is:

27. We are all 'bent over' metaphorically one way or another.[29]

And with different scopes for 'Metaphorically speaking', we can mark the different scopes of metaphorical interpretation. Thus:

28. 'Juliet,' metaphorically speaking, is the sun
29. Metaphorically speaking, 'Juliet is the sun.'[30]

As we see in the formal structure of Mthat-expressions, the quotation marks signal a metalinguistic element in metaphorical interpretation, the fact that the very expression type of the literal vehicle tokened in the utterance is crucial, and irreplaceable, for its metaphorical interpretation.

But if *metaphorical* interpretation can be analyzed by invention of the operator 'Mthat' corresponding to the overt expression 'Metaphorically speaking, why not give the same kind of formal treatment for *literal* interpretation? Why not posit an operator for literal interpretation like 'Mthat,' precisely because any sentence S ought to be equivalent to the sentence "Literally speaking, S"? But there is a disanalogy between metaphorical and literal interpretation and the overt adverbs 'Metaphorically' and 'Literally.' We said that making the fact of metaphorical

---

[29] Liz Camp (p.c.) raised the question whether (26), with its quantifer, violates the Actual Context Constraint or requires multiple different metaphorical interpretations for 'bent over.' I think not, since (26) does not itself assert any particular metaphorical interpretation in its context; instead it quantifies over one (or more). That is, (ignoring details about the plural 'we') on one reading (26) states:

(26.1) In any context c, there is some way or another of being metaphorically 'bent over' such that we (fixed in c) are all that way (in c).
On another (less likely reading, although it would be preferable if we substituted 'each' for 'all' in (26)) it states,

(26.2) In any context c, for every individual in c who belongs to the extension of 'we' fixed in c, there is some way or another of being metaphorically 'bent over' such that she is that way (in c).

In either case, "being 'bent over' metaphorically one way or another" is a property that the "we" or its members possess. On neither reading is there a problem for my account. (Cf. Stern 2006, pp. 276–277).

[30] (29) should be distinguished from the string

(29.1) Metaphorically speaking, 'Juliet,' metaphorically speaking, 'is the sun.' which corresponds to
(29.2) Mthat['Juliet'] Mthat['is the sun.']
in which there occur multiple metaphors. It is possible that (29) is one of those artifactually generated strings that we do not in fact ever recognize as a metaphorical interpretation of (4). However, there are metaphors whose units are whole sentences, for example, 'White is white and black is black' for which a structure like (29) would be appropriate.

interpretation explicit with 'Metaphorically speaking' can weaken its force. With 'Literally speaking' the effect is the very opposite. If I say,

30. The movie, literally, made my hair stand up straight/made me climb the wall.

I am not speaking literally with the words "made my hair stand up straight/made me climb the wall." The point of the words 'Literally speaking' is rather to focus on the words themselves, rather than on their literal meaning. Hence, here too, "Literally speaking" is meta-linguistic:

31. The movie, literally speaking, 'made his hair stand up straight.'

where we are saying something, perhaps hyperbolic—namely, "terrified him"—but also focusing on the words used to express that content. Here, then, the words 'literally speaking' do not verbalize the literal meaning of the sentence; rather, as with 'metaphorically (speaking)' they call our attention to the very words used and in so doing makes those words do double duty. 'Metaphorically (speaking)' is the concrete natural language realization of 'Mthat'; 'Literally' signals a super-literal, if not a non-literal interpretation of the words it dominates.[31]

References

Bezuidenhout, A. (2001). Metaphor and what is said: A defense of a direct expression view of metaphor. In P. A. French & H. K. Wettstein (Eds.), *Midwest studies in philosophy (Vol 25): Figurative language* (pp. 156–186). Boston, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Borg, E. (2004). *Minimal semantics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Camp, E. (2004). The generality constraint, nonsense, and categorial restrictions. *Philosophical Quarterly, 54*(215), 209–231.

Camp, E. (2006). Contextualism, metaphor, and what is said. *Mind and Language*, *21*, 280–309.

Camp, E. (2007). Prudent semantics meets wanton SpeechAct pluralism. In G. Preyer & G. Peter (Eds.), *Context-sensitivity and semantic minimalism: New essays on semantics and pragmatics* (pp. 194–215).

Camp, E. (2008). Showing, telling, and seeing: Metaphor and 'poetic' language. *The Baltic international yearbook of cognition, logic and communication: A figure of speech* (Vol. 3, pp. 1–24). http://www.thebalticyearbook.org/.

Cappelan, H., & Lepore, E. (2004). *Insensitive semantics: A defense of semantic minimalism and speech act pluralism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Carston, R. (2002). *Thoughts and utterances: The pragmatics of explicit communication*. London: Blackwell.

---

[31] There are other uses of 'literally' that are not hyperbolic but deflationary; they signal that an expression that one might think is metaphorical is in fact literal. Thus in a review of an exhibition of the distinguished conceptual artist Stephanie Brooks, entitled "Downtime," the reviewer proposes that the title expresses (metaphorically) the idea that all the pieces in the show express "hypnotic tranquility." When questioned about the title, Brooks answers: "Quite literally," she says, "I make my art in my downtime from caring for my children."

Castaneda, H.-N. (1967). Indicators and quasi-indicators. *The American Philosophical Quarterly, 4*, 85–100.

Cavell, S. (1967). Aesthetic problems of modern philosophy. In M. Black (Ed.), *Philosophy in America* (pp. 74–97). Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Cohen, T. (1976). Notes on metaphor. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 34*, 249–259.

Davidson, D. (1984). What metaphors mean. In *Inquiries into truth and interpretation.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gentner, D. (1982). Are scientific analogies metaphors? In D. Miall (Ed.), *Metaphor: Problems and perspectives* (pp. 106–132). Brighten, England: Harvester Press.

Gibbs, R., & Tendahl, M. (2006). Cognitive effort and effects in metaphor comprehension: Relevance theory and psycholinguistics. *Mind and Language, 21*, 379–403.

Glanzberg, M. (2008). Metaphor and lexical semantics. *The Baltic international yearbook of cognition, logic and communication: A figure of speech* (Vol. 3, pp. 1–47). http://www.thebalticyearbook.org/.

Goodman, N. (1976). *Languages of art* (2nd ed.). Hackett: Indianapolis.

Jakobson, R. (1981/1957). Metalanguage as a linguistic problem. In *The framework of language.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives. In J. Almog, J. Perry, & H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (pp. 481–563). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kaplan, D. (1990). Words. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 64*(suppl), 93–119.

King, J. (2001). *Complex demonstratives: A quantificational account.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

King, J., & Stanley, J. (2005). Semantics, pragmatics, and the role of semantic content. In Z. Szabo (Ed.), *Semantics vs. pragmatics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Levinson, J. (2001). Who's afraid of a paraphrase? *Theoria, 67*, 7–23.

Lewis, D. (1979). Scorekeeping in a language game. *Journal of Philosophical Logic, 8*, 339–359.

Margalit, A., & Goldblum, N. (1994). Metaphors in an open-class test. In J. Hintikka (Ed.), *Aspects of metaphor.* Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Perry, J. (1979). The problem of the essential indexical. *Nous, 13*, 3–21.

Perry, J. (1986). Thought without representation. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 60*(suppl), 263–283.

Preyer, G., & Peter, G. (2007). *Context-sensitivity and semantic minimalism: New essays on semantics and pragmatics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Récanati, F. (2004). *Literal meaning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Récanati, F. (2007). It is raining (somewhere). *Linguistics and Philosophy, 30*(1), 123–146.

Récanati, F. (2010). Pragmatics and logical form. In B. Soria & E. Romero (Eds.), *Explicit communication. Robyn Carston's pragmatics.* New York: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Reimer, M. (forthcoming). The direct expression of metaphorical content.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1995). *Relevance: Communication and cognition* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Stalnaker, R. (1972). Pragmatics. In D. Davidson & G. Harman (Eds.), *Semantics of natural language* (pp. 380–397). Dordrecht: Reidel.

Stanley, J. (2000). Context and logical form. *Linguistics and Philosophy, 23*, 391–434.

Stanley, J. (2002). Making it articulated. *Mind and Language, 17*(1&2), 149–168.

Stanley, J. (2005). Semantics in context. In G. Preyer & G. Peter (Eds.), *Contextualism in philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stanley, J., & Szabo, Z. (2000). On quantifer domain restriction. *Mind and Language, 15*, 219–261.

Stern, J. (1983). Metaphor and grammatical deviance. *Nous, 17*, 577–599.

Stern, J. (2000). *Metaphor in context.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Stern, J. (2006). Metaphor, literal, literalism. *Mind and Language, 21*(3), 243–279.

Taylor, K. (2007). A little sensitivity goes a long way. In G. Preyer & G. Peter (Eds.), *Context-sensitivity and semantic minimalism: New essays on semantics and pragmatics* (pp. 63–93).

Tirrell, L. (1989). Extending: The structure of metaphor. *Nous, 23*, 17–34.

Travis, C. (2000). *Unshadowed thought.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Wearing, C. (2006). Metaphor and what is said. *Mind and Language, 21*(3), 310–332.

White, R. W. (1996). *The Structure of metaphor: The way the language of metaphor works.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wilson, M. (2006). *Wandering significance: An essay on conceptual behavior.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.