Meaning, semantics and semiotics[1]

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Abstract

This paper questions the assumption, widespread in linguistic theory and pragmatics, that linguistic expressions have meaning in virtue of possessing semantic properties/content. Problems created by this assumption are discussed and an alternative, semiotic, account of meaning is developed that places 'linguistic meaning' in the context of meaning in general.

1. Introduction.

In a discussion of relevance theory, Dan Wedgwood comments:

> 'Relevance theorists have tended to assume that RT can be used... as an adjunct to fairly conventional approaches to other parts of linguistic theory…. But in making the move away from the moderate contextualism of Gricean approaches, RT has more radical consequences, whether we like it or not. In effect, this constitutes a break from conventional perspectives on semantics.... the nature of encoded meaning cannot be understood without active consideration of inferential contributions to meaning. This is nothing less than a reversal of conventional methodology, which tends to abstract away from inferential pragmatic processes as much as possible. ... Once we reject [conventional semantic analysis], as RT does in principle, the nature of encoded meaning becomes an entirely open question.... A great deal of contemporary syntactic theorising is motivated by a wish to account for the perceived semantic character of a given sentence (hence the regular use of levels of representation of syntactic representation like LF, LOGICAL FORM)' (2007, 679).

These are the thoughts I develop in this paper. I will argue that pragmatic theory - and relevance theory in particular - should be seen as offering a challenge to 'conventional' linguistic wisdom.

What is at issue is the nature of meaning, no less. I will make a case for - or aim to reinstate - an account of meaning at odds with 'conventional' linguistic theorising, by which I will assume Wedgwood means Chomskyan generative grammar (CGG). The relevant CGG assumption is evinced by Brody (1995, 1) when he writes 'it is a truism that grammar relates sound and meaning'. CGG seeks to achieve this by positing two interface levels of linguistic representation, Phonetic Form (PF) and Logical Form (LF), attributing to expressions two sorts of property, phonological and semantic. This double-interface assumption is assumed to be necessary to the modelling of 'language as sound with a meaning' (Chomsky 1995, 2).

[1] I am grateful to Phil Carr, Wolfram Hinzen, Magda Sztencel, Dan Wedgwood and Deirdre Wilson for discussion in connection with this paper. Needless to say, they are not responsible for errors or misthinkings in it, nor do they necessarily agree with everything in it.

In reconstructing the idea that expressions 'have meaning' by assigning them semantic properties, CGG effectively equates semantics and linguistic meaning. I will argue that this insulates linguistic meaning from meaning in general and is unexplanatory. Furthermore, it is the basis of Grice's 'moderate contextualism'. As Wedgwood observes, relevance theory (RT) is radically contextualist in principle but shares Grice's and CGG's assumption that there is such a thing as linguistic semantics and Logical Form (LF) thought of as a level of linguistic encoding. To that extent RT's radical contextualism is qualified.

CGG's double-interface assumption is a legacy of Saussure's concept of sign (Burton-Roberts & Poole 2006). I approach the topic of this paper through a discussion of the Saussurean sign (in Section 2) because I want to bring semiotics to bear on the subject of meaning and to highlight some problems for CGG's (Saussurean) reconstruction of 'sound with a meaning'. I reject that CGG account in favour of a (roughly) 'Peircean' concept of sign. This, I argue, is more general in its application, more explanatory and more consistent with the cognitive naturalism of CGG and RT.

In the light of that, Section 3 offers a general account of what meaning is, developing ideas touched on in Burton-Roberts (2005, 2007). This account denies that linguistic expressions have semantic properties. It distinguishes between meaning and semantics. Assuming, with RT, that only thoughts have ('real') semantic content, it argues that meaning is a relation (of something, potentially anything) to the semantic content of a thought, a cognitive relation effected by inference. The crucial idea here is that meaning is not a (semantic) *property* but a semiotic *relation* (to semantic properties). This goes for meaning generally; my aim is to situate linguistic meaning within a semiotic account of meaning in general. My own view is that the picture of meaning that emerges is consistent with RT. One might even go as far as to say that relevance, as defined in RT, *is* meaning.[2]

2. 1. The Saussurean sign...

[2] I won't push this thought further but the reader may want to bear it in mind in Section 3 below. Incidentally, Sperber & Wilson (1986/1995: Chapter 1) assume that any *semiotic* approach to meaning aims to reduce all meaning to a code model of communication. That may have been true of 20th century extensions of Saussurean semiotics (they cite Levi-Strauss and Barthes) - in connection with which they write (with justification in my view) 'The recent history of semiotics has been one of simultaneous institutional success and intellectual bankruptcy' (p. 7) - but nothing could be further removed from my aim here. Whereas, in their terms, 'The semiotic approach to communication... is a generalisation of the code model of verbal communication' (p. 6), my aim is precisely the opposite: to situate linguistic meaning within a more general semiotic - i.e. inferential - account of meaning. My claim is that all meaning (though not all communication, see note 9 below) - and all 'decoding' involved in the construction of meaning - is inferential in character.

There are two well-known features of the Saussurean linguistic sign.

The first is that the linguistic sign is constituted by the conjunction of a concept and a sound image. Sound image and concept combine to make a further entity, the sign itself, which is a 'double entity' (Saussure, 65), 'a two-sided psychological entity' (66).[3] The relation between concept and sign and that between sound image and sign are part~whole relations. In modern parlance, the concept is the sign's semantics; the sound image is its phonology. The relation between semantics and phonology is thus a part~part relation. Saussure (e.g. 67) explicitly refers to the sign as 'the whole' and to the sound image and concept as its 'parts'. The same idea is evident in CGG's double-interface assumption: 'there are sensorimotor systems that access one aspect of an expression and there are conceptual-intentional systems that access another aspect of an expression, which means that an expression has to have two kinds of symbolic objects as its parts' (Chomsky 2000b, 9).

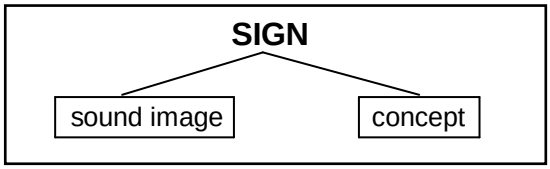
The formal study of part~part and part~whole relations is called 'mereology'. I won't be invoking formal mereology, but I'll borrow the term 'mereological' in discussing the Saussurean sign. In an intuitively equivalent formulation, concept and sound image are respectively the semantic and phonological *properties of* (or 'aspects' of) the linguistic sign.

Saussure has little to say about where syntax figures in this. This is addressed in CGG, where phonological and semantic features are treated as properties (parts, aspects) of *syntactic* entities (Burton-Roberts, to appear). This adds substance to the 'double entity' idea: if you believe in the existence of a further entity jointly constituted by phonological and semantic features, there should indeed be something substantive to say about it – e.g. that it is syntactic - over and above what can be said about the phonological and the semantic.

The second feature of the Saussurean sign is that it involves a *semiotic* relation, the signifier~signified relation. The sound image signifies the concept. Significantly, nothing in CGG reflects this feature of Saussure's thinking, a matter I address below.

Now, the mereological (part~part) relation and the semiotic (signifier~signified) relation are at least different. Since things generally are related in more ways than one, it might seem that sound image and concept can be related in both these ways, as Saussure assumed (see Fig. 1).

[3] All references to 'Saussure' are to Wade Baskin's (1959) translation of the *Cours de Linguistique Generale*.



Mereological: co-part, or co-property ⟷ co-part, or co-property
Semiotic: signifier ⟶ signified

Figure 1. The Saussurean sign.

Against this, I will argue that the two relations are so different as to be incompatible; we must choose between them.

Notice first that the part~part relation is symmetric, in the sense that they are *co*-parts, *co*-constitutive of the Saussurean sign. Saussure (113) draws a general analogy with a sheet of paper: in a language ('a system of signs'), sound image and concept each relate to the sign as the two sides of a sheet of paper relate to the sheet. As we shall see, this symmetry was crucial for Saussure. In sharp contrast, the semiotic relation is antisymmetric. One term is the signifier, not the signified; the other is the signified, not the signifier. It's a relation *from* the sound image (signifier) *to* the concept (signified). The sheet-of-paper analogy is completely inappropriate in this connection.

Notice furthermore that on the mereological conception there is no *direct* relation between sound image and concept. Their (part~part) relation to each other is entirely derivative: they are in that relation only because each is, primarily, in the (antisymmetric) part~whole relation to the sign. In that respect, the relation between sound image and concept is not self-explanatory. The semiotic relation, by contrast, is direct and primary. It does not follow from any other more direct relation. In that sense, by comparison with the mereological relation, the semiotic relation between sound image and concept is self-explanatory.

A further difference is that the mereological account treats as an *object* ('the sign') what the semiotic idea, by itself, treats purely as a *relation*. The mereological idea, by definition, entails that there is an object distinct from both sound image and concept constituted by their combination. Not so the semiotic idea. Unless mereological, a relation

between two objects implies no further object.[4] Notice that 'property-of' talk in connection with the mereological conception is questionable on the semiotic conception. If *x* stands in a semiotic relation to *y* (i.e. signifies *y*), there is no conceptual necessity to posit an object *Z* (the 'sign') for *x* and *y* to be properties of.

This doesn't mean that, on a purely semiotic conception, we have to abandon any idea of 'sign'. There is an alternative, non-mereological, conception of sign compatible with the signifier~signified relation. On this conception it is the *signifier* itself that is the sign (Fig.2).

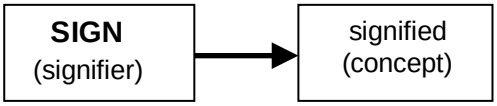


Figure 2. The 'purely semiotic' (Peircean) sign.

I call it 'Peircean' because it is consistent with the thought of C. S. Peirce (1933). But I won't be invoking the whole panoply of Peircean semiotics. Furthermore, I will assume - with Saussure, not Peirce - that the signified is always a concept (Section 3 below).

Saussure (67) explicitly rejects this (Fig. 2) concept of sign, insisting on the mereologically constituted sign (Fig. 1). Against this I will suggest that the mereological account is conceptually (a) insufficient and (b) unnecessary, even (c) assuming it is possible. And there are other objections to it, notwithstanding its influence on CGG's double-interface assumption and moderate contextualism's 'encoded meaning/semantics'.

The mereological account is conceptually insufficient, I hold, because there is nothing actually *semiotic* about it, in and of itself. Mereological (part~part and part~whole) relations have nothing to do with meaning. What I mean is that they fail to differentiate the relation we are concerned with from e.g. that between the barrel and the nib of a pen, the two sleeves of a shirt, the seat and back of a chair, which *are* mereological. This mereological idea offers no explanation of why a sound image (phonology) and a concept (semantics) should actually be related. It might be objected that this ignores the fact that, for Saussure, the relation between sound image and concept isn't only mereological, it's also semiotic. But that just goes to show the conceptual insufficiency of the mereological idea in this context. It *needs* to be supplemented by the semiotic idea.

[4] Other than an abstract set-theoretical entity. See Burton-Roberts (to appear) for discussion of the issue in CGG. Saussure explicitly denies the sign is an abstract entity (15, 102), insisting on its being a 'concrete entity'. His reference to 'parts' and 'wholes' (e.g. 67) would be inappropriate were he thinking in merely set-theoretical terms. Sets don't have parts, they have members.

As regards conceptual necessity: having supplemented it with the semiotic relation, what conceptual/theoretical work remains for the mereological account? It adds nothing. The semiotic idea, we have just seen, is necessary - and it is in itself sufficient. Furthermore, it yields a concept of sign that is at least more obvious: what is a sign if not a signifier?[5] It is also more parsimonious. It calls for just one relation between just two entities. The mereological account multiplies beyond necessity. It posits three relations (two part~whole relations and a part~part relation) and three entities.

We might even question whether in this context the mereological idea is possible, on the grounds that phonological and semantic properties are *sortally* distinct. Sortally distinct properties are such that nothing can have both sorts of property. For example: sore throats, earthquakes, epidemics, years, prime numbers, marriages, mortgages - none of these is of a sort that can be sky blue, right-angled, bisyllabic or constitute a proof of Fermat's last theorem. Against this it might be argued that, since they are both mentally constituted, phonological and semantic properties cannot be sortally incompatible. However, given how phonology and semantics are grounded, their respective contents are sortally incompatible: articulatory/acoustic vs. conceptual-intentional. Arguably, the sortal incompatibility of sound image and concept is the basis of Saussurean arbitrariness: whatever species of relation holds between sortally incompatible properties, it can only be arbitrary (non-natural). Within CGG this sortal incompatibility is effectively acknowledged in its assumption that phonological and semantic properties are mutually un-interpretable (Burton-Roberts, to appear).

Given this sortal consideration, can we really allow that something could be mereologically constituted as both bisyllabic and prime, e.g. the putative 'double entity' *seven*? That question doesn't even arise on the Peircean conception. The Peircean sign is bisyllabic, not prime. Sortally distinct, and separate, from the sign itself is the numerical concept it signifies, which is prime not bisyllabic. I suggest the relation can only be semiotic, not mereological.

Furthermore, since the signified is mind-internal (a concept), the mereological account must insist the signifier is also mind-internal. Otherwise we would be committed to something (the Fig. 1 'sign') constituted mind-internally in one part and mind-externally in its other part. I take that to be incoherent. Of course, Saussure does insist on the mind-internal

[5] It is reasonable to ask what signs are signs *of/for*. On the Fig. 2 (purely semiotic) notion of sign, the question receives an answer (though a general one): they are signs of/for concepts. But on the Fig.1 (Saussurean) notion of sign, the question is simply incoherent: the mereologically constituted sign isn't *of/for* anything. See below on a necessary precondition for signification (and bootstrapping).

nature of the sound image - reasonably, assuming it's phonological. However, the purely semiotic account (Fig. 2), while compatible with a sign being mind-internal, is compatible with a sign being a mind-external phenomenon. There's no reason why a semiotic relation can't hold between a mind-external phenomenon and a (mind-internal) concept/thought. A wide range of mind-external phenomena do function as signs for us. [6] Potentially at least, all phenomena do. I take this to be the substance of RT's (very general) First Cognitive Principle of Relevance (Carston 2002, 379).

In that respect, the purely semiotic (Peircean) conception has wider application, applying not just to linguistic signs but to signs in general. Notwithstanding Saussure's suggestion (e.g. 16) that linguistics might form part of a more general 'semiology', his account actually applies only to linguistic signs. The symmetry of his mereological conception is crucial here.

Saussure insists on this symmetry on the grounds that sound image (qua signifier) and concept (qua signified) are related by mutual implication (e.g. 103). Recall the sheet-of-paper analogy. However, while the *terms* 'signifier' and 'signified' are mutually implying, it doesn't follow that the things those terms refer to (sound image, concept) are mutually implying. What I mean is that a concept is still a concept whether or not it happens to be signified by a sound image. In fact, a conceptually necessary precondition for signification is that the signified exist independently of the fact that it is signified. (There is again an asymmetry here, for nothing similar can be said of the phonological sound image, the whole rationale of which lies in its being a signifier.) But all this is precisely what Saussure seeks to deny. The symmetry of his mereological conception is motivated by his view that concepts only exist as constituents of linguistic signs. He explicitly denies that 'ready made ideas exist before words' (65, see also 112). Assuming concepts necessarily figure in thought/ideas, the Saussurean contention is that thought is couched only in the signs - the 'code' (14) - of some particular language. The motivation, in short, is an extreme version of the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

This must be rejected, I believe. As Sperber & Wilson (1986/1955, 192) and Carston (2002, 30-42) argue, what is thought/thinkable extends well beyond what is linguistically encoded/encodable. This is not a merely philosophical or theoretical matter; it's the stuff of common experience. Chomsky (2000b, 76) puts it well: '...very often, I seem to be thinking

[6] The nearest Saussure comes to allowing this is in the idea that (mentally constituted) signs are 'realized' in phonetic phenomena. But even here, it is surely just the signifier (the sound image) that's 'realized'. Since the Saussurean sign is constituted in part by a concept, it's hard to accept it could be 'realized' in phonetic phenomena.

and finding it hard to articulate what I am thinking. It is a very common experience… to try to express something, to say it and to realize that is not what I meant... it is pretty hard to make sense of that experience without assuming that you think without language. You think and then you try to find a way to articulate what you think and sometimes you can't do it at all;... if you are thinking, then presumably there's some kind of conceptual structure there.' The universality of such experience, the necessary precondition for signification mentioned earlier and the related problem of how the Saussurean sign could actually evolve/arise other than by the merest (most circular) bootstrapping (Fodor e.g. 1975), all lead me to agree there must be 'some kind of conceptual structure there', a language of thought 'used internally' (Chomsky 2006, 9), if subconsciously, logically prior to a speaker's particular language, as argued by Fodor and assumed in RT. [7]

How is the set of concepts delimited? Since the relation between sound image and concept is arbitrary, if concepts only exist as constituents of linguistic signs then the set of concepts must be arbitrary (and, notice, semantics = linguistic semantics). Another response, more consistent with the naturalism of CGG and RT, is that the set of concepts is the set of humanly entertainable concepts, a set delimited by nature - human nature. This is consistent with a Peircean conception of sign but not with what motivates the Saussurean sign.

2.2. ...CGG and pragmatics

I've suggested we must choose between the Saussurean (mereological) sign and the Peircean (purely semiotic) sign and have sought to show we must choose the latter. All this would be of merely historical interest were it not that CGG makes the diametrically opposite choice. It is the mereological idea that is embodied in CGG's idea of a (syntactic) object with phonological and semantic properties ('aspects…parts'). And *only* the mereological idea. CGG doesn't appeal to 'sign'. It eschews all reference to semiotic concerns. In CGG we are asked to make do *just* with a mereological (part~part) account of the relation between phonology and semantics.

[7] I would argue it is phylogenetically and ontogenetically prior. The passage from Chomsky, incidentally, is consistent with a more nuanced version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. I am not the first to suggest there is more than one kind of thought. There is (a) the kind of thought explicitly referred in that quote and (b) another, also in evidence there, which consists in gaining more conscious *access* those thoughts by trying to articulate them. See Burton-Roberts (to appear).

Grice takes the Saussurean line: 'A plausible position is that...language is indispensible for thought' (1989:353). But (355) he is upfront - and unusually clear - on the dilemma this poses re the precondition for signification (his 'intelligibility'). Less clear (to me) is his proposed solution (355-6).

I have argued this is at least conceptually insufficient - uninformative and unexplanatory. Mereological relations have nothing to do with meaning. CGG's response might be that, in attributing semantics to expressions, it assigns them their meanings. This equates 'having meaning' with 'having semantic properties' in the linguistic context. The next section presents an account of meaning that undermines that equation. In the meantime, I here offer some observations on the mereological account in the context of CGG and RT.

In addition to the above objections to it, the mereological account poses two problems internal to CGG (Burton-Roberts, to appear). The first is this. As noted, phonological and semantic properties are acknowledged in CGG to be mutually un-interpretable. If lexical items (and expressions composed of them) are [phon+sem] 'double entities', their phonological properties are not interpretable at LF and their semantic properties are not interpretable at PF. As a consequence, neither of the interfaces that the linguistic computation serves is actually capable of interpreting the double entities - words and thus anything composed of words - it is generally thought to manipulate.

The second (related) problem is this. I assume, with CGG, that the linguistic computation is universal (invariant) and natural (innate). But how could such a computation possibly operate with objects mereologically constituted by phonological and semantic properties, given that the relation between those properties is arbitrary (non-natural)? Being arbitrary, such relations are cross-linguistically variable, not innate but learned in the course of acquiring a language. This indeed is what Chomsky assumes: 'there is something like an array of innate concepts and… these are to a large degree merely "labeled" in language acquisition' (2000a, 65). Notice that the label metaphor (see also pp. 61, 66) anyway seems less consistent with CGG's mereological picture than with the semiotic. It is superfluous, and surely wrong, to posit something constituted both by the label itself and what-it-is-a-label-for. If the label metaphor is appropriate, why not allow it is (morpho-)phonologically constituted *signifier* for the concept?

To my knowledge Chomsky has only ever mentioned semiotics in a brief and scathing dismissal (2000b, 47-8). This dismissal may relate to a methodological objection to semiotics within 'conventional' linguistics. I suggested earlier that the semiotic account is recommended over the mereological on the grounds of its wider application, to meaning in general. Within autonomous linguistics (incl. 'semantics'), this - effectively, the diffuseness of semiotics - would count as a positive dis-recommendation. 'Semantic theory' is thought of as concerned exclusively with *linguistic* meaning. This restriction of the scope of 'semantics' might be thought an advantage if linguistics is autonomous, concerned with a module of

mind, to be insulated from dealing with interpretation in general. In connection with the project of constructing an 'interpreter' that 'accepts non-linguistic as well as linguistic inputs', Chomsky writes 'the study of the interpreter... is not a topic for empirical enquiry...: there is no such topic as the study of everything' (2000a, 69). See also Fodor's First Law of the Non-Existence of Cognitive Science: 'the more global ...a cognitive process is, the less anybody understands it' (1983, 107).

In the light of that, however, one might wonder whether, in assigning 'semantic' properties (and Logical Form) to expressions in a module of mind, CGG does in fact claim to deal with meaning/interpretation as generally understood. In fact, Chomsky is actually quite sceptical about such an enterprise (2000a, 21) - it is not the job of science to elucidate folk-scientific notions like 'meaning' (notwithstanding his 'language as sound with a meaning') - and indeed sceptical about 'semantics' in generative grammar. 'It is possible that natural language has only syntax and pragmatics; it has "semantics" only in the sense of "the study of how this instrument... is actually put to use"' (2000a, 132).

I believe pragmatic theory does underwrite scepticism regarding 'the semantics of natural language' and 'knowledge of meaning' (Larson & Segal 1995) within an autonomous sub-personal generative model of language, independent of how it is put to use (i.e. independent of pragmatics) and, indeed, independent of meaning in general. As for more recent CGG itself, strong minimalism anyway seeks to go 'beyond explanatory adequacy' (Chomsky 2004), attributing as little as possible to (modular) unexplained features of UG, seeking explanation in other aspects of human cognition. In the light of that enterprise, situating linguistic meaning within an approach to meaning in general might well be explanatory. 'Meaning' may be 'folk-scientific' but it can't be dismissed in the absence of a theory that explains it away.

Carston (2002, Introduction) is a vigorous defence of RT against the charge that, as a theory of interpretation, it is scientifically impracticable/vacuous. Commenting on her defence in my review (2005, 389), I wrote 'RT is a theory of something quite specific, however general in its application, namely all that is implied by "optimal relevance"…' One needs to go further in its defence of course, but how much further? As I understand it, RT's account of linguistic communication is rooted in a more general theory of how humans interpret the world. Carston's defence seems to retreat from that, portraying RT as about 'a mental module... domain specific in that it is activated exclusively by ostensive stimuli' (7). I think this is unfortunate - and even questionable. Stimuli, even humanly produced, don't come ready-labelled '+/- ostensive'. The assumption that a given stimulus is ostensive is just

that - an assumption, inferentially derived. If the claim is that *linguistic* stimuli do come thus ready-labelled, their interpretation still requires a host of occasion/context-specific inferences, as RT itself has shown in response to the problems of what has come to be known as 'Gricean pragmatics'.

Notwithstanding Grice's preoccupation with meaning in general, he sought (particularly in his 'Retrospective Epilogue') to erect a corral around one 'central' species of meaning/signification - formal, 'dictive' (in the main), timeless, linguistic-type meaning, unrelativised to speakers, occasions or contexts, which 'will authorize the assignment of truth conditions to... linguistic expressions' (1989, 364), as assumed in 'semantic theory'. Gricean pragmatics is in fact a defence of this and yields a moderate contextualism.

Carston by contrast (2002, 4) suggests that, as 'cognitive pragmatics', RT is 'no longer to be seen as an adjunct to natural language semantics....' As Wedgwood observes, this is exactly the right conclusion in principle but not obviously true in practice. Carston immediately qualifies it with '...though it clearly continues to have essential interaction with semantics'. RT assumes and depends on 'natural language semantics', endorsing the attribution of semantic properties to expressions as non-contextual types and their deterministic decoding by a dedicated module of mind. Logical Form as a level of encoded linguistic representation figures crucially in RT's explicature/implicature distinction. Although Fodorian in spirit, RT has not pursued Fodor's suggestion that 'English has no semantics' (1998, 6) or his contention 'that LF is a level of description not of English, but of Mentalese...' (2008, 78). At least, while agreeing with Fodor in locating semantics in thought, RT posits a 'linguistic semantics'. Carston stops short of Recanati's 'radical claim that there is no lexical meaning in the sense of stable encoding' (Carston 2002, 375) and his suggestion (1998, 630) that 'the only meaning which words have is that which emerges in context', taking a less 'extreme', more 'conservative' line 'on which words do encode something, albeit something very schematic...'. I have discussed this and its problems elsewhere (2005, 2007).

It may be true (I think it is) that there can be no naturalistic, causal, mechanistic, sub-personal, modular account of interpretation/meaning. And it may follow that no account of interpretation/meaning is natural science. I leave it to others to decide whether that matters at this stage of the game. As Chomsky has often observed, what counts as natural science has changed in the past. It may in the future, perhaps in the light of questions (and answers) now counting as non-scientific. It is not as if contemporary pragmatics - or cognitive science or linguistics (of the more thoughtful kind) - can claim to have jumped entirely free of

'philosophising'. Carston's defence of RT *as natural science* (on the above terms) is ambitious yet constraining in that it unduly moderates RT's contextualism and, I believe, fails to reflect what is potentially the true scope of the theory.

3. Meaning

Meaning is not exclusively linguistic, nor is 'sound with a meaning'. If we seek an explanatory account of 'linguistic meaning', it should be laid in the nest of these (cognitive, semiotic) truisms.

I don't claim that all of what follows is new. What it aims to show is that it is unnecessary and unexplanatory (not to say plain wrong) to attribute *any* kind of semantic property/content to linguistic expressions. To that end, section 3.1 argues for a distinction between meaning and semantics. In the light of that, section 3.2 discusses their relation.

3.1. Distinguishing meaning and semantics

A phenomenon *P* is a sign iff it is significant. It signifies something (*X*). Thereby *P means X*. Consider first some well-worn examples of 'natural signs'. (i) 'Those spots mean measles' (Grice 1989, 213). (ii) Pattering on the window means rain. (iii) Red litmus paper means acid. (iv) Smoke means fire. These are examples of Peirce's category of 'indexical' sign, involving Grice's 'natural meaning'. (ii) is a case of 'sound with a meaning'. What makes *P* a natural sign of *X* here is a natural (agent-less) causal relation between *X* and *P*. *Pace* Peirce, whose terminology suggests that all semiotic relations are representational, these are *not* representational. As a (natural, indexical) sign of fire, smoke is not a representation of fire. By the same token, they are not ostensive.[8] They are signs-*of*, not signs-*for*.

It's not nearly that simple of course. None of (i)-(iv) is objectively true, i.e. true in the absence of a subject *S* noticing *P* on an occasion. A particular phenomenon *P* is a sign only if it signifies something (*X*) *to S*. And meaning-*X*-to-*S* depends on *S* making inferences based on her beliefs. Red litmus paper in a liquid will mean to *S* that the liquid is acid only if *S* assumes it is litmus paper and has the belief *B* that acid causes litmus paper to turn red. 'Red

[8] However, they can be exploited ostensively in a way that either depends on their indexicality or overrides it. A Glaswegian accent is an indexical sign of Glaswegian provenance but not if deliberately adopted (in which case, if not intended to deceive, it will be representational). Susan putting on her coat is an indexical sign of her intention to go out (perhaps) but she may exploit that with the semiotic intention of (ostensively) representing her desire to do so. White smoke rising from the Vatican ostensively represents a Papal election and, if so recognised, that will override (iv).

litmus paper means acid' abstracts away from such crucial details, on the assumption that *B* is (general) knowledge. Those spots may mean measles to a doctor but not to Peter. 'General knowledge' and even what passes for 'the evidence of one's eyes (ears, etc.)' don't obviate the need for inference, however subliminal (Searle 1983).

Nor is it true that *P* means *X* to *S* - not if '*X*' stands for the causing phenomenon. Rather, *P* means *that-X* to *S*. Meaning is by its nature *communicative*. Subject to cognitive conditions just described, smoke is meaningful to *S* because it communicates to her that there's a fire – where 'that there's a fire' identifies a thought of *S*'s. I take 'communicates', when it involves meaning, to be equivalent to 'leads *S* to entertain a thought'. [9]

What follows from all this, even if obvious, is important. Although we say that *P*, as a sign, 'is meaningful' or 'has' meaning, and although we talk of 'sound with a meaning', such talk does not identify any *property* of *P*. More to the point - and this *is* my point - no one would want to say that their 'having meaning' identifies a *semantic* property of those phenomena. On an occasion of pattering-on-a-window, it is true (false) that it is raining but no one would attribute any truth condition to the pattering. If truth conditions are what you're after, they pertain to *S*'s thought that-*X*. What might be said to be 'the meaning of *P*' is entirely extrinsic to *P*. Despite the predicational similarity, 'means *X*' is utterly different from 'rises when heated' or 'is mercury/heavy/edible'. In at least the cases discussed so far - indexical signs in general - meaning and semantics are clearly distinct.

With indexical signs we are far from language but, in the respects that matter here, the above holds quite generally. Take Peirce's category of *symbolic* signs - Grice's non-natural meaning ($meaning_{nn}$). I illustrate this first by non-linguistic examples but we are close enough to language here, I suggest, for it to have a direct bearing on 'linguistic meaning'. The suggestion is that, as with indexical signs so with symbolic signs (whether linguistic or not): meaning and semantics need to be distinguished. Illustrative phenomena are a red flag (meaning artillery practice is in progress or swimming is forbidden), a gunshot (to start a race) and a ringing bell (to stop the bus, raise the alarm, etc.), the last two being 'sound with a meaning'. What makes these 'symbolic' is the fact that there's no natural (i.e. agent-less) causality involved here. These are non-natural in depending on other things: **(a)** on a certain convention, **(b)** on semiotic intention, and **(c)** on inferentially derived recognition by *S* of (a) and (b). Unlike indexicals, in virtue of (a)-(c), symbolic signs *are* representational; they are

[9] I am concerned with communication but only insofar as it can held to involve *meaning* (and thus thought and inference). There are of course other kinds of communication – e.g. among honey bees and (chemical) among cells – as Deirdre Wilson reminds me. I am not concerned with these.

ostensive. The difference is that, symbolic signs being representational, that-*X* is *meant*. (We don't say that-there's-a-fire *is meant* by smoke.) Here 'meant' = 'intended'; and 'intended' here is short for 'intended to mean (to *S*)'. In these symbolic cases, an agent *A* communicates that-*X* to *S* by means of *P*. In other words, *A* arranges for the occurrence of some phenomenon *P* intending that its occurrence will communicate to *S* (lead *S* to have the thought) that-*X*. Since we are not telepathic, some perceptible *P* is necessary.

It was Grice who instated intention and its recognition at the centre of symbolic (nn) meaning ('m-intention', indeed). A convention, though important when involved, only makes for the *possibility* of meaning.[10] But possible meaning is not meaning (any more than a 'possible queue' on a motorway is a queue). A red flag actually means nothing to anyone in its box. Even when flying and intended/meant thereby to mean/communicate e.g. that artillery practice is in progress, it won't *actually* mean that if no one (*S*) notices it other than *F*, the person who flew it. I'm not sure it *actually* means that to *F* himself, crucial though its *potential* meaning was to his intention in hoisting it. It is the implementation of a convention on an occasion that makes for actual meaning and then only if some (other) *S* assumes that it was meant/intended to mean/communicate - to her - what it potentially means (rather than, in the case of the ringing bell, as a demonstration in fire practice). As regards 'artillery practice is in progress' *or* 'swimming is forbidden', a flying flag might be said to be 'ambiguous' in virtue of there being distinct conventions governing what it potentially means. But, for that reason, such 'ambiguity' has the same nugatory status as 'possible meaning'. It's not ambiguity - i.e. *actual* ambiguity. Actual ambiguity is an occasion-specific subjective mental state of (inferential, interpretative) indecision of *S* (Burton-Roberts 1994).

There are of course big differences between indexical and symbolic signs. Nevertheless, I see no reason not to say that, when *P* functions as a symbolic sign, P 'has meaning' in the same sense as when *P* is an indexical sign. It is the cognitive mechanics that subserve the meaning that differ, (a)-(c) above in the symbolic but not the indexical case. Indexical signs involve just one person (*S*) while symbolic signs involve more than one (*A* and *S*) but that doesn't affect the general fact about meaning. It concerns only whether the meaning involves intention (was meant) and convention. Both communicate an idea to *S*, lead her to have a certain thought. It is true that, with symbolic signs, *someone* (by means of *P*) is

[10] As the first two examples of note 8 above show, while all non-natural (representational, ostensive) signs depend on intention, not all depend on convention.

communicating rather than merely *something* (*P*) communicating - but it's inferentially dependent communication in both cases.[11]

Symbolic signs also differ from indexical signs in that, when symbolic, the whole rationale of *P* lies in its *being* (intended as) *a sign*. Since *A* arranges for it, the very occurrence of *P* is motivated by that. But that doesn't (or shouldn't) tempt us into thinking that *P*'s status as sign involves any intrinsic property of *P*. Nor would we attribute any truth condition to a flying flag. Truth conditions lie elsewhere. My point is this: impressive though the differences are, *P* as a symbolic sign 'has meaning' but it no more has semantic properties than any indexical sign. Indeed, what makes for meaning with symbolic signs is, if anything, doubly extrinsic to *P*.

Subject to sorting out issues with 'word' (below), I see no reason not to say that words are symbolic signs - and thus that all the above applies to them. In some quarters, that's uncontroversial. But Grice wrote '...the distinction between natural and non-natural meaning is, I think, what people are getting at when they display an interest in a distinction between "natural" and "conventional" signs. But I think my formulation is better. For some things which can $mean_{nn}$ something *are not signs (e.g. words are not)*' (1989, 215, my emphasis). In the absence of any explanation or argument, I can only speculate why Grice (or anyone) should deny that words are signs. He was interested in Peirce's semiotics (Chapman 2005, 71) and opened 'Meaning' (1989, 213-223) by discussing indexical and symbolic signs (though 'Peirce', 'semiotics', 'indexical' and 'symbolic' make no appearance). So, to speculate, could Grice's denial have been in aid of driving a wedge between (semiotic) meaning in general and word meaning? I'm not entirely convinced by this explanation of the denial, though it would be consistent with the semantic 'corral' mentioned earlier. For, if the denial was motivated by the assumption that *words have meaning in virtue of having semantic properties* ('having meaning' in a literal, objective, property sense), that certainly would distinguish their meaning from that of signs generally, as I have sought to show. But, widespread (well-nigh universal) though it is, that assumption has actually never been defended explicitly. In the absence of explicit supporting argument, a distinction between

[11] Sperber & Wilson (1996/1995, 22-23) deny this. Their discussion involves an example of the ostensive use of an indexical sign: 'Suppose that Mary intends to inform Peter of the fact that she has a sore throat. All she has to do is let him hear her hoarse voice…' (22). Of this they write (23) 'This should not be regarded as a form of communication' - a denial that must apply, *a fortiori*, to (non-ostensive) indexical signs as such. For myself, I see no reason to deny, if Peter is led to think that Mary has sore throat from hearing her hoarse voice (whether or not by speaking in that voice she intended to inform of it), that her hoarse voice (*P*) does *communicate* to him that she has a sore throat.

'meaning-as-semantics' and semiotic meaning (the former 'linguistic' but not explained beyond that) is both conceptually profligate and uninformative.

A more persuasive reason for denying that words are signs is this. At least as treated thus far, signs are perceptible phenomena ('*P*' above), but words are not perceptible phenomena. Hence words are not signs. I'm prepared to accept that - on one interpretation of 'word'. However, the relevant perceptible phenomena here are the phonetic phenomena we think of as 'uttered words'. The question is: When do such phenomena count as uttered words? And, since 'uttered word' suggests the existence of words independent of and prior to utterance, what *is* a 'word' anyway?

The CGG (and RT) answer is that a word is a syntactic object constituted by phonological and semantic properties. But I doubt whether proponents of this answer really believe that what we physically utter literally has syntactic and semantic properties. It's agreed, surely, that what speakers utter are sounds - brute sounds. In which case, what speakers utter can no more have semantic properties than the pattering of rain or a starter's gunshots can.

Phonetic phenomena functioning as linguistic signs involve a phonology (more strictly, a morpho-phonology). But I don't want to say (and I don't think phonologists do) that uttered sounds themselves have phonological properties. Actual sounds counting as 'linguistic' are *implementations* of a phonology. What a phonology does is license the production of phonetic phenomena (actual sounds). That much is uncontroversial. But in what sense does a phonology 'license' sounds? I suggest it licenses them for use as symbolic (representational) signs. [12] It is in virtue of this, not the possession of semantic properties, that we might talk of linguistic 'sound with a meaning'.

On this account, then, a word is a phonologically constituted license for the use of sounds as symbolic signs. A word is not an object (with semantic properties) but a phonologically constituted semiotic license. It's a rule, if you like. As such, words are indeed not signs and don't themselves 'have meaning'. They make for the *possibility* of signs and thus meaning. *P* counts as an 'uttered word' and thus an actual sign when assumed to be the physical implementation of a phonologically-constituted semiotic license.

This licensing is subject to the cognitive conditions (a)-(c) above and all the provisos discussed there. Condition (a) made reference to 'convention'. The above amounts to the suggestion that a word is a phonologically constituted convention. By 'convention' I simply

[12] This is the 'representational' (as against 'realizational') conception of phonology proposed by the Representational Hypothesis (e.g. BR 2000, to appear, BR & Poole 2006).

mean a relational locus of (non-natural, symbolic) Saussurean arbitrariness. I don't mean it is conventional in the sense of existing in a supposedly objective 'public language' external to individuals (c.f. Sperber and Wilson's (1998) 'public words'). As Chomsky argues (e.g. 1986), there are no such public languages ('E-languages'). Conventionality in this 'public' sense, insofar as it exists as a linguistic phenomenon, is rooted in the personal assumptions of individuals (Pateman 1987). These are *I-linguistic* assumptions, collectively amounting to an I-assumption about others' words - effectively, the I-assumption that others implement the same conventions as 'I'. We notice this in inferential interpretation consciously only when faced with its fallibility. A famous fictional example (from Sheridan's *The Rivals*) is Mrs Malaprop's "Sir, you are the pineapple of politeness!" Here the need for inference regarding her I-language (her I-conventions/licenses) and thus her I-assumptions about 'the public language' is more apparent (intentionally so, it being fictional) and it is generally successful (Davidson 1986).

What does *pineapple* mean? The 'semantic' answer, of supposedly objective necessity, runs: '*pineapple* means PINEAPPLE'. But this is either vacuous ('*pineapple* means what it means') or - if it implies that *pineapple* always and for everyone means the same thing - simply false. There is no literally 'objective/public' fact here, i.e., no fact independent of particular I-assumptions and inferences about others' I-assumptions and intentions on occasions, however well-evidenced those assumptions might seem to be. Nor is there any call here for talk of 'a coming apart of speaker meaning and linguistic meaning' (Carston 2002, 18). What is the use of words - including Mrs Malaprop's - if not linguistic? Words mean what speakers mean by them on occasions of use (Recanati 1998) - and that in the case of Mrs Malaprop's *pineapple* is what I, and I believe others, mean by *pinnacle*.

More relevant here, because empirically (non-fictionally) more widely attested, are certain uses of *disinterested, infer, refute, antisocial* - uses in which they mean what I, and I believe some others, generally mean by *uninterested, imply, reject, unsociable*. But who am I (or anyone) to damn these as 'misuse' - let alone imply they are not 'linguistic' - especially when, on the evidence of my own understanding of them (given my I-appreciation of their prevalence), they are part of my own I-language?

As work in RT has vividly shown, even when other speakers' uttered words appear to be consistent with our own I-assumptions about 'standard (normal/public) meaning', they seldom if ever actually mean that. See e.g. Sperber & Wilson (1998) on *tired*. Furthermore, as Carston's (2002, Ch.5) discussion of *open* and *happy* vividly demonstrated, it is not even clear we could actually grasp such 'standard' (objectively encoded) meanings. Meaning

(actual meaning) just *is* personal, neither sub-personal nor supra-personal (public). A case in point is "He was upset but not upset", offered by a witness in O.J. Simpson's trial, cited by Carston (2002, 324 and 2004). But Carston's (2004, 839) discussion of it illustrates what I have been questioning. She writes 'As far as linguistically supplied information goes, this is a contradiction, a fact that presumably must be captured somewhere within a semantics for natural language'. I have been urging, in effect, that there is no fact here to be captured within a semantics for 'English', let alone for 'natural language'. What there undoubtedly is here includes the articulatory/acoustic fact of the double occurrence of *upset*. But only a firm commitment to the double-interface [phon+sem] assumption would suggest that this phonetic fact goes, of objective necessity, hand-in-hand with some unique semantic fact. Carston herself points out that what's intended and recognised - i.e. the actual meaning - is not contradictory, representing this by her distinction 'UPSET*' vs. 'UPSET**'. It is this, as RT itself argues, that's ('really') semantic.

'Convention' needs more discussion than space allows. I'll mention just one issue in this connection. With convention comes 'encoding'. As I have discussed elsewhere (2005, 2007), RT operates with what I've called a 'constitutive' notion of encoding, according to which the encoded meaning of a word is a constitutive semantic property of it, deterministically decoded not inferred (Carston 2002, 322-3), consistent with CGG's Saussurean double-interface assumption. By 'encoding' I mean something different, briefly contemplated by Carston (2002, 363) but not pursued. In illustration of what I mean, and to keep things very simple, take Morse code, where (the convention is that) 'dot-dash' encodes THE LETTER 'A'. The whole point of Morse code is that 'dot-dash' *is not* the letter 'A'. It has none of its properties. It is, quite distinctly, a sign for - a pointer to, a representation of, indeed means - THE LETTER 'A'. I accept there is 'encoded meaning' only in this latter (relational, semiotic, non-constitutive) sense, distinguishing what's-encoded (X) from what-encodes-it - E(X) - subject always to the above on conventions and in no sense that admits of deterministically decoded, as distinct from inferred, meaning.

I have in effect been arguing with Fodor (1998, 9) that 'English has no semantics'. But Fodor immediately follows that with 'Learning English isn't learning a theory about what its sentences mean, it's learning how to associate its sentences with the corresponding thoughts'. There is much I would question in this but what concerns me here is the implied equation between (not)-having-semantics and '(not)-having meaning'. If the claim that 'English has no semantics' is to be sustained with any plausibility, we need to avoid any suggestion that what doesn't have semantics doesn't 'have meaning'. I hope I've shown that this does not follow,

given a distinction between meaning and semantics. On the contrary, as I will argue in the next section, 'learning how to associate [α]s with ...thoughts' *precisely amounts to* 'learning...what [α]s mean'. Jerry Fodor (p.c.) has dismissed this as terminological. Nevertheless, it seems to me important if 'English has no semantics' is to command assent.

3.2. Relating meaning and semantics

I have sought to show that meaning is not a *property*. More particularly, it is not a semantic property. Meaning and semantics must be distinguished. I think it follows clearly from 3.1 that meaning is a *relation*. Talk of 'sound-meaning relations' (or 'relating sound and meaning') has always made me uneasy. What exactly was sound supposed to be related *to*? And what kind/species of relation was it supposed to be? Unease is dispelled in recognising that such talk treats meaning as one term (one of the *relata*) of a relation when it is in fact *the relation itself*.

Meaning is a (the) cognitive, antisymmetric semiotic relation *from* something (α) *to* something else (*X*). As I show below, α can be anything, not just a mind-external phenomenon *P*. But for a relation to be *semiotic* (i.e. for it to be meaning) *X* must be a thought *T*. (It can be just a concept, as in the Morse code example, but it's thoughts I'm mainly concerned with.) For α to actually mean *X* to *S* is for α to communicate that-*X* to *S* - i.e. α leads *S* to entertain *T*, the thought that-*X*. As noted, we're tempted to say that α 'has' meaning and to talk of 'α's meaning'. But notice we're equally tempted to say α's meaning 'lies in' the thought, that the content of *T is* the meaning of α. Well, meaning can't both be a property of α and lie in *T*. The quandary is explained and resolved if meaning lies neither in α nor in *T* but in their relation.

Thoughts are where semantics enters the picture. Thoughts I assume are conceptually constituted. Thought involves concepts syntactically complex enough to be *entertained as* representations i.e. those that can be objects of propositional attitudes. An actual thought is one that *is* so entertained. I hold that it is concepts (including those that can be entertained as thoughts) and only concepts that have semantic content.

The relation between meaning and semantics, then, is this. Meaning is a *relation to* semantics – an antisymmetric semiotic relation from α (anything) to conceptual/semantic content. Since semantic content is necessarily one of the terms of the semiotic/meaning relation, it follows that you can't have meaning without semantics. But it doesn't follow that meaning *is* semantics; this relational account of meaning distinguishes meaning and

semantics. As I argue below, even - indeed especially - when we want to say something both 'has meaning' *and* has semantic content, we still need to distinguish. Nor does it follow, on the assumption that linguistic expressions 'have meaning', that semantic properties are linguistic, if by 'linguistic' we mean pertaining-to-languages rather than pertaining-to-the-language-of-thought. No-meaning-without-semantics holds across the board: it goes as much for (symbolic) linguistic signs as for non-linguistic signs, be they symbolic or indexical. The semantics of a given concept/thought is constitutive of and only of that concept/thought. It is not the semantics of anything else.

P is an actual linguistic sign (and as such 'has' actual meaning) when it counts as an uttered word or (temporal, linear) concatenation of words - that is, when *P* is produced with the intention of implementing a morpho/phonologically constituted semiotic I-license in aid of representing the syntactically (hierarchically) structured semantic content constitutive of a particular thought. *P* does not, in virtue of *representing* such content/properties, have such content/properties itself. That's why *P*s that count as sequences of uttered words require 'parsing'. I take parsing to be a matter of putting what *lacks* syntactico-semantic properties into (semiotic, representational) 'correspondence' with what *has* such properties.

A brief (all too brief) Fodorian digression is needed here. I have appealed to some notion of a 'language of thought' but how much of the above is Fodorian I hesitate to say. I had better put on record that I depart from Fodor's account of semantic/conceptual 'content'. This, again, involves property vs. relation. His account of conceptual 'content' is externalist and relational - 'content is constituted, exhaustively, by symbol-world relations' (Fodor 1998, 14). This is not what I mean. By conceptual 'content' I mean a (indeed the individuating) property of a concept.[13] This is an internalist constitutive notion of conceptual content - and nativist, implying that what you acquire is not a concept but a certain kind of *access* to a concept (from worldly and/or linguistic experience). However, this may be 'terminological', since Fodor himself allows that concept-world relations are determined by something 'mind-dependent', which I assume has to do with the concept itself. 'Being a doorknob is just: striking our kinds of minds in the way that doorknobs do' (Fodor 1998, 162). This seems to me to allow, if not demand, that the concept DOORKNOB has some kind of internal constitutive property. This for me is its 'content', determining non-arbitrarily what external

[13] Fodor (ibid.) comments that his atomistic theory of concepts 'allows' him 'not to hold that one's inferential dispositions determine the content of one's concepts'. It seems to me that it forces him not to hold that and forces the relational account of 'content'. Incidentally, on atomism in RT, see Burton-Roberts (2005, 339).

phenomena it 'locks onto' and thereby makes sense of. Concept-world relations (semantics in an externalist, relational sense), it seems to me, arise when a concept sufficiently complex to be entertained as a representation actually *is* so entertained. I think this amounts to saying that the distinction-and-relation between internalist and externalist semantic content is the distinction-and-relation between the language of thought and actual thoughts. End of digression.

I earlier undertook to show that, even when something can be said to have both semantic content *and* 'have' meaning, the two must be distinguished. At issue here is whether thoughts (concepts), in and of themselves, 'have meaning'. I've assumed thoughts have semantic/conceptual content; but do they, thereby (in virtue of just that fact), 'have meaning'? My answer is 'No'. I don't recall this question ever having been asked but, intuitively, that seems to me the right answer. Independently of that, my answer must be 'No' given what I'm claiming meaning is. It is signs that 'have meaning' but thoughts are not, in themselves, signs. It is not necessary, not *definitional* of a thought, that it leads you to have a thought. The only sense in which that could be definitional would be if a thought led you have that very thought. Self-causing thoughts are out, I assume. Your having thought *Tj* does not communicate *Tj* to you. In short, semantic content is not, in itself, semiotic (not meaning).

However, although I am claiming that thoughts in and of themselves don't 'have' meaning (are not in and of themselves signs), I am not denying that, nevertheless, thoughts *can* 'have meaning', i.e. can function as signs in the mental life of an individual. They generally do. (It is this that motivated my earlier move from '*P*', for external phenomena, to 'α', for anything.) The point is, though, that this 'meaning of' a given thought *T*, for *S*, is distinct from its semantic content. The idea is simply this: having one thought T_1 can lead you to have/entertain *another* thought T_2 whose semantic content may be entirely distinct from that of T_1. Having T_1 can communicate to you (the distinct content of) T_2. This strengthens the distinction between semantics and meaning. (The scare quotes around 'have (meaning)' and 'meaning of' are a reminder that the meaning in fact lies in the relation $T_1 \rightarrow T_2$.)

I illustrate this below but I must first address an issue I've not attended to. Let's say Susan (*S*) sees something α in the kitchen which she takes to be a pile of clean washing. This needs unpacking: α is a visual *stimulus* and *S*'s first thought (T_1) on seeing α is THAT'S (or LO!) A PILE OF CLEAN WASHING. What I'm calling 'first thoughts' are, in psychological terminology, *percepts*. My previous use of '*P*' (for phenomenon) obscured the distinction between stimulus and percept (the result of mentally processing the stimulus). Thereby it slid

over the issue of whether mere stimuli are signs. Is [stimulus→percept] a semiotic relation? In other words, is it meaning? Since I've described the percept as a 'first thought' (T_1), you will have guessed I want to say it *is* meaning. Given how *S* is internally constituted, the stimulus leads *S* to have a percept (*P* for 'percept' now), an inferentially-derived mental representation. *P* is a conceptual *interpretation* of that stimulus. Without percepts there's no meaning, just meaningless stimuli. The inferential move from α to SMOKE(α) is different from, but not different *in kind* from, the move from SMOKE(α) to CAUSED-BY-FIRE(α). If [stimulus→percept] is excluded from (on grounds of being in some sense prior to) any semiotic move, where do we stop? Is CAUSED-BY-FIRE(α) a percept? I'm bothering with this because it might be felt that treating the [stimulus→percept] relation as meaning stretches 'meaning' too far, thereby undermining my account. I want to say it *is* meaning and, given the generality of my project for 'meaning', don't regard this as undermining.

So, Susan's first thought is THAT'S (or LO!) A PILE OF CLEAN WASHING (T_1). Let's say that, given Susan's cognitive context, C_S - her current mental state, her projects and preoccupations - T_1 leads her to have (communicates to her) another thought T_2: JOHN HAS DONE THE WASHING THAT NEEDED DOING. (If T_1 is true then, given C_S, T_2 is true; T_1 by assumption is true, hence T_2 is true.) Now let's say, given C_S, T_2 leads to T_3: I DON'T NEED TO DO ANY WASHING RIGHT NOW and T_3 in turn to T_4: I CAN FINISH MY LECTURE RIGHT NOW. Susan will almost certainly go further - subject to constraints expounded by relevance theory - but I'll stop there. The stimulus and each of T_1, T_2 and T_3 are *signs* for *S*, given C_S. The 'meaning of' *T1* for *S* (and, I claim, 'of' the stimulus itself) ultimately and indirectly 'lies in' *T4*. The relations stimulus→$T_{1...}$→...T_4 are semiotic. They are meaning relations. But they are clearly not semantic. The stimulus has no semantics and T_1, T_2, T_3 and T_4, are semantically unrelated. The point of this illustration has been to show that even - indeed especially - in the case of what does have semantic/content (namely thoughts and only thoughts) *and* 'has' meaning, meaning and semantics are distinct.

As an aside, it's reasonable to ask what *kind* of semiotic relation holds between those thoughts of Susan's. Since it involves neither convention nor semiotic intention, it is clearly not symbolic (not *nn*), not representational. Although we're dealing with an agent, *S*, the relevant causations of thought are not agentive. So it seems it must be indexical (natural). I reconcile myself to this conclusion as follows. We saw, with our original examples of natural (indexical) signs, that their status as signs depends on a given subjective background. The same holds in the above illustration. The difference is that our original examples were assessed against subjective backgrounds assumed to be shared as (supra-personal) 'general

knowledge' and taken for granted as such, whereas in the illustration the background (C_S) is personal, with no claim to be 'general knowledge'. Here what counts as 'general knowledge' is irrelevant. What's relevant is Susan's pre-existing personal projects/preoccupations. Although we, as 'observers' of Susan, won't take C_S for granted, Susan does - necessarily, it being her own current state of mind.

This is not to say that relevant aspects of C_S can't be shared. John may have developed some appreciation of those aspects of C_S. They may be mutually manifest to Susan and John given previous conversation between them. In which case, John may have left the pile of washing in a prominent place in the kitchen ostensively, i.e. with the (semiotic, communicative) intention of leading Susan to have T_2 and intending her further to derive T_3 and T_4. Given C_S, Susan may derive those thoughts whether or not she recognises John's intentions. However, following an account by Susan of her preoccupations, John might instead utter "I've done the washing". The meaning 'of' that utterance/stimulus 'lies in' the semantic content of *S*'s thought T_2 (actually it lies in $U \rightarrow T_2$.) In that case, if Susan recognises his intention, John might be said to have conversationally implicated T_3 and T_4.

Incidentally, John might instead march proudly in with the clean washing and simply utter "Done!" with the same effect. Consider also "Kitchen?" in the context of a burning smell or "I've lost my keys!" You don't need 'sentences' (Stainton 2006). The relevance of non-sentential utterances to my general theme is that 'Logical Form' as a semantic level of *linguistic* representation cannot play a (bottom-up) part in their interpretation, since it seems to me that you could only know which LF to assign to them in the light of the thought you take to have communicated by them (i.e. top-down). This makes LF as a level of linguistic representation redundant in utterance processing.

Conclusion

I have made a case for thinking of meaning as a relation, entirely extrinsic to the terms related in it. It is a cognitive, semiotic, antisymmetric relation *from* something (potentially anything a subject is aware of, be it an external phenomenon or a thought) *to* semantic content. Semantic content is of-and-only-of thoughts, couched in an internal 'language of thought'. As a relation having semantics as one of it terms, meaning is to be distinguished from (though necessarily related to) semantics. Linguistic expressions, on these terms, can be said to 'have meaning' without being attributed semantic properties (including 'LF' properties). But even that is not quite right, I argued, because linguistic expressions only make for the possibility of meaning

and do so only in a given I-language (not in any supposedly objective public language). Actual meaning is personal (neither sub-personal nor supra-personal), specific to the occasion/context of utterance. The scope of pragmatics (contextual inference in interpretation) thus extends into what is often taken to be 'linguistic semantics' and decoding.

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