Semantic Accounts' Response to the Psychological Reality Challenge

The question I want to raise is how semantic accounts meet the challenge from the psychological reality objection, i.e. that they merely describe the mechanisms of interpretation via which our successful communication *could* be arrived at, but not the *real* processes through which we *actually* interpret. I consider two semantic responses and suggest that their proposals pave the way towards a truth-conditional pragmatics (TCP), or at least that such a stance is a better alternative. I illustrate that TCP makes the right predictions about the correct order of interpretation in ironic metaphors.

Firstly, I argue that Borg's project of substantiating the claim that semantic facts depend on psychological facts is not free of worries from an epistemic viewpoint. By distinguishing a metaphysical dependency of semantics on psychology from an epistemic one, I suggest that Borg's empirical predictions—that we compute minimal content *prior* to, and independent of, speaker meaning, as output of a psychological module that underpins our linguistic knowledge—are not psychologically confirmed. E.g., cases of ellipsis, metaphors, scalar implicatures are problematic, since speaker meaning is grasped without the (conscious) recovery of a minimal content, and the order in which semantic and pragmatic information is integrated is not entirely sequential and one-way. Borg's psychological response is in terms of a *tacit knowledge of a theory of meaning* trading in sentence-contents which correspond to structures in our brain underpinning our semantic competence, and which explains why we are in a position to recover speaker meaning at all. My worry with such a response is that it doesn't engage with an explanatory adequacy criterion in spelling out the real processes of speaker meanings retrievals through which interpretation is *actually* arrived at. Not only is Borg's solution another facet of a rational reconstruction strategy, whereby the semantic theory specifies the content competent speakers are guaranteed to be able to recover, given adequate lexical resources, plus processing literal meaning of sentences, but there is a further worry of consistency between her empirical predictions and her minimalist postulates. E.g., Borg's acknowledgment that pragmatic and semantic processes run in parallel, the former operating on sub-sentential clauses before the semantic interpretation of the sentence is complete, and furthermore, allowing hearers to stop semantic processing whenever they have enough evidence to grasp whatever the speaker is trying to convey, before the semantic module delivered any sentence-content, seems to me biting the bullet in favour of a TCP, according to which if semantics is bound to deliver truth-conditions, it needs pragmatics in its rescue.

Secondly, I argue that Carpintero's restriction of semantics to expressions/sentences' character* (i.e. a rule assigning a contextual value to some expression, thus serving to constrain and determine the truth-conditional content in context), is a better option than Borg's minimalist account, in particular his claim that we are consciously aware of how characters* are saturated and freely enriched. What I disagree with is (i) his claim that this is in tension with Recanati's phenomenological availability constraint (since Recanati could argue for a *local* availability); & (ii) his explanation of such intuitions in terms of rational reconstruction, since the characters*' psychological reality in virtue of our conscious intuitions of the subpersonal inferences from characters* to enriched contents is not warranted in the psychologically relevant sense, i.e. having intuitions of such inferences as they *occur* in the actual process of interpretation.

Thirdly, I argue that hypotheses about the psychologically real processes involved in determining the truth-conditional content and implicatures of utterances can be naturally construed within a TCP paradigm, according to which many "free" (not linguistically driven) pragmatic processes play a crucial role in determining the truth-conditions. A species of TCP like the one endorsed by relevance theory posits precise constraints on the derivation of truth-conditional content: (i) it is a pragmatic development of the encoded linguistic meaning, & (ii) it must provide inferential warrant for the implicature. The device that regulates these constraints is a mechanism of mutual adjustment, i.e. assumptions about truth-conditional content and about implicatures are derived in parallel and mutually adjusted to each other until they stabilize in a logical argument with determinate contents: implicatures are logically grounded in the truth-conditional content together with relevant contextual assumptions. On this view, truth-conditional content is inferentially warranted both from words' linguistic meanings, and from backwards confirmation by fitting into an argument where together with contextual assumptions it justifies the implicature.

Fourthly, I argue that one of the reasons why Carpintero's rational reconstruction, or Borg's minimal semantics, is unsatisfactory is that interpretation of ironic metaphor (IM-metaphor used ironically) gives the wrong predictions allowing a different order of interpretation—irony first and then metaphor, which is predicted from a rational reconstruction perspective, or literal>metaphor>irony, which is predicted by a minimalist account which treats both metaphor and irony as implicatures. To explain why only a *metaphor-first* approach gives the right result, I argue for a psychological and logical *metaphor's priority thesis* (MPT), i.e. in IM, the metaphor *is/has to* be computed before irony. I distinguish weak from strong versions of both psychological and logical MPT, resulting in four MPT versions.

> **Weak MPT**: in *some* cases of IM, the metaphor is/has to be computed first.
> **Strong MPT**: in *all* cases of IM, the metaphor is/has to be computed first.

In order of increasing strength they are: weak psychological MPT, weak logical MPT, strong psychological MPT, and strong logical MPT. I argue for each in turn, and conclude that the metaphor-first proposal is easily predicted by TCP which treats metaphor as contributing to intuitive truth-conditions. Even if Borg or Carpintero could accommodate metaphorical meaning as part of an intermediate pragmatically enriched level of "what is asserted," there remain concerns as to whether the metaphor-first order of interpretation in two-stages (metaphor>irony, without going via the literal meaning) can be predicted by their underlying rational reconstruction.