

# *Subsentential utterances, ellipsis, and pragmatic enrichment\**

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## **Abstract**

It is argued that genuinely subsentential phrases can be used to perform speech acts with truth conditions. Attempts to assimilate this phenomenon to syntactic ellipsis (sluicing, gapping, etc.) are discussed, and are rejected on the grounds that any implementation of this idea will involve a redundant level of representation in natural language that plays no role in the interpretation process, and therefore be less economical than a pragmatic enrichment account. An argument against the latter kind of approach from the indeterminacy of content is discussed, then it is shown how a pragmatic account can accommodate this indeterminacy and turn it into an advantage through consideration of the role of processing effort in inferential comprehension.

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background: The determinants of truth-conditional content**

This paper addresses the status of what appear to be discourse-initial subsentential phrases, such as “The second man from the left” to pick someone out of a line-up, or “From Greece” to indicate the provenance of an item. The aim is to show that these are genuine cases of just words or (subsentential) phrases used to perform speech acts, and that they therefore provide evidence for the reality of the disputed pragmatic process of free enrichment.

The wider issue forming the background to this discussion of subsentential speech is the ongoing debate about whether all constituents of the truth-conditional content of an utterance can be traced to the encoded linguistic meaning (logical form). There are two broadly opposing views on this issue. One view, the more semantically oriented, represented by Stanley (2000, 2002, 2005a); King and Stanley (2005); Stanley and Szabo (2000); Taylor (2001), among others, is that all determinants of truth conditions are indeed traceable to logical form (or parameters of the lexical semantics). Apart from disambiguation, pragmatic contributions to truth-conditional content are limited to saturation – assigning values where the linguistic form calls for them. These authors take the object of semantic theory to be the intuitive truth-conditional content of an utterance (Stanley and Szabo 2000:

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\* Many thanks to Robyn Carston for many helpful discussions of subsententials and comments on earlier drafts of the paper. This work is supported by an AHRC doctoral award.

240; King and Stanley 2005: 141), as opposed to a minimal semantic content more or less isomorphic with overt (i.e. pronounced) elements. This means that, to account for the pragmatic effects of quantifier domain restriction and other kinds of nominal restriction, adjectival modification, provision of a location value with weather verbs, and so on, they are forced to posit either extensive hidden structure in the logical forms of sentences – syntactic entities such as covert variables attached to the relevant overt lexical item – or parameters in the semantics of the expressions. The alternative approach, defended by Recanati (2002); Carston (2002, 2004), etc., is that of ‘contextualism’, which maintains that pragmatics can have a far more pervasive effect on truth conditions than merely supplying values which are linguistically mandated. According to the contextualist view, at least some of the above kinds of pragmatic effects, and many others, are not cases of saturation; instead, a pragmatically motivated process of free enrichment – ‘free’ from linguistic control but, obviously, tightly constrained by pragmatic considerations – provides ‘unarticulated constituents’ of truth-conditional content (where ‘unarticulated’ means not just unpronounced, but not articulated at any level of linguistic representation – i.e. not traceable to a covert variable or parameter). Free enrichment occurs on pragmatic grounds, where the result of decoding, disambiguation, and saturation would not be a proposition that the speaker intends to express.

Advocates of the semantic approach claim that it enables a clear, systematic account of how hearers grasp the truth conditions of utterances, in contrast to the seemingly unconstrained and unpredictable pragmatic enrichment account. Its detractors point to the implausibility of the proliferation of hidden linguistic structure or parameters required by the syntactic/semantic account, and are optimistic that further investigation will show that the pragmatic mechanisms that are independently necessary for (particularized) conversational implicature also operate to constrain optional pragmatic contributions to truth-conditional content.

## **1.2 ‘Subsentential’ utterances and the free enrichment debate**

We can utter what appear to be isolated noun phrases, prepositional phrases, etc. such as those in (1)a-(7)a – mostly familiar from papers by Stainton (e.g. 2004), Stanley (2000), and Botterell (2005) – and thereby communicate propositional contents; some possibilities are given in (1)b-(7)b:

- (1) a. [Uttered while indicating a man across the room]  
John's father.  
b. THAT IS JOHN'S FATHER.<sup>1</sup>
- (2) a. [Pointing at a restaurant table]  
Reserved.  
b. THAT TABLE IS RESERVED.
- (3) a. The editor.  
b. THAT WOMAN IS THE EDITOR OF MODE MAGAZINE.
- (4) a. [Uttered by someone who has been robbed and is trying to pick the  
robber out of a police line-up]  
The second man from the right.  
b. THE SECOND MAN FROM THE RIGHT ROBBED ME.
- (5) a. [Uttered by a used-car salesman]  
Only 10,000 miles. Like new.  
b. THIS CAR HAS ONLY BEEN DRIVEN 10,000 MILES. IT'S LIKE NEW.
- (6) a. Nice dress.  
b. YOU ARE WEARING A NICE DRESS.
- (7) a. Typical.  
b. THAT BEHAVIOUR IS TYPICAL OF HIM.

The consensus is that the propositions in (b) are the propositions expressed by (truth conditional contents of) utterances of the (a) expressions, rather than mere implicatures. As Stainton (e.g. 2004) has pointed out, one could clearly lie with (1)-(5), for example, which shouldn't be possible if all they communicate is implicatures, and these propositions are the starting-points for inference to implicatures – (6) can be used ironically, for instance; (7) could implicate disapproval.

Since (1)-(7) can be uttered without prior discourse, they do not immediately look like varieties of syntactic ellipsis. (So as to not prejudge the issue, I will label them 'fragments' for now, rather than subsententials). The received opinion on ellipsis is that it is a grammatical operation, with the unpronounced material being reconstructed algorithmically, internal to the language faculty; it is not inferred according to principles of pragmatics or general reasoning. Hence the need for an overt linguistic antecedent to serve as a licenser for ellipsis, as found with recognized forms of ellipsis such as gapping, VP-ellipsis, and sluicing. So (1)-(7) do not (at least *prima facie*) seem to be syntactically elliptical sentences. If appearances reflect reality, then all that (1)-(7) encode are bare NPs/DPs, and so on,

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<sup>1</sup> These are rough indications of the propositional contents, which will, of course, not contain names, pronouns, demonstratives, or referentially used definite descriptions, needing reference assignment; the references will be fixed, and the natural-language indexicals etc. in (1b)-(7b) just represent the concepts of objects and properties that are part of the propositions.

with the semantics of phrases, yet their semantics can be combined with non-linguistic information to express propositions. It follows that the propositions expressed must contain unarticulated constituents, and such utterances would, then, provide obvious and extensive evidence of the reality of free enrichment. To maintain, as the semanticist wants to, that the linguistic form and the truth conditions of an utterance are structurally isomorphic requires denying that there are any genuine cases of subsentences being used to perform speech acts (or at least to express truth conditions). Since it is agreed that utterances of (1)-(7) and many examples like them do have truth conditions, the semanticist must show that they are structurally complete sentences, with some kind of ellipsis having applied.

In the next section, I discuss the recent defence of this 'sententialist' approach by Stanley (2000), and then some variations on it by Merchant (2004; 2006), and Ludlow (2005), who all propose to account for most of the data in question by treating it as syntactic ellipsis. This is seen as having the advantages of preserving the standard, systematic mapping between logical form and truth conditions, and of being more parsimonious than a pragmatic enrichment account by virtue of making use of the independently motivated constraints and operations governing the production/interpretation of more familiar varieties of ellipsis, therefore avoiding the need to introduce extra, allegedly ad hoc, pragmatic machinery. In response, Stainton (2006a; 2006b), Barton (2006), and others have argued that the interpretation of discourse-initial fragments (or at least most of them) is unlike that of recognized kinds of ellipsis. Building on their arguments, I develop the general 'subsentialist' case further by examining how, on these ellipsis proposals, the comprehension systems integrate the contextual information required to go from the pronounced fragment to a full-fledged proposition. I argue that this process cannot take place entirely in natural language, but must at least partly involve representations in some other medium – Language of Thought, or Mentalese representations. Any attempt to rescue the ellipsis story for these discourse-initial cases requires that the full sentence/proposition be represented in natural language at some stage of processing, and I aim to show that all such attempts suffer from problems of redundancy by necessitating superfluous levels of representation that play no role in the interpretation process.

Having argued that data such as (1)-(7) really are subsential phrases, in section 3 I turn to a more positive defence of the contextualist approach which sees the interpretation of these utterances as involving pragmatic enrichment. It has been suggested (Stanley 2000) that the use of a truly (i.e. non-elliptical) subsential phrase does not count as performing a genuine linguistic speech act, because the utterance lacks determinate content and/or illocutionary force. In response, first I argue, following Stainton (2006b etc) and Clapp (2005), that this requirement is unrealistically strict, and would wrongly entail that much of speech, including many fully sentential, grammatical utterances, would not count as linguistic speech

acts. Second, I sketch an account of how this indeterminacy is an advantageous feature of subsentential speech, once proper consideration is given to the role of processing effort in inferential comprehension.

## **2 Ellipsis**

### **2.1 Fragments and varieties of ellipsis**

A number of semanticists who want to preserve the traditional equation of linguistic form and truth conditions have claimed that utterances such as (1)-(7), when used to perform speech acts, are actually structurally complete sentences to which syntactic ellipsis has applied, leaving just the pronounced fragment. This section discusses some recent defences of this sententialist approach (Stanley 2000; Merchant 2004, 2006; Ludlow 2005) and the response from those who believe there are genuine subsentential speech acts (e.g. Stainton 2006a,b).

The sententialist claims that apparent subsententials such as (1)-(7) are in fact elliptical sentences, hence similar to phenomena such as direct, immediate answers to questions (8), sluicing (9), gapping (10), and VP-ellipsis (11):

- (8) A: Where are you from?  
B: Italy.
- (9) He left. I wonder why.
- (10) Linda speaks French and Jane German.
- (11) Linda speaks French but Jane doesn't.

(8)-(11) are widely accepted as cases of syntactic ellipsis: the apparent fragment is syntactically a full sentence, and the elided material can be recovered algorithmically by processes internal to the language faculty, essentially just copying material into the ellipsis site that is syntactically identical to material present in the antecedent (subject to syntactic locality constraints).

A feature of accepted types of ellipsis is that they can't occur discourse-initially, or in isolation: they need explicit linguistic antecedents as licensors. Gapping, for example, while often easily comprehensible, is ungrammatical in isolation or without the right type of linguistic antecedent:

- (12) A: Does anyone speak French or German?  
B: \*Yes, Jane German.

(1)-(7) don't have explicit antecedents, so don't look to be the same phenomenon. They are perfectly natural when uttered discourse-initially: The utterance of "John's father" doesn't require an explicit prior question; all that is needed is that

an appropriate person be salient of whom can be predicated the property of being John's father.

However, Stanley (2000: 401-9) argues that, despite appearances, many such fragments, including (1)-(5) in section 1.2, are only discourse-initial in an implausibly wide sense of discourse-initial. They don't have explicit linguistic antecedents but, according to Stanley, it would be a mistake to conclude that they don't have linguistic antecedents at all: explicitly mentioning a linguistic antecedent, he says, is not the only method of raising linguistic expressions to salience. The felicitous use of these apparently discourse-initial utterances depends on something in the non-linguistic context raising to salience some linguistic expression to serve as the antecedent for the ellipsis: for example, they would generally be infelicitous without a preceding ostensive stimulus (such as a demonstration) to draw attention to some object, person or situation, as in (1). They therefore aren't discourse-initial in any relevant sense, claims Stanley, because the prior context necessary for such utterances to be acceptable will have made linguistic antecedents salient to serve as licensers for ellipsis. For (1), the implicit question "Who is that man?" is salient, so this and the utterance "John's father" function similarly to the overt question-answer pair in (8) above: The implicit question makes the linguistic expression "That man is..." available as the restoration of the deleted material in the 'reply'.

If this is correct, it removes an objection to treating (1) as syntactic ellipsis. However, it would be premature to conclude that what is going on here really is ellipsis. From the fact that an utterance requires prior linguistic context (in Stanley's extended sense of what can constitute linguistic context), it does not follow that the utterance is elliptical, because needing prior linguistic context is not exclusive to elliptical sentences. The felicitous use of many overtly fully sentential utterances also would depend on this kind of context being available, for example to complete the definite description in (13) (assume it is attributively used)<sup>2</sup> to give THE AUTHOR OF THAT BOOK:

- (13) [Speaker points at a book]  
The author's going to be signing copies later.

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<sup>2</sup> Judging from what is said about context in various places in Stanley's work, it seems that he is drawing a distinction between two roles of context in interpreting these fragments. On the one hand, there is the role of context in making linguistic expressions salient. This is what Stanley must have in mind in his discussion of fragments, with non-linguistic context making linguistic expressions salient to serve as antecedents for ellipsis. On the other hand, since such natural-language expressions cannot serve as the content where singular reference is involved, context has a different role – that of saturation (assigning referents to the natural-language indexicals which have been made salient by the non-linguistic context). King and Stanley (2005: 130) mention this second role of context in connection with the referential use of definite descriptions.



Regarding example (1), the only kind of situation that Stanley could treat as genuinely discourse-initial would be where no attention is established on a referent, and there is no demonstration of the entity or property being referred to, in order to make a linguistic indexical salient, but in such a situation, an utterance of (13) would be just as infelicitous as (1). So (1) needing prior context is no argument for it being a case of ellipsis.

This argument can be pushed further by considering (6)a (“Nice dress”). Stanley’s original discussion of this example was as follows:

In this case, it is fairly clear that an assertion has been made, whose content is a singular proposition about the object in question, to the effect that it is a nice dress. However, it is intuitively plausible to suppose, in this case, that the speaker simply intended her utterance to be shorthand for “that is a nice dress”. (Stanley 2000: 409)

This ‘shorthand’ proposal is not developed any further by Stanley, but Elugardo and Stainton (2004: 448-54) consider several different conceptions of what the interpretation of ‘shorthand’ would involve. To qualify as a genuine alternative to free enrichment, shorthand must involve some kind of encoded link between a word/phrase and a propositional meaning; however, this leads to an implausible multiplication of linguistic elements: either multiple lexical ambiguity, or multiple conventions of use associated to an expression. (See Elugardo and Stainton’s paper for the details of the argument.)

The shorthand strategy, then, looks to be a non-starter, and Stanley himself would, reportedly, no longer appeal to it<sup>3</sup>. However, this means that there are cases which, as he acknowledges, “can occur discourse initially, are clearly uttered with assertoric force, and have determinate unique propositional contents” (Stanley, *ibid*). As I will discuss later, there seems, *pace* Stanley, that there is some indeterminacy about the propositional content (and possibly also about the illocutionary force) of (6)a, in which case it may be open to the sententialist to deny that it constitutes a proper speech act – a strategy which is considered in section 3). However, my guess is that the sententialist would treat such cases as ellipsis, since I think most people would agree that (6)a is used in this context to express truth conditions (there is a strong intuition that if the speaker in fact believes the dress to be hideous, her utterance of (6)a is false).

The problem for the sententialist, now that the examples previously dismissed as shorthand will have to be treated as ellipsis, is that the notions of ‘discourse-initial’ and ‘prior context’ will have to be restricted and broadened, respectively, even further than they were in Stanley’s (2000) discussion of ellipsis. Since an utterance

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley, personal communication to Stainton, cited in Stainton (2006b: 147).

of “Nice dress” can be used without the speaker and hearer having previously attended to the dress or been involved in any form of discourse, the ‘not discourse-initial’ requirement that is satisfied by more familiar examples of ellipsis will have to be weakened, and what we end up with is that an utterance can count as non-discourse-initial, and therefore be a genuine case of syntactic ellipsis, as long as the context makes salient enough any descriptive material required to interpret the utterance. This further modification, though, collapses any distinction with sentential speech: If the required context is inaccessible, because no appropriate linguistic expression is salient, then many fully sentential utterances (e.g. probably just about all sentences containing a non-referentially used quantifier) will be uninterpretable (see footnote 2 on the two roles of context Stanley is assuming). Thus the fact that a given subsentential utterance needs some ‘linguistic context’ to license it provides no way of choosing between this account and the pragmatic enrichment one. The choice between the two approaches will have to be made on other grounds, and, in the next subsection, I argue in more detail against some specific ellipsis accounts and in favour of pragmatic enrichment.

A further reason why, from the fact that an apparently subsentential utterance is felicitous and interpretable, it does not automatically follow that it is elliptical (or, for that matter, shorthand) is that to draw such a conclusion would be simply to stipulate that ellipsis (or shorthand) is present, and would be ruling out free enrichment without any argument. Given that Stanley does not exclude the possibility of the existence of free enrichment (contingent on a satisfactory future account of it), that conclusion would need arguing for. There is no evidence that this is ellipsis, other than that no other option is left after dismissing the possibility that it’s free enrichment. Yet as Stanley (2005b) says, the semanticist position (that there are no strong pragmatic effects on truth conditions) is an empirical hypothesis, in advance of detailed inquiry. Since one would expect an empirical hypothesis to be falsifiable, data that threatens to falsify it cannot be dismissed on the grounds that to do so is necessary to maintain the truth of the hypothesis. There must be some independent evidence to support the claim that what we see here is ellipsis, and, as I discuss in the rest of this section, such evidence is completely lacking.

The main difficulty in treating discourse-initial<sup>4</sup> phrases like (1)-(7) as elliptical is that, if this is ellipsis, then it is not much like any of the familiar varieties, and its dissimilarity reinforces the impression that the only reason to try and assimilate it to more usual kinds of ellipsis is to save the semanticist (sententialist) position. The generally accepted view of ellipsis is that the exact natural-language source must be

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<sup>4</sup> Given the discussion of different conceptions of ‘discourse-initial’ on the previous couple of pages, I should make it clear at this point that, from now on, I will be using ‘discourse-initial’ as shorthand for ‘occurring without any explicit linguistic antecedent’, and not in Stanley’s more restrictive sense of occurring without any context which could raise linguistic antecedents to salience.



identifiable: as Barton (2006) puts it, “An ellipsis account presumes a full sentential source from which syntactically and semantically identifiable material has been deleted”. Identification of the unique deleted material is possible with sluicing, gapping, VP-ellipsis, pseudogapping, and question-answer pairs, as is to be expected if these constructions are just ordinary natural-language sentences, some elements of which go unpronounced, and it follows from the fact that ellipsis does not occur discourse-initially: it is the explicit antecedent that provides the linguistic expression to complete the fragment. But, as has been repeatedly pointed out (Stainton 2006b; Barton 2006, etc.), in the discourse-initial cases, we can’t identify the allegedly deleted linguistic material. For instance, candidates for the unpronounced elements in (1) might include “He is”, “That is”, “That man is”, “The man who just came in is”, “has just come in”, “The man in the pink tie is”, “is the man near the door”, “is over there”, and so on. That we can’t say what sentence was allegedly uttered, or what sentence the hearer recovered, suggests that there wasn’t a sentence uttered: the rest of the proposition that we understand is not from a linguistic source. But for the syntactic ellipsis account to hold, there needs to have been deletion of a linguistic expression: if not, then part of truth-conditional content is not traceable to the logical form of what was uttered, so has been supplied through free enrichment.

## **2.2 Ellipsis accounts of discourse-initial fragments**

Having established that discourse-initial fragments are not very naturally assimilated to syntactic ellipsis, in this subsection I consider the various proposals given by Stanley (2000), Merchant (2004) and Ludlow (2005), in order to examine in more detail what an ellipsis account would involve and show why a pragmatic account is needed instead.

As argued in section 2.1, since there is no linguistic antecedent to license ellipsis, and therefore no unique identifiable linguistic material that is recoverable, it is problematic to analyse the discourse-initial fragments in (1)–(7) as varieties of syntactic ellipsis. The sententialist may reply that recovery of the exact intended linguistic material is not essential: discourse-initial fragments were not previously considered, and maybe recoverability is not a necessary feature of ellipsis, but just something that happens to be displayed by most forms of ellipsis. An essential feature (and, it could be argued, the defining feature) of syntactic ellipsis is that reconstruction of the missing material is an algorithmic, dumb process carried out entirely internal to the language faculty. If, as Stanley (2000) claims, context makes available a linguistic expression to serve as antecedent for the ellipsis, then it would be expected that the linguistic expression could vary between hearers, especially where the role of the allegedly elided expression is to refer to an object or person – as is often the case with the fragments under discussion – since any number of

descriptions or indexicals might serve equally well. Whether this is plausible depends on what the correct wider conception is of the relationship between language and thought representations in the interpretation of these fragments, which is the issue that I turn to now.

The two general approaches to the analysis of these fragments line up (approximately) with different views on what the medium of thought is. A commonly held conception, defended by Fodor (1975), and adopted by the advocates of a pragmatic enrichment analysis, is that thought takes place in a distinct medium from natural language, and that the integration of material from different sources also takes place in this distinct Language of Thought (LoT). The other view, which seems more compatible with the ellipsis account, is that thought takes place (mostly) in natural language. In what follows, first I explain the LoT idea in a little more detail and discuss the competing approaches to fragments with regard to this view. I then discuss varieties of what is to some extent a 'thinking in natural language' view, and try to show that on no conception of the relation between language and thought in the interpretation of these fragments is the ellipsis account really plausible.

The view of mental architecture and processing shared by those defending a subsententialist account is along the general lines suggested by Fodor (1983). The mind is divided into a central system (or systems; questions of its/their internal architecture can be set aside here), and various peripheral input/output systems. The central system deals with representations in a conceptual format (a Language of Thought), and is where inferential processes (including pragmatic processing) take place. The peripheral systems are the perceptual (input) systems and a linguistic de-/encoding (input/output) system. The perceptual systems and linguistic decoding deliver to the central system schematic representations, in a conceptual format, which carry information about the world, and it is in the central system that information from different sources – the perceptual systems, memory, inference – is integrated. Stainton (1994; 2006b) sketches an account, situated within this picture of cognition, of how what are genuinely only subsentential phrases could be used to express propositions; this goes roughly as follows. The linguistic input is decoded into a conceptual representation that is delivered to the central system, which is where pragmatic inference occurs; the same happens with inputs to the other perceptual systems, e.g. vision. Information stored in encyclopaedic memory or inferred from stored assumptions is also available in the central system, in the same conceptual format, so representations derived from the various perceptual and language systems can be integrated by the central system with information from inference and memory. Integration, suggests Stainton, is performed by function-argument application: the speaker utters either (i) a word or phrase whose content is an argument to some propositional function, and context provides the function, or (ii) a word/phrase whose content is the propositional function, and context provides

the argument. Applying the propositional function to the argument results in the proposition expressed. For example, in the case of (2) above (“Reserved”), the central system will receive from the visual system a concept of the table pointed at (i.e. the argument); the input from linguistic decoding is a property concept (the propositional function), and the two inputs are concatenated in the language of thought (Stainton 2006b: 156).

Stanley’s ellipsis account of the ‘subsentential’ data does not fit very comfortably into this picture of the mind. According to Stanley, the linguistic expression needed to complete the sentence uttered is made salient by the object to which it refers, or by the demonstration of that object (taking as an example (1), “John’s father”, uttered while glancing at a man across the room). Since it is difficult to see how a demonstration of an object in order to make salient a linguistic indexical (which needs to be assigned the object as content), could avoid simultaneously activating in the hearer a concept of the object, it follows that a conceptual representation of the object must inevitably be tokened even on the ellipsis account. A representation provided by the uttered phrase will also be available in the same format, since perceptual systems translate their input into conceptual representations. And the two LoT representations are concatenated to form a proposition (as on Stainton’s account, described above).

On the assumption that such informational integration does take place in the language of thought, then if noticing the object does for some reason activate a natural-language description of it (something that many people would find implausible anyway<sup>5</sup>), or an indexical or demonstrative that is used to refer to it (even more implausible, since these natural-language expressions are too coarse-grained to track objects in the world to which they are used to refer), that would be incidental: the integration takes place in LoT, and natural language plays no further role once the language faculty has delivered its subsentential input to the central system. Construction of the proposition expressed is a matter of free enrichment, which is a process of adding further concepts to a conceptual representation decoded from an utterance. All the required information is present already in a conceptual format and needs to also be integrated in the central systems if it is to be of any use, since this is the format it needs to be in to play a role in thought. Going

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<sup>5</sup> As in the following quote from Elugardo and Stainton (2003: 277): “...the idea that to understand less-than-sentential speech one must recover an ordinary natural-language expression that picks out the element supplied by the environment is no more plausible than the idea that whenever someone notices an object, she tokens a natural-language expression that refers to it. It is highly implausible to suppose that, when someone looks at her desk and sees the objects on it, recognizing their features, a constant flurry of English sentences runs through her head. But then why suppose that when one notices an object *being discussed*, and considers its properties, one must token a singular term in English that refers to it?”

through an additional phase of integration in or translation into natural language is, therefore, unnecessarily multiplying representations.

The ellipsis story, requiring that a natural-language representation of the entire sentence be constructed at some point in processing, would initially seem less objectionable if either natural language were the medium of thought, or inputs from different modalities are integrated in natural language. Both options have their adherents: the first is probably taken by some sententialists; the second is the view of Carruthers (2002).

There are quite a few good arguments for natural language not being the medium of thought (Fodor 1975; 1987: appendix), including:

- We probably don't want to say that any humans (e.g. infants, wild children, aphasics) who haven't (yet) acquired a natural language, or have lost their linguistic abilities, can't think.
- We couldn't learn natural language if we didn't have a LoT: identifying speaker's meaning in vocabulary acquisition requires a 'target' against which to form hypotheses, i.e. we have a concept of an object (e.g.), and have to work out what the object is called.
- Linguistic underdeterminacy: sentences are not fine-grained enough to distinguish different thoughts; words are not fine-grained enough to distinguish different concepts (especially the kind of referring expressions – words such as "he" and "that" – posited as involved in the elliptical sentences being discussed here).

It's less than perfectly clear what the sententialists' views are on LoT: Stanley (2000) in his comments about context and interpretation seems to be doing without it; the others, who I discuss near the end of this section, are Merchant (2004), who seems to believe in it, and Ludlow, who thinks that conceptual structure is superfluous (2003: note 17). The Fodorian story described above, with the central system processing and integrating LoT representations received from the perceptual systems and from memory or inference, fits far more naturally with an enrichment account of subsententials than with an ellipsis account. If, on the other hand, that story turns out to be not entirely correct, and natural language is the medium for at least some thought (or just for the integration of contents from different modalities), then it might seem that a serious problem of redundancy raised by LoT for the ellipsis account would disappear, since the representation of the full sentence in natural language would appear to be necessary.

However, there are two related objections to this line of response which mean that it ultimately suffers from the same problem of multiplying levels of representation. The first is that natural language does not include *de re* individual

concepts<sup>6,7</sup> – it only includes descriptions, indexicals etc. used to refer to individuals (persons or objects); not concepts of them. Because the interpretation of subsententials, with their fairly minimal encoding, requires context to do a lot of work, the identification of the speaker's meaning is often highly dependent on the presence of salient entities in the immediate perceptual environment to serve as the discourse topics. These entities are therefore known to the hearer by acquaintance and he represents them by means of *de re* concepts, rather than by description. It is a feature of most (perhaps all) of the subsentential cases that part of what is omitted, what needs supplying to construct a full proposition, is a *de re* concept. So the thoughts that are recovered in interpreting subsententials cannot, in the usual case, be entirely in natural language, but must be, at best, an amalgam of e.g. a natural-language predicate and some individual concept in another medium. As on the LoT story sketched above, the contextual salience of the entity (which one presumably has to perceive, before forming a natural-language description of it, or tokening a natural-language indexical or demonstrative to refer to it) means that the individual concept that represents it will be available prior to any representation of it in natural language. So, construction of any natural-language description/indexical is, again, not part of the interpretation process, and would only occur post-hoc.

The second objection concerns any potential cases where the unpronounced part of the recovered proposition does not include a *de re* individual concept. We might accept that thought occurs partly in natural language and that therefore the proposition recovered in such cases could consist entirely of natural-language material, with the result that, at least for these cases, this natural-language sentence would not be redundant. However, the ellipsis analysis still does not gain much support. The reason is that there is still no evidence that the unpronounced part of the thought was encoded in the uttered fragment, rather than being inferred – since the resulting thought would be the same, whether achieved through the grammatical reconstruction of ellipsed material, or through pragmatic inference. Unless one is antecedently irrevocably committed to the sententialist thesis, there is no reason to think that syntactic ellipsis is involved here. It might appear that there is little to choose between the two accounts for these cases – simpler encoded meaning plus more pragmatic work, versus more complex encoding with automatic reconstruction – but, as I will argue in section 3, considerations of the processing effort involved in decoding and inferential comprehension strongly favour the pragmatic view, even for these examples.

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<sup>6</sup> I use the term “individual concept” to mean a mental representation of an individual entity, following Powell (2003). Similar to Recanati (1993), Powell “identifies individual concepts with dossiers containing information all of which is taken by the holder of the concept to be satisfied by the same individual” (Powell *ibid.*: 21).

<sup>7</sup> King and Stanley (2005: 130), who seem inclined to the thought-in-natural-language view, also recognize that natural language does not include these entities.



Finally in this section, I will consider a type of ellipsis account which seems to be enjoying some popularity lately, as, when applied to discourse-initial fragments, it promises to explain away the problematic fact that they are unlike other types of ellipsis. These accounts acknowledge that the missing elements of truth-conditional content are not uniquely identifiable, and leave a lot of work to pragmatics. The idea is that what has been deleted, and gets recovered grammatically, is just the syntactic completion of the sentence, and this consists of deictic elements (both pronouns and underspecified verbs, which are never pronounced). The exact semantic content recovered (truth conditions) is therefore predicted to vary between hearers, but what was encoded was still a full (indexical) sentence<sup>8</sup>.

Two variants of such an account are given by Merchant (2004) and Ludlow (2005). Merchant acknowledges that discourse-initial fragments do not obey the same conditions as sluicing, VP-ellipsis, etc, conceding that there is no linguistic antecedent to act as a controller for the ellipsis. He does not want to claim that the more fine-grained natural language material that would correspond to the complete proposition expressed can be made salient enough by the discourse context. He recognizes that such a claim would be likely to commit him to the view, which he isn't happy with, "that perception and thought be conducted for these purposes in language itself, in Chomsky's 'narrow language faculty', and not entirely in the language of thought/semantic representations". However, since he is reluctant to countenance a non-standard mapping (i.e. a lack of isomorphism) between linguistic form and truth conditions, he still wants to analyse the discourse-initial fragments as syntactic ellipsis. His suggestion is that, when the elided elements are "[<sub>VP</sub> *do it*]" or "[<sub>IP</sub> *this/that* [<sub>I</sub> *is t*]]", then the ellipsis can function without a linguistic antecedent, as long as it is clear from the context what "it" and "this/that" refer to (Merchant 2004: 725). The former might cover cases like (4) (picking someone out of a line-up); the latter would apply to (1)-(3) and (6) (where the pronounced fragment predicates something of an object or person, an individual concept of which is the content of the unpronounced deictic).

The immediately obvious problem here is that these two options ("do it" and "this/that is" ellipsis) are insufficient to cover anywhere near all the linguistically discourse-initial examples. Consider (5), said of a used car, or (14), said to a small child who looks like spilling its glass of milk (Stainton's example), or (15)B (due to Robyn Carston):

- (5) Only 10,000 miles. Like new.
- (14) Both hands.

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<sup>8</sup> Whether this *syntactic* material should be consciously identifiable or not is uncertain: It seems to consist of some kinds of deictics which are not merely silent counterparts of overt indexicals – so it would possibly be reasonable to maintain of this kind of thing that we needn't be able to report what the completion of the sentence was.



- (15) A: Big house.  
B: Four kids.

The first sentence of (5) obviously does not mean “This is only 10,000 miles”, or “Only 10,000 miles do it”; (14)-(15) are similarly impossible to account for with only these two candidate completions; see Stainton (2006a: 108-9) for a number of other examples. So the list of options for the elided portion of discourse-initial fragments needs to be expanded.

An account that has a better chance of covering all the possible interpretations of such fragments is that of Ludlow (2005), who proposes that cases of apparently subsentential speech are really full sentences, and the unpronounced material is formed from some combination of the following deictic elements: PRO in subject position; an unpronounced light verb such as “have”, “do”, “be”; OBJ in object position and DET in determiner position. However, as Stainton (2006b: 126-7) notes, this idea remains at best underdescribed, since in the sketchy form given by Ludlow, it wildly overgenerates elliptical discourse-initial expressions. Nothing is said about where these deictic elements can and cannot occur: To mention two examples given by Stainton, what prevents the subsentence “PRO already bought OBJ” (with the phonological form “already bought”) being a well-formed English sentence meaning “Fiona already bought some jam”; and why can these silent deictics not appear in ordinary sentences so that an utterance of “John tall” is a grammatical sentence?

Even if the proposal were more fully described, though, when applied to discourse-initial fragments, it would be subject to more or less the same objection that I argued is faced by the more usual idea of ellipsis as deletion of the syntax and the semantic content: that its only potential merit is to preserve the equation of logical form and truth conditions, and that this rather questionable benefit anyway incurs an unjustifiable cost in introducing extra representations. First, as Carston (2002: 155) says, such a structure with indexicals needing saturation is largely redundant, since the conceptual material necessary to saturate it would be highly activated anyway. The incorporation of this material into the proposition expressed, whether by saturation or free enrichment (concatenation with the decoded subsentential logical form), would involve negligible processing effort. The free enrichment account is thus preferable because of the extra processing effort entailed by the ellipsis account for decoding the silent deictic elements.

A further objection to these ‘unpronounced deictic’ accounts arises from the fact that pragmatic inference would have to be involved not only in assigning content to the recovered deictics, but also in choosing the correct logical form, prior to reference assignment. Merchant (2004) pretends that this pre-semantic inference can be idealized away, since on his account, there is a choice of precisely two logical forms. His probable reasoning is that, since one of them can occur only in

subject position and the other only in predicate position, they are sometimes mutually exclusive anyway as completions of fragments, so the disambiguation doesn't place undue strain on pragmatics and can be forgotten about. Some people might agree with Merchant (as Stainton 2006a: 101 seems to) that such an idealization is harmless, provided the number of choices is strictly limited to around two. However, as Stainton demonstrates (see the examples on the last page, plus Stainton 2006a) and Ludlow's account also recognizes, the number of choices cannot be restricted to just two, but will need to include other light verbs and deictic elements – besides, there is no reason (other than the desire to keep the number of options down, and with it the amount of pragmatic work involved) why these other silent elements should not feature in Merchant's account as well: if "this" and "that" are allowed, why not "there", "here", "him", and so on; since "is" and "do" are required, what principled reason would there be for excluding other light verbs? In that case, then, when faced with a discourse-initial fragment, the hearer has a large number of possible sentential logical forms to choose among. On Merchant's and Ludlow's accounts, if the fully sentential expression containing the deictic is to play any useful role, the hearer would *first* decide which of the possible deictics is the correct completion of the logical form, and only *then* go about assigning the intended content to those deictics. The sequence of interpretive steps assumed by such accounts is clearly illogical, since the disambiguation required to work out which logical form is being used is dependent on the hearer working out the content that forms the proposition expressed. So we have returned to the familiar objection to ellipsis accounts of these cases: The allegedly reconstructed natural-language material serves no purpose, and simply adds an extra, completely superfluous stage to the comprehension process.

### 3 Subsententials and indeterminacy

Section 2 argued against treating discourse-initial fragments as syntactic ellipsis. However, if the sententialist maintains that some version of an ellipsis story could be shown to hold for some of the data, there is a further set of cases which even he is unlikely to try and subsume under such an account. To avoid the conclusion that free enrichment is involved in interpreting them, another response that has been suggested is to deny that some fragments are used to perform genuine linguistic speech acts.

According to Stanley, "Linguistic speech acts must determinately be made with the relevant sort of force. They must also express determinate contents" (2000: 407). The example he discusses is (16):

- (16) (Thirsty man staggers up to water vendor)  
Water!

Stanley concludes that an utterance of (16) is not a proper speech act as it lacks determinate content (the truth conditions are not determinately that THE SPEAKER WANTS WATER, as opposed to a number of other options, such as that THE ADDRESSEE SHOULD GIVE THE SPEAKER WATER) and illocutionary force (is (16) an assertion, order, request, ...?). While such utterances can undoubtedly be used as vehicles of communication, beyond the initial decoding it is general (as opposed to linguistic) knowledge that is brought to bear in interpreting them; Stanley likens this sort of communication to a kick under the table, a tap on the shoulder, or a frown. All that these utterances and non-linguistic gestures communicate is implicatures: they don't have propositions expressed, so the question of free enrichment contributing to truth conditions does not arise.

In response, Stainton (2006b) and Elugardo and Stainton (2004) argue that the requirement that, to be a genuine speech act, something must have determinate content and force, is far too strong, as, on such a criterion, many cases of fully sentential speech would, contrary to everyone's intuitions, not count as performing speech acts. Two of Stainton's examples are given here:

- (17) (Looking out at Grand Canyon)  
That's beautiful.  
(18) You must turn in your report before you leave today.

Of (17), Stainton asks whether there must be a determinate referent for "That" – a particular object or collection of objects – for the utterance to count as an assertion. Intuitively, this is not required, in which case we have a speech act where there is no determinate content. Similarly, (18) is undoubtedly a speech act, though we might not be certain what force it has – e.g. whether it is an order, or an assertion of policy, or a request. If the 'determinacy' criterion is applied consistently, then much of verbal communication – whether sentential or subsentential, even if judged grammatical, and if grammatically and semantically complex – will not count as performing linguistic speech acts. Interestingly, Stanley and Szabo (2000: 237-8) themselves acknowledge that in quantifier domain restriction, the context does not provide the unique descriptive material that specifies the domain, and this is the reason they give for not treating this phenomenon as syntactic ellipsis: discussing the quantifier "every", they note that "there are very few cases where there is a single plausible candidate for the role of the domain restricting predicate", whereas "In cases of syntactic ellipsis, there is a unique phrase recoverable from the context". Since in the usual (i.e. non-referential) cases of quantifier domain restriction, the descriptive material (the domain-restricting predicate) constitutes

the content, Stanley and Szabo are agreeing that there is indeterminacy of content here (and the same will apply to non-referential uses of definite and indefinite descriptions). Yet Stanley apparently fails to notice the implications for this of his determinacy criterion: having admitted that sentences needing domain restriction often do not have determinate contents, yet accepting that they are used to perform speech acts, it follows that the (in)determinacy of content should not be used as a criterion to decide whether a given utterance constitutes a genuine linguistic speech act, and the decision should be made on other grounds.

Intuitions, which Stanley et al profess to take seriously as the core data for a semantic theory to explain, are that the domain restriction cases and many (apparent) subsententials do express truth conditions. In this regard, Clapp (2005) also argues that the determinacy criterion and intuitions pull in different directions. In cases where intuitions are that an utterance is used to express truth conditions, but where it is indeterminate exactly what those truth conditions are, then applying the determinacy criterion strictly would require one to accept that speaker-hearer's intuitions about truth conditions must be wrong. But if Stanley were to claim that intuitions about truth conditions are often wrong, it would undermine his entire project of trying to use semantic theory to account for them: It would render otiose his syntactic strategy (the appeals to syntactic ellipsis and shorthand to account for subsententials, and the positing of hidden indexicals to account for quantifier domain restriction and other effects of context in sentential utterances (since any cases of quantifier domain restriction etc. that do have determinate contents could be analysed as elliptical)). If one is claiming that people are often mistaken about the truth conditions of their utterances, then rather than modifying linguistic theory with hidden indexicals and novel forms of syntactic ellipsis in order to account for these intuitions, one could instead become a semantic minimalist à la Cappelen and Lepore (2005) or Borg (2004). As Clapp says, **all** fragments that are not **obvious** cases of syntactic ellipsis (i.e. the cases such as (1)-(7), for which it needs to be argued that they are elliptical, precisely because the exact deleted syntactic and semantic material is not identifiable, i.e. their content is indeterminate) will not qualify as expressing truth conditions, so would not need accounting for by semantic theory. To allow for the indeterminacy displayed by (17) and (18), and quantifier domain restriction, and many other cases, while still respecting speaker-hearer intuitions that such utterances perform speech acts (with truth conditions), the determinacy criterion will have to be loosened to an extent that it will actually exclude very few (allegedly) subsentential utterances. The majority, then, would have to be analysed as syntactically elliptical – an option which I hope has now been discounted.

Returning now to the subsentential cases like (16) (Thirsty man: "Water!"), which probably does exhibit a greater degree of indeterminacy than most other sentential or subsentential utterances, I'll consider how these should be treated:

whether Stanley is correct to deny that they perform speech acts, or whether they should be treated as speech acts, expressing truth conditions, despite their obvious indeterminacy.

I agree with Stanley that we can single out a category of utterances that do not express propositions. Likely examples that fall into this category are (19) and (20):

- (19) (Mother to husband upon realizing they've mislaid their three-month-old)  
The baby!
- (20) (Uttered by someone who's gone out and remembers she left the oven on)  
The oven!

With these utterances, it may well be the case that the speaker does not intend to explicitly express any proposition, and the hearer does not assign any truth conditions to the utterance. It hardly makes sense to ask whether the truth conditions/proposition expressed by (19) is *THE BABY IS NOT HERE*, or *WE HAVE FORGOTTEN THE BABY*, or *WE SHOULD FIND THE BABY*, and so on. (19) and (20) probably function simply as devices to focus the hearer's attention on, e.g., the said baby, and therefore may fall in with non-verbal ostensive gestures, such as demonstrations, which by themselves would not be taken to express truth conditions.

The case of "Water!", however, seems different. Intuitions are that the speaker has *said* something: her aim is not to focus the hearer's attention on water, but rather to express a proposition. And the interpretation that the hearer ends up with includes a proposition that is a development of the encoded phrase. Although there is likely to be variation between hearers in what they take the proposition expressed to be, this variation will be restricted to a clear range – including *THE SPEAKER WANTS WATER*; *THE HEARER SHOULD GIVE THE SPEAKER WATER*; etc. Unlike (19) and (20) above, it at least seems meaningful to ask the question of what proposition was expressed, which indicates that we have intuitions that there exists such an entity, and the suggestion that I will develop in more detail shortly is that the proposition that the hearer constructs, developing the encoded meaning, is what should count as the proposition expressed. "Water!" is probably a 'directive' of some sort, rather than an assertion, which complicates the question of how to judge what its truth conditions are. However, intuitions are much clearer with other cases. Recall the example which Stanley (2000) originally treated as shorthand:

- (6) Nice dress.

As I said in discussing this example in section 2.1, an utterance of (6) is intuitively false if the speaker does not in fact believe that the dress in question is nice. So speakers and hearers undoubtedly take the utterance of (6) to have truth

conditions (and to perform a successful speech act), although there may be some indeterminacy about illocutionary force ((6) may be an assertion, but it is also possible that it is an exclamative), and there is certainly a fair amount of indeterminacy about what the truth-conditional content is (THAT IS A NICE DRESS; YOU ARE WEARING A NICE DRESS; YOU BOUGHT A NICE DRESS; or maybe WHAT A NICE DRESS).

So the contextualist is likely to say that an utterance such as (6) or (16) does express a proposition, and so includes unarticulated constituents, despite the indeterminacy. In what follows I sketch a contextualist account of the interpretation of subsententials using Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995). According to RT, all pragmatic processes operate according to the same principles, no matter at what level of representation their results are seen. Consider pragmatic processes that do not contribute to the proposition expressed: in cases of conversational implicature, non-verbal or paralinguistic communication, interjections, and so on, it is implausible that satisfying the speaker's communicative intention involves the hearer recovering exactly the thought content that the speaker had in mind (and in many cases, it is anyway unlikely that the speaker had any very specific content in mind). Everyone would agree that such communication can be successful while typically incorporating a great deal of indeterminacy about the exact set of propositions that the speaker intends the hearer to construct. It is also generally accepted that (virtually) every utterance requires some degree of pragmatic inference to arrive at the proposition expressed.

Following Sperber and Wilson, the domain of pragmatics is the class of ostensive stimuli, whether verbal or non-verbal, and all such stimuli are interpreted by a single pragmatics system employing the same pragmatic principles. By virtue simply of not being decoding, but rather hypothesis formation and confirmation, all pragmatic inference involves some leeway for divergence between the thought that the speaker has in mind and the thought that the hearer infers: strict duplication of thoughts is anyway an unrealistic requirement and not necessary for successful communication, but, depending on the accuracy demanded in a given discourse situation, any of a range of propositions might be near enough. Given this and the fact that linguistic meaning virtually always underdetermines the proposition expressed anyway, there is no motivation for singling out the proposition expressed as necessarily having to meet a higher standard of determinacy than any other communication, and no requirement that a single unique content be grasped by both speaker and hearer.

A considerable degree of indeterminacy about the proposition expressed is, then, acceptable from the RT and contextualist point of view. A sketch of the RT account and justification for this, concentrating on subsententials, is as follows. A speaker, judging what information will be manifest to the hearer, can have some more or less precise expectations about what interpretation the hearer can construct from a



given utterance. So a speaker who utters a subsentential phrase, having available the linguistic resources to be more explicit, can be assumed not to have any one particular proposition in mind that she expects the hearer to recover; instead, a number of propositions will be compatible with the speaker's communicative intention, and so this intention will be satisfied if the hearer recovers any one of these propositions. Whichever of these propositions the hearer constructs, it will inevitably have some constituents supplied by free pragmatic enrichment, since the subsentential linguistic input did not encode a propositional schema.

From the contextualist (and particularly RT) point of view, then, the indeterminacy about truth conditions<sup>9</sup> that is the result of interpreting many subsentential utterances (and many utterances in general) is no disadvantage, and is to be expected given reasonable assumptions about what is required for successful communication. Far from being problematic, the acceptance of indeterminacy in fact is tied up with a significant advantage for any pragmatic theory that, as it needs to if it aims at being a theory of the actual processes and principles used in utterance comprehension, takes account of the interaction of the processing effort expended and the effects achieved. If as much equivalence as possible between the thoughts of speaker and hearer were the aim, then the greater amount of encoding, the better, since less work is left to pragmatic inference. However, decoding linguistic expressions requires processing effort, and further effort will be needed to saturate, disambiguate, enrich and otherwise modulate the linguistic logical form. So it is clear that on occasions where, for example, the context makes uniquely salient an object that the speaker wants to refer to – say when speaker and hearer are both looking at a particular restaurant table, and this fact is mutually manifest to them – the hearer will be entertaining a representation of the object, in the conceptual format in which it is available for integration with representations from other (e.g. linguistic) sources. In that case, it may well be that, as Carston (2002: 154-6) suggests, it is more effort for the hearer to decode the fully sentential utterance “That table is reserved” and assign reference to the demonstrative description, than to interpret just the subsentential utterance “Reserved” and work out that this property is being predicated of the table. This working out would, on an RT account of the comprehension procedure, involve minimal effort: according to RT, the fact that a speaker, by addressing a hearer, is demanding some processing effort from him, licenses a particular comprehension procedure for interpreting ostensive stimuli:

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<sup>9</sup> Note that the propositions resulting from pragmatic processing and forming the truth-conditional content will themselves be determinate. What is indeterminate is exactly what falls under the speaker's communicative intention.

Relevance theory comprehension procedure: Test interpretive hypotheses in order of accessibility; stop when you find an interpretation that meets your expectations of relevance.

The speaker, wanting to get her message across, and being able to predict to some extent what information is accessible to the hearer, will try to shape her utterance to ensure that the hearer constructs an interpretation that satisfies her communicative intention, and to minimize the risk of misunderstanding. The tacit knowledge that interlocutors have this ability means that the first interpretive hypothesis to occur to the hearer has a high degree of plausibility simply by virtue of occurring first, since its occurrence should have been predictable by the speaker. In the context described above for the utterance of “Reserved”, a concept of the table will be the first argument tested as something that could combine with the predicated property, since it is mutually manifest to speaker and hearer that the table is highly salient. The resulting interpretation, that the table is reserved, is relevant enough, so is accepted, and the comprehension procedure does not go on to consider further hypotheses about the proposition expressed. The efficiency of this comprehension strategy is even clearer in the case of (1), the utterance of “John’s father”. Carston (2002: 155) points out that, given the context in which the speaker’s demonstration makes the referent salient, the hearer may have available to him any one of a number of different representations of the referent (THE MAN WHO IS STANDING NEXT TO THE DOOR IS X; X HAS JUST WALKED IN; etc), and, on the subsentential account, the decoded phrase can simply slot in to whichever of these conceptual representations is most salient in the hearer’s mind.

Although Stanley’s “Water!” example is much less determinate than most other alleged subsententials, I don’t see any problem in analysing this as also expressing a proposition. It doesn’t seem to fall in with Stanley’s examples of non-verbal communication: a kick under the table or a tap on the shoulder are simply devices for getting attention; there is no intuition that anything is decoded from these actions which serves as a constituent of whatever is communicated. The thirsty man is a rather different matter from just attention-getting, as he can be assumed to have been trying to communicate a proposition with his utterance of “Water!”. And the hearer will, in interpreting the utterance, recover a proposition, and get some information to the effect that the man wants some water: there is a clear range of candidates for the proposition expressed which would satisfy the speaker’s communicative intention. To relegate this to the status of a mere implicature would be unintuitive, and the only reason for claiming that it can only be implicated, and not the proposition explicitly expressed, can be its high degree of indeterminacy. So to claim that the utterance has no truth conditions is to say that hearers’ intuitions are mistaken. In which case, this theory faces the conundrum posed by Clapp (2005) that, if our intuitions about the scope of semantic theory are wrong, it

makes no sense to modify grammar or semantic theory in order to render our intuitions correct. RT, on the other hand, accepts that, on occasion, there may be quite a lot of indeterminacy in the proposition expressed (and has to accept this, given how much pragmatic work is supposed to happen between logical form and proposition expressed), so does not face the problem of having to draw an arbitrary cut-off point beyond which an utterance has too indeterminate a content to count as expressing a proposition/having truth conditions.

#### 4 Concluding remarks

In the last section, I've sketched a relevance-based pragmatic account that accommodates subsententials and indeterminacy quite neatly. There are several aspects of the above picture that I suspect the truth-conditional semanticist would not be enthusiastic about, so, in this concluding section, I will consider briefly whether he would be justified in rejecting it. First, how determinate does a proposition have to be to count as the proposition expressed? It seems to be accepted that much of linguistic communication suffers from the meaning-intention problem (Schiffer 1995; see also Wettstein 1981): for cases of quantifier domain restriction, propositional attitude reports, and so on, no facts about either the context or the speaker's intentions can identify a unique proposition expressed. But the construal of this as a problem assumes that there is some abstract interpersonally or metaphysically determined entity that is 'the proposition expressed'. It is agreed that hearers cannot actually recover such an entity, even assuming that it has some reality. So there is no sense in considering this abstract entity the object of explanation of a theory that aims to account for how hearers really interpret utterances online, which is what Stanley (2005a) states that semantic theory should do, and what his approach has to do if it is being presented as an alternative to a pragmatic enrichment account. What must be explained, then, is how hearers grasp the proposition expressed/truth conditions that they actually do grasp, and this is a determinate proposition, with truth conditions – the issue of whether it is determinately *the* thing that the speaker had in mind becomes unimportant. Moreover, Stanley agrees that truth-conditional semantics cannot account for the proposition that the hearer does recover from an utterance of a subsentential phrase: it is *pragmatically* developed into a full proposition. To avoid an obviously question-begging argument (if it's indeterminate, it's not a speech act; if it's determinate, it can't be free enrichment so it's elliptical), there would have to be some evidence that the result of such pragmatic development is inevitably too indeterminate to count as a speech act. But I predict that no such evidence would be forthcoming: after all, there are undoubtedly cases where the results of optional pragmatic inference are determinate and there is practically no freedom for the

hearer to construct a different interpretation: take the case of scalar implicatures where “some” implicates “not all”, or indirect answers to “yes/no” questions, as simple examples. This is a further reason why, from the fact that a given apparently subsentential utterance has determinate content, it cannot be concluded that, because pragmatic processes are inherently too imprecise to have succeeded in arriving at this particular content, the utterance is syntactically elliptical. Indeterminacy has to be allowed in assigning values for indexicals (“here”, “now”, and “there” being obvious examples where there can be considerable leeway in the exact values for locations or times that the hearers assign), quantifier domains, etc. So I see no principled justification for allowing indeterminacy resulting from saturation to be part of the proposition expressed, but excluding any indeterminacy that cannot be traced to saturation, if intuitions are that these pragmatically supplied elements contribute to truth conditions<sup>10</sup>: This is obviously an idealization to make a small part of communication partially tractable for a semantic theory, but cannot serve as a theory of utterance interpretation.

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<sup>10</sup> The justification that the truth-conditional semanticist would give is, of course, that the only pragmatic contributions to truth-conditional content must result from saturation if we are to maintain (a version of) the principle of compositionality for this level of content, so that the truth conditions of an utterance result from combining the values of (only) the constituents of the sentence. The arguments in section 2 against ellipsis accounts showed that the level of intuitive truth-conditional content of these fragments, which is the propositional level that the sententialist accounts aim to explain, does not meet the principle of compositionality.

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