

## Overlooking Conventions: The Trouble with Devitt's What-Is-Said

ESTHER ROMERO AND BELÉN SORIA\*  
*University of Granada, Granada, Spain*

*In his forthcoming book, Overlooking Conventions: The Trouble with Linguistic Pragmatism, Michael Devitt raises, once again, the debate between minimalism and pragmatism to defend the former. He claims that, by taking some overlooked conventions into account, a semantic notion of what is said is possible. In this paper, we claim that a semantic notion of what is said is not possible, especially if some overlooked compositional conventions are considered. If, as Devitt defends, verbal activity is more linguistically constrained, compositional linguistic rules should be included in his catalogue of overlooked conventions and this entails an important challenge to the minimalist claim that the semantic view of what is said can handle all context relative phenomena. In this paper, we argue that, when conventions concerning compositionality are not overlooked, modulation should be added to the two qualifications (disambiguation and saturation) accepted by Devitt in the constitution of what is said. Thus, what is said is not always literally said and the traditional semantic view of what is said cannot be saved.*

**Keywords:** Linguistic conventions, semantics, pragmatics, what is said, minimalism, linguistic pragmatism.

### 1. Introduction

In this paper we discuss the account of Michael Devitt's notion of what is said in his latest book *Overlooking Conventions: The Trouble with*

\* A version of this article was given at the Mental Phenomena course (Dubrovnik 2018) where Michael Devitt's latest book was discussed. We wish to express our gratitude to the members of that audience for various discussions and insightful comments. Thanks also to John Keating for suggestions on an earlier draft. This research was supported by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities through the project PGC2018-098236-B-I00.

*Linguistic Pragmatism* (forthcoming)<sup>1</sup> and in one of his previous publications, “Is there a Place for Truth-Conditional Pragmatics?” (2013). In these works, Devitt gives his particular defence of the “traditional view” and argues that the constitution of what is said is “semantic”. This traditional view stems from Paul Grice (1975/89) and has also been defended recently by Emma Borg (2012), Kepa Korta and John Perry (2011), Ernie Lepore and Mathews Stone (2015), among others. Although these authors do not agree on everything, they propose the minimalist thesis according to which a sentential utterance has a proposition as its semantic content. That proposition, a minimal proposition, is a complete truth-conditional content obtained simply by virtue of the lexico-syntactic rules and the context required by ambiguous or context-sensitive expressions.<sup>2</sup>

In some of our previous works we have already given arguments against this minimalist thesis. We have rejected Borg’s minimalist position arguing that her defence of minimal propositions against pragmatist objections does not serve to avoid other objections which arise from compositional context-sensitivity (Romero and Soria 2019). We have also challenged Lepore and Stone’s semanticist claim that pragmatic reasoning never contributes content to utterances (Romero and Soria 2016). Now we turn to Devitt’s defence of minimalism against pragmatism. Taking into account that although there is a certain degree of overlap with other minimalists’ arguments, Devitt’s rejection of pragmatism focuses on an aspect that deserves specific attention: his claim that pragmatists generally overlook some linguistic conventions.

This claim, however, is not entirely new. There are both semanticists, such as Lepore and Stone (2015), and pragmatists, such as ourselves (Romero and Soria 2016, 2019), claiming that there are overlooked conventions, although they are different and both differ from Devitt’s. Lepore and Stone claim that there are conventions related to discourse coherence and other aspects of meaning that are linguistically encoded but are not truth-conditional in nature. Devitt focuses on those linguistic rules that demand slot-filling of regular elements of a certain type, which are claimed to form a part of the truth-conditional content of the sentence uttered. Instead, we defend that there are some

<sup>1</sup> From now on when we refer to Devitt without specifying the date of publication, we are making reference to his proposals from a draft (December 2018) of his forthcoming book. We will only specify “forthcoming” when we quote textually from this version (with pages still unavailable).

<sup>2</sup> Strictly speaking, semantic content of a sentential utterance as a minimal proposition opposes non-propositional conceptions of semantic content such as Sperber and Wilson’s (1986/95) or Bach’s (2006). According to the latter, given a sentence token, it is not possible to determine what state of affairs should obtain for such a sentence to be true. However, Devitt’s proposal not only opposes non-propositional conceptions of semantic content but also what is pragmatically said (the notion defended in linguistic pragmatism) since his notion of semantic content, what the sentential utterance says, is what is said by the speaker in case speaker’s meaning includes what is said.

compositional linguistic rules which impose certain type constraints in relation to some core elements and which sometimes demand contextual adjustment (modulation or slot-filling) to get the truth-conditional content expressed by the speaker. The focus is clearly different in these three approaches and although our claims affect the other two, they do in different ways.

In this paper, we focus on the way our position challenges Devitt's and we will do so respecting the theoretical and methodological requirements that Devitt recommends. We claim that if the semantic type is taken into account for regular elements as Devitt defends (e.g. the provision of a location in the semantic frame of 'raining' or the provision of a cause in the semantic frame of 'dying'), the constraints imposed by the semantic type of core elements cannot be ignored (e.g. the provision of a sentient participant in the semantic frame of 'waiting', which cannot be the semantic type of a core element in the frame of 'raining', for example). These type-constraints prevent ill-formed compositions of elements such as 'the man is raining from cancer' or 'the table is waiting in Paris' and allow well-formed compositions of elements in a frame as in 'the man is waiting for his check' or 'the man is dying from cancer'. Evidence for these types of compositional regularities can come, as Devitt argues, from corpora elaborated by linguists. Although Devitt does not name any specific corpus, we suggest that Devitt could use FrameNet<sup>3</sup> to support some of his claims about regularities in the frames of 'raining' or 'dying'. However, he has not considered the compositional constraints for the semantic type of core elements in a frame. A frame is a regular schematic linguistic representation of a situation and "[f]rame elements [FEs] that are essential to the meaning of a frame are called "core" FEs (e.g. Speaker in frames connected with communication); expressions of time, place and manner are generally not core FEs." (<https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/glossary>). For example, in the frame of 'telling' there are several core elements of certain semantic types: sentient speaker, sentient addressee and topic. In the frame of 'waiting', its two core elements are sentient protagonist and expected event. The two core elements in the frame of 'raining' are location and time.<sup>4</sup> If Devitt considered these constraints, he would have to admit these types of compositional conventions and their consequences. If he did not, but wanted to be consistent, he would owe us some principled way to accept the demand of the provision of a location in the frame of 'raining' and reject the demand of a sentient participant in the frame of 'waiting'. De-

<sup>3</sup> FrameNet provides annotated examples with information about how words are used in actual texts. It includes more than 13,000 word senses and more than 200,000 manually annotated sentences linked to more than 1,200 semantic frames. It includes detailed evidence for the combinatorial properties of a core set of the English vocabulary.

<sup>4</sup> Evidence of these two frames can be found respectively at <https://framenet2.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Waiting> and <https://framenet2.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Precipitation>.

vitt, however, does not and we think he cannot provide us with such a principled distinction and thus he must accept both. In cases where the semantic types are not provided, they demand determination in context and although the type of contextual adjustment is often slot-filling (as in the provision of a location for a raining event), in certain cases, it must be conceptual modulation as we will see.

Thus, even if we think, as Devitt does, that both pragmatists and semanticists have overlooked some linguistic conventions (Romero and Soria 2013, 2019), unlike him, we think this is a reason to have a pragmatic notion of what is said rather than a semantic one. The reason is simple: some compositional linguistic rules or conventions of the type that Devitt proposes to add sometimes demand modulation to get the truth-conditional content of the sentence uttered. Thus, disambiguation and slot-filling (or saturation) are not the only ways of exploiting linguistic conventions. As we have defended (Romero and Soria 2013, 2019), modulation may be obligatory and without it, not even saturation is possible in certain cases, cases in which slot-filling is dependent on modulation. This is a very serious challenge for the traditional view that Devitt is trying to save since, if it is right, what is said is not always literally said.

This paper is divided in two sections. In the next section, we present Devitt's proposal on what is said and the way in which Devitt articulates it. In the third section, we focus on the challenges to Devitt's semantic notion of what is said. Our disagreement with him leads us to provide the arguments for our defence of a pragmatic notion of what is said. Finally, we present our conclusions.

## 2. *Devitt's proposal on what is said*

According to Devitt, the study of language is theoretical and empirical and this has two consequences. First, we have to analyse theoretically interesting notions of meaning: a favoured notion of what is said and a notion of what is meant. Second, we need direct evidence from linguistic usage in favour of these notions and not intuitions which are themselves theory-laden and open to question.

We have a theoretical interest in human languages as representational systems constituted by a set of governing rules that people use to communicate the contents of their inner states to each other. These rules are largely conventional: symbols have their meanings by convention. Conventions associated with a linguistic form emerge from the regular use in the community of that form to convey certain parts of messages. The regular use of a linguistic form in utterances with a certain speaker meaning leads to that form having that meaning conventionally in the language of that community.<sup>5</sup> The regular use gives

<sup>5</sup> This theoretical approach to meaning is similar to the strategy initiated by Grice (1957/89, 1968/89)'s or Schiffer (1972)'s.

us evidence of linguistic conventions, of semantic properties, if they provide the best explanation of regularities. We can gather evidence about regularities from linguistics since linguists often acknowledge the role of usage as a source of evidence: in the study of corpora and elicited production.

The regular use of a linguistic form in utterances with a certain speaker meaning somehow leads that form to have that meaning (or part of that meaning) conventionally in the language of that community. For example, the conventions associated with (1)

(1) It's raining

come from the regular use of (1) to communicate messages such as that it is raining in Granada, that it is raining in NY, that it is raining in Dubrovnik, etc. When the speaker believes that it is raining in Granada and she is in Granada, she (in English) produces (1) and this token of (1) means that it is raining in Granada. That meaning is the message the speaker intentionally communicates, her "speaker meaning", when she is being literal and straightforward. Conventions in these cases make reference to what is regularly included, that it is raining [in some place to be determined]. These rules show that a theoretically interesting what is said, a what-is-said that may be the content of a mental state, is "very tainted" in context. Some linguistic rules demand contextual "saturation"; a "slot" should be filled as in example (1). The very frequent provision of a location in the frame of 'raining' can be taken as evidence that it obeys a linguistic rule, it is clearly a linguistic regularity recognized in FrameNet. (1) has its representational properties partly by virtue of the place where it is raining, by virtue of something that is not encoded.

Example (1) is similar to examples that involve words with an indexical or demonstrative element. Their linguistic rules demand saturation in context. For example, the linguistic rule associated to 'that' captures the convention for expressing the demonstrative part of a thought, its encoded meaning, and according to it, a token of the demonstrative 'that' in an utterance of (2)

(2) That is red

"refers to whatever object is linked to it in the appropriate causal-perceptual way" (Devitt forthcoming). So the token of 'that' in (2) has its representational property partly by virtue of something that is not encoded, an apple, for example. The demonstrative in (2) straightforwardly semantically designates the apple (in the situation): in using 'that' the speaker had that apple in mind by virtue of her thought being causally grounded in it. Having the apple in mind in using 'that' simply requires that the part of the thought that causes that use of 'that' refers to the apple in question. What makes an object the referent of 'that' is its causal relation to the part of the thought expressed by (2). The reference of 'that' is determined by a mental state of the speaker. What is

said is often partly constituted by whatever determines the reference of any word with an indexical or demonstrative element.

Sometimes more than one linguistic rule governs a symbol. This multiplicity arises from multiple conventions for the linguistic form. Multiplicity of conventions demands disambiguation and what is said takes one of those meanings. In an utterance of (3)

(3) He went to a bank

The speaker is participating in one of the two conventions for 'bank'. Disambiguation is needed to arrive at the representational properties that are of theoretical interest. This also shows that a theoretically interesting what is said is "very tainted" in context.

The same must be said of (4).

(4) Visiting relatives can be boring

We are interested in which of the two conventions for 'visiting relatives' the speaker is participating in. The explanatory role of a particular linguistic form (simple as 'bank' or complex as 'visiting relatives') depends on which rule has been exploited.

Rules related to saturation and disambiguation are in the speaker and they are not inferential nor, in any interesting sense, pragmatic. They contribute to the theoretically interesting what is said, which, although it is "very tainted" in context, is not pragmatic. The distinction between what is said and what is meant guides, according to Devitt, the semantics-pragmatics debate.

Taking into account examples (2)–(4), what is said departs from the conventional meaning of the sentence when saturation is needed or when disambiguation is involved. Saturation and disambiguation are linguistically demanded. Devitt and pragmatists do not disagree on that, although they disagree in the way disambiguation and saturation is reached. According to Devitt, the intentional act that is necessary for disambiguation and saturation is not an act of communicating a thought as linguistic pragmatists argue but one of expressing a thought.

However, the main point of disagreement comes from their different views on some context relative phenomena such as the utterance of (1) to say that it's raining in Granada. For pragmatists truth-conditional content depends not only on processes linguistically demanded (mandatory) but also on processes non-linguistically demanded (optional) such as the pragmatic enrichment required for (1), a case of unarticulated constituent. For Recanati, in (1) there is no linguistic demand for the provision of a location. The demand is pragmatic through and through and yet it is part of what the proposition explicitly communicated, it is part of what is pragmatically said. For Devitt, on the contrary, every contextual influence in what is said by an utterance is necessarily taken to be linguistically demanded. (1) linguistically demands slot-filling and not a pragmatic enrichment. From his traditional semantic view (or minimalism), the context-relative phenomena that motivate

linguistic pragmatism (or contextualism) can be handled by including previously overlooked conventions without abandoning its main tenet

that a sentential utterance has its truth-conditional content simply [...] in virtue of the conventional rules of the speaker's language. This content is typically thought to be "what is said" by the utterance and its constitution is thought to be a "semantic" matter. (Devitt 2013: 86)

Devitt's recognition of context-relative phenomena can be accounted for in the minimalist tradition by means of just two qualifications. If an expression is ambiguous, its contribution to what is said will depend on which of its meanings the speaker "has in mind". When an utterance contains an indexical, what is said depends on reference fixing. For Devitt, the constitution of what is said is "semantic" since the representational properties provided by the linguistic rules only demand determination in context in cases of disambiguation and slot-filling and there are no purely pragmatic effects on the truth-conditional content said.

The traditional semantic view has been questioned by pragmatists taking into account (1) and other examples such as

- (5) The table [in my room] is covered with books
- (6) I've had breakfast [this morning]
- (7) You are not going to die [from that minor cut]

in which, according to them, pragmatic enrichment (in square brackets) is needed to go from semantic content to what is said. These sentences in context mean what their words mean together with what is marked in brackets, while they say something else literally. (5) says the absurd claim that there is one and only one table and it is covered with books, (6) says that the speaker has had breakfast [sometime in the past], (7) attribute immortality to the addressee. As what is said by means of these sentences does not coincide with what is meant in context, these examples show that "pragmatic" enrichment is needed to get what is said from what is "semantically" determined.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, Devitt claims that example (1) does not require free pragmatic enrichment to get what is said. (1) would be a case of slot-filling and thus the result of contextual determination is a result of a linguistic demand. Evidence that the provision of a location obeys a linguistic rule can be found in its very frequent use, a very clear linguistic regularity. Similarly, there are conventions for expressions included in (5)–(7) that demand saturation in context. The convention associated with the referential use of 'the table' comes from the regular use of (5) to refer to the particular object the speaker has in mind, as also happened in the case of 'that' in example (2). The conventions associated with (6) come from the regular use of (6) to say that the speaker has had breakfast [sometime in the past to be determined]. The past tense of the verb phrase requires determination of a specific past time in context, it must be saturated in context, for example, with this morning. What is semantically said by the utterance of (6) is that

the speaker has had breakfast this morning. To explain Bach's famous example (7), Devitt also claims that there is a convention demanding slot-filling. In (7) there is not an indexical such as tense in (6) but there is a regular provision of the cause of the death in the use of sentences with 'die' as the main verb. To make this claim, however, Devitt should provide us with some sort of evidence. According to FrameNet, in the frame for 'dying' there are at least two frequent elements: a core element (sentient protagonist) and a non-core element (situation or event that led directly to the death).<sup>6</sup> Even if it is considered a non-core element, the situation or event that led directly to the death is a regular sort of information. This type of regularity can be taken as evidence for Devitt to argue that there is a normal disposition of the speaker to include the event that would (or would not) lead to the death in what is said, and thus, in an utterance of (7), what '[from that minor cut]' means can be considered as part of what is said.

In this way, the slot-filling involved in examples such as (1) and (5)–(7) can be considered semantic and, according to Devitt, linguistic pragmatism loses one of its main motivations. Devitt's criticism of pragmatists is that their enlarged what is said is partly "pragmatic" (2013: 96). By adding overlooked conventions that demand slot-filling, he also defends that there is an enlarged what is said in these examples but, since slot-filling is for him a semantic process, his notion of what is said is still semantic.

Linguistic pragmatism, Devitt admits, also takes into account some phenomena that demand enrichments or impoverishments of what is said such as

- (8) The *burglar nightmare* was over
- (9) a. Max *cut* the grass
- b. Max *cut* the cake
- (10) The ATM *swallowed* my credit card

Utterances like (8)–(10), in a context, can convey a more precise or less precise message than the semantic what is said. These messages are achieved by enrichment and impoverishment. The reasons for that, according to Devitt, may be that it is ponderous and boring to communicate the precise message using conventions, as in (8), or that the only available conventions determine a meaning that is vaguer or narrower than the desired message, as in (9) and (10) respectively.

The truth-conditional content expressed by (8) is an imprecise what is said. The imprecise what is said, according to Devitt, would be that whatever the relation between burglar and nightmare denotes, the burglar nightmare is over. What 'burglar nightmare' would thus contribute would be rather imprecise but it will provide the needed constraint: anything that is to count as a burglar nightmare has to be of that imprecise kind. This constraint is a convention that determines a

<sup>6</sup> See at <https://framenet2.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Death>.



vague truth condition that the speaker enriches in a context to get a more precise message; the speaker conveys the precise proposition she means with the help of the imprecise proposition she expresses.

The truth-conditional content expressed by (9) is also an imprecise what is said. ‘Cut’ is seen as referring to what is common to cutting grass, cutting cakes, and all other forms of cutting. So, as Devitt (2013: 96, forthcoming) says following Hale and Keyser (1987), it means “something along the lines of *produce linear separation in the material integrity of something by a sharp edge coming in contact with it*”. What ‘cut’ would thus contribute would be rather imprecise but it could provide the needed constraint: anything that is to count as a cutting action has to be of that rather vague kind.

The enrichment in (8) and (9) is pragmatic. A “pragmatic” mechanism needed to get from what is said to a potential message that is an expansion of a semantic what is said; a semantic what is said that is truth-conditional and thus truth-conditional pragmatics is not needed. In these cases, what is said follows from what is meant.

Impoverishment occurs, according to Recanati (2004: 26), in a token of (10). The proposition meant is *less* precise than the proposition said. Devitt follows him in the impoverishment proposal but although (10) may once have been a case of impoverishment, he thinks (10) is now a dead metaphor and thus disambiguation is the strategy involved. For a pragmatist such as Recanati, it is a case of modulation affecting what is said. By contrast for Devitt, if it really were a case of impoverishment, it would be a case of modulation external to what is said.

Devitt’s putative solutions for explaining what is said by means of examples (1) and (5)–(7) are of no use to provide an explanation of (8)–(10) and he grants a role for pragmatics in their explanation. Each of their contents is characterized as what is (semantically) said + pragmatic modulation (2018: 47, forthcoming). As this type of content is characterized in part pragmatically, it represents occasional features of linguistic communication.

Linguistic pragmatism also takes into account a metaphorical use of examples such as (11),

- (11) The rock, now becoming brittle with age, responds to his students’ questions with none of his former subtlety (adapted from Kittay 1987: 71)

or metonymical uses of examples such as (12) and (13)

- (12) The beer faucet is waiting for her second ‘tapa’ (a real utterance of a waitress referring to Belén Soria in a tapas bar in Granada when she was sitting at the counter by the beer faucet)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This is a novel metonymy similar to the now classical example by Geoffrey Nunberg (1979: 149), ‘the ham sandwich is waiting for his check’. Devitt considers this example a case of conventional metonymy which should be explained by regular polysemy. Cases like this exemplify “*meta*-conventions, processes for generating lexical conventions, of the following form: wherever a convention is established

- (13) There is a lion in the middle of the piazza (taken from Recanati 2010: 5)

that are not included in Devitt's list. These examples hold, according to pragmatists, what is pragmatically said. 'Rock', 'beer faucet', and 'lion' contribute to what is pragmatically said with a modulated meaning in the first case and with extended complex concepts in the other two cases.

Nevertheless, Devitt does not consider that these examples challenge his view of what is said. They are cases in which what the speaker means differs from what is said. They convey contents external to what is said: they are implicatures, non-literal contents. The speaker says something she does not mean as a way of conveying something that she does. Devitt handles (11)–(13) arguing that what is said does not have to be meant. As he says “the fact that *p* is *what is said* by an utterance does not entail that *p* is *meant* by the utterance (does not entail that *p* is the utterance's *message*)” (forthcoming). The metonymical utterance of (13), for example, cannot constrain truth conditions different from its literal ones. A token of (13) says that there is a lion in the middle of the piazza and this semantic content is not included in what the utterance means, that there is a lion statue in the middle of the piazza. What is meant does not coincide with what is said. The utterance has pragmatic properties. This would be a case of implicature and thus it is meant non-literally and indirectly.

In sum, Devitt (2018: 47, forthcoming) has a four-way distinction among the properties of utterances: encoded conventional meaning; what is said (as a result of encoded conventional meaning, disambiguation and reference assignment); what is said + pragmatic modulation; and implicatures. And he considers that two notions of meaning are theoretically well based: what is meant and what is said. The ways in which what is meant goes beyond encoded conventional meaning includes the types of contents shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1. *Devitt's catalogue of utterance contents*

<b>What is meant</b>	<b>= what is said</b>		
	<b>≠ what is said</b>	what is said + <b>pragmatic modulation</b>	<b>...+ enrichment</b>
		<b>...+ impoverishment</b>	
<b>what is implicated</b> by means of indirect or figurative uses			

that an expression refers to things of type X that expression will also *thereby* refer conventionally to things of related type Y.” (forthcoming). However, (12) is not one of the conventional types of regular polysemy and needs a pragmatic explanation.

In general, there are two possibilities for the notion of what is meant. First, what is meant by the uttering of a sentence coincides with what is said by the utterance. Then the utterance has only semantic properties. The speaker is being literal and straightforward as in Devitt's explanation of example (1) above. His what-is-said includes many overlooked conventions that linguistically demand slot-filling as in examples (5)–(7). Second, what is meant by uttering a sentence does not coincide with what is said by the utterance. Then the utterance has pragmatic properties. As what is meant can be constituted in two different ways, there are two types of contents with pragmatic properties: what is said + modulation and implicatures. While implicatures are purely pragmatic properties, what is said + modulation is a type of content with properties that are only in part pragmatic, those related with the result of modulation. Thus, there are different ways in which what is meant can depart from what is said:

- the proposition meant is a precise proposition with the help of the imprecise proposition said as examples (8)–(9) show
- the proposition meant is less precise than the proposition said as in (10)
- the proposition meant is a conversational implicature as in (11)–(13).

### *3. Challenges to Devitt's semantic notion of what is said: Overlooking conventions*

Devitt's semantic notion of what is said includes conventions demanding contextual information which are generally overlooked by both semanticists and pragmatists. We are afraid that by adding the kind of overlooked conventions that are involved in utterances of (5)–(7), Devitt should also include much more in what is said since he has to take into account generally overlooked compositional conventions related to the metaphorical utterance of (11) or to the metonymical utterance of (12). Devitt's proposal faces an important challenge with examples of metaphor and metonymy. This challenge arises because all his requirements to save the tradition are really not compatible. It is inconsistent to maintain that compositional conventions should not be overlooked and to reject non-literal contents as part of what is said in examples such as (11). The strategy Devitt follows to defend his overlooked conventions, would lead him, in our opinion, to include in what is said more than just the result of disambiguation and saturation if compositional conventions are taken into account. The properties that an utterance may have as a result of the speaker's exploitation of her language arise not only from encoded conventional meaning together with disambiguation and reference fixing but also from modulation. Thus a sentential utterance has its truth-conditional content not simply by virtue of the (largely) conventional rules of the speaker's language with two impor-

tant qualifications, saturation and disambiguation, since at least one other qualification should be included. Some generally overlooked compositional conventions often demand modulation to get a proposition, both from the point of view of production and interpretation.

Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that Devitt is right about the meaning-properties of utterances (1)–(7) and his explanation of them. Do we also have to accept that (8)–(10) are adequately explained by what is said + pragmatic modulation? To know if examples such as (8)–(10) must be considered as cases of what is said + pragmatic modulation we need to know first what truth-conditional contents are obtained with (8)–(10) that constitute what is said by these utterances and, second, what expressions within (8)–(10) are undergoing pragmatic modulation. As we are going to show it would become more consistent for Devitt if saturation in context were used to explain how to get the type of what is said by (8) and if disambiguation in context were used to explain how to get the type of what is said expressed by (10). The only case of what is said + pragmatic modulation would be (9) but it is not clear to us why this example is not a case of implicature for him. Let us see the problems for Devitt's treatment of cases (8)–(10).

For us, there is no truth-conditional content obtained with (8) that constitutes an imprecise proposition. The problem for Devitt's proposal of an imprecise proposition expressed by (8) is that without specifying the relation of burglar with nightmare in context, the restrictive modifier cannot constrain the denotation of 'nightmare' and thus 'burglar' is not performing its linguistic task. The speaker cannot have in mind an imprecise proposition expressed by (8) since there is nothing in common between the nightmare the burglar has about something and the nightmare that a person has about the burglar and thus what semantics delivers for 'burglar nightmare' will not be an imprecise part of a proposition. There is no imprecise proposition capable of truth evaluation, something the speaker can think of.

If this is so, the content of (8) is merely a set of propositional constituents that has not admitted semantic composition since some sub-propositional context-dependent component of content (the relation between the content of the two nouns) is missing. (8) is similar to (1) and 'burglar nightmare' expresses a constituent of what is said that results from a *semantic* addition demanded by a convention exploited by the speaker, the convention for N+N construction. The speaker of (8) participates in a convention with the use of 'burglar nightmare' as far as what is regularly delivered by the semantics of this N+N construction is the meaning of 'nightmare [in some relation with] burglar [to be determined]'. But this does not determine a vague part of a truth condition that the speaker enriches to convey a more precise message. Thus, 'burglar nightmare' in a token of (8) is not a case of modulation. Neither the meaning of 'nightmare' nor the meaning of 'burglar' undergoes pragmatic enrichment. Devitt's explanation of the content conveyed by

the utterance of (8), what is said + pragmatic modulation, is not plausible. We think it would be more consistent for Devitt to argue that (8) is a context-relative phenomenon more similar to (1) and (5)–(7) than to cases of what is said + pragmatic modulation in the sense that its convention in relation to the N+N construction establish a slot to be filled in context: the relation that nightmare bears to burglar.

(9) is also considered by Devitt as a case in which its truth-conditional content is imprecise and becomes precise by the pragmatic enrichment of ‘cut’. Although it is an extension or elaboration of a constituent of the proposition said, Devitt considers it external to what is said. In this way, he can maintain his main point: “the semantic what-is-said that is thus expanded is already truth-conditional and so there is no place here for “truth-conditional pragmatics”.” (forthcoming). However, why are utterances of (9a) and (9b) considered cases of what is said + pragmatic modulation rather than implicatures?

Let’s look at an utterance of (10). Although he said that this is a case of impoverishment, he also claims that this utterance is a case of conventional metaphor. Thus, Devitt thinks it expresses a truth-conditional content that depends on disambiguation and constitutes what is semantically said by this utterance; it literally says that the ATM swallowed the credit card. In this sense, Devitt does not provide us with a good example of impoverishment.

We could use examples of novel metaphors such as the metaphorical utterance of (11), which, according to Recanati (2004), is a case of impoverishment as well. However, for us, no truth-conditional content is obtained with an utterance of (11) that constitutes what is said and has to be impoverished. According to our conventions, in (11), ‘responds’ should express a property of animate beings (a sentient speaker).<sup>8</sup> This is similar to Devitt’s claim that there are conventions demanding slots to be filled by a location in (1), a time in (6), a cause in (7) and, as we say he should admit, a relation in (8) to get the truth-conditional content. In Devitt’s slot-filling proposal, the slots must be filled with entities of a certain semantic type if they are to count as conventions to get the truth-conditional content. Type constraints are part of linguistic regularities as we can see in FrameNet. Taking into account the evidence from this corpus, *location* is the regular type to fill the slot in (1) and *cause* is the regular type to fill the slot in (7) but the cause cannot fill in the slot in (1). When these type constraints affect core-elements they can be taken as linguistic rules (Asher 2011, Romero and Soria 2019). For instance, the verb ‘wait’ demands a sentient participant as subject of the VP in the active form. If we take into account these compositional linguistic rules, composition of the semantic constituents of (11) is precluded by normal type constraints and a pragmatic adjustment is demanded.

<sup>8</sup> Evidence of this frame can be found at [https://framenet2.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Communication\\_response](https://framenet2.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Communication_response).

In addition, the pronoun ‘his’ carries gender and number features which constrain the antecedent of the anaphor and which must be masculine. However, the object referred to by the token of the NP, the rock, is not of the semantic type required by ‘responds’ and cannot be an acceptable antecedent of ‘his’. (11) shows lack of semantic coordination between the meaning of the NP, the rock, and the meaning of ‘responds’ and thus their composition is not possible. Thus, no resulting truth-conditional meaning can be expected to represent a thought with both of them as constituents. The speaker is not doing, Devitt would say, “what she is normally disposed to do.” She is “deliberately assigning another meaning to an expression, as in metaphor or pragmatic modulation” (forthcoming). In his defence of the tradition, however, he rejects that this difference in meaning may affect what is said. By contrast, we claim it does and examples like (11) challenge his defence in a serious way since modulation of the meaning of ‘rock’ is here necessary for the slot-filling of ‘his’.

In (11), ‘his’ demands a slot-filling through anaphor resolution and anaphor resolution is guided by linguistic rules of agreement. This agreement is possible in (11) only with the modulated meaning the speaker has in mind rather than with the encoded meaning. If the speaker had used ‘the rock’ to refer to a rock, the speaker would have uttered ‘the rock (...) responds to *its* students’ rather than ‘the rock (...) responds to *his* students’ to get the agreement that the rules of language require. However, the speaker of (11) uses ‘the rock’ to refer to the old professor she has in mind and this partly determines its meaning in the appropriate causal-perceptual way. The old professor behaviour has prompted the speaker to conceive the professor metaphorically as a rock getting brittle with age and the best way to represent the metaphorical thought she has in mind is with the metaphorical utterance of (11). The metaphorical use of ‘the rock’ is causally grounded in the speaker’s metaphorical conceptualization of the professor and by her use of ‘his’ rather than ‘its’, she participates in a convention grounded in this metaphorical conceptualization. In cases like this, saturation depends on modulation. If the truth-conditional meaning of an indexical is partly determined by what the speaker has in mind and what she has in mind is a metaphorically conceptualized professor, she produces a metaphorical utterance through a regular mechanism, the metaphorical, which is quite systematic in language use. In (11), the speaker selects ‘his’ rather than ‘its’ to represent her metaphorical thought. Thus, modulation cannot be external to what is said on pain of ungrammaticality. (11) is a well-formed metaphorical utterance and it would be ill-formed if taken literally. We do not think the content of an ill-formed literal utterance corresponds with what the speaker has in mind. In (11) what is said is metaphorically said. This can be claimed if we accept that compositional conventions demand modulation to solve the lack of semantic coordination. But by adding this type of conventions we are opposing both pragmatists and Devitt’s traditional view. For all of them, the derivation of metaphorical meanings is never lin-

guistically demanded. But if metaphorical modulation is optional, what is the propositional literal content that the speaker has in mind in (11)? A rock which has students and can respond to their questions? We think this is inconsistent for Devitt if compositional rules are recognised conventions. Lack of semantic coordination indicates context-dependence which demands pragmatic adjustment. Conventions tell us that a sentient entity is needed to be able to compose a full content for (11). The speaker is deliberately assigning some (abnormal) meaning to 'rock' so that composition is allowed in a regular way. The resolution of this compositional context-dependence cannot be treated as part of semantics. A pragmatic process is needed to make composition possible since although the speaker participates in the convention when using the word 'rock' she is exploiting it metaphorically to express the metaphorical concept the speaker has in mind, the speaker is also participating in the compositional conventions by her selection of the verb 'respond' and the pronoun 'his' to coordinate semantically with the metaphorical conceptualization the speaker has in mind.

Without the modulated meaning, there is no literal proposition for (11), no impoverishment (or any other type of modulation) of the concept ROCK can be added as something external to what is said. Recanati is right when he includes modulation in what is said and argues for what is pragmatically said. Where Recanati is wrong is in his defence of impoverishment as the result of a pragmatic process that is always optional. Modulation in the utterance of (11) is compositionally and linguistically demanded. If this is so, to handle (11), Devitt's theoretically interesting notion of what is said has to be modified since this utterance does not have a truth-conditional content simply by virtue of the conventional rules of the speaker's language, disambiguation and saturation.

However, Devitt might defend his position by saying that (11) is not a case of impoverishment but of transfer and that transfer is involved in implicature. (11) would not be a challenge for his what-is-said + pragmatic modulation after all. This defence has two problems, though. The first problem is that if transfer is involved in implicature, we do not understand why (9), a case of enrichment, is not also a case of implicature. Transfer together with enrichment and impoverishment are the optional pragmatic processes that characterize the notion of what is pragmatically said. If transfer goes to implicature, enrichment and impoverishment should go too. The reason, we suppose, why enrichment, a type of content external to what is said, is not included in implicature is that modulation affects the meaning of a word and not the meaning of the uttered sentence but this also happens with transfer. The second problem is that implicature and what is said + pragmatic modulation presuppose in Devitt's theory a semantic what is said, but in (11) what is said cannot be obtained without pragmatic modulation.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Devitt does not include transfer as a case of modulation. If transfer is involved in implicature and it is characteristic of metaphor, why does Devitt understand

As whatever process is involved in metaphor, it is compositionally and linguistically demanded to get what is said in cases such as (11), the result of impoverishment or transfer in these cases is not added to what is said simply because there is no literal what is said. In cases such as (11) the result of these pragmatic processes is not an implicature for the same reason. The result must be included in what is said; a proposition said that can be an input for implicatures. To the extent that in (11) there is no semantic proposition said and that what the speaker has in mind is a metaphorical thought, there are reasons to think that in those cases the proposition is a metaphorical proposition and what is said is metaphorically said. The proposition said is non-literal and this is not acceptable for the traditional view that maintains that what is said is always literally said.

Example (12) shares some properties with (11). The type of core elements involved in the frame of waiting are a sentient protagonist and an expected event. The pronoun 'her' carries gender and number features which constrain the antecedent of the anaphor that must be feminine (but no acceptable antecedent is expressed). (12) shows lack of semantic coordination between the meaning of the NP, 'the beer faucet', and the conventional constraints imposed by 'waiting' and 'her'. No explicit NP of the type required (sentient protagonist) is expressed and no feminine acceptable antecedent for 'her' is expressed. Thus composition of their encoded meanings is not available. There are conventions for (12) as complex expressions that compositionally and linguistically demand contextual information. There is compositional context-sensitivity.

What expressions in (12) are undergoing modulation according to pragmatists? If we follow pragmatists such as Recanati, 'beer faucet' has to undergo transfer. Nonliterality is attributable to a specific expression, 'beer faucet', and its meaning is what must be changed. 'Beer faucet' non-literally means 'beer faucet customer'. Conventions tell us that a sentient entity is needed to be able to compose a full content for (12). The speaker is deliberately assigning some (abnormal) meaning to 'beer faucet' so that composition is allowed in a regular way.

We think instead, in a spirit more coherent with Devitt's proposal, that saturation in context can be used to go from a non-propositional semantic content to what is said in (12). The meaning of 'the beer faucet' must work as part of the restrictive modifier of [customer] to say that the customer by the beer faucet is waiting for her second tapa. A new kind of slot-filling appears. 'Beer faucet' means 'beer faucet' and 'the beer faucet' has in (12) its representational property partly by means of the object the speaker has in mind, the customer by the beer faucet. In Devitt's vein, it could be said that this utterance has a truth-conditional content simply by virtue of the conventional rules of

impoverishment, the process involved in novel metaphor according to Recanati, as a case of what is said + modulation? His two proposals on metaphor are not coherent.



the speaker's language, disambiguation and saturation. Nevertheless, what is semantically said by (12) is non-literal. Again we have a case of what is non-literally said.

In order to handle (11)–(12), Devitt's theoretically interesting notion of what is said needs to include either modulation or a new kind of slot-filling. In these cases, the pragmatic adjustment is demanded conventionally due to compositional context-sensitivity (Romero and Soria 2013 and 2019) and it has to be included in what is (pragmatically and non-literally) said. At the end of the day, the properties of these types of utterances are linguistically demanded but inevitably pragmatic.

Additional evidence to show that these properties are inevitably pragmatic is that the metonymical property of the utterance of (12) should be of the same nature as the metonymical property of any metonymy. This means that the metonymical use of (13) should include a non-literal and expanded meaning for 'lion' as a result of the new kind of slot-filling. However, a token of (13) does not conventionally demand this slot-filling and any contextual effect not conventionally (or optionally) demanded by an utterance constitutes without any doubt a pragmatic property. A similar argument could be made if we think of a metaphorical use of (13).

#### 4. *Conclusion*

In this paper we have explained Devitt's semanticist position and how it depends on including more conventions in the constitution of what is said. Although we have also defended that there are *overlooked conventions*, we cannot agree with Devitt's "semantic" notion of what is said since the properties that an utterance has simply as a result of the speaker's exploitation of the conventions of her language sometimes demand contextual modulation and not only disambiguation and saturation.

We have argued that modulation may be demanded by conventions which constrain the compositionality of complex expressions (phrases and sentences) and that Devitt's way of delineating the constitution of what is said by including more conventions leads him further than he would be ready to accept in his defence of traditional truth-conditional semantics for which what is said is always literally said. Some of the overlooked conventions Devitt is trying to highlight have a compositional character and if he attempts to include them in the semantic constitution of what is said without being unsystematic, he should provide a principled way to justify why certain types of exploitation of linguistic conventions are accepted in the determination of what is said (disambiguation and saturation) and others are not (modulation) and why certain types of conventions are accepted in some cases (e.g. the provision of a location in the frame of 'raining') while they are rejected in other cases (e.g. the requirement of a sentient protagonist in the frame of 'waiting'). If there is not a principled way to discard certain

compositional conventions, the wider semantic notion of what is said that he proposes will not be viable.

If the theoretical reason to include the resolution of context-sensitivity in what is said is that, if we didn't, there would be no way to attribute the speaker a thought in order to explain his behaviour, and the overlooked conventions include (as we argue) compositional demands for contextual (non-linguistic) information, Devitt should accept that modulation and certain types of slot-filling (excluded in the traditional semantic approach) must be included in what is said. In certain cases, the semantic role of a core-element can match other constituents only if there is a conceptual adjustment of the encoded meaning as in metaphorical modulation or a metonymical slot-filling. In these cases, what semantics delivers is not something that the speaker can mentally represent as something capable of being true. This is especially evident when saturation is dependent on modulation. If what the speaker has in mind is a metaphorical thought, the encoded meaning undergoes modulation through transfer and the speaker expresses a metaphorical truth-conditional content. If what the speaker has in mind is a complex concept and expresses it by means of a sub-phrasal constituent of a sentence, the speaker is expressing part of a thought metonymically. In both cases, what is said is non-literally said. However, if compositional conventions demand that the result of metaphorical modulation and metonymical complex concepts are included in what is said, we think that even Devitt would find it better to call the resolution of context-sensitivity "pragmatic" rather than "semantic". If we want to give a systematic account of the properties of utterances, we need a pragmatic notion of what is said.

## References

- Asher, N. 2011. *Lexical Meaning in Context: A Web of Words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bach, K. 2006. "The Excluded Middle: Minimal Semantics without Minimal Propositions." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73: 435–442.
- Borg, E. 2012. *Pursuing Meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Devitt, M. 2013. "Is There a Place for Truth-Conditional Pragmatics?" *Teorema: Revista Internacional de Filosofía* 32 (2): 85–102.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2018. "Sub-Sententials: Pragmatics or Semantics?" In A. Capone, M. Carapezza and F. Lo Piparo (eds.), *Further Advances in Pragmatics and Philosophy*. Cham: Springer: 45–64.
- \_\_\_\_\_, forthcoming. *Overlooking Conventions. The Trouble with Linguistic Pragmatism*.
- Grice, H. P. 1957/89. "Meaning." In H. P. Grice 1989: 213–223.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1968/89. "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning." In H. P. Grice 1989: 117–37.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1975/89. "Logic and Conversation." In H. P. Grice 1989: 22–40.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 1989. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Hale, K. and S. J. Keyser 1987. "A View from the Middle." *Lexicon Project Working Papers* 10, Center for Cognitive Science, MIT, Cambridge, Mass.
- Kittay, E. F. 1987. *Metaphor. Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Korta, K. and J. Perry 2011. *Critical Pragmatics: An Inquiry into Reference and Communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lepore, E. and M. Stone 2015. *Imagination and Convention: Distinguishing Grammar and Inference in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nunberg, G. 1979. "The Non-uniqueness of Semantic Solutions: Polysemy." *Linguistics and Philosophy* 3: 143–84.
- Recanati, F. 2004. *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2010. *Truth-conditional Pragmatics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Romero, E. and B. Soria 2013. "Optionality in Truth-Conditional Pragmatics." *Teorema: Revista Internacional de Filosofía* 32 (2): 157–74.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2016. "Against Lepore and Stone's Sceptic Account of Metaphorical Meaning." *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (47): 145–72.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2019. "Semantic Content and Compositional Context-Sensitivity." *Theoria* 34 (1): 51–71.
- Schiffer, S. 1972. *Meaning*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sperber, D. and D. Wilson 1986/95. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Blackwell.