Functionual Proposition: A New Concept for Representing Discourse Meaning?

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Forthcoming in *Journal of Pragmatics*

1. Introduction: Propositions and the History of Wrong Questions

1.1. In Search of a New Concept

Two decades into the 21st century, philosophy of language offers an array of opinions on the meaning and utility of the term ‘proposition’. From a formal-semantics-triggered definition of proposition as a bearer of truth value and the meaning of a sentence, to a more general definition as an object of beliefs and other mental attitudes, it engenders debates across all the senses it is associated with. Although McGrath and Frank (2018: 1) quite aptly call it a ‘quasi-technical word’, it has proven indispensable to a vast number of theories of meaning. The history of the concept is long, much longer than that of the term itself, in that it is not difficult to encounter a need for a construct of an abstract, mind-independent object when one theorizes about meaning and cognition. Some of the landmarks here are the Stoics, medieval scholastic philosophy, and 19th-century phenomenology.\(^1\)

For my purpose, it will suffice to begin with Frege’s (1918-19) concept of a proposition as a sharable thought expressed by sentences. Fregean propositions are structured: they are composed of senses that are equally abstract equivalents of concepts (where the latter are mental representations held by thinking subjects).\(^2\) But it is not the concept I will end up adopting. The question I want to address here is a practical one: how to delimit the concept of a proposition that would suit the purpose of theories of meaning in discourse – meaning that is conveyed by the speaker, recovered by the addressee, partly co-constructed by them\(^3\), transmitted via different modalities, and coming from different sources. There is no doubt that the concept standing for the meaning of an utterance is a useful theoretical construct without which it would be difficult to develop a theory of a suitable

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\(^1\) See McGrath and Frank 2018.
\(^2\) See Frege 1892. On concepts as abstract representations vis-à-vis concepts as abstract objects see e.g. Margolis and Laurence 2007; on heterogeneity of concepts see Machery 2009, 2015.
\(^3\) On co-construction of meaning see Section 5.1 below.
generality and predictive power. But just as we have been, for several decades now, addressing the question of the boundary between semantics and pragmatics, so, I argue, we should address the question of the nature and content of the unit that functions as a suitable theoretical construct once the boundary has been decided on. So, I am contributing here to the ongoing debate on what are “the things we mean”, to borrow the phrase from Schiffer (2003), but I am doing so from a new vantage point. My aim will be to delimit, or help construct, the notion of a proposition that fits a pragmatics-rich, contextualist, and psychologically real theory of meaning where truth conditions are applied to speaker’s utterances and deliver the kind of meaning that pertains to the main communicated message in the cases of successful, non-defective discourse. As such, my departure point is the contextualist stance in the tradition of Atlas-Kempson (Atlas 1977, 1979, 1989; Kempson 1975, 1979, 1986), Sperber and Wilson (1986, 2012), Recanati (1989, 2004, 2010) and more recently Jaszczolt (2005, 2010, 2016). My method is that of conceptual analysis and the path is partly a historical one: building on the foundations of seminal answers to the questions as to (i) what scope one ought to allocate to propositions and (ii) how people interact with propositions in communication, I end up developing a radically contextualist notion of a pragmatics-rich proposition, freed from the constraints of the sentence and its structure, and pertaining to the varied, multimodal input in communication. As I explain in what follows, it shares some of the core characteristics with Schiffer’s (2003) pleonastic propositions on the one hand and with Soames’ (2014a) cognitive propositions and King’s (2014) naturalized propositions on the other: such propositions stand for, so to speak, the manner of thinking and speaking. Although they are abstract constructs, they are constructs a theorist needs in order to talk about people and their discourse, not about language and its abstract units. And in this sense my propositions are real. In the process, I argue that pragmatics-rich propositions are the best way forward if we are to avoid the known pitfalls of analysing meaning, and therefore, arguably, push the discussion of naturalized and cognitively plausible propositions forward by associating the ‘cognitive turn’ with a ‘contextualist turn’ in analysing meaning.

The question fits in the domain of foundational questions and as such belongs to the meta-level of semantics and pragmatics, or to metasemantics and metapragmatics. Before

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4 In the literature, the term ‘multimodal proposition’ is often used with reference to the theory of Charles Peirce. My use of the term is theoretically non-committal in that it merely exploits the standard, compositional meaning of the adjective ‘multimodal’. The term can be taken at its face value: as a proposition that combines information arriving through different modalities, where ‘modality’ is loosely defined as pertaining to different types of sources and types of processing.
proceeding, it will be important to state how it fits into, and reflects, the semantics/pragmatics boundary that needs to be adopted here. That adopted boundary will also affect the understanding of the metasemantics/metapragmatics relation. So, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In Section 2 I present a brief justification of my search for a novel concept of a proposition, placing it in the context of the semantics/pragmatics boundary dispute and in particular in the context of the requirements of the contextualist stance adopted here. Section 3 follows with the search for the right foundational questions (Section 3.1) and the preliminary qualities of the concept to be developed (Section 3.2). In Section 4 I address the question as to what exact characteristics such a proposition ought to possess, focusing on the utility of foregrounding the cognitive content. I discuss it taking on board some extant proposals and adopting, in a ‘positively eclectic’ way, some of the characteristics of such proposed propositions, adapting them to fit my multimodal, pragmatics-rich construct of a functional proposition for co-constructed discourse meaning that I propose in Section 5. Section 6 concludes, discussing the concept of a functional proposition in the context of philosophical, pragmatics-rich semantics, dispelling in the process some misunderstandings and myths about the status of the latter in current research on meaning in discourse.

2. Pragmaticized Proposition and the Semantics/Pragmatics Boundary Adjustments

Propositions used to be simple: a natural-language sentence has its structure, captured (more, or less, faithfully) by the logical form stated in a formal metalanguage such as that of predicate logic; the logical form allows us to assign a truth condition; and, on one influential theory, the truth condition ‘segregates’ those possible worlds in which the sentence is true from those in which it is false (or undefined). A bunch of such selected worlds gives the meaning, or the proposition. But pragmatic aspects of meaning inevitably interfered: at the very least, syntactic and lexical ambiguities have to be resolved and indexical terms have to be filled in before such a segregation of worlds can take place, and these require pragmatic processing (Grice 1978). Next, pragmatic aspects proved to be more ‘aggressive’ than that: there are many different types of them and they are often so crucial for the meaning that without them truth conditions are intuitively incorrect or even impossible to assess.

5 While foundational for formal semantics, possible-worlds approaches have been criticised in philosophy of language on the grounds that they (i) fail to explain how propositions are representational (in that in order to represent states of affairs, or anything at all, they would have to be linked to human cognitive activity) and (ii) make use of explanantia whose meaning is taken for granted such as ‘worlds’ and ‘truth values’. See Soames 2014b.
Beginning with Atlas’ and Kempson’s reanalysis of negation as necessitating an underdetermined logical form where the relative scopes of negation and presupposition are pragmatically determined\(^6\), the floodgates opened for allowing more and more underdetermination and assigning an increasingly significant role to pragmatic contributions. Intuitive truth conditions started to dictate how much pragmatic content to ‘add’ to the meaning, that is, how the logical form is to be ‘developed’ to cater for the intended proposition in the theory of Relevance (RT, Sperber and Wilson 1986; Carston 1988, 2002), or, alternatively, what pragmatic input to use in ‘modulating’ the components of the uttered sentence in Truth-Conditional Pragmatics (TCP, Recanati 1989; 2010). Subsequently, in Default Semantics (DS, Jaszczolt 2005, 2010), intuitive truth conditions were understood as truth conditions pertaining not to the meaning of the uttered sentence or the thought it conveys but to the main content communicated by that sentence, even if that content is communicated indirectly.

A more detailed analysis of the boundary disputes is not my current concern\(^7\) but the kinds of contributions that these post-Gricean developments\(^8\) bring to the understanding of the truth-conditional content is of core importance: to sum up, RT takes the representations that are the output of syntactic processing and lets pragmatics develop them freely to the status of the representations of intended content; TCP allows for free pragmatic modification\(^9\) of constituents of the representation in the process of pragmatic composition of meaning; DS takes this pragmatic composition to be the process conducted entirely on the conceptual level where the representation pertains to this primary meaning, irrespective of the direct or indirect way in which it was conveyed.

In short, once pragmatic input to the truth-conditional representation stops being syntactically mandated, the question becomes how extensive this input can be.\(^{10}\) Let us consider (1), a celebrated example adapted from Bach (1994).

\[(1) \quad \text{A little boy cuts his finger and cries.} \]

Mother: You are not going to die.

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\(^{6}\) See references in Section 1.

\(^{7}\) For a comprehensive introduction to the semantics-pragmatics interface see Jaszczolt 2012.

\(^{8}\) On the analysis of what it means to be ‘Gricean’ see Jaszczolt 2019.

\(^{9}\) By ‘free’ I mean here that there is no requirement of a syntactic trigger.

\(^{10}\) Embedded irony is one pertinent example, where the implicit (ironic) meaning arguably contributes to truth conditions but is far removed from the logical form of the sentence. See Popa-Wyatt 2019 for a discussion.
The mother’s main message to the boy can be captured along the lines of (1a) or (1b), or some related comforting statement.

(1a) There is nothing to worry about.

(1b) It’s not a big deal.

Both are implicatures but they can also function as the main (‘primary’ in the DS-theoretic sense) meanings of this utterance in a context where the act of comforting was performed indirectly. Both correspond to propositions that are of interest when one investigates such primary messages in pragmatics. As such, both have truth-conditional content. DS takes on board such intuitively primary propositions.

Next, there is a proposition associated with (1c).

(1c) The boy is not going to die from this cut.

Contextualist accounts such as RT and TCP allow for free pragmatic enrichment – ‘free’ in the sense that it is not dictated by ‘slots’ to be filled in the structure of the sentence – to yield a more cognitively plausible meaning, such as (1c). The construction of this proposition stops at additions, modifications, enrichments, or developments (to use some of the common terms) to the logical form of the original sentence. RT and TCP make it the main object of analysis of a truth-conditional theory of meaning, even though it may fall short of capturing the main message, as it is the case in this example.

Finally, the term ‘proposition’ can also cater for minimal semantic content as conceived of in Borg’s (2004, 2012, 2019) Minimal Semantics or Cappelen and Lepore’s (2005) Insensitive Semantics. The pragmatic input is clearly delimited by a list of terms that need a resolution (Cappelen and Lepore) or, quite similarly, by the directives from the lexicon and syntax (Borg). In our example, (1d) is such a minimal proposition, where the indexical expression ‘you’ triggers the assignment of the referent.

(1d) The boy is not going to die.
We will have little interest in this ‘docile’ proposition here: it is justified for pursuits that focus on the workings of the language system and the meanings it can compositionally produce but it is tangential to our pursuit of a ‘functional’ unit that would capture meaning in discourse. It is true that minimal propositions have a role to play in discourse, for example in jokes, misleading and deception, and may be intuitively available to the speakers (see Borg 2019) but, for our purposes, they can be viewed as a ‘tool’ that facilitates such roles, nothing more. To explain: when the minimal meaning results in humour, it becomes the primary meaning. When it results in misleading, it does not. Either way, it is the function, the primary message that requires a unified concept of a proposition. Distinguishing between the ways the message has been communicated will not give us the unity we need. So, minimal propositions are well accounted for by a unified functionalist outlook pursued here.

Needless to say, the main message intended by the speaker can be any of these: sometimes speakers communicate directly and through ‘minimal propositions’, at other times the message relies on pragmatic enrichment of the structure of what was physically uttered, and yet at other times, when the message is conveyed indirectly, it pertains to a proposition that is different altogether. My aim is to expose the need for a concept of a proposition that will cover all of these cases. This will allow us to break away from the constraints of traditional divisions in semantics and pragmatics and treat speaker’s main meaning as a unified object of study, irrespective of whether this meaning is communicated (i) directly and uttered in full, (ii) directly but not uttered in full, or (iii) indirectly.

Everyday parlance that is rife with implicatures points in favour of such a uniform understanding of discourse meaning. Example (2) contains a question posted on an internet forum, followed by one of the answers.

(2) A: Why do you think it’s OK to eat animals?

B: I went vegan in 1987. You’re preaching to the converted here.\textsuperscript{11}

The sentence that interests us is (2a).

(2a) I went vegan in 1987.

\textsuperscript{11} https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20200913065657AAehFpV (accessed 15 September 2020)
The standard Kaplanian (1989a) view allows us to fill in the indexical expression ‘I’ and obtain a proposition in (2b) – a proposition defended by minimalists discussed above.  

(2b)  B went vegan in 1987.

But the proposition that matters for the exchange at hand corresponds to the particular function that (2a) plays in this context, namely something to the effect of (2c).

(2c)  B doesn’t think it is OK to eat animals.

Such implicated meanings are crucial to everyday conversation and it is time to downplay Grice’s said/implicated distinction, not merely shift it sideways. It is time to subsume implicit but strongly communicated meanings such as (1a), (1b) or (2c) and explicit primary meanings under the same concept of a proposition. After all, they have the same function – they just happen to be indirectly conveyed, for reasons to do with politeness, other social conventions, or even idiosyncratic preferences.

So, before the search for a suitable notion of a proposition can commence, we have to delimit the contextualist object of study. To sum up: to push the contextualist outlook on discourse meaning to its logical limits and account for such indirect but strong meanings as in (1a), (1b) and (2c), it seems that we should opt for DS. On the other hand, to push the contextualist outlook on the intuitive meaning of the uttered sentence, one should remain closer to its uttered constituents, assume compositionality on the level of natural-language, pragmatically-enriched semantics and opt for RT or TCP. Whatever contextualist stance we choose, the concept of the appropriate proposition will follow. But if there are good grounds for pushing the concept of the proposition ‘the whole hog’ to the status of a practical, functional unit that will capture the main information content conveyed multi-modally, directly or indirectly, then this is the kind of contextualist stance that will interest us most as it best caters for speakers’ and addressee’s co-constructed discourse meaning. And it seems that the reasons are indeed compelling, as well as common-sensically transparent: after all, representing the core contribution the utterance makes to discourse, that is the main intended

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12 See also Henricks Stotts 2020 on a justification for such minimal pragmatic additions and on keeping the semantics/pragmatics distinction sharp.
and recovered message, is the objective that does not call for a justification. I return to this question in Section 4.1. On the other hand, providing a semantics that is guided by the sentence structure is an altogether different enterprise: it is an intra-theoretic, syntax-driven objective, independent from providing a theory of meaning that captures a co-constructed conceptual structure pertaining to the main speech act and the main information content.

3. A New Concept of a Proposition: A Question for Metasemantics and Metapragmatics?

3.1. Foundational Questions

Metasemantics, also called ‘foundational semantics’ (Stalnaker 1997) or ‘the metaphysics of meaning’, concerns itself with metaphysical explanations of semantics facts13 (see Burgess and Sherman 2014a). An important category of foundational questions concerns the relations that sentences of natural language bear to conceptual structures and to the world. But my question does not fit it snugly. Since I am asking about the meaning of the term ‘proposition’ that pertains to communication rather than natural language system – or, an utterance rather than a sentence, the foundational question spans metasemantics and metapragmatics, where metapragmatics stands for, so to speak, theorizing about pragmatic theories – or the metaphysics of communication.14 From now on, since in my search for the proposition I have assumed a contextualist stance on meaning, I shall use the term ‘metasemantics’ to refer to the meta-theory of meaning tout court, and as such a meta-level that also subsumes aspects of meaning traditionally ascribed to pragmatics.

Needless to say, metaphysical explanation of facts about meaning is not the same thing as delimiting the objects with which to provide such an explanation. In other words, the question as to how to delimit propositions could, arguably, be placed in an altogether different kind of theory.15 For example, one can work with an assumption that such pragmatics-rich propositions must be built out of concepts and, like concepts, ought to be borrowed from psychology and used as they are used in a psychological theory one favours. Metaphysical explanations would then be pegged to a theoretical construct borrowed from psychology. But it has been convincingly demonstrated that concepts are used very

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13 For introduction to metasemantics see also Burgess and Sherman 2014a (and other contributions to Burgess and Sherman 2014b); Soames 2014b, 2014c, 2014d; Simchen 2017; contributions to Ball and Rabern 2018; and Jaszczolt 2016, 2018a, 2019, in press.
14 The term ‘metapragmatics’ is still largely up for grabs. For three different definitions see Caffi 2006. For a discussion see Jaszczolt, in press.
15 I return to this classification in Section 6.
differently in psychology and linguistics and, arguably *a fortiori*, their role in meta-theory will also differ.\(^{16}\) So, it would be more prudent to argue as follows. Metasemantics (now in our broad sense) is not only in charge of seeking metaphysical explanations of semantic facts, but also in charge of asking what counts as semantic facts. Or, to quote Simchen (2017: 65), “metasemantics asks how semantically significant things become endowed with their significance”. Semantically significant things are the constructs in natural language – for our pragmatics-rich semantics, these are utterances, real objects, physically delivered in the context of particular discourse, taken on the level of types or tokens à la Grice. Any inquiry that addresses the question as to how an expression obtains its meaning (or: semantic value) is a metasemantic question. Since the kinds of objects of analysis, and kinds of meaning, differ depending on the kind of (descriptive) semantics one adopts, then it is necessary to point out that each semantic theory comes with its own metasemantic grounding. The grounding consists not only of the question *how, on what basis*, a certain meaning is ascribed (Kaplan 1989b), but also, by extension, what *units* are employed in providing this basis.

For example, traditional truth-conditional semantics is associated with foundational questions that make use of the relation between the sentence and the world.\(^{17}\) As such, its metasemantics makes use of a notion of a proposition that has a logical structure providing the necessary truth condition that delimits the set of possible worlds defining the meaning of the sentence. The meaning is sensitive to the situations in possible worlds, the existence of the referent, and how the referents are woven into the predicate-argument structure. Naturally, all well-rehearsed problems with intensional contexts follow suit.\(^{18}\) On the other hand, cognitive semantics is associated with foundational questions that make use of the relation between a natural-language construction and the mind, analysing the structure as a conceptual structure. The grounding facts are mental facts. The associated propositions (if at all needed) will differ accordingly: they will be mental, conceptual propositions, used in answering the question what is the meaning of an expression when the latter is defined as the externalization of the speaker’s thought.\(^{19}\) The theoretical requirements vary but the common thread is the link between the linguistic unit and the mind.

Our contextualist theory of meaning mixes the two: it requires a proposition that serves the foundational question about the relation between the conceptual structure the

\(^{16}\) Machery (2009), for example, provides good arguments for exorcising concepts from psychology but not from linguistics. For counter-arguments see Pino and Aguilera 2018.

\(^{17}\) For a recent defence of externalist semantics against Chomsky’s objections see King 2018.

\(^{18}\) For an example see (3a) and (3b) below.

\(^{19}\) Strictly speaking, this is a generalized concept: on the level of types rather than tokens.
utterance invokes in the interactants and the world, taking into consideration the speaker’s primary intentions and their recognition. I will be interested in foundational questions pertaining to such a theory, and within those, to zoom in even more, in the concept of a proposition that will help ground such a theory. And so, our proposition will have to be a cognitively plausible proposition, supported by an account of its composition that pertains to its truth-conditional structure. Example (2) showcased the need for such a concept – a concept that would capture the meaning associated with the primary discourse function of an utterance. Other considerations, such as directness vs. indirectness, said or implicated, belong to theory-internal perspectives. Time comes when established intra-theoretic perspectives begin to feel more like shackles than like wings for ideas.

3.2. Different Objectives, Different ‘Propositions’
Definitions of a ‘proposition’ vary both among philosophers and among linguists in that different questions are being foregrounded. Examples (1) and (2) allowed us to address the question ‘which proposition’. They have also signalled the importance of questions about properties of propositions, such as their structure, their relation to the structure of natural-language sentences, and whether these properties come from the relation propositions stand in to the world or to thinking agents. Some assume that a proposition has to have the logical structure mirroring that of a given sentence of a natural language and spend a lot of effort figuring out what these structures are, on the assumption that the semantics of natural language has to be compositional, in virtue of arguments from ontology or from methodological or other practical necessity. Others assume that a proposition is what we grasp in thoughts and open up their pursuit to the possibility that it is a concept with properties yet to be specified. It can very well be an unstructured concept, or a conceptual structure that reflects the human thought much better than it reflects the natural-language sentence. Yet others propose different kinds of ‘propositions’, and different kinds of ‘content’ that serve different functions. Since one normally adopts a particular theoretical stance about propositions before questions are formulated in these debates, it is now clear that asking ‘what is a proposition’ is not a good start: proposition will never become a rigid theoretical construct that serves all.

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20 I say more about these in Section 4. For a defence of structured propositions see e.g. King 2007, 2014, 2019. King’s finely-structured propositions inherit their structure from sentences (in that they are endowed with truth conditions by language users). For types of content see e.g. Perry 2001 and Korta and Perry 2011.
By the same token, neither is it useful to ask about the structure of a proposition in abstraction: it would amount to asking about the structure of different objects. Likewise, asking about the relation of a proposition to language users cannot be performed in abstraction in that different constructs, thought up to serve different theoretical purposes, can be entertained in this relation. To explain, let us consider here naturalized propositions that have been at the forefront of discussions for some time. ‘Naturalized propositions’ are propositions whose properties, such as truth-conditionality or representing situations in the world, come from their relations to the minds of human agents who entertain them. And here is where philosophers who advocate naturalized propositions come pretty close to our quest for a proposition that captures speaker’s primary meaning – quite close, but not all the way. For example, King’s (2007, 2014, 2019) naturalized propositions have truth conditions contingent on language users but the content closely dictated by the structure of the sentence. As such, they are not exactly what we need to capture the primary message that can be communicated in a variety of ways exemplified in (1) and (2). Soames’ (2014a, 2019) propositions are cognitive event types whose tokens are instances of agents’ representing things, so their relation to language users is in the core of their definition. They are ‘kicked up’, so to speak, to the level of semantic and pragmatic content: they capture information that matters in discourse. But their truth conditions are conservative: they are not sensitive to such agent-related conceptual content. So, again, they are not exactly what we need either. Schiffer’s (2003) pleonastic propositions, also naturalized, are constructed ‘out of nothing’, as he says, in virtue of the a priori characteristics of our cognition and language use. They are unstructured – for good reasons, the most important of which is the problem with delimiting the content compositionally. But, needless to say, unstructured entities would be of little use when we want to represent the structure of information carried by an utterance or discourse. They help pave the way but they serve a different set of objectives. I return to the contributions these proposals make to my search for a functional proposition in Section 4.

One has to narrow down; a proposition can be many things, depending on what one chooses to investigate: cognitive processes, natural-language sentences, intended meaning in discourse, to name a few, and, albeit not independently, what kind of relation between such a unit and what other relatum (human actions, situations, possible worlds), one wants to address. Had this choice resulted in clear disciplinary boundaries, such as, say, ‘psychologists’ proposition’, ‘linguists’ proposition’, or ‘philosophers’ proposition’, we could stop at this point and descend from the meta-level to doing the theory of meaning proper. But it has not; linguistic semantics and pragmatics afford formidable choices here and as such
demonstrate that philosophical semantics and pragmatics are as necessary as they have always been before ‘doing semantics’ or ‘doing pragmatics’ can begin.\(^{21}\) Hence my search of a proposition that would specifically serve the theory of discourse meaning.

4. Foregrounding Cognitive Content: Progressing Naturalization and Progressing Functionalism?

4.1. From Pleonastic Propositions to Conceptual Representations

The appeal of Schiffer’s (2003) pleonastic propositions is their functionalism: a proposition is not something we interact with, not something our minds grasp à la Frege. Instead, it is what cognition and linguistic communication make use of. They arise through, to quote, ‘something-from-nothing transformations’ (Schiffer 2003: 71) in that ‘that \(p\) is true’ arises out of \(p\) alone because our \(a\) priori conceptual knowledge guarantees it. Such propositions are finely-grained, and as such, for Schiffer, non-compositional (unstructured): by making them finely-grained he can account for the meaning of belief reports where a mode of presentation of the referent may make a difference to the truth value.\(^{22}\)

To explain, let us use the celebrated example in (3a) and (3b) discussed by Schiffer.

(3a) Lois believes that Superman flies.

(3b) Lois believes that Clark Kent flies.

Schiffer’s pleonastic propositions account for the cognitive processes associated with each situation, and as such offer an answer to Frege’s substitutivity problem: Superman is Clark Kent, but in our cognitive processes it matters that on some occasions an individual acts like Superman (and flies) and on others like Clark Kent (and does not fly).\(^{23}\)

This concept of a proposition is directly influenced by scepticism about compositional semantics of natural language: to simplify the argument, since we need such finely-grained and non-compositional propositions to explain cognition, it is very likely that natural-language sentences associated with beliefs also need a great measure of contextual smoothing out in any attempt to represent their meaning. In different terms again, we need a great dose of pragmatics to represent the meaning of expressions. And this, on my reading, makes

\(^{21}\) I leave further justification of philosophical pragmatics for Section 6.

\(^{22}\) For a discussion see Schiffer (2003: 84-85).

\(^{23}\) On some problems with pleonastic propositions as referents of belief reports see Steinberg 2020.
pleonastic propositions cognitive precursors of constructs that we need for our purpose. But what we are going to borrow is only their role as naturalized objects; we also need units that would capture the conceptual structure, so our propositions have to be, by definition, structured in order to serve the purpose of a compositional, pragmatics-rich theory of meaning. A non-compositional theory of meaning is, in my view, inconceivable: compositionality has to be a methodological (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1991) or ontological assumption (Szabò 2000) about human languages but it is not to be satisfied on the level of syntactic structures of natural language sentences. We simply have to look for this composition on the higher level, that of conceptual structures to which syntactic structures merely contribute. What we need are finely-grained, pragmatics-rich propositions and the degree of this pragmatic influence is dictated by the stance we choose to adopt on the desired limits of contextualism.

So, here is where the task begins. Building on the insights from cognitively-oriented and naturalistic accounts, we search for a unit that would fit conceptual representations: pragmatics-rich and at the same time compositional conceptual structure. And the first question is how ‘pragmatic’ we ought to allow this unit to be.

Let us consider (3a) and (3b) again. There is no good reason, apart from the devotion to the old-fashioned analysis of meaning and its emphasis on the logical form of the sentence, why we should not push Schiffer’s concept further. Suppose I ask the question in (4) and you reply by using (3a).

(4) Does Lois think that Superman is an ordinary human being?
(3a) Lois believes that Superman flies.

In this context, the main message is conveyed through an implicature and consists of something along the lines of (5).

(5) Lois doesn’t believe that Superman is an ordinary human being.

This brings us back to the need for a proposition that captures implicit meanings, such as our earlier (1a), (1b) or (2c), and now (5), not as a separate category from explicit content but subsumed under the same explanatory concept. It will not, however, mean adopting a stance that is irreconcilable with Schiffer’s: natural languages do indeed have at most compositional character theories, lacking compositional content theories, and a fortiori
lacking compositional semantics. But this is not to say that composition of discourse meaning on the level of conceptual structures that draw on many modes of conveying information cannot be taken as common-sense reality of human interaction. And if it is common-sense, then, surely, it would be useful to have it formally modelled. The ubiquity of situations where indirectly communicated meaning is strongly felt to be the main intended message best demonstrates the utility of this move. There is a long way to go before such a formal multi-modal theory can be constructed but, as I have indicated here, substantial inroads have been made by TCP, RT and DS on one side and, on the other, by philosophers who advocate naturalized propositions.

4.2. The New Legacy of Cognitive Propositions
Soames’ cognitive propositions have practical utility and put us on a good path towards a concept we are searching for here. To repeat, Soames (2014a: 92) opts for a proposition to which semantic and pragmatic information both contribute. Propositions are “pieces of information that are asserted or expressed”. Like Schiffer’s, his is an explicitly naturalistic account: propositions are not Platonic entities to be ‘grasped’ or ‘interpreted’. For Soames, they are contents of cognitive states, necessary for cognition, perception, and the use of language. They represent things not just as ‘things’ but as “being certain ways” (2014a: 95). What makes them representational is not some mystical quality of abstract constructs but their relations to agent’s actions: humans represent things, and hence propositions do as well. Put simply, in cognitive propositions, Superman is not Clark Kent, so to speak, because agents’ mental representations of that individual differ. For Soames, propositions are cognitive event types whose tokens are agent’s acts of representing things. They are structured and the structure is provided by agent’s mental operations. As such, they do not ‘exist’; they are, so to speak, ‘structurings’ of event types bestowed on them by human mental operations. In short, they are ‘cognitive acts’ – just like questions or directives, but unlike them, they are true or false (Soames 2019).

The question is to what extent cognitive propositions are helpful in the search for our construct that would fit the purpose of a radically contextualist theory. Since their structure is provided by the speaker’s and the hearer’s mental operations, they appear to have the correct kind of structure to serve the purpose of semantic qua cognitive representation. But

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24 In agreement with DS, I exclude cases of miscommunication, leaving them outside the concerns of a theory of meaning (and fit for the concerns of psycholinguistics).
since the units that we adopt for this semantics will have to extend to cater for messages communicated indirectly as in (3a) in response to (4), we still need an explanation of the leap from the structure of the uttered sentence to the structure of the agent’s cognitive representation. Moreover, Soames’ propositions have truth conditions that they then impose on sentences, utterances, and cognitive states. But, to repeat, the truth conditions of his cognitive propositions are not sensitive to differences in cognitive states. And that will not do.

In order to make use of Soames’ concept as our springboard, the necessary leap could be executed in two different ways.

Option 1
First, we allow for a context-driven understanding of the constituents of the uttered sentence (or sentence fragment), in agreement with the fact that discourse processing is incremental.\(^{25}\) As before, we opt for the semantics (to repeat, in our broad, pragmatics-rich sense) of conceptual structures – the meanings that are intended by the speakers and recovered by the addressees, as distinguished from the traditional semantics of natural-language sentences \textit{qua} abstract syntactic units. Next, we \textit{compose} the representation, using information coming from different sources and through different modalities, at every relevant stage of this incremental process. We then obtain a representation that can either be (a) very close to the syntactic representation of the sentence, as, say, in (1d) or (2b); (b) more remote from it due to the reanalysis of certain component expressions or adding fragments ‘top down’, that is, when they are not mandated by the logical form, as, say, in (1c); or (c) maximally remote when the reanalysis results in a very different structure altogether, as in indirect communication through strong implicatures that serve as main, primary meanings (again, ‘primary’ in the DS-theoretic, implicature-including sense) in virtue of conveying the main intended content, exemplified in (1a), (1b), (2c), and (5) – or in the case of some conceptual metaphors, idioms, and irony.

Option 2
The second solution is to hypothesize that the processing of a natural-language sentence results in a logical form as it is understood in generative grammar and the leap to the

\(^{25}\) See e. g. Kamp and Reyle 1993 and Levinson 2000 for two different ways to utilize this incremental nature of processing in a theory of meaning.
conceptual structure is a pragmatic one modelled along the traditional connection between direct and indirect speech acts in Speech Act Theory (Searle 1969, 1975) or the traditional, Grice’s (1975) understanding of a global, post-propositional process of constructing an implicature. But in view of evidence in favour of incremental processing mentioned above, we will not pursue this option. It could still be adopted as a theoretical ‘shortcut’ and might result in equally correct representations, enjoying equally strong predictive power, but it will not fulfil the criterion of psychological plausibility. Neither will it be compositional in that it has been well-acknowledged that the processing of some implicatures has to be explained on the local, pre-propositional level.26

Like Soames’ cognitive propositions, my propositions will have to be naturalized and structured. They have to combine conventionally encoded information with contextual and other situational input. Like Soames’ propositions, they have to reflect mental states of the speakers. But there are also crucial differences. First, my propositions have to be constructs made up for the purpose of a theory of discourse, so they will reflect the cognitive and linguistic activities of the communicators. Soames’ concept is both narrower and broader. It is broader in that it also accounts for perception which, like cognition, has representational content. It is also narrower because his focus on representing states of affairs, dictated by the assumption that compositionality is to be sought on the level of natural language structures, does not allow him to include ‘ways of thinking’ about these states of affairs in the truth-conditional content. In other words, his cognitive proposition does not come with cognitive truth-conditional content.

Now, in agreement with my ‘maximally’ radical contextualist assumption, the relation my propositions bear to truth conditions will be different.27 Propositions that stand for different cognitive acts can be representationally the same about the world – this is the case when, for example, the mode of presentation makes a difference to a belief and its ascription but not to the relation with the world, as in (3a) and (3b). But, unlike for Soames, for me this does not mean that two different cognitive propositions have to have the same truth conditions when they are representationally the same about the world. My propositions capture those aspects of cognitive states of the speakers that pertain to such modes of

26 See e. g. Levinson 2000 and Chierchia 2004 on the local interpretation of scalar terms and a response from Geurts 2009.

27 ‘Maximally radical’ in the sense that departures from the logical form are not limited to ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ modifications of it but can consist in overriding it entirely when the main intended message is communicated indirectly as in (1a), (1b), (2c) or (5). The concept of primary meaning in DS shows that DS is such a ‘maximally radical’ contextualist account.
presentation and, in agreement with my contextualist assumption, their truth conditions are sensitive to those aspects. In other words, such propositions will have different truth conditions.\footnote{By the same token, a report on a belief \textit{de se} and a report on a \textit{de re} belief about oneself will come with different truth conditions. A celebrated example of a relevant scenario is provided by Perry (1979): while following a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, a shopper comes to self-ascribe a property of making a mess when he realises that it is the split bag in his own trolley that causes it – a property that he had initially ascribed to a person referred to with a third-person indexical. ‘I’ substituted for ‘that guy’ makes a difference.}

This move, warranted by the assumption of compositional conceptual structures, will also allow us to depart further from the extant proposals of naturalized propositions to capture conceptual structures of main but indirectly communicated messages. To repeat: the proposal is that the direct/indirect distinction, so entrenched in the history of theories of meaning, ought to give way to the orthogonal main message/ancillary message distinction, each of them either direct or indirect. It is the uniform category of the main message that we need a new concept of a proposition for and a function-based distinction gives us just that.

4.3. \textit{Progressing Naturalization}?

Naturalistic accounts can take many forms and focus on different aspects of the naturalized concept. In the case of a ‘proposition’, they can vary for example with respect to foregrounding either the scope and the nature of the content, or the way this content is arrived at (where the solutions to the two aspects are correlated). King’s naturalized propositions, for example, are characterized by sentence-based content associated with a robust naturalization attained by throwing the ball in the court of language users:

“Once speakers are deploying sentences of their languages, they thereby are cognitively connected to the facts that I claim are propositions and are interpreting their propositional relations in such a way that the structured contents of those sentences have truth conditions. In so doing, language users endow the propositions with truth conditions.” \textbf{King} (2014: 59).

As such, King’s account appears to assign a more significant role to sentence structure than the more cognitive-act-based views discussed before, so this aspect of his delimitation of the ‘proposition’ would not make it meet the requirements of our ‘contextualism pushed to its logical limits’ preferred here. On the other hand, the feature of agents’ endowing propositions
with truth conditions is a strongly naturalistic one, also shared by the unit we are developing here.  

Now, naturalistic accounts open up a scope for redefining a proposition not merely on the basis of theoretical commitments as to what object of study a theory of meaning ought to consider in virtue of its practical utility but also, more importantly, on the basis of psychological and cognitive considerations do to with utterance processing. Nevertheless, ‘naturalized’ is an implicitly subtractive epithet. It assumes a starting point that is highly abstract and makes a positive feature out of abandoning the abstract theoretical high ground and ‘descending’ to the observation of nature and society and related processes (in this case, linguistic interaction). But since such naturalization concerns a theoretical concept, it is of a meta-philosophical concern rather than a concern about research methods: research methods are applied to an object so constructed. It is worth pointing this out in order to stress the importance of this search for a right kind of unit.

The differences between the three proposals discussed here notwithstanding, it appears that this naturalization of propositions is progressing along the axis of practical utility. On my reading, Schiffer’s focus on human conceptualization of reality, Soames’ focus on the utility of this conceptualization in cognition, perception, and the use of language, and King’s focus on how language enables the structure of cognition point in the direction of the increasing focus on the activities, the behaviour of human agents as gatherers and distributors of information. This is important. Metadiscourse about meaning in terms of Russellian propositions would obliterate the differences between human mental activity and machines displaying competence without comprehension. Propositions as theoretical aids to explain human cognition and communication, and as such human competence and comprehension, must reflect human nature. I can’t resist observing here that this is how naturalizing itself becomes naturalized.

4.4. Progressing Functionalism?
In the history of semantics, utterances with indexical terms such as (6), or with an implicit relativization to a location such as (7), have been an important testing ground on which not only the theory of meaning but also the concept of a proposition have been put to the test. Arguably, they are no less expedient as a criterion for theory adequacy than belief reports.

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29 Pickel (2020) offers some compelling arguments against King’s and Soames’ view on mapping from the structure of the sentence to a structured proposition.
While a belief report, *qua* an intensional context, clearly requires some covert addition to the semantic structure to get the meaning right (see e. g. Schiffer 1992 and examples (3a) and (3b) above), overt and covert indexicals pose a different kind of challenge: the content cannot be determined without reference to a situation of discourse.

(6) I am here now.
(7) It is snowing.

Kaplan’s (1989a) seminal content-character distinction, as well as other varieties of two-dimensional semantics\(^{30}\) well attest to this fact. And so do Austinian propositions that allow implicit reference to the situation of discourse, whereby a situation referred to completes the proposition (Barwise 1989: 273; see also Recanati 2016). These attempts testify to the quest for a theoretical construct with a more practical utility than ordinary Russellian proposition in order to talk about the content of assertion, not merely the content of a sentence. In broadly the same spirit, contextualist approaches search for a proposition that would account for the meaning of an utterance that is intended by the speaker and recovered by the addressee in the context of discourse.

To repeat, while early attempts remain within the confines of the logical form of the uttered sentence, later ones ride on the tide of radical pragmatics and allow for developments to the logical form that are not triggered by its constituents, or even for prioritising the main speech act even if it is indirectly conveyed – the position we have entertained in Section 2. As an orthogonal extension, they then opt for representing (a) the speaker’s meaning, faithful to Grice’s (1989) intention-based pragmatics; (b) what is actually communicated, and thereby the addressee’s perspective (as in RT); or (c) a default model speaker-model addressee interaction (as in DS).\(^{31}\)

I call this historical process *progressing functionalism* about propositions. It is interconnected with, but different from, the (arguably) progressing naturalization process observed in Schiffer’s, Soames’ and King’s accounts in that while, to repeat, the latter takes the proposition away from being the (Fregean) abstract object that can be ‘grasped’ and ‘interpreted’ to being a characteristic of human cognition and communication, the first takes as the starting point the Russellian structured proposition, composed of objects and

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\(^{30}\) See also Stalnaker 1978. For an introduction to two-dimensional semantics and its varieties see García-Carpintero and Macià 2006.

\(^{31}\) For a comprehensive introduction to defaults in semantics and pragmatics see Jaszczolt 2018b.
properties, and progresses by fitting into this syntactic mould aspects of meaning that go further and further beyond the logical form of the uttered sentence. Progressing naturalization and progressing functionalism are interrelated in that the more the proposition becomes a description of cognitive abilities, the more it makes sense to incorporate in its structure the multimodal information input. In other words, the end product of progressing functionalism cannot but meet with the end product of naturalization, although they get there via different routes.

This takes us to the point at which it ought to be possible to put together progressing naturalization and progressing functionalism and come up with a ‘positively eclectic’ construct of a proposition that would perform the tasks required of an explanatorily adequate and as such cognitively plausible contextualist theory of meaning.

5. Towards Functional Propositions

5.1. Co-construction of Meaning
Progressing functionalism and progressing naturalization, qua processes leading to a structured cognitive act that is to function as the suitable notion of our multimodal proposition, converge with the trend in linguistic pragmatics that foregrounds the fact that meaning is collectively constructed (or: co-constructed) in discourse. They converge because they share the aim of representing meaning in relation to all the factors that affect the content of the act of communication. Co-construction of meaning has been the object of attention of conversation analysts (e.g. Sacks 1992) and philosophers (e.g. Searle 1990) who point out that any study of meaning, both explicit and implicit, ought to account for the mutual influence of the interactants on the resulting product. In the case of Searle’s view, it also accounts for the formation of collective intentions. Both the intentions (which for Searle are the topmost explanans) and the meaning (explanandum) are collectively constructed. More recently, this emphasis on a joint construction of meaning was developed as a so-called Conjoint Co-constituting Model of Communication (Arundale 1999, 2010), focusing on the interactive production of implicatures and constitution of interlocutors’ face.32

Acknowledging this convergence of interests across the disciplines, the meaning we are interested in in the current search is neither speaker’s meaning, nor addressee’s meaning: it is interactively achieved in conversation. As Elder and Haugh (2018: 593) put it, it is a

‘joint endeavour of complex inferential work’. It is propositional but pertaining to what we called a multimodal proposition – a proposition that is a conceptual, not a linguistic, structure, a structure that describes the cognitive act of processing various inputs and putting them, normally subdoxastically, together. It is “the most salient propositional meaning that is ostensibly made operative between interlocutors” (p. 595) and as such it can be either expressed explicitly or implicated:

“…we depart from the standard Gricean distinction between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is meant’, and instead take a view on speaker meaning that is more closely related to Jaszczolt’s (2005, 2016) ‘primary meaning’ – namely, the main intended meaning of a speaker which is successfully recovered by a hearer – or Ariel’s (2002) ‘privileged interactional interpretation’, the speaker’s most relevant contribution to the discourse.”

Elder and Haugh (2018: 595-596).33

I propose that such propositions are in fact our naturalized, functional and co-constructed units. They can serve the purposes of a cognitively plausible, ‘maximally radical’34 contextualist theory of meaning. To repeat, a ‘unit’ means a cognitive act that leads to meaning construction or recovery.35

5.2. Functional Propositions

To sum up, our propositions, qua naturalized, functional and co-constructed units, are interactive and multimodal36 – they draw on information conveyed through different modalities, from qualitatively different sources and through qualitatively different processes. Processing of linguistic units, that is the processing of the lexicon and sentence structure, is only one of them; pieces of information that are represented by agents are often synthesized from many qualitatively different clues. A proposition that serves as an explanatory tool in such a theory I shall call a functional proposition. A proposition will be called ‘functional’ when it serves as a theoretical construct by means of which we can build a theory of the kind of meaning that constitutes the primary message conveyed by an utterance in discourse. As

33 See also Ariel 2016.
34 See fn 27.
35 See fn 24 on miscommunication.
36 See fn 4 on the term ‘multimodal proposition’.
such, its relation to conceptual structure is analogous to that a traditional proposition of formal semantics has to logical form.

Working with the tool of a functional proposition requires some rethinking of the compositionality of meaning and of the role of truth conditions. When functional propositions are naturalized, they are geared towards discourse interactants. As such, they include the concepts entertained by the interactants that figure in the co-constructed, intended and recovered meaning. They convey information, as well as the speaker’s (and, through co-construction, also the addressee’s) perspective on information. In this paper I assumed a commitment to ‘maximally radical’ contextualism about meaning and concluded that contextualism has to adopt such functional propositions as its units. What follows is the commitment to a truth-conditional analysis of such rich, interactants-oriented meaning, and so the adoption of the commitment to compositionality of meaning on the level of such functional propositions. The first is relatively easy: truth conditions are a tool that can be applied to analyse different kinds of content – ‘slim’ content proposed by semantic minimalists or ‘rich’ content proposed by contextualists, as discussed in Section 2 and exemplified in (1). But compositionality, when conceived of as a property meaning has on the level of conceptual rather than natural-language syntactic structure, will have to remain a methodological and ontological assumption of a theory of discourse meaning, in that it is, arguably, a necessary prerequisite of any practical, workable system of communication but not its fully understood characteristic. The question as to how the composition of meaning on the level of sentence structure is to be handled now becomes tangential to our main concern in that recalcitrant cases such as (3a) and (3b) and other intensional contexts, difficult to handle under sentential compositionality without introducing obscure elements of the logical form that stand for ‘ways of thinking about the object’, can now be handled on the level of conceptual structure, analogous to implicit primary meanings in (1a), (1b), (2c) or (5). We assume that there is a level of cognitive structure at which composition of meaning must take place and we search for a unit that would reflect this multimodal process. In short, we are interested in the level of communication at which compositionality ensues. So, compositionality is here ‘kicked up’, so to speak, to the level of multimodal, functional propositions. In other words again, this gives us a functionalist theory of meaning where the

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37 This is related to a more general distinction between wide vs. narrow content, applied to various kinds of entities. For the purpose of the theory of natural language meaning, the second, unlike the first, is mandated by the requirements of the sentence itself rather than by the context alone (see e.g. Bach 2001).
compositional content, analysed through the truth-conditional methods, is multimodal, and as such it collects information content from different domains and through different processes.

Different contextualist accounts made different kinds of in-roads into such a functionalist approach to meaning. To repeat, RT focuses on the development of the logical form of the uttered sentence to the point at which it attains the status of the representation of the expressed thought. TCP follows a similar path but instead of mapping representations onto representations, it opts for a composition of modulated components that is itself representational of what the utterance is intended to convey (see Recanati 2010: 129-136). Next, DS opts for conceptual representations where the composition process follows the path of a conceptual composition; there is no obligation to adhere to the syntactic ‘skeleton’ provided by the uttered sentence. None of the existing contextualist approaches provides the last word on such contextualist meaning. While it makes sense to assume that on a multimodal account functional proposition ought to be unrestricted by the confines of one of these modalities, and as such also by the structure of the uttered sentence, we have to remember that the object of study is a linguistic pragmatic one: we are not constructing a unit to represent information that is not conveyed through natural language expressions. Simply put, it is (2) that gives us access to (2c). Hence different theorists have different attitude to exploiting the logical form of the sentence, as the difference between RT and TCP demonstrates, or to the commitment to the logical form altogether, as the difference between RT and TCP on the one hand, and DS on the other shows.

Needless to say, a multimodal, functional proposition is open to various kinds of possible objections to do with (i) compositionality as a functional application, (ii) the assumptions about the relation between conceptual and semantic representation, and, relatedly, (iii) the charge of smuggling in a fair dose of psychologism into the theory of meaning. Let me begin with potential objection (iii).

Psychologism has now been successfully banned from logic and mathematics. In Begriffsschrift, Frege (1879) put forward a new, psychology-free conception of logic as a function/argument analysis where the reference of a predicate is a function from objects to truth values. Subjective mental representations and subjective thoughts gave way to theoretical constructs. As he says, “[t]here must be a sharp separation of the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective” (Frege 1884: 90): of concepts and objects on the one hand, and ideas on the other. In Grundgesetze der Arithmetik, Frege (1893: 202) refers to a ‘corrupting intrusion’ of psychology into logic. He repeats that “being true is quite different from being held as true” (p. 202). In Logic (Frege 1897/1969: 250), he postulates
that logic be “concerned with the laws of truth, not with the laws of holding something to be true”.

It is, however, unlikely that a successful ban of psychologism from a theory of natural-language meaning could proceed along similar lines.\footnote{Moderate psychologism for natural language semantics is defended in Jaszczolt 2008.} Even minimal semantics discussed in Section 2 allows psychological considerations embodied in the processing of meaning to contribute to the proposition: disambiguation, for example, is a matter of selecting the relevant intended meaning. Next, contextualist theory assumed here allows for a much greater dose of pragmatic input in that the pragmatic contributions do not have to be syntactically mandated. As such, it is substantially intention-and-inference driven. But, at the same time, one can argue that psychologism is not any more unrestrained than in the case of minimalist views. Just as the objective of minimalist semantics is to provide a theory of meaning associated with a language system in abstraction, so the objective of contextualist, pragmatics-rich semantics is to provide a theory of meaning as intended by the speaker and recovered by the addressee, and partly co-constructed in the process – a theory, not a \textit{description}, and as such normative and enjoying considerable predictive power. Psychologism is here a naturally constrained and healthy trait rather than a ‘corrupting intrusion’ and as such is not a weakness of a functional proposition.

Objection (ii) embodies the ongoing debate between those for whom semantic representation ought to be independent from the conceptual structure and those who unify the two. On the first construal, contextualist theory of meaning is not contextualist semantics in that contextualist semantics would obliterate a clear-cut distinction that is assumed: once we start adding to the representation concepts that are not ‘authorized’ by the syntax or the lexicon, we move on a slippery slope towards a conceptual representation, no matter how ‘objective’ we assume our concepts to be (and definitions of concepts are indeed ample to choose from). We are then left with semantic representation as conceptual representation. Although I opted for this unified construal, for the purpose of my present argument we can leave the question of choice out: depending on one’s objectives and interests, one can adhere to minimalist semantics using the standard, ‘docile’ proposition\footnote{See Section 2.} when addressing the questions about the language system, and also engage in a contextualist pursuit of discourse meaning using the functional proposition when interested in natural language communication. There is no clash, just as I can play a solo on the violin in the morning and
play the same violin in an orchestra in the afternoon, co-constructing the experience. After all, investigations into the properties of the linguistic system and investigations into the properties of multimodal communication call for different theoretical constructs.

Objection (i) was partly addressed in Sections 3 and 4. To repeat, on my understanding of what a theory of meaning is, it is inconceivable that it could be non-compositional: compositionality is a necessary methodological assumption about a theory of meaning and an ontological assumption about human languages – the latter, possibly, inherited from the compositional structure of events via supervenience. And as such, compositionality pertains to a functional application by assumption, but in virtue of my answers to (iii) and (ii), it applies on the level of the conceptual structure – that of composing a multimodal, functional proposition that captures the multimodal way of obtaining information. Exactly how bits and aspects of information can be attributed to different modalities is still an open question and nowhere is this more evident than in the discussion of the boundary between the lexical and pragmatically inferred content. The more information we pack into lexical items, the more restricted pragmatic inference can be (Del Pinal 2018). But the more information we pack into the lexicon, the more likely it is that we will have to depart from the definition of word meaning as concept; rather, we will have to adopt a multidimensional view on the level of lexical content itself – perhaps along the lines of Rayo’s (2013) ‘grab bag localism’ where there is no linguistic meaning as such but instead the agent has access to a set of possibilities delimited by the relevant context. Time will tell – research on the lexicon/pragmatics interface is progressing fast.

Another potential objection is that there may seem to be a whiff of circularity in setting my task as a search for a proposition when a scope of my theory of meaning is assumed in advance. In other words, one can raise the objection that a contextualist theory of meaning that caters for multimodal communication requires propositions that by a definitional extension collect input from different sources and processes. That is indeed true but this does not make the enterprise circular. It merely defines the search as a search for a construct that best serves this particular purpose and as such for laying down its characteristics. The journey through progressing naturalization, progressing functionalism, and the combination with co-construction of meaning allowed us to characterize such a construct.

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40 Understood, put simply, as inheritance in virtue of definitional characteristics.

As I have indicated in Section 3, since the boundary between the meta-level and the object-level, the metaphysical and the semantic/pragmatic, is not set in stone, the concept of the proposition is not set in stone either and will have to fit the kind of theory of meaning that is adopted. Hence I focused my discussion on the search for a theoretical construct that would do the best job for representing discourse meaning. And I assumed, and justified, in Sections 2 and 4.1, that such a theory ought to adopt a ‘maximally radical’ contextualist approach to the truth-conditional content in order to represent the core contribution to discourse, intended, co-constructed and recovered by the interactants.

Let me return briefly to the metaphysical vs. semantic/pragmatic distinction. What constitutes (a) the basis for claims about meaning and (b) the explanation of what meaning is can be disputable. For Kaplan (1989b: 573), “[t]he fact that a word or phrase has a certain meaning clearly belongs to semantics. On the other hand, a claim about the basis for ascribing a certain meaning to a word or phrase does not belong to semantics.” As he says (p. 574), it belongs to metasemantics or foundational semantics. Now, as Soames (2014c: vii) points out in the Preface to Metasemantics: New Essays on the Foundations of Meaning (Burgess and Sherman 2014b), the importance of metasemantics has to be attributed to the fluid, or we can say pre-paradigmatic, state of semantic theory. Epistemology and philosophical logic are of limited help in that the suitable concept of a proposition has not yet been developed. 41 Soames’ cognitive proposition and other more, or less, naturalized conceptions of a proposition discussed in this paper push this search forward.

Metasemantics so conceived appears to be layered. If metasemantics is to address the question of how to ground a semantic fact, then we have to go one level higher in order to establish the possibilities as to what is to count as a semantic fact and, arguably a fortiori, what is to count as an appropriate proposition. 42 I have not addressed here the metaphysical question as to what counts as a semantic fact; we have assumed, to repeat, a strongly contextualist stance and have ‘cut in’ on the level of the metaphysics of our selected, pragmatics-rich, semantic theory in order to search for a proposition that is compatible with this particular stance and is maximally serviceable in theorizing about discourse meaning. 43

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41 On the relation between semantics and philosophy see also Cappelen (2017) and Nefdt (2019).
42 See Jaszczolt, in press.
43 Burgess and Sherman (2014a: 9-10) offer a different proposal as to how to cut the metasemantic pie. First, there is (a) ‘basic metasemantics’ that maps semantic facts onto the facts by which they are grounded. Then, on the second level, there is (b1) ‘the theory of meaning’ and (b2) ‘the metaphysics of semantic values’. The theory
Next, metaphysics of meaning can be construed as belonging to metaphysics of language (and as such to philosophy of language) or, possibly, on contextualist accounts, as overlapping with it in that meaning is conveyed in discourse also through media other than linguistic expressions. The third option is to say that even the contextualist stance makes the metaphysics of meaning properly included within the philosophy of language if (i) the object of inquiry is restricted to natural language utterances in context and (ii) we adopt the view, shared by RT, TCP and DS, that the processing of utterances is a process of interpreting the constituents of the utterance in an incremental manner, plugging in other methods of communication (gestures, facial expressions) as and when they contribute to the conveyed message. Seen in this way, philosophy of language itself can adopt a scope that is compatible with (even maximally radical) contextualist assumptions. As such, it is better called *philosophical pragmatics* or, adopting a contextualist stance, *philosophical (pragmatics-rich) semantics*: it is concerned with intentions, inferences, directly communicated as well as implicated messages, and, as part of it, with metasemantics and metapragmatics.

I will finish on a terminological note. I am fully aware that the term ‘philosophical pragmatics’, like ‘metapragmatics’, is still up for grabs. The most conservative definition will derive it from philosophical logic that concerns itself with such concepts as reference, existence, quantification, truth, or modality, to name a few. Logic has its syntax and semantics, so philosophical logic subsumes philosophical semantics and, by the extension just entertained, also philosophical pragmatics. But this is not how the term is standardly used. It is used to address ‘big questions’ of the kind just mentioned but it addresses them with respect to communication (human, human-machine, or CMC) in natural language. The meaning of the term that has been implicit throughout my inquiry is that of philosophical pragmatics as a sub-part of philosophical semantics of natural language, itself a part of

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of meaning (b1) is concerned with what counts as an expression’s *standing in a meaning relation* to something. For example, meaning can be conceived of as a representation of something (mental operations, situations in the world) or as use. The metaphysics of semantic values (b2) then addresses the big questions: ‘what is meaning?’ or ‘what are propositions?’ - The first level of ‘grounding’ is the same as in my approach and it seems uncontroversial for a foundational semantics. But their two aspects of the second level seem to be ill-suited for cohabiting the same tier: expression’s standing in a meaning-relation presupposes answers to the metaphysical question as to what to adopt as the *relata* in that relation. That is, we have to ask first what kind of ‘expression’ we want a theory of: a syntactic string (however semantically ‘gappy’), its representation that is truth-conditionally analysable, an utterance, an intended thought of the speaker, meaning recovered by the addressee, the conventional, co-constructed meaning that would normally be communicated by a certain form in a certain context, and so forth. So, Burgess and Sherman’s ‘second tier’ seems to be itself multi-layered where (b1) better belongs to the level of basic metasemantics. Then, both (a), qua grounding, and (b1) presuppose the answers to (b2)-type questions.

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44 For an in-depth discussion of philosophy vis-à-vis linguistic pragmatics see Jaszczolt 2015, 2018a.
philosophy of language. Metalinguistic inquiry, then, itself layered, as argued earlier in this section, naturally belongs to philosophical (pragmatics-rich) semantics as a branch of philosophy of language.\footnote{In Jaszczolt 2018a, it is referred to as ‘pragmaticsPPL’.}

Another option, appealing to those who choose to focus on methods, would be to use the term ‘philosophical pragmatics’ to make it stand for traditional, theoretical, for example Gricean, pragmatics that uses conceptual analysis, deductive argumentation and other traditional methods of philosophical inquiry. As such, ‘philosophical pragmatics’ would be contrasted with empirical (and in it experimental, corpus- or survey-based) pragmatics and, orthogonally, with computational pragmatics (that is itself most commonly corpus-driven). It would, however, be an obvious denigration to define philosophical pragmatics as the use of ‘philosophical’ methods – and inaccurate too, in that philosophical inquiry can itself avail itself of experimental methods.

To conclude, I proposed here a new concept of a functional proposition, to serve the purpose of analysing discourse meaning. The next step will be to employ it to build truth-conditional representations that capture the interactants’ conceptual structures in the spirit of the version of the ‘maximally-radical’ contextualist assumptions defended here. Once we free the theory of meaning from the legacy of propositions that are, on the one hand, removed from human acts of communication and cognition, and, on the other, chained to one of the media of communication (the linguistic structure) rather than embracing its multimodal nature, the floodgates stand open for an entirely new, exciting outlook on meaning. Compositionality is retained as a \textit{sine qua non} prerequisite of such a theory, and truth conditions as the most useful tool researchers have developed to date. But they both operate on the multimodal meaning, represented as a conceptual structure, that is founded on the assumption of the dominant role of functionalism and as such of intentions, inferences, and co-construction of meaning in defining the object of study.

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