Semantics vs. Pragmatics

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Abstract

Semantics and pragmatics overlap in their scope as they both deal with the meaning of linguistic expressions. Since semantics can be viewed as an abstraction from pragmatics, the question of what divides them thus becomes as well a question of what the scope of semantics should be. Traditionally, three features have been suggested to define semantic content and delimit it from pragmatics: semantics content is truth-conditional, conventional, and constant. However, there are only two cases in which the three criteria line up. Literal meaning is characterized by all of them, while conversational implicatures exhibit none. We then examine all other six possible combinations of the three features. This will lead to a typology of kinds of meaning which then raises the question of which of the features seems to be best suited to draw the lines between semantics. I argue that a semantics based on conventions is both the conceptually most reasonable choice for a defining feature and the line it draws between semantics and pragmatics that converges with the practice in theoretical and empirical linguistic research.

1 Semantics and pragmatics vs. the rest

The aim of this article is to work out the differences between semantics and pragmatics. In order to do so, it is helpful begin with acknowledging what unites them. Take any general introductory text book into linguistics and chances are pretty high that you find that its structure follows the “big five”. By this, I mean the traditional major subdisciplines, which, beside semantics and pragmatics, include phonetics/phonology, morphology, and syntax; which are maybe accompanied by some additional chapters on psycho- or historical linguistics. While semantics has connections to the other three of the big five, if there is one conceptual division across the five disciplines, semantics is grouped together with pragmatics.

From a traditional Saussurean semiotic point of view, phonetics, morphology, and syntax study the form of linguistic signs – from the phone/phoneme, the morpheme and word level up to the phrasal level – while semantics and pragmatics are concerned with the meaning of those signs.
Of course, saying that semantics and pragmatics deal with “meaning” is as rough a characterization as saying that the other three deal with “form”, but it leads to the main question that this article is going to address. While it is true, that semantics interacts with phonology (e.g. in → Association with focus, → Focus in discourse, → The semantics of intonation), morphology (e.g. → …), and syntax (→ …) and even depends on them (→ compositionality), the coarse distinction between from and meaning makes it easy to distinguish semantics from all of them.¹ The question of how to delimit semantics from pragmatics is, however, not as easy to answer, as they overlap in having meaning as their general subject. Not only are there many complex issues surrounding the interaction between semantics and pragmatics (→ Literal vs. enriched meaning), it is not even clear with criteria can be chosen to categorize some aspect of meaning as semantic or pragmatic, as this article will demonstrate. Taken these two problems together, it is no surprise that question about the relation between semantics and pragmatics are still not settled. In order to get a better understanding of the problem that underly these difficulties, we will begin with some basic ideas and criteria that have been and are used to draw the boundary between semantics and pragmatics.

2 Semantics as abstraction

The tradition of the semantics-pragmatics distinction has a long history and even though the very idea of distinguishing between these two subfield is much older, its first explicit employment is commonly attributed to Morris’s foundational works on semiotics.

One may study the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable. […] [T]he study of this dimension will be called semantics. Or the subject of study may be the relation of signs to interpreters. […] [T]he study of this dimension will be named pragmatics. (Morris 1938: 6)

According to this coarse characterization, semantics, in case of linguistic sign systems, studies the expressions themselves and how they relate to the world, that is, it is concerned with references in the Fregean sense. Pragmatics, in contrast, does

¹ This does, of course, not imply that it is also an easy question whether a particular linguistic phenomenon, like, say, restrictions against certain readings of a syntactic configuration, are better analyzed and explained in semantic or non-semantic terms.
take the speaker into account and how they use those expressions. That is, pragmatics deals with concrete utterance tokens made by speakers in concrete discourse situations which are located in time and space, while semantics abstracts away from those concrete contextual factors and studies the decontextualized expression types that underly those utterances. In this sense, the relation between semantics and pragmatics parallels the broader distinction between competence and performance (Chomsky) or langue and parole (Saussure).

Furthermore, this view can be understood as treating semantics as being an abstraction of pragmatics; an abstraction insofar as it abstracts away from the specific aspects of concrete utterance situation. This is intuition explicitly expressed in Carnap take on the distinction between semantics and pragmatics (Recanati 2004b: § 2)

If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or, to put it in more general terms, to the user of a language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics. […] If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics. (Carnap 1942: 9)

One way to mold this take on semantics as an abstraction into a distinction between the objects being study, is to say that while pragmatics deals with real utterances, semantics studies the abstract sentences, or more generally, the expression simpliciter. The question of how this abstraction approach can be spelled out in detail leads to some equally fundamental questions for the semantic enterprise. As we will see, the above characterization can be detailed in various ways and how exactly one draws the border between semantics and pragmatics leads to different conceptions of semantics: If semantics is an abstraction of pragmatics, what you think you have to take away will have consequences for what has to be regarded as semantic. That is, the search for a proper definition of the semantics-pragmatics distinction is also a search for a proper definition and semantics (and, in turn, pragmatics). Therefore, in order to approach the broader question about the semantics-pragmatics distinction, we will start, so to speak, from below and ask ourselves what the scope of semantics should be and how it should be delimited. Investigating which criteria can be used to characterize an aspect of meaning as semantic has not only consequences for what kinds of linguistic meaning fall on the semantic side, but will also tell us something about the other side of the equation, namely what pragmatics is. Another important outcome of such an investigation is that the different ways in which we can define the scope of semantics may give rise to different formal and empirical tools used to investigate semantic aspects of linguistic expressions.
3 Three criteria for semantics and the CCT view

The basic characterization of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics as given above is broad enough that it has not lost any of its intuitive appeal. However, if we study the consequences of this definition in more detail, we will see that it leads to some points in which we have to prioritize some aspects over others, which will lead to non-equal conceptions of semantics and thereby of the semantics-pragmatics distinction. So, let us step back a little bit and ask to what criteria for the semantics the general definition of semantics as an abstraction of pragmatics leads.

If semantics studies the linguistic expressions themselves and abstracts from the speaker and the utterance context, then the meaning studied by semantics cannot be determined by the intentions of the speaker and/or the contextual circumstances. That is, the only meaning aspect that falls under the scope of semantics is the literal meaning of an expression, by which I mean the meaning that an expression has by linguistic, semantic conventions, irrespective of any actual use of the expression. That is, even if nobody uttered or will utter the sentence in (2), semantics nevertheless can study its meaning that it has in virtue of the conventions that govern the meaning of its parts and the meaning of the way they put together (→ Compositionality).

(2) A police officer on her blue hippopotamus chased a red haired man who has been suspected by the Icelandic Intelligence to have stolen Rothko’s No. 14 in order to trade it for twenty seven bananas and a rare book on the evolution of whales at an underground book store on the Reeperbahn in Hamburg.

Whereas semantics studies the literal meaning of an expression, the subject of pragmatics is what and how speakers communicate by using that expression. In other words, semantics is more tied to the conventional aspects of linguistics meaning as encoded in the lexicon, while pragmatics deals with the conversational aspects of speaker meaning in concrete discourse contexts. The difference between conventional and conversational meaning is illustrated clearly by irony.

(3) Brett is so smart!

By the conventions of English, (3) expresses an evaluation of Brett as being smart. However, when uttered when Brett just realized that he forgot his keys and hence cannot get back into his apartment, an utterance of (3) can conversationally convey the contrary.

This last aspect also points us towards the next criterion to distinguish semantics from pragmatics. If semantics is based on an abstraction of pragmatics that forgoes with all aspects of the concrete utterance context, one may also draw the conclusion that pragmatics studies those aspects of meaning that are context dependent, whereas semantics is confined with what could be called constant, that is, context independent.
meaning. The non-ironic reading of (3) is independent of the utterance context. In fact it is the reading that is always accessible, even if we do not know anything about the utterance context whatsoever. That we still can grasp that meaning is because we can employ our knowledge of the conventional meaning of the words and structure used. In contrast, the ironic reading of (3) highly depends on the particularities of the utterance context.

Besides these two criteria, there is the traditional criterion of truth-conditionality. This is the core of truth-conditional semantics in the Fregean tradition, which constitutes a paradigmatic case of a systematic answer to the question of what the scope of semantics is. According to this view, semantics concerns those aspects of meaning that are truth-conditional, which means that they are relevant for determining the truth-conditions of a sentence. Given this conception of semantics, we immediately have a procedure to test whether two expressions semantically differ in meaning or not. If an expression is substituted by another one while leaving the rest of the sentence as it was and the truth-conditions of the sentence change, the two expressions differ in semantic meaning. If, one the other hand, the truth-conditions remain the same, their semantic meaning must also be the same. Applying this procedure shows, for instance, that cat and turtle differ in meaning because substituting one for the other changes the truth-condition of the overall sentence. (4a) may well be true while (4b) is false and vice versa.

(4) a. A turtle sleeps under the couch.
   b. A cat sleeps under the couch.

In the same vein, this test establishes that couch and sofa have the same meaning because two sentences that differ only with respect to these two words will always have the same truth-conditions. There are no situations in which (5a) is true while (5b) is false or vice versa. Either both are true or both are false.

(5) a. The cat sleeps under the couch.
   b. The cat sleeps under the sofa.

Expressions like couch and sofa can be exchanged without changing the truth-condi-

2 An important exception are of course quotational contexts as in the following examples.

(i) a. “Couch” consists of five letters. (true)
   b. “Sofa” consists of five letters. (false)

However, even if it is still up to dispute how exactly the contribution of quotation marks has to be understood (cf. e.g. the collections by de Brabanter (2005) or Brendel, Meibauer & Steinbach (2007, 2011) for overviews and discussions), it is clear that the quoted words in the following two examples do not have their ordinary meaning and therefore constitute no real problem for treating couch and sofa as truth-conditionally equivalent.
tions of the sentence in which they occur. They are truth-conditionally equivalent.

According to the criterion of truth-conditionality, pragmatics deals with all kinds of non-truth-conditional meaning, that is, aspects of meaning that cannot be accounted for by their contribution to the truth-conditions of a sentence. This definition of pragmatics is most famously captured in the so-called Gazdar-formula (Gazdar 1979: 2).

(6) \[ \text{pragmatics} = \text{meaning} - \text{truth conditions} \]

In analogy to this conception of pragmatics, we can formulate parallel definitions of pragmatics that are based on the other two criteria as well. According to the first criterion, pragmatics deals with the conversational, that is, non-conventional aspects of meaning.

(7) \[ \text{pragmatics} = \text{meaning} - \text{conventions} \]

According to the second criterion, which I would like to call constancy, pragmatics deals with the context-dependent, that is, non-constant aspects of meaning.

(8) \[ \text{pragmatics} = \text{meaning} - \text{constancy} \]

Note that in all three formulas, pragmatics is entirely defined negatively as that what remains if we abstract away from the semantic parts of the overall meaning of an utterance. That is, what one understands as a pragmatic phenomenon depends on one’s ideas of the scope of semantics.

Taking the three criteria together gives us a good first shot at a conception of semantics and thereby of pragmatics. The intuitive, though naïve, idea is that conventionality, constancy, and truth-conditionality go hand-in-hand and, taken together, can be used as a means to distinguish semantics and pragmatics. That is, we get the following formula.

(9) \[ \text{pragmatics} = \text{meaning} - (\text{conventions} + \text{constancy} + \text{truth conditions}) \]

According to this, semantics concerns the conventional, constant, and truth-conditional content. I call the view on semantics expressed by (9) the CCT conception. From this conception, we get a pragmatics that deals with conversational, context dependent, non-truth-conditional meaning. This is summarized in Tab. 1 on the facing page.
Table 1: Semantics vs. pragmatics: the CCT view

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantics</th>
<th>Pragmatics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>conventional</td>
<td>conversational</td>
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<tr>
<td>constant</td>
<td>context dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth-conditional</td>
<td>non-truth-conditional</td>
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However, as we will see in the following section, the CCT conception of the division of labor between semantics and pragmatics can only be a rule of thumb, since it holds only for two clear-cut cases in which all three criteria line up perfectly. But there kinds of meaning for which the three criteria deliver different results, which questions the viability of the simple CCT conception.

4 Kinds of meaning

The CCT conception of the semantics-pragmatics distinction is based on three (binary) features. Taking the null-hypothesis that every combination of valuations is possible, we get $2^3 = 8$ possible kinds of meaning based on the three features. In the following, we will discuss one phenomenon per feature combination. This will not only help us to arrive at a typology of kinds of mind, but will also help us to decide which of the three criteria seems to be the most useful to define the scope of what semantics should deal with. We will begin with the two clear cut cases and then work through the remaining six combinations.

4.1 Literal meaning

That kind of meaning that falls under the scope under semantics according to the CCT conception may be called literal meaning. Literal meaning designates the constant, conventional, and truth-conditional aspects of meaning.

Let us consider, as an example, the word *turtle*. Its (literal) meaning is determined by the conventions of English. Being a linguistic sign, the particular combination of its form – a combination of phonemes (or graphemes) – and content is arbitrary, and hence only knowledge of the linguistic convention enables one to get from its form to its meaning. The meaning of *turtle* is also constant: *turtle* (in English) refers to turtles irrespective by whom or when it is used. And of course, it is also truth-conditionally relevant, as the truth of a sentence like (4a) on page 5 depends on a turtle sleeping under the couch. That is, literal meaning is clearly classified as being semantic, even under the strict CCT conception of semantics.

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3 All this, of course, does not rule out a non-literal use of *turtle*, as in *Leo is such a turtle!* As we
4.2 Conversational implicatures

The prototypical pragmatic kind of meaning is constituted by conversational implicatures. This notion, developed by Grice (1975) in his famous essay Logic and conversations, are conversational inferences on the basis of the literal meaning of the sentence, both knowledge of the utterance context and general world knowledge, as well as what Grice called the cooperative principle and the conversational maxims (see Horn 2004; Meibauer 2006 for overview articles).

Since I have already discussed an example of irony in (3) on page 4 above, let us add Grice’s (1975) examples for metaphors.

(10) You are the cream in my coffee.

Semantically, (10) says something absurd and obviously false, namely that the addressee is, literally, the cream in the speaker’s coffee. That is the conventional meaning of (10). By pragmatic inference, however, it can convey something conversationally quite reasonable. Depending on the speaker’s coffee preferences, (10) can implicate that the addressee is important to the speaker or that the addresses spoils the fun for the speaker. In case of the ironic use of (3), what the sentence semantically expresses contradicts what the speaker conversationally intends to convey, namely that Brett is actually not smart at all. Irony and metaphors are rather extreme cases as the literal semantic content is pragmatically not conveyed at all but completely substituted for by the conversational meaning. Such implicature that, so to speak, throw away literal meaning once the implicature is calculated, are known under the name "substractive implicatures" Levinson (2000: 406, note 59) or, as Grice, in unpublished manuscripts, called them, “disimplicatures” (Chapman 2005: 134).

However, we do not have to revert to such cases, as conversationally implicatures come also in more mundane variants, where the conversationally implicated meaning adds to the conventionally encoded meaning, instead of overwriting it. Consider for instance the following example.

saw, such a metaphorical use clearly falls into the real of pragmatics; it is conversational, context-dependent, and non-truth-conditional.
If one follows Grice’s (1975) analysis of *and,* (11) semantically expresses just the conjunction of two propositions, without conventionally encoding a relation between them. Depending on the “purpose or direction of the talk exchange” (Grice 1975: 45), (11) may mean exactly that, even on the conversational level. This is the case the following dialog.

(12) A: My son never had any accidents. What’s about yours?
    B: Eric had a bike accident and he broke his arm.

However, in a different context, the speaker of (11) may well intend to convey that the two propositions are indeed connected by a temporal-causal relationship.

(13) A: I haven’t seen your son at the tennis court for some time.
    B: Eric had a bike accident and he broke his arm.

That is, whether a possible additional relation between the two conjuncts is conveyed conversationally, depends on the utterance context. In (12), no implicature to a causal relationship is triggered, whereas in (13), the context supports such a conversational inference. The same is true for (10) and (3). That is, conversational implicatures do not only extend beyond the conventional meaning of a sentence, but also transcend its constant meaning. That is, according to the first two features, implicatures fall on the pragmatic side of the divide.

As it turns out, conversational implicatures are not part of the truth-conditional content of the sentence either. For instance, the special rhetoric power of metaphors (10) and, even more so, irony (3) are based precisely on the fact that the speaker says something that is obviously false. According to Grice (1975: 52), such implicatures are triggered by a volitional “flouting” of the maxim of quality. But also the additional relationship that can be conveyed by *and* is not part of the sentence’s truth-conditional content either. This can be shown by the fact that this aspect is cancelable without leading to contradictions – one of Grice’s main properties of conversational implicatures. This can happen in a variety of ways.

(14) a. Eric had a bike accident and he broke his arm, but strangely enough, the later happened a day after the accident when he slipped on a banana.
    b. Eric had a bike accident and he broke his arm. So that’s already two accidents this year.

That is, all three criteria converge in case of conversational implicatures and diagnose them as a pragmatic aspect of meaning.

Having discussed the two clear-cut cases of literal meaning and conversational implicatures, I’ll now turn to cases that, under the lens of CCT, fall between seman-
tics and pragmatics and that will force us to weight the three features differently when we want to come up with a heuristics to distinguish between semantics and pragmatics.

### 4.3 Indexicals

The first corner case for which the three criteria do not line up is provided by indexicals (→ *indexicality*). Expressions like the second person pronoun you or adverbs like here and now are maybe the most obvious cases of expressions whose meaning cannot be given without any reference to their actual use in a concrete utterance situation. That is, their meaning depends on the properties of the context in which they are uttered and hence their meaning is not constant. According to the criterion of constancy (8), they therefore are a case for pragmatics. And indeed, due to its context dependency, indexicals or deixis is often understood as a textbook phenomenon of pragmatics.\footnote{This holds also in the literal sense. See the textbooks Levinson 1983; Meibauer 2001. And even in the *The Handbook of Pragmatics* (Horn & Ward 2004), one of the first chapters deals with deixis (Levinson 2004). Interestingly, Montague, who provides a semantic analysis of indexical expressions, titles his paper *Pragmatics* (Montague 1968).} However, even though indexicals are without a doubt context-dependent, it is also obvious that the context dependency of an indexical like you is linguistically triggered. It is part of our linguistic knowledge of the lexical meaning of the second person pronoun that it refers to the addressee of the utterance context. If one uses you to refer to, say, the speaker or a cat (that one is not addressing), then one does not merely commit a conversational infelicity, like one does if one asserts that some of the cats are gray, while one knows that all of the cats are gray. Instead, one makes a linguistic mistake based on incorrect assumptions about the conventional meaning of the second person pronoun. That is, according to the conventionality criterion (7), the meaning of indexicals falls under the scope of semantics, even if they are context dependent.

That is, regarding the combination of the first two properties, indexicals show that the three criteria do not always pull into the same direction: one C goes one way, the other C goes the other. Indexicals also reveal that constancy does also not line up with truth-conditionality. Even if the meaning of the indexical you depends...
on the utterance context, it clearly makes a contribution to the truth-conditions of an utterance. Consider the following example.

(*15*) [Addressing Paul:] You are a linguist.

It is clear that the meaning that *you* has in the context of (*15*), namely the addressee Paul, is part of the utterance’s truth-conditions.

(*16*) When said to Paul, “You are a linguist” is true iff Paul is a linguist.

For indexicals, the three criteria hence deliver unclear results, that is, they cannot be unambiguously classified by the CCT conception. Their context dependent meaning gives them a pragmatic character. However, regarding both conventionality and truth-conditionality, there are clearly on the semantic side. In Tab. 8, I have filled out the Tab. 1 for indexicals, by check-marking to which side they belong according to which feature.

However, given that two of the three criteria speak for the semantics and in view of the rule-based nature of indexicals, it is therefore no wonder that indexicals have an established place in semantic theory, at least since Kaplan’s seminal work on how to provide a formal logic for context dependency (*Kaplan* 1978, 1989; → indexicality).

### 4.4 Enrichment

As the previous section taught us, the meaning of indexicals is context-dependent, yet conventional and truth-conditionally relevant. Beside the conventionally triggered context-dependency of indexical content, there are also context-dependent aspects of meaning that are rather conversationally established, while still arguably contributing to an utterance’s truth-conditions, in contrast to conversational implicatures. Consider, for instance, the following assortment of examples, taken from *Carston* (2002: 22)

(*17*) a. Paracetamol is better.  
   [than what?]

b. That is the same.  
   [as what?]

c. He’s too young.  
   [for what?]
In all these examples, there is some constituent “missing” that is needed in order for the sentence to express a complete proposition. Even if not all authors agree on this (Borg 2004; Cappelen & Lepore 2004), some completion process is therefore needed that fills-in the missing parts in order to arrive at a complete proposition. These processes are mostly agreed upon to be pragmatic in nature since they are not governed by linguistic rules like indexicals are, but rather are driven conversational principle like salience, plausibility, or relevance. For cases like (17), one can still maintain that the pragmatic search for enrichment constituents is at least linguistically triggered, since there actually is linguistic material missing (at least, that is a prevailing intuition). Therefore, those cases of pragmatic enrichment, called saturation or completion, are considered to be bottom-up processes. However, despite being triggered linguistically, there is still no convention that helps us to fill in the missing piece in, say, (17c). 

The crucial point about pragmatic enrichment for our discussion, however, is that the missing material, once it is supplied, is intuitively truth-conditionally relevant. It obviously makes a difference in truth-conditions, if (17c) is enriched as in (18a) or as in (18b).

\[(18)\]
\[
a. \text{He's too young [to drink alcohol].} \\
b. \text{He's too young [to ride the roller coaster].} \\
\]

It is pretty save to assume that, when referring to a 14-years old boy in Germany, the expanded reading in (18a) is true, while the one in (18b) is false.

I contrast to these bottom-up processes, it does not always have to be the case that such pragmatic processes are triggered linguistically by the fact that the linguistic material does not yet express a full proposition. For instance, Bach (1994: 134ff.) discusses the examples in (19), which he calls processes of expansion instead of the completion processes in (17) (other terms used are narrowing and modulation; cf. Recanati 2004a).

\[(19)\]
\[
a. \text{I have eaten breakfast. [today]} \\
b. \text{You're not going to die. [from this cut]} \\
c. \text{I have nothing to wear. [appropriate for the wedding]} \\
\]

In contrast to the examples in (17), these sentences (seem to) express full propositions. However, it seems as if these propositions are not (always) the ones that are relevant for determining the truth of an utterance. For instance, a speaker of (19a) usually does not make the claim the she has not eaten breakfast ever before. What is relevant for its the truth, so the argument goes, is that she has not eaten breakfast at the day of the utterance. That is, the truth-conditions are determined by an expanded proposition, the specifics of which depend on the utterance context, our knowledge of it, and our knowledge of the world. Consider, for instance, the
Table 5: Between semantics and pragmatics: enrichment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Semantics</th>
<th>Pragmatics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>constant</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conventional</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>truth-conditional</td>
<td>✓</td>
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contrast between (19a) and the following variant.

(20) I have eaten caviar. [before]

Due to our knowledge of the context and the speaker, this sentence will most likely be interpreted as being expanded by *before*, which is logically equivalent to the non-expanded version (Bach 1994: 134). But in a different conversational context, it may as well be expanded in the way as (19a). Enrichment as in (19) hence are considered to be top-down processes, that are triggered by conversational factors.

There are different labels for the phenomena just discussed. In neo-Gricean pragmatics, it is called *pragmatic intrusion* (Levinson 2000), in relevance theory is named *explicature* (Carston 2002), and Bach (1994) uses the term *impliciture*. These technical terms are not synonymous and depend on the overall architecture of the semantics-pragmatics interface of the various theories. However, the phenomena that are studied under the different labels all contribute the same point to the present discussion. There are pragmatic processes – let me use *pragmatic enrichment* as a neutral term – that are driven by conversational principles and not based on linguistic conventions, but nevertheless contribute to the truth conditions of a sentence. As the discussion of (19a) has shown, the conversational nature of pragmatic enrichment makes it dependent on the utterance context, and hence a non-constant phenomenon. Tab. 5 shows how the three features are distributed for these cases.

Before we proceed to the next kind of meaning as constitute by the three features, let me note that in contrast to indexicals, the nature of pragmatic enrichment and how to locate it theoretically is still up to dispute. For instance, there have been attempts – most famously championed by Stanley (Stanley 2000; Stanley & Gendler Szabo 2000: e.g.) – to trace back all enrichment processes to covert material and thereby reducing it to indexicality. However, the major difference still is that there is no clear conventional rule for how to enrich the utterance in question (→ *Literal vs. enriched meaning*).

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5 For a detailed comparison between the various theories behind these labels, there is still no better place Recanati 2004a. For more concise overviews, see Elbourne’s article on → *Literal vs. enriched meaning* in this companion or Gutzmann (2010), for a quick run through Recanati’s classification in German.
4.5 Expressives

Indexicals showed that constancy as a criterion for semantics does not provide it with the same scope as conventions and truth-conditions do, while the phenomenon of pragmatic enrichment that I just discussed showed a similar discrepancy for truth-conditionality versus the other two criteria. What is about conventionality? Are there cases it gives a different classification than both truth-conditional impact and constancy give?

There are indeed kinds of meaning for which they get into conflict as well. Recall from the discussion of (4) and (5) that two expressions have the same truth-conditional content if they can be substituted \textit{salva veritate}, that is, without changing the sentence’s truth value. This leads to the conclusion that \textit{turtle} and \textit{cat} do not have the same truth-conditional meaning. In contrast, using \textit{sofa} over \textit{coach} does not alter the truth-conditions of a sentence and therefore they have the same truth-conditional meaning. Such pairs of expressions are called \textit{propositional synonyms} by Cruse (2004: 155). Furthermore, switching between \textit{couch} and \textit{sofa} does not only leave the truth-conditions of a sentence untouched, they can also be substitute for one other in in every context without affecting the felicity of the utterance. They are considered to be \textit{absolute synonyms} (Cruse 2004: 154). Due to economic tendencies in natural language (→ \textit{semantic change}) pairs of absolute synonyms, however, have a tendency to diverge in meaning over time and hence absolute synonymy is relatively rare in natural language. Cases of expressions that are propositionally synonymous but are not absolute synonyms are much more frequent. This encompasses, for instant, expressions that have the same truth-conditional content, but differ with respect to their register. Consider the following three examples, taken from Cruse (2004: 156).

\begin{enumerate}
\item This was the first time they had \textbf{had intercourse}.
\item This was the first time they had \textbf{made love}.
\item This was the first time they had \textbf{fucked}.
\end{enumerate}

The first sentence is the most formal variant, while the second is relatively neutral, and the third one the most informal and expressive way of saying the same thing.\footnote{As noted by Geurts & Maier (2003: 114), “[t]here may be speakers of English for whom ‘fuck’ is truth-conditionally distinct from ‘have intercourse’ and ‘make love’”. For these speakers, the examples in (21) are not stylistic variants and propositional synonyms, but expressions for different events.}

However, besides instances of non-absolute propositional synonyms that belong to different registers, there are also cases of propositional synonyms that are not absolute synonyms due to differences that go beyond mere stylistic variants. Consider, for instance, the following minimal pair, involving a neutral expression and its expressive or “colored” counterpart (Frege 1897/1979: 140).
(22)  a. This cur howled the whole night.
    b. This dog howled the whole night.

The difference between these two sentences is not merely a matter of register. Instead, (22a) expresses a negative speaker attitude towards the dog, which is absent from (22b). That is, while both sentences are true in the same situations, namely if the dog in question howled the whole night, and therefore are truth-conditionally equivalent, one cannot substitute cur for dog in all contexts without leading to infelicity. What is crucial for the present discussion is that, in contrast to the purely stylistic infelicity of uttering fuck in a formal context, the infelicity that may be caused by using cur instead of dog is directly tied to the lexical content of the expression itself. It is part of the lexical meaning of cur to expresses a negative speaker attitude. The attitude is part of the conventional meaning of cur. This is different from merely belonging to a different register. That to have intercourse belongs to a rather formal register is not part its meaning, just like it is not part of the meaning of Feudel that it is a Northern German expression for mop. Moreover, when used in the appropriate formal context, a formal-register expressive like that does not convey anything above its literal meaning. In contrast, a colored expression like cur will always convey the negative attitude, even if it is used in the “right” register or context. It is ingrained in its lexical content.

These consideration should already establish that there is a conceptual difference between the register-induced non-total propositional synonymy in (21) and those like (22). However, even stronger evidence is provided by expressive adjectives. Consider the following example, which, for the present purposes, could be regarded as synonymous to (22a).

(23)  This damn dog howled the whole night.

Like (22a), an utterance of (23) expresses a negative attitude towards the dog in question. However, here an explanation with respect to different registers cannot even be considered in the fit place, because it is obviously the expressive adjective damn that contributes the attitude to the overall meaning of the sentence (expressives). According to the criterion of conventionality, the meaning conveyed by damn therefore should fall under the scope of semantics. But under the truth-conditional picture, its meaning is pragmatic, as it does not contribute to the truth-conditional of (23).

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7 This can be illustrated by the following consideration. It is entirely possible for a speaker of Northern German to have full linguistic knowledge of the meaning of Feudel – one knows what the expression refers to and what features distinguish those referent from other similar tools like brooms – while being ignorant that it only belongs to northern German dialects, instead of being an expression in Standard German as well. When such a speaker visits southern Germany and keeps using Feudel for mops, she may be said so make a pragmatic or socio-linguistic error, but certainly, it would not be a lexical semantic mistake.
Table 6: Between semantics and pragmatics 3: expressive adjectives

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<th>Semantics</th>
<th>Pragmatics</th>
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<td>constant</td>
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<tr>
<td>conventional</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>truth-conditional</td>
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Therefore, expressive adjectives like *damn* or colored expressions like *cur* constitute cases in which conventions and truth-conditions as criteria for categorization provide different results. This already was the case for pragmatic enrichment, where it was the other way round.

What is about constancy? Note that I have characterized the negative attitude expressed by *cur* or *damn* as a *speaker* attitude. That is, the negative evaluation is made by the speaker of the utterance – speaker orientation is one of the prototypical properties of expressives (Potts 2007) – and therefore they contain an indexical element. Therefore, expressives are also context-dependent as the full content that they display can only be specified with respects to the utterance context. That is, in this case, we constancy and truth-conditions are pulling into the pragmatic direction, while the conventionality of the expressive content speaks for a classification as semantic content. That is, we arrive at the picture given in Tab. 6 for the categorization of expressive adjectives.

### 4.6 Conventional implicatures and utterance-modifiers

As we just saw, expressive like *cur* or *damn* conventionally convey a non-truth-conditional kind of meaning that resembles indexicals insofar as they include context-dependent reference to the speaker. However, it should not be too hard to find a context-independent pendant to expressives that likewise contribute conventional, yet non-truth-conditional meaning. And indeed such aspects of meaning can be found. I will discuss two different phenomena that arguably fall under this feature combination.

Let us start with sentential connectives like *but*, which famously have been analyzed by Grice (1975) as conveying *conventional implicatures*. Like their conversational cousins, Gricean conventional implicatures convey content that does not affect the truth-conditions of an utterance. In contrast, they are conventionally associated with specific linguistic items (or construction) and do arguably not depend on the utterance context. For instance, consider the following example.

(24) Nika is smart, **but** funny.

Truth-conditionally – so the Grician analysis – *but* is equivalent to simple sentential
conjunction. That is, (24) is true if Nika is smart \textit{and} funny. However, the use of \textit{but} over the simple \textit{and} conventionally implicates that usually, if someone is smart, one is not funny. This contrast is conveyed in a constant manner.\footnote{Of course, on what the contrast is based must be inferred on a contextual basis. That there is some opposition between the two conjuncts, however, is constant.}

It shall be noted that this analysis of \textit{but} has been subject to some dispute. For instance, Bach (1999) disputes the very existence of conventional implicatures and argues that \textit{but} simple conveys a secondary (truth-conditional) proposition, whereas Horn (2013) defends a non-truth-conditional treatment of \textit{but} along Gricean lines, but under the notion of $\varphi$-implicature.\footnote{$\varphi$ is for Frege, who, as Horn (2007, 2008) shows, discussed conventional implicature-like aspects of meaning way before Grice.} Also, whereas conventional implicatures received much less attention than conversational implicatures, they more recently are experiencing a late spring, due to the resurrection by Potts’s (2005) influential book \textit{the logic of conventional implicatures}. However, it shall be noted that Potts’s understanding of conventional implicatures is not completely the same as Grice’s. For instance, Potts sides with Bach (1999) in not understanding \textit{but} as being an instance of that kind of meaning. Instead, he includes expressives as the ones discussed in the previous section under this label (as well as supplements like appositives, $\rightarrow$ \textit{The semantics and pragmatics of appositives}) .

Interestingly, the other phenomenon that falls under this feature combination is also discussed by Bach (1999) in his attack on the notion of conventional implicatures. Besides connectives like \textit{but}, which he labels as \textit{alleged conventional implicature devices}, he discusses what he calls \textit{utterance modifiers}, by which he means adverbs or phrases that modify or comment on the act of uttering itself, instead of its propositional content. Of course, this is a highly diverse class witnessed by the fact that Bach gives 14 categories of utterance modifiers. Some of them are clearly context dependent or even involve indexical elements and hence are more akin the kind of meaning discussed in the previous section, but some of them arguably convey constant meaning. Consider for instance the following utterance modifiers, which Bach assigns the categories of \textit{positionals, illustratives, additives, and conclusives} respectively.

\begin{enumerate}
\item[a.] \textbf{First of all}, not all utterance modifiers are constant.
\item[b.] \textbf{For instance}, some involve indexicals.
\item[c.] \textbf{In addition}, there phrasal utterance modifiers.
\item[d.] \textbf{To conclude}, utterance modifiers are a very diverse class.
\end{enumerate}

First, these utterance modifiers do not affect the truth-conditional content of the utterance. For instance, (25a) is true if not all utterance modifiers are constant, irrespective of whether the sentence is the first item in a kind of enumeration.
addition, the use-conditional meaning expressed by first of all does not depend on the utterance context. Furthermore, what first of all expresses is conveyed by the conventional meaning of this utterance modifiers and not by means of some conversational inferences. To conclude, utterance modifiers as those in (25) fulfill the criteria we are currently searching for. This is summarized in Table 7.

Even if, as alluded to above, the term conventional implicature is in danger of being misleading, I will keep the original Gricean spirit of that notion here, mainly due to a lack of a better alternative, and summarize the two phenomena just discussed under this label.

### 4.7 Low-level implicatures

The three criteria of the CCT conception define eight kinds of meaning, six of which were discussed in the previous subsections. We are left with two kinds, both of which combine constancy with non-conventionality. Are there instances of kinds of meaning for those combination as well? It is hard to think of clear cases. The reason is that if a kind of meaning is expressed not by conventions, but conversationally in the discourse situation, it is hard to imagine how this can happen in a constant way. If the discourse situation varies, one would expect that without the glue of conventions an aspect of meaning that is conveyed just on the conversation-level may co-vary with the context. That is, while it is easy to find kinds of meaning that are context-dependent and conventional, as is the case for indexicals, there seems to be a strong implication-like connection from non-conventionality to context-dependency. Hence it is hard to find cases that clearly have this feature combination. However, there are still some cases that may at least to be considered to fall under this category. I will start with the non-truth-conditional kind. However, keep in mind that the following is more for the sake of exploring the space of possible kinds as it is given by the three properties and is not meant to be conclusive discussions of the phenomena under consideration.

For something to be conversationally conveyed but to be expressed context-independent, it must be some kind of conversational inference that arises in every

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10 The felicity of using first of all of course depend on the utterance context, simply because of the fact that it relates the utterance at hand to previous utterances in the discourse. But this is no more context dependent as Frida made the first utterance.
context. Moreover, we are currently searching for something that does not have any influence on the sentence’s truth-conditional content proper. A quick glance back at § 4.2 tells us that the kind of meaning we are searching for differs only in its constancy from conversational implicatures. That may be a good first hint towards what we have to look for: a context-independent conversational implicature. *Prima facie*, this seems almost like a contradiction, as one of the main characteristics of conversational implicatures is their context-dependency (as we saw in § 4.2). However, contrary this, there actually are some implicatures that arise in a very context-independent way. That I have in mind are not the so-called generalized conversational implicatures (Levinson 2000), but implicatures that are generated by the conversational maxims in a rather direct way without any (or much) reference to the actual context. The maxim of quality serves a perfect example here.

(26)  
(a) Eric broke his leg.  
(b) The speaker believes that Eric broke his leg.

Given that the speaker is assumed to be cooperative, she will stick to the maxim of quality and, in particular, its first submaxim – “Do not say what you believe to be false” (Grice 1975: 46) – which then generates the implicature that she believes what she uttered. That is, an utterance of (26a) will almost invariably convey (26b). Actually, this implicature is not only rather independent from the actual context, it is also not cancelable, one of the other main properties of conversational implicatures. Trying to cancel it gives rise to Moore’s paradox.

(27) #Eric broke his leg, but I don’t believe it.

The only scenario I can think of, beside straight-up lies, which we can set aside due to their parasitic nature, are “gambling-contexts”. Being in a shell-game context and having no clue whatsoever where the nut actually is – i.e. the speaker assigns a probability of \( \frac{1}{3} \) to each shell if there are three – a utterance analogous to (27) may seem possible after all.

(28) The nut is under the left shell, but I don’t believe it.

However, that may not be construed as an actual assertion, but merely a guess or random selection, so that it can probably be ruled out as a real cancellation of the epistemic quality implicature. A genuine assertion, however, will invariably convey that the speaker believes what she asserted. Not for nothing is it included as one of the sincerity conditions of assertive speech acts and *believe* is given as the psychological state for assertions (Searle 1969: 64). Likewise, an promise involves *intention* as its psychological stare and will trigger the inference that the speaker intends to perform the named act (Searle 1969: 60). More generally,
herever there is a psychological state specified in the sincerity condition, the performance of the act counts as an expression of that psychological state. This law holds whether the act is sincere or insincere, that is whether the speaker actually has the specified psychological state or not. Thus to assert, affirm, state (that \(p\)) counts as an expression of belief (that \(p\)). To request, ask, order, entreat, enjoin, pray, or command (that \(A\) be done) counts as an expression of a wish or desire (that \(A\) be done). To promise, vow, threaten or pledge (that \(A\)) counts as an expression of intention (to do \(A\)). To thank, welcome or congratulate counts as an expression of gratitude, pleasure (at H’s arrival), or pleasure (at H’s good fortune).w (Searle 1969)

Hence, we can generate Moore-like paradoxes not just for assertions, but also for promises, as well as for other types of speech acts like commands or thanks.

(29) a. #I buy you a new bike for your birthday, but I do not intend to do so.
   b. #Open the door, but I do not want you to do so.
   c. #Thank you for helping me, but I am not thankful for that.

Let us call such inferences from speech acts to their sincerity condition – like from (26a) to (26b) – sincerity inferences, without any commitment whether they are actually a special kind of implicature derived directly from the maxim of quality or something else.

To the extent that the utterance of a sentence is construed as an, say, assertion, such sincerity conditions are constant across contexts. Any assertion will convey that the speaker believes in the propositional content of the assertion. However, this is clearly not part of the conventional meaning of the expression itself. That is, the sentence (26a) itself does not carry the conventional meaning that the speaker believes that Eric broke his leg. Only when asserted, this inference arises. This can be shown by the fact that the following two sentences can easily be true simultaneously.

(30) a. Eric broke his leg.
   b. John does not believe that Eric broke his leg.

What is crucial is that once John asserts (30a), the sincerity inference that he believes that Eric broke his leg is triggered which is incompatible with an assertion of (30b). Therefore, the order of the utterances does not matter.

(31) #I don’t believe that Eric broke his leg, but Eric broke his leg.

This also illustrates the obligatory nature of this inference. If it were optimal, like ordinary conversational implicatures are, the sincerity inference should not arise in (31), as the first sentence already would keep the implicature from arising.
Moreover, sincerity inferences are not part of the truth-conditional content. Whether the speaker of (30a) actually believes in his utterance does not matter for it being true.\textsuperscript{11} To sum up, sincerity inferences arguably fall under the category of constant, conversational inferences that are truth-conditionally irrelevant.

Besides inferences to sincerity conditions, there are other, even more low-level implicature-like inferences that are conveyed in a relatively context-independent manner. For instance, from John’s utterance of (32a), we can infer (32b) and (32c).\textsuperscript{12}

(32) a. Eric broke his leg.
    b. John said that Eric broke his leg
    c. John is alive.

What is interesting of these inferences is that they are made true by the utterance itself. The utterance of of (32a) indicates the truth of (32b) and (32c). One my hence think of (32b) and (32c) as being a natural meaning of the utterance (Grice 1957). Like smoke naturally-means – means – fire, John’s utterance (32a) means, (32b), and especially (32c).

(33) a. That John uttered Eric broke his leg means, that he said that Eric broke his leg.
    b. That John uttered Eric broke his leg means, that he is alive.

Again, those inferences are non-conventional. Neither (32b) nor (32c) is part of the conventional meaning of (32a). It is only John’s utterance that allows us to draw these inferences. They do not depend on the specific conversational context either. And finally, what John said or whether he is alive does not have any effect on whether (32a) is true or not.

There is another possible candidate for a kind of meaning that is conversationally, though constantly conveyed, and which has recently been discussed by Lauer (2013: § 9.3). Lauer studies cases of conversational implicatures that are – contrary to the common definition – neither context-dependent nor cancelable and are obligatorily triggered. He illustrates them with reference to the “ignorance implicature” found with unembedded disjunction (Lauer 2013: 262).

(34) a. John is in London or he is in Paris.
    b. Speaker does not know that John is in London.
    c. Speaker does not know that John is in Paris.

The use of sentential disjunction as in (34a) is often analyzed as conversationally

\textsuperscript{11} This leads to the curious phenomenon of (insincere assertion =) lying, while telling the truth; cf. Meibauer 2014.

\textsuperscript{12} Thanks to Kai von Fintel (p.c.) for pointing me to these cases.
implicating that the speaker does not know either one of the disjuncts, as in (34b) and (34c). The reasoning goes as follows. Since each disjunct alone asymmetrically entails the whole disjunction, both (35a) and (35b) are more informative than the disjunction in (34a).

(35)  
   a. John is in London.  
   b. John is in Paris.

If the speaker had known that John is in London, she should have asserted (35a) instead of the less informative disjunction in (34a). This is enforced by the fact that the disjunction is not only less informative, but obviously also more complex than each of the disjuncts alone, as it contains them as constituents (modulo the pronoun in the second conjunct). That is, the speaker has chosen to taken additional efforts in order to express an utterance that is less informative than either of the more informative yet simpler alternatives in (35). The speaker must have a reason for this maneuver. In many contexts, this reason may simply be that she does not know either of disjuncts alone.

What we are after for our hunt for more constant yet conversational meanings is not the ignorance implicature that the sketched inference arrives at, but the inference that the speaker must have a reason for choosing the disjunct, which builds the basis for additional step towards the derivation of the ignorance implicature. Lauer (2013) calls them need a reason or, for short, NaR implicatures. As he shows, NaR implicatures are strongly mandatory and cannot be canceled (Lauer 2013).

(36) ??John is in London or he is in Paris. In fact, he is in Paris.

This contrasts with the secondary ignorance implicature, which can be canceled without problem.

(37) John is in London or he is in Paris. And I know which one.

However, if one cancel the ignorance implicature, the NaR implicature prevails and (37) still implicates that the speaker must have a reason for having chosen the disjunction. For instance, she may be unwilling to give the speaker the full information about John's whereabouts. That is, while the ignorance implicature itself is context dependent, the NaR implicature on which it is based is triggered in every use-context of unembedded disjunction.

Lauer (2013: 273) generalizes from the cases of disjunction to come up with a list of conditions that make an implicature a mandatory NaR implicature.13

(38) An expression e will give rise to a NaR implicature if:

13 Confer also Blutner’s (1998; 2000) derivation of Horn’s division of pragmatic in bidirectional optimality theoretic pragmatics for related considerations.
Table 8: Between semantics and pragmatics 7: low-level implicatures

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<th>Semantics</th>
<th>Pragmatics</th>
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<tr>
<td>constant</td>
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<td>truth-conditional</td>
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a. There is alternative expression $e_1$ which is informationally stronger than $e$.
b. $e_1$ is salient whenever $e$ is uttered.
c. There is a linguistic preference for uttering $e_1$ rather than $e$, all else being equal.

The notion of NaR implicatures is still rather young, but I think this set of conditions will prove to be useful to find more cases in future research. Crucially, every phenomenon that will amenable for a NaR treatment will also be a non-truth-conditional aspect of meaning that is conveyed constantly, but conversationally.

What all three cases that I discussed in this section have in common is that they are all triggered directly from basic maxims and presuppositions for rational conversation. The sincerity inferences are directly derived from the maxim of quality, while NaR implicature follow from a combination of the maxim of manner together with the maxim of quantity. Finally, the inferences in (32b) and (32c) are based on basic precondition on uttering and utterance interpretation. To give a label to the three discussed phenomena, I call them low-level implicatures.

4.8 Empirical necessities

The last remaining kind of meaning defined by the three criteria – context-independent meaning aspects that are conversationally conveyed but still have a truth-conditional affect, are the most mysterious. Had I already go to some length in order to find constant meaning that is neither constant nor truth-conditional in the previous section, finding a truth-conditional counterpart to what I called low-level implicatures is even harder. So let us come up with a checklist of what this particular feature combination means in order to get a better sense of what we are after. What seems certain is aspects of meaning that are constant as well as truth-conditional must come close to being an entailment of the utterance. However, this entailment must not be based on the conventions of language. Instead, it must come to life via the circumstance of the discourse, but without varying when those circumstance change. I have to admit that is hard to come up with completely convincing examples, but let me nevertheless discuss one potential candidate, at least for the sake of completeness.
One entailment-like kind of inference that, even though in principle depending on the circumstances of the utterance, is constant across all contexts are based on what can be called empirical necessities. Without going into the detail of the philosophical intricacies behind this term, the basic idea is that there are necessarily true statement that are, however, not analytic truths. An analytic truth is one that is based on the (conventional) meaning of the words alone.

(39)  
a. All bachelors are unmarried.  
b. No rectangle has five sides.  
c. However has three children, also has two children.

The examples in (39) are all necessary truths solely by virtue of the conventional meaning of the words used (and the way they are put together). The lexical knowledge of the conventional meaning of bachelor, rectangle, and three respectively (and knowledge of the way they are put together with the remaining expressions in the sentence) is sufficient to know that both sentence are true statements, irrespective of how the facts in the circumstance of evaluation may be. This contrasts with empirical claims like the following.

(40)  
a. All creatures that have a heart also have a kidney. (Quine 1951)  
b. All linguistics use stupid examples.

Even though both sentence both may well be true statements, they are neither analytical nor necessary. Even if it is the case that all creatures that have a heart also have a kind (and that all linguists use stupid examples), this does not follow from the conventional meaning of having a heart and linguist. One can also, more or less easily, imagine a creature with a heart but without a kidney and, maybe, a linguist that never uses stupid examples.

However, as argued most famously by Kripke (1980), there are also empirical statement like (40), that are necessarily true, but which, in contrast to (39), are not based on the conventional meaning of the expressions involved. Statements of this sort often include natural kinds, like in Kripke’s (1980) famous example.

(41)  
Water is H$_2$O.

Obviously, (41) is an empirical statement; it was a chemical discovery that water consists of H$_2$O molecules. Being H$_2$O is not part of the conventional meaning of water. One can have full lexical knowledge of water without knowing anything about its chemical composition. This contrasts sharply with the cases in (39). If one thinks that there can be unmarried bachelors or five-sided rectangles, one is mistaken in one’s conception of the lexical meaning of the respective expressions. In this respect, (41) is like the cases in (40).

However, according to Kripke, (41) is nevertheless a necessarily true statement. If
Table 9: Between semantics and pragmatics 8: empirical necessities

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<th>Semantics</th>
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something is water it must be H₂O, because if it were not H₂O, it would be something different, not water. In contrast to the empirical claims in (40), the statement that water is H₂O is necessarily true, irrespective of the circumstances that hold in the utterance situation.

Based on the notion of empirical necessities we can then say that inferences that are based on them fall under the category we are after. Consider the following example.

(42)  a. There is water in the pool.
    b. There is H₂O in the pool.

Based on the empirical necessity in (41) we can infer (42b) from (42a). Crucially, this entailment is truth-conditionally relevant, since (42a) cannot be true when (42b) is false. In addition, being based on a necessity, this inference will go through in every context. However, (42b) still cannot be said to be conveyed conventionally, because it based on facts of the external, i.e. non-linguistic, circumstances. Table 9 summarizes this finding.

I have to admit that this maybe the least convincing example of all eight cases I have discussed for the different kinds of meaning and that I had to revert to a bag of philosophical tricks to come up with an example at all. However, the fact that for the combination of constancy with non-conventionality it was the hardest to attest aspects of natural language meaning, shows that there maybe a deeper connection between these two properties than each of them has to truth-conditions.

5 Different conceptions based on feature selection

In the previous section, we saw that the three features that are the basis for the strict CCT conception of semantics give rise to eight possible kinds of meaning, all of which can be attested in natural languages. These eight kinds of meaning are summarized in Table 10.

From these eight kinds of meaning only two – literal meaning and conversational implicatures – can be unambiguously be classified by the CCT criteria. For the remaining six kinds of meaning, the three criteria pull in different directions. That is, if we want to come up with a clear distinctions between semantic and pragmatic
aspects of meaning, we need to choose between the three criteria. Of course, at some level, it is all a matter of definition. Depending on which feature we think takes precedence, we end up with different conception of semantics. However, these different conception then may lead to different approaches of linguistic phenomena and even philosophical problems, so that, at least, the different possible resulting conceptions of the semantics/pragmatics distinction may have conceptual and practical ramifications. In order to see what the options to choose from are, I will go through the different possibilities in the following. This will help us to get a better picture of what the distinction induced by the different criteria are and whether one may be preferred over the other.

5.1 Constant semantics

Prioritizing constancy as the criterion for distinguishing semantics from pragmatics, we end up with a conception of semantics that can be called constant semantics, as under this view, semantics encompasses all meaning aspects that are constant across context. Dividing the eight meaning kinds first by constancy gives us the meaning typology in Figure 1.

On the semantic side of this typology, we have then, obviously, literal meaning, as well as conventional implicatures, empirical necessities, and the low-level implicatures discussed in 4.7, while indexicals, expressives, and the pre- and post-truth-conditional pragmatic processes of enrichment and conversational implicatures fall on the pragmatic side of this meaning tree.

14 For a good overview (in German) of how these three criteria shape the semantics-pragmatics distinction and conceptions of meaning, I recommend the second chapter in Stei 2012.
5.2 Conventional semantics

Under the view that may be called conventional semantics, semantics is the study of those aspects of meaning that are conveyed by means of the conventions of language at hand, that is, the conventional meaning of the lexical expressions used in an utterance and the compositional process that correspond to the convention of how they are put together. That is, it does not matter whether an aspect of meaning is non-truth-conditional or context-dependent; as long it is part of the conventional meaning of an expression or construction, it is, according to conventional semantics, amenable to a semantic analysis. In contrast, all meaning aspects that transcendent what is convey by the conventions of the language system alone are considered to fall on the pragmatic side of the border. The meaning typology based on this conventionalist view of semantics is illustrated in Figure 2.

In comparison to the meaning tree of constant semantics in Figure 1, the low-level implicatures as well as empirical necessity inferences are now part of pragmatics, while both indexicals and expressives fall under the scope of semantics in a convention-based conception of semantics-pragmatics distinction.
5.3 Truth-conditional semantics

When we prioritize truth-conditional impact over the other two criteria, we get truth-conditional semantics as epitomized by the Gazdar-formula (6). All and only those aspects of meaning that are part of the truth-conditional content of a sentence are considered to be semantic, irrespective of the question of whether they are conventionally or conversationally conveyed or whether they constant or context dependent. That is, according to the purely truth-conditional conception of semantics, the eight kinds of meaning can be structured in a meaning typology like in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Kinds of meaning in truth-conditional semantics

Comparing this to the typology based on conventions in Figure 2, we see that in truth-conditional semantics the lower branch of the upper four kinds of meaning switches places with the upper two kinds of the pragmatic side. That is, besides literal meaning and indexicals, empirical necessities and enrichment processes also are considered to be semantic meaning aspects under a truth-conditional perspective, while, being non-truth-conditional, conventional implicatures and expressives are treated as pragmatic phenomena.

6 Towards conventional semantics

Having discussed the three major pictures that one can gain when aligning the semantics-pragmatics distinction with one of the three CCT criteria, we now face the question of how we can ever decide between the three opposing views? And it gets even more complicated if we take mixed conceptions into account as well. For instance, one could take a conventional and truth-conditional take on semantics, so that only literal meaning and indexicals are left for pragmatics. Due to limitations of space, I have to leave the presentation of those conceptions out of this article. However, the general problem of how to chose one conception over the other and
possible strategies of how to do so remain the same even if we restrict the discussion to the three “pure” conceptions of semantics.

As already said above, to a certain extend, how to draw the line by prioritizing one of the three properties is a matter of definition. That does, however, not mean that all ways are equally plausible, neither from a conceptual nor empirical point of view. Let us review some of the former factors.

A first observation that may help to decide between the three features is the observation that for at least two meaning kinds it was a bit sketchy to find convincing examples. Interestingly, these were the cases in which a constant meaning aspect is not determined by conventions, but by conversational aspects, which suggest a connection between these two properties. And indeed, it seem like that conversational meaning actually depends on the utterance context in a rather principled way, because being related to the conversation naturally suggests a variation between different conversational context. In order to nevertheless find cases for this feature combination, we had to look for specific circumstances that never change between context, even if they are based on the conversational context. So, in some sense, one could argue that these two meaning kinds are still context dependent, it just happens to be the case that this is a rather silly kind of context dependency that delivers the same result for every possible context. If this is the case, we could say, that, at least to a certain degree, non-conventionality implies context dependency. That is, constancy then would become a secondary feature of conventionality and hence could be excluded as a main criteria for distinguishing between semantics and pragmatics. Interestingly for the purposes at hand is that Gazdar 1979: § 1, where he supposes his famous formula – see (6) on page 6 – discusses all three criteria I assumed in this articles as possible bases for semantics. He provides another argument against constancy as a necessary condition for semantic content. Since “indexical expressions permeate natural language […] it appears that natural languages will only have a syntax and a pragmatics” (Gazdar 1979: 2), if we chose constancy as the main criterion for semantics.

It hence seems as if constancy can be excluded as serious contender for a necessary property of semantic content. And indeed, the development of formal logics for indexicals and demonstratives (most notably Kaplan 1978, 1989; Montague 1968) has shown that conventionally determined context dependency can receive a formal semantic treatment if we enhance the formal apparatus. We are therefore left with conventions and truth-conditions as founding characteristics for semantics. Setting aside constancy, the eight kinds of meaning distribute over the two features as illustrated in Table 11.

Without further conceptual reasons for or against one of the two remaining criteria, choosing between truth-conditional and conventional semantics boils down to the question of which phenomena we think should fall under the scope of semantics, or, to put it differently, which phenomena are better suitable for a semantic analysis.
Table 11: Conventional vs. truth-conditional semantics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>+TC</th>
<th>−TC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+CONV literal meaning, indexicals</td>
<td>conventional implicatures, expressives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>−CONV enrichment, empirical necessities</td>
<td>low level implicatures, conversational implicatures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under a convention-based perspective, the upper row represents semantic aspects of meaning, while a semantics determined by truth-conditional impact encompasses the left column. That means, under both perspectives, literal meaning and indexicals are semantic phenomena, while both the low-level as well as the ordinary conversational implicatures are left for pragmatics. The difference between the two views then regards whether conventional implicatures and expressives or enrichment process and empirical necessities are treated as semantic content.

While the truth-conditional view had been the prevailing view since the beginning of formal semantics, recent developments seem to shifted the field more towards conventional semantics. This can be witnessed by the fact that phenomena that fall under the [+CONV, −TC] field have received more and more attention in semantics and different formal tools have been adopted and developed for their analysis. For instance, expressives and conventional implicatures like those discussed above have been analyzed in type-driven systems of multidimensional semantics Gutzmann’s (2012); McCready’s (2010); Potts’s (2005, 2007), by means of continuations (Barker, Bernardi & Shan 2010; Kubota & Uegaki 2011), or in monadic approaches (Giorgolo & Asudeh 2011). In contrast to this recent rush into non-truth-conditional, conventional meaning, enrichment phenomena – empirical necessities are hardly studied at all – have received only little semantic treatments, but have, in contrast, been a central field of investigation for pragmatically oriented investigations (Bach 1994; Carston 2002; Recanati 2004a).

At least partly, the proliferation of semantic investigations into these topics is initiated by Kaplan’s (1999) infamous underground paper on the meaning of ouch and oops, where he – using expressives and interjections as his main case – suggests to extend the scope of semantics beyond just truth-conditional aspects to all conventionally conveyed information.

15 It is telling that the most famous semantic treatments of these phenomena by Stanley (2000); Stanley & Gendler Szabo (2000) reduce them to indexicals, thereby putting them back into the [+CONV, +TC] field of Table 11 and hence also under the scope of conventional semantics.
By clarifying the relation between speaker intention and linguistic convention in regard to the expressive use of language, we strengthen the argument that there are non-descriptive features of language that are associated with certain expressions by linguistic convention, and thus belong to semantics, and not to a separable discipline, pragmatics, in which attitudes and intentions of language users that go beyond what is conventionally associated with the expressions they use come into play. (Kaplan 1999: 42, my emphasis, DG)

Besides this observable (and still ongoing) shift from truth-conditional semantics towards a convention-based conception, it is interesting to note that this conception is more in line with Morris’s (1938) original characterization of semantics and pragmatics, quoted at the beginning of this article. If semantics concerns the conventional aspect of linguistic meaning, it is still possible to understand it as the study of the relation between signs and their denotation, while in pragmatics, the speaker and discourse matter, which play a role for both pragmatic enrichment and conversational implicatures. If we chose truth-conditionality as the main criterion of semantics, these relations would be lost. Therefore, I believe that conventionality is the better criterion in order to draw the line between semantic and pragmatics. That is, to quote Kaplan (1999: 42) again, semantics should also deal with those “non-descriptive features of language that are associated with certain expressions by linguistic convention”.

References


