

## **Abstract**

Chapter 4 of Kasia Jaszczolt's *Default Semantics* (Jaszczolt 2005) examines the default semantic analysis of (1), uttered when standing in front of El Temple de la Sagrada Família in Barcelona.

(1) The best architect designed this church.

At first sight, Jaszczolt's conclusion that the cognitive default reading of (1) is "Antoni Gaudí designed El Temple de la Sagrada Família, and the speaker believes him to be the best architect" looks right, I would guess that this is exactly what you and I would normally understand by such an utterance. But is it in fact an appropriate semantic analysis, even given Jaszczolt's pragmatics-rich approach? Whereas I think there are good grounds (following in the footsteps of Grice and many others) for assuming that, by default, (1) expresses the true opinion of the speaker that the architect of Sagrada Família is the (world's, Spain's, Catalonia's) best architect we cannot safely assume that the speaker, qua speaker, knows the architect's identity. Our knowledge of what the particular speaker is likely to know is our only guide here. We will make different assumptions for the speaker who is a four-year old child, George W Bush, or a native of Barcelona (and so on). The same goes for the addressee: an adult addressing a four-year old child will very likely follow up (1) by identifying the architect. We only know whether speaker and hearer correctly identify the architect from the co-text of (1), and so I don't think Jaszczolt's assumption that there is a cognitive default reference to Antoni Gaudí through the definite description 'the best architect' in (1) is correct without considerably more input from contextual and encyclopaedic data than she allows.

**Keywords:** common ground, context, co-text, definite descriptions, default semantics, encyclopaedic knowledge, intended reference, understood reference

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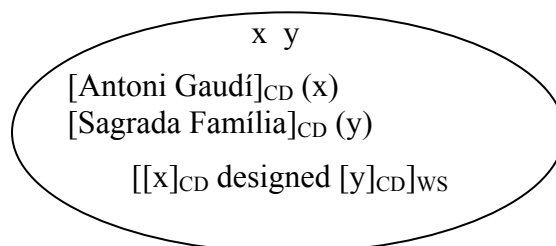
For Default Semantics (hereafter DS) 'the domain of semantics [is] not the *semantics of sentences* but the *semantics of acts of communication*' (Jaszczolt 2005: 114, *sic*). DS subscribes to the view that truth conditions apply to the sentence enriched with information from pragmatic inference. That is, DS is a theory that equates semantics with representations of discourse processing by a model hearer of what is intentionally conveyed by the speaker in the act of communication. Hence DS models a particular act of communication in a particular context on a particular occasion (*ibid.* 81, 85, 86, 109, 113). A 'compositional merger representation' approximates content by being a construct of the most likely reconstruction by a model hearer of the event conveyed by the speaker in an act of communication (Jaszczolt 2005: 49, 78, 81). The merger representations of DS are based on those of Discourse Representation Theory and consist of a set of discourse referents  $\{v_{1...n}\}$  and a set of conditions  $\{C_{1...n}\}$ . In DS the conditions derive from four sources: WS – the combination of word meaning and sentence structure; CPI – conscious pragmatic inference; CD – cognitive defaults that stem from the architecture and types of operations that the mind performs; SCD – social or cultural defaults that arise from previous experience and the cultural (cum societal) common ground (Jaszczolt 2005; [To appear]). To my understanding, WS is the locution, an identifiable expression  $e$ , consisting of a sentence or sentence fragment from language L,

spoken with identifiable prosody,  $\pi$  such that the pair  $\langle \pi, e \rangle$  has the sense or logical form “ $\mu$ ”.<sup>1</sup>

According to Jaszczolt, in the context of the interlocutors standing looking at la Sagrada Família in Barcelona, (1) means by default that Antoni Gaudí designed la Sagrada Família.

(1) The best architect designed this church.

The justification is given in Figure 4.3, Jaszczolt 2005: 110, reproduced here as Figure 1. Notice that the references for variables  $x$  and  $y$  are said to be cognitive defaults (CDs) and that the propositional structure derives from a combination of word meaning and sentence structure (WS). I have no objection to the latter, but I would question the matter of cognitive defaults as presumed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: (Partial) merger representation for the default reading of (1)**

Defaults are instantaneous and automatic, they arise without computation of intentions or other inference from contextual clues (*ibid.* 52, 53). However, I am not convinced that there is no inference from contextual clues in respect of Jaszczolt’s interpretation of (1) as given in Figure 1. I suspect that default interpretations always rely on context and common ground and what makes them ‘default’ is that they are the most probable in the absence of additional information. For example, the name *Elizabeth Taylor* is most likely to (by cognitive default) refer to the stunningly beautiful American actress born February 27, 1932 in London, star of such films as *Lassie Come Home*, *National Velvet*, *Giant*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Cleopatra* and *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Wolf*. There was a 20<sup>th</sup> century novelist of the same name, but few people would know that; and even fewer would, by default, recognize the name *Elizabeth Taylor* to refer to an otherwise obscure woman living in Tucson around 1990. And it is not only proper names that have default referents; there are different default interpretations given to the animal nouns in (2)–(5).

- (2) Jacqueline prefers leopard to fox.
- (3) Harry prefers lamb to goat.
- (4) All we had to eat was leopard.
- (5) I’d prefer the lining to be made of lamb, because it’s softer.

The animal nouns in (2) and (5) refer to types of fur; those in (3) and (4) to types of meat (see Allan 1981 for discussion). It may be arguable that the interpretations of (2) and (3) are social or cultural, whereas those in (4) and (5) are more closely dependent on the WS, but the matter is far from cut and dried. Consider another example of a default implicature which is, I am sure, a CD. By cognitive default, (6) most likely refers to a bovine animal (an I-implicature in terms of Levinson 2000).

(6) We saw a bull. +> a bovine

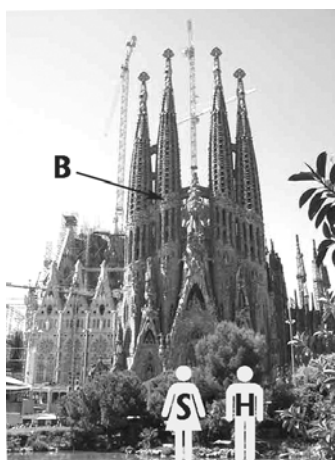
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1. Prosody  $\pi$  is composed of the pattern of pause, pitch level, stress, tone of voice, and the like; its counterpart in the written medium is punctuation and typography.

However, the context may override this default implicature, for example when whale spotting or talking about a herd of elephants because (in part) the WS of *x is a bull* will identify it as denoting a male animal of certain orders of large creatures including Bovinae, Cetacea, Crocodilia, Hippopotamidae, Proboscidae. For someone who doesn't know this, the default implicature, the CD, functions instead as part of the WS. The error is akin to that of someone who believes *if x is a whale then x is a fish* or a very young child who names any man *Daddy*: the error is a function of ignorance.

Anyone who has stood before El Temple de la Sagrada Família will be aware that it is visually dominant such that an utterance of (1) made when standing in front of it will unambiguously refer to la Sagrada Família unless the speaker is very obviously not referring to it because, for instance, s/he is pointing to a picture or description of another church (such as the Basilica di San Marco) in a guide book. In order to clarify the significance of context on the interpretation of (1), I propose we place the following condition on it: in Figure 2, S (she) utters (1) to H (him) when standing in front of building B.

**Figure 2: S utters (1) to H as they stand before B**



Ordinarily, *this church* refers to the most salient church in the foreground of attention (except when it is introducing the referent into the foreground of attention as in *This morning I came across this church with a gold-plated roof*). There are number of reasons for thinking that, in the situation of utterance described by Figure 2, the reference to 'this church' would be unambiguous. One is that S will know at least roughly where she is and under most circumstances, so will H. Even if S and H had not intended to be in front of la Sagrada Família and merely happened upon it, they would see that (based on encyclopaedic knowledge) B looks like a church. It is conceivable that in such a circumstance, S is not aware of the name of the church; nevertheless, (1) would still be a credible utterance and so would (7), in which S accesses her encyclopaedic knowledge (see Allan 2001; 2006).

(7) This church must be that one designed by Gaudí.

In both (1) and (7) 'this church' indubitably refers to B without any recourse being necessary to the name of the church. In other words, the name of B is necessarily an additional inference from common ground (which includes discourse context, situation of utterance, and input from relevant encyclopaedic knowledge, see Allan 2001). Thus I don't accept that the '[Sagrada Família]<sub>CD</sub>' constituent of the merger representation in Figure 1 is justified: the name of the church is not a default interpretation without recourse to context and/or encyclopaedic knowledge. In respect of B, such knowledge will, at a minimum, be that there is a church called (El Temple de) la Sagrada Família (or a translation of that name into another language). Ordinarily, but not necessarily, this will be strengthened by additional information such as knowledge of its approximate location and appearance, and/or some idea of its history and who designed it.

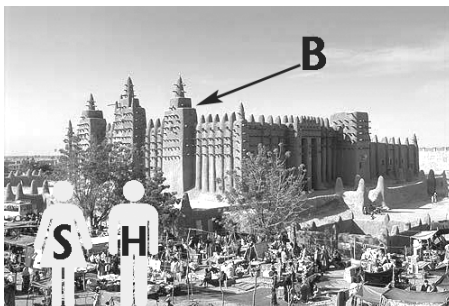
Suppose S utters (1) in the context given by Figure 2 but S mistakenly believes the church is La Seu (la Catedral de Santa Eulàlia), so that she could comment on (1) by saying (8).

(8) In saying *the best architect designed this church* I am talking about La Seu.

It is clear that there is nothing wrong with (1) on account of (8): S could honestly believe that the best architect designed B, referred to as ‘this church’. The error that (8) reveals is the naming of B: in the context obtaining, (8) is referentially incorrect only because B is wrongly named.

Let’s now take the case of (9) as uttered by H to S in the context described by Figure 3.

(9) The best architect designed this church.



**Figure 3: H utters (9) to S as they stand before B**

H’s referent for ‘this church’ is readily identified as B, which is church-like even though it is in fact a mosque. Whether or not H can name the building as the Great Mosque of Djenné is irrelevant to S’s successful interpretation of the utterance in (9) as referring to B.

It is clear from (1), (8), and (9), that successful reference to B as ‘this church’ is independent of the correct naming of B and even independent of whether B is literally a church (which it isn’t in Figure 3). Consequently, the default interpretation of the constituent ‘this church’ merely needs to be “the most salient church or church-like building in the foreground of attention”. I take this to be the true cognitive default (CD) of ‘this church’ in (1), (7), (8), and (9), and it requires a rewriting of the merger representation in Figure 1.

Although S, the speaker of (1), may know that she is referring to la Sagrada Família, H may not (for instance if H is a young child). H does not need to know “Antoni Gaudí designed El Temple de la Sagrada Família, and the speaker believes him to be the best architect” in order to perfectly adequately understand (1), because the default interpretation of the constituent ‘this church’ is “the most salient church(-like building) in the foreground of attention”. The advantage of this parsimonious interpretation is that it does not interfere with H attributing the wrong name to the church, B – for instance, erroneously believing (whatever the speaker might believe) that B is La Seu. Although it is conceivable that this mistake is never rectified, it is more likely that it will be corrected very quickly – because the speaker of (1) names the church or the architect, or on approaching the church a signboard is seen, and so on. What difference does such an error make to H’s understanding of (1)? None. The referent of ‘this church’ was recognized correctly as B, the fault is merely that the wrong name was (perhaps temporarily) assigned to B. We may represent the coherent discourse as (10):

(10) S says *the best architect designed this church*. H understands that S says the best architect designed La Seu (B).

This contrasts with the incoherent discourse that results if ‘this church’ is equated with “La Sagrada Família” as in (11):

(11) S says *the best architect designed La Sagrada Família* (B). \*H understands that S says the best architect designed La Seu (B).

We can recast (10) as containing the (mistaken) I-implicature in (12). If H had attributed the correct name to the church, the resulting implicature would be (13).

(12) H understands that S says “The best architect designed the most salient church(-like thing) in the foreground of attention” +> the best architect designed La Seu.

(13) H understands that S says “The best architect designed the most salient church(-like thing) in the foreground of attention” +> the best architect designed La Sagrada Família.

I turn my attention next to the interpretation of (1)’s ‘the best architect’. Let’s ignore the infelicity arising from the unspecified domain: Does S mean the best in Barcelona? In Catalonia? In the world? In the 19<sup>th</sup> century? The best ever? Leaving that aside, consider three different scenarios, all in the context described by Figure 2, where S is addressing H as they stand before B.

Suppose S were to follow up (1) with (14):

(14) In saying *the best architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that whoever designed la Sagrada Família (B) was the best architect.

Let’s make the default assumption that S is speaking felicitously, that is, she has genuine aesthetic grounds for stating her opinion that the design of B is such that it must be the work of ‘the best architect’. It is notable that this may simply be an attributive usage (as per Donnellan 1966) where S cannot name the architect. However (14) is also appropriate (though perhaps only marginally so) when S is able to correctly name the architect; her judgment of his skill is based on this building alone. In such a case, the optimal phraseology (without actually naming Gaudí) would be (15).

(15) In saying *the best architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that the person who designed la Sagrada Família (B) was the best architect.

However, (15) is ambiguous between what Donnellan and Jaszczolt call attributive and referential uses: ‘the person who designed la Sagrada Família’ can be attributive (refer to whosoever the architect was) or, alternatively, refer to Gaudí.

A second possibility is that S follows up (1) with (16):

(16) In saying *the best architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that Antoni Gaudí designed la Sagrada Família (B).

This is, of course, what Jaszczolt described as the default interpretation. It is certainly the one that well-educated folk would make. However, where Jaszczolt believes this interpretation to be arrived at without implicature, I do not – as has been argued for already. The naming has to be supplied from one’s mental encyclopaedia (which apparently falls into the Jaszczolt category of Conscious Pragmatic Inference, as we shall see). Once again, S’s grounds for her judgment that she is looking upon the work of ‘the best architect’ are ambiguous. She may mean that the design of B is such that it must be the work of ‘the best architect’, whether or not she can name the architect. This is only partially consistent with Jaszczolt’s analysis in Figure 1. Or S’s grounds are that she has seen (for instance) La Casa Vicens, La Casa Batlló, La Pedrera, Parc Güell in addition to la Sagrada Família and, on the basis of these works, judges Antoni Gaudí ‘the best architect’. Indeed, S might have described him as ‘the best architect’ even if he had not designed la Sagrada Família.<sup>2</sup> S could gloss this state of affairs as (17):

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2. A more credible example of such a thing is *The world’s best playwright wrote ‘Troilus and Cressida’*. If this were the only play of Shakespeare’s to have survived, he is unlikely to have been regarded as the world’s best playwright. However, the proposition that *The world’s best playwright wrote ‘King Lear’* might be justified on the basis of *Lear* alone.

(17) On the basis of the many buildings I (S) have seen in Barcelona designed by Gaudí, I would say that the man who designed this church (B) is ‘the best architect’.

Of course, S didn’t say this in (1) under conditions described by Figure 2. What she did say in (1) is most accurately glossed in (18).

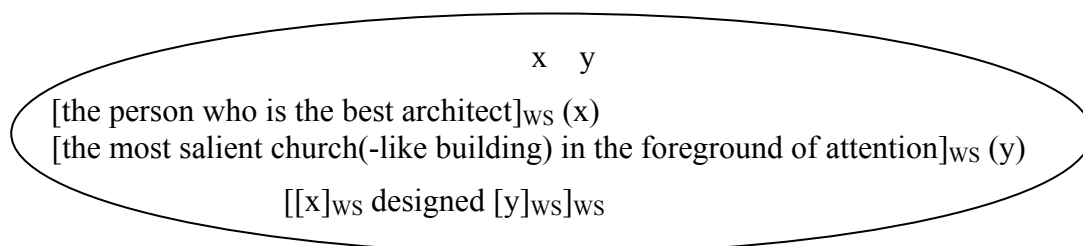
(18) In saying *the best architect designed this church*, S meant that the person who is the best architect designed the most salient church(-like building) in the foreground of attention.

In a third scenario, S might explain her utterance (1) (in the context described by Figure 2) by saying (19):

(19) In saying *the best architect designed this church*, I (S) meant that Frank Gehry designed la Sagrada Família (B).

First of all let’s assume that ‘Frank Gehry’ is not somehow a mismatch between tongue and brain such that the speaker had in mind Antoni Gaudí but misnamed him. In other words, S believes as she utters (1) that Frank Gehry designed B and that he deserves the accolade ‘the best architect’. This erroneous but intended attribution in no way destroys the comprehensibility of (1) which still has the meaning that I attribute to it in (18). Only additional discourse will reveal S’s mistake or perhaps, even though she may recognize her own error, it may never be explicitly corrected. What (19) does demonstrate, though, is the inapplicability of the merger representation in Figure 1.

What do we conclude from all this? I propose that Figure 1 be corrected as shown in Figure 4. Essentially this identifies the logical form of (1).

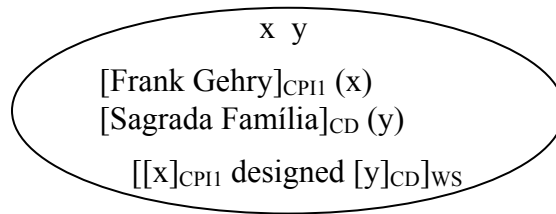


**Figure 4: (Partial) merger representation for the default reading of (1)**

The speaker’s act of referring applies locution  $\langle \pi, e \rangle$  meaning “ $\mu$ ” to a particular world  $w_i$  at time  $t_i$ . This is what is captured in Figure 4, and it is clearly what Jaszczolt intends to capture in Figure 1. According to Figure 4, (1) refers to three things: (unit) sets  $x$  and  $y$  and the proposition predicated of them,  $x$  *designed*  $y$ . The referents of  $x$  and  $y$  are named in their predications as determined by the logical form represented in the second and third lines of Figure 4, and proposition is named directly through WS in the bottom line.

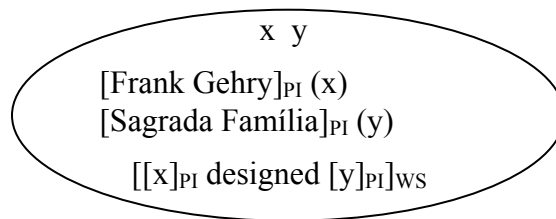
On the assumption that this is correct, what would the merger representations look like for the interpretations of (1) in the light of (10), where H believes that ‘the best church’ refers to La Seu, in (14) or (15) where ‘the best architect’ is used attributively, (16), which refers to both Antoni Gaudí and la Sagrada Família, and (19), which refers to Frank Gehry and la Sagrada Família?

I take up the merger representation for (19). Based on Figure 4.4 in Jaszczolt 2005: 113, Jaszczolt would have the merger representation in Figure 5.



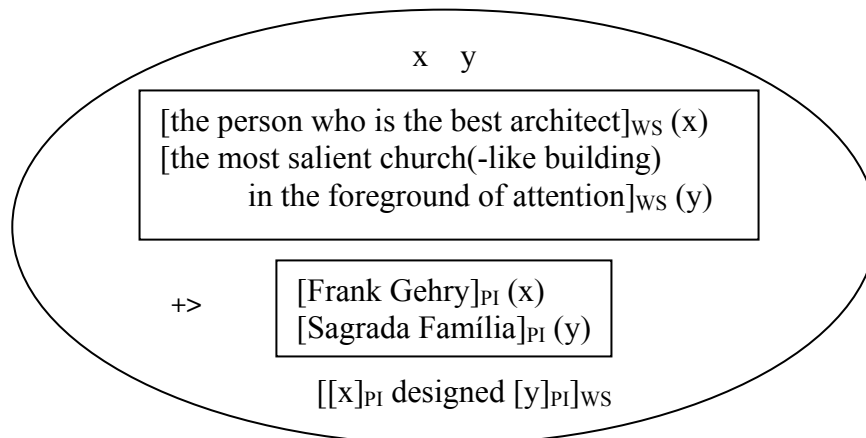
**Figure 5: Jaszczolt's (partial) merger representation for the reading of (1) on the basis of (19)**

No explanation is offered for the difference between the '[Antoni Gaudí]\_{CD} (x)' of Figure 1 and the '[Frank Gehry]\_{CPII} (x)' of Figure 5. The fact that the former is accurate with respect to the context described in Figure 2 while the latter isn't should surely not be represented as the difference between a cognitive default (CD) and a conscious pragmatic inference (CPI). No criterion is given to justify the epithet 'conscious' which seems to be contrasted with the implied unconsciousness of a cognitive default. There is no evidence that the erroneous attribution of the accolade 'the best architect' to Frank Gehry in Figure 5 is any more conscious than attributing the compliment to Antoni Gaudí in Figure 1. Both are pragmatic inferences (PI) and what distinguishes them is that, for obvious reasons, Antoni Gaudí will be recognized as the architect of la Sagrada Família more frequently by more people and probably with greater certitude than Frank Gehry; those criteria are what render it a cognitive default. In this light I would replace Figure 5 with Figure 6.



**Figure 6: Revised (partial) merger representation for the reading of (1) on the basis of (19)**

Unfortunately Figure 6 seems to me to ignore (1) altogether by completely failing to account for the link between the WS of (1) and the merger representation in Figure 6. We need to interpret the motto 'the domain of semantics [is] not the *semantics of sentences* but the *semantics of acts of communication*' (Jaszczolt 2005: 114) to include both the semantics of acts of communication and the semantics of sentences (logical form). Thus I would want to combine parts of Figure 4 and Figure 6, as shown in Figure 7.

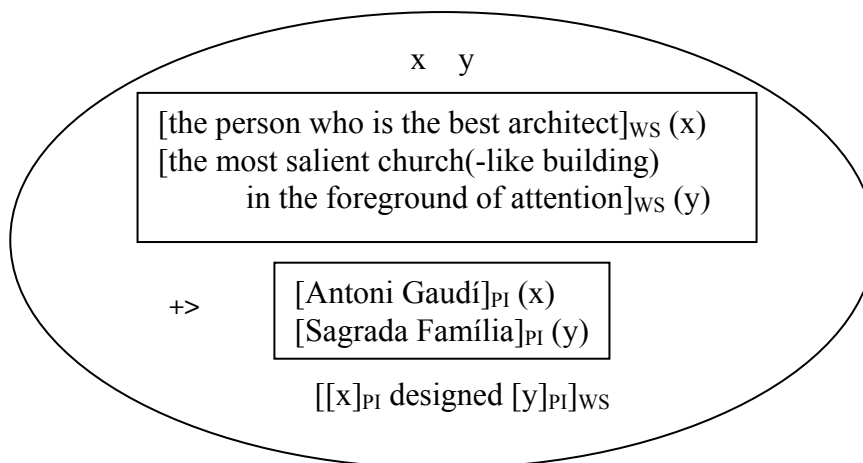


**Figure 7: (Partial) merger representation for the reading of (1) on the basis of (19)**

The use of +> to indicate that the lower rectangular box in Figure 7 is a conversational implicature of the upper box picks up on the representations used in (6), (12) and (13). The relationship undoubtedly has features in common with conversational implicature in being

probabilistic and, in Figure 7, being based on the maxim of relation. Furthermore, the implicature can be cancelled, as one is when *The best architect designed this church, but I'm not talking about la Sagrada Família* is uttered in the context described by Figure 2.

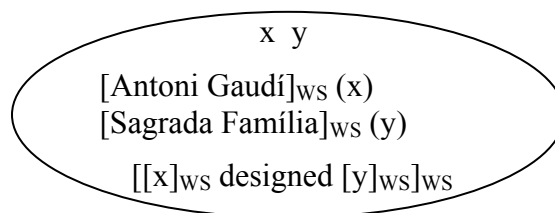
According to Jaszczolt, (16) will have the merger representation in Figure 1. This has been disputed, so what is the revised merger representation to be? Something very similar to Figure 7, of course, namely Figure 8.



**Figure 8: (Partial) merger representation for the reading of (1) under conditions of Figure 2**

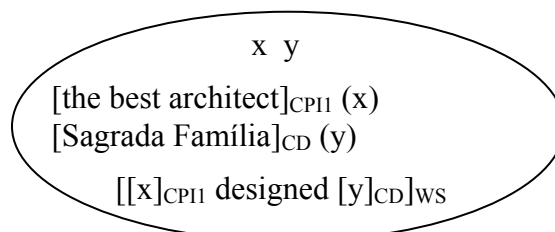
Figure 8 differentiates (1) from (20), whose merger representation only differs from that in Figure 1 as shown in Figure 9. Were there no difference between Figure 1 and Figure 9, there would be no reason for there to be a lexical difference between (1) and (20). We cannot, should not, must not just ignore that lexical difference and pretend that (1) and (20) necessarily have the same interpretation. As is made clear in Jaszczolt 2005 and again in this paper, they don't.

(20) Antoni Gaudí designed la Sagrada Família.

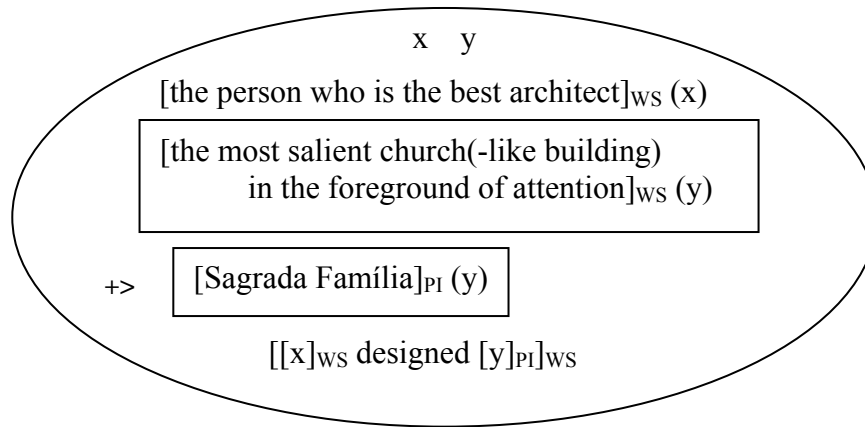


**Figure 9: (Partial) merger representation for (20)**

According to Jaszczolt, the attributive reading of (1), as in (14) or (15), has the merger representation in her Figure 4.5 Jaszczolt 2005: 113 reproduced here as Figure 10. My own merger representation is given in Figure 11. Unlike Jaszczolt, I believe that the attributive reading of *the best architect* is the cognitive default, on the basis that there is no name to add – or rather that the speaker or hearer (depending which the merger representation is trying to capture) cannot or does not supply a name on the occasion of utterance.



**Figure 10: Jaszczolt's (partial) merger representation for the attributive reading of (1)**



**Figure 11: (Partial) merger representation for the attributive reading of (1) on the basis of (15)**

I conclude that default semantics should not ignore the linguistic cues provided by the sentence used in an utterance in order to go straight for the illocutionary point without mapping the route to that goal. Jaszczolt [To appear] seems to recognize this when she writes: ‘What a semantic theory needs is an algorithm to show how all the sources of information about meaning interact.’ But in my view she fails to abide by this dictum. Merger representations need to take more account of meaning within the locution (the logical form) than Jaszczolt has allowed for. To arrive at the speaker’s message in what is said does indeed use pragmatic inference (PI) and one kind of PI is the cognitive default (CD). What determines CDs is that they need to be based on the criteria of being those interpretations arrived at more frequently by more people and probably with greater certitude than any alternatives. Pragmatic inference is in part reliant on context and common ground. As I have shown, it is necessary to describe these whenever indexicals are used, and the definite descriptions are indexical. But in truth, description of context and common ground is necessary in the interpretation of virtually all utterances.

The theoretical issue raised by my objection to Jaszczolt’s interpretation of (1) in terms of Figure 1 is that my Figure 8 has an extra level in the merger representation and it thereby brings into question the Parsimony of Levels principle in DS (an application of Grice’s Modified Occam’s Razor, Grice 1978). This is that the logical form in WS does not warrant a separate representation from ‘the “true” propositional form which contains all the necessary information for the assignment of truth value’ (Jaszczolt 1999: 57) where the latter is directly communicated by cognitive default. This shows that the Parsimony of Levels principle hinges on what counts as cognitive default, and that has already been extensively discussed in this paper.

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