

## Questions to Professor Jaszczolt:

### Meaning Merger: Pragmatic Inference, Defaults, and Compositionality

1)

Linguistic underspecification of utterance content is widely accepted across different frameworks including the neo-Gricean approaches (cf. Horn 2005; Levinson 2000) and relevance theory (Carston 2002; 2005; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995). There is also an agreement that if linguistic underdeterminacy is given, pragmatic inference is required if a hearer is to recover a speaker's meaning successfully. In your default semantics you reject the idea of underdetermined semantic representation, and offer an alternative approach in which semantic representation is established with the help of intentions in communication. This means that intentions 'intrude' into the semantic representation, and the semantic and pragmatic components are interwoven. **What are the advantages of this one-level semantics as opposed to the modular view? It can be argued that in a way default semantics is also a modular approach because intentions can be considered preverbal thoughts generated in the "conceptualizer" and linguistically shaped in the "formulator" using Levelt's terminology (Levelt 1989; 1999). Do you agree with this line of thinking?**

Your reading of my *Default Semantics* is correct and very insightful. It is indeed the case that various sources of information about meaning distinguished there are compatible

with a modular interpretation. The representation of meaning is propositional, like in Levelt's model, but there are various vehicles by which meaning can be carried. As a result, my semantic theory is *not* a linguistics semantic theory: it is a theory of meaning of acts of communication that combines information carried by various 'vehicles of thought', to use Dummett's phrase. Naturally, in order to give such a model some theoretical support, one has to have an algorithm for how the output of these sources of meaning interacts and combines to form one representation. This is what I do in Default Semantics.

You also mention semantic underdetermination. Before I answer the question, let me make a terminological remark: I use *underdetermination* as a label for the phenomenon that the output of syntactic processing does not always give us the proposition intended by the speaker, and *underspecification* as a more technical term for the property of the semantic representation that results from such processing. My approach to underdetermination is more complex than a straightforward rejection. The disappearance of underdetermination from my model is a direct concomitant of the reanalysis of the property of compositionality. For me, compositionality is not a property of the logical form, nor a property of a logical form embellished with the output of pragmatic processing. It is a property of a representation which merges information about meaning that comes from a variety of sources. While the output of syntactic processing is indeed underspecified, this underspecification does not feature in the representation because there is no separate semantic representation that pertains to this level. Merger representation is far removed from syntax: all the sources of information are treated on a par. Let me explain. In the history of semantic theory traced back at least to Frege (1892),

composition has been taken to mean a property of meaning where what is composed is word meanings and the ‘glue’ is the grammar of the language. Compositionality is often taken to be a necessary property that is assumed in the methodology (which makes compositionality a methodological principle, see e.g. Groenendijk and Stokhof 1991; Dekker 2000; Zeevat 1989). As Groenendijk and Stokhof aptly observe,

‘...it is always possible to satisfy compositionality by simply adjusting the syntactic and/or semantic tools one uses, unless that is, the latter are constrained on independent grounds.’

Groenendijk and Stokhof (1991: 93).

This amounts to saying that, as long as one can come up with a successful formalization that does not distort the facts, one is free to maintain the compositionality of meaning. This is, in my view, a welcome position in semantics in that a theory of meaning that rejects compositionality tout court is, at least to me, inconceivable. However, we all know the hurdles that such an approach has to overcome. I have devoted a substantial part of my research to intensional contexts, in which the principle of compositionality is either questioned or is saved by means of adding some semi-legitimate objects to the output of syntactic processing (known as logical form, propositional form, semantic representation, to mention some of its currency). For example, hidden-indexical theory (Schiffer 1977, 1992; Crimmins and Perry 1989; Crimmins 1992; see also Cappelen and Lepore 2005; Jaszczolt 1999b, 2000) proposes various flavours of indices that stand for the way of thinking about the proposition. Schiffer (1992) resolves the problem of the logical form of reports on beliefs (of the form ‘A believes that B  $\phi$ s’), proposing a

representation to the effect that there is a mode of presentation of a certain type and the relation of believing holds between three arguments: the holder of the belief, the proposition (semantic content of the *that*-clause), and the mode of presentation. In short, he populates the logical form with entities that cannot be derived from the processing of grammar and lexicon. As a result, he himself is very skeptical about his own solution and questions the viability of a compositional semantics (see also Schiffer 2003). After a couple of decades of trying to come to grips with the compositionality in such intensional contexts, it occurred to me that the very assumptions have to be reconsidered. Namely, compositionality is not to be sought on the level of the output of syntactic processing and further patched up when it does not seem to be there, but instead it has to be sought on the level on which information about meaning, coming from a variety of (linguistic and non-linguistic) sources, meets, interacts, and merges. Instead of an enriched logical form which, of course, before various embellishments, *can* be underspecified, I look for compositionality on the level of this merger. This standpoint may seem radical but it is just a natural step to take. Recanati's (2004: 132) suggestion is based on a similar conviction that compositionality is to be sought where information about meaning interacts:

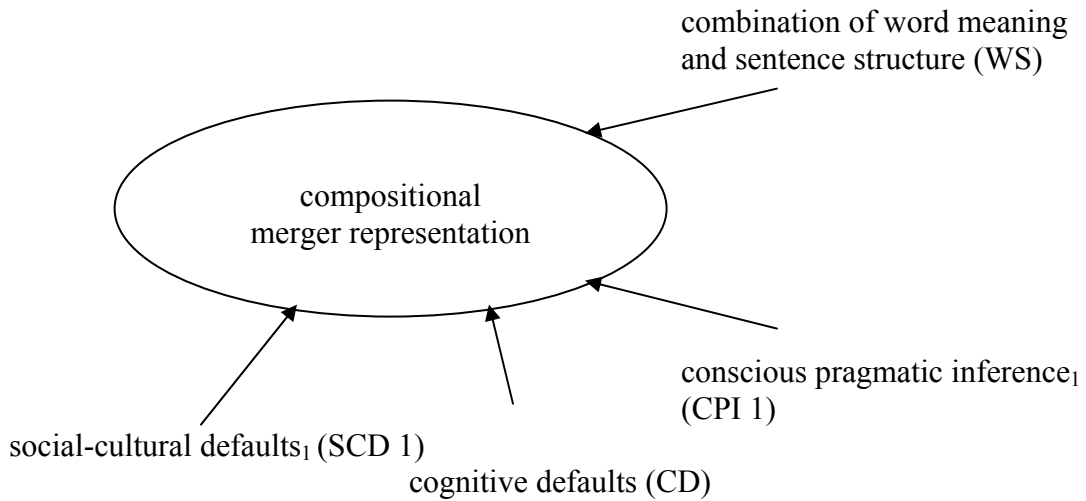
‘...the semantics of natural language is not insulationist. (...) [T]he meaning of the whole is *not* constructed in a purely bottom-up manner from the meanings of the parts. The meaning of the whole is influenced by top-down, pragmatic factors, and through the meaning of the whole the meanings of the parts are

also affected. *So we need a more 'interactionist' or even 'Gestaltist' approach to compositionality.'*

However, he does not go quite as far in removing compositionality from syntactic representation: free enrichment of the output of syntax is less radical than a merger where all sources of information are treated on a par. My perspective has obvious benefits, the main one is correctly capturing the speaker's intuitions about what was intentionally said in an utterance. But this comes at a price. Once we reduce the role of syntax and deprive the syntactic form of the role of the backbone of the semantic representation, we have to provide the mechanism by which the representation is built. We have to construct an algorithm for this interactive model of meaning and we have to have a formalized, compositional theory of such mergers. This is the goal of my approach.

At this point I have to introduce the model of utterance interpretation that I proposed in *Default Semantics* (2005a) in order to spell out *what exactly* is being merged. Graphically, we can represent it as in Figure 1 below.

Stage I: Processing of the truth-conditional content



Stage II: Processing of implicatures

- social-cultural defaults<sub>2</sub> (SCD 2)
- conscious pragmatic inference<sub>2</sub> (CPI 2)

Fig. 1: Utterance interpretation in Default Semantics (adapted from Jaszczolt 2005a: 73)

In explaining the model, I shall start with what is common currency in post-Gricean pragmatics and point out what is new. We will confine the discussion to Stage I of the model, that is to the content of *what is said* understood as intended primary meaning, albeit, as will become clear shortly, not defined as a development of the logical form in the tradition of post-Griceans. Since at least the late 1970s, semantics has been regarded as underdetermined by the output of grammatical processing and requiring further additions from pragmatics (see e.g. Carston 1988, 1998, 2002; Recanati 1989, 2001, 2004). This output of processing of grammar and lexicon is identified in my model as one of the four sources that contribute to the representation of meaning (**merger representation**): it is called **word meaning and sentence structure** (WS). Now, the character of the additions to WS is what differentiates underdetermined semantics and my approach. Before I explain this difference, I have to talk about a couple of landmarks in post-Gricean research that lead to my perspective. According to the post-Gricean tradition represented by Levinson, Sperber, Wilson, Carston, and Recanati, representation of meaning so enriched is the object of study of truth-conditional theory of meaning: truth conditional semantics (Levinson, Carston, Sperber, Wilson) or truth-conditional pragmatics (Recanati). In accordance with Grice's (1978) methodological principle of not multiplying senses beyond necessity (*Modified Occam's Razor*), semantic ambiguities are axed and underdetermination prevails. But one can go further. There seems to be no need to postulate a representation of meaning that is the output of the processing of the lexicon and grammar, as well as a separate, enriched representation that contains the result of pragmatic processing through inference or defaults. Instead, in theorizing about utterance meaning, understood in the Gricean way as meaning intended

by the speaker, it suffices to adopt one representation of meaning, called a semantic representation, propositional form, or the like, that pertains to what is said by the speaker, including its pragmatic ingredients. Just as Modified Occam's Razor is a sound methodological principle, so the Parsimony of Degrees Principle seems to be one: 'Levels of senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity' (Jaszczolt 1999b: xix). This point is also more and more frequently made in post-Gricean pragmatics. (Nota bene, I use the term 'post-Gricean' literally, to mean all developments of Grice's intention-based approach to communication, including both relevance theory and neo-Griceans. But see also Horn 2005, this journal). There is one step from there to saying that there is only *one* such representation of meaning that combines information coming from various sources: the lexicon, grammar, inference, and possibly defaults, the latter understood rather broadly and liberally as shortcuts through conscious inference. Put in this way, the sources of information about meaning can hardly be objected to, be it by neo-Griceans or relevance theorists.

Default Semantics models the sources of meaning information as in Figure 1. It adheres to the view that pragmatic sources of information operate *independently of the grammar*. The output of syntactic processing does not dictate what additions are required; there need not be any 'slots' in the logical form that need to be filled. This is what Recanati (2002, 2004) calls 'top-down' pragmatic processing: (1a) is pragmatically enriched to (1b), although there is no slot in the syntactic representation that signals a missing argument.

(1a) I haven't eaten.

(1b) I haven't eaten *dinner* [or some other meal appropriate for the time of day at which the utterance was made] *yet*.

Pragmatic processing in the form of defaults and inference is precisely such a free, top-down enrichment:

‘...even if the semantic value of a word is fixed by language (and context, if saturation [that is, filling in slots in the syntactic representation, KMJ] is necessary), composing it with the semantic values for other words often requires help from above [that is, a top-down process, KMJ]. It is semantic composition which has a fundamentally pragmatic character.’ Recanati (2004: 139).

My understanding of this composition is akin to Recanati's. The main difference lies in the commitment to strong contextualism. While for Recanati (2004) and other contextualists this pragmatic processing is always present, in Default Semantics it is activated only when such additions to the output of grammar are genuinely taking place. But, as I indicated before, Default Semantics is more radical on another front. At this point I can elaborate at last on what is new in my approach. What I am going to say now is an important characteristic of this model and has to be taken in tandem with my earlier comments on the place of compositionality in theory of meaning. The pragmatic input spelled out as CD, SCD 1 and CPI 1 is regarded as being on a par with the syntactic source of information about meaning, in the sense that any source can ‘override’ the output of another source in some situations. In other words, the four sources marked as

arrows in Figure 1, and listed below for convenience as (i)-(iv), all contribute to a representation of meaning that merges their outputs.

- (i) word meaning and sentence structure (WS)
- (ii) conscious pragmatic inference (CPI)
- (iii) cognitive defaults (CD)
- (iv) social-cultural defaults (SCD)

This merger produces a merger representation, indicated by the oval shape in Figure 1. This is a controversial move but, in my view, it is a necessary step forward. Instead of seeing pragmatic additions to the representation of meaning as embellishments to WS, we give them a rightful place as sources of meaning. Now, I believe, I can answer your question concerning modularity: there is language as a carrier of meaning (WS), but there is also inference and there are shortcuts through this inference, carried out by various vehicles of thought, among which language is only one, albeit common, possibility.

Next, following my earlier principles for the revision of the place of compositionality in semantic theory, merger representations are compositional in the sense of a methodological requirement imposed on them. Shifting this property from the level of WS, where it is normally sought, to merger representations is an essential move in my model. On this construal, it is assumed that compositionality is exhibited by the result of the processing of an act of communication rather than by any of the sources of this composition. Since meaning is composed through the merger, the principle of compositionality should hold for merger representations. It is also a more viable

alternative: the problems with intensional context I mentioned at the beginning clearly demonstrate that compositionality of WS is not attainable for all sentences of a natural language without considerable help from information from elsewhere. Instead of infesting the logical form with entities that are not clearly present in the syntactic structure, I have moved compositionality to the level of representation that can more legitimately incorporate such pragmatic additions. (*Nota bene*, the opposite end of the spectrum, equally radical, would involve keeping semantics ‘uninfested’, minimal. See Borg 2004; Cappelen and Lepore 2005; Jaszczolt 2005d).

Merger representations are understood here as coarsely-grained equivalents of thoughts. They contain more information than the sentence does, but they contain less than the speaker’s or addressee’s mental state that corresponds to this utterance. They contain only as much as is necessary to represent the meaning of the utterance and tell it apart from meanings of other possible utterances of this sentence or from other interpretations of this utterance. Needless to say, merger representations have truth conditions. And, in order to be semantic structures and credible constructs, they have to be supported by an algorithm for how the output of information for the four sources combines. This is what I began in Part II of *Default Semantics* and what is going to occupy me and some of my students for some time yet.

Coming back to your comment on underdetermination, the benefits of the radical reassessment of semantics that was executed in *radical pragmatics* in the late 1970s is visible in utterances where a lot of information has to be added by the addressee to the content recovered from the lexicon and grammar, such as (1a) above. The important question is the character of this pragmatic addition. Does this addition always pertain to

inference from context or do addressees sometimes use a more economical alternative, such as ‘jumping to conclusions’, to use Bach’s (1984) apt phrase, when there are no indications that the situation is out of ordinary? Here I have to address your comment concerning the agreement that pragmatic inference is mandatory for the recovery of the speaker’s meaning. One can speak of an agreement on this matter only when ‘pragmatic inference’ is construed extremely widely. When one adds ‘conscious’ to ‘pragmatic inference’, then we have *disagreement*. In my view, a lot of this disagreement rests on a terminological mismatch in the use of the term ‘inference’ rather than on principled differences of opinion. Here I fully agree with Recanati’s (2004: 43) excellent exegesis. I shall explain from the beginning. According to most current pragmatic theories, pragmatic inference is not always present: there are also default, presumed, salient meanings that are shortcuts through such effortful inferential enrichment. Those salient meanings are understood differently in different approaches: for some, they arise ‘locally’, as soon as the relevant word or expression is uttered (Levinson 2000), for others they are, like Grice’s implicatures, ‘global’, ‘post-propositional’, arising after the whole utterance has been issued. Default interpretations in Default Semantics are of this latter kind. Next, for some, defaults can be easily cancelled, for others, once they arise, they are not normally cancellable, unless there is a serious mismatch between the interlocutors’ background knowledge. For some, they belong to language competence, for others, to performance. (For a selection of standpoints see Levinson 1995, 2000; Horn 2004, 2005, 2006; Recanati 2003, 2004; Jaszczolt 2005a, b, c; Asher and Lascarides 2003; Blutner and Zeevat 2004. I discuss varieties of defaults in my 2006b). Be that as it may, to quote Horn (2004: 4-5),

‘Whatever the theoretical status of the distinction, it is apparent that some implicatures are induced *only* in a special context (...), while others go through *unless* a special context is present (...).’

On the other hand, according to relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995, Carston 2002), pragmatic inference is mandatory in such enrichment. But although disagreement persists as to whether such default meanings should be called implicatures, enriched propositional content, or something else, the common-sensical validity of Horn’s claim can be accepted without much controversy. The more so, that the differences between the post-Gricean camps are not as significant as they appear to be. The concept of pragmatic inference is the main culprit in accentuating the differences beyond their true significance. Recanati claims that all pragmatic processes that contribute to *what is said* are non-inferential: ‘[t]he determination of what is said takes place at a sub-personal level, like the determination of what we see’ (Recanati 2004: 39). Implicatures, on the other hand, are derived through inference. On the contrary, relevance theorists distinguish two types of inference: conscious reasoning and unconscious inference. Pragmatic processes that contribute to *what is said* (explicature) and those that lead to implicatures are both, on their view, of the latter kind. To make things more complicated, the conscious/unconscious distinction of relevance theorists does not correspond to the inferential/non-inferential distinction of Recanati’s. Instead, if we adopted a three-way distinction within inference, Recanati’s ‘non-inferential’ would become ‘inferential but unconscious’, and within conscious inference relevance theorists

would have to distinguish (i) ‘explicit’ reasoning, where the premises that lead to a conclusion are available to the subject, and (ii) ‘spontaneous’, automatic reasoning that does not fulfil this criterion. For Recanati, implicature generation can be of both of these kinds.

In *Default Semantics*, I do not engage in the debate as to whether the pragmatic additions to the representation of meaning are ‘unconscious’ or only ‘spontaneous’. In order to do so, one would need relevant empirical evidence and current experimental pragmatics, albeit progressing fast, has not provided it yet (see e.g. Noveck and Sperber 2004). Instead, as is evident in Figure 1, I distinguish two types of shortcuts through pragmatic processing: **cognitive defaults** (CD) and **social-cultural defaults** (SCD), labeling pragmatic inference itself as a conscious process: **conscious pragmatic inference** (CPI) that makes use of the contextual input in producing a richer meaning. Now, cognitive defaults are to be understood as follows. Let us consider a definite description as in (2).

(2) The best architect designed this church.

Definite descriptions such as ‘the best architect’ give rise to two readings: the referential one, about a particular, known individual, say Antoni Gaudí or Christopher Wren, and an attributive one, about whoever fits the description of the best architect (see also Chapter 7 of Jaszczolt 2002 and Chapter 4 of Jaszczolt 2005a). These two readings are not equally salient. Definite descriptions are normally used about individuals who are identifiable by both interlocutors. They are used by the speaker with a strong intention to refer to a

particular individual. In other words, by default, they are used referentially. This is a cognitive default because it pertains to the property of mental states. There is a lot more to say about cognitive defaults but I shall reserve a more detailed story for your next question. Next, social-cultural defaults arise when the interlocutors share cultural or social information and can rely on this shared background to use it as a ‘shortcut’ through utterance processing. For example, for reasonably well educated interlocutors in western culture, the relationship between Picasso and the painting in (3) is resolved as that of authorship without any need for effortful inference.

(3) Picasso’s painting is of a crying woman.

These defaults are not as clearly definable as cognitive defaults though. One has to be careful not to overgenerate. For example, it would be easy to stipulate that (4b) is the explicit meaning of (4a). In fact, on Levinson’s (2000) theory of presumptive meanings, the proposition that is subjected to the truth-conditional analysis is precisely (4b).

(4a) We advertised for a new nanny.

(4b) We advertised for a new *female* nanny.

While it is indeed true that, alas, being a nanny is still largely a female occupation, if the sex of the required nanny is the salient, presumed meaning, then perhaps so are other typical attributes of nannies such as being young, pretty, musical, and full of ideas. Perhaps they also belong to the propositional content (*what is said*). Despite numerous

proposals for the demarcation (Recanati 1989; Carston 1988, 1998), it is difficult to tell where the boundary between the default interpretation and implicated meanings should be drawn. That is why, for the present, it is necessary to confine the concept of social-cultural defaults to clear cases such as the resolution of the genitive case in (3) or the reference assignment in (5a) as in (5b), where, again, interlocutors brought up in western culture may assume as shared information that the famous painter whose first name was Pablo and who painted crying women was Pablo Picasso.

(5a) Pablo liked painting crying women.

(5b) Pablo Picasso liked painting crying women.

CDs and SCDs of Default Semantics are ‘global’: they arise after the whole utterance has been processed and hence are rarely cancelled. Unlike Levinson’s (2000) ‘local’ defaults, they do not pose problems for the economy of processing. The problem with local defaults is this. When default interpretations are conceived of as arising immediately after the relevant word or phrase has been processed, then they must, necessarily, be subject to frequent cancellations. However, when they are construed as ‘global’, ‘post-propositional’, following the traditional model of Gricean implicatures, then there is no need to postulate costly cancellation: it just does not have to take place.

Merger representations use an extended and slightly amended language of Discourse Representation Theory (Kamp and Reyle 1993; van Eijck and Kamp 1997; Kamp *et al* forthcoming) to build semantic representations. For the formal account, I use dynamic relational semantics. The model has been applied to a variety of constructions.

Through the work of my students it is also proving to be successful for languages in which a lot of intended meaning is left to inference. In Thai, for example, marking temporality through tense, aspect or temporal adverbials are all optional. One verb form can have a wide variety of meanings. Merging information from lexicon, syntax, and pragmatics, and recognizing default senses seems to be a perfect model for such languages (see e.g. Srioutai 2004; Jaszczolt and Srioutai *forthcoming*).

This in short is how the model of merger representation works in its conceptual sketch. And this is what I mean by rejecting underdetermination. To repeat, I am not in opposition to other post-Griceans who uphold underdetermination in that I admit it is there when we focus on WS. But I claim that there is no need to focus on WS. Instead, we should focus on the merger of WS, CPI, CD, and SCD. Merger representation is the only representation in my theory and there is no underdetermination there.

2)

I understand Default Semantics has a production side and an interpretation side. In production meaning comes from an *intentionality-compositionality merger* which means that the logical form as the output of syntactic processing interacts with the information coming from the property of mental states of *having an object, being about* something, called their *intentionality*. According to your approach there are two sources of meaning: (i) compositionality of the sentence meaning and (ii) intentionality of the mental state that underlies this sentence. **What role do you see for context in meaning construction?**

In some of my articles (e.g. Jaszczolt 2005b, c, 2006a) I stressed this binary character of information about meaning but in more detail it is just the model in Figure 1 above. On some occasions, the processing of the meaning of the act of communication (in my model, utterance meaning as produced by a model speaker and recovered by a model hearer) makes use only of WS. On others, it needs WS and CPI 1. Yet on others, it may need, say, WS and CD. The latter category of cognitive defaults plays a particularly important role in my model. I will reply concentrating on the role of intentionality in utterance interpretation that makes use of cognitive defaults.

In introducing CDs in response to your previous question, I considered an example of a definite description in (2), repeated below.

(2) The best architect designed this church.

I said that definite descriptions normally come with the strongest referential and informative intention and, by default, their reading is referential. I had provided various syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and philosophical arguments in support of the default status of the referential reading of definite descriptions elsewhere (see e.g. Jaszczolt 1997, 1998a, b, 1999a, b) and will not repeat them here. What will concern us now are some properties of such default interpretations. They arise out of a general principle of intentional communication which says that the speaker makes the strongest statement that is compatible with his/her knowledge and that is relevant at the current point in conversation. We can explain this through Grice's maxim of Quantity (Grice 1975), or

any of its later offshoots such as Horn's (1984, 1988) or Levinson's (1987) Q-principle. The 'strongest' interpretation, the one pertaining to the strongest referential and informative intentions, is taken by the addressee to be the one intended by the speaker. It is the *cognitive default*. Now, the default 'strength' of this interpretation can also be explained on the level of mental states. Just as the utterance comes with the strongest intention, so the corresponding mental state of the speaker has the strongest *aboutness*, the strongest *intentionality*. Intentionality is a property of some mental states and has been widely used in the phenomenological tradition in philosophy for talking about meaning (see mainly Husserl 1900-01; Jaszczolt 1996, 1999b; Searle 1983). I appeal to this important feature of mental states in order to explain the rationale behind the fact that interlocutors 'jump to conclusions' and take some interpretations as given, salient, presumed. An analogous situation pertains to propositional attitude constructions, such as reports on beliefs as in (6).

(6) Tom believes that the best architect designed this church.

You may remember that I discussed belief reports in my answer to the previous question, assessing them as one of the most problematic constructions for a compositional theory of meaning. But when we are equipped with cognitive defaults and merger representations, it is easy to account for their meaning. Just as definite descriptions in extensional contexts gave rise to referential and attributive interpretations, so propositional attitude reports give rise to *de re* and *de dicto* interpretations (at this level of detail, we shall ignore well known complications with this distinction; see e.g. Recanati

2000). And just as referential readings are the default for descriptions, so the *de re* reading is the default for attitude reports: the reading about the particular individual (*res*) is the cognitive default, and the underlying intentionality of the mental state of belief is the strongest, ‘undispersed’. Since I have also succeeded in applying this explanation to a variety of other problematic expressions and phenomena, including temporality, modality, and presupposition, the property of intentionality has proved to be an important explanatory tool in Default Semantics – and, arguably, a tool with a correct cognitive underlay.

To address your comment on production and comprehension: intentionality is necessarily a component of both. ‘Necessarily’, because the kinds of mental states of interlocutors pertinent to utterance processing and interpretation are intentional states: both the speaker and the hearer form beliefs at their respective ends of the communication process. Finally, on the question of context: as the model in Figure 1 demonstrates, pragmatic inference from contextual clues is one of the four sources of information, all treated on a par. Context adds to the output of grammar and lexicon, and sometimes, as I discussed in my previous answer, CPI 1 overrides the output of WS. Context may also create a situation in which CDs or SCDs, albeit statistically frequent, in practice do not arise. Remember that defaults in Default Semantics are global, post propositional: when they arise, they are rarely cancelled. They are cancelled when there is a mismatch between the information state of the speaker and the addressee and the speaker’s assumptions concerning the addressee’s background information to be used in the process of interpretation are mistaken. I should repeat that I am a moderate

contextualist as compared with Recanati (2004): surely, context is always present in the situation of discourse interpretation, but it is not always employed.

3)

In your book *Semantics and Pragmatics* (Jaszczolt 2002) there is a chapter on cross-cultural pragmatics. **How do you see the role of culture in meaning construction? Are intentions affected in any way if the interlocutor speaks more than one language?**

I think the question is best and most succinctly answered by pointing to social-cultural defaults SCD 1 and SCD 2 in my model of utterance interpretation in Figure 1 above.

Discourse is normally bound to place and time, it is immersed in a culture and society, it reflects them as well as helps create them. I find Sperber's (1996: 1) view most convincing:

‘Culture is made up, first and foremost, of ... contagious ideas... To explain culture, then, is to explain why and how some ideas happen to be contagious. This calls for the development of a true *epidemiology of representations*.’

Intended meanings are the input for such representations. Sometimes the intentions are grasped fully by the addressees, at other times they are misunderstood or ‘stored’ in some vague form in the addressee’s memory for future understanding. This is well accounted for in the idea of *metarepresenting* developed by Sperber and a group of his co-workers

and followers (see e.g. Sperber 2000). Humans have an ability to represent to themselves other people's, and their own, representations such as thoughts, utterances, and sentences. When a representation fits well with some already established cultural representations, it spreads well. Similarly, when it is only half-understood, it spreads as an irrational cultural or religious belief. Cultural beliefs can be of two types: factual (intuitive), based on, say, perception, or non-factual, representational (reflective), like half-understood ideas (see Sperber 1997). This perspective on culture is extremely fruitful for pragmatic theory. It allows us to see the process of utterance interpretation as metarepresenting the speaker's utterance. It tells us much more about the link between thoughts, utterances and what they stand for than the traditional view that utterances of sentences have a proposition as its meaning, assessed with relation to a model (understood as a kind of 'reality'). In practice, the propositional content, if any, may not be so easy to identify, and a thought may not be clearly propositional. Human ability to metarepresent, by definition, involves the possibility of 'misconstruing' (or 'metaconstruing') what is being metarepresented. For Sperber (1996: 97), '[c]ulture is the precipitate of cognition and communication in a human population'. My model of discourse processing proposed in *Default Semantics* shows how this cognition and communication work, drawing on more than the propositional content given in the WS, and, what differentiates it from other post-Gricean models, without giving the leading role to WS among the sources of meaning information. In this, I believe, it can be very useful for explicating the outcome of metarepresenting. It also incorporates the insight that culture, being itself the shared 'dossier' of beliefs, in turn facilitates communication and cognition: my social-cultural defaults (SCDs) sum up the idea that cultural beliefs give participants of that culture an

advantage in discourse processing in the form of ‘jumping to conclusions’, that is shortcuts through conscious inference.

The second part of your question concerns the effect that speaking more than one language can have on comprehension. I share Levinson’s (2003) view that languages differ only on ‘molecular level’, that of the constructions made out of simple, atomic concepts. On some deeper level, the level of atomic concepts, however, there are universals. He calls it *neo-Whorfianism*: linguistic relativity effects hold on the level of constructs that culture and society make for its own purposes out of some universal atomic concepts. Most of our thinking is conducted in such language-specific, high-level concepts, but these concepts can be broken down into low-level, atomic, universal concepts. Relativity and universalism are hereby reconciled. What this means for utterance interpretation is that cultural differences are not insurmountable. Concepts that are culture-specific can be understood by members of a different culture but perhaps not as swiftly as by the locals. Of course, one can also explicate this standpoint in terms of a universal language of thought or Natural Semantic Metalanguage of Wierzbicka’s (e.g. 1996), at least in its overall assumptions. The details of semantic composition are perhaps a little more contentious but this is not a place to elaborate on this point, neither are they relevant for the point I am making. In short: cultural differences are not a barrier precisely because what for ‘locals’ can be processed through SCD, for representatives of other cultures may have to be processed through CPI. ‘Jumping to conclusions’ may have to be replaced with conscious processing of the speaker’s intentions. Since the information about meaning that comes from various sources merges and it is only the

merger that counts as a representation of meaning, there is no problem with accounting for cross-cultural differences in Default Semantics.

I would like to conclude with a remark on the advantages of my model for handling cross-linguistic differences with respect to how much is communicated overtly, by grammar and lexicon. In my answer to the first question I mentioned that in Thai both tense and aspect are optional. One and the same construction can be interpreted as having future, present, or past time reference. Aspect and modality may also have to be inferred. What we have shown (Jaszczolt and Srioutai *forthcoming*; Srioutai 2004) is that merger representations are particularly well suited for analyzing speaker's intended meaning in languages like Thai where so much is left to pragmatic inference and defaults. The meaning of an act of communication is the merged meaning and, once we allocate the components of the merger representation to the correct sources (WS, CD, SCD, CPI) and show how they interact, it ceases to be a puzzle why and how languages can cope with such fuzziness or ambiguity. There is no ambiguity or fuzziness in merger representations and there is no reason why one source, WS, should give us all of the meaning: WS gives us more in one language, less in another, and all is well, communication is successful. We cannot at this stage answer the question as to whether this means that speakers of English and Thai conceptualize time differently, research is still in progress (Srioutai, *in progress*). However, it seems that the conclusion is likely to be neo-Whorfian again: there is the atomic level at which we can find universals, although, in thinking, representatives of different cultures make use of different 'molecules' made out of these atoms.

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