

# CHAPTER ONE

## FRAGMENTS AND SPEECH ACTS

ROBERT M. HARNISH,  
UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

*Think of exclamations alone, with their completely different  
functions: Water!, Away!, Ow!, Help!, Fire!, No!*

*Are you inclined still to call these words 'names of objects'?*

Wittgenstein, 1953: section 27

### 1. Introduction

If you pay attention, when people talk (or write things down) they often do not use complete sentences; they use 'fragments' – expressions which on the face of it are just words or phrases, such as Wittgenstein's examples above, though Wittgenstein's point is not ours.<sup>1</sup> These uses may be exclamations (they could have other uses too), but they are also exclamations with more content than just what is provided by the words alone. Here we will outline a theory of speech acts and communication with enough detail to accommodate our pragmatic intuitions regarding the interpretation of the utterance of fragments (which we will sometimes shorten to "fragment interpretation"). We will do this in two steps: first, we review a general theory directed primarily at the use of complete sentences; second, we investigate the extension of this theory to fragments. First, a bit of a background.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein was reacting to his earlier view in the *Tractatus* that words are names, and the organization of words in a sentence "pictures" the way the world must be if the sentence is true.

## 2. A Bit of Background<sup>2</sup>

The problem that fragments present to the theory of language is sometimes seen almost exclusively through the lens of syntax (and semantics): are such items just words (or phrases), or are they "short for" sentences?<sup>3</sup> And how should a systematic theory of the syntax of a language (a grammar or a parser) deal with them? Such a perspective has given rise to the "ellipsis wars". The big divisions in the project of specifying the linguistic properties of fragments is between those who "generate" fragments from sentences, those who "base-generate" fragments, those who do neither, but define the linguistic properties of fragments off of their occurrences as constituents in sentences that are "generated". There are other divides as well. Among "sentential" theories, some authors propose an "empty element" account<sup>4</sup> vs. the traditional deletion account.<sup>5</sup> Some describe syntactic ellipsis in terms of "reconstruction"<sup>6</sup>, and some deny that there is a syntactic phenomenon of ellipsis at all.<sup>7</sup> We will not take sides on this issue.<sup>8</sup>

But the problems fragments present can also be seen through the lens of pragmatics and cognitive science: how are such fragments interpreted? Clearly the syntactic-semantic question and the pragmatic question are related in that if fragments are "short for" sentences, then a correct grammar of sentences and a theory of how we interpret them will give us a theory of fragments almost for free. However, if some are not "short for" sentences, then we will need interpretive strategies that depart from the sentential model in some important respects. In this work we will assume that not all fragments are "short for" sentences and so fragments must be dealt with on a case by case basis.<sup>9</sup> Given this assumption, the problem becomes one of facing the following questions:

---

<sup>2</sup> See Harnish (2009) for a more detailed discussion of these issues.

<sup>3</sup> This umbrella term is meant to be neutral for ellipsis, abbreviation or any other kind of shortening.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Williams (1977).

<sup>5</sup> Consider the sentence 'The man who didn't see the man who did'. Contrast the empty element account (a) The man who didn't [leave]<sub>VP</sub> saw the man who did [\_\_VP], with the deletion analysis (b) The man who didn't [leave]<sub>VP1</sub> saw the man who did [Delta]<sub>VP</sub>.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Fiengo and May (1994).

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Dalrymple (2005).

<sup>8</sup> For surveys of ellipsis see Hankamer and Sag (1976), Chao (1988), Morgan (1989), Lappin (1996), Lappin and Benmamoun (eds.) (1999), Merchant (2001, 2004, 2006), Stainton (2005, section 3; 2006a, chapters 5, 6), Barton (1990, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> As is the view of some of the leading people working on these various aspects of fragments: Barton (1990), Merchant (2004), and Stainton (2006a).

- Q1. [Pragmatics] What is the best account of the (correct, successful) interpretation of the utterance of a fragment in a context? In particular:
- a. How can a speaker intend to communicate a given message (in many cases an illocutionary force and propositional content) by uttering a fragment in a context?
  - b. How can a hearer recognize what the speaker is intending to communicate in such cases?
- Q2. [Cognitive Science] What mental mechanisms and representations subservise acts of intended and successful communication using fragments?

The issue of the pragmatics and cognitive science of fragments has not profited from the kinds of debates and interactions that their syntax (and semantics) has. The first major inquiry, due to Barton (1990) can be sloganized as (revised) Chomsky plus (revised) Grice. Barton locates her theory between two competing theories. The first is structural (syntactic/semantic), the second is pragmatic. On the structural side Barton wants to deny that fragments are best accounted for by extending the phenomena of linguistic "ellipsis" (sentential or discourse) to them. On the pragmatic side, Barton wants to deny that the interpretation of fragments can be explained by the operation of a single non-modular principle such as in Relevance Theory. The second major inquiry, due to Stainton (2006a, b), locates the interpretation of fragments within cognitive science: speakers use more than linguistic competence to understand fragments, they use general knowledge and inferential abilities, and this means that information from a variety of sources and in a variety of formats (linguistic, perceptual, memorial) must be integrated during the process of the interpretation of fragments, as with any other utterance.

Each proposal has its virtues, but each has certain limitations as well: they agree that there are genuine fragments that need to be interpreted; they seem to disagree on the scope of the theory in that Stainton is willing to give the sententialist most of discourse ellipsis, whereas Barton's theory extends her pragmatic theory to include it. (Here we are inclined to agree with Stainton.) They agree on the central role of "inference" in fragment interpretation, but they differ on issues of modularity. (Here too we are inclined to side with Stainton.) Both Barton and Stainton take a combined pragmatic-cognitive science point of view, though the ratio is different for each of them. Barton appeals to implicature to help handle both syntactically and pragmatically controlled cases, but there is not very much discussion of mental representations, operations on them, or cognitive faculties. In Stainton in turn there is much more discussion of these latter cognitive science issues. Stainton seems to abjure implicature in handling the interpretation of fragments. Neither Stainton nor Barton has much to say about the interpretation of the force of fragments. When

one decides to give force equal billing with content it becomes clearer that what is needed is a more speech act oriented approach, one that fits fragment interpretation into a language framework of performing and communicating with speech acts in general.

### 3. The Framework Applied to Sentences

Here is what often happens when we talk. Speakers utter things (utterance act), and in uttering things they often say things (locutionary act), and in saying things they often do things (illocutionary act). And typically speakers bother with all this because they want to communicate something to a hearer, and even have some effect on the thought and/or action of that hearer (perlocutionary act). This much it would seem is just Austinian common sense. What is not common sense, but part of a theory, is how to best describe these acts, and how to explain the possibility of successful communication. The general framework for approaching these issues to be testing for adequacy in this work is not new. Indeed, it is about 30 years old – positively retro. It is a version of the theory of speech acts and communication put forward in Bach and Harnish (1979). Here is a brief reminder of the main relevant features of that theory.<sup>10</sup>

**Communicative Intentions.** Following Grice, we take it that successful communication involves the hearer recognizing what it is that the speaker intends to communicate. Once that happens, communication, at least, is successful, even though additional effects, such as boredom or persuasion may or may not follow. Communicative intentions are intended to be recognized, and when they are, communication is successful.

**Communicative Inference.** Also following Grice, we take it that this recognition involves a kind of 'inference' the hearer makes, an inference to the best available explanation of why the speaker uttered what they did under the circumstances. For

---

<sup>10</sup> One reason for this choice of this speech act theory over, say, rule-based theories such as Searle (1969) or Alston (2000), is the implausibility of many fragments being governed by illocutionary rules of the required sort: utter e in context C iff P. Such rules would endow these fragments with an unlimited number of meanings --one meaning for every possible completion of the fragment. See Harnish (2006), Harnish and Plunze (2006) for further discussion. The other major approach, due to Searle and Vanderveken (1985), has difficulties handling sentential mood, and so will be difficult to extend to fragments. See Harnish (2007) for detailed discussion.

instance, a hearer who understands a speaker to be offering to pay the hearer \$5, will have this thought because it is the best available explanation of why the speaker uttered "*I'll give you \$5 for that*" in circumstances where the hearer is selling something and is waiting for bids on it.

**Strategies.** Of course, there are multiple ways this inference can go. The sentence might be ambiguous or semantically incomplete, the references might be underdetermined, the speaker might not mean what they say (literality), the speaker might mean more than they say (indirection). The theory outlines inferential 'strategies' for these possibilities.

**Presumptions.** The theory also outlines factors that help 'cause' a hearer to make these inferences. We call these 'presumptions', which are largely shared by speaker and hearer, though they are defeasible and can be overridden by additional information. We propose, roughly:

- A. that speakers typically presume that the hearer shares enough of the language to understand what is said, and
- B. that hearers typically presume the speaker is speaking with some identifiable communicative intention, and
- C. that hearers typically presume the speaker is speaking 'cooperatively', viz. relevantly, truthfully, sincerely, etc.

**Speech Acts.** Finally, we propose a theory of speech acts that intersects with the above. We recognize all the above Austinian categories, and further subdivide illocutionary acts into those that are basically 'communicative' and those that are basically 'institutional' (or 'conventional'). We offer taxonomies of each category, and we offer (summary) analyses of about fifty particular acts.

**A Sample.** Consider a sample literal and direct (L&D) inference from Bach and Harnish for a full sentence:

- L1. S utters '*John will pay Sam back*'
- L2. S means that John will repay Sam (rather than John will seek revenge on Sam) by '*John will pay Sam back*'<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> The locution 'means that ... by ...' is actually a hybrid of two meaning specifications from Grice. The first is 'applied timeless meaning': "Such specifications aim to give one the correct reading ... on a particular occasion of utterance" (1989: 89). These involve directly quoting the words and in effect selecting a meaning. The second is 'utterer's occasion meaning', which

- L3. S is saying that John will repay Sam
- L4. S, if speaking literally, is constating that John will repay Sam
- L5. S could be speaking literally
- L6. S is constating that John will repay Sam

What further information allows L6 to be inferred? Basically information from linguistic and nonlinguistic sources. Linguistically, the mood of the sentence (declarative) restricts the class of (L&D) speech acts to those that are constative (involve the expression of beliefs and are truth-evaluable). Nonlinguistically, it involves settling on the exact force within the range of constatives. For instance, the speaker might be simply asserting, or guessing, suggesting, predicting, conceding, assenting, retracting, objecting, etc. that John will repay Sam, and which, if any, of these is recognized by the hearer will depend on the contextual (including the cooperative nature of the talk-exchange) and background information. For instance, if it is part of the knowledge of the context and talk-exchange up to the utterance that H just claimed that no one would repay Sam, then the speaker could be taken as objecting. If the speaker had claimed that John would not repay Sam, but then the hearer had given a reason why he would, then the speaker could be taken as conceding etc.

Bach and Harnish saw no possibility at the time (or maybe ever) of regimenting contextual and background knowledge in such a way as to be able to pair utterances of sentences with (L&D) illocutionary acts. The best that can be done is to say that given L1-L6, and the Presumptions, it is possible to specify contextual and background information that would make it reasonable for the hearer to take the speaker to be *F-ing that P* per L5/L6. We should not expect to be able to do more for fragments. But can we do as much? Let's begin, as Bach and Harnish did, with the inferentially simplest case: literal and direct. Let's also assume the theory of illocutionary acts from that book as a first approximation.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. The Framework Applied to (Free) Fragments: First Approximation**

Fragments come in degrees of non-sentencehood, and in typically spoken or

---

says what the speaker, not the words, means on an occasion, and these involve indirect quotation (1999: 89). L2 in effect takes the first and rolls it into the second. We will see a reason later for perhaps decoupling these two.

<sup>12</sup> Harnish (2005a) explores the strengths and weaknesses of "expressed attitude" theories of speech acts (such as Bach and Harnish) vs. "normative" theories (such as Alston's).

written form.<sup>13</sup> So it might be useful to first try to locate fragments (both spoken and written) in the space of expressions that are typically used to express a force and/or content.<sup>14</sup>

#### **TYPICALLY SPOKEN SENTENTIAL**

*Major Moods:* Snow is white, Leave the room!, Who is buried in Grant's Tomb?, Is snow white?, Snow is WHITE?

*Minor Moods:* John likes beer, doesn't he?, Does John resemble his father or his mother, Move or/and I'll shoot, What a nice dress

#### **TYPICALLY SPOKEN SEMI-SENTENTIAL**

*Sayings/Proverbs:* Waste not, want not; Monkey see, Monkey do; No pain, no gain; Out of sight, out of mind; Like father, like son

*Pragmatic Idioms:* How(s) about a beer?, Where does he get off saying something like that, Be that as it may, Take it easy!, Buzz off!, Up yours!

*Greeting/Leave-Takings:* Hello, Good morning/evening/night/bye

*Fragments:* Want some coffee?

#### **TYPICALLY SPOKEN NON-SENTENTIAL**

*Vocatives:* John! Hey! You over there!<sup>15</sup>

*Fragments:* Off with his head! On with the show! From Maui, On the floor

#### **TYPICALLY WRITTEN SEMI-SENTENTIAL**

*Special Registers:* Cookbooks, recipes, diaries, headlines, telegrams, telegraphic, instructions

#### **TYPICALLY WRITTEN NON-SENTENTIAL**

*Labels/Titles:* Strawberry Jam, 12% Alcohol by volume, Starbucks

*Street Signs:* Dead End, 60 Day/ 50 Night, I-10

---

<sup>13</sup> We need a taxonomy of the use of fragments that goes much deeper than this, one analogous to the dominant taxonomies of illocutionary acts. For a first approximation see Larson (1984).

<sup>14</sup> See Merchant (2006, section 3.6) for an overlapping list, not including moods.

<sup>15</sup> See Zwicky (1974) for an interesting discussion of vocatives. He argues that vocatives can be divided into "calls" and "addresses", and that NP vocatives differ syntactically and pragmatically from referential NPs.

As can be seen, we have located fragments in the cells: spoken X semi-sentential, spoken X non-sentential, written X non-sentential. We turn now to the question how to account for the interpretation of such fragments, given a theory for non-fragments.

## 5. Modifying the SAS

Bach and Harnish (1979, section 10.4) noted there are instances of what they called "taking a syntactic liberty", i.e. the "use of ungrammatical sentences or even nonsentences with identifiable illocutionary intents" (1979: 231). Many examples were cited, from the mangled grammar of accident reports, through cases of "scope shifting" and "lexical omissions"<sup>16</sup> to cases such as (repeated):

- (1)
  - a. Close [the] cover before striking [the match]
  - b. No smoking [allowed]
  - c. The Steelers [are] going for a field goal
  - d. [This is] Lucerne two-ten low-fat milk
  - e. [This road is] Slippery when wet
  - f. [Give me tickets for] Two nonstudents, please

Bach and Harnish noted that one problem for this class of locutions is that the theory outlined earlier in the book (what was called the "Speech Act Schema" or SAS) requires a level of representation stipulating what is said: S says that P. But in some of the above cases, especially the non-sentences, that "locutionary" level does not seem to be applicable. Bach and Harnish's way out was to postulate some extra processing in its stead:

H, assuming the CP [Communicative Presumption] to be in effect is able to figure out

---

<sup>16</sup> What Bach (1994) called "conversational implicature". It is an open question whether the utterance of fragments to perform illocutionary acts with propositional content is an instance of implicature, although some authors (e.g. Elugardo and Stainton, 2004) treat it as such (see Harnish part I, 2009). On the one hand, intuitively, the information that "completes" a fragment seems as much "implicit" in what is said as in other examples. On the other hand Bach's canonical examples of completion implicatures involve the full sentences, such as 'Al is finished' or 'Mary is ready'.

what S means by what he utters, perhaps by associating a grammatical sentence with the locution uttered. Perhaps what one does, using strategies developed through experience is ascertain [what is said] directly, without the mediation of a grammatical sentence. (1979, 231)

The first ("indirect" i.e. through words) way involves H having an idea as to what S intended to utter and from this to what S meant. This is something we do when faced with speech errors such as slips of the tongue, mispronunciations or malapropisms. At least occasionally it is possible to introspect the revised words. For instance, to get the kids joke: "Two peanuts were walking down an ally; one of them was a salted/assaulted" it is necessary to hear the single phonetic string as possibly two separate word strings. The second ("direct") way bypasses revised wording and goes directly to what S meant. Bach and Harnish say nothing about what this second way might look like nor how it might be "developed through experience". It is worth looking again at this phenomenon.

The minimal modification, one discussed by Bach and Harnish (1979, chapter 2), is to add to the 'said that' locution, by allowing other forms of saying. The most natural extension is to what are called "referentially transparent" uses of 'said' i.e. 'said of' as in:

- (2) John said of [the guy next door] that problems with the pregnancy were likely

Here the description 'the guy next door' is taken to be the speakers description and not a description John would accept, who thinks the neighbor is female. This may work for a few of the above examples (note that we had to cheat with bracketed material):

- (3)  
a'. He said of the match book and the match [to] close cover before striking  
e'. He said of the road that [it is] slippery when wet

But for the rest, it is very awkward, e.g.:

- b'. ?He said of the situation [that] no smoking [is allowed?]  
d'. ?He said of [the] Lucerne two-ten low-fat milk that [it is] Lucerne two-ten low-fat milk  
f'. ?He said of two tickets and the giving relation: two nonstudents, please

In conclusion, it looks like for some fragments we need to bypass a strictly

locutionary stage (saying that, saying of).<sup>17</sup> That gives us a spectrum of cases:

1. (Enriched) saying that: in uttering 'on the table' [when asked where the knife is] S said that the knife was on the table
2. Saying of: in uttering 'on the table' [when noticing someone looking for the knife] S said of the knife that it was on the table
3. Utterance saying: In uttering 'Two non-students, please' S said 'Two non-students, please'

So what we should do first is see how some of the examples mentioned above from Bach and Harnish might work:

(1'a) Close cover before striking

This is relatively simple for two reasons. First, it is more of a small clause than a fragment in that it has readily identifiable sentential structure and only NP related material needs to be recovered. Second, its typical use on e.g. matchbooks gives it the status of something like an instruction, in an abbreviated form that has become standardized<sup>18</sup> as to what cover to close (the one with the token on it) and what to strike (a match). So determining what the message is requires little figuring out. The SAS is "short-circuited" by the standardized information. Exactly how to state this is currently up for grabs, but it might look something like this:

Standardization 'Close cover before striking' is standardly used to instruct the reader to close the cover of the matchbook it is printed on when striking a match on its scratch surface.<sup>19</sup>

(1'b) No smoking

This is also a fairly standardized example – it may in fact be a kind of pragmatic idiom, which is productive in the gerund position (no parking, no running, etc.). We

---

<sup>17</sup> See Bach (2001) for a discussion of other objections to a locutionary stage.

<sup>18</sup> See Bach and Harnish (1979: 193) for a first approximation to a definition of standardization.

<sup>19</sup> See Sadock (1974) for a discussion of the grammar of "labelese". In particular he notes a variety of relationships the understood referents, usually of what would be the object NP, bear to the fragment: (i) the referent is the label itself ('Do not remove under penalty of law'), what the label is on ('Do not puncture or incinerate'), if a container, its contents ('Stir well'). There are obvious similarities to "cookbookese".

hear it as 'Don't smoke' even though the natural completion turns it into a constative: 'No smoking is allowed' or even better 'Smoking is not allowed'. Again, little figuring out is required once it is determined that it is being uttered literally; exactly how to state this is also currently up for grabs, but it might look something like this:

Standardization 'No smoking' is standardized for directing the hearer/reader to not smoke in the vicinity of the location of the utterance/sign.

(1'e) Slippery when wet

One way of viewing this is as a standardized indirect utterance:

(L&D constative) This road is slippery when wet  
(Indirect directive) Drive carefully (because this road is slippery when wet)

Standardization 'Slippery when wet' is standardized for directing the reader to drive carefully on the road the "utterance" is next to because it is slippery when it is wet.

(1'f) Two nonstudents, please

The literal use of 'please' is evidence that a directive is in the offing. However, circumstances must provide the information regarding the exact force and mode of communication:

- (f) Give/Sell me tickets for two nonstudents (L&D directive)
- (f') I would like tickets for two nonstudents (L&D constative + Indirect directive)

Let's turn back to some of our earlier fragment examples, moving from the more sentence-like to the least.

#### **PROTO-MOOD FRAGMENTS**

In these examples, the fragment seems to carry some force information as part of its structure (words, syntax, intonation). We can use the device of indicating with words what a completion of the fragment might look like.

#### **Exclamations**

(4) What a nice dress! [that is]

This can be analyzed as a minor mood.<sup>20</sup> However, here we will explore the idea that they are fragments (too). Intuitively, exclamatives such as these express a pro-attitude toward the item "mentioned" in the fragment. That is the function of the mood of the sentence, including the word 'nice'. The understood element is the item being remarked about. It is not clear what the "logical structure" or "propositional content" of such an exclamative is, but one candidate would be: 'That dress is nice!' Evidence that this is so (vs., say: 'That is a nice dress') is that it is easy to highlight 'nice' for sarcasm, but not 'nice dress'.

### Directives

- (5) [Let's get] On with the show!
- (6) [\*Cut/\*take] Off with his head!

The first could well be a pragmatic idiom. There are limits to its productivity in that substituting other NPs creates forms that are intelligible, but sound like plays on the original (e.g. 'On with the movie!'). The second construction is much more productive, even clothing can be mentioned (but not arbitrary possessions). However, it does not seem to involve simply leaving out words that could be there (\*'Cut off with his head'). That may suggest a special construction, with a special use:

- (6) 'Off with (3rd person possessive) NP' is used to direct the hearer to cut/take off (3rd person possessive) NP.

### Questions

- (7) [Is this] From Columbia?
- (8) [Do you] Want some coffee?

Raising intonation on these forms may carry the force of an Yes/No interrogative sentence, but without sentential propositional content. Since a Yes/No interrogative requires something propositional to Yes or No, something is needed to be the "subject" of the remark, and that is recovered from context:

- (7) 'From Columbia?' is used to ask for a response whether X is from Columbia or not

---

<sup>20</sup> See Harnish (1983: especially 353), Sadock and Zwicky (1985, section 2.3.1).

- (8) 'Want some coffee?' is used to ask for a response whether the hearer wants some coffee or not.

#### NEUTRAL FRAGMENTS

Sadock and Zwicky (1985) give the following examples, and say that they have a variety of uses (they do not say if all expressions have all these uses):

- (9)
- a. Some whiskey (Quantifier)
  - b. Six of the pink ones with sprinkles on top (Cardinal Number)
  - c. All of you with beards (Quantifier)
  - d. Lord Threshingham (Proper Name)
  - e. The left shoulder, please (Definite Description)

To make this plausible, let us take examples from (9a) and supply some words to indicate possible contexts for their use:

- (9')
- a. [Please give me] Some whiskey: request
  - b. [Give me] Some whiskey: order
  - c. [Would you like] Some whiskey: offer
  - d. Some whiskey [falling, watch out]: warning
  - e. Some whiskey [or your life]: threat
  - f. [All you've got is] Some whiskey: dismay
  - g. [Oh goody] Some whiskey: delight
  - h. [That is] Some whiskey: identify the liquid

And Stainton (2006b and elsewhere) gives many examples of Verb Phrases, Prepositional Phrases, Adjective Phrases, Adverbial Phrases etc. used as fragments:

- (10)
- a. [The hammer is] on the floor (Statement)
  - b. [Get down] on the floor (Command)
  - c. [Take me] to Segova (Request)
  - d. [On the floor] Quick(ly) (Command)
  - e. [These Twinkies were] purchased at Walmart (Statement)

It would not be hard to tell an ad hoc story for each of these that would do the

job of the words in brackets. For example, in the case of (10a) vs. (10b) we need only imagine scenarios of a bank robbery as opposed to a carpenter and his assistant. According to the Bach and Harnish story rehearsed earlier, in each case S will be presumed to be speaking with some recognizable illocutionary intent, and H will try to recognize that intent on the basis of knowledge of 'on the floor', contextual and background information. In the case of (10a) we imagine a carpenter asking his assistant for the hammer, the assistant saying he does not have it, both of them looking around, the carpenter spotting it as close to the assistant and uttering 'on the floor'. Again, after the utterance H will presume that S expects the hammer to be locatable on the floor and H will look there for it. In the case of (10b), being in the middle of a bank robbery is likely to remind H of such scenes from movies or literature where people fell to the floor. And the threatening demeanor and gestures of the robber will either reinforce this, or independently give H this idea. These stories do not require the fragment to be "short-for" (elliptical-for, an abbreviation-of, etc.) anything sentential. Even assuming (with Stainton) that only propositions can be communicatively meant, not everything "in" the proposition need be a value of something "in" the utterance.<sup>21</sup> How, then, might the connection between the fragment (with its mutually believed linguistic properties), the context, background information, etc., and the proposition meant be organized?

Perry (1994) was perhaps the first to suggest using Kaplan's (1989) "structured propositions".<sup>22</sup> Think of propositions as structured entities "containing" what they are about. Some propositions might involve only properties and/or relations, so-called "general" propositions such as that all men are mortal. Others might involve properties and/or relations but also some individual object, so-called "singular" propositions such as that Socrates is mortal. Such propositions can be the content of e.g. an assertion, and one that is communicatively successful, in virtue of having the identity of the intended constituents recognized by H (as meant by S). When we say that in producing an utterance the speaker expresses a certain proposition, that can cover two importantly different relations. Perry (*ibid*) distinguishes between "constructing" a thought or proposition, as when one asserts a proposition unrecoverable from the context, and "completing" a thought or proposition, as when at least one constituent of the proposition is recovered from context. In this latter case, the expression uttered can be viewed as expressing a schematic proposition, a

---

<sup>21</sup> See Stanley (2000) and Cappelen and Lepore (2005) for the contrary view relative to sentences. We withhold final judgment on this question for sentences, however.

<sup>22</sup> See also Elugardo and Stainton (2003) for further discussion. Both Perry, and Elugardo and Stainton, focus on singular propositions for fragments, but in principle general propositions could be recovered from context as well.

proposition with a missing constituent in need of completion.<sup>23</sup> Most importantly, this schematic proposition can be viewed in some cases as "in the air". When it is, the utterance of an expression that identifies the missing constituent can be sufficient, in the context to allow the hearer to recover a complete proposition. For example, in the carpenter case the property/relation is carried in large part by the linguistic expression 'on the floor', and the object (the hammer) which has been fixed by past experience (its the only hammer they have on the job) is the object S and H are seeking, and is what S now sees.<sup>24</sup> So the singular proposition <HAMMER, ON THE FLOOR><sup>25</sup> is the content of S's assertion, as well as what H grasps when H understands that assertion.

How psychologically is S able mean that proposition, and how is H able to grasp that? Those are good questions, but for cognitive science, not for pragmatics.<sup>26</sup> In addition to not having a general theory of perceptual "aboutness",

---

<sup>23</sup> Perry calls these incomplete propositions "issues". This terminology has not caught on. Note that these need not have just one hole in them, though presumably the more holes, the harder it will be to complete them correctly.

<sup>24</sup> We assume that 'the floor' has been taken care of; the status of predication (what 'be' would do in an utterance) is still dark.

<sup>25</sup> Where HAMMER is the actual hammer, and ON THE FLOOR is the property/relation of being on the floor.

<sup>26</sup> Though someone might practice both. For instance, Elugardo and Stainton (2003, section 5), building on work of Levine and Pylyshyn, sketch a story of how this might go in a modular cognitive architecture. Although I am sympathetic to its broad outlines, some of the details are puzzling. For instance, they propose that there is a mentalese demonstrative **IT** associated with a percept, **a**, such that **IT**<sub>a</sub> refers to the thing you see. "It does so in virtue of demonstrating a percept, namely **a**, that itself represents the dog. The demonstrated percept in turn, represents the dog in virtue of certain causal facts about the perceptual situation, including facts about the visual indexes that play a causal role in tracking the perceived dog." (ibid, 292) But it is unclear why the percept **a** itself is not the "visual demonstrative" picking out the dog and allowing the subject to think and speak of the dog. The constraint that thinking is done in mentalese (the "language of thought") does not necessarily rule out percepts or imagistic copies of them (we can remember what a visual object looked like). Fodor's (1975) original discussion of the structure and vocabulary of mentalese left the question of the referential role of percepts/images ("images-under-descriptions") officially open: "What I regard as an open empirical question is the mechanisms by which descriptions and images are related" (1975: 193). Fodor's main negative argument against images is directed not at their referential role, but their role as truth-bearers: "It is ... no more problematic that there should be a language in which reference is defined for images than that there should be a language in which reference is defined for words ... But I see no way of construing the notion that there might be a language in which truth is defined for icons instead of symbols ..." (180).

no one has a general theory of what makes a part of the context informationally relevant to recognizing a communicative intention for sentences, let alone for fragments. What authors do is what we just did: stipulate the relevant pieces of information, then try to show how, given that information, the interpretation might go. Here stipulation is a substitute for a theory of contextual salience.

***The Limits of Stipulation: The Thirsty Man.*** Stanley (2000), in his influential and provocative article, argues in passing that some purported examples of the utterance of fragments to perform discourse initial (genuine) speech acts are only that, purported. His target example is this:

(11) (A thirsty man staggers up to a vendor and says:) 'Water'

Stanley doubts that the thirsty man made a "linguistic speech act"<sup>27</sup> based on two principles. First, linguistic speech acts must be performed with a determinate force, and second, linguistic speech acts must express a determinate content (Stanley 2000: 407).<sup>28</sup> However, in the thirsty man case: "It would be equally consistent with the thirsty man's intentions to suppose that the utterance was a request or command [besides an assertion]." (407) And moreover: "Is the proposition thereby expressed the proposition that the thirsty man wants water? Is the proposition that the vendor should give the thirsty man water? The available facts simply do not determine a determinate propositional content" (408). Elugardo and Stainton (2004) rightly question the two principles that underlie Stanley's claim.<sup>29</sup> In particular, they argue that examples like the above show that the thirsty man can be seen to have issued a directive, because the "speech act, whatever it may be, is satisfied" if the thirsty man is given water by the vendor. It does not matter, as they put it, what the "special circumstances" of the utterance are. It could be "metaphysically indeterminate which specific kind of illocutionary force" (466) the utterance had "without vitiating the utterance's bona fides as a speech act"<sup>30</sup> (466). Be this as it may, the point to be pressed here is that the case is radically underdescribed. What Stanley stipulates leaves it open what the thirsty man's intentions and beliefs are. Elugardo and Stainton only mention social and physical circumstances. Of course,

---

<sup>27</sup> Stanley does not explain this peculiar expression, alien to speech act theory. Are there "nonlinguistic" speech acts? what would they be?

<sup>28</sup> Stanley does not say where these principles come from or what justifies holding them.

<sup>29</sup> They call them "Stanley's (Determinate) Force Principle" (465) and "Stanley's Determinate Content Principle" (466).

<sup>30</sup> But if the speech act is an illocutionary act, doesn't it have to have SOME kind of illocutionary force (even if disjunctive)? If not, what makes the force ILLOCUTIONARY?

given only this, it can be "metaphysically indeterminate" what speech act has been performed. And Elugardo and Stainton's evidence for a directive force is only relevant if the thirsty man is speaking sincerely, etc. Moreover, the circumstances plus fragment do not determine the communicative mode of the directive: was it direct ('Give/sell me some water') or indirect ('I want/would like some water', 'Do you have any water?')? If one makes up an example it is no fair to leave out determining information and then complain that the act is indeterminate.

## 6. Fragments, Pragmatically Controlled Ellipsis<sup>31</sup> and the SAS

Earlier we claimed that not all fragments are "short for" sentences, and that identifying the "free" fragments must be handled on a case-by-case basis. This goes against linguistic conservatism which would like to use sentence grammar to cover all the data. And it goes against pragmatic conservatism which would like to use inference and speech acts to cover all the data.

In an interesting series of papers and replies, Hankamer, Sag and Schachter have explored this border with the tools of syntax and speech act theory. The data they discuss is interesting and the principles they offer are controversial. The material is worth reviewing in its own right, but additionally we would like to know if the approach we have started to develop in the first parts of this paper can help resolve any of these issues.

### 6.1. A Bit More Background

The first and historically most important type of ellipsis was "syntactic" ellipsis within sentences, and specific operations (or families of operations) had labels such as:

SYNTACTICALLY CONTROLLED SENTENTIAL ELLIPSIS:

**Gapping:** Mary hit the hay and John the bottle.

**VP Deletion:** The man who didn't leave saw the man who did.

---

<sup>31</sup> See Hankamer and Sag (1976), Sag and Hankamer (1984), Stainton (2005), Elugardo and Stainton (2005) for more discussion of the distinction between syntactic and pragmatic ellipsis. See Tanenhaus et al. (1985, 1990) for experiments tending to support the distinction between these two forms of ellipsis.

*Comparative Deletion*: Mary found more counterexamples than John (found).

*PP Deletion*: Mary is at the door and Betty is too

*Subject-Verb Gapping*: John ate dinner last night, and breakfast this morning.

*Sluicing*: Mary is at the door and I wonder why

*Stripping*: Mary likes to surf but not Betty

The original transformational analysis of these cases was in terms of deletion (under identity).<sup>32</sup> But this was, and is not, the only way of seeing these cases. Indeed this kind of analysis is now controversial, even passe.

It was then noticed that many within-sentence processes could cross sentence and even speaker boundaries:<sup>33</sup>

#### SYNTACTICALLY CONTROLLED DISCOURSE ELLIPSIS

##### Stripping

(12) Hankamer: Listen, Ivan, he's playing the William Tell Overture on the recorder.

Sag: Yeah, but not very well.

##### Gapping

(13) Hankamer: Ivan is now going to peel an apple.

Sag: and Jorge, an orange.

## 6.2. Pragmatically Controlled Ellipsis

In contrast to the above intra and inter sentential (syntactic) examples are cases of "pragmatic" ellipsis, where information is understood not because it is in some sentence, but because it is available from the context to use in filling out the content carried by the sentence:

(14) [We both notice Hulk Hogan entering the room]: (That guy is) Big!

---

<sup>32</sup> Plus or minus a bit, as in Stripping: \*Mary likes to surf, but not Betty likes to surf. Rather: Mary likes to surf, but Betty does not like to surf.

<sup>33</sup> The examples are from Sag and Hankamer (1977).

Sag and Hankamer illustrate how some ellipsis processes can pass content from being pragmatically controlled to being syntactically controlled:

- (15) [Sag produces a cleaver and prepares to hack off his left hand]
- a. Hankamer: Don't be alarmed ... he never actually does it.
  - b. Hankamer: At least he never has yet

Interestingly, there is reason to think that there are some elliptical processes which must be syntactically controlled and cannot be pragmatically controlled:

### Stripping

- (16) [Sag plays William Tell Overture on a recorder] Hankamer: \*Yeah, but not very well

### Gapping

- (17) [Hankamer produces an orange, proceeds to peel it, and just as Sag produces an apple, says:]  
\*And Ivan, an apple.

Why do some processes require syntactic control? Sag and Hankamer suggest that it is those:

[The Claim]

"which consist in syntactic deletion, leaving no pro-form in place of the deleted structure, that require syntactic control." (1977, 125)

But there are numerous limitations to The Claim and exploring them will bring out some interplay between the syntax and pragmatics of fragments. First, we would still like to know why the presence vs. absence of a pro-form correlates with pragmatic vs. syntactic control. What is the connection?<sup>34</sup> Second, Sag and Hankamer note that (18) might be a counterexample to the above claim:

- (18) [I see you about to throw up in my wastebasket:] Not in my wastebasket, you don't

---

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the thought is that having a pro-form available allows pragmatic information to "bind" to it, but with nothing there it cannot. See point four below.

Sag and Hankamer tentatively propose that: "the requirement of syntactic control holds only for strictly declarative sentences, sentences with the illocutionary force of statements" (1977: 133-4). But "declarative" and "statement" are not alternative ways of saying the same thing. The first is a grammatical category, the second is a speech act category, and they do not always go together – one can state (or request) something indirectly with e.g. an interrogative sentence. At best the speech act category needs to be restricted to literal and direct performances.<sup>35</sup> But is illocutionary force really necessary? Why not restrict it to just declarative mood? Sag and Hankamer note that imperatives and exclamations also appear to be counterexamples to the above claim:

(19) [Hankamer brandishes a cleaver, advances on Sag]  
Sag: Don't! My God, please don't!

(20) [You see an acquaintance has dyed their hair green]  
You didn't!<sup>36</sup>

Sag and Hankamer conclude:

What is clear is that in each of these cases the illocutionary force is not declarative ... we have no idea why there should be such an effect on the behavior of anaphoric processes conditional on the illocutionary force of the utterance (1977: 134).

Again, why is illocutionary force necessary over and above mood? Moreover, it is not clear how and where in a grammar one would state such a condition.

Third, Sag and Hankamer note that this division may not be hard and fast. They give the example:

Sag (to Hankamer): [After watching a pygmy pole vaulter, not three feet tall, spit on his hands, rub them up and down on the shaft of his pole, eye that bar which is fixed at 19'3", take a thirty-yard running approach, and successfully clear the bar by an inch and a half] It looks like he can! (1977: 134)

---

<sup>35</sup> And even then, "statements" is too narrow, at least if it is supposed to contrast with other more specific "constatives" (see Searle 1975; Bach and Harnish 1979: chapter 3 section 1).

<sup>36</sup> It is not clear that the sentence is not declarative (in form) and the speaker is not making a statement – which is not to say that they are not also e.g. exclaiming.

Their explanation of this is that:

... once an event or situation has been observed long enough in silence, it becomes part of a tacit discourse between the observers, and can trigger syntactically controlled anaphora ... . (1977: 134)

It is hard to know what to say about this explanation. Surely it is not literally true that the "situation" becomes a part of "discourse", since other words describing the situation would have worked as well – are there many "discourses"? And the description does not have to be nearly so elaborate to work:

Sag (to Hankamer): [After noticing a pygmy pole vaulter, not three feet tall, eye that bar which is fixed at 19'3"] I wonder if he can.

Fourth, it is not clear how a situation or an aspect of a situation becomes a "pragmatic controller" or a candidate to be one, nor how this "controlling" actually works.

### 6.3. Schachter's Pragmatic Alternative

Hankamer and Sag (1976, section 6.3) note that the existence of syntactically controlled ellipsis poses an obstacle for a kind of "pan-pragmatics", the idea that:

a creature that could interpret sentences in isolation, and who is adequately endowed with common sense, would need no additional apparatus in order to converse just like us normal humans.

This is because syntactically controlled anaphora imposes a: "purely linguistic requirement ... that [the discourse] contain an explicit antecedent of the appropriate syntactic form".

Schachter (1977) argues in favor of such a picture. He begins by noting that there are counterexamples to The Claim:

- (21) (John tries to kiss Mary. She says)  
John, you mustn't
- (22) (John pours another martini for Mary. She says)  
I really shouldn't

and proposes an explanation for both such cases; cases where no proform (which

Schachter calls 'propredicates') is left behind, as with personal pronouns, are generated directly and are interpreted on the basis of contextual clues that may be either linguistic or nonlinguistic, and:

[The Hypothesis]

... speakers are free to use propredicates without linguistic antecedents whenever they can reasonably assume that these propredicates will convey the intended message. (767)

Schachter thinks this hypothesis also accounts for the rarity of such cases:

... the number of possible referents for [a propredicate] in any given situation is usually too large to ensure that the intended message will in fact be conveyed. Obviously this need not be the case with personal pronouns

(764, quoting from 1976)

... the relative rarity of pragmatically controlled propredicates is thus a reflection of the relative rarity of situations in which a speaker can legitimately [presume that his intended message will be conveyed by a sentence in which there is a propredicate that lacks a linguistic antecedent?

(765)

Schachter notes a declarative counterexample to The Claim restricted to declaratives (due to Kuno):

(23) (A and B are competing in weight lifting. A lifts 300 pounds. B says:)  
If you can, so can I/I can

and argues that The Hypothesis can deal with Sag and Hankamer's examples too:<sup>37</sup>

... nondeclaratives in general cover a narrower referential range than declaratives. Thus statements may be about anyone or anything, but requests are restricted to actions to be performed by the addressee and questions to information presumably possessed by the addressee. (767)

In sum, the existence and/or location of the exact line between syntactically and

---

<sup>37</sup> Hankamer (1978) argues that Schachter's proposal for pragmatic rather than syntactic control of VP ellipsis as a general phenomenon does not work. High recoverability of the "meaning" of an anaphor is not sufficient, because in the same situation there cases where VP anaphora does not work: [Clairol ad] \*'Does she?', [another Martini] \*'John, are you aware that no one else has?'

pragmatically controlled deletion may need to be reconceived, and there may be more going on pragmatically than there first appeared to be.<sup>38</sup>

#### 6.4. Ellipsis and the SAS

As far as the SAS is concerned, syntactically controlled ellipsis can be inferred from the SAS in the same fashion as any other sentence, on the assumption that the "fragment" is really a sentence (repeated):

(24)

- a. Hankamer: Ivan is now going to peel an apple.
- b. Sag: and Jorge, an orange
- c. [And Jorge is now going to peel an orange]
- d. Message: Sag is constating that Jorge is now going to peel an orange<sup>39</sup>

According to the SAS, if the hearer presumes the speaker (Sag) is uttering the fragment with some recognizable communicative intent, and the hearer's linguistic competence allows hearing (b) as (c), then the hearer, given contextual information will interpret the utterance of (b) as (d). One problem facing the SAS is where and how exactly to represent the move from (b) to (c). Should it be represented as what is uttered or as an extension of what is uttered:

L1 S uttered: 'and Jorge, an orange'

L1' S produced the sentence: 'and Jorge is going to peel an orange'

OR

L1 S uttered: 'and Jorge is going to peel an orange'

We will not settle this here, except to note that if one does not take the "elliptical" line with syntactically controlled deletion, and one tries to deal with the fragment directly, then the SAS has problems at later levels as well. Consider (24b) again:

---

<sup>38</sup> For instance Sag and Hankamer (1984) reconceptualise the distinction in terms of processing surfacy logical forms and processing discourse model entities.

<sup>39</sup> This leaves out the conjunctive component, which is controversial. Grice proposed distinguishing basic, core speech acts, such as constatives, from derivative speech acts commenting on them, which the conjunction 'and' here might be seen as doing.

- L1 S uttered: 'and Jorge, an orange'
- L2 ?S means that: and Jorge, an orange, by 'and Jorge, an orange'<sup>40</sup>
- L3 ?S said that: and Jorge, an orange
- L4 S, if speaking literally is: conjoining the constative that Jorge is going to peel an orange.

The rest of the syntactically controlled ellipsis examples have the same limitation.

Pragmatically controlled ellipsis offers an extra challenge to the SAS, beyond where and how to represent unspoken linguistic information. Since there is no sentence in the offing, such fragment interpretation does not reduce to the general case of (complete) sentences, and so the information that would have been carried by the linguistic context now has to be recruited from the nonlinguistic context, which is notoriously egalitarian when it comes to the relevance of its parts. Recall that Schachter's (1977: 767) "Hypothesis" for pro predicates was:

... speakers are free to use pro predicates without linguistic antecedents whenever they can reasonably assume that these pro predicates will convey the intended message.

And this can be applied to pragmatically controlled fragments in general, because in essence it is just a special case of the Communicative Presumption of the SAS, viz. if a hearer presumes that the speaker is speaking with a recognizable communicative intention, then the speaker must expect that intention to be recognizable on the basis of what is uttered, and other contextual and background information. So the information the speaker considers relevant to recognizing his communicative intent must also be considered available to the hearer, who will see that and how that information is relevant to that recognition. This is just a fleshed out version of Schachter's hypothesis.

Consider examples from Sag and Hankamer, and Schachter, some repeated:

[SAG AND HANKAMER]

(25)

- a. [Hankamer is about to throw up in Sag's wastebasket]  
Sag: Not in my wastebasket, you don't  
Sag's message: Don't (you) throw up in my wastebasket!

---

<sup>40</sup> Here is where decoupling applied times meaning (of an utterance type) from utterer's occasion meaning might be useful. Surely if the fragment were ambiguous one could report which meaning is operative by something like: S meant here: \_\_\_ by Y. To use Grice's example: S meant here marijuana by 'grass'.

- b. [Hankamer brandishes a cleaver, advances on Sag]  
Sag: Don't! My God, please don't!  
Sag's message: Don't cut me with that cleaver! My God, please don't cut me with that cleaver!
- c. [S&H notice a pygmy pole vaulter, not three feet tall, eye that bar which is fixed at 19'3"]  
Sag (to Hankamer): I wonder if he can  
Sag's message: I wonder if he can clear the bar.

[SCHACHTER]

(26)

- a. Does she or doesn't she? (Miss Clairol ad)
- b. (John tries to kiss Mary. She says:)  
John, you mustn't  
Mary's message: John, you mustn't kiss me
- c. (John pours another martini for Mary. She says:)  
I really shouldn't  
Mary's message: I really shouldn't drink another martini.
- d. (The band starts playing, and several couples head for the dance floor. Pulling back his chair and half-raising, John says to Mary:)  
Shall we?  
John's message: Shall we dance?
- e. (John hands Mary the expensive present he has bought for her. She says:)  
Oh, John, you shouldn't have  
Mary's message: Oh, John, you shouldn't have bought me this expensive present.
- f. (John comes to the table where Mary is sitting, makes as if to take out one of the spare chairs, and says:)  
May I?  
John's message: May I sit here?  
(Mary replies)  
Please do  
Mary's message: Please do sit (t)here

- g. (A and B are competing in weight lifting. A lifts 300 pounds. B says:)  
If you can, so can I/I can  
B's message: If you can lift 300 pounds, so can I lift 300 pounds/I can lift  
300 pounds

In each of these cases the theory would like the SAS to proceed as if the "message" (or the sentence reporting it) replaced the fragment. For instance, for (26c) above:

- L1 S uttered: 'I really shouldn't'  
L2 S means that: She really shouldn't [have another Martini]  
L3 S said that: She really shouldn't [?have another Martini]<sup>41</sup>  
L4 S, if speaking literally is: constating that she really shouldn't have another  
Martini.

The usual problem recurs here: how to get an appropriate content from the context? Merchant (2004, 2006) has proposed a theory of "limited ellipsis", which, if it can be maintained, would allow the SAS to proceed as usual.<sup>42</sup> Simplifying, Merchant's idea is that the Sag, Hankamer and Schachter examples involve an unpronounced VP form [<sub>VP</sub> do it].<sup>43</sup> There are two ways this proposal could be taken. On the one hand, the words of English 'do it' could be constituents of this VP. On the other hand, do it could be some sort of pro-VP analogous to a free variable or a trace. Merchant tends to talk of it in the former way, as when discussing examples like those above:

In all cases, I claim the elided VP is [<sub>VP</sub> do it]. The meaning of this VP is licensed by the discourse relevance of some action; it need not have a determinate propositional content, if by determinate we mean that the hearer can determine precisely what the speaker had in mind ... What is linguistically relevant is that action and participants in those actions can be raised to salience to resolve the anaphora involved in the VP expression do it (whatever 'it' refers to here). Under these conditions, this VP can be elided, yielding the above examples. (2004: 720)

---

<sup>41</sup> It is still an open question what is "said", parallel to the question of what was "uttered" in syntactic ellipsis.

<sup>42</sup> Stainton (2006b) raises some important issues. For instance, if these fragments involve VP-deletion of [<sub>VP</sub> do it], then why can't they be embedded the way the full version can: 'If there is graffiti on the wall, then several men from Segova \*0/did it'. And what is the source for (Q) 'The Pope likes beer and what?' – surely not the required (A) 'Tomato juice the Pope likes beer and t'.

<sup>43</sup> Merchant has an analogous proposal for pro-NPs, such as: '[that/it is] Sam's mom'.

In the passage Merchant alludes to "the meaning of this VP", viz. do it, as licensed by discourse relevance. It is not clear what that amounts to. Surely, if the words 'do it' occur in the VP (notice the phrase "whatever 'it' refers to"), they have the meaning they have, discourse or not. Merchant's rationale for supposing these cases to involve eliding [<sub>VP</sub> do it] is that: "only the VP do it can be made manifest enough to antecede an ellipsis; other linguistic descriptions of pragmatically salient eventualities, with particular lexical items and other structure specific properties, cannot." (2004, 722) And this is because:

a large number of mutually compatible specific linguistic descriptions" can correctly characterize the context ... deciding which among these might be intended by a user of ellipsis is simply impossible." (2004, 722)

All of this makes it sound as if the words 'do it' occur unpronounced in these fragments. On the other hand, do it with English words is not optionally pronounced in every case. Due to the eccentricities of colloquial English, 'do it' simply cannot always be said preserving contextual appropriateness:<sup>44</sup>

- (27)
- a. ?Not in my wastebasket, you don't (do) it
  - b. Don't! My God, please don't (do) it
  - c. You didn't do it
  - d. I wonder if he can do it
  - e. Does she or doesn't she do it
  - f. John, you mustn't do it
  - g. I really shouldn't do it
  - h. Shall we do it
  - i. Oh, John, you shouldn't have do(ne) it
  - j. May I do it, Please do (do) it

This suggests that do it is some sort of pro-VP, functioning like an indexical, and its reference will be determined<sup>45</sup> on the speaker's side by referential intentions and information about context, and on the hearer's side by the appreciation of these

---

<sup>44</sup> For instance, in neutral contexts (5e,h) are vaguely suggestive.

<sup>45</sup> As Bach e.g. (2005) has emphasized, there are two things that go by the label of "determining" e.g. content: saying what constitutes having such and such a content, and saying how a hearer might figure out or recognize that an utterance has such and such a content. Merchant seems to assume only the second, when both are of theoretical interest.

same factors.<sup>46</sup> Taken this way, the above "fragments" would really be sentential with a pro-VP requiring reference fixing-and-recognition, but nothing that the SAS can't accommodate already.

A different, but possibly related suggestion comes from Hankamer (1978), who does not dispute the pragmatic control of these examples, but challenges their productivity and generalizability. In effect, he suggests, such forms are "idiomatic and formulaic" (1978: 74) and in principle can be listed (1978: 74):

(IandF) don't, do, you wouldn't, may I, shall we, you shouldn't have, oh no you don't, I shouldn't, you mustn't ("and a few more")

These only seem to be instances of VP ellipsis, rather they:

are not only base-derived, but also listed in the lexicon, together with some specification as to restrictions on their occurrence and interpretation. (1978: 73)

Although he never gives details, presumably the idea is that each construction has something in it like do it which picks up its reference pragmatically (Hankamer and Sag's (1976) "deep anaphora"), and in the lexicon it is associated with various conditions on its occurrence and use. In service of this idea, Hankamer divides devices of natural language into two categories: (a) informational, which effect the transmission of information: declarative statements, information questions, instructions and most commands (Hankamer 1978: 74), and (b) expressive, which are signs of an internal state of the speaker, or "conversational lubricators":

I suggest that there are no productive devices in class (b), and that all such expressions must be lexically listed with some account of their expressive force and circumstances of use. (74)

And examples (IandF) are claimed to fall into category (b).

There are three issues here, the issue of the nature and significance of this distinction, the issue of which category the above examples fall into, and the nature of the "formulaic and idiomatic" character of them. First, the (a)-(b) distinction is

---

<sup>46</sup> Merchant chooses to put this in terms of making various things "manifest". Indeed, at one point he says: "only the VP do it can be made manifest enough to antecede an ellipsis; other linguistic descriptions of pragmatically salient eventualities, with particular lexical items and other structure specific properties, cannot." (2004: 722) But this is very confusing. Surely do it does not need to be "made manifest" (whatever that means exactly) since it comes with the fragment. Rather, what it refers to on that occasion needs to have been "made manifest".

speech act theory relative. Most speech act theories analyze at least some illocutionary acts in terms of expressing "internal" states, and some analyze many acts that way. And there is the problem of drawing the line: are promising, firing someone, adjourning a meeting all "signs of an internal state" or "conversational lubricators"? So it is not obvious what explanatory mileage Hankamer will get out this. Second, regarding assigning examples to category (a) or (b), at one end we find 'Do', which is not a plausible candidate for having special conditions of use associated with it, and certainly can't be assigned to one category over the other. At the other end is 'Does she or doesn't she?' which, as Hankamer notes (1978: 68), has sexual connotations which the ad plays on, and which make it a possible candidate for being to some extent "formulaic and idiomatic". This can be seen from the fact that the equivalent 'Does she?' works less well, if it works at all. But does it fall into category (b)? It looks more like category (a), but is it really an "information question"? In short, it is hard to know where to put it. The same goes for the expressions in between. It is hard to know without more details. Finally, regarding their "formulaic and idiomatic" character, consider two examples again.

(28) [another Martini: Mary says] I really shouldn't

According to Hankamer, this "is used only in situations where the speaker is faced with the choice of performing or not performing an act that is at the same time pleasant and somehow (at least potentially) detrimental to some greater or more long-term good" (Hankamer 1978: 71). Could this be a condition on the use of 'I really shouldn't'? One thing is that it is a little too specific; the act does not have to be pleasant, just something like the lesser of evils.

(29) [expensive gift: Mary says] Oh, John, you shouldn't have

This utterance requires "the stereotyped situation where John has surprised Mary with some extravagant gift or performed some special service uncalled for by the normal rules of their interaction." (1978: 71) Could this be a condition on the use of 'You shouldn't have'? First, it's not clear what is "stereotypical" about it, or what that is. But worse there is all this mention of John, Mary, gifts, etc. These need to be stripped out to get the requisite generality, but it is not obvious how to restate it.

In both these cases we seem to have constative illocutionary force and propositional content related to what one should or shouldn't do (however that is analyzed). So on the face of it these belong in category (a) and should be candidates for pragmatically controlled VP anaphora. Moreover, one test for "idiomaticity" is that semantically equivalent forms need not have the same restrictions on their use ('kick

the wooden pail' does not work like 'Kick the bucket'). However, replacing 'should/shouldn't' in the above with 'ought/oughtn't' does not seem to affect their use. It is possible that what is being given as a condition of use is actually inferable from the force and content of the utterance plus knowledge of context and background information.

## 7. Conclusion

Bach and Harnish (1979) proposed a general theory of speech acts and linguistic communication. Although schematic in some ways,<sup>47</sup> it did attempt to show how in the utterance of a sentence in a context a speaker could perform any of a wide variety of speech acts – literally, directly, nonliterally or indirectly – and reasonably expect a hearer to recognize the force and content of that speech act. Bach and Harnish realized that to extend the theory beyond (complete) sentences could require modification or extension of the theory, which was not attempted. In this work we argued that with small modifications, the theory can accommodate the interpretation of many fragments. We reviewed a number of examples of fragment interpretation, and noted that there are three areas that need further theory. First, for fragments that are pragmatic idioms we need a theory of such idiomaticity. Second, for fragments that have become standardized we need an account of what that is and how it comes about.<sup>48</sup> And for the rest there is the general problem of how to bring to bear the relevant contextual and background information on the interpretation of a fragment. This is a problem that can't be solved by stipulation (though stipulation can allow us to get on with other problems). It is a problem fragments share with sentences, and that this theory shares with every other theory. We ended by seeing to what extent the phenomena of pragmatically controlled "ellipsis" fits in with our outline of a theory for fragments. Syntactic ellipsis can go the way of sentences in general. But we saw many competing principles at work in the pragmatic cases. We argued that the data is consistent with our outlined speech act account of fragments, but the details are far from settled.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> For example, there was no explicit theory of how the illocutionary force potential of sentences is related to the details of their mood. See Harnish (1983, 1994) for an early attempt to add this element, and Harnish (2005b, 2006, 2007) for detailed proposals.

<sup>48</sup> Fragments may contrast with e.g. indirect standardization, in not having a non-standardized use to for its basis. See Bach and Harnish (1979, chapter 9) for further discussion.

<sup>49</sup> Thanks go to Kent Bach and Merrill Garrett for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

## References

- Alston, William. *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Bach, Kent. "Conversational Implicature", *Mind and Language* (1994), 9(2): 124-162.
- . "Semantically Speaking". In *Perspectives on Semantics, Pragmatics and Discourse: A Festschrift for Ferenc Kiefer*, edited by István Kenesei and Robert M. Harnish, 146-170. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2001.
- . "Context ex Machina". In *Semantics versus Pragmatics*, edited by Zoltán Szabo, 15-44. Oxford: Oxford University, 2005.
- Bach, Kent and Robert M. Harnish. *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979.
- Barton, Ellen. *Nonsentential Constituents*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1990.
- . "Towards a Nonsentential Analysis in Generative Grammar". In *The Syntax of Nonsententials*, edited by Ljiljana Progovac et al., 11-31. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2006.
- Cappelen, Herman and Ernie Lepore. *Insensitive Semantics*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005.
- Chao, Wynn. *On Ellipsis*, New York: Garland, 1988.
- Dalrymple, Mary. "Against Reconstruction in Ellipsis". In *Ellipsis and Nonsentential Speech*, edited by Reinaldo Elugardo and Robert J. Stainton, 31-55. Dordrecht: Springer, 2005.
- Elugardo, Reinaldo and Robert J. Stainton. "Grasping Objects and Contents". In *Epistemology of Language*, edited by Alex Barber, 257-302. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- . "Shorthand, Syntactic Ellipsis, and the Pragmatic Determinants of What is Said", *Mind and Language* (2004) 19(4): 442-471.
- . (2005), "Introduction", In *Ellipsis and Nonsentential Speech*, edited by Reinaldo Elugardo and Robert J. Stainton, 1-26. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Fiengo, Robert and Robert May. *Indices and Identity*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.
- Fodor, Jerry. *The Language of Thought*, NY: Crowell, 1975.
- Grice, Herbert P. (1969), "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions", reprinted in Herbert P. Grice (1989), 86-116.
- . *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Hankamer, Jorge. "On the Nontransformational Derivation of Some Null VP Anaphors", *Linguistic Inquiry* (1978), 9: 66-74.
- Hankamer, Jorge and Ivan Sag. "Deep and Surface Anaphora", *Linguistic Inquiry*

- (1976), 7: 391-426.
- Harnish, Robert M. "Pragmatic Derivations", *Synthese* (1983), 54: 325-373, doi: [10.1007/BF00877685](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00877685).
- . "Mood, meaning and speech acts." In *Foundations of Speech Act Theory*, edited by Savas Tsohatzidis, 407-459. London: Routledge, 1994.
- . "Commitments and Speech Acts", *Philosophia* (2005a), 75: 11-41.
- . "Communicating with the Moods of English: An Inferential Approach", *Research in Language* (2005b), 3: 5-32.
- . "A Normative Theory of Mood in English: Prospects and Problems", *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics* (2006), 1: 59-89.
- . "Mood: What's the Illocutionary Point", in Piotr Cap et al. *Current Trends in Pragmatics*, 182-204. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007.
- ., "The Problem of Fragments: Two Interpretive Strategies" *Pragmatics and Cognition* (2009), 17 (2): 251-282.
- Harnish, Robert M. and Christian Plunze. "Illocutionary Rules", *Pragmatics and Cognition* (2006), 14(1): 37-52.
- Kaplan, David. "Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals". In *Themes From Kaplan*, edited by Joseph Almog, John Perry & Howard Wettstein, 481-563. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Lappin, Shalom. "The Interpretation of Ellipsis". In *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory*, edited by Shalom Lappin, 145-175. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996.
- Lappin, Shalom and Elabbas Benmamoun (eds.) *Fragments: Studies in Ellipsis and Gapping*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Merchant, Jason. *The Syntax of Silence: Sluicing, Islands and the Theory of Ellipsis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- . "Fragments and Ellipsis", *Linguistics and Philosophy* (2004), 27(6): 661-738.
- . "'Small Structures': A Sententialist Perspective". In *The Syntax of Nonsententials*, edited by Ljiljana Progovac et al., 73-91. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2006.
- Morgan, Jerry "Sentence fragments revisited". In *CLS Parasession on Language in Context*, edited by Bradley Music et al., 228-241. Chicago: Chicago Linguistics Society, 1989.
- Perry, John. "Davidson's Sentences and Wittgenstein's Builders", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* (1994), 67: 23-37.
- Sadock, Jerrold M. "Read at Your Own Risk", *Chicago Linguistic Society* (1974) 10, Chicago.
- Sadock, Jerrold M. and Arnold Zwicky. "Speech Act Distinctions in Syntax". In *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, edited by Timothy Shopen, 155-

196. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Sag, Ivan and Jorge Hankamer. "Syntactically vs. Pragmatically Controlled Anaphora". In *Studies in Language Variation*, edited by Ralph Fasold and Roger Shuy. Georgetown, 1977. 121-135.
- . "Towards a Theory of Anaphoric Processing", *Linguistics and Philosophy* (1984), 7: 325-345.
- Schachter, Paul. "Does She or Doesn't She?", *Linguistic Inquiry* (1977), 8: 763-767.
- Searle, John. *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.
- . (1975) "A taxonomy of illocutionary acts." Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Reprinted in *Expression and Meaning*, edited by John R. Searle, 1-19, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Searle, John and Daniel Vanderveken. *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Stainton, Robert. "In Defense of Nonsentential Assertion". In *Semantics versus Pragmatics*, edited by Zoltán Szabo, 383-457. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- . *Words and Thoughts*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006a.
- . "Neither Fragments nor Ellipsis". In *The Syntax of Nonsententials*, edited by Ljiljana Progovac et al., 93-116. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2006b.
- Stanley, Jason. "Context and Logical Form", *Linguistics and Philosophy* (2000), 23: 391-434.
- Tanenhaus, Michael K., Greg N. Carlson & Mark S. Seidenberg. "Do Listeners Compute Linguistic Representations?". In *Natural Language Parsing*, edited by David Dowty, Lauri Karttunen and Arnold Zwicky, 359-408. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Tanenhaus, Michael K. and Greg N. Carlson. "Comprehension of Deep and Surface Verbphrase Anaphors", *Language and Cognitive Processes* (1990), 5(4): 257-280.
- Williams, Edwin S. "Discourse and Logical Form", *Linguistic Inquiry* (1977), 8: 101-139.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*, NY: Macmillan, 1953.
- Zwicky, Arnold. "Hey, Whatsyourname!", *Chicago Linguistics Society* (1974) 10, Chicago, 787-801.