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# The problem of fragments

## Two interpretative strategies\*

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We do not always talk in complete sentences; we sometimes speak in “fragments”, such as ‘Fire!’, ‘Off with his head’, ‘From Cuba’, ‘Next!’, and ‘Shall we?’. Research has tended to focus on the ellipsis wars — the issue of whether all or most fragments are really sentential or not. Less effort has been put into the question of exactly how fragments are to be interpreted, especially their force. We separate off the issue of fragment interpretation from the issue of systematically accounting for their linguistic properties — the issue of how to generate fragments. We review two projects directed at the issue of fragment interpretation: Stainton (2006), who approaches the issue obliquely (concentrating more on legitimizing the use of fragments and its consequences), and Barton (1990), who approaches the issue of interpretation directly and systematically. We find areas of agreement and disagreement with both studies. In the end we conclude that what may be needed is a more speech act oriented approach, one that fits fragment interpretation into a framework for performing, and communicating through, speech acts in general.

**Keywords:** ellipsis, fragments, implicature, speech acts, subsentences

A sentence is a (relatively) complete and independent human utterance — the completeness and independence being shown by its standing alone or its capability of standing alone, i.e., of its being uttered by itself [footnote 1: On a previous occasion I defined a sentence as what can stand alone without being an answer or a retort ... I am now somewhat doubtful about this restriction.] (Jespersen 1924: 307)

It would be better to divide sentences into the following classes:

- (1) Inarticulate sentences: ‘Thanks’, ‘What?’, ‘Off!’
- (2) Semi-articulate sentences: ‘Thank you’, ‘What to do?’, ‘Off with his head!’
- (3) Articulate sentences: ‘I thank you’, ‘What am I to do?’, ‘You must strike off his head!’

(Jespersen 1924: 308)

## 1. Introduction

Philosophers of language, linguists, and psycholinguists often treat how we sometimes speak as the paradigm of how we always (or ought to) speak. But we do not always speak fluently, face-to-face, grammatically, literally and directly, explicitly and in “complete” sentences.<sup>1</sup> This sort of idealization is probably required, at least at the beginning, to get a theoretical grip on such complicated phenomena as language and linguistic communication. However, eventually these idealizations must be relaxed if all of the phenomena we are interested in are to be accounted for. In the end we need to deal with: (i) pauses, hesitations and false starts etc., (ii) telephone conversations, etc.,<sup>2</sup> (iii) semi-grammatical (or otherwise mangled) sentences, (‘I was handed down this car’<sup>3</sup>), (iv) nonliteral and indirect language use, (‘I’ll bet the cat likes having its tail pulled’), (v) implicit, understood elements of the message (‘It’s raining’), (vi) fragments, constituents, phrases, sub-sentences (‘to the university’). In what follows we want to see what happens when we relax this last ingredient in the idealization.<sup>4</sup> What are we doing, how do we do it, and how can communication be successful when we speak in (free) ‘fragments’? Although pragmatic concerns such as these motivate the present inquiry, Stainton (2006a) in particular has correctly noted that certain philosophical and cognitive science claims have rested in part on the nature of fragments.<sup>5</sup> So getting fragments right can have consequences outside linguistics-pragmatics narrowly construed.

## 2. The problem and two projects

### 2.1 Free fragments

The class of expressions we will be interested in have been called a lot of things.<sup>6</sup> We will follow others and call them ‘fragments.’ Here we have to watch our terminology. Some authors distinguish “free” Xs (fragments, constituents etc.) from another unnamed class (that we could call “linked” fragments) by saying that free Xs can felicitously initiate a talk-exchange, whereas linked Xs have discourse dependencies, such as (short) answers to questions (brackets mark understood material):

- (1) a. Who did she see?  
b. Bob Dylan  
c. [She saw] Bob Dylan  
d. She saw Bob Dylan
- (2) a. Who is playing now?  
b. Bob Dylan

- c. Bob Dylan [is playing now]
- d. Bob Dylan is playing now

But contrary to appearances, this is not a distinction at a single level; it is a distinction between types and tokens. To see this ask what the consequences would be of type-analyzing (1b)/(2b) as (1c)/(2c). First, since this list could be continued indefinitely, ‘Bob Dylan’ would be indefinitely ambiguous. Second, it would make (1d)/(2d) redundant, as the explicit material is now implicit in the name. Proposals such as this are fine for something like a “discourse grammar”, but not obviously correct for a “sentence grammar”.<sup>7</sup> In what follows we will be interested almost exclusively with fragments on their free occurrences, which we abbreviate as ‘free fragments’. When discussing others, we will use the terminologies of the moment, assuming them to be interchangeable (until further notice).

## 2.2 Examples

To begin with, then, let’s look at a sample of ‘free fragments’, where the original authors speculated on some connection between form and function. We organize these chronologically.

Yanofsky (1978) noted that there are NPs that are well-formed, but since they can initiate a talk-exchange, are not always explainable by a linguistically (syntactic, pragmatic) controlled deletion rule, but they are usable and often used with the same force as (full) sentences:

- (3) a. Fire!
- b. Shark(s)!
- c. End run
- d. Scalpel (doctor)
- e. My ex-husband
- f. A flat tire
- g. The wine (have to go back to get it)
- h. Your turn
- i. Your elbows (mother to son at dinner table)
- j. Cookies
- k. No cookies
- l. Some coffee?
- m. My room (or yours)?
- n. Nice day
- o. That damn dog
- p. My car keys! (surprise)
- q. Dog shit! (disgust)

- r. The soup! (while walking in the park)
- s. 12 o'clock (time to go home)
- t. Pig! You pig!
- u. Ladies and gentlemen: The Hazmat Twins!

According to Yanofsky, these can be used to warn, direct, explain, remind, threaten, offer, comment, complain, explain, hint and introduce.

Bach and Harnish (1979). According to Bach and Harnish, the following can be used to instruct, direct, explain, inform, warn and request:

- (4) a. Close cover before striking
- b. No smoking
- c. The Steelers going for a field goal
- d. Lucerne two-ten low-fat milk
- e. Slippery when wet
- f. Two nonstudents, please

Sadock and Zwicky (1985) offer noun phrases as examples for “free fragments”

- (5) a. Some whiskey
- b. The goblins
- c. Six of the pink ones with sprinkles on top
- d. All of you with beards
- e. Lord Threshingham
- f. A beer, please
- g. The left shoulder, please

According to Sadock and Zwicky, these can be used to: convey a request, order, offer, warning, threat, an expression of dismay or delight (they do not say if all expressions have all these uses). The first six expressions can be used to: supply an appropriate designation of these objects or call someone's attention to these objects. Finally, (5d)/(5e) can be used to attract someone's attention ('vocatives').

Other found cases include the following examples:

- (6) [Proto-Imperatives]
  - a. PP: Off with his head! (Jespersen op cit)
  - b. On with the show!
- (7) [Proto-interrogatives]
  - a. NP: The time?
  - b. VP: Want some coffee?
  - c. She like her new job?

### 2.3 What is the problem with free fragments?

It is not easy to summarize the issues that free fragments have been taken to raise in the literature, but here are two samples. Merchant (2004: 662) gives some examples of fragments with: “the same propositional content and assertoric force as ... fully sentential syntactic structures”. He then poses the question: “How can we account for the semantically propositional character of what appear to be syntactically less than sentential structures?”. He goes on to ask:<sup>8</sup> “... does the propositional content ... come from (i) the usual mechanisms (an interpreted syntactic structure, i.e., an LF structure), or (ii) a novel method of generating and interpreting such fragments”. And Stainton (2004: 270; and many other places) describes what he calls rejecting the “appearances”, i.e., that we can and do utter ordinary words and phrases “with the syntax of ordinary words and phrases”, to perform speech acts, such as asserting, questioning, requesting, that would otherwise be performed with sentences. The two main strategies for rejecting these appearances are (i) to deny that genuine speech acts<sup>9</sup> are performed, or (ii) to deny that the expressions are really not sentences. So both authors raise syntactic, semantic, and broadly pragmatic questions. For later reference we will identify the following major kinds of issues in the study of fragments:

#### *[Syntax]*

Q1. What is the best account of the syntax of fragments? In particular:

- a. Do they only have the syntax they appear on the surface to have?
- b. Or, are they ‘elliptical’ versions of full sentences?
- c. Are there any syntactic restrictions on what can be a free fragment?

#### *[Semantics]*

Q2. What is the best account of the semantics of fragments? In particular:

- a. Do they have the normal compositional semantics of an expression with the syntax described in Q1?
- b. Or do they have a semantics at variance with the syntax assigned to them as in Q1?

#### *[Pragmatics]*

Q3. 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?

*[Cognitive Science]*

Q4. What mental mechanisms and representations subserve acts of intended and successful communication using fragments.

Most of the ink spilt so far on free fragments has been devoted to Q1 and Q2, with less discussion of Q3 and Q4. One reason for this focus is that the relation between propositional content and sentential structure is much better understood than the relationship between sentential structure and illocutionary force, or speech acts in general. (There is a fifty year history of ellipsis study in generative grammar and a fifty year history of the study of illocutionary acts performed with sentences). Another reason for this is that the right answer to Q1 will influence the right answers to the others.<sup>10</sup> At present, one investigates these later questions on condition that a certain answer is given to Q1 (and perhaps Q2). We will follow this strategy, but to do so we will have to say a word or two about what to assume regarding Q1 (and to some extent Q2).

## 2.4 Two projects

In what follows we need to distinguish two projects, which have analogs at the sentence level too. The first project (the “linguistic-type” project) is to account for the linguistic properties of fragments, such as their well-formedness, their syntactic, semantic and phonological structure, etc. This issue is commonly addressed via the question of how a grammar “generates” fragments. The second project (the “linguistic-token” project), is to account for the interpretation of the utterance of fragments in context.<sup>11</sup> The relation between these two issues is just a special case of the more general, and much discussed, issue of the relation between a grammar (what used to be called a model of “competence”) and language processing (what used to be called a model of “performance”), broadly construed as in Levelt (1989). On the one hand, some researchers see these projects as (at least in principle) dissociable.<sup>12</sup> They argue that what a grammar does is one thing, while what speakers do when interpreting an utterance is something else: grammars typically work top-to-bottom (or vice versa), employing “derivations” or “merges”, autonomously (disconnected from context) to specify the linguistic properties of expressions,

whereas speakers typically process “left-to-right”, employing “perceptual strategies”, taking contextual information into account, and on some theories without access to a grammar, on other theories with only fall-back access to a grammar.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, some researchers see a connection, for after all the tokens are of a type. If we assume that a speaker’s “linguistic competence” includes the first-pass ability to assign fragments the analysis provided by a grammar (either by ellipsis or by base-generation, etc.)<sup>14</sup> then that information can be used in the interpretation process. And in the limiting case, where a full sentence is recovered, the problem of interpreting a fragment reduces to the problem of interpreting the host sentence, and that problem needs to be solved anyway, even without considering fragments. These researchers, then, work on the assumption that fragments have a structural description that can be specified by a grammar (or parser), and that speaker-hearers and/or theoreticians have access to that information when arriving at an interpretation of the utterance.<sup>15</sup> We can think of the “pragmatics” of the interpretation of fragments as the machinery needed, in addition to the linguistic analysis, to arrive at an interpretation of the utterance of a fragment.

## 2.5 Interpretation

But what is an “interpretation” of the utterance of a fragment, and who is its interpreter? At one extreme would be the position of Noveck and Sperber (2007). They see the subject of pragmatics as fundamentally different from e.g., syntax and semantics and not directly accessible by the methodologies of linguistics. According to Noveck and Sperber, fundamental *semantic* facts are semantic intuitions, and semantic theories systematically describe and/or explain these intuitions: “It makes sense ... to judge a semantic description by its ability to account for semantic intuitions ... because Semantic intuitions are not just *about* semantic facts; they are semantic facts themselves” (ibid.: 185). Fundamental *pragmatic* facts, on the other hand, involve intuitions addressees have about the intended meaning of an utterance directed to them: “Genuine pragmatic intuitions are those that addressees have about the intended meaning of an utterance addressed to them” (ibid.).<sup>16</sup> Hence the typical pragmatic methodology of hypothetical cases and imaginary or generic interlocutors is fundamentally defective. Their suggestion is that experimental pragmatics can compensate for this inherent limitation by giving subjects utterances to interpret under controlled conditions. More would have to be said here, but it seems that this is a bit of stipulation that does not accord with general practice. In pragmatics we do not just take the hearer’s point of view (think of speech act theory), and we do not focus exclusively on the speaker’s message (think of conversational analysis). And it is not clear that some pragmatic information isn’t built into the language (think of mood, performatives, deixis, honorifics)

for us to have intuitions about.<sup>17</sup> Note, we are not endorsing the methodology of pragmatic intuitions (nor are we denying it), but rather asking what the argument is for treating pragmatic facts differently from other linguistic facts.

More moderately, we could adopt an idealized second person point of view; how would a reasonable hearer interpret the utterance, given their knowledge of the shared context and background information. Or we could adopt a third person point of view: how should a reasonable observer interpret the utterance, given an appreciation of the shared context and background information. Which ever we pick, we are still left with the question: what is such an “interpretation” of an utterance of a fragment? That’s a question that repeatedly gets dodged in the literature on fragments, and we will dodge it too. For the time being we will adopt the reasonable hearer’s point of view, and we will assume that settling on an “interpretation” of an utterance of a fragment is settling on a force<sup>18</sup> and a content, which together we will sometimes refer to as a “message”. Work on utterance interpretation of fragments has focused almost exclusively on the problem of recovering the (propositional) content of the message, as opposed to its force. The explanation of this is probably that research on fragments has been dominated by promoting or criticizing “ellipsis” or “sentential” theories of fragment interpretation, and sentences are the natural vehicle for the expression of a proposition. In what follows we will be interested in force as well as content.

## 2.6 The syntax and semantics of fragments (Q1 and Q2)

“But grammarians should always be wary in admitting ellipsis except where they are absolutely necessary and where there can be no doubt as to what is understood ...” (Jespersen 1924:307)

The strongest *conservative* position<sup>19</sup> would be to claim that all free fragments are really ‘elliptical’ or ‘sentential’ at some deeper level of analysis (syntactic or semantic). Since there are a variety of viable syntactic theories, and a variety of postulated “deeper” levels of analysis, this is really a class of positions. We have already terminologically neutralized some of the case for conservatism by restricting our discussion to “free” fragments, which must be capable of initiating a talk-exchange, thereby taking the second member of adjacency pairs, such as question-(short) answers, out of play. The strongest *liberal* position<sup>20</sup> would be that no free fragments are sentential at any deeper level of analysis (syntactic or semantic). If the conservative position is a kind of “null hypothesis” for syntacticians (everything is sentential until proven guilty), the liberal position is kind of the “null hypothesis” for pragmatics (everything is pragmatic until proven guilty). The *moderate* position would be that conservatism is correct for some fragments, and liberalism is correct for others. If this is right, as e.g., Barton, Stainton, and Merchant suggest

the battle will be a border dispute, which means that for our purposes, the interesting discussion is not to be found at this level of generality (at the level of “all fragments”), but one level down, at the level of particular fragments and classes of fragments. That is, for each fragment (or class of fragments) we want to know what evidence there is for treating it sententially or not.

We noted at the beginning that many researchers see a connection between the “type” project for fragments and the “token” project for fragments. If normal speaker-hearers command the structural information about a fragment that a good grammar or parser would assign them, then it is reasonable that in the right circumstances that information could be recruited for utterance interpretation. Therefore, if a given fragment could be shown to be elliptical for a given sentence, that would be important. We are only assuming that there are some cases of genuine fragments (that is, where there is no evidence for ellipsis). Lots of things are called ‘ellipsis’ in the literature, and there are lots of conceptions of these lots of things.<sup>21</sup> We will not review that here, nor will we review the “ellipsis wars”.<sup>22</sup> Our focus will be on questions Q3 and Q4.

### 3. The pragmatics and cognitive science of fragments (Q3 and Q4)

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), 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. In what follows we will assess these two strategies as answers to questions Q3 and Q4. Given the lack of contact between them, and the generality of cognitive science approach, we will begin with Stainton.

### 3.1 Stainton

Stainton's general picture seems to be something like this. The interpretation of fragments, as with the interpretation of sentences, is typically the result of (i) the language faculty (module) analyzing the linguistic properties of the expression type, and (ii) the interpretation of the resulting expression (under the linguistic analysis) in central systems, which can appeal, in principle, to any contextual and background information the system has. Genuine fragments (i.e., where there is no evidence of ellipsis), are non-sentential, and are processed by the language faculty to yield "sub-propositional" semantics. Typically, but not exclusively, these fragments are well-formed words or phrases — NPs, PPs, ADJPs, and VPs. These fragments have two broad types of use (in central systems).

*Non-Illocutionary Uses of Written Fragments:* Typical examples are as labels, signs, titles etc. "It seems reasonable to say that in these cases there is simply no illocutionary act at all: there might be a language use, but there is no speech act properly so called" (Stainton 2004:271).<sup>23</sup> Stainton's purpose in emphasizing these examples seems to be to convince the "sententialist" (or "ellipsis-theorist") that there is pragmatic work to be done between fragment (type) and fragment (token) interpretation. I.e., these are uncontroversial cases where one would not want to give a "sententialist" or "illocutionary" account of fragment interpretation. These, then, might serve to soften up the "sententialist" to the necessity of at least some pragmatic machinery, in the hopes of then extending that machinery to cover more controversial cases: "... sometimes words and phrases are used to do something other than to communicate a proposition e.g. in labels, book titles, lists and so on ... Hence merely producing a word or phrase in isolation cannot trigger the quest for a proposition-meant. Instead, producing them in a situation in which only a proposition would be pragmatically appropriate is key" (Stainton 2005:387). It is key, because expecting a full illocutionary act is what drives the inference, and in the cases of labels and so forth it is not there. On the other hand, we may wonder, first, whether these words really are "in isolation". The above make it seem that many of them occur in quite familiar contexts, often with other bits of language. Because of our familiarity with things like business cards, menus, dictionaries etc., we have a pretty good idea what these fragments are there for. And second, no reason has been given not to think that at least some (or many) of these examples involve expressing propositions. For instance, 'Strawberry Jam' on a label might express '[This contains] strawberry jam', whereas 'strawberry jam' on a shopping list might express '[Buy some] strawberry jam'. Notice that one of Stainton's indicators of assertionhood is whether we would take the "utterance" to be false or a lie. Isn't that what we would conclude if, e.g., the manufacturer did not include strawberries in the jam, and knew it? (Note: we talk about "false advertising" and "truth

in labelling”) Or if the transportation department (knowingly) posts an ‘Exit’ sign where there is no exit?

One feature Stainton does not emphasize is that the above examples of non-illocutionary uses are written or printed.<sup>24</sup> In fact this seems to be true of virtually all of the examples Stainton gives of non-illocutionary “uses” of fragments: titles, signs on trucks, currency, store fronts, license plates, business cards, labels (bottles), street signs, maps, names on boats, addressed envelopes, shopping lists, CD covers, dictionary, entries, phone books, TV guides, menus (2005:431ff).<sup>25</sup> Since these written tokens have not been investigated systematically in pragmatics, it is possible these may work differently in important respects. In sum, we should be reluctant to put too much weight on Stainton’s discussion of these types of examples, and instead focus on the utterances of fragments in speech to perform acts. This is not to say that such written cases do not pose distinctive problems, especially surrounding their indexicality, that bear scrutiny.<sup>26</sup>

*Sub-Illocutionary Use of Spoken Fragments.* Stainton contends that phrases can have subsentential *semantics*: ‘From Spain’ expresses the property of being from Spain, or ‘Sam’s mom’ denotes the x that is the mother of Sam. This semantics then connects with information from the context to give a proposition: “Leaving details aside, what is asserted when a sub-sentence is used communicatively is that proposition which results from minimally saturating the content of the bare phrase actually uttered” (2005:388). But Stainton does not seem to commit himself to sub-illocutionary (or sub-propositional) *pragmatics* as in: ‘From Spain’: used to predicate the property of being from Spain (to x), or ‘Sam’s mom’: used to refer to the mother of Sam. As close as Stainton comes to endorsing sub-propositional pragmatics is his acknowledgment of ‘vocatives’:

(8) ‘Hey/You/John, look out!’.

where the initial material is used to draw someone’s attention to something. But this looks like a perlocutionary act, on the traditional speech act taxonomy. So on Stainton’s story, the interpretation process goes “directly” from e.g., grasping a property (or recognizing an entity) expressed by a fragment, to recognizing an assertion involving that property or entity — unmediated by any sub-propositional speech act.

*Illocutionary Use of Spoken Fragments.* Stainton gives every indication of believing that the uses of fragments have the same range of uses and modes of communication that sentences have. In his terminology sentences (and fragments) can be used to perform a “full fledged speech act” (FFSA). Stainton’s conception of a FFSA is that it is *literal, illocutionary* act with *propositional* content,<sup>27</sup> performed using a *grammatical* expression.<sup>28</sup> Stainton does not say what he takes an illocutionary act

to be, or if he is working with any particular notion beyond Austin's examples and allusions to conventionality.<sup>29</sup> Stainton connects illocutionary acts with utterances of language via the distinction between the 'force<sub>ACT</sub>' attaching to certain kinds of actions<sup>30</sup> and the 'force<sub>EXP</sub>' of kind K attaching to expression types when it "has the job" as a matter of "convention" of being used to perform an act of kind K. For example, 'Hello' used to greet, and interrogative mood used to ask questions. Stainton does not say how exactly expressions get their 'force<sub>EXP</sub>' nor what exactly it is. He does say that tokening an expression with force K is neither necessary nor sufficient for performing an act with force K, though "ceteris paribus a tokening of such an item will carry" the force of that act (2006: 18). Sentences carry force through their mood (which we will see he claims words and phrases lack). Stainton does not discuss the obvious problem that there are not enough moods to go around (to all the illocutionary forces).<sup>31</sup> Stainton's tendency to use interrogative mood as his example is misleading in one respect: arguably, interrogative mood (in English) has a main or central function of asking questions. But what can be said analogously of declarative or imperative mood? What illocutionary force attaches to 'I'll be there' or 'Get out!?' Stainton remarks that illocutionary force also need not be "fully determinate". He calls this the "weak" notion of having a force, and illustrates it with forms like 'If you do X you'll get Y' — which he says does not have to be a promise or a prediction "in order to be a perfectly fine speech act" (2006: 57). But that avoids the question: what then IS its force? Are sentences of this form governed by some sort of disjunctive convention (promise or prediction)?

Returning to fragments, the relevant speech acts are not only illocutionary and propositional, they are what he calls 'literal' (though it would seem to be "directness" that he is after<sup>32</sup>) — they are not used metaphorically, ironically, or indirectly to "implicate" their content. Evidence for this comes from his use of the lying "diagnostic" (2006: 58) to distinguish assertion (where one lies) from implicature (where one misleads). Stainton introduces this as a way to avoid "merely relying on intuitions about what counts as asserted" (2006: 58). If Jones sees Smith looking for the hammer and says to him 'on the floor', knowing that it is on the table, we judge him to have lied. If Paul says of a candidate's writing sample just 'Nice typing' implying incompetence at philosophy, but believing her to be excellent, we judge him not to be lying (he believed the typing WAS nice), but to have been misleading. So for Stainton, "lying" is kind of an indicator for assertion and "misleading" is kind of an indicator for implicature.<sup>33</sup> Stainton does not attempt to defend or explain these judgments (which we are not denying). However, given the connection between the two pairs of concepts, it is not clear how much weight one can put on the "lying" diagnostic — how does one defend a judgment that something was not (just) misleading, but a lie (or vice versa)?

Stainton must be nervous about this because he introduces another approach to the assertion-implicature distinction. The idea is that with the latter, but not the former the content “doesn’t result from development of the structure used” (2006: 59). This poses a “puzzle” for subsentences, since there is no appropriate structure to “develop” propositionally, and so it is hard to use this criterion in these cases.<sup>34</sup> Stainton’s solution is to invoke a “minimal proposition” — “that proposition which results from minimally adding to the content of the bare phrase actually uttered” (Ibid.: 60). Although Stainton is sensitive to the problem of “underdetermination” in ellipsis work,<sup>35</sup> he does not seem to think there is a similar problem here finding THE minimal proposition.<sup>36</sup> Stainton also notes that fragments can be used nonliterally (in the usual sense of not meaning what you say): “Richard could utter ‘The next Nobel Laureate’ while pointing at a notoriously brainless politician, thereby saying that the politico is the next Nobel Laureate — but meaning that he’s a buffoon” (2004: 269–70). Finally, according to Stainton, fragments (unlike sentences) do not have mood to carry illocutionary force information, and so have no “force<sub>EXP</sub>”. He notices examples such as ‘From Colombia?’, which can be used to ask whether something is from Colombia, but he says: “... the force ... is not inherited from the syntax and semantics of the phrase type itself, since the phrase type does not syntactically encode a force indicator” (2004: 269). He says this because he (2006: 18–19) explicitly excludes intonation from mood, but he gives no argument or citation for doing so. However, it is typical in studies of mood to include the intonation contour of the sentence, including final rising intonation.<sup>37</sup> Thus, ‘interrogative’ is a mood, not an illocutionary force. In fact, Stainton drifts between these, as when he says “I take it that there are a quite limited number of forces — e.g. used to ask, used to assert, used to order and possibly a couple more” (1999: 76). Clearly the Austinian notion of (illocutionary) force is not in play here, but traditional grammatical mood could well be. In short, fragments typically, though not invariably, lack any kind of “force<sub>EXP</sub>”, and so the gap between form and illocutionary act can be even greater than with sentences. How does he propose to bridge it?

Stainton<sup>38</sup> calls his approach a “representational-pragmatic” view (RPV), though we will see that there is more representation than pragmatics in it. He first formulates a general statement of (RPV), then a specific version of it. The “guiding idea” behind his position is that subsentence interpretation involves (a) grasping a content from language, (b) grasping a content from somewhere else but language, and (c) combining the two by function-argument application (2006: 156). What drives functional application is (d), the recognition by the hearer that the speaker wants to communicate something, and this requires, according to Stainton, something propositional to be meant, even though nothing propositional has been uttered (2006: 158). Now, we can agree with (a), (b)<sup>39</sup> and even for the moment

(d). But for a “general” position, (c) is rather parochial. Why assume that the format for content, linguistic or otherwise, is function-argument, why not standard quantification theory? And what happened to force — is that also gotten by function application — how? The “specific” version spells these “general” ideas out: (a) grasping contents means having faculties provide Central systems with representations of them, but (b) finding them is up to pragmatics (2006: 160). That’s it; for a “representational-pragmatic” theory that’s a bit skimpy on the pragmatics. And (c) the various representations of content are combined in Central systems. Stainton returns to the issue of how to decide if a content is asserted or merely conveyed, which is pressing in the case of subsentences because of the need to flesh them out to be propositional. His idea is to extend Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) analysis<sup>40</sup> of assertion to subsentences by adding the thought that the proposition communicated is the minimal one gotten by “developing” the linguistic content (Stainton 2006a: 163). This means straight off that one can’t assert anything nonliterally or indirectly. Indeed, it looks like Stainton has in mind ‘saying’ not ‘asserting’. Additionally, Stainton does not tell us much about what a proposition has to be to qualify as “minimal” with respect to a subsentence (and a context).<sup>41</sup> So on some speech act intuitions this proposal does not draw the assertion-conveying line correctly. It is a striking feature of this “representational-pragmatic” theory that there is no pragmatics, as normally understood.

*Fragments and Implicature.* Finally, Stainton at times sees the phenomenon of fragment interpretation as similar to, or even continuous with, that which goes in the literature under labels such as ‘explicature’, ‘implicature’, ‘unarticulated constituents’, and which he pulls together under the label “free pragmatic enrichment” and “pragmatic determinants of what is said”. Elugardo and Stainton (2004) claim that an utterance of ‘From the mountains of Columbia’ said of a bag of coffee is just a prepositional phrase that “contains no indexicals or other context-sensitive items — no slots to be filled” (Ibid.: 445). Hence in its use to assert that the bag of coffee is from the mountains of Columbia “free pragmatic enrichment must be playing a role in determining the literal truth-conditional content” (Ibid.). And Stainton comments: “subsential speech provides another example of pragmatic determinants of what is stated, asserted or claimed ...” (Stainton 2005: 392), and further “... what I say here is intended to be consistent with an utterance of ‘I’ve had breakfast’ being a literal statement to the effect that ‘I’ve had breakfast today’...” (Ibid.: 388).

It could be that all Stainton wants to emphasize is that machinery that interprets fragments is of the same type (or is the same) as that which interprets these other e.g., “breakfast” cases (or what we can for convenience call ‘implicatures’). But there still do seem to be some differences: implicatures are typically sentential,

and the need to pragmatically interpret them usually comes from the fact that either: (i) they don't express a proposition or (ii) they don't express a contextually appropriate one. Fragments typically are not sentential/propositional, though the need to "enrich" them in pragmatic interpretation also usually comes from the fact that something propositional is contextually required. Stainton uses the propositional character of what a speaker means to drive the pragmatics (and take pressure off of semantics to create convenient ambiguities): "After all, the speaker couldn't possibly be communicating a property — what would that be?" (Stainton 2000: 448). He does not say why communicating propositions is less mysterious than communicating properties, especially given his endorsement of singular propositions.<sup>42</sup> If properties can be constituents of propositions, why can we communicate that proposition, but not the property?<sup>43</sup>

Stainton is aware that different authors have different views about notions like "slots", "saturation", and "minimal propositions", and that on some views, (some) implicature sentences have linguistic slots to be filled (Stanley 2000), and that on other views they do not (Recanati 2002). On some views they express minimal propositions (Cappelen and Lepore 2005), on other views they do not. But the fact that e.g., Elugardo and Stainton (2004) want to use fragments to argue against Stanley indicates that they see fragments as just another instance of enrichment.<sup>44</sup>

In conclusion, we can agree with most of what Stainton says about the interpretation of fragments (disagreements have been noted):

- We agree that the interpretation of fragments takes place within a broadly (Fodorian) modular cognitive architecture,
- We agree that the relevant fragments are genuinely subsentential and that they can receive an appropriate linguistic analysis,
- We agree that there can already be in place pragmatics sufficient to deal with all modes of communication using full sentences,
- We agree that in typical cases, fragments are interpreted as literal and direct speech acts, and not necessarily as implicatures.

What we have not gotten from Stainton is an account of:

- What non-illocutionary speech acts fragments can be used to perform and how,
- What illocutionary acts fragments can be used to perform, and how,
- How the force of both illocutionary and non-illocutionary speech acts get recognized in the utterance of fragments.

### 3.2 Barton

Barton (1990) proposes a “competence module” to handle the linguistic structure of utterances. For Barton, fragments are nonsentential, and are “generated” by a grammar directly, not via sentential or discourse ellipsis. Barton achieves this by expanding the set of categories that can initiate a “derivation” from just sentence, to any major lexical category (in terms of a modified version of Chomsky’s “Government Binding” (GB) theory), where fragments get more or less the structure that they appear to have as constituents: NPs, VPs, PPs, ADJPs etc.

Barton then proposes a “pragmatic module”, to interpret these fragments. It is composed of two submodules: the pragmatic submodule of “Linguistic Context”, which relates the utterance fragment to previous discourse, and the pragmatic submodule of “Conversational Context”, which deals with other information.

*The Pragmatic Submodule of Linguistic Context (PSLC).* PSLC does its thing when given a fragment and a discourse context, as analyzed by the competence module. The operation of “discourse inference” then assigns the fragment to any available “expansion possibilities” in the discourse. This yields one or more “interpretations” of the fragment relative to the discourse. But it is possible that such assignments, though formally licensed, are not acceptable. The “Condition of Acceptability” then filters out the implausible assignments on the basis of “practical knowledge about the world”. Barton does not pretend to have a general theory about how such knowledge can be brought to bear on such assignments — and neither does anybody else. For example, the fragment ‘Old grudge’ would be handled by the PSLC as in:

(9) [PSLC]

A: What stops the White House staff from visiting Tip O’Neill in his  
Congressional office?

B: Old grudge

In this case, A’s remark is represented in GB notation, with ‘What’ analyzed as something like:

for which x is it such that x stops the ...  
[AGENT]

B’s remark is represented as:

[NP old grudge]

The PSLC submodule then assigns ‘old grudge’ as the AGENT to ‘for which thing x’, and “infers” something like:

(An) old grudge stops the White House staff from visiting Tip O’Neill in his Congressional office.

*The Pragmatic Submodule of Conversational Context (PSCC)*. PSCC does its thing when given a fragment and a discourse context (as analyzed by the PSLC), paired with a nonlinguistic context. Fragments interpretation involves three steps. First, the ‘Principle of Conversational Context’ “describes the structure of conversational context for each utterance in a discourse sequence” (1990: 166):

*Principle of Conversational Context*

In a discourse sequence, the representation of linguistic context for each utterance becomes the representation of an utterance with a potential structure of implicatures explaining its relevance as a cooperative contribution within the conversational context. (1990: 166)<sup>45</sup>

And according to Barton, the “conversational context” encompasses: “a number of domains of knowledge and information, including (at least) the physical context of situation, the topic of conversation, the background knowledge of the discourse participants, and their general knowledge about the world” (Ibid.: 162). These domains are then available to the second piece: the inference drawing machinery:

*Cooperative Inference*

- “(i) If the utterance is relevant based on information from knowledge of the physical context, then ...
- (ii) If the utterance is relevant based on information from knowledge of the topic of conversation, then ...
- (iii) If the utterance is relevant based on information from background knowledge, then ...
- (iv) If the utterance is relevant based on information from knowledge about the world, then ...” (1990: 167).

Barton admits that she has not described how these inferences work in detail (Ibid.: 198), but she thinks having “multiple domains” allows the system to account for the “indeterminacy” of interpretation (i.e., the fact that a fragment may have many different interpretations) depending on differences in context. The system does this either by (i) accommodating to the specific information within a domain, or (ii) privileging one domain over the others (Ibid.: 167). Barton illustrates how changes in privileging can change an interpretation, but admits that she has no mechanism for doing this (Ibid.: 198).

Finally, the “Condition of Acceptability” determines that one or more interpretations of the fragment (in the context) is acceptable in terms of being a cooperative contribution to the talk-exchange. The same fragment ‘Old grudge’ would be handled by the PSCC as in:

(10) [PSCC]

A: The White House staff doesn't visit Tip O'Neill in his Congressional office.

B: Old grudge  
[NP old grudge]

The PSCC submodule makes the following assumption:

Background assumption: B believes A knows that Tip O'Neill has an old grudge against the White House staff.

It then "infers" something like the following (where '+>' is implicature):

+> RELEVANCE If the utterance is relevant based on information about the background knowledge of the interlocutors, then the White House staff doesn't visit Tip O'Neill because Tip O'Neill has an old grudge against the White House staff. (Barton 1990: 174)

Like most discussions of fragments, the focus of concern in this work is on getting the propositional content right (getting the theory to accord with interpretation intuitions). Almost nothing is said about (illocutionary) force. There is at least one apparent exception [abbreviated]:

D: Yes, apparently, she [Mrs. Hunt] was the pillar of strength in the family before [her] death.

P: Great sadness. As a matter of fact ...  
[NP great sadness]

+>RELEVANCE If the utterance is relevant based on information from the topic of the conversation, then Mrs. Hunt's death was a great sadness.

Assumption about the world

- Mention of death conventionally calls for a remark of condolence or regret.

+> RELEVANCE If the utterance is relevant based on information from knowledge about the world, then this remark is a conventional expression of regret regarding Mrs. Hunt's death. (1990: 182-3)

And on some taxonomies of illocutionary acts, expressions of regret form a category of illocutionary acts, and hence there is an inference to illocutionary force (and content), and hence to an illocutionary act.

Thus far, it is fair to say that, questions of linguistic evidence for the analysis of fragments and discourse aside, there is nothing particularly pragmatically controversial, at this level of generality, about the idea of building an interpretation of a fragment in a discourse in terms of linking the fragment to items in the discourse on condition of general plausibility. Nor is it particularly controversial to

view interpreting a fragment relative to nonlinguistic context in terms of its being conversationally acceptable. But the devil is in the details, and the details of these pragmatic submodules are complicated and controversial. Part of the problem is that Barton chooses to put the theory in the combined terminology of modularity and implicature. It is unclear in what sense these components are modules, and it is unclear in what sense these inferences are implicatures.

*Modularity.* Despite frequent discussion of “modularity”, it is not obvious what is being claimed in this regard. It is not clear Barton recognizes Fodor’s (1983: Chapter 1) distinction between the modularity of “information” (data, rules, etc.), and the modularity of “mechanisms”. For example, Fodor considers the key features of modularity to be “domain specificity” (the module is triggered by a specific domain of information), and “information encapsulation” (information from the central system, general knowledge, does not affect the functioning of the module). In Barton’s theory, this issue comes home in the form of the question: why we have just the above four (or any special) “domains” of information or knowledge?<sup>46</sup> Barton gives no justification for cutting up knowledge in this rather than some other way. Indeed, she does not even tell us how to distinguish “background knowledge” from “knowledge of the world”. And isn’t knowledge of the physical situation and topic of conversation knowledge about the world? A lot of serious work needs to be done here that is absent. Fodor (1983) compared central systems (where Barton’s domains are stored) to a Sears catalog, with its multiple ways of categorizing and accessing every item. Barton has given us no reason to suppose that memory is more like her proposal than Fodor’s. In particular, the two reasons she offers do not choose between them because, put bluntly, the domains do no work. What does the work is the information “in” the domains. When Barton imagines inter-domain information influencing interpretation it is the difference between e.g., X holding a grudge against Y vs. Y holding a grudge against X (Ibid.: 173). And when Barton imagines intra-domain information influencing (“privileging”) interpretation, it is the saliency of e.g., a door slamming vs. the ongoing conversation (Ibid.: 162). But in each case it’s the particular piece of information, not the category that it is from, which is operative, somehow. The domain categories are inert for the interpreter, though maybe convenient for the theorist. In the end, Barton backs off from making specific claims about psychological mechanisms and the mental representation of information. She acknowledges that although the theory breaks fragment interpretation into “modules” and “submodules”, it may be the case that in the actual interpretation of a fragment the principles, inferences, and conditions may operate in various orders, or even in parallel. Given this tentativeness, we will not pursue the issue of the modularity of pragmatics here.

*Implicature*. Both pragmatic submodules are said to: “have Gricean inference as their central mechanism: the operation of inference generates hypotheses about the implicated meaning of an independent constituent utterance” (Barton 1990: 163). The difference between the two submodules is supposed to be that: “... Discourse Inference is generalized ... regardless of context ... within the submodule of conversational context the operation of inferences is particularized, that is, implicatures are calculated within the specific conversational context ...” (Ibid.). And these inferences are said to be “implicatures” because they are said to conform to Grice’s “five features” of conversational implicature. None of these claims really stands up to scrutiny. Barton does have an “inferential” theory, but there is nothing particularly “Gricean” about it.

To begin with, operations of “discourse inference” of the PSLC and of the “co-operative inference” of the PSCC have nothing to do with what Grice thought of as “implicature”, which is an umbrella term Grice introduced to cover a range of more specific notions such as: suggest, imply, hint, insinuate etc. For Grice, a speaker typically implicates that Q in saying that P. But neither example (9) nor (10) fit this picture. In neither case would it be intuitive to think of the speaker of the fragments as hinting, suggesting, implying etc., anything. Or for clarity, take answers to questions. It is completely un-Gricean to claim that the answer implicates the unspoken material:

- (11) a. Is John here?  
 b. Yes [John is here]

B did not implicate that John is here, B directly asserted it. If John is not here B is wrong, what B asserted is false. If B knew John is not here, B is lying, not just misleading. Finally, in neither case could the utterance of the fragment be seen by Grice as a case of “saying that P” for the simple reason that for Grice, what is said in uttering a sentence is closely connected to the elements of the sentence, their order and their syntactic character.

*The Five Features*. Barton gets into this fix by taking Grice’s five features of (conversational) implicature as “definitional” (Barton 1990: 144). But Grice explicitly denies having such a definition for (conversational) implicature, and when Grice summarizes his discussion of (conversational) implicature he introduces the list saying, of (conversational) implicature, that “it must possess certain features” (Grice 1989: 39). So these are at best necessary conditions, not sufficient, and so not definitional ones. In fact, the closest thing to a “definition” that Grice gives is the following: “I am now in a position to characterize the notion of conversational implicature ...” (Ibid.: 30). And he goes on to give his well-known “working out schema” for conversational implicatures. Barton is aware of this schema, and we

return to it soon. Barton then surveys Grice's five "features" of (conversational) implicature, which she labels as: "indeterminacy", defeasibility (Grice: cancellability), non-detachability, "non-conventionality", and "calculability".<sup>47</sup> Barton argues that the PSLC's Discourse Inference can have all five features, (and therefore gives rise to "implicatures"). Here is one of Barton's cancellability examples:

- (12) A: What did John say about the drive around Washington?  
 B: 'Red lights', but he didn't say 'red lights' about the drive around Washington, he was warning Mary about upcoming red lights at the next corner" (1990: 145).

Even if this was coherent (the "answer" doesn't answer the question), it is not at all what Grice had in mind by cancellation of an implicature, because no implicature was generated to cancel. Contrast with a Gricean case:

- A: Does John have a girl friend?  
 B: He's making a lot of trips to New York lately, but probably to attend the US Open.

Here, the second clause cancels the implicature (Yes, he does) of the first clause. Barton's "cancellation" of an implicature just looks like a redirection of an inference, and not every such redirection is cancellation. The other four features do not fare any better. They all illustrate the features applied to inferences, but none of them are Gricean implicatures.

*The PSLC: "Generalized" Implicature.* Barton characterizes the Discourse Inference implicatures of the PSLC as "generalized": "... the operation of Discourse Inference that creates the implicature associating the NP with the discourse function of Agent is one that is generalized: unless canceled by specific clauses or other contextual information, the operation of Discourse Inference goes through" (1990: 158–9), and "... the submodule of linguistic context represents the discourse-based interpretation of a constituent utterances as generalized implicatures" (1990: 192). What is a bit misleading about this is that Grice also distinguishes a class of "generalized" conversational implicatures (GCIs) within the class of conversational implicatures (CIs), and Grice gives a superficially similar characterization of GCIs:

- (GCI)  
 "the use of a certain form of words in an utterance would normally (in the absence of special circumstances) carry such-and-such an implicature or type of implicature" (Grice 1989: 37).

But his examples of GCIs are totally different from Barton's:

- (13) a. He's meeting a woman  
 b. Implicature: she is not a wife, sister, mother or Platonic friend.

The idea is that in saying that (13a) and thereby implicating that (13b), it is the form of words (perhaps 'meeting a woman') that carries the implication. Uttering (13a) implicates (13b) unless it is canceled by context (linguistic or non-linguistic). This is not the case with e.g., (11a) and (11b)–(11a) does not carry the "implicature" (11b) unless context cancels it. So there is not much reason so far to conclude with Barton that the PSLC operates to yield Gricean "implicatures" at all, not even "generalized" implicatures.

*The PSCC: "Standard" and "Particularized" Implicature.* Barton characterizes the Cooperative Inference implicatures as both "standard" (following Levinson 1983) and "particularized". Let's begin with "standard":

... the operation of Cooperative Inference has calculated implicatures based on the assumption that each constituent [fragment] utterance represents a cooperative contribution within a specific conversational context. These implicatures are what Levinson calls 'standard implicatures' that arise from observing the Cooperative Principle; *standard implicatures contrast with conversational implicatures* which arise from exploiting the maxims of the cooperative principle. In this work I concentrate upon standard implicatures rather than conversational implicatures, because the use of independent constituent utterances [fragments] is made possible by the assumption that discourse participants have the ability to calculate standard implicatures (1990: 180, emphasis added).<sup>48</sup>

The idea behind "standard" implicatures seems to be that there are inferences one can draw from the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative in just what they say.<sup>49</sup> As Grice would put it, to speak as if one is being cooperative, but really not, might be to mislead: "A participant in a talk-exchange may fail to fulfill a maxim in various ways ... He may quietly and unostentatiously *violate* a maxim; if so in some cases he will be liable to mislead" (Grice 1989:30). It is important that Grice does not call such cases "implicatures". Grice has only three classes of implicatures: conventional, generalized conversational, and particularized conversational. And none of these are simple "violations". One serious problem with such a class of "implicatures" is where to stop drawing them. Barton does not require them to be intended by the speaker, or intended to be recognized by the hearer. Think of the inferences one could draw from the utterance of (13a): that the speaker knows some English, is awake, is alive, thinks the hearer is all of the above too, etc. Such inferences have nothing to do with Gricean "implicatures".

Turning now to "particularized", according to Barton: "... the submodule of conversational context represents the information-based interpretation of

constituent utterance as particularized implicatures” (Barton 1990: 192). For Grice particularized conversational implicatures are:

(PCI)

... cases in which an implicature is carried by saying that *p* on a particular occasion in virtue of special features of the context ... (Grice 1989: 37).

Barton also thinks such inferences of the PSCC satisfy the five features of implicatures: “Within the submodule of conversational context, implicatures generated by the operation of Cooperative Inference also satisfy all of these diagnostics for implicatures ...” (Barton 1990: 194). And she illustrates each of them. Of particular interest is the feature of “calculability”. She says: “... the calculation of the implicatures associated with the constituent utterance [fragment] ... follows Grice’s specification of the working-out process” (Ibid.: 195). And step two of Grice’s “working-out” schema requires the Cooperative Principle and/or a Maxim to be *violated* at the level of what is said, only to be *conformed to* at the level of what is implicated:

(2) the supposition that he is aware that, or thinks that, *q* [the implicature] is required in order to make has saying, or making as if to say *p* ... consistent with this presumption [“that (1) he is to be presumed to be observing the conversational maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle ...”] (Grice 1989: 30–31).

Barton outlines how such an example might go in her terms (Barton 1990: 196: example (52iii)). The problem is, of course, that this is what Barton above called a “conversational” implicature, vs. a “standard” implicature. But we were told the theory only covered “standard” implicatures. In short, Barton wants it both ways but she is in a dilemma: she wants her theory to apply to inferences where no violation occurs (inferences run off of conformity to the Cooperative Principle and/or Maxims), “standard” implicatures, yet she also wants to be able to claim her inferences are “implicatures” and so have the five features, one of which is “calculability” which involves “working out” which is incompatible with being “standard”.

In conclusion, we disagree with a number of detailed points about Barton’s proposal. We disagree that she has used the relevant notion of modularity, and we disagree that the inferences in her two pragmatic “submodules” are Gricean implicatures. We can agree with Barton, though, that:

- There is something like a “competence model” in the language faculty which “feeds” the pragmatics, though the nature of that model and how it feeds is still up for grabs,
- The pragmatics of utterance interpretation is heavily inferential, and will involve, in one way or another, appeals to all sorts of contextual information and general background knowledge.

What we have not gotten from Barton is a variety of connections:

- between uttering fragments, speaker meaning, speech acts and successful communication on the one hand, and
- doing the same with (full) sentences on the other.

In short, we want a theory that sees the pragmatics of (genuine) fragment interpretation as a special case of the interpretation of expressions in general.

### 3.3 Stainton and Barton

We have reviewed the two major discussions of the pragmatics of fragment interpretation:

- They agree that there are genuine fragments that need to be interpreted.
- They seem to disagree on the scope of the theory: 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.
- They differ on issues of modularity. (Here too we are inclined to side with Stainton.)
- Neither Stainton nor Barton have much to say about the interpretation of the force of fragments.

(Non-sentential) approaches to fragment utterance interpretation could fall into any number of categories. Classical pragmatic theories could use the resources of speech act or implicature theory. Cognitive science theories could use the resources of mental representations, operations, and cognitive architecture. And there could be other approaches, such as conversational analysis. Interestingly, two of the major players on the non-sententialist side of the debate, Barton and Stainton, both 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. Whereas in Stainton there is much more discussion of these latter cognitive science issues (see especially Elugardo and Stainton 2003), Stainton seems to abjure implicature in handling the interpretation of fragments.

Both Barton and Stainton embrace "modularity". However, it is not clear they mean the same thing by 'modular'. Stainton (2005: 386) denies, what Barton seems to maintain, viz that there are pragmatic "modules" at work in utterance interpretation. This may very well be largely terminological: Stainton is working with Fodor's (1983) conception of modular architecture (modularity of mechanisms),

whereas Barton seems to be working more with a Chomskian notion (modularity of information or data). And both authors concentrate almost exclusively on accounting for content. However, it is probably fair to say, though this is an open question, that both authors would expect that the machinery they explore *if sufficient to assign the right content would be sufficient to assign the right force*. That is, no new force-specific machinery will be needed. Each author does discuss, at least in passing, some issues regarding force, but nothing as systematic as (propositional) content.

#### 4. Conclusion

We do not always talk in complete sentences, we sometimes speak in “fragments”, such as ‘Fire!’, ‘Off with his head’, ‘From Cuba’, ‘Next!’, and ‘Shall we?’. Research has tended to focus on the ellipsis wars — the issue of whether all or most fragments are really sentential or not. Less effort has been put into the question of exactly how fragments are to be interpreted, and almost nothing on the interpretation of their force. We separate off the issue of fragment interpretation from the issue of systematically accounting for their linguistic properties — the issue of how to “generate” fragments. We reviewed two strategies directed at the issue of fragment interpretation: Stainton, who approaches the issue obliquely,<sup>50</sup> and Barton, who approaches the issue directly. We found areas of agreement and disagreement with both studies. One glaring fact is that pragmatic work on fragments to date has concentrated on issue of recovering (propositional) content, not issues of recovering force. When one decides to give force equal billing with content it becomes clearer that understanding the use of fragments, like understanding the use of sentences, must take into account the speech act information, both as intended by the speaker and as recovered by the hearer. What is needed is an approach that fits fragment interpretation into a theory of performing and communicating with speech acts in general. There are a number of theories of speech acts out there: (i) the conventions-rules (normative) approach of Austin, Searle, Alston, (ii) the illocutionary point approach of Searle and Vanderveken, (iii) the expressed intentional state approach of Grice, Schiffer, Holdcroft, and the hybrid approach of Bach and Harnish, to mention just a selection.<sup>51</sup> Not all of these theories are equally able to support an account of mood,<sup>52</sup> and not all speech act theories extend naturally from sentences to fragments. However, sorting this out is a project for another occasion.

## Notes

\* I want to thank Kent Bach, Merrill Garrett, and Marcelo Dascal for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

1. Jespersen's criterion ("capability of standing alone") speaks to independence, not to completeness, as his hesitation on question-answer pairs indicates. Maybe we should ask: what is an "incomplete" sentence? Any string of words that can be made into a sentence? "Made into" how? By adding words? Then any string of words is an "incomplete sentence". The notion is still only intuitive.
2. At this point one could go from speaking to writing: emails, letters etc., and from there to print communication in general. We will return to this point briefly.
3. Heard on "Car Talk", June 7, 2008 National Public Radio.
4. An interesting class of cases involves both the second and the last restriction i.e., the class of written or printed fragments. We return to these cases briefly later.
5. Stainton (2006: Part III), and elsewhere, takes up such issues as whether grasping thoughts requires sentences, whether sentences are central to arguments, the "context principle" and the priority of sentence-meaning to word-meaning, and the role of sentences in the concept of assertion.
6. For instance: '(sentence) fragments' (Morgan: 1973; Merchant 2004), 'nonsentential constituents' (Barton 1990), 'free constituents' (Sadock and Zwicky 1985), 'subsenteses' (Stainton 2006). Notice that all of these labels suggest that such expressions are potential or actual "parts" of grammatical sentences. Stainton comments that, with the term 'fragments', "... is the question [about ellipsis] begged by the choice of a label" (Stainton 2006b: 114). The same could be said of all of the above — including Stainton's 'subsenteses'. What the field seems to have in mind is that these expressions are, to a first approximation, potential "constituents" of a longer (grammatical) sentence at some level of analysis. It would be nice to have a term that did not have this suggestion, but I cannot think of a good one, so I have adopted 'fragment' ('non-sentence' is too broad).
7. Hankamer and Sag (1976:6.3) use such data to argue against the sufficiency of "sentence grammar": "the assumption that an adequate description of linguistic competence can be represented in a sentence-generating grammar must be given up". One issue that is rarely discussed in this regard is where these "discourse pairs" come from. Is the alternative to "sentence" grammar "discourse" grammar? Does the grammar generate well-formed discourse? If not, are the principles to be applied only to idealized discourse, where the linguistic context is (somehow) highlighted material directly preceding the fragment? This is often not the case in real discourse where e.g., answers to questions can hop over intervening remarks.
8. We might legitimately wonder what happened in both of these discussions to the (assertive) force? Isn't that a puzzle too?
9. Probably Stainton should have said 'illocutionary act', since some authors, such as Searle (1969), embrace "sub-propositional" speech acts such as referring and predicating.

10. Assuming, as is common in the field, that the syntactic structure of an expression will play a major role in the semantics, pragmatics and processing of that expression. Whether the reverse is true, the issue of “pragmatic incursion” into syntax is controversial. Notice that agreeing to this does not itself require a mechanism for *recursively specifying* the syntax of every sentence — say a grammar or a parser — that calls for further assumptions.
11. For a survey of many of the semantic issues here see Predelli (2005).
12. This is related to controversy over the “psychological reality” of grammar. See Devitt (2006) for a recent survey discussion.
13. See Townsend and Bever (2001) for this latter proposal.
14. This might be done by incorporating the grammar into the interpretation process, or having a parser that assigns the same analyses to a fragment as a grammar would, as in Marcus (1980).
15. Notice that when the pragmatics is stated in terms of “interpretation”, as it usually is, that takes the issues out of the speakers perspective; speakers do not need to “interpret” what they are doing.
16. As they put it: “Quite generally, pragmatic intuitions invoked in theoretical pragmatics are not about actual utterances addressed to the reader of a pragmatics article, but about hypothetical cases involving imaginary or generic interlocutors ... these are not about how an utterance is interpreted, but about how an utterance *would be* interpreted if it were produced in a specific situation by a speaker addressing a listener ...” (ibid.: 186).
17. And the recommended fix of turning to psychology does not accord with psycholinguistic practice either. Typically in experimental pragmatics, subjects are given sentences to respond to from a third person point of view, with little context, and imaginary speakers. Predictions are made about their behavior, statistics are applied, theories are confirmed or disconfirmed. Almost nowhere can subjects be described as having what Noveck and Sperber (2007) consider a genuine pragmatic intuition. So although their conception of pragmatics finds a central place for experiments, it’s just not experiments that are typically done.
18. Generalizing Austin (1962), we will use ‘force’ to mark the kind of speech act in general being performed, not restricted to illocutionary acts/force.
19. Conservative in the sense that the domain of a grammar does not need to be expanded from the class of sentences. Merchant’s (2004:662) conservatism consists in “... preserving the usual mapping of syntax and semantics ...”, but he calls it the ‘ellipsis approach’.
20. Liberal in the sense that grammars (or parsers) will not generate (or parse) only sentences, but fragments as well. Merchant (2004:663) calls this the ‘direct interpretation’ approach.
21. For a fun(ky) informal trip across the landscape of ellipsis and its near neighbors try Wilson (2000).
22. The big division in the “type” 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. Among “sentential”

accounts, some authors propose an “empty element”, Delta, account (see e.g., Williams 1977) — contrast the deletion account (a) with the empty element account (b): a. The man who didn't [leave]<sub>VP</sub> saw the man who did [\_\_\_VP], b. The man who didn't [leave]<sub>VP1</sub> saw the man who did [Delta<sub>1</sub>]<sub>VP</sub>. Some describe syntactic ellipsis in terms of “reconstruction” (see Fiengo and May 1994), and some deny that there is a syntactic phenomenon of ellipsis at all (see e.g., Dalrymple 2005). We will not take sides on this issue. For surveys of ellipsis see Hankamer and Sag (1976), Chao (1988), Morgan (1989), Lappin (1996), Lappin and Benmamoun (1999), Merchant (2001, 2004, 2006), Stainton (2005: Section 3; 2006, Chapters 5, 6), Barton (1990, 2006).

23. This passage seems to conflate “illocutionary” and “speech”, acts, since there are other “speech acts” than illocutions. Stainton (2006: 8–9) restricts his domain to grammatical linguistic acts with literal illocutionary force and propositional content.

24. In fact, the terminology of language use and speech acts only awkwardly applies to such cases. It is more natural to speak of “occurrences” of these fragments than their use or utterance, but we will follow Stainton until further notice and use the single terminology.

25. This list is for the most part repeated in Stainton (2006: 7).

26. See Predelli (2005) for further discussion and references.

27. Stainton alert: sometimes Stainton uses ‘content’ to mean both illocutionary force and propositional content (see 2004: 268; 2006: 18). This is non-standard and it makes it difficult to refer to non-force aspects of interpretation in general.

28. Most of Stainton's discussion of the force of fragments concentrates on grammatical and propositional cases in part because he wants to challenge ellipsis accounts of fragments, which relate them to sentences, which are the natural vehicle for illocutionary acts. We will take *propositional content* as understood and *grammaticality* as given.

29. Stainton (2006: 215) rejects a strong conception of conventionality, due to Dummett, at least for assertion, though as we will see he allows for elements of conventionality, but this is not developed.

30. Stainton's whole idea of the force of a (kind) of act is puzzling, especially when he illustrates it only in illocutionary terms: “for instance, there is a force specific to asking questions” (2006a: 18). Well, is there a “force” specific to ringing door-bells? If not, what does this terminology buy us beyond just saying that there are (illocutionary) acts of asking questions and some sentences are “conventionally” used to do so?

31. He does not mention one popular way of connecting sentences with illocutionary force, “performative prefixes” such as ‘I promise (that)’. Some theorists (e.g., Austin) use them to invoke illocutionary conventions, others (Searle) to invoke “constitutive rules”. In any case, they supplement mood in signalling ‘force<sub>EXP</sub>’.

32. See Bach and Harnish (1979: Chapter 4) for more discussion.

33. If right, this poses an interesting problem for those who think that such implicatures are cases of indirect assertion — why don't they pass the lying-test?

34. Since fragments can be just NPs like ‘Brahms,’ the idea that these can be “developed” into sentences reduces to the idea that a sentence can be constructed with it as a constituent. The problem is that there is no obvious (privileged) propositional “development” of it; there are countably many “developments” of it.
35. Also, misleadingly, called “overgeneration” viz. the problem of too many candidates to be the added content and no reason to choose one over the other.
36. See Preyer and Peter (2007) for a collection of papers on this topic.
37. See Sadock and Zwicky (1985) and Harnish (1983, 1994) for more discussion and further references.
38. See Stainton (2006: Chapter 8).
39. Although he says almost nothing about how representations of contextual elements get assigned the *right* elements — i.e., what makes a representation about one thing rather than another.
40. Stainton calls it a “definition”, but it is only stated as a necessary condition (2006a: 163).
41. At one point he characterizes it as “the first one the hearer arrives at” (2006a: 174). Home lesson: find ten things wrong with this idea.
42. Borg (2004: 270), endorsing the outline of this position, notes that “it is not clear that this ‘completion at the level of thought’ need occur ... it is not clear that all thought content must be ... propositional.”
43. Or to put it in Gricean terms (which Stainton accepts), if (successful) communication of a proposition is, roughly, having the (reflexive) intention to think it recognized, why isn’t communicating a property, roughly, having the (reflexive) intention to think of it recognized?
44. For instance, Elugardo and Stainton (2004: 144) argue that in a certain context a person can utter ‘Every Friday’ and express the proposition that a certain person comes every Friday to a certain store and sniffs two pieces of fruit. Here we have multiple variable binding in logical form, but only a prepositional phrase in syntax. Hence, they conclude, Stanley’s (2000: 392) claim that “the effects of extra-linguistic context on the truth-conditions of assertions are traceable to logical form” is wrong.
45. Barton does not discuss one possible side effect of this; it looks like the theory cannot apply to talk-exchanges where the Cooperative Principle is not in effect.
46. Barton (1990: 175) distinguishes these: ‘knowledge’ is a “cognitive construct, a representation”, whereas ‘information’ is “activated portions of that knowledge in a specific conversational context”. We will ignore these rather eccentric uses of these terms.
47. Only the second and third labels are Grice’s.
48. This terminological contrast is not completely felicitous; “standard” implicatures depend on the CP, which governs conversations and so would seem to be “conversational”.
49. These were called “direct implicatures” by Harnish (1976: 361ff), and “implicatures” simpliciter by Bach and Harnish (1979: 171).

50. Stainton is more concerned with legitimizing the existence and use of (genuine) fragments to perform “full fledged speech acts” and drawing out the consequences of this, than developing a pragmatic account of how fragments are interpreted.
51. See Harnish (2005a) for a more detailed comparison.
52. See Harnish (2005b, 2006, 2007) for specific proposals connecting sentential mood to speech act approaches (i), (ii) and (iv).

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