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Are There Any Subsentential Speech Acts?[2]

Abstract In this paper, I critically examine the major philosophical standpoints regarding (apparent) subsentential speech acts such as "Nice dress", "Under the table", or "Where?". The opponents of this category (e.g. Stanley, Merchant) argue either that apparent subsentential speech acts are ellipses (i.e. sentential) or that they are not full-fledged speech acts. The defenders of subsentential speech acts (e.g. Stainton, Corazza) argue that even though they are not sentences in the syntactic or the semantic sense, they can be used to perform a speech act. I argue in defence of subsentential speech acts and propose to analyze them using Recanati's moderate relativism.[3]

Keywords speech acts, ellipsis, subsentential speech acts, moderate relativism

1. Introduction

In his book titled *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Michael Dummett holds that "a sentence (...) is the smallest unit of language with which a linguistic act can be accomplished, with which a 'move can be made in a language-game'" (Dummett, 1973, p. 194).[4] Kent Bach considers this thesis to be an idealization (Bach, 2008, p. 739), and takes the fact that people state, propose, ask etc. using bare phrases, even single words, to

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[4] Dummett is a "villain" in the eyes of the proponents of subsentential speech acts. They make frequent references to the quoted passage.

be obvious. He takes Dummett's thesis to be clearly false, to the point that he finds it strange that anyone should try to demonstrate its falsity. Meanwhile, Robert Stainton dedicated most of his extensive monograph *Words and Thoughts* to arguing that apparent subsentential speech acts are indeed speech acts performed using non-sentential utterances. Stainton thinks that we encounter such speech acts on a daily basis and lists the following examples (Stainton, 2006):

1. "Sanjay and Silvia are loading up a van. Silvia is looking for a missing table leg. Sanjay says: "On the stoop"". (Stainton, 2006, p. 5)

2. "Benigno gets into a taxi and says: "To Segovia. To the jail"". (Stainton, 2006, p. 5)

3. John demonstrates a letter he is holding in his hand and says: "From Spain".

4. During a conference, a linguist says to a colleague in order to identify a person entering the room: "Barbara Partee" (cf. Stainton, 2006, p. 6)

5. "Meera is putting jam on her toast. As she scoops out the jam, she says 'Chunks of strawberries'. Anita nods, and says 'Rob's mom'" (Stainton, 2006, p. 115).

6. "I'm at a linguistic meeting. (...) There are some empty seats around a table. I point at one and say, 'An editor of *Natural Language Semantics*'" (Stainton 2006, p. 209).

7. I walk into a pub and say to the bartender: "Three pints of lager".

Although in each of these cases the speaker utters a non-sentential expression, there is no doubt, according to Stainton, that a speech act has been performed. Sanjay said that the table leg is on the stoop; Benigno asked the taxi driver to take him to Segovia, to the jail; John reported that the letter came from Spain; the linguist said that the person entering the room is Barbara Partee etc. Stainton claims that users of language frequently utter words and phrases that are not complete sentences but whose utterance constitutes the performance of a full-fledged speech act (Stainton, 2006, p. 3). In his opinion, these words and phrases are not sentences in the syntactic sense (they do not have sentential syntax) or the semantic sense (they do not express propositions) but are sentences in

the pragmatic sense (they can be used to perform a speech act) (Stainton, 2006, p. 32). A subsentential assertion, for example, is the utterance of a non-sentential expression ("in isolation": not embedded in any larger syntactic structure (Stainton, 2006, p. 11)) with a determinate illocutionary force and a determinate truth-conditional content. A subsentential assertion does not express a proposition but can be used to assert a proposition. This proposition is supposedly what is said: the literal, not implied or suggested, content. Jason Stanley, who does not believe in the existence of subsentential speech acts, defines a subsentential assertion as "an unembedded utterance that is a successful linguistic assertion" (Stanley, 2000, p. 402).[5]

The examples given by Stainton stem from "real life". I am convinced that the reader has encountered thousands of utterances of this sort. There is thus no doubt that, from the point of view of successful communication, it is often sufficient to utter a fragment of a sentence. One can nonetheless doubt, first of all, if such fragments are indeed full-fledged speech acts, and secondly, if they are not hidden sentences.

2. Semantics-oriented standpoints regarding subsentential utterances

2.1. Jason Stanley's principle of "divide and conquer"

Standpoints regarding apparent subsentential utterances can be divided into semantics-oriented and pragmatics-oriented ones (see Stainton, 2006). The proponents of the semantics-oriented standpoints, such as Jason Stanley, Jason Merchant, and Michael Dummett, hold that there are no subsentential speech acts. They claim that since, in the absence of clear semantic rules, context cannot supply constituents directly to the contents of the expressed propositions, utterances that are not complete sentences cannot be speech acts. According to them, the examples given above are either not full-fledged speech acts or are, contrary to appearances, not subsentential. Accordingly, Stanley employs the principle of "divide and conquer" (cf. Elugardo & Stainton, 2004, p. 446), claiming that these examples can be divided into three groups and that none of these groups can serve as a counterexample to Dummett's position quoted at the beginning. In his opinion, the alleged

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[5]"An utterance is unembedded if and only if it is an utterance of a non-sentential expression, and it is not part of an utterance of a sentence in which that expression occurs as a constituent" (Stanley, 2000, p. 402).

subsentential assertions are: (1) elliptical sentences; (2) not full-fledged speech acts; or (3) shorthand for sentential utterances.

Stanley thus claims that some of Stainton's examples are ellipses, even though they are not accompanied by any linguistic context. It is usually thought that ellipses cannot occur at the beginning of a conversation – an ellipsis must be preceded by some other utterance serving as an antecedent providing content for its supplementation. But according to Stanley:

> (. . .) explicitly providing a linguistic antecedent by mentioning it is only the simplest way to provide it. There are other methods of raising linguistic expressions to salience in a conversation without explicitly using them. (Stanley, 2000, p. 404).

For instance, an apparent subsentential assertion can be an answer to a question that has not been asked but is obvious given extralinguistic context. Stanley considers the following example.

> Suppose that Bill walks into a room in which a woman in the corner is attracting an undue amount of attention. Turning quizzically to John, he arches his eyebrow and gestures towards the woman. John replies "A world famous topologist" (Stanley, 2000, p. 404).

Even though no question has been uttered, the described extralinguistic context makes it obvious, according to Stanley, that Bill's gesture and quizzical look express the question "Who is she?". John's utterance is thus an ellipsis replacing the sentence: "She is a world famous topologist" (see Stanley, 2000, p. 406).

Here is another example:

> Suppose that a group of friends, including John and Bill, has gone bungee jumping. Every member of the group is watching Bill, who is the first to muster the courage to bungee jump. As Bill is standing eight stories above the water on the platform of a crane, ready to plummet into the water below, Sarah, aware of John's terror of heights, turns to one of the other friends and utters ["John won't"], shaking her head (Stanley, 2000, p. 405).

According to Stanley, in this situation one should not claim that Sara's utterance has no linguistic antecedent. This is because context brings attention to the expression "bungee jump" which can serve as an antecedent for the ellipsis ("John won't bungee jump").

According to Stanley, some other apparent subsentential speech acts are not speech acts at all because they do not have a sufficiently determinate illocutionary force or a sufficiently determinate content. Here, Stanley gives an example of a thirsty man staggering up to a street vendor and saying "Water!". Stanley holds that no determinate illocutionary force can be ascribed to an utterance like that since it is not clear if it is supposed to be an assertion, a request, or an imperative. No determinate content can be ascribed to it either since it is not clear if the proposition expressed by the speaker is the proposition that the speaker wants to drink some water or the proposition that the vendor should give the speaker some water (Stanley, 2000, p. 407). Therefore, an utterance like that is not a speech act.

The examples that cannot be classed under either of these two groups are treated as shorthand by Stanley. For example, if someone utters the words "nice dress" to a women met in the street, it is "fairly clear that an assertion has been made, whose content is a singular proposition about the object in question, to the effect that it is a nice dress" (Stanley, 2000, p. 409). Hence, the expression "nice dress" uttered in such a context is simply shorthand for the sentence "This is a nice dress".[6]

Staley would most probably see examples 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 as ellipses whose linguistic antecedents are provided by implicit questions, and example 3 – as shorthand.

Stanley's standpoint has attracted serious criticism. Regarding the postulate to treat subsentential utterances accompanied by extralinguistic context as ellipses, it has been objected that extralinguistic context can bring attention to objects but not to expressions referring to these objects. Stainton claims that "non-linguistic context cannot determine a linguistic item" (Stainton, 2006, p. 169). As has already been mentioned, it is usually assumed that an ellipsis must have a linguistic antecedent. Stanley does not reject this assumption but argues that such an antecedent can be provided by extralinguistic context. If, then, Stainton is right that context cannot make salient a linguistic item, the alleged ellipsis does not have an antecedent after all. According to Alison Hall, on the other hand, the fact that subsentential utterances require extralinguistic context in order to be correct does not entail that they are ellipses. There are sentential utterances that also require extralinguistic context (for example, during a book signing, the host might

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[6]Compare below.

point to a book and say: "The author's going to be signing copies later.")[7] (Hall, 2009, p. 240).

Regarding the exclusion of subsentential utterances from the category of speech acts due to the lack of a determinate force or content, it has been noted that this strategy is too restrictive – its adoption is bound to preclude many uncontroversial sentential utterances from being counted among speech acts. In particular, it seems doubtful that uncertainty as to whether an utterance is an assertion, a request or an imperative should suffice to exclude it from being a speech act. It seems that uncertainty of this sort also arises in situations featuring sentential utterances, and in such cases there is usually no suspicion of the speech act being defective. There is no reason for the conditions imposed on subsentential speech acts to be more severe than those imposed on sentential utterances. Elugardo and Stainton (2004, p. 466) give the example of a sentence uttered by Mary to Susan, her subordinate and good friend at the same time: "You must turn in your final report before you leave in the afternoon". Given that Susan and Mary are bound by professional and personal relations, it may be unclear if the sentence uttered by Mary is a request, a command, or a description of rules in place at the office. However, we do not want to assume that Mary did not manage to perform a speech act.

Regarding the argument that in contexts featuring subsentential utterances there is always an implicit question, Stainton notes that even if this were the case, one should not assume that such a question can serve as a linguistic antecedent for an ellipsis. This is because questions are not linguistic items, only interrogative sentences are. Even if there is an implicit question in a given context, but no interrogative sentence is uttered, one should not assume that the linguistic form of the implicit question is determinate enough for it to serve as an antecedent. In order to speak of an omission of a fragment one must know its shape, not just its content. If I ask "Who bought the bread?", the answer can be "John" but not "by John", even though the full answer "The bread was bought by John" is correct. This is because a shorthand answer is assumed to "inherit" the structure of the question and not just its content (cf. Merchant, 2010, p. 18). In the example about the topologist described by Stanley, for instance, the asker could have meant the question "What does she do?" rather than "Who is this?". The utterance "a world famous topologist" does provide an answer to the first question, but it cannot be treated as an ellipsis supplemented

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[7]The example is controversial since it could be considered to constitute an ellipsis: "The author of this book...," where relevant book is determined by context.

by the structure of this (silent) question since such supplementation would lead to the formation of an ungrammatical utterance: "She [does] a world famous topologist".[8]

Regarding treating some subsentential utterances as shorthand, Elugardo and Stainton argue in their article *Shorthand, syntactic ellipsis, and the pragmatic determinants of what is said* that this strategy is bound to fail.[9] They provide four possible interpretations of the thesis that subsentential utterances are mere shorthand and demonstrate that none of these interpretations can be used by the proponents of the semantics-oriented approach. In their opinion, the fact that one expression is shorthand for another can mean that: (a) the latter could be used instead of the former to achieve the same effect; (b) one is a synonym of the other (on some reading); (c) one is conventionally tied to the other; and (d) the two are not conventionally paired but the speaker intended the hearer to read the first as the latter and to use the latter expression to interpret what was meant (Elugardo & Stainton, 2004, pp. 449–454). Interpretation (a) does not exclude the possibility that the first expression can be a subsentential speech act; interpretation (b) leads to treating many expressions as ambiguous – one must admit that the expression "nice dress", for example, could, depending on context, express a proposition or a property. Interpretation (c) results in the need to postulate numerous linguistic conventions and, moreover, just like interpretation (d), does not deny that speakers use subsentential utterances to perform speech acts (Elugardo & Stainton, 2004, pp. 449–454). Hence, none of these interpretations permits the conclusion that the fact that a subsentential utterance is shorthand for a sentential one means that the former is not a subsentential speech act.

Stanley thinks that the truth-conditional role of context is limited to the resolution of indexicality, broadly construed (Stanley 2000: 401). For this reason, he rejects the idea that, in the case of subsentential utterances, context supplies constituents directly to the content of the proposition

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[8]It must be admitted that in many ellipses the omitted fragment is of a different form than its linguistic antecedent. One example of this is the sentence "John plays the piano, and Barb and Zoe, the triangle". However, it seems that in the case of short direct answers to questions the requirements imposed on ellipses are more restrictive (see above). Subsentential speech acts would clearly be closest to ellipses of this sort (if they were to be considered ellipses at all).

[9]Stainton notes that Stanley himself has admitted as much. Incidentally, it might be worth noting that, as has been mentioned earlier, Stanley considers the expression "nice dress" to be shorthand for "This is a nice dress"; Hall, on the other hand, points out that it could be shorthand for "You are wearing a nice dress" (Hall, 2009, p. 237).

expressed (Stanley, 2000, p. 402). This is why he attempts to demonstrate that all apparent subsentential speech acts are in fact either not subsentential or not speech acts. However, his argumentation for the elliptical character of apparent subsentential speech acts requires that context precisely indicates linguistic antecedents for such ellipses. But it is implausible to assume that in such cases context operates strictly within the boundaries determined by the rules of language. Therefore, one may doubt if Stanley's attempt to avoid an undue extension of the truth-conditional role of context does not lead him to ascribe another role to it, one equally problematic for an opponent of contextualism.

2.2. Jason Merchant's limited ellipsis and scripts

Jason Merchant holds that most apparent subsentential speech acts are ellipses, and thus, in fact, complete sentences. Some of them are syntactic ellipses and others semantic ones. An ellipsis is syntactic if the uttered expression is a part of a larger unuttered syntactic structure. As has been mentioned earlier, short answers to questions are one kind of syntactic ellipses. For example, if Beatrice asks "Did you buy the tickets?" and John answers "I did", then his utterance can be treated as an ellipsis. The utterance "I did" is a part of the structure "I did buy the tickets" omitted by John. Merchant claims that many examples of subsentential speech acts can be analyzed using a "limited ellipsis" strategy (Merchant, 2010, p. 25)[10]. According to this strategy, expressions such as *it*, *this*, *that*, *he*, or *she*, accompanied by an appropriate form of the verb *be*, can be omitted as long as their reference is obvious. This strategy can also be applied to examples in which the expression uttered denotes a property belonging to a salient object, and to examples in which it denotes an individual bearer of manifest properties (Merchant, 2010). Hence, "on the stoop" is generated by omitting "it is" from "It is on the stoop" since context makes the matter clear. A similar omission occurs in the case of "This is Barbara Partee" or "This came from Spain".[11]

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[10]It is called "*limited* ellipsis hypothesis" because it concerns two cases: one mentioned in the text above and another in which "do it" is elided.

[11]Merchant is aware of certain technical difficulties facing his position (e.g. the fact that apparent elliptical fragments, unlike other ellipses, cannot be embedded in larger structures) but believes that these difficulties are not insurmountable (Merchant, 2010, p. 28 ff.).

Alternatively, these examples can be treated as semantic ellipses. Here, one must assume that apparently subsentential utterances contain hidden free variables to which one must assign an appropriate value based on context. For example, the semantic value of "on the stoop" is "on the stoop (x)", where x is a free variable whose value is determined by context. Merchant emphasizes that:

> no extraordinary appeal to pragmatics is necessary [here] beyond what we already assume: namely that the assignment function is set by the context, not the semantics, but is used to determine the semantic value of an expression in a context. (Merchant, 2010, p. 41).

The role of context here is the same as in the determination of the reference of indexical and demonstrative expressions. The postulate of hidden variables makes it possible to treat the majority of apparently subsentential utterances such as "on the stoop" as expressing propositions. The following example, however, cannot be treated as either a syntactic or a semantic ellipsis:[12]

> A father is worried that his daughter will spill her chocolate milk. The glass is very full, and she is quite young, and prone to accidents. He says, "Both hands" (Stainton, 2006, p. 5).

Stainton considers the "both hands" example to be a particularly good illustration of the use of a subsentential speech act. Since it is difficult to treat the utterance "both hands" as a syntactic or a semantic ellipsis (the assumption that the father is saying "These are both hands" does not make much sense), the example is promising for Stainton. However, it should be noted that this is due to the lack of cases in English. A Polish father would have to say "obiema rękoma" ("both hands" in the instrumental case) instead of "obie ręce" ("both hands" in the nominative case) in this situation. In light of this, one might ask, after Merchant, "Where does the case come from?" (Merchant, 2010, p. 42). This example, therefore, contrary to the author's intentions, is in fact an argument in favour of treating subsentential utterances as fragments of longer sentential utterances. Those

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[12]For examples such as "an editor of *Natural Language Semantics*" Merchant proposes a separate analysis, based on the idea of labelling. A label can be the name of the labelled object or the name of another object bound to the first by some pragmatic relation. In the editor example, this relation is "being a chair reserved for" (Merchant, 2010, p. 27).

understanding the father's utterance as a fragment of "Use both hands" ("Trzymaj kubek obiema rękami") have no problem explaining why the father says "obiema rękoma" instead of "obie ręce". Those taking it to be a subsentential utterance, on the other hand, will have a much harder time explaining why the instrumental case is used in this situation instead of the nominative.

Many more examples where the uttered fragments are in cases other than the nominative can be given. Merchant thinks that one can appeal to scripts in order to explain the other case forms occurring in these examples (Merchant, 2010, p. 41). According to him, in everyday conversations we often use scripts, and since these scripts are well known we can use fragments of longer utterances – the speaker uses a script and their utterance is a fragment of a larger whole featuring in the script. Possibly the utterance "Both hands" is an ellipsis which might be supplemented by anyone familiar with the appropriate script. Similarly, a person saying "Water!" utters only a part of a script which in its entirety says "Give me some water!" or "I'll have some water, please". Merchant thus assumes that the speaker utters the appropriate fragment in a grammatical form that fits the script deemed by them as befitting the situation. The speaker assumes that their interlocutor knows this script and will be able to supplement the utterance:

> In following a script, the participants know and can anticipate the actions (including the utterances) of the others following the same script, and can plan accordingly (. . .). In such a context, certain particular linguistic phrases can be expected: they are 'given', though not by the immediate actually spoken linguistic precedents, but rather by mutual knowledge of the script being followed (Merchant, 2010, p. 44).

The conception of scripts thus treats subsentential utterances as fragments of sentences whose other parts remain unspoken but are available for all participants in a given conversation because they all follow the same script.

Hall points out that Merchant's analysis proves inadequate in the case of some examples, especially examples featuring names, such as "Rob's Mom" or "Nova Scotia" (see below). Let us remember that Anita, who says "Robert's Mom", means that it was Rob's mother who made the jam in which Meera found chunks of strawberries. Anita only uttered the nominal phrase. This phrase cannot be treated as a syntactic ellipsis since such an

assumption would yield the utterance "This is Rob's Mom". It also seems that there is no ready script here for Anita to use.

Hall emphasizes that in many situations we are forced to appeal to pragmatic inferences not only to ascribe values to hidden indexical expressions featured in the logical form but also to choose the logical form itself (see Hall, 2009, p. 249). This can be seen in the case of the call "Water!", for instance. In this situation, no one expression is "given" as undoubtedly intended by the speaker. It is often the case, especially in situations featuring a subsentential utterance at the beginning of a conversation, that context does not point to unequivocally determined linguistic material. Multiple supplementations are possible. For example, in a situation where someone says "John's father" and points to a man on the other side of the room, the following supplementations are possible: "this is,' "this person is," "this man is," "the person I am pointing to is," 'the person that has just entered the room is," "...has just entered" etc. (cf. Hall, 2009, p. 243). In Hall's opinion, this suggests that the utterance was not a fragmentary sentence: it was not generated by excluding certain expressions and its supplementation is not a matter of reconstructing its true logical form.

3. Pragmatics-oriented standpoints regarding subsentential utterances

3.1. Robert Stainton's Neo-Russellian propositions

Stainton is a proponent of a pragmatic analysis of subsentential utterances. He thinks that such utterances are indeed subsentential and that they can be speech acts. Subsentential assertions have semantic truth-conditional content that is asserted, not just implied, by the person performing the speech act. Stainton holds that:

> The propositional content of subsentential speech acts is arrived at by grasping (a) a content from language, and (b) a content from elsewhere, which is never translated into natural language format (Stainton, 2006, p. 156).

Let us consider the example of Sanjay uttering the expression "on the stoop". According to Stainton, Sanjay states a *de re* proposition about a table leg that it is on the stoop. The assumption that a proposition has been stated is due to our intuition that Sanjay could be right or not; he could also be

lying. Stainton claims that the proposition is stated through the utterance of an expression which, syntactically speaking, is a bare prepositional expression not embedded in any larger syntactic structure. Its meaning is a property. Semantically speaking, this expression is thus incomplete and must be assigned an argument. This argument is provided by context: it is an object salient in this context. It is therefore the object itself and not its name that serves as the argument here. The argument and the function are combined in Mentalese – it is a combination of two mental representations stemming from different sources: the representation of the property stems from the decoding of an appropriate linguistic signal; the representation of the object comes from a source other than language (memory, sight, understanding intentions of agents etc.) (see Merchant, 2010, p. 9). Propositions stated by speakers using subsentential utterances are thus Neo-Russellian propositions featuring extralinguistic objects as their constituents.

The author of *Words and Thoughts* distinguishes two cases: (1) the speaker utters an expression whose content is a propositional function the argument for which is provided by context (as in the case described above), and (2) the speaker utters an expression whose content is an argument the function for which is provided by context. This function is not reducible to a demonstrative function (such as Merchant's "this is x"). Stainton gives the following example:

> After two weeks of cold and rainy weather in mid-summer, in a part of Canada that is usually hot and sunny, Brenda ran into Stan. Brenda looked up at the sky and said "Nova Scotia" (Stainton, 2006, p. 6).

The function provided by context in this situation is "the weather here is similar to...".

Here again the translation of Stainton's example into Polish turns out problematic since the function "the weather here is similar to the weather in..." requires an argument in the appropriate case (the locative), and the expression uttered by Brenda is in the nominative form. However, this situation is different from that of the father saying "Both hands" since here, even though the most probable function provided by context is indeed "the weather here is similar to...", Brenda would say "Nova Scotia" in the nominative rather than the locative even if she spoke Polish.

Since the example featuring the expression "Both hands" has been treated as an argument in favour of ellipses and implicit scripts, this example should be treated as an argument in favour of the pragmatics-oriented

standpoint. Even though there is an implicit linguistic context here which could be seen as a ready script, Brenda's utterance does not fit this context and yet it does not seem incorrect. Stainton could claim that Brenda's utterance provides an argument for a function determined by context. A grammatical discrepancy is not a problem here since – to recall – Stainton thinks that the content provided by context is not formulated in natural language. It is a *de re* content grasped in Mentalese; it need not be a concretely articulable function. Stainton himself gives a similar argument in favour of his conception: Hans and Franz play by exhibiting different objects and saying who these objects remind them of. They part and meet again several days later. Hans points to an old beer-stained table and says "My father". Although it is clear to Franz that Hans said that the table reminds him of his father, the utterance is in the nominative and not in the accusative (Stainton, 2006, p. 107).

Examples such as "Nova Scotia" or "My father" pose a serious problem for the proponent of scripts since she must find a script accommodating a nominative form. Otherwise, the utterances made by Brenda and Hans are bound to be seen as counterexamples undermining her position.

3.2. Eros Corazza's situated unenriched illocutions

Eros Corazza refers to a conception by John Perry, in particular, to the latter's distinction into objects that a proposition is about and objects that a proposition concerns. In the classic text *Thought without Representation* Perry notes that thoughts and propositions can concern objects that correspond to no constituents of the sentences expressing them. For example, if I look out the window and utter the sentence "It is raining", the proposition I express will concern the place I am at while uttering that sentence even though the place is not a part of the content of the relevant proposition (it is not its constituent). Similarly, if a child says "It is three", the proposition she expresses concerns a particular time zone even though the child may be unaware of the existence of time zones. The appropriate parameters (e.g. PM, *Central European Time*) are provided by the situation in which the sentence "It is three" is uttered (Corazza, 2011, p. 566).

Corazza also makes use of the distinction between reflexive and incremental truth conditions introduced by Perry, and the latter's thesis about the multiplicity of propositions semantically related to sentences. Reflexive truth conditions are conditions based on linguistic conventions. For sentence (1) "Jane smokes cigars", these conditions are the following:

(1) A. There is an individual x and a convention C such that:

    (i) C is exploited by (1);

    (ii) C permits one to designate x with "Jane";

    (iii) x smokes cigars (Corazza, 2011, p. 563).

Incremental truth conditions are what is said: the semantically expressed proposition, in this case the proposition that Jane smokes cigars. In order to grasp the reflexive conditions of an utterance, it is enough to know the language – it is not necessary to know the context of the utterance or to perform any pragmatic inferences. In particular, it is not necessary to grasp the proposition expressed by that utterance (that is, its incremental conditions).

Corazza follows Perry in adopting the principle of cognitive economy and claims that "since in many cases the situation fixes all that needs to be fixed, the speaker and her audience need not represent what their discourse concerns" (2011, p. 567). Here, one should distinguish the contextual dependence of sentences from their situational dependence. A sentence depends on the situation if its logical value depends on it, but the speaker need not have a representation of this situation. If a sentence is indexical, on the other hand, and depends on context, the speaker must have a representation of the latter in order to be able to determine the reference of the relevant indexicals.

A lot of information can be "stored" in situations or in our long-term memory. This information allows us to act successfully without us having to articulate it in our thought (Corazza, 2011, p. 567). Subsentential speech acts are a very good illustration of this phenomenon, according to Corazza. Let us consider the following situation:

> John, a well-known anti-Fregean, has been told that Jane is desperately looking for Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language*. Jane walks into John's office. John suddenly utters: [2] Hidden on top of the shelf (Corazza, 2011, p. 570).

In this situation, Stainton would assume that John made an assertion whose content is the proposition that Dummett's book is hidden on top of the shelf. However, as is noted by Corazza, Jane need not have been thinking about the book as she walked into John's office. She may have even forgotten that she had been looking for it. Since the book is hidden and

Jane is unable to see it, it seems that the relevant proposition cannot be *de re* about this book. What Jane can do, according to Corazza, is grasp the reflexive truth conditions of John's utterance, which are:

There is an x such that:

(i) (2) concerns x;

(ii) x is hidden on top of the shelf (Corazza, 2011, p. 575).

It is enough that such truth conditions are conveyed and grasped in order for the communicative goal to be achieved. Even if Jane does not remember that she had been looking for Dummett's book, if she grasps the reflexive conditions of John's utterance, she will be able to reach out to the top of the shelf and find the book there. Corazza holds that a speech act can be successful even if it is not accompanied by pragmatically enriched thoughts possessing truth conditions. The situatedness of the utterance is enough for it to have truth conditions. The utterance "hidden on top of the shelf" is not an ellipsis, according to Corazza, nor does it require pragmatic enrichment. All the necessary information is stored in the situation and need not "enter into" the utterance. Corazza's conception thus differs significantly from Stainton's position since the latter holds that propositions stated by the speakers of subsentential assertions have contents stemming from two sources: a linguistic utterance and a context. According to Stainton, content unenriched by context does not have truth conditions and does not constitute a proposition. A successful subsentential speech act must have a pragmatically enriched content. Meanwhile, Corazza claims that:

> in distinguishing between reflexive truth conditions and incremental truth conditions we can deal with successful communication involving subsentential speech without appealing to ellipsis and/or enrichment. And we can do so only by considering our thoughts and utterances as situated (Corazza, 2011, p. 577).

It should be emphasized here that Corazza is more interested in successful communication than in the assertoric content of utterances used in such communication. He considers the reflexive truth conditions described above to be sufficient for successful communication and writes explicitly that it does not matter if Jane grasped a *de re* thought about Dummett's book or a general thought about something being hidden on top of the shelf (Corazza, 2011, p. 578). The only factor important for successful communication in

this case is whether the hearer's action resulting from the conversation is in accord with the speaker's intention. Since we can engage in action based on general thoughts – i.e. on reflexive truth conditions – successful communication does not require that *de re* thoughts be conveyed. As we have seen, in Corazza's opinion, reflexive truth conditions are sufficient for successful communication, and it is not necessary that incremental truth conditions be conveyed or grasped. If, then, one assumes, as is usually done, that the asserted content of a speech act must be a proposition expressed (i.e. incremental truth conditions), then many successful subsentential utterances will not be speech acts after all.

3.3. François Recanti's strong moderate relativism and subsentential speech acts

François Recanati is a proponent of a standpoint he calls strong moderate relativism. He does not discuss subsentential speech acts specifically,[13] but in my opinion his conception is perfectly suited for their analysis. According to the position in question, sentences have two kinds of content: explicit content and complete content. Explicit content (the *lekton*) may not possess absolute truth conditions and may be true only relative to some particular circumstance of evaluation. Complete content (the Austinian proposition) is explicit content plus the appropriate circumstance of evaluation. For example, the explicit content of the utterance "It is raining" is ⟨it is raining⟩; whereas the time and place of the rain are constituents of the situation determined by the context of the utterance. Recanati makes the following assumptions:

- duality: both a content and a circumstance of evaluation are necessary to determine logical value;

- distribution: the determinants of logical value (such as time) are given either as ingredients of the content or as aspects of the circumstance of evaluation (Recanati, 2008, p. 42).

Recanati also assumes the principle of economy according to which the elements necessary to determine logical value are either ingredients of the content or aspects of the circumstance of evaluation but never both.[14] In

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[13]Recanati at one point cites the utterance "Very handsome!" and considers it to express a proposition dependent on the person. However, he does not explore this issue much further (see Recanati, 2007, p. 252).

[14]Compare Corazza's principle of cognitive economy cited above.

other words, the richer the content, the poorer the circumstance necessary for its evaluation can be and *vice versa*. The *lekton* of the sentence "It is raining" differs from the *lekton* of the sentence "It is raining here" because the content of the first sentence does not include the place of the rain. The *lekton* is the explicit content of a sentence in a context: the indexical sentence "It is Friday today" is thus going to have different explicit content in different contexts. Context determines the reference of the relevant indexicals and the situation in which the *lekton* is to be evaluated. The situation of evaluation need not be the same as the situation of context: a person saying "It is raining" in Warsaw may mean that it is raining in Cracow (if he has just spoken on the phone to someone in Cracow and is reporting the conversation, for example). The content of a sentence is the function from a situation to logical value. The truth of a sentence is thus relative: the same sentence can be true in one situation and false in another. Recanati defends a strong version of moderate relativism according to which even sentential utterances semantically expressing propositions (such as "It is raining here and now") have two levels of content: explicit content and complete content. The explicit content of a sentential utterance is a classic proposition (e.g. "It is raining in Warsaw on Jan 11, 2017 at 12:00"), and in order to assign determinate logical value to this proposition one only needs a possible world, not a constituent-rich situation. According to the weak version of moderate relativism, the *lekton* in this situation is simply its complete content. According to strong moderate relativism, the complete content of such an utterance will also include the appropriate situation: "what the utterance [of such a sentence – J.O.-S.] ⟨says⟩ is that *the situation in question supports the proposition in question*" (Recanati, 2007, p. 49).

In the case of sentences whose content is semantically complete, two kinds of evaluation are thus possible: one can evaluate the sentence itself (the proposition in regard to the actual world) or the utterance (the proposition in regard to the situation featured in the Austinian proposition) (see Recanati, 2007, p. 50). Let us imagine the following situation (Recanati, 2007, p. 50). I am looking at a group of people playing poker. It seems to me that among them is Claire. I see her cards and say: "Claire has a good hand now". It so happens that Claire is not present among the players I am looking at but she is at the same time playing poker somewhere else and indeed has a good hand there. Is the sentence uttered by me true? Our intuitions are contradictory here: on the one hand, the sentence is false about the situation I am looking at, but on the other, accidentally true about some other situation of which I am ignorant. Recanati claims that both intuitions can be grasped from

within his position for one can say that the *sentence* "Claire has a good hand now" is true (because it is made true by the situation of which the speaker is ignorant) but the *utterance* "Claire has a good hand now" is false because it is not true in regard to the situation featured in the Austinian proposition (Recanati, 2007, p. 50).

As I have already mentioned, I think that Recanati's conception is ideal for the analysis of subsentential speech acts. From our point of view, it is irrelevant which version of moderate relativism – weak or strong – is assumed since subsentential utterances must always be completed by a situation. According to the principle of distribution, some elements necessary for the determination of the proposition expressed and its logical value can be located in the circumstance of evaluation. Subsentential speech acts thus seem to represent a limiting case illustrating the functioning of the principle of economy: their content is very poor but the other necessary elements can all be found in the situation of the utterance. Let us assume that in the situation described above I only say "good hand". If it is clear to everyone whose cards I am looking at, the utterance will be understood as an assertion that the person I am looking at has (at the time of the utterance) a good hand. Here, only the denotation of the expression "good hand" belongs to the explicit content; all the other elements are unarticulated (the person in possession of a good hand, the relation of possession, time and place).

Moderate relativism, just like Corazza's position, refers to Perry's conception, in particular, to the idea of situatedness and unarticulated constituents. However, an analysis of subsentential speech acts in light of moderate relativism is more promising than their treatment as situated illocutions. This is because it allows us to speak of the explicit and the complete content of these acts rather than just their reflexive truth conditions.

Unfortunately, this application of Recanati's conception is not free from problems. On the one hand, it permits the ascription of content to all communicative acts, not just speech acts. On the other hand, it is not clear if it can distinguish asserted content from content that is implied or communicated otherwise. Both these difficulties blur the category of speech acts, especially the category of assertion. Let us imagine that instead of saying "good hand" I only say "good" and make a head gesture to indicate what I mean, or that I make the same gesture and give a thumbs-up. If my gestures are sufficiently clear and precise, I will have managed to successfully communicate that the person I am looking at has a good hand. But were any of these behaviours a speech act? Did any of these situations feature an assertion? The second situation certainly cannot be deemed a speech act

because I did not say anything. What about the first? It seems that as long as one can claim that I asserted a proposition, and that at least a part of this proposition stems from a linguistic source, this was indeed a speech act.

Merchant has made similar remarks regarding Stainton's position (Merchant, 2010, pp. 10–11). The advantage of this position, according to him, is that it separates the act of assertion from the particular kinds of linguistic utterances. This means that one can make assertions using utterances that semantically do not express propositions. Merchant entertains the idea that, in light of this, assertions need not be speech acts. If in an answer to the question "How many children do you have?" a person shows three fingers, they assert having three children, according to Merchant, despite having said nothing (in the sense of Grice) (Merchant, 2010, pp. 10–11). Regarding the last example, one could maintain that although this is not a speech act, it is a communicative act. The question is: can one take such acts to have asserted content as opposed to content communicated otherwise? Separating assertions from what is said certainly makes the boundaries of the former category extremely fuzzy.

3.3.1. What is said in subsentential assertions

Even if we assume that an assertion must be a speech act, we still need to introduce a principle allowing us to distinguish asserted content from otherwise communicated content. Stainton writes that an asserted proposition is a proposition generated through a minimal enrichment of the content of the expression uttered (Stainton, 2006, p. 161). Minimal enrichment is enrichment necessary for the content to have truth conditions.[15] However, it seems that Stainton's "Nova Scotia" example violates this rule. To recall, Stainton would like the proposition asserted in this example to be "the weather here is similar to...."; but it is difficult to take such an enrichment to be minimal.[16] According to Stainton, the criterion allowing one to distinguish asserted content from implied content is whether the speaker could be accused of lying as opposed to merely misleading the hearer. The

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[15]Merchant notes that it is usually assumed that a proposition p is minimal relative to all the other propositions q in a contextually determined set P if for all q, q entails p. The problem is that there will be many propositions in a context that are not bound by the relation of entailment (Merchant, 2010, p. 15).

[16]One might try to save the situation by claiming that at issue here is a minimal function *manifest* in the situation (cf. Merchant, 2010, p. 26).

speaker can only be accused of lying if they asserted something (as opposed to suggesting it, implying it etc.) (Stainton, 2006, p. 58).

Stainton used the lie criterion to distinguish asserted content from communicated content, and Jennifer Saul (2012) uses asserted content (what is said) to define lying. When characterizing what is said, she appeals to the minimal enrichment criterion proposed by Stainton and puts forth the following definition:

> A putative contextual contribution to what is said is a part of what is said only if without this contextually supplied material [the sentence] *S* would not have a truth-evaluable semantic content in [the context] *C* (Saul, 2012, p. 57).

Saul claims that this contextual supplementation need not be grasped by the hearer, although she does not determine if it must be obvious in a given context or intended by the speaker. She also constructs examples aimed at illustrating this (see Saul, 2012, p. 60 ff.). Since her examples concern sentential utterances, I will not cite them here. Instead, I would like to propose similar examples (modifications of scenarios proposed by Corazza and Stainton) featuring subsentential utterances:

A. John, a well-known anti-Fregean has been told that Jane is looking for Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language.* John knows that the book is lying in his desk drawer. Jane walks into John's office. John says: (1) Hidden on top of the shelf. Jane has bad hearing and did not hear a thing.

B. Sanjay and Silvia are loading furniture onto a van. Sanjay thinks that Silvia is looking for a misplaced table leg. He is mean and wants to mislead Silvia. Since he thinks that the leg is on the hutch, he says "on the stoop". It so happens that Silvia is looking for a desk drawer which is in fact on the stoop.

In scenario A, the intended content of the utterance was not grasped by the hearer. Corazza would consider John's utterance to be unsuccessful and would probably forego the analysis of its content. For Saul, it is irrelevant whether the hearer grasped the intended content or not. It seems that also Stainton would conclude that the Neo-Russellian proposition constituting the content of John's utterance comprises a copy of Dummett's book and the property of being on top of the shelf. For both Saul and Stainton,

the decisive factor would be the fact that there is no doubt in this case that John lied (even though the lie was unsuccessful). A similar solution could be proposed within moderate relativism. In scenario A, there is a situation sufficiently determinate to provide all the elements necessary for the utterance's complete content. As regards scenario B, Corazza would simply conclude that a successful communicative act occurred. There is no room in his conception for the charge of lying. Saul, on the other hand, has written about an analogous situation that it is unclear if this is a lie or not. The speaker (who is wrong as to the context in which he is situated) intended the table leg to enter the expressed proposition, but the context decided otherwise. Assuming that the situation is a part of the actual world, and that it is not determined by the speaker's intention, moderate relativism must conclude in this case that the content of Sanjay's utterance is different from the content he intended. These examples show that appealing to minimal contextual enrichment can be controversial, and that it might not suffice to univocally determine if a given linguistic item is a speech act. This need not be a problem since it might be argued that in cases like these it is just not clear if a speech act has been performed or not.

4. Conclusion

The main motivation for semantics-oriented standpoints denying the existence of subsentential speech acts is an unwillingness to expand the role of context. According to these standpoints, context does not play the controversial truth-conditional role consisting in providing constituents directly to the asserted content of the proposition expressed (as opposed to assigning semantic values to the constituents of the expression uttered) (see Stanley, 2000, p. 402). The truth-conditional function of context is limited to disambiguation and the resolution of indexicality.

Semantics-oriented standpoints can be criticized for their inability to offer a convincing analysis of all pertinent examples (e.g. "Rob's Mom"), for the fact that they make an unjustified appeal – unjustified given their own assumptions – to pragmatics (a pragmatic inference is often supposed to determine the logical value of the utterance), and the fact that they postulate, at least in some cases, counterintuitive contents for assertions.

The departure point of pragmatics-oriented standpoints is the assumption that the manner in which the content of a speech act is enriched is determined to a large extent by context, not by linguistic rules. The pro-

ponents of these standpoints assume that the role of context consists not only in disambiguation and the resolution of indexicality but also in the provision of constituents directly to the content of propositions uttered in context. The advantage of pragmatics-oriented standpoints is their appeal to familiar and otherwise required pragmatic mechanisms, and the fact that they do not interfere with syntax and semantics (they do not postulate introducing unarticulated structures or hidden variables) (compare Merchant, 2010, p. 10). Their weakness lies in the fact that they make it difficult to maintain the distinction between asserted content and content that is suggested or implied.

How to answer the titular question then? I have no doubt that we perform speech acts using at least apparently subsentential speech acts. It is true that their content or illocutionary force may not be fully determinate, but this is also the case for many sentential speech acts. The only thing that could be questioned is whether these utterances are indeed subsentential. I consider arguments offered by the proponents of semantic standpoints unconvincing. Many different supplementations are permissible in the majority of contexts, not just one select supplementation, which is why these utterances cannot be treated as ellipses, in my opinion. Appealing to widely known scripts does not help much either. The situation where a person is getting in a taxi can indeed be considered standard, that is, one for which some kind of script is in place. However, even here it is still unclear if the driver would ask "Where to?",[17] "Where are we going?", or "Where shall I take you?". Hence, Benigno's utterance "To Segovia. To the jail" cannot be treated as an answer to a particular question.

For these reasons, I consider pragmatics-oriented standpoints affirming the existence of subsentential speech acts to be more adequate. I have proposed to analyze such acts within the framework of Recanati's moderate relativism. Moderate relativism allows us to grasp the intuitions behind Stainton's standpoint in a more organized manner. In the proposed analysis, we can consider the contents of speech acts to be distributed between what was said on the one hand, and the situation in which the utterance was made, on the other. Since the explicit (semantic) content of subsentential speech acts is usually very limited, the situation plays an immense role in its completion. In Stainton's conception, emphasis is put on the controversial assumption that the content of a speech act is not formulated in natural

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[17]The question "Where to?" is, of course, another example of an apparent subsentential speech act. The opponent of subsentential speech acts would have to appeal to another script in order to address it.

language; propositions stated by the speakers performing such acts are Neo-Russellian and their constituents include extralinguistic objects. All such propositions are thus *de re*. This assumption is not necessary in moderate relativism. What a subsentential speech act expresses is a propositional function relativized to the situation. Moderate relativism introduces the additional level of explicit content – explicit content need not be complete and can only have truth conditions in a sufficiently rich situation. That said, before moderate relativism can be considered a fully adequate analysis of subsentential speech acts, it is necessary to propose a satisfactory method of distinguishing asserted content from implied content – I think that the distinction into lying and misleading is on the right track, although it must be supplemented by an appropriate metaphysics of situation, among other components. The proponent of a pragmatics-oriented conception must also convincingly explain why in some cases subsentential utterances occur in cases other than the nominative.

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