

Accessibility and Relevance: A fork in the road*

Diana Mazzarella

Abstract

The accessibility based framework proposed by Recanati (2004) aims at explaining the output of primary pragmatic processes in entirely associative terms. This attempt has been challenged by the relevance-theoretic position that selection of meaning components is directed by considerations of relevance and not by accessibility alone. The key question concerns the extent to which an associative mechanism can account for consideration of speaker's beliefs and intentions when these affect the derivation of the propositional content of the utterance. This paper discusses two counterexamples to the accessibility based framework; both are cases of reference assignment, one modulated by speaker's abilities and the other by speaker's preferences.

Keywords: primary/secondary pragmatic processes, accessibility, schemata, inference, optimal relevance

1 Introduction

The Gricean distinction between 'what is said' and 'what is implicated' has recently encountered a 'contextualist' development. According to the contextualist position, it cannot be framed in terms of the semantics/pragmatics distinction. Far from being minimally pragmatically determined, 'what is said' subsumes much more than mere semantic information and its pragmatic determinants are not limited to disambiguation and reference assignment. As far as this contextualist turn is concerned, both Recanati (2002, 2004) and relevance theorists (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995, Carston 2002) vigorously support a pragmatic notion of 'what is said'. Where they part company is with regard to the nature of the pragmatic processes involved.

Recanati (2002, 2004) introduces the distinction between primary and secondary pragmatic processes: the former contribute to the determination of 'what is said' whereas the latter are responsible for the derivation of 'what is implicated'. Not only do they play distinct roles in utterance interpretation, but they are thought of as processes of a different kind. Firstly, primary pragmatic processes are pre-propositional: they are essentially local and apply to sub-propositional constituents, without presupposing the prior identification of a propositional input. Secondary pragmatic processes, on the other hand, are propositional since they derive conversational implicatures from the propositional output of primary pragmatic processes ('what is said'). Secondly, they correspond to different levels of processing, primary pragmatic processes being sub-personal and secondary pragmatic processes occurring at a personal level¹. Finally, primary pragmatic processes are conceived as a type of associative process whereas secondary pragmatic processes are essentially inferential, in the strong senses of involving premises and conclusions that are warranted by those premises.

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¹ For a formulation of the sub-personal/personal distinction in finer-grained terms, see Recanati (2007: 53). In that context, the distinctive feature of secondary pragmatic processes is identified with their conscious availability, which is said to be both occurrent and constitutive (rather than merely dispositional and accidental).

Let us focus on primary pragmatic processes and their associative explanation. Beside disambiguation and saturation (the reference assignment to an indexical expression), they include optional processes which are not linguistically mandated: free enrichment, which provides the so-called 'unarticulated constituents', and conceptual adjustment (or meaning modulation), which replaces lexically encoded concepts with contextually derived concepts. Recanati (2004) sketches a unified account of how these processes work which is based on the notion of accessibility. His accessibility based framework claims that, in processing a linguistic expression, different candidates for the status of its semantic value are activated in parallel and compete with each other. The candidate which is retained and undergoes semantic composition is the *most* accessible one. It corresponds to the most active representation when the interpretation process stabilizes.

It is important to underline Recanati's emphasis on the temporal dynamics of the interpretation process. The degree of accessibility associated with competing representations is not fixed once and for all. Thus, the most accessible interpretation at an initial stage of the interpretation process may well turn out to be unsatisfactory at some later stage, failing to enter the resulting interpretation. In fact, the occurrence of an accessibility shift may reverse earlier results of the competition among different conceptual representations.

What triggers an accessibility shift? In order to offer a response to this question, Recanati introduces the notion of a schema:

One interpretation is the most accessible one, hence wins, at *s*, but the interpretation fails to fit some schema, hence loses at some later stage *s'*.
(Recanati 2004: 32)

Schemata, or world knowledge structures, are abstract representations of a situation type. The role they play in utterance comprehension is to promote coherent interpretations whose subparts jointly succeed as instances of a certain schema. This role is perfectly compatible with Recanati's account of primary pragmatic processes in associative terms. In fact, schemata can be evoked by the word used or by other salient features of the speech situation. Furthermore, they drive the interpretation process by making an important contribution to the spread of activation within conceptual networks: an activated schema raises the accessibility of those conceptual representations which fit the schema itself. As a result, it too gains extra activation due to mutual reinforcement between well fitted representations and the schema they instantiate. For this reason, both the activation of a schema and the interpretation it drives rely on an entirely associative mechanism.

According to the framework outlined above, primary pragmatic processes involve no genuine inferential process. They exploit a dumb and mechanical mechanism involving no reflection on the interpreter's part (Recanati 2004: 32). This mechanism provides 'what is said' as its output. When the output is not compatible with what we know of the speaker as a rational agent, considerations about the speaker's beliefs and intentions come into picture. In these cases, secondary pragmatic processes are responsible for delivering a global utterance interpretation which is consistent with the assumption that the speaker is a rational agent (Recanati 2002: 113). In line with the Gricean view, conversational implicatures are inferentially derived from premises concerning the speaker's intentions in saying what she says.

In contrast with Recanati, relevance theorists propose a unified account of primary and secondary pragmatic processes, which are supposed to be based on the same inferential mechanism. In fact, the derivation of both the explicatures ('what is said') and the implicatures is the result of the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure. According to RT, an utterance comes with a presumption of optimal relevance: (a) it should be at least

relevant enough to be worth processing and (b) it should be the most relevant one compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences. The expectation of optimal relevance drives the comprehension process which follows a path of least effort in accessing interpretative hypotheses and stops when this expectation is satisfied².

As far as our discussion is concerned, it is worth noticing that considerations of relevance are tightly constrained by considerations about the speaker's beliefs and intentions. In fact, the notion of optimal relevance includes as one of its components an explicit reference to the speaker's abilities and preferences: the most relevant interpretation is the one that the speaker is willing and able to produce. For this reason, assumptions about the speaker play an important role in the interpretation process, both in recovering the explicatures and in deriving the implicatures.

Comparing these brief reconstructions of Recanati's and RT's accounts of utterance interpretation, it seems that the role attributed to considerations about the speaker's intentions in the delivering of 'what is said' is highly debatable. Can considerations of this kind be excluded in order to recover the output of primary pragmatic processes? The aim of this paper is to provide evidence to support the RT idea that an entirely associative account of primary pragmatic processes is not able to explain some simple pragmatic phenomena, because these involve considerations of the speaker's mental states requiring an appeal to inferential mechanisms.

2 The speaker's abilities

2.1 Carston's counterexample

In order to demonstrate the inadequacy of the accessibility based framework, Carston (2007: 25-27) elaborates an example which should ultimately show that Recanati's account can even fail to explain a simple pragmatic phenomenon such as reference assignment.

Let us consider the following scenario. Robyn is in one of her student's company. At some point in the conversation, the student, Sarah, addresses to her the following utterance:

(1) Neil has broken his leg.

Suppose that Robyn knows two people called "Neil", her young son (NEIL₁) and a colleague in the linguistics department where she works (NEIL₂). Thus, there are two candidate referents which are both activated when the name "Neil" is uttered. Consequently, there are two possible interpretations of (1) characterized by difference reference assignments (leaving aside here any other primary pragmatic processes that might also be required):

(1a) NEIL₁ has broken his_x leg.

(1b) NEIL₂ has broken his_x leg.

Let us further suppose that Robyn is constantly worried about her son who tends to get into a lot of trouble. For this reason, her NEIL₁ concept is more highly activated than her NEIL₂ concept. As Carston points out, according to Recanati's accessibility based framework, NEIL₁ should be the winning candidate and (1a) should be selected as the intended interpretation. This interpretation is consistent with Robyn's knowledge (she has not seen her son for several hours), perfectly coherent and highly relevant. Thus there is nothing blatantly wrong in the

² For a more detailed account of the RT's comprehension system, see Wilson & Sperber 2004.

output of the blind primary pragmatic processes. Nevertheless, (1a) is not Robyn's selected interpretation. Robyn prefers the alternative interpretation (1b) since she is aware that Sarah does not know anything about her family life. Sarah does not even know that Robyn has a son whose name is Neil, while she knows that Robyn has a colleague, Neil, who teaches her syntax.

This example aims at showing where Recanati's account goes wrong with regard to utterance interpretation. According to his view, the selection of a conceptual representation is determined solely by its accessibility, so that the most accessible one is selected for interpretation. In relation to the example discussed above, this model seems to produce the counterintuitive prediction that (1a) will be the preferred interpretation. The conclusion drawn by Carston is that even the simple pragmatic phenomenon of fixing the reference of a proper name goes beyond blind associative mechanisms and may involve considerations of the speaker's beliefs and intentions.

Relevance theory, on the other hand, has the theoretical tools to explain how (1) is correctly interpreted in the context at hand. In fact, it predicts that the interpreter, Robyn, follows a comprehension process which stops when the expectation of optimal relevance raised by the utterance is satisfied. This means that competing interpretations are accessed in order of accessibility and one is selected if and only if it is optimally relevant. According to this view, the interpretation (1a) is accessed first due to its high accessibility but it is dismissed since it is not optimally relevant. As we have previously noticed, the concept of optimal relevance includes as a crucial component considerations of the speaker's abilities and preferences. The speaker's abilities include her knowledge of the world. For this reason, an interpretation can achieve optimal relevance only if it is compatible with the speaker's beliefs and knowledge about the world. It seems pretty clear that (1a) does not satisfy this requirement, being incompatible with Sarah's system of knowledge. Hence, it is dismissed: Robyn recognizes that Sarah does not know (or believe) that she has a son called "Neil" and she takes it that Sarah did not (and could not) intend to refer to him.

2.2 The externalization of the explicature

In his reply to Carston, Recanati (2007) tries to resist the conclusion that accessibility is not ultimately an adequate notion to provide an account of hearers' grasp of 'what is said' (explicature) which is exclusively based on it. His strategy consists of providing an explanation of the example at issue in terms of an accessibility shift.

Assuming that Robyn's NEIL₁ concept is initially more highly activated than her NEIL₂ concept, the only way in which Recanati can explain that the intended interpretation is

(1b) NEIL₂ has broken his_x leg

is to appeal to an accessibility shift from an initial stage *s* to a later stage of the interpretation process, *s'*, in which NEIL₂ has increased its degree of activation and as a result is the most accessible candidate referent. According to Recanati, an accessibility shift occurs when a conceptual representation fails to fit some activated schemata. What kind of schema is involved in this example?

Recanati (2007: 50) suggests the intervention of the meta-representational schema "The speaker says that ..." which is responsible for the required accessibility shift. Since the speaker (Sarah) is completely unconnected to NEIL₁, (1a) fails to fit the schema. In other terms, "The speaker says that NEIL₁ has broken his_x leg" is not a coherent instance of the meta-representational schema. Thus, (1a) loses its initial high accessibility while (1b) increases its degree of accessibility. In fact, not only is "The speaker says that NEIL₂ has

broken his_x leg” a perfectly coherent instance of the meta-representational schema, but also the concept of NEIL₂ and the concept of Sarah mutually reinforce their activation owing to the connection between them in the knowledge base of the interpreter.

According to this explanation, the initial stage *s* of the interpretation process is followed by a later stage *s'* which Recanati calls 'the externalization of the explicature'. At this latter stage, the primary meaning is embedded within the meta-representational schema and the accessibility shift is so triggered. As Recanati points out, the accessibility shift occurs when the explicature (1a) is externalized. This externalization requires that the interpreter starts paying attention to the fact that the speaker is saying what she is saying. As a result, the explicature is shaped by the externalization itself.

Recanati's explanation deserves further analysis. First of all, it is worth noticing that a full explanation of the role of meta-representational schemata should provide an account of how these schemata are activated. Furthermore, it needs to be spelled out in associative terms in order to preserve the coherence of the overall account. As noticed above, a schema may be evoked by the words used or by other salient features of the speech situation. As far as our example is concerned, the meta-representational schema is not evoked by the words used. Thus, it should be activated by some salient features of the speech situation. Recanati does not make an explicit statement on this issue, but it is possible to figure out a plausible suggestion from his general explanation. The externalization process occurs when the interpreter starts paying attention to the fact that the speaker is saying what she is saying. Therefore, the fact that the speaker is saying what she is saying could be interpreted as a feature of the speech situation at hand which activates the meta-representational schema. Obviously, this is not a feature that is particular to the specific speech situation described above, rather it is a feature of speech situations in general: every speech situation is characterized by the existence of a speaker who says what she says. For this reason, every speech situation should evoke a meta-representational schema of the kind “The speaker says that...”. However, this result needs to be avoided by Recanati:

[...] the interpretation process may involve some meta-representational component even at the primary level. It may, but it need not: that is presumably sufficient to ground the difference between the primary and the secondary level. (The secondary level is *essentially* meta-representational: to understand conversational implicatures you have to be sensitive to the fact that the speaker is saying what she is saying.) (Recanati 2007: 51)

It is important to maintain that meta-representational schemata are not a general or essential feature of the primary level in order to preserve a clear distinction between it and the secondary level. For this reason, Recanati cannot accept an explanation which assumes the generality of the meta-representational schema at the primary level. Assuming, then, that it is an unusual feature, occurring only in particular cases of primary meaning, we need an account of what triggers it in those cases. It might reasonably be thought that what triggers the meta-representational schema about the speaker at this level is some recognition that something has gone wrong, for instance, as in the current case, that the wrong referent has been assigned. But what could bring this about other than the recognition that it is inconsistent with the speaker's belief state, which is precisely the kind of reflective inference that is claimed to be unavailable to the dumb associative primary processes. There seems, then, to be no other convincing answer to what triggers the move to meta-representational schemata at the primary level. This lack seems to undermine Recanati's overall reply to Carston, preventing it from being a full and coherent explanation of how meta-representational schemata work.

2.3 Situational schemata

In the last paragraph we focused on some problematic features of Recanati's reply to Carston (2007). In spite of this, the issue raised by Carston's counterexample is far from being definitely settled. In fact, the theoretical inadequacy of meta-representational schemata does not necessarily undermine the associative approach itself. We may wonder about the possibility of an alternative pragmatic explanation which avoids the difficulties concerning the externalization process and, at the same time, is spelled out in associative terms.

Mazzone (2011) proposes a different solution to Carston's counterexample, one which is not committed to meta-representational schemata. He develops an important suggestion already embedded in Recanati's explanation though without playing a decisive role in it. As reported above, when Recanati describes the dynamics of accessibility, he fleetingly notices that the concept of NEIL₂ (Sarah's syntax lecturer) and the concept of Sarah mutually reinforce their activation. Their connection within the knowledge base of the interpreter is said to be responsible for this extra activation. Mazzone aims at demonstrating that the connection between the two concepts is strong enough to drive the interpretation process towards the expected direction. In other terms, the particular world-knowledge at issue (the fact that Sarah does not know NEIL₁ while she is acquainted with NEIL₂) could ground the expected interpretation of (1), that is, (1b) NEIL₂ has broken his_x leg, independently from any embedding of the primary meaning within the meta-representational schema "The speaker says that ...".

Mazzone (2011: 2158) suggests that speaking with Sarah could automatically trigger Robyn's knowledge about her. This knowledge includes information about the environment where Robyn usually meets her, the people associated with that environment, the activities which generally take place there, and so on. According to this suggestion, Robyn's concept of Sarah should be deeply associated with a related environment (the university) including events and entities such as the other people who belong to that environment (lecturers, in the example). For this reason, Robyn's NEIL₂ concept receives extra activation which drives it into the intended interpretation.

This alternative account of Carston's counterexample seems to receive some support from Yeh & Barsalou's (2006) theory of 'situated concepts'. Their main thesis is that concepts are tightly associated with their background situations³. In more specific terms, the representation of a concept in memory is associated with situational information about physical settings, events, and the subjective perspectives of agents. This means that when a concept is processed, associated situations become active (and *vice versa*).

As far as our discussion is concerned, we could try to incorporate the situated theory of concepts within Recanati's account in order to resist Carston's challenge. Mazzone's proposal fruitfully goes in this direction. We could think about background situations associated with a concept in terms of schemata which are activated by its occurrence. In line with this perspective, we should say that speaking with Sarah (the focal entity) activates a so called "university schema" which corresponds to the background situation in which Robyn usually meets Sarah. It could be a 'situational' schema of this sort: <STUDENT₁ (x₁),..., STUDENT_n (x_n) – LECTURER₁ (y₁),..., LECTURER_m (y_m) – CLASS₁ (z₁), ..., CLASS_l (z_l) – ...>. The activation of such a schema raises the accessibility of the concept NEIL₂, a relevant semantic value for the

³ A situation is defined as "a region of perceived space that surrounds a focal entity over some temporal duration, perceived from the subject perspective of an agent. The region of space surrounding the entity may include a variety of entities and events, and the agent's subjective perspective on the region may contain a variety of mental states." (Yeh & Barsalou 2006: 353)

slot LECTURER_i, and triggers the accessibility shift from NEIL₁ (initially more active) to NEIL₂. Furthermore, we may assume that the highly frequent co-occurrence of Sarah and this kind of background situation in Robyn's experience makes the “university schema” highly activated by Robyn's representation of Sarah.

To sum up, Mazzone (2011) provides an associative explanation of Carston's counterexample which seems to be less problematic than Recanati's one, being much better fitted to Recanati's overall project. In fact, it does not require the intervention of some occasional supplements to primary pragmatic processes (e.g. the meta-representational schemata) but it is completely based on the standard dynamics of association-and-activation.

Despite this, we can outline some residual perplexities on Mazzone's account. Mazzone's line of argument seems to take for granted that 'situational schemata' have the force to trigger the required accessibility shift. Fitting the “university schema”, Robyn's NEIL₂ concept is said to receive an extra activation which would outdo the level of activation of the individual concept of Robyn's son. However, the initial hypothesis that NEIL₁ is so much in her current thoughts casts some doubt about this alleged automatic shift. It could be objected that, although Robyn's NEIL₂ concept increases in accessibility thanks to the “university schema” evoked, its degree of activation is not significantly different from NEIL₁-concept's one. In fact, Robyn's NEIL₁ concept could be even more active due to his mother's excessive apprehension. Therefore, once again, accessibility alone might not be sufficient to warrant the intended interpretation.

3 The speaker's preferences

3.1 A new counterexample

In the last section, we discussed Carston's counterexample and its possible solutions. Despite the outlined limits of Recanati's proposal, we found a more convincing solution defended by Mazzone (2011). Putting aside the doubts raised above, the latter seems to be able to contain the critical flow of the discussed counterexample against associative explanations in pragmatics. However, in this section I propose an adapted version of Carston's counterexample which should be resistant to any similar explanation in terms of associative processes.

Let us consider the following scenario. Peter and Mary are two MA students in Linguistics. They first met at university and they usually spend a lot of time together, attending the same classes and studying at the departmental library. Let us suppose that they are talking together about their university life, their impressions about their first term courses and their lecturers. Peter asks Mary if they could meet on Wednesday afternoon to prepare their oral presentation on Generative Grammar planned for the following week and she replies, uttering:

(2) I have to see Neil on Wednesday.

Let us further suppose that Peter knows two people called “Neil”, one of whom is their syntax lecturer, NEIL₁, the other is a guy they met a few days before at a party, NEIL₂. Thus, there are two possible interpretations of (2):

(2a) I_x have to see NEIL₁ on Wednesday.

(2b) I_x have to see NEIL₂ on Wednesday.

Because of the topic of their conversation, Peter's NEIL₁ concept is more highly activated than his NEIL₂ concept. For this reason, an accessibility based framework predicts that (2a) is the selected interpretation, unless some accessibility shift occurs. Once again, there is nothing blatantly wrong in this interpretation: it is perfectly coherent with the speech situation and relevant. Nevertheless, this is not the interpretation Peter gives to the utterance. The reason is that he knows it is unlikely that Mary would refer to their syntax lecturer using his first name rather than a more formal title like 'Dr. Simpson'. Recognizing that social conventions do not allow Mary to do this, Peter takes it that she did not intend to refer to their lecturer.

According to RT, we can explain the selected interpretation, (2b), along the following line: (2b) is selected as the winning interpretation since it is the one which is optimally relevant. In fact, even if (2a) is accessed first because of its higher accessibility, it is dismissed by the interpreter, being incompatible with the speaker's preferences. As we mentioned above, the notion of optimal relevance includes considerations of both the speaker's abilities and her preferences. In the example at issue, Mary's preferences include compliance with a social convention which prescribes avoidance of first names when referring to older people known in a pretty formal context. For this reason, Peter recognizes that, given Mary's concern to be polite and respectful, she did not intend to refer to NEIL₁ by uttering "Neil".

Before analyzing the extent to which an associative account might try to explain this example, it is important to cut out a potential objection to it. In fact, it could be replied that the example does not work because it assumes that Peter's NEIL₁ concept should be initially more activated. This objection could exploit the fact that, just as the existence of social conventions may prevent students from referring to their lecturers by their first names, so Peter's concept of NEIL₁ would not be highly activated by an occurrence of "Neil". In order to resist the objection, we may refine the example at hand in a more detailed way. Let us suppose that Peter and Mary are really familiar with their syntax lecturer's proper name. They have read a lot of papers published by NEIL₁ which presented his full name among the headings, they have often visited his office which has a plaque bearing his full name hanging on the door, they have listened to other lecturers speaking about NEIL₁ using the name "Neil", they have often encountered his full name on their timetable, and so on. In these circumstances, we may assume that Peter's (and Mary's) NEIL₁ concept is strongly associated with the word "Neil" even if neither of them actually use it to refer to NEIL₁. These refinements should avoid objections of this sort and support the adequacy of the counterexample proposed.

3.2 Where situational schemata do not work

In this paragraph I try to sketch an associative explanation of the counterexample proposed following Mazzone's (2011) line of argument based on situational schemata. My aim is to show how this kind of explanation fails with the example at hand.

In line with the previous explanation, we may suppose that Peter's representation of Mary is associated with different background situations (at least two): a "university situation" and a "party situation". For this reason, speaking with Mary should activate two different background situations or situational schemata: the "university schema", $\langle \text{CLASSMATE}_1(x_1), \dots, \text{CLASSMATE}_n(x_n) - \text{LECTURER}_1(y_1), \dots, \text{LECTURER}_m(y_m) - \text{CLASS}_1(z_1), \dots, \text{CLASS}_l(z_l) - \dots \rangle$, and the "party schema", $\langle \text{FRIEND}_1(x_1), \dots, \text{FRIEND}_n(x_n) - \text{LOCATION}(y) - \text{DRINK}(z) - \dots \rangle$.

Generally speaking, it is really plausible to assume that a particular concept can be linked with more than one background situation. For this reason, we need an account of how different and competing situational schemata can drive the interpretation process. Let us consider an insightful passage from Recanati:

[..] a schema is activated by, or accessed through, an expression whose semantic value corresponds to an aspect of the schema. The schema thus activated in turn raises the accessibility of whatever possible semantic values for other constituents of the sentence happen to fit the schema. The schema itself gains extra activation from the fact that some other constituent of the sentence has a possible interpretation which fits the schema. [...] Coherent, schema-instantiating interpretations therefore tend to be selected and preferred over non-integrated or 'loose' interpretations. (Recanati 2004: 37)

According to this remark, we could claim that, although all associated situational schemata are activated by a particular concept, it is only the one whose slots are filled by some other constituents of the uttered sentence that plays a role in the interpretation process.

However, it could be the case that two different associated schemata both gain extra activation from the fact that some other constituent of the uttered sentence has a possible interpretation which fits the two schemata. This seems to be the case of our example: both the "university schema" and the "party schema" can gain extra activation from the fact that the constituent "Neil" of the uttered sentence (2) has a possible interpretation (NEIL₁ and NEIL₂, respectively) which fits the schemata. In fact, NEIL₁ is a relevant semantic value for the slot LECTURER_i; whereas NEIL₂ is a relevant semantic value for the slot FRIEND_j. Consequently, both (2a) and (2b) are interpretations which are coherent instances of an activated situational schema.

Let us further suppose that Peter and Mary not only spend a lot of time at the university as classmates, but also that they seldom organize to go out together. In these circumstances, the "university schema" should be initially highly activated due to the fact that it corresponds to the background situation in which Peter usually meets Mary. As long as nothing prevents it from obtaining extra activation during the interpretation process, the resulting interpretation should be (2a) I_x have to see NEIL₁ on Wednesday. As noted above, this result strongly contrasts with our intuitions, given the nature of Mary's preferences, which are known to Peter. It seems, then, that we have a genuine counterexample to the wholly associative account of primary pragmatic processes.

4. Conclusions

As the above discussion is intended to show, the debate between RT and theorists who support an entirely associative explanation of primary pragmatic process (Recanati 2004, Mazzone 2011) is far from definitely settled. On the one hand, it seems potentially fruitful to extend Recanati's accessibility based framework in order to explore how far schemata can go. On the other hand, though, as I have tried to indicate, there are clear limitations on the extent to which associative approaches can mimic inferential processes.

Recanati proposes an analysis of the role of schemata in the interpretation process which does not explicitly cover some pragmatic phenomena. As Mazzone (2011) aims at showing, this analysis can contribute to an explanation in entirely associative terms of pragmatic phenomena which seem to require consideration of the speaker's beliefs. Along this line, Mazzone develops the notion of schema employed by Recanati and interestingly applies it to the situated theory of concepts (Yeh & Barsalou 2006). The result is what I called 'situational schemata', a type of schemata which plays a decisive role in accounting for considerations of the speaker's abilities, including her knowledge about the world. Situational schemata seem to be much more coherently integrated into Recanati's overall account than his own notion of a meta-representational schema, involved in explaining the same kind of

phenomena. For this reason, I suggested that Mazzone's (2011) explanation of Carston's counterexample in terms of situational schemata has to be considered a more challenging and powerful one. As far as consideration of the speaker's abilities is concerned, an explanation based on an associative mechanism seems to be able to resist the RT challenge.

In the second part of this paper, I proposed a different kind of counterexample, albeit adapted from Carston (2007), in order to show that an accessibility-based framework, even extended through situational schemata, fails to explain how consideration of the speaker's preferences can enter into the utterance interpretation and modulate the derived explicature. In fact, even if we admit that a non-inferential approach employing schemata can account for a wider range of phenomena than RT generally acknowledges, it seems to have some inherent explanatory limitations which inferential processes do not share.

Although I recognize that further investigations of the notion of schema could extend its explanatory power in unexpected ways, the examples discussed in this paper should cast some doubts on the possibility that an associative mechanism is as adequate as its inferential counterpart in explaining how hearers achieve the various pragmatic tasks required to grasp the explicature of an utterance.

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