

Searle on Context, Content and Literal Meaning

Silvan Imhof

The notion of literal meaning provides an indispensable basis for the explanation of various cases where a speaker uttering an expression means something else or more than what the expression literally means. Searle attempts in his 1978 paper *Literal Meaning*¹, first, to ride an attack against the traditional idea that one can fully determine the literal meaning of a sentence by analyzing nothing but the sentence itself. Against this idea, Searle holds that other factors influence the literal meaning which are not part of the content of the sentence and, therefore, cannot be explicated by semantic analysis. He identifies these factors with contextual assumptions. Secondly, Searle offers an account of the literal meaning of a sentence, where context contributes to its determination.

I believe that Searle's attack against the traditional idea of literal sentence meaning is successful, yet, I also believe that his own notion of literal meaning fails. After a short summary of his theoretical presuppositions in the theory of speech acts and intentionality, I will give a diagnosis of how it fails. My main argument is that the notion of literal meaning requires a notion of semantic content (the meaning of a linguistic expression), and that Searle cannot give an adequate definition of this notion, i. e. one independent from the concepts of speaker's intentions and context. Therefore, he loses the notion of literal meaning.

1. The Context Hypothesis

Searle first brought up the hypothesis of the context in *Literal Meaning*, and already there, he suggested that it applies not only to literal speech but to every form of intentionality, especially to intentional, mental states (*Literal Meaning*, p. 130). Correspondingly, one finds a section in *Intentionality* (pp. 145-148) on "The understanding of literal meaning" in support for the general Context Hypothesis (CH). Thus, intentional, mental states, speech acts, context, and meaning seem to be closely connected.

¹ First published in *Erkenntnis* 13 (1978); reprinted in 1979 in Searle's *Expression and Meaning* to which the page numbers refer.

Searle believes that this connection is established by a common feature of speech acts and some mental states: they both *represent* something, i. e., they are directed at or about something (*Intentionality*, p. 1).

He distinguishes two essential components in intentional, mental states: *propositional content* (*p*) and *propositional attitude* (*S*) (*Intentionality*, p. 5f.). The first characterises what the state represents or what it is about; the latter, how the person having this state is related to what the state represents: whether he believes, desires, fears, etc. that facts are or should be as represented. The general structure of an intentional, mental state is thus *S(p)*.

Attitude and content together determine another essential feature of intentional states: they have *conditions of satisfaction* (*Intentionality*, p. 10ff.). The belief that the cat is on the mat, e. g., is satisfied, if the cat in fact is on the mat; in this case the belief is true, and its conditions of satisfaction are *truth conditions*; the desire that the cat will be on the mat is satisfied, if the cat will be in fact on the mat at some future time.

However, attitude and content do not determine sufficiently the conditions of satisfaction of an intentional state; and that's where context comes in. Searle recognises two contextual factors: (a) the network and (b) the background.²

(a) Searle argues that an intentional state wouldn't have any determinate conditions of satisfaction, if it were in isolation (see *Intentionality*, p. 19ff. and p. 141f.). But it has to be part of a whole *network* of interlinked intentional states. If, for example, a Pleistocene man in a hunter-gatherer society had the intention to become president of the United States of America, but did not have any further beliefs and intentions about the political system of the American State, its constitution, etc., his intention would be completely absurd. In order to have conditions of satisfaction at all, intentional states require other intentional states with which they are connected.

(b) The *background*, in contrast, forms the "bedrock" of intentionality (*Intentionality*, p. 143f.) and consists of various non- or preintentional mental abilities and dispositions – biological, perceptive, socio-cultural, and cognitive. These are required for representation to take place and influence the way the world is represented: lacking background capacities, one couldn't even form intentions. Though there are various kinds of background features, it is

² In *Literal Meaning* Searle doesn't make this distinction, and simply speaks of contextual as well as of background assumptions, as if context and background were the same. In *Intentionality* he distinguishes background and network, both having influence on literal meaning, although background is considered more basic. In *The Rediscovery of the Mind* he even conceives the network as "part of the Background that we describe in terms of its capacity to cause conscious intentionality." (p. 187) Because both factors are relevant for the notion of literal meaning anyway, I will here speak of context as including background and network, and correspondingly of the "Context Hypothesis".

important to notice that all of them are mental. Hence, background always is a person's mental background.

Searle's conception of network and background isn't completely satisfactory. Searle himself admits not to have any striking arguments for the context and its influence on sentence meaning (*Intentionality*, pp. 143 and 144), so the assumption of it is only a hypothesis, more or less plausible. Yet, I will not discuss the difficulties connected to it³, because I do not want to question the CH itself. Taking these reservations into account, Searle's Context Hypothesis for intentional, mental states can be stated as follows:

CH_M: A mental state represents, i. e. has a content and conditions of satisfaction, only within a system of other representational states and with there being some non-representational capacities.

As I mentioned above, intentional, mental states and speech acts share the feature of intentionality. But while the former represent intrinsically, items used in the performance of speech acts, particularly sentences, do not: they have to be turned into something representing or intentional. Searle provides a quite elegant explanation how this happens (*Intentionality*, p. 9f.): sentences are used to express intentional states. Intentional states are determined by propositional content and propositional attitude. In order to express an intentional state, one has to impose content and attitude on the sentence used to express it. Hence, by performing a propositional act, the sentence receives the propositional content p of the intentional state. The whole propositional act consists of the act of referring and the act of predicating, which together determine what is said about what. Additionally, the sentence is uttered with a certain illocutionary force F expressing the propositional attitude S of the intentional state. Thus, the general structure of a speech act is $F(p)$.

The content and the conditions of satisfaction of an intentional state depend on context (background and network). But, if the sentence used to express an intentional state acquires the same content and conditions of satisfaction, they depend on context, too. The Context Hypothesis for speech act meaning can be stated as follows:

CH_S: In the same way as the intentional state it expresses, a speech act (or at least a large class of speech acts) represents only within a system of further representations and with there being some non-representational capacities.

³ See Barry Stroud's criticism of the notion of background in *Searle and His Critics*, pp. 245-258; and Searle's response, pp. 289-293.

It is important to note that the network of intentional states as well as the background capacities are mental features of a speaker. Thus, context, comprising network and background, means always *speaker's context*.⁴

2. Semantic content, speaker's context, and the problem with literality

Everything said so far about meaning concerns the meaning of speech acts. In most cases these are performed by uttering sentences. Thus, only the meaning of *uttered sentences* (sentences *as* uttered) has been considered, and not the meaning of *sentences considered as linguistic expressions*. Searle's attack against the traditional view is basically grounded on just this difference. The traditional view holds that the literal meaning of a sentence follows from the analysis of the sentence as linguistic expression. Accordingly, if one knows the meanings of the components and the structure of a sentence, one knows what the sentence means, when uttered literally.

While Searle admits that linguistic expressions actually have definite semantic content⁵, he does not agree that they determine sufficiently the literal meaning of a sentence. Normally it is not enough to know the semantic content of the sentence in order to grasp the meaning of its literal utterance, but one needs additionally the context relative to which it is uttered. Without knowledge of context, one particularly wouldn't know the conditions of satisfaction of the utterance, because it only has conditions of satisfaction relative to the context. Therefore, to grasp the literal meaning of a sentence, at least in part, is to grasp speaker's context.

On reasons Searle gives in *Literal Meaning*, but which I will not examine here, it will never be possible to make all relevant contextual assumptions explicit in the semantic analysis of the sentence. Hence, semantic meaning alone cannot explain literal meaning. Up to this point, Searle's argument runs as follows:

1. Sentences as linguistic expressions do have "constant and unvarying descriptive meaning" (*Literal Meaning*, p. 121) or semantic content.

⁴ It is not to be confused with the *situational* context of a speech act – the "context of utterance" – which is not relevant here; see *Literal Meaning*, p. 133f.

⁵ Searle uses "semantic content", "descriptive content", or "descriptive meaning" for the meanings expressions (words, sentences) have unvaryingly in every context of their literal use. Following this, I will speak of "semantic content".

2. The semantic content of a sentence is not sufficient to settle conditions of satisfaction for each literal utterance of the sentence.
3. The sentence, or its semantic content, only determines conditions of satisfaction in combination with the speaker's context of the utterance.
4. The additional contextual assumptions cannot be made explicit as part of the semantic structure of the sentence as linguistic expression.
5. Hence, literal meaning depends in part on context.

According to 1., linguistic expressions have definite, context-independent, semantic content, presumably just the kind of content one would get by analysing the sentence following the traditional view. Yet, Searle points to the fact that linguistic expressions determine conditions of satisfaction only if *applied* relative to some context. Searle uses "application" quite loosely, he speaks of the application of the *notion* of literal meaning as well as of the application of a *sentence*, and even of the application of the *meaning* of the sentence (see the numerous examples in *Literal Meaning*). The first case concerns the general question whether there is a theoretically useful notion of literal meaning, our main subject here. Leaving this aside, Searle must mean by "application" that expressions, especially sentences, have to be considered as expressions *in use*, i. e. uttered sentences. For, if one only looks at the sentence as linguistic expression, one don't get the meaning of any literal utterance of a sentence. That means, in order to understand the utterance, one has to know how the sentence is used (applied), i. e. relative to what context it is uttered.

Semantic content can only contribute to the literal meaning when they are applied by a speaker, because it determines conditions of satisfaction only together with context. But context is speaker's context and must be provided by the speaker uttering the sentence. Semantic expression meaning and speaker's context take on some kind of job-sharing and together determine truth conditions of a literally uttered sentence: an uttered sentence has literal meaning if one expresses exactly what one means, partly due to the semantic content of the sentence, partly due to the context relative to which it is applied.

Thus, Searle needs a notion of the contextual application of a sentence by a speaker (speaker's context and intentions) as well as a notion of speaker-independent semantic content. Only their contrast makes an applicable notion of literal sentence meaning possible. Challenging this notion of literal meaning, I will (i.) try to show that there is no such notion of semantic content available for Searle which can be contrasted with speaker meaning. In the light of the speech act theory and its intentionalistic foundation, semantic content can only be

understood in terms of speaker's intentions, and the central semantic concepts will prove to be context-contaminated. I will then (ii.) show that even if there were a conception of speaker-independent semantic content available, it couldn't play the role it is supposed to play for literal meaning. I will argue that if one accepts CH, no specification of semantic content is possible, which does not rely on context. If the constant semantic content has to allow for different conditions of satisfaction utterances of the same sentence relative to different contexts, it must be very unspecific and nearly empty; and to understand this minimal remainder of semantic content, background assumptions are indispensable. In any case, Searle loses the concept of semantic content. His theoretical presuppositions admit only speaker meaning⁶, thus leave no room for a notion of literality.

i. The notion of semantic content

From the traditional point of view, it would be a natural thing to say that semantic content is constituted by the meanings of the component expressions which, centrally, is their referential and predicative meaning.⁷ Expressions *have* referential and predicative meaning, independent of any contextual assumptions: "this cat" singles out some cat in whatever context, "is on" predicates a certain spatial relation of some things. But this traditional jargon is not admissible for the speech act theorist right away for his conception of context-free, semantic content.

As mentioned in the first part of this paper, speech act theory conceives predication and reference as parts of the propositional act, predication and reference being acts themselves. Predication and reference is not something expressions do by themselves, but something one does when using expressions. Consequently, it is not the word "this cat" that singles out a certain cat, but the speaker using the word for this purpose. So the primary way of talking is not that expressions have referential or predicative meaning, but that expressions are used to refer or to predicate by a speaker. Reference and predication must be conceived in terms of speaker's intentions, and thus don't equal their traditional counterparts.

Reference, predication and content must be considered as intentional concepts. But, as CH holds, they must be influenced by context: The propositional act, consisting of the acts of

⁶ Speaker meaning, here, is simply what a speaker means (= intends to express) with an utterance of an expression. In contrast, an expression has semantic content or meaning independently from a speaker or an utterance.

⁷ Centrally, because predication and reference alone can constitute propositional content, while other types of expression meanings do mainly modify such contents. Furthermore, most expression meanings can roughly be reduced to referential and predicative meaning.

reference and predication, constitutes the propositional content of a speech act, which expresses the content of an intentional state. As the latter is essentially context-dependent, the content of a corresponding speech act and the acts of reference and predication, too.⁸

This does not mean that the speech act theorist cannot arrive at the idea of referential and predicative meaning of expressions. But, in Searle's speech act theory, pure expression meaning must be understood as a mere idealisation of what reference and predication really are; it can be achieved only by abstraction. But to abstract is always to leave something out, in our case: that reference and predication are acts performed by speakers.

That means, we couldn't know what predication and reference are, if we did not acknowledge the influence of speaker's intentions and context. But then we couldn't make any sense of the corresponding abstract semantic notions without the notions of intentions and context, for one cannot have a conception of the result of an abstraction, if one doesn't understand from what one abstracts.⁹ The *notions* of reference and predication rely on the *notion* of context; the notion of pure semantic content is pure only due to abstraction from the essential context-infection of propositional content.

Thus, following the assumptions of Searle's speech act theory, the central semantic notions (the notions of pure, unvarying, semantic content) depend on the notion of context. This may not be considered fatal for the notion of semantic content, *taken in an abstract sense*, as long as one can show that it contributes to the determination of conditions of satisfaction of a literally uttered sentence in a significant way. But conceptually, the central semantic notions do not function autonomously. They are not basic concepts, but derived by abstraction or idealisation from the underlying concepts of the speech act theory, which are not independent of the notions of speaker's intention and context. It becomes doubtful, then, that this notion of semantic content can be contrasted with speaker meaning, as is required for the notion of literal meaning.

a contrast (conceptually) of the abstracted with what it is abstracted from!

- i. what the concept of semantic content really is
- ii. whether semantic content, conceived in this way, can do what it is supposed to do

⁸ Searle makes this clear for reference: "Since linguistic reference is always dependent on or is a form of mental reference and since mental reference is always in virtue of Intentional content including Background and Network, proper names must in some way depend on Intentional content" (*Intentionality*, p. 232).

⁹ Like in mechanics one can only abstract from friction if one has already acknowledged an influence of friction. The notion of ideal motion, taken strictly, yields empirically false results. One can only make sense of the notion, if one keeps in mind that relevant factors are not taken in account.

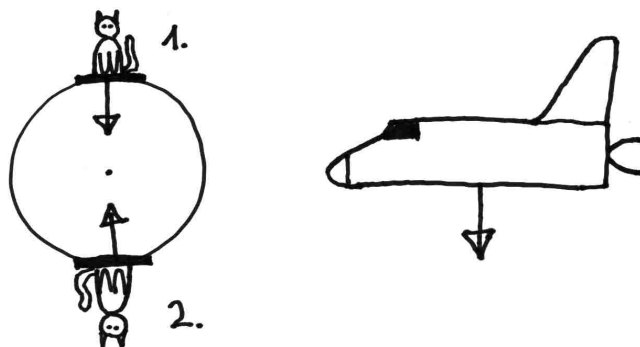
ii. *The interplay of semantic content and speaker's context*

What has to be challenged then is this last reservation: Even if the the notion of semantic content is only derived by abstraction from speaker's context and intentions, as long as it can be shown to contribute significantly to the determination of conditions of satisfaction for an utterance of a sentence, the notion of literal meaning may survive. But I will show that semantic content cannot make any significant contribution to this purpose. In fact, semantic content will be completely absorbed by speaker's intentions and context.

In *Literal Meaning* Searle argues for the importance of context mostly by providing examples. The phenomenon common to them all can be formulated in the following way:

The same sentence with the *same semantic content*, uttered literally, can determine *different conditions of satisfaction* depending on the context relative to which it is uttered.

Let us look at an example where this happens:¹⁰



The picture represents the following situation: a person on earth who utters “The cat is on the mat” literally, would say something true in the cat₁-situation as well as in the cat₂-situation; he uses the “is on” in “The cat is on the mat” contextually relative to the direction of gravitation on earth. An astronaut in the spaceship, after a long intergalactic voyage, has become accustomed to use “is on” contextually relative to the position of his spaceship, taking the tail fin as determining the up-direction. Thus, for the astronaut, to utter literally “The cat is on the mat” would be true of cat₁, but not of cat₂ (he would consider cat₂ to be under the mat). Thus, truth conditions for each person's utterances differ as their contexts differ.

In the example, both persons use the same sentence in order to express what they mean. According to Searle's thesis, the sentence has the same semantic content in each case, but the

¹⁰ The scenario is a variation of Searle's examples in *Literal Meaning*, pp. 122-123.

conditions of satisfaction, here the truth conditions, differ. It is now tempting to say that both *say the same* of the cat and the mat, at least in the cat₁-situation, viz. they say *that the cat is on the mat*. According to the thesis, each utters the sentence literally, hence, what each says is exactly what he means. Therefore, both people not only utter the same sentence with the same semantic content, but also express the same *propositional* content.

As the propositional content expressed in a speech act is identical with the propositional content of the corresponding intentional state (we take both persons to be sincere), it likewise is tempting to say that they both *believe the same* to be true of the cat and the mat in the first case. But not only the truth conditions of each person's utterance differ, but also the truth conditions of their beliefs; and they differ not only in the second case, but also in the first (although the truth values coincide in this case). As long as the context remains the same, each belief that the cat is on the mat, has the same truth conditions. Thus, if truth conditions differ for both persons in the cat₂-situation, they also differ in the cat₁-situation. But if truth conditions as well as context differ for the astronaut and the person on earth, what remains the same in their respective beliefs? What entitles us to say what seemed plausible first, viz. that they both believe the same of the cat and the mat in the first case?

Searle would like to say that their beliefs have the same (type of) content. In *The Rediscovery of the Mind* he holds the view that "The same *type* of intentional content can determine different conditions of satisfaction when it is manifest in different conscious tokens, relative to different Background capacities, and relative to some Backgrounds it determines none at all." (p. 191) This must be wrong, because it makes no sense to speak of propositional (intentional) content, having no determinate conditions of satisfaction. For, it is one thing to say that intentional states have content, *and, therefore, conditions of satisfaction*, only relative to a context; this only means that there would be no intentional states without a network and a background. It is another thing to say, like Searle, that there is some autonomous, constant content which determines conditions of satisfaction only with the help of context.

The problem with Searle's version is that there is no account of an autonomous, constant content, because propositional content is defined in terms of conditions of satisfaction : that, for example, the belief that the cat is on the mat is about a certain cat on a certain mat *means* that it is true, if a certain cat is on a certain mat. Otherwise it wouldn't be a *belief about* anything; i. e. it wouldn't be intentional at all. Likewise, it makes no sense to say that the Pleistocene man (mentioned above) has an intention with the content that he becomes president of the USA, without the relevant background or network. He couldn't have any such

intention at all, because he wouldn't even know what his intention is about, i. e., what intention he has. Hence, it is wrong to say that there indeed is an intentional content, but that it does not determine any conditions of satisfaction, due to the absence of a relevant context. It will be impossible to specify this content, as long as one can't say what it is about; and if one can, conditions of satisfaction are already there, and with them context. Content and conditions of satisfaction are conceptually entangled in a way, that one cannot take away one (the conditions of satisfaction), and still keep the other (the content). If there are no conditions of satisfaction, there is no content.

While in the case of utterances one has still the sentence (the words) which is reasonably supposed to have some constant, autonomous content, there is no analogue for intentional states.¹¹ While it is possible to mean something (non)literally, it is not possible to believe something (non-)literally. Literality emerges, as mentioned above, from the contrast between speaker meaning and speaker-independent sentence meaning. In the case of intentional states, there are no believer-independent counterparts of linguistic items.¹² Consequently, there is nothing else than propositional content which can account for the sameness of the conditions of satisfaction of intentional states (whether contextually or not). But then, if conditions of satisfaction differ, content must differ, too. This is what happens in our cat-example: if the truth conditions of the respective beliefs of the person on earth and the astronaut differ, they don't believe the same about the cats and the mats in each case.

It was first plausible to assume that the astronaut as well as the person on earth believe the same, because one is tempted to describe the contents of their respective beliefs in the same words. This may be motivated by the fact that both would express, as the example goes, their beliefs in uttering the same words, viz. "The cat is on the mat", saying thereby exactly and literally what they mean. However, we have seen that they don't believe the same. Thus, expressing their beliefs with the literal utterance of the same sentence, they don't mean the same, and, consequently, they don't say the same about the cats and the mats, whatever the semantic content of the sentence may be.

¹¹ Presumably, Searle is prepared to accept that same intentional states have same neurophysiological structures. However, this is not relevant here, because we don't have to examine our brains in order to know what we believe.

¹² This seems to be true even if you believe in a mental language, and even if you conceive of believing something as meaning a mentalese sentence (say, assertively). Still, there is no room for believing it (non)literally. What is needed for literality is not just a linguistic structure (or an analogue of a linguistic structure), but a linguistic structure with elements which have speaker- or, in the mentalese case, believer-independent meaning, i. e. conventional meaning. The fact that there is no room for literality in mentalese, the fact that a basic linguistic concept is not applicable to it, indicates, in my eyes, that there is something wrong with the conception of a mental language.

The point of this digression into intentionality was to elucidate Searle's idea of a constant, autonomous content of intentional states expressed in utterances of sentences. He seems to believe that there is such a thing which determines conditions of satisfaction, if context is added. This has proved wrong. The correct version is that there is no content at all independent of context. Content and conditions of satisfaction always come together, and they only come relative to some context.

As already mentioned, the case is different with utterances. There we have linguistic items which are reasonably supposed to have a definite, autonomous, semantic content, unvarying in different contexts. But if two persons utter the semantically same sentence literally, yet with different conditions of satisfaction relative to different contexts, they don't mean the same and they don't say the same. This seems to be quite a radical divergence between different, literal utterances of the same sentence with the same semantic content.¹³ We should ask, what can be the constant content of the sentence, which still admits of such radical divergence?

In order to answer this question, we can try to isolate the semantic content which has to be constant in each utterance. In our example, the difference of contexts does not make any difference for "the cat" and "the mat", these expressions don't affect the truth conditions. It is only the semantic content of "is on" which has to allow for different truth conditions relative to the different contexts. The criteria for the semantic content of "is on" are given: the semantic content must, together with the respective contexts, produce the right truth values for each utterance of "The cat is on the mat". The semantic content of the sentence must make it possible that for the person on earth, the utterance is true both in the cat₁-situation as in the cat₂-situation; and that for the astronaut, it is true in the cat₁-situation, but false in the cat₂-situation. Now try to explicate the semantic content of "is on" in a way that these criteria are satisfied! The only solution I can imagine is to say that "is on" is a *two-place predicate which relates physical bodies spatially in a certain way*. For, if one tries to say more and especially tries to explain the spatial relation in question, one would have to use words like "is upon", "is above", "is beyond", "is over", all of which are themselves dependent on some context just as "is on". Therefore, they cannot explain its unvarying semantic content.

If this is all to the semantic content of "is on" – meaning a certain spatial relation between physical bodies –, one would be reluctant to call this "semantic content" at all. It only characterises the semantic category of the predicate, but does not account for its specific difference from other expressions of the same category, like "is under", "is behind", "is to the

¹³ Searle acknowledges this: "Sentence meaning *radically* underdetermines the content of what is said." (*The Rediscovery of the Mind*, p. 181), but he still underestimates how radical the underdetermination really is.

right of”, etc. Surely nobody would assume these expressions to be synonymous; but exactly this would be the consequence, if the specification of semantic content couldn’t get any further.¹⁴ The sentence “The cat is on the mat” would have the same semantic content as “The cat is under the mat”, and both would make the same contribution to the determination of truth conditions. Each use of “is on” could count as literal, as long as it is used to express *any* spatial relation between physical bodies. The semantic content does not fix the specific differences in meaning between expressions of the same category. These differences, which are relevant for the truth conditions, have to be specified contextually, too. Thus, the influence of context goes even further than Searle would like to admit.

Though semantic content has already become rather hollow, it isn’t completely empty yet. But the point can be put even stronger: in order to understand the constant semantic content of “is on” – a spatial relation between physical bodies –, one must make some assumptions about the behaviour of physical bodies and the spatial framework in which they are related. But these are typical contextual assumptions and background capacities. If this is correct, pure, constant semantic content vanishes, and context takes over completely.

I think, the same will happen with any example, because there is a general, systematic phenomenon: if semantic content must be compatible with different conditions of satisfaction in different contexts, it has to be so unspecific and undetermined that it cannot make any significant contribution to utterance meaning when applied; it has to be *almost* empty. In order to understand this hollow version of semantic content, one needs context. No context-free specification of semantic content can be given, hence, the notion of pure semantic content is *totally* empty.

The concepts of intentional states, propositional content, conditions of satisfaction, context, speech acts, and representation form a very tightly woven network. Every additional concept will either be integrated in this network or have no significance. This is exactly what happens to the concept of semantic content: my first line of argument (i.) has shown that it cannot have a conceptually independent function for the notion of literal meaning. According to the second argument (ii.), if CH holds, intentional content is thoroughly context-dependent for every form of representation. It is not surprising then, that semantic content is absorbed by speaker’s context, if it is supposed to have any influence.

The final conclusion is that, in any case, Searle loses the notion of a constant, pure semantic content that could take the counterpart of speaker’s intentions and context in the

¹⁴ Perhaps, one would like to expand the semantic explication of “is on” to: “a certain spatial relation between physical bodies *in contact*.” But first, according to the dictionary, “to be on” means not necessarily to be in touch, spatial proximity would do. Second, it wouldn’t make better the situation, for it would still be synonymous with predicates like “is to the right of and touches”, “is behind and touches”, etc.

determination of conditions of satisfaction. Consequently, he loses the notion of literal meaning which was supposed to be grounded on this contrast. The meaning of an uttered sentence, whether literally or not, is fully determined by speaker's intentions and context; semantic content shrinks to the point of insignificance. Hence, the meaning of any expression depends completely on speaker's intentions and context and thus can change from context to context. This results in indefinite ambiguity, which Searle himself calls an "absurd result" (*Intentionality*, p. 145).

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