

Among the central issues in the philosophy of language, the determination of the content conveyed by sentences on the occasion of their utterance is certainly one that is of major importance to linguists and cognitive scientists. Over the years, a modicum of agreement has emerged as to what aspects of utterance meaning pertain to the most pragmatic layers of interpretation. The focus of the debate has now moved to issues like the literal, truth-conditional or propositional content of utterances: is it entirely a matter for semantics to deal with, or does pragmatics affect that content (and, if so, to what extent)? Around these issues, several major positions have emerged, ranging from so-called 'radical contextualism' (pragmatics massively impacts on truth-conditional content) to equally radical 'semantic minimalism' (there is no such pragmatic impact), through 'moderate contextualism' and 'truth relativism'.

While the debate is still raging, we have thought it useful take a step back and look at how the various theories fit, or can be made to fit, into general models of cognition. We have gone on the assumption that compatibility with a plausible cognitive framework is a legitimate goal for linguistic inquiry. In other words, we endorse the view that theories of language (and language use) should be prepared to commit themselves to any conception of the human mind with which they are compatible.

We hope that the Brussels workshop will offer an opportunity for language scholars to present their views on the mechanisms underpinning the interpretation of (certain aspects of) utterances. Our expectation is that putting these issues in the light of broader psychological assumptions should clarify the debate about the semantics/pragmatics distinction and provide a fresh perspective for the evaluation of the different schools of thought that attempt to answer the tough question: how much of the meaning of expressions must be accounted for by semantics, and how much by pragmatics?