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for  
Research and Humanist Studies

Al-jud competition  
poised modernism

Thierd Year, Thierd Volume, Second Edition  
Jumada alulaa 1435, March 2014

Tel: +964 032 310059 Mobile: +964 771 948 7257  
<http://alameed.alkafeel.net>  
Email : [alameed@alkafeel.net](mailto:alameed@alkafeel.net)

# AL-`AMEED

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for  
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In the Name of Allah,  
Most Gracious, Most Merciful  
Allah will  
Raise up to suitable ranks  
And degrees, those of you  
Who believe and who have  
Been granted knowledge  
And Allah is well acquainted  
With all ye do\*.

(\* Abodullah Yussif Ali, The Holy Quran, Text Translation and Comment, (Kuwait : That El-Salasil, 1989) 1509, Iyat 11, Sura, Mujadila, or The Woman Who Pleads.

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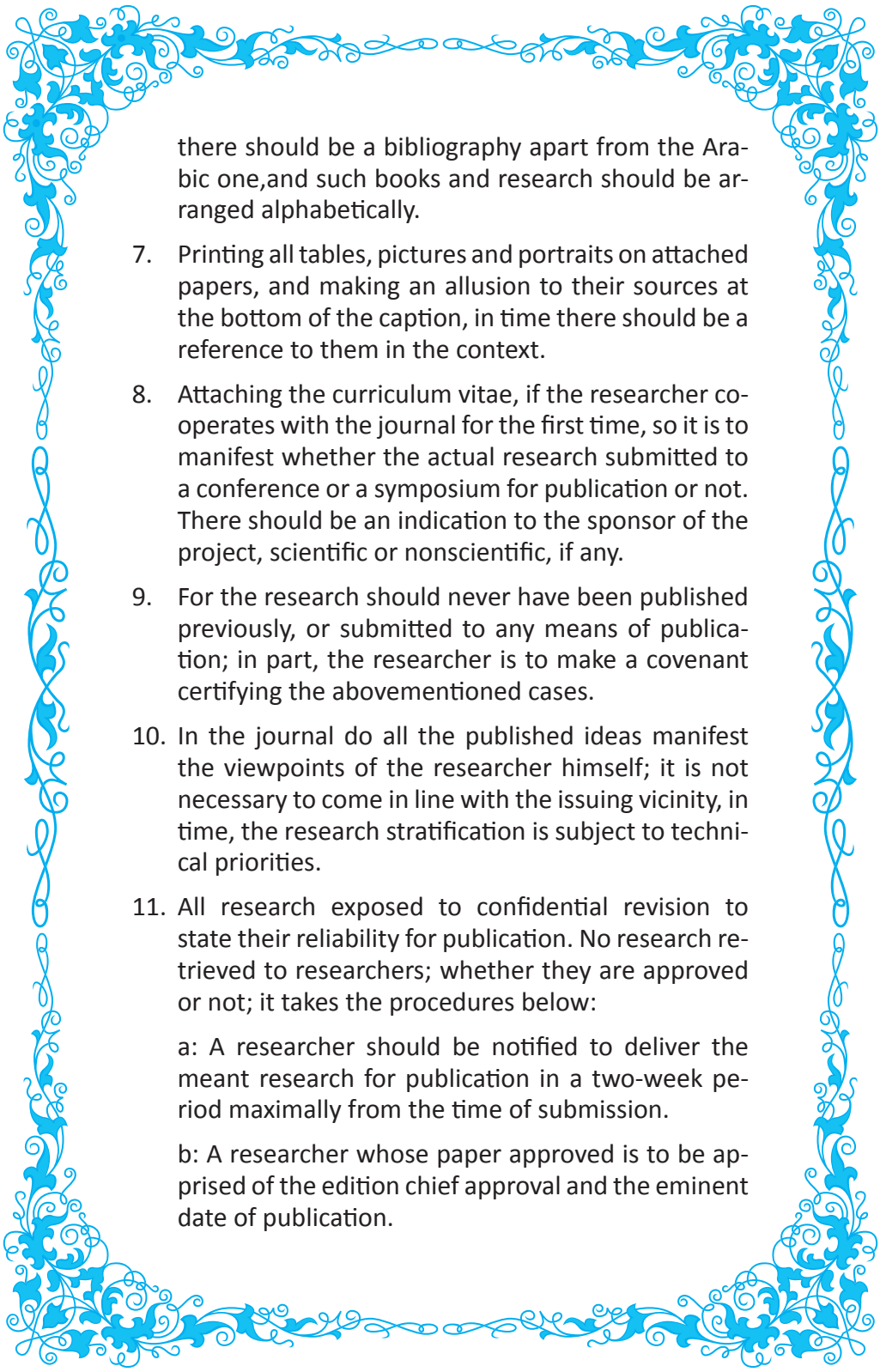




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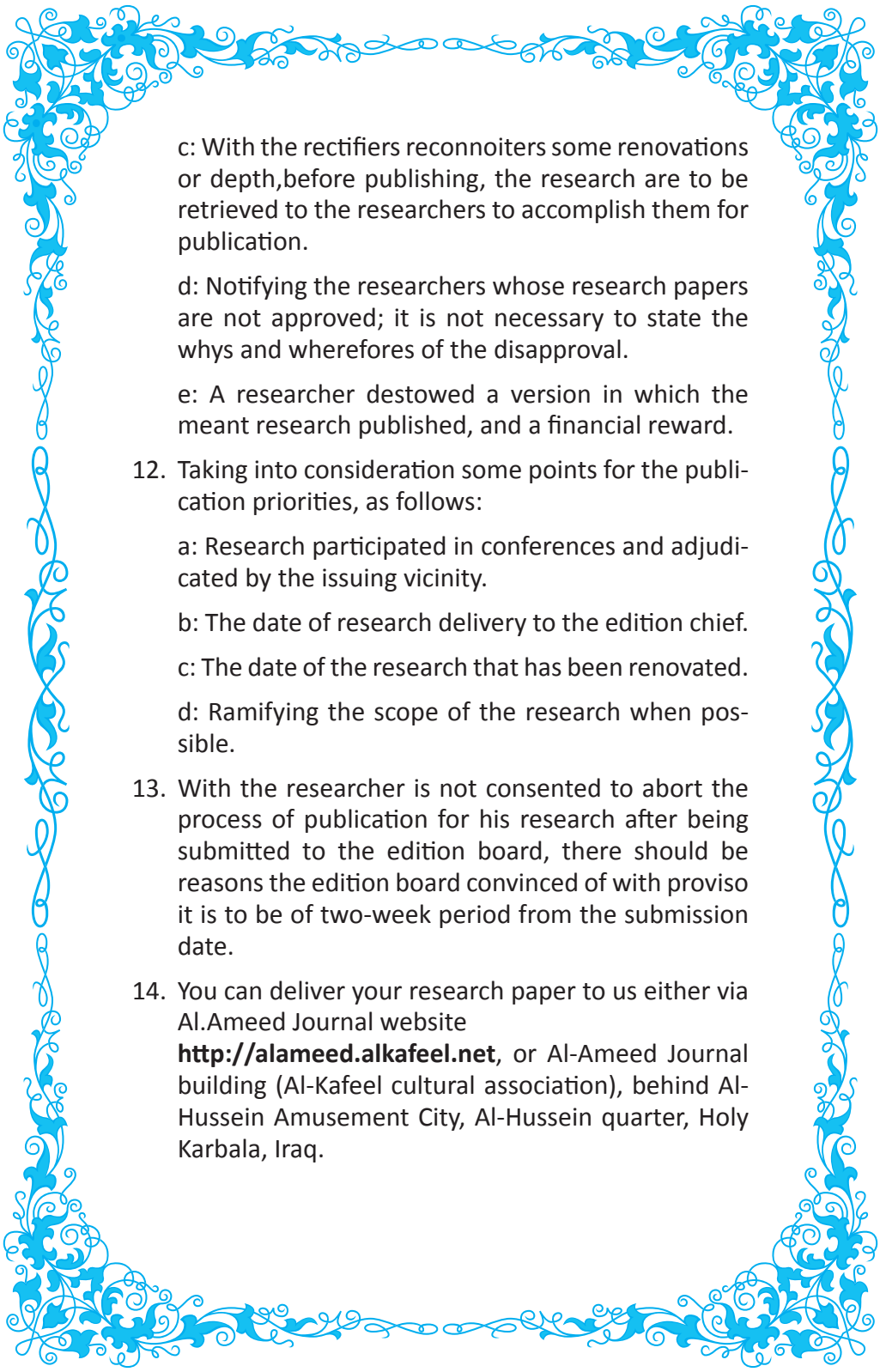
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## In the Name of the High

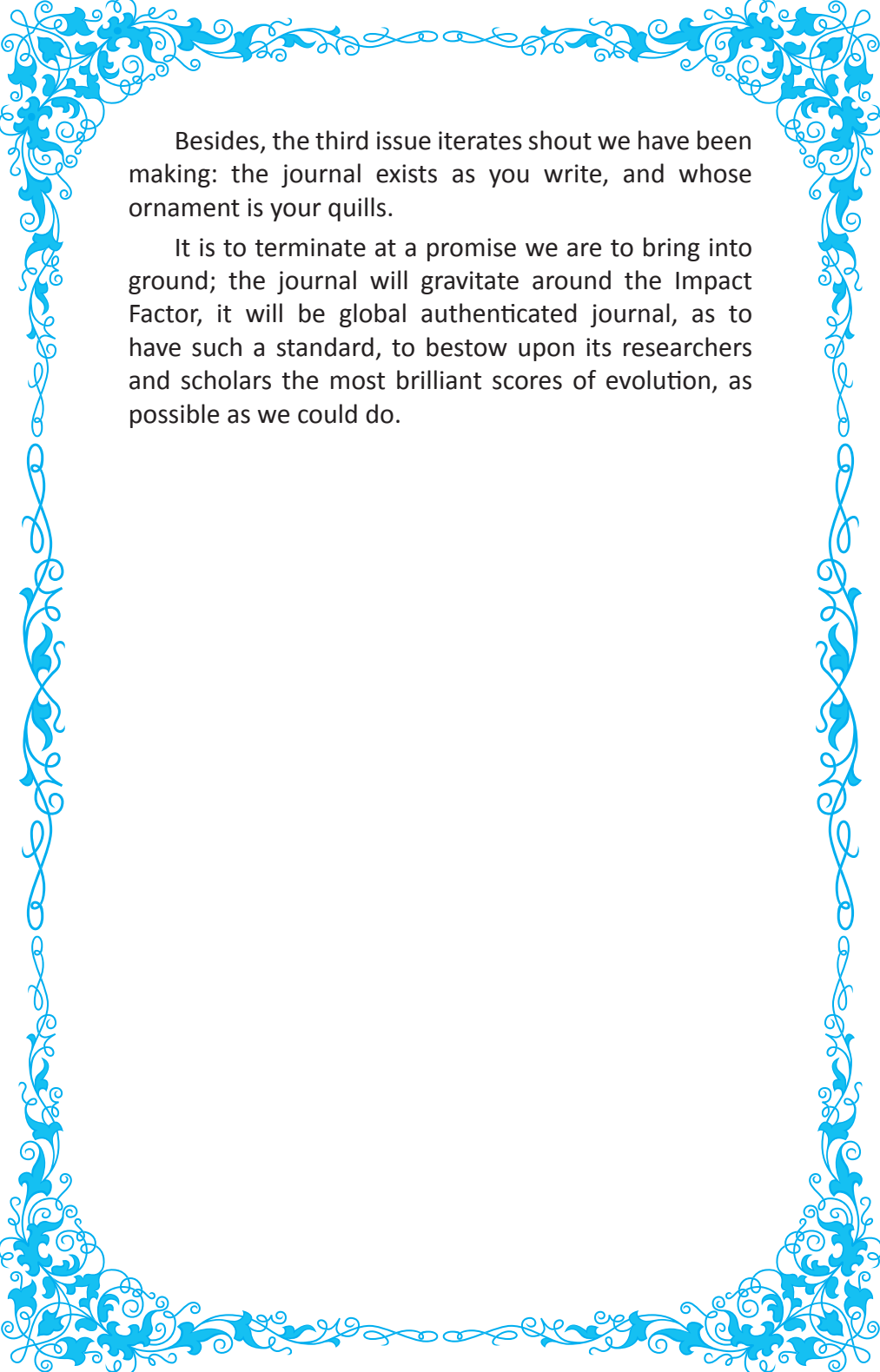
... Edition word ...

### **Second threshold to the third candle ...**

Burning your third candle designates a sense that you take a threshold further; further responsibilities surge; success threshold should be more considerate, since what you had culled in the first harvest stipulates having two brunts; the first is to keep the accumulative achievements intact; the second to cull the best; as the man of sapience, the prince of the believers Imam Ali Ibin Abi Talib, fixates such a sense into words: «in loss one whose two days come equal».

The tenth edition surges into paramouncy for having certain issues; first it is the second threshold to the third year of the journal erection, second, it cuddles so important and cultural a file that engraves the cultural tinge of the Holy Al-`Abbas Shrine : the Global Al-Jud Contest for Verse in the light of Abualfadhil Al-`Abbas (Peace be upon him) of which The present edition takes holds certain academic artworks .

In the first issue, as stated previously, the journal bears the brunt of keeping the accumulative achievements intact and inspiring to the best. In the second issue, surveillance is surveillance, without observation the competitive deeds, the creative ones, could be rendered into being static; tedious, so the journal takes delight in receiving some research papers elucidating the vantage points of such cultural deeds in the contest with objectivity.



Besides, the third issue iterates shout we have been making: the journal exists as you write, and whose ornament is your quills.

It is to terminate at a promise we are to bring into ground; the journal will gravitate around the Impact Factor, it will be global authenticated journal, as to have such a standard, to bestow upon its researchers and scholars the most brilliant scores of evolution, as possible as we could do.



**Formal Semantics  
or Dual Pragmatics**

**Prof. Dr. Majeed Al-Maashta  
Islamic University  
in Hilla**





من البحوث المشاركة في

مؤتمر العميد العلمي العالمي الاول

المنعقد تحت شعار

نلتقي في رحاب العميد لنرتقي

للمدة من ٢٥-٢٦ تشرين الاول ٢٠١٣ م

برعاية العتبة العباسية المقدسة

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We Do Meet to Augment**





### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to see how each of these two schools studies meaning. Semantics, as we all know, is concerned with the literal meaning of a lexical item and a sentence and the relations pertaining among them.

Driven more use-invariantly, formal semantics (FS) studies language “in terms of the formal features of linguistic expression...”, as Borg, on whom this study has relied largely, says, “independently, to some extent at least, of the use to which the language is being put”, Borg 15. It inspects literal meaning in the sense that it overlooks such semantic properties as metaphor and irony... which are “often held to occur post-semantically,” Borg 18, once the literal meaning is settled. So, to look at the meaning of a sentence formally is to view its words through their formal properties as we view their phonetic features and their syntactic or logical combination into a sentence. Thus, meaning is not affected by context.



## ملخص البحث

يهدف هذا البحث إلى التعريف بمدرستين تتصارعان في العقدين الأول والثاني من القرن الحالي على أحقية دراسة المعنى اللغوي: الدلالة الشكلية أو ما تسمى بالدلالة الدنيا والتداولية الثنائية. تذهب الأولى إلى أن دراسة معنى الجملة تتحقق بالشكل الصحيح بفحص البنية النحوية والصيغة المنطقية للجملة وبتهميش السياق. وتسعى المدرسة الثانية إلى إعطاء الأولوية في فهم المعنى بربط الجملة بالسياق الذي ترد فيه.

ينتهي البحث بترجيح كفة الدلالة الدنيا علماً أن أحداً لم يكتب عنها بالعربية حسب علمي أو ان عدد المصادر بالانكليزية لا يتجاوز عدد أصابع اليدين أفضلها في رأيي كتاب Borg الذي اعتمدت عليه بشكل خاص.



A basic claim by formal semantics is that linguistic understanding, as Borg says, is both productive and systematic.

It is productive in that a sentence can be enlarged and enlarged to produce more and more complex sentences and that anyone who can understand the initial sentence can theoretically in the least understand all those enlarged versions. If there are some understanding problems, they are most probably due to other factors else than any limitations in linguistic competence. It is systematic in that there exists a systemic relation between grasping the sentence meaning and grasping the meanings of its parts.

These two features point to the compositionality of meaning, that is, the meaning of a sentence is the function of the meanings of its parts together with the mode of their composition. This compositionality is what enables one in fact to understand all types of sentences.

The question now is how it is possible for one to produce this infinite range of sentences. Davidson answers it by binding a sentence to its conditions of truthfulness: it is meaningful so long as it is true in a certain situation. In other words, he assumes “a pre-existing connection between meaning and truth”, Borg 22. A formal theory is successful then if it moves a sentence from a natural language to a language of thought. Accordingly, the literal meaning of a sentence can be specified through its formal features without paying attention to its actual use, Borg 25.

This move faces a vehement opposition by those who hold that context should be taken into consideration in specifying meaning. They face formal theorists with such examples as:

– Many children talked about a crooky yesterday –

It is quite clear that the formal features of this sentence do not suffice to expose its meaning: did they talk about a dishonest man or about a long stick? Did they all about the same crook? Context then is the decisive factor here.



Let's have a second example:

– Sam likes this cat more than Jane –

This sentence can be disambiguated only through knowing more about the situation.

A third example may go to the indexical words:

– We have been living here for a very long time –

It may mean my wife and I have been living in this apartment for..., or: we, human beings, have been living on this planet for...

A fourth example may involve the speaker's intentions:

– I feel tired –

The meaning cannot be grasped unless the listener knows whether the speaker intends to go to bed or to end the meeting...

These four examples are certainly different from context-invariant sentences as:

– A leap year is 366 days –

This situation spurs us to distinguish between a sentence and its variant utterances. FS is concerned with sentences only, while pragmatics restricts its attention to their utterances, that is, their use-based cases specifically. The problem with FS then is that it appeals neither to context nor to the speaker's intentions and, consequently, it cannot cover all dimensions of meaning.

It is pragmatics that steps forward here, claiming that it can replace FS as a theory of specifying meaning. But what about context-invariant cases where FS beats general pragmatics? For this reason, general pragmatics has modified its position to what Borg has called dual pragmatics (DP). In spite of its insistence that FS underdetermines meaning, DP tries to adopt some certain syntactic and logical elements from FS in a reconciliatory attempt to replace FS.

The strong challenge DP has lunched to FS is that pure formal analysis by itself is redundant to the study of meaning, in contrast, of course, to the formal claim that "context-sensitivity [is] ... somewhat peripheral." Borg 36. Nevertheless, DP does acknowledge the

formal claim that meaning has a logical form which does not change with the change of context.

The other remark DP puts against FS is that such concepts as sentence meaning are too abstract to be of any practical value in meaning analysis.

Now two questions pose themselves here. How does FS react to these remarks? What is the alternative DP offers? I will start with the second question.

It is called DP because it holds that meaning comprehension is a two-stage process: the logical, that is, the basic level which precedes any context involvement and the final level. This analysis is somehow similar to distinguishing between what is said and what is implied: the speaker expresses in one way or another his own intentions and the hearer makes use of these intentions to grasp the intended meaning. So, unlike FS which holds that a sentence meaning can be arrived at solely through its formal features, DP affirms that the meaning of any utterance can inferentially be exposed only via context-sensitivity.

Again unlike FS, which relies heavily on the sentence structures in arriving at its meaning, Kamp and some other dual pragmatists hold that there is an intermediate level between syntax and semantics. This level, which Kamp calls discourse, maps sentence structures before subjecting them to semantic interpretation. Brog 49

From all this, one may realize that the relation between FS and DP is not a matter of either or as some may imagine it. Rather, FS devotes all its efforts to meanings of sentences and word types, while DP is limited to successful communication through utterances. In other words, FS may not claim from now on any authority on actual communication, that is, it has to minimize itself to sentences and those word types and to leave communication to its rival. For this reason, it has been called minimal semantics (MS) or semantic minimalism (SM). It maintains that "for every grammatical sentence the semantic values of the words it contains... and the logical form of the sentence determine a unique proposition that is the semantic content of the sentence", Clapp 251. With respect to the relationship between semantic content and speech act content, Clapp goes

on saying, "SM maintains not only that speech act content is radically different from semantic content, but moreover SM maintains that competent speakers have intuitive access only to speech act content", Clapp 255.

This, however, does not mean that DP may stroll the way it likes. One may not accuse the formal theory of being too abstract to be of any relevance to meaning analysis. The fact that a native speaker can understand a complex sentence which he did not hear before simply means that its meaning is only "determined by the meanings of its parts and their mode of composition". Borg 56.

FS steps forward here to take care of the linguistic compositionality, though DP does insist that part of an utterance meaning may be clarified only by context, without which this meaning is not graspable. On the other hand, FS claims that to gain validity, an argument should have its content specified quite independently of context. It also holds that it is sometimes possible to grasp a sentence meaning even when there is no clue to its contextual situation.

In spite of all these disagreements, the two theories share the same point of departure in specifying meaning: the logical form. Larson and Segal define it as follows:

"The level of logical form is where syntactic representation is interpreted by semantic rules." Borg 63

From all this we may realize how sharp the difference between these two theories is: whereas FS insists that sentence meaning can be delivered through interpreting the formal features, DP says that this delivery cannot be achieved without pragmatic support. An important point in favor of the former view is that most formalists affirm that meaning is part of a modular language faculty. Modularity clearly means the division of the human mind into various modules or parts, each having its own tasks. Borg 75. It comprises both information and rules that process this information. Since grasping linguistic meaning is a matter of words and rules, it is "part of a genuine language module", Borg 81, which combines them computationally.



Since DP stipulates context nutrition to grasping meaning, modularity does not suit it as it suits FS. Moreover, FS but not DP holds that the grasp of literal meaning is domain specific, by restricting its attention to words and syntax only. Whereas FS studies information generated by our formal faculty, DP studies information generated by other cognitive domains. Similarly, whereas FS explains the syntax-driven computational grasp of literal meaning, DP offers a model of how linguistic utterances and intentional gestures serve to communicate ideas.

Within this sharp dispute, Cappelen and Lepore list the following points in favour of MS:

1. Unlike all other semantic theories, MS “recognizes only a very limited number of context sensitive expressions.” Cappelen and Lepore 151
2. MS is the only view which “can account how the same context can be expressed in different contexts” Cappelen and Lepore 152
3. SM pictures very successfully the proper relationship between semantic content and speech act content without confusing them.
4. Unlike all other semantic theories, SM does not involve itself with such questions as: what is fatness? what is greenness? ... only because answering such questions will drive us towards the philosophy of language and metaphysics.
5. It is the only semantic theory that enjoys true psychological reality.

Finally, the controversy in contemporary semantic literature between SM and context sensitivism is not as sharp as it has been pictured by some scholars. The present paper argues that the choice between them is rather determined by the aim of study: neither should exceed its own limits and encroach on the other’s area.

Personally, I do find formal semantics the proper study of linguistic meaning and I do support my word with the following quotation by Borg 33:

“There is a level of semantic content which can be recovered simply on the basis of the formal features of the expressions produced together with a formal description of the context in which they are uttered, without any appeal to the use to which the speaker is putting those expressions (specifically, without any appeal to her mental, or intentional, states).”

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