

Shorthand, Syntactic Ellipsis, and the Pragmatic Determinants of What Is Said

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Abstract: Our first aim in this paper is to respond to four novel objections in Jason Stanley's 'Context and Logical Form'. Taken together, those objections attempt to debunk our prior claims that one can perform a genuine speech act by using a sub-sentential expression—where by 'sub-sentential expression' we mean an ordinary word or phrase, not embedded in any larger syntactic structure. Our second aim is to make it plausible that, *pace* Stanley, there really are pragmatic determinants of the literal truth-conditional content of speech acts. We hope to achieve this second aim precisely by defending the genuineness of sub-sentential speech acts. Given our two aims, it is necessary to highlight briefly their connection—which we do in the first part of the Introduction. Following that, we introduce Stanley's novel objections. This is the role of the second part of the Introduction. We offer our rebuttals in Section 2 (against 'shorthand') and Section 3 (against syntactic ellipsis, among other things).

1. Introduction: The Background Debate, Stanley's Theses and Non-Sentential Speech Acts

There are at least three things that can help determine the content *conveyed*, literally or otherwise, by an utterance in context. Most obviously, what the (disambiguated) expression means in the shared language typically helps establish what an in-context utterance conveys. Call this possible determinant of content the *disambiguated expression-meaning*. Another usual determinant is reference assignment, i.e., which non-linguistic objects are assigned, in context, to special context sensitive items: to pronouns ('I', 'she', 'you'); to words like 'now', 'here', and 'today'; to tense markers ('lives' versus 'lived'), etc. These special context-sensitive 'slots' must typically be filled in, from non-linguistic context, to arrive at what the utterance conveys. Call this second determinant of conveyed content *slot-filling*. It is widely, although not universally, agreed that pragmatics plays a part in helping to fix these first two determinants. But pragmatics can contribute to conveyed content in another way as well. This third determinant of conveyed content is more holistic, and is far less constrained by the syntactic form and conventional content of the sound-pattern uttered; it turns especially on things like what it would be reasonable and cooperative

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for the speaker to have intended to convey, in the situation. This third determinant is thought by many to play a large role in irony, sarcasm, conversational implicature, metaphor and such. Call this third factor *free pragmatic enrichment*.

Nearly everyone would agree that disambiguated expression-meaning, slot-filling and free pragmatic enrichment are frequently important for determining conveyed content. But do all three play a role in determining the literal truth conditions of the utterance, e.g., in determining what is strictly asserted? As is widely known, numerous authors (including Robyn Carston, François Récanati, John Searle, Dan Sperber, Charles Travis, and Deirdre Wilson) have recently argued that all three determinants do play this role—that free pragmatic enrichment plays a part in determining the literal truth-conditional content of speech acts. Not only does free pragmatic enrichment determine conversationally implicated propositions ('non-literal truth conditions', if you will), it also determines which propositions are conveyed literally, e.g., asserted. In claiming that there are 'pragmatic determinants of what is said', these authors don't merely mean that pragmatics is at work in determining disambiguated expression-meaning and fillers for slots; they also mean that, even once those two determinants are fixed, pragmatics is often required still again, to yield what is strictly asserted, etc.. (Given the widely adopted terminology, in what follows we too will sometimes use 'pragmatic determinant' to mean not the overall contribution of pragmatics to content, but rather the third determinant, i.e., 'free pragmatic enrichment'—though we stick to the latter phrase when there is any risk of confusion.) Another author who endorses such unconstrained pragmatic determinants of what is asserted/stated is Kent Bach. This will surprise some readers, since Bach has repeatedly insisted that there are no pragmatic determinants of *what is said*. However, in essence, what Bach means by 'what is said' is the merely locutionary content of the expression type, once all slots have been filled. Bach emphatically does not equate 'what is said' with the illocutionary notion of what is asserted/stated. The latter, even for him, is determined not just by slot-filling and disambiguated expression-meaning, but also by what we are here calling free pragmatic enrichment. (Bach has also suggested that what Grice meant by 'what is said' is the minimal notion, and that Grice likely accepted 'pragmatic determinants' of what is asserted/stated. We put aside that exegetical question here.)

Jason Stanley, in contrast, has recently defended the thesis that 'all truth-conditional context-dependence results from fixing the values of contextually sensitive elements in the real structure of natural language sentences' (Stanley, 2000, p. 392). Call this *Stanley's general thesis*. (The general thesis also figures prominently in Stanley and Zoltan Szabo's account of quantifier domain restriction. See Stanley and Szabo, 2000. Bach, 2000 and Neale, 2000 contain objections to their account. See also Stanley, 2002 for a spirited defense of his thesis.) Put in terms of the three 'determinants of content' introduced above, unlike Carston, Récanati, *et al.*, Stanley sees a role only for disambiguated expression-meaning and slot-filling, in determining the truth-conditions of speech acts. To make this thesis plausible, Stanley argues that frequently there are unpronounced elements in the 'real

structure', or 'logical form', that provide hitherto unnoticed syntactic slots, which can then be filled by context. While he intends the thesis to apply to speech acts of all kinds—asking questions, giving orders, making bets, etc.—in his recent much-cited paper, Stanley focuses his attention on assertion. When applied to assertions, his general thesis yields that 'all effects of extra-linguistic context on the truth-conditions of assertions are traceable to logical form' (Stanley, 2000, p. 392). Call this *Stanley's assertion-specific thesis*.

It is worth stressing what Stanley is committing himself to here. Stanley thinks it conceivable that, given a disambiguated expression–meaning, context could affect literal truth conditions by some means other than slot–filling. Free pragmatic enrichment contributing to literal truth conditions is, for Stanley, possible in principle. In particular, this conceptual possibility is not ruled out by the very definition of 'slot'—which it would be, if a slot in the logical form were to be introduced automatically, for any element of literal propositional content. Stanley does not, as some of his harsher critiques seem to think, suppose that what determines the logical form of the expression uttered just is the proposition successfully asserted. That would make his theses true, but trivially so. Rather, Stanley maintains, on broadly empirical grounds, that in natural language there are enough independently motivated slots, including unpronounced ones, to do the job of fixing literal truth conditions. This is worth stressing: for Stanley (and for us), what determines the logical form, the 'real structure', of the expression produced is what one's grammatical competence actually assigns to the expression type. That structure is not fixed by the literal content of the utterance. Thus Stanley is making an avowedly empirical claim; in particular, that claim is about the role of the language faculty in general, and context-invariant syntax in particular, in determining in-context truth-conditional content.

As he notes, Stanley's theses—both general and assertion-specific—are inconsistent with the existence of genuine non-sentential speech acts, and with non-sentential assertions in particular.¹ If speakers can make a fully propositional

¹ There is, as a matter of fact, another interesting connection between Stanley's theses and sub-sentential speech. In Section III of his paper, Stanley relies heavily on the assumption that where there is binding, there are syntactic variables in the real structure of the expression. This is the principle he uses to posit hidden variables in sentences like 'It's raining'. Interestingly, however, if sub-sentential speech acts genuinely exist, then one sub-variety of them will call Stanley's 'binding assumption' into serious question. Consider the following case. Jose has a grocery store. On Fridays, a peculiar looking man comes in, picks up a fruit and sniffs it; he then picks up a different fruit and sniffs it; he then leaves. The man seems to have no preference about which fruits he sniffs: sometimes it's an apple and a kiwi, sometimes it's a grapefruit and a pear, etc. Jose's daughter has seen this happen several times. After one such visit by the peculiar looking man, Jose says to his daughter: 'Every Friday'. He could thereby assert: [Every x : Friday][There are two y : fruits][He sniffs y on x]. Here we seem to have binding, but without hidden structure—if, that is, this really is an utterance of the bare quantifier phrase 'Every Friday'. Indeed, there can even be binding *with scope interactions*, without syntactic variables in the expression used. Thus if we alter the scenario slightly, such that the man always sniffs the *same* two fruits, Jose could use 'Every Friday' to assert a proposition that has [There are two y : fruits] taking wide scope over [Every x : Friday], instead of vice versa.

'move in the language game' of the right sort by uttering ordinary words and phrases (e.g., plain old nouns and Noun Phrases, adjectives and Adjective Phrases), then there are speech acts whose truth-conditional content is fully propositional, though the content of the structure produced, even after slot-filling, is not truth-evaluable. That content is, rather, of semantic type $\langle e \rangle$, or $\langle e, t \rangle$, $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$, or what-have-you. For example, suppose Alicia holds up a bag of coffee, and says 'From the mountains of Colombia'. The content of the Prepositional Phrase, 'From the mountains of Colombia', in English, is simply a propositional function. This is the expression-meaning. This is equally the satisfaction-conditional contribution of an *utterance* of this expression when it is contained in a larger sentential utterance, since this Prepositional Phrase contains no indexicals or other context-sensitive items—no slots to be filled. In which case, if Alicia can make an assertion which is true or false by using *this very PP*, but now unembedded, then context must be contributing to the truth-conditions of the assertion in ways that are not traceable to items in the disambiguated syntax, i.e., to slot-filling, since the only thing which syntactic structure contributes to the content here, even relative to a context, is a propositional function. In which case, the third determinant of content, free pragmatic enrichment, must be playing a role in determining the literal truth-conditional content of Alicia's assertion. This is how the issue of non-sentential speech acts relates to the issue of pragmatic determinants of literal content/truth-conditions.

Before turning to Stanley's objections against sub-sentential assertion, and our replies, one final introductory remark is in order. In the present context, it may seem especially important to distinguish two senses of 'pragmatic determinants'. As Kent Bach (2002) has urged, 'how x is determined' can mean 'how one figures out that x ' and also 'what makes x the case'. Call the first *epistemic determining* and the second *metaphysical determining*. It does sometimes seem that defenders of free pragmatic enrichment as a determinant of what is asserted/stated/said, focus almost exclusively on epistemic claims about how hearers figure out what is asserted. In contrast, those who reject such pragmatic determinants of what is asserted/stated/said are concerned to deny a metaphysical thesis: they deny that what is asserted supervenes on factors beyond the first two determinants. (In particular, supporting just such a denial is Stanley's plaint.) Given these two senses of 'determine', it's worth making explicit that we mean to claim, in cases of sub-sentential speech, that what is asserted/stated/said is both epistemically and metaphysically determined by free pragmatic enrichment. There must be metaphysical determination at play because what is asserted, in the cases in question, is fully propositional; but what is metaphysically determined by slot-filling and disambiguated expression-meaning is something less than propositional; hence what is asserted must supervene on some other factor, beyond these two.

Having explicitly flagged the two senses of 'pragmatic determinants', it's worth pointing out that the two are (likely) not as independent as some might suppose. A key determinant of content, in the metaphysical sense, is speakers' intentions. Or so we assume. And, following Donnellan (1968), we insist that the intentions that a

speaker can have are importantly constrained by her reasonable expectations about what the hearer can figure out. Donnellan writes:

The fact about intentions that I want to stress is that they are essentially connected with expectations. Ask someone to flap his arms with the intention of flying. In response he can certainly wave his arms up and down, just as one can easily on command say the words 'It's cold here'. But this is not to do it with the intention of flying. Nor does it seem to me that a normal adult in normal circumstances can flap his arms and in doing so really have that intention... Similarly, one cannot say entirely out of the blue, 'It's cold here' and mean 'It's hot here', but not, I think, because whatever one's intentions the words will not get invested with that meaning. Rather, we explain this by the impossibility of having the right intentions in such circumstances (Donnellan, 1968, p. 212).

Thus it is that what the hearer can figure out (something epistemic), ends up constraining what a speaker can intend—which, in turn, is part of the metaphysical determinants of utterance content. So, epistemic determining indirectly impacts on metaphysical determining after all. This lesson about utterance content in general presumably applies quite directly to the determinants of what is asserted/stated/said. Thus, in the end, we do not think it a mere confusion repeatedly to call attention to what the hearer can figure out, even when discussing issues about metaphysical determinants of what is asserted/stated/said. These topics are, albeit circuitously, inextricably linked. In light of this, though the two senses of 'pragmatic determinants' are conceptually distinct, we do not think it does undue harm sometimes to ignore the distinction in practice, as we will below.

There are two obvious maneuvers for rejecting the existence of genuine non-sentential speech acts. The first is to deny that the examples are truly non-sentential, alleging instead that every apparently sub-sentential speech act is actually an utterance of an elliptical sentence. The second obvious maneuver is to deny that there are genuine speech acts performed at all. We have considered both of these extensively in prior work, and have rejected each. This is where Stanley's novel objections against non-sentential speech acts come in. Though building on these two obvious maneuvers, Stanley seemingly defangs our prior replies by adding important new twists—thereby defending his two theses. In particular:

- Stanley suggests that many cases can be treated as 'shorthand'—an idea that we had never explicitly addressed.
- Stanley rightly points out that Stainton never considered a 'divide and conquer' strategy in his prior publications: explaining away some cases as syntactically elliptical, some cases as shorthand, and other cases as not truly speech acts.
- Anticipating the objection that some examples that have determinate propositional content cannot be elliptical, because they occur discourse

initially, Stanley argues that, Stainton's claims notwithstanding, many putative examples actually do not appear in true discourse initial position, but rather have a non-spoken linguistic antecedent. Moreover, this phenomenon occurs in cases of genuine syntactic ellipsis as well. So the objection is avoided.

- Stanley then suggests that once these prior points are recognized, *all* cases can be explained away. Stanley defends this universal claim by presenting a dilemma: If an apparently sub-sentential utterance has determinate propositional content and force, then (depending on whether it truly is discourse initial or not) it should be treated as either ellipsis or 'shorthand'; if an utterance lacks either determinate propositional content or force, then it is not a genuine speech act having truth-conditions. Therefore, *all* apparent cases of sub-sentential speech acts should be treated either as elliptical/shorthand or as not genuinely speech acts after all. (We think of this as the fourth novel objection.)

With regard to the last point, Stanley writes: 'I do not believe that there is a uniform phenomenon underlying all apparent examples of non-sentential assertion. Many, on closer inspection, turn out to be cases of ellipsis. Others turn out not to be cases of linguistic assertion at all. *Once the various examples are placed in their distinct categories, we are left without a single unproblematic example of a non-sentential assertion*' (Stanley, 2000, p. 403–404, emphasis added).

These four objections can be combined into one larger argument. Let's call it Stanley's Dilemma, with a capital 'D':

Premise 1: If a putative sub-sentential utterance *u* truly does occur in discourse initial position, then if *u* has determinate propositional content and force, then *u* is shorthand.

Premise 2: If a putative sub-sentential utterance *u* does not truly occur in discourse initial position, then if *u* has determinate propositional content and force, then *u* is syntactically elliptical.

Conclusion 1: If *u* has determinate propositional content and force, then *u* is either shorthand or syntactically elliptical. [By P1 and P2.]

Premise 3: If a putative sub-sentential utterance *u* lacks determinate propositional content or force, then *u* is not a genuine speech act exhibiting truth-conditions.

Conclusion 2: Every putative sub-sentential speech act either is shorthand or syntactically elliptical, or it is not a genuine speech act exhibiting truth-conditions. [By C1 and P3.]

Premise 4: If a putative sub-sentential utterance *u* is shorthand, syntactically elliptical, or not a genuine speech act exhibiting truth-conditions, then *u* is not genuinely a sub-sentential speech act after all.

Conclusion 3: Every putative sub-sentential speech act is not genuinely such. [By P4 and C2.]

Our aim in the present paper is to rebut Stanley's four novel objections, and the larger Dilemma they together create. We will begin, in Section 2, by discussing the appeal to 'shorthand'. We argue that this appeal fails because on every natural way of interpreting 'shorthand', the claim that what is occurring is shorthand is either empirically very implausible, or else it leaves one with pragmatic determinants of literal truth conditions in any case. In Section 3, we weave together the three remaining novel objections into a simpler, more streamlined version of the Dilemma. Unsurprisingly, we go on to reject this reconstructed Dilemma as well. (Note: we structure the paper in this way because (i) the Dilemma above is a bit too complicated to attack all at once, hence a simplifying move is in order, and (ii) Stanley (p.c.), in light of our arguments against it, flags 'shorthand' as the element he would most readily give up, if pressed. Stanley continues to insist, however, that even the remaining three objections can together handle every purported sub-sentential speech act. Given this, shorthand is the obvious candidate to set aside first, in our pursuit of a simpler target.) We thus conclude that non-sentential speech acts are a genuine phenomenon, and that there are indeed pragmatic determinants of literal truth-conditional speech act contents in general, and of assertions in particular. Hence both Stanley's assertion-specific and his general theses are false.

2. Against Shorthand

Stanley's claim is that when a speaker really does assert, and not by using a genuinely syntactically elliptical structure, she is merely 'speaking in shorthand'. He writes:

There is a final set of cases that can occur discourse initially, are clearly uttered with assertoric force, and have unique propositional contents. One example given by Stainton (1995, p. 293) is an utterance of 'nice dress', perhaps to a woman one passes by in the street. In this case, 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. However, it is intuitively plausible to suppose, in this case, that the speaker simply intended her utterance to be shorthand for 'that is a nice dress'. It is difficult to see how any of the resources of linguistic theory could be used to show that intuition misleads in cases of this sort (Stanley, 2000, p. 409).

Now, there are numerous things that one might mean by calling this kind of speech 'shorthand'. We will consider four options—each of which has genuine initial plausibility. It might be that none of these four ways is precisely the one which Stanley himself had in mind: since the above paragraph is the sum total of what he says about shorthand, it's hard to know. We focus on them not because they are what Stanley must have intended—he really is quite unclear, in the text,

about what this claim amounts to—but because (a) they may well occur to readers, (b) they are the only ones which are intuitive/plausible at a glance and (c) discussing them brings out all of the key points that we want to make about this general strategy.

Our overall conclusion will be this: none of the ways of cashing out ‘shorthand’ that actually reject sub-sentential speech and pragmatic determinants of what is said is plausible. Put otherwise, there are uses of ‘shorthand’ which explain away the appearance of sub-sentential speech, so that it doesn’t end up being a genuine phenomenon, and hence does not offer an example of pragmatic determinants of what is asserted, etc.. What appears to be sub-sentential speech gets explained away as a mere appearance. But, we will argue, when used in this ‘explaining away’ fashion, it is not plausible that ‘shorthand’ is going on. There are other uses of ‘shorthand’ in which the appearances are accepted as reality—speakers really do utter ordinary words/phrases, and thereby perform speech acts—and then an explanation of *how* sub-sentential speech manages to succeed is provided in terms of ‘shorthand’. When used in this ‘explaining how’ mode, the appeal to shorthand is plausible enough. But describing as ‘shorthand’ the genuine use of words and phrases to perform speech acts does not help Stanley.

In support of this result, we will consider the following four ways of cashing out Stanley’s appeal to shorthand—where it is understood that the linguistic expression *x* in question is in some intuitive sense ‘shorter than’ the corresponding expression *y*:

Four Senses of ‘Shorthand’

- a) *x* is shorthand for *y* iff one could have used *y* rather than *x*, and thereby achieved the same effect;
- b) *x* is shorthand for *y* iff *x* is (on some reading) synonymous with *y*;
- c) *x* is shorthand for *y* iff *x* is conventionally tied to the expression *y* (so that, for instance, when a speaker utters *x*, the hearer explicitly recovers *y*, and decodes the latter);
- d) *x* is shorthand for *y* iff, despite the fact that *x* and *y* are not conventionally paired, the speaker of *x* nevertheless intended the hearer of *x* to recover *y*, and to use *y* to understand what was meant.

We’ll take each in turn.

- a) *x* is shorthand for *y* iff one could have used *y* rather than *x*, and thereby achieved the same effect

Suppose that sense (a) is intended. Then, for example, to say that ‘Nice dress’ is shorthand for ‘That is a nice dress’ is simply to say that, though the person in fact

uttered the ordinary phrase ‘Nice dress’, and thereby made an assertion, he could have uttered ‘That is a nice dress’ with the same proposition being asserted. Unlike (b), this is not to claim any kind of context-independent synonymy between ‘That is a nice dress’ and (some reading of) ‘Nice dress’. It is merely to claim that, in some circumstances, these two quite different expressions can be used to make the same speech act. Fair enough, at least at first blush. (Though, as Elugardo and Stainton (2001) note, there appear to be at least some cases where it is doubtful that the speaker could have found any sentence of her language which, uttered in that context, would have *precisely* captured the proposition asserted by her use of a sub-sentence. We put that aside.) But then to call the utterance of ‘Nice dress’ shorthand in this sense is not to deny that it was sub-sentential. Nor is it to deny that the bare phrase really was used to make an assertion. So, to call it shorthand in sense (a) is not to explain away alleged cases of non-sentential assertion; it is, rather, to grant the reality of the phenomenon, using other terminology. (Adding only that the speaker didn’t have to make a non-sentential assertion—he could have chosen to use a sentence instead. But, even if true, this isn’t relevant to whether less-than-sentential assertion, and the consequence of pragmatic determinants of what is asserted, are genuine phenomena.)

b) x is shorthand for y iff x is (on some reading) synonymous with y

Suppose, then, that sense (b) of ‘shorthand’ is intended instead. Applied to the case at hand, that means that ‘Nice dress’ (the expression type, that is) is a shorter version of, but (on some reading²) synonymous with, ‘That is a nice dress’—because according to sense (b), to be ‘shorthand’ just is to be synonymous with something longer. But clearly this propositional character cannot be the meaning which the Noun Phrase contributes when it appears embedded. For instance, given a context, what [nice dress] contributes to the meaning of [IP That is a nice dress] is a property. It doesn’t, once suitably contextualized, contribute a proposition here. So, if sense (b) of ‘shorthand’ is intended, then the vocable *nice-dress* must be assigned two semantic types, $\langle t \rangle$ (this is the meaning as said by the gentleman in the street) and $\langle e, t \rangle$ (this is the meaning when embedded in larger structures). In which case, taking ‘shorthand’ in sense (b), the ‘shorthand gambit’ multiplies meanings. And not just for ‘Nice dress’, but for every phrase in the language. (Since, given the right context and the usual abstraction away from performance limitations, all of them can be used unembedded.) This just won’t do. Especially when our pragmatics-oriented

² We say ‘on some reading’ because it is not required that the shorter phrase and the longer sentential expression share *every* meaning/reading. Such a requirement would entail, absurdly, that ‘That is a nice dress’, for example, have a predicative reading on which it is synonymous with the ordinary embedded phrase ‘nice dress’. Put otherwise, the idea behind (b) is not that x and y are perfect synonyms, but just that there is some reading of the word/phrase x on which x is synonymous with a longer sentential expression y .

alternative, described in earlier publications, adds not a single extra meaning for any word or phrase.

c) x is shorthand for y iff x is conventionally tied to the expression y

What about sense (c)? This is surely more plausible. Applied to the case at hand, the idea is not that 'Nice dress' has as one of its meanings that exhibited by 'That is a nice dress'. What 'Nice dress' always means—whether uttered in isolation, or within a sentence—is that property had by all and only the nice dresses. But this phrase, with its sub-propositional meaning, is conventionally paired with 'That is a nice dress', so that whenever a speaker produces the former, the hearer can easily recover the latter, and interpret it. No multiplication of meaning assignments here.

That said, we want to make three points about this proposal. The first is this: though there isn't a multiplication of meaning assignments in this case, there is a multiplication of conventions. This proposal requires an explicit conventional connection between (i) an infinite number of phrases, most of which have never been used and (ii) an infinite number of their supposedly corresponding sentences. And, since the ability to communicate using words/phrases can be explained without positing such conventional connections, they are posited without necessity. Secondly, this proposal suffers from the same sort of defect that afflicted sense (a) of 'shorthand'. On this proposal, speakers really do utter plain-old words and phrases, and they thereby make genuine assertions. So no 'explaining away' of the apparent pragmatic determinants in assertion is really occurring. Rather, what is on the table is a proposed explanation of *how* speakers manage to make genuine non-sentential assertions, and how they manage to assert more than what their words, even after slot-filling, encode. (They manage to do this because the ordinary words and phrases employed, though never *synonymous* with anything of semantic type $\langle t \rangle$, happen to be conventionally tied to full sentences.) Thus the proposal multiplies conventions, and it doesn't limit itself to just the two permitted determinants of literal content after all. Moreover, to come to our third point, there are positive reasons for doubting that this is how sub-sentential communication works: if there were such explicit conventions, one would expect speakers and hearers to have no trouble whatever identifying the precise sentence which is conventionally paired with the phrase used. But, typically, speakers and hearers provide not one definite paraphrase—the one which, they are absolutely certain, is the conventionally determined counterpart—but a series of more-or-less appropriate rewordings. (Compare, 'What is "D.I.Y." shorthand for?' Here one experiences no difficulty in identifying the precise sentential counterpart, 'Do it yourself', that spells out this shorthand. So 'D.I.Y.' is a genuine case of shorthand in sense (c). But it is totally unlike the cases we have elsewhere used as examples of genuine non-sentential assertions.) Hence we see no hope for more than a select few cases of non-sentence use—e.g., explicitly adopted codes—being assimilated to shorthand in this third sense. Certainly not a single one of the examples we have offered elsewhere fits in this category.

d) x is shorthand for y iff, despite the fact that x and y are not conventionally paired, the speaker of x nevertheless intended the hearer of x to recover y , and to use y to understand what was meant.

This leaves only sense (d). One problem with taking ‘shorthand’ in this final sense should already be clear: it too grants that non-sentential assertion is a genuine phenomenon, proposing not to explain it away, but to explain how it occurs. We cannot stress this enough: on this proposal, as on (b) and (c), speakers really do utter *ordinary* words and phrases. They do, on this proposal, expect their hearer to find a sentence; but they do not themselves utter a sentence. So even if non-sentential speech is a kind of shorthand in this fourth sense, that cannot help defend Stanley’s view that what is asserted is exhaustively determined by disambiguated syntax/semantics and slot-filling in the thing uttered. (These last four words are crucial: Stanley’s view is not just that what is asserted is determined by slot-filling of *some* sentential logical form; the view is that what is asserted is determined by slot-filling of the logical form of the thing uttered. See Stanley, 2000, p. 396.) Even putting this aside, this final proposal, like the third one, also requires the speaker to intend a specific sentence; and it requires the hearer to recover that specific sentence, and decode it. But typically neither speaker nor hearer will be able to identify ‘the’ sentence which was intended, and recovered—because there just isn’t one.

This isn’t to say that shorthand, in sense (d), could never occur. To the contrary, we can think of one case that more or less fits this mold. Recall the clever military man who supposedly cabled ‘Peccavi’ to his superiors. (Unfortunately, what he uttered in this case was a Latin *sentence*, rather than something sub-sentential: ‘Peccavi’ is headed by tense and agreement markers. So it’s not a perfect example. But we’ll ignore that.) What the clever fellow reputedly uttered was one thing. But what he intended his superiors to recover, on the basis of hearing ‘Peccavi’, was something quite different. He intended them to recover its English translation, ‘I have sinned’. He further intended them to notice the homophonous sentence ‘I have Sind’, and to go from there to the recognition that he was communicating that he had taken Sind. Thus the speaker of x ($x = \text{‘Peccavi’}$) despite the fact that x and y are not conventionally paired ($y = \text{‘I have Sind’}$), nevertheless intended the hearer of (the shorter) x to recover a (longer) sentence y , and to use y to understand what was meant. This is shorthand in sense (d). But notice that in this case we can easily identify the precise sentence that the clever combatant had in mind. So this is really quite different from less-than-sentential speech.

There is a further very important feature of the ‘Peccavi’ case that we ought to note, since it highlights the sense in which even if (d) were true of non-sentential speech, it would not help Stanley avoid pragmatic determinants of what is said. Notice that the recipients of the cable arrive at the intended interpretation—that the speaker has taken Sind—on the basis of an all-things-considered inference. In particular, they arrive at this result by considering what it would be reasonable and

cooperative for the sender to have meant. Finding the expression uttered, disambiguation and reference assignment alone will not allow the commanders to understand; instead, they must realize that the military man couldn't simply be conveying that he had sinned (why cable something as vague and as personal as that to one's military commander?), and they must recall that he was last heard from somewhere near the province of Sind, etc. That is how the precise sentence *y* is found: viz. by free pragmatic enrichment. So if this kind of case is to be the model of shorthand, as sense (d) suggests, then arriving at the intended sentence is not a 'semantic' process in Stanley's sense anyway. (This is precisely because there is no *convention* to the effect that 'Peccavi' can be used to mean *I have Sind*.) Thus, in contrast with sense (c), shorthand ends up being a pragmatic phenomenon in any case. True, one finds a sentence intended; but this is just a different mechanism for free pragmatic enrichment to determine what is said, rather than a case of what is said deriving solely from the other two determinants. In which case, not only won't appeal to 'shorthand' in sense (d) help repudiate sub-sentential assertion, it won't support the more general thesis that all effects of extra-linguistic context on the truth-conditions of an assertion are traceable to logical form.

It may serve to sum up our responses to the 'shorthand gambit' to say the following. We are not entirely sure what philosophers have in mind, when they appeal to things like 'shorthand'. (Stanley is not the first to have made this kind of vague suggestion, by the way—it frequently comes up in conversation.) We have argued, however, that none of the obvious ways of cashing out this idea can help in an attempt to re-categorize alleged cases of non-sentential speech as something else. What's useful about these four is that discussing them illustrates the whole range of moves that should be made in response to any appeal to shorthand or the like. The things to ask, in the face of any such appeal, include:

- (i) Does the appeal to shorthand really explain away non-sentential speech, or does it rather offer a concrete explanation of how what is genuinely non-sentential speech manages to succeed? In a related vein, would such an appeal ultimately avoid pragmatic determinants of asserted content?
- (ii) Does appeal to shorthand, in the sense intended, multiply meanings? If so, is there any good reason to suppose that the additional meanings so introduced really exist? For instance, do they explain anything not equally explainable without them?
- (iii) Similarly, where the sense of 'shorthand' appealed to introduces special conventions, is there positive evidence of such conventions? If not, could the phenomenon be explained more parsimoniously without introducing said conventions?
- (iv) What is the model for shorthand, in the sense intended? For instance, is 'Nice dress' to be assimilated to 'Gone fishin'', 'D.I.Y.', 'Peccavi', or something else again? Do examples of non-sentential speech really fit the intended model?

- (v) In particular, is the process of interpretation psychologically like that found in the model, e.g., in the sense of there being a determinate expression recovered? Is the process otherwise psychologically plausible?

Our own view is that asking such questions will eventually dissuade one from looking to shorthand (or similar maneuvers) as a way of re-categorizing more than a very few examples of less-than-sentential assertion. (The few exceptions would include explicit codes: to take an example from Peter Ludlow, agreeing that shouting 'Apple sauce' will mean that someone in the crowd has a gun.) These rare examples aside, sub-sentential speech really does provide another example of pragmatic determinants of what is asserted. Unless, of course, all apparent cases of sub-sentential speech acts can be reclassified as either not really speech acts, or syntactically elliptical.

3. Stanley's Simplified Dilemma (i.e. the Dilemma minus Shorthand)

Having set shorthand aside, the original version of Stanley's Dilemma, on page 447, must now be revised. Obviously Premise 1 of that argument, which explicitly refers to shorthand, drops out entirely. But then something must be put in its place, to handle putative cases that were previously conceded to be in discourse initial position yet also to exhibit determinate propositional content and force. The obvious move, and the one Stanley (p.c.) favours once shorthand is abandoned, is to maintain that *whenever* there is a determinate speech act made with an apparent sub-sentence, what has really occurred is syntactic ellipsis. This introduces a new burden, of course: Stanley must now claim, about even more cases, that seeming to appear in discourse initial position does not after all provide evidence against ellipsis. To meet this burden, the original Premise 2 must be changed as well. Its matrix antecedent (now inappropriately) specifies its range of application to be *bona fide* non-discourse initial cases. This is inappropriate because either the 'ellipsis gambit' will now have to apply to genuine discourse initial cases as well (so P2's matrix antecedent becomes overly restrictive), or it will have to be argued that no genuinely discourse initial cases with determinate content actually exist (so the antecedent would be vacuously satisfied, hence pointless). Either way, the antecedent of the original P2 should be dropped. To make P2 minus the matrix antecedent plausible, a whole new premise is also required: Premise 2*, below. The result of these changes is the following Simplified Dilemma:

*Premise 1**: If a putative sub-sentential utterance *u* has determinate propositional content and force, then *u* is syntactically elliptical.

*Premise 2**: The 'discourse initial objection', viz. that sub-sentences can occur in discourse initial position while syntactic ellipses cannot, is not effective.

Premise 3: If a putative sub-sentential utterance *u* lacks determinate propositional content or force, then *u* is not a genuine speech act exhibiting truth-conditions.

*Conclusion 1**: Every putative sub-sentential speech act either is not a genuine speech act exhibiting truth-conditions or it is syntactically elliptical. [By P1*, P2* and P3.]

*Premise 4**: If a putative sub-sentential utterance *u* is syntactically elliptical or not a genuine speech act exhibiting truth conditions, then *u* is not genuinely a sub-sentential speech act.

Conclusion 2: Every putative sub-sentential speech act is not genuinely such. [By C1* and P4*.]

Our criticism of this Simplified Dilemma is straightforward: we will reject the first three premises.³

*Against Premise 1**. To evaluate P1* properly, it is crucial to recall the larger role that syntactic ellipsis plays in the defense of Stanley's general and assertion-specific theses. Of particular importance, syntactic ellipsis must be a phenomenon that would set aside as illusory both supposed cases of non-sentential speech acts, and the associated pragmatic determinants of asserted content that they threaten. In light of this, when syntactic ellipsis is appealed to, it must be the case, for Stanley's purposes, that *the thing uttered* is such that filling in its (pronounced and unpronounced) slots will yield what is asserted/stated. This will be a fundamental constraint on how 'syntactic ellipsis' is understood in the discussion of P1* that follows.

Given this point, consider several ways of understanding 'ellipsis' that would not help Stanley defend his claims. To echo lessons from Section 2: it will not help Stanley's case if the speaker could have used a sentence, though she did not actually do so; nor will it help Stanley's case if the speaker intended the hearer to find some sentence or other, not actually uttered, and to fill in *its* slots to arrive at what is asserted. If one thinks of such phenomena as 'syntactic ellipsis', then one might think P1* very plausible; but if that is how 'syntactic ellipsis' is read in P1*, then that premise being true would not actually avoid non-sentential assertions. In a more theoretical vein, theorists who favour 'semantic' accounts of things like VP ellipsis and sluicing might equally find P1* plausible.⁴ But ellipsis in that sense—popularized by Darymple, Shieber and Pereira (1991), Crouch (1995) and others—even if it occurred in sub-sentential speech, would not set aside any cases of sub-sentential speech as merely illusory examples of pragmatic determinants of what is asserted. To the contrary, such theorists must reject Stanley's theses across

³ Purists will note that the Simplified Dilemma mildly offends the aesthetic sense of canonical validity: the requisite dilemma can be constructed with Premise 1* and Premise 3 alone. However, any aesthetic loss is compensated for by much greater expository clarity. Cast this way, we can deal with each premise individually; moreover, the 'ellipsis premise' needn't consist in a complex conditional with P2* as its antecedent.

⁴ 'John hates someone. I'm just sure he does [VP___]' provides an example of VP ellipsis, while 'John hates someone. I wonder who [s___]' is an example of sluicing. What distinguishes them, as the subscripts suggest, is the kind of thing omitted: a verb phrase and a full clause, respectively.

the board—because on such accounts, there isn't hidden syntactic material *even in VP ellipsis and sluicing*, let alone in 'From Spain' unembedded. What there is, instead, is recovery of asserted content, without reconstruction of any corresponding unpronounced structure. Thus, on these latter sorts of views, 'logical form'—in the narrow sense of 'underlying syntactic structure'—doesn't determine literal truth conditional content even in familiar sentential cases of ellipsis. (See Stainton forthcoming for extended discussion of Dalrymple-type accounts.)

Given how 'syntactic ellipsis' must be understood in P1*, if this premise is to actually help Stanley, a fairly detailed discussion is in order about burden of proof. Properly understood, P1* is certainly not a truism. It's not even an innocent default hypothesis. Rather, it is a very robust empirical claim. Whether something really is a case of syntactic ellipsis in the sense at play depends, we maintain, upon the actual processing within minds of the speaker and hearer. Roughly, it depends upon *what was processed where*. In particular, we happen to think that it depends upon whether there was, in the speaker, an algorithmically determined sound-production of a 'shorter' sound from a 'larger' fully propositional syntactic source, brought about by a language-specific device; and whether, in the hearer, there was algorithmically determined reconstruction by a language-specific device, resulting in some fully propositional syntactic expression. If so, this was genuine ellipsis (for both speaker and hearer). One might balk at this quite particular story about what syntactic ellipsis amounts to. Happily, the details don't matter for our purposes. All we need to insist upon is this: to establish that syntactic ellipsis *in the sense Stanley requires* is going on, much empirical evidence needs to be provided.

It's also important to note that certain kinds of evidence, taken alone, don't really support P1* at all. First, it is not sufficient to support P1* if a 'question' is salient when the sub-sentence is used. Even if a question is salient, it would not follow that any linguistic expression capable of serving as a linguistic antecedent for ellipsis was appropriately salient, simply because questions are not themselves linguistic expressions. Crucially, however, it is salient sentences, hence not questions, which are required as antecedents for syntactic ellipsis. (Interrogatives are expressions, but questions are not. Compare: an issue/topic is not an expression, hence an issue/topic cannot be the linguistic antecedent for, say, VP ellipsis.) So the presence of a question is not sufficient to satisfy this necessary condition on syntactic ellipsis. (See below, and Stainton forthcoming, for a discussion of why the condition of a salient expression *is* necessary.) Second, even where a single unique linguistic expression is salient, the mere fact that it is salient is still not enough to conclude that syntactic ellipsis has occurred. Saliency of a sentence is merely a necessary condition for syntactic ellipsis, not a sufficient condition. That's because, for it to be syntactic ellipsis in the sense required, the salient material needs to be used in the right way. For instance, even if the hearer can identify one specific expression that could serve as a linguistic antecedent, if she uses this information not to *grammatically derive* the sentence actually uttered, but rather to sort out, in a holistic way, what content was literally meant, then there still are pragmatic determinants of literal content at play. Nor can the fact that a determinate speech

act was made be employed, on its own, as evidence for ellipsis. To begin with, this would beg the question in favour of P1*. But there's another problem as well: there is a more parsimonious explanation of how a determinate speech act could be made, that doesn't appeal to hidden syntactic structure. So the existence of the former provides no particular grounds for positing the latter.

This takes us to a larger point about burden of proof. Stanley writes as if, in so far as syntactic ellipsis has not been ruled out, something like P1* will allow him to set aside many cases of (apparently) sub-sentential speech acts as illusory. But this just isn't the case. The burden on the theorist who would treat, say, 'From Brazil' as syntactic ellipsis (in the sense required), is much heavier than the burden on those who, like us, treat it as a Prepositional Phrase used assertorically. The question at hand is what, for example, the sound pattern/frəm brəzɪl/ corresponds to, when it occurs on its own. Because no one disputes that it corresponds to a PP, of semantic type <e,t>, when it occurs embedded—e.g., in 'I saw a world famous topologist from Brazil'—that mapping is antecedently required. Thus we, who claim that this PP can be used in isolation to make an assertion, are not introducing any 'new beast' into linguistic theory: neither new syntactic structures, nor new semantic mappings from structures to context-invariant content. We couldn't be, since our claim isn't about the grammar itself at all, but only about the use of previously accepted elements of it: perfectly ordinary words and phrases. ('Previously accepted' because no one has ever seriously denied that English has words and phrases in it. Indeed, almost no one would seriously deny that words and phrases can be grammatically used unembedded: as book titles, on billboards, on maps, on business cards, as labels on jars, on currency, in grocery lists, street signs, etc. Ludlow (forthcoming) is the only possible exception we know of.) The only controversial claim that we are making is not about the grammar itself, or even about what may be used grammatically, but only about what things can be used to perform genuine speech acts. Not so Stanley. He needs to posit unpronounced structure *in the expression produced*, thereby providing extra slots for slot-filling. The burden is thus very much on Stanley to show that an additional mapping, from this very sound (but unembedded) to another structure and semantic-character, is also necessary. But Stanley provides no telling positive evidence.⁵

Put another way, Stanley bears this extra burden, and we do not, because only he is positing an ambiguity: one sound, but two syntactic structures, each corresponding to a different expression-meaning (specifically, each corresponding to a different function from context to content). For example, to sustain Stanley's

⁵ In fact, there is some evidence of the kind Stanley requires. As Morgan (1989) points out, one piece of data in favour of the syntactic ellipsis account being true of *some* examples, is that the grammatical case that 'fragments' exhibit often mirrors the case that the expression would exhibit in a corresponding full sentence. Thus, for example, in German one describes an item as coffee using the bare nominative NP, but one orders a coffee using the bare accusative NP. Some countervailing evidence from case marking will be briefly discussed below. For further evidence in favour of syntactic ellipsis, see Morgan, 1973 and Ludlow, forthcoming. For detailed critical discussion of this sort of evidence, see Stainton, forthcoming.

theses, the single sound pattern/frəm brəzɪl/must correspond both to the logical form [PP from Brazil] of semantic type <e,t> (this is what occurs inside sentences), and to a different logical form, of semantic type <t>, having an unpronounced slot there to be filled by context (this is what occurs unembedded). If only the former existed, then when people *appeared* to make speech acts with bare phrases, that's just exactly what they really would be doing. And Stanley's two theses would be false. To deny that this is what they are doing, Stanley needs to posit an entity which sounds like a phrase, but isn't a phrase—either structurally or semantically. Thus the structural ambiguity. It's clear that the argument that such a structural ambiguity is necessary cannot be that, in those cases in which the sound pattern is felicitously and successfully produced, a speech-act is performed—since, again, that can be explained without positing a structural ambiguity, by appealing to pragmatics.⁶ Hence, if extra structure is to be justified, then some other reason must be given. But, we contend, Stanley has not provided any evidence *for* the extra syntactic material, other than the communicative potential of certain examples. Rather, he provides arguments that ellipsis has not been ruled out: specifically, that one of our arguments against ellipsis, i.e., that sub-sentences can occur discourse initially, is unsuccessful (a claim that we will dispute below when we address P2*). He then assumes that, where both his story and ours have a chance to work, his ellipsis story wins. We emphatically disagree.

We have made three key points so far, in our discussion of P1*. First, P1* is a very robust empirical claim. It cannot, therefore, just be accepted as a default hypothesis. Second, much of the evidence Stanley actually provides for P1* is not of the right kind—it is evidence about what is asserted, and about what 'questions' are in play, when it should be about structure. Third, not only is there a heavy burden on someone who wishes to establish that some kind of genuine syntactic ellipsis is taking place, that burden is far heavier than on a theorist of our persuasion, who accepts the appearance

⁶ We thus see the present dispute about how to handle apparently sub-sentential speech as an instance of a general debate, viz.: Should multiple uses of a sound-pattern be explained by (a) unpronounced syntax, (b) a single syntactic structure that exhibits a semantic ambiguity, or (c) pragmatics. Stanley favors the first option. We opt for the third. (Applied to sub-sentential speech, the second option corresponds to what Stainton elsewhere calls 'the semantic ellipsis hypothesis'. See Stainton, 1995.)

It's also worth noting, in passing, that if what one posits is not deletion and later reconstruction, but rather empty elements which lack pronunciation altogether, a pragmatic story still needs to be told about how the referents of those empty elements get determined in context. The problem is not that the story cannot be told, but rather that once it is told, it can be immediately applied within a broadly pragmatic framework, to explain how the hearer recovers the proposition meant—but now without positing the extra syntactic element. See Stainton, 1994, forthcoming, for such a pragmatic framework. A similar pragmatics-oriented approach to Stainton's, though in a very different (i.e., computational) framework, is adopted in Carberry 1989. (Other novel work in computational linguistics on non-sentential speech acts may be found in Schlangen and Lascarides, 2002. Given its very different goals and theoretical underpinnings, however, it is difficult to classify this latter work in terms of its bearing on Stanley's theses.)

of sub-sentential speech at face value. In light of these three points, until much more evidence is provided for it, there is already sufficient reason for rejecting P1*.

One might reply on Stanley's behalf that the claim that something is *not* elliptical must equally be an empirical claim about the actual mental workings of speaker and hearer. Hence, it will be said, we too ought to support our anti-ellipsis view, and our rejection of P1*, with data. This is a fair complaint. Besides, it's surely better to out-and-out win, on the basis of the facts, than simply to have your opponent disqualified. Let us therefore put burden of proof issues behind us, and turn at last to some positive evidence against P1*.

We begin with a case that exemplifies, or so we think, a situation in which the antecedent of P1* is true, but the consequent need not be. Suppose Fritz and Rob are walking past a misbehaving teenage boy. Fritz utters, 'From Brazil'. Fritz here says, about the boy, that he is from Brazil, and this is what Rob understands. Fritz has made a quite determinate speech act, namely a (*de re*) assertion; and it has quite determinate truth-conditions. That Fritz's act has truth-conditions is clear because he can speak falsely in uttering the phrase: what he uttered is false if the boy is not from Brazil. That he performed a genuine speech act should be clear as well because Fritz's utterance is lie-prone, which is a key feature of assertions. (For instance, suppose Fritz is trying to encourage disapproval of Brazil, and says 'From Brazil' with the intention of encouraging Rob's prejudice against young Brazilians. If Fritz knows full well that the misbehaving boy is German, but he speaks falsely in order to mislead, Fritz would have lied. We'll say more about lying and assertion below.) Nor is the proposition communicated cancelable—or anyway, it's no more cancelable than if the speaker has said, with disgust, 'That is from Brazil'. So, in this example, the antecedent of P1* is true. But the consequent need not be, because there need not be an appropriately salient *expression* that can license syntactic ellipsis: what is salient can simply be a worldly object, in this case the boy. A very good reason for thinking that, in this example, it is the boy which needs to be salient, rather than any English label for the boy, is that in many cases there will be no good reason for saying that the salient label was 'he' versus 'that boy' versus 'that teenager', and so on. Note too that no particular interrogative will inevitably be salient, to serve as '*the salient question*': there can often be many slightly different interrogatives which capture the same rough question. Or there might be none, or anyway none psychologically available to the speaker and the hearer. (For detailed discussion of the general issue of 'indeterminacy' and its bearing on ellipsis accounts, see Clapp, 2001 and Elugardo and Stainton, 2001.)

What the case highlights, then, is a fundamental problem with P1*: it assumes, wrongly in our view, that whenever a non-linguistic thing is salient—object, property, issue, etc.—there will be a specific linguistic expression (a natural language singular term, predicate, interrogative sentence, what-have-you) which is uniquely salient, and is hence able to serve as a linguistic antecedent licensing syntactic ellipsis. Once this assumption is abandoned, there is no reason why worldly things cannot play a role in yielding a determinate proposition, without having to do so via making a particular expression highly salient. And if that can

happen, there is no positive reason for believing that syntactic ellipsis is going on in these cases. (Note that we are not committed to there always being a single determinate object or property intended, in sub-sentence cases; the point, rather, is that even when there is a determinate worldly thing/property in play, yielding a determinate proposition asserted, there needn't be a determinate linguistic expression for that thing/property. It is this that calls P1* into question, precisely by making the antecedent true and the consequent implausible.)

We turn now to some evidence from theoretical syntax, against the syntactic ellipsis analysis. Rather than rehearse all the details, we will here simply provide three brief example arguments. That should be enough to answer the demand for actual data. Much more detailed discussion may be found elsewhere.⁷

First, there are considerations about what genuine sentences—elliptical or otherwise—can license in following discourse. Sentences can license VP-ellipsis ('He doesn't____') and sluicing ('I wonder who____'), for instance, but mere lexical or phrasal utterances cannot. This fact bears on whether apparently sub-sentential speech should be treated as elliptical or not, because even if the speaker of (1a) manages to assert, of the salient boy, that he came from Brazil, his interlocutor cannot *grammatically* use (1b). This suggests that (1a) simply is not sentential, since it doesn't license VP-ellipsis.⁸ The contrast with (2) is quite striking in this regard.

1. a) From Brazil.
b) *But that girl isn't.
2. a) That boy is from Brazil.
b) But that girl isn't.

Second, further evidence that much sub-sentential speech does not involve genuine ellipsis comes from considerations about what sorts of things can be elided. Now, it may be too simple to say that only syntactic constituents may be elided. That simple principle would, for example, immediately rule out (3b) as a case of syntactic ellipsis.

3. a) Question: Where does Rajiv live?
b) Answer: London.

And it would rule out 'gapping' as well (e.g., 'Janine apparently likes to eat pears and Vikram____mangos', with the non-constituent 'apparently likes to eat' omitted). Nevertheless, even if this over-simple constraint does not hold, there

⁷ See Elugardo and Stainton, 2001, 2003 and Stainton 1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2000; forthcoming, for further arguments from syntax, and for more details pertaining to the present arguments. See also Barton, 1990; Kenyon, 1999; Morgan, 1973, 1989; Sag, 1976; and Shopen, 1973.

⁸ We should note that some closely related constructions do not need a prior sentential structure to be grammatically licensed, e.g., 'That girl too' does not. The existence of such other constructions doesn't lessen the fact that (1a) is a genuine test, however. It is also important to keep in mind the contrast between being interpretable, and being grammatical. Given the context, (1b) unquestionably is interpretable; but we find it ungrammatical.

clearly are severe restrictions on what can and cannot be elided: not all omissions can count as syntactic ellipsis, at least not in the sense of ‘syntactic ellipsis’ required for Stanley’s purposes. Granting this, consider what material would have to be omitted from the complete source sentence—or, to use the jargon of another framework, what empty elements without pronunciation would need to be posited in syntactic structure—to account for the following attested case. 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’. Now, both Meera and Anita could have spoken falsely here. So these are clearly speech acts bearing truth conditions. Indeed, this is clear because sentences which roughly encode what Meera and Anita communicated include ‘This jam contains chunks of strawberries’, and ‘Rob’s mom made it’. But even if these sentences were salient, no known theory of ellipsis would allow syntactic omission of ‘This jam contains’ from the former.⁹ Insofar as no plausible theory of syntactic ellipsis would countenance eliding such things, however, we have good reason to deny that sub-sentential speech generally is syntactically elliptical—in the sense at play. It is this sort of evidence, not addressed by Stanley, which calls P1★ into question: given the constraints on what can be elided, these cannot be cases of syntactic ellipsis; and yet there is an assertion made.

Third, the syntactic ellipsis account of apparently sub-sentential speech will frequently make the wrong prediction about what grammatical case will be assigned to ‘the fragment’. For instance, suppose Hans and Frank are speaking German, discussing things which remind them of various people. Hans says, in German, ‘My father’, pointing at a table. The corresponding sentence would have to be (4), with ‘my’ in accusative. (The context ‘remind me of___’ demands this grammatical case in German.) But the sub-sentence that one uses in this scenario, in German, actually exhibits the nominative case, as in (5).¹⁰

4. Das erinnert mich an meinen Vater.
That reminds me of my-ACC father.
5. Mein Vater.
My-NOM father.

Thus the utterance should not be treated as syntactically elliptical, though it is a perfectly fine speech act—which provides another counterexample to P1★. Nor is German the only language where case markings ultimately point away from a syntactic ellipsis analysis. Thus Morgan (1989, pp. 236–238), who employs case facts to argue that syntactic ellipsis *sometimes* occurs, equally notes that Korean has both case-marked noun forms and case-less forms, each apparently occurring

⁹ Or, in the empty-element framework, no such theory would countenance the structure below, with the meaning required:

[S [NP [DET___][N'___]][VP [V___][NP chunks of strawberries]]].

¹⁰ We are indebted to Corinne Iten for the example, and for discussion of the German facts.

unembedded.¹¹ Morgan argues that the case-marked forms are derived from sentences, via ellipsis, but that the case-less forms are not, because they are ill-formed when embedded: they truly are bare phrases, used to make determinate assertions and other speech acts. Something P1* cannot countenance.

We hope to have given ample reason for rejecting P1*. We grant that we have not definitively refuted it. Being an empirical claim, that would be too tall an order. It should be clear, however, that given the current state of play there is little evidence in favour of P1*, and much evidence against it.¹² What's more, there is another important piece of evidence against P1* which we have yet to touch on: there can often be a determinate content asserted, using a sub-sentence, in discourse initial position. This position does not, however, allow syntactic ellipsis. At least not in general. Hence such cases too provide counterexamples to P1*. If, that is, P2* is false. Speaking of which, we turn now to the second premise of the reconstructed argument, which we equally reject.

Against Premise 2: Stainton and others (e.g., Ellen Barton and Nancy Yanofsky) have appealed to the fact that sub-sentences can be produced in discourse initial position to show that sub-sentential utterances are not genuinely elliptical. The argument runs like this: True syntactic ellipsis—as opposed to just ‘speaking elliptically’, in the everyday sense—requires that the missing syntactic material be recoverable; this, in turn, requires that there be a linguistic antecedent; but in discourse initial position, there is no linguistic antecedent; therefore, if something occurs in that position, it isn't syntactically elliptical. Now, in the examples of apparent sub-sentences given above—e.g., ‘From Brazil’ and ‘Chunks of strawberries’—the bare phrase was the very first utterance in the discourses. This provides some evidence that these and other such utterances are not elliptical in the sense that Stanley needs. Stanley's third novel objection is an interesting rebuttal to this line of thought.

In responding to this ‘discourse initial objection’, Stanley first notes two senses of ‘discourse initial’. There is the language-specific sense of ‘discourse initial’, the sense in which no linguistic item has yet been tokened. Call this *DI-lang*. There is also the null-context sense of ‘discourse initial’, which amounts to something more like ‘an absolutely novel context’, a situation where ‘no background context has been set up at all’ (Stanley, 2000, p. 405)—in particular, where no gestures etc. are

¹¹ Interestingly, the case-less forms require no linguistic context, though they are also permitted to occur within a discourse context; in contrast, the case-marked forms require overt linguistic context, e.g. a preceding interrogative. To give an example from Morgan 1989, ‘nae chal’ [“my car” (no case)] can be used by a person returning to a parking lot, and finding her car stolen. But both ‘nae cha-ka’ [“my car” (nom.)] and ‘nae cha-rul’ [“my car” (acc.)] are ill-formed in that discourse initial circumstance. The reader is invited to consider how this data bears on P2*.

¹² There is evidence of other less familiar kinds too. But we haven't space to discuss it here. For some highly suggestive (albeit preliminary) evidence from clinical cases, in which patients can apparently understand sub-sentential speech but cannot (easily) process sentences, see Elugardo and Stainton (2003), which draws in turn on Chatterjee *et al.*, 1995 and Sirigu *et al.*, 1998.

at work to make appropriate things salient. Call this *DI-null*. Discourse relevant objects and properties can be antecedently salient in *DI-lang*, as long as no *words* have been spoken; but not even discourse relevant objects and properties can be antecedently salient in *DI-null*. (This isn't to say that nothing is salient in *DI-null*. It is arguably inevitable that many things are salient whenever we speak. *DI-null*, rather, has to do with whether there are already salient, or whether gestures and such make salient, things *of the right kind* for the linguistic items used and the speech acts being made.) Given this contrast, Stanley suggests that it is simply not true that sub-sentences can be used in *DI-null*. In which case, one patently should not argue, 'Sub-sentences can be used discourse initially (in the *DI-null* sense), so they aren't elliptical'. Stanley then grants that sub-sentences can be used in discourse initial position in the language-specific sense. But, he says, this does not show that they aren't elliptical, because paradigm syntactically elliptical expressions can also occur in *DI-lang*. Or anyway, genuinely elliptical constructions can so occur if a linguistic antecedent is nevertheless present by other means. Crucially, however, Stanley maintains that a linguistic antecedent can often be present by other means, even in *DI-lang* position, because a linguistic expression can be made salient without being spoken. As an example, Stanley (2000, p. 404) notes that Sarah may utter 'John won't' as the first speech act in a discourse—about a prospective bungee-jumper, standing eight stories above a body of water. She may do so, Stanley says, because 'the expression 'bungee-jump' has been made salient' (p. 405).

In responding, we want first to emphasize that appearing or not in *DI-null* position provides essentially no syntactic evidence, at least with respect to the current dispute. Nor have we ever supposed otherwise. On the one hand, sub-sentences can occasionally occur in *DI-null* position just as sentences can.¹³ On the other hand, though full sentences—even ones containing deictics—can sometimes occur discourse initially, full sentences cannot *always* felicitously occur in *DI-null* position. In particular, full sentences containing deictic pronouns and other indexical words cannot generally so occur when these expressions need to be assigned an appropriate object from the context. Thus the need for slot-filling taken alone makes *DI-null* a poor candidate as a test for syntactic ellipsis. We therefore put *DI-null* aside as a red herring.

Turning to *DI-lang*, it is certainly not the case that genuine elliptical constructions never occur unless there has been appropriate prior speech. To the contrary, Hankamer and Sag (1976; 1977) type cases, exemplified by Stanley's 'John won't' said of the prospective bungee jumper, make plain that VP-ellipsis constructions and such may occasionally occur in *DI-lang* position. Stanley is right about this. It's

¹³ Nancy Yanofsky gives the following sort of example of a sub-sentential sentence actually occurring in *DI-null* position (see Yanofsky, 1978). Imagine that Mr. X is leaving his house for an important business meeting. In his haste, he forgets to put on a tie. Just when he reaches the door, Mrs. X yells down the stairs, 'Your tie!'. Here no appropriate object or property is salient. To the contrary, it is the very lack of saliency of the key object which demands that the utterance be made. Putting aside the issue of whether an assertion can be made like this, this example does show that *DI-null* poses no grammatical bar to sub-sentential speech.

important to note, however, that Hankamer and Sag cases are special: they occur only under unusual circumstances, and always with a certain pragmatic awkwardness. We think we know the reason for this. It relates to what we suggested when discussing P1*, namely that ellipsis is a properly linguistic process, rather than a matter of the agent as a whole ‘guestimating’ what the speaker might have meant. In particular, syntactic ellipsis of the sort exemplified by ‘I wonder why’ and ‘He doesn’t’ seems to involve algorithmic copying of identical material at the syntactic level of logical form. (Or, on other views—e.g., Williams, 1977—it involves anaphoric linking of a null element of syntax to prior linguistic material, which then ‘fills the gap’ left by ellipsis.) Thus it is patently a marked case to use syntactically elliptical constructions in the absence of prior actually spoken discourse, because it amounts to demanding that the language faculty copy, or create an anaphoric link to, linguistic items that have not been spoken. This can be done. But it happens only exceptionally, and with awkwardness.

Having noted this, we want to appeal to an intuition of usage about sub-sentential speech, an intuition gleaned from listening to actual speech: sub-sentences can appear without an actually spoken linguistic antecedent as freely, and with as little awkwardness, as full sentences can. No more special stage setting is required for sub-sentence use than is required for the use of non-elliptical sentences. Sometimes speaking non-sententially requires the presence of a relevant worldly *thing* (object, property, event, etc.) that the speaker is talking about; but often that’s true of indexical-containing sentences too. Nor are these frequent uses just grammatical errors: they occur commonly in vigilantly edited publications and carefully prepared TV ads, etc. The argument that sub-sentential speech is not elliptical, then, is not that sub-sentences can occur in DI-null. Nor is the argument that only sub-sentences, and not elliptical sentences, can occur in DI-lang. The argument, rather, is that unlike elliptical expressions, sub-sentences can occur as freely, and with as little awkwardness, in DI-lang as full sentences containing slots that need to be filled.¹⁴

¹⁴ These points relate, of course, to a central problem with P1*. Put crudely, what constrains the use of non-sentences is not salient *specific bits of language*, but salient *stuff*: objects, events, activities, properties, topics, etc. In contrast, genuine syntactically elliptical constructions, if such there be, really do require salient bits of language to which the language faculty has access. Using the latter without previously spoken material thus gives rise to awkwardness. To anticipate a natural worry about this contrast, we should note that Jason Merchant (2001) has recently argued forcefully that what licenses syntactic ellipsis (VP ellipsis and also sluicing) is not syntactic material, identical at some level of representation, appearing in prior discourse, as in Sag, 1976, but rather appropriate semantic content preceding the ellipsis. (Merchant also thinks of ellipsis as syntactic reconstruction—so if ellipsis in his sense were occurring, it really would help Stanley.) However, in defense of the contrast between genuine syntactic ellipsis and non-sentential speech, note that even if Merchant is right about the constraint on syntactic ellipsis being weaker than usually allowed, this would not vitiate our general point that genuine ellipsis needs appropriate prior linguistic material to license it. For, in Merchant’s story, it is the semantics of *prior linguistic items* that licenses syntactic ellipsis. In contrast, say we, such material is not required to license the use of sub-sentences.

Time to quickly recap. Putting ‘shorthand’ aside, Stanley (2000) presents the following dilemma for the proponent of non-sentential assertions, and other sub-sentential speech acts. If a sub-sentential utterance lacks determinate propositional content or force, Stanley says that it is not genuinely a speech act at all; but if the utterance has both determinate propositional content and force, Stanley says that it should be treated as syntactically elliptical. Given this dilemma, Stanley conjectures that a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy will deal with all purported cases of sub-sentential speech acts. In attacking P1* and P2* of the Simplified Dilemma, we have been resisting the ‘elliptical’ horn of Stanley’s argument. We will now address the ‘no speech act’ horn.

Against Premise 3: P3 says that if an utterance lacks determinate propositional content or force, then it is not a genuine speech act exhibiting truth conditions. Stanley maintains that because of this, apparent non-sentential assertions which are not ellipses are therefore not really assertions or even genuine speech-acts. In defense of that claim, he gives the following example (henceforth, ‘*The Thirsty Man Example*’):

Consider, for example, a thirsty man, who staggers up to a street vendor and utters:

(4) water.

Clearly, this utterance occurs discourse initially in every sense. However, in this case, I doubt that the thirsty man has made a linguistic speech act (Stanley, 2000, p. 407).

Stanley gives two reasons for thinking that the thirsty man fails to perform a linguistic speech act. The first reason is that ‘linguistic speech acts must determinately be made with the relevant sort of force’ (p. 407). The second reason is this that genuine linguistic acts ‘must not just be determinately made with the relevant sort of force. They also must express determinate contents’ (p. 407). Stanley then argues that in the Thirsty Man example, the utterance has neither a determinate force nor a determinate propositional content.

Stanley is appealing to a general principle here, namely: If, in uttering an expression *e* in context *C*, a speaker performs an illocutionary speech act *at all*, then her utterance of *e* in *C* has a determinate, specific, illocutionary force. Call this Stanley’s Force Principle. He needs this very strong principle because his general thesis is not just about assertion, it is about speech acts more broadly. Thus it isn’t enough to show that in *The Thirsty Man Example* the speaker fails to make an *assertion* by his utterance of ‘water’. Stanley must show that the speaker—here, and in every other case which cannot be treated as ellipsis—did not perform any genuine linguistic speech act at all, even of a non-determinate but still illocutionary kind.

This general principle is highly objectionable, however. Suppose Maria utters (6) to Susan whom she supervises and who is also a good friend:

6. You must turn in your final report before you leave in the afternoon.

We can well imagine that the context fails to constitute Maria's utterance as an assertion of a standard policy, or as an order. Because of their professional and personal relationships, it may remain an open question whether Maria ordered Susan to submit her report, requested that she do so, or just described certain rules to her. Would it follow that Maria simply did not perform a speech act with truth conditions at all? Can we, on these grounds alone, really assimilate her utterance of (6) to a kick under the table, as Stanley seems to do in the case of sub-sentential cases which aren't determinate? Surely not. Not least because her speech act, whatever it may be, is satisfied (unsatisfied) if Susan turns in (does not turn in) her report in the afternoon. To be clear, we are not merely making the epistemological point that Susan may be unable figure out what specific illocutionary force Maria's utterance has. We are also making the metaphysical point: the special circumstances under which Maria uttered (6), which includes her professional relationship and her personal relationship with Susan, could make it metaphysically indeterminate which specific kind of illocutionary force her utterance had, without thereby vitiating the utterance's *bona fides* as a speech act. So, we conclude, Maria could have produced a directive but one that lacked one specific illocutionary force. Or again, suppose a grandmother says to her grandson: 'If you finish your peas, you'll get a big piece of cake'. Does this really need to be determinately either a promise or a prediction, in order for it to be a speech act at all? This seems far too strong a requirement.¹⁵ Hence, Stanley's Force Principle, which he needs to support P3, is simply implausible.

What about the condition of expressing a determinate proposition? Call it *Stanley's Determinate Content Principle*. The first thing to notice is that if this were a genuine necessary condition, it would show that many of the cases which Stanley himself counts as assertions really could not be. Recall, for example, his Bungee-Jump Example (Stanley, 2000, p. 404) in which Sarah utters (7) in the context in which John is next in line among a group of bungee-jumpers:

7. John won't.

Stanley says that the context makes salient the implicit VP 'bungee-jump'. But in so far as the context makes 'bungee-jump' salient, it also makes several other English expressions salient too: 'jump', 'leap', 'do it', 'make the jump', 'take the plunge', etc.. So, Stanley's demand of a determinate propositional content entails (surely wrongly) that this is not a genuine speech act after all, because the facts do not determine whether the proposition that she allegedly asserted is the proposition that *John won't bungee-jump*, or whether it is the proposition that *John won't do it*, or

¹⁵ Interestingly, J.L. Austin himself noted, in effect, that implicit performative acts can have non-specific illocutionary force. See Austin, 1956.

whether it is the proposition that *John won't find the courage to jump*, etc. It follows, against Stanley's own intuitions, that Sarah failed to assert anything. Indeed, all of the cases of apparently sub-sentential speech which Stanley (2000) treats as assertions (but via an elliptical sentence), should be denied this status—by Stanley's own Determinate Content Principle. For in every such case, numerous different completions are justified by the prior context, hence none is 'fully determinate'.

Stanley's problems with his own examples aside, his Determinate Content Principle is false. If it were true, all genuinely vague discourse would fail as speech acts. For instance, suppose Andrew utters (8), looking out over the Grand Canyon at sunset:

8. That's absolutely beautiful.

Must Andrew have a particular object, or particular collection of objects, in mind in order to have performed a speech act? If even he can't tell us precisely what thing(s) he was calling beautiful, or in what precise regard he thinks them beautiful, must we *ipso facto* say that he wasn't making a speech act at all? Maybe sometimes. But surely not always—as Stanley's Content Principle seemingly requires. Or again, consider a child who has just descended from a rollercoaster, who says: 'I loved it'. Just how precise/determinate does her thought have to be, if this is to be a speech act? It seems far too strong to require, for example, that she be able to say, exhaustively or even at all insightfully, what she meant by 'it'. (The act of riding? The whole experience, from waiting in line to walking down the exit ramp? The rollercoaster itself? The feelings she experienced while riding? Which such feelings?). Nor need she have a clear idea of just what sense of 'love' was intended. Besides, if *nothing* before the canyon observer was beautiful in any way, he would have spoken falsely; similarly, if the child hated *every* aspect of the ride, but lied out of embarrassment, she would have spoken falsely too. This is surely reason to grant that a speech act can be made, even if the proposition asserted is not wholly 'determinate'. Finally, suppose Andrew utters:

9. In most ways, every one of John's books is a good book.

In deciding whether a 'genuine linguistic act' was performed, we don't think it matters at all that there is here a set of possible acts/interpretations. Surely, for instance, Andrew asserted *something about John's books*. Not least because if Andrew failed to assert anything by his utterance of (9), then nothing could have obtained that would have rendered his utterance true or false—yet what he said is false if, on every way of making the possessive description, 'John's book', more precise, some book of John's is not a good book on any relevant criterion that one could reasonably imagine. Thus, Stanley's Determinate Content Principle is false. Hence so is P3. (For a different but equally pressing critique of Stanley's claim that much sub-sentential speech is not genuinely assertoric, see Clapp, forthcoming.)

Before leaving P3 entirely, we should make a final point. Stanley seems to want to assimilate sub-sentential speech, or anyway that portion of it which cannot be treated as involving covert syntactic structure, to things like kicks under the table. That is the ultimate point of P3. But this cannot be the right approach. One can *almost* think it is plausible for the Thirsty Man example. But consider an utterance of ‘Two bottles of Brazilian rum and vodka’, said while passing some obviously intoxicated young men. Given the right circumstances, the speaker could assert thereby that what caused their drunkenness were two bottles of Brazilian rum and vodka. Yet, no plausible theory of syntactic ellipsis would assimilate this to something like VP ellipsis or sluicing. (What exactly is the material to be ‘copied’ or ‘anaphorically linked to’? And where precisely does it come from?) And yet, as this example highlights, sub-sentential speech is productive (because it is recursive), syntactically complex, and semantically systematic; it affords very subtle semantic contrasts, and exhibits entailment relations as well as lexical and structural ambiguity; it requires knowledge of the language, including especially knowing the satisfaction conditions for referring expressions, quantifier phrases, and predicates; and for just this reason it is impaired by many of the same brain injuries that damage sentential speech. And so on. This is very unlike the interpretation of kicks.

But, one may ask, if the literal truth conditions of an utterance, i.e., what is asserted in so speaking, are not exhaustively determined by elements of syntactic structure, pronounced and unpronounced, what makes linguistic interpretation fundamentally different from other kinds? It is this question, we suspect, which ultimately motivates Stanley to reject free pragmatic enrichment as a determinant of what is asserted—he apparently fears that if this third determinant is allowed in, then no great difference will remain. But the obvious fundamental difference, suggested by the last paragraph, is that understanding a kick does not involve using the language faculty. In contrast, understanding speech—whether sentential or non-sentential—is a performance that draws on linguistic competence, as well as other things. Put otherwise, on our view, linguistic interpretation, including arriving at literal content/truth conditions, is very much an interaction effect. To admit that, however, is not, *pace* Stanley, to blur the distinction between linguistic interpretation and understanding kicks and shoulder taps. We are not thereby assimilating the interpretation of speech acts ‘to the ways in which we interpret non-linguistic acts’ (Stanley, 2000, p. 396). Quite to the contrary, we insist on placing sub-sentential speech squarely on the speech interpretation side, and emphatically not on the tap/kick side, because interpreting sub-sentential speech draws so heavily on linguistic competence.

In sum, our main points against the three-premise argument we labeled ‘the Simplified Dilemma’ are these:

- A worldly thing may be salient even when no particular label for it is salient. So, there being a determinate proposition asserted is not sufficient

grounds for thinking that there is salient linguistic material capable of licensing syntactic ellipsis.

- Given what Stanley's theses commit him to, the claim that syntactic ellipsis has occurred must be a very substantive empirical claim, to the effect that there is unpronounced but causally effective syntax playing a part in (putative) sub-sentential speech. This non-trivial claim, ultimately about the human mind, is thus not anything like an innocent default hypothesis. Therefore, when Stanley maintains that syntactic ellipsis is going on as soon as a determinate content can be found, evidence in favor of this view needs to be presented. And the evidence must go beyond the presence of a possible linguistic antecedent. (This is especially so because of parsimony considerations: appealing to syntactic ellipsis, unlike our own approach, requires positing extra structure, yielding a different semantic 'character', and hence a structural ambiguity.) But positive evidence simply has not been provided. Moreover, there is a body of evidence against the ellipsis approach which Stanley has not addressed.
- Even the evidence which Stanley tries to rebut, viz. that sub-sentences can occur discourse initially, is not rebutted effectively. For there remains a key difference between sub-sentences and genuine elliptical constructions, namely that only the former may occur in DI-lang position as freely and without awkwardness as ordinary full sentences containing indexicals.
- Stanley's requirements on 'genuine linguistic acts', viz. that they must have both determinate force and determinate propositional content, are far too strong. They would rule out whole swaths of perfectly ordinary sentential speech.

Having argued against 'shorthand' in Section II, and having rejected the first three premises of the Simplified Dilemma in Section III, we conclude that the phenomenon of non-sentential assertion is genuine. Hence the broader phenomenon of non-sentential *speech acts* is genuine too. In which case, both of Stanley's theses are false: there are pragmatic determinants literal of truth conditions; and, in particular, there are effects of context on what is asserted that are not traceable to slot-filling or disambiguated expression-meaning.

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