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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Narrowed and Broadened Concepts: A Contribution to Current Issues and Future Directions**

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**| ABSTRACT**

As standardly conceived in truth-conditional pragmatic theory, particularly from a relevance-theoretic perspective, lexical adjustment can be effected by a pragmatic process of ad hoc concept construction. Studies of ad hoc concept construction fall into two types: early (or traditional) and current (or later) studies. According to the early studies, ad hoc concept construction is claimed to be accommodated univocally. While this is so, it is, in fact, viewed as falling into two varieties: narrowing and broadening. On the other hand, although current studies developed out of a concern with certain issues connected to the traditional conception of ad hoc concept construction, they seem to retain these two varieties. The current paper takes issue with the two-directional approach to ad hoc concept construction. It is argued that the specific approach is based on a line of argument detracting from descriptive rigor and parsimony. It is also argued that it has unfavorable implications for theoretical assumptions that are well-established in pragmatic theory. In this light, it is proposed that the dual view of narrowing/broadening needs to be dispensed with, along with the labels sustaining it, in the interest of a genuinely coherent view. Ultimately, the discussion offered in the present paper is intended as a potential contribution to the currently developing or later approach to ad hoc concept construction.

**| KEYWORDS**

Ad hoc concept construction; broadening; conceptual modulation; lexical adjustment; lexical pragmatics; narrowing

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**1. Introduction**

The argument that lexical meaning can be contextually determined has benefited largely from relevance-theoretic (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995) research on lexical pragmatics. Within this research framework, the process of occasion-specific lexical adjustment is commonly addressed under the label 'ad hoc concept construction' (henceforth AHCC).

The discussion of AHCC can be divided into two periods of study: the earlier and the later period. The earlier period is basically represented most notably by Carston's (1996, 2002, 2004, 2009, 2010a), Wilson's (2003), as well as Wilson & Carston's (2007) project on the nature of conceptual content and its impact on a) propositional meaning and b) the distinction between literal and non-literal interpretation. However, Carston's closer attention to matters of semantic underspecificity marks a later period of study; a period of reconceptualization of the AHCC issue (Carston, 2013, 2016a, 2019, 2022).

The earlier period generated the standard or traditional view of AHCC, according to which, AHCC is typically organized into two varieties: a) conceptual strengthening (also called narrowing or enrichment) and b) conceptual weakening (also called broadening or loosening). While the former has crucially been associated with the construction of propositions literally expressed, the latter is seen as contributing to the construction of propositions non-literally or metaphorically expressed.

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To illustrate, according to the current literature, understanding the sentences uttered in (1) and (2) is taken to involve the pragmatic adjustment of the lexical concepts *bachelors* and *rectangle*, respectively.

- (1) I want to meet some bachelors.
- (2) There is a rectangle of lawn at the back.

Thus, the interpretation of the utterance in (1) has been claimed to involve the pragmatic process of narrowing the general or standing (or decontextualized) meaning of *bachelors* to a more context-specific, literal sense (perhaps that of a bachelor who is eligible for marriage) as this is intended by the communicator in the contextual situation in (1). On the other hand, the interpretation of (2) has been taken to rely on loosening the originally strict sense of a perfect rectangle encoded in *rectangle*, so that the looser, non-literal sense matches the speaker's intended broader meaning of a less-than-perfect rectangular shape.

Although the notions of narrowing and broadening were developed as part of the traditional relevance-theoretic framework of lexical pragmatics, they seem to reserve a place in the later phase of the discussion of AHCC, regardless of the various alterations introduced to the broader framework of analysis. In this sense, this later phase represents a stage of revising aspects of AHCC, some of which might turn out to affect the notions of narrowing and broadening. It follows that, at this point, the later argument still remains open (to additions or reconsiderations).

The aim of this paper is fairly modest: to argue against the standard dual view of AHCC<sup>1</sup>, offering a potential contribution to the currently developing alternative/late view of the notion at issue (Carston, 2013, 2016a, 2019, 2022). More specifically, we will argue that the standard relevance-theoretic argument underlying the dual view requires further descriptive rigor and that, as it stands, it does not encourage a very clear view or thorough assessment or, ultimately, a justification of it. Moreover, contrary to the kind of approach pursued on relevance-theoretic grounds (Wilson & Carston, 2007), it seems to detract from a genuinely unitary approach to lexical pragmatics. In actual fact, as will be demonstrated, a closer observation of the matter reveals the necessity for treating 'narrowing' and 'broadening' as an identical category of AHCC and, that as a result, we are better off without the two foregoing terms. In fact, this suggestion seems to make a more obvious contribution to the unitary approach to lexical pragmatics.

Moreover, we will show that what may heighten the obscurity of the reasoning behind the standard (dual) view of AHCC is the availability of a large number of terms employed to refer to the same distinction: 'broadening' vs. 'narrowing', 'weakening' vs. 'enrichment', 'loosening' vs. 'strengthening'.

The discussion offered below is organized as follows: section 2 presents the dual view of AHCC, as this has been adopted in the standard relevance-theoretic literature, i.e. a view of narrowing/broadening; the following sections undertake to expose the range of problems connected to the argument underpinning the dual view of AHCC (sections 3 and 4) and the potential implications of this approach for pragmatic theory (section 5), suggesting the need for a more coherent treatment of AHCC phenomena. The final section (section 6) exposes the factors that conspire to perpetuate the dual view.

## **2 Ad hoc concept construction: Narrowing vs. broadening**

This section sets out to outline a brief account of the notion of AHCC, as this has been developed in the relevance-theoretic literature<sup>2</sup>.

First of all, any account of AHCC necessitates a prior introduction to the nature of concepts, to which we now turn. In the relevance-theoretic literature, the suggestion as to what identifies a concept originates in Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995). A concept is taken

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<sup>1</sup> Current research in the field of lexical pragmatics has raised a number of important queries, spelled out in Carston (2013); these queries basically concern the extent to which concepts are invariably underspecified or AHCC is an optional pragmatic process; they also relate to the possibility of lexical concepts being of a conceptual or non-conceptual nature (Carston, 2016b). We do not aspire to resolve these issues here; the potential contribution of this discussion to the overall project of lexical pragmatics notwithstanding, the current paper defines a separate aim of study within the specific project (which is to evaluate the necessity for holding on to the notions of narrowing/broadening) regardless of whether the process of ad hoc concept construction, as a whole, constitutes a mandatory process in utterance interpretation or whether lexical meanings could (or could not) consist in fully fledged concepts.

<sup>2</sup> Carston's contribution to the development of this notion is evident in a rather long line of enquiry, as has been noted, but is especially appreciated in her book (Carston, 2002), which affords ample space for a substantial and fairly unambiguous analysis of the divergence between narrowing and broadening. As such, constant reference to this contribution in the current work serves a methodological purpose, since it is meant to supply a constant line of argument (with specific orientation to the dual view of ad hoc concept construction), the essence of which remains intact to date, as will become evident in the remaining part of our investigation). Indeed, more recent work by Carston, e.g. (Carston, 2016a) displays evidence of a tendency to revise aspects of the notion of ad hoc concept construction; these aspects, however, are not taken to bear on what we focus on: the dual view of narrowing/broadening, a view that remains alive and kicking to date.

to correspond to a label or 'file name' operating at the interface between language and thought; it resides, on the one hand, in the individual's memory and, on the other, in the logical form of an utterance. In this light, we can distinguish three aspects of information, or entries, constitutive of a concept: a) lexical, b) encyclopedic and c) logical (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 86).

More specifically, the lexical entry of a concept captures information about the natural-language counterpart of the concept. In this sense, it is "the word or phrase of natural language which expresses it" (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 86). On the other hand, the encyclopedic entry incorporates information about the denotation of a concept: "that is, about the objects, events and/or properties which instantiate it" (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 86). Lastly, a logical entry consists in a set of deductive or inference rules which apply to the logical form in which the concept appears (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 86).

Wilson and Sperber (1993) take a step further in expounding the logical character of conceptual meaning:

A conceptual representation [...] has logical properties: it enters into entailment or contradiction relations, and it can act as the input to logical inference rules. Second, it has truth-conditional properties: it can describe or partially characterize a certain state of affairs (Wilson & Sperber, 1993, pp. 7).

On this view, the type of words that typically qualify for a truth-conditional appraisal are words expressing atomic or full-fledged concepts of the open class, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives (Carston, 2010a, p. 21). Against this backdrop, Carston (2002, 2010a) seems to shed further light on the distinction between logical and encyclopedic entries:

The logical entry consists of a set of inference rules, or 'meaning postulates', which capture certain analytic implications of the concept, generally falling far short of anything definitional. The encyclopedic entry comprises a wide array of different kinds of knowledge, including commonplace assumptions, scientific information, culture-specific beliefs and personal idiosyncratic observations and experiences (Carston, 2002, p. 321).

To ground the discussion to the concerns of the current investigation, on the relevance-theoretic conception, the determination of the propositional content expressed by an utterance depends on two distinct interpretation processes: a) decoding the linguistically specified material of the utterance and b) pragmatically constrained inference. In this light, although the interpretation of a linguistically encoded concept may involve simply a decoding process, it crucially involves a contextual or pragmatically-assisted process of lexical adjustment, or adjusting conceptual content. This conceptual adjustment has been investigated under the label 'ad hoc concept construction'.

In Carston's terms, "the basic characteristic of an *ad hoc* concept is that it is accessed in a particular context by a spontaneous process of pragmatic inference, as distinct from a concept which is accessed by the process of lexical decoding and so is context-invariant" (Carston 2002, p. 323). Also, AHCC has been discussed in terms of two varieties: conceptual narrowing (or strengthening, or enrichment) and conceptual broadening (or weakening, or loosening). While both varieties of concept construction rely on pragmatic inference for their realization, they allegedly also differ in definite respects.

To elucidate the points at which the two types of pragmatic process diverge, it would be purposeful to contrast the set of utterances in (1)-(2) with the one in (3)-(4). Examples (1) and (3) repeat the situations in (1) and (2) for convenience. While (1)-(2) appear to represent cases of conceptual narrowing, (3)-(4) depict cases of broadening:

- (1) I want to meet some bachelors.
- (2) Mary cut the cake.
- (3) There is a rectangle of lawn at the back.
- (4) This steak is raw.

[taken from Carston 2002, pp. 324, 328; 1996, p. 3]

On this account, while the interpretation of (1) is delivered by means of narrowing or strengthening the concept encoded in the lexical item BACHELOR<sup>3</sup>, the interpretation of (3) is said to involve broadening the concept encoded in RECTANGLE.

To elaborate on the notion of narrowing first, the logical entry connected to the lexical item or lexical concept BACHELOR, mainly considered in abstraction from sufficient contextual information, is taken to encompass the standing meaning postulate of an

<sup>3</sup> In line with the relevance-theoretic paradigm, (the names of) both linguistically encoded and ad hoc concepts will be represented in capital letters, while, to distinguish between the two cases, an asterisk (\*) will mark only ad hoc concepts (e.g. BACHELOR vs. BACHELOR\*).

unmarried adult male. Moreover, the set of its encyclopedic or stereotypical entries initially (or outside context) seems to include all sorts of bachelors, i.e., young or older, eligible for marriage or not, and so forth.

If, on the other hand, BACHELOR is uttered in context, for example, that of settling down in family life (1), the range of original encyclopedic entries is adjusted relative to that context. In this connection, the use of the derived concept BACHELOR\* is conceived of as 'activating' only a subset of the stereotypical entries associated with BACHELOR: youngish, heterosexual man, who, inter alia, is free to marry or willing to make a commitment. This type of pragmatic process narrows the denotation of BACHELOR, as it 'excludes' the subset of bachelors that are considered inappropriate candidates for marriage (Carston, 2002, pp. 324, 326). Accordingly, the lexical concept CUT in (2) is inferentially adjusted to the narrower, context-specific<sup>4</sup> sense of CUTTING\* A CAKE, rather than, for example, CUTTING\* THE GRASS or HAIR or CLOTHES or FLESH.

While the narrowing of BACHELOR involves affecting the range of original encyclopedic entries, it leaves the logical entries intact. In fact, Carston leaves open the possibility that an encyclopedic entry within the narrowed concept might be elevated to a logical status, as in the case of ELIGIBILITY FOR MARRIAGE (Carston, 2002, p. 339).

On the other hand, the utterances in (3)-(4) are said to exemplify the "apparently opposite" process of conceptual broadening (Carston, 2002, pp. 328), inasmuch as the speaker's intended concept corresponds to the loosely used concept RECTANGLE\* or RAW\*. One of the hallmarks of broadening, in contradistinction to narrowing, seems to be the dropping of the logical (or defining) entry of a lexical concept. Along Carston's (2002) lines "[...] a logical or defining feature of the lexically encoded concept is dropped in the process of arriving at the intended interpretation" (Carston 2002, pp. 329). Furthermore, it could also be the case that broadening involves dropping one or more of the logical or defining properties of a lexical concept (Carston, 2002, p. 339), in other words at least one and not necessarily all.

In the case of the RECTANGLE, then, it can be said that the logical entry of the specific lexical concept amounts to its strictly definitional information, e.g. a parallelogram that has four right angles. Thus, the broadened interpretation of RECTANGLE is seen as involving the removal of this logical entry; a removal that results in the derivation of a type of concept that roughly approximates or resembles the originally defined shape of a perfect geometrical shape of a rectangle. In this sense, RECTANGLE\* receives the interpretation of an approximately rectangular shape of the area of lawn referred to in context.

By the same token, the encoded concept RAW is originally held to describe completely uncooked and, thus, inedible food. In (4), though, it undergoes a process of loosening, which involves rejecting the aforementioned logical entry. In this process, RAW achieves broader application, in other words, application in a broader range of contexts, which would allow the use of the lexical item at issue in a less-than-strict or literal sense. To take an example, in a restaurant context, RAW is employed to approximate the ad hoc concept of RAW\*, as in the phrase *raw steak*, which could describe an undercooked steak that has been ordered.

This loss of logical features does not entail total absence of a central kind of entry in the broadened concept (Carston, 2002, p. 337). While the type of entry that this core meaning corresponds to is not spelled out, it transpires from Carston's overall framework of discussion that she means it as a newly developed logical entry, occasionally named 'defining' (Carston, 2002, p. 344) or 'definitional' (Carston 2016a, p. 202-203). For example, elsewhere, it is specified that a loosely interpreted concept, e.g., HAPPY\*, could have a logical entry (Carston, 2002, p. 323). However, her intention with these latter terms may be, the assumption of the possible development of new logical entries in an ad hoc concept clearly does not affect the original assumption that broadening initially involves dropping logical entries encoded in the corresponding lexical concept.

The suggestion that a derived concept may develop a new logical entry (which is absent from the lexical concept) is in tune with Carston's view that an ad hoc concept and its lexical equivalent do not necessarily share constant meaning (Carston, 2002, p. 341) a view that is further exploited in her more recent project on the under-specificity of ad hoc and polysemous concepts, (Carston, 2016a). Hence, we may speak of 'replacing' the encoded concept by a pragmatically inferred concept, to the extent that the process of utterance interpretation replaces the logical form of an utterance with its explicature (Carston, 2002, p. 341). On this view, the truth-evaluable content of a metaphor depends on the contribution that this sort of (newly developed) core meaning makes to the proposition non-literally expressed.

Within her later conception of AHCC, Carston (2013, 2016a, 2019, 2022) argues for an alternative, empirically plausible view, which is on a par with the relevance-oriented semantic underdeterminacy thesis. On this view, word meaning, like sentence meaning, is underspecified: it consists in an underspecified type of meaning (rather than a full-fledged concept), which pragmatically develops

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of context is taken to include that of co-text and, therefore, also collocations.

into a full-fledged ad hoc concept. To this extent, the meaning of a word, in abstraction from context, acts as a pointer to or as linguistic evidence of the concept or sense intended by the speaker in context. The plausibility of this idea notwithstanding, the fact remains that the notions of broadening/narrowing (and their corresponding terms) are retained in the later view of AHCC. Still the process of manipulating conceptual material into an ad hoc concept remains is one of the issues that have not yet been adequately demonstrated.

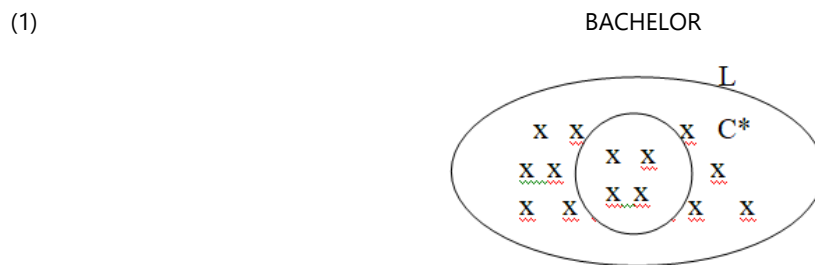
Having concluded our presentation of ad hoc concept construction, we would like to suggest that the standard relevance-theoretic view of a two-directional AHCC process a) requires further descriptive rigor and, also b) results in a profligate account. In this sense, it also invites reconsideration. In what follows, we intend to discuss the problems connected to (a) and (b) and, also move on to a discussion of the implications of the dual view for basic assumptions held in pragmatic theory. First, we embark on the discussion of the first issues (a) and (b) below (section 3).

**3 Problems connected to the dual view of AHCC**

In this section we will probe into the relevance-theoretic claim of narrowing/broadening, focusing on the standard perspective on which it was shaped, with a view to unveiling its weaknesses: a) lack of descriptive rigor and b) profligacy. To the extent that the notions of narrowing and broadening are also active in later discussions of AHCC, the weaknesses pointed out may be appreciated as generally relevant.

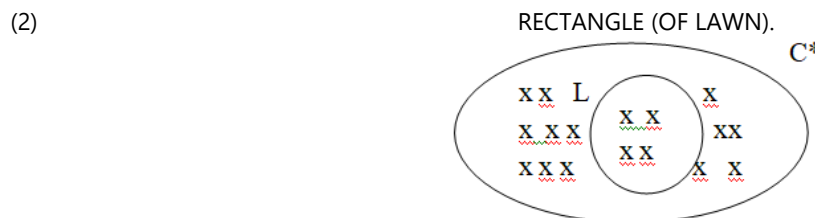
Let us begin our examination with a brief presentation of the relevant notions.

The process of narrowing is illustrated in (1) below (Carston, 2002, p. 325); L stands for the denotation (or extension) of the lexical concept (e.g. BACHELOR) and C\* is the denotation of the narrowed ad hoc concept (e.g. BACHELOR\*).



In this connection, what the particular schema undertakes to depict can be briefly explained as follows: “the set of entities falling in the denotation of the lexical concept L contains as a proper subset the set of entities in the denotation of the strengthened *ad hoc* concept C\*” (Carston, 2002, p. 343).

The process of narrowing depicted in (1) is purported to directly contrast with that of broadening represented in (2):



Based on the suggestion that broadening is the opposite, as it were, process of narrowing, the illustration in (2) shows a reversal of operation between L and C\*. Carston (2002, p. 344) explains (2) in relation to example (3):

The encoded concept RECTANGLE is loosely used in [(3)], since the lawn in question might have all sorts of little irregularities that render it not strictly rectangular (i.e. not having four right angles). If the denotation of RECTANGLE\* includes all strict rectangles along with other shapes that deviate to some limited degree from strict rectangularity, then the relation between RECTANGLE and RECTANGLE\* is captured by the diagram in [(2)] (Carston, 2002, p. 344).

The illustration of denotational adjustment in (1)-(2) seems to lack sufficient detail. For instance, while it undertakes to illustrate the overall adjustment of denotation L [i.e., the set of x entities (bachelors)] to denotation C\* [i.e. the subset of x entities (bachelors)] (7), it seems to be inattentive to the (encyclopedic or logical) identity of the entries (of set-members) partaking of the AHCC process. In other words, what is discussed is the content of conceptual sets or subsets in terms of set-members e.g. (types) of

bachelors, irrespective of the types of entry that they reflect<sup>5</sup>. In fact, the freer use of the term 'denotation' to describe overall conceptual content, i.e., either logical or encyclopedic [(as evidenced in the quotation above), although it was originally meant to allude specifically to encyclopedic entries (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/95, p. 86), as was suggested in section 2] seems to be symptomatic of this inattention to entry identification.

This type of oblivion to entry behavior is not as unproblematic as it may seem, as it inevitably results in a type of argument that lacks descriptive rigor. This, in turn, deflects a clearer view of the argument, thus challenging our appreciation of the operation of narrowing/broadening and, ultimately, the necessity for a dual view of AHCC. For instance, insofar as the retention of logical content is criterial of the realization of narrowing, the identification of the specific kind of process is undermined in the absence of explicit reference to logical (as distinct from encyclopedic) entries.

To illustrate the consequences of this type of obscurity, the description of broadening (8) in the quotation above seems to leave out terms that make explicit reference to logical vs. encyclopedic entries, thus blurring the view of broadening (in comparison to narrowing). As a result, a number of queries about the operation of the particular process are raised: the first question that calls for an answer is what sort of entry strict rectangularity amounts to, if not a logical entry, in other words, the type of entry that consists in the strictly literal meaning of RECTANGLE? On the whole, strict rectangularity constructs the literal, definitional meaning of RECTANGLE, in which case a further question follows: granted the generalization that the process of broadening involves the rejection of the logical entry of a lexical concept, is it not surprising that, on the occasion in (8), the logical entry of 'strict rectangularity' is retained in the broadened concept RECTANGLE\* (as is specified in the quotation above)? Ultimately, if the logical or literal content of a concept remains intact in the broadening process, how does broadening differ from narrowing?

What is more, as is noted of (2) (in the same quotation above), the 'other shapes' in the ad hoc denotation [of the rectangle of lawn] deviate from strict rectangularity 'to some limited degree'. In other words, it is claimed that the other shapes in the broadened denotation deviate from the logical entry of strict rectangularity. This is a remark of consequence, as it introduces the notion of deviation (of the ad hoc denotation) from the logical entry or literal meaning of the encoded concept. Also, it entitles us to the generalization that this deviation is a matter of degree.

We do not find the proposed notion of deviation from the lexical concept's logical entry entirely clear, inasmuch as it appears to be susceptible to inaccurate measurement; for, what are the criteria based on which we can measure or determine the extent of the differentiation of an entity/property from strict rectangularity and, in this sense, literal meaning? In fact, this lack of concrete differentiation criteria comes as no surprise in face of the above-mentioned difficulty in distinguishing members of sets L or C\* with logical entries from members without logical entries. Once again, it transpires that the description of broadening lacks descriptive rigor. And if this description lacks descriptive rigor, it also discourages a comparative view of broadening/narrowing, which could justify the preservation of the dual view of AHCC.

To build a more plausible case that is relieved of the onus of maintaining a distinction between broadening/narrowing, and a clear view of AHCC that this would require, Carston (2002) introduces a notion of broadening that builds in elements of narrowing, as will be explained in (3) below. This suggestion seems to adduce an alternative to the 'pure broadening' kind of approach (2) to approximations like (3).

### **3.1 Broadening: Extending the account**

On the account offered, it is fathomable that the processes of broadening and narrowing entwine (at least partially). Carston herself characteristically speaks of cases like (3) or (4) as cases where "the relation of conceptual overlap is not one of broadening alone but also involves some narrowing" (Carston, 2002, p. 344). To explain the hybrid kind of pragmatic process proposed, she notes that

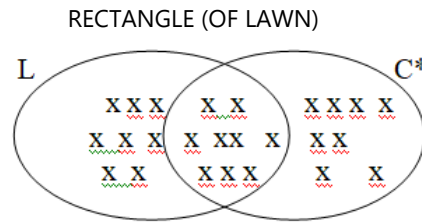
[...] the denotation of the *ad hoc* concept might include some cases of strict rectangles while excluding others; it might, for instance, exclude those with two sides a mile long and the other two only a few inches long, the relevant [ad hoc] concept here [(3)] being one that can apply to lawns. If so, then the relation between RECTANGLE and RECTANGLE\* is reflected in [(3)]; the denotations of the concepts merely overlap (Carston, 2002, p. 344).

In this spirit, the extent to which the two denotations converge is where they overlap, as becomes clear below.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a terminological issue of potential consequence, considering the significance of the notion of denotation in our appreciation of the nature of conceptual adjustment: "lexical narrowing and broadening are to be understood in denotational terms, that is, the denotation of the communicated content may be a subset or a superset of the sets that comprises the denotation of the encoded concept" (Carston, 2013: 6).

(3)

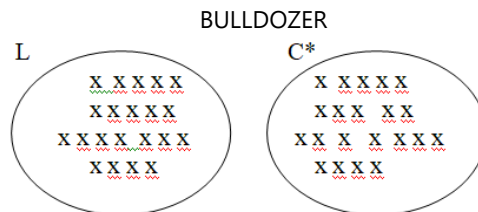


In this sense, it seems that the specific suggestion is intended to accommodate instances of broadening that, contrary to initial postulations, involve the partial retention of the logical entries and, consequently, also the literal meaning of the original concept. To take the example under scrutiny, the case of RECTANGLE\* in (3) can be treated as an instance of broadening that retains, rather than rejecting, some of the members of a perfect rectangle.

The comment quoted above, in combination with the diagram in (3), seems to convey the impression that those rectangular entities that are presumed to technically match the perfect rectangle contained in L may fall outside the speaker's intention to construct the ad hoc concept of RECTANGLE\* of lawn. These entities, then, may fall outside C\* but, due to their resemblance with the perfect rectangle, can be said to fall within the domain of intersection between L and C\*. In fact, Carston sees this combined account of broadening and narrowing (3) as doing general duty to most cases of loose use (Carston, 2002, p. 344), including simile-based metaphors [x is (like) y], which will be discussed in due course (section 4).

Leaving aside the plausibility of the argument for a combined concept construction [reflected in (3)] for the moment, an added type of schematic representation is proposed of creative metaphors, such as *Mary is a Bulldozer*, as in (4):

(4)



In general, this schema suggests that “the properties that make up the *ad hoc* concept cannot be recovered from the encyclopedic (or, indeed, logical) entry of the encoded concept”. As a result, “the entities in the world that fall under these two concepts [BULLDOZER and BULLDOZER\*] comprise disjoint sets” (Carston, p. 2002: 354)<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, regarding logical entries, while the one attached to BULLDOZER is HEAVY MACHINERY OF A CERTAIN SORT, that of BULLDOZER\* is HUMAN TEMPERAMENT OF A CERTAIN SORT. Also, regarding encyclopedic entries, whereas the encyclopedic entry of BULLDOZER “includes information about its land-clearing function, its effectiveness in mechanically pushing away large volumes of earth, rocks and other debris, and about its physical appearance”, the “components of the ad hoc concept BULLDOZER\* include representations of the [following properties]: obstinacy and persistence, insensitivity to other people's feelings and views, single mindedness in pursuing personal interests” (Carston, 2002, p. 354).

We do not mean to question the recommendation for a differentiating treatment of creative metaphor, especially of the type that appears in poetry<sup>7</sup>. However, as it stands, it simply suggests an attempt to accentuate the need for an added type of broadening [represented in (4)]. In particular, the claim of disassociation between the encyclopedic properties of the two concepts requires substantiation. For it is unclear why, for instance, BULLDOZER and BULLDOZER\* have no encyclopedic entries in common, or any common assumptions associated with their immediately identifiable encyclopedic entries, e.g. forcing one's way by making your presence as imposing or intimidating as that of a bulldozer.

<sup>6</sup> Carston does not agree with the traditional relevance-theoretic suggestion about broadening (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995), namely that the interpretation process brings together the encyclopedic entries for MARY and BULLDOZER. In her view, properties of Mary interact with properties of bulldozers (Carston, 2002: 350).

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Carston recently outlined an account of interpreting literary or creative metaphors (e.g. in poetry) (Carston, 2018; Wilson & Carston, 2019) based on non-propositional effect derivation and mental imaging. We will leave this matter outside the scope of the current enquiry.

Unfortunately, on the grounds that (1) illustrates an account of narrowing that differs from that of broadening in (2) or (3) or (4), we are entitled to the following conclusion: although the argument in (3) aims to provide a more integrative type of account that combines elements of narrowing into broadening, ultimately, it retains the employment of the two notions. This conclusion, in turn, entitles us to an investigation of the distinctive aspects of narrowing and broadening, so that a sharper observation of the respective processes is enabled and, in the end, the preservation of a differentiation can be justified.

In this quest for a clear observation of broadening/narrowing in (3)-(4), the problem is that the proposed explication seems to inherit the same drawback relating to her explication of (1)-(2): that of lack of descriptive detail. In view of the array of issues besetting the identification of narrowing or broadening behavior, the identification of pure narrowing, pure broadening or a combination of both in the process of AHCC becomes an unclear issue.

Up to this point, then, the proposal for (2), (3) and (4) simply suggests a triple view of broadening, outlined within a broader dual account of AHCC (1)-(2), (3), (4). However, this proposal suggests a profligate type of account of AHCC, which is not necessarily justified.

The obscurity in the description of narrowing/broadening appears to be no coincidence. Rather, it appears to follow from an absence of substance behind the related varieties. Indeed, the move towards a combined or unitary process of narrowing/broadening suggests a realization of the difficulty inherent in maintaining a distinction between the two notions. In this light, the case is made for discounting the prospect of an actual distinction between the two processes, noting that it would be "misleading" to think of broadening and narrowing as "two distinct processes at work" (Carston, 2002, p. 334)<sup>8</sup>. This idea is subsequently reaffirmed: "The idea is not that there are distinct processes of narrowing and broadening of word meaning but rather that there is a single process of word meaning adjustment which takes place as part of the bid for an interpretation" (Carston, 2016a).

On this score, a symmetrical view is put forward of the processes of broadening and narrowing, as sources of propositional development, very early on. While the symmetrical view is certainly construed as laying the foundation for a unitary approach to AHCC, still the claim that broadening and narrowing are not distinct processes is different and is no foregone conclusion in Carston's early work, as has been argued. In fact, evidence of the plan for a genuinely unitary and cognitively plausible approach to AHCC (uniting narrowing and broadening) does not appear earlier than Wilson and Carston's (2007) subsequent work on lexical pragmatics. It might be recalled that this work forms part of the traditional view of AHCC.

Let us consider their suggestion in what follows.

#### **4. A Unitary approach to lexical pragmatics**

In their paper *A Unitary Approach to Lexical Pragmatics*, Wilson and Carston (2007) take a step closer to the suggestion of a coherent account of AHCC. On this account, instances of narrowing, approximation, loose talk and figurative uses fall on a continuum between literal and non-literal interpretation. It is also argued further that both varieties make a contribution to the propositional content of an utterance. Moreover, in this light, they are both treatable in terms of a single interpretive task of mutual parallel adjustment, which is governed by considerations of relevance. Thus, the construction of an ad hoc concept is influenced by a process of interaction between explicitly and implicitly communicated content in the course of deductive reasoning.

For instance, in a conversation such as the following,

- (1) A: Will Sally look after the children if we get ill?  
B: Sally is an angel.

Speaker B's response is intended as a comment regarding Sally's disposition. Wilson and Carston (2007) analyze the case of interpreting ANGEL as a case of mutual parallel adjustment that involves

narrowing the denotation of ANGEL to include only (good) angels [a type of encyclopedic entry]<sup>9</sup> and broadening it to include people who share with (good) angels some of the [following] encyclopedic properties [exceptionally good and

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<sup>8</sup> In fact, her more recent work (Carston 2013, 2016a) is indicative of a more general problematization around a number of issues with regard to ad hoc concept construction, including the future of the differentiation between narrowing/broadening, which, however, remains intact to date.

<sup>9</sup> The comments offered in brackets throughout the quotation are meant as elaborations offered by the current author.



kind, watches over humans and helps them, virtuous in thought and deed, messenger of God, etc. (Wilson & Carston, 2007).

The conclusion ultimately arrived at is that

Both narrowing and broadening emerge as by-products of the search for relevance, and the same encoded concept may be narrowed or broadened (or both) to different degrees, and in different ways across different occasions of use" (Wilson & Carston, 2007).

At this point, it is noteworthy that the account of ANGEL above seems to resemble the case of combined broadening/narrowing illustrated above in (3). Now, the issue that seems to arise from the remarks quoted above is the following: does the treatment of ANGEL as a concept undergoing both narrowing and broadening entitle us to the conclusion of an integrative or unitary view of AHCC? Surely not. For how can we arrive at this conclusion, unless this treatment also involves abandoning the two notions of narrowing and broadening along with their labels; and these labels are still in use, as becomes evident. Further evidence of a preserved differentiation between the two varieties lies in the direct classification of instances of figurative talk under broadening (or broadening and narrowing), rather than narrowing (a classification standardly sustained in the current literature). Overall, it appears that, in face of the endeavor to advance the argument of a unitary lexical pragmatic view, they focus on the similarities, leaving aside the differences between narrowing and broadening.

The suggestion, then, of a unitary analysis of AHCC (Carston & Wilson, 2007; Sperber & Wilson, 2008) basically amounts to a treatment of narrowing and broadening as instances of a single interpretive process [of the sort explained in (3)], i.e., mutual parallel adjustment. However, contrary to first impressions, this suggestion turns out to combine two processes that ultimately retain their differentiated identity in making their contribution to the ad hoc construction of a concept like ANGEL\* (1). In this sense, Carston's claim that the notions of narrowing/broadening are 'not distinct' calls for specification: if broadening and narrowing represent separate by-products of a single type of interpretive process, how is there no distinction between them? If there is no actual distinction, are the two respective terms to be used interchangeably? In the final analysis, as the extent of the similarity between these two processes has not been clearly elucidated, the picture of an integrative process of AHCC remains remote within the standard relevance-theoretic conception.

In light of this conclusion, then, it would make sense to revisit the case in (1) (described in the former quotation of the two above), so as to look into the proposed operation of narrowing in comparison to that of broadening. The question that seems to emerge is the following: how is the case of ANGEL explicated by reference to 'narrowing' as well as 'broadening', if both processes involve encyclopedic material inclusion? Does this type of inclusion also involve the exclusion of some conceptual material? If it does, is it logical or encyclopedic? These questions are left unaddressed.

Indeed, the proposal for the process of mutual parallel adjustment is not at stake here, any more than the integration of narrowing or broadening into a singular type of mutual parallel adjustment is. What is at stake is the actual uniformity of the two notions of AHCC, in a framework of analysis that ultimately retains the employment of these two notions, along with their labels.

The obscurity involved in retaining the two notions is, perhaps, viewed equally clearly by way of contrasting the following simile-based figurative examples, both discussed in one of Carston's (2016a, p. 202) more recent reviews of the traditional view of AHCC:

- (2) Boris is a child.
- (3) Boris is a bachelor.

To start with the example in (2), the figurative use of CHILD is treated as a case of broadening<sup>10</sup>:

"the encoded concept CHILD is adjusted so as to mean roughly 'person who behaves in certain childish (or child-like) ways', and the result is a concept CHILD\* which is broader than the lexically encoded concept – as well as children, it includes some adults" (Carston, 2016a, p. 202).

It transpires, then, once again, that the broadened concept, i.e., CHILD\* (2) retains its logical entry in the AHCC process (since it includes 'children'), despite the loss of the literal meaning of CHILD; at the same time the specific process involves the inclusion of another entry, namely, a person who behaves in a childish way. But if the logical entry of a non-adult [included in CHILD (2)] were to be seen as remaining attached to CHILD\*, we would probably be faced with a contradiction between literal and non-literal

<sup>10</sup> Narrowing is not in the picture of Carston's account here.

interpretation, i.e., a child that is not a child. More generally, once again, we are led to an unclear view of broadening (in comparison to narrowing) and to the prospect of an inaccurate use of the respective terms.

Of course, we might attempt to continue the discussion of a unifying argument in a bid to find a way out of the impasse [in (2)], but this would renew our quest for answers. Thus, perhaps the logical entry of CHILD\* (i.e., non-adult) is to be seen as being reduced to an encyclopedic one. If it is encyclopedic, then the question that arises is whether the newly included entry (i.e. a person who behaves in a childish way) is encyclopedic too, or a formerly encyclopedic one that is elevated to logical status. If it is encyclopedic too, then, it is unclear whether there is a logical entry at all in CHILD\*. But in this case, is the derived concept devoid of any sort of substitute for a logical entry, e.g. definitional or central? And, finally, if the latter entry (person who behaves in a childish way) turns out to be logical or definitional, then how does it compare to the logical entry retained in any narrowed concept? Are the two types of logical entry of the same order?

Now, curiously, the example in (3) appears to contrast with that in (2). More specifically, whereas, it is used metaphorically (on this occasion), like the case in (2), it is also said to frame a case of combined broadening/narrowing modulation, unlike the case in (2), which, as has been noted, has been explained strictly in terms of broadening:

Then, if we take [(3)] as an utterance by Boris's wife, who has long endured his affairs with other women and general lack of commitment, the concept BACHELOR\* which is communicated is, arguably, both a broadening of the lexical concept BACHELOR (it includes *married* men who behave in certain ways) and a narrowing of it (it excludes unmarried men who don't behave in this stereotypic way) (Carston, 2016a, p. 202).

The question that seems fair to ask in this light, however, is the following: does the same exclusion (narrowing)/inclusion (broadening) not hold for the case presented in (2) too? In the same way that BACHELOR\* in (3) excludes its logical/literal entry of an unmarried man, including at the same time the entry of a 'married man who behaves in certain ways', does the ad hoc concept CHILD\* (2) not exclude its logical entry of being a non-adult male, including, at the same time, the entry of a male adult who behaves childishly? In this sense, it is worth addressing the question of why (2) and (3) are not treated on a par.

What seems to lend support to the postulation of a unified picture of AHCC is drawing attention to the distinction made between a pragmatic process, on the one hand, and interpretive processes, on the other. Thus, "[...] lexical narrowing and broadening (or a combination of the two) are the outcomes of a single interpretive process which fine tunes the interpretation of almost every word" (Wilson & Carston, 2007, p. 231). However, this distinction may not always prove tenable, inasmuch as reference to these two interpretive outcomes commonly requires a discussion of discrete pragmatic processes involving the manipulation of entries: entry inclusion (in the case of broadening), or entry exclusion (in the case of narrowing) or a combination of inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, a pragmatic process (AHCC) and the interpretive result it leads to become hard to distinguish. Moreover, the question that seems fair to ask is the following: if narrowing and broadening are simply reduced to two interpretive outcomes of a single process of AHCC, why are the respective terms needed, especially in face of a list of terms available for the description of 'literal' vs. 'metaphorical'/figurative/non-literal' interpretation?

Let us, then, conclude our discussion (in sections 3 and 4) about the problems connected to the notion of the dual view of AHCC. So far it transpires that, as it stands, the proposal for conceptual narrowing vs. broadening runs into trouble in two important respects: first, it falls short of a clear account of the behavior of logical entries in the process of broadening. This shortcoming prevents a transparent comparison between broadening and narrowing, thus, in the final analysis, a critical assessment and possible justification of the value of the particular distinction in ad hoc concept interpretation. Secondly, the suggestion of broadening involves the notion of deviation from a logical entry; a rather relative notion that can lead to the arbitrary identification of conceptual content. In face of the aforementioned problems, the proposal for a multi-schematic representation of broadening seems equally unclear, not to mention unnecessarily profligate.

In this light, while the relevance-theoretic move to deny the distinction between narrowing/broadening (within a unitary conception of AHCC) proves to be on the right track, so far, it only seems to have deemphasized or backgrounded the dual view of AHCC, rather than canceling it. As a result, more recent accounts appear to regress to a preservation of the two notions at hand, rather than supporting a genuinely singular approach.

In response to a number of issues connected to the traditional view of AHCC, Carston (2013, 2016a, 2019, 2022) advances an alternative and empirically more plausible view, according to which, in line with the thesis of semantic underdeterminacy, it is not only sentence meaning that is underspecified. More specifically, word meaning, too, consists not in a fully fledged concept but, rather, in an underspecified type of meaning that pragmatically develops into an ad hoc concept. To this extent, all word meanings, in abstraction from context, serve to point to the concept or sense intended by the speaker in using a word in context. In this

respect, ad hoc concept construction is a matter of free enrichment that occurs mandatorily in the course of interpreting word meaning.

The plausibility of this idea notwithstanding, the fact remains that the notions of broadening/narrowing (and their corresponding terms) are retained in the novel view of AHCC. To this extent, the novel view of AHCC seems to inherit elements of the standard (dual) view. In this connection, several questions remain to be addressed within the newly discussed framework of lexical pragmatics: how does the suggestion of underspecified word meaning affect the two notions? Does underspecified meaning contain entries? To the extent that narrowing crucially involves excluding entries and broadening involves including entries, how does exclusion/inclusion work?

In the next section (section 5), we consider a set of unfavorable implications that the standard view of AHCC has for general theoretical assumptions held in pragmatic theory, thus departing from this view.

### **5. General implications of the standard/dual view of ad hoc concept construction**

In this section we would like to argue further against the standard/dual view of AHCC, this time from the wider perspective of pragmatic theory. As has been suggested (at the end of section 4), while the later view of AHCC affects the nature of lexical meaning and, in this sense, also the process(es) of broadening/narrowing, the question remains as to how this/these process(es) is/are affected.

To return to the concerns of the current section, in the first place, the process of broadening and narrowing is explained below; this explanation is pervasive throughout the standard literature (Carston, 2002, 2004; Wilson & Carston, 2007).

What concept broadening entails is that, in effect, the original (lexical) concept makes available more information than you need, so that you can simply disregard whatever does not contribute to relevance [...] on the particular occasion. But, of course, the opposite is the case in many instances of narrowing/enrichment; here what the lexical concept makes available is often rather less than one needs to derive the intended effects (Carston, 2002, p. 335)

To appreciate the claim in favor of a dual view of AHCC, much hangs on what is meant by 'more' or 'less' information in her characterization of the pragmatic processes at hand. Below we attempt to consider two possible readings.

On a first approximation, the foregoing qualification ('more' or 'less' information) could be thought of as a set of values measuring the amount of information encoded in a lexical concept in, roughly speaking, quantitative terms. As has been explained (section 2), this information is generic or stereotypical, thus, not necessarily retrieved as a whole in context.

In this line of speculation, the explication of, say, broadening receives the reading that a lexical concept makes available a larger amount of general information than is required for the purpose of utterance interpretation. And this amount of information undergoes reduction in context. Let us pursue a speculative contrastive analysis of BACHELOR in terms of broadening vs. narrowing along standard relevance-theoretic lines.

Starting with the case of broadening, unlike the contextual situation in (1), the one in (3), repeated below as (1), exemplifies a metaphorical occurrence of BACHELOR:

- (1) Boris is a bachelor [where Boris is technically married].

In line with the accounts of (3)-(4), the logical property of the lexical concept, i.e. an unmarried man, would customarily be seen as being dropped, while the encyclopedic properties potentially retained would be those of a straight playboy or womanizer. On this account, this loss of logical content can reasonably be argued to involve reducing the overall conceptual material (originally) encoded in BACHELOR and, also, the broadening or loosening of the specific concept.

The suggestion that the conceptual material encoded in BACHELOR in (1) undergoes reduction in context is unsurprising and perfectly clear. What is less clear is why this notion of conceptual reduction or loss of conceptual material suggests a kind of reductive operation peculiar to broadening, rather than extending to narrowing. Would it not be plausible to suppose that, in the case in (1), the narrowing of BACHELOR\* is also subject to conceptual reduction (or lessening of conceptual material)? In other words, is it not the case that the rejection of entries stereotypically attached to BACHELOR (e.g. ineligibility for marriage) suggests a conceptual reduction too, so that only the speaker-intended (or relevant) entries are highlighted in context (e.g. eligibility for marriage)? Surely it is.

In this line of reasoning, it seems that conceptual reduction (or reduction in the amount of conceptual content) inevitably concerns both cases of AHCC. The only respect in which 'broadening' differs from 'narrowing' is that the former essentially involves shedding a concept's logical entries, while the latter crucially involves shedding a concept's encyclopedic entries.

But if reduction in conceptual information underlies both narrowing and broadening, then it is unlikely that the phraseology 'more (or less) information (than needed)' was intended to refer to values of quantity (of information encoded in the lexical concept). In this light, it is conceivable that she intended it to assign a greater or lesser degree of meaning specificity.

Indeed, elsewhere (Carston, 2004, p. 38, 2013; Wilson and Carston, 2007), the connection of the notion of specificity to narrowing is spelt out. In particular, in analyzing the meaning of the predicate 'tired' (in a context where 'I'm tired' is intended by the speaker as a response to the preceding question 'Do you want to go to the party?'), Carston (2004) notes that "'tired' is something much more specific, something roughly paraphrasable as 'tired to an extent that makes going to the party undesirable to [the speaker]'". However, if the notion of specificity is integral to the discussion of narrowing, then we can expect that it is by recourse to the same notion (to be accurate, lack of it) that we can discuss the 'opposite' pragmatic process, too, that of broadening<sup>11</sup>.

However, could broadening realistically involve absence of (or reduction in) meaning specificity? We surmise that it could not. To resume our discussion of broadened BACHELOR\* in (1), a contextual reduction in the information originally encoded could not, under ordinary interpretive circumstances, involve a decline in the level of specificity of this information, insofar as context is not, realistically speaking, the typical kind of environment for the achievement of sense generality or less sense specificity.

To illustrate further, if a broadened sense were to be considered less specific, how would the allegedly broadened concepts of BACHELOR\* in (1) or RAW\* in (3) compare to their contextless equivalents BACHELOR or RAW in terms of sense-generality? In particular, could the 'broadened' concept BACHELOR\*/RAW\* realistically be claimed to contain less specific information in context than its decontextualized counterpart BACHELOR/RAW? Alternatively, could, for example, the entry 'completely uncooked meat' (connected to RAW) reflect information that differs in specificity from the type of information that RAW\* could reflect in a context where, for example, a specific person buys a specific chunk of raw meat from a specific butcher?

An affirmative answer would seem to be grounded on the following assumption about the way context operates: namely, that the same source of contextual information could contribute two types of input to conceptual interpretation, so that the two contrasting processes of narrowing/ broadening can be justifiably maintained. We would find a theoretical assumption of this sort counter-intuitive on the following grounds: if the role of context is, *prima facie*, to enrich or further specify encoded meaning, how can it also be reconciled to any notion of broadening (or loosening or weakening a concept) that is effected via the provision of contextual information that is less specific than the information encoded linguistically? Indeed, granted that metaphorical interpretation depends on context and reference assignment as much as literal interpretation does, one can only come to the realization that, contrary to expectations, broadening does not result in generic but, rather, in specific conceptual meaning. On these evidential grounds, the suggestion that broadening involves over-determinacy of lexical meaning outside context, "in the sense that encoded content is overly restrictive" (Carston, 2002, p. 330) cannot be plausibly held.

It appears, then, that, on the second reading of Carston's phraseology, the proposal that broadening consists in decreasing meaning specificity proves implausible, too, as it contradicts basic tenets in pragmatic theory about the nature of context.

More plausibly, 'more or less' can be accounted for in terms of both information load and specificity on condition that the two ad hoc processes are treated on a par along the following lines: like (the putative case of) narrowing, (the putative case of) broadening, too, results in a) 'less' conceptual material and, at the same time, b) 'more' specific meaning in context. In this sense, the construction of ad hoc meaning in context necessarily involves a) the selection or 'exclusion', in Carston's terms, of general conceptual material, i.e., logical or encyclopedic entries, so that b) the ones 'activated' of 'highlighted' will adapt or appropriately apply to the description of a specific referent; this entry selection amounts to reduction in conceptual content. It is on this view that the prospect of a more coherent or integrative approach to lexical adjustment can be entertained.

On this approach, the dual view of 'narrowing' and 'broadening' cedes place to a single view of ad hoc concept construction; and the two associated notions need to be abandoned altogether and replaced by a single and undifferentiated notion of ad hoc concept construction. Along these lines, the two aforementioned varieties are not simply seen as falling under a comprehensive relevance-theoretic heuristic but, rather, are taken to represent an identical process of ad hoc concept construction. On this view, a cancelation of the two varieties also involves the cancelation of the respective terms used to label them. In this way, we are relieved of the obligation to describe their allegedly distinctive character. In fact, to refer to the proposed single notion of ad hoc

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<sup>11</sup> The connection of the notion of specificity to the two types of AHCC is also spelled out in Carston (2013).

concept construction, we can employ the term 'ad hoc concept construction' or 'modulation', the latter term being already popular in the relevant literature and credited to Recanati (2004, 2010).

But if broadening and narrowing are one and the same process, what can we hold accountable for the perpetuation of the misimpression that AHCC falls into two types? In what follows, we will attempt to expose the factors contributing to the above-mentioned misimpression.

We would like to suggest that the perseverance of the dual view can be attributed to two factors: firstly, terms such as 'pragmatic processes' frequently act as cover terms distracting the analyst from a rather crucial differentiation in utterance interpretation: that between a) the pragmatic tasks performed in delivering an interpretation and b) the delivered interpretation itself, in other words, the end result of the pragmatic task. Secondly, the prospect of raising awareness to this kind of neglect seems to be particularly limited, in face of the terminological profusion disorientating the description of these pragmatic processes. In what follows we discuss further the foregoing set of factors distorting our view of ad hoc concept construction.

### **6. Factors contributing to the dual view of ad hoc concept construction**

As already suggested, the dual view of AHCC appears to be problematic in that it overlooks a differentiation between separate stages involved in comprehension analysis: firstly, the pragmatic tasks employed for the delivery of an interpretation and, secondly, the resulting interpretation itself.

As was mentioned earlier, in fairness to the standard relevance-theoretic treatment, their proponents too, appears to recognize the difference between a) pragmatic processes and b) the interpretive outcome of these processes. Thus, "[...] there are two possible outcomes (a narrower concept or a broader one) of what is essentially a single process: a process of picking and choosing from among elements of logical and encyclopedic information that are made available by the encoded concept" (Carston, 2002, p. 334).

However, in actual practice, in the standard relevance-oriented lexical-pragmatic analysis, 'broadening' or 'narrowing' are used as cover terms to refer indistinctly either to the pragmatic process involved in the ad hoc conceptual adjustment of a word as well as the word's resulting conceptual adjustment (or the conceptually adjusted interpretation) itself. Thus, a concept both undergoes the process of 'broadening' or 'narrowing' in context and, at the same time, winds up framing a broader or narrower conceptual space.

To illustrate the neutralization of the distinction between the interpretive parameters reflected in (a) and (b), the reading of all utterances in (3)-(4) as cases of broadening seems to have dwelled on the assumption that the dropping of the logical entries attached to RECTANGLE (3), RAW (4) leads to the 'broadening' of the bounds of the respective concept; and this 'broadening', in turn, somehow entitles us to the conclusion that the derived concept can be used more broadly, in other words, in less-than-literal contexts. Overall, then, the term 'broadening' seems to refer indistinctly either to the broadening of a concept by way of a pragmatic process, or to the broad range of the concept's applications in context, motivating an equally broad range of interpretative outcomes.

In fact, it is no coincidence that the following explanation of the broadened meaning of CIRCLE\* in (2) loses sight of the two interpretive parameters. This explanation is given as part of Carston's (2013) presentation of the standard view of AHCC in the relevance-theoretic framework.

(2) The children quickly formed a circle

If the word 'circle' encodes the concept paraphraseable as 'closed flat curve every point of which is equidistant from the circle' [...] then the concept CIRCLE\* communicated by [the] utterance [...] is likely to encompass a much broader range of shapes (Carston, 2013, p. 182).

We surmise that the explanation of CIRCLE\* as a broadened concept here is open to objection. More specifically, on account of its disambiguating function, the context (e.g. a visually perceived setting) is not typically construed as the type of environment that allows a concept, such as CIRCLE\*, to encompass a broad range of shapes or, more generally, interpretations. Rather, it is seen as securing the assignment of a single, specific shape to CIRCLE\*. In fact, it could be more plausibly argued that the rejection of the logical entry of literal CIRCLE makes the concept applicable to a broader range of contexts, licensing a non-literal understanding. This does not suggest, however, that the derived concept carries a range of senses (in this case shapes) in each one of these contexts of use.

What is more, the problem discussed is exacerbated by the availability of an abundance of terms to describe 'broadening/narrowing'. To this issue, we might add that some of these terms seem to be wanting in transparency in describing the concept construction process. For instance, within the standard conception of ad hoc concept construction, the term 'loose' may initially be intended to describe the loosening or broadening of a concept but it also covers instances of 'loose talk' or 'loose use' in general; for example, it is worth pointing out cases of loosely, in the sense of inaccurately formulated phrases, sentences or conjunctions, apart from cases of singular loosely used words.

It transpires, then, that despite original intentions, a constant orientation is not maintained towards the two separate stages at issue involved in the interpretation process. This is probably the reason why the standard AHCC account ultimately regresses to the dual view of narrowing/broadening and the preservation of the current terminological status quo.

To conclude, it becomes evident that the study of AHCC needs to consistently observe two distinct stages: a) the pragmatic task employed for the delivery of an interpretation and b) the resulting interpretation itself. On this view, we would like to suggest that AHCC a) consists in a single type of pragmatic task that b) may lead to two types of interpretation: literal and non-literal<sup>12</sup>. In light of this discovery, it seems that a genuinely unitary treatment of AHCC requires abandoning not only the traditional dual view of concept construction, i.e. in terms of narrowing/broadening, but also the diversity of terms used to describe the foregoing varieties, i.e. narrowing, enrichment/ strengthening vs. broadening/ loosening/weakening. In this connection, figurative uses are to be reserved for a discussion of non-literal interpretation, rather than broadening, or combining broadening and narrowing.

Along the lines proposed, the postulation of over-specified vs. under-specified lexical concepts needs to be abandoned, in face of the fact that lexical meaning is inherently underspecified, in the sense that it depends on context for specificity; and if it is not under-specified, it certainly cannot be viewed as originally over-specified.

A word of caution is required here: the proposal for a one-directional AHCC does not cancel the notion of ad hoc concept construction. To this extent, we continue to view AHCC as contributing to the propositional content of an utterance. Moreover, our approach does not affect the relevance-theoretic notion (Wilson & Carston 2007) of a continuum between literal and non-literal interpretation, on which a range of non-literal uses fall, ranging from approximations, to hyperbole and metaphor; neither does it affect the relevance-based suggestion that literal interpretation is bypassed in arriving from linguistic content to a figuratively intended or communicated proposition.

## **7. Conclusion**

The discussion on AHCC can be divided into periods: the early and the later period. While early work focuses on the mapping of a lexical concept onto an ad hoc concept in the course of interpretation, later work basically challenges the possibility of a lexical concept outside context, albeit preserving the notions of narrowing and broadening (as it seems).

The current discussion took issue with the proposal for organizing AHCC into two varieties, according to the early relevant-theoretic conception: narrowing and broadening. In this connection, it has advanced the argument that the dual view of lexical adjustment is misplaced and, in this respect, appears to dwell on a rather obscure and unnecessarily profligate argument that has, also, been fostered by haphazard terminological application.

In this spirit, we proposed abandoning the two varieties of narrowing and broadening, in preference to a more coherent account of ad hoc concept construction. On this account, while the distinction between literal and non-literal interpretation holds, the delivery of these types of interpretation is not a matter of two distinct pragmatic operations. Rather, it seems to be secured by a single pragmatic operation (of ad hoc concept construction), which invariably involves conceptual loss, in other words the reduction of the encyclopedic or logical entries of a lexically encoded concept. Thus, while literal interpretation is secured by loss of (encoded) encyclopedic content alone, non-literal interpretation involves (or also involves) loss of (encoded) logical content.

Since the development of the later conception of AHCC is currently in progress, since the notions of narrowing and broadening appear to have a place in it, too, and since the process of conceptual modulation remains an open issue, we surmise that the present paper has made an important contribution in the direction of a robust proposal.

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<sup>12</sup> One might rush into the assumption that the move of abandoning the distinction between the two types of AHCC has an unfavorable implication; that it also involves dropping another co-extensive distinction: that between literal and non-literal interpretation. However, this assumption would be ill-founded, as it would fail to discriminate between the two aforementioned separate stages involved in the interpretation process.

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