

Lectures 9-10 The Semantics/Pragmatics Boundary Disputes

I. Paul Grice: Summary

Intention-based theory of rational communicative behaviour

The role of speaker's intentions:

'A meant_{NN} something by x ': 'A uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention'. (Grice 1957 in 1989, p. 219)

“‘ U meant something by uttering x ’ is true iff, for some audience A , U uttered x intending:

- (1) A to produce a particular response r
- (2) A to think (recognize) that U intends (1)
- (3) A to fulfil (1) on the basis of his fulfilment of (2).” (Grice 1969 in 1989, p.92)

Implicature (implicatum): inferences that are drawn from an utterance. They are seen by the hearer as being intended by the speaker. **Speakers implicate, hearers infer** (Horn 2004).

The Cooperative Principle:

'Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.'

Grice 1975 ('Logic and conversation') in 1989 p.26

The Maxims of Quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

The Maxims of Quality:

Try to make your contribution one that is true:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

The Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

Properties of implicatures arising from these three maxims: **cancellability, non-detachability, calculability, non-conventionality**

The Maxim of Manner:

Be perspicuous

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.

2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief.
4. Be orderly.

–and one might need others, e.g. ‘Be polite’.

Revision of Grice’s maxims of conversation:

- (1) neo-Gricean (rearrangement of Grice's maxims, Horn & Levinson);
- (2) relevance theory (one principle, Sperber & Wilson)

1. Neo-Gricean

1.1. Horn (1984, 1988, 2004, 2007):

The Q Principle: Make your contribution sufficient; say as much as you can (given *R*).

(replaces Grice’s Quantity 1, ‘Be informative’, and Manner: ‘Avoid ambiguity’, ‘Avoid obscurity’.) = **Maximization of informational content**

The R Principle: Make your contribution necessary; say no more than you must (given *Q*).

(replaces Grice’s Relation (‘Be relevant’), Quantity 2 (‘Do not be too informative’), and Manner: ‘Be brief’.) = **Minimization of form**

The use of a marked expression such as a complex, more effortful one, when a simpler one is also available produces an interpretation according to which the message is marked in some way. Quality, truthfulness is always assumed.

1.2. Levinson (1987, 1995, 2000):

Q-principle: ‘Don’t provide a statement that is informationally weaker than your knowledge of the world allows, unless providing a stronger statement would contravene the I- principle.’

‘I often take sugar in my coffee.’ +> not always

‘I believe that John is away.’ +> not know

I-principle (the maxim of minimization): ‘Say as little as necessary’, i.e. produce the minimal linguistic clues sufficient to achieve your communicational ends, bearing *Q* in mind.

‘John turned the key and the engine started.’ +> and then

‘Harry and Sue bought a piano.’ +> together

M-principle: ‘Do not use a prolix, obscure or marked expression without reason.’

Order of preference: $Q > M > I$:

‘John caused the car to stop.’ $M > I$

Adding meaning to the truth-conditional content (G. Gazdar): (1) background assumptions from general knowledge; (2) semantic entailments; (3) potential

conversational implicatures: (i) Q-implicatures: clausal, then scalar; (ii) M-implicatures; (iii) I-implicatures; (4) potential presuppositions.

2. Principle of Relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1986/95):

Interlocutors preserve the balance between the effort and the effect in conversation by minimising the expenditure (the *processing effort*) and at the same time maximising the gain (the contextual implications, *cognitive effect*).

‘In *Relevance*, we make two fundamental claims, one about cognition, the other about communication:

- (1) Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.
- (2) Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance.’
Sperber & Wilson (1995: 260).

II. Semantics/Pragmatics Boundary Dispute

Conclusion so far:

$Meaning_{NN}$ (what is conveyed): what is said + what is implicated
(conventionally and non-conventionally).

Problem:

Where is the boundary between semantics and pragmatics?

- (1) It is getting late.
+> Let’s go home. (particularized; different sentence)
- (2) Everybody read *Wolf Hall*.
+> Everybody in my family read *Wolf Hall*. (particularized; addition to the uttered sentence)
- (3) Some (but not all) people like Alexandra Burke.
+> Some but not all people like Alexandra Burke. (generalized; addition to the uttered sentence)

1. Traditional distinction:

SEMANTICS

deals with truth-conditional
meaning

PRAGMATICS

deals with non-truth-conditional
meaning; PRAGMATICS = MEANING -
TRUTH CONDITIONS

But: Grice's *what is said* (semantic, truth-conditional meaning) also includes the outcome of the *pragmatic processes* of reference assignment e.g. to pronouns and disambiguation of ambiguous expressions (Grice 1978).

Grice's what is said *entails* what is meant. So, metaphor and irony have to be classified as 'making as if to say' (Grice 1975: 30 in 1989). The entailment condition was abandoned by post-Griceans and more pragmatics was allowed in 'what is said':

→

2. Contextualism (currently dominant view)

'...it is no longer possible to contrast 'what is said' with those aspects of the interpretation of utterances that are pragmatically rather than semantically determined; for what is said turns out to be, in a large measure, pragmatically determined. Besides the conversational implicatures, which are external to (and combine with) what is said, there are other nonconventional, pragmatic aspects of utterance meaning, which are constitutive of what is said.'
Recanati (1989: 98)

2.1. Explicature (Carston 1988, 2002; Sperber & Wilson 1986/95)

The proposition expressed is the *explicature* (development of the logical form of the sentence)

She kicked him and [+ as a result] he fell.

Explicatures are functionally independent from implicatures:

'Implicatures have distinct propositional forms (...) with their own truth conditions and they function independently of the explicature as the premises and conclusions of arguments. So we have a further property of any assumption conveyed by an utterance that we would want to call an implicature: as well as cancellability (without contradiction) and calculability, there is the independent functioning of these forms in the inferences involved in deriving the full import of an utterance.'
Carston (1988: 157-158)

Scope Principle: Explicature falls within the scope of logical operators such as negation, disjunction and conditional:

'If the old king died of a heart attack and a republic was declared Sam will be happy, but if a republic was declared and the old king died of a heart attack Sam will be unhappy.'

$(p \& q) \rightarrow r$ $(q \& p) \rightarrow \neg r$

Explicature is an object of study of truth-conditional semantics. Pragmatic processes that contribute to the construction of the explicature belong to truth-conditional semantics. There is no psychologically real level of logical form.

2.2. Recanati's What Is Said (1989, 2004, 2010)

I haven't had breakfast.

→ I haven't had breakfast today.

Enrichment: *strengthening* and *saturation*

Pragmatic enrichment of *what is said* is automatic, subconscious.

Criteria for distinguishing conversational implicatures from pragmatic constituents of what is said:

*Minimalist Principle: a pragmatically determined aspect of meaning belongs to what is said if without it the utterance would not express a complete proposition.

It will take us some time to get there.

I have had breakfast.

√ *Availability Principle*: ‘In deciding whether a pragmatically determined aspect of utterance meaning is part of what is said, that is, in making a decision concerning what is said, we should always try to preserve our pre-theoretic intuitions on the matter.’

Recanati (1989: 106)

Tom has [exactly] three children.

Tom studied at Oxford or [exclusive] Cambridge.

√ *Scope Principle* (see above – the old king & Sam example)

The truth conditions of the utterance depend on the interplay of a variety of sources of information. As a result, we obtain Truth-Conditional Pragmatics:

‘...various contextual processes come into play in the determination of an utterance’s truth conditions; not merely saturation – the contextual assignment of values to indexicals and free variables in the logical form of the sentence – but also free enrichment and other processes which are not linguistically triggered but are pragmatic through and through. That view I will henceforth refer to as ‘Truth-conditional pragmatics (TCP).’

F. Recanati. 2002. ‘Unarticulated constituents’. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 25: 299-345. p. 302.

Recanati (2004, 2010) advocates a rather strong view of pragmatic enrichment (*modulation*). He claims that such contextual modulation is *always* present: ‘there is no level of meaning which is both (i) propositional (truth-evaluable) and (ii) minimalist, that is, unaffected by top-down factors’. (2004: 90). This view is called *contextualism* and it is currently the subject of heated debates with those who would rather keep semantics simple, ‘minimal’, close to what is physically uttered.

2.3. Merger representations in *Default Semantics* (Jaszczolt 2005, 2009, 2010)

Parsimony of Levels Principle (POL):

Levels of senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.

A: I’ve cut my finger.

B: You are not going to die!

Primary meaning (in merger representation): There is nothing to worry about.

Default Semantics abandons the **syntactic constraint** of truth-conditional pragmatics and relevance theory according to which the explicit content (explicature, what is said) has to be the *development of the logical form* (i. e. has to be added to the output of syntactic processing) of the sentence. Primary meaning is defined as the most salient meaning intended by the speaker and recovered by the addressee and it may sometimes override the logical form of the sentence, as in B above.

Primary Intention Principle (PI): The primary role of intention in communication is to secure the referent of the speaker's utterance.

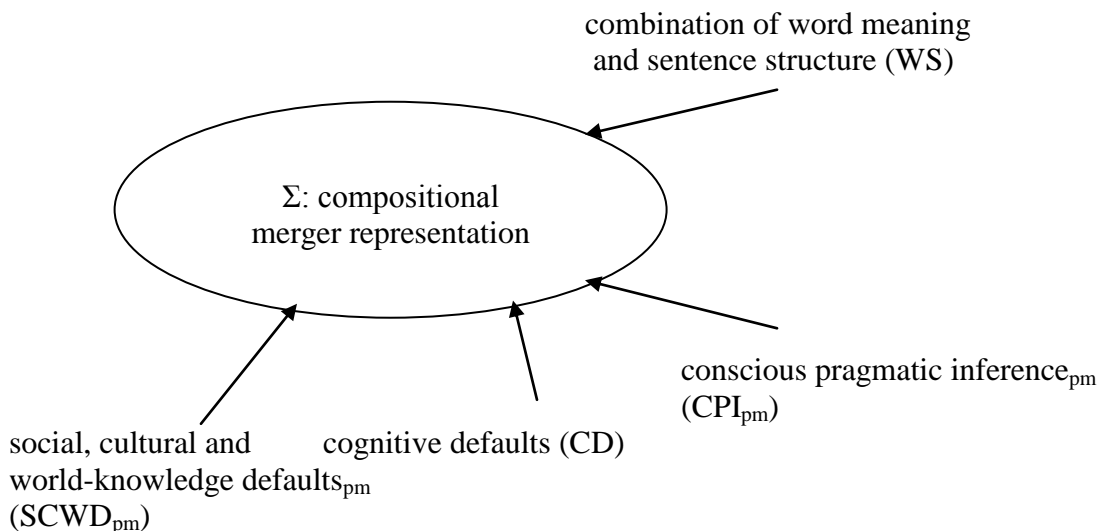
‘The winner of the Nobel Prize for literature 2006 is a good writer.’
referential (Orhan Pamuk) > attributive (whoever received the prize)

Degrees of Intentions Principle (DI): Intentions come in various strength, i.e. they allow for degrees.

‘Ralph believes that the best architect designed Sagrada Família.’
de re (Antoni Gaudí) > *de dicto*₁ (Simon Guggenheim) > *de dicto*₂ (whoever designed that church)

Processing of utterance meaning:

Primary meaning:



Secondary meanings:

- social, cultural and world-knowledge defaults_{sm} (SCWD_{sm})
- conscious pragmatic inference_{sm} (CPI_{sm})

3. Levinson's *Middle Level of Meaning* (1995; 2000)

Three levels of meaning: sentence meaning, utterance-type meaning, and utterance-token meaning.

“This third layer is a level of systematic pragmatic inference based *not* on direct computations about speaker-intentions, but rather on *general expectations about how language is normally used*. These expectations give rise to presumptions, default inferences, about both content and force; and it is at this level (if at all) that we can sensibly talk about *speech acts, presuppositions, felicity conditions, conversational pre-sequences, preference organisation and, of especial concern to us, generalised conversational implicatures*.” Levinson (1995: 93)

A: What time is it?

B: Some of the guests are already leaving.

PCI: It must be late.

GCI: Not all of the guests are already leaving. <all, some>

“...that intermediate level is constantly under attack by reductionists seeking to assimilate it either to the level of sentence-meaning or to the level of speaker-meaning; thus, for example, in the case of the inferences we are calling GCIs, many theorists (Kamp, Peters, Barwise and others) have suggested that they should be in effect semanticised, while Sperber and Wilson and some so-called local-pragmatics theorists have presumed that on the contrary they should be assimilated to matters of nonce-inference at the level of speaker-intention. But generalised implicatures are not going to reduce so easily in either direction, for they sit midway, systematically influencing grammar and semantics on the one hand and speaker-meaning on the other. I shall therefore presume that we do indeed need such a three-tiered theory of communication.” Levinson (1995: 95)

- semanticization of middle level in Discourse Representation Theory
- pragmaticization of middle level in relevance theory

“...it would seem incontrovertible that any theory of utterance interpretation would have to admit the contribution of a level at which sentences are systematically paired with preferred interpretations.” Levinson (2000: 27)

4. Semantic Minimalism

4.1. *Minimal Semantics*, Emma Borg (2004, 2007)

Semantic theory must remain unaffected by pragmatic considerations. Borg constrains the task of semantics to accounting for deductive, formal operations through which sentence meaning is arrived at:

“The truth-conditional semantic theory is governed, not by rich (...) inferential processes, but rather by formally triggered, deductive operations.”
Borg (2004: 8).

The main reason for this is modularity: sentence meaning is processed in the encapsulated computational language module, while the recovery of speaker’s intentions and of the meaning of the *utterance* is non-modular.

‘That is red’ is true iff the contextually salient object is red.
‘Steel isn’t strong enough’ is true iff steel isn’t strong enough for something or other, salient in the context.

Truth conditions are not verification conditions: we don’t have to know what situation in the world would make the sentence true.

+ a very similar view:

4.2. *Insensitive Semantics, Cappelen and Lepore (2005)*

A truth condition can be produced for a sentence even if we are not in a position to discern possible situations that would verify it. It is a mistake to assume that a semantic theory should account for speakers’ intuitions about the content of the utterance, i.e. about the speaker’s meaning.

Semantically context-sensitive expressions: personal pronouns (‘I’, ‘he’); demonstrative pronouns (‘this’, ‘that’); adverbs ‘here’, ‘there’, ‘now’, ‘today’, ‘yesterday’, ‘tomorrow’, ‘ago’, ‘henceforth’; adjectives ‘actual’ and ‘present’; tense.

“Semantics is about how best to specify the semantic value of the lexical items and their contribution to the semantic values of complex expressions and sentences in which they occur.

On the other hand, when we think about and describe what people say, i.e., when our aim is to represent or articulate what’s said by an utterance, we aim to characterize a speaker’s act (that utterance), and in so doing our aim is to determine something about a particular act in a particular context...”
Cappelen and Lepore (2005: 58).

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| minimal semantics + speech act pluralism |
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4.3. Radical Semantic Minimalism, Bach (e. g. 2004, 2007)

“It is just a brute fact about language that some syntactically complete sentences are not semantically complete.” (‘The boy isn’t good enough.’)
(Bach 2004: 37)

“As long as it is not assumed that the job of semantics is to give truth conditions of (declarative) sentences, there is no reason to suppose that pragmatics needs to intrude on semantics.” (p. 42)

“The semantics-pragmatics distinction is not fit to be blurred. What lies on either side of the distinction, the semantic and the pragmatic, may each be messy in various ways, but that doesn’t blur the distinction itself. Taken as properties of sentences, semantic properties are on a par with syntactic and phonological properties: they are linguistic properties. Pragmatic properties, on the other hand, belong to acts of uttering sentences in the course of communicating. Sentences have the properties they have

independently of anybody's act of uttering them. Speakers' intentions do not endow them with new semantic properties..." (p 27).

Bach accuses Borg, Cappelen and Lepore of not being radical enough and adopting *propositionalism* whereas a sentence doesn't always have to express a full proposition.

How does this minimal sentence relate to what the speaker means?

→ Bach's Implicature

people often speak loosely, non-literally:

(a) Sentence non-literality

Expansion of a minimal proposition:

'Everybody went to Paris.' → Everybody in this room went to Paris.

'I haven't eaten.' → I haven't eaten breakfast today.

(b) Semantic underdetermination

Completion of a propositional radical:

'The boy isn't good enough.' → The boy isn't good enough to play in the youth orchestra.

I am too tired [+ for what?]

?She is leaving [+ from where?]

?She wants a taxi [+ to do what with?]

vs. ellipsis: Bill wants pie for dessert and Bob pudding.

vs. the resolution of indexical reference

"There is simply no sense in which the slots in propositional radicals have counterparts (syntactic gaps) in the semantically underdeterminate sentences that yield them. For incomplete logical forms can be generated by complete syntactic forms." Bach (1994: 283)

Summary: "...with sentence non-literality a minimal proposition is fleshed out; with semantic underdetermination a propositional radical is filled in."

Bach (1994: 269)

"Implicatures go beyond what is said, but unlike implicatures, which are additional propositions external to what is said, implicatures are built out of what is said."

Bach (1994: 273).

“For example, in ‘Bill managed to finish his homework’, the truth-conditional content includes both the finishing and the entailed difficulty.” Bach (1994: 289)

An argument for minimal propositions:

‘I haven’t eaten.’

I haven’t ever eaten in my life.

There is no time prior to the time of utterance at which the speaker ate.

State of the Art:

There are several *contextualist* approaches to semantics and several *minimalist* ones and the debate is continuing.

Suggested reading (at least three or four chapters/articles from the following)

Introductory:

Jaszczolt 2002, ch 10-11
 Ariel 2010 ch 5
 Jaszczolt 2010 a,b, & forthcoming
 Huang 2007, chs 2, 6-7
 Bach 1994
 Levinson 1995

Advanced/detailed:

Recanati 1989, 2004, 2005,2010
 Carston 1988, 1998a, 2002, 2007
 Levinson 2000
 Horn 1988, 2004, 2007
 Sperber & Wilson 1995, ch 3
 Bach 2004, 2006, 2007
 Jaszczolt 2010c
 Cappelen and Lepore 2005
 Borg 2004, 2007
 Jaszczolt 2005, Part I
 Jaszczolt 2009, ch 4.1
 Preyer and Peter 2005
 Szabó 2005