

PHIL 3710/LING 3332: Philosophy of Language
Week 5: Grice on meaning

Speaker meaning and expression meaning

1. Linguistic expressions mean things – we have been talking about what various linguistic expressions (names, definite descriptions, sentences) mean, and how they come to mean it.
2. Also *speakers* mean things. When I assertively utter ‘Ithaca is gorgeous’, I mean something by ‘Ithaca’, by ‘gorgeous’, and by ‘Ithaca is gorgeous’.
3. When a speaker uses an expression to mean something (or means something by the expression) there is sometimes (perhaps often) a difference between what the speaker means by the expression and what the expression itself means:
 - a. I have a dearth of good students
 - b. That is black
 - c. Sue is ready
 - d. (?) Derk has very nice handwriting
4. What is the connection, if any, between expression meaning and speaker meaning?

Grice’s project

1. Grice (1957, 1968, 1969) believed that we can and should do the following:
 - a. Account for *expression meaning* in terms of *speaker meaning*. I.e. account for what an expression *e* means in terms of what speakers use *e* to mean.
 - b. Account for *speaker meaning* in terms of *speaker intentions*. I.e. account for what a speaker uses *e* to mean in terms of what the speaker intends.

We will focus on the second part of this project (as Grice himself did)

2. Grice wanted a *reductive* account (analysis) of speaker meaning. I.e. an account that need not itself appeal to speaker meaning.

Which of the following accounts are reductive?

- For a speaker to use *e* to mean *m* is for *m* to be what the speaker means by *e*
- To be a parent is to have a child
- For *S* to know that *p* is for *S* to have a justified true belief that *p*
- For *S* to be a bachelor is for *S* to be an unmarried male
- For *p* to be necessary is for *p* to be true in all possible worlds
- For event *e*₁ to have caused event *e*₂ is for *e*₂ to counterfactually depend on *e*₁: if *e*₁ had not have happened then *e*₂ would not have happened

3. Ideally we want accounts of the form “For ... is for ...” or “To be ... is to be ...”, but often we settle for accounts of the form “Necessarily, ... iff ...”. There is a difference:
 - a. To be triangular is to be trilateral
Necessarily, for all x : x is triangular iff x is trilateral
 - b. To be angry is to be angry and such that $2 + 2 = 4$
Necessarily, for all x : x is angry iff x is angry and $2 + 2 = 4$
4. When we are looking for an account of something, X , we are looking for an account of X itself, not of our *concept* of X . But since we are doing it from our armchairs, apparently just by examining our concept of X , the process is sometimes called *conceptual analysis*. Here ‘conceptual’ describes the *manner* of the analysis, not the *object* (compare: ‘sword fighting’).
5. Some terminology. Accounts can:
 - Be extensionally adequate
 - Be necessarily extensionally adequate
 - Be conceptually adequate
 - Overgenerate
 - Undergenerate
6. How plausible is it that a reductive account of speaker meaning can be given? After all, it seems that we can’t even give a reductive account of what a chair is.
7. If it can, how plausible is it that it can be given in terms of speaker intentions? (Remember: e can be a sub-sentential expression.)

Grice’s ‘Meaning’ (1957)

1. Grice distinguishes two uses of the verb ‘mean’: the *natural* use and the *nonnatural* use. And with it two kinds of meaning: *natural* meaning (meaning_N) and *nonnatural* meaning (meaning_{NN}).

Natural:

- Those spots mean measles.
- The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year.

Nonnatural:

- Those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full.
- That remark meant that Smith found his wife indispensable.
- My drawing and showing the picture meant that Mr Y had been unduly familiar.

2. He points to five differences between the two uses:

- a. If the recent budget means that we shall have a hard year then we shall have a hard year.
 - b. If those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full, then something is meant by those three rings.
 - c. If those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full, then someone means something by those three rings.
 - d. If those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full, then those three rings mean 'the bus is full'.
 - e. If those spots mean measles then the fact that he has those spots means that he has measles.
3. Maybe we can draw the distinction between the two uses more precisely?
- a. Each sentence involving the first use can be paraphrased in the form 'The fact that P means that Q', where 'P' and 'Q' are to be replaced by declarative sentences. In these sentences the verb 'mean' expresses a 2-place relation between propositions.
 - b. Each sentence involving the second use can be paraphrased in the form 'S means that P by x ', where 'S' is to be replaced by a noun phrase, 'P' by a declarative sentence, and ' x ' by an expression that refers to what Grice calls an 'utterance'. In these sentences the verb 'mean' expresses a 3-place relation between a subject, a proposition, and an utterance.
4. Grice raises the question: what is mean_{NN} ?
5. He rejects the following 'causal' answer:

For x to mean_{NN} something, x must have (roughly) a tendency to produce in an audience some attitude (cognitive or otherwise) and a tendency, in the case of a speaker, to be produced by that attitude, these tendencies being dependent on "an elaborate process of conditioning attending the use of the sign in communication."

- Problem: Putting on a tail coat does not mean_{NN} that one is about to go to a dance. The given conditions are not sufficient (they overgenerate).
 - Problem: Telling someone that Jones is an athlete does not mean_{NN} that Jones is tall (overgenerates).
 - Problem: Only works for standard meaning, not particular meaning.
6. Grice offers his own analysis, in four steps:
- a. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience.

Problem: Leaving B's hanky at the murder scene does not mean_{NN} that B was the murderer. The conditions are not sufficient (they overgenerate).

- b. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience, and intended the audience to recognize that intention.

Problem: Leaving the china my daughter has broken lying around for my wife to see does not mean_{NN} that my daughter has broken the china. The conditions are not sufficient (they overgenerate).

- c. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience, and intended the audience to recognize that intention, and that recognition makes a difference.

Problem: Frowning does mean_{NN} that I am in displeasure. The conditions are not necessary (they undergenerate).

- d. A meant that p by x iff A intended x to induce the belief that p in some audience, *by means of* the recognition of this intention.

7. Grice extends the analysis to effects other than inducing beliefs:

- a. A meant so-and-so by x iff A intended x to induce the so-and-so effect in some audience, *by means of* the recognition of this intention.

Need to qualify: Primary intention only.

8. Grice extends the analysis:

- a. x meant so-and-so iff somebody meant so-and-so by x .
Problem: Traffic light changing to red.
- b. x means (timeless) so-and-so iff ... or ... or ... (a statement or disjunction of statements about what people mean by x).