Part I
Theoretical Foundations

1 Ordinary Language Philosophy and the Birth of Pragmatics

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the main modern approach to language, driven by Russell and Frege, was 'logicist'. Its aim was to delineate what a language appropriate for scientific discourse would be. Natural language was seen as a deficient tool, which should be appropriately constrained and modified to be made fit for scientific use. The language which would fulfil such a purpose would have to be able to express propositions, that is *truth-conditional* and *truth-functional* representations, in other words, representations which can be true or false, and to which logical operations can be applied and preserve their truth or falsity.

Towards the middle of the twentieth century, in the wake of Wittgenstein's approach, a philosophical movement contested this logicist view of language, with the aim of restoring natural language as an entity worthy of philosophical investigation. The first target of this movement, which came to be called *ordinary language philosophy*, was to condemn the logicist approach to language as *descriptivist*, that is, as content to account for language as if its only function was to describe reality. Ordinary language philosophers developed the so-called *performative* theory or *speech act* theory (see, e.g. Austin 1962, Searle 1969), which tried to account for all uses of language and pointed out that, far from being restricted to descriptive use, language was also a tool for action.

Austin, who introduced the term performative, noted that some verbs (e.g. *promise*, *order*, *declare*) are such that, when used in the first-person and indicative present, they do not describe anything but rather perform a given action. To illustrate, let us look at the following examples:

(1)

John promised that he would come tomorrow.

(2)

I promise that I will come tomorrow.

As Austin pointed out, while (1) describes John's action of promising to come tomorrow and hence can be true or false (it will be true in case John promised to come tomorrow and false otherwise), this is not the case for (2). (2) is not true or false as it does not describe anything. Rather, what it does is *perform* the act indicated by the performative verb *promise*. In saying (2), John promises to come tomorrow. His utterance, rather than being true or false, may be *felicitous* or *infelicitous*. It is felicitous if he sincerely intends to come tomorrow and if he knows of no obstacle to his coming tomorrow, and it is infelicitous otherwise. Austin gave a list of such performative verbs but noted that though the very existence of such verbs indicated the function of language as used in action, utterances could be actions even if they contained no performative verbs. For instance, rather than saying (2), John could have uttered (3) and he would thereby equally have promised to come tomorrow:

(3)

I will come tomorrow.

Just as (2), (3), rather than being true or false, is felicitous or infelicitous in the same circumstances as (2) is.

There is obviously much more to speech act theory than this rather sketchy presentation, but we will be content with it as the present goal is only to give an idea of the historical context in which the notion of *implicature* was introduced.

Although speech act theory contested two major tenets of the logicist approach, i.e. the descriptive function of language and the truth-conditionality of sentences, it nevertheless remained squarely in the same line regarding its approach to interpretation. Speech act theory has adopted a largely context-free approach to the interpretation of utterances, seeing linguistic meaning as conventional through and through. This, as we will now see, is where the second major contribution of ordinary language philosophy to pragmatics comes in.

That linguistic communication cannot be reduced to the transmission of a conventionally determined context-free meaning should be obvious from example (3). Granted, it can be a promise. But it could equally correspond to a few other speech acts, for instance,

prediction, menace or warning. The form of (3) by itself is not enough to determine which of these possibilities is the correct one. In other words, there is an ambiguity between the linguistic meaning of (3) and what it is used to communicate. And this is where Grice, the other major contributor to contemporary pragmatics, comes into his own.

1.2 PAUL GRICE'S CONTRIBUTION TO PRAGMATICS

Herbert Paul Grice (1913–1988) was a natural language philosopher who also became influential in the middle of the twentieth century. At a time when philosophy of language was mainly devoted to speech act theory, with major contributions by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), which urged a strongly conventionalist view of linguistic meaning, Grice took a highly different path. It should be emphasized that while speech act theory has more or less run its course by now, Grice's approach to meaning and communication is more influential than ever.

Grice made two main contributions to philosophy of language, both of which have been important to linguistics, and more precisely to pragmatics: a *theory of meaning* and a *logic of conversation*. Although they are often considered separately, there is a strong and obvious link between the two.

1.2.1 Meaning

In 1957, Grice published a paper entitled 'Meaning'.[1] In it, he compared two sets of examples such as the following:

(4)

These spots mean (meant) measles.

(5)

The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year.

(6)

These three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the bus is full.

[1] All of Grice's writings about language and communication were posthumously published in a volume entitled *Studies in the Way of Words* in 1989. We refer the reader to this volume, where all the relevant papers quoted here are reproduced.

(7)

That remark, 'Smith couldn't get on without his trouble and strife', meant that Smith found his wife indispensable.

Grice compared the first two examples with the last two relative to what one could or could not say or argue from them, and concluded that (4) and (5) correspond to what he called *natural meaning*, while (6) and (7) correspond to what he called *non-natural meaning* (standardly abbreviated as *meaning*$_{NN}$). He noted that natural meaning and meaning$_{NN}$ differ on two central characteristics, *volition* and *factivity* (these are the two features he retained when he came back to the topic in 1982 in a paper entitled 'Meaning revisited'.) Quite simply, natural meaning is factive, but not under voluntary control (the patient, in (4), does not intend to communicate anything by his spots), while meaning$_{NN}$ is non-factive, but under voluntary control (the bus driver, in (6), intends to communicate that the bus is full when he rings the bell three times). Volition is an intuitive notion, but factivity may be less so. The notion of factivity comes to this: if it is true that these spots mean measles, then it is true that the bearer of the spots has measles (see (4)). By contrast, it may be true that these three rings on the bell of the bus mean that the bus is full, while it is false that the bus is full (see (6)).

Grice went further than this regarding meaning$_{NN}$ and proposed the following definition:

> 'A meant$_{NN}$ something by *x*' is roughly equivalent to 'A intended the utterance of *x* to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of that intention.'

This definition implies a double intention:

- the speaker's primary intention to produce a given effect in her audience;
- the speaker's secondary intention to produce this effect via the audience's recognition of her (the speaker's) primary intention.

Grice emphasized that the secondary intention was crucial to the definition: cases where the audience recognizes the meaning without recognizing the primary intention are not cases of meaning$_{NN}$.

On the face of it, this definition is perfectly compatible with a *conventionalist* view of meaning$_{NN}$. This is the interpretation that Searle

(1969: 49) gave of meaning$_{NN}$ in his speech act theory. He reformulated Grice's definition of meaning$_{NN}$ to make it fully compatible with his own conventionalist view of language use:

A. S utters sentence T and means it (i.e. means literally what he says) = S utters T and
B. S intends (i-1) the utterance U of T to produce in H the knowledge (recognition, awareness) that the states of affairs specified by (certain of) the rules of T obtain. (Call this the illocutionary effect, IE.)
C. S intends U to produce IE by means of the recognition of i-1.
D. S intends that i-1 will be recognized in virtue of (by means of) H's knowledge of (certain of) the rules governing (the elements of) T.

Conditions B and C reformulate Grice's secondary condition. But condition C gives it a strong conventionalist import that it did not have in Grice's initial formulation. This understanding of meaning$_{NN}$ was rejected by Grice, who insisted that meaning$_{NN}$ could be, but did *not* have to be, conventionalist.

By contrast with Searle, Strawson (1964), based on examples such as (3), recognized the centrality of speaker's intentions in the determination of meaning, using the notion of meaning$_{NN}$. Clearly, whether (3) is a promise, a menace, a warning or a prediction depends in large part on what the speaker intends it to be. To identify (3) as any of these things, the hearer must recognize the speaker's primary intention (which is also the criterion for the 'correct' interpretation).

It is important to note that Grice, despite his rejection of the conventionalist view of meaning$_{NN}$, did not thereby reject the idea that linguistic meaning is in part conventionally determined. Grice, as we will now see, acknowledged this. But he strongly denied that meaning$_{NN}$ could be reduced to conventionally determined linguistic meaning. In other words, there is more to language as used in communication than mere conventional meaning.

1.2.2 Implicature

The notion of an implicature was introduced by Grice in his 'Logic and Conversation', originally published in 1975. Grice's point of departure was a question concerning the meaning of logical words (*and*, *or*, *if… then*, quantifiers and negation) in natural language that was the subject of lively discussion at the time among natural language philosophers. More specifically, it was claimed at the time that

the linguistic meaning of these words, as they are used in natural language sentences, is different from what it is in logic, as it relates to truth-tables. As a typical example, in logical terms, *p or q* can be false only in the case where both disjuncts are false. But, when used in natural language, *p or q* can often be interpreted in such a way that it is true when only one of the disjuncts is true and the other false. In other words, while the logical interpretation is inclusive, the linguistic interpretation is exclusive, that is, more restricted. The same thing goes for *if… then*, which is interpreted logically in terms of material implication (always true, except when the antecedent is true and the consequent is false), but it seems to be linguistically equivalent to *if and only if* (true only when both the antecedent and the consequent are true). Such considerations led natural language philosophers to the conclusion that logical words have two different meanings, one logical and one linguistic.

It is precisely this conclusion that Grice rejected. His basic idea was that meanings should *not* be multiplied unless it is necessary to do so, a precept that he dubbed *Modified Ockham's Razor*. According to him, logical words are a case in point. This, however, presupposes that there is an account that can explain the apparent discrepancy between the logical meaning of the relevant words and their meaning as used in conversation. It is precisely such an account that Grice proposed in 'Logic and Conversation'.

Grice's solution was to distinguish between *sentence meaning* (i.e. linguistic or conventional meaning) or *what is said*, and *speaker meaning* (the content that the speaker intended to communicate) or *what is communicated*. While sentence meaning can be established independently of the speaker's intentions, speaker meaning cannot and is thus heavily dependent on the speaker's intentions and their recognition by the hearer. The notion of implicature is based on this distinction: in a single utterance, the speaker can both *say something* (sentence meaning) and *implicate* another content (speaker meaning). This is the basis of Grice's solution to the puzzle of the meaning of logical words:

- Their contribution to sentence meaning is their logical meaning.
- Their speaker meaning may, however, differ from their logical meaning, via an implicature.

Hence, the difference between their logical meaning and their meaning in use does not necessarily provide grounds for the natural

language philosophers' claim that they have two different encoded meanings.

So, how do implicatures work? Let us first note that Grice distinguishes between two main types of implicature:

- *conventional implicatures* (as illustrated by (8));
- *conversational implicatures* (as illustrated by (9)).

(8)

Former President Sarkozy is French, *but* he is a poor cook.

(9)

A: Where will the meeting take place?
B: Somewhere in this building.

In the case of (8), the conventional implicature (French people are in general good cooks) is triggered by a specific lexical item, *but*. By contrast, in the case of (9), the conversational implicature (the speaker does not know exactly where the meeting will take place) is not triggered by any specific lexical item. This implicature is triggered by the fact that B's answer is not informative enough to answer A's question. However, there is no reason for A to question the fact that B is trying to help him the best she can. He thus concludes, and this is the implicature triggered by B's answer, that she does not know more precisely where the meeting will take place. Contrary to (8), this implicature is not linked to a linguistic expression but to the presumption that the speaker is cooperative (she is trying to help) and more specifically to the expectation that she gives as much information as she possibly can. In his work, Grice put a particular emphasis on examples like (9) that represent cases of conversational implicatures. We will therefore focus on those implicatures in the rest of this chapter. Conventional implicatures will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

As hinted above, conversational implicatures are dependent on the assumption that speakers comply with a general principle that governs rational conversation, which Grice named *the Cooperative Principle*:

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

This general principle is detailed in four maxims, which are themselves subdivided into submaxims:

Quantity:

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

Quality:

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

Relation:

Be relevant.

Manner:

Be perspicuous.
Avoid obscurity of expression.
Avoid ambiguity.
Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
Be orderly.

These maxims and submaxims guide the inferential process that reveals the speaker's intentions when the sentence meaning of an utterance seems either to follow or to flout a maxim. Let us take the example of the maxim of Quantity and see how it applies to (9) as a case of speaker following a maxim. The main assumption is that the speaker of (9) respects the Cooperative Principle and its attendant maxims, including the maxim of Quantity. The maxim of Quantity enjoins the speaker to say what is necessary, but no more than what is necessary. The speaker of (9) should have said exactly where the meeting was to take place, had she known it. Given that she did not, and on the assumption that she complies with the maxim of Quantity, the conclusion is that she does not know exactly where it will take place.

The same type of reasoning goes for logical words. Let us have a look at (10):

(10)

Peter or Paul will come.

The speaker of (10) would have used *and* if she knew that both Peter and Paul were coming. Given that she has not, and on the assumption that she complies with the maxim of Quantity, the conclusion is that either she knows that only one of them will be coming, or she is not

sure that both will come. Note that in both cases, the reasoning is based not only on what the speaker *actually* said but also on what she *might* have said.

This led Grice to draw a distinction among two kinds of conversational implicatures, depending on how the alternative utterances that the speaker could have produced are determined. In the case of utterances such as (9), the alternative utterance(s) is determined through the context. Grice calls such cases *particularized conversational implicatures*. In the case of (10), the alternative utterance is lexically determined. Grice calls such cases *generalized conversational implicatures*. We will discuss both types of implicature in detail in Chapter 4 (particularized implicatures) and Chapter 6 (generalized implicatures), respectively.

Both examples (9) and (10) illustrate situations in which the speaker follows the maxim of Quantity. But Grice also considered the possibility that speakers can deliberately fail to respect a maxim (or, in his words, decide to flout it), and this also leads to the derivation of implicatures. For example, the maxim of Quality is flouted when Mary utters (11) to speak about Jane, who is not born from royal parents.

(11)

Jane is a little princess.

Here the description Mary gives of Jane is obviously false. This leads the hearer to look for alternative reasons why Mary would use the word *princess* to talk about Jane. He will probably conclude that Mary intends to tell him that Jane shares similarities with princesses, such as being spoiled, etc. This conclusion also represents a case of conversational implicature.

In short, the inferential mechanism through which conversational implicatures are computed (as described above) aims at recovering the speaker's intentions when speaker meaning and sentence meaning do not coincide. In other words, implicatures are a clear instance of meaning$_{NN}$.

1.3 PROPERTIES OF IMPLICATURES

To support the notion of implicature, as well as his various distinctions among implicatures, Grice listed a number of properties by which implicatures are distinguished from sentence meaning as well as differing among themselves.