The Philosophy of Language
Lecture Seven
Grice’s Theory of Meaning

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Grice’s Theory of Meaning

Re-Cap: Quine versus Meaning

Intentions

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Weak

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Strong

An Objection to Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

Summary
Verificationism

• **Verificationism:** A sentence is meaningful only if it is either *analytic*, or *empirically verifiable*

• Verificationism was very popular in the early 20th Century

• Philosophers used the verificationist criterion of meaning to undermine the claims of metaphysicians, moral philosophers and theologians

• But verificationism is much less popular today, and that is in large part due to Quine’s attack
The First Dogma

- Quine launched his attack in ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’
- The first dogma was the analytic/synthetic distinction:
  - **Analytic** truths are sentences which are true purely by virtue of what they mean
  - **Synthetic** truths are sentences which are true in part because of what they mean, but also in part because of how the world is
- According to Quine, we cannot offer a non-circular explanation of what it is for a sentence to be analytic
  - Whenever we try to define analyticity, we end up using concepts like synonymy, necessity and ‘semantical rules’
  - All of these concepts are inter-definable, but they are all as mysterious as each other
The Second Dogma

- The second dogma was reductionism
  - Every sentence is associated with a collection of experiences which would confirm that sentence (i.e. increase the likelihood that the sentence is true)
- Quine pointed out that we cannot really confirm or disconfirm a sentence in isolation:
  - No experience increases the likelihood that a single sentence is true
  - You always have to make lots of background assumptions before an experience tells you anything about whether a given sentence is true
- Instead of reductionism, Quine recommends confirmational holism
  - It is whole theories which are confirmed or disconfirmed by experience
Quine’s Web of Belief

- Quine thinks we should picture our beliefs as forming a huge web
- The experiences which most directly relate to experience are at the edge of the web
- As you move into the web, you get more and more theoretical beliefs
- At the very centre are logical and mathematical beliefs
Revising our Beliefs

- Sometimes experience tells us that there is something wrong with our web

- In those cases, we must revise some of our beliefs, but we are free to choose to revise whichever beliefs we like
  - There are no analytic truths which are immune to revision!

- The only reason we do not usually go around revising our mathematical beliefs is that doing so would require revising lots of other beliefs too
Quine versus Meaning

- Grice and Strawson pointed out that Quine’s attack on analyticity was really an all out attack on the whole idea of meaning
  - To say that one expression is synonymous with another is just to say that they mean the same thing
  - So if you deny that it makes sense to say that one expression is synonymous with another, you are denying that it makes sense to say that they mean the same thing
  - But in that case, it surely doesn’t make any sense to say that these expressions mean anything at all!

- Grice and Strawson thought that this was absurd, but it turns out that this is exactly what Quine thought!
Quine versus Meaning

- In ch. 2 of *Word & Object*, Quine argued that the ordinary concept of meaning was fundamentally broken.
- He argued that if we were trying to translate a foreign language into English, we could always cook up multiple, equally good translation manuals:
  - These translation manuals would translate the foreign language differently.
  - But each manual would fit all the behaviour of the foreign speakers perfectly.
- Quine took this to show that there is no fact of the matter what the sentences in the foreign language mean.
How can we Save Meaning?

- If Quine’s argument against meaning works, all it really shows is this:
  - You cannot reduce meaning to mere linguistic behaviour

- Quine takes this to show that there is no such thing as meaning

- But you might just accept that meaning is real, even if it cannot be reduced to mere linguistic behaviour

- This week we will look at one such approach to meaning, due to Paul Grice
Grice’s Theory of Meaning

Re-Cap: Quine versus Meaning

Grice’s Theory of Meaning

Intentions

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Weak

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Strong

An Objection to Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

Summary
Meaning and Intentions

• Grice originally presented his theory in a paper called ‘Meaning’

• According to Grice, sentences get their meanings by speakers using them with certain intentions

• Grice’s proposal was, then, to define meaning in terms of intention

H.P. Grice
Preliminary 1: Natural and Non-Natural Meaning

- Grice starts his ‘Meaning’ by distinguishing between natural and non-natural meaning.

- **Natural Meaning**
  - Those spots mean measles
  - Those tracks mean that wolves are nearby

- **Non-Natural Meaning**
  - Those three bells mean the bus is full
  - That sign meant that there are roadworks ahead
Preliminary 1: Natural and Non-Natural Meaning

• When we are dealing with natural meaning, ‘$x$ means $p$’ implies ‘$p$’
  – ‘Those tracks mean that wolves are nearby’ implies ‘Wolves are nearby’

• When we are dealing with non-natural meaning, ‘$x$ means $p$’ implies ‘$p$’
  – ‘That sign meant that there are roadworks ahead’ does not imply ‘There are roadworks ahead’

• Grice is interested in non-natural meaning
  – To make this clear, Grice uses ‘means_{NN}’, but that is ugly, and so I will just use ‘means’ for non-natural meaning, unless I clearly indicate otherwise
Preliminary 2: Speaker-Meaning and Sentence-Meaning

• Grice was one of the first philosophers to emphasise the important difference between **speaker-meaning** and **sentence-meaning**
  
  – The speaker-meaning of an utterance is what the speaker is trying to convey by that utterance
  – The sentence-meaning of an utterance is the literal, conventional meaning of that utterance

• Speaker A asks, ‘Is Sartre a good philosopher?’, and Speaker B tactfully replies, ‘Sartre is a good playwrite’
  
  – Sentence-meaning of B’s utterance: *Sartre is a good playwrite*
  – Speaker-meaning of B’s utterance: *Sartre is not a good philosopher*
A Two-Step Strategy

- Grice’s plan to reduce *meaning* to *intention* comes in two steps
  - **Step 1:** Reduce *speaker-meaning* to *intention*
  - **Step 2:** Reduce *sentence-meaning* to *speaker-meaning*

- We will start with Step 1, and look at Step 2 in a moment
A First Shot Analysis

- By uttering \( u \), speaker \( S \) means that \( p \)
  - By uttering \( u \), speaker \( S \) intends to induce the belief that \( p \) in their audience \( A \)

- By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ to Erica, Sharon means that Rob is more annoying than funny
  - By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’, Sharon intends to induce the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny in Erica
A Counter-Example

I might leave B’s handkerchief near the scene of a murder in order to induce the detective to believe that B was the murderer; but we should not want to say that the handkerchief (or my leaving it there) meant anything or that I meant by leaving it there that B was the murderer.

(Grice, ‘Meaning’ pp. 381–2)
What Went Wrong?

- Why didn’t I say that \( B \) is the murderer by placing his handkerchief near the murder scene?

- Because although I did intend to make the detective believe that \( B \) is the murderer, I was trying to \textit{conceal} my intention
  - I don’t want the detective to realise that I placed the handkerchief at the murder scene, let alone that I did it with the intention of framing \( B \)
  - If he did realise that, he wouldn’t be led to believe that \( B \) was the murderer!

- This led Grice to add another clause to his analysis of speaker meaning, which eliminated this kind of concealment
A Second Shot Analysis

- By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ means that $p$
  
  (i) By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ intends to induce the belief that $p$ in their audience $A$
  
  (ii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (i)

- By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ to Erica, Sharon means that Rob is more annoying than funny
  
  (i) By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’, Sharon intends to induce the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny in Erica
  
  (ii) Sharon intends Erica to recognise intention (i)
Another Counter-Example

• Suppose Sharon discovers that Erica’s husband, John, is wasting their money on fancy shoes

• Sharon takes incriminating photos of John buying shoes, and shows them to Erica

• By showing these photos to Erica, Sharon surely didn’t mean that John is wasting money on shoes

• Nonetheless, Sharon meets all the criteria who have so far given in our analysis:
  (i) By showing Erica the photos, Sharon intends to induce the belief that John is wasting money on shoes in Erica
  (ii) Sharon intends Erica to recognise intention (i)
Another Example

- Now suppose that rather than taking photos, Sharon *drew a picture* of John buying shoes, and shows it to Erica.

- Grice thinks in this case that we *should* say that by showing Erica the drawing, Sharon meant that John is wasting money on shoes.

- The difference between this case and the photo case is all about what it is that makes Erica believe that John is wasting their money on shoes.
  - In the photo case, Erica comes to believe that John is wasting money on shoes because she has seen a photo of it.
  - In the picture case, Erica comes to believe that John is wasting money on shoes because she realises that that is what Sharon is trying to make her believe, and she trusts Sharon.
Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning

- By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ means that $p$
  (i) By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ intends to induce the belief that $p$ in their audience $A$
  (ii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (i)
  (iii) $S$ intends $A$ to form the belief that $p$ at least in part because $A$ recognises intention (i)
An Example

• By showing Erica the drawing, Sharon means that John is wasting money on shoes

(i) By showing Erica the drawing, Sharon intends to induce the belief that John is wasting money on shoes in Erica

(ii) Sharon intends Erica to recognise intention (i)

(iii) Sharon intends Erica to form the belief that John is wasting money on shoes at least in part because Erica recognises intention (i)
Another Example

• By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ to Erica, Sharon means that Rob is more annoying than funny

  (i) By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’, Sharon intends to induce the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny in Erica

  (ii) Sharon intends Erica to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) Sharon intends Erica to form the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny at least in part because of Erica recognises intention (i)
Unconscious Intentions

• In this way, Grice reduces speaker-meaning to a complex of intentions

• Importantly, though, Grice is not suggesting that whenever we mean something by an utterance, we consciously have all of these intentions in mind

• In most cases, these intentions will be unconscious, and we may not even realise we have them
  – The idea of unconscious intentions isn’t so strange
  – We’ve all had the experience of walking somewhere while our mind wanders, and realising at our destination that we couldn’t remember walking there
  – You would have had to make lots of decisions along that walk, but it seems that many (or even all) of them were unconscious
Sentence-Meaning

- Now that Grice has given an analysis of speaker-meaning, he can analyse sentence-meaning in terms of speaker-meaning.
- In his original paper ‘Meaning’, Grice does not spend too long explaining how this analysis will work.
- $x$ sentence-means that $p$ iff $x$ is regularly or conventionally uttered with the speaker-meaning that $p$.
  - ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ sentence-means that Rob is more annoying than funny.
  - ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ is conventionally uttered with the speaker-meaning that Rob is more annoying than funny.
- Grice does go into more detail elsewhere, e.g. ‘Utterer’s Meaning and Intention’, but that is a complex paper!
A Reduction of Meaning to Intention

Sentence-Meaning
↓
Speaker-Meaning
↓
Intentions
Grice’s Theory of Meaning

Re-Cap: Quine versus Meaning

Intentions

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Weak

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Strong

An Objection to Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

Summary
Responding to Quine

- How does Grice respond to Quine’s argument against meaning?
- Quine argues that we cannot reduce meaning all the way down to mere behaviour
- But Grice isn’t trying to reduce meaning to behaviour
- Grice is trying to reduce meaning to intentions
- There is obviously some sort of relation between intention and behaviour, but many philosophers have denied that you could ever reduce intention to behaviour
How Would A Quinean React?

- A Quinean would obviously be unimpressed by this response.
- It is easy to imagine that Quine would include intentions in his circle of interdefinable but ultimately ungrounded concepts, along with analyticity and synonymy.
- And if intention does not reduce to behaviour, then Quine would have wanted to know how a translator could ever recognise the intentions of the speakers of a foreign language.
Developing the Epistemological Worry

- How can we figure out someone’s intentions?

- Maybe I can figure out some of your very simple intentions just by watching you
  - If I watched you walk into a shop and buy a sandwich, and saw no signs of coercion, I can reasonably conclude that you intended to buy a sandwich

- But the kinds of intention that Grice appeals to are much more complex than that
Developing the Epistemological Worry

- According to Grice, Sharon meant that Rob is more annoying than funny when she said ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ to Erica iff:

  (i) By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’, Sharon intends to induce the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny in Erica

  (ii) Sharon intends Erica to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) Sharon intends Erica to form the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny at least in part because of Erica recognises intention (i)

- How are you meant to tell whether someone has these very complex intentions?
Developing the Epistemological Worry

- In real life, one of the best ways of figuring out what your intentions are is just to ask you what they are
  - If I ask Sharon, ‘Why did you say “Rob is more annoying than funny” to Erica?’, she can explain her complex intentions

- But it doesn’t seem that Grice can appeal to this ordinary way of discerning someone’s intentions
  - Grice is trying to reduce meaning to intention
  - This reduction wouldn’t work very well if we had to ask someone to explain in words what their intentions are
In the Words of Mark Platts

*It is perhaps possible that very simple intentions can be detected quasi-behaviouristically; but for intentions of any fair degree of complexity, this is simply implausible, the behavioural guide being too inexact. Any explanation of how such intentions are recognised will inevitably rely upon the audience’s recognition of the literal meaning of the sentence; that meaning is the route to the speaker’s intentions, the reverse journey usually being impossible [...] Detection of sentence-meaning will require on [Grice’s] programme the detection of utterer’s intentions, and, perhaps, of audience’s responses.*
But again, for any except the simplest of intentions and simplest of responses, such detection will require both the verbal expression of those intentions and intentions together with an understanding of those verbal expressions. This verbal expression of intention or response, if sufficiently precise, will standardly use, in part, the very sentence whose meaning we are trying to detect via the intentions held and responses induced. So to gain access to the appropriate intentions and responses we must first have knowledge of the meaning of the sentence concerned.

(Platts, Ways of Meaning, p. 91)
Defending Grice: Orders of Priority

- Alexander Miller has defended Grice from this epistemological worry (*Philosophy of Language*, 233–5)

- If Grice is right, then intention is **analytically** prior to meaning
  - Meaning is *defined* in terms of intention

- But it might still be that meaning is **epistemologically** prior to intention
  - To *discover* the intentions someone had when they uttered something, you might need to *know* what that utterance meant
Defending Grice: Orders of Priority

- Grice would not be the only one to have suggested that analytic and epistemological priority can sometimes run in opposite directions

- Lockeans think that *psychological continuity* is **analytically prior** to *personal identity*
  - You can define *personal identity* in terms of *psychological continuity*

- But many Lockeans would still want to say that *personal identity* is **epistemologically prior** to *psychological continuity*
  - If you want to discover whether person $X$ is psychologically continuous with person $Y$, you usually need to know whether person $X$ is person $Y$
What do you all think of the way that Grice relies on intentions in his theory of meaning?
Grice’s Theory of Meaning

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An Objection to Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

Summary
Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning

- By uttering \( u \), speaker \( S \) means that \( p \)
  
  (i) By uttering \( u \), speaker \( S \) intends to induce the belief that \( p \) in their audience \( A \)
  
  (ii) \( S \) intends \( A \) to recognise intention (i)
  
  (iii) \( S \) intends \( A \) to form the belief that \( p \) at least in part because \( A \) recognises intention (i)
Two Kinds of Counter-Examples

- **Grice’s analysis is too weak**
  - There are cases which meet all of the conditions in Grice’s analysis, but which are not cases of someone meaning something by some utterance

- **Grice’s analysis is too strong**
  - There are cases of someone meaning something by some utterance, but which do not meet all of the conditions in Grice’s analysis

- In this part of the lecture, we will focus on one counter-example of the first kind

  (Lycan discusses a couple of different counter-examples in Chapter 7 of his *Philosophy of Language*; I have decided to focus on one very interesting counter-example which Lycan ignores)
A (Complex) Counter-Example

- Suppose that Billy works for Corporation-X which has committed lots of crimes
- Corp-X is very good at covering up its tracks, and if it is left to its own devices then it will never get caught
- Billy wants to blow the whistle on Corp-X, but doesn’t have the courage
- Billy decides the best thing to do is to find a roundabout way of letting Debbie the Detective know what Corp-X have been up to
A (Complex) Counter-Example

- Billy gets to know Debbie, and makes it clear to her that he is a good, honest person
- Then, one day, Billy plants some evidence against Corp-X, but he isn’t trying to frame them
- He intentionally waits until Debbie is watching him, but he pretends he doesn’t realise that she is around
- His hope is that Debbie will think, ‘I can see that Billy is planting evidence against Corp-X, but I know that Billy is a good person, and so he would only plant evidence if Corp-X have really done bad things’
A (Complex) Counter-Example

- This example is based on one given by Strawson in his ‘Intention and Convention in Speech Acts’ pp. 446–7

- Strawson thinks that we wouldn’t want to say that by planting the evidence, Billy meant that Corp-X had committed a crime, but...

  (i) By planting the evidence, Billy intended to induce the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime in Debbie

  (ii) Billy intended Debbie to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) Billy intended Debbie to form the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime at least in part because Debbie recognises intention (i)
What Went Wrong?

- Strawson suggests that the problem here is that Billy is concealing some of his intentions.

- Billy doesn’t want Debbie to realise that he intended her to know that he was trying to make her think that Corp-X are guilty of a crime.

- This led Strawson to add another clause to Grice’s analysis of speaker meaning, which eliminated this kind of concealment.
Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning

- By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ means that $p$
  
  (i) By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ intends to induce the belief that $p$ in their audience $A$
  
  (ii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (i)
  
  (iii) $S$ intends $A$ to form the belief that $p$ at least in part because $A$ recognises intention (i)
Strawon’s Revised Analysis

• By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ means that $p$

  (i) By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ intends to induce the belief that $p$ in their audience $A$

  (ii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (ii)

  (iv) $S$ intends $A$ to form the belief that $p$ at least in part because $A$ recognises intention (i)
Applying the Revised Analysis

- It is **not** the case that by planting the evidence, Billy means that Corp-X had committed a crime

  (i) By planting the evidence, Billy intended to induce the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime in Debbie

  (ii) Billy intended Debbie to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) **Billy did not intend Debbie to recognise intention (ii)**

  (iv) Billy intended Debbie to form the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime at least in part because Debbie recognises intention (i)
Applying the Revised Analysis

- By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ to Erica, Sharon means that Rob is more annoying than funny

  (i) By uttering ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’, Sharon intends to induce the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny in Erica

  (ii) Sharon intends Erica to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) Sharon intends Erica to recognise intention (ii)

  (iv) Sharon intends Erica to form the belief that Rob is more annoying than funny at least in part because of Erica recognises intention (i)
Higher-Order Intentions

- Grice can get around Strawson’s counter-example by adding a higher-order intention
  - A higher-order intention is an intention about an intention

- But once we start down the road of adding in higher-order intentions, it is not clear that we will ever stop

- We can cook up more and more complex scenarios which will call for higher and higher order intentions
A *(Very Complex!)* Counter-Example

- As before, Billy pretends to plant evidence while Debbie is watching.
- But this time, Billy is very worried that Debbie won’t realise why he is planting evidence.
- Billy decides to act out his planting *poorly*, so that Debbie will realise that he knows she is watching, and is planting the evidence for her benefit.
- Importantly, though, Debbie isn’t meant to realise that Billy knows that she has realised he is planting the evidence for her benefit.
A (Very Complex!) Counter-Example

- I think we still wouldn’t want to say that by planting the evidence, Billy meant that Corp-X had committed a crime, but...

(i) By planting the evidence, Billy intended to induce the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime in Debbie

(ii) Billy intended Debbie to recognise intention (i)

(iii) Billy intended Debbie to recognise intention (ii)

(iv) Billy intended Debbie to form the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime at least in part because Debbie recognises intention (i)
Further Revising the Analysis

- By uttering \( u \), speaker \( S \) means that \( p \)
  
  (i) By uttering \( u \), speaker \( S \) intends to induce the belief that \( p \) in their audience \( A \)

  (ii) \( S \) intends \( A \) to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) \( S \) intends \( A \) to recognise intention (ii)

  (iv) \( S \) intends \( A \) to form the belief that \( p \) at least in part because \( A \) recognises intention (i)
Further Revising the Analysis

• By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ means that $p$

  (i) By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ intends to induce the belief that $p$ in their audience $A$

  (ii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (ii)

  (iv) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (iii)

  (v) $S$ intends $A$ to form the belief that $p$ at least in part because $A$ recognises intention (i)
Applying the Further Revised Analysis

- It is **not** the case that by planting the evidence, Billy means that Corp-X had committed a crime

  (i) By planting the evidence, Billy intended to induce the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime in Debbie

  (ii) Billy intended Debbie to recognise intention (i)

  (iii) Billy intended Debbie to recognise intention (ii)

  (iv) **Billy did not intend Debbie to recognise intention (iii)**

  (v) Billy intended Debbie to form the belief that Corp-X had committed a crime at least in part because Debbie recognises intention (i)
An Infinite Regress?

- At this point, it seems very likely that if we are clever enough, and are willing to spend enough time on it, we will always be able to come up with counter-examples that require us to add more higher-order intentions.

- This has made some philosophers worry that Grice’s analysis of speaker-meaning is confronted by some sort of infinite regress:
  - We will keep adding in higher and higher order intentions, forever and ever into infinity.

- If this regress is unavoidable, then it poses a serious problem for Grice’s analysis of speaker-meaning:
  - For a defence of Grice on this point, see Blackburn’s *Spreading the Word*, chapter 4, §2.
Grice’s Theory of Meaning

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Intentions

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Weak

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Strong

An Objection to Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

Summary
Grice’s Original Analysis of Speaker-Meaning

- By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ means that $p$
  
  (i) By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ intends to induce the belief that $p$ in their audience $A$
  
  (ii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (i)
  
  (iii) $S$ intends $A$ to form the belief that $p$ at least in part because $A$ recognises intention (i)
The Analysis is too Strong

• In this part of the lecture, we will look at the worry that this analysis is too strong
  – There are cases of someone meaning something by some utterance, but which do not meet all of the conditions in Grice’s analysis

• There have been many objections along these lines, but we are going to focus on these two:
  – The Soliloquy Case
  – The Proof Case
The Soliloquy Case

• On Grice’s analysis, it is only possible to speaker-mean something by an utterance if you are addressing an audience
• But people often speak to themselves, with no audience at all
• For example, in preparation for this lecture, I might go over my notes and say to myself, ‘Grice tried to reduce meaning to intention’
• It seems that by uttering this sentence, I meant that Grice tried to reduce meaning to intention
• However, I wasn’t addressing any audience
You Are Your Own Audience

- You might try to get around this problem by saying that when you are soliloquising, you are your own audience.

- You are literally talking to yourself:
  
  (i) By uttering ‘Grice tried to reduce meaning to intention’, Rob intends to induce the belief that Grice tried to reduce meaning to intention in Rob.
  
  (ii) Rob intends Rob to recognise intention (i).
  
  (iii) Rob intends Rob to form the belief that Grice tried to reduce meaning to intention at least in part because Rob recognises intention (i).

- The trouble here is that none of (i)–(iii) look true!
Hypothetical Audiences

- A better way out is to appeal to **hypothetical audiences**

- When I say ‘Grice tried to reduce meaning to intention’ to myself, I speaker-mean that Grice tried to reduce meaning to intention because I intend that if someone were to hear my utterance, the relevant belief would be induced in them in the way that Grice’s analysis describes

- It is not 100% clear to me that this will always work
  - Imagine that I have a code that only I know, and often soliloquise using that code
  - I do not intend that anyone would form any beliefs if they heard these utterances
The Proof Case

• Suppose I present a proof that $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational

• The very last line of these proof is the conclusion, ‘$\sqrt{2}$ is irrational’

• Presumably, when I write that on the board, I speaker-mean that $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational

• However, I do not seem to meet the conditions laid out in Grice’s analysis of speaker-meaning
Applying the Gricean Analysis

- By writing ‘√2 is irrational’ on the board, Rob means that √2 is irrational:
  
  (i) By writing ‘√2 is irrational’, Rob intends to induce the belief that √2 is irrational in his audience.

  (ii) Rob intends his audience to recognise intention (i).

  (iii) Rob intends his audience to form the belief that √2 is irrational at least in part because they recognise intention (i).

- On the face of it, (iii) looks false

  - I don’t want you to form the belief that √2 is irrational because you recognised that my intention was to make you believe that.

  - I want you to form the belief that √2 is irrational because you followed the proof!
Adding to the Proof Case

- Now imagine that we have spent all day looking at proofs that $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational, and that all our earlier proofs are already on the board.

- When I conclude my final proof by saying ‘$\sqrt{2}$ is irrational’, I do not even seem to be trying to induce in you the belief that $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational.

- You already had the belief induced in you when you saw the first proof.

- I am not even trying to bring that belief to the front of your mind.

- It has been at the front of your mind all day!
Grice’s Theory of Meaning

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An Objection to Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

Summary
Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

- x sentence-means that p iff x is *regularly* or *conventionally* uttered with the speaker-meaning that p
  - ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ sentence-means that Rob is more annoying than funny
  - ‘Rob is more annoying than funny’ is conventionally uttered with the speaker-meaning that Rob is more annoying than funny

- This is only a rough attempt at defining sentence-meaning in terms of speaker-meaning, but it is already enough to raise one serious objection

- This objection was presented by Platts in his *Ways of Meaning*, pp. 89–90
An Infinity of Sentences

- There are infinitely many English sentences
- By this, I mean that there are infinitely many sentences that you can make in accordance with the rules of English
  - Rob is not annoying; Rob is not annoying and Rob is not annoying; Rob is not annoying and Rob is not annoying and Rob is not annoying...
- Every one of this infinity of sentences is meaningful, in the sense that English has given a meaning to all of them
- The same of course goes for other natural languages, like French, German, Japanese, etc. etc.
Unuttered Sentences

- English contains infinitely many sentences, but only finitely many of them have ever been uttered.
- Thus, there are infinitely many unuttered sentences of English.
- This spells trouble for Grice’s analysis of sentence-meaning.
  - \( x \) sentence-means that \( p \) iff \( x \) is conventionally uttered with the speaker-meaning that \( p \).
- The trouble with this analysis is that most of the meaningful English have never been uttered, let alone uttered with a conventional speaker-meaning!
Hypothetical Intentions

- You might try to solve this problem by saying that if we were to utter one of the unuttered sentences, then we would utter it with certain intentions.
- But on the face of it, I could utter any sentence I like with any intentions I like!
- To get around this, we need to introduce some constraints on the kinds of intention I am supposed to have, but what constraints?
- The only obvious suggestion is that our intentions are supposed to be constrained by what the unuttered sentence means, but now we have gone in a circle.
- We were meant to be analysing sentence-meaning in terms of our intentions!
Generally, the constraint upon the hypothetical intentions with which a sentence can be uttered, and upon the audience’s responses to such an utterance, is precisely the meaning of the sentence. [...] If this is correct, the attempt to define the meanings of unuttered sentences in terms of hypothetical intentions and responses is hopeless: for it presupposes a prior notion of sentence-meaning.

(Platts, Ways of Meaning, p. 90)
Our ability to master a language containing infinitely many different sentences is definitely remarkable.

Linguists and philosophers usually try to account for this fact by saying that language is **compositional**:

- The meaning of a sentence is determined by the meanings of the expressions it is built out of, and the way it is built out of them.
- The meaning of ‘Socrates is a philosopher’ is determined by the meanings of ‘Socrates’ and ‘x is a philosopher’.

If language is compositional, then our ability to understand a previously unuttered sentence is not mysterious:

- We recognise the expressions it is built out of.
- We then use our knowledge of what those expressions mean to figure out what the sentence as a whole means.
Grice’s Self-Defence

• The problem with Grice’s analysis of sentence-meaning is that it does not seem to be compositional

  – $x$ sentence-means that $p$ iff $x$ is conventionally uttered with the speaker-meaning that $p$

• Grice was himself aware of this shortcoming, and tried to introduce compositionality by thinking of the intentions involved in meaning as complex, and then breaking them down into simpler intentions

• The intentions involved in meaning that Socrates is wise by uttering ‘Socrates is wise’ involves these two sub-intentions:

  (a) The intention to refer to Socrates with ‘Socrates’
  (b) The intention to refer to wisdom with ‘$x$ is wise’
Grice’s Self-Defence

- If Grice can introduce compositionality into this theory in this way, then he will be able to deal with unuttered sentences.

- An unuttered sentence has a meaning because the expressions which make it up are conventionally used with certain intentions, and the meaning of the whole sentence is determined by those intentions.

- The question is whether Grice is able to introduce compositionality in this way.

- Philosophers have raised a number of objections, but we will look at just one.
The Reduction of All Semantic Properties

- Grice’s project is to reduce meaning to intention
- So far we have focussed on the meanings of whole sentences
- But presumably, if you want to reduce all meaning to intention, then you need to reduce the meaning of subsentential expressions too
  - A subsentential expression is an expression which is part of a sentence, but is not itself a sentence
  - A subsentential expression is an expression that is smaller than a whole sentence
- For example, we want to find a way of reducing to intentions the fact that ‘Socrates’ is a name that refers to Socrates
A Problem for Grice’s Self-Defence

• Now consider the intention we imagined Grice associating with the name ‘Socrates’
  – The intention to refer to Socrates with ‘Socrates’

• This content of this intention mentions one of the semantic properties (i.e. a meaning property) of ‘Socrates’

• So our intention presupposes the idea of a meaning property, and thus we cannot reduce meaning to this intention

  (This objection is presented by Miller in his *Philosophy of Language*, p. 239)
Grice’s Theory of Meaning

Re-Cap: Quine versus Meaning

Intentions

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Weak

Grice’s Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Strong

An Objection to Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

Summary
Grice’s Project

- Grice wanted to reduce meaning to intention

- By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ means that $p$
  
  (i) By uttering $u$, speaker $S$ intends to induce the belief that $p$ in their audience $A$
  
  (ii) $S$ intends $A$ to recognise intention (i)
  
  (iii) $S$ intends $A$ to form the belief that $p$ at least in part because $A$ recognises intention (i)

- $x$ sentence-means that $p$ iff $x$ is \textit{regularly or conventionally} uttered with the speaker-meaning that $p$
Presupposing Intention

- Grice’s reduction presupposes that the notion of intention is in good order.
- This is something that someone like Quine would surely doubt.
  - A Quinean would likely add *intention* to their list of inter-definable but ungrounded concepts, along with *analyticity*, *synonymy*...
- There is also an epistemological question.
  - How can we recognise that someone has the complex intentions that Grice appeals to without already presupposing that we can understand the sentences that they use?

- Some Griceans have tried to get around this by distinguishing between *analytic* priority and *epistemological* priority.
- I will leave it to you to decide whether that is a good way out.
The Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Weak

- It seems that Grice’s analysis of speaker-meaning is too weak
  - Strawson presented a complex case in which someone meets all the conditions in Grice’s analysis of speaker-meaning, but does not seem to speaker-mean anything

- We can try to fix this problem by adding more and more higher-order intentions

- But the worry is that once we start adding these higher-order intentions, we will never be able to stop
The Analysis of Speaker-Meaning is too Strong

- It seems that Grice's analysis of speaker-meaning is too strong
  - The Soliloquy Case and the Proof Case seem to be examples of people speaker-meaning something, but not meeting all of the conditions in Grice's analysis

- There is no obvious way of fixing this problem for Grice
Against Grice’s Analysis of Sentence-Meaning

- Grice’s analysis of sentence-meaning has trouble accounting for the meanings of sentences which have so far gone unuttered.

- The trouble is that Grice’s analysis of sentence-meaning does not seem to be compositional.
  - To say that meaning is compositional is to say that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meanings of the expressions it is built out of, and the way it is built out of them.

- Grice can try to introduce compositionality by thinking of the intentions involved in speaker-meaning as being built out of smaller sub-intentions.

- But it is not obvious that there is any way of doing that while also reducing all meaning properties to intentions.
Tomorrow’s Seminar

- The reading for tomorrow’s seminar is:
  - Grice, ‘Meaning’

- Access to this paper can be found on the VLE Reading List
Next Week’s Lecture and Seminar

• For next week’s lecture, read:
  – Kemp, *What is this thing called Philosophy of Language?*, Chapter 8

• For next week’s seminar, read:
  – Davidson, ‘Radical Interpretation’

• Access to the this paper can be found on the VLE Reading List