

Herbert Paul Grice



- Born 1913, Birmingham, UK; died 1988, Berkeley, USA
- Studied classics at Oxford
- Taught at Oxford, holding a series of visiting appointments at the likes of Stanford and Harvard, before moving to Berkeley in 1967
- Published little during his lifetime
- His major work, *Studies in the Way of Words*, is a collection of lectures in the philosophy of language he gave at Harvard in 1967
- A collection of lectures on the metaphysics of value was published posthumously as *The Conception of Value*

FROM USE TO MEANING

His work

- Grice made important contributions to metaphysics & ethics, but was best known for his work in the philosophy of language
- The latter has been *hugely* influential in linguistics
- Two key (connected) projects:
 - **Intentional theory of linguistic meaning**: Explaining the content of what is said when a given sentence is uttered in terms of the particular intentions of speakers on the various occasions when they make these utterances
 - **Theory of implicatures**: Accounting for the way in which speakers manage to convey what they mean by saying what they say, by appealing to general rules of conversational good practise
- We focus on 2 early essays: 'Logic & Conversation' and 'Meaning'

Language and logic

- Grice's programme was motivated by what he took to be a potential risk in a standard pattern of inference
 - Moving from observations about the way words are typically used by speakers to a conclusion regarding their linguistic meaning
- His specific target in L&C:
 - Criticisms of the standard truth-functional analyses of the logical connectives ('and', 'or', 'if...then') based on certain patterns of use
- The resulting perceived shortcomings of the truth functional analysis motivated both
 - Calls to abandon or reform 'messy' natural language
 - Calls to abandon 'simplistic' logical analyses

The truth-functional analysis

- In case your memory is hazy:
 - A conjunction is true iff both its conjuncts are true
 - A disjunction is true iff at least one of its disjuncts is true
 - A conditional is true iff it isn't the case that its antecedent is true but consequent false

| P | Q | $P \& Q$ | $P \vee Q$ | $P \rightarrow Q$ |
|-----|-----|----------|------------|-------------------|
| T | T | T | T | T |
| T | F | F | T | F |
| F | T | F | T | T |
| F | F | F | F | T |

Grice's objection

- Grice: we should distinguish
 - What a speaker would explicitly and literally **say** in making an utterance
 - What he or she would **mean** by it (which governs when he would or wouldn't make that utterance)
- What is meant could be something *stronger*:
 - Said: 'He has a nice personality.'
 - Meant 'He has a nice personality but is physically unattractive.'
 - Said: 'I've already eaten'
 - Meant: 'I've already eaten today'

Truth functions and use

- Say I tell you:
 - 'John fell out of bed and bumped his head.'
- It seems that I would typically only be inclined to assert this if John bumped his head *as a result* of falling
- Say I tell you one of either:
 - 'The prize is either in the attic or in the garden.'
 - 'The prize isn't in the attic, then it's in the garden.'
- It seems that I would typically only be inclined to assert this if I didn't know whether prize was in the attic or in the garden
- Doesn't this undermine the truth-functional analysis?

Grice's objection (ctd)

- What is meant could be something *weaker*:
 - Said: 'Everyone was at the meeting'
 - Meant: 'Everyone on the board of governors was at the meeting'
 - Said: 'You won't die'
 - Meant: 'You won't die from that cut'
- It could be something *altogether different*:
 - Said: 'That was incredibly generous of you' [in a sarcastic tone]
 - Meant: 'That was pretty stingy of you'
 - Said: 'He has a heart of stone'
 - Meant: 'He is cruel'

Grice's objection (ctd)

- Upshot:
 - (i) We could feel it's *OK* to assert something in circumstances in which it is *false* (because what we would mean would be true)
 - (ii) We could feel that it's *not OK* to assert something in circumstances in which it is *true* (because what we would mean would be false)
- The case relevant to the case of the connectives is (ii):

The facts about temporal order and lack of speaker knowledge may well only be part of what is meant but not of what is said
- Grice calls something that is meant that is not part of (not entailed by) what is said an '*implicature*'

Testing for implicatures (ctd)

- Another way of bringing this out:

'The prize *isn't* either in the attic or in the garden , *because I know I put it in the attic.*

'John *didn't* fall out of bed and bump his head, *because he bumped his head before falling out of bed .*
- OK, so what *determines* what is said and what is meant?

Testing for implicatures

- Test for implicature-hood: would a further assertion of the falsity of the would-be implicature have yielded an *inconsistency*?

'He has a nice personality *and is pretty attractive too.*

'I've already eaten, *but not today.*

'The prize is either in the attic or in the garden. ; *I know that because I know where I put it, but I am not going to tell you*

'John fell out of bed and bumped his head, *but not in that order.*
- Contrast:

'Ayaan has a red car *and doesn't have a car*'

GRICE ON MEANING

An ambiguity in 'meaning'

- Grice suggests that the notion of meaning is ambiguous between a 'natural' and a 'non-natural' sense
- The natural sense:
 - (1) 'Those spots mean measles.'
 - (2) 'The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year.'
- Some features of (1):
 - I *can't* follow it up with 'But you don't have measles'
 - I *can't* rephrase it as 'By those spots it was meant that *P*'
 - I *can't* rephrase it as 'Those spots mean "*P*"'
 - I *can* rephrase it as 'The fact that *P* means measles'

Grice's analysis of meaning_{NN}

- What does it take for someone to mean_(NN) that *P* by uttering a given sentence or, more generally, performing a given act?
- In the case of utterances, this doesn't seem to be determined by linguistic form:

'Moving in with him will drive you crazy'

The speaker could either mean this literally or figuratively
- The matter seems to have to do with the **intended effect** of the utterance on the hearer; more specifically, the resulting beliefs
- But to intend the hearer to believe that *P* by saying *Q* isn't sufficient for one to have meant '*P*' by '*Q*'...

An ambiguity in 'meaning' (ctd)

- The non-natural sense (**meaning_{NN}**):
 - (3) 'Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean the bus is full.'
 - (4) 'That remark, 'Smith couldn't get on without his trouble and strife', meant that Smith found his wife indispensable.'
- According to Grice, we can contrast (3) with (1) as follows:
 - I *can* follow it up with 'But the bus isn't full'
 - I *can* rephrase it as 'By those 3 rings on the bell it is meant that the bus is full.'
 - I *can* rephrase it as 'Those 3 rings on the bell mean "the bus is full"'
 - I *can't* rephrase it as 'The fact that *P* means the bus is full'

Grice's analysis of meaning_{NN} (ctd)

- Counterexample:

The ticket inspectors stop me on a UK train. To avoid a fine, I say 'C'est la première fois que j'prends ce train sans payer', simply so as to make them believe that I am French. I didn't mean 'I am French' by that utterance.
- Similarly for non-verbal actions:

I want to detective to believe that Harry is guilty, so I leave Harry's handkerchief at the crime scene. But I don't mean 'Harry is guilty' by leaving the handkerchief.
- Grice: one must intend to instil the relevant belief *by virtue of the hearer's recognising one's intention to do so*

From speaker meaning to sentence meaning

- Grice takes the above to provide a basis to explain what it is for the *sentence 'P'* to mean that *Q* (sentence meaning)
- He briefly suggests:
 - “[sentence] *x* means_{NN} (timeless) that so-and-so' might as a first shot be equated with some statement or disjunction of statements about what 'people' (vague) intend to effect by [uttering] *x*.”

CONVEYING WHAT IS MEANT

Implicatures

- Question: how does the speaker expect the hearer to figure out what he means?
- Clearly the speaker will expect the hearer to have the following:
 - Knowledge of what the speaker said (the conventional meaning of the words uttered)
 - Knowledge that the speaker has particular situation-specific items of information (and knows that the hearer knows he does)
- But this leaves the inference, which aims at uncovering the *purpose* of the utterance, grossly underdetermined
- The hearer needs something else...

The Cooperative Principle

‘Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically...cooperative efforts; and each participant recognises in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes...This purpose...may be fixed from the start..., or it may evolve during the exchange; it may be fairly definite, or it may be so indefinite as to leave very considerable latitude to the participants...But at each stage, some possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. We might then formulate a rough general principle which will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: *Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose...of talk exchange in which you are engaged.* One might label this the **COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE**.’

The Maxims

- Grice goes on to outline some more specific principles (conversational 'maxims') that follow:

MAXIMS OF QUANTITY

- Make your conversational contribution as informative as is required (by current conversational purposes).
- Don't make your conversational contribution more informative than is required

MAXIMS OF QUALITY:

- Don't say what you believe to be false
- Don't say that for which you lack adequate evidence

Deriving implicatures

- Grice describes the hearer's inference process:

'He has said that q ; there is no reason to suppose that he is not observing...the Cooperative Principle; he could not be doing this unless he thought that p ; he knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that the supposition that he thinks that p is required; he has done nothing to stop me thinking that p ; he intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that p ; and so he has implicated that p .'
- Question: How many iterations of knowledge is sufficient?
- Note that sometimes the inference will hinge on assumptions about specific features of the situation (**particularised** implicature) and sometimes it won't (**generalised** implicature)

The Maxims

- Two more:

MAXIM OF RELEVANCE: Make your contribution relevant to the purpose of the conversation

MAXIMS OF MANNER:

- Avoid obscurity of expression
- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief
- Be orderly

Examples

- 'The prize is either in the attic or in the garden':

There is no prior reason to think that the speaker knows where the prize is. If the speaker had known that the prize was in the attic (say), she would, by the MAXIM OF QUANTITY, have made the stronger assertion.
- What about our other examples?

'He fell out of bed and bumped his head'
'He has a nice personality.'
'I've already eaten'
'That was incredibly generous of you'
'He has a heart of stone'