Philosophy 308
The Language Revolution
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Class #26
Grice - Conversational Implicature

Business

- Sean and Justin on Gricean Implicature today
  - ▸ 2pm action

Speech Act Theory

- A concern that there's something beyond the literal meaning of our words has been bubbling under our work all semester.

- Semantics tends to focus on literal meaning

- Austin (and Searle and Grice) are looking at the broader activities we perform with language.

- Speech acts

- One way to understand our course narrative:
  - ‣ Get clear about the primary, literal uses of language.
  - ‣ Then, extend the analysis as far as we can.
  - ‣ Introduce new approaches only as necessary.
  - ‣ The conservativeness of science

Assertion as Performative

- The assertionist view of language: All language is essentially assertion
  - ‣ Frege or Russell or early Wittgenstein
  - ‣ Grice

- The assertionist view is not utterly disconnected from the broader view of language as something with which we perform acts.
  - ‣ "We see then that stating something is performing an act just as much as is giving an order or giving a warning; and we see, on the other hand, that, when we give an order or a warning or a piece of advice, there is a question about how this is related to fact which is not perhaps so very different from the kind of question that arises when we discuss how a statement is related to fact" (251).

Wittgenstein's List

Investigations §23

Making a joke; telling it
Solving a problem in practical arithmetic
Translating from one language into another
Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying

Giving orders, and obeying them
Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements
Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)
Reporting an event
Speculating about an event
Forming and testing a hypothesis
Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams
Making up a story; and reading it
Play-acting
Singing catches
Guessing riddles

What Do We Do With Words?

- Austin's four cases
  - ▶ wedding, apologizing, naming, betting
- Can we understand these as assertions?
  - ▶ "In all these cases it would be absurd to regard the thing that I say as a report of the performance of the action which is undoubtedly done - the action of betting, or christening, or apologizing. We should say rather that, in saying what I do, I actually perform that action. When I say 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*' I do not describe the christening ceremony, I actually perform the christening; and when I say 'I do' (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife), I am not reporting on a marriage, I am indulging in it "(235).
  - ▶ "In issuing an explicit performative utterance we are not stating what act it is, we are showing or making explicit what act it is" (245).

Photo # 80-G-447599   Mary Lin Moore christens USS Impervious, 1952

A Thin Line

- 'Hurrah' and 'Damn'
- 'I'm sorry'
  - ‣ "[I]f somebody says 'I am sorry', we wonder whether this is just the same as 'I apologize' - in which case of course we have said it's a performative utterance - or whether perhaps it's to be taken as a description, true or false, of the state of his feelings" (246).
  - ‣ "I'm sorry if you were hurt by my comments."
- Demands

Grice

Sean and Justin

Formalism and Informalism

- Grice begins with a description of a debate between the formalist and the informalist over the purported divergence between the meanings of terms in formal languages and their natural-language counterparts.
  - ‣ Formalist: the divergence is due to the inadequacy of natural language.
  - ‣ Informalist: the formalist's picture misconstrues the purpose of natural language, basing it on scientific paradigm.
- For the informalist, there need to be two logics: one for natural language, and one for formal language.
- Grice: this is the wrong way to look at things.
  - ‣ Both the formalist and the informalist make a mistake of assuming divergences exist.
  - ‣ Attention to the conditions governing conversation will clear up the problem.
  - ‣ The formalist can take care of semantics.
  - ‣ But there's stuff in language that goes beyond semantics.
    - – E.g. the context of communication
- Pragmatics

Implicature

- We can communicate information beyond what we say.

- Grice coins the term 'implicature' to apply to the information which is communicated without being said.

- Implicature helps distinguish what is said from what is implied, suggested or presupposed.

- Implicatures may be conventional or nonconventional.
  - ‣ Conventional: 'He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave'.
  - ‣ Nonconventional implicature: of someone newly working in a bank, 'He likes his colleagues and he hasn't been to prison yet'.
    - – The semantics of that portion of the sentence concern the person and prison.
    - – That portion of the sentence is true if and only if the person has not yet been to prison.
    - – The speaker has also communicated something else about the subject, that he is liable to corruption, one supposes.
    - – A semantic theory which ascribes an imputation of corruption to the speaker of the sentence will be complex and misleading.
    - – Nothing was said about corruption.

The Cooperative Principle and Its Maxims

- CP: 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.

- Maxims:
  - ▸ Quantity: Provide no more or less information than required.
  - ▸ Quality: Say neither what you believe false nor that for which you lack evidence.
  - ▸ Relation: Be relevant.
  - ▸ Manner: Be perspicuous, avoiding obscurity, ambiguity, and prolixity, while being orderly.

- Maxims as guidelines for interpersonal interactions in general.
  - ▸ "[O]ne of my avowed aims is to see talking as a special case or variety of purposive, indeed rational, behavior..." (47)
  - ▸ Talk exchanges as quasi-contractual cooperative transactions.
    - – Not exclusively

CP and Implicature

- The point of Identifying CP and its maxims is to establish a baseline for ordinary communication.

- Then we can identifying systematic, conventional ways in which ordinary maxims are violated.
  - ‣ We can identify the information which gets communicated by violating those maxims.

- The pragmatics of communication consists largely in systematic violations of CP and its refinements.

Failing to Fulfill a Maxim

- One may violate it and, likely, mislead one's audience.

- One may opt out, indicating unwillingness to cooperate.

- One may find oneself with a clash among maxims, unable to be both maximally informative and maximally accurate.

- We can flout a maxim, blatantly failing to fulfill it.
  - We force our audience to make sense of our statements through attributions of implicature.
  - This is called exploiting a maxim.

Conversational Implicature

- S, by saying p, conversationally implicates that q if
  - 1) S is presumed to be observing the conventional maxims, or at least CP;
  - 2) S is presumed to be aware that q is required in order to make consistent sense of p and the conventional maxims together;
  - 3) Both S and the audience think that each other can work out the above.

- "Apply this to my initial example, to B's remark that C has not yet been to prison. In a suitable setting A might reason as follows: '(1) B has apparently violated the maxim 'Be relevant' and so may be regarded as having flouted one of the maxims conjoining perspicuity, yet I have no reason to suppose that he is opting out from the operation of the CP; (2) given the circumstances, I can regard his irrelevance as only apparent if, and only if, I suppose him to think that C is potentially dishonest; (3) B knows that I am capable of working out step (2). So B implicates that C is potentially dishonest'" (50).

Flouting Maxims

- In implicature, we flout the maxims of ordinary conversation.
- When both a speaker and an audience are complicit in the flouting, they are able to communicate using implicature.
- This complicity is not easy to establish.
- Speaker and audience must be aware of:
  - 1. the conventional meaning of the words used, including the identity of any references involved;
  - 2. the CP and its maxims (at least implicitly);
  - 3. the context of the utterance;
  - 4. other items of background knowledge; and
  - 5. the fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case.

Semantics and Pragmatics

- Attention to the maxims governing communication might lead one to complicate, unnecessarily, one's semantics.
- Sometimes, when one says, 'an X', we intend to communicate that the X is not ours.
- Sometimes, we use it with the intention to communicate that the X is ours.
- Sometimes we intend to indicate neither.
- But we don't want to claim that there are semantic differences among such claims.
  - "I am inclined to think that one would not lend a sympathetic ear to a philosopher who suggested that there are three senses of the form of expression an X: one in which it means roughly 'something that satisfies the conditions defining the word X,' another in which it means approximately 'an X (in the first sense) that is only remotely related in a certain way to some person indicated by the context,' and yet another in which it means 'an X (in the first sense) that is closely related in a certain way to some person indicated by the context' "(56).
- In other words, the information which we communicate using implicature is not semantic.
- It's pragmatic.
- CP and its maxims help to identify the information, from context, which is conveyed beyond the meaning of the terms used.

Features of Conversational Implicature

- It can be canceled, explicitly or contextually, by opting out of the Cooperative principle.

- Nondetachability: you can't say the same thing without the implicature, unless you add a different implicature.

- Both parties need knowledge of the conventional force of a statement, minus implicature.

- The truth of an implicature is unconnected to the truth of a statement; the implicature is not carried by what is said, but by how it is said.

- Implicature is inexact; analysis of any implicature often leads to a disjunctive result.