Chapter 13 – Grice on meaning

13.1 Introduction

- **Quine** & **Davidson's** radical interpretation:
  What's meant in one language can be captured in another language
- **Austin's** speech acts:
  Language is the tool in getting things done

However, provided words are just types of mark or sounds with no meaning in themselves → how could they have meaning?
1) **Grice's** focus on meaning

13.2 Grice's overall strategy

- **Grice's ultimate aim:** to explain the notion of meaning as it applies to the linguistic expressions like sentences, words, or phrases.

- He tries to understand the **everyday notion of meaning** (which has much wider application to the linguistic expressions).
  By how?
  He started with dividing the general notion of meaning into 2 categories:
  1) **Natural**
     e.g. Those spots mean that she has measles.
  2) **Non-natural**
     e.g. Three rings on the bell mean that the bus is full.
  These two sentences are similar in form but fundamentally different in sense.

  Differences as per Grice:
  i.   *Natural* meaning: 'X means that p' → implies that **it's true that p**
        (1) implies that she really does have measles
        However, this does not hold for *non-natural* meaning
        (2) the bell might have been rung 3 times by mistake

  ii.   *Non-natural* meaning: the string of words follows 'means that' could be put in quotation marks (i.e., the rings meant 'the bus is full') as it's not the natural meaning

  iii. *Natural meaning* can be understood as the significance of certain *facts*, whilst *non-natural meaning* is concerned with the significance of certain *objects/features of objects*
        ⇨

  iv.   ==Statements of non-natural meaning of 'X means that p → implies **somebody** meant that p by X==

  - The distinction between natural & non-natural meaning → basis of an intuitive argument

for Grice's account of linguistic meaning

- The difference is not necessarily a distinction between natural & non-natural → it is in fact the difference of whether or not a sentence would express a teleological conception of meaning

- What is teleology? 目的论 → what has a goal/purpose/point
  (like here, (2) does but (1) doesn't)
  (2): those three rings of bell are there **in order to** show that the bus is full

  But keep in mind that *something* (here as '3 rings of bell') is supposed to show that the bus is full **can be faulty**
  Hence, we can see that the use of <u>quotation mark</u> is natural as it could isolates what seems to be shown from the actual fact. (i.e., the rings meant 'the bus is full' – as objects/features of objects having purposes not facts)

- Compared with that of (i) – (iii), (iv) is slightly different:
  - It's not that statements of non-natural meaning **imply** that someone meant something
  - It's that this is the best (and perhaps the only conceivable) **explanation** of how they could be true.
  - Therefore (iv) is not a strict **implication** indicating that from (2) we can say that someone meant that the bus is full
  - It's only because there's no other better explanation

- Therefore, if (i) –(iii) express the difference between a teleological/non-teleological notion
- Then (iv) is **an application** to the notion of meaning of a general claim about teleology
  → **Creation Condition (CC)**

  ==**Creation Condition:** no mere object can really have a purpose unless somebody has made it have that purpose==

- Take simple declarative sentences as an example:
  - *E* is such a sentence
  - We need to figure out what has to be true for '*(E) E means that p*' to be true.
  - This is a statement of non-natural, teleological meaning (as '$_{NN}$' as per Grice)
  - Given (CC), (E) can only be true if somebody has made E have that meaning → that is the truth of (E) depends on facts about speakers.
  - Given that **S** is a speaker, then the core facts on (E**)** depend on:
    (S) **S** means that **p** by **E**

Here we have two meanings:
1) Expression-meaning (E) → **stable** & **independent** to **circumstances** of a moment → <u>timeless</u>
2) Speaker-meaning (S) → **depends** on the **circumstance** of a moment → <u>a S only means</u>

<u>something by an expression on particular occasions.</u>

2) Also, we can mean by an expression something other than what the expression itself means

Grice's original definition of expression-meaning in terms of speaker-meaning (for the case of simple declarative sentences):

<mark>(SE) *E* means that *p* **if and only if** 'people' (vague) mean that *p* by *E*</mark>

Interpretation as:

<mark>For an expression to mean something (timeless meaning) is for **people** habitually or conventionally to mean something by it on particular occasions.</mark>

Consider:

- When someone means something by an expression (temporarily and for that person) → the same kind of function as expressions in general have in languages.
- If we accept CC (creation condition), we basis of something's having a function will be someone's deliberate action (as their **specific communicative intention**)

(S1) *S* means that *p* by *E* if and only if *S* produces *E* with the intention of getting an audient to believe that *p*

➔ However, Grice found this unsatisfactory as it did not take into account the difference between **telling someone something** (speaker's action of telling the audience) & **letting her know** (allowing the audience to interpret correctly what the speaker meant)

- Therefore, the audience must recognize what the speaker is trying to do. Grice revised (S1):
  (S2) S means that p by E if and only if S produces E with the intention of getting an audience A to believe that p by means of A's recognition of that very intention

Grice's 4 maxims:
1) **The maxim of quantity:**
   where one tries to be as informative as one possibly can, and gives as much information as is needed, and no more.
2) **The maxim of quality:**
   where one tries to be truthful, and does not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence.
3) **The maxim of relation:**
   where one tries to be relevant, and says things that are pertinent to the discussion.
4) **The maxim of manner:**
   when one tries to be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as one can in what one says, and where one avoids obscurity and ambiguity.

13.3 Sympathetic objections to Grice's account of speaker-meaning

- Sympathetic objections inspired the opponents of Grice's proposal to produce modifications

of their own within the larger Gricean programme

1. **Objection to Grice' speaker-meaning as an expression of her communicative intention:**
   1) Not all uses of language are with such **communicative intention** (e.g. shopping list, diary etc.)
   2) Grice' may response to this as follow:
      - These uses are communicative
      - The meaning of expressions is established by the communicative uses; any non-communicative uses are simply by-products

2. **P. F. Strawson:**
   1) Problem with the definition of speaker-meaning
   2) Strawson's version:

   <mark>(S3) S means that p by an utterance of E if and only if:</mark>

   i. S intends that the utterance of E should get an audience A to believe that p;
   ii. S intends that A should recognize the intention **(i)**; and
   iii. S intends that A's recognition of the intention **(i)** should be part of A's reason for believing that p.

   3) He presses further on the basis of Grice's point regarding the difference between **telling** & **letting know**
   4) He believes (ii) & (iii) aren't enough, so he added:
   iv. **S intends that A should recognize the intention (ii)**
   ⇨ **Every extra intention we mention needs itself to be intended to be recognized.**
   ⇨ **Grice's analysis can never be completed** (Grice accepted this view)

   5) <mark>**Grice's 3 response to this:**</mark>
   a) **Mutual knowledge** shared by two speakers;
   b) The original proposal is somewhat **implicit** (e.g., the definition of *genuine/true communication*) → therefore he offered a simple account of speaker-meaning (for declarative sentence) → **see point 4.**
   c) Review of Schiffer's book, Gilbert Harman suggested that the difficulties only arise because Griceans were concerned to avoid appealing to reflexive/self-referential intentions ➔ but in (S3), the self-referential intention has been removed. Therefore (S2) is not to the infinite series of (S3) & claimed that all intentions are self-referential (that is, if we intend to do something, we always intend to do it in virtue of that very intention)

3. **Based on 'Mutual knowledge' (5)-a)), then Schiffer revise (S3)**

<mark>(S4) S means that p by an utterance of E if and only if S intended that the utterance of E should bring about a state of affairs M with the following feature:</mark>

M is sufficient for S and an audience A to mutually know* –
i. that M obtains;
ii. that S intends that the utterance of E should get A to believe that p;

iii.   that S intends that A should recognize the intention (ii); and

iv.   that S intends that A's recognition of the intention (ii) should be part of A's reason for believing that p.

    ➔   (S4) is still very complex & not as harmless as he claimed

4.   A simple account of speaker-meaning (declarative sentences):

> **(S5) S means that p by an utterance of E if and only if in uttering E S is in a state which is optimal for communicating that p.**

1)   Genuine communication is an ideal

2)   But in daily life while we're communicating with others, we're close enough to the ideal for the everyday purposes we have in mind (cooperative principle)

13.4 Sympathetic objections to Grice's account of expression-meaning

● **Grice's original proposal (declarative sentences)**

> **(SE) E means that p if and only if 'people' (vague) mean that p by E.**

    ➔   Suggested that an expression's meaning something depends on there being a **custom** or **convention** to mean that by the expression

● However, the sympathetic objections to his original proposal **deny** any custom/convention & believe expression-meaning is to be explained in terms of speaker-meaning

1.   **Davidson:**

1)   **Malapropisms**: a use of one word where another would have been (in some sense) more appropriate

2)   An expression means what someone can be understood to mean by it

3)   Therefore, there's no custom/convention of an expression's meaning

4)   We manage to work out the meanings on the basis of our prior knowledge (as per his prior theory)

5)   He rejected Grice's timeless meaning (or standard meaning)

6)   However, he said it's still possible to distinguish between speaker-meaning & expression-meaning ➔ that's to understand the figurative uses of languages by the speaker (or metaphorical uses that would not normally/standardly be said by means of those words)

2.   **Grice himself**

1)   What an expression means may have some connection with what people mean by it on particular occasions (no necessary connection with convention)

2)   Convention may be one way of establishing what's proper ➔ **but it is not the only way**

3)   So, Grice revised his original proposal

> **(SE*) E means that p if and only if it is proper to mean that p by E.**

13.5 An unsympathetic objection to Grice's account of expression-meaning

- **Grice's original proposal (declarative sentences)**
  - <mark>(SE) E means that p if and only if 'people' (vague) mean that p by E.</mark>

1. **Mark Platts**
   1) It's possible to construct an infinite number of sentences in most languages, and a large number of them will never have been used.
   2) If they haven't been used, they'll never have been used with particular meaning ➔ there's no habit/convention of people to mean anything
   3) So, he amended (SE)

   <mark>**(SE**) E means that p if and only if, if 'people' (vague) were to use E, they would mean that p by E.**</mark>

   4) Why people would mean something by an unused sentence? ➔ people would mean that by the sentences is that that's what the sentence means
   5) **Difficulty**: However, if 4) is true, there's no such expression-meaning in terms of speaker-meaning because speaker-meaning depends on expression-meaning
   6) **How to deal with the difficulty?**
      A way of accepting that what people would mean by an unused sentence is determined by what the sentence means, and still giving an account of that in terms of speaker meaning:
      - The meaning of a certain finite stock of sentences is explained in terms of speaker-meaning ➔ & the meaning of these sentences is es determined by the fact that people mean something by them.
      - As sentences have parts, once the sentences is fixed ➔ the meaning of the parts is fixed ➔ once the meaning of the parts ais fixed ➔ the meaning of any sentence which can be constructed from those parts is also fixed (even though these sentences have never been used)

   7) **Another way:**
      - to take languages as abstract entities which consist essentially of pairing symbols with interpretations of them
      - even if no one use the language, as long as it's possible for signs to have interpretation, the language may be said to exist
      - therefore, language comes with its own theory of meaning
      - based on Grice:
        a language (in the sense of an assignment of meanings to signs) is the actual language of a given population if the communicative intentions of the population are made sense of by supposing that that's the language they're deploying

13.6 An unsympathetic objection to Grice's account of speaker-meaning

1. John Searle:

> (c) The American means that he is a German soldier by the sentence 'Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen?'

1) When you use a sentence, you can only mean by it something which it already means & you cannot mean what you like by it.
➔ Speaker-meaning itself turns out to depend on expression-meaning

2) However, if you take the meaning of a common language to be held in place by convention, you seem to be assuming that the meaning of expressions in a language is dependent on what individual speakers mean by them

3) For the purpose of having smoother social interaction, people tend to adopt a convention to mean the same as each other.

4) If that's true ➔ Searle cannot both object that expression-meaning is prior to speaker-meaning & take expression-meaning to be conventional

5) **Grice's response to this (followed by Schiffer):**
   - Searle's case is a genuine counter-example
   - There's no restriction on what you can mean by uttering a sentence (as per Schiffer)
   - They referred to different kinds of meaning:
     Searler: meaning of linguistic expressions – sentences and words
     Schiffer: meaning of actions – the actions of uttering linguistic expressions.

13.7 After Grice

1. Based on the Creation Condition, the meaning of linguistic expressions must depend on speakers' intention

If reject Grice, we need to either deny linguistic expressions are 'mere objects' OR to find other way(s) for 'mere objects' to have purposes.

2. To find other way(s) for 'mere objects' to have purposes
3) Evolutionary theory: how objects can have purposes without anybody every having given them those purposes (e.g., a heart can be there in order to pump blood, if our ancestor's hearts had not pumped blood, our hearts wouldn't have existed)
4) For linguistic meaning: if these words hadn't been used in a particular way in the past → they wouldn't now be used at all
5) Evolution provides us with an account of what seems to be purposive, without actually introducing any purposes.

3. Words are not really 'mere objects' – not really just types of mark and sounds → therefore they are intrinsically meaningful → therefore we don't need to account of how they come to have meaning.