AN EVALUATION OF GRICE’S INTENTIONALISTIC
THEORY OF MEANING

(ABSTRACT)

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The concept of meaning is central to Philosophy of Language as well as to Linguistic Philosophy.¹ What is central to meaning? This is the question to which every theory of meaning more or less tries to answer. Grice’s account of meaning keeps utterer’s intention central to the concept of meaning and, accordingly, Grice attempts to define meaning in terms of utterer’s intention. The main objective of this work is to critically evaluate Grice’s intentionalistic theory of meaning. The evaluation is undertaken through an assessment of the criticisms on Grice’s account of meaning, after projecting the significance of Grice’s theory of meaning, distinguishing his notion of intention from that of Searle and examining different theories of meaning. Accordingly, this work has the following five chapters besides the Introduction and the Conclusion.

Chapter I: Theories of Meaning
Chapter II: Grice’s Theory of Meaning
Chapter III: Intentionality: Searle versus Grice
Chapter IV: Criticisms on Grice’s Theory of Meaning
Chapter V: The Possible Defences

In the Introduction, we point out that the present work comes under Philosophy of Language, rather than Linguistic Philosophy. Secondly, we point out that the significance of a theory of meaning is to be evaluated in relation to a broader

¹ Following Searle (1971), we can make a distinction between Philosophy of Language and Linguistic Philosophy. The two can be interpreted as two different aspects or dimensions of Analytic Philosophy.
philosophical perspective that accounts for the triangle of Language, Thought and Reality. In this connection, briefly presenting the stand points of Dummett and Davidson on Meaning and Truth, we try to explain how language, thought and reality are related to each other in terms of the explanatory status of meaning in relation to Truth and Reference.

**In the first chapter,** we have outlined the fundamental features of different theories of meaning. The important theories of meaning accounted here are: (i) Referential theory of meaning (ii) Verification theory of meaning (iii) Use theory of meaning (iv) Speech Act theory of meaning (v) Causal theory of meaning and (vi) Intentionalistic theory of meaning.

The referential theory counts the object (concrete or abstract) or the state of affair referred to by an expression or represented through a sentence does determine the meaning. The verification theory takes the method of verification as the meaning determinant. The use theory counts a multiple meaning determinants, like the language game, the rules governing the use, form of life, the contexts of use. Searle’s speech act theory considers illocutionary acts the minimal units of linguistic communication. The causal theory of meaning keeps the causal relation between what is said and what is meant as to be the central factor for meaning determination. An intentionalistic theory of meaning keeps utterer’s intention as the defining factor of meaning.

As referring is one linguistic job among others and is assigned only to some types of expressions, no account of meaning that presupposes that all meaningful units refer to something can be correct. More specifically, it cannot be the case that every meaningful linguistic unit functions just like a name or does nothing but refers to something or other in this world. Thus Referential Theory of Meaning is untenable. Even Verification Theory of meaning is unacceptable, mainly because it commits a Descriptive Fallacy and it is contrary to a holistic theory of meaning.
Later Wittgenstein’s Use theory of meaning\(^2\) successfully argues against an essentialistic theory of meaning, against picture theory of meaning and against the possibility of private language. However, it fails to provide us a systematic theory of meaning. In a strict sense, it does not define meaning nor does it make an attempt to construct a theory of meaning. It upholds the multiplicity of meanings of an expression or sentence in multiple different contexts of its use; but without outlining the ways in which each of these meanings is to be determined. The significance of rules is recognized by use theory of meaning but what exactly are these rules? No explicit statement of those rules governing our language use is found in this theory.

The speech act theory of meaning does convincingly establish that every use of language is an instance of ‘doing things with words’. However, we find that this theory of meaning does not define meaning in terms of intention although intentionality is an important factor in speech act theory, particularly, in Searle’s speech act theory which considers illocutionary acts the minimal units of linguistic communication.

A causal theory of meaning is also not appropriate for an analysis of meaning mainly because it ignores the ‘non-natural’ aspect of human communication and, thereby, it does not account for the intentionality factor that inevitably exists with that non-natural aspect. For a causal theory of meaning a bearer has a certain meaning if and only if that meaning can be correctly inferred from it through a causal relation. However, the causal theory of meaning ignores the agent, the respondent, and the intention to determine the meaning.

In explaining intentionalistic theory of meaning we relate it to use theory of meaning and speech act theory of meaning as its background theories. Intention is a characteristic of action, as when one acts intentionally or with a certain intention; a feature of one’s mind, as when one intends (has an intention) to act in a certain way. The intentionality factor as a meaning determinant stands unquestionable insofar as

\(^2\) For which we rely on Wittgenstein L. (1953), \emph{Philosophical Investigations}, (Trans.) G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil Blackwell, Oxford
language is a rule governed activity and every voluntary human action has got intention as an indispensable factor.

In the second chapter, an exposition of Grice’s theory of meaning has been undertaken. Grice considers ‘intention’ the most fundamental factor in the analysis of meaning. For him, meaning can be defined in terms of utterer’s intention. Grice maintains that for a speaker to mean something by an utterance is to make that utterance with the intention of producing certain effects on his audience. Grice’s analysis of speaker’s meaning explicates semantic notions in terms of the psychological concepts of intention and belief. Meaning does not result from conventions but is a function of what users do with sounds and gestures as well as sentences and words. This function of the users of language is explicated in terms of their intentions.

Grice (1957) makes a distinction between “Natural Meaning” and “Non-natural Meaning”; abbreviates the latter to “MeaningNN”. For him, it is MeaningNN, and not the Natural Meaning, that concerns us for a proper analysis of meaning. We ascribe communicative meaning only to things that result from the deliberate actions of people. The purpose of bringing in the said distinction is to show that each of the different points on which Grice draws the distinction suggests the absence of intention in natural meaning and presence of intention in MeaningNN.

Grice’s analysis of meaning suggests that ‘a speaker means something by x’ is equivalent to ‘that the speaker intends the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention.’ However, Grice has not made any explicit argument against the non-intentionalistic theories of meaning except some against the causal theory of meaning. In accordance to Grice’s (1957) analysis of meaning, the three conditions necessary and sufficient for an utterer, U, to meanNN something by uttering x are as follows:

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(1) U intends to induce some belief in A
(2) U intends A to recognize that U intends to induce some belief in A
(3) U intends A to fulfil U's first intention on the basis of A's fulfilment of U's second intention.

The first one is the Belief-inducing condition, the second is Recognition condition and the third is the Fulfilment condition. In our exposition of Grice's account of meaning, we have tried to explain the necessity of each of these conditions.

In the third chapter, we have done a comparative study between Searle's analysis of speech acts and Grice's analysis of meaning, keeping 'intention' as the point of reference. Speaker's intention plays a vital role in Searle's theory of speech acts, though Searle does not consider speaker's intention the defining factor of meaning. From Searle's refutation of Austin's Locutionary-Ilocutionary distinction, it is clear that Searle considers illocutionary acts the minimal units of linguistic communication. For him, locutionary act is not separable from the illocutionary act. In illocutionary acts, illocutionary forces are vital and speaker's intention is indispensable for the determination of illocutionary force.

The basic difference we find between the two stand points is that, though both recognize the significance of intention in human communication, Searle considers intentionality extrinsic to linguistic entities whereas Grice takes it to be intrinsic. Accordingly, emphasizing on the linguistic rules and conventions, Searle frames certain rules and conditions for what he counts the minimal units of linguistic communication, namely, the illocutionary acts; and, emphasizes on communicative intention that mostly works in accordance to the utterer's knowledge of the linguistic rules and conventions, On the other hand, Grice attempts to define meaning in terms of utterer's intention. In Grice's understanding, intentionality is not a very technical term; it is not to be understood in terms of the concepts relevant for speech acts. Instead, intentionality explains meaning and even certain features of speech acts.
In the fourth chapter, we have looked into criticisms on Grice’s theory of meaning. Criticisms made by S. Schiffer, J.R. Searle, P.F. Strawson, Paul Ziff, R.C. Gandhi, N.L. Wilson, Steven Davis, Gilbert Harman and Mathew Weiner have been taken into account.

Schiffer\(^4\) argues that the Gricean analysis fails to recognize the due importance of the utterance itself by confining meaning to the speaker’s intentions. The reason for which a speaker thinks that the audience will recognize his intention from utterance he has made may not be the same with the reason for which the audience actually recognizes the intention. Pointing out this difference, Schiffer argues that Grice’s conditions are not sufficient for meaning something by an utterance.

Strawson\(^5\) also argues against the sufficiency of the Gricean conditions. He proposes that Grice should add a further condition, that the utterer U should utter x not only, as already provided, with the intention that U intends to obtain a certain response from A, but also with the intention that A should think that U has the intention just mentioned. In other words, Strawson argues that Grice’s analysis of non-natural meaning requires a fourth condition, namely, the recognition-of-recognition condition.

R.C. Gandhi’s\(^6\) main contention is that an audience’s recognition of an utterer’s intention would be counter productive in the sense that the audience would not believe that p if he comes to know that the utterer is persuading him to believe that p. Gandhi, following Strawson, also argues that Grice’s analysis has inadequate number of recognition-conditions and it may in fact be necessary to add an indefinite number of recognition-conditions to Grice’s list of conditions.

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Ziff\(^7\) argues that Meaning\(_{NN}\) is not the meaning proper for an analysis of meaning. He offers a number of counter-examples to show that meaning\(_{NN}\) is not equivalent with meaning. For example, an utterer utters “Ugh ugh blugh blugh ugh blug blug”\(^8\) intending
(i) the audience to be offended
(ii) the audience to recognize the utterer’s first intention
(iii) the audience to fulfil the first intention on the basis of fulfilling the second intention.

Neither the utterance means anything, nor does the utterer means anything by the utterance, but the utterer satisfies Grice’s three conditions. Similar conclusions are drawn from his counter-examples of utterances like ‘pi.hi.y pi.hi.y’, ‘Gleeg gleeg gleeg!’ and even with respect to ‘Claudius murdered my father’ uttered in three different contexts of which only one is an instance of meaning something.

N.L. Wilson\(^9\) argues that Grice’s analysis is not just faulty, but on the wrong track. He says that there is confusion between what the utterer intended to say, that is, the alleged fact he intended to report and what he intended to accomplish by saying it. Wilson says that the primary and secondary intentions vary independently. He is of the view that meaning cannot be in the control of an utterer whereas the utterer’s intentions are completely in the utterer’s control. Meaning is something objective, intentions are subjective in nature. Accordingly, for him, meaning cannot be defined in terms of utterer’s intentions.

Searle gives importance to the intentionality factor but intentionality understood in the framework of his speech act theory, not in the Grician sense of intentionality that defines meaning in terms of utterer’s intentions. His counter-example of the American Soldier\(^10\) suggests that, for Searle, Grice’s account of meaning can turn

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\(^8\) Ibid, p. 7
any nonsense to sense. He thinks that the role of rules and conventions has not been recognized in Grice’s account.

Steven Davis\textsuperscript{11} is of the view that if the string of definitions which Grice offers were adequate, the semantic notions of idiolect and timeless expression meaning could be eliminated in favour of the psychological notion of speaker’s intention to produce certain effects in their audiences. He says, ‘if it were successful, our theory of linguistic behaviour would not need to posit meanings as entities, but could get by with psychological states.’

Mathew Weiner\textsuperscript{12} claims that not all conversational implicatures are cancellable. There are cases in which the cancellability test fails. He says that even though the speaker’s utterance of A implicates B, uttering something like ‘A but not B’ would not commit her to A without committing her to B. In these cases, the putative cancellation merely strengthens the implicature.

According to Gilbert Harman\textsuperscript{13}, Grice’s theory of meaning avoids the charge of circularity by explaining the meaning of a message (what the speaker means) in terms of the content of the thought communicated (which the speaker intends the hearer to think the speaker has). However, he says that Grice’s theory of meaning is troubled by two difficulties: (a) difficulties in accounting for the difference between telling someone one wishes him to do something and ordering him to do it, and (b) difficulties in accounting for meaning something by one’s words in silent thought.

\textbf{In the fifth chapter}, an attempt has been made to defend Grice’s account of meaning against the criticisms made by different philosophers. The defence mechanisms we have adopted here consist of two simple strategies. One, we use Grice’s own answer where we find it satisfactory against a criticism. Two, we use certain general truths about human communication and language, relying on Use

\textsuperscript{13} Harman, G. (1999), \textit{Reasoning, Meaning and Mind}, Oxford University Press, New York
theory of meaning and Speech Act theory of meaning. The second strategy is taken with the understanding that Grice's intentionalistic theory of meaning is a further development of the idea that language is a rule governed activity; and that the Use theory and Speech Act theory do uphold and argue in different ways to establish that idea.

With respect to Strawson's criticism, we find Grice's (1969) answer satisfactory and, in addition to that, we point out some implausibility in Strawson's counter-example. The problem raised by Strawson can be avoided if we eliminate the potential counter-examples by requiring \( U \) not to have a sort of complex of intentions like \( U \) intends \( A \) to recognize that \( U \) intends \( A \) "both to rely on some inference element \( E \) and also to think that \( U \) intends \( A \) not to rely on \( E \)." 14 Secondly, the cases of deceptions like lies or cheatings are no less the result of certain successful communications than the descriptions, reports, orders, warnings and so on are. Strawson's counter-example presupposes the opposite, and that is the basic point of implausibility involved in his criticism against Grice's account of meaning.

Against Gandhi, we have argued that Gandhi's criticism is untenable insofar as Strawson's counter-example is implausible and satisfactorily answered by Grice. Further, we argue that Gandhi's argument relies on a peculiar sense of 'counter-productive' by which Grice's second condition becomes counter-productive.

We accept that Schiffer is right in pointing out that the analysis needs correction insofar as he thinks that it fails to account for the connection between the utterance itself and the utterer's second intention. However, this problem can be easily fixed. Following Martinich, We need only to correct the second condition as that '\( U \) intends \( A \) to recognise intention (i), at least partly because of the utterance of \( x \).' 15

Against Searle’s counter-example of the American soldier, Grice says that the example is not a genuine counter-example and that the imaginary situation is underdescribed. Described properly, Searle’s counter-example demands that “U intends A’s recognition of U’s intention (to produce that effect) to be achieved by means of the recognition that the sentence uttered is conventionally used to produce such an effect.” But, for Grice, a conventional correlation between a sentence and a specific response provides “only one of the ways in which an utterance may be correlated with a response.” Against Searle’s criticism that Grice’s account “does not show the connection between one’s meaning something by what one says, and what that which one says actually means in the language,” we propose that the criticism can be overcome once we accept that timeless meaning and applied timeless meaning can be explicated in terms of utterer’s occasion-meaning.

The fundamental point Wilson raises against Grice is that utterer’s intention is in the control of an utterer whereas meaning is not under the utterer’s control, thereby, for him, meaning should not be explicated in terms of utterer’s intentions. This criticism is overcome once we understand that communicative intention is not completely subjective. Utterer’s intention is not completely under his control as much as meaning is not completely under his control. Grice says that for x to have meanings\(_N\), the intended effect must be something which in some sense is within the control of the audience.

Ziff’s criticism presupposes the distinction between “U means something by uttering x” and “U means something by x” and claims that Grice’s analysis addresses to the former whereas the latter is more important for semantics. However, relying on Grice’s distinction between utterer’s “occasional meaning” and ‘timeless meaning,’ we may answer that Grice has given due importance to what U means by x, though he does analyze what U means by uttering x.

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17. Ibid, p. 161
Harman's criticism can be overcome by specifying the different intended responses corresponding to different kinds of things an utterer does (like reminding, requesting, ordering, warning, describing etc.) in uttering something. Grice\textsuperscript{19} says that generic differences in type of response would be connected with generic differences within what is meant.

We can overcome Weiner's criticisms by following Grice's \textsuperscript{20} claim that all conversational implicatures (not just generalized ones) are cancellable. Grice maintains that a conversational implicature presupposes at least the Cooperative Principle. Since it is possible to opt out of the observation of this principle, a generalized conversational implicature can be cancelled in a particular case. It can be explicitly cancelled by the addition of a clause that states or implies that the speaker has opted out. And it can be contextually cancelled, if the form of utterance that usually carries it is used in a context that makes it clear that the speaker is opting out.\textsuperscript{21}

A reply to Steven Davis' criticism can be put forth by looking at the connection between Grice's notion of meaning which is involved in saying of someone that by (when) doing such-and-such he meant that so-and-so (what he calls non-natural sense of the word "meant"), and the notions of meaning involved in saying (i) that a given sentence means "so-and-so" (ii) that a given word or phrase means "so-and-so."\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{In the Conclusion,} we have summarized the findings of previous chapters and, on the basis of those findings, we conclude that meaning can be defined in terms of utterer’s intentions; hence, interpreted in a proper way, Grice’s intentionalistic theory of meaning can be successfully upheld in Philosophy of Language.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p. 39
We have tried to suggest the general ways in which one can get rid of the questions raised either against the necessity or against the sufficiency of the Grician conditions. The necessity of each of the Grician conditions can be upheld on two grounds. One, every case of meaning something in a communication situation is for sure a case of non-natural meaning and Grician conditions are derived from an analysis of non-natural meaning. Two, violation of any of the three conditions amounts to that the utterer does not succeed in meaning anything to the audience by his/her utterance. The problem with respect to the sufficiency of the Grician conditions can be met on two fronts. One, the significance of the rules and conventions are not undermined once the utterer’s intentions are properly adjudged as communicative intentions such that the utterer is not free to intend anything arbitrarily when he makes an utterance to mean something. Secondly, in normal situations of communication, we do not make use of indefinite levels of intending. Techniques can be provided to stop intentions of that sort from damaging the sufficiency of Grician conditions.

Thus we have concluded that meaning can be defined in terms of utterer’s intentions, hence, interpreted in a proper way, Grice’s intentionalistic theory of meaning can be successfully upheld.