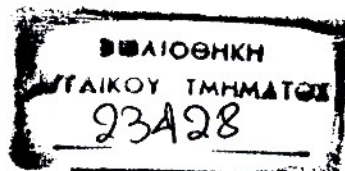


ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI  
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY - SCHOOL OF ENGLISH  
ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΕΙΟ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ

YEARBOOK OF ENGLISH STUDIES  
VOLUME 1

ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΕΤΗΡΙΑ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΚΗΣ ΣΧΟΛΗΣ  
ΠΕΡΙΟΔΟΣ Β'

ΤΜΗΜΑ ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗΣ ΓΛΩΣΣΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ  
ΤΟΜΟΣ 1



A COMMENT ON GRICE'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN  
SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

In his theory of Conversation, Grice (1975) proposes a framework within which all aspects of the interpretation of utterances can be handled. He claims that we must distinguish between what is said in an utterance and what is implicated, thereby drawing a major distinction between semantics and other aspects of communication, which may be called pragmatics. His motive for such a distinction is his desire to preserve a truth-conditional semantics, on the one hand, allowing, on the other, for the general conditions governing conversation to take care of other aspects of communicated facts. The advantages of the viability of such a theory are well known and need not be gone into here (see Kitis, 1982).

It goes without saying, however, that in the proposed framework those aspects of the meaning of the utterance which are specified as what is said there (or the conventional meaning) must necessarily fall within the scope of semantics and, therefore, be determined by semantic rules. The comment that I wish to make relates to the validity of this distinction within the proposed framework.

Grice distinguishes between two identifications of 'what is said'. A full identification, for which one would need to know "(a) the identity of *x*, (b) the time of utterance, (c) the meaning on the particular occasion of utterance" (Grice, 1975:44) the words, or sentence uttered; and a partial one, for which none of the above factors are needed. Although Grice's definition of a partial identification of 'what is said' is closely related to the conventional meaning of words (or sentences), yet it is not identified with it. He writes:

In the sense in which I am using the word 'say', I intend what someone has said to be closely related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered. Suppose someone to have uttered the sentence 'He is in the grip of a vice'. Given a knowledge of the English language, but no knowledge of the circumstances of

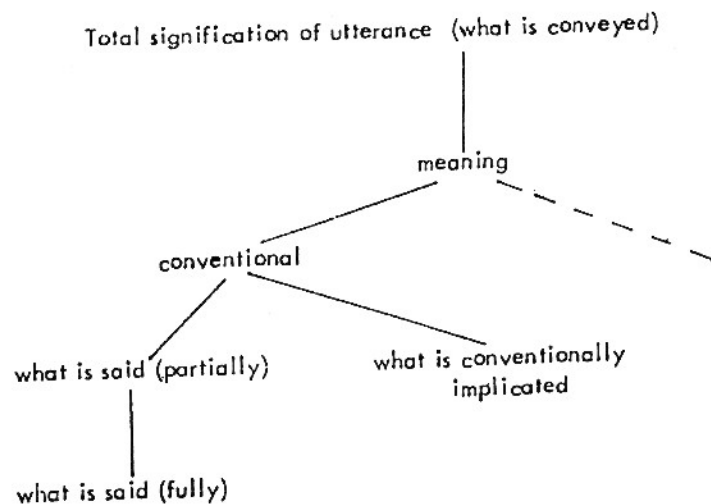
the utterance, one would know something about what the speaker had said, on the assumption that he was speaking standard English, and speaking literally.

(ibid.:44)

However, the partial identification of what is said seems to be indistinguishable from the conventional meaning of words or sentences. The reason for his distinction, apparently, lies in the fact that he wants to leave room within the bounds of conventional meanings for his concept of conventional implicatures. Conventional implicatures have to be part of the conventional meaning of words. Therefore, a partial identification of what is said is identifiable with only a part of the conventional meaning and bears a part-whole relationship to it.

The question that can be raised in this connection, however, bears on the utility of a distinction between two identifications of what is said. Wouldn't the definition of a full identification of what is said still leave room within the bounds of the conventional meaning for accommodating conventional implicatures deriving from it? Grice does not seem to give any justification for this distinction. A graphic representation of his concept of 'what is said' would be as in figure 1:

Figure 1



The only grounds for singling out a partial identification of what is said seems to be the fact that we have a rough understanding of what is said, as well as of what is conventionally implicated, without having any knowledge of the factors determining the full identification of what is said. For if I overhear someone saying (1)

(1) Robin is very fond of seals, therefore he ordered one,

I have a rough understanding of what is said and what is implicated (conventionally), though I do not know who is the referent of 'Robin', nor whether what is meant by the word 'seal' is the sea mammal, or the engraved stamps, or the sealing wax. I still understand, though, that the person referred to as Robin ordered either a sea mammal, or an engraved stamp, or a sealing wax, as a result of his / her being fond of it. This relation of consequentiality is what Grice calls the conventional implicature attaching to the word 'therefore'.

The main problem in his account, however, seems to be the following: In order to determine factor (c), the meaning, on the particular occasion of utterance, of the phrase used, you need to know more than what is specified in factors (a) and (b), i.e. the identity of references in the sentence uttered, and the time of utterance. For imagine a situation in which I say to my friend (2) at a specific time *t*,

(2) Queen Elizabeth II is very fond of seals;

given that the identity of the reference is quite clear and the time is also specified, my friend couldn't, on the grounds of the identification of these two parameters alone, decide between the two interpretations (2a) and (2b) of (2):

- (2a) Queen Elizabeth II is very fond of sea mammals  
 (2b) Queen Elizabeth II is very fond of engraved stamps.

(similar examples used for different purposes are pointed out in Lehnert, 1980)

More circumstances of the utterance need to be known for identifying precisely the conventional meaning of the words used, i.e. for a full identification of 'what is said', as Grice conceptualises it. Factor (c), the meaning on the particular occasion of utterance, is not determined merely by semantic rules, since the context of situation will often play a decisive role in determining what is said.

Therefore, Grice fails to notice that for a full specification of what is said — which, quite clearly, must fall within the purview of semantics on his view — mere knowledge and employment of semantic rules will not suffice. This point, if taken into account, undercuts Grice's distinction between semantics and pragmatics, which he goes to great pains to preserve<sup>1</sup>.

## NOTES

1. For a different argument, which, however, criticizes the same distinction within the same framework, see Wilson and Sperber (1981).

## REFERENCES

- Grice, H. P. (1975), 'Logic and conversation'. In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics, Speech acts*, V. 3. New York: Academic Press, 41-58.
- Kitis, E. (1982), *Problems connected with the notion of Implicature*. Ph. D. Thesis. University of Warwick.
- Lehnert, W. G. (1980), 'The role of scripts in understanding'. In D. Metzger (ed.) *Frame conceptions and text understanding*, V. 5. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 79-85.
- Wilson, D. and D. Sperber (1981), 'On Grice's theory of Conversation'. In P. Werth (ed.) *Conversation and Discourse*. London: Croom Helm, 155-178.