

Meaning, Speech Acts, and Communication

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There was a time when philosophy of language was concerned less with language and its use than with meanings and propositions. Meanings were abstracted from the linguistic items that have them, and (indicative) sentences were often equated with statements, which were in turn equated with propositions. It is no exaggeration to say that such philosophers as Frege, Russell, and the early Wittgenstein paid only lip service to natural languages, for they were more interested in deep and still daunting problems about representation, which they hoped to solve by studying the properties of ideal (“logically perfect”) languages, where forms of sentences mirror the forms of what sentences symbolize. As Austin complains at the beginning of *How to Do Things with Words*, it was assumed by philosophers (he had the logical positivists in mind, like Schlick, Carnap, and Ayer) that “the business of a [sentence] can only be to ‘describe’ some state of affairs, or to ‘state some fact’, which it must do either truly or falsely.” Austin and the later Wittgenstein changed all that. Austin made it abundantly clear that there are all sorts of “speech acts” besides statements. And the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, rebelling against his former self, came to think of language not primarily as a system of representation but as a vehicle for all sorts of social activity. “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” he advised. Here he went too far, for there is good reason to separate the theory of linguistic meaning (semantics) from the theory of language use (pragmatics), not that they are unconnected.¹

Linguistic Meaning and Speaker Meaning

Both words and people mean things. So we had better keep clear the difference between the meaning of a linguistic expression—a word, phrase, or sentence—and what a person means in using it. Interestingly, although what an expression means is the meaning of the expression, we do not say that what a person means is the meaning of the person. Expressions have meanings; people do not.

Expressions have meanings even when they are not being used,² but it is only in using expressions that a person means something.³

Various views have been held about linguistic meaning and its relationship to other semantic notions, such as reference, truth, mental content, synonymy, entailment, ambiguity, and vagueness. Some of these views will be presented in later parts of this book, so for the moment let us be neutral about the nature of linguistic meaning. I don't think that will affect our discussion of what it is for a speaker to mean something in using language and of the relationship between speaker meaning and linguistic meaning.⁴ All we will assume about linguistic meaning itself is that it is a central part of the linguistic knowledge⁵ that speakers and hearers bring to bear to make themselves understood and to understand each other. This knowledge is taken for granted in ordinary conversations, where there is a mutual presumption among people that they speak the same language, specifically, that what a given expression means to one is the same as what it means to the other. Our discussion will rely on the very sort of knowledge of linguistic meaning on which we rely in everyday life when we communicate.

What we mean is generally connected to, though sometimes only remotely, to what our words mean. To appreciate this consider a case where there is no such connection. Suppose someone says to you, "What's the frequency, Kenneth?" (the very words used by a man who mugged Dan Rather). By prearrangement he means that a certain meeting will take place that night. This is an exceptional case, for what the speaker means is not at all related to what his words mean. Ordinarily, what matters is the meaning of the words, not the words themselves. Even so, linguistic meaning does not in general determine what the speaker means. One way this can happen is because of *ambiguity*. A sentence can have more than one meaning because it contains an ambiguous expression, like 'pen' in

(1) Farmer Jones found his pen empty.

or because it is, like (2), structurally ambiguous.

(2) The chicken was ready to eat.

Because of the lexical ambiguity in (1), a speaker could be talking about a farmer looking for his animals or about a farmer wanting to write a letter. A user of the structurally ambiguous (2) could be

talking about a hungry chicken or a broiled chicken. In each case only one linguistic meaning is relevant to what the speaker means.⁶ Another way linguistic meaning can fail to determine what the speaker means is via *nonliterality*. For instance, although sentence (3) means something analogous to what (4) means,

(3) Farmer Jones was up to his ears in debt.

(4) Farmer Jones was up to his ears in mud.

a speaker is likely to mean something quite different. What he means is related to but distinct from the linguistic meaning, since he means that Farmer Jones was only figuratively up to his ears in debt. In other cases, involving *indirection*, a speaker means what the sentence means but means something else as well. If a friend asks you for something to drink and you utter (5),

(5) There's some beer in the fridge.

you mean not only that there is some beer there but that your friend may help himself to some. These various examples illustrate different ways in which what the speaker means can be distinct from what the sentence means. The speaker may mean one of the things the sentence means, as with (1) or (2), something quite distinct from anything it means, as with (3), or both, as with (5).

Now for a minor complication. We need to distinguish what a speaker means *by* an expression and what he means *in using* it.⁷ The need for this distinction is evident from (6), for example,

(6) There was an explosion in Dr. Frankenstein's lavatory.

where the speaker probably means laboratory by "lavatory." This distinction is also needed to handle utterances of ambiguous sentences such as (1) and (2), where what a speaker means by his words does not include each of the things that they mean. In these cases what the speaker means by his words determines which meaning is operative in his utterance of them. With (3), however, there is no linguistic ambiguity. Despite what a speaker would mean *in using* the words "up to his ears," it is not clear that he means anything different *by* them than he would in uttering (4). The phrase does not seem to be ambiguous but rather to have both a literal and a figurative use, one tied to its single meaning and the other derived from it in a certain intuitively evident way. The speaker is exploiting the single (literal) meaning of his words in order to mean something else in using them. As for the case

of (5) the speaker means both what the sentence means and something else as well. When he utters “The beer is in the frig,” he means *by* those words just what they mean. Yet *in* uttering (5) he means more than just that, namely that the hearer may help himself to some beer.

Speech Acts

So far we have identified various ways in which a speaker can mean something when uttering a meaningful sentence. Now let us look at utterances differently, as a kind of intentional action. With intentional action, what one intends can contribute to what one is doing. For instance, moving one’s arm in a certain way can count not only as pushing away a bag of potato chips but also, partly because of one’s intention, as trying to stay on one’s diet and as trying to impress one’s spouse. Notice here that a single bodily movement is involved in a multiplicity of actions.⁸ This is what happens with ordinary utterances. In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin identifies three distinct levels of action beyond the act of utterance itself. He distinguishes the act *of* saying something, what one does *in* saying it, and what one does *by* saying it, and dubs these the *locutionary*, the *illocutionary*, and the *perlocutionary* act. By the locutionary act Austin does not mean the act of utterance itself, the act of saying certain words that is reported by means of direct quotation, such as

(7) The President says, “Inflation is not a problem.”

Rather, the locutionary act is what is reported by indirect quotation:

(8) The President says that inflation is not a problem.

The President does not have to use the words, “Inflation is not a problem,” to say that inflation is not a problem. He does not even have to be speaking in English. Regardless of the means by which he says that inflation is not a problem, he could be performing the illocutionary act of assuring the public that prices and interest rates won’t go up significantly and be thereby performing the perlocutionary act of assuaging their economic fears.

The sentence uttered does not in general determine the type of illocutionary act being performed. Just as we can do one of several different things in shaking hands—introduce ourselves,

greet each other, seal a deal, or bid farewell—so we can use a given sentence in various ways. For example, you could use

(9) The police will break up the party.

as a prediction, a warning, a promise, a threat, or even an order.⁹ Now one obvious difference between sentence (9) and a handshake is that whereas the handshake means nothing in itself, the sentence does mean something independently of its various uses. Indeed, whereas the handshake just *is* a means for performing acts of various types, it is partly because of what the sentence means that it has its various uses. After all, the sentence expresses, at least relative to a given context of utterance, a proposition about what certain police will do with respect to a certain party. To be sure, the *sentence* doesn't specify which police or which party, but it is a linguistic fact about the sentence that an utterance of it, if taken literally, is about certain police and a certain party. *Non-linguistic* factors determine whether it counts as a prediction, a warning, a promise, a threat, or an order.

Performatives

Austin was astonished that philosophers generally assumed, or at least pretended, that sentences are essentially devices for making statements. After all, sentences can be marked grammatically for non-assertive use, as with the interrogative or imperative moods. Relying on his distinction between *performatives* and *constatives*, Austin claimed that even certain *indicative* sentences are marked for non-assertive use. These are utterances whereby we make explicit what we are doing by using a performative verb like 'promise', 'pronounce', 'apologize', or 'request' in a sentence beginning with 'I' followed by a performative verb in present tense and active voice, such as these:

(10) I promise you a new car.

(11) I pronounce you husband and wife.

The first-person plural is possible too ('We apologize ...'), as is the second-person passive,

(12) You're fired.

Austin contended that these *explicit performative utterances* are, unlike statements, neither true nor false. For example, a performative promise is not, and does not involve, the statement that one is promising.

It is an act of a distinctive sort, the very sort (promising) named by the performative verb. Now one can promise without doing so explicitly, without using the performative verb 'promise', but even if one does use it, according to Austin making explicit what one is doing is not describing what one is doing or stating that one is doing it. However, Austin never thought to ask what is *said* by someone who utters a sentence like (10). The speaker may be promising the hearer a new car, but offhand it seems that he is also *saying* (even if he is not stating) that he is promising the hearer a new car, in which case what he is saying *is* true or false. It is true just in case he is making that promise.

Strawson, in "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts," quotes Austin's mysterious remark that the use of a sentence with a certain illocutionary force is "conventional in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula." Austin must have thought that explicit performative utterances are conventional in some more straightforward sense. Perhaps he thought that a special explanation is needed for the fact that utterances of indicative sentences like (10) or (11) count as acts of types other than statements, and that this explanation resides in the distinctive nature of the performative formula. Since it is not part of the meaning of the word 'promise' that an utterance like (10) counts as a promise, perhaps there is some convention to that effect. If there is, presumably it is part of a general convention that covers all performative verbs. But is there such a convention?

Compare the situation with performatives with cases in which there clearly is a convention that an utterance of a certain form counts as the performance of an act of a certain sort. For instance, a jury foreman's pronouncement of "Guilty" or "Not guilty" counts as a verdict, an "Aye" or a "Nay" counts as a vote in a parliamentary session, and an umpire's cry of "Y'er out" counts as calling a runner out. Indeed, even an utterance of the explicit performative (11), when uttered by a judge or a clergyman under the appropriate circumstances, counts as joining a couple in marriage. Similarly, a boss's "You're fired" (12) to an employee can count as firing the employee. In all these cases there are specific, socially recognized circumstances in which a person with specific, socially recognized authority may perform an act of a certain sort by uttering words of a certain form.

Austin was interested enough in such cases to develop a theory of what it takes for these formalized utterances to be performed successfully and felicitously. He even classified the various things that can go wrong into “flaws,” “hitches,” and various other sorts of “infelicities.” But, as Strawson shows, he was overimpressed by such cases. Strawson explains why conventional illocutionary acts constitute a special case. Most illocutionary acts involve not an intention to conform to an institutional convention but an intention to communicate something to the audience. There is no sense of the word ‘conventional’ in which the use of any given sentence with a certain illocutionary force is conventional, much less a sense having to do with the fact that this force can be “made explicit by the performative formula.”

Although Austin did not abandon his view that performative utterances are neither true nor false, he came to realize that explicit constatives function like explicit performatives. For a statement can be made by using phrases like ‘I assert ...’ or ‘I predict ...’, just as a promise or a request can be made by means of ‘I promise ...’ or ‘I request ...’. In later chapters of *How to Do Things with Words* the distinction between constative and performative utterances is superseded by the one between locutionary and illocutionary acts, and included among the latter are assertions, predictions, etc., for which Austin retains the term ‘constative’, along with promises, requests, etc. The newer nomenclature takes into account the fact that illocutionary acts need not be performed explicitly—you don’t have to say “I suggest ...” to make a suggestion or “I apologize ...” to apologize.¹⁰ So it would seem that an account of explicit performatives should not appeal, as Searle’s elaborate account in “How Performatives Work” does, to any special features of the performative formula.¹¹

Communication

Strawson suggests that unlike those illocutionary acts confined to institutional contexts, most illocutionary acts are performed not with an intention to conform to a convention but with a communicative intention. But what is that? In “Meaning” Grice characterizes the distinctively reflexive character of communicative intentions by proposing that a speaker means something by his utterance only if he intends his utterance “to produce some effect in an audience by means of the

recognition of this intention."¹² If the rationale of this formulation is not clear from the various examples that lead up to it, consider the following games, which involve something like linguistic communication.

Take the game of charades, in which one player uses gestures and other bodily movements to help the other guess what she has in mind. Something like the reflexive intention involved in communication operates here, for part of what the first player intends the second player to take into account is the very fact that the first player intends her gestures etc. to enable him to guess what she has in mind. Nothing like this goes on in the game of 20 questions, where the second player uses answers to yes-or-no questions to narrow down the possibilities of what the first player has in mind. Here the only cooperation required is honest answers on the part of the first player. Compare 20 questions with the following game of tacit coordination: the first player selects and records an item in a certain specified category, such as a letter of the alphabet, a liquid, a mode of transportation, a city, or a US president; the second player has one chance to guess what it is. Each player wins if and only if the second player guesses right without any help. Now what counts as guessing right depends entirely on what the first player has in mind, and that depends entirely on what she thinks the second player, taking into account that she wants him to guess right, will think she wants him to think. The second player guesses whatever he thinks she wants him to think. To appreciate how this cooperative guessing game works, play this game with a friend. Try additional categories too, and consider why some work better than others.

When players use the above categories, they almost always both pick the letter 'A', water, cars, the city in which they are located, and the current president. It is not obvious what all these "correct" choices have in common: each one stands out in a certain way from other members of the same category, but not in the same way. For example, being first (among letters of the alphabet, being the most common (among liquids), and being current (among presidents) are quite different ways of standing out. It is still not clear, in the many years since the question was first raised,¹³ just what makes something uniquely salient in such situations. One suggestion is that it is the first item in the

category that comes to mind, but this can't be right, since what first comes to the mind of one player may not be what first comes to the mind of the other.

Whatever the correct explanation of the meeting of the minds in successful communication, the basic insight underlying Grice's account of speaker meaning is that communication is like a game of tacit coordination: the speaker intends the hearer to reason in a certain way partly on the basis of being so intended. That is, the hearer is to take into account that he is intended to figure out the speaker's communicative intention. It is the meaning of the words uttered, of course, that provides the input to this inference, but what they mean does not determine what the speaker means (even if what he means is precisely what his words means, the fact that he is speaking literally is not determined by what they mean). What is loosely called "context" encompasses whatever other considerations the hearer is to take into account in ascertaining the speaker's intention, partly on the basis that he is intended to do so.

Communication and Speech Acts

Now we are in a position to follow up on Strawson's suggestion that most illocutionary acts are performed not with an intention to conform to a convention but with a communicative intention. Pretheoretically, we think of an act of communication, linguistic or otherwise, as an act of expressing oneself. This rather vague idea can be made more precise if we get more specific about what is being expressed. Take the case of an apology. If you utter, "[I'm] sorry I forgot your birthday" and intend this as an apology, you are expressing regret for something, in this case for forgetting the person's birthday. An apology just is the act of (verbally) expressing regret for, and thereby acknowledging, something one did that might have harmed or at least bothered the hearer. It is communicative because it is intended to be taken as expressing a certain attitude, in this case regret. It succeeds as such if it is so taken. This is what counts as making oneself understood. Using a special device such as the performative 'I apologize' may of course facilitate understanding (understanding is correlative with communicating), but in general this is unnecessary. Communicative success is achieved if the speaker chooses his words in such a way that the hearer will, under the circumstances of utterance,

recognize his communicative intention. So, for example, if you spill some beer on someone and say “Oops” in the right way, your utterance will be taken as an apology for having done that.

Now an utterance is generally more than just an act of communication. When you apologize, for example, you may intend not merely to express your regret but also to seek forgiveness. Seeking forgiveness is to be distinguished from apologizing, even though the one utterance is the performance of an act of both types. As an apology, the utterance succeeds if it is taken as expressing regret for the deed in question; as an act of seeking forgiveness, it succeeds if forgiveness is thereby obtained.

Speech acts, being perlocutionary as well as illocutionary, generally have some ulterior purpose, but they are distinguished primarily by their illocutionary type, such as asserting, requesting, promising, and apologizing, which in turn may be distinguished by the type of attitude expressed. The perlocutionary act is essentially a matter of trying to get the hearer to form some correlative attitude.

Here are some typical examples:

ILLOCUTIONARY ACT	ATTITUDE EXPRESSED	INTENDED HEARER ATTITUDE
statement	belief that p	belief that p
request	desire for H to D	intention to D
promise	firm intention to D	belief that S will D
apology	regret for D-ing	forgiveness of S for D-ing

These are examples of the four major categories of communicative illocutionary acts, which may be called constatives, directives, commissives, and acknowledgments.¹⁴

If each type of act is distinguishable by the type of attitude expressed, there is no need to invoke the notion of convention to explain how it can succeed.¹⁵ It can succeed if the hearer recognizes the attitude being expressed, such as a belief in the case of a statement and a desire in the case of a request.¹⁶ Any further effect that it has on the hearer, such as being believed or being complied with or even being taken as sincere, is not essential to its being a statement or a request. Notice that an utterance can succeed as an act of communication even if the speaker does not possess the attitude he

is expressing.¹⁷ Communication is one thing, sincerity another. Sincerity is actually possessing the attitude one is expressing.¹⁸

Since communicating is the act of expressing an attitude (which one may or may not actually possess), so that the condition of its success is that one's audience infer the attitude from the utterance, one can appreciate why the intention to be performing such an act should have the reflexive character pinpointed by Grice. Considered as an act of communication rather than anything more, it is an attempt simply to get one's audience to recognize, partly on the basis that one so intends them, a certain attitude as being the one expressed. One is as it were putting a certain attitude on the table. The success of any further act has as its prerequisite that the audience recognize this attitude. Communication aims at a meeting of the minds not in the sense that the audience is to think what the speaker thinks but only in the sense that a certain attitude toward a certain proposition is to be recognized as being put forward for consideration.¹⁹ For this reason, when Grice characterized meaning something as intending one's utterance "to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention," he should have imposed a tighter constraint on the kind of effect to be produced than that it be in the audience's control. As Strawson makes clear, the relevant effect is understanding or what Austin called "uptake," rather than a further (perlocutionary) effect, such as belief, desire, or even action on the part of the hearer.²⁰

Conversational Implicature

In "Logic and Conversation" Grice coins the term "implicature" for what a speaker means but does not say. Whereas what is said may *imply* something (Grice reserves the word "implication" for what sentences imply), what a speaker *implicates* is a consequence of his saying it. For example, if I ask you what you think of my new car and you reply,

(13) Your car has a terrific stereo.

you are implicating that my car is otherwise mediocre at best. The explanation for this implicature, and for my recognizing it, is essentially this: presumably you are giving an informative answer to my question, but saying something about my car's stereo, which is not an automotive feature, is on the

face of it not an informative answer. However, you intend me to infer, and I do infer, partly on the basis that you intend me to infer, that you have nothing else to say in praise of my car. You are thereby implicating that it is mediocre at best (or something to that effect—implicatures can be vague). My making this inference (and your intending me to make it) relies on the supposition that despite appearances your answer really is informative, albeit tacitly so. Somewhat different inferences are required in the following cases,

(14) You won't need a car alarm.

where you might be implicating that my car isn't worth stealing, and

(15) My car cost more than a Yugo.

where I might be implicating that its price is none of your business.

Grice proposes a general Cooperative Principle and specific “maxims”—of quality, quantity, relation (relevance), and manner, as he calls them—to account for the rationale and success of conversational implicatures. However, it is arguable that being cooperative simply consists in being truthful and relevant, hence that there is no need for four separate maxims. For example, observing the maxim of quantity is just being relevantly informative. Also, it seems that the maxims might better be thought of as presumptions, for it is on the presumption that the speaker is being truthful and relevant that the hearer figures out what the speaker means over and above what he is saying.

Grice's philosophical purpose, beyond providing the framework for an account of rational cooperation in conversation, is to enforce a distinction between word meaning and speaker meaning in connection with certain words of special interest to philosophers, such as “know,” “seem,” “good,” “voluntary,” and logical connectives like “if” and “or.” His aim is to show that with such a distinction enforced, there is no need to impute to word meaning features that are really tied to use, so that analyses of word meanings can avoid needless commitments to ambiguity and other undue complications.²¹ For example, it might seem that the word “or” has both an inclusive and an exclusive sense, but the alleged exclusive sense can be explained away in Gricean terms. So if someone asks you where's the umbrella and you reply,

(16) It's with my raincoat or in the car.

your words do not imply that it is not in both places (your raincoat could be in the car), but you are implying that it is in one place or the other and not both—and that you don't know which.

Conversational implicature is actually a kind of indirect speech act, a special case of performing one illocutionary act by way of performing another. Recall example (5) and consider (17) as well.

(5) There's some beer in the fridge.

(17) The police are coming.

In uttering (5) you not only *tell* someone where the beer is but also *suggest* that they help themselves to some. Similarly, you might utter (17) not only to *inform* your guests that the police are coming but also to *warn* them to curtail their boisterous and illicit activities. The direct illocutionary act need not be a statement, as in the following examples. You might directly *ask* a question

(18) Do you know that you just got a parking ticket?

to *inform* someone indirectly that he just got a ticket, and you might make a *suggestion*

(19) Go to the hardware store.

and thereby *tell* someone indirectly where they can find the tool they are looking for. In all these cases you have two communicative intentions, one corresponding to each illocutionary act, and you intend your audience to recognize one by way of recognizing the other. Most of Grice's examples of conversational implicature are special cases of indirection in which both the directly and the indirectly performed illocutionary acts are statements.

Grice confuses matters somewhat by counting as cases of implicature nonliteral utterances, such as irony

(20) That cut-rate lawyer was a real bargain.

and metaphor.

(21) Fired and divorced, I was thrown from the saddle of life.

Since he describes irony and metaphor as cases not of saying but merely "making as if to say" something,²² it is rather puzzling why he assimilates them to implicature. For one thinks of implicating as stating or meaning one thing and meaning something else as well, not as meaning

something else instead.²³ Even so, the same sorts of inference processes are involved as in genuine implicatures, so that Grice's theory of conversational implicature may be generalized to cover not only indirect statements but also nonliteral utterances, as well as indirect illocutionary acts besides statements.²⁴ For in general the hearer relies on the presumption that the speaker intends his communicative intention to be identifiable under the circumstances; if the speaker cannot plausibly be taken to mean what he says or just what he says, the hearer reasons that what the speaker does mean is inferable from what he is saying together with contextual information salient enough to have been expected to be taken into account.

What is Said and More

We need to say more about saying, the locutionary level of speech act, and the correlative notion of what is said. The notion of saying is needed for describing three kinds of cases: where the speaker means what he says and something else as well (implicature and indirect speech acts generally), where the speaker says one thing and means something else instead (nonliteral utterances), and where the speaker says something and doesn't mean anything. The notion of what is said is needed for contrast with what is implicated (below we will see how it figures in Grice's notion of conventional as opposed to conversational implicature), and it is relevant to explaining what it is for an utterance to be literal, since in that case what is meant is identical to what is said. The notion of what is said is not as straightforward as it might seem, and lately some philosophers have suggested that it is more comprehensive than either Austin or Grice supposed.

Saying isn't just a matter of meaning what one's words mean. As Austin defines it, the locutionary act is the act of using words, "as belonging to a certain vocabulary ... and as conforming to a certain grammar, ... with a certain more or less definite sense and reference." And although what is said is, according to Grice, "closely related to the conventional meaning of the ... sentence ... uttered," it is not identical to conventional meaning because there can be ambiguity or context-dependent reference. Usually only one conventional (linguistic) meaning is operative in a given utterance, and linguistic meaning does not determine what the words 'she', 'this', and 'now' are used

to refer to (see Part II). If someone utters, "She wants this book," he is saying that a certain woman wants a certain book, even though the words do not specify which woman and which book. So not just linguistic knowledge but (salient) contextual information can play a role in determining what is said.²⁵ Nevertheless, Grice gives the impression that the distinction between what is said and what is implicated is exhaustive. One problem, already noted, is that irony, metaphor, and other nonliteral utterances do not seem to be cases of implicature, inasmuch as they are cases of saying one thing and meaning something else instead rather than in addition. There are two other kinds of cases to be considered, which were overlooked by Grice and have come to the fore only recently.

Lately it has been observed that there are many sentences whose standard uses are not strictly determined by their meanings but are not implicatures or figurative uses either. For example, if your child comes crying to you with an minor injury and you assure him,

(22) You're not going to die.

you do not mean that he will never die (that is false and irrelevant) but merely that he won't die from that injury. And if someone wants you to join them for dinner and you say,

(23) I've already eaten.

you do not mean you ate at some previous time (that is obviously true but irrelevant) but merely that you've had dinner that evening. In both cases you do not mean precisely what you are saying but something more specific.²⁶ On the other hand, what you do mean isn't an implicature either. The following two examples are somewhat different. If your spouse is honking the horn at you and you yell,

(24) I'm not ready.

you mean that you are not ready to go with her in the car. And if your spouse yells back,

(25) We'll be late.

she means that you will be late for a certain event that you are planning to attend. In neither case is there anything in the sentence that corresponds to the implicit reference. Although the speaker means something definite, the sentences themselves, even with the references of the indexicals 'I' and 'we' fixed, lack determinate truth conditions. As with (22) and (23), though for a different

reason (*semantic underdetermination*), what the speaker means is more specific than what the sentence means. We might say that whereas what a user of (22) or (23) is an “expansion” of the sentence meaning, what a user of (24) or (25) means is a “completion” of the sentence meaning.²⁷

Now several of Grice’s critics have pointed out that expansions and completions are not related closely enough to conventional meaning to fall under Grice’s notion of what is said but that they are too closely related to count as implicatures. Recanati suggests that the notion of what is said should be extended to cover such cases,²⁸ but clearly he is going beyond Grice’s understanding of what is said as corresponding to the constituents of the sentence and their syntactic arrangement. Sperber and Wilson coin the word “explicature” for this in-between category,²⁹ since part of what is meant explicates what is said. I propose calling what happens in these cases *implicature*, since part of what is meant is communicated not explicitly but implicitly, by way of expansion or completion.

Grice disallowed inexplicit saying, but he did recognize a category of explicit nonsaying. For in his view there can be elements in what is meant that correspond directly to elements in the sentence uttered but do not enter into what is said. Because of this correspondence they lead to *conventional* rather than conversational implicatures, propositions which are merely “indicated.” Grice’s examples of “problematic elements” are connectives, such as ‘therefore’ and ‘but’, which make a certain contribution to what the speaker means by indicating a certain relation between the two items they connect, e.g. that one is a consequence of the other or that there is a contrast between the two. Grice denies that this linguistically specified relation enters into what is said, evidently to allow for an element of literal content that is not truth-conditional. He denies that an utterance of (26), for example,

(26) He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave.

“would be, strictly speaking, false should the consequence in question fail to hold.” This may seem unintuitive—the speaker does seem to be *saying* that the second claim is a consequence of the first. Just because connectives like ‘therefore’ and ‘but’ are not truth-functional does not mean that they do not enter into truth conditions. Grice also suggests that conventional implicature is involved in the performance of what he calls “noncentral speech acts,”³⁰ such as qualifying, contrasting, or concluding.

He has in mind the use of such expressions as 'loosely speaking,' 'frankly,' 'in contrast,' 'to digress,' 'if I may say so', and 'all in all', which are often used to comment on the very utterance in which they occur, as in the following examples.

(27) Frankly, you're making a big mistake.

(28) In contrast, George would never do a thing like that.

However, it seems to me that it is not accurate to call these second-order speech acts (conventional) implicatures. The speaker of (27) or (28) is not *implying* that he is speaking frankly or is making a contrast. In using a locution like 'frankly' or 'in contrast', one is *saying* something about (providing a gloss or commentary on) one's utterance or its conversational role.

Summing up, we have reviewed a variety of ways in which what a speaker means can extend beyond what his words mean. Because of indexicality, ambiguity, underdetermination, nonliterality, and indirection, sentences are not uniquely correlated with the attitudes they are used to express. Also, we have seen how the notion of speaker meaning can be incorporated into the theory of speech acts insofar as these are communicative rather than conventional in character. Communication is not a straightforward process of putting thoughts into words, nor is understanding the reverse but equally straightforward process of decoding those words. Communication is not essentially a matter of conveying linguistic meanings but of expressing attitudes, and understanding is a matter of recognizing the attitudes being expressed.

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Notes

¹Many of the following footnotes not only give references but amplify or qualify points made in the text for the benefit of readers interested in pursuing them further. The text is self-contained, so that those new to the subject need not be distracted by these footnotes.

²By 'expressions' I mean expression types, items that can be used over and over, not particular occurrences or tokens of them. For example, in the first sentence of this footnote the (one) word 'over' has two occurrences; there are two tokens of it in the token of that sentence that appears in each copy of this book.

³Hereafter I will follow the usual graphophobic practice of referring to language users as *speakers* and those to whom uses are directed as *hearers* or as the *audience*.

⁴There is the question, which I do not mean to be begging, of whether linguistic meaning can be reduced to speaker meaning. In "Meaning" Grice suggests that it can be. He starts with the idea that for an expression to mean something is for people to mean something by it, and develops this idea in a later article (Grice 1968). Schiffer develops it still further in his 1972 book *Meaning*, but repudiates it in his 1987 book, *The Remnants of Meaning*. In my view meaning in a language reduces not to speaker meaning but to meaning in speakers' idiolects, to what words mean to speakers.

⁵Knowledge of phonological (or orthographic) form and syntactic structure is needed too, insofar as meanings are correlated with forms and meanings of complex expressions depend on the structural relations as well as the meanings of their constituent expressions. We may suppose that, as a first approximation, the linguistic meaning of a sentence is what a language user knows about a sentence as a consequence of knowing the meanings of its constituents and of knowing how these constituents fit together syntactically.

⁶There is such a thing as deliberate ambiguity, as in an easily imagined utterance of "I'd like to see more of you," but deliberate ambiguity is rare, at least outside of romance and politics.

⁷This distinction was overlooked by Grice in "Meaning," the 1957 article reprinted here. He

recognized it in his 1969 article, which avoided objections raised by Searle (1969, pp. 44-45) and by Ziff (1967) to the earlier account.

⁸For detailed discussion of this and other points in philosophical action theory, see Davis 1979.

⁹For the case of ordering imagine a small-town mayor rattling off orders to various subordinates, including the police.

¹⁰This raises a serious difficulty for Searle's theory in *Speech Acts*. Because it proposes to explain illocutionary forces by means for "constitutive rules" (conventions) for using "force-indicating" devices, such as performatives, it is incapable of explaining the presence of illocutionary forces in the absence of such devices.

¹¹In "How Performatives Really Work," Harnish and I argue that Searle's account is based on a spurious distinction between having a communicative intention and being committed to having one (see note 19 below) and on a confusion between performativity and communicative success.

¹²Partly because of certain alternative wordings, Grice's analysis is sometimes interpreted, by Strawson for example, as defining communicative intentions iteratively rather than reflexively. Recanati 1986 has pointed to certain problems with the iterative approach, but in reply I have argued (Bach 1987a) that these problems do not arise on the reflexive analysis.

¹³This question was raised by Schelling (1960), who was the first to discuss games of tacit coordination (pp. 54-58).

¹⁴Harnish and I develop a detailed taxonomy in *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (chapter 3), where each type of illocutionary act is individuated by the type of attitude expressed. In some cases there are constraints on the content as well. We borrow the terms 'constative' and 'commissive' from Austin and 'directive' from Searle. We adopt the term 'acknowledgment' rather than Austin's 'behabitive' or Searle's 'expressive' for apologies, greetings, thanks, congratulations, condolences, etc., which express an attitude to the hearer that is occasioned by some event that is thereby being acknowledged, often in satisfaction of a social expectation.

¹⁵However, it is arguable that promises are conventional as well, because they create obligations

and do not merely express firm intentions or commitments.

¹⁶A common misconception is that the communicative theory of nonconventional illocutionary acts holds that the performance of such an act involves the communication of the type of act being performed. Blakemore (1991) suggests that this theory implies that, for example, to predict, even when no performative is used or when it is used only parenthetically, is to communicate not just what one is predicting but that one is predicting it. However, the theory does not imply this. It implies only that predicting is an act of communication and that an act of communication is the act of expressing an attitude, such as a belief about the future. The foregoing misconception about the communicative theory is part of the motivation for the opposing theory, so-called “relevance theory,” put forth by Sperber and Wilson (1986) and for Blakemore’s relevance-theoretic account of performatives.

¹⁷The difference between expressing an attitude and actually possessing it is clear from the following definition: to express an attitude is reflexively to intend the hearer to take one’s utterance as reason to think one has that attitude (Bach and Harnish 1979, p. 15). This reason need not be conclusive and if in the context it is overridden, the hearer will, in order to identify the attitude being expressed, search for an alternative and perhaps nonliteral interpretation of the utterance. For discussion see *ibid.*, pp. 57-59 and 289-91.

¹⁸Correlatively, the hearer can understand the utterance without regarding it as sincere, e.g., take it as expressing regret without believing that the speaker regrets having done the deed in question. Getting one’s audience to believe that one actually possesses the attitude one is expressing is not an illocutionary but a perlocutionary act.

¹⁹If the hearer thinks the speaker actually possesses the attitude he is expressing, in effect she is taking him to be sincere in what he is communicating. But there is no question about his being sincere in the communicative intention itself, for this intention must be identified before the question of his sincerity (in having that attitude) can even arise. In other words, deceiving your audience about your real attitude presupposes successfully expressing some other attitude. You

can be unsuccessful in conveying your communicative intention—by being too vague, ambiguous, or metaphorical, or even by being wrongly taken literally—but not insincere about it.

²⁰This is how Searle puts the point in *Speech Acts* (p. 47). Even though understanding is the intended effect of illocutionary acts, he does not regard them merely as acts of communication. In his view, there is more to the performance of an illocutionary act than the “expression of its sincerity condition,” with the exception of cases like thanking and congratulating (p. 67). But his account of their “essential conditions” does not make clear what this something more is.

²¹Searle has a similar aim in “Three Fallacies in Contemporary Philosophy,” chapter 6 of *Speech Acts*.

²²Grice is using ‘say’ idiosyncratically here, since for him saying something implies meaning it. This entails that someone who is not speaking literally is not saying anything. Evidently Grice uses ‘say’ not as a locutionary verb but as an illocutionary verb, to mean explicitly state. Interestingly, he originally (in Grice 1961) formulated the distinction between saying and implicating in terms of stating and implying.

²³That’s what it is to speak nonliterally—at least if one does it intentionally. One can also *unintentionally* not say what one means, owing to a slip of the tongue, misusing a word or phrase, or otherwise misspeaking. Also, one can say something without meaning anything at all, as in cases of translating, reciting, or rehearsing.

²⁴Harnish and I do just that in *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (chapter 4).

²⁵Indeed, as Grice points out, even on the linguistic side there is the assumption that the speaker is using standard English (or whatever the relevant language) and that he is using his words literally

²⁶In Bach 1987 I describe such utterances as cases of *sentence* nonliterality, because the words are being used literally but the sentence as a whole is being used loosely. Compare (22) and (23) with the similar sentences, ‘Everybody is going to die’ or ‘I’ve already been in the Army’, which are more likely to be used in a strictly literal way.

²⁷Semantic underdetermination is taken up in Sperber and Wilson 1986 and Bach 1987.

²⁸Recanati 1989.

²⁹Sperber and Wilson 1986, p. 182.

³⁰in Grice 1968/1989, chapter 6, p. 122. There is a straightforward explanation why these locutions do not fit comfortably into specifications of what is said.: they are in construction syntactically but not semantically with the clauses they introduce. Syntactically they are sentence adverbials but they function as “illocutionary adverbials” (Bach and Harnish 1979, pp. 219-228), interpreted as modifying not the main clause but its utterance. The result is as it were a split-level utterance.