

Being Gricean in 2018: Questions for Metapragmatics (keynote)

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Paul Grice's foundational influence on contemporary pragmatic theory has its roots in the combination of focus on (i) intentions in their role of explanantia for meaning in discourse with (ii) the rigidity of the truth-conditional approach upon which his theory of communication is built. However, forty years on, it has become necessary to ask how much, and on what identifiable dimensions, one can depart from his original program and still remain 'post-Gricean'. The program has been subjected to critical scrutiny on several dimensions. First, communication has since been envisaged as mostly direct and non-inferential (e.g. Recanati 2004, 2016). Next, the grammatical origin of some implicatures has been proposed (e.g. Chierchia 2004; Chierchia *et al.* 2012), associated with the proposal to reinstate semantic ambiguities in lieu of meaning-underdetermination (e.g. Lepore & Stone 2015). The focus on cooperative interaction has been weakened through the attention to strategic communication (e.g. Asher & Lascarides 2013). Perhaps most importantly, the Gricean cline of meaning construction (sometimes called 'the pipeline picture of meaning') has been questioned, originally in game-theoretic approaches (e.g. Lewis 1979, and recently e.g. in Equilibrium Semantics, Parikh 2010), but also in post-Gricean Default Semantics (Jaszczolt 2005, 2016) where discourse meaning is not constructed following the steps from the output of syntactic processing, through modulation, to implicatures, but rather follows the principles of situated interaction independently of the relation of the meaning to the structure of the uttered sentence. Finally, the modular approach to meaning has been questioned and replaced with general cognitive mechanisms that are allegedly responsible for implicatures (Goodman & Stuhlmüller 2013; Goodman & Lassiter 2015).

This meta-theoretic enquiry begins by introducing the main novel dimensions on which the Gricean program has recently been challenged and proceeds to arguing that none of the challenges constitutes a real threat to it. I develop two strands of argumentation showing how the approaches either (a) can be incorporated as its extensions or (b) are in pursuit of different goals and as such are not in competition with it. Argument (a) applies to automatic meaning assignment, the rejection of the 'pipeline picture of meaning', emphasis on conventions, strategic conversation and generalized cognition. Argument (b) applies to the revival of semantic ambiguity and the grammatical foundation of implicatures. It is concluded that the Gricean program can be relaxed on the dimensions covered by (a) and co-exist with the approaches subscribing to (b).

Selected references

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