

**Phil/Ling 375: *Meaning and Mind***  
**[Handout 22]**

**Review of the Course**

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**§ Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics**

**Syntax:**

\_\_\_ The study of the ways that words and other elements of language can be strung together to form grammatical units, without taking the meaning of the sentence into consideration at all.

e.g. Green ideas sleep furiously

\_\_\_ grammatically correct

\_\_\_ Syntax is now the subject matter of linguists. The point of doing syntax is to find some simple, basic structure which is finite and derivative.

**Semantics:**

\_\_\_ The study of the meaning of words and sentences. Meaning has generally been thought of as a relationship between words and the world. Thus, semantics is the attempt to talk about the relationship between words and things.

\_\_\_ Meaning and truth are two principal concepts used in semantics.

**Pragmatics:**

\_\_\_ The study of how language is used by the speaker. Or, the study of language in relation to the users of language. Speakers can use language to make statements, promises and bets; to ask questions; to issue commands; to express condolences; and so on. Pragmatics focuses on the interaction between speakers and hearers. The major idea that guides research in this area is that speaking is intentional behavior and governed by rules.

**§ Historical Review**

**I. Pre-1950s**

**Logical Positivism**

\_\_\_ Logical Positivism flourished first in central Europe during the 1920s and early 1930s and then in England, the United States from 1930s until the early 1950s. The original Logical Positivists were the philosophically oriented scientists and mathematicians who formed the Vienna Circle under the leadership of Moritz Schlick. Soon, most logical positivists were philosophers who believed that only science discovers the truth about reality. They thought that metaphysics in contrast with science had hindered intellectual progress, and one of their goals was to discredit metaphysics.

\_\_\_ Its aim is to make philosophy scientific. The positivists held that the methods of the empirical sciences gave the one way of gaining knowledge of the world as it is. They rejected anything that smacked of metaphysics and used the principle of verification as a test to determine whether a statement, a theory or a doctrine which purported to say something about the world really did. Any that failed the test were to be discarded as “meaningless”, “nonsense,” or without “cognitive meaning.”

### **The Verification Principle**

\_\_\_ The meaning of a sentence is its method of verification or confirmation.

\_\_\_ Statements of logic and mathematics, together with statements that spell out meaning relations, are true purely in virtue of their meaning and provide no information about the world. They are called analytic statements. [An analytic truth is one whose truth (falsehood) is a consequence of the very meaning of the words in which it is expressed. e.g. Bachelor is unmarried male. The tallest spy is a spy. All vixens are female foxes.]

### **Therefore,**

For a statement to be cognitively meaningful, it must satisfy one of the following conditions: Either

(a) it is an analytic truth or falsehood, or

(b) it is capable of being verified as true or false by experiential means (procedures which ultimately can be reduced to what can be directly ascertained to be true or false by means of the senses).

\_\_\_ **Most philosophical claims are meaningless by this standard, since they lack methods of verification.**

e.g. Form exist in the world of Forms.

e.g. Everything happens according to God’s grand plan.

e.g. There is a undetectable substance underlying all objects.

e.g. Time is unreal.

## **II. 1950s**

\_\_\_ **Quine’s rebuttal: Two Dogmas of Empiricism**

**His frontal attacks on logical positivism marked the end of that movement.**

### **Quine’s claim:**

\_\_\_ There is no ground for claiming that analytic statements are vacuously true, with no dependence on the way the world is.

\_\_\_ the web of sentences (holism): sentences cannot be confirmed or falsified singularly, they can be confirmed or falsified only in relation to other sentences, in the context of theories.

**The overthrow of Logical Positivism marks the beginning of the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind. The last 40 years in these fields have seen some of the most intense and intellectually powerful discussion in any academic field during the period from 1950 to 1990. Yet the achievements in these areas have not**

been widely appreciated by the general intellectual public. This is partly because they are abstract and difficult.

### III. The Linguistic Turn

\_\_\_ It began with Frege at the turn of the century. Frege's theory was, however, made **widely known in 1952** with the publication of *Translations of the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, edited and translated by Geach and Black. Belatedly, during the 1950s, Frege came to be widely recognized as the father of twentieth-century philosophy.

\_\_\_ The Logical Positivist movement, influenced by Frege through Russell, Carnap, and Wittgenstein, had propagated the view that the study of linguistic meaning was the proper starting point for philosophy. Language and meaning were supposed to elicit initial agreement better than other traditional starting points.

\_\_\_ By the 1950s the linguistic turn had taken hold. **There are two traditions: Frege's and Moore's.** The tradition deriving from Frege took science, logic, or mathematics as the source of inspiration for linguistic and philosophical investigation, whereas the tradition deriving from Moore took ordinary practice as the touchstone for linguistic and philosophical judgment. Both traditions took philosophy of language as the starting point for doing philosophy.

#### [A] Frege's tradition:

\_\_\_ Frege, Russell, Quine...

\_\_\_ They attempt to find a perfect language to express the structure of mathematics. The underlying idea was that though language was a reasonable focus for philosophy, it had to be understood in the light of reforms needed for scientific purposes.

#### [B] Moore's tradition:

\_\_\_ **Moore, Wittgenstein**

\_\_\_ Moore insisted on the primacy of ordinary judgments and practices in dealing with philosophical problems. Philosophical problems were seen to be either solvable or dissolvable by reference to ordinary practice.

\_\_\_ **1955 J. L. Austin's lecture at Harvard (1962 published as *How to do things with words*):** Austin produced a taxonomy of speech acts and the taxonomy became a starting point for much work on pragmatics. He destroyed the distinction between talking and acting, by showing that making a statement requires that certain conditions be satisfied that are strictly analogous to conditions for Performative utterances.

\_\_\_ **1956. Strawson's theory of reference:** According to Strawson, it is not words that make statements or refer, but people. Sentences are neither true nor false. It is not the sentence but the statement or assertion that is made by using the sentence to represent the world that is true or false. Thus, it is pragmatics (how people use words), not semantics, that is the primary object of linguistic study. Strawson did not present a well-developed alternative to the prevailing theory of meaning. It was Grice (Strawson's colleague at Oxford) who came up with a theory of meaning.

\_\_\_ **1957. Grice** attempted to analyze linguistic meaning in terms of a special sort of communicative intention. He claimed that linguistic meaning is to be understood in terms of what a person means by an utterance. And this latter sort of meaning is to be understood in terms of the person's intending the utterance to produce some effect in an

audience by means of the recognition of this intention. The linguistic meaning of the utterance is roughly the content of the intention. Thus, certain mental states were taken to be analytically basic to understanding language. → language and mind. Grice also pointed out that it is not always easy to distinguish between the linguistic meaning of an utterance and various contextual suggestions (conversational implicatures) that might be associated with the meaning of the utterance.

e.g. The ringing of the bell means the bus is full.

e.g. By raising her hand, Mary meant that she knew the answer.

\_\_\_ **1969. Searle. *Speech Acts*.** Searle developed his teacher Austin's view further.

Unlike Grice's theory that develops conversational rules, the theory of speech acts tends to study the use of individual sentences.

**Although the 1960s and 1970s were the heyday of pragmatics, semantics was also the focus of discussion.**

### **1960s - 1970s**

\_\_\_ The philosophy of language became a vibrant, semi-autonomous discipline in the 1960s and early 1970s.

\_\_\_ The philosophy of language improved methods of argument and sensitivity to relevant distinctions. Partly because of its close connection with the development of mathematical logic in this century, the standards of argument in philosophy have certainly been raised.

**Two concerns (both from Frege):**

**(1) How do we define the logical form in natural languages?**

**(2) How do we separate the two semantical notions: sense and reference?**

**\* Language must attach to the world at certain points. The way that language attaches to the world is reference.**

\_\_\_ Theoretical development and explication of the notions of reference and sense became fundamental problems for the philosophy of language.

### **[1] Frege**

**[A] The Naïve Theory: the meaning of a word is the object it directly denotes.**

\_\_\_ Traditionally, a name simply means its object and has no other descriptive meaning. For instance, "Dartmouth" does not mean at the mouth of Dart, it simply means the place.

### **[B] Frege's Theory**

**Frege's example: "Hesperus is Hesperus" and "Hesperus is Phosphorus".** Frege points out a puzzle about Hesperus and Phosphorus that is generated by the Naïve theory. The two statements are about the same object, but they carry different "cognitive value" (Frege calls it "sense"). Therefore, the meaning of a name cannot simply be its object. The object is the referent of the name, and the name has its own sense as well.

**Frege had made some remarks that suggested that the reference of a proper name is fixed by definite descriptions that a speaker associates with the name.**

\_\_\_ Hesperus is Hesperus/Hesperus is Phosphorus

## [2] Russell

Russell purified and generalized this sort of view. He claimed that reference could rest either on acquaintance — an immediate, infallible, complete knowledge of an object — or on description.

## [3] Searle and Strawson

They suggested that the reference of proper names was fixed by a cluster of descriptions associated with the name by a community of speakers.

\_\_\_ This view loosened the relation between the reference of names and any one associated definite description. And it portrayed reference as dependent on more than descriptions in the mental repertoire of the speaker. Reference depended partly on the speaker's relations to others in the community.

**\* The above views are all “description theories”.**

## [4] Donnellan

In 1966 (“**Reference and Definite Descriptions**”) Donnellan pointed out that there is a use even of definite descriptions in which their meaning — the conditions laid down by the definite descriptions — does not fix the referent.

[“The man drinking the martini over there”, “that woman’s husband”]

[“Smith’s murderer is insane”] — referential use (referring to Jones — even if Jones did not murder Smith) and attributive use (whoever murdered Smith)

\_\_\_ Whether the description is being used referentially or attributively depends on the speaker’s intention and context.

\_\_\_ Donnellan applied the conclusion that [referring to an object does not require that the word used has a descriptive content that fits the object referred to] to proper names.

Proper names do not have or in any way rely upon any descriptive content. His theory is called **the historical account of referring**. A proper name refers to the object that it does because it is connected to that object through all the previous uses of that name to refer to that object.

## [5] Kripke

\_\_\_ **The decisive further move was made in 1970s by Kripke. (1972: *Naming and Necessity*)**

He produced a series of examples that indicated that the referents of proper names are in many cases not fixed by any set of descriptions the speaker associated with the name — or even by descriptions associated with the name by members of the **speaker’s**

community. The speaker's whole community of contemporaries might be ignorant. Yet the name might still have a definite referent.

**\* This is the view called the historical/causal chain theory, or the direct reference theory.**

\_\_\_ Implicit in the example was a positive account of how the reference of names is fixed. The reference seemed to depend on relations between the speaker and his social and physical environments that are best understood not by investigating the speaker's mental repertoire but by inquiring into the chain of circumstances that led to the speaker's acquisition or present use of the name. These relations involve a mix of causal and intentional elements and include a person's reliance on others to fix a referent.

\_\_\_ Reference depends on more than the beliefs, inferences, and discriminatory powers of the individual. Reference seems to depend on chains of acquisition and on the actual nature of the environment, not purely on the beliefs and discriminative abilities of the person doing the referring. **This result suggests that reference cannot be reduced to psychological states of individuals**, unless these states are themselves individuated partly in terms of the individual's relations to his community and/or physical environment.

### **1970s - 1980s**

\_\_\_ But by the late 1970s or early 1980s philosophy of language no longer seemed the obvious propaedeutic for dealing with central philosophical problems.

\_\_\_ One ground for this shift was that many philosophers felt that philosophy of language had done its job. Another ground was that some of the discussions, particularly of the theory of meaning and of what "semantics" should or should not do, seemed to be at impasses.

\_\_\_ What seems to have taken its place is the development of the philosophy of mind.

### **[Conclusion]**

To study the philosophy of language is to see that there is progress in philosophy. The idea that **the basic meaningful unit of language is the word** was superseded by the idea that **the basic unit is the sentence**, and that was superseded by the twin ideas that **the meaning of a sentence makes sense only as it relates to the language as a whole** and that **linguistic meaning ultimately rests upon people meaning things by their utterances**. The idea that language is a discrete entity that can be understood independently of the non-linguistic context was superseded by the idea that **language can be understood only in its context**, and that idea was superseded by the idea that **there is no sharp line to be drawn between linguistic behavior and non-linguistic behaviour or between linguistic behaviour and the environment in which it occurs**. Although there are no final answers, much has been learned in this century about the nature and uses of language, the primary locus of meaning, the nature of interpretation, the relation between language and empirical evidence, and the interrelation between meaning and the cognitive states of speakers.

### **[Sources]:**

— Tyler Burge: "Philosophy of Language and Philosophy of Mind: from 1950 to 1990"

— A. P. Martinich: “Philosophy of Language”