

GRICE AND WITTGENSTEIN ON CONTEXT-DEPENDENCY

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AT FIRST GLANCE a Gricean analysis of certain kinds of utterances seems to agree with a Wittgensteinian approach in many important respects. In this paper we shall examine some of these points of agreement, trying to situate both perspectives in a shared tradition of issues that go back to Russell. As we will see, Paul Grice and Ludwig Wittgenstein give somewhat similar accounts of how the meaning of sentences depends upon their context of utterance—one by doing adjustments to the extent of the applicability of a quantificational approach, and the other by rejecting it (or its overall usefulness). Lastly, we will make some general comments on the relevance and role that each strategy of dealing with context-dependency deserves. We will follow Stephen Neale's¹ presentation of the Gricean-Russellian account where it's pertinent. When we speak of Wittgenstein's perspectives we will focus on those portrayed in his *Philosophical Investigations* (henceforth denoted by PI) and after.

War is war

The easiest way of seeing the similarities in these two authors' approaches is to see how each would address a common case. In PI II, pg. 221 Wittgenstein says:

- (i) One says "I know" where one can also say "I believe" or "I suspect"; where one can find out. (ii) (If you bring up against me the case of people's saying "But I must know if I am in pain!", "Only you can know what you feel," and similar things, you should consider the occasion and purpose of these phrases. (iii) "War is war" is not an example of the law of identity, either.) [the numbers are mine]

It is important that we deal with the points made in this paragraph together. He traces valid conceptual relationships (those that illustrate our meaningful use of kindred concepts in various contexts) and puts a limit to others (those that lead to confusion). Let's say a word about (i)-(iii), bearing in mind that (iii) is going to be our link to Grice.

(i) Wittgenstein seems to be restricting the use of "I know," "I believe," and "I suspect" to those cases where 'one can find out.' One might object that such concepts are not equivalent. Indeed, it seems that there is an epistemic gap between knowing, believing, and

suspecting. They seem to denote different levels of certainty. To believe or to suspect shows a ‘partial certainty’ while to know shows an ‘absolute certainty.’

But what would an absolute certainty look like? It wouldn’t be a certainty at all! We say that we know, believe or suspect something when we could also not know, not believe, or suspect that not. We do mean that we are more certain of things when we say ‘I know’ than when we say ‘I suspect,’ but it’s equally awkward to tell a friend, once we are both dripping wet under the rain, ‘I *know* it is raining’ or ‘I *believe* it is raining’. It’s only meaningful to speak of certainty where there is a space for doubt, otherwise this alleged certainty is a metaphysical one, beyond all context and language-game.²

This is what he wants to point out through the examples portrayed in (ii). What kind of knowledge would ‘the knowledge that I am in pain’ be? The question itself is misleading. We should rather ask ourselves, as Wittgenstein suggests, for the occasion and purpose that could make meaningful the utterances of sentences such as ‘But I must know if I am in pain!’ or ‘Only you can know what you feel’ (for example, a valid language-game for the second sentence could be that of giving advice). Bearing in mind the many other approaches towards this problem throughout Wittgenstein’s work, one could say that the ‘knowledge that I am in pain’ could not be *knowledge*. For how could we not know that we are in pain? Would the concept of ‘knowing x’ have its essential concept of separating what we know from what we don’t in cases where we *always* know? The connection between a bearer and his pain is part of our form of life. It’s neither a *belief* nor an *absolute certainty* that everyone can have from introspection.

(iii) What we have said so far should not be new to anyone familiar with the main lines of Wittgenstein’s thought. It will be of further interest to look into the details and consequences of his seemingly marginal remark that ‘war is war’ is not an identity statement, and also the fact that (iii) shares a paragraph with (i) and (ii). We could paraphrase the text quoted as follows: analogously to the cases of ‘Only you can know what you feel’ and others, the utterance ‘war is war’ is meaningful only when we consider the ‘occasion and purpose’ to which it is said.

Wittgenstein seems to be in favor of a form of the thesis that (at least some) meanings are context-dependent. This seems fairly adequate for the case of ‘war is war.’ Consider the following example. Two soldiers walk through a burned town. Everything is shattered. One says to the other: “Joe, this is terrible.” The other replies: “You know, *war is war*.” In a loose sort of way, bearing in mind the ‘occasion and purpose’ of the remark *does* make it meaningful.

Consider now this example: a lady rips the last box of a very popular Christmas present out of the hands of another shopper. At the surprised look on her face, she replies with a smile and utters, while treasuring the article in her shopping cart, “You know, *war is war*.” Where in the second example it's clear that the utterer is offering a justification for her deeds, in the first example the utterance could be replaced by the sentence “these are the kinds of things that happen in every war,” or something of the sort.

Taking into account other parts of Wittgenstein's works will allow us to understand better what this ‘context-dependency’ is all about. We could not do a fair exegesis of the relationship between (i), (ii), and (iii) solely in terms of ‘occasion and purpose.’ Even though the context-dependency with which we are dealing has blurry edges, we must consider additional criteria.

For Wittgenstein, every significant utterance is part of a language-game, where “the term ‘language-*game*’ is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (PI §23). This is not one of the clearer passages in Wittgensteinian philosophy. Interpreters have had painful disputes on the interpretation of these words. Since Wittgensteinian exegesis, as explanations, need come to an end, let us venture some considerations on how language-games and forms of life trace the limits of context dependency for the case we have been following.

Also in PI §23, Wittgenstein makes a list of language-games, of ‘activities that belong to the stream of human life,’ such as ‘reporting an event, speculating about an event, making a joke, translating from one language into another,’ etc. Regardless of how we are to stand towards these words, they do accomplish one thing: they establish the place to look for answers. In Baker's words, “forms of life are the source and limit of meaning” (281). If we are to give an account of the meaning of an utterance, we will not look to the words themselves (tokens) or to their raw semantic value; *we will take into consideration the activities that made them meaningful* (comforting a fellow soldier, justifying oneself to a fellow shopper).

These situations offer examples of a sense in which one could say that forms of life are a *source* of meaning. Not only do such utterances seem meaningless if we don't take into account the context of utterance, also our attempt to understand their meaning is meaningless if we don't take into account such context (for what would we be trying to understand? 100% context-free utterances?). As for how forms of life *limit* meaning, two things must be said. The first, that ‘meaning’ only happens within our forms of life (‘God’ doesn't mean anything to a dog). The second, that an expression frequently becomes

meaningless when we take it away from the language-games where it's used in our ordinary language, as the verb 'to know' in (i) and (ii).

We still have to say a word about the ironic tone in the remark that "war is war' is not an example of the law of identity." Saying that 'war is war' is an example of the law of identity has a family resemblance with the thesis that everybody *knows* when he or she is in pain. They both would sustain absurd context-independent conclusions. Wittgenstein is saying here that one is being equally blind to the context of utterance (language-games) when one says that war is war is an example of the law of identity or that everybody has a privileged knowledge of his or her own pain. One is simply confused and rushes to establish a mindless generalization. By contrast to the more obvious case of 'war is war,' he is pointing out the fact that utterances of the form 'I know that x' are also part of the stream of human life, and they need to be considered perspicuously, that is, in meaningful activities. 'I know my pain' is a misleading sentence when we begin to theorize upon it, confusing its grammar, for instance, with that of the sentence 'I know there is a bean in that box.'

It was always fairly obvious, right from the beginning, that 'war is war' is at least in some respect context-dependent. But it has not always been obvious that utterances could be context-dependent at all. Let us first mention the merits of Wittgenstein's answer when contrasted against the Russellian wallpaper. Then we'll take a look at how Grice would explain what is going on with 'war is war' and we'll see which of these merits they share.

In a Fregean and in a Russellian perspective, tautologies are regarded solely as truisms: they express an a priori truth and have no cognitive value. For any term a , $a=a$ will apply regardless of what a is. In a purely semantic approach, no mention is made of significant contextual elements that render this sentence meaningful. Repeated attempts to mold the theory to such an example will be unsuccessful. If we take the 'is' to be of identity, our sentence wouldn't be different from 'a cat is a cat,' 'a dog is a dog,' '1=1.' If somehow we assumed that the 'is' is predicative, it would be equally meaningless to say that something is predicated of an 'a' when we say that 'it's an a'. The predicate 'equals one' doesn't give any additional information from that in the subject of the sentence 'one equals one.' For this sentence to be informative, somehow the two sides of the sentence should not be exactly the same, namely, they could share a reference but express different senses. And how could this happen in 'war is war'? If a name is to be given a sense by a definite description that is associated with that name, as the classical description theory of Frege and Russell maintained, for this sentence to have a cognitive value we would

somehow have to be comparing two different descriptions³. Would we get far by following these options while trying to give an account of the case of our two soldiers?

These remarks help us to see what Wittgenstein was standing against and allow us to introduce the Gricean solution.

For Grice, the puzzle with 'war is war' could be resolved if we consider two levels in which the proposition occurs: the proposition said and the proposition meant. The proposition said, by itself, would be but a truism and could be approached via a quantificational analysis. The proposition meant, however, deserves more attention (and in this sense we mentioned that Grice delineates the applicability of Russell's quantificational analysis). In Wittgenstein's example, he would say that the proposition meant could be: 'Things like these happen during war,' or 'Every war brings its share of atrocities.' How can we arrive at these propositions?

Grice argues that this step needs to be ascribed to general conversational principles rather than to pure semantics. In order to give a Gricean solution to our issue, we must first introduce some basic notions. Since in most cases conversation is a purposeful and cooperative enterprise, one could formulate a principle that participants are expected to observe:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this **the Cooperative Principle**. (Grice 1989, 26)

Grice also speaks of some maxims that result from this principle:

Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true. Specifically: Do not say what you believe to be false; do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner: Be perspicuous. Specifically: Be brief and orderly, avoid ambiguity and obscurity. (Neale 76)

The best way to get familiarized with this conceptual framework is to put it to work in the case that we are dealing with. We are trying to offer an explanation of how 'war is war' could be meaningful in the

case of the soldiers; it will be in virtue of the proposition(s) that can be 'implicated' in observance of this principle and its maxims. We shall follow a Gricean justification schema as portrayed by Neale (78).

- (a) A soldier A has expressed the proposition that 'war is war.'
- (b) There is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the Cooperative Principle or the maxims.
- (c) The soldier A could not be doing this unless he thought that, for example, 'it's normal that destruction occurs during a war,' because otherwise he would be flouting the Maxim of Relation (he would be saying something irrelevant).
- (d) A knows (and knows that Soldier B 'Joe' knows that he knows) that I can see that he thinks the supposition that he thinks that 'it's normal that destruction occurs during a war' is required.
- (e) A has done nothing to stop me thinking that 'it's normal that destruction occurs during a war.'
- (f) A intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that 'it's normal that destruction occurs during a war.'
- (g) And so, A has implicated that 'it's normal that destruction occurs during a war.'

This is of course only a sketch of what Grice would have to say in our example. What we are interested in pointing out here is the place where he decides to look for the answer to the question: context-dependence. This strategy and these very same maxims will help him to account for troublesome phenomena in the philosophy of language, such as semantical ambiguity, meaningful incomplete sentences, apparent natural language 'inconsistencies' with traditional logic, etc.

Indexicality, the context-dependency of certain (if not all) propositions, is one of the linguistic phenomena that gave grounds to the suspicion that Russell's analysis wasn't satisfactory. In the case of "war is war," contextual elements are the ones that render the proposition not only meaningful but also give it cognitive value, that is, given the context, the sentence is not a truism of the form $a=a$. The utterance 'war is war' doesn't simply repeat an a priori truth without giving any information about a state of affairs; it's rather an informative remark that belongs to an appropriate situation. Grice and Wittgenstein seem to agree in *where* to look for giving an account of what is going on: context—at least in the broad sense that we have worked with so far.

Misdescription means war

Referentialists raise an important issue against Russell's analysis. Keith Donnellan (1966) claims that Russell's account of language is insufficient, for he ignores the referential use of definite descriptions. The quantificational analysis of '*the table covered with books*' seems to be adequate for its attributive use, that is, for using this description for attributing to *some* object that it is a table, and only one table, and that it's covered with books (the example is P. F. Strawson's). But we can also answer to the question 'Which table?' with the sentence '*the table covered with books*.' Here the definite description is used for referring to a specific object, and allegedly, Russell failed to provide an account of this use of definite descriptions.

The leak opened by this observation can be seen most clearly in the so-called argument from misdescription. Here it seems that for a definite description to refer, it doesn't even need to pick out the object it refers to. When a speaker uses a definite description referentially, he may have stated something true or false even if nothing fits the description, as in the following example (Donnellan 378). Two friends are at a party and one says to the other: 'the man drinking a martini is flirting with your wife.'

In Russell's analysis, this sentence is true exactly when there is one and only one y , w , m such that y is you, w is married to y , x is a man, x is drinking a martini, x is flirting with w . Let Y , S , M , D , F be the predicates 'is you', 'are married', 'is a man', 'drinking a martini', and 'is flirting' respectively. For Russell, the sentence is true if and only if:

$$\exists!y\exists!w\exists!m(Yy \wedge Syw \wedge Mx \wedge Dx \wedge Fxw)$$

But what if the man isn't *really* drinking a martini? Suppose the husband knows that the man he is referring to is not drinking a martini but a cup of water with an olive that he served himself. In such a case, Strawson and Donnellan take two different paths. Strawson (1950) claims the quantificational analysis failed to pick out an object, and so the statement is neither true nor false. This observation has the merit of showing that something is wrong with Russell's analysis, and that if one applies it naively, strange explanations like this arise. On the other hand, Donnellan argues that in this case one can evidently say something true or false even if nothing satisfied the description. The husband could answer: "No, he's not flirting with my wife, he's her cousin. And by the way, he is drinking water."

Indeed, if someone at a party says that the man drinking a martini is flirting with one's wife, one wouldn't be relieved by knowing that the man is drinking water. Donnellan proposes to solve this riddle by

posing an ambiguity of *'the'* for the referential and the attributive uses. In this case, the *'the'* would not attribute anything to the man (it's irrelevant if he drinks a martini or not), where in *'the table covered with books'* we are attributing a property to an object. In these cases, the *'the'* would have different senses, and a successful analysis will be a non-Russellian analysis that takes this into account.

Neale (1990) claims to have a better solution. He rightfully argues that a better explanation will be a more economic one, and thus invokes the Modified Occam's Razor principle, which says *'don't posit senses beyond necessity.'* His mission will be to give a better explanation of this phenomenon without requiring multiplying the senses of *'the.'* Grice is going to provide the framework for defending of Russell's analysis, and also, a more sound explanation than those of Strawson and Donnellan. This will follow the same schema as the explanation we gave above for the case of *'war is war.'*

- (a) An utterer has expressed the proposition that *'the man drinking a martini is flirting with your wife.'*
- (b) There is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the Cooperative Principle or the maxims.
- (c) The utterer could not be doing this unless he thought that the man is drinking a martini and that he is flirting with the wife of the person he is talking to, because if these conditions don't apply, then his remark would not be relevant and thus he wouldn't be observing the Maxim of Relation.
- (d) Also, if he didn't believe that the man is drinking a martini, he would be flouting the Maxim of Manner (he would deliberately make his conversational contribution one that is ambiguous).
- (e) The utterer knows (and knows that the husband knows that he knows) that the husband can see that he thinks the supposition that he thinks *'the man is drinking a martini'* and *'he is flirting with your wife'* is required.
- (f) The utterer has done nothing to stop the husband from thinking that *'the man is drinking a martini'* and *'he is flirting with his wife'*.
- (g) The utterer intends the husband to think, or is at least willing to allow him to think that *'the man is drinking a martini'* and *'he is drinking with his wife'*.
- (h) And so, the utterer A has implicated that the man is drinking a martini, and that he is flirting with his wife.

By dealing again with two levels, that of the proposition said and

that of the proposition meant, Neale is able to give an account of what goes on in the argument from misdescription. Donnellan and Strawson had been looking in the wrong place for the answer to the Russellian account's gap for the referential use of definite descriptions. Russell's semantics are *fine*, and they can still be of use if we take into account Grice's pragmatic considerations: "the Russellian-Gricean sees referential usage as an important fact about *communication* to be explained by general pragmatic principles, not something of *semantical* import" (85).

It's worthwhile noting that Grice's account has other virtues: generality and systematicity. Without sacrificing these two important features of the quantificational analysis, he seems to have found a way of 'filling in the blanks' in Russell's account, at least for the two cases with which we have dealt.

Wittgenstein would be glad to see that context-dependency is taken into account when we speak of the meaning of utterances. The crystal-purity ideal of speaking about meaning without even looking at pragmatics has been left aside. In the case of 'war is war,' he would even agree that one could say that the soldier meant something like 'atrocities take place during every war.' He'd agree that the fact that the man wasn't drinking a martini is of no relevance for communication. He'd also agree in assigning an important role to context, and would subscribe to the Modified Occam's Razor principle, but as we shall see, Grice and Wittgenstein's convictions about the relationship between language and the world differ.

Let us now present Wittgenstein's insights on misdescription. This will show us where Wittgenstein stands in relation to the different views that we've portrayed so far, including Grice's. It may be stated before hand that he does *not* agree in important respects with either of these authors' positions. Unlike Strawson, Donnellan, and Neale, Wittgenstein does not conclude that Russell's analysis was *incomplete* in any of the stronger or more mild ways that they propose. These are, respectively: by confusing the referential with the attributive use; by failing to point to a semantical ambiguity (the the's) that matches the difference between referential and attributive use of definite descriptions; by ignoring certain pragmatic conversational considerations that trace the limit for the application of a purely semantical account. In all of these positions, something can be done to Russell's quantificational analysis if one wanted to save it from oblivion. In Wittgenstein's opinion, the whole project is pointless. It's driven by a compulsive theorizing need to answer to misleading questions that need not be asked. At its very basis one can find a grammatical confusion.

Wittgenstein ironic remarks circa PI §680 address the issue of the indexicality of definite descriptions long before the referentialists did:

Nor, of course does one say: “Are you sure that you cursed him, that the connection with him was established?” Then this connection must be very easy to establish, if one can be so sure of it?! Can know that it doesn’t fail of its object! - Well, can it happen to me, to intend to write to one person and in fact write to another? And how might it happen?

Does one ‘fail to refer’ to the man drinking a martini if one describes him as ‘a man drinking a martini’ when he is drinking water? Does the witch fail to curse someone because she described him during the concoction as ‘the man wearing a red hat’ when he wore a blue one? Condensed in a drop of grammar, Wittgenstein seems to be pointing at the very same absurdity that Donnellan warned us of. But there’s a twist to it. Wittgenstein invites us to ask ourselves if it is at all sound to wonder about how we can *know* if we are ‘establishing a connection’ with an object. What kind of knowledge would this be?

Ask yourself what ‘speaking of him’ consists in (§687).

Is it something we *know* when we speak of him? We spoke about the elusive grammar of the verb ‘to know’ earlier in this paper, and how ‘that the world exists’ is not a piece of knowledge. Well, what permits the connection between our words and the object they refer to is not a piece of knowledge either! The internal relationship between language and the world is part of our form of life. There is no place for doubting whether ‘I have a body,’ ‘the world exists,’ or ‘my words refer to objects in the world.’ How could I be so sure that I have a body? How could I not be? How could I be sure that my words refer to objects in the world?

“But can you doubt that you meant this?”—No: but neither can I be certain of it, know it. (§679)

Wittgenstein seems to agree with Grice in pointing out that if one follows Russell’s quantificational analysis blindly, that is, without taking into account context-dependency, ‘war is war’ would end up being an example of the law of identity and there would still be things to do in order to determine the referential use of definite descriptions. However, while the rest of the philosophers that we’ve considered try to offer a better explanation of how a definite description can refer, Wittgenstein questions if this is something that needs to be explained at all.

We have suggested a part of the grammatical confusion underlying

Russell's account. Yet another of the tricky 'philosophical verbs' comes into account: 'to mean.' Not only is the question 'how can we *know* that we refer to him?' misleading, but so is the related question 'how can I *mean* something?' It leads us to theorize about how a speaker can actually *mean* someone, how he can *point at* him. We begin to look in the wrong places for an answer to this question: in what he says, in what he really means by what he says, even in the mental sign that is supposed to be the ultimate meaning of his utterance (such would be the case for mentalists, although we haven't mentioned them here). And how can the connection be established?

How could it *not* be established?

Again, the case of the incorrectly sent letter is not like the case of the witch's cursing. It is not the case that "the connection isn't established" either in Donnellan's case or in the argument from misdescription at all. There, as Wittgenstein points out, the communication is successful. It's misleading to say that the communication is successful '*despite* the fact that the connection can not be established' or '*despite* the fact that we cannot give an explanation of how the connection is established' (similar to 'the world exists despite the fact that we cannot explain how'). And indeed funny things like this happen when one separates semantics from pragmatics.

Let us imagine a suitable context for the following utterance: 'Oh! I thought you meant *him!*' Where should we look for whatever 'failed'? When? In the moment he was 'meaning' him? In semantics?

One could ask (misleadingly): did our speaker actually say what he meant to say when he said that the guy drinking a martini was flirting with one's wife?

If we are still tempted by the thought that words 'pick out reality,' Wittgenstein invites us to do the following experiment:

Compare the grammar of "mean"⁴ (meinen) and "vouloir dire". (§657)

His hope is that by doing this, we will lay aside the 'magical properties' of the expression 'to mean.' In countless contexts we can rightfully replace one expression for the other, as in 'I mean him' for 'It's he whom I want to say' (C'est lui qui je veux dire). Should we posit an ambiguity in the use of 'saying'? Or if you prefer: 'I mean the man drinking a martini' = 'I want to say the man drinking a martini' (Je veux dire l'homme...). There is no hidden process through which one establishes the connection with what one refers to, nor is there one between what one 'means to say' and what one says. When one 'wants to say' someone, one does it. One can also 'say someone' without first wanting, consciously or not, to 'say someone.' Even if there were

something similar to such a process (mental, for instance), could the *meaning* be explained in this manner?

Context is of central importance to meaning. Every meaningful utterance occurs in a language-game (speaking about the man who is flirting with one's wife, really meaning to say 'I love you' or saying it without meaning it too much). Wittgenstein prefers to study language games rather than meanings, for what could a meaning be without a context of utterance? (This is not to be confused with saying that language games are merely contexts of utterance.)

Does all this mean that there is no point in studying how it is that our words are connected to the world? That question is misleading, and one could reply with the questions: 'what (meta-)words could you use in your study of the connection of our language with the world?' and 'What will connect you and your explanation of the connection?'⁵

We *can* study, though, the language-games where we refer to something, and we can learn from them. By this last observation we aren't trying to impose a certain terminology. Our problem is conceptual, not terminological. An important shift takes place when we focus our study on language-games. Let us consider the extent of this shift. Up to now one could think that at bottom, Grice and Wittgenstein could be 'saying the same thing with different words.' The rest of this paper will emphasize how this is not so even if the Gricean and the Wittgensteinian approach share the many points that we've stressed so far and yet more to come. We will also present some closing remarks on Wittgenstein's position towards the other stages in the debate that we have presented.

So what is this shift all about? Let's take a look at the following fragment:

Imagine that you were telephoning someone and you said to him: "This table is too tall", and pointed to the table. What is the role of pointing here? Can I say: I *mean* the table in question by pointing to it? What is this pointing for, and what are these words and whatever else may accompany them for? (§ 670)

One of the features that makes Grice's account so appealing is the fact that indexicals are taken into consideration. Since he acknowledges the importance of pragmatics, his account of many utterances will contemplate possible alterations of meaning that can be aroused by pragmatic aspects as, say, lifting one's finger towards the object one is talking about. The quoted passage invites us to further reflect on indexicality. One could say that pointing to the table is, in this case, something idle (and it is). Indeed, what is the role of pointing

here? Or better: need there be a role? In this passage Wittgenstein is trying to make us realize that it's within a language-game (and not due to the pointing, or the word 'this,' or that the utterer *means* this) that this is a meaningful expression. Is indexicality a challenge at all? Expressions have a meaning only 'in the stream of human life,' indexicality happens *within* language-games. When we describe different language-games we are *already* (internally) taking into consideration context-dependency. Context-dependency is not some pair of eyeglasses that we can take off in order to look at them. Could we make a *generalization* about how 'context-dependency' works?

This is a very thorny question! It's one of those questions that it's better not to answer at all. Let us rather ask ourselves: what would we *pursue* with that generalization? What could we *explain* with such a generalization?

I will offer an answer to these questions. But first, let us return to some loose ends that will also indicate how important it is to address these questions.

Closing words⁶

Both Wittgenstein and Grice succeed in giving an account of statements that 'fail to refer' but 'say something meaningful' that is more economical than the referentialist account. They both realize that referential usage of definite descriptions is a non-semantic phenomenon. Grice, and even more so Wittgenstein, would subscribe to the Modified Occam's Razor principle: 'do not posit *senses* beyond necessity.' There is no need to say that an utterance is ambiguous unless, effectively, it is ambiguous. And for Wittgenstein this only means that such an utterance is misleading, or that in a given context it can be understood in different ways. (Such an ambiguity can be solved by rephrasing what one was saying, not by supposing that a specific term is ambiguous or anything like that.)

During this paper we exposed various other points of agreement, that might well be encompassed in Neale's remark: "Part of Grice's project involves providing an analysis of meaning that does not presuppose any linguistic or otherwise semantical concepts" (Neale 105). Indeed, *part* of Grice's project does. But something is wrong from the very foundations of the project; there is a 'presupposition' that one is to explain the connection between language and the world. In the argument from misdescription, where all others see it as an awkward fact that 'certain expressions refer' and begin to wonder about it, Wittgenstein just refuses to theorize. He might as well say: "well, in some language-games, we use those expressions to refer, and so?"

In a sense, Grice only spreads out the confusion into two levels

(when not more): that of the ‘proposition said’ and that of ‘the proposition meant.’ Wittgenstein would criticize this. Would we gain anything by multiplying levels instead of senses? There are no levels, the proposition said is already the proposition meant and its sense is given within its language game. If somebody argued that the fact that conversational implicatures are defeasible shows that there is, after all, *a meaning*, we would have to reply: “*where* would a supracontextual meaning be meaningful?”

Grice and Wittgenstein deal with different kinds of context-dependence in the first place. For Grice, one can give general properties for how meaning changes through context-dependency from what it is said to what is meant. For Wittgenstein, language-games and forms of life are the source and limit of meaning, meaning is given within them and is particular to each language-game; there is no ‘angelic point of view’ from which one could speak of ‘meaning.’ By noting the source of confusion and theorizing that it comes from our use of the verbs ‘to know’ and ‘to mean’, we hope at least to have shown a path towards how our forms of life are the *limit* of meaning. By dealing with context-dependency, we hope to have shown how they are also the *source* of meaning. We hope to have made clear, with our account of the idea of forms of life, why we cannot and shouldn’t *say* more on some sort of a ‘process’ through which our forms of life ‘become’ source and limit.

A very interesting feature of Grice’s project is his cooperative principle. One could mistakenly think that this, as it is, would survive a Wittgensteinian critique. It sounds very plausible that such a principle underlies our conversations, but let us consider the following quote.

A doctor asks: “How is he feeling?” The nurse says: “He is groaning.”...Might they not, for example, draw the conclusion “If he groans, we must give him more analgesic” – without suppressing a middle term? Isn’t the point the service to which they put the description of behavior?

“But then they make a tacit presupposition.” Then what we do in our language-game always rests on a tacit presupposition... Should we ever really express ourselves like this: “Naturally I am presupposing that.....”-Or do we not do so only because the other person already knows that?

Doesn’t presupposition imply a doubt? And doubt may be entirely lacking. Doubting has an end. (PI II v)

This is a striking passage. If one were tempted to say that what we

do in our language-game (and it's important to say 'what we *do*' since we're not dealing with words but with the activities where these words belong) would rest on the tacit 'cooperative principle,' one could ask: 'What principle can you use to *tell* when people are being cooperative at all?' That they don't flout a maxim? But what do these maxims rely upon in the first place? Do you *know* when someone is being cooperative? Can you doubt it? (This isn't the same as not believing in what he or she says.)

What we find most appealing in Grice's account of language is that it looks to balance semantics and pragmatics. This is a helpful task. For Wittgenstein, however, the divorce between semantics and pragmatics never took place. The connection between the world and language doesn't need to be explained, there is not *a* meaning that has to be reconciled with little meanings that we take in particular circumstances. We hope to have made clear that, as far as they share the theorizing need for such an explanation, Russell, Strawson, Donnellan, Neale and Grice are looking in the wrong place. The descriptive study of language-games, as understood in the context of Ludwig Wittgenstein's thought—that is, in connection to many other issues that we couldn't have covered here—offers a better explanation (or a place, rather) to the 'phenomenon' of indexicality.

The downside of such a study within language-games, however, is the lack of systematicity, and here we do have to give Grice some credit. He regretted it himself:

So one might, in the end, be faced with the alternatives of either reverting to something like their [the A-philosophers, footnote 6] theoretically unambitious style or giving up hope altogether of systematizing the linguistic phenomena of natural discourse. To me, neither alternative is attractive. (Grice 4)

Should we mourn over systematizing? Are these the only alternatives left?

At this time, it should be clear that there is no point in saying that one can state general, systematic principles that describe 'how context-dependency works.' Is the whole of Grice's philosophical project to be taken to the scaffold?

No, but its aims are to be reconsidered. Grice and others suffer from the scientific ideal in philosophy that Wittgenstein so much criticized, and he inherits it in straight line from Russell.⁷ We cannot arrive at a complete systematization of the linguistic phenomena of natural discourse as we could of the behavior of gases, because these 'linguistic phenomena' are internally connected with the world. The

connection of language and the world cannot be an object for scientific research since scientific research presupposes it (or better, doesn't need to presuppose it at all). Grice is one step ahead of other philosophers: he realizes that referential usage is a nonsemantical phenomenon. Wittgenstein might go further down that road and say that this 'phenomenon' should not be regarded like those phenomena in the natural sciences at all.⁸

I would like to propose two useful and promising uses for Grice's account as far as this essay is concerned (war and misdescription). The first one is rather funny and still points at misleading conclusions that one could draw from Grice's work. The second one is very serious.

I. If we are a third person watching the dialogue of the soldiers, and we had never heard the expression 'war is war,' we could apply his method for understanding the meaning of this utterance. And we could say to ourselves: 'now I get it! He meant that it's normal for things like these to happen during a war!' If one is totally clueless about what he meant to say, one could begin to look for the answer by wondering what he could be saying in order to comply with the cooperative principle, and this would be achieved by assuming that the maxim that is obviously flouted in the proposition said will be observed in the proposition meant. In this sense, the notion of conversational implicature could serve us as a *method* for drawing a conclusion. But suppose we thought 'Oh, I see, soldier b didn't understand either until he did the very same inference that I had to make, only very fast.' Once more a mental spasm! This is a nice example to see what the scientific ideal in philosophy looks like: you confuse what you are describing with what you describe it with, and suddenly you get a hidden process that you can theorize upon. (And remember: "If God could see into our heads, he wouldn't see meanings there.")

II. A good way of exorcising the scientific ideal from philosophy is to quit philosophy and start doing science. This doesn't mean that, in science, one will not commit the same philosophical errors. Indeed, the basis for much of science is filled with misconceptions, but at least, sciences *achieve* something. It occurs to me that interesting achievements could await Grice's methods in the realm of Artificial Intelligence (for a layperson in such a fast developing subject, it wouldn't be surprising that attempts had already been made). He is able to introduce pragmatic considerations into problems that can't be solved through a classical semantical strategy. Also, and this is very important for the project of AI, he does so in a general and systematic way. If we could program a machine to describe the soldiers' scene as our third person did just a while ago, we will have come a long way.

NOTES

- ¹ Although in his papers, as collected in his *Studies in the Way of Words*, Grice doesn't openly defend Russell against the claims of the referentialists, we agree with Neale that his notion of conversational implicature can be used to defend Russell's quantificational analysis in this case. Grice does defend Russell from Strawson's claims in "Presupposition and Conversational Implicature" (269-282).
- ² Is 'the world exists' a belief? Could we doubt it? Isn't it rather a part of a transcendental common ground for our beliefs, of our form of life (Cf. *On Certainty* and PI II 226)?
- ³ Informative identity statements stretch a Russellian account into paradox. "The description theory was partially motivated by an apparent contrast between 'Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens' and 'Aristotle is Aristotle.' But if the classical description theory is right, there is no such contrast" (Devitt and Sterelny, pg. 49).
- ⁴ Grice himself worked on the verb 'to mean' ("Presupposition and Implicature" 269-282). He establishes a distinction between what he calls a natural sense of 'mean,' where this entails that something will happen (white smoke coming out of a chimney in the Vatican means that a new Pope will be presented) and a nonnatural sense, where it doesn't entail anything. Following this lead would take us too deep into Grice for the purposes of this paper, but it's interesting to point at the contrast with Wittgenstein's observations on our use of the same verb.
- ⁵ Not only is Wittgenstein making fun of Russell here, he's also making fun of the *Tractatus*.
- ⁶ Without going into detail, for in this paper we preferred to compare authors through their response to common problems ('war and misdescription'), three arguments could be given against the 'specific' claims of Grice against Wittgenstein. (1) We agree with Hacker in saying that Grice fails to establish a case against Wittgenstein's account of the relation between meaning and use, (allegedly Wittgenstein would be wrongly allocating to meaning features of the use of expressions that properly belong to pragmatic principles of conversation) (Hacker 246) (2) This can also be blatantly seen in his failure to characterize Wittgenstein as one of the 'A-philosophers' (under the same blanket with Austin and Searle) he wants to refute. (3) Overall, he doesn't seem very knowledgeable in Wittgensteinian studies, an example of which is his treatment of Wittgenstein's 'seeing... as,' where he extrapolates this argument regardless of the connections that Wittgenstein so laboriously established between this point and many others, as relevant as the idea of form of life or language-game. Detailed research could be done to establish whether he ever had a case *against* Wittgenstein, or, as he sometime says, more towards "certain philosophers sympathetic to Wittgenstein."
- ⁷ When someone believes that he or she is approaching language 'in a scientific way,' his or her explanations tend to become stiff and fail to explain the multiplicity of language. Wittgenstein's sardonic remark on §289 seems to point in this direction: "Descriptions are tools, not pictures hanging on a wall" (vs. Russell). One could say that Strawson's distinction between a referential and attributive *use* of definite descriptions is a first step in the

right direction, but this bipolar division is still too stiff. For a moment Donnellan seemed to take himself away from this 'stiffness' by pointing at misdescription (this suggests that the 'match' between language and the world is not yet perfect). Later on, however, he proved to be the stiffest of them all: it's so imperative for the words in a sentence to have a partial 'influence' on the total meaning, that in case of doubt we must speak of two senses of 'the'! It's the very same burden of the lack of dynamicity in Russell's Theory of Descriptions that leads Neale to introduce pragmatic elements in its 'application.'

- ⁸ A useful caricature: What would glue the utterer to whatever glued him to what he says? What would glue what he says to whatever glues him to what he means?

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