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Linguistics and philosophy

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33.1 Philosophy of language: traditions and themes

Philosophy and the study of language are intimately connected, to the extent that it is impossible to say from which point in human intellectual history the study of meaning in natural language can be regarded as an independent enterprise. Natural language syntax, semantics and pragmatics are now considered to be subdisciplines of theoretical linguistics, surrounded by the acolytes in the domains of language acquisition, language disorders, language processing (psycholinguistics and neuroscience of language), all using empirical, including experimental, methods in addition to rationalistic inquiry. However, philosophical problems associated with the structure of language as well as with meaning in language and in discourse still remain, and arguably will always remain, the backbone of syntax and semantics, and a trigger for progress in theorising. It is impossible to summarise the impressively rich tradition of thinking about language in the history of philosophy. One would have to start with Presocratics in the sixth and seventh centuries BCE in Ancient Greece and cover two and a half millennia of intensive questioning and argumentation over the relations between language, reality, truth and the human mind. Or, one could try to delve into the history before the Greeks, then move through the landmarks of Plato, Aristotle and the later Stoics into the current era (see e.g. Harris and Taylor 1989; Law 2003; Allan 2010). In this brief introduction we shall focus on much later debates, starting from the period when discussions about topics that are currently in the focus of debates originated, that is late nineteenth century, marked by Frege’s insights into an ideal language for describing knowledge and the origin of modern logic that is now used as a metalanguage for theorising about meaning in natural human languages. From formal approaches within analytical philosophy I shall move to the ‘language-as-use’ paradigm of the ordinary language philosophy, followed by the more recent debates on meaning as it is to be understood for the purpose of formal representation and linguistic theory. In the process, I shall address some of the core areas that philosophers of language have been drawn to such as reference and referring or propositional attitude reports. Next, I move to the topic of the role of intentions and inferences, and finish with a brief attempt to place ‘linguistics and philosophy’ on the map of language sciences and research on language in the twenty-first century.
33.2 Meaning, truth, and the rise of formal semantics

Relation between language and reality has been at the forefront of research in philosophy at least since the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of interest in the ideas developed by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. The earlier preoccupation with the relation between meaning and the mind that characterised phenomenologists such as Brentano and Husserl was now considered to have plunged theorising about meaning into dangerous ‘psychologism’, dubbed a corrupting intrusion of the mental, where what was supposed to be investigated was in fact external to the mind and objective, namely meaning and the world.

The origin of the formal approach to meaning is often equated with Gottlob Frege’s development of a new concept of logic, although it can be traced further back to the seventeenth century when Leibniz proposed his calculus ratiocinator, ‘the calculus of reasoning’, a formal inference system – an idea followed by Frege in his Begriffsschrift (or a ‘concept script’, Frege 1879). Frege’s proposal for a ‘logically perfect language’ contains an analysis of the logical form of judgements in terms of functions where a predicate is a function that maps arguments to truth values. Frege’s view breaks away from earlier psychological logic that focused on thought processes and subjective mental representations. His condemnation of psychologism was forceful indeed and influenced the future of philosophy of language, semantics and pragmatics for decades to come. In Grundlagen der Arithmetik, Frege explicitly bans psychological explanations in logic. He says that ‘[i]there must be a sharp separation of the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective’ (1884 [1997: 90]). He distinguishes concepts and objects, which he accepts as legitimate objects of theorising, from ideas (Vorstellungen) understood as psychological constructs that have to be excluded from investigation. In short, ideas are not objects; the way people think about an object is not to be equated with the object itself.1 In practice, this means that logical inquiry is governed by the laws of logic rather than by thinking that something is valid or correct.

This attack on psychologism constituted a landmark in philosophy, logic and arithmetic. Approaches to meaning that relied on theories of mental processes and mental representations were now rejected as an old paradigm. The meaning of a sentence is a proposition, but the proposition is true or false independently of what its users make of it:

The description of the origin of an idea should not be taken for a definition, nor should the account of the mental and physical conditions for becoming aware of a proposition be taken for a proof, and nor should the discovery [‘Gedachtwerden’] of a proposition be confused with its truth! We must be reminded, it seems, that a proposition just as little ceases to be true when I am no longer thinking of it as the Sun is extinguished when I close my eyes.

(Frege 1884 [1997: 88])

Similar comments appear in many other works by Frege. In Grundgesetze der Arithmetik, vol. 1 (Frege 1893 [1997: 202]), he calls psychology a ‘corrupting intrusion’ into logic in that ‘being true is quite different from being held as true’. Next, in ‘Logic’, Frege (1897) argues that the task of logic is ‘isolating what is logical … so that we should consciously distinguish the logical from what is attached to it in the way of ideas and feelings’ (1897 [1997: 243]), because
logic is concerned with the laws of truth, not with the laws of holding something to be true, not with the question of how people think, but with the question of how they must think if they are not to miss the truth.

(Frege 1897 [1997: 250])

The function-argument analysis was subsequently adopted for natural languages, with an attempt to demonstrate that they have a compositional structure.

In addition, Tarski’s semantic definition of truth and his model theory resulted in a semantics of artificial languages that yielded itself to application to natural languages. Modern formal semantics of natural language was born, with the advances of the works by Donald Davidson (1984), Richard Montague (1974), Barbara Partee (2004), Hans Kamp (1984) and many others in developing the theory of truth-conditional, possible-words, model-theoretic semantics. In the second half of the twentieth century, truth-conditional semantics became the dominant approach to natural-language meaning. In this context, it is also necessary to acknowledge the contribution of Logical Positivism, an early twentieth century movement, also known as logical empiricism, and represented mainly by the Vienna Circle (Carnap, Schlick, Neurath) whose approach to meaning can be summed up in the principle of verification: sentences acquire meaning when they are assessed for their truth or falsity – on the basis of sense experience, evidence of sense experience, or, in the case of analytical propositions, in virtue of their grammatical form and the meanings of the words. While a strict adherence to verifiability poses problems and was rapidly criticised by such philosophers as Quine or Strawson, the very idea of employing truth values has resulted in the most powerful tool in the analysis of meaning proposed to date – with the proviso that the ban on psychologism had to be relaxed.

Donald Davidson’s insightful adaptation of Tarski’s theory of truth as a theory of natural-language meaning is supposed to ‘bypass’ any issues to do with the psychological aspects of meaning. If ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if the snow is white, that is, if we are deriving the meaning of the sentence from the semantic properties of its parts, we are concerning ourselves with language tools as they can be found in the language system; we are not concerning ourselves with the uses to which these tools may be put. In other words, speakers’ truth-value judgements were considered to be separate from truth values per se; intentions and inferences belonged to an altogether different object of study.

Reversing the direction of explanation, the analytical tradition in philosophy produced not only advances for the study of language, but also some (albeit not as significant) new approaches to metaphysics. The pertinent idea here is that the traditional problems discussed in metaphysics are in fact pseudo-problems; all one needs is an understanding of the nature and use of natural language. This way of approaching philosophy through language was called linguistic philosophy (not to be confused with the philosophy of language) and spanned various approaches to meaning, including ordinary language philosophy discussed in §33.4.

More than a hundred years have passed since Frege’s writings and we can now stand back and reopen the question of the ‘psychological intrusion’. Was it indeed a sign of progress to separate meaning from mental representations? Let us take Russell’s (1905, 1919) celebrated approach to definite descriptions. He classified them as quantifying expressions and as such qualitatively different from directly referring expressions such as proper names or demonstrative and personal pronouns. Sentence (1) then acquires an analysis as in (1a), using classical quantifiers of predicate logic, or (1b), using generalised quantifiers (cf. Neale 1990: 45), where vertical lines stand for cardinality.
(1) The king of France is bald.

(1a) \( \exists x (KoF(x) \& \forall y (KoF(y) \supset y = x) \& \text{Bald}(x)) \)

(1b) ‘[the x: Fx] (Gx)’ is true iff \( |F - G| = 0 \) and \( |F| = 1 \)

However, as has been well acknowledged since Donnellan’s (1966) seminal paper ‘Reference and definite descriptions’, the latter are ambiguous between the attributive reading that is captured in (1a) or (1b) and referential reading that would make them akin to proper names. In those early days, disputes concerning the status of this ambiguity (semantic or pragmatic) were rife. But looked upon from the perspective of more than half a century, the unprejudiced story would have it that what is important is that there is an ambiguity of some kind or other, pertaining to the meaning of such constructions. And where we have a conceptual ambiguity, we have to have either semantic underspecification, or semantic ambiguity, or finally a semantic underspecification/ambiguity with a specified semantic default meaning (see Jaszczolt 2005 for an extensive discussion). The point I am making here is that where one tries to exorcise psychologism through the main door, it comes back in through the window: we want to know the meaning of such constructions and it appears that to know the meaning one has to know the intentions of the speaker and the inferences performed by the addressee. In other words, one either: (a) has to be Gricean and acknowledge the fact that at least some generalisable aspects of the psychology of utterance processing, such as maxims of conversation or their offshoots in the form of post-Gricean heuristics and principles, constitute an essential component of a theory of meaning; or (b) stop halfway, with ‘incomplete meaning’ that pertains to the language system rather than language use.

The example of definite descriptions is particularly striking when they are embedded in intensional contexts such as propositional attitude reports as in (2).

(2) Sam believes that the king of France is bald.

It has been traditionally assumed in the philosophy of language that propositional attitudes are ambiguous between the transparent and the opaque reading (see e.g. Quine 1956) that correspond to the wide (2a) and narrow (2b) scope of the existential quantifier.2 ‘Bel\textsubscript{S}’ stands for ‘Sam believes that…’

(2a) \( \exists x (KoF(x) \& \forall y (KoF(y) \supset y = x) \& \text{Bel}_S \text{Bald}(x)) \)

(2b) \( \text{Bel}_S \exists x (KoF(x) \& \forall y (KoF(y) \supset y = x) \& \text{Bald}(x)) \)

In (2a), the speaker ascribes to Sam a belief about a particular, known individual (\textit{de re}); in (2b), the speaker reports on the belief as a whole (\textit{de dicto}), without making a commitment to the existence of the king of France. Next, if we pursue the Gricean argument and are interested in the speaker’s intended meaning, we can add a scenario on which Sam is referentially mistaken and in fact attempts to refer to the king of Sweden, and the uptake of this intention is successful. Then the reporter utters (2c).

(2c) \( \exists x (KoS(x) \& \forall y (KoS(y) \supset y = x) \& \text{Bel}_S \text{Bald}(x)) \)
What we have here is an example of three possible readings of a belief report with a definite description and it is only through recognising the role of intentions and inferences that we can arrive at the correct interpretation. Frege’s ban on psychologism, pivotal as it was for the emergence of modern logic that gave linguistic semantics an unambiguous metalanguage of predicate calculus, now appears to be too strong.

Charles Travis (2006: 125–6) aptly points out that taking any kind of stance on how the laws of logic apply to language users seems to constitute in itself a form of psychologism. If it is so, then Frege’s position is also a form of psychologism. This is well exemplified in his seminal work ‘On Sense and Reference’ (Frege 1892) where he observes that the identity of referents does not guarantee the identity of meaning. Although (3) is true, (4) and (5) have very different truth conditions; in other words, the situations that make (4) true are not the same as those that make (5) true.

(3) Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens.

(4) John believes that Mark Twain is the author of *Huckleberry Finn*.

(5) John believes that Samuel Clemens is the author of *Huckleberry Finn*.

According to the so-called Leibniz’s Law applied to natural language, two expressions are identical with each other if they are substitutable preserving the truth of the sentence. ‘Mark Twain’ and ‘Samuel Clemens’ are not substitutable; John may believe the proposition in (4) but not consent to the one embedded in (5). Frege solves the problem by introducing the concept of sense (*Sinn*) which stands for the way of thinking about an individual, or a mode of presentation. The ban on psychologism is still preserved in that senses are intersubjective; they can be shared and in that they differ from private ideas of objects. But this ban is preserved only narrowly. If we want a truly compositional theory of meaning, we must understand what components enter into this composition. Sense, mode of presentation, however, remained a ‘creature of darkness’ (and it was considered as such, for example, by Quine): it is perfectly possible for John to assent to the proposition embedded in (4) but dissent from the one embedded in (5) without being able to pinpoint the ‘mode of presentation’ under which he holds the belief.

More formally, one can attempt, following Schiffer (1992), to represent a mode of presentation for (5) as in (6) where believing is a three-place relation among the believer, the proposition and the mode of presentation under which the person believes this proposition. ‘Φ*m’ stands for a type of the mode of presentation and ‘< >’ for intensions.

(6) (∃m) (Φ*m & Bel (John, <SC, author-of-HF>, m))

However, despite the transparent formal representation, *m* remains a mystery and as long as we do not know what exactly this constituent of the logical form stands for, compositionality of meaning is not demonstrated. And it is likely that in order for the meaning to turn out correctly, *m* has to be a psychological entity: a private concept that is suitably rich or suitably general for the purpose of the particular discourse situation. This is how intentions, inferences and, all in all, psychological considerations reappear whenever a move from formal languages to natural language is attempted.

Word meanings and sentence meanings are notoriously flexible. Celebrated examples with quantifiers and logical connectives such as (7) or (8) demonstrate that in order to
account for the proposition that reflects the speaker’s intentions one often has to ‘write in’ what is not there to be seen. ‘Every’ in (7) stands for ‘every in a contextually given domain’ as, for example, in (7a). The connective ‘and’ conveys more than conjunction; it can convey a causal relation between two simple propositions as in (8a).

(7) Every student read Frege.

(7a) Every student in Kasia’s semantics seminar read Frege.

(8) The temperature fell below zero and the lake froze.

(8a) The temperature fell below zero as a result the lake froze.

Approaches to such modifications vary. Minimalists claim that they fall outside semantics proper (Borg 2004, 2012; Cappelen and Lepore 2005). According to indexicalists, they constitute part of the truth-conditional content but only if they can be traced to a slot in the logical form. Stanley and Szabó (2000) show that quantifier domain restriction does indeed succumb to such an analysis. Radical contextualists see them as ‘top-down’ modifications that need not be triggered by any syntactic slots (e.g. Recanati 2004, 2010). We can go further in both directions. Minimalists need not even admit that truth conditions and propositions are necessary in semantics in that meaning that is of interest is the meaning that can be gleaned from the structure of the sentence even when the sentence does not correspond to a unique proposition (e.g. Bach 2006). At the other end of the spectrum, contextualists can equate their modified semantic representation with the main proposition intended by the speaker and communicated to the hearer, which on some occasions is so different from the uttered sentence that it requires not only expanding or completing the logical form but instead a substitution of an altogether different logical form as is the case, for example, in indirect reports (Jaszczolt 2005). On this construal, the truth-conditional analysis takes as its object the primary, intended meaning of the speaker, or the primary speech act.

Debates between different orientations concerning the appropriate scope of the theory of meaning have come to the fore of semantics, pragmatics and philosophy of language in the 1980s and have remained vivid ever since. They are further complicated by the attempts to distinguish between: (a) the truth-conditional content that can be pragmatics-rich; and (b) semantics, which can remain narrow. On this construal, we obtain ‘truth-conditional pragmatics’ (Recanati 2002, 2010). The rationale behind this complication is arguably that semantics has to remain algorithmic, delimited by the grammatical structure, in order to be implementable at all:

Is semantic interpretation a matter of holistic guesswork (like the interpretation of kicks under the table), rather than an algorithmic, grammar-driven process as formal semanticists have claimed? Contextualism: Yes. Literalism: No. […] Like Stanley and the formal semanticists, I maintain that the semantic interpretation is grammar-driven.

(Recanati 2012a: 148)

However, it is an open question as to whether semantics narrowly understood and dissociated from intuitive truth-conditional content is: (a) attainable; and (b) expedient. It may not be attainable because the flexibility of meaning is reflected not only in the need to modify (‘enrich’, ‘modulate’) the structure, but also in the need to assign essentially context-
dependent meaning to lexemes. To paraphrase Searle’s (1980) celebrated example, the meaning of ‘cut’ in ‘to cut the grass’ is quite different from the meaning of this verb in ‘to cut a cake’: stabbing the grass with a knife is not what is intended, and neither is driving a lawnmower over the cake. Recanati (2012b: 179) uses this flexibility as a starting point for arguing that compositionality of meaning does indeed have to rely on a logical form provided by the grammar (i.e. it is ‘bottom-up’), but the meanings of the words are determined by the contexts in which they occur (‘top-down’). Compositionality in the standard Fregean sense can be vindicated as long as the meanings of simple expressions can be relaxed. In short, algorithmic, grammar-based semantic interpretation and massively context-dependent, flexible meanings of the constituents that enter this interpretation work in tandem: if word meanings are sufficiently flexible, compositionality is preserved.

The answer to the second query, namely as to whether semantics narrowly understood and dissociated from intuitive truth-conditional content is expedient, requires a recourse to common sense and preferences in delimiting the object of study. If, like most linguists in the twenty-first century, one disobeys Frege’s ban and associates the study of meaning with meaning as it is understood by conversational interactants, then narrow semantics is only of use as one of the sources of information about meaning. In other words, while some utterances exhibit a high degree of precision and little need for resorting to the context-specificity and intentions, as for example (9), others rely on multiple sources of information for their processing.

(9) A prime number is a whole number larger than 1 and divisible only by 1 and by itself.

Clearly, the meaning of this sentence is composed out of the meanings of its parts with little or no recourse to any information external to this sentence. So, it appears that there must be a concept of narrow semantics that allows us to compose meanings in this way. At the same time, for the majority of utterances speakers produce, sources external to the lexicon and structure of the uttered construct have to be consulted – be it to complete it if it is a sentence fragment as in (10) or a grammatical sentence that does not correspond to a full proposition as in (11), or because the proposition it appears to express is not the proposition that is understood by the interlocutors to have been conveyed as in (12).

(10) Nice shoes.
(11) Sam is ready [>> to do what?]
(12) Sam pressed the button and [>> as a result] the garage door opened.

All in all, the history of philosophy of language from the end of the nineteenth century to the present has demonstrated a colossal preoccupation with attempts to fit natural languages in the mould of formal, unambiguous languages such as (but not only) the languages of first-order logic. Adopting such a precise metalanguage enabled generations of linguists and philosophers to pursue the big question ‘What is meaning?’ adopting a fairly reliable starting point: that of the relation between the sentence and the situations in the world that it appropriately corresponds to. However, a cursory glance at the most commonly discussed examples, such as definite descriptions or the celebrated ‘donkey sentences’ (in (13), with anaphoric relations marked by indices) already reveals problems. Its metalinguistic
equivalent in (13a) is produced compositionally from (13) but does not have the required interpretation (the variables \(x\) and \(y\) in Beats \((x,y)\) remain outside the scope of the quantifiers). The representation in (13b) has the required interpretation but the structure is not isomorphic with that of the English sentence; the formula cannot be derived compositionally from (13).

\[
(13) \quad \text{‘If a farmer}_1 \text{ owns a donkey}_2, \text{ he}_1 \text{ beats it}_2.’
\]

\[
(13a) \quad \exists x \exists y (\text{Farmer}(x) \land \text{Donkey}(y) \land \text{Owns}(x,y)) \rightarrow \text{Beats}(x,y)
\]

\[
(13b) \quad \forall x \forall y ((\text{Farmer}(x) \land \text{Donkey}(y) \land \text{Owns}(x,y)) \rightarrow \text{Beats}(x,y))
\]

Various attempts have been made to remedy the semantic representation, most notably in dynamic approaches to meaning. In Discourse Representation Theory (DRT, see Kamp and Reyle 1993: 168) unselective binding is proposed, resulting in the reading ‘for every farmer \(x\) and for every donkey \(y\) that \(x\) owns, \(x\) beats \(y\)’. In Dynamic Predicate Logic (DPL, see Groenendijk and Stokhof 1991: 58), existential quantifiers are redefined and allowed to bind variables outside of their syntactic scope. These are ‘quick-fixes’ that, although they constitute signs of progress, do not do justice to the various meanings these sentences can assume and only emphasise the big difference between how formal languages and natural languages work. For example, if a farmer owns several donkeys and beats only one, is the sentence true? One of the options would be to acknowledge the fact that in the case of natural-language communication, unlike in the case of meaning inherent in formal languages, language is hardly ever the sole medium; we communicate by uttering sentences in the specific situation, at the specific time, place, and assuming that we share certain knowledge, assumptions, principles of reasoning, and so forth, with the audience. This makes speech inherently situated, and tips the scales from the emphasis on the formal to the emphasis on the situated action.4 Such emphasis on what is achieved by speech is characteristic of another paradigm in the philosophico-linguistic deliberations which I discuss in §33.4: the ordinary language philosophy and the resulting theory of speech acts.

### 33.3 Philosophy of linguistics

From about the middle of the twentieth century scholars interested in natural-language meaning had various paradigms to follow: they could either proceed with the ideas that originated in analytical philosophy and continue a formal analysis of sentences in terms of extensions and intensions (that originated in Frege’s sense and reference) as was done in Montague Semantics, or abandon the idea of ‘semantics mirroring syntax’, pursuing newly emerging Chomskyan generative linguistics, or focus instead on language use. I shall have little to say about Chomskyan generative linguistics here in that the questions pertaining to philosophy and language arise there only on a more abstract level, for example:

1. Is referential semantics compatible with Chomsky’s idea of I-language?
2. Is syntax determined by the external environment or just by the human mind?

And more generally:

3. What is the nature of linguistic rules?
4. What counts as data for a linguist?
5. What is the role of intuitions in linguistic theory?
6. How did language evolve?
7. How is language acquired?
8. Are there linguistic universals and if so, what is their nature?

These questions are discussed in depth in Peter Ludlow’s (2011) *The Philosophy of General Linguistics*. Because of their ‘metalevel flavour’, in the sense of a ‘philosophy of a linguistic theory’, they will not be pursued here. As Scholz (2011) aptly summarises: ‘Philosophy of linguistics is the philosophy of science as applied to linguistics. This differentiates it sharply from the philosophy of language, traditionally concerned with matters of meaning and reference.’ Remaining on the object level of ‘what counts as meaning’, the view that a theory of meaning is exhausted in a theory of language use is the next one we move to.

33.4 Ordinary language philosophy and speech acts

In his seminal series of lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955, John L. Austin changes the focus of attention of philosophers from declarative sentences describing states of affairs to utterances in the case of which ‘the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as, or as “just”, saying something’ (Austin 1962: 5). Although Austin was not by any means the first philosopher to talk about ‘acts’ that are done by using language, in that in this context one has to remember the writings of Thomas Reid in the eighteenth century as well as the nineteenth century phenomenologists, Austin was the first to systematise such actions performed by using language in a well-developed theory, distinguishing various aspects of such actions: locutionary (saying), illocutionary (acting), and perlocutionary (exerting influence), and attempting a classification. A related and roughly co-temporaneous approach to language was put forward by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his late work *Philosophical Investigations*: ‘For a large class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word “meaning” it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language’ (Wittgenstein 1953: 43).

The focus on the use of language in ‘doing things’, for example requesting, apologising, complaining, warning and so forth, meant that the preoccupation with propositions and truth conditions subsided and gave rise to an interest in the properties of the act itself, substantiated in the analysis of the illocutionary force. Speech acts, as they were subsequently dubbed, could be successful (felicitous) or unsuccessful (infelicitous); conditions of success seemed to take the place of truth conditions. But it would be an oversimplification to stop at this summary. In fact, truth and falsity on the one hand, and felicity and infelicity on the other, proved to constitute two interwoven distinctions. Let us start with felicity. A speech act is infelicitous when the conditions for its appropriateness are not satisfied. These conditions pertain not only to language but also to the situation of discourse, cultural and social prerequisites and the characteristics of the interactants. For example, uttering ‘I hereby pronounce you husband and wife’ does not count as an act of marrying two people when it is uttered by a person without the required authority. More standard cases involve, for example, requests and promises. A speech act counts as a promise when it satisfies the following conditions. It has to be uttered in a sentence that has the content of a promise (the so-called propositional content condition); it must concern an eventuality that is beneficial to the addressee (‘I promise I will kill you’ will not do) and an eventuality that is not going to take place anyway (‘I promise tomorrow is Friday’ will not do either). The latter two are called preparatory conditions. Next, there is also the essential condition whereby the
speaker puts himself/herself under an obligation to fulfil the promise either by intending to do so or by making a good pretence of it (see Searle (1969: 62) on insincere promises: ‘the speaker takes responsibility for having the intention rather than stating that he actually has it’), and so sincerity condition also has to be satisfied when looked at from the position of the addressee.

What is important is that for Searle (1983) speech acts are intricately connected with mental states: the conditions of satisfaction of speech acts are inherited from their corresponding mental states such as belief or desire. This inheritance is facilitated by the fact that mental states have intentionality: they are about something (we believe something, fear something, or desire that something be the case). The way to look at it is this: conditions of satisfaction pertain to mental constructs, but it is theoretically useful to talk about them with respect to linguistic constructs as well. In addition, one must not neglect the fact that it is social reality that makes promise a promise: an obligation to fulfil it is what members of societies learn. In other words, social conventions create an explanatory shortcut through intentions.

This theoretical machinery of satisfaction conditions for speech acts must not be seen as a replacement of truth conditions. Although the origin of ordinary language philosophy was precisely a reaction to verificationism, truth, logical metalanguage and other tools and characteristics of the formal analyses of language from the first half of the twentieth century, truth and appropriateness eventually merged in an attempt to formalise speech acts. In Foundations of Illocutionary Logic, Searle and Vanderveken (1985) address such questions as ‘What is the relation between illocutionary force and the meaning of sentences? What is the logical form of performative sentences?’ (p. ix). They want to know whether illocutionary forces are formalisable and how they combine with the propositional content on which they operate. Naturally, the initial obstacle in such an enterprise is the lack of a bi-unique relation between forces and verbs: to advise someone can mean to help them make a decision (‘advise to’) or to inform them about something (‘advise that’); an exclamative ‘watch out’ can be a warning, a threat, or friendly advice (‘Watch out when you read “r” + “z” in Polish: sometimes it is pronounced “ʒ” and sometimes “rz”.’). Moreover, some illocutionary forces are conveyed through non-lexical means such as mood, word order or intonation. However, having acknowledged this initial hurdle, there is a lot to say about possibilities of formalisation. Illocutionary forces are operators that take propositions as arguments. For example, (14) can be formalised as in (14a), where ‘F’ stands for the illocutionary force associated with promising and ‘P’ for the proposition ‘Kasia will pay for the dinner’ (when uttered by me).

(14) I promise to pay for the dinner.

(14a) F(P)

Sentential connectives can be shown to interact with the force. The force can take scope over negation as in (15)–(15a), or the negation operator (¬) can take scope over the force as in (16)–(16a).

(15) I promise not to wear stiletto heels.

(15a) F(¬P)
(16) I don’t promise to wear stiletto heels.

(16a) \( \neg F(P) \)

The latter is called *illocutionary denegation*, in order to distinguish negating illocutionary force from negating a proposition. Next, illocutionary force is given a precise analysis in terms of its seven components (the illocutionary point, its degree of strength, mode of achievement, propositional content conditions, preparatory conditions, and sincerity conditions and their degree of strength, see Searle and Vanderveken 1985, Ch. 1), and the entire analysis is proposed as an extension to Montague Semantics (see e.g. Vanderveken 1990), combining illocutionary logic with Montagovian intensional logic.

In short, while truth conditions are not easily applicable to speech acts in that false statements may turn out strictly speaking true as in (17) (where the act of stating was indeed performed) or an expression may require a convoluted analysis in order to turn it into a truth-evaluable form, as in the case of indirect speech acts such as the request in (18), truth conditions and felicity conditions meet when the force is recognised as an operator – be it linguistically or contextually realised.

(17) I state that I am a fool.

(18) Are you free to help me with this software?

These inquiries into force and content and attempts at their precise analysis constitute arguably the most valuable and long-lasting aspects of the theory of speech acts when we assess it from the perspective of the second decade of the twenty-first century. On the contrary, attempts at constructing a typology of speech acts have been rather futile: Austin’s was grossly unprincipled, while Searle’s, albeit improved, still did not overcome the problem of the missing indicator of the precise illocutionary force: a speech act may be direct or indirect, and even if it is direct (that is, the sentence contains a performative verb or a grammatical form that clearly signals the speech act type), it still has the flavour of indirectness in that there is no guarantee that a particular kind of force has been conveyed by it. In fact, as Sperber and Wilson (1986: 245) aptly observed, in many cases interlocutors need not be able to identify the type of act for the intended meaning to go through. It appears that Jacob Mey (2007) well captured the nature of speech acts when he pointed out that speech acts are *situated*; they should be investigated only within: (a) the context of the situation in which they appear; and (b) the language in which they are issued. Developing the idea further, for Mey, the object of study of pragmatic theory is a situated pragmatic act and its generalised theoretical equivalent, a *pragmeme*.

Returning to the question of psychologism, it seems that ordinary language philosophers brought psychologism to the fore of attention, so to speak, through the back door. Speaking about fuzzy illocutions and often inscrutable perlocutions, pointing out the indirect means of communicating the main intended content they focused the attention of linguists on the role of intentions and conventions, as well as on the possibilities of theorising about indirectness. Indirectness of human communication is indeed a phenomenon for which we need psychologism back. In §33.5 I move to another attempt at reconciling the extant paradigms, this time with the emphasis on the formal, truth-conditional analysis of meaning but supplemented, in various ways, with the result of inferring meaning from a speaker’s intentions.
To conclude this section, it is important to point out that ordinary language philosophy was a landmark not only when assessed from the perspective of linguistics but also from the perspective of the ‘core’ of philosophy that concerns itself with the nature of reality, namely metaphysics. Those pursuing meaning in natural language have now turned to the properties of linguistic actions and sometimes to their classification, while those pursuing answers to metaphysical questions have been offered a new (after the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle) ‘linguistic turn’: reality and facts do not exist outside language and therefore it is language use that one should pursue. Problems with such an outlook notwithstanding, its place in the history of metaphysics, secured by Austin and late Wittgenstein, cannot be disputed.

33.5 Psychologism and truth conditions: saying, intending and implicating

The trends and paradigms in linguistics in the twentieth century testify to the truth of the claim that adopting formal methods in semantics – and thereby adopting the assumption that natural languages are sufficiently similar to formal languages of deduction to build their semantics around this similarity – need not necessarily mean abandoning an interest in a speaker’s intended meaning and/or the addressee’s recovered meaning. Grice’s program shows that intending and inferring a speaker’s intentions can be built on top of the edifice of truth-conditional semantics. In ‘Logic and Conversation’, Grice (1975) proposes a two-part solution aimed at ‘saving’ truth-conditional semantics. First, there are context-dependent expressions such as indexical terms that have to be filled in by assigning to them a referent, and lexical and structural ambiguities that have to be resolved. Next, there are meanings intended by the speaker that come over and above the proposition literally expressed and that can be inferred according to the principles of reasoning he proposes (the Cooperative Principle and the four maxims associated with it). These pragmatic meanings he calls *implicata*. They are worked out (calculated) with more, less, or no help of the context, through the reasoning principles captured with his four maxims in the process he calls an *implicature*. And it is the totality of meaning, the ‘said’ and the ‘implicated’, that constitutes the object of study. Grice (1957) calls it *non-natural meaning*, or ‘meaning NN’: to mean something ‘NN’ is to make an utterance with an intention of producing a belief in the addressee – a belief that is a result of the addressee’s recognising the speaker’s intention to do so. Various post-Gricean revisions to the maxims notwithstanding, the paradigm still gathers strong support and intention-and-inference-based theory of meaning is arguably the most buoyant approach currently on the market, both in theoretical and applied linguistics. Since the late 1970s the ‘what is said’ began to gain ground to the detriment of ‘what is implicated’: more and more results of pragmatic inference (or, according to some post-Griceans, pragmatic inference or pragmatic *default meaning ascription*) came to be considered as modifications (enrichments, modulations, intrusions into and so forth) of the logical form of the uttered sentence. Disputes concerning the boundary between semantics and pragmatics, as well as the principles for drawing this boundary, have been rife since the late 1980s.

First, philosophers of language started treating psychologism as a criterion for distinguishing two different types of inquiry. When one is concerned with the meaning of sentences, allowing for some limited contribution of content to fill in ‘slots’ signalled by pronouns, adverbials ‘here’ and ‘now’, and other context-sensitive expressions that belong to a small, highly restricted set, one is a minimalist about meaning and searches for a
semantic theory that would account for meanings pertaining to linguistic strings. When one is concerned with the speaker’s intended meaning and/or the meaning recovered by the addressee, one is a contextualist. Now, such additions can be explained by postulating elements of the logical form that are responsible for them (‘indexicalism’) or it can be assumed that at least some of these pragmatic additions to the truth-conditional content do not correspond to any predetermined slots. One can go further and question the assumption that minimal semantics is feasible in that word meanings are not invariant but instead are created in the interaction between words in a particular sentence in a particular context: the compositionality of meaning has to allow for the flexibility of the meanings of the constituents. I have discussed these debates in §33.2 in the context of accounting for the compositionality vis-à-vis the flexibility of meaning. A detailed summary of this lively ongoing debate is beyond the scope of this chapter but it has to be pointed out that the debate re-vindicates psychologism in the theory of natural-language meaning: contextual contribution, be it (a) minimal or (b) going all the way towards the main speech act performed by using a linguistic expression, leads to a version of a theory of what is said, rather than a theory of sentence meaning. As soon as linguists start talking about context-dependence, be it through indexicals like in Kaplan’s (1989) content-character distinction or through free, syntactically uncontrolled enrichments and other modifications, we are already in the domain of the said. In fact, on this level of generalisation, Frege himself was guilty of psychologism about meaning: instead of saying that substitution of coreferential expressions goes through for the purpose of the theory of meaning although it appears to us not to go through, he introduced intersubjective senses and thereby made verification itself operate on a pragmatic rather than a semantic object.

33.6 Philosophy and language sciences: future directions

To conclude, it is important to emphasise that the interface between linguistics and philosophy has benefited both parties. For linguistics, addressing the question of the nature of meaning gave rise to increasingly more adequate semantic and pragmatic theories. For philosophy, the pursuit of meaning gave rise to new ways to address metaphysical questions. A striking example is the ‘linguistic turn’ in metaphysics, referred to earlier as ‘linguistic philosophy’, according to which knowledge and truth can only be attained through analysing language in that the only reality there is, and the only facts there are, are immersed in linguistic description. Unkempt as this approach was, it is a worthy reminder that language constitutes a medium through which humans conceptualise the world and, in view of mounting evidence for linguistic relativity (at least at the level of concept combinations if not atomic concepts themselves, see e.g. Levinson 2003), natural-language meaning is a worthy object of study. Epistemology, ethics and political philosophy also concern themselves with meaning in language. These areas of interface are too large to be covered here but let us consider one example. In Lying, Misleading, and What Is Said, a book subtitled ‘An Exploration in Philosophy of Language and Ethics’, Saul (2012) distinguishes between lying and merely misleading, approaching the distinction through a pursuit of an adequate concept of ‘saying’, continuing with the question as to whether merely misleading is ‘morally better’ than saying. She demonstrates that topics that bring together philosophy of language and moral philosophy are worth exploring. Needless to say, the same goes for pairing philosophy of language with other areas of philosophy and, on a greater scale, with various disciplines in social and natural sciences. It is a rather short-sighted view to claim, as some do, that scientific disciplines and various areas of philosophical study ‘carve off
chunks’ of philosophy of language, leaving it to die a slow but sure natural death. The perspectives for the future of philosophy of language seem to be quite the reverse.

In a talk delivered at the Cambridge University Moral Sciences Club, David Chalmers (2015) asks a pertinent question: ‘Why isn’t there more progress in philosophy?’ He assesses some possible answers such as that philosophers have not converged on a set of big questions, let alone a set of answers to such putative questions that would produce what we call knowledge. He then assesses the utility of methods in philosophy, where in addition to the overall method of argumentation (as opposed to experiment in science or proof in mathematics), philosophers use some sophisticated methodologies, among which there are formal or linguistic ones. Whether advances in such methods aid the progress depends on what assumptions one holds about the existence of objective empirical truths and their accessibility to the human mind. But one can contend that the pursuit of meaning in language will continue and the question ‘What is meaning?’ will remain a philosophical one, even if the methods include those associated with formal semantics, neuroscience of language, or corpus linguistics. It seems safe to surmise that in theory construction, as well as in the understanding of empirical data in language sciences, argumentation will always play first fiddle.

Notes
1 On psychologism in the theory of meaning see also Travis (2006) and Jaszczolt (2008).
2 For an introduction to propositional attitude reports see e.g. Jaszczolt (2012).
3 Pace Recanati’s (2004: 90) contextualism in which ‘there is no level of meaning which is both (i) propositional (truth-evaluable) and (ii) minimalist, that is, unaffected by top-down factors.’ But see below (Recanati 2012b) on the current understanding of these ‘top-down factors’: they seem to affect the meaning of the units (words) in the composition rather than the structure itself.
4 On situated speech see Mey (2007).
5 See also chapters 2, 24, 28, this volume.
6 See Jaszczolt (2002: 309–10) for references to some of these precursors.
7 See e.g. Jaszczolt 2002, Chapter 10.3 for a summary of post-Gricean principles and heuristics.

Further reading
Lepore and Smith (2006); Devitt and Hanley (2006); Ludlow (1997).

References


