Intention in pragmatics

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1. Introduction

A significant amount of theorizing in Cognitive-Philosophical pragmatics, or so-called Anglo-American pragmatics, has been premised on the view that communication involves speakers expressing their intentions, and hearers attributing intentions to those speakers. If the intentions attributed by the hearers are roughly the same as those expressed by the speaker, then communication is considered to have been successful. One of the tasks of pragmatics, according to this view, then, is to explicate how exactly the hearer makes these inferences, as well as how speakers and hearers know the ''correct'' inferences have been made, and so determine what counts as (the speaker's) meaning. Levinson (2006a, 2006b), for instance, has recently reasserted the centrality of (Gricean) intentions in postulating an ''interaction engine'' that he argues underpins human interaction.

The capacity for Gricean intentions (as in Grice's 1957 theory of meaning), that is intentions driving behaviours whose sole function is to have the motivating intentions recognized . . . is what makes open-ended communication possible, communication beyond a small fixed repertoire of signals. (Levinson 2006a: 87)

The heart of the matter is *intention attribution*: given the observed behaviour, the interaction engine must be able to infer likely goals that would have motivated the behaviour. (Levinson 2006b: 48)

In Levinson's view, then, human communication is crucially dependent on the existence of communicative intentions, specifically Gricean intentions, which exist in the minds of speakers, and about which addressees make inferences. This presumption of the centrality of intention in communication is common to theorists who hold to view that pragmatics is— or should be—about the study of meaning beyond what is said as a ''core component of a theory of language, on a par with phonetics, phonology,

morphology, syntax and semantics'' (Huang 2007: 4), including adherents of Gricean and neo-Gricean Pragmatics, Relevance Theory, and Speech Act Theory among others. The importance of intention to the Cognitive-Philosophical perspective in pragmatics can be traced to Grice's seminal work on (speaker) meaning. In a break from previous approaches, Grice argued that a speaker meant$_{NN}$ something by x if and only if S ''intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention'' (Grice 1957: 385). Grice's approach to (speaker) meaning was then aligned with more general theories of communication by those developing the field of (linguistic) pragmatics.[1] In the Cognitive-Philosophical perspective on pragmatics, then, there has seemingly been little question amongst theorists that (Gricean) intentions in some form or another lie at the heart of communication.

On the other hand, in much of the theorizing of pragmatics in Socio-cultural-Interactional pragmatics, or so-called European-Continental pragmatics, discussion of the place of intention in communication is notable for its equivocality. Intention is often labeled as ''problematic'' and then only mentioned again in passing, if at all, in the analytical frameworks that are subsequently developed. Verschueren (1999: 48), for example, argues in his call for ''a pragmatic return to meaning in its full complexity, allowing for interacting forces of language production and interpretation'' that while intentions may play a role in the broader sense of ''directedness'', communication is not always dependent on speaker intentions.

It would be unwarranted to downplay the role which intentions also play. An important philosophical correlate of intentionality is 'directedness'. Being directed at certain goals is no doubt an aspect of what goes on in language use … But it would be equally unwise to claim that every type of communicated meaning is dependent on a definable individual intention on the part of the utterer. Such a claim would be patently false. (Verschueren 1999: 48)

In Verschueren's view, then, while intentions do play a role in communication, he does not regard them as always being central to interaction.[2] This equivocal treatment of intention in communication is common to theorists who hold the view that pragmatics is—or should be—about ''the study of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society'' (Mey 2001: 6), or alternatively ''a general cognitive, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behaviour'' (Verschueren 1999: 7). The equivocality, or even rejection, of a role for intention in analyzing interaction has thus arguably been a central tenet in the Sociocultural-Interactional perspective on pragmatics.

In light of the entrenched nature of views on intention in both the Cognitive-Philosophical and Sociocultural-Interactional traditions in pragmatics, it is perhaps not surprising that the question of the place of intention in pragmatics has been attended to only sporadically by researchers. Yet, while debates about intention in pragmatics have been somewhat limited—as opposed to ongoing work in psychology and cognitive science[3]—a number of the issues that have been raised in these debates bring into serious question some of the fundamental assumptions held about the place of intention in pragmatics.

In the case of the Cognitive-Philosophical perspective on pragmatics, the role that Gricean intentions, or refinements thereof, actually play in understanding (speaker) meaning, and more broadly communication, has been hotly debated (Bach 1987; Davis 1998, 2007, 2008; Gibbs 1999, 2001; Green 2007, 2008; Jaszczolt 2005, 2006; Keysar 2007; Recanati 1986; Saul 2001; Searle 1983, 1990; Thompson 2008). These debates have involved, for instance, challenges to Grice's emphasis on the reflexivity of (communicative) intentions, the drawing of attention to the relative neglect of conventionality in the Gricean account of meaning, and proposals that shared or "we-intentions", rather than individual intentions, underlie communication. All of these debates indicate that Gricean intentions may play a less central role in communication than traditionally assumed.

In the case of Sociocultural-Interactional pragmatics, while intention has for the most part received little attention, the role intention might nevertheless play in approaches which eschew, or at least remain somewhat agnostic about, "cognitivism" has also been more carefully considered in recent years by conversation analysts and discursive psychologists (Bilmes 1986; Drew 1995, 2005; Edwards 2006; Edwards & Potter 2005; Heritage [1990] 1991; Hopper 2005; Schegloff 1996). Much of this work has centered on the claim that *intention* is more usefully understood as a *post facto* construct that is explicitly topicalized in accounting for actions, including violations of norms or other interactional troubles, or implicitly invoked in other subtle ways through interaction. It has also been argued that intention attribution should actually be regarded as a culture-specific perspective on communication by a number of theorists working in the anthropological tradition (Danziger 2006; Duranti 1988, 1993, 2006; LeVine 1984; Ochs 1984; Richland 2006; Rosaldo 1982). The key claim made by linguistic anthropologists is that the conceptualization of intention as an *a priori* mental state that underpins communication is not necessarily analytically productive, particularly as it is contextualized in different ways across cultures. These arguments indicate that a more radical reconceptualization of the place of (Gricean) intentions in pragmatics may be necessary.

While these various debates considered in isolation might resemble ''squabbles at the margins'' to some (cf. Levinson 2006a: 90), when these arguments are brought together it becomes apparent that the role intention plays is more complex than proponents from both of these broad perspectives in pragmatics might at first glance assume. The aim of this special issue is thus to bring these debates into a single forum, and thereby suggest that while the evidence mounting against the continued placement of Gricean intentions at the centre of theorizing in pragmatics is now substantial, if not overwhelming, there remains a need to account for the cognition that underlies interaction. In this way, it is hoped that more substantive dialogue between scholars working in different traditions about this arguably core issue in pragmatics might be stimulated.

2.   Intention in the mind

While Grice's formulation of the intentions underlying speaker meaning has been debated and undergone various ''refinements'' in accounting for communication, these modifications have for the most part not deviated from the central claim that reflexive intentions to communicate are attributed to speakers by addressees in interaction. However, in the first three papers in this special issue, this assumption is challenged in the context of two of the most important post-Gricean theories of meaning, and communication, respectively, to have emerged, the Expression Theory of Meaning (Davis 2003) and Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995). These papers point towards drawing the conclusion that Gricean intentions are *not* what solely underpin (speaker) meaning, let alone communicative interactions, contrary to Levinson's (2006a, 2006b) recent claims.

Grice's presumption that the intentions underlying meaning need be reflexive is first challenged by Wayne Davis in his paper, ''Expressing, meaning, showing and intending to indicate,'' which opens this special issue. Davis contrasts his approach to speaker meaning and communication with Green's (2007) theory of Self-Expression, the latter of which draws from Grice's original work in characterizing speaker meaning as being dependent on reflexive intentions. According to Green, speaker meaning is (roughly) dependent on making manifest the speaker's belief that *p*, as well as the speaker's intention to make this belief manifest. Davis, however, counters that Green's theory of self-expression is too weak in some respects, while too strong in other respects. In particular, he argues that only first-order intentions, rather than second-order reflexive intentions, are involved in self-expression and speaker meaning. Davis

also argues that while speaker meaning and expression involve *intending to indicate*, they do not involve *showing*.

In Tim Wharton's paper—"'Meaning$_{NN}$' and 'showing': Gricean intentions and relevance-theoretic intentions"—important differences between Gricean and Relevance theoretic approaches to intention are discussed. Gricean intentions are deconstructed by Relevance theorists into the informative intention, that is, the intention "to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions" (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 58), and the communicative intention, namely the intention "to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 61). Thus, while Relevance Theory is often framed as building upon Grice's intention-centered view of meaning, in framing the informative intention as an intention to modify the cognitive environment of the addressee rather than his or her thoughts per se, and by distinguishing it from the communicative intention, Relevance Theory thereby arguably allows for a more nuanced view of intention. Wharton focuses on clarifying the implications of this move in terms of the Relevance Theoretic continuum between strong and weak communication. In particular, he argues there are varying degrees to which hearers are required to consider the intentions of speakers underlying behavior along the continuum between showing and meaning$_{NN}$. He concludes that the range of "meanings" that can arise from an utterance are much more complex than the intentions normally attributed to speakers in explicating their observed behavior, and so must also involve recourse to "fast and frugal heuristics."

The distinction between the informative and communicative intentions is further developed in Enikő Németh T's paper, "Verbal information transmission without communicative intention." Németh T. proposes that there is an important non-communicative form of language use that has been relatively neglected in pragmatics, namely "informative language use." Important differences, as well as similarities, between communicative language use and informative language use are also highlighted. For example, informative language use is characterized as less dynamic than communicative language use, in that there is little room for speakers to make self-corrections or elaborations or for the addressee to provide feedback on what he or she has understood to have been communicated. Németh T. also argues that not all language use involves the speaker intending to inform the addressee of his or her intention to inform (the communicative intention) contrary to the received view in Relevance Theory. The notion of "manipulative intentions" is proposed to account for such cases where the speaker "hides" his or her intention. Németh T. thus goes beyond the traditional Relevance theoretic

distinction between covert and overt communication, which is character-ized in terms of the presence or not of a communicative intention on the part of the speaker, in claiming that manipulative intentions may underlie both informative and communicative language use.

The first three papers in this special issue indicate that there is consid-erable debate in regards to the characterization of intention in prag-matics. While Davis argues second-order (that is, reflexive) intentions, of which Relevance Theoretic communicative intentions are an example, are unnecessary in accounting for speaker meaning, Wharton and Németh T. defend the Relevance Theoretic distinction between informative and com-municative intentions, and so implicitly hold to the position that the in-tentions underlying communication may at times be reflexive. However, they also both move away from the received view in Relevance Theory that there are just two types of intention underlying communication, or more broadly language use, thereby allowing for a more nuanced view of intention and its possible place in pragmatics. Thus, while Cognitive-Philosophical pragmatics clearly owes a considerable debt to Grice's seminal work on the role of intentions in characterizing speaker meaning, a central place for Gricean intentions in Cognitive-Philosophical ap-proaches to meaning and communication is by no means assured.

3.   Intention in interaction

While Cognitive-Philosophical approaches to pragmatics tend to view intention as an *a priori* mental state of speakers, in Sociocultural-Interactional pragmatics intention has for the most part been conceptual-ized as a *post facto* participant resource that emerges through interaction. The next two papers in this issue explore how intention, in the sense of a discursive resource of participants, is interactionally achieved.

Derek Edwards explores the ways in which intention and intentionality are invoked as a discursive description of events in "Intentionality and *mens rea* in police interrogations: the production of actions as crimes." He focuses on how intention(ality) is specifically topicalized in the culturally-embedded context of establishing *mens rea*—the mental state that needs to be attributed to the person charged for it to constitute a crime in the British justice system—in police interrogations. Edwards shows how police carefully attempt to construct through interrogations the degree of culpability of the accused for damage caused to property, ranging from deliberate damage, recklessness, negligence, through to ac-cidental damage. This degree of culpability assumes an underlying scale of "intentionality", and so the analysis focuses on the various strategies

police interrogators use to attribute varying degrees of intention(ality), and the ways in which the accused resist such attributions.

The notion that intentions may be analyzed as a participant resource in disputing meanings is developed further by Michael Haugh in his paper, "Intention and diverging interpretings of implicature in the 'uncovered meat' sermon." Haugh argues that the view that miscommunication involves the addressee incorrectly inferring the speaker's intention gives an impoverished account of the controversy that arose over what was implied by the "uncovered meat" comments made by Hilali during a recent sermon given in a Sydney mosque. While Hilali and his associates made various attempts to ground their interpretation of what was implied by the comments in Hilali's *intended meaning* and how the comments would have been understood by his *intended audience*, these accounts were rejected by media commentators. In tracing this discursive dispute over what was implied, it is argued by Haugh that it could not have been Hilali's intentions per se about which the broader Australian public were making inferences. Instead, it was through differences in underlying sociocultural presuppositions and interpretive norms that these diverging understandings of what was implied arose. In this way, *intention* as a *post facto* participant resource can be exploited in developing a richer explication of "deep misunderstanding" in intercultural contexts.

In the final paper, which concludes this special issue, "Against (Gricean) intentions at the heart of human interaction," Robert Arundale considers the implications of re-conceptualizing communication as interactional for Levinson's (2006a, 2006b) recent claim that Gricean intentions are central to interaction.[4] He carefully marshals evidence to show how Gricean intentions are inconsistent with the dynamic emergence of meaning in interaction. In characterizing interaction as the sequential achievement of coordinated meanings by speakers and hearers, Arundale argues that the Gricean mechanism is not a plausible explanation, contrary to Levinson's (2006a, b) recent claims. In particular, he shows how Gricean intentions cannot account for the ways in which meanings and actions are proactively and retroactively influenced due to the sequential interdependence of utterances in interaction. This means that Gricean intentions, and perhaps intentions in general, should have no privileged place in explaining language use. Arundale goes on to propose that what lies at the heart of interaction is the reflexive attribution of meanings, and the holding accountable of speakers for those meanings. These reflexively attributed meanings range from the words distinguished and turn constructional units recognized, through to the actions understood and the implicatures constructed, as well as the emotions and the relationships developed, among other things. Because recipients hold speakers

accountable for these meanings, Arundale argues that intention does have a place in analysis, namely as a discursive description of events seen to have "directionality" or "aboutness." In doing so, Arundale offers a detailed and sophisticated explication of how communication can be reconceptualized without the need for recourse to (Gricean) intentions.

However, whether one ultimately accepts this move to displace intention in pragmatics, it becomes apparent from these final three papers that intention plays a role in interaction which has not been considered in depth within Cognitive-Philosophical pragmatics thus far. The neglect of the ways in which intention is invoked in discursive dispute of events may seem at first glance to be of peripheral interest in pragmatics, but the stakes can be very high indeed as demonstrated through both Haugh's analysis of the controversy that ensued over the "uncovered meat" comments, and Edwards' analysis of the imputation of *mens rea*, which is crucial to establishing the degree of severity of charges in criminal cases. As Arundale argues, it may be that the place of intention in pragmatics is properly reserved for the analysis of such cases. However, such a move has the potential to widen the gap between Sociocultural-Interactional and Cognitive-Philosophical approaches to pragmatics. The question arises, then, as to whether these perspectives should, or even can, be reconciled.

4.   Reconciling cognitive and interactional perspectives on intention?

The question of whether there is any value in attempting to reconcile Cognitive-Philosophical and Sociocultural-Interactional perspectives on intention lies at the heart of the potential of this special issue to make a contribution to the discipline of pragmatics. In considering the reactions such questions can sometimes elicit, it is perhaps worth recalling a recent "discussion" of the place of intention in pragmatics that ensued during the question time following a plenary at one of the more recent International Pragmatics Association conferences. After the plenary was finished one member of the audience challenged the speaker on whether intention really had such a central role to play in communication. The response from the plenary speaker, however, which was something to the tune of "Well if we're not talking about intention, I don't know what we're talking about," shut down any discussion before it had even begun. The question of the place of intention can thus generate incompatible responses from those working in pragmatics and related disciplines, ranging from "believers" through to "skeptics" (with perhaps not a few "agnostics" in-between). And just as discussing different religious beliefs invariably

ends in conflict and so is invariably avoided, so too apparently is discussion of the place of intention in pragmatics often regarded as unproductive, and the adage "to let sleeping dogs lie" seems apt. The question perhaps arises, then, as to why this special issue on intention in pragmatics?

It is suggested here, in response to such a possible line of argument that disciplines do not advance by avoiding the slippery questions that lay at their very foundations. It is in dealing with seemingly intractable issues that we can see with greater clarity through to the epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions underlying different research traditions in pragmatics. Levinson (2005) has recently suggested that there are three basic levels of analysis in studies of human interaction, what he terms the individual (or linguistic), interactional, and sociocultural systems. The papers in this special issue approach intention at each of these so-called different "levels", and more importantly touch upon possible links between these levels.

The first three papers in this issue, for instance, assume an epistemology grounded in (the minds of) the individual, and (arguably) a positivist ontology in analyzing the place of intention in pragmatics. However, while the contribution by Davis frames intention purely in terms of the individual, for instance, Wharton and Németh T.'s papers also move to some extent towards a conceptualization incorporating insights from an epistemology of intentions grounded in interaction (at least in the weaker sense of interaction as involving more than one person conversing). The second three papers in this issue, on the other hand, assume an epistemology that is grounded in interaction (in the stronger, more technical sense—see footnote 4), and a social constructionist ontology in their analyses of what place intention might productively have in pragmatics. Yet while Edwards approaches intention as a largely interactional phenomenon, Haugh also explores the possible influences of broader sociocultural "norms" in the ways in which intention is invoked in interaction. Arundale's paper touches on all three "levels," and thus provides a useful overview of the epistemological and ontological commitments of Gricean versus social constructionist views of communication and the implications of these for the place of intention in pragmatics.

In teasing out these underlying assumptions, then, we may respond to Schegloff's (2005: 476–477) call for researchers to carefully ground their analyses in some kind of empirical reality. As while the continued existence of multiple perspectives on the place of intention in pragmatics is no doubt a means of advancing the discipline, it is ultimately only through discarding certain views and developing new alternatives that we may ultimately deepen our understanding of meaning, communication and interaction.

Notes

1. Ironically, such a move was not necessarily intended by Grice himself (Arundale 1991; cf. Neale 1992).
2. It is worthwhile noting here, however, that Verschueren makes no sharp distinction between intention in the intuitive folk sense (as an *a priori* plan or motivation underlying an action), and intentionality in the more broad philosophical sense inherited from Brentano of "aboutness" or "directedness" (Nuyts 2000), and so is presumably arguing for the importance of intentionality rather than intention per se in communication.
3. See for instance: Cohen, Morgan and Pollack (1990); Malle, Moses and Baldwin (2001); Malle and Hodges (2005); and Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne and Moll (2005).
4. It is important to note that interactional here does not simply refer to two or more people "talking," but rather is used in the technical sense of "index[ing] the conjoint, nonsummative outcome of two or more factors" (Arundale 2006: 196).

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