Another Look at That Old Chestnut: The Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction* 1

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That there should be a subbranch within linguistics which deals with meaning has been generally accepted in the history of (generative) linguistics:

> ···regardless of whether natural languages employed by human beings function primarily as internal representation codes in which thinking can be carried out, ··· there would appear to be no value in knowing a natural language if no meanings were associated with its expressions. Thus it is uncontroversial (or should be) to assume that the specification of a relation between the expressions of a language and their meaning is a central goal of linguistic theory (Gazdar *et al.* 1985: 6)

Dividing the study of meaning into two components, i.e. semantics and pragmatics, has been the standard view. Now how they should be demarcated is contentious. It seems reasonable to state, however, that limiting semantics to the study of truth-conditional or prepositional meaning[1] has been the standard view.

In his recent book, Stephen Levinson (Levinson 2000) argues for a

tripartite structure, in which pragmatics is divided into pre- and post-semantic components. I have argued elsewhere that this is not an elegant solution (Masuko 1992: 177f.). Levinson claim that this is necessary because implicatures, taken as prototypical pragmatic inferences, contribute to reference resolution including that of indexicals. That now unfortunately appears misguided because David Kaplan, the philosopher whose paper on indexicals has been regarded as the one who laid the claim that indexical fixing is pragmatic, argues that it is not so. In what follows, I shall attempt to elucidate what exactly Kaplan means by this and what implication(s) it has for linguistic theory of meaning.

In his attempt to clarify what exactly semantics should cover, Kaplan (1997:3) offers the following suggestion:

For certain expressions of natural language, a correct Semantic Theory would state rules of use rather than something like a concept expressed.

Such expressions include *ouch* and *oops*. Kaplan calls them "expressives" as they do not 'describe' objects but rather 'express' or 'display'[2] objects. Moreover, *ouch* and *oops* differ with regard to an important point. *Ouch* is "subjective" because it only reflects the speaker's state. *Oops*, on the other hand, is "objective" because, according to Kaplan, anybody, not just the speaker, could see whether the utterance containing the expression was correctly used or not: i.e. *oops* should be uttered when the speaker has just observed a minor mishap. He suggests also that there are "situational" expressives exemplified by the French pronoun *tu* and *goodbye*[3]. Contrasted with these "expressives" are words such as *fortnight*, which are called "descriptives" simply because they describe certain objects.

Kaplan (1997:16) contends that the goal of semantics is "to give a scientific description of the semantics of the object language", i.e. metalinguistic description. Since such descriptions could be attained for indexicals, they are to be dealt with in semantics, and not in pragmatics. Such a semantics may differ from the 'semantics' in its commonly used sense, which might be called "Semantics of Meanings". Kaplan calls this unorthodox subbranch of semantics "Semantics of Use". Semantic information of indexicals can be represented by considering all contexts in which a descriptive sentence is correctly used. Kaplan argues further that the same theory can be extended to cover expressives.

What should pragmatics look like in this scheme? Kaplan suggests that it covers social practices that dictate use of certain expressions whose prototypical examples are expressives and induces speech acts. He considers Grice's (1975) pairing of *conventional* and *conversational implicatures* "unfortunate" (Kaplan 1997: fn. 24), presumably because the former behaves in manners similar to expressives and hence should be treated within his semantics whilst the latter should be dealt with in pragmatics.

If such a claim by Kaplan is deemed tenable, then the traditional division between semantics and pragmatics will no longer hold. Semantics no longer will be described as the study of prepositional meaning or truth-conditional part of meaning. Similarly, pragmatics will no longer be the component of the study of meaning which monopolises non-propositional meanings as some non-propositional meanings will now belong to the Semantics of Use. All this, however, rests on re-examination of his classic paper on indexicals (Kaplan 1979). It is because although it has been taken by most linguists, if not all, as *the* evidence for the argument that indexicals belong to pragmat-

ics as they have to be interpreted in context and that some part of pragmatics is necessary for determining truth conditions, Kaplan now claims is wrong and that he thought he had made it clear in the original argument. As this will require a very careful examination of his original argument—it would be inconceivable otherwise that so many theorists have misunderstood his point, I shall leave it to another occasion.

Notes

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1 Here I am not suggesting that the two are the same. In fact they usually are separate: see, for instance, Masuko (1992) and references therein.

2 Kaplan's *display* (and *express*) corresponds to Masuko's (1992) *convey*.

3 Kaplan (1997: fn. 17) states that they may possibly include "certain honorifics", though he does not explicate which ones.

4 Kaplan's use of *sentence*s and *utterances* seems rather equivocal and they appear interchangeable.

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