

- (1) Today we'll end the course with two topics less focused on literal uses of language than semantics usually is. First, we will talk a little bit about *expressive* language, utterances which can't be fully explained in terms of their meaning or what speech-act they perform. Some interjections, like 'Ouch!', 'Yuck!', or 'Oops!', barely seem to have meaning nor be used to perform a speech act. All they seem to do is to express an *attitude* towards something.
- (2) But meaningful expressions and utterances which perform a speech-act can also express an attitude. Taking on a sarcastic tone for an otherwise normal utterance also expresses an attitude towards its content. Likewise, the utterance

Ice cream isn't tasty.

seems to be an assertion but it also expresses the speaker's negative attitude towards ice cream.

- (3) So, it seems like we need to explain yet another dimension of what's conveyed by an utterance. We could approach this either by giving a separate theory for expressive content or by situating it within our semantic or pragmatic theories. The most common approach is to consider expressive content as a pragmatic enrichment or encroachment on the semantic meaning of a sentence. Compare, for example,

My damned room mate hasn't taken out the trash again.

My room mate hasn't taken out the trash again.

Someone like Kaplan would say that these sentences have the same semantic meaning. But the first one has also expressed anger, a negative attitude, towards my room mate.

- (4) Since there is such immense variety within the category of expressive language, it's difficult to give a unified theory for all of it. Even if you accept the idea that, say, interjections and modifying adjectives merely express attitudes, it's less clear how that view can explain irony or sarcasm. If I say that,

Brandom isn't always a clear writer.

it doesn't seem like I've expressed my attitude towards its content. Rather, I seem to have speaker-meant something different from the sentence's semantic content. If I go even further to sarcastically say that,

It's always an immense pleasure to read Brandom.

I seem to have speaker-meant the opposite of what I am literally saying. This idea, that sarcasm is a kind of inversion, has been developed further by Elizabeth Camp (2012) to include both semantic content and which speech-act is performed by the utterance.

- (5) There is a far ranging debate about how sarcasm and irony should be explained and how well they can be captured by the Gricean machinery of implicature and speaker-meaning. But the

kind of expressive language which we will look more closely at today is *pejoratives*. These are words which express a derogatory or negative attitude. This includes,

- (a) Regular insults like ‘Idiot’ or ‘Dork’.
- (b) Negatively loaded act-descriptions like ‘Steal’.
- (c) Slurs which describe entire groups in a derogatory way like ‘Frog’ for French people.

I have intentionally chosen an example of a slur which largely isn’t in use since one of the characteristic properties of these words is how difficult it is to cancel their derogatory content even when one attempts to mention them neutrally.

- (6) How to explain slurs is a substantial contemporary debate within philosophy of language. One immediate attempt proceeds by considering their relationship to a *neutral counterpart*.
 - (a) According to this view, every slur has an ordinary general term, which thus denotes a group of people or things, as its neutral counterpart.
 - (b) ‘Frog’, for example, has ‘French people’ as its neutral counterpart with which it shares content and extension. The difference is that ‘Frog’ also carries a conventional implicature that the speaker holds a negative attitude or belief about whoever is talked about.
 - (c) As such, the two sentences De bāda meningarna,

Pierre is a frog.

Pierre is French.

have the same semantic content according to this view. But only the first of these sentences would conventionally implicate a negative belief about Pierre when uttered.

This approach to slurs is sometimes called, as Lycan does, *the received view*.

- (7) Theories of slurs face several challenges.
 - (a) The expressive content of a slur seems to be very difficult to deny or cancel. If I say that,

Pierre is no frog.

I’ve only denied that Pierre should be considered a member of the negatively distinguished group. I’ve still conveyed the negative connotation for French people in general. So, the way we explain expressive content can’t be fully compositional.
 - (b) It also seems possible to sometimes use a slur without expressing anything negative about the target. Among friends we can sometimes call each other terrible things without conveying a negative attitude. But, on the other hand, it is the very fact that the words have a negative connotation which explains why we use those and not others for this kind of joking behaviour. So, our theory has to make space both for the conventional negative meaning of slurs and their ability to be used without negative speaker-meaning.
 - (c) If slurs have the same semantic content as their neutral counterparts, it follows that the sentence

All French people are frogs.

is analytically true. But this claim in itself seems to carry negative expressive content which we wouldn't want to accept at all. Worse yet, when a racist calls the Frenchman Pierre a frog, we would have to say that their utterance is true.

- (d) It's not obvious that all slurs even have a neutral counterpart. Many gendered slurs, such as 'Slut' might have a counterpart like 'Promiscuous woman' but since women's sexuality is deeply caught up in our societies normative evaluations it's hardly a *neutral* counterpart.
- (8) Our final subject is *metaphorical* language. A lot of our everyday use of language isn't quite so literal and direct as many philosophers of language would wish. Instead of saying

Max is really someone who can be trusted in every situation.

Your table manners are terrible!

we say things like

Max is a rock.

You're a pig!

So, if we want to explain how we understand language beyond the literal, we need an explanation metaphorical content.

- (9) One important distinction to start with is between *living* and *dead* metaphors. Many ostensibly figurative expressions of our language no longer function metaphorically. The phrase 'ear-marked', for example, used to be a figurative expression alluding to the practice of marking the ears of animals to distinguish them. Today, this connection has been lost and the phrase literally means that something is intended for a specific purpose. Metaphors which have lost their figurative content and turned literal in this way are usually called *dead* metaphors.
- (10) There are many theories of metaphorical language. Here, I will discuss the two most influential kinds, but there are a few others mentioned in the course book. First up is *simile theory*.
 - (a) There are some striking similarities between metaphor and explicit similes. It seems that we can rewrite both our examples above as similes without changing their meaning.

Max is *like* a rock.

You're *like* a pig!

- (b) The idea behind these theories is that metaphorical language abbreviates similes. That is, we understand metaphorical expressions exactly the same way that we understand similes.
- (c) Searle has criticised this approach for simply exchanging the problem of explaining metaphor with the question of which similarities are intended to be conveyed by the simile. When Romeo says that

Juliet is like the sun.

there are some specific properties of the sun that he wants to attribute to Julia. And it's not that she consists entirely of gas and is older than the Earth.

- (d) Worse yet, if someone says that

Niklas is like a block of ice.

to convey that he is cold and hard, then the content conveyed by ‘Cold’ and ‘Hard’ is itself supposed to be metaphorical. The speaker doesn’t mean that Niklas has low temperature or solid to the touch.

One way to improve simile theory is to conclude that we should understand all similes literally. As Lycan notes, literal simile is symmetrical; if Max is like a rock, then a rock is like Max. But that doesn’t follow from the claimed simile.

(11) Richard Fogelin (1988) presents an improved version of simile theory along that exact line. According to it a metaphor abbreviates a figuratively understood simile.

(a) To explain what this means, Fogelin claims that every thing has a set of *salient* features. These are those which are immediately noticed when you think or perceive the object.

(b) The literal meaning of a simile can then be explained with the following truth condition.

A is (literally) like B iff A has sufficiently many of B ’s salient features.

(c) The metaphorical content of a simile becomes apparent when the literal meaning is clearly false, that is when A doesn’t actually share enough of B ’s salient features. When this happens, A ’s salient features set the standard for which of B ’s features are relevant for the comparison. This is captured in the following truth condition for figurative similes. Vi får alltså ett sanningsvilkor i stil med

A is (figuratively) like B iff A has sufficiently many of B ’s features which are salient with respect to A ’s salient features.

(d) Salient features both answers Searle’s objection about which similarities are intended to be conveyed and explains why similes aren’t symmetrical. The two objects can simply have different salient features.

(e) That the conditions demand that the objects share *sufficiently many* features also means that they are deeply contextual. Which features are salient and how many of them the objects have to share can only be determined within a context of utterance which sets the applicable standard of similarity.

(12) Even the improved theory faces some issues.

(a) Sometimes the information we want to convey metaphorically through a simile isn’t a property that B actually has; it’s only a false stereotype. So, if we understand salient features as real properties of the object, then the theory seems to get some examples wrong. When I say,

You’re like a pig!

to complain about your table-manners, the idea is that the way you eat should specify which of a pig’s features are salient in this context. But pigs are very cleanly animals. They simply don’t have a feature of eating disgustingly which, if you share it, would make the figurative simile true.

(b) Many sentences have both a metaphorical and a literal reading, like

Adolf is a butcher.

According to simile theory, this sentence would be ambiguous between its literal meaning and the hidden simile

Adolf is like a butcher.

and that we can only determine which is expressed by considering the context of utterance. But this supposed ambiguity is not one we seem to notice.

- (c) Even if simile theory can handle simple metaphors quite well, it's not as clear how it can explain more complicated poetical language. Lycan takes the following line of poetry as an example.

When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows.

This metaphor is complicated enough that it's difficult to see how we can rephrase it as one or more similes.

- (13) The other popular theory of metaphor that we'll discuss considers it a pragmatic phenomenon. Essentially, the theory denies that there is any non-semantic metaphorical content and instead tries to explain metaphor in Gricean terms. Searle (1975) is one of the key figures in the development of this theory.

- (a) Whenever we try to understand an utterance, the first step is to determine whether it should be understood literally. We do this by considering whether it violates any of the communicative maxims governing the conversation. If the utterance seems false, uninformative, irrelevant, or badly formulated when interpreted literally, we conclude that the speaker tried to convey something other than the literal meaning of their words.
- (b) The next step is to determine whether we should understand the speaker-meaning of the utterance as a metaphor. As we've seen when discussing implicature, an utterance can be literally defective in several ways without being meant metaphorically. As such, Searle thinks that we have to look for cues that speak in favour of understanding the utterance as metaphor, like whether any similarities or comparisons are being made.
- (c) Having identified some possible speaker-meanings which are metaphorically connected to the utterance, the final step is to determine which of them is most likely to be intended by the speaker. This is done by seeing which speaker-meaning fits best with both the communicative maxims as well as our information about the context of utterance.

Accordingly, Searle thinks that metaphor is just a special kind of conversational implicature, where the speaker-meaning differs from the literal interpretation of the utterance by making a comparison.

- (14) As always, there are some objections.

- (a) Although Searle has denied that there is any metaphorical kind of meaning, he still accepts that metaphor indirectly conveys content. They do so through speaker-meaning, which is still the same *kind* of meaning as literal semantic meaning. As such, metaphor still conveys semantic content, whether that should be understood as propositional, truth-conditional, or something else. But it's not clear that all metaphorical language conveys this something so

specific as semantic content. A metaphor can convey a vague framework or perspective in a way which is difficult to capture propositionally. Note that this argument is also applicable to simile theory.

- (b) On the other hand, speaker-meaning seems insufficient to explain the content of metaphor since that would imply that they can't mean anything beyond what the speaker intended to convey. But we can imagine a metaphorical claim to be enlightening to the degree that it conveys far more than the speaker can have intended with the utterance.
- (c) Many words have several literal meanings which seems to be related by some kind of metaphorical similarity. Take, for example the word 'charge'.

I charged the battery.

I charged the enemy.

I charged your bank account.

I charged the perpetrator.

Each of these meanings is literal, but there seems to be some underlying metaphor which explains why these distinct meanings are expressed with the same word. But without a wider notion of metaphor than Searle allows for, this phenomenon is beyond explanation.