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Varieties of linguistic conventions.
A book symposium on Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone's
Imagination and Convention. Distinguishing Grammar and Inference in Language
(Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015)

Imagination and Convention by Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone (2015) is a thought provoking book that challenges the predominant Gricean paradigm in the philosophy of language and develops an alternative framework based on the idea "of language [conventions] as a specifically social competence for making our ideas public" (Lepore and Stone 2015: 198).

According to the broadly Gricean picture of linguistic practice, the meaning of a speech act is constituted by the speaker's communicative intention, i.e., by her intention to produce a certain response in the hearer by means of getting him to recognise this intention (Grice 1989; Strawson 1964; Bach and Harnish 1979; Sperber and Wilson 1995). The proponents of the Gricean tradition also claim that verbal comprehension "involves a mixture of coding and inference" (Wilson and Sperber 2012: 263). More specifically, they maintain that what plays a key role in *determining* the meaning of a speech act – i.e., in *recognising* the speaker's communicative intention – is not our knowledge of semantic rules, but our *inferential* or *mind-reading* ability that allows us to enrich and modulate the linguistically determined meanings of the words uttered by the speaker. A central idea behind the Gricean programme is that the inferential mechanisms underlying verbal comprehension form a natural class in that they all are guided by general principles of cooperation and rationality. It is instructive to stress that in foregrounding the importance of inferential mechanisms of intention-recognition in verbal communication, the Griceans sideline the role of language conventions. That is to say, they embrace a bare-bones model of grammar, according to which the domain of conventional meanings comes down to what can be determined by the rules of lexical and compositional semantics.

A central idea behind the framework developed by Lepore and Stone is that the function and content of a speech act is constituted by what they call the speaker's *basic intention*, i.e., her intention to produce "an utterance of a specified linguistic structure [and contribute] its grammatically specified meaning to an ongoing conversation" (Lepore & Stone 2015: 208). In other words, according to the view they call *direct intentionalism*, intentions underlying our conversational practice of meaning-making can function only against the shared background of

linguistic conventions that constitute part of our social competence. In most cases, then, verbal comprehension involves a mixture of coding (or, more accurately, *convention-recognition*) and disambiguation: in interpreting an utterance, the hearer recognizes the conventions invoked by the speaker and, if there are two or more alternative readings of her words, decides which one of them is right. Therefore, "where [the Gricean models] have postulated pragmatic processes of enrichment, what's really going on is disambiguation: finding the right reading of the utterance, understood as a grammatically specified pairing of form and meaning." (Lepore and Stone 2015: 88) The authors of *Imagination and Convention*, then, reject the bare-bones conception of grammar and claim that the domain of linguistic conventions is broader and more diversified that it is envisaged by the proponents of the Gricean programme: besides the well-known principles of lexical and compositional semantics, it involves rules and norms of the *grammar of speech acts*, the *grammar of information structure*, and the *grammar of discourse reference*, as well as other principles that associate linguistic items with conventional meanings. Lepore and Stone acknowledge that not all interpretive effects of our utterances can be accounted for along these lines. That is to say, there are creative and non-conventional uses of language – involving metaphors, sarcasm, irony, hints, and other figures of speech – that trigger open-ended and productive inferences on the part of the hearer and prompt his imaginative engagements. According to Lepore and Stone, however, the inferences prompted by figurative uses of language do not form a natural class; that is to say, the imaginative mechanisms in question are heterogeneous and as such cannot be reduced to a general inferential strategy guided by the principles of rationality and cooperation.

It is instructive to stress that accepting the non-Gricean framework developed by Lepore and Stone we can no longer regard the notion of *conversational implicatures* as a theoretically useful category. In other words, according to the view in question there are no conversationally implied meanings. Lepore and Stone argue, namely, that interpretive effects traditionally classified as conversational implicatures can be accounted for *either* by reference to the rules of extended grammar and, if necessary, the process of disambiguation, *or* in terms of our productive and heterogeneous inferential abilities that have nothing to do with general principles of rationality and cooperation. In short, most, if not all, *allegedly* pragmatic meanings can be explained away *either* as conventional *or* imaginative interpretive effects.

The authors of the papers collected in this volume discuss various aspects of Lepore and Stone non-Gricean model of communication. Manuel García-Carpintero argues that indirect assertions are genuine conversational phenomena that can be best described and explained as cases of conversational implicatures. Kasia Jaszczolt and Joanna Odrowąż-Sypniewska focus on the notion of *convention* and the role it plays in our theorizing about linguistic practice. Marcin

Matczak and Maciej Witek use the tenets of direct intentionalism to account for the nature of legal interpretation and the phenomenon of accommodation, respectively.

In "There Are Indirect Assertions", Manuel García-Carpintero argues that the category of conversational implicatures is a useful theoretical tool. In particular, he claims that it can be used to account for indirect assertions, which, *pace* Green (2015), constitute genuine conversational phenomena. It is instructive to stress that García-Carpintero agrees with a lot of what Lepore and Stone say about language and communication. For instance, he rejects the Gricean model of speech acts in favour of the Austinian approach, the central tenet of which is that the force of an act is determined by the rules or norms invoked by the speaker rather than by her communicative intention (Austin 1975; Alston 2000; García-Carpintero 2004; Williamson 1996). Nevertheless, he argues that this broadly Austinian picture can and should allow for the phenomenon of indirect speech acts and, by the same token, for the existence of conversational implicatures. In particular, García-Carpintero develops a neutral account of conversational implicatures and argues that it can be used within the Austinian framework.

In "On Unimaginative Imagination and Conventional Conventions: Response to Lepore and Stone", Kasia Jaszczolt refers to Strawson's (1964) distinction between *linguistic conventions proper*, that determine semantic representations of well-formed sentences, and *extra-linguistic conventions*, that constitute social practices and procedures such as weeding ceremonies, parliamentary debates, and so on. She also argues that there is a "whole battery of cases in-between", e.g., standardized strategies for performing indirect illocutionary acts (Bach and Harnish 1979), rhetorical structure rules (Asher and Lascarides 2003), and cognitive, socio-cultural and world knowledge defaults (Jaszczolt 2010, 2016). In short, Jaszczolt agrees with the observation that not all conventions governing our public inquiry are linguistic. Nevertheless, she is reluctant to call this variety of conventions a 'grammar'. She also suggests that Lepore and Stone's rejection of the Gricean approach to meaning is not sufficiently motivated. She claims, namely, that "developing the convention-based aspects of the theory of meaning need not go in tandem with relegating intentions to a secondary role."

In "Conventions of usage vs. meaning conventions" Joanna Odrowąż-Sypniewska focuses on Lepore and Stone's account of indirect speech acts. In particular, she critically discusses the analysis they offer for the request made in uttering "Can I have a French Toast?". What she finds controversial is their idea that "can" is lexically ambiguous between inquiry and request readings. Finally, she compares Lepore and Stone's model of indirect speech acts with the account developed by Searle (1979) and with Michael Devitt's (2004) semantic treatment of the referential/attributive distinction. Searle distinguish conventions of usage from meaning conventions; he also argues that it is the former, not the latter, that underlies the functioning of conventionalised indirect speech acts.

Lepore and Stone, in contrast, follow Devitt in regarding all conventions of usage as meaning conventions; as a result, they take the rules governing the production and interpretation of indirect speech act to be part of a grammar. According to Odrowąż-Sypniewska, however, any account that takes conventions of usage to be meaning conventions is committed to concede global ambiguity.

In "Does Legal Interpretation Need Paul Grice? Reflections on Lepore and Stone's *Imagination and Convention*", Marcin Matczak argues that the non-Gricean framework developed by Lepore and Stone provides an attractive tool for the theorist of legal interpretation: despite the fact that the Gricean model of meaning is a dominant paradigm in legal philosophy and legal theory, its externalist alternative better reflects the nature of legal discourse. Matczak starts his paper with a critical discussion of the internalist model of legal interpretation, according to which the lawmaker is a Gricean speaker whose communicative intentions determine the meanings of her law-making acts. He claims that there are at least three shortcoming of the internalist model of legal discourse: first, the lawmaker is not a person, but a group; second, the group does not speak, but use written instruments to communicate; third, the communication involves complex discourses rather than isolated sentences. According to Matczak, all these features of legal communication can be adequately accounted for along the externalised lines offered by Lepore and Stone. He argues, however, that their original model – i.e., direct intentionalism – is still too Gricean in that it makes room for meaning-constituting intentions. To cope with this difficulty, he proposes to supplement Lepore and Stone's framework with Ruth G. Millikan (2005) concept of conventions as lineages.

In "Accommodation and Convention", Maciej Witek uses Lepore and Stone's model of meaning-making to account for the phenomenon of accommodation. Roughly speaking, accommodation is a context-adjusting (Stalnaker 2002) or context-repairing (Lewis 1979; cf. Witek 2013, 2015) process that is guided by the need to maintain the default assumption that the speaker's utterance constitutes an appropriate move in a language game. He starts his paper with a brief reconstruction of Lepore and Stone model, which results from integrating direct intentionalism and extended semantics. Next, he presents and discusses the phenomenon of accommodation as it occurs in conversational practice. Finally, Witek develops an externalist account of the discursive mechanisms underlying accommodation. In particular, he argues that the mechanisms in question function against the background of rules of appropriateness, which associate linguistic forms with tacit actions that the use of these forms commits the speaker to, and are guided by the Maxim of Appropriateness, which a social or conversational norm. According to Witek, the rules of appropriateness play a key role in determining the speaker's tacit actions that the hearer is invited to accommodate. For this reason, they can be regarded as part of the extended grammar of the language used by the speaker.

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