

**The theses of the PhD dissertation**

**THE PROBLEM OF INTENTIONALITY IN THE  
PRAGMATICS OF COMMUNICATIVE  
LANGUAGE USE**

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## **1. The scope of the dissertation**

The problem of intentionality is at the intersection of the research fields of human language and cognition as well as the philosophy of language and pragmatics. Although the word, intentionality is not present in our everyday language use, this does not ensure that the term is univocal and unambiguous in scientific context. Many studies emphasises the necessity of defining intentionality and provide different definitions of it. However, the problem itself has a wider scope: the question concerns to the nature of intentionality as well as its role in the domains of language, communication, cognition, social acts, rationality and cooperation. Although each field is connected to the other, it is impossible to investigate all of them in the expected comprehensive fashion. Therefore, I must focus on a single, particular problem of intentionality.

Intentionality is defined in its widest interpretation as aboutness, direction upon a mental content or reference to it. The particular analytical definitions of intentionality in the narrow sense differ from each other regarding their different foci on the nature of mental states (intentions) and on the nature of their mental contents. The same method of narrowing applies for the discipline of pragmatics. My dissertation is concerned with the different approaches to intentions in the traditional, analytical philosophy based linguistic pragmatics and in relevance theory. If we overview the history of linguistic pragmatics, it will be revealed that the first author addressing the question of intentionality was Austin (1940/1970, 1946/1970, 1956a/1970, 1956b/1970, 1962a, 1962b, 1966/1970) (Németh T. 2007, 2008a, Bódog 2008: 24). He argued that the felicity conditions of the particular illocutionary acts contain feelings, intentions (in the sense of want) and thoughts that the person performing/carrying out the given act must possess. These conditions have undergone serious investigations made by Searle (1969, 1979, 1983) who tried to individuate the sincerity conditions of illocutionary acts only by their corresponding intentions. Searle is concerned with the role of the speaker in communicative language use and tried to approach it from the third person perspective of the so-called belief-desire-intention psychology. Contrary to the Searlean focus, Grice (1957, 1975, 1982) adopted the perspective of the hearer. His so-called inferential pragmatics investigates the role of the hearer in communicative language use. The central concepts of the Gricean and the neo-Gricean pragmatics involve the speaker's intention and implicature, and their analysis can shed light on the problem of intentional states

in communicative language use. My dissertation only focuses on the approaches of Austin, Searle and Grice, since the neo-Gricean approaches preserve the Gricean concepts, and the received version of the speech act theory is the Searlean one. The Searlean and the Gricean approaches were amalgamated by relevance theory that conceptualises the naturalisation claim of the analytical philosophy based pragmatics in its strongest form. To sum up, the present dissertation investigates the pragmatics of Austin, Searle, Grice and relevance theory from the perspective of their approaches of intentional states.

## **2. The goals of the dissertation**

The main goal of the present dissertation is to demonstrate that the traditional, philosophically motivated linguistic pragmatics and relevance theory is incapable to give a proper, comprehensive account of intentional states since their scope is limited to the causally effective explanation of speaker's intentions. I reach my goal through the analysis of the pragmatics of Austin, Searle, Grice and relevance theory. There are plenty of papers related to intentionality in the field of pragmatics, yet, the outcome of only the above-mentioned (Austin, Searle, Grice and relevance theory) approaches is widespread in contemporary pragmatical theorising.

According to my main goal, I must tackle the philosophical foundations of intentionality that determine the approaches of intentionality in the early period of the philosophically motivated pragmatics. I also need to examine the naturalisation claim of contemporary cognitive science that affects relevance theoretical pragmatics.

The main goal of the present dissertation is reached by the accomplishment of three subgoals.

1. I analyse the approaches to intentional states in the pragmatics of Austin, Searle, Grice and relevance theory and argue that the approaches to intentionality of the received version of speech act theory (as developed by Searle), of the Gricean inferential pragmatics and of the relevance theory reduce the intentions to be examined.
2. I demonstrate that such a reduction has emerged due to the individualistic fashion of analytical philosophy of mind and intentionality.

3. I argue that the state of art in the traditional, reductive and individualist pragmatics is oriented to the third person psychological perspective, which can only investigate the causally efficient reconstruction of intentional states of the speaker.

### **3. Methods used**

My dissertation is composed of three main chapters: after the first introductory chapter, I outline the theoretical landscape on the pragmatically relevant problems of intentionality in the second chapter. In the following, third chapter the Austinian, Gricean, Searlean and relevance theoretical approaches to intentionality are presented. The fourth chapter summarizes the revealed problems of intentionality in pragmatics in a thematic manner.

The second chapter starts with the analysis of the *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (1874) written by Franz Brentano who was the father of the philosophy and psychology of intentionality in the modern age. Applying two different kinds of analyses of this paper is important because I am able to demonstrate how the linguistic and the representational turns of philosophy made the Brentanian approach understandable and applicable to the analytical philosophers. After the critical examination of the analytic, representational interpretation of Brentano's theses, I illustrate through the example of naïve theory mind how this interpretation invades into cognitive psychology. In the second chapter I project that the classical analytical interpretation of intentionality and the approach to naïve theory of mind are of great importance because the traditional philosophically motivated pragmatics emerged from the philosophy of ordinary language use, and the relevance theoretical approach inclines the intentionality interpretation of naïve theory of mind.

In the third chapter I demonstrate the approaches to intentionality by Austin, Searle, Grice and relevance theory. The main body of the third chapter is based on the comparative and contrastive analysis of the works of the above mentioned authors and their theories. The Searlean approach to intentionality is contrasted with Austin's framework, the Gricean interpretation of communicative intention is compared with the relevance theoretical perspective. In this section I show evidence for the circularity present in the relevance theoretical approach (which is) based on the careless acceptance and application of the naïve theory of mind. In the fourth chapter I summarize the main results of my analyses in a thematic fashion.

## **4. Results**

### ***4.1. Approaches to intentionality in the analytical tradition***

In the second chapter of my dissertation I demonstrate that in the second half of the twentieth century a consensual standpoint arose about the nature of intentionality in the philosophy of language and mind, which is based on the Brentanian theses of intentionality on the one hand, but transform them in the traditional analytic way on the other hand. According to this analytical claim, (i) we possess mental states that direct upon some kind of mental contents, (ii) these contents can be internal or external, (iii) the mental states can be represented as attitudes, and their contents as propositions, (iv) we accept the view of inner realism regarding to propositional attitudes, (v) we assume mental representations behind the propositional attitudes. In this chapter I demonstrate that the view of intentionality in the received version of cognitive psychology is not inherited from the original Brentanian theses, but from the above mentioned analytical consensual standpoint. This heritage is unreflected in the field of cognitive psychology; therefore, it leads to contradictory theoretical practice.

### ***4.2. Intentionality in speech act theory***

Pragmaticians claim that the father of speech act theory was Austin. The commonly held view states that his approach was later elaborated in the received version of speech act theory (as developed by Searle), so it is inevitable to discuss the Austinian notion of intention. As a result of my analysis, I conclude that despite Austin's analytical commitments (as he is one of the founders of philosophy of ordinary language use), his view of intentionality does not fit into the consensual analytical approach: Austin rejects the inner realist position of intentionality and proposes a natural, direct version of it. He emphasizes that in ordinary language use intentions have either individual or interpersonal character, and the lexical and linguistic individuation of them is not trivial. He proposes, therefore, that the intention based individuation of illocutionary acts would be a highly uncertain process.

In contemporary pragmatics we refer to Austin as a historical figure in pragmatics, and we tend to think that his speech act theory was elaborated and systematised by his pupil, Searle. After the collation of intentionality related establishments in the two versions of speech act theory (one of Austin and one of Searle), I confirm the verdict of Rajagopalan

(2000), namely that the received version of speech act theory is not a continuation, but a redraft of the classical, Austinian framework.

I demonstrated by the comparison of the Austinian and Searlean approaches to intentionality that speech act theory is not homogenous regarding to its different views of intentionality. Despite the fact that Austin and Searle both argue for individual and collective intentions, Austin treats collective intentions as interpersonal, while Searle treats them as individual. The Austinian framework argues against the dichotomic system of intentions and conventions (which is invisible for those who only read *How to do things with words* (1962b) by Austin). Contrary to Austin, Searle — despite his efforts to integrate both individual and collective intentions into the system of sincerity conditions of illocutionary acts — sketches two distinctive worlds for individual and collective, social factors. Although Austin distinguishes personal and interpersonal factors of intentions as well, he argues for the individual nature of beliefs, the social nature of knowledge and that interpersonal contents (like knowledge) are irreducible to individual states. The Searlean account of such externalism is difficult to establish because he pretends to accept the legitimacy of interpersonal content (via the acceptance of collective intentions), meanwhile he puts collective intentions in the heads of individual speakers (therefore, he denies the legitimacy of external contents).

#### ***4.3. The Gricean notion of communicative intention***

The scope of intentional phenomena in Gricean inferential pragmatics is highly reductive; it only sheds light on the communicative intention of the speaker. According to his framework of speaker's intentions, mental content together with its intentional aspects will become part of the communicative language use if the speaker is led by some kind of intention while the hearer is led by the reflexive intention to recognize speaker's intention. My analysis confirmed that the reinterpretation of the structure of the speaker's intention necessarily involves the distinction of mental and non-mental factors. Although Grice emphasizes the adequacy of the personal level explanation of communicative intention, the later references typically pose intentionality to the sub-personal level (this method is excessively used by relevance theory). Whether we pose intentionality on the personal or the sub-personal level, we have to face the fact that intentions belong to the individual speaker, his intentions are invisible for the

communicative partner. The hearer must use his own inferential apparatus in order to interpret the speaker's utterance.

The Gricean theoretical framework clearly shows that there was a shift in the intentionality related discussions of philosophy of ordinary language use: while the focus of the Austinian analyses was on the exceptional cases of ordinary language use in order to shed light on the causes of unsuccessful communicative language use, the Gricean analyses address the conditions for successful communicative language use in the absence of the directly accessible mental contents and intentions of the speaker.

Since Grice favours mentalism, he prefers the individualistic perspective of intentionality as well. While his approach to intentionality only focuses on the communicative intention of the speaker, his views adopted by cognitive psychology made him the father of the naïve theory of mind (which clearly tries to give a full-fledged account of intentionality). I argue that this appointment is misleading because (i) Grice himself discredited the legitimacy of the cognitive approaches to intentionality, (ii) his interpretation of M-intention is reflexive, and this reflexivity is of an interpersonal nature, and (iii) there are more than one possible readings of his Cooperative Principle.

#### ***4.4. Relevance theory***

Relevance theory combines the Searlean and Gricean approaches to communication, eliminates the partiality of their account to communication and communicative language use, and it also redefines pragmatics as a component of cognition. I demonstrate that this dual heritage is present in the relevance theoretical approach to intentionality as well.

The views of relevance theory on intentionality are based on the features of cognitive science committed to the consensual standpoint of analytic tradition (as it is defined in 4.1). According to such analytic fundamentals, relevance theory as well as the Searleian approach to intentionality reflect features of individualism (because it partially integrates the Searleian code model of information processing), they explicate inner realism regarding the states of intentions and reduce the intentions of communicative language use to beliefs, desires and intentions. Relevance theory as well as the Gricean approach assume that during the processes of understanding, which require cognitive efforts, we have to infer the partner's invisible,

directly inaccessible, private mental states and their contents in order to work out the optimal interpretation of his utterance. According to this scenario of interpretation, understanding may be uncertain whenever information conveying and processing involves intentional elements.

Relevance theory assumes that a proper theory on the intentionality of communicative language use must deal with the ostensive behaviour of the communicator and the metarepresentational processes of his or her partner. Such metarepresentation is based on the mechanisms of the naïve theory of mind. The latter element of the relevance theoretical approach to intentionality leads to the circularity of its explanation of communication because relevance theory uses the cognitive psychological explanations to the naïve theory of mind in order to argue for the legitimacy of the analytical consensual standpoint of intentionality, such standpoint is the basis of the cognitive psychology of the naïve theory of mind.

#### ***4.5. The problems of the traditional, consensual approach to intentionality***

One of the aims of my dissertation is to thematise the problems of intentionality in the pragmatics of communicative language use. It is important to stress that at the moment there are no solutions to these problems inside the traditional, philosophically motivated pragmatics, partially because the problems themselves are not articulated well within the field.

##### **The first problem:** *The reduction of intentions*

The examined pragmatic theories (except the Austinian speech act theory) reduce the intentional states to beliefs, desires and intentions as propositional attitudes. This method presupposes that (i) the mental states as intentional states can be unproblematically identify with their linguistic description and (ii) these states form mental representations, so inner realism is true.

##### **The second problem:** *The individualisation of intentions*

The acceptance and application of the above mentioned presuppositions lead to the following controversial situation: the theories of intersubjective cognition are committed to the solipsistic account of representational theory of mind. According to the first problem, the examined pragmatic theories (except the Austinian speech act theory) handle the intentions of



communicative language use in an individualist fashion. Searle, Grice and the relevance theoretical approach apply Shannon and Weaver's cybernetic model of information processing. One of the consequences of the acceptance of this model is that the traditional theories must deal with the fact that understanding during communicative language use is hazy and uncertain. Since we think of communication as information conveying and processing, the application of the cybernetic model is the most plausible choice as a basis of modeling communication. Tracing back the indirectness of understanding to the cybernetic model suggests what happens to the intentions behind the linguistic choices of the speaker. However, these intentions are often not present in the causally efficient explanations of communicative language use. Due to the cybernetic model and the indirectness of understanding, the hearer must reconstruct the speakers' intentions. In addition, this reconstruction is causally efficient even without considering all speaker's intentions.

**The third problem:** *the third person psychological explanation of intentions*

I argue that Searle and relevance theory try to give a full-fledged theory on the intentionality of communicative language use, but their accounts are limited to the beliefs, desires and intentions of individual minds. The fact that Searle consciously neglects and rewrites the Austinian account of intentionality and his methods of theory building and that relevance theory is bound by the mechanistic methods of computational cognitive psychology clearly shows that each of these accounts investigates intentionality from the third person perspective. Grice himself uses this perspective as well since he investigates the role of the hearer during intentional communicative language use.

This third person perspective necessarily works on the causally efficient explanations of intentional states, therefore, it is inadequate to use it to reveal all of the speaker's intentions during communicative language use.

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