

# The Act of Meaning

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Speakers sometimes use an expression in a nonstandard way. This happens either because of the appearance of new things, or because of a change of interest and focus. Today, we can buy CD versions of many classics, from Hume's *Treatise* to Dante's *Comedia* or the *Oxford Dictionary*. Having bought a CD containing a copy of one such text, we might say that we have bought a *book*. This isn't anymore stretching today English. Oxford UP and other publishers offer CD-books, alongside paper versions, and what only ten years ago was a nonstandard use is becoming standard. The meaning of 'book' has shifted in the last few years. In fact, at the the heart of the dynamics of the semantics of language there is this practice of meaning shift, together with that which introduces new lexical items.<sup>1</sup>

Our concern is with understanding the phenomenon of meaning shift as such. We hope that it will provide some insights into the nature of the semantic link.

Speaker's meaning is, I take it, the act at the core of meaning shift, where meaning can be the very act or its output.<sup>2</sup> What are its conditions, which intentions direct it? What's its mechanics? I will give a first answer to the first question. Then, I will discuss the mechanics of speaker's meaning, as well as meaningful links different from speaker's meaning. This will bring me to surmise a second answer to the first question. Along the way, I will compare the act of meaning with other acts. In closing, I will try a limited elucidation of the notion of intention, which I use throughout.

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning shift can be viewed as a special form of introduction of a new lexical item. For the lexical item is linked with a new entity, and therefore the expression can be seen as a new homophonic and homographic expression. A meaning shift can bring with it a new lexical entry in the dictionary or a rearrangement of the old one, possibly with the adding of a new subentry. Such a rearrangement in the case of *book* would amount to a specification that a book, *qua medium*, can be either "a number of sheets of printed paper fastened together in a cover" or a file recorded on a disk. Hence, the abstract characterization of a book as "literary composition that would fill such a set of sheets or disk" would become primary.

<sup>2</sup> The idea that meaning itself can be the act of speaker's meaning might find support in the fact that the English "mean" can have an animated subject. We can say "'p' means p" but also "I mean p". In Italian, the first gets translated as "'p' significa p", the second as "Io intendo p", whereas "'p' intende p" and "Io significo p" make no sense. But that does not settle the case. If, anyway, meaning is, as suggested in footnote 9, an act of interpretation, its being an act would not help very much in understanding what meaning is.

On these issues there is the conspicuous tradition of studies, originating from the late Paul Grice, to confront us with. Rather naturally, I will move from it. But I am interested in the notion of speaker's meaning and its place in an analysis of meaning, and not in that tradition as such. The notion of speaker's meaning, I think, is relevant even for those who do not subscribe to a Gricean approach to meaning, as I don't.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The conditions for nonnatural meaning.

Grice's aim in reverting to speaker's meaning was, I think, to define the notion of meaningful expression. In "Meaning" (1957), Grice presents for the first time his account of speaker's meaning. Speaker's meaning is, he claims, the act of inducing an audience, by doing an action, to either believe that something or intend to do something, via the recognition of the intentions underlying the action. By uttering "x" the speaker means her audience to believe that *p* (or to intend to do *p*). The account connects language directly with psychological attitudes: an act of meaning is one in which a speaker manifests an attitude aiming to induce another attitude in her audience. Reversing standard priorities, Grice takes the notion of *speaker's meaning* as basic, and defines on its base the other semantic notions, like the *expression's timeless meaning*, and groups all of them as *nonnatural meaning*. People would not mean something because what they utter means it, but the other way around. Well known problems beset Grice's account, *in specie* (a) what is the proper formulation of the intentions which define speaker's meaning, and (b) whether or not the account presupposes meaning. When the account comes down to names and to adjectives (common nouns, verbs), that is to subsentential

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<sup>3</sup> Locally, my views come close to those of Millikan 1984. For instance, I claim that often people perform meaningful actions rather than act of meaning -- the relation between the two being close to that between an intentional action and acting intentionally. The point seems to me close to the one Millikan (1984) does at p. 62, where she distinguishes between acting following an explicit intention and acting purposefully. A point even closer to mine is at p. 67, where Millikan writes:

The truth in Grice's model is that we have the ability to interrupt and prevent the automatic running on of our talking and our doing-and-believing-what-we-are-told equipment, and assume others have this ability too.

Indeed, I maintain that only in occasion of a meaning shift, there is an act of meaning.

Besides, I claim that when we have problem in understanding what has been meant, we do not inquire into what are speaker's intentions, but look at the context and at how the speaker has acted on it. Cf. Millkan (1984), p. 65.

Yet, my account is much more sympathetic to Grice and is still driven by the notion of intention, though with a different understanding of its working. That understanding makes my account very far from that of Sperber and Wilson (1986), who drastically simplify the logic and conversation apparatus by Grice, but share his view of speaker's meaning.

expressions, it introduces special correlations between expressions and things -- correlations which establish the content of the attitude, and then contribute to determine what attitude the speaker aims to induce in her audience. Now, the meaning of the subsentential expressions seems to be already given by such correlations. Although such correlations are, by Grice's own lights, the output of an act, they are not the output of a speaker's meaning act.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of an adequate formulation of the intentions which define speaker's meaning takes both a quantitative turn -- is there an upper limit to the number of intentions one has to have to mean something? -- and a qualitative turn -- exactly what intentions has one to have? Actually, in the 1957 paper Grice offered a three intentions formulation, in the following years tested both quantitatively and qualitatively by discussing many alleged counterexamples. In his William James Lectures, on "Logic and Conversation" (1967), and always since until the end of the '80ies, he and others offered some revised formulations. None of them is satisfactory, as has been in due time conceded.<sup>5</sup>

In "Logic and Conversation" (1967), Grice restates his original position (in "Meaning" 1957), via the following definition:

I. "The utterer meant something by uttering x" is true iff, for some audience, she uttered x

intending her audience:

- (1) to produce a particular response;
- (2) to think (recognize) that she intends (1);
- (3) to fulfill (1) on the basis of the fulfillment of (2).

Then, he endeavours to achieve a proper reformulation of the definition to handle two kinds of alleged counterexamples, which I will call respectively u- and s-counterexamples, because they seem to have been originally produced respectively by Urmson and by Schiffer. Counterexamples of the first kind are aimed at the proper reformulation of the three conditions above; counterexamples of the second kind are aimed at the inadequateness of any limited number of conditions to define speaker's meaning.

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<sup>4</sup> Another basic charge moved against Grice's account is that there is no way to specify the attitude the speaker wants to induce which doesn't presuppose the meaning that very act is supposed to introduce -- either because one already possesses the language or because it is just impossible to give a full blown theory of the attitudes independently of language. Cf. Schiffer (1987).

<sup>5</sup> See Grice (1982) and Schiffer (1987), especially ch. 9. See also Kemmerling (1986).

The u-counterexamples. There are many versions, and I prefer the bribery to the torture one. In Italy to restore a house a permission by the City Hall is required. Let us suppose that I go to the City Hall office to ask for permission for restoring my house, and that when face to face with the official in authority I put down on the desk, together with my application, an envelope with 5 millions lire. I intend the official to give me the permission; I want him to recognize I intend that; and I want him to give me the permission on the basis of his recognition that I want to have it. It seems that the definition is satisfied. By the 5 millions lire, do I mean "Give me the permission to restore my house"? No, though 5 millions may mean something, they aren't a meaningful expression.

The s-counterexamples. Mr. Scrovegni is notoriously avaricious. Mr. Carraro is with him in his own sitting-room. Mr. Carraro wants to get rid of Mr. Scrovegni. So, Mr. Carraro tosses a 500.000-lire bill out of the window. He intends Mr. Scrovegni to think as follows: "Mr. Carraro wants to get me to leave the room, thinking that I shall run after the money. He also wants me to know that he wants me to go (so contemptuous was his performance). But I am not going to demean myself by going after the banknote; I shall go, but I shall go because he wants me to go. I do not care to be where I am not wanted." Here too the definition is satisfied, and, besides, Mr. Scrovegni recognizes that he is supposed to leave at least in part because he recognizes that Mr. Carraro intends him to leave. By throwing a 500.000-lire bill out of the window, does Mr. Carraro mean "Leave the room"? No, though throwing a 500.000-lire bill may mean something, it isn't a meaningful expression.

The u-counterexamples push Grice to reformulate condition (2) of his original definition. At first he just inserts in (2) the parenthetic "at least in part from the utterance of  $x$ ";<sup>6</sup> later he modifies more deeply the original definition by replacing the former three conditions with the following five:

## II. The utterer uttered $x$ intending

- (1) her audience to think  $x$  possesses the feature  $f$ ;

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<sup>6</sup> An utterance, according to Grice, has not to be verbal. It may be either an act or an object, a sentence or a phrase or a word or a non linguistic something analogous to a sentence, a phrase, or a word. (*Logic and Conversation* 5, p. 89; "Meaning", 215-5) How are we to characterize a something to call it an utterance? How are we going to claim that by protruding my eyes I did utter..., or that I didn't utter...?

- (2) her audience to think she intends (1);
- (3) her audience to think of  $f$  as correlated with the type of response to which the response  $r$  she intends the audience to produce belongs;
- (4) her audience to think she intends (3);
- (5) her audience to think on the basis of the fulfillment of (1) and (3) that she intends her audience to produce the response  $r$ . (*Logic and Conversation*, 5, p. 103)

The s-counterexamples and the like bring him to add two other conditions:

- (6) her audience, on the basis of the fulfillment of (5), to produce  $r$ ;
- (7) her audience to think she intends (6).

Now, this reformulation, as others suggested in the literature, does not block the alleged counterexamples. The reformulation of the original conditions (1)-(3) as (1)-(5) does not overcome the bribery counterexample. Consider a case analogous to it, but with no break of the law. I go to a city bus tickets booth and put down on the counter the cost of a ticket. The man in the booth gets that I want a ticket, and helps me one. By the coins do I mean "One ticket, please"?<sup>7</sup> Though the example satisfies the conditions as reformulated, it would be hasty to answer "Yes".<sup>8</sup> We can say that in putting down the coins I intend to get a ticket, because that was the point of my action, but not that I mean "One ticket, please". If I were less laconic, coming to the booth, I would have asked "One ticket, please" while putting the money on the counter. The complete sequence of actions would have been: asking for the ticket and putting down the coins. Some features of the situation enable me not to say what I want to exchange my money for. Since at the booth only bus tickets are sold, and since the cost of the ticket is fixed, if I put down the exact amount for one ticket, the man immediately retrieves my want for a ticket. In the whole transaction the money is always there as what has to be exchanged for the ticket, and only for that. The same is true when you say "How much do you bet on Schumacher winning the race?" and I put a 100.000-lire bill on the table in front of you. Since it is me who put down the bill, that shows it is me who accept the bet. The bill is my bet, and it shows how much I bet. The amount of the price of the bus ticket as the amount of my bet have a feature  $f$  correlated with the intended response.

Coming to the s-counterexamples, conditions (6) and (7) do not block them. The case of Mr. Carraro and Mr. Scrovegni is described as not satisfying condition (7). Even if it is

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<sup>7</sup> A positive answer would be a cue, according to Grice, that the speaker endows with (nonnatural) meaning the coins, in the circumstance.

<sup>8</sup> As Grice does ((1989), p. 94).

assumed that Mr. Scrovegni attributes Mr. Carraro the intention (7), it still wouldn't be the case that by throwing the 500.000-lire bill out of the window Mr. Carraro means "Leave". The case is more complicated than the previous one. People resist acknowledgement of their vices. Avarice is a vice. An avaricious man tries to get hold of valuable things. By throwing a 500.000-lire bill out of the window Mr. Carraro will at once suggest Mr. Scrovegni to go out and offend him. Mr. Scrovegni has to conceal his vice, by not collecting the bill. Yet, being avaricious he will be all the more offended, and will deem mandatory to act upon the offence. Hence, Mr. Scrovegni closes up the encounter by leaving. Indeed, a countermove to the offence open to the offended party is to close up the social occasion in which he has been offended. Moreover, when a social occasion gets closed up, if the occasion was held within the territory of one of the participants, it is the extraneous participant who leaves. These rules together with Mr. Carraro's action -- throwing the bill out of the window -- fully explains the events. Mr. Carraro has to throw intentionally the 500.000-lire bill out of the window, and that intention has to be detected by Mr. Scrovegni, in order to tempt Mr. Scrovegni and offend him. No other intention of his either adds to or detracts from the case. It can only make Mr. Carraro more impudent.

Summing up, by throwing the 500.000-lire bill Mr. Carraro does not mean "Leave", though by so doing he does indeed intend to get rid of Mr. Scrovegni. He does something to that effect, and he can be charged either of having had that effect in mind or of not having considered the consequences of his action.

The cases I have examined have two relevant features. (a) Something is achieved as an effect of someone's action -- putting down a certain amount of money and throwing away a certain amount of money. The responsibility of the agent concerning the relevant action stands out clearly. Whatever follows from his action can be judged as something he was looking for, or he had to foresee, or at least as something which can be traced back to him. Yet, (b), his intentions but that of doing the very action he did -- passing the envelope with the money to the city official, putting the coins on the counter or throwing the 500.000-lire bill out of the window -- are irrelevant. His not having those intentions will not block the production of the series of effects, and will not save him in court. The agent's liability depends upon his having been the cause of those effects.

In "Meaning", Grice distinguishes *nonnatural* from *natural meaning*. Natural meaning is illustrated via some examples, like "Smoke means fire" and "Those spots mean measles." Two criteria are offered for telling natural from nonnatural meaning. First,

only when the meaning is natural, the case can be approximately restated by using the phrase "The fact that..." -- "The fact that he passed the money means that he attempted to bribe the official" and "The fact that he threw the 500.000-lire bill out of the window means that he offended his avaricious guest." Second, only when meaning is nonnatural we can restate the case as follows "The bell ring means 'The lesson is over.'" We have seen that the two cases discussed fail the second restatement. But they pass the first test: we can say both "His passing the money means that there was an attempted bribery" and "His throwing the bill out of the window means he offended him." This suggests a not ungricean solution for both the u- and the s-counterexamples. The counterexamples are cases of *natural* meaning (and not, of *nonnatural* meaning, as it was somehow suggested).

There is one more thing to adjust. Grice excludes not only that anyone can mean "x" by something which has a natural meaning, but also that anyone can mean something by what has a natural meaning. That would be true if one could never produce something which has a natural meaning, but one can. By drinking the camomile, he meant to quiet himself down.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> I will come back to this later.

Grice was convinced that meaning is either natural or nonnatural but never both, and that condition (3), in the first formulation, and condition (5), in the second formulation, exclude cases of natural meaning. He doesn't seem to have considered that some of the speaker's intentions may be redundant as to the achievement of the relevant effect. One possibility would be to decide case by case whether the intentions are redundant. A certain effect could be achieved, by doing something, either because it is a natural consequence

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<sup>9</sup> It seems we can use "mean" anytime some interpretative aspect is involved. What does an utterance tell? What does a natural happening, what does an action tell? We use "intend" or "plan" rather than "mean" when the action is looked from, so to say, an agent perspective. Closer to "mean" is "want". In this family of verbs, "plan" seems to be the most distant from "mean".

"Mean" in "I mean *p*" is very peculiar. *p* can be almost any kind of expression. "I mean George", "I mean red", "I mean selling the house", "I mean *at the right of*", "I mean you to go by train". With the constraint that *p* has to be in quotes, there is the same latitude with "say" and with "utter".

<sup>10</sup> Smoke means fire. We are out on a walk through some alpine valley. We come to a fork surrounded by two mountain tops. We decide to split, to see who reaches first "his" top, your being the left and mine the right one. Of course, we spy each other to check how we are performing. While looking at me you see that on the other side of my mountain, a side which I cannot see, there is a fire. Then, you stop and start a fire on your mountain hoping to alert me. After all, smoke means fire. Hence, by producing smoke you can mean fire. The case reminds of the doctor pointing at his own nape and asking the child whether it is there that it hurts. I owe the story to Marco Santambrogio.

Another example. I can start a fire to produce smoke, to signal people far away that I am here. Smoke means fire; fire means people. When the situation is different, instead of starting a fire I can scream, with the same purpose: "I am here!"

of the action, or because the action has, and is understood as having, a nonnatural meaning. Another possibility would be to rearrange the conditions so to make explicit the non overlapping between natural and nonnatural meaning. I prefer the second one. A rearrangement of the first formulation, which of course drops condition (3), would, for instance, be:

"The utterer means  $p$  by  $x$ " is true iff, for some audience, she uttered  $x$  intending her audience

- a (1) to produce a particular response  $q$ ;  
 (2) to fulfill (1) at least in part on the  
 basis of the  
 audience recognition of her  
 intention (1);<sup>11</sup>

and iff

- b  $x$  doesn't naturally mean  $p$ .

(Here  $p$  and  $q$  are no variables.)

The iff-clause (b) is reminiscent of a condition Grice suggests in another reformulation of his, which some Gricean have preferred.<sup>12</sup> Such reformulation approximately groups the conditions (1)-(5) in II above together as (a) above, and adds the following condition (b'), instead of II.(6)-(7):

- b' In uttering  $x$ , the utterer was in no way  
 deceitful or secretive towards  
 her audience  
 with respect to (1)-(5).<sup>13</sup>

Both conditions are expressed as negative statements; both exclude an infinite number of psychological attitudes, either of intending, of knowing, of believing or the like. But my reformulation brings into the open what kinds of phenomena can interfere, and why the speaker gets anyway the response she was looking for. Both reformulations suggest that the ascription of meaning to someone is defeasible. If there isn't a set of criteria sufficient to establish whether or not the condition

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<sup>11</sup> I have deleted any reference to the utterance (or to the uttering) of  $x$  in the clauses, because Grice's notion of utterance is in no way characterized. Then, to speak of the utterance in a condition for meaning wouldn't help.

<sup>12</sup> It is the reformulation B mentioned above in my footnote 5.

<sup>13</sup> Reformulation version B. (*Logic and Conversation* 5, pp. 104-5). However, the version I use is due to Kemmerling (1986), p. 147.



(b) holds, we may ascribe meaning to the utterer, being open to withdraw our ascription upon the discovery that the condition (b) doesn't hold.

So far I have argued for Grice's original analysis of speaker's meaning. Faced with the u- and s- counterexamples, Grice took them as counterexamples. To mean, he conceded, the speaker has to have a rather more complex intention. On the contrary, I have here claimed that the u- and s- counterexamples aren't real counterexamples and can be accounted for by the already available mechanism of natural meaning. Grice overdid speaker's intention, not only in the reply to his critics, but, as I will try to show in the next section, from the beginning. Speaker's intention, and hence speaker's meaning, are not what Grice suggests. Besides, speaker's meaning though central in the generation of meaning is much rarer than Grice supposed. In most cases speakers don't perform an act of meaning, but meaningful actions, i.e. they do things which have already a meaning. When speakers perform a meaningful action, the only relevant intention is that of intentionally uttering what they utter.

## 2. The nature of nonnatural meaning.

a naturally means b when a link between them is already given, the link is acknowledged, and the occurrence of a (categorically, conditionally, with probability 1 or less, etc.) warrants the occurrence of b. Smoke means fire: if you see smoke, you will see fire. Speaker's meaning, which is the core notion of conventionally or nonnaturally constituted meaning, is instead an act by which someone establishes a link which isn't there. "Table" nonnaturally means table. What kind of link, between the word and the thing? Grice thought that the word-thing link was dependent on a link between speaker's and audience's attitudes. By her utterance the speaker means something if and only if she has an attitude (an intention) concerning the attitude her audience has to form upon the utterance itself. The audience understands an utterance if and only if they recognize them to be suggested to form that attitude, and thereby form it.<sup>14</sup> The speaker's intention directs her utterance act. The utterance indicates the speaker's

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<sup>14</sup> The exact form of the intended reply *r* has changed through the years. In Grice (1957), it was a belief or an action, later it has been a belief or an intention to act, and sometimes it has been recognizing that the speaker wanted the hearer to form either a belief or an intention to act. I take the first formulation to be the only correct one. I can mean something even if sometimes I do not yield the reply *r* I look for. The other formulations are an attempt to warrant the looked for reply, and show that it has become an internal rather than an external object of the act of meaning. Both things are, I think, wrong.

attitude, and triggers the audience's one. The utterance has its meaning in virtue of being the action run out of the speaker's intention.

Now, let us have a closer look at the mechanics of speaker's meaning and audience's understanding. It is not your having an attitude which makes me having another. If you keep silent -- that is if you don't do anything nor withdraw from doing anything verbal or not verbal -- your having an attitude will not induce in me another attitude. We don't suppose that there is a natural sequence, having your attitude as antecedent and my attitude as consequent. If there were, it would be a case of natural meaning, whereas by hypothesis it isn't. Things would not change simply by adding an utterance of yours as second member in the sequence. If your having an attitude, your uttering something and my forming an attitude constituted a natural sequence of events, the case would again be one of natural meaning. Nor we do suppose it to be pure chance that I form a proper attitude upon you having that attitude, or upon you having that attitude and uttering  $x$ . A *regular chance* outcome doesn't make much sense. Neither does a meaningless utterance inducing a proper attitude. Your utterance, it is claimed, isn't meaningless, but is endowed with meaning by the intention with which you utter it.

Hence, the problem becomes how do you project your intention onto your utterance. How do I tell the intention you utter it with? Here we seem to be stuck in some sort of circularity: your utterance is to have a content dependent on your intention in uttering it; but to tell the intention we have nothing but the utterance, which is useless if it hasn't already a content. If intentions endow utterances with meaning, to tell the meaning of an utterance it will not do to resort to explicitly formulated linguistic intentions, nor to what is normally intended by the utterance. It would amount to a loop. Nor will it do to resort to the context, for what is in question is not a disambiguation between a number of given meanings but the very attribution of meaning.<sup>15</sup>

When you utter " $p$ " -- where " $p$ " has to be understood as uttered with a certain force, i.e. as being a request, a statement, or a judgement, etc. -- how can I conjecture that you have the attitude  $A(A(p)*q)$ <sup>16</sup> concerning the inducement in me of the attitude  $A(p)$ ? It is spontaneous to fill in at all relevant places a " $p$ ", and saying " $p$ ", " $A(p)$ ", " $A(A(p)*q)$ "; but it is misleading. Let me use instead " $r$ " and " $s$ ". When you utter " $p$ ", how can I conjecture that you have attitude  $A(r)$  concerning

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<sup>15</sup> Concerning explicitly formulated linguistic intentions, what is normally intended by the utterance, and the role of context, see "Meaning", pp. 221-3.

<sup>16</sup> Here  $*$  expresses some kind of link between  $q$  and  $A(p)$ .  $A(p)$  may be embedded in a  $q$  context or  $*$  may be a connective between  $q$  and  $A(p)$ .

the inducement in me of the attitude  $A(s)$ ? How does "p" point towards your attitude  $A(r)$ ?<sup>17</sup>

Let us look at some cases. Take first a simple meaning shift, like that I exemplified before speaking of a *CD-book*. Go back to 1992, when they started to think of CD-books. It wasn't a primeval meaning introduction, but a meaning shift. 'Book' had a meaning, and that meaning was stretched. Imagine that a CD, which recorded a written version of *Candide*, was first called "book" at Xerox Park Lab. Handling the first CD version of *Candide*, a researcher came into a Lab's room saying "Here is the book!". In the situation, it was immediately clear what the book was. For it was known that they were working at a CD version of *Candide*, and it is easy to see that a CD is a possible embodiment of a text. But suppose, to make it easier, that there were no paper books in the room. Hence, the CD the researcher was handling was then the best candidate to be the book she was speaking about.<sup>18</sup> From the attention being brought to the CD-book, the audience projected back the speaker's intention. But the aim she had in her act of meaning, the reply she was looking for from the audience, had already been achieved. The expression was connected with a thing, and that allowed a retrieval of the agent's intention.

Take now an imaginary case of meaning introduction. Suppose you utter "Fire!" when there is a fire, but that "fire" for none of us already means fire. It isn't the phonetic string "Fire!" which induces in me a blooming fire attitude of alarm -- the high pitch of your scream might alarm me, but it doesn't induce a fire rather than a water attitude. Your scream might make me notice the fire, and hence make me form a fire attitude -- but any other type of scream might have been equally effective. Seeing the fire makes me form the fire attitude, from which I retrieve, the more grateful, your intention in screaming. Indeed, a meaningless utterance can *ex post* be attributed a meaning. In fact, all English speakers know that "fire" means fire. If you scream "Fire!" to warn me, then I form a fire attitude and retrieve your warning intention in virtue of what "fire" means.

Summing up. An act of meaning seems to be intentional, and to aim to induce an attitude in an audience, by establishing a link between two things. A person wants to call another's attention to something; he utters, say, "p"; that affects the situation, adding further structure and saliency to it, and calls the other

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<sup>17</sup> This is the same difficulty, I think, pointed out by Schiffer (1987). Here, however, I present it from the point of view of the persons participating to the talk exchange, and as a problem of retrieval of the speaker's intention.

<sup>18</sup> The situation is not as ritually marked as a baptism is.

person's attention to the intended something.<sup>19</sup> There is no direct link between their attitudes, but the second person's attitude depends on the first's one, and the second person may retrieve the first's attitude, as well as the first person may predict the second's one.

All this hints at a further reformulation of the definition of speaker's meaning, namely:

The utterer means  $p$  by  $x$  iff, for some audience, she utters "   $x$   " intending her audience:

- 1 to produce a particular  $q$ , as a response to her utterance of "   $x$   ".

and

- 2 a either " $x$ " doesn't already mean  $p$ , or

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<sup>19</sup> " $p$ " may be a sentence or a subsentential expression; a thing may be an entity (an object or a property or a relation), or a state of affairs. The supposed one-word sentences of much philosophical literature, as the notorious "Rabbit" or "Brick", aren't, I guess, sentences at all, but subsentential expressions acting as attention caller to an entity. Their success obviously depends on being the situation so structured that the word can make leverage on some saliency. Suppose I don't know any French, your screaming "Feu!" alarms me and make me see the fire. That makes me behave consequently.

b in the situation nothing fits "x".<sup>20</sup>

(Here  $p$  and  $q$  are no variables.)

(2a) takes care of non introductory uses, while (2b) takes care of shifts. As to the latter the effect of the utterance has on the audience is a natural effect (grounded on a convention and artificially produced): speaker's meaning is an action which adds to the structure and the saliency of the situation. Speaking of uttering "x" instead of "x" solves the second Gricean problem mentioned at the beginning of § 1. To account for the meaning of subsentential expressions, like names and adjectives (common nouns, verbs), Grice introduces special correlations, R-correlation (correlation of reference) and D-correlation (correlation of denotation) between expressions and things, to explain the details of the attitudes involved. But the result is that the meaning of the subsentential expressions is given by such correlations and not by an act of meaning. If, as I have suggested, an act of meaning establishes exactly these kinds of correlations, the Gricean problem disappears. There is no lack of uniformity in the treatment of subsentential and

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<sup>20</sup> Dan Sperber has challenged my definition with a rich series of counterexamples, two of which looks to me very intriguing. The first. Suppose you think I am a boaster. When I boast to have achieved, or to be going to achieve something, you cut my claim by half. Suppose I know you think and do that. Then, since I want you to believe I am going to win 1.000 French francs tonight, I say "Tonight, at poker, I will win 2.000 French francs". Since this satisfies (a), is it the case that by such a sentence I mean that tonight, at poker, I will win 1.000 French francs? Of course, no, in virtue of (b). Two things are worth of notice concerning this counterexample. (i) A pure Gricean would claim that by that utterance I could have meant that tonight, at poker, I will win 1.000 French francs if only I had been overt concerning what I wanted you to believe. Yet, if I were overt, you would think I am going to win 500 francs. Overtness would make it impossible any equilibrium. (ii) If it were possible, for a pure Gricean to mean that I will win 1.000 French francs by uttering "Tonight, at poker, I will win 2.000 French francs", the pure Gricean would take the utterance to have two different meanings. For, the conclusion that I mean that I will win 1.000 French francs can be got only assuming that the utterance of "Tonight, at poker, I will win 2.000 French francs" means what it literally means. The second intriguing counterexample is the following. I have had some disease at my vocal cords, which has prevented me from speaking for quite a while. You do not know at what stage I am with the therapeutic process, and meeting me you ask: "Are you able to speak", and I answer "Yes, I can speak". According to my definition, when I say "I can speak" it seems that I cannot mean that I can speak, since what I do already naturally means that I can speak. The case is very delicate because here the natural meaning seems to be at work independently of "I can speak" being endowed with its semantic value. We would not say "Paul is an English name" but rather "'Paul' is an English name". I would have to say then, along the same lines: "'I can speak'". Finally, as I most indirectly hint at in the text by this last reformulation of what an act of meaning is, it is not "I can speak" which has a semantic value, but it is "I", "can" and "speak" which have one, and we derivatively say the sentence to have a semantic value because it is correctly built out of expressions endowed with semantic value. Then, there could not be coincidence between the natural meaning of the whole expression and its having a meaning as a whole.

sentential expressions and no suspect of explaining meaning already assuming it.

The grounds of meaning are (i) natural or (ii) artificial regularities, and sometimes it is difficult to adjudicate between the two, or (iii) regularities started by an act of meaning. All the following are examples of (i) or (ii): "Those spots mean measles", "The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year", "Eating according to good manners means being polite", "Violating good manners means lacking of respect for other people at the table". Instead, the following are examples of (iii): "This is the book" (as in the above case), "'Table' means table", "'My watch needs a new battery' means that my watch needs a new battery", "'Saying 'My watch needs a new battery'" means saying that my watch needs a new battery". The last three cases are reenactments of acts of meaning. Of course, there are differences between (i) meanings on the one hand and (ii) or (iii) meanings on the other. The link relevant to the first ones are meaningful only in so far as they are acknowledged by the community; those relevant to the second kinds of meaning exist and are meaningful only in so far as they are acknowledged by the community. In any case, anyway, ignorance of the link is no excuse for the individual -- a man is impolite if he violates good manners and ignorance of good manners amounts to impoliteness if it manifests itself in bad manners.

Once an act of speaker's meaning has established a connection, and the connection is acknowledged by the community, other speakers can use the expression because of its semantic value. As with meanings grounded on artificial regularities, the link seems to exist only in so far as it is acknowledged by the community.<sup>21</sup> Being that "steal" and "watch" mean what they mean, if someone says of a stranger: "He has stolen my watch!", that is a charge. Though it could be repaired, it cannot be made unmeant, by claiming not to have meant it. When an act of speaker's meaning has established a link, this cannot be disposed of at will by the agent. The utterance is evidence of the intention, and if the intention isn't there that's is a fault in the speaker's intentional behavior. Uttering an expression is an action. As when a person throws a stone, he is supposed to know what he is doing and he is liable for the consequences of his action; when a person utters something he is supposed to know what it means.

But if an expression is used as having a semantic value, how is it possible that meaning *shifts*? A meaning shift is an act of

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<sup>21</sup> The connection has not been established by a convention. It is enough that people have convened establishing and exploiting the connection. The constraint of people convening in the act of meaning, which Grice introduces prototypically in a face to face situation, together with it being a fact that they convene, suggest a concrete way to investigate the social origin of language.

meaning done by the speaker if in the situation nothing fits the established meaning. Better, it is an act of the speaker if in the situation nothing fits the established meaning and she knows that, and it is a deed of her if she doesn't know that.

### 3. Meaning and the attitude of intending.

Intending is the psychological attitude which plays the main role in the account of nonnatural meaning. Intending has an internal object according to a tradition which goes back to Medieval philosophy, revived by Brentano and contemporary phenomenology. An intention with an internal object is manifested by sentences like: "I intend you to go and pick up Emma at the railway station" and "I intend that you go and pick up Emma at the railway station."<sup>22</sup> The two sentences show a basic feature of an intention with an internal object: the intention is directed towards an object, an action, an outcome, etc., via a representation (of it).<sup>23</sup>

To entertain an intention with an internal object, and not only to express it, we have to master a system of representation. Maybe we can entertain such an intention only after having mastered a language. If our intentions always have an internal object, our words but give voice to our intentions. This is another old idea worth of respect. It looks most reasonable to claim that to introduce a word we have to know what we intend to use it for, that we have to have already grasped what we intend to name or to predicate. Hence, a shift in the established meaning of an expression would require a shifted grasp of a thing, a property or a relation. If it were so, semantic change would be an epiphenomenon of conceptual shift, and speaker's meaning would have only a linguistic relevance. To investigate the shift, that speaker's meaning would then merely register, we would have to move from language to thought.

That view, I suspect, would make difficult to explain conceptual as well as linguistic shifts. On the one hand, nothing analogous to speaker's meaning mechanics would do for a conceptual shift. On the other hand, if linguistic shift is parasitic on conceptual shift, then I can appreciate a linguistic shift only if I undergo the very conceptual shift which is expressed by the linguistic shift.

Let me then sketch an alternative view, already hinted at in § 2, according to which there are intentions with an external object, and "intending" is given the minimal, so to speak,

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<sup>22</sup> The two sentences instantiate two sentential schemas, the first the schema "I intend to *p*", the second the schema "I intend that *p*".

<sup>23</sup> Grice seems to assume, in a tortuous way, that our intentions have an internal object. See his (1989), p. 142.

meaning of calling attention to. That would not make intentions the less primitive, but it would show how words and things interplay with the attitude of intending to mark and show a shift, which is both conceptual and linguistic.

Intentions with an external object are expressed more or less straightforwardly by a sentence of this type: "I intend this". (Very young kids could use just "I want" that way.) One can reply to the question "What are you looking for?" saying "I want this" with a watch in one's hands. Such intentions are entertained prototypically when the object is present -- be it an object *stricto sensu*, an event, a fact, a property, a relation, or the like.<sup>24</sup> A characteristic feature of an intention with an external object is that its object is present rather than represented. Hence, there is no need to master a representation of the object to entertain the intention. Better, having the object and being focussed on it, there is the opportunity to represent it, i.e. to make a drawing of or to mimic it, or to say, picking up another object, "Let this be that." In these situations, introducing a word naming the object is introducing a very special representation. Words are not required to resemble what they represent, and are an unlimited and almost universally available resource. This allows to use words to mark out what they are to name, to make the to be named object the key stone in an already structured situation. Words, that is, enable us to focus on objects and to call other people's attention to them, to make them intend the objects spoken of. If it is not an object or a fact to be marked, but a property or a relation, it will be marked in the only way it can be so, i.e. by having an instance marked.

Let's go back to the CD-book example. I find most natural to call "book" a CD-book, but I can imagine many people resisting the idea of having half of their library filled up with CD-books. Anyway, one who didn't have the concept of a book as a CD, but who knew about CDs and books, would find it most easy to form the concept of a book in a CD version, especially if a CD were handed to him with the words: "Here is the book I promised you." This is a case of meaning shift, not the introduction of the word "book." Clearly, the speaker exploits a conceptual net already mastered by the hearer, but, by hypothesis, she twists a concept, adding to it a turn unknown to the hearer and changing for him the concept's extension. (Notice that the conceptual shift is achieved via a meaning shift.) Some such cases frequently occur.

Most likely, words are always attention triggers. When a meaning shift, or more generally a language change, occur, the

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<sup>24</sup> If nothing is there, the intention is empty.



word used is the best candidate to become the name of what it has attracted attention to.<sup>25 26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Grice doesn't elucidate at all his notion of intention. Exactly because of this he is generally understood as using the ordinary notion of intention, according to which intentions are what guides human action. Grice's notion of intention is compatible with the medieval and the phenomenological one -- the medievals illustrated the notion speaking of the intention to take a walk. According to Grice it is not the action itself which affects people but the recognizability in the action of the intention behind it. The notion of an intention with an external object is very different. It affects people because it affects the situation.

Even in Grice's work (in "Method in the Philosophy of Psychology (From the Banal to the Bizarre)", reprinted in Grice (1991)), one can find a hint concerning the phenomenon I have been presenting. The external object of an intention, as it happens with any other attitude, can be internalized. Indeed, this is what happens when we move from the situation expressed by the sentence "I intend to buy this [watch]" to the situation which we can express with the sentence "I intend to buy this watch". Here "this watch" is already representing the watch.

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