

The Gricean Mechanism vs. Intentional Misinformation

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In his 1957 essay *Meaning* Grice proposes a difference between natural and non-natural meaning. In an effort to formulize the difference between the different concepts of meaning, he proposed the following cases to help illustrate the issue:

(a) I show Mr. X a photo with the intention of inducing the belief that Mr. Y is having an inappropriate relationship with Mrs. X.

(b) I draw a picture for Mr. X of the same scene with the same intention as the photograph.

Grice notices that these two cases seem to have surprising differences, namely the object's knowledge of intention. To clarify, when shown a photograph, Mr. X understands that I am intending him to believe that his wife is having an inappropriate relationship with Mr. Y. In contrast, when drawing a picture, Mr. X may believe that I am simply intending to portray a fictional event. Therefore, a three-condition formulation of $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$ can be described as follows:

A means that *x* in uttering *u* to hearer *H* iff:

1. *A* intends *H* to believe that *x* on based on *u*
2. *A* intends *H* to believe that *A*'s intents are as such (1)
3. *A* intends *H* to believe that *x* in part by *H*'s knowledge of *A*'s intentions (1).

In example (a) only conditions 1 and 2 are met, since Mr. X will be able to come to the conclusion that Mr. Y is having an inappropriate relationship with Mrs. X (belief of *x*) as well as the conclusion that I intended him to believe this. In the example of the drawing, however, Mr. X will come to the conclusion that Mr. Y is having an affair with Mrs. X only by realizing that it is my intent for him to believe this, thereby fulfilling the third condition of $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$.

This line of thinking, while certainly reasonable and convincing seems to be somewhat unfinished, however. Perhaps some further investigation into the nature of $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$ will provide further insight. Let's first take the following case into consideration:

(c) While playing poker against Mr. X, I raise Mr. X's bet with the intention of causing Mr. X to believe that I am bluffing. In other words, I intend for Mr. X to believe that I believe that Mr. X will believe that I have a good hand, which in fact, I do.

Now how does this fit with Grice's formulation?

I (*A*) mean_{nn} I have a good hand (*x*) in raising (*u*) to Mr. X (*H*) iff

1. I intend Mr. X to believe that I have a good hand based on my raise.

2. I intend Mr. X to believe that I intend him to believe that I have a good hand.
3. I intend Mr. X to believe that I have a good hand in part by Mr. X's knowledge that I intend him to believe I have a good hand.

On the surface this seems on the level, but one must remember that in a heated game of poker, nothing is what it seems. Because Mr. X will assume that what I intend him to believe is opposite of what is actually true, if my ruse holds up as I mean for it to, Mr. X will not, in fact believe that I have a good hand (1), even though he will believe that I intend him to believe that it is (2), and he will certainly come to the conclusion that I do not have a good hand based in part on my intent to make him believe otherwise. So in this example of intentional misinformation, conditions 2 and 3 of meaning_{nn} are met, even though condition 1 is not.

Consider also the following example:

(d) While speaking to Dr. X (who is a professor of History) I say "I am taking a History class which I quite enjoy" intending Dr. X to believe that the class which I referred to is his class, while still leaving enough ambiguity that Dr. X will ask me for clarification, giving me the opportunity to elaborate without risk of over-flattery.

Once again this example seems somewhat irregular and should be examined using Grice's formulation:

I (A) mean_{nn} I enjoy Dr. X's class (x) in saying "I am taking a History class which I quite enjoy" (u) to Dr. X (H) iff

1. I intend Dr. X to believe that I enjoy his class based on my statement.
2. I intend Dr. X to believe that I intend him to believe that I enjoy his class.
3. I intend Dr. X to believe that I enjoy his class in part by his knowledge that I intend him to believe it.

As before, this seems to work on first glance, but upon further inspection is flawed. I do, in fact, intend Dr. X to believe that I enjoy his class based on my statement (1). But I do not intend Dr. X to believe that I mean for him to believe that I enjoy his class (2). Once he asks for confirmation, however, he will see that I intend him to believe that I enjoy his class, and he will use this information to further solidify his belief that I enjoy his class (3).

So where does this leave us? Grice seems to have believed that the third condition was responsible for the difference between natural and non-natural meaning. And it appears that he was correct, at least to some extent, in this assumption. But by considering examples such as (c) and (d) above, we see that the third condition is not the only one which may or may not be present. In fact the first condition may be left unmet (as in example (c)), as can the second condition (as in example (d)).

Now we are left with perhaps more questions than we had when we started. Are examples (c) and (d) examples of $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$ because Grice's third condition is met, or are they not $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$ because they fail to meet one of the other requirements? Perhaps these examples represent types of meaning which are simply not addressed by Grice's theories. Perhaps there are other conditions to meaning which have not yet been discovered? Certainly more investigation is required, and no doubt the final word on the subject has yet to be written.