COMMENTS ON FRANKE, JAGER AND VAN ROOIJ'S
'RELEVANCE IN COOPERATION AND CONFLICT'

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0. I will restrict myself on the question whether the broader game-theoretic perspective could or should replace the broadly Gricean perspective many philosophers of language tend to take for granted when they think about pragmatics. My view on the matter is mixed. While I think pragmatic reasoning is indeed a species of strategic reasoning, I also think it is a rather distinctive kind, which deserves special treatment.

1. The main contention of the paper is that "speaker relevance plays a significant, and so far largely overlooked, role in pragmatic reasoning." (1) Given the presuppositions of classical game theory, any action is undertaken for the sole purpose of advancing the agent's interests, and it is relevant to the extent that it succeeds in that. The charge that speaker relevance has been neglected in pragmatics is sort of like saying that the role of eating has been overlooked in gastronomy.

Of course, pragmatics as we know it does allow *some* role for speaker interest – the problem is that this role is rather limited. The charge is that in adopting the Cooperative Principle, followers of Grice first identify the speaker's interest with the common interest operative in the conversation, and then identify the common interest (at least in typical cases) with the hearer's acquisition of some information she needs. This, in effect, subordinates the speaker's interest to the hearer's. Relevance theory does better when it replaces the Cooperative Principle with the Communicative Principle of Relevance, which at least talks about the speaker's abilities and preferences. But according to Relevance Theory, utterances are presumed to be optimally serving the hearer's interests, while maintaining mere compatibility with the speaker's. Thus the speaker's interests remain secondary.

Due to this bias towards the hearer, van Rooij and his co-authors contend, Gricean pragmatics forfeits the resources to account for strategic reasoning in situations of partial conflict. And while Relevance Theory can handle some of those cases, it too falls short when it comes to total conflict. The authors call for a change of perspective: a uniform game-theoretic framework in which one could handle all linguistic interaction, no matter what the participant's interests might be.

As I see it, there are three distinct arguments one can extract from the paper against Gricean pragmatics. The first is not entirely explicit, but its elements are all present in section 2. The gist is that if speaker and hearer really had common purpose we would get cooperation with a character very different from what we actually observe. The second argument is that Gricean explanations cannot generalize to cases of scalar implicature when speakers do not want to convey information beyond the semantic content of their

utterances. Finally, the third observes that the Grice's strategy is unavailable for reasoning employed in trying to catch an intentionally deceptive speaker. I will briefly address these arguments in order.

2. If we assume, as seems reasonable, that the hearer's interest in communication lies in obtaining information, and further assume, as Grice does, that the speaker's interest is aligned with the hearer's, then we should conclude that the speaker's interest lies also in obtaining information. The obvious model is *reciprocity*: I know something you should know and I will tell it to you; in exchange I expect you to do the same when you know something I need to know. The problem is that this model fits human and animal communication poorly: it predicts that speakers should keep track of hearers they gave information to and punish the reticent free-riders among them. This just does not happen.

The most promising evolutionary explanation for communication, the authors claim, requires that speakers aim is to advance their *social status*. The status is not for the hearer to bestow – rather it is the entire group that acknowledges the speaker as a provider of sound information. Speakers line up with what they have and hearers choose the best product available. Hearers carefully monitor the quality of information they receive and when they are not satisfied they turn to another provider. This gives speakers a strong incentive to adjust their efforts to meet their hearers' needs, which in turn explains the largely cooperative character of communication. So, ironically, the best explanation of the "Gricean" features of conversation requires a "non-Gricean" picture, according to which speakers and hearers want fundamentally different things out of their interaction.

In response, defenders of Grice should give a better run for the reciprocity-based explanation. Although it is often used as a simplifying assumption, the claim that the purpose of conversation is nothing more than information-sharing is by no means part of Grice's theory. When considering the evolution of communication, it seems appropriate to take a wider view. The story favored by van Rooij et al, already assumes that everyone is interested in social status and that the gain of a speaker in social status typically outweighs the loss in competitiveness the sharing of information involves. If it is good to speak, it is also good to allow one's hearer to speak in exchange of the hope that he will then be willing to listen again. Speaker and hearer may get into to a mutually beneficial tit-for-tat, sharing more and more information, gaining more and more in social status.

This model makes all the predictions made by the one the van Rooij and his collaborators endorse, and some more. If the hearer is eager to speak, she will presumably be on the lookout for any sign of the speaker trying to cut off the conversation once he is done speaking. If she thinks he might she will probably make a pre-emptive quit. Whether such pattern of behavior is present in rhesus monkeys or babblers I will leave to qualified researchers to decide. But I should mention that I have frequently observed such behavior during fieldwork among members of the species *Homo Sapiens*. So the prediction is perhaps not too farfetched.

3. Let me turn to the problem of unwanted scalar implicatures. The key example is an utterance of (1) made during a debate about the Middle East by someone who argues that

the stalling of the peace process is the fault of the Palestinians, not the Jews. Such a speaker clearly does not *want* to convey (2); nonetheless the inference will certainly be drawn by the hearer.

(1)   Most Israelis voted for peace.
(2)   Some Israelis did not vote for peace.

Ariel has used this example in arguing that – since implicatures cannot be unwanted in the Gricean theory – 'most' semantically entails 'not all'.

The authors believe – and I am inclined to agree – that we should not follow her down that line. They point out that, in this context the hearer can assume that the speaker would have asserted that *all* Israelis voted for peace if he could have. The only thing that plausibly prevented him from saying this is a commitment to truthfulness. From this, together with the presumption of the speaker's expertise, the hearer can work his way to the conclusion that (2) is true. The reasoning is the exact analogue of the familiar Gricean one, except for its first step. In the familiar case the hearer knows about the speaker's preference to assert that all Israelis voted for peace because she can assume that the speaker's preferences are *the same as* hers (i.e. he prefers to provide the strongest information possible); in Ariel's case the hearer knows about the speaker's preference to assert that all Israelis voted for peace because she can assume that the speaker's preferences are *contrary to* hers (i.e. he prefers to land the strongest rhetorical punch possible).

What I disagree with is the contention that Grice's theory cannot handle the case. The Cooperative Principle does not require perfect match between the total preferences of the conversational participants, only perfect match between their preferences with respect to "the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange."[1] The accepted purpose in this case is the resolution of debate regarding responsibility for the failure of peace talks. (Good luck with that.) The participants desire different resolutions, but this is not a problem: unlike a brawl, a debate is still a fundamentally cooperative enterprise. That the participants have different preferences regarding the outcome is common ground, and as such, it can be legitimately appealed to in pragmatic reasoning. I see the reasoning von Rooij and his collaborators offer in this case as a classical Gricean derivation of a conversational implicature. The unraveling argument shows that given certain plausible assumptions (including a positive chance of interpretative naiveté on the part of the hearer) this sort of derivation will be available in a host of cases. This is a way to make the Gricean story more precise and more predictive, not a way to show its limitations.

But isn't it a problem that the implicature is unwanted? Conversational implicatures are supposed to be, after all, part of what the speaker meant in the Gricean picture. To clear up this matter, we need to eliminate a minor confusion in Grice's view. He writes:

> … to ask for a specification of what *A* meant [by making an utterance] is to ask for a specification of the intended effect (though, of course, it may not always be

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[1] Grice (1957): 26.

possible to get a straight answer involving a "that" clause, for example, "a belief that…").[2]

The parenthetical remark is a bit surprising, for "straight answers" to the question what someone meant by making an utterance typically involve an infinitive, not a "that" clause:

(3a)   By uttering 'Watch out!' I meant to bring you to a halt.
(3b)   By uttering 'Who is that?' I meant to get you to tell me who you were talking to.
(3c)   By uttering 'Most Israelis voted for peace' I meant to convince you that the Palestinians are to blame.

By contrast, if we focus not on what effects the speaker intends to accomplish *by* making the utterance, but rather on what the speaker intends to do *in* making it, we can easily get the impression that a straight answer must indeed involve a clause – not necessarily one headed by the complementizer 'that', but a clause nonetheless:

(4a)   In uttering 'Watch out!' I meant to issue a warning that the train is coming.
(4b)   In uttering 'Who is that?' I meant to ask who you were talking to.
(4c)   In uttering 'Most Israelis voted for peace' I meant to assert that most Israelis voted for peace.

It is hard to resist the idea that Grice did not pay sufficient attention to Austin's distinction between *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* acts.[3] For example, when Grice's famous A writes his even more famous letter of recommendation, he asserts that his pupil's attendance at tutorials has been regular, and he implies that the pupil is no good at philosophy. Both are part of what he means in the illocutionary sense. In addition, A means to block the pupil's hire and means to score a point for his irresistible wit. Both are part of what he means in the perlocutionary sense. Implicatures are supposed to be meant by the speaker in the illocutionary, not perlocutionary sense.

Does the speaker of (1) in Ariel's example mean that (2) is true? I think he does, as the following conversation illustrates:

(5)   Uri: −Most Israelis voted for peace.
         Ali: − Do you mean some of them didn't?
         Uri: − No, I don't mean that at all!

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[2] Grice (1957): 220.

[3] Austin (1962), esp. Lecture VII. Illocutionary acts are what later came to be called speech acts – acts that have content, often but not always specifiable by a clause. Such acts include asserting, describing, warning, commanding, requesting, referring, etc. Perlocutionary acts are *effects* of illocutionary acts on the audience. The third of Austin's tripartite distinction, the *locutionary act*, is the mere utterance of a meaningful linguistic expression. For example, according to Austin in performing the locutionary act of articulating a sequence of premises and a conclusion I often perform the illocutionary act of arguing, and if things work out fine I may also perform the perlocutionary act of convincing my audience. Grice's lapse has been stressed by Strawson (1964), Searle (1969), Bach and Harnish (1979), and Szabó (2006).

I am inclined to think Uri's response is a lie unless he interprets Ali's question as being about perlocutionary meaning. If he wants to stay within the bounds of honest debate, he should instead say something like "Yeah. But still, most of us did the right thing." The concession does not mean that he *wanted* Ali to draw the inference. But he did license the inference and that is all it takes to mean it in the illocutionary sense.

Consider the following analogy. Suppose I owe you money. When I give you the money I mean to pay my debt. I do not want you to accept the payment – I'd rather you forgive my debt. Still, I license you to accept it: that is part of what it is to mean to pay my debt. I think the case is similar to Uri's. Uri means to assert that most Israelis voted for peace. He does not want to convey that some did not – he'd rather have Ali fail to draw the conclusion. Still, he licenses the implicature: that is part of what it is to mean to make this assertion in a context where his preferences are common ground.

4. While I think Grice can accommodate cases of partial conflict I agree that cases of attempted deception are beyond the scope of his theory. When a speaker tries to deceive his audience (either by trying to lure them into drawing a false inference on the basis of their true assertion, or by outright lying) he is not overtly opting out from the operation of the principle (like those whose behavior gives rise to the "unwilling to tell" inference), but rather acting in covert violation of it.

Pragmatic reasoning is a variety of strategic reasoning, but it is of a rather restricted sort. Its aim is to follow the clues laid by the speaker to figure out the full extent of what he meant. Since meaning something is an effort to make content available, this is a setting where the hearer can take a lot for granted. But once she is willing to go beyond what was meant pretty much all bets are off. The hearer can gain extra information from spotting the sweat on the forehead, the trembling of the hands, sudden change in the pitch of the voice, or whatever else there may be in the setting the speaker did not wish to disclose. (This, of course, includes the crumbs on Micha's face.) There is a difference between voluntary information transfer and involuntary information extraction. The fundamental reasoning process might be the same, but its character changes. I think this is a natural boundary marked by the notion of speaker meaning.

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