

This is a pre-final draft. To appear in:
The Routledge Handbook of Pragmatics,
ed. by Anne Barron, Yueguo Gu, and Gerard Steen,
Routledge, Abingdon/New York, 2017, 215–26.

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INTENTION (INCLUDING SPEECH ACTS)¹

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Introduction

This chapter deals with some of the different senses that the term ‘intention’ has in pragmatics, and the way they are related to each other. I shall begin by distinguishing one employment of the term, which belongs to our folk psychological practices of understanding actions in terms of reasons, from a more technical use, related to the *aboutness* of language. After a brief historical sketch, I describe the intentional approach to pragmatics as an attempt to account for the intentionality of language (its aboutness) in terms of intentional action. I will do so by explaining the basic tenets of two very influential proposals: the Gricean theory of conversation and speech act theory. This chapter finishes with a review of contemporary debates on the foundations of pragmatics where intentions have a predominant role to play.

‘Intention’: two definitions

There are two very different notions, or clusters of notions, commonly associated with ‘intention’ and various cognate terms. Firstly, the word ‘intention’ stems from our ordinary practices of understanding actions in terms of goals and reasons. For instance, there could be different ways of accounting for an agent’s performance in intentional terms, according to Anscombe’s (1957) classical approach to the issue:

- (1) Mary turned on the light *intentionally*.
- (2) While walking the corridor, Mary had the *intention* to turn on the light.
- (3) Mary pressed the switch with the *intention* to turn on the light.

Attaining a unified account of these multiple uses has become one of the main tasks of the theory of action (Setiya 2011), but for our topic it may suffice to know that most authors converge today on what is called *the standard theory of action*. This is the idea that intentions accomplish such an explanatory role because they are psychological states in the minds of agents with causal effects on their behaviour. In this example, the light turned on as a causal effect of Mary’s cognitive state of intention. Therefore, such an account is causal and cognitive. Even if it is well

extended, it has been contested on several occasions, and we must bear in mind that it is just one option among others in order to make sense of this folk psychological practice.

Secondly, there is a technical use of the same term ‘intention’, usually (but not exclusively) associated with its cognate ‘intentionality’ – a seeming homonymy that is utterly misleading. To have intentionality, be intentional, or be intentionally directed is to be *about* something else, or being referred to something else, something that may not even exist. Coined by medieval scholastics (the Latin verb *intendo* means to point at, or aim at something), the term was recovered by nineteenth-century psychologist and philosopher Franz Brentano (1995: 68), who famously claimed that all mental states, and only them, have intentionality. That means that beliefs, desires, and also intentions (in the former cognitive sense) are psychological states directed towards something beyond themselves. For instance: John’s belief that the shop is open is about the shop, which is not in his mind, but out there. Mary’s intention to turn on the light, which is a mental state occurring in her mind, is about the light, which is at the other side of the corridor.

Despite Brentano, there seem to be many non-mental candidates for intentionality, at least apparently. Some of them are present in the natural world, as when we claim that smoke on the horizon informs us *about* fire, footprints on the floor tell us that some animal has been there, or stripes in a bug’s abdomen alert us to its poison; some others belong to human culture, like signs, maps, or language, the latter of which is a prominent case of intentionality since linguistic expressions have meanings. Members of this highly heterogeneous group of phenomena will require very different explanations (Searle 1983; Haugeland 1990; Millikan 2004), and those explanations must somehow fit together. Finding out the way they do is one of the main tasks of the theory of content.

The intentional approach to language is an attempt to bring both senses of ‘intention’ together by reaching an explanation of the intentionality of language in terms of the intentional performances of social agents. In a nutshell, the idea is that language has a meaning, and is thus *intentional* (in the sense of aboutness), because it is employed by people with certain *intentions* (in the folk psychological sense). This insight was in the origins of pragmatics as a study of language in use, and different champions in this field often differ on the way the intentions of agents may help us explain the intentionality of their language. But, before facing those alternatives, a quick look back at history may help us understand their significance.

Historical perspective

Intentional approaches to language appeared quite recently in the analytic philosophy of language. At the beginning of the twentieth century, authors like Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, or the young Ludwig Wittgenstein were focused on the problem of intentionality in its two main varieties: thought and language. One of their main aims was to explain what it is that allows our thoughts and language to be *about* the world, a problem they approached in a twofold way: by means of semantics on one hand, and syntax on the other. In contrast to this, in the interwar period, philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein himself, John L. Austin, or Peter Strawson began to consider language as a product of human action, built into the social environment, and not just as an abstract, semantic/syntactic structure. The novelty of their account was that they searched for an explanation of the intentionality of language not in its direct relation to the world, but through the mediation of speakers and hearers, who employ that language in their ordinary lives. Thanks to those authors, the way was open for an account of the intentionality of language in terms of the intentional character of human action.

By the middle of the twentieth century, two conceptions of this task were proposed, initiated by Grice and Searle, respectively. Grice’s proposal aimed to explain linguistic meaning in

terms of the communicative intentions of speakers, together with the inferential capacities of hearers. In contrast to this, Searle's proposal was based on Austin's incipient ideas on the nature of 'speech acts' – actions we perform in saying something. The former initiated a branch of pragmatics mostly focused on communicative processes, whereas the latter aims to explain the occurrence of social performances that imply changes in speakers' normative status (i.e., new rights and obligations arising from the performance of promises, donations, orders, warnings, invitations, and so on). Both conceptions of pragmatics have proved highly influential: Gricean proposals were decisive for the later appearance of relevance theory, giving rise to cognitive pragmatics and intention-based semantics, whereas Searlean speech act theory has been widely applied beyond linguistics, in fields like psychology, artificial intelligence, sociology, legal studies, or literary theory.

Despite both being fruitful, the two trends are in fact quite an 'uneasy couple' (Dascal 2003: 507). They are sometimes considered as complementary theories, and sometimes as competing accounts. I will show in the next section that the different role accomplished by folk psychological intentions in each of them may be responsible for this tense relationship.

Critical issues and topics

Communicative intentions and conversation

I have said that Grice's aim was to reach an explanation of linguistic meaning in terms of communicative intentions, which are those intentions agents have when they try to communicate something. Those intentions, as any other kind of intentions, are defined in terms of goals: the speaker said whatever she said because she was pursuing something. What is specific about those intentions is that speakers rely on the capacity of others to detect their own intentions by means of inference. In this way, the sort of communicative intentions that explain communicative actions are, according to Grice (1989), threefold. A speaker who tries to communicate something intends at the same time:

- (1) to produce a particular response in her hearer,
- (2) to make her hearer recognise that she is intending (1), and
- (3) to fulfil (1) on the basis of her fulfilment of (2).

Communicational utterances would thus be performed by speakers with the intention to affect hearers by means of their very recognition of that same intention. Accordingly, understanding would be a matter of utterances being recognised by hearers as being intentionally produced by speakers in order to be recognised as intentional (of course, 'speaker' and 'hearer' are used here in a wide sense, since Grice's account is not meant to be restricted to oral communication).

At first sight, this account certainly looks stilted. Why could we not simply say that, in communicating, the speaker intends to convey some information to her hearer? The reason this could not suffice may be grasped by means of an example: imagine we have run out of milk at home; I would like my partner to buy some and, in order to attain this, I leave an empty milk bottle on the kitchen table. I don't mind if she realises that I have done this on purpose, and she does not realise so, but she does discover that we have ran out of milk, and she buys some. Now, even if I succeed in what I intended, could we say that I *communicated* to her that we had no more milk? Grice's intuition would be that I did not. I would have managed to convey that piece of information to her, but I would not have *communicated* it to her because I did not intend her to recognise that I was intending to convey that piece of information to her. In order to have a fully fledged

case of communication, the speaker's performance must be explainable as a fulfilment of complex communicative intentions along the lines of the threefold kind I have sketched.

Since Grice's initial attempt to define communicative intentions as self-referential exhibited fundamental problems (see Avramides 1989), Sperber and Wilson (1986: 58) proposed an alternative account, along the lines of the Gricean proposal, but distinguishing between informative and communicative intentions. In their view, any act of communication would respond to a first-order informative intention (the intention to convey information to others) and, at the same time, to a second-order communicative intention (the intention to make that informative intention manifest to the hearer). Communicative intentions would thus be second order (that is, referred to other intentions).

One way or the other, communicative intentions would be the basis of what Grice called non-natural meaning (meaning_{nm} for short), which is the kind of intentionality that characterises language, in contrast to more simple cases of natural meaning (as in the smoke on the horizon, footprints, or the bug's stripes). Grice's seminal idea is that language has meaning_{nm} because it is the effect of actions that respond to communicative intentions.

Notice that meaning_{nm} was not involved in the previous example, even if it could be a case of successful communication (in case I intended my intention to be recognised, and succeeded in it). In order to have a fully fledged case of linguistic communication, we would additionally need the communicative intention to be fulfilled by means of some linguistic expression. The speaker must produce an utterance that is a token of a linguistic type, that is, an individual occurrence of a meaningful sentence. For instance, instead of leaving an empty bottle on the kitchen table, I could have left a note saying, 'We've run out of milk!'

It may look simple, but difficulties arise for the Gricean project when we make this little change in the story. When communication is based on linguistic means, it seems to rely on the agents' awareness of the *meaning* of the linguistic types employed – that is, on their knowledge of *what is said* by the sentences they utter. I know, for instance, that my partner knows that a note that says, 'We've run out of milk!' means that we have run out of milk. However, if Grice's aim was to reach an explanation of the intentionality of language (the aboutness of meaning_{nm}) in terms of the intentions of agents, and he took for granted that the instruments agents employ already have their own intentionality (given that expressions would have some previous meaning), his account would leave its target unexplained. Unlike the case of the empty bottle, whose meaning on the table is fully explained by what I intend to do by leaving it there, the case of the note is more complex. It does not have a meaning because I left it there: I left it there because it already had a meaning!

The problem is that the verb 'mean' has a tricky double sense here: when we claim that a speaker 'means' something, we are talking about what she intends to do, or say, which is a matter of psychological explanations of her actions in terms of reasons; in contrast to this, when we claim that a sentence 'means' something, we are talking about what it refers to, which is a matter of the intentionality of language. We are not claiming that a speaker has a 'meaning' when we say that he *means* something, and we are not claiming that a sentence has a 'reason' to do what it does when we claim that it *means* something. This may look like a platitude, but it could be the source of much theoretical confusion in the field.

Now, if we want to stick to an account of intentionality in terms of intentional action, the problem is how and why do sentences *mean* at all, besides or beyond what agents *mean* by using them? What would explain the intentionality of linguistic expressions themselves? The Gricean project requires some further account of meaning_{nm} in terms of communicative intentions, since otherwise the intentional account of the intentionality of language would be painfully circular.

Grice and most post-Gricean accounts have pursued this explanation in terms of conventions: by being systematically employed to perform some communicational purposes, linguistic

expressions acquired some sort of ‘timeless’ meaning that is independent of the ‘occasion’ meaning they may have while being used by any particular speakers (Grice 1989: 145–338). Speakers make use of sentences because there is something that is *what is said* by them; but, at the same time, the meaning_{mn} of a sentence is an effect of its having become a conventional instrument by which *agents* intend to say what they say. In that way, linguistic expressions have an intentional content precisely because they are conventional means to fulfil very particular communicative intentions (even if speakers may use them in order to fulfil quite different intentions on particular occasions).

In that way, speakers’ linguistic utterances rely on the intentionality of linguistic types but, at the same time, the intentionality of linguistic types stems from those communicative intentions conventionally associated to their utterances. Both what speakers say in their utterances and *what is said* by the sentences they employ would be explained in terms of communicative intentions (either those of the particular agent, for the utterance, or those conventionally associated to that linguistic type, for the sentence).

Illocutionary intentions and speech acts

Let’s now look at the example of the note from a different perspective: the one of speech acts theory, whose main aim is not to account for communication, but for the sort of deeds that we perform by means of language, and the way those deeds transform the social scene. In this case, my note would constitute what is called a *speech act*: an utterance that would make it the case that agents are committed to new rights and obligations. And, following Austin (1962), my performance could be described as comprising three different nested sub-actions, which are different descriptions of what I actually did: firstly, I *wrote* something on a piece of paper – something that, as a matter of fact, has some linguistic structure, syntax, and meaning. That is what Austin called the ‘locutionary act’. Secondly, in leaving this note, I *said* that we had run out of milk, and indirectly *requested* my partner to buy some. Those are, according to Austin, ‘illocutionary acts’, and they are not just a matter of meaning, but of what he called *force* – since my utterance actually makes it the case that I performed these deeds. And thirdly, by means of these illocutionary acts, I may have attained some expected goals, like having the milk bought, and obtained some unexpected results, like annoying my partner because it was my turn to buy it.

The Austinian perspective is another sort of intentional approach to language, since all three sub-actions may be explained in terms of the intentions agents had while performing them. That is: if we asked for the reasons why I did what I did, my act of leaving the note may be described as a fulfilment of

- (1) my *locutionary intention* to write some words; of
- (2) my *illocutionary intention* to tell something to my partner, or of the one to indirectly request something from her; and of
- (3) my *perlocutionary intention* to have milk bought for tomorrow.

Nonetheless, it is important to realise that the role of intentions is crucially different in the case of illocutionary acts. It seems that the description of the utterance as an illocutionary act immediately implies the attribution of the illocutionary intention to the agent, whereas that is not the case with the other acts, which may be unintentionally performed. That is: I may have written some sentence unintentionally, and I may have annoyed my partner unintentionally, but I may not have made a request unintentionally. If I made a request, then I was intending to do it. Illocutions are constituted by intentions in a way locutions and perlocutions are not.

This is a feature that is not exclusive of illocutionary acts: there are a good number of actions that are constituted by the intentions to perform them: to communicate, as we saw in the previous section, is a clear case, together with many other non-communicative deeds, such as ‘attacking’, ‘resting’, or ‘achieving’. In the case of both communicative and illocutionary acts, a social trait is added, since their successful performance is constituted not just by the fulfilment of the intention to perform them, but also by the hearer’s recognition of that same intention. In this sense, communicative acts and illocutionary acts seem equal.

However, despite this similarity, according to Searle (1969), illocutionary acts are not mere communicative acts, since the former are *constituted* by rules, whereas the latter are merely *regulated* by them. Regulative rules apply to activities that are logically prior to such rules, and independent of them. Think about an activity like fishing: there may be many rules on what, when, and how to fish, rules that perhaps indicate the most efficient ways to do it, or ways in which it is allowed. However, the activity of fishing is not itself constituted by those rules: it is merely regulated by them. One may fish not following any rule in particular, and that may still count as ‘fishing’. In contrast to this, constitutive rules *are* logically prior to the activity in question. They make the activity possible in the first place, and there is no such activity if the agent is not following the rules. Classic examples are games like chess or baseball: people did not first begin to play chess, and then decide to regulate their practice according to rules – rules themselves constitute the practice. In order to perform actions governed by constitutive rules, an agent must know those rules, and that he is acting according to them. Illocutionary intentions, from this perspective, are those agents have when their aim is to follow such constitutive rules.

In Searle’s opinion, the Gricean approach to language neglects the fact that speech acts are like chess, not like fishing. The sort of rationality Grice envisaged to account for communication is merely constrained by maxims of a regulative kind: it only requires intelligent agents, able to fulfil their communicative purposes and to guess those of others by inference. But that is not enough for the performance of speech acts, according to Searle, since speakers must additionally know the illocutionary rules in use in their community, and act according to them, in order to perform illocutionary acts. One must know what it is to make a promise in order to make one, or what it is to get married in order to do so. One must have the intention to perform these deeds, that is, to follow the rules that constitute those practices.

A theory of speech acts ought to describe and explain, in Searle’s view, those constitutive rules, and the method he proposes for this is to analyse the meaning of illocutionary verbs (like requesting, offering, inviting, promising, or informing), which are explicit indicators of their illocutionary force. A study of those meanings would be the best way to make their rules of use explicit, and thus shed light on the nature of speech acts. This is a move that seems counter to the intentional approach to language, giving conceptual priority to linguistic meaning over agential intentions, and some authors have criticised it as a semanticization of pragmatics.

More relevant is the idea that speech acts theory attributes a *constitutive* role to intentions in the performance of speech acts. Whenever a speech act is performed, the speaker must have had the intention to act according to some instituted rule – otherwise, no speech act was actually performed. However, not all intentions manifested in speech have this constitutive role. The speaker’s act may also respond to other intentions in a contingent way, since we may also *express* intentions by means of speech that are not constitutive of our speech acts. For instance, by requesting someone to do something we express our desire to have that thing done; by thanking, we express our gratitude. In this sense, most (but not all) speech acts count as expressions of specific mental states, called their ‘sincerity condition’ (Searle 1969, 62). In particular, some speech acts have intentions as their sincerity condition. The case of promises is paradigmatic in this respect, since they have a future intention of the speaker as their sincerity condition (that

is: whenever a speaker promises to do something, she expresses her intention to do it). In these cases, the role of the expressed intention is not constitutive: even if the speaker did not have the intention she expressed, the speech act did occur (her speech act would be insincere, but still committing, giving rise to new rights and obligations). In contrast to this, as I said before, it seems that constitutive, illocutionary intentions must be present whenever the speech act takes place, even in insincere performances.

To summarise: on one hand, Gricean communicative intentions are intentions speakers have when they try to influence their hearers by means of their recognition that they are trying to influence them. On the other hand, Austinian/Searlean illocutionary intentions are the intentions to perform speech acts, which are those that modify the normative status (rights and obligations) because they are constituted by socially instituted rules. Those two approaches are not clearly compatible, given the different roles intentions accomplish in each one of them, and the different sort of rationality they attribute to agents. Grasping this difference is essential to navigate the current literature on pragmatics whenever the complex notion of intention is at stake.

Recent work and future directions

My aim in this final section is to pinpoint recent debates on the foundations of pragmatics where intentions have an important role to play. Hopefully, understanding on those debates may be earned from the distinctions made in the previous section.

The semantics/pragmatics interface

A very influential proposal coming from the Gricean trend is Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory (1986). Theirs is a work that puts speech acts in a corner, and definitely focuses on the problem of communication. In their view, two main models account for this phenomenon: the code model and the inferential model. The code model would explain *communication* as the process by which a speaker transfers some message by means of a code, while *understanding* would consist of the audience decoding that message. In contrast to this, the inferential model claims that *communication* may be attained without the help of any shared code, just relying on the inferential capacities of the agents. The example of the empty milk bottle (in case it fulfilled my communicative intentions) is a case of purely inferential communication, whereas that of the note implies a code.

One basic idea behind Sperber and Wilson's proposal is that code models are not autonomous, but always depend on inferential capacities. They claim that there is no way to make sense of communication and understanding as a simple process of coding and decoding. One of the main reasons they adduce for this is that codes are not specific enough by themselves to express the thoughts or psychological attitudes of speakers:

It is true that a language is a code which pairs phonetic and semantic representations of sentences. However, there is a gap between the semantic representations of sentences and the thoughts actually communicated by utterances. This gap is filled not by more coding, but by inference.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986: 9)

Such a radical unevenness between mental attitudes and sentence meanings is argued to have two quite disturbing effects, which are the two sides of the same coin: firstly, we could not make the content of a speaker's intention fully explicit by simply indicating a sentence that expresses

it; and secondly, it would be impossible in principle to define the meaning of a given sentence in terms of the content of a speaker's intentions.

There is an important and lively dispute on the interface between semantics and pragmatics that may be interpreted as an effect of this problem. Semantic minimalists defend a traditional frame where semantics determines the content of *what is said* by a sentence. It does so by allowing us to specify the proposition an utterance expresses in the light of the conventional meanings of words, compositional rules for combining them, and some objective and innocuous features of the context. According to authors like Bach (2004), Cappelen and Lepore (2005), or Borg (2006), pragmatic processes would take all of that as an input and use it inferentially in order to find out the communicative intention of the speaker – and perhaps what speech acts have been actually performed. In contrast to this, defenders of pragmatic intrusion, like Recanati (2010) or Jaszczolt (2005), claim that there is no way to specify the content of *what is said* in any relevant sense, unless we take into consideration the pragmatic context. And this crucially includes the intentions with which speakers made their utterances. An effect of this sort of position, sometimes labelled as *contextualist*, is that it implies quite a radical attack on the autonomy of semantic deliberations, which would depend on pragmatic concerns.

This debate has significant implications for the very possibility of the Gricean project. If some form of contextualism is right, it seems that the input to pragmatic inference would not be constructed prior to pragmatics itself. If *what is said* is the starting point for the hearer to find out the speaker's communicative intentions and, at the same time, pragmatic inference on the agential intentions of speakers is a must to determine *what is said*, then it seems that we are enclosed in circular reasoning. This is what Levinson (1995; 2000: 186) called Grice's circle – a problem affecting the very basis of pragmatics that seems to be still on the table.

The battlefield of this debate is thus the notion of *what is said*. According to some authors, its content is some sort of 'minimal proposition', which ought later to be specified or qualified by means of pragmatic processes; according to others, we may not attribute any content to it before pragmatic inferences on the intentions of the participants are made. Remembering the two senses of intention exposed at the beginning of this chapter, we may say that it is the autonomy of the intentionality of language that is at stake: semantic minimalists attribute intentionality to linguistic expressions themselves, whereas contextualists and defendants of pragmatic intrusion claim that we may find no fully fledged intentionality in language unless we take the intentional character of agency into consideration.

Between internalism and externalism

Many areas of philosophy employ a famous distinction between internalism and externalism, which roughly classifies theories depending on their proneness to rely on mental features of the person or facts about the world around her in order to account for some phenomenon. Applying this distinction to pragmatics, Harnish (2009) has claimed that theories of speech inspired by Austin or Searle are prone to postulate external conditions, since they try to explain the workings of speech acts by making conventions, rules, and norms explicit, while those inspired by Grice are more inclined to internalism, since they understand communication as a process of unveiling communicative intentions.

Even if making a clear-cut classification of different pragmatic theories according to this distinction does not seem possible, the tension between internalism and externalism is manifest in the literature. A good example is the discussion of the way the content of demonstratives may be determined. David Kaplan (1977) famously proposed that demonstratives are

incomplete unless accompanied by an overt physical demonstration, since the linguistic rules that govern their use are not sufficient to determine their referents. However, Kaplan himself later argued against this idea, claiming that the ‘directing intention’ of the speaker determines what is the target of the demonstrative (Kaplan 1989). He thus moved from an externalist to an internalist position. This step was criticised by Reimer (1991), who claimed that only manifest, observable, ostensive gestures are semantically significant, regardless of the speaker’s intentions. This, again, is a clearly externalist position – see further discussion in Mount (2008) and King (2014).

This is an epistemological issue that would not be deprived of important consequences for research in pragmatics, affecting our methodological strategies to confront empirical data. A radically externalist position would preclude us from including features about the speakers’ minds in our descriptions of their communicative exchanges. And even if we were allowed to describe the conversational scene in cognitive terms, the notion of intention could still be banned for different reasons. For instance, an author like Bach (2006) is known for having resisted admitting intentions as a part of the context on the grounds that context ought be understood as the basis the hearer has when she tries to infer the speaker’s intentions – a reservation that might also be found in Fodor and Lepore (2004).

In order to properly assess those refusals, it is crucial to stipulate the notion of context under consideration: on one hand, there is the Austinian idea of context as ‘the total speech act in the total speech situation’ (Austin 1962: 147), where it is hard to deny that intentions are an important part (unless we also wanted to impeach the whole intentional account of action); but, on the other hand, there is an epistemic notion of context, which is the basis for the hearer’s inferential processes. Either understood as some form of ‘common knowledge’ between speaker and hearer (Lewis 1969), or as ‘mutual knowledge’ among them (Schiffer 1972), the epistemic context is what speaker and hearer allegedly share before the communication of new information takes place. It is here where the presence of intentions may seem controversial (Bach 2006: 546). Bach seems right in claiming that it does not make any sense to introduce the speaker’s communicative intention as a part of the epistemic context that allows the hearer to infer *that very same* intention, since otherwise communication itself would be futile. However, I would say that nothing in his arguments forces us to exclude *other* intentions the speaker may have as a part of the epistemic context that allows the hearer to infer some current communicative or illocutionary intention. For instance: if other intentions have been previously manifested, then they may be part of the shared or common epistemic context, which allows the hearer to infer the speaker’s specific intentions at some given moment.

In this sense, what we need is a deeper understanding of what it is to make an intention public or manifest, allowing it to become a part of the epistemic context. Mitchell Green (2007) is putting forward ideas in this respect that could be ground-breaking. Elaborating on empirical data in the field of biosemiotics, he explains the way in which hidden states and capacities of animals may be made manifest by means of external signs, insofar as those signs have been selected with the function to make those hidden states overt to others. They are even better indicators if they are costly to produce, because then they are hard to imitate by fakers, becoming ‘handicaps’. In Green’s opinion, speech acts ought to be understood along these lines, as a particular kind of ‘handicap’ (2009): they are produced to allow speakers to manifest their intentions in the social scene, and an imbalance between what is manifested and what actually takes place in the speaker’s mind is punished with social exclusion. In the end, the frontier between natural and non-natural meaning (as the one between the internal and the external) may not be as deep as we initially thought it was.

Conclusion: Beyond intentions

Up to this moment, I have described a model where each individual utterance is explained in terms of its intentional origins, considering each utterance as an independent act motivated by some psychological state of the speaker. However, a recent trend in pragmatics promotes a different approach, focussed on the interactional and collaborative character of conversation. Instead of accounting for speech performance as a sequence of individual and independent utterances chained in serial exchanges, some scholars propose to look at it as a whole process of social interaction, performed simultaneously by all the participants (Bara 2010). In some cases, this theoretical shift is put forward as an abandonment of the intentional account in favour of some alternative possibility (Arundale 2008), whereas in other cases a similar emphasis on the dialogic and negotiated character of communication does not seem to imply such a deep breach with the intentional account (Thomas 1995; Haugh 2009, 2013, Haugh and Jaszczolt 2012).

There are serious doubts that a simple causal model of folk psychological explanations, based on the idea that each individual action is the effect of some particular intention in the mind of the speaker, could do all the explanatory work required to account for the complex ways in which agents are held responsible for their words and interact with others by means of speech. In this sense, discussion of the role of agential intentions in communication and speech acts may be illuminated by recent developments in the theory of action, which encourage us to go beyond the cognitive-causal notion of intention that sustains the standard account of action. Besides their mental states being the *cause* of their behaviour, agents are *present* in their actions in other complex ways, by means of which they make sense of their deeds as their own. To account for this complex kind of belonging or recognition there are different theoretical instruments at our disposal: not just a standard causal theory of mind (Davidson 1980), but more complex ways to elucidate the rationality of action, such as meta-representational capacities to form second-order beliefs, desires, or intentions about our own first-order mental states, in order to guide them towards what is really important for us (Frankfurt 1988); capacities of prevision and projection, articulated in temporally structured planning strategies oriented towards social coordination (Bratman 1987); or the ability to integrate events in narratives, whose coherence and intelligibility allows us to consider them as a meaningful part of our own biography (Ricoeur 1994; Velleman 2009). This seemingly theoretical disquisition could be illuminating in empirical research in order to make sense of the way agents seem to negotiate with others the meaning and force of their utterances, while they try to get along by means of speech. And, although these clues impel us to look beyond intentions, following them could be the only way to attain a really successful intentional account of language.

Suggestions for further reading

- Grice, H. P. (1989) *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Collects the classic papers that initiated the study of language in terms of communicative intentions, and the project of intention-based semantics.
- Searle, J. R. (1969) *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Is his systematic development of Austin's seminal ideas: an account of speech acts theory based on constitutive rules.
- Green, M. S. (2007) *Self-Expression*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Contains a recent development of speech acts theory, well informed on biological and evolutionary facts.
- Haugh, M. (2008) 'Intention in pragmatics', *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 5(2): 99–110.
A collection of recent papers discussing intentions' role in pragmatics from different perspectives.
- O'Connor, T. and Sandis, C. (eds.) (2010) *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
A comprehensive collection of papers that addresses the main issues in the theory of action.

Note

- 1 I would like to thank Anita Avramides, Teresa Bejarano, Adriano Bermudo, María Marbán and Margarita Planelles for insightful discussion and comments. Financial support for this chapter has come from the Spanish government (FFI2011–25131, Ministerio de Investigación e Innovación).

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