

Meaning, intentions, and argumentation. KEPA KORTA & JOANA GARMENDIA, (Ed.). Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 2008. (xiv, 240)

This volume offers a representative cross section of current approaches to questions encompassed by its title through language philosophy, rhetoric, semantics, and pragmatics (xi) in the eleven papers from an international array of scholars working in these areas. These papers taken together constitute a specialized body of study, whose audience follows current developments in these interrelated disciplines.

At the outset, though, I will correct the editors, who reflect the reductive and misinformed, albeit mainstream popular view, of the role of the ancient Sophists in Athens. We must understand that at the time of Gorgias, Greek society embraced the pantheistic tradition in which virtue was believed to be innate, i.e., the result of birth, and wisdom was dispensed by the gods — the historical Socrates, we will recall, was charged in 399 BCE with refusing the city gods; it was these thinkers who perceived the relativity of social values, promoted the use of language to obtain wisdom, and taught the effective application of language to attain social and political ends, which had the effect of divesting power and authority from those whose control of institutions and social policy arose from birthright in newly democratic Athens (interested readers are referred to Kerferd 1981 and de Romilly, 1992).

It seems that from its inception as a subdiscipline, linguistic pragmatics and truth value semantics have been on a collision course, since the focus of this semantics is the *sentence*, while the realm of pragmatics, in its manifold permutations, is the *utterance* and the context in which it occurs, which can be seen to nullify the truth value in the *sentence*. In the first article, “Intention, Reference, and Semantic Value,” by John Perry, (1 – 12), intention could be broadened to include presupposition in context. It also seems that the category *definiteness* is under-

emphasized throughout, as that grammatical category is implicit in reference. The author seeks to integrate the two vectors, truth value semantics and pragmatics, but the argument remains essentially formal.

Luis M. Valdés-Villanueva refutes much of Perry's argument in "On Perry's Relative Truth-conditions" (29 – 40), primarily on the grounds "that Perry's truth-conditions are in fact *preconditions*" [emphasis original] (29). Both Perry's example of *indexical* information (that we can interpret from seeing mail on our desk certain facts, that someone has been there, that it was the person we know to bring the mail, that she has not yet gone on vacation) and the authors' discussion of it (35) miss a point: the letters on the desk do constitute an index (in the Peircian sense); but if having found the mail we uttered to a colleague, "Oh, I found mail on my desk," would we expect the colleague to interpret the implications given in the example (as might follow from Grice's Maxim of Relevance)? Only if the answer is 'yes' would this case of indexicality rise to the level of reference. Here the truth value of the utterance (were it in fact uttered) has nothing to do with what we use it to communicate. It seems that the discussion about "constraints" here simply redigests the aforementioned maxim.

Likewise, another fundamental question is not raised: if the example remains at the level of finding the mail, can we impute to the mail bringer the intention to impart the above information, i.e., was bringing the mail a *communication signal*? This intention would be entailed if we take the appearance of the mail as a token in a communication event. Otherwise, like footprints in the snow, the phenomenon is simply present, subject to interpretation. These two points together show that while signs in systems of communication may function as indices, the compass of indices is not limited to communication signs.

Eros Corazza, in “Singular Propositions, Quasi-singular Propositions, and Reports” (13 – 28), explores the thorny areas of indexicals as referential terms and terms in attitude reports. It is not clear how we can give up Frege’s thesis that “thoughts refer to truth value” without “undermining Frege’s general semantics” (19, n4), since fundamental in Frege is the notion that the sense of a sentence is a *thought*. The argument here, in the tradition of Frege, is formally based.

In “Fiction and Deception: How Cooperative is Literature?” (41 – 60), Salvatore Attardo provides a thorough review of literature in which the topic of the Grice’s Cooperative Principle is applied to the field of ‘creative nonfiction’. The notion, though, of a millennia-old socio-cultural conviction that literature “must” be true, and that it takes a Ph.D. to be disabused of it (45), is simply not the case. The novel in English as we know it is a product of the first half of the Eighteenth Century which replaced the popular Heroic *Romans* tradition with its fantastic narratives — history records that even Prime Minister Walpole was an avid reader of *Romans* as a schoolboy. In Charlotte Lennox’s *The Female Quixote* (1752), the young heroine, who had been raised in utter seclusion with only such *Romans* stories for companionship and *exempla* of the world, behaved as though the fabulous worlds she read about were factual, a ridiculous state of affairs of which she was finally disabused by experience. The plausibility of the premise of the novel required the utter social isolation of the heroine as a precondition for acquiring the aforementioned conviction, i.e., a wholly unnatural situation had to be concocted for readers to accept that the heroine believed it. Certainly an early formula, exploited by Defoe, Fielding, and Richardson, involved presenting the text as a *history*, i.e., as being REAL, which contemporary critics and readers temporarily believed to be the case. But what this stratagem underscores is that a means was developed to overcome the default expectation of critics and readers — that

literary works be fictional. Most critics agree that it was the development of techniques that produce a psychologically realistic experience in readers that defined the new genre. The key word here is realistic. Benjamin Franklin, for example, remarked in his autobiography about this style of writing, which gave readers the impression that they were present in the company of those involved in the action. Again, a presupposition of this remark is the consciousness that the writing is fictional.

On a different note, the Least Disruption Principle cited here, interestingly, follows quite closely the rules of musical counterpoint, as inferred from the compositions of J.S. Bach and others at the beginning of the Common Practice Era.

Achille C. Varzi, in “Failures, Omissions, and Negative Descriptions” (61 – 75), argues that “‘negative events’ are just ordinary, ‘positive’ events under a negative description” (63). Along the way, an interesting distinction is made between causal *explanations* contra causal *reports*.

“The Case for Core Meaning” (77 – 112), by Manfred Kienpointer, distinguishes between core meaning and contextual meaning and reviews literature about these questions. As K points out, contextual metaphorical extension of a core meaning can become conventional. This is, in fact, the primary means of vocabulary expansion. We could add that this occurs at precisely the point when the fact of its extension becomes opaque. This is exemplified in English by *HAPpy* and *HAPpen*, which synchronically have lost their association with *hap* ‘chance’. I certainly agree that “literal meaning cannot be isolated by imagining a fictitious communicative use” (85), but is determined by reference to actual texts. The notion of literal meaning, in this regard, though, is probably the great embarrassment for formal semantics.

It should be pointed out here that Jp *hon* 本, is in fact a much longer story than a case of so-called central or non-central features (92). A borrowing from Chinese *ben* (in Northern Chinese, it might be understood as polysemous, but it is better apprehended as the name of two homonyms, one ‘the root (of something)’, as the ideogram depicts (which participates in such compounds as 根本 *genben* ‘fundamentally’, 本錢 *benqian* ‘capital’ and 成本 *chengben* ‘cost’); the other the classifier for ‘book(s)’. Some scholars have gone to pains to associate the two lexically, but it is most likely the case that, like many graphs used in Chinese, a language with multitudinous homonyms, the character for ‘root’ was later borrowed to write ‘book’.

Tim Fernando, in “Situations from Events to Proofs” (113 – 130) applies string representations to R. Cooper’s proposal that natural language propositions “are types of situations.” Nicholas Asher and Eric McCready, in “A Compositional Account of Counterfactuals” (131 – 163), explore counterfactuals and the relation of English modals with indicatives in related sentences. In “The Rhetorical Attachment of Questions and Answers” (165 – 177), Philippe Muller and Laurent Prévot study a corpus using a framework of Segmented Discourse Representation Theory and conclude that question and answer, as a discourse event, can be realized as a monologue unit.

Marc Dominicy, in “Epidictic Rhetoric and the Representation of Human Decision and Choice,” (179 - 207) revisits these age-old questions with reference to Aristotle and Illocutionary Act / Performative Act Theory. In “Within the Bounds of Reason: Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse” (209 – 235), Frans H. von Eemeren and Peter Houtlosser provide a succinct review of literature on the rhetorical and dialectic traditions. I certainly agree with the authors when they state, “the communicative and interactional meaning of argumentative discourse can only really be grasped if it is put in the functional perspective” of the event in

which it occurs (209). The authors' aim of balancing the dialectical objective of resolution and the rhetorical objective of one's own position being accepted leads to a more complete analysis of a unit of discourse, especially so, as a common reading of Aristotle's description of rhetoric encompasses knowledge of the arts or sciences to which it is applied (the *Rhetoric*, Book 1), a point which itself needs to be considered in "the functional perspective."

References

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