



Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

Journal of Pragmatics xxx (2017) xxx–xxx

journal of
PRAGMATICS

www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma

Book review

Meaning in Linguistic Interaction: Semantics, Metasemantics, Philosophy of Language

Kasia M. Jaszczolt, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, XII + 215 pp., ISBN: 978-0-19-960246-9

Since the seminal work of Paul Grice problems pertaining to communication have been a matter of intense and rich debates concerning the boundaries between semantics and pragmatics, the logical form of the sentences used to convey information, context sensitivity, etc. Jaszczolt's book sits well within this trend. For it touches problems pertaining to the logical form of utterances, how words are context sensitive, as well the debate between minimalism (see e.g. Bach, 1994; Cappelen and Lepore, 2004; Borg, 2004) and contextualism (see e.g. Sperber and Wilson, 1986; Carston, 2002; Recanati, 2004, 2010) The minimalism versus contextualism debate plays central stage, for instance, in the chapters collected in Preyer and Georg (Eds.) (2007). Jaszczolt attempts to bypass this debate insofar as she takes a radical contextualist stance. To do so she examines and criticizes the main tenets pertaining to both the minimalist and contextualist camps.

This is a rich and well-argued book. It is informed by an extensive array of cross-linguistic and experimental data. It expands on Jaszczolt's previous works on Default Semantics, DS (e.g. Jaszczolt, 2005). DS is, roughly, the view that to understand what people say in their communicative interactions we must take into consideration variegated phenomena. Thus, on top of incorporating the cognitive architecture triggering certain senses, we also need to consider features pertaining to the communicators' culture and society. Jaszczolt proposes a sort of *maximalist* semantics (or maximalist pragmatics, for the clear cut semantics/pragmatics divide is lost). DS is inspired by the second Wittgenstein occasion-meaning, or language-game insights, faithful to the well-known motto that meaning is use. The use involved in the communicators' interaction is what triggers the message they end up sharing. Nonetheless, meaning so understood can still be subjected to a truth-conditional analysis and the conceptual representation is deemed to be the semantic representation (as we will soon see, compositionality occurs at the level of merger representations).

To put forward her view, Jaszczolt starts by criticizing some of the current theories on the market, such as radical contextualism (both in the Relevance Theory and Truth-Conditional Pragmatics versions) which appeals to free pragmatic enrichment or expansion, and semantic minimalism (both in its radical form and in its indexicalist version) that takes meaning to be determined or guided by the syntax and lexicon of the language in which an utterance, or sentence-in-context, belongs. These theories are considered as *fixers*. For, they 'fix' the semantic representation by adding bits to the output of morphosyntax. While minimalists add a little, contextualists add more, but the latter, unlike DS, do not go as far as dissociating the semantic representation from the kind of meaning based on this morphosyntax. In short, although their meaning may come close to the intuitive intended content conveyed by an utterance, they do not go far enough. In particular, they do not capture the semantics of linguistic *interaction*. The latter is derived from a variety of sources of information without giving preference to any of them. Thus, semantic representation does not rest on a given form being enriched, modulated or expanded as a result of contextual information. Rather, all the processes involved in a communicative interaction have equal status, so that the result from these processes can override the logical form (as traditionally understood) qua input for pragmatic enrichment or implicatures. Semantic representation is the *merger representation* that depends on many sources contributing to the truth-evaluable content conveyed in a discourse situation. In short, the regularities guiding linguistic interactions also depend on regularities emerging from all kind of features underpinning the communicators' conversational interactions. Hence, the term *default semantics*.

Furthermore, DS does not rely on Gricean maxims and pragmatic implicatures. The default (or primary) meaning is the most intended and salient one that arises from the communicators' interaction. The primary/secondary meaning distinction in DS is orthogonal to the Gricean explicit/implicit one. One can thus ask whether DS is still a Gricean-inspired theory or not. This meaning qua conceptual representation has the status of semantic representation. It is from this analysis of meaning that truth-conditions enter the scene. An example (p. 79) may illustrate this level of meaning. If in

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.11.003>
0378-2166/© 2017 Published by Elsevier B.V.

Please cite this article in press as: Corazza, E., Book review. Journal of Pragmatics (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.11.003>

answering a student's question "Can I go and get my phone from the locker?", the teacher replies "The lesson has not finished yet", the primary, salient and intended, meaning is "The student cannot go to get the phone from the locker". This is not what the teacher said (in Gricean terms). Nor is this understood by calculating a Gricean pragmatic implicature. The primary meaning is, rather, the conceptual representation that has the status of semantic representation. It is at this level of representation that truth-conditions are employed and it is this representation that has a compositional structure. The latter is a methodological, epistemological and metaphysical assumption based on the argument from productivity and systematicity of meaningful conversational exchanges. What we get is a merger meaning or representation that bypasses the level of the inferential processes: "A semantic representation so understood is called in DS merger representation. The representation is assumed to have a compositional structure. Compositionality is therefore a methodological but also epistemological and metaphysical assumption, based on arguments from productivity and systematicity of conversational interaction patterns" (p. 80). Since semantic representation is the *default* meaning, it encompasses the information coming from variegated aspects of the discourse situation: "the default meanings are automatic interpretations that are available in some contexts" (p. 80).

It is at this level of meaning, the level of merger representation, that the traditional notion of logical form loses its appeal. For this reason Jaszczolt's theory differs from the (traditional) contextualism advocated by, e.g., Relevance Theory and Truth-Conditional Pragmatics. In other words, DS is a form of radical pragmatics (or semantics) where the *primary meaning* of an utterance emerges from the discourse situation where the communicators are engaged in joint, interactive activity. As such, the primary meaning may differ from what the speaker literally said or expressed. Literalness, like the Gricean notion of what is said or Kaplanian content, plays no privileged role in DS. It is mainly for this reason that Jaszczolt can bypass most of the theories currently in vogue in the philosophy of language. DS also bypasses the traditional semantics/pragmatics divide. It does so by abandoning the Gricean distinction between what is said and what is pragmatically implicated (either as a generalized or a particularized conversational implicature). Grice's distinction is supplanted by the distinction between primary and secondary meaning. The default, primary, meaning is driven by the notion of salience upon which linguistic interaction is built. Salience is (context) sensitive to the occasion of the particular linguistic interaction between the speaker and her audience. Meaning, in its compositional form, occurs at the level of conceptual structures (mental representations). The latter "do not obey the syntactic constraint; they do not necessarily follow the logical form of the uttered sentence, *pace* various attempts by 'fixers' to make them appear to do so" (p. 123).

When we come to the meaning of specific words, DS also assumes a radical contextualist stance. We do not have a specific meaning associated to a word that gets modulated in the context of the speech act. What we have is, rather, a *dynamic* meaning based on past uses. Thus a word like 'rabbit', although it is likely to refer to rabbits rather than oranges or tables, in a discourse situation may come to convey the meaning rabbit-meat rather than rabbit-fur. It does so, not because the concept rabbit gets modulated in the context of the utterance (the Relevance Theory notion of ad hoc concepts is of no use to Jaszczolt's project). Although we can start with the assumption that 'rabbit' stands for a concept, we must assume that this concept is situation-specific. But concepts are situation-specific "not because they shift according to some clear rules or that they are constrained by possibilities of the grammar; neither are they situation-specific because they are built in the process of language use. Rather they are dynamic simply because they are susceptible to new uses in virtue of past uses; the generalization over past uses does not produce an abstract concept but instead paves the way towards new uses" (pp. 133–4). So understood, concepts are fluid. To use a metaphor, concepts are like rivers that, according to the obstacles they encounter, can change their course. As we cannot fix the river and then describe its course, we cannot fix a concept and then describe that it comes to mean in a discourse situation. Upon this dynamic perspective on meaning, Kaplan's content/character distinction crumbles. For, even in the case of indexicals (e.g. 'I', 'now', 'here', 'today') we do not have a fixed character (or linguistic meaning) that gives us a content (referent) according to the context in which they are uttered. What we have, instead, are fluid characters that reflect the process involved in the recovery of the (default) meanings conveyed. In some cases the meaning recovery is triggered by a single word, in others by a stretch of words or even the whole discourse situation. This recovery process is based on the processing unit of merger representations. This unit must be sufficiently flexible to reflect the incremental nature involved in the interpretation of an utterance. Furthermore, "indexicality creeps in potentially in the case of every word [...] and in addition words enter into clusters that, so to speak, behave "like indexicals"' (p. 146).

In analyzing the first person pronoun, often considered the indexical expression par excellence, Jaszczolt argues that we cannot stipulate a Kaplanian character that in the context of its use gives the agent (roughly, the speaker or writer) as referent. To buttress her claim, Jaszczolt cites numerous cross-linguistic studies (e.g. Japanese) which suggest that the use of 'I' is linked with and undetachable from the information it conveys. For example, the Japanese 'boku' means 'I-male-casual', 'atasi'-'I-female-casual', 'otosan'-'I-father', 'sensei'-'I-teacher', etc. This information linked to the first-person marker cannot be explained as being pragmatically added or as an implicature. For, when we consult native speakers "they say that making a mistake in the use of such a term feels like a serious deficiency in language competence [...]. these meanings are not cancellable [...] these meanings belong with primary meanings and as such with the truth-conditional content. A failure to acknowledge such arguments is precisely the problem with some attempts in philosophy at justifying Kaplan's distinction [...] the first-person pronoun is far removed from the 'I' of Kaplanesque fiction" (p. 162).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7297621>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7297621>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)