

Noted Presuppositions

Not to do with
of / with distinction, though their background entailment
idea is relevant.

The king of France is bald. (a)

The king of France is not bald. (a)

and analysis:

The presupposition that there is a unique k of France.

If not true, then neither true nor false,

with value gap.

the case of (a) background entailment. Russell says:

the case of (a) conversational implicature.

The k of F is not bald since what is said.

there isn't a k of F. (not / Russellian grounds)

conversational implicature.

Not $[A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C]$
from $A \rightarrow B$ and $B \rightarrow C$

conversational implicature

Presupposition Theory of Conversational Maxims.

CKI003d

Presupposition and Conversational Implicature¹

Paul Grice (1913-1993)

I want in this chapter to consider, from a certain point of view, whether the theory of descriptions could, despite certain familiar objections, be accepted as an account of the phrases, and whether the kind of linguistic phenomena that prompted the resort to the theory of presupposition as a special sort of logical relation (with all the ramifications which that idea would involve) could be dealt with in some other way. One might consider three objections which have at one time or another been advanced by this or that philosopher.

The first is the kind of objection that primarily prompted Strawson's (1950) revolt against the theory of descriptions (Russell, 1905), namely, that when one is asked such a question as whether the king of France is, or is not, bald, one does not feel inclined to give an answer; one does not feel very much inclined to say either that it is true that he is bald or that it is false that he is bald, but rather to say things like *The question doesn't arise* or *He neither is nor isn't bald*, etc. There is, indeed, something unnatural

¹ The material of this chapter was originally delivered as a lecture to the University of Illinois at Urbana in 1970; it has since then been somewhat revised and expanded, but not substantially altered. Its appearance here is intended as a tribute to the work, in this and other philosophical domains, of my friend, former pupil and former Oxford colleague and collaborator, Sir Peter Strawson.

about assigning a truth-value, as far as ordinary discourse is concerned, to statements made by means of sentences containing vacuous descriptions.

The second objection was also made by Strawson, namely, that, if you take an ordinary conversational remark, such as *The table is covered with butter*, it seems a somewhat unacceptable translation to offer in its stead, *There exists one and only one table and anything which is a table is covered with butter*. To make this kind of remark is not to be committed, as seems to be suggested by the Russellian account, to the existence of a unique object corresponding to a phrase, *the so-and-so*; to suggest that one is so committed is quite unjustified.

The third objection (voiced by Searle, among others) is that one gets into trouble with the Russellian theory where one considers moods other than the indicative. To say, for example, *Give these flowers to your wife* does not look as if it translates into something like *Make it the case that there is one and only one person who is married to you, who is female, and who is given these flowers by you*. And, *Was your wife at the party?*, again does not seem as if it would be properly represented by *Was it the case that you have at least one wife and not more than one wife and that no one is both your wife and not at the party?* There does not seem to be the feeling that the person who asks whether your wife was at the party is, among other things, inquiring whether you are nonbigamously married.

I would first start considering whether one could use, to deal with this sort of difficulty, the notion of CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE which I concocted some time ago (Grice, 1975). I will here just give a brief résumé of the main aspects of it. I was concerned with the kind of implication, on the part of a speaker, which appears in such cases as that when somebody asks me where he can get some petrol and I say that there is a garage around the corner; here I might be said to imply, not just that there is a garage around the corner, but that it is open, and that it has stocks of petrol, etc. Or if, in response to a request for a testimonial for somebody who is a candidate for a philosophical job and whom I have taught, I write back and say that his manners are excellent and that his handwriting is extremely legible, I could be said to be implying that he was not all that good at philosophy. I distinguished a number of what I called CONVERSATIONAL MAXIMS which, I suggested, generally applied to the way we talk. They were such things as "Other things being equal, give neither more nor less information than, or at least give as much information as, is required." Another maxim was "Do not say that which you believe to be untrue or that for which you have inadequate evidence." A third was "Be relevant." These maxims are all concerned with the kinds of things that one might say. Besides them there was also a general bunch of items that fell under the heading of MANNER (the manner in which one says things), including the general

maxim "Be perspicuous." These were desiderata that normally would be accepted by any rational discourser, though, of course, they could be infringed and violated. But the general assumption would be that they were not, and that, if there was an apparent violation, then there would be cause for looking to see whether the violation was, in fact, only apparent. I suggested that the presence of some conversational implicatures arose from cases where there was at least an appearance of violation of one of these maxims. What was implicated by the speaker would be what he might expect the hearer to suppose him to think in order to preserve the idea that the maxims are, after all, not being violated. That is to say, to take the case of the testimonial, the suggestion would be something like that the hearer might be disposed to have a thought that could be expanded in this way: "It is clearly in point for him [the speaker] to tell me a good deal about this candidate's philosophical abilities. [This is required by the maxim of Quantity.] He hasn't done so; on the assumption that he is not violating conversational procedures, he has some reason why he has not. That reason is likely to be that the things he would say would either be untrue or else bad and he doesn't want to say those things. So the explanation then would be that he had a low opinion of the candidate." Thus this information is conveyed indirectly.

I also distinguished, within this general heading, particular conversational implicatures that depended on particular contextual features (the features of the context) and ones that I thought of as relatively general which I called GENERALIZED IMPLICATURES. These are the ones that seem to me to be more controversial and at the same time more valuable for philosophical purposes, because they will be implicatures that would be carried (other things being equal) by any utterance of a certain form, though, as with all conversational implicatures, they are not to be represented as part of the conventional meaning of the words or forms in question. (It is important that what is conversationally implicated is not to be thought of as part of the meaning of the expressions that are used to get over the implication.) And I thought that this notion of a GENERALIZED conversational implicature might be used to deal with a variety of problems, particularly in philosophical logic, but also in other areas. In these cases there seemed to me to be quite good grounds for suspecting that some people have made the mistake of taking as part of the conventional meaning of some form of expression what was really not part of its conventional meaning, but was rather a nonconventional implication which would normally be carried, except in special circumstances, by the use of that form. It is difficult to find noncontroversial cases just because, if this mistake has been committed, it has been committed on such a wide scale. But plausible examples are perhaps not impossible to find. It was sug-

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gested by Strawson, in *An Introduction to Logical Theory*, that there is a divergence between the ordinary use or meaning of the word *and* and the conjunction sign of propositional or predicate calculus, because *He took off his trousers and went to bed* does not seem to have the same meaning as *He went to bed and took off his trousers*. The suggestion here is, of course, that, in order properly to represent the ordinary use of the word *and*, one would have to allow a special sense (or subsense) for the word *and* which contained some reference to the idea that what was mentioned before the word *and* was temporally prior to what was mentioned after it, and that, on that supposition, one could deal with this case. I want to suggest, in reply, that it is not necessary, if one operates on some general principle of keeping down, as far as possible, the number of special sense of words that one has to invoke, to give countenance to the alleged divergence of meaning. It is just that there is a general supposition which would be subsidiary to the general maxim of Manner ("Be perspicuous.") that one presents one's material in an orderly manner and, if what one is engaged upon is a narrative (if one is talking about events), then the most orderly manner for a narration of events is an order that corresponds to the order in which they took place. So, the meaning of the expression *He took off his trousers and he got into bed* and the corresponding expression with a logician's constant "&" (i.e., "he took off his trousers & he got into bed") would be exactly the same. And, indeed, if anybody actually used in ordinary speech the "&" as a piece of vocabulary, instead of as a formal device, and used it to connect together sentences of this type, they would collect just the same implicata as the ordinary English sentences have without any extra explanation of the meaning of the word *and*.

I should say that I did suggest, in the paper on implicature, two sorts of tests by which one might hope to identify a conversational implicature. I did not mean to suggest that these tests were final, only that they were useful. One test was the possibility of cancellation; that is to say, could one, without logical absurdity, attach a cancelling clause. For instance, could I say *He took off his trousers and got into bed, but I don't mean to suggest that he did those things in that order*? If that is not a linguistic offense, or does not seem to be, then, so far as it goes, it is an indication that what one has here is a conversational implicature, and that the original suggestion of temporal succession was not part of the conventional meaning of the sentence. The other test was a related sort of test; it consisted in looking for other ways of saying just what was being said by the original thing which would not carry the same implication. And if one found that all the other ways seemed to be infected in just the same way (to carry the same implication) as the original, then that, so far as it went would be a good indication that the implicature did not attach to any par-

ticular words, but was something to do with conversational rules. But neither of these tests was regarded by me as being final; the final test for the presence of a conversational implicature had to be, as far as I could see, a derivation of it. One has to produce an account of how it could have arisen and why it is there. And I am very much opposed to any kind of sloppy use of this philosophical tool, in which one does not fulfill this condition.

cancelability
requirement

Now, what about *the present king of France*? As far as I could see, in the original version of Strawson's truth-gap theory, he did not recognize any particular asymmetry, as regards the presupposition that there is a king of France, between the two sentences, *The king of France is bald* and *The king of France is not bald*; but it does seem to be plausible to suppose that there is such an asymmetry. I would have thought that the implication that there is a king of France is clearly part of the conventional force of *The king of France is bald*; but that this is not clearly so in the case of *The king of France is not bald*. Let us abbreviate *The king of France is not bald* by \bar{K} . An implication that there is a king of France is often carried by saying \bar{K} , but it is tempting to suggest that this implication is not, inescapably, part of the conventional force of the utterance of \bar{K} , but is rather a matter of conversational implicature. So let us apply the tests of cancellability and detachment.

NB

First, the implication seems to be explicitly cancellable. If I come on a group of people arguing about whether the king of France is bald, it is not linguistically improper for me to say that the king of France is not bald, since there is no king of France. Of course, I do not have to put it that way, but I perfectly well can. Secondly, the implication seems to be contextually cancellable, that is, cancellable by circumstances attending the utterance, \bar{K} . If it is a matter of dispute whether the government has a very undercover person who interrogates those whose loyalty is suspect and who, if he existed, could be legitimately referred to as the loyalty examiner; and if, further, I am known to be very skeptical about the existence of such a person, I could perfectly well say to a plainly loyal person, *Well, the loyalty examiner will not be summoning you at any rate*, without, I would think, being taken to imply that such a person exists. Further, if I am well known to disbelieve in the existence of such a person, though others are inclined to believe in him, when I find a man who is apprised of my position, but who is worried in case he is summoned, I could try to reassure him by saying *The loyalty examiner won't summon you, don't worry*. Then it would be clear that I said this because I was sure there is no such person.

Furthermore, the implicature seems to have a very high degree of non-detachability. Many of what seem to be other ways of saying, approxi-