Grice 1957, "Meaning"

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I. Two types of meaning

Natural meaning:

(1) "Those spots mean measles." (377)

(2) "The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year."

Non-natural meaning:

(3) "Those three rings on the bell mean that the bus is full."

We'll use 'meaning' for natural meaning and 'meaning$_{nn}$' for non-natural meaning.

(4) "That remark, 'Smith couldn't get on without his trouble and strife,' meant that Smith found his wife indispensable."

Five ways in which meaning differs from meaning$_{nn}$:

Keep an eye on how normal these natural meaning-ascriptions are...
? "Those spots mean measles, but he doesn't have measles"
vs. "Those three rings mean the bus is full; though it's not!" Is that right? It seems to me natural to say "they are *supposed* to mean/indicate that...

i) Meaning-ascriptions are factive, whereas meaning$_{nn}$-ascriptions are not.

ii) Meaning-ascriptions can't be transformed into passive versions, whereas meaning$_{nn}$ can:

   (1) $\not\Rightarrow$ "What is meant by those spots is that he has measles."
   But what about 'indicated' rather than 'meant'?

   (3) $\Rightarrow$ "What is meant by those three rings is that the bus is full."

iii) Relatedly, you can't move from meaning-ascriptions to intentional ascriptions; but you can do so from meaning$_{nn}$-ascriptions,

Compare (1) to (3).   "The conductor meant by that..."

iv) Meaning-ascriptions do not warrant going meta-linguistic, whereas meaning$_{nn}$-ascriptions do.

? "Those spots mean 'measles'." Is this kosher in "Those bells mean 'the bus is full'"?

v) Meaning-ascriptions can be re-stated with 'The fact that...', but meaning$_{nn}$-ascriptions cannot.

II. What is meaning$_{nn}$?

"The question which now arises is this: 'What more can be said about the distinction between the cases where we should say that the word is applied in a natural sense and the cases where we should say that the word is applied in a nonnatural sense?' Asking this question will not of course prohibit us from trying to give an explanation of 'meaning$_{nn}$' in terms of one or another natural sense of 'mean.'" (379)

Question we'll come back to: "What is Grice even trying to do?" First-pass: characterize meaning$_{nn}$ in a more general, less piece-meal way.

A. The causal answer:

"for x to mean$_{nn}$ something, x must have (roughly) a tendency to produce in an audience some attitude (cognitive or otherwise) and a tendency, in the case of a speaker, to *be* produced *by* that attitude, these tendencies being dependent on 'an elaborate process of conditioning attending the use of the sign in communication.'" (379)

Obj. 1: *Accidental meanings.* People have a tendency to put on tailcoats when they go dancing, and others will likely conclude as much from seeing this; but putting on a tailcoat does not mean$_{nn}$ that one is about to dance!

Obj. 2: *Proliferating meanings.* Why doesn't "Jones is an athlete" mean$_{nn}$ that Jones is tall? – people will certainly draw that conclusion.
Stevenson: it makes sense to speak of non-tall athletes.
Grice: This puts the cart before the horse.

Obj. 3: *Meaning and use.* This can only account for *standard* meaning, not for what someone means with some utterance on a particular occasion. Moreover, you might think that this is a huge theoretical mistake: meaning$_{nn}$ needs to be explained in terms of use!

B. Grice's answer, in stages:

First Pass: "x meant$_{nn}$ something" is true iff "x was intended by its utterer to induce a belief in some 'audience' and that to say what the belief was would be to say what x meant$_{nn}$" (381)

Problem: Leave B's handkerchief near a murder scene to get the detective to believe this.

Second Pass: Add that the speaker has to have intended the audience to recognize the intention behind the utterance?

Problem: "Herod presents Salome with the head of St. John the Baptist on a charger." Intends to make Salome believe St. John was dead, and to recognize that she so intended. (382)

Example: contrast (1) showing Mr. X a photo of Mr. Y and Mrs. X, with (2) drawing a picture of Mr. Y and Mrs. X, and showing it to Mr. X.
What's the difference? Plausibly: the *causal efficacy* (or believed causal efficacy) of his recognition of your intention – did it play an essential role in instilling the belief?

Final Pass: "x meant$_{nn}$ something" is true iff (1) x intended to induce some belief in her audience (2) by means of their recognition of her intention; and to say what this belief was would be to say what x

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Stevenson

Basically, this is all done in terms of causal tendencies, without reference to intentions.

Grice: "This clearly will not do."

Respond by saying we must be using the sign in communication? That would be circular, à la 'x has meaning$_{nn}$ if it is used in communication'.

The reason we can speak of non-tall athletes is that it is not meaningless$_{nn}$ to do so; we're trying to figure out how this arises. (380)

Start with meaning$_{nn}$ of particular utterances in order to get at general meanings$_{nn}$ of signs.
Broad use of 'utterance'

We want to distinguish "deliberately and openly letting someone know" from "telling."

Contrast: stumbling across the photo vs. stumbling across the drawing (doodle?).

meant$_{nn}$. (383-4)

Objection: deliberate vs. spontaneous frowns? Either one will lead to conclusion that you are displeased. Response: deliberate frown only has same effect provided the audience recognizes the intention, even though the spontaneous one would have a similar effect (383).

C. *Worries for the proposal:*

i) Why can't I mean something by a utterance even without intending that an audience picks up this meaning? (Or even deliberately intending them not to – cursing under my breath; writing things in a diary.)

> Somehow "parasitical" on standard uses? Worry that this gets back to Grice's objection to Stevenson.

ii) On the believed causal efficacy of my audience's recognition of my intention:

  – Does it only require that I *think* he'll draw the conclusion? What if I'm delusional, and think that Mr. X will only trust the photograph if he recognizes my intention to convey info with it? – Does it thereby get meaning$_{nn}$?

  > What if I think saying 'blarg' will get him to believe his wife is unfaithful – does my word thereby take on that meaning$_{nn}$?

  – What if I know my audience will draw the conclusion no matter what; it doesn't seem like this always makes my utterance lack meaning.

  > We see a car crash, and I say, "That car just crashed."

iii) Why, exactly, is there no paradoxicalness in the self-reference-y part? What if I say, "I am not intending that you recognize any of my intentions" to you? Plugging this into Grice's proposal, this has meaning only if I intend to induce in you a belief with content *Kevin is not intending that I recognize any of his intentions* by means of recognizing my intention that you do so. But presumably I can't intend to do something that I so obviously cannot do.

> Not really a paradox, but just another questionable prediction? – Namely, that my utterance doesn't have meaning$_{nn}$.

<u>Big picture question</u>: what, exactly, is Grice trying to do? Helping himself to intentionality and content; but once you have that, is there really much left to be explained? Are his aims simply much more modest than solving the problem of intentionality in language?

> He discusses his use of intentions, and mainly defends it by arguing that our knowledge of them is not problematic (386-7).