Phenomenology of the Sign: the Cultural Meanings in the Linguistic Activity of Consciousness

Pavel N. Baryshnikov

Department of History, Social Sciences, Philosophy, Oriental Studies and Theology
Pyatigorsk State University
Pyatigorsk, Russia
E-mail: pnbaryshnikov@pglu.ru

Abstract—**This article deals with the phenomenological foundations of the intentional theory of meaning. Despite the peculiar reductionism, the phenomenological tradition lays the methodological basis for the philosophy of ordinary language. Semantic and pragmatic studies of language pay special attention to distinguishing the content of mental states from the content of the proposition. A special role is played by externalist approaches in analyzing the situational cultural forms of presupposition. In the researchers understanding, language has become not just a sign-symbolic communicative system but also a type of social activity that translates cultural meanings. The stages of the theory of speech acts formation manifest grounds for the convergence of the philosophy of language with the classical psychophysical problem (mind-body problem).**

Keywords—phenomenology of sign; intentional theory of meaning; philosophy of ordinary language; speech act theory; mental states

I. INTRODUCTION

What is phenomenology, and how is it related to the problem of language and the linguistic activity of consciousness? If we give the most general definition, then any description of things as they are in consciousness can be called phenomenology. That is, the subject of phenomenology is not objective reality but the ways of the objective reality comprehension in consciousness. Pursuant to the phenomenological approach, the possibility of direct access to reality exists due to certain characteristics of consciousness. Therefore, to determine certain properties of reality, it is necessary to investigate these characteristics. Phenomenology is another philosophical attempt to direct the "ray of knowledge" into the foundations of one's own self. These ideas go back to the works of J. Locke, R. Descartes, D. Hume, I. Kant, and their later followers. If the world is how it is shown to us in the structures of consciousness, then the connection with the cognitive aspects of language is obvious: language, according to some approaches, is a way of the world existence in the cognitive-communicative activity of consciousness. The phenomenological tradition prefers to put the objective reality and the psychological component of the subject "out of the brackets". What does it mean? For a phenomenologist, intentional states of consciousness — or ways of consciousness directing towards an object — become significant.

II. PHENOMENOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION OF SIGNS

The phenomenological theory of the sign, which was described in detail by E. Husserl in volumes I and II of Logical Investigations [1] [2] is of particular interest to the philosophy of consciousness and semiotic research. Through the distinction between the indication-sign and the expression-sign, Husserl tries to develop a special methodology for language analysis to derive the laws and objects of pure logic.

An indication-sign (label, stamp) does not carry the function of meaning assigning, but only serves as a notification. For example, a cross drawn on a hand or a knot on a scarf attracts attention as code symbols and should remind us of something very important, but at the same time we often forget about the content of such "reminders". Such symbols, both in the case of crosses and knots, and in the case of the empirical level of science, give rise to motivations in the belief that these "knots" have the signified. Although the connection between the signified and the significant is not obvious in this case.

An expression-sign, on the contrary, is intended to ascribe meaning to something through itself. Husserl immediately distinguishes the expression as a kind of syntactically organized articulation and an expression in the meaning of "emotional expression." Only speech belongs to expression-signs, since gestures or facial expressions do not prescribe sign relationships, but only signal the manifestation of certain emotional states as symptomatic features. Characteristically, the indication-sign may not be an expression (for example, a spontaneous notch on a tree), whereas an expression-sign cannot exist without a material code expression. Speech is possible, if only if the speaker has the intention to communicate something, otherwise it will be just meaningless physical fluctuations of the environment. The semantic intention of the speaker is necessary, as well as the recognition of this intention by the listener (without the latter, understanding is impossible).

Hence, the physical phenomenon of expression is the material carrier of articulation, the process of imparting

meaning; it is connected with the intentionality of the speaker (the intention to communicate something that is objectively or conceptually connected with the expression of the sign); the realization of meaning is a process when the meaning of the sign does not coincide with what was meant by its expression. The sign is the phenomenological unity of these three levels.

Husserl's ideas are largely consonant with G. Frege's principles of distinguishing sense and meaning. However, at the same time, there is a significant difference: "Husserl's meaning is the meaning of the thing (state of affairs) in consciousness, while Frege's meaning is the meaning of the word (sentence) denoting the thing (state of affairs)" [3].

Despite the original theory of the sign, Husserl seeks to reduce any linguistic foundations, trying to avoid the "temptation of language". In his later works, Husserl admits that phenomenology was never able to take the language out of the picture and get closer to pure essential contemplation of the meaning. Indeed, while preserving in phenomenology the "language game" of the theory expressed in linguistic propositions, Husserl conflicts with the principle of reduction.

III. INTENTIONAL THEORY OF MEANING

Nevertheless, the theory of intentionality and the phenomenological problem of the relationship between the meaning of the expression and the meaning of the utterance will develop in the pragmatic aspects of the philosophy of ordinary language.

In the middle and in the second half of the 20th century, logical and semantic problems derived from the theory of consciousness and philosophy of science was reconsidered within the scope of linguistic pragmatics and semantics. It happens primarily due to popularization of externalist approach within human sciences. In the process of communication, much attention was paid not to the meaning of a sign but to its mode of intuition. Systems of these modes of intuition turned out to be complicated and subject to a great amount of factors — from emotional state of communicators to their social status, background knowledge, gender and age factors, etc.

Today, the term "semantics" is used in various disciplines (from programming to medicine), and therefore the term has lost its unambiguity. In philosophy, there is both a broad interpretation of the term "semantics" (everything related to the content of a certain expression) and narrower definitions within the framework of formal logic, the theory of conceptual meaning, psycholinguistics, sociology, the theory of artificial intelligence, etc.

All variety of approaches is united by one term — "meaning", the meaning of which is formed due to the constants of the semantic triangle. In the classic work "The Meaning of Meaning", C. K. Ogden and A. A. Richards give twenty-two definitions of this term. G. Leech, in turn, emphasizes the incompatibility of these definitions and understands the content of the term "meaning" using the following approach:

- internal properties;
- set of words that reveal the content of the word in the dictionary;
- connotation of a word;
- place of something in the system;
- practical consequence of a thing in the future experience;
- what the subject (creator, author) relates the symbol to;
- what the subject should relate the symbol to;
- what the symbol should be related to, according to the convictions of the subject;
- what the interpreter relates the symbol to;
- what the symbol should be related to, according to the interpreter's convictions;
- what the subject relates the symbol to, according to the interpreter's beliefs. [4]

They started to analyze native speakers' capability of expressing their intentions with the help of sign systems and of understanding the intentions of a conversation partner within linguistic researches, i.e. why and on what purpose this or that statement came, taking into account the context, situation when the statement was produced. Communicative tools for achieving of aims play now an important role. According to the researchers' opinion, language became not only a semiotic and symbolic communicative system, but also a kind of a social activity and even a behavior form.

The term "presupposition" – which was brought to the analytical tradition by G. Frege in order to distinguish something that is stated and something that causes estimation – is seriously considered within the modern linguistic semantics. [3] Therefore, presupposition is not an evident sense of a statement but the one contained in indirect features. The problem of presupposition created new horizons in semantic analysis of a meaning of a sentence. A whole layer of implied context-dependent meanings based on semantics of background knowledge was found out within linguistic statements.

Analysis of background unclear premises for propositions brought to a stricter division of logical and semantic approaches into nominative and communicative ones, and to rapprochement of semantic questions and philosophic theories of consciousness.

The question is what is the reason of such a rapprochement? A possible answer is that all the non-obvious semantic reasons of certain forms of linguistic behavior are tied up to ontological status of mental states, intentionality of consciousness. Philosophical descriptions of content of consciousness commit not about natural language, but of some upper forms of abstraction. It brings philosophy closer to modern researches in cognitive linguistics; its representatives concentrated their efforts on the problem of

content core of meaning. Key question is what is the conceptual core of polysemy, metaphoric sense, and multidimensionality of statements of natural language? What is a linguistic sign immerged in the communicative context not equal to its meaning? Why does it "shimmer" with its unstable semantic connections?

Both linguistics and philosophy of consciousness try to explain what it means, "to say R while meaning S". In Husserl's terms, if R has a plane of expression, then how is the indirect implementation of sense effected? In fact, associative and sense complex, which is effected within communication, refers to deep mental contents of consciousness; these contents do not demand any algorithmic consequent plane of expression (as it was required in machine languages).

The main difference of the intentional theory from cognitive and semantic approaches is its focus on pragmatics, i.e. on an action effected by a speech act. According to P. Grice, understanding of the meaning of an expression is connected to identification of an intention of a speech act. The following relations determine the meaning of an expression: for S person, expression X means q, only if S normally pronounces X when he means q. Following the idea of L. Wittgenstein that meaning is using, P. Grice managed to pose the main question of semantics: how to pass from the physical essence of a sign to its sense? [5]The author suggests reducing meaning of any language expressions to communicative intention; the naturalistic concept of language's origin is suggested here. The essence of this concept is about the following: a man at an early stage of his development consciously simulated natural signs in order to inform of some situation; afterwards this simulation came together with free denotations, which became socially determined communicative habits. The key point in Grice's theory is a targeting of an expression. The most effective way of achieving the goal is being chosen within combinatory schemes of natural language at the level of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. The first formula can be expanded in such a way: S, pronouncing expression X, which means for him q, has an intention I to achieve a certain goal in the scope of situational context".

In this case, language is the only structured evidence of some states of consciousness. It is not the sense of expression that plays a role, but the communicative fact of its presence – implicature. Implicature is a semantic and pragmatic aspect of an expression, which has to do with subaudition of something with the fact of expression itself. Implicature can be defined as metaphoric aspects of meaning and sense with are not included in conventional structure of linguistic expressions (in linguistic code) directly, i.e. it is what is meant, what is implied. Despite of following criticism of Grice's intentionalism, one should admit that Grice turned out to be among the first ones who pointed out the problem of implementation of mental contents in the terms of pragmatic linguistics.

IV. SPEECH ACT AND CONTENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

American researcher J. Searle created his own interpretation of intentionality within the scope of the theory of speech acts almost at the same time as Grice did. In his early works, taking into consideration J. Austin's theory of speech acts, J. Searle presented language as a form of activity which can be explain with the help of terms of human intentions, wishes and beliefs. Hence, Searle brings linguistic component to the second-level concepts and points again to the deciding role of mental contents of consciousness; that brings philosophy of language into the sphere of theory of consciousness. Searle defines intentionality as "that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world". [6] [7]

Searle draws rather drastic conclusions. He proposes an important thesis: psychological states have propositional content. For instance, while saying

(1) "It's snowing",

the speaker sets conditions of verity of this proposition:

(2) "In Russian, this construction is supposed to define precipitation at sub-zero temperature, I register reality, which correlates with the meaning of this statement, and the situation suits for adequate pronunciation of this statement".

In order to understand the phenomenological question about representative features of intentionality, Searle brings the question of Wittgenstein: "What is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?" Searle considers representative elements of intentionality (regarding phenomena of consciousness) along with representative nature of speech acts and emphasizes four positions:

- Provisional contents and illocutionary contents (meaning of action) are distinguished.

- Both the speech act and intentionality have the direction of conformity, i.e. they are directed to some facts of reality.

- The fact of a speech act realization expresses the presence of a certain intentional state (with the exception of intentional lies or a performer's bad acting).

- Speech acts and intentional states set conditions for accomplishability. [8]

To distinguish between the intentional content and the content of the speech act, we offer the following examples ("Table I").

TABLE I. EXAMPLES OF INTENTIONAL CONTENT AND THE CONTENT OF THE SPEECH ACT

Description of relations	Intentionality of consciousness		Speech act	
1. Propositional contents and illocutive contents	Proposition	Illocution	Proposition	Illocution
	"He will leave the room".	"I am afraid that..." "I hope that..." "I hate when..."	"He will leave the room".	Leave the room! (order) Will he leave the room? (question)
2. Direction of intentionality and speech act	State like the one "I am convinced that he is not guilty" is only true if one isn't really guilty (from word to world)		Proposition "It's snowing" will be true or false regarding a natural phenomenon. (from word to world)	
	A state of a broken promise makes "I promise to love you till death do us part" statement a lie. (from world to word)		A man and a woman used to become a married couple only after a priest pronounced an illocution: "I now pronounce you man and wife!" (from world to word)	
3. Implementation of a speech act and existence of some intentional state	Statements, where propositional content conflicts with intentionality, are impossible. This connection is easy to explain by contradiction using Moore's paradoxes: "I ask you to give up smoking but I don't want you to give up smoking", "I apologize for having offended you but I do not regret having offended you", "I congratulate you for having won but I am not glad that you have won", etc.			
4. Speech acts and intentional states in conditions of possible implementation	"My belief can be implemented if only if things are like I see them, my wishes will come true, if only if they come true, my intentions will be fulfilled if only if they are fulfilled".		"...my statement is true only if my stated belief is true, my order is only then fulfilled, if my wish implied in this order comes true ...".	

V. CONCLUSION

Therefore, we see that in Searle's theory of speech acts phenomena of consciousness, which are expressed in intentional states also, play the main roles in the implementation of sense of linguistic expression. Philosophic theory of speech acts, which actually derives from issues of phenomenology and epistemology, becomes an analysis of performative expressions, which are equal to an action. At the modern level, researches in between of neurobiological theories of consciousness and linguistic pragmatics and semantics look the most promising. If the sense of a linguistic action is possible to describe with the help of the state of brain, philosophers will have to get back to the idea of universal semantics and search for substantial basis of sense.

We have attempted to draft a theory that would substantiate the deep relationship between the phenomenology of the sign and the key problems of pragmatic semantics. Modern philosophy, even in its most radical positivistic, science-centered forms, necessarily expands the analysis of linguistic expressions with cultural components, which in turn are refracted through the speaker's subjective experience. The content of linguistic expression thus becomes a material suitable for the analysis of mental states and their inclusion in the texts of culture. The classical phenomenology of the sign did not reach its goal since it has not revealed a pure essential meaning, but it became the theoretical basis for rigorous research in the field of ordinary language. As we can see, even at the early stages of the intentional theory of meaning, the question of the mechanism of the transition of the mental to the physical was formulated. A pragmatic approach determines the elements of culture, which require observation of speech and behavioral rules, as such a mechanism. Representative properties of intentionality directly involve cultural forms of communicative interaction. So, it is available to formulate the answer to L. Wittgenstein's question about the arm: "If you subtract the upward movement of the arm, the text of the culture will remain, explaining the reasons why you raised it."

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