

XI*—TWO NOTIONS OF UTTERANCE MEANING

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ABSTRACT Two alternatives are considered: (1) the notion of utterance meaning as constituted by the match between the communicative intention and interpretation, (2) the notion of utterance meaning as a set of the utterance's normative consequences. (1) is criticised for its being based on a notion of communicative success limited to a certain type of discourse. On the contrary, (2) allows for a variety of types of discourse governed by different principles of the determination of utterance meanings: they differ in particular in the role assigned to linguistic conventions and to hypotheses about speaker's intentions. A special kind of these hypotheses which can be relevant within both accounts of utterance meaning is analysed in detail.

I

Utterance meaning and communicative success (a marriage). I take it that the ultimate task of the theory of meaning is to explain what it is for an utterance to have a meaning; in other words, what it is for a certain action or its product to bear a particular propositional content and illocutionary force. Notions like sentence meaning, word meaning, truth and reference are meaning-theoretically relevant only within the framework of solving this task.

If nothing unexpected happens, I will finish this paper by rejecting the most attractive meaning theoretical position I have ever met: the Davidsonian notion of utterance meaning as constituted by the match between communicative intention and interpretation.¹ Its appeal, I think, is due to the fact that it does nothing more than to voice the intuitive notion of communicative success: the speaker and the audience succeed precisely in the same case, namely when the speaker is understood as he wanted. So we have two notions in one. And this double notion immediately gives the principle of determination of meanings of particular utterances:

1. Cf. e.g. Donald Davidson, 'The Social Aspect of Language', in *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*, ed. B. McGuinness and G. Oliveri, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht-Boston-London 1994, pp. 11–12.

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the utterance has the propositional content p and illocutionary force f if and only if it was so meant by the speaker and understood by the audience. So we have three notions in one. Another saving immediately follows: utterance meaning is not dependent on any kind of conventions, no matter whether linguistic or not, and in particular, a shared language (identified by a conventionally fixed set of syntactic and semantic rules) is not necessary for making meaningful utterances. To be sure, we can still appeal to various kinds of standards (like those determining what counts as the normal use of some expressions in a given community) or principles (like the principle of charity) such that if the communication participants follow them, the desired match is more probable. But if we want to be true to the trinity introduced above, we have to insist that it is the match between relevant mental states in itself, and not any of those standards or principles, which constitutes the utterance meaning.

No doubt, the desired match can be reached quite spontaneously, and yet be more than a piece of good luck: it can be well-grounded in the shared routine practices governing the use of words and reactions to them in a given community. But the speaker can also choose words quite deliberately, on the basis of certain beliefs about how they will be interpreted by a given audience on a given occasion, and the audience can interpret the utterance on the basis of certain beliefs about how the speaker wants and expects to be interpreted by him on that occasion.² And the speaker's belief about how he will or may be interpreted can be based on a belief about what is the audience's belief about how the speaker wants and expects to be interpreted, etc. And similarly for the audience. It remains open whether any of them goes into these higher order considerations, and if so, how far he goes. But this does not mean that one cannot say anything precise about the possibilities which are open and evaluate them from the point of view of the notion of communicative success characterized above. In the next section I will try to make a few steps in this direction. Then, in section III, we will see that these considerations make sense also within

2. With respect to these cases, I find appropriate Davidson's description in terms of speaker's and audience's 'prior' and 'passing theories'. Cf. Donald Davidson, 'A Nice Derrangement of Epitaphs', in *Truth and Interpretation. Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. by E. Lepore, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1986.

another framework, created by a radically different notion of utterance meaning.

II

Communicative success and agreement in beliefs.

Standard meaning neutralized. *S* and *A* have met a man *X* who introduced himself as Woody Allen. Later they both independently discover that *X* is a deceiver and that the film star and real bearer of the name 'Woody Allen' is another person *Y*. Sometime later *S* says to *A*:

[1] Woody Allen borrowed 20 dollars from me.

We shall now take as granted the Davidsonian account of communicative success and ask how *S* can rationally intend his utterance to be interpreted, and likewise how *A* can rationally interpret the utterance, against the background of certain beliefs concerning the partner's beliefs. The question, of course, concerns the referential intention connected with the name 'Woody Allen'.³

As the story says, both *S* and *A* know, that *Y*, rather than *X* is the real bearer of the name 'Woody Allen' (further for short: *Y* is *W*). But the following possibilities (among many others) are still open:

- (1) *A* believes that *S* believes that *X* is *W*: in virtue of this *A* believes that by uttering the name, *S* intends to refer to *X*.
- (2) *A* believes that *S* believes that *Y* is *W*; but *A* also believes that *S* takes *A* as believing that *X* is *W*: this is for *A* a reason to believe that *S* has uttered the name to refer to *X* (since *S* has assumed that *A* would relate the name to *X*). Etc.

In this way, we can construct a series of *A*'s hypotheses about *S*'s beliefs, such that no matter where we stop, *A* has a reason to interpret the utterance of the name 'Woody Allen' as intended to refer to *X*: in each case we only have to add the condition that *A* believes that *S* will base his choice of words on the highest order belief *S* ascribes to him. And of course, a parallel series can be constructed for *S*.

3. The points I want to make do not specifically relate to proper names: we could have chosen an example with any kind of expression. A similar example, but concerning a definite description, used referentially in Donnellan's sense, has been discussed by H. Clark and C. Marshall in 'Definite Reference and Mutual Knowledge', in *Elements of Discourse Understanding*, eds. A.Joshi, B.Weber and I.Sag, Cambridge, Cambridge UP 1981.

All this can be schematically summarized as follows:
 [p stands for the proposition 'Y is W', q stands for the proposition 'X is W', B_{AP} reads: 'A believes that p ', $B_A B_S p$ reads: 'A believes that S believes that p ', etc.]

On the part of A (Series I):

- (1) B_{AP} & $B_A B_S q$
 - (2) B_{AP} & $B_A B_S p$ & $B_A B_S B_A q$
 - (3) B_{AP} & $B_A B_S p$ & $B_A B_S B_{AP}$ & $B_A B_S B_A B_S q$
 - (4) B_{AP} & $B_A B_S p$ & $B_A B_S B_{AP}$ & $B_A B_S B_A B_S p$
 & $B_A B_S B_A B_S B_A q$
- Etc.

On the part of S (Series II):

- (1') B_{SP} & $B_S B_A q$
 - (2') B_{SP} & $B_S B_{AP}$ & $B_S B_A B_S q$
 - (3') B_{SP} & $B_S B_{AP}$ & $B_S B_A B_S p$ & $B_S B_A B_S B_A q$
 - (4') B_{SP} & $B_S B_{AP}$ & $B_S B_A B_S p$ & $B_S B_A B_S B_{AP}$
 & $B_S B_A B_S B_A B_S q$
- Etc.

A's belief about S's belief specified in (1) is (within our story) false, A's belief specified in (2) is true if S has the belief specified in (1'), etc. And analogically from S's point of view. This can be summarized as follows:

Partial agreement between S's and A's beliefs:

A's beliefs truly represent S's beliefs if A's and S's beliefs are combined in one of the following ways: (2,1'), (3,2'), (4,3'), etc.

S's beliefs truly represent A's beliefs under the following combinations: (1, 2'), (2,3'), (3,4'), etc.

But one may not be satisfied by this kind of match between S's and A's beliefs: somebody may claim that the successful communication requires *full agreement* in that sense that all S's beliefs about A's relevant beliefs and all A's beliefs about S's relevant beliefs are true (relevant beliefs being beliefs of the kind exemplified in the series I and II). This more demanding kind of match will obtain for example in each of the following cases:

Full agreement between S's and A's beliefs:

- (i) $B_{AP} \& B_A B_{SP} \& B_{SP} \& B_S B_{AP}$
- (ii) $B_{AP} \& B_A B_{SP} \& B_A B_S B_{AP} \& B_{SP} \& B_S B_{AP} \& B_S B_A B_{SP}$
Etc.

But even this kind of match may be found too modest. Somebody may require, as a condition of successful communication, not only that all *S*'s beliefs about *A*'s relevant beliefs are true and *vice versa*, but that *S* has true beliefs about all *A*'s relevant beliefs (i.e. that there is no relevant belief of *A* which would not be truly represented in *S*'s belief), and *vice versa*. This *exhaustive agreement* necessarily includes an infinite series of beliefs on both sides, as the following consideration shows: Let us suppose that *S* believes that *p*. The exhaustive agreement requires that *A* knows this, which means that *A* must believe that *S* believes that *p*. If this is fulfilled, then it is something which must be known by *S* (otherwise the exhaustive agreement would not obtain), which means that *S* must believe that *A* believes that *S* believes that *p*. If this is fulfilled, *A* must know about it, etc. *ad infinitum*. And analogically if we begin with *A*'s belief that *p*. Taken together, we have:

Exhaustive agreement between S's and A's beliefs:

$B_{SP} \& B_{AP} \& B_S B_{AP} \& B_A B_{SP} \& B_S B_A B_{SP} \& B_A B_S B_{AP}$
&... etc. *ad inf.*

This exhaustive agreement in *beliefs* can be regarded as an agreement in *knowledge*, provided that *p* is true and that we put up with the modest notion of knowing as having a true belief (or alternatively: provided that *p* is true and all the relevant beliefs are properly justified). Then if *S* and *A* believe that *p*, they also know that *p*. But then if *S* believes that *A* knows that *p*, he also knows that *A* knows that *p*, and analogically for *A*, etc. *ad infinitum*.

What we have labelled here as *exhaustive agreement in knowledge*, has played an important role in the philosophy of language under the title of *mutual knowledge*, introduced by Stephen Schiffer.⁴ Schiffer originally expected this notion to solve the problem of an infinite regress in the definition of the basic notion of Gricean semantics, the notion of speaker's meaning. But

4. Stephen Schiffer, *Meaning*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972, pp. 30 ff.

it has found applications even outside Grice's project. As I have mentioned above, Clark and Marshall have discussed a case similar to our Woody Allen example: instead of a proper name they consider a description, used referentially in Donnellan's sense. They believe that successful communication requires the speaker and the audience to have mutual knowledge about the reference of the description. Related to our example and put in our terminology, this amounts to requiring that *S* and *A* reach exhaustive agreement in relevant knowledge. But the Davidsonian account of communicative success is far less demanding. It should be clear that in order to get a rationally based match between *S*'s referential intention and *A*'s interpretation (provided that it consists simply in *A*'s relating the name to the person intended by *S*) neither exhaustive agreement between *S*'s and *A*'s relevant beliefs, nor full agreement and not even partial agreement as they are defined above, is required.

Let us suppose that the following conditions are fulfilled:

Condition (a): If *S* makes an utterance in order to perform a certain speech act, he intends and expects that act to be assigned to the utterance in *A*'s interpretation.

Condition (b): *A* interprets the utterance in the way which he believes to have been intended by *S*.

Let us further assume that both *S* and *A* are rational and that they exploit all components (all conjuncts) of their relevant beliefs, i.e. beliefs of the type specified in the series I and II: *S* in the choice of words and *A* in their interpretation. Then any combination of *S*'s beliefs from the series II with *A*'s beliefs from the series I provides the same result, i.e. communicative success in Davidson's sense: the name 'Woody Allen' is used and interpreted as referring to *X*. This is because the highest-order components of all beliefs from both series, i.e. the components specified by the last conjuncts, include the same proposition *q* (the proposition that *X* is *W*). This shows that, according to the Davidsonian account of utterance meaning, an utterance including a proper name can be an assertion about some person *X*, even if the name uttered is not the name of *X* in the community to which *S* and *A* belong, *S* does not believe that *A* regards *X* as a bearer of that name (neither in 'official' nor in any other sense), *A* does not believe that *S* regards *X* as a bearer

of that name, *S* does not believe that *A* believes that *S* regards *X* as a bearer of that name, etc. And the utterance has this meaning even if *S*'s relevant beliefs do not correctly represent *A*'s relevant beliefs and *A*'s relevant beliefs do not correctly represent *S*'s relevant beliefs.

We still have not exhausted all the possibilities of successful communication in Davidson's sense, which obtain in our example. Others come to light if we, in addition to the series I and II, consider the cases in which *q* appears not only in the highest-order belief but also in some other place. And we should also bear in mind that one can have a belief of the order *n* without having any belief of the order *n-1* or any lower order belief. For example, let us take *A*'s complex belief (2): in an alternative case, *A* can believe that *S* ascribes to him the belief that *q* (i.e. *A* can have the belief specified by the third conjunct of (2)), but need not have any belief about whether *S* believes that *q* or that *p*, and also need not have any belief about whether *p* or *q* is true. Finally, the highest-order beliefs need not be decisive for the choice of words on *S*'s part nor for the interpretation of their utterance on *A*'s part, even if the rationality condition is fulfilled. For instance, if *S* has the complex belief (3'), it may be rational for him not to exploit his highest order belief $B_S B_A B_S B_A q$ if he thinks that the belief he ascribes there to *A* (i.e. $B_A B_S B_A q$) will not play any role in *A*'s interpretation of the utterance. The reason can either be that *S* does not take *A* as sophisticated enough to exploit in interpretation a belief of such complexity (though he is sophisticated enough to have it); or *S* may believe that *A* does not take *S* as sophisticated enough to exploit the belief *A* ascribes to *S* in $B_A B_S B_A q$. And analogically for *A*. Let us call the relevant beliefs actually exploited in the choice of words or in the interpretation of the utterance *effective* beliefs. Then the following principle suggests itself:

(P) Granted the rationality of *S* and *A* and granted (a) and (b), the utterance is communicatively successful (in Davidson's sense) in any of the combinations of relevant beliefs of *S* and *A* in which *S*'s effective belief has the same basic content as *A*'s effective belief. [By 'basic content' I mean the propositional content of the first-order beliefs, like the belief ascribed to *A* in $B_A p$, and the last embedded proposition of the higher order beliefs, e.g. *p* in the belief ascribed to *A* in $B_A B_S p$.]

Standard meaning eliminated. In belief series like I and II the notion of ‘real bearer’ of the name plays a relevant role, even if the name need not be used to refer to its real (or official) bearer and need not be interpreted as referring to it. If we want to get rid of it in our example, we have to replace the propositions p and q concerning who is the real bearer of the name ‘Woody Allen’ by propositions concerning what is the referential intention connected with the utterance of that name on a given occasion or how the utterance will be interpreted. The unpleasant consequence is that we have to take into account four propositions instead of two, namely:

- p_1 : if S utters ‘Woody Allen’ (on a given occasion) he intends to refer to Y ;
- p_2 : S ’s utterance of ‘Woody Allen’ (on a give occasion) would be interpreted by A as referring to Y ;
- q_1 : if S utters ‘Woody Allen’ (on a given occasion) he intends to refer to X ;
- q_2 : S ’s utterance of ‘Woody Allen’ (on a given occasion) would be interpreted by A as referring to X .

Now it is easy to see that there is no space for any direct analogy with the series I or II. For instance (1’) would have to be modified as follows:

$$(1'^*) \quad B_{SP_2} \ \& \ B_{SBA_{Q_1}}$$

Here the second conjunct says: S believes that A thinks that S ’s utterance of ‘Woody Allen’ would be intended to refer to X . If S believes this and takes the condition (b) as fulfilled (as described above), he should infer q_2 , i.e. that his utterance of ‘Woody Allen’ would be interpreted by A as referring to X . Since the belief specified in the first conjunct of (1’*) is incompatible with this, S cannot consistently have the complex belief (1’*).

Needless to stress, the mere fact that S believes that his utterance of ‘Woody Allen’ would be interpreted by A as referring to Y (B_{SP_2}) does not imply that consistency or rationality requires that he also has the second-order belief that A believes that S ’s utterance of ‘Woody Allen’ would be intended as referring to Y ($B_{SBA_{P_1}}$), not to speak of higher order beliefs ($B_{SBA_{B_{SP_2}}}$, etc.). But if he reasons on the second-order level, the only belief compatible there with

B_{SP_2} is $B_S B_{AP_1}$, provided that he takes (b) as fulfilled: under that presumption the latter belief justifies the former. And since this can be generalized, we have the following series based on the relation of justification (' \leftarrow '):

$$B_{SP_2} \leftarrow B_S B_{AP_1} \leftarrow B_S B_A B_{SP_2} \leftarrow B_S B_A B_S B_{AP_1} \leftarrow B_S B_A B_S B_A B_{SP_2} \\ \text{etc. ad inf.}$$

And analogically on the part of *A*:

$$B_{AP_1} \leftarrow B_A B_{SP_2} \leftarrow B_A B_S B_{AP_1} \leftarrow B_A B_S B_A B_{SP_2} \\ \leftarrow B_A B_S B_A B_S B_{AP_1} \text{ etc. ad inf.}$$

These two infinite series obtain only granted that *S* and *A* mutually believe (in Schiffer's sense) that the conditions (a) and (b) are fulfilled. But of course, for any particular case of justification only a fragment of this infinitely expanded belief is needed.

Let us suppose that *S* chooses the name 'Woody Allen' to refer to *Y* on the basis of the belief that *A* will interpret his utterance as referring to *Y* (in that case the condition (a) is fulfilled). This belief can (though need not) be based on *S*'s belief that *A* believes that if *S* utters that name, he intends to refer to *Y* (this requires that *S* takes the condition (b) as fulfilled). And this latter belief can (though need not) be based on *S*'s belief that *A* ascribes to *S* the belief that if he utters the name 'Woody Allen', he will be interpreted as referring to *Y* (this requires that *S* takes *A* as taking the condition (a) as fulfilled). Etc. And analogically on the part of *A*. *A* can interpret *S*'s utterance of 'Woody Allen' as referring to *Y* because *A* believes that *S* intends to be so interpreted (this means that the condition (b) is fulfilled). This belief of *A* can (though need not) be based on his belief that *S* uttered the name believing that *A* would interpret his utterance as referring to *Y* (this requires that *A* takes the condition (a) as fulfilled). And this latter belief of *A* can be based on his belief that *S* takes him as believing that *S*, when uttering the name 'Woody Allen', intends to refer to *Y* (this requires that *A* takes *S* as taking the condition (b) as fulfilled). Etc.

Granted (a) and (b), the sufficient condition for the communicative success in Davidson's sense is that *S* and *A* have corresponding beliefs of the first order: in our example this obtains under the combination B_{SP_2} and B_{AP_1} or alternatively B_{SQ_2} and B_{AQ_1} . Unlike in the series (I) and (II) above, the beliefs of the first order cannot be 'defeated', i.e. overridden in the choice of the

communicative strategy, by any higher-order beliefs (granted (a) and (b) and a relevant fragment of the mutual belief concerning (a) and (b)): one cannot have other higher-order relevant beliefs than beliefs belonging to the justification series beginning with the first-order belief in question, on pain of being inconsistent. And the higher-order relevant beliefs can contribute to the choice of the communicative strategy only by being involved in generating the first order beliefs.

III

Utterance meaning and communicative success (a divorce). Our considerations about the relevance of agreement in beliefs for communicative success repeatedly appealed to two assumptions:

- (a) If *S* makes an utterance in order to perform a certain speech act, he intends and expects that act to be assigned to the utterance in *A*'s interpretation.
- (b) *A* interprets the utterance in the way which he believes to have been intended by *S*.

Everybody who subscribes to the Davidsonian account of utterance meaning and communicative success must presuppose (a) and (b) as essential features of the communicative attitude. But it is easy to find counter-examples. Let us imagine that Paul says to John: 'Martial wrote witty epigrams.' He hopes that John, due to embarrassing gaps in his education, will interpret him as asserting that Martial wrote witty epitaphs and that this will come to light in John's reaction: that would provide a welcome opportunity to give John a lesson in literary terminology. I think the most natural thing to say here is that Paul wants to be misinterpreted, which means: there is a discrepancy between what he wants to assert and what he wants to be taken as asserting. Then the condition (a) is not fulfilled. And Paul can very well succeed in both respects: even if he is interpreted as he wanted, we shall, I think, say that he asserted that Martial wrote witty epigrams (this is also what he is going to later explain to John). This is certainly something which the Davidsonian notion of utterance meaning does not allow us to say.⁵ Now

5. Let us suppose that in addition to the intentions we have ascribed to him, John also wants to be interpreted by Mary, who witnesses his utterance, as asserting that Martial wrote witty epigrams (his aim is to discredit John in her eyes). If he is interpreted by both John and Mary as he wanted, what did he assert according to Davidsonians? Which of the two matches between intention and interpretation is to be taken as relevant? Perhaps they should say that the utterance is ambiguous.

imagine that John knows what 'epigram' conventionally means and that he also sees through the trick intended by Paul: then he will obviously interpret the utterance in the standard way, even if he knows that this is not the way John wanted him to interpret it (and it will be quite natural if he manifests to John that he understood him correctly, i.e. not as John wanted). In that case the condition (b) is not fulfilled.

If this is how we would evaluate such cases, we can conclude that our intuition speaks against the Davidsonian notion of communicative success and of utterance meaning in the following respects: the intended meaning can differ from the intended interpretation; the interpretation can differ from the hypothetical identification of the intended interpretation; utterance meaning can differ from the intended interpretation, from the actual interpretation as well as from the audience's hypothesis about how the speaker wanted to be interpreted.

One can give dozens of similar examples. Imagine a colonel who gives an order which he wants to be misinterpreted, in order to gain an opportunity to punish a soldier; or imagine somebody who warns somebody else that it would be dangerous to do *p*, since it is his duty, but wants to be misinterpreted, because he would like his audience precisely to do *p*, etc. In all such cases, the speakers count on a notion of utterance meaning as something independent of how the utterance is intended to be interpreted and of how it is interpreted. I would say that the theory of meaning should at least admit it, too.

In general, I do not think that the most fundamental phenomenon to be grasped by the notion of utterance meaning is the fact that sometimes we do something with the intention of being interpreted in a certain way, e.g. as asserting that *p*, and we succeed. A no less fundamental phenomenon to be accounted for is the fact that sometimes we do something with *objective consequences* which can be appropriately summarised in reports like '*X* asserted that *p*', '*X* promised to do *q*', etc. The person who asserts that *p*, finds herself *eo ipso* in the role of a (potential) source of information that *p*, bearing responsibility for its being compatible with her beliefs and appropriately justified. This imposes certain normative restrictions on her behaviour: for instance, if she behaves in a way which does not make rational sense under the ascription of the

belief that p to her (related to the time of the utterance), her behaviour is incompatible with her utterance and we are entitled to criticize the utterance as a lie or apply other kinds of sanctions. In other words, her utterance commits her to believing that p in an *objective* sense, irreducible to a feeling of obligation on the part of the speaker and corresponding expectations on the part of the audience. In a similar way, a promise to do q commits the promiser to intending to do q , etc. The utterance's having this kind of consequences is a matter of *public fact* in the following normative sense: everybody who denies it qualifies herself either as non-serious or insincere or linguistically incompetent or not well informed about the circumstances of the utterance, or in some other way unable or unready to properly classify what happened in the utterance. Clearly, the utterances can have consequences with this status only in virtue of certain social principles with normative power: I cannot see how they could be established by the match between the speaker's and the audience's mental states.

I think objective consequences of this kind are the best candidates for the role of utterance meanings: the fact that an assertion that p has been made can be equated with the fact that the speaker incurred the commitment to believing that p and certain other commitments, the types of which are to be specified in the definition of assertion as a speech act type.⁶ So, I am making two distinct, though related claims of normativity: (i) Utterance meaning amounts to the utterance's normative consequences (of a certain kind). (ii) Utterance meanings, so understood, must be determined by social standards with normative power.

There is no reason why these standards should not be sensitive to the fact that in the most ordinary communicative situations we are directed to grasping what the speaker intended to convey.

6. I have suggested a definition of assertion of this kind in 'Meaning and the Third Realm', in *Frege: Sense and Reference One Hundred Years Later*, ed. John Biro and Petr Kořátko, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht-Boston-London 1995. The idea to base the theory of meaning on the notion of commitment is not so extravagant. It has been mentioned, though in a rather sceptical tone, by Michael Dummett with reference to the late Wittgenstein in his book *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Duckworth, London 1973, pp. 361–2. John Pollock used a corresponding notion of obligation as the central notion of his theory of meaning presented in his *Language and Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ 1982, Peter Alston suggested reformulating the conditions of success in Searle's definition of a promise in terms of speaker's commitments in 'Searle on Illocutionary Acts', in *John Searle and His Critics*, ed. E. Lepore and R. van Gulick, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1991—and perhaps one could find more examples.

Consider the following candidate for a principle determining utterance meanings:

(π): The utterance is a performance of that speech act about which we are justified (according to the social standards of justification of propositional attitude ascriptions) to believe that the speaker intended to perform it, provided that the objective conditions of successful performance of that act are fulfilled.⁷

This makes the determination of utterance meaning independent of the actual speaker's intentions, but it does not impose any limits on our effort to do justice to them in the interpretation. On the contrary, it requires us to be as sensitive to them as we can: since what could we do better in this direction than to exploit all the available evidence and apply the standards of rational reasoning? Hence in the light of the principle π , the effort to identify utterance meaning is identical with the effort to identify the speaker's communicative intentions. This may include exploitation of the hypotheses about the speaker's beliefs of the kind we have discussed in section II: they can play a relevant role in the determination of utterance meaning, provided that they are justified according to social standards of rational reasoning (and provided that we are also justified in assuming that the condition (a) is fulfilled and that the speaker takes the condition (b) as fulfilled). Needless to say, the more complex these hypotheses are, the less likely it is that they could be adequately justified.

Granted π , linguistic conventions are allowed to play a role in the determination of the utterance meaning only in so far as we can assume that the speaker uses the words in accord with them. But the latter is, indeed, typically a common and well based presumption. Taken as a maxim of interpretation, it radically simplifies the evidential basis of interpretation in ordinary situations:

(*M*) With respect to all members of the linguistic community we are automatically justified in presupposing that they use words according to their conventional meaning, unless we have a special reason to think otherwise.

7. The qualification is intended to cover such things as the speaker's having the authority for issuing orders of a certain kind.

It is indeed an empirical question in which areas of communication, if at all, π and M hold. The principle certainly does not hold in the highly formalized or ritualized areas of communication, such as those in which people issue military orders or legal enactments, make contracts, reply to test questions, etc. Here linguistic conventions do not contribute to the determination of utterance meaning in the framework of principle π , but in a quite different framework defined by a distribution of institutional roles, a framework within which linguistic utterances count as moves in a game with strict rules. One can easily (though without much pleasure) imagine a community in which all communication takes place on this level. Or think of a communication in which linguistic conventions and justified hypotheses about the speaker's intentions have the same weight. There the utterance has the content p and force f only if this is compatible with both criteria: if they disagree, the utterance counts as ambiguous or as meaningless. Or imagine communication without any conventionally fixed language like English or Czech, where the principle π determines utterance meanings without the help of the maxim M .⁸

In this way, we can distinguish various types of communication according to the principles determining the utterance meanings. All the principles we have mentioned satisfy the requirement imposed by our notion of utterance meaning: they all determine utterance meanings with normative power. And for the types of communication governed by these principles we can, if we find it important, formulate one general principle of communicative success:

P^0 : The utterance is communicatively successful if and only if the principle of the determination of utterance meaning applying to it unambiguously determines the speech act performed in it and this is identical with the act intended by the speaker as well as with the act assigned to the utterance in the audience's interpretation.

8. Even a community in which all the communication was of this kind could be thought to have a shared language, though in a rather non-standard sense. Its sentences would be all types of observable acts for which there are possible circumstances such that the performance of those acts in those circumstances would count (according to the standards of that community) as sufficient evidence that the speaker intends to communicate a particular proposition with a particular force. And since such circumstances are in principle imaginable for any type of act, the language in question would include all kinds of observable acts as its sentences. Mastering such a language would amount to mastering the standards of making justified hypotheses about the communicative intentions of other people, on the basis of the observation of their behaviour.

But this should not be regarded as anything more than a regulative notion voicing a certain ideal of communication. As we have seen, one can intend his utterance to have a certain content and force, and succeed, without intending the utterance to be communicatively successful in the sense of P^0 , in particular, without intending it to be recognized as having that content and force (see the Martial and colonel examples).

In contrast to Davidson (see section I), our concepts of utterance meaning and of communicative success cannot be made one. And they do not provide us with *the* principle of the determination of utterance meanings: we have to admit a variety of principles like standards of rationality, linguistic conventions or division of institutional roles, which can (according to the type of discourse) participate in the constitution of utterance meanings. To be sure, when explaining what it means for such principles to hold in a certain community, one has to refer to the beliefs, intentions, preferences, etc. of the community members. But to refer to them on this level is something very different from making meanings of particular utterances dependent on the speaker's and audience's momentary intentions and beliefs.⁹

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