

FICTIVE INTERACTION AND THE NATURE OF LINGUISTIC MEANING*

Sergeiy Sandler

One may distinguish between three broad conceptions of linguistic meaning. One conception, which I will call “logical”, views meaning as given in reference (for words) and truth (for sentences). Another conception, the “monological” one, seeks meaning in the cognitive capacities of the single mind. A third, “dialogical”, conception attributes meaning to interaction between individuals and personal perspectives. In this chapter I directly contrast how well these three approaches deal with the evidence brought forth by fictive interaction. I examine instances of fictive interaction and argue that intersubjectivity in these instances cannot be reduced to either referential-logical or individual-cognitive semantic notions. It follows that intersubjectivity must belong to the essence of linguistic meaning.

Keywords: dialogism, intersubjectivity, philosophy of language, semantics, theories of meaning.

[Published in: Esther Pascual and Sergeiy Sandler (eds.) 2016. *The Conversation Frame: Forms and Functions of Fictive Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 23–41. DOI: 10.1075/hcp.55.02san]

The conversation frame is a frame of intersubjectivity. In fictive interaction, the conversation frame, and thus intersubjectivity, emerges as the structure behind many linguistic and cognitive phenomena (Pascual 2002, 2006, 2014). Thus, when a business offers its potential customers a “*Not happy? Money back!* guarantee” (Pascual 2014, p. 65), a scenario is set up, in which a buyer exhibits dissatisfaction, the seller asks her: “Not happy?”, she confirms, and, finally, the seller redresses her dissatisfaction by offering her money back. This conversation, only part of which is spelled out, is used to modify the noun “guarantee” and establish a category, a *kind* of purchase arrangement (Pascual, Królak, and Janssen 2013). Referring to this kind of guarantee and thinking of it thus involves intersubjectivity on the conceptual level.

So what? Yes, people use language to communicate, but centuries of philosophical and linguistic tradition tell us that, at least when we consider the nature of linguistic meaning, intersubjectivity and communication do not come first. In this chapter, I offer an argument for the opposite view. I examine instances of fictive interaction and argue that intersubjectivity in these

* Work for this chapter was supported by a Vidi research program (276.70.019, Principal Investigator: E. Pascual) from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). I would like to thank Esther Pascual and Karen Sullivan for many valuable comments on earlier drafts of the text.

instances cannot be reduced to allegedly “simpler” semantic notions. It follows that intersubjectivity must belong to the essence of linguistic meaning.

In making these claims, I will be applying a distinction between three different approaches to the nature of language and meaning. The distinction (made originally by Voloshinov 1986) is based on the number of people necessary for linguistic meaning to emerge.

One view—I will call it the *logical* approach—seeks meaning in the words and sentences of a given expression in-and-of-themselves, belonging to the abstract (logical) system of language. The minimum number of persons necessary for an expression to be meaningful on this view is zero.

A second view—I will call it the *monological* approach—seeks meaning in the mind (or cognitive capacities or conceptualizations) of the individual human being. The minimum number of people necessary for an expression to be meaningful on this view is thus one.

Finally, the third, *dialogical* approach seeks meaning in interaction between persons and sees language as structured through-and-through by such interaction. This approach requires a multiplicity of persons¹ (two or more) for an expression to be meaningful (and note that this is a multiplicity of individuals; an undifferentiated mass of “society” will not do).

In what follows, I present logical and monological responses to the phenomenon of fictive interaction, and argue, based on the evidence fictive interaction brings, for a consistently dialogical approach.

1. The logical approach to language

Let me begin with a quote from the first chapter of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* (Barnes 1984, p. 25):

Now spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of—affections of the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of—actual things—are also the same [...] Just as some thoughts in the soul are neither true nor false while some are necessarily one or the other, so also with spoken sounds. For falsity and truth have to do with combination and separation. Thus names and verbs by themselves—for instance “man” or “white” when nothing further is added—are like the thoughts that are without combination and separation; for so far they are neither true nor false.

¹ These may be personified non-human entities or entirely imaginary personae, but eventually, face-to-face interaction between actual individuals offers the cognitive model on which meaning-making is based.

This passage offers us the earliest and most influential conceptualization of language, at least in Western culture (Arens 1984). It is a picture of language we all still easily recognize today: words signify concepts, which in turn stand for things in the world and their properties. If the word for a property is predicated of a word for an object that has this property, the result is a sentence expressing a true proposition. Absent such a match between words and reality, the proposition is false. The conditions for forming a sentence are defined by truth and falsity.

Note that in this picture, meaning resides in words, their combination, and their connection with things. Human beings are part of the process (through the “affections of the soul”), but their role is entirely passive (these affections are copies of forms in the world, not shaped by the soul that bears them). Note also the role of logic (“truth and falsity”) in this account.

Aristotle’s conceptualization of language gave us the grammar taught in grammar school, it gave us the units into which we break language down, it created the terrain on which millennia of philosophical and linguistic battles on the word-concept-object axis were waged. More recently, the Fregean tradition in the philosophy of language (including truth-conditional semantics and generative grammar) can be seen as an extended elaboration of the theme of “falsity and truth have to do with combination and separation”. Aristotle’s picture is so deeply ingrained in the way we look at language that we’d be naïve to think, even today, that we have overcome it.

And yet, for some decades now, we have seen evidence amass that shows this picture is deeply misleading. Central elements of it came under direct attack from cognitive linguists (e.g. Fauconnier 1990; Fauconnier and Turner 2002; Langacker 1987), functional linguists (e.g. Hopper 1998), discourse and conversation analysts and interactionists (e.g. Ochs, Schegloff, and Thompson 1996), and others. Unfortunately, space does not allow me to review this evidence and arguments based on it, but I do want to briefly examine one particular kind of critique. This critique, unlike others, received considerable attention from logically-minded linguists and philosophers (e.g. Gendler Szabó 2005), which also allows us to observe their strategy for responding to such challenges. To see the problem, consider the (constructed) sentences in (1), which are among the more frequently used examples in the relevant literature.

- (1) a. The stove is hot.
- b. Liz has not eaten breakfast yet.

For both (1a) and (1b), the context in which they may be uttered affects the criteria for determining their truth or falsity. At a temperature of 140°C, a stove would not be considered hot, and so (1a) would be false, if you plan to bake bread in it, but (1a) would be deemed true if you are wondering whether it is safe to touch the stove with your bare hands (Travis 1996). As for (1b), a

literal interpretation should have assigned it the meaning that Liz has *never* had breakfast, even though any reasonable person would understand (1b) as stating Liz has had no breakfast *on the day on which it was uttered*. These examples show that we cannot exclude persons, with their rich understanding of the situations in which utterances are made, from an account of linguistic meaning, even if meaning is construed in the traditional logicist terms of truth conditions.

To understand how “hardline” adherents of the logical approach respond to this critique, we should bear in mind that the Aristotelian conceptualization of language, as such, is viewed by these scholars not as a model to defend, but as a self-obvious ground for any discussion of language and semantics. They then defend their truth-based semantic theories from this self-evident ground.

This is the basis for the sharp analytical distinction between semantics and pragmatics (and its close correlates, the distinctions between meaning and use and the literal and figurative), which forms the latest line of defense for formal and truth-based semantic theories against the onslaught of evidence that appears to falsify them. The basic idea here is that the true meaning (or rather “semantic content”) of a sentence is given in its literal interpretation, arrived at by composing the literal meanings of the words making it up according to the sentence’s syntactic structure. This semantic content is then elaborated upon, mostly through drawing conversational implicatures (Grice 1989) from it.

It has long been acknowledged that the “semantic content” of a sentence need not form a complete proposition (Bach 1994), or make sense on its own (e.g. Cappelen and Lepore 2005), but its existence has been treated as if it were a self-evident, undeniable truth. That the semantic content of a sentence, thus determined, bears little or no relation to what we would normally take this sentence to mean is said to have no “significance for truth conditional semantics” (Cappelen and Lepore 2005, p. 47). Taking people’s actual use and understanding of language as a relevant starting point for discussing semantics is claimed to involve a “pragmatic fallacy” (Salmon 1991).

So, on this view, we can say (1a) is true if and only if the stove is hot, and this statement of the sentence’s truth conditions would be correct regardless of what exact temperature “hot” implies, and a semantic interpretation of (1b) would yield the statement that Liz has never eaten breakfast in her life. We can *use* (1b) to say Liz has not yet had breakfast *today*, but this is merely an implicature we draw from it (Bach 2005).

This line of defense works reasonably well with the sort of critiques cognitive linguists have levelled against logicist accounts of semantics (at least when evaluated on the logicists’ terms), and it may appear at first blush that the same strategy would apply to examples of fictive interaction too. Thus, if a speaker refers to dots that scream “Do something *now* about me” (example analyzed in Oakley and Coulson 2008), we can safely claim the semantic content of that speaker’s sentence has dots (in the literal sense) screaming (in the literal sense) the exact words “Do something now about

me”, and whatever else one gathers from this sentence is already a matter of how it was used, of its pragmatics.²

Alas, if we probe a bit further into the fictive interaction field, we will find a class of examples with which even this defense strategy fails. I specifically refer to direct speech compounds (Pascual, Królak, and Janssen 2013; Pascual 2014, pp. 59–81), as seen in (2):

- (2) a. *How are you? Fine.* Relationships (Pascual 2014, p. 67)
- b. *touch-your-nose-and-stand-on-one-foot,-are-you-drunk?* test (p. 63)
- c. “*if only I had this or that [...] then I’d be happy*” attitude (p. 68)
- d. *Make-your-kids-into-greedy-little-materialistic-consumption-addicts* day (p. 70)

These are all attested examples of actual linguistic usage, instantiating a widespread practice, but this is rather a liability to a logically-minded semanticist.³ Such a semanticist would instead insist that the examples in (2) should not be considered as they don’t make up a full sentence. But we can still use the examples in (2) as inspiration for constructing the sort of invented example sentences logicians prefer (a preference I shall accommodate for the remainder of this section):

- (3) a. Stephen and Matilda have a “*How are you? Fine.*” relationship.
- b. The cop gave John the *touch-your-nose-and-stand-on-one-foot,-are-you-drunk?* test.
- c. The “*if only I had this or that then I’d be happy*” attitude does not help you in life.
- d. Tomorrow is *Make-your-kids-into-greedy-little-materialistic-consumption-addicts* day.

Syntactically, the sentences in (3) can either be declared ungrammatical (and therefore, on the logical account, meaningless), or we can analyze the entire fictive utterance as a single constituent (Pascual 2006; Pascual, Królak, and Janssen 2013). The sentences in (3) appear to bear meaning, also in the narrow sense of having well-defined truth conditions. Thus, we can tell whether (3a) is true or false by observing whether or not Stephen and Matilda’s relationship indeed fits the description. So it would be difficult even for adherents of the logical approach to declare such sentences meaningless.

² Of course, dots cannot scream, but this is hardly a problem. The literally-interpreted semantic content amounts to a patently false claim about screaming dots. This flouts Grice’s (1989) maxim of quality, at which point conversational implicature, and thus pragmatics, kicks in.

³ “Ordinary discourse often involves the use of complex expressions which would be counted as ungrammatical even by the utterer’s own lights [...] It is absurd to suppose that we should count such discourse as grammatical, and thereby modify syntactic theory to account for it, and this despite its (statistically speaking) relative normalcy. It is just as absurd to suppose that our conception of semantics should be modified to account for every communicative action which involves the use of language” (Stanley 2000, p. 408).

However, if deemed meaningful, the sentences in (3) pose a serious problem for a logical approach. Each direct speech modifier in (3) contains at least one (fictive) utterance—and utterances come with all of their attendant pragmatics. We cannot correctly understand (3a) unless we identify “How are you? Fine” as a question-answer pair, and as an exchange of greetings. Moreover, the pragmatics in question is of the most unruly type (from the logicist perspective); it links not to the current context of utterance, but to the typical or fictive context of the embedded utterance: “I” in (3c) does not refer to the current speaker and “you” and “your” in (3a) and (3b) do not refer to the current addressee.

The problem is that the methods, explained above, of separating pragmatics out of a sentence’s semantic content no longer work. Direct speech compounds need not use figurative language. Thus, in (3b), all the words in the compound (“touch”, “nose”, “stand”, “one”, “foot”, “drunk”) mean exactly what the dictionary says they mean. Crucially, it is also impossible to account for the examples in (3) as implicatures. The criterion for identifying an implicature is cancellability. (3d) is particularly instructive in this sense. Consider: “Tomorrow is *make-your-kids-into-greedy-little-materialistic-consumption-addicts* day, and I don’t mean Christmas”. Originally, (2d) referred to Christmas day, but this reference can be denied. This is a typical case of “cancelling” an implicature. But what is the “literal” meaning to which our understanding of this sentence reverts after cancellation? We’d still expect the utterer to have referred to a day (and behaviors taking place on it) characterized by greed, addictive consumption, etc. What is cancelled is the reference to a specific holiday, but not the meaning of the reported speech compound.⁴

What I hope to have shown in this brief discussion is that it is impossible to build a wall separating semantics from pragmatics, linguistic meaning from the way people act, think, and understand each other.

2. The monological approach to language

A monological approach to language seeks explanations for linguistic phenomena in the individual human mind. If logical approaches to language have to peg meaning to objects in the world and their

⁴ Note also that direct speech compounds do not function (semantically) as simple reported speech. Thus, (3c) does not attribute the uttering of the words “if only I had this or that then I’d be happy” to anyone. It is also not a self-referential statement about these words as such (despite De Brabanter 2005; see Pascual 2014, pp. 74–75).

properties, monological views are free to recognize the dynamic and contextual nature of meaning, reflecting the dynamic and contextual nature of human perception and cognition.

Historically, monological approaches to language, in their purest form, flourished in 19th- and early 20th-century German linguistics (see Voloshinov 1986, pp. 48–52, 83–98 for a critical overview). In this original form, monologism was typically aligned with idealist trends in philosophy: meaning, grammatical phenomena, and especially linguistic change, were accounted for as instantiations of the internal development processes of the collective national, or even universal (Absolute) mind or spirit (see, e.g., Vossler 1932). More recently, a new version of monologism has emerged within Cognitive Linguistics. This new monologism focuses on the cognitive capacities of the individual human mind, particularly on conceptualization, to account for linguistic phenomena and meaning.⁵ Typically monological themes in Cognitive Linguistics include, among others, work on metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and conceptual integration (Fauconnier and Turner, 1996, 1998, 2002) as features of human cognition that shape language, the introduction of radial categories with their prototype-periphery structure into linguistics (Langacker 1987), following work on prototypes in cognitive psychology (Rosch 1973), and the notion of fictivity (Talmy 2000), linked to our cognitive capacity of imagination.

Cognitive Linguistics as such, however, is not reducible to monologism alone. Instead, Cognitive-Linguistic theories typically combine monological and dialogical principles and motivations. Thus, a clear commitment to a usage-based account of meaning and of grammatical form (Langacker 1987; Croft 2001) is a core dialogical element of Cognitive Linguistics. In recent years, there has been an increasing trend toward dialogism and intersubjectivity in the field (e.g. Du Bois [2001] 2014; Verhagen, 2005; Oakley and Hougaard 2008; Croft 2009; Dancygier and Sweetser 2012)—a trend which the literature on fictive interaction is very much part of. In this context, it is also important to frame my argument in the present chapter correctly, not as an argument against Cognitive Linguistics, but rather as an argument *internal* to it, an argument for a more consistently dialogical approach within Cognitive Linguistics.

From a dialogical perspective, a critique of monological approaches differs both in its aims and in its methods from a critique of logical ones. Logical theories of language and meaning are, on a dialogical view, fundamentally wrong about how language works. A dialogical critique of such theories would seek to refute them. By contrast, a dialogical critique of monological theories does not come in the form of a refutation. After all, dialogue occurs between individuals, so a proper account of what goes on in a single person's mind when speaking and communicating is part and

⁵ “[M]eaning is, in the last analysis, a matter of conceptualization (what else could it possibly be?)” (Langacker 1987, p. 156).

parcel of any correct description of dialogue. Hence, the qualm dialogism has with consistently monological accounts of language is not that they are wrong, but that they are *incomplete*. They try to ignore or marginalize the essential role of intersubjectivity in meaning-making.

Fictive interaction offers a strong argument against monologism. We have already seen how fictive conversations are used to refer to (kinds of) entities. More broadly, the phenomenon of fictive interaction shows how people regularly use the conversation frame to conceptualize experience (as argued extensively in Pascual 2002, 2014 and see Pascual and Sandler, this volume). It joins and complements other evidence for the thesis that *intersubjectivity* is essential to human cognition (see, e.g., Zlatev et al. 2008). It follows that the human mind is not alone in language, because even where a single person speaks and thinks, she uses interaction between two or more individuals as a model for shaping her speech and her thinking.

There is, however, a possible retort available to the principled monologist, and argument that would relegate intersubjectivity to a relatively peripheral role. The idea would be to postulate the existence of some cognitive operation or capacity (not itself involving intersubjectivity) to the exercise of which fictive interaction would be claimed to *reduce*. A reduction of this kind would still acknowledge the presence of intersubjectivity in fictive interaction, but its function would be restricted to the relatively marginal role of a domain of conceptual *content*. For example, in (2a), such a reductionist account would acknowledge that a conversational exchange (“How are you? – Fine”) is used to characterize a relationship, but this would not be taken to indicate that the conversation frame has any fundamental role in language or cognition. Instead, (2a) would be analyzed as an instance of, say, conceptual metaphor, or blending,⁶ which just happens to use a certain interaction routine as an input. Similarly, *any* example of fictive interaction would, on such an account, be analyzable in terms of supposedly simpler individual-cognitive capacities.

In response, one could argue for the non-derivative status of intersubjectivity in human cognition based on research in cognitive psychology and neuroscience (see, e.g., Gallese and Goldman 1998; Zlatev et al. 2008; Gallese and Cuccio 2015). My contribution to the debate, however, comes in the form of two philosophical arguments, both based on examples of fictive interaction. One argument demonstrates that we conceive of subjective experience itself in intersubjective terms. The other problematizes the tacit assumption that fictive interaction can be fully accounted for in terms of manipulating content.

For the first argument, consider (4):

⁶ Such a reductionist account of fictive interaction is indeed explicitly proposed by Pagán Cánovas and Turner (this volume), with conceptual integration (or blending; see Fauconnier and Turner 1996, 1998, 2002) as the suggested underlying capacity.

- (4) a. So while my heart says *Travis or Scott*, my head says *Kai or Connor* and my gut says *Danny*.⁷
b. I'm not myself today (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, p. 283).

(4a) is one of many examples of fictive interaction used to express the thoughts or feelings of an individual by conceptually splitting that individual into two or more speakers (Pang 2005; Pascual 2014, pp. 91–98).⁸ Now, splitting of the self has been dealt with extensively in cognitive linguistics. There is the detailed study of conceptual metaphors involved in such expressions by Lakoff and Johnson (1999, pp. 267–289) and there is the even earlier treatment of the subject as part of Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier [1985] 1994, 1997; Lakoff and Sweetser 1994, pp. ix–x). These and other studies provide an account for the meaning of such expressions as (4b), which pose a severe challenge to logical approaches (note the contradiction that emerges if we assign the deictics “I” and “today” their standard functions, as done by Kaplan 1989).

But there is also a difference between (4a) and (4b). By uttering (4b), the speaker compresses a multiplicity of behaviors and attitudes she has exhibited in a wide variety of situations, at different places and times, into one compact image (a self, as distinct from the subject, in Lakoff and Johnson's 1999 terms), and then goes on to contrast her behavior today with this identity. This fits well into a monological account, where a conceptualizer uses a single image to mentally access a complex distribution of diverse phenomena. In their discussion of “constitutive and governing principles” for conceptual integration, Fauconnier and Turner (2002, pp. 309–352) provide exactly this sort of monological rationale. Of particular interest is one principle (or “noteworthy subgoal”) they list: “Go from Many to One” (p. 323). Indeed, in (4b), the speaker goes from many behaviors and attitudes to one self.

However, (4a) does not seem to help us grasp anything that should be difficult for the speaker's mind to access. Quite to the contrary (and this is typical of the fictive-interaction kind of

⁷ Parker, Christopher, The predictions: Molokai-2-Oahu, *SUP Magazine*, 25 July 2013, <http://www.supthemag.com/news/the-predictions-molokai-2-oahu/#S66d4T3zKaHR7K13.99>. The quote is a prediction about the results of an upcoming paddling race. After said Travis and Scott finished first and second, the author penned a follow-up article aptly titled “Listen to your heart” (<http://www.supracer.com/listen-to-your-heart>).

⁸ Also common are such expressions as “the optimist in me says”, or “part of me says”. More generally, fictive interaction is frequently used to express emotions, thoughts, and other inner states. Thus, the common phrase “something tells me” may not locate the “something” that tells me things inside my body, but still uses communication between two agents as a way to refer to what is in principle an individual's subjective state of mind.

self-splitting), what (4a) expresses is the utterer's current thinking on a subject (in this case, his opinion on who may win in an upcoming race), to which he (presumably) has direct mental access. Nevertheless, this is conceptualized and presented in (4a) as a (fictive) conversation with *multiple* participants.⁹

Blending theory has a useful term: "human scale" (Fauconnier and Turner 2002, pp. 79–137 *et passim*). Facing the immense size and complexity of the world around us, we use cognitive mechanisms to "compress" objects we think and talk about to a manageable size and level of simplicity. As stated so far, this notion features essentially a single mind facing the world around it, but, as such examples as (4a) show, on a truly human scale, the mind is not alone. When it comes to conceptualizing our mental states and experiences, we seem to be supplementing the subgoal "go from many to one" with the new subgoal, "go from one to (at least) two". But then, accepting that intersubjectivity is essential to what human scale is amounts to replacing a monological theory with a dialogical one.

So, intersubjectivity is part of how we conceptualize our individual subjective experience. And there is one more reason the attempt to marginalize intersubjectivity in monologic reductionism should fail, which becomes apparent when we consider the *performative* aspect present in many examples of fictive interaction. Compare the two examples in (5):

- (5) a. A good walk is the answer to most problems (Pascual 2014, p. 9).
- b. In part, Minna Pyhkkala's installation "*Hi Die*" is a *fuck you* to the *how are you fine* approach to life... (Pascual 2014, p. 45).

Both (5a) and (5b) are examples of fictive interaction. In both, a conversational exchange of one sort or another is used as a cognitive frame to conceptualize non-conversational relations. We may say, for example, that the metaphor of a debate, interrogation, or exam is used in (5a): the problems are presented as posing some kind of *verbal* challenge (an argument, a hard question), and the walk is cast in the role of the *verbal* response that removes that challenge (a successful defense in an argument; a correct answer to an exam question). Similarly, in (5b), the art installation "*Hi Die*" is presented as an obscenity shouted at the "how are you fine approach to life", marking its creator's contempt toward such an approach.¹⁰

⁹ Such self-splitting also need not reflect an inner conflict or disagreement that must be reconciled. Cf. another sports-related prediction: "My gut says *Payet*, my head says *Payet* and my heart says *Payet*" (Forum post by Wise FPL Owl, <http://www.fplacademy.com/captains-32/>).

¹⁰ Of course, "*Hi Die*" and "how are you fine" are also examples of fictive interaction, but I will not discuss them here.

However, there is also a difference: in (5a), the walk is merely said to be the answer to the problems, while in (5b) we can actually read the words the art installation is uttering; we get to hear its voice, its utterance is being *performed*, or demonstrated (Clark and Gerrig 1990). Both (5a) and (5b) can serve as good examples to support the claims of conceptual metaphor theory (or blending theory, etc.), but when it comes to an attempt to *reduce* away or marginalize intersubjectivity, (5b) poses a challenge that (5a) does not. The utterer of (5b) not only uses communication as a domain of human experience to map conceptual content from or onto, but also employs intersubjectivity in the very act of uttering: a discourse character speaks, its voice briefly heard and its perspective briefly assumed.

To be sure, the fictive utterance in (5b) is formulaic and the whole sentence originally comes from a text (an art review article) crafted and edited for publication. One could still argue that the conceptual mapping provided the blueprint and the performance staged in (5b) merely elaborates on that (underlying) blueprint. The mapping—this argument would go—establishes what (5b) *means*, while intersubjectivity in how this mapping is being expressed in an utterance merely instantiates this meaning in one particular fashion. But this latter defense of monological reductionism is only applicable in some cases. The conversation transcript in (6) shows—admittedly in a way that requires subtle analysis to uncover—why this line of defense cannot hold.¹¹

- (5) 1 S: Can we help with anything?
2 R: No but it's time to sit down cause the food is getting cold it's a cold day today.
3 S: ↓Oy [(h) (h) (h) [if we don't eat up we won't grow up?
4 R: [the [the good thing is that
5 (0.5)
6 R: Exactly. (.) the good thing is that I'm sitting alone.

R is the host of a small family gathering. Her guests are her two adult children (both in another room when this conversation takes place), and her son-in-law (S). As the conversation begins, R is about to finish arranging the dishes on the dinner table for the meal.

On one level, what we see in (6) is S politely asking whether he could help R in serving the meal and R telling him to go get the other diners to come to the table instead. But there's also another

¹¹ The original conversation was recorded by the author and conducted in Hebrew; the transcript below is a translation, in simplified notation (which is sufficient for present purposes). I do not include a transliteration of the Hebrew original to avoid making the transcript too cumbersome to read. See Sandler (2009) for a detailed analysis of the original. Transcription symbols used follow Jefferson (2004).

level, to understand which we need to consider a certain cultural stereotype. English speakers might be familiar with it under the label “Jewish Mother”.¹² The Jewish Mother is an overweening parent, who gets her children (typically adults, or at least adolescents) to do what she wants by means of constant guilt-tripping wrapped in bitter irony. The Jewish Mother comes with a repertoire of utterances and behaviors, and a good amount of folklore (jokes, stories). This repertoire is on display in the conversation we are looking at: “The food is getting cold”, “If you don’t eat up you won’t grow up”, and, perhaps the most famous one (among Hebrew speakers): “[leave me] sitting alone in the dark” are all stereotypical Jewish-Mother utterances that are either repeated or alluded to here.

What we see in this conversation then is R adding a touch of humor to her request of S in line 2 by uttering it in the Jewish Mother’s voice. In line 3, S joins the role-play as the Jewish Mother’s ill-fated child. The rising intonation contour at the end of line 3. In this instance, it marks the utterance as a guess. S is guessing the Jewish Mother role-play is on purpose, but asks for confirmation (and does so by joining in the role-play, not by making an explicit query). R’s eventual response in line 6 starts with giving the confirmation asked for (“Exactly”), followed by what is essentially a repeat of the request in line 2. But this is again done in the Jewish Mother’s voice (“The good thing is that I’m sitting alone”—“sitting alone” here simultaneously refers to the predicted undesirable situation of R, the host, sitting alone at the dinner table while her guests are busy doing other things, and alludes to the Jewish Mother sitting alone in the dark, offended by her uncaring and ungrateful children). Following this, S (or is it the scolded, guilt-tripped child of the Jewish Mother?) goes to the other room to call the other guests to dinner.

At no point during the entire exchange does either participant step out of character. Impersonating the Jewish Mother and her child is seamlessly woven into the more practical exchange about calling guests to the dinner table. Utterances that are part of the role-play are used to successfully accomplish (speech) acts that are part of the practical exchange.

Now, on one level, the conversation in (6) lends itself well to analysis along monological lines. A blending analysis (Fauconnier and Turner 1996, 1998, 2002), in particular, fits this example like a glove:¹³ R, S, and the situation in which they interact, provide an input to a conceptual integration network, and the stereotypical Jewish mother and child scenario provides a cultural frame.

¹² Hebrew speakers would refer to it as the “Polish Mother”, with a middle-aged Ashkenazi-Jewish woman as a prototype in both cases. R—it should be noted—fits the stereotype in terms of ethnic identity and age.

¹³ Thus, my analysis here joins a small but noteworthy literature that applies blending theory to conversation and explores both the benefits and the challenges of crossing blending theory with conversation analysis. See, especially, Hougaard (2004), Coulson and Oakley (2006), and Oakley and Hougaard (2008).

Blending theory offers a rich field of ways in which such an integration network can be used to make meaning, and much of this field is indeed being exploited by the interlocutors.

But recall that it is not the usefulness of blending theory (or other monological theories) as such that we are discussing, but rather the attempt to reduce intersubjectivity away by marginalizing its role. And for this attempt to work it is not enough to show that this conversation can be analyzed within a blending framework after the fact. It is also necessary to show that in *producing* the role play we see here, a general cognitive capacity for blending was employed by R and S first, while intersubjectivity is only involved in providing an input into the blending process. Note that in (6), this means the speakers' current communicative ground is an input into the conceptual integration network.¹⁴ In other words, for the reductionist account to work, we should assume that R and S use their own currently unfolding actions as inputs into a conceptual integration process that produces these very same actions.

If we zoom in on R's turn of talk in line 2, we can say that once this utterance has already been made, it can be analyzed (even by its immediate audience, S) in blending terms. R—her appearance, identity, and the words she has just uttered—offers an input to be integrated with the Jewish mother frame. But R herself, when uttering line 2, only had access to the Jewish mother frame. She does not see her own face, or hear her own (as yet unspoken) words. She does not integrate two batches of conceptual content. Instead, she performs an *action*, and this action is designed so as to be perceived by her interlocutor as instantiating the Jewish mother stereotype. In other words, R is doing something paradigmatically intersubjective: she is assuming another's perspective.

It follows that such individual-cognitive capacities as conceptual integration are fruitfully exploited for the purposes of intersubjective communication, both actual and fictive, but they do not *underlie* it. Our ability to entertain another's perspective is not reducible to the cognitive capacities of a solitary subject facing an inanimate world.¹⁵

¹⁴ Pagán Cánovas and Turner (this volume) indeed claim that the current communicative ground often serves as an input in what they call fictive communication blends.

¹⁵ Cognitive science lends added support to this last claim. Indeed, we have some understanding of the cognitive, and even neural, mechanisms at work (e.g., Gallese and Goldman 1998; Gallese and Cuccio 2015). These mechanisms involve a link between perceiving and performing actions—so a specific mechanism for allowing intersubjective communication, not a special case of a more general cognitive capacity.

3. The dialogical approach to language

From the discussion so far, it is clear that the dialogical approach has a central negative commitment: intersubjectivity cannot be bracketed out from an account of linguistic meaning. In this section I would like to briefly discuss the *positive* commitments of such an approach and refer readers to some work that has been done in pursuing them. Naturally, a constructive program cannot be adequately covered in the span of one article, let alone one subsection of it, so this is only going to be a promissory note, an invitation to further reading, research, and debate.

The basic insight of a dialogical approach to meaning is that meaning arises where people interact. To mean is to communicate something *to somebody else*, and the meaning of what I say gets realized in how others respond to it, or as Bakhtin put it:

By meanings I understand *answers* to questions. That which answers no question is meaningless to us [...] Meaning is potentially infinite, but it may only be actualized when it comes into contact with other meaning (Bakhtin 1986, pp. 145–146, translation modified).¹⁶

Fictive interaction allows extending this definition of meaning in three ways, thus opening up a path toward a full-fledged dialogical linguistic theory. First of all, not everything people say, let alone write, receives a response from others, and not all utterances are even intended for an audience. But even the most secret soliloquy can be said to have an *implied* audience, an addressee whose response is tacitly assumed, perhaps hoped for, or feared. This implied response reflects and defines the *meaning* of the utterance in question. That is, to explain what it means is equivalent to explaining what implied response it is geared toward (cf. Grice 1957).

Secondly, intersubjectivity, by definition, is our mode of engagement with other human beings, but we can and do extend intersubjectivity beyond the sphere of direct communication with other subjects. Classical examples of fictive interaction feature utterances and speech acts attributed to inanimate objects, body parts (as in (4a) above), animals, abstract ideas, and any number of other non-speaking entities (Pascual 2014). More broadly, the world we live in, as it exists for human consciousness and culture, can be said to be dialogically constituted (Cooren and Sandler 2014). It is a thoroughly personified, speaking, world, in which things, ideas, emotions, organizations, etc. can always acquire voice and agency (Cooren 2010).

¹⁶ This semantic principle has been independently applied by Harvey Sacks (1992) in conversation analysis: to understand what kind of an action a turn in conversation performs, what it is, what it means, we need to look at the turn or turns that respond to it (cf. Bilmes 1985). Within philosophy of language, note the definition of meaning in terms of intended response in Grice (1957).

Finally, on the level of linguistic structure, research into fictive interaction indicates the conversational turn—the basic unit of intersubjective communication—should be considered the fundamental unit of linguistic structure and analysis (Pascual 2014, p. 8).¹⁷ This opens up the possibility of studying grammatical structure as fossilized conversational structure, and of discovering forms of intersubjectivity within grammatical constructions on all levels. Several recent works have achieved substantial progress along this path. I should particularly note Verhagen’s (2005) analysis of such ubiquitous constructions as (sentential) negation in explicitly intersubjective terms and Gasparov’s (2010) theory of linguistic texture, as well as the grammaticalization studies by Jarque and Leuschner in this volume.

Moreover, on a dialogical account, words, phrases, prosodic markers, the very texture of language, are all imbued with voices. Thus, “the food is getting cold” is a phrase that carries the Jewish Mother’s voice—among others—with it. These voices and our responding manipulation of them is what makes linguistic units *meaningful* (Bakhtin, 1981; Gasparov, 2010).

The extant explicitly dialogical linguistic literature is still relatively small, but has been growing consistently in recent years. To the works already cited in this section, I should also add such programmatic works as Wold (1992), Linell (1998), Ducrot (1984), and (within Cognitive Linguistics proper) Croft (2009), Du Bois’ [2001] (2014) work on resonance and implications drawn from it for grammar (Brône and Zima 2014), and studies focusing on the role of intersubjectivity in human cognition and its ontogeny, such as the papers collected in Bråten (1998) and Zlatev et al. (2008).¹⁸ All this progress notwithstanding, elaborating a full dialogical theory of meaning is still a task that lies ahead. This is not a task for a single paper, or for a single author’s efforts, so I will stop here for now. But I hope I have made a good case for developing the dialogical approach further, and for the central place the study of the rich and diverse forms of fictive interaction has in such an endeavor.

¹⁷ This dovetails with Bakhtin’s (1986, pp. 60–102) point about the utterance, which he defines as a discursive whole delimited by the change of speaking subject, being the fundamental unit of language and communication.

¹⁸ The title and central metaphor of Zlatev et al. (2008), however, also gives reasons to pause and practice some philosophical caution. The notion of “the shared mind”, if taken seriously, represents a step backwards from a dialogical point of view. Instead of offering an account of individual cognition grounded in intersubjectivity, it offers the long-forlorn specter of a collective mind, a single super-subject, which is as lonely in facing the outside world as the individual subject is on a strictly monological account. Erase the border (as thin and shifting as it may sometimes be) between self and other, and intersubjectivity evaporates with it.

References

- Arens, H. (1984). Aristotle's theory of language and its tradition: Texts from 500 to 1750. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bach, K. (1994). Conversational implicature. *Mind and Language*, 9(2), 124–162. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0017.1994.tb00220.x
- Bach, K. (2005). Context *ex machina*. In Z. Gendler Szabó (Ed.), *Semantics versus pragmatics* (pp. 15–44). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (pp. 259–422). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Barnes, J. (Ed.). (1984). *The complete works of Aristotle: The revised Oxford translation* (Vol. 1). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bilmes, J. (1985). “Why that now?” Two kinds of conversational meaning. *Discourse Processes*, 8, 319–355.
- Brône, G., & Zima, E. (2014). Towards a dialogic construction grammar: *Ad hoc* routines and resonance activation. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 25(3), 457–495. doi: 10.1515/cog-2014-0027
- Cappelen, H., & Lepore, E. (2005). Radical and moderate pragmatics: Does meaning determine truth conditions? In Z. Gendler Szabó (Ed.), *Semantics versus pragmatics* (pp. 45–71). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Clark, H.H. & R.J. Gerrig. 1990. Quotation as demonstration. *Language*, 66(4): 784–805. doi: 10.2307/414729
- Cooren, F. (2010). *Action and agency in dialogue*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Cooren, F., & Sandler, S. (2014). Polyphony, ventriloquism, and constitution: In dialogue with Bakhtin. *Communication Theory*, 24, 225–244. DOI:10.1111/comt.12041
- Coulson, S. & T. Oakley (2006) Purple persuasion: Conceptual Blending and deliberative rhetoric. In J. Luchjenbroers (ed.). *Cognitive Linguistics: Investigations across Languages, Fields, and Philosophical Boundaries* (pp. 47–65). Amsterdam: Benjamins. DOI: DOI: 10.1075/hcp.15.06cou
- Croft, W. (2001). *Radical construction grammar: Syntactic theory in typological perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Croft, W. (2009). Toward a social cognitive linguistics. In V. Evans, & S. Pourcel (Eds.), *New directions in cognitive linguistics* (pp. 395–420). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Dancygier, B., & Sweetser, E. (2012). *Viewpoint in language: A multimodal perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Brabanter, P. (2005). The impact of autonomy on the lexicon. *Word*, 56(2), 171–200.
- Du Bois, J.W. [2001] (2014). Towards a dialogic syntax. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 25(3), 359–410. doi: 10.1515/cog-2014-0024
- Ducrot, O. (1984). *Le dire et le dit*. Paris: Minuit.
- Fauconnier, G. (1990). Invisible meaning. *Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 16, 390–404.

- Fauconnier, G. [1985] (1994). *Mental spaces: Aspects of meaning construction in natural language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fauconnier, G. (1997). *Mappings in Thought and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (1996). Blending as a central process of grammar. In A.E. Goldberg (Ed.), *Conceptual structure, discourse and language* (pp. 113–130). Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (1998). Conceptual integration networks. *Cognitive Science*, 2(1), 133–187.
- Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gallese V., & Cuccio, V. (2015). The paradigmatic body: Embodied simulation, intersubjectivity and the bodily self. In T. Metzinger, & J.M. Windt (eds), *Open MIND* (pp. 1–23). Frankfurt: MIND Group. doi: 10.15502/978395857026
- Gallese, V., & Goldman, A. (1998). Mirror neurons and the simulation theory of mind-reading. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2(12), 493–501.
- Gasparov, B. (2010). *Speech, memory, and meaning: Intertextuality in everyday language*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Gendler Szabó, Z. (Ed.). (2005). *Semantics versus pragmatics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Grice, H.P. (1957). Meaning. *Philosophical Review*, 66(3), 377–388.
- Grice, H.P. (1989). *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hougaard, A. (2004). *How're we doing: An interactional approach to cognitive processes of online meaning construction*. PhD dissertation, university
- Hopper, P.J. (1998). Emergent grammar. In M. Tomasello (Ed.), *The new psychology of language: Cognitive and functional approaches to language structure* (pp. 155–175). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G.H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 13–31). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives. In J. Almog, J. Perry, & H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Themes from Kaplan* (pp. 481–563). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lakoff, G., & Sweetser, E. (1994). Foreword. In G. Fauconnier, *Mental spaces: Aspects of meaning construction in natural language* (pp. ix–xvi). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Langacker, R.W. (1987). *Foundations of cognitive grammar: Volume 1, Theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Linell, P. (1998). *Approaching dialogue: Talk, interaction and contexts in dialogical perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Oakley, T., & Coulson, S. (2008). Connecting the dots: Mental spaces and metaphoric language in discourse. In T. Oakley, & A. Hougaard (Eds.), *Mental spaces in discourse and interaction* (pp. 27–50). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- Oakley, T., & Hougaard, A. (Eds.). (2008). *Mental spaces in discourse and interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ochs, E., Schegloff, E.A., & Thompson, S.A. (Eds.). (1996). *Interaction and grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pang, K.-Y.S. (2005). 'This is the linguist in me speaking': Constructions for talking about the self talking. *Functions of Language*, 12(1), 1–38.
- Pascual, E. (2002). *Imaginary dialogues: Conceptual blending and fictive interaction in criminal courts*. Utrecht: LOT Publications.
- Pascual, E. (2006). Fictive interaction within the sentence: A communicative type of fictivity in grammar. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 17(2), 245–267. doi: 10.1515/COG.2006.006
- Pascual, E. (2014). *Fictive interaction: The conversation frame in thought, language, and discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Pascual, E., Królak, E., & Janssen, Th.A.J.M. (2013). Direct speech compounds: Evoking socio-cultural scenarios through fictive interaction. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 24(2). doi: 10.1515/cog-2013-0011
- Rosch, E.H. (1973). Natural categories. *Cognitive Psychology*, 4, 328–350.
- Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Salmon, N. (1991). The pragmatic fallacy. *Philosophical Studies*, 63, 83–97.
- Sandler, S. (2009). *The dialogical approach in the philosophy of language*. (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Ben-Gurion University, Beer Sheva, Israel.
- Stanley, J. (2000). Context and logical form. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 23(4), 391–434. doi: 10.1023/A:1005599312747
- Talmy, L. (2000). *Toward a cognitive semantics: Concept structuring systems*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Travis, C. (1996). Meaning's role in truth. *Mind*, 105(419), 451–466.
- Verhagen, A. (2005). *Constructions of intersubjectivity: Discourse, syntax, and cognition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Voloshinov, V.N. (1986). *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vossler, K. (1932). *The spirit of language in civilization*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Wold, A.H. (Ed.). (1992). *The dialogical alternative: Towards a theory of language and mind*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Zlatev, J., Racine, T.P., Sinha, C., & Itkonen, E. (Eds.). (2008). *The shared mind: Perspectives on intersubjectivity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.