

THE SEMANTICS/PRACTICALS DISTINCTION:

A DEFENCE OF GRICE

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THE SEMANTICS/PRAGMATICS DISTINCTION: A DEFENCE OF GRICE

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Abstract

The historical development of Morris' tripartite distinction between syntax, semantics and pragmatics does not follow a smooth path. Examining definitions of the terms 'semantic' and 'pragmatic' and the phenomena they have been used to describe, provides insight into alternative approaches to the semantics/pragmatics distinction. Paul Grice's work receives particular attention and taxonomy of philosophical positions, roughly divisible into content minimalist and maximalist groups, is set up.

Grice's often neglected theory of conventional implicature is defended from objections, various tests for the presence of conventional implicature are assessed and the linguistic properties of conventional implicature defined. Once rehabilitated, the theoretical utility of conventional implicature is demonstrated via a case study of the semantic import of the gender and number of pronouns in English.

The better-known theory of conversational implicature is also examined and refined. New linguistic tests for such implicatures are devised and the refined theory is applied to scalar terms. A pragmatic approach to scalar implicatures is proposed and shown to fare better than alternatives presented by Uli Sauerland, Stephen Levinson and Gennaro Chierchia.

With the details of the theory conversational implicature established, the use made of Grice's tool in the work of several philosophers is critically evaluated. Kent Bach's minimalist approach to quantifier domain restriction is examined and criticised. Also, the linguistic evidence for semantic minimalism provided by Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore is found wanting.

Finally, a content maximalist approach to quantifier domain restriction is proposed. The approach differs from other context maximalist theories, such as Jason Stanley's, in relying on semantically unarticulated constituents. Stanley's arguments against such theories are examined. Further applications of the approach are briefly surveyed.