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# Intentionality, Illocutions and Aggression

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*Abstract: For decades the notion of intentionality possessed a arguments that are concerned with meaning and interpretation. The notion has been approached excessively from language philosophers in the framework of theoretical formulation and practical application of the speech act theory. The present paper discusses the notions of intention and intentionality from the different pragmatic perspectives. The relationship between the notion of intention and the notion of illocutionary force is established with hinting upon their connection to the phenomenon of linguistic aggression.*

*Keywords: Intentionality, Illocutionary act, Speech acts.*

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### **- Introduction**

Austin, Searle and Grice are the three main thinkers who use intention for explaining human action. Both Austin and Searle depend on the notion of intention in articulating the illocutionary forces of human utterances. John Austin includes intentions in the felicity conditions for speech acts; and John Searle, following Austin, makes intentions a central component of his speech act theory. H.p Grice, as well, considers that the reliance on intentions is what makes linguistic meanings different from all other kinds of phenomena to which an interpretation can be given (Duranti, *The Anthropology* 11). The phenomenon of linguistic aggression is best understood in the framework of the concepts of speech act theory. Aggression is realized linguistically in the form of speech acts that carry an aggressive illocutionary force. Such an illocutionary force is an expression of an utterer intention. To prove this assumption there is a need to establish a relationship between the three notions (i.e. illocutions, intention, and aggression).

**- Problem Statement**

The speech act theory is an appropriate framework for studying the phenomenon of linguistic aggression. Illocutions are prime concepts in the SAT and they depend strongly on the notion of intention. The present research is inspired by the need for shedding light on the relationship between illocutions and intention in order to relate both concepts to the phenomenon of linguistic aggression.

**- Questions of the research**

The present research tends to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the different pragmatic approaches to the notion of intention?
- 2- What is the relationship between the notion of intention and that of illocutions?
- 3- What is the relationship between the notion of intention and that of aggression?

**1. Brentano's Definition of Intentionality**

According to Franz Brentano (1838 – 1917), intentionality is the directedness or the aboutness of thought. In his thesis of the intentionality of mind, Brentano claims that to say that thought is intentional is to say it intends or is about something, that it aims at or is directed upon an intended object. Intentionality is thus the aboutness of thought, the relation whereby a psychological state intends or refers to an intended object. Brentano argues that all psychological phenomena and only psychological phenomena are intentional. He holds that to believe is to believe something; it is for a belief state, a particular kind of mental act, to intend or be about whatever is believed. The intended object of a belief is often a certain state of affairs that today is Tuesday or that God exists, if the belief is that today is Tuesday or that God exists. The situation is the same with respect to other psychological states, such as desire, hope, fear, doubt, expectation, love and hate ( Jacquette 102). So, Intention in the intuitive folk sense can be defined as a prior plan or motivation underlying an action, while intentionality refers to a

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more broad philosophical notion that is inherited from Brentano's "aboutness" or "directedness" (Nuyts 2000).

Michael Haugh (2008), states that a significant amount of theorizing in cognitive – philosophical pragmatics adopts the view that communication involves speakers expressing their intentions, and hearers attributing intentions to those speakers. If the intentions attributed by the hearers are roughly the same as those expressed by the speaker, then communication is considered to have been successful (Haugh 1). One of the tasks of pragmatics, according to this view, is to explicate how exactly the hearer makes these inferences, as well as how speakers and hearers know the "Correct" inferences have been made, and so determine what counts as (the speaker's) meaning.

### 2. Grice's Intention-Based Semantics

Giving intention a focal interest in pragmatics can be traced to Grice's work on (speaker) *Meaning*. Grice proposes an intention based semantics – i.e., a semantic theory according to which the meaning of an utterance is explicated in terms of the psychological state it is intended to produce in an audience. Such semantics focuses on the use of language to communicate. Hence Grice begins with an attempt to isolate a particular kind of meaning, which he calls 'Communicative meaning', or 'non-natural meaning' (Meaning NN). According to Duranti (2015) this non-natural meaning refers to:

.. a particular and common type of "meaning" in human actions that is realized through conventional "signs" (with linguistic utterances being the most commonly discussed) that must be distinguished from non-conventional 'Signs' (e.g, those commonly based on recurrent association.). For example, the meaning of the utterance "Fire"! shouted by a person is a sign that is different from the meaning of some smoke going up in the sky, which could also be interpreted as a 'sign of fire'. Grice (1957) calls the first type of meaning (by a person shouting " Fire!") "non-natural" and the second type (the smoke) "natural" (12).

Grice states that non-natural or communicative meaning has two properties. The first is that the person who produces the message (the speaker) intends to make the hearer/ addressee /recipient knowledgeable about something (in Grice's terms "to induce... a belief in an audience"). The second property is that the speaker wants the hearer to recognize that the message was intended to have the particular meaning that the speaker trying to convey. Grice (1957) defines non-natural meaning saying:

For A to mean something by X..., A must intend to induce by X a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized as so intended (379).

This definition of the speaker's meaning is stated in terms of the speaker trying to get the audience to believe something by relying on the audience to take the speaker's intention as a reason for belief (Vlach 359). Here is Grice's characterization of the communicative intention:

An utterance  $u^3$  is made with a communicative intentions-or, in Grice's own terminology, the speaker(S)'means something' by U- if and only if S utters u intending:

(G1) S's utterance 4 to produce a certain response r- e.g. a certain belief – in the audience A,

(G2) A to recognize S's intention (G1)

(G3) A's recognition of S's intention (G1) to function as at least part of A's reason for A's response r. (that is, the fulfillment of intention (G1) is intended to depend partly on its recognition.) (Recanati 214).

Throughout this focus on the communicative intention, Grice rejects a causal account of meaning<sub>NN</sub>. Such an account would be formulated like this:

X means<sub>NN</sub> something if x has a tendency to produce such and such a cognitive effect in a hearer and to be produced by that state a speaker.

Grice rejects the causal account of an utterance for it does not take the notion of intention into consideration. The causal

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relationship accounts for the effect that tends to be produced, while, according to Grice, what communicatively matters is the effect that the speaker intends to produce. Besides, the causal account is more consistent with the idea of the standard meaning (of an expression or utterance), such an idea ignores what a particular speaker may mean on a particular occasion.

Levinson (2006 a, 2006 b), asserts the view of Grice concerning considering intention the "interaction engine" that underpins human interaction:

-The capacity for Gricean intentions (as in Grice's 1957 theory of meaning), that is intentions driving behaviors whose sole function is to have the motivating intentions recognize... is what makes open-ended communication possible, communication beyond a small fixed repertoire of signals. (Livenson 2006a 78).

-The heart of the matter is intention attribution: given the observed behavior, the interaction engine must be able to infer likely goals that would have motivated the behavior. (Livenson 2006 b 48)

Levinson agrees with the view that human communication is crucially dependent on the existence of communicative intentions, specifically Gricean intentions, which exist in the minds of speakers, and about which addressees make inferences (Haugh 2). This presumption of the centrality of intention in communication is common to theorists who hold to view that pragmatics is about the study of meaning beyond what is said as a "core component of a theory of language, on a par with phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics" (Huang 4).

Referring back to Grice's aforementioned characterization of the communicative intention, we can claim that the act of communication is defined as "an utterance act which manifests an underlying communicative intention. " (Recanati 214). Grice's ideas concerning the central role of intention in fulfilling human communication finds a general agreement among linguists and philosophers of language interested in pragmatics. They believe that

something along the Gricean lines provides the foundation for an adequate theory of linguistic communication.

### **3. The New-Gricean's Claim**

Related to the previous ideas a further development has appeared. With reference to Recanati, this development is represented in what is called 'the Neo-Griceans claim', according to which, the fulfillment of communication does not only depends on speaker's intention but also on hearer's recognition of that intention. John Searle, for example, states that:

Human communication has some extraordinary properties, not shared by most other kinds of human behavior. One of the most extraordinary is this: If I am trying to tell someone something, then (assuming certain conditions are satisfied) as soon as he recognizes that I am trying to tell him something and exactly what it is I am trying to tell him, I have succeeded in telling it to him. Furthermore, unless he recognizes that I am trying to tell him something and what I am trying to tell him, I do not fully succeed in telling it to him. In the case of illocutionary acts, we succeed in doing what we are trying to do by getting our audience to recognize what we are trying to do (Searle, *Speech Acts* 47).

Bach & Harnish assert the same point saying:

Communicative illocutionary intentions... are reflexive intentions, in the sense of H.P. Grice (1957): a reflexive intention is an intention that is intended to be recognized as intended to be recognized. We further restrict illocutionary intentions to those intentions whose fulfillment consists in nothing more than their recognition (Bach & Harnish xiv-xv).

Along the same line, McDowell claims that:

Speech acts are publications of intentions : The primary aim of a speech act is to produce an object – the speech act itself- which is perceptible publicly, and in particular to the audience, embodying an intention whose content is precisely a recognizable performance of the very speech act. Recognition by an audience that such an intention has been made public in this way leaves nothing

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further needing to happen for the intention to be fulfilled (McDowell 130).

P.F. Strawson (1964) assumes that the mysterious illocutionary acts of Speech Act theory can be defined only in Grecian terms. But in addition to Grice's claim concerning speaker's intention, Strawson agrees with Searle, Bach & Harnish and McDowell in asserting that hearer's recognition of intention is necessary for fulfilling communication. Strawson restates Grice's claim as following:

S non-naturally means something by an utterance X if S intends( $i_1$ ) to produce by uttering X a certain response (r) in an audience A and intends( $i_2$ ) that A shall recognize S's intention ( $i_1$ ) and intends ( $i_3$ ) that this recognition on the part of A of S's intention ( $i_1$ ) shall function as A's reason, or a part of this reason, for his response r.... It is, evidently, an important feature of this definition that the securing of the response r is intended to be mediated by the securing of another (and always cognitive) effect in A; namely, recognition of S's intention to secure response r. (Strawson 446).

Strawson comments on Grice's claim and proceeds a further step saying:

... we must add to Grice's conditions the further condition that S should have the further intention ( $i_4$ ) that A should recognize his intention ( $i_2$ ) ( 447).

Throughout the addition of the fourth type of intention, Strawson aims at connecting Grice's ideas with Austin's terminology of "securing uptake". Strawson believes that Grice's ideas concerning intentionality represent the key for analyzing the notions of illocutionary force and of the illocutionary act. He asserts that "to say something with a certain illocutionary force is at least to have a certain complex intention of the ( $i_4$ ) form." ( 449).

### **4. The Sociocultural-Interactional Approach to Intention**

According to Michael Huagh (1-2) theorists who belong to the sociocultural – Interactional pragmatics, or the so-called European- continental pragmatics, hold a different point of view in



relation to the place of intention in communication. Verschueren (1999: 48), for example, argues in his call for "a pragmatic return to meaning in its full complexity, allowing for interacting forces of language production and interpretation" that while intentions may play a role in the broader sense of "directedness", communication is not always dependent on speaker intentions:

It would be unwarranted to downplay the role which intentions also play. An important philosophical correlate of intentionality is 'directedness'. Being directed at certain goals is no doubt an aspect of what goes on in language use... But it would be equally unwise to claim that every type of communicated meaning is dependent on a definable individual intention on the part of the utterer. Such a claim would be patently false. (Verschueren: 48)

While intentions do play a role in communication, Verschueren has not regarded them as always being central to interaction. Such a treatment of intention in communication belongs to theorists who hold the view that pragmatics is about "the study of language in human communication as determined by conditions of society" (Mey: 6). Although theorists of the sociocultural- Interactional school of pragmatics try to avoid "cognitivism" that is traced in Greco-Roman treatment of intention they cannot avoid considering the role of intention in communication at all. They just claim that intention is more usefully understood as a post – facto construct that is explicitly topicalised in accounting for actions, including violations of norms or other interactional troubles, or implicitly invoked in other subtle ways through interaction (Huagh: 2). They also hold the claim that intention attribution should actually be regarded as a culture specific perspective on communication.

### **5. Searle's Conception of Intention**

Searle and Vanderveken reformulate Grice's deductive approach within speech act theory as follows:

A speaker who means to perform non literal speech acts intends that the hearer understands him by relying: firstly on the hearer's knowledge of the meaning of the used sentence and on his

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ability to understand the success and satisfaction conditions of the literal illocutionary act; secondly on their mutual knowledge of certain facts of the conversational background; and thirdly on the hearer's capacity to make inferences on the basis of the hypothesis of the respect of conversational maxims (Vanderveken 52).

According to Duranti (*The Anthropology* 25), there are two main notions of intention in the philosophical literature, and Searle utilizes them both. The first notion agrees with the folk psychological sense of "intention" and the common use of the English noun intention and the English verb intend. The other is the broader notion of intentionality as "directedness," which draws from the phenomenological tradition. Utilizing the two notions, Searle introduces a thorough conceptualization of the notion of intentionality and has connected it to the speech act theory establishing a strong relationship between it and the notions of illocutionary act and the illocutionary forces. The way Searle defines intentionality reveals a strong agreement with Brentano's conception of the notion at the first glance. Proceeding with Searle's ideas however, reveals that he treats the notion differently. In his work Intentionality: An Essay in the philosophy of mind (1983) Searle defines Intentionality saying:

Intentionality is 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. If, for example, I have a belief, it must be a belief that such and such is the case; if I have a fear, it must be a fear of something or that something will occur; if I have a desire, it must be a desire to do something or that something should happen or be the case. And so on through a large number of other cases. I follow a long philosophical tradition in calling this feature of directedness or aboutness "Intentionality" (1).

Searle here agrees completely with Brentano and asserts that the features of directedness and aboutness are the characteristic features of intentionality. However, unlike Brentano, Searle declares

that "only some, not all, mental states and events have Intentionality. Searle states that:

Beliefs, fears, hopes, and desires are Intentional; but there are forms of nervousness, elation, and undirected anxiety that are not Intentional. A clue to this distinction is provided by the constraints on how these states are reported (1).

To prove his claim empirically, Searle suggests a test to distinguish between Intentional and non-Intentional states:

On my account if a state S is Intentional then there must be an answer to such questions as: what is S about? What is S of? What is it an S that? (2).

In cases when there are no answers for these questions, the mental state i.e. anxiety, depression and elation, is undirected, hence, not Intentional. Actually, at this particular point, Searle's distinction does not seem convincing. The undirected mental state is something that doubtfully exists. When a person is depressed, elated or anxious, each one of these states should be about something or of something. The existence of such states without being about something or being directed at something indicates a state of psychological abnormality in which a person is diagnosed as being mentally or psychologically disordered for falling under the control of undirected mental states. So, in that concern, Brentano's definition of intentionality is more realistic and more convincing.

Searle distinguishes as well between the notion of 'a state' and that of 'an act'. He objects to the philosophers who describe the mental states such as beliefs, fears, hopes and desires as 'mental acts'. For Searle, an act is something that is realized tangibly; something that a person does:

Drinking beer and writing books can be described as acts or actions or even activities, and doing arithmetics in your head or forming mental images of the Golden Gate Bridge are mental acts; but believing, hoping, fearing, and desiring are not acts nor mental acts at all. Acts are things one does, but there is no answer to the

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question", what are you now doing?" which goes, "I am now believing it will rain" (3).

The significance of Searle's ideas about intentionality in relation to the present research is represented in his formulation of the relationship between intentionality and speech act theory. Searle takes the speech act as a model for the representation of intentionality, or as he states as an answer to the question "what is the relationship between the Intentional state and the object or state of affairs that it is in some sense directed at? "Searle gives an immediate answer for that question saying that "Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense of "represent" that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense of "represent" that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs' (p.4). For elaborating this simple answer, Searle presents four points of similarity and connection between Interactional states and speech acts. All the four points prove the role of intentionality in underlying meaning as they clarify the relationship between the cognitive mental states of the utterer and the illocutionary force this utterer gives in his/her utterances.

### **6. The Relationship between Intentionality and Illocutions**

The first point of similarity or connection between intentional states and speech acts is represented in the capacity of representation that both phenomena have. In speech acts, the illocutionary force presents a certain propositional content; the same way the Intentional state presents a certain psychological mode. Searle states it saying:

The distinction between propositional content and illocutionary force carries over to intentional states. Just as I can order you to leave the room, predict that you will leave the room, and suggest that you will leave the room, so I can believe that you will leave the room, fear that you will leave the room, want you to leave the room, and hope that you will leave the room. In the first class of cases, the speech act cases, there is an obvious distinction

between the propositional content that you will leave the room and the illocutionary force with which that propositional content is presented in the speech act. But equally in the second class of cases, the Intentional states, there is a distinction between the representative content that you will leave the room and the psychological mode, whether belief or fear or hope or whatever, in which one has that representative content ( Searle, Intentionality 5-6; What is 75- 76).

In the second point of connection between Intentional states and speech acts, Searle presents the notion of "direction of fit" through which he establishes the relationship between language and the (real or imaginary) world. Searle (1979, 1983) claims that:

The distinctions between different directions of fit, also familiar from the theory of speech acts, will carry over to Intentional states. The members of the Assertive/Representative class of speech – statements, descriptions, assertions, etc. – are supposed in some way to match an independently existing world; and to the extent that they do or fail to do that we say that they are true or false (76,6).

But the members of the directive class of speech acts – orders, commands, requests, etc., - and the members of the commissive class-promises, vows, pledges, etc., - are not supposed to match on independently existing reality but rather are supposed to bring about changes in the world so that the world matches the speech act.

So, the two classes of directive and commissive speech acts have a *world - to- word* direction of fit. In these cases an utterer is trying to make the world change or adapt to the kind of world that the word describe. As Duranti (The Anthropology 15) clarifies this point:

In requesting students to write a paper on a given subject, I am using language to make other people do something they might not have otherwise done. The "world," that is, theirs and mine, will change as a result of my linguistic act of requesting a term paper.

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For Searle, there are also speech acts that have a double direction of fit, i.e. the speech acts of declarations, belonging to which acts that make the world adapt to the description of a state of affairs. Searle states that "The performance of a declaration brings about a fit by the very fact of its successful performance" (Searle, *A Taxonomy* 14).

According to Searle, the fourth type of fit is the null cases in which there is no direction of fit. These cases belong to the expressive speech acts:

If I apologize for insulting you or congratulate you on winning the prize, then though I do indeed presuppose the truth of the expressed proposition, that I insulted you, that you won the prize, the point of the speech act is not to commit me to either direction of fit; the point is to express my sorrow or my pleasure, about the state of affairs specified in the propositional content, the truth of which I presuppose. (What is 77, *Intentionality*7).

For Searle, these four directions of fit between the world and the speech acts carry over to Intentional states. In the cases when beliefs turn out to be wrong, the situation is corrected by changing the beliefs but not by changing the world. In such a case, beliefs are similar to statements that can be true or false and that have the mind-to-world direction of fit. Intentions and desires, on the other hand, present different cases. When a person fails to carry out his intentions or when this person's desires are unfulfilled, the situation cannot be corrected by changing the intentions or the desires. In these cases it is the fault of the world if it fails to match the intention or the desire. Desires and intentions cannot be true or false, but can be compiled with or fulfilled for they have the "world – to – mind" direction of fit (Searle, *What is 77*).

In the third point of connection, Searle establishes a direct relationship between illocutionary acts and intentional states. This relationship is mediated by the activity of expression.

Searle claims that giving an utterance with a certain illocutionary force is simply an expression of a certain intentional state. Describing this relationship between illocutionary acts and the activity of expression Searle states that:

Whenever there is a psychological state specified in the sincerity condition, the performance of the act counts as an expression of that psychological state. (Searle *Speech Acts* 65)

Searle goes on to establish a direct connection between illocutionary acts and intentional states saying:

In the performance of each illocutionary act with a propositional content, we express a certain Intentional state with that propositional content, and that Intentional state is the sincerity condition of that type of speech act. Thus, For example, if I make the statement that p, I express a belief that p. If I make a promise to do A, I express an intention to do A If I give an order to you to do A, I express a wish or a desire that you should do A. If I apologize for doing something, I express sorrow for doing that thing (Intentionality 9).

The fourth point of connection or similarity between speech act and Intentional states is related to the conditions of satisfaction. Searle assumes that the notion of conditions of satisfaction applies to the Intentional states the same way it applies to speech act in all cases where there is a direction of fit. So, a statement is true or false; an order is obeyed or disobeyed; a promise is kept or broken. In each of these cases we ascribe success or failure of the illocutionary act to match reality in the particular direction off it provided by the illocutionary point. So, a statement is satisfied if and only if it is true, an order is satisfied if and only if it is obeyed, a promise is satisfied if and only if it is kept, and so on. The same way: My belief will be satisfied if and only if things are as I believe them to be, my desires will be satisfied if and only if they are fulfilled, my intentions will be satisfied if and only if they are carried out." (10).

**7. The Relationship between Intentionality and Aggression**

With a special reference to the phenomenon of linguistic aggression, intentionality possesses a significant position. Using language to deliver harm is indeed a matter of purposeful intention. Misunderstanding or delivering harm indeliberately is not a focus of interest. Rather, it is how competent users of a language formulate meaningful utterances to cause psychological damage for a target in order to achieve specific goals. The existence of prior intention is part of the human aspect of linguistic aggression. Such a phenomenon is best understood in the framework of the SAT with the hypothesis that aggression is an illocutionary force that is delivered via speech and that can be detected through various types of linguistic indicating devices. Based on such a perspective that deals with linguistic aggression as an illocution, the relationship between intentionality and aggression is established.



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