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Acknowledgments

This book is an outcome of the 134th Symposium of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, which convened October 2–9, 2004, in Duck, NC. Wenner-Gren symposia are renowned for their intensity, and this one was no exception. After presentation, discussion, and the scrutiny of 25 pairs of eyes, the precirculated papers emerge phoenix-like as chapters of this book. The chapters reflect only indirectly the intense weeklong discussion, and we would therefore like to take the opportunity to thank our distinguished discussants who did much to goad, encourage, and meld the discussion in useful directions: Maurice Bloch, Alessandro Duranti, Richard Fox, Jane Hill, and Catherine Snow. We also gratefully acknowledge the participation of Federico Rossano (who served as symposium monitor) and Paul Kockelman (whose presentation appeared as Kockelman 2005). We thank the contributors for their generosity in accepting our invitation to the meeting, producing papers for precirculation, putting so much into the meeting itself, and finally getting the revisions done in good time. We have also benefited enormously from the considered comments on part or all of the text from Dick Fox, Bob Arundale, and three incisive anonymous reviewers.

The editors, as conveners of the meeting, would like to thank above all two officers of the Wenner-Gren Foundation: Dick Fox and Laurie Obbink. Dick Fox, then-president of the foundation, approached us in late 2002 with the idea that a meeting of this kind might help to remedy the near absence of any productive relationship between anthropology and the cognitive sciences. Dick remained closely engaged throughout the project, and this book stands as he retires as a timely reminder of his broad vision for anthropology. Our second special debt is owed to Laurie Obbink, who as organizer of countless such symposia has a deep grasp of the art involved in making these meetings work as brainstorming sessions so different from your average conference or workshop. She was responsible for most of the groundwork, which made the meeting run so flawlessly. On countless occasions, Laurie went well beyond the call of duty, always with inimitable grace. In addition, we thank Mary Beth Moss, also of the Wenner-Gren Foundation, for providing further organizational assistance during the meeting. During production of the book, the efficient and professional contributions of Victoria Malkin at Wenner-Gren and Ken Bruce at Berg were invaluable. Finally, for much help in preparing the manuscript, we are indebted to Edith Sjøerdsma.

N. J. E. and S. C. L.

Reference

The Mopan Maya, indigenous swidden agriculturalists of Central America, can strike outsiders as remarkable in their attitudes to mental states. In particular, when things go wrong in the Mopan world, perpetrators of crimes are found responsible and punished according to the degree of damage or waste that they have caused, rather than according to the degree to which their crime was committed intentionally. This extends from full-blown adult wrongdoing at the village judicial level to the misdemeanors of the private household (for more on Mopan society, see Danziger 2001; Gregory 1984; Thompson 1930). Children and adults alike are punished according to the outcome of their doings; the defense of “I didn’t mean it!” is considered irrelevant, and therefore seldom attempted. And this is not merely an institutional or interested stance. The same attitude of disregard for the mental states of perpetrators is found in the everyday gossip of bystanders. In one instance for example, I heard from one of his neighbors the story of a man who had recently committed suicide. The man, it seems, had drunk poison rather than face the machetes of fellow villagers, who were out for his blood after his yearly agricultural burn had destroyed their cacao trees. In the account that I heard, the fact that his fire had burned out of control and that the destruction was not intended weighed nothing—either in mitigating the reported anger of those wronged or in the
narrator's assessment of their likelihood to forgive the perpetrator. The neighbor found it quite understandable that he would have made the decision to kill himself under these circumstances. Most remarkable of all, the nonintentional nature of this crime was something I only elicited from the narrator through specific questioning. It was not originally included as a reportable component of the narrative.

The phenomenon is found across the spectrum of Mopan misdemeanor and reproach; linguistic wrongdoing is no exception. The uttering of a falsehood is not excused even if the speaker believes at the time of utterance that his or her statement is true. Children who indulge in pretend play or fantasy story making are reproved—several adults have told me that they hid such play from their parents as children. Meanwhile, adult storytellers react with moral indignation when queried whether their stories—including those involving talking animals or other supernatural creatures—are literally true. The person who retells a Mopan story is held responsible for its truth, and tellers are cautious in thus committing themselves.

The basis for Mopan belief in a story tends to depend on the degree of respect that a person holds for the individual from whom he or she first heard the story. But although social analysts (Foucault 1980; see also Evans-Pritchard 1976) might be quick to point out that in the Mopan case, as in all others, the question of what counts as “true” depends on social and political circumstances, Mopan practitioners do not see things this way. Utterance truth is considered in Mopan ideology a straightforward matter of word-to-world fit, and utterances are held either to succeed or to fail at accurately describing some actual past or present state of affairs (e.g., I was told that animals did speak in days gone by). Stories and other statements that are not assessed as true within this matrix are referred to in Mopan as tús (lies).

There exists no other candidate lexeme in Mopan for the notion of “lying” or “stating falsehood,” and the translation “lies, lying” is the only one ever offered for this form by bilingual Mopan speakers. Harshly or mildly applied, a negative connotation is always present to some degree in uses of this word. A characterization of another’s utterance as tús, however, is based exclusively on the perceived truth value of expressions and not on the intentional or belief states of the speaker. This is so even when the speaker merely translates the opinions or repeats the words of another (Danziger 1996b, 2001, 2002). Accordingly, many cases of expression that might be categorized elsewhere as “errors” are condemned in Mopan as tús. Accusations of tús are common in Mopan face-to-face interaction and in gossip, and these accusations carry the negative charge we have discussed. Mopan social practice is characterized by a tendency toward caution and reticence in interactions with others (Gregory 1975), by the liberal deployment of evidential and quotative particles in speech (Danziger n.d.) and by an accepted interactional reliance on silence in cases of uncertainty (Danziger 1996a, 2001; cf. Basso 1970).

In the varieties of English that have so far been investigated, a false statement is properly a “lie” only if the speaker is aware of its falsehood (Coleman and Kay 1981; Sweetser 1987; for other, more Mopanlike, possibilities within English however, consider Brice Heath 1982). It is precisely the fact that, despite its ubiquity, the gloss “lies” only a partially adequate translation for Mopan tús that is of interest for the present discussion.

**Mopan Philosophy of Language**

These distinctive Mopan social and interactional phenomena do not seem to occur as effortful attempts to comply with a superficial or externally imposed moral ideology. Rather, they emerge as a consequence of deeply held and themselves largely unconscious beliefs about the nature of language, mind, and the universe.

Mopan certainly know that others can have false beliefs and mistaken understandings of the world. Pilot versions of standard tasks (see, e.g., Astington this volume) show that Mopan children acquire understanding of others’ false belief by school age and certainly well before puberty. And it is quite straightforward in Mopan to describe another’s mental state, using everyday predicates such as k’at (want), tz’okes (believe), eel (know) and others. But in Mopan ideology one does not use one’s understanding of the possibility that others can entertain false beliefs to excuse falsehood. This is because a separate and sacred morality inheres in the very relationship of spoken word to actual world. The nature of the transgression involved in speaking falsehood is cosmological as well as interpersonal.

The prohibition on the telling of falsehoods is an aspect of tzik (respect), one of the most important moral forces in the Mopan universe. Elsewhere (Danziger 2001), I have described how tzik forbids incest, murder, unruliness, laziness, levity, and, crucially for our purposes, the telling of lies. To violate these prohibitions is called in Mopan p’a’as, a term whose translational range goes all the way from “teasing” to “mockery” to “insult” and “blasphemy.”
This sacred aspect of the word-to-world fit is related to the desirability of keeping the universe in good order and lends itself to supernatural inversion. One Mopan man explained to me that he had been taught as a child not to indulge in pretend play explicitly for fear that his false utterances should come true as a result of his speech. Formal genres of Mopan speech cannot be performed, even for the eager anthropologist, except under the conditions appropriate for nonstaged performances. This is because the utterances involved are believed to remain efficacious regardless of context, and using them in the wrong circumstances creates a word-to-world mismatch that is regarded as both dangerous and blasphemous (Danziger 2001).

Overall, in Mopan philosophy, linguistic words and expressions are considered to be related to their signifiers in ways that are ubiquitously performative, and that transcend the volition of those who use them. It follows that judgments about the morality of false expression is made on the basis of perceived word-to-world fit, without consideration of utterer intentions or belief states. Translated into a different vocabulary (Searle 1965), we might say that in Mopan philosophy utterances have locutionary but not illocutionary force.

**Ideologies of Intention in Cross-cultural Context**

The Mopan case has significant resonance in the ethnographic literature on non-Western philosophies of language. There is clear evidence from a number of societies and contexts that an utterer’s mental state is not always or universally considered relevant to the interpretation of his or her speech and action. Levinson (this volume) makes mention of the large body of social theory that has recognized for generations that legal responsibility in many societies is vested elsewhere than in the individual and his or her intentions (see also Rosen 1995). Specifically with regard to language, we know that in Samoa, for example, children are shown that the mental states only of high-status others are to be interpreted (Ochs 1982); Samoan politicians are held accountable for broken commitments even when their failures are the result of others’ bad faith (Duranti 1992). In the Philippines, Ilongot warriors swear binding oaths rather than making sincere promises (Rosaldo 1982). DuBois (1987) shows that religious divination across cultures functions in the absence of utterer intentions, whereas in Guatemala, one simply shrugs one’s shoulders when asked to consider the motives and mental states of others (Warren 1995). See Gaskins (this volume) for other examples drawn from the study of cross-cultural socialization. Robbins (2001) is particularly helpful in articulating the fact that the particular ideology that considers intentionality as the key to linguistic production and interpretation is that of historic “modernity” and as such a cultural product like all other ideologies of language (see also Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Reddy 1993).¹

Like these, the observations from Mopan can readily be directed to cast doubt on the privileged role of intentionality as it is enshrined in the philosophy of language in interaction (Grice 1989c; Searle 1965). A ready riposte to such a cultural critique, however, lies in pointing out that what a people believe they are doing and what an analyst observes them to be doing may not be one and the same. If Samoans, Ilongot, Mopan, and the rest experience their own mental states and appreciate those of others, then any claimed disregard for such states as factors in the conduct of interaction can be seen as a kind of false consciousness, a “folk” understanding that the analyst may freely set aside.

I endorse in what follows the position that cultural ideologies (whether of the Mopan or of the moderns) have little to do with the conduct of most interaction. I intend to conclude however, that there are at least some grounds for proposing that local philosophies about the place of mind in linguistic meaning cannot always be disregarded. In that connection, it will be fruitful to consider the cultural differential not as an issue related to actual utterer intentions or the lack of them (contra Nuyts 1994), nor even as a matter of audience belief that such intentions may exist, but as a matter of the degree to which audiences are willing to take them into account as a routine part of linguistic interpretation. This shift of focus will lead us to conclude that local beliefs and philosophies about language are not always mere linguistic epiphenomena but may at times play a crucial role in determining the types of meaning making that can successfully take place in a given society.

**Varieties of Meaning**

Far from suggesting that local ideologies about language and meaning might be irrelevant to the actual practice of interaction, several of the most influential scientific articulations of the modernist ideology actually entail the conclusion that speech participants who do not subscribe to a mentalist theory of interaction should not show normal patterns of interaction. This is because, in these articulations of the theory, constant and relatively aware monitoring of the interlocutor’s intentions is a sine qua non of successful interaction.
Grice's seminal definition of linguistic meaning, for example, runs as follows, "For some audience A, U intended his utterance of x to produce in A some effect (response) E, by means of A's recognition of that intention" (1989c:122, emphasis added). In other words, for Grice, U (the utterer) intends A (the audience) to recognize not just the signification of the gesture U emits, but also U's very intention to have that signification (or another one) recognized. Note how this formulation requires that U rely on A's willingness to "recognize," that is, guess at—whatever it is that U actually intends. For Grice (1989b, 1982), this issue is far from trivial. If audiences interpret meaning without regard to utterers' communicative intentions, their interpretation is of the type he called "natural" and that he exemplified in classic examples like "those spots mean measles," or "those clouds mean rain." However, meaning that relies on the "by means of" clause is "non-natural," and it is this type of meaning that Grice spent his career examining.

In one illuminating passage, Grice (1989b) discusses Searle's example of the U.S. soldier during World War II who, when captured by Italians, attempts to convince them that he is actually a German officer, and therefore not to be detained. The American speaks in German to the Italians, who recognize but do not understand that language. Grice argues that the case in which the Italians conclude that their prisoner is a German officer from the very fact that he is speaking German is qualitatively different from that in which they draw the same conclusion based on their "recognition" of his intention to utter the specific German sentence "I am a German officer." The former case, although inferential, does not require intention recognition. Only the latter, which does require it, can be considered a case of non-natural meaning. In both cases, according to Grice, we are free to suppose that the U.S. soldier might have had certain intentions in speaking (including deceptive ones), and even that the Italians might form hypotheses as to what those intentions could be. Only in the second case, however, and not in the first, do the hypotheses of the audience about the intentions of the utterer make a difference to the meaning that the audience takes from the utterance.

Note that both are cases of inference. The latter, in the prototypical Gricean way, is an inference from what is assumed to be the speaker's desire to get his intention recognized. The former is an inference from the assumption of "natural" (indexical, associational) compliance with something—indeed with whatever it is that the U.S. soldier in this example does not comply with—something like "speak your own language." The fact that the American can manipulate the expectation of such compliance is evidence enough that the association in question is not purely "natural." But Grice himself tells us that is not what he means by "non-natural." Grice here seems to propose that we understand the conventional as a variety of the "natural," on the grounds that neither involves the crucial diagnostic of the "non-natural"—the intention to get one's intention (and not just one's signal) recognized.

In various other areas of his writings, Grice departs from the strict natural–non-natural dichotomy by giving consideration also to conventional meaning (Grice 1989c, see discussion below). But the dichotomy, with its embedded reliance on audience willingness to interpret the utterer's mental state, is among Grice's most influential contributions. In certain critical passages (Grice 1989a:30–31), Grice insists that all interaction be amenable to a mental-state calculus. Certainly, the dichotomy articulates well with other influential paradigms within the philosophy of language (Searle 1965), as well as with folk versions of the modernist philosophy.

**Conversational Implicature**

Making full use of his notion of non-natural meaning, Grice elaborated a theory of conversational coherence that has had enormous influence on academic accounts of interaction ever since. For Grice (1989a:45–47), conversations cohere because participants assume that all parties adhere to a set of "conversational maxims" as follows:

**Quantity:**
- a) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)
- b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

**Quality:** Try to make your contribution one that is true
- a) Do not say what you believe to be false
- b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

**Relation:** Be relevant

**Manner:** Be perspicuous
- a) Avoid obscurity of expression
- b) Avoid ambiguity
- c) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- d) Be orderly
All parties adhere to these maxims under an umbrella rule referred to as the cooperative principle. Apparent non sequiturs and nonsenses in talk are resolved, under what I call the "strong view" of Gricean inference, through intention guessing or mental-state simulation of the interlocutor. So, for example, on hearing the exchange:

A: I am out of petrol
B: There is a garage around the corner [Grice 1989a:51]

Speaker A ruminates: "B's remark Y seems irrelevant to my own prior remark X. But it can't be [by maxim of relevance]. So what could B have had in mind that he or she wants me to see would make Y in fact relevant to X?" Answer: "B thinks, or thinks it possible, that the garage is open, and has petrol to sell." (Grice 1989a:51, emphasis added).

To the extent that interpretation of such an exchange relies on quasi-conscious attempts on the part of the audience to construct hypotheses about the intentions underlying the utterer's remarks (in sequences like "B thinks, or thinks it possible ..."), we should conclude that such exchanges would be uninterpretable under philosophies like that of the Mopan, in which the utterer's intentions are considered irrelevant to utterance interpretation. Exactly because the strong version of Gricean implicature requires relatively aware strategies of intention-seeking on the part of the audience, the theory does not allow us to dismiss as false consciousness any explicit cultural belief system that would consider such strategies to be inappropriate or irrelevant. (The possibility that the Gricean procedure is taking place, but at a level inaccessible to consciousness, will be considered later.)

Some of the more radical predictions of such a cross-cultural state of affairs include the occurrence of strictly literal and very wooden-seeming exchanges among individuals in some societies. Such wooden exchanges are not reported from Mopan or from any other group of people where a philosophical disinterest in others' mental states is found. Exchanges in Mopan do indeed seem to make use of the assumption that utterances comply with some version of relevance, manner, quality, and quantity. When it is demonstrated that utterances do not comply, there is also a notion of violation, often explicitly articulated (Danziger 2005). The failure of these most radical predictions amounts to a demonstration that Gricean "non-natural" meaning in its strongest form (that of aware and reflective deployment in everyday conversation) is not the mechanism by which humans actually conduct most of their linguistic interactions.

"Natural" Implicature

This conclusion converges with that strand of reasoning within psycholinguistics and linguistic pragmatics that has recently come to doubt that the strong Gricean model actually accounts for most cases of interaction, even in modern societies (Carston 2005). Scientific doubts as to the validity of the view that intentions are conscious (or at least readily accessible to consciousness) in the conduct of interaction has arisen on the one hand from genuine philosophical skepticism as to the plausibility of such an assumption (Bar-Om in press; Green 2003, Sperber and Wilson 2002; see also Enfield this volume on the "no telepathy" assumption, and Schegloff this volume), and on the other hand from a series of experimental psycholinguistic results that do not accord with the predictions of the view. When experimenters carefully separate what utterers know about a state of affairs from what utterers know that their audience knows (e.g., by placing certain objects within sight of the utterer but ostentationally out of sight of the audience), utterers nevertheless use their egocentric knowledge, apparently unconsciously, even when designing good-faith utterances to the audience (see Barr and Keysar 2005 for recent review). But these sorts of carefully controlled experimental situations do not represent the norm for human interaction. In most situations, utterers who use egocentric information in designing their utterances are on safe interactional ground, because the same information is likely also to be available to the audience (see also Clark, this volume, on the notion of common ground).

From this type of perspective certain psycholinguists and philosophers of language have revisited Grice's notion of conversational implicature, and find that normal conversational utterances might best be seen as other than "non-natural" indicators of the fact that the conversational maxims hold for a given conversational case (cf. Keller 1998; Sperber and Wilson 1986). Keller (1998), for example, explains that because the conversational maxims "must" be obeyed, the occurrence of any remark B is for the audience a "symptom" of the compliance of this remark with relevance and the rest. If taken this way, then maxim-compliant-compatible interpretations of utterances do not require recourse to guesses about what the speaker must have in mind, but only to inferences about what is "naturally" entailed by the remark in its symptomatic relation to maxim compliance. (Speaker X ruminates "Y's remark B seems irrelevant to my own prior remark A. But it can't be [by maxim of relevance]. So what could be the case that would make A in fact relevant to B?" Answer (from A's own knowledge): A garage will have petrol to sell.)
Under this analysis, a great deal of everyday linguistic interaction could survive the loss of fully intention-laden philosophies of meaning among its users. The making of any utterance could be taken ideologically as a "natural" symptom rather than as a non-natural and reflexively intended statement that the utterer is in compliance with the cooperative principle. Many forms of linguistic framing or layering (Clark 1996; Goffman 1974) such as narrations, re-presentations and quotations would also be possible under such a view, as long as the fact of layering was made explicit through evidentials, quotatives, and so on.

The strength of this kind of analysis lies in pointing out that the relationship of linguistic utterances to states of psychological commitment is not necessarily conscious or intentional. Inference and implicature could take place without "non-natural" meaning. But even when unconsciously produced, linguistic and other semiotic expressions are not true associative symptoms or natural expressions of their meanings, in the sense that spots are of measles and clouds are of rain. If they were, then linguistic and social deception would be impossible. Violation of Grice’s maxims should rarely if ever occur; most people should tell the truth, and interlocutors should rarely mislead or deceive one another. This is certainly not the case, either among the Mopan or in any other society of which we have records. Not only is verbal deception a fact among the Mopan, for example, but as we have seen, the suspicion of it is widespread. (This is hardly surprising, recall, because any utterance that turns out to be literally false will be categorized as blameworthy, and few exonerating circumstances ("I didn’t mean it") exist.

Convention and Conversation

I have argued that it is exactly within a philosophy of language based on non-natural meaning that local belief systems about language and mind should make the most difference to the actual conduct of interaction. The prediction from within the modernist theory is that interactants who do not constantly calculate one another’s mental states should be unable to interact in the way we consider characteristic of normal humanity. But actual interaction is not variable in this way across cultures. We must conclude that conscious consideration of others’ mental states is not a necessary part of human interaction. However, an analysis based strictly on “natural” meaning also does not account for the facts of interaction across cultures.

Let me return now to the question of whether conversation proceeds everywhere as Grice proposed, but that audience interpretation of the utterer’s mental state takes place below the threshold of consciousness for both parties (I call this the “weak” Gricean view). If the process takes place out of consciousness, then presumably there is no room for local belief systems to come into play. This view reduces Gricean inference to equivalence with the operation of conventional meaning.

Several theorists (Burling 1999; Haiman 1998; Wilcox 1999) deal with the possible origins of conventional meaning by proposing that signs that were originally fully “natural” (signifiers necessarily associated with their signifieds) were freed from this necessity and deliberately—that is, “non-naturally”—staged, possibly for deceptive purposes. Conventionality arose when ritualized repetition of such stagings led to habituation: precisely to the loss of conscious psychological awareness in using them to convey a given meaning. Certainly today, conventionalized semiosis relies for much of its effectiveness precisely on the suppression of conscious intention in its use. Until conventional meaning had been established—at the hypothetical moment when all meanings were either necessary associations (“natural”) or deliberate stagings (“non-natural”)—it could not yet be said that true human language had developed. If we seek candidates then, for interactional devices that all humans share and that are not widely used by other animals, then the deployment of convention will be one that we will be hard-pressed to ignore.

The signifying power of the conventional sign is not motivated by any “natural” resemblance to or necessary association with its referent. Neither does it reside in nonce efforts to guess at the other’s mental state. Instead, it lies exclusively in the fact that there has taken place a historical convergence on a particular form—meaning pairing in some community of speakers This kind of inference from “prior arrangement” is how a very great deal of human communication actually works (see Clark, Enfield, Levinson this volume).

Once conventions of meaning are in place, mutual and conscious intention guessing is not necessary for interlocutors to decode one another’s utterances. Non-natural meaning (intention guessing) need come into play only when the signal in context is insufficient to yield inferences about what is signified by other means. If the signal is indexical or iconic, there may be sufficient nonmentalist grounds for inference about meaning even if it is not conventionalized (the woman who reaches for the betel basket in Enfield’s example in this volume). But if the signal is arbitrary, then either convention or intention guessing will
be needed. And if convention is present, intention guessing is moot. Only if convention is absent and the signal is arbitrary with respect both to its context and its form, does intention guessing usefully come into its own as a communicative tool. The type of case in question now reduces, for example, to the relatively rare case of a person who has lost access to the majority of the semiotic repertoire—perhaps an eyebrow flicker occurs. His friends and family confer: ‘Was that a flicker? What do you think he means? Maybe he’s thirsty?’ and so on (see Goodwin this volume). But these conjectures amount precisely to ‘expansions’ (Ochs 1982; see also Gaskins this volume). And these are the kinds of interactional exchanges that we know to be cross-culturally limited in their occurrence. Willingness to use intention guessing (pure non-natural meaning) is clearly culturally constrained. This can be the case because actual occasions on which no other semiotic option is available are in practice relatively limited in their occurrence.

A ‘weak’ version of the Gricean proposal (that conversation proceeds through unconscious assessment of the interlocutor’s mental state) is analytically indistinguishable from an analysis in terms of conventional meaning. Although Grice himself (1989a) limited the use of ‘conventional meaning’ in his discussions of implicature to something like ‘literal meaning.’ I am suggesting here and below that we consider the very fact that interactants comply with the Gricean maxims as a matter of convention. It is neither ‘natural’ and automatic—hence, the kinds of cultural variability described by Keenan (1976) and discussed by Goftman (1983)—nor ‘non-natural’ and fully conscious. The operation of conventional meaning is equally well (or, rather, equally poorly) philosophized by culturally local ideologies like that of the Mopan, who hold that communication does not rely at all on calculation of mental states, and by those—like that of Grice and other moderns—who hold that that is all it relies on.

**Flouts and Figures**

I have reached a position from which I can claim the similarity of conversational processes among all of humankind, despite the documented existence of quite divergent cultural philosophies about the matter. The phenomena of signal motivation, common ground (Clark this volume, Enfield this volume) and conventional meaning go far to explain the operation of inferential conversational processes in all societies, including our own. Before concluding, however, allow me to pursue the point that there exist certain linguistic and conversational phenomena that could logically only occur under a cultural theory that sees linguistic meaning as intention laden—in Gricean terms “non-natural.” These are the Gricean flouts and their Machiavellian cousins, the hostile second guessing known as ‘reverse psychology.’ We should predict that such interactional forms do not occur where cultural philosophies of language are unconcerned with the ‘recognizing’ of intentions.

Flouts occur when maxim violation under conditions of mutual knowledge is deployed by an utterer for the purpose of stimulating in the audience the making of guesses about what the utterer intends the utterance to ‘mean’ that would not arise under other mutual mental-state circumstances. For example, the case in which U speaks falsehood, but not only does A know that U’s utterance is false, A also knows that U knows that A knows (“Juliet is the sun”). In such a case the audience reasons from the mutual knowledge circumstances that the utterer cannot intend to deceive, even though the utterance is false. The audience now attempts to consider what U “may have had in mind” in making the utterance, and ends by adopting a metaphorical interpretation of U’s remark (Begg’s; 1992; Grice 1989a; for a different cultural case see Mitchell-Kernan 1972). Pragmaticists use the notion of the flout to explain the occurrence of certain forms of verbal art—including metaphor, fiction, and the kinds of dry wit at which Oxford philosophers so excel—which rely on violation of the Gricean maxims for their operation.

In many cases of routinized figurative speech, it has now been experimentally demonstrated that literal meaning is not computed before figurative meaning (Gibbs 1994). But where flouts involve novel usages rather than routinized ones, the strong Gricean process of conscious reflection about the utterer’s mental state may indeed be in play (Giora 2003). To use these kinds of novel figurative forms, and especially where delivery is made “deadpan,” without benefit of contextual or paralinguistic cues as to the nonliteral nature of the remark, utterers must rely on audiences’ willingness to consciously or semiconsciously seek out the utterer’s probable mental state in making the utterance. Audiences from other than mentalist philosophical traditions will not in principle be willing to do this. We should predict then that these forms of figurative meaning will be absent among those who in general hold other than non-natural theories of linguistic meaning.
Mopan Flouts

If culturally variable ideas about intentionality make any difference at all in interaction then, they should do so in the arena of the flout. Even among the ethnographers of speaking (Hymes 1974), systematic investigation of cultural distribution of figurative language forms in relation to cultural philosophies of language has not ever really been undertaken. But if local theories affect interaction, we would expect to find little elaboration of novel metaphor and other literary genres based on falsehood in societies where nonmestcental cultural theories of language and communication prevail. If candidates for such phenomena occur, I predict that they will not be understood as figurative but as maxim violations.

Although most of the research into cultural distribution of figurative language types remains to be done, the prediction so far has some plausibility as regards the Mopan (Danziger 2001, n.d.). Mopan people value the performance of poetic and musical texts, and they regularly enjoy festive displays of sensation and spectacle. Mopan Catholicism dictates the celebration of annual feast days on which plaster and ceramic statues of Christian saints are treated to household visits, ritual baths, or public parades. Traditional Mopan theatrical dances oblige performers to adopt the personae of deer, jaguar, and monkey. But Mopan do not talk about these things as cases of metaphor or symbolic representation. On the contrary, to those involved, the statues really are saints; the dancers really are deer. Supernatural consequences attend on this fact. Specific rituals must be carried out, for example, to placate the masks used in traditional dances, as a way of averting the danger of death that is otherwise believed to accompany their use.

There is no institutionalized genre of fiction in the traditional Mopan verbal repertoire. Mopan verbal humor for example concentrates around puns (often indecent ones) rather than around improbable narratives. And we have already seen that the stories that are narrated by Mopan tellers are all believed to be strictly true (or taken as dangerous lies). Where fiction has been introduced into the area, it has been taken as truth and then—once its literal falsehood is revealed—as "lies" (Danziger n.d.).

Conclusion

If in the future the Mopan (or other ethnographic) data continue to fit the predictions, it would not mean that there is no universal human interaction engine. But it could mean that there are fundamentally different means of functioning within the "engine."

Where reliance on the modernist cultural ideology in academic philosophical theories has been overly heavy, we have been scientifically and not just culturally wrong about two things: (1) how the universal layers of the human interactional engine work (they are based on sign motivation, common ground, and conventional meaning, not on constant calculation of speaker's nonce mental state) and (2) the idea that we could consult our own intuitions for reliable information about what the separable components of the engine are, and about which pieces of the engine constitute the "basic model" and which are optional extras.

Although certain parts of the Gricean system (basic assumption of compliance with the maxims) operate the same way—namely, via conventional meaning—in both Mopan and moderns, other parts of "Gricean inference" may not be universal (mutual intention-guessing and consequent byproducts in regimes of responsibility and in figurative language preferences). In particular, those areas of Western linguistic interaction in which the operation of Grice's non-natural meaning is most clearly to be observed—those involved in the verbal artistry of pragmatic flout and Machiavellian reverse psychology—may constitute specialized cultural traditions of verbal art that should not be allowed too closely to inform either our investigations into questions of language origins or our general theorizing about how language relates to mind at the species level.

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7. There are also relevant predictions for child development from the suggestion that mentalism in interaction is a cultural specialty. Namely, even in mentalist societies, children's acquisition of flout-reliant figures should be late and may have to be formally taught. The conduct of normal conversational interaction should on the other hand be much earlier, and should be independent of children's mastery of the flout.

8. My observations have centered exclusively on issues in Mopan language philosophy that relate to the Gricean maxim of quality ("Try to make your contribution one which is true"). There is reason to believe that quality has a special status among the maxims (Grice 1989a), but should explicit local philosophies be found relating to the other maxims, I predict (among other possibilities) one or all of: quantity—decreased appreciation and use of hyperbole or litotes; relevance—no proverbs; and manner—absence of mockery, sarcasm, or irony. Questions of "keying" (Hymes 1974) and framing (Goffman 1974) will also be crucial.

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Virtually all theories of human social development presume universal outcomes. They aim to explain the development of the human species as a whole, not the different trajectories of particular subgroups. When different group outcomes are encountered (e.g., by gender, socioeconomic status, or culture), they are viewed as superficial to the underlying, shared developmental trajectory. Yet most researchers also presume that one of the most significant characteristics of our species is its long period of dependency during which many skills and understandings necessary for successful adult functioning must be learned (Bruner 1972). Much of this learning is informal in nature, taking place during children’s everyday interaction with others. Finally, it is also presumed (at least tacitly) that during this period of dependency both the content to be learned and the everyday environment of that learning are both culturally organized and culturally variable. None of these three presumptions is particularly controversial on its own, but they stand in an uneasy relationship to one another. The idea of universal yet experientially influenced developmental outcomes becomes suspect once the range of cultural variation in experience during childhood is acknowledged. A viable argument about development can only be made if at least one of the three presumptions (universal developmental outcomes, influence of experience on development, or cultural variation in experience) is discarded. The three viable solutions become that (1) development is dependent on experience but relevant experiences are universally present in all cultures (i.e., cultural variation is insignificant); (2) universal development is largely