EXPRESSIVES AND BEYOND:
AN INTRODUCTION TO VARIETIES
OF USE-CONDITIONAL MEANING

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1. Introduction

Formal semanticists, as is well known, have found it useful to make certain simplifying assumptions in approaching the vast field of natural language meaning.\(^1\) Thus, following the lead of logicians, they have concentrated on rigidly stating truth conditions for declarative sentences in a quest for clarifying notions like entailment, synonymy, and contradiction (cf., for example, Dowty et al. 1981 or Gamut 1991). However, it was recognized right from the start that much work would remain to be done once the truth-conditional story was told. Again, it is well known that Frege himself directed attention to various lacunae (cf. Horn 2007): (i) the treatment of presupposition, which has oscillated between truth-conditional and “pragmatic” approaches ever since the seminal “Russell-Strawson debate” (Russell 1905; Strawson 1950);\(^2\) (ii) the necessity for envisaging something like speech acts (cf. Frege’s Urteilsstrich, which is called assertion sign by Geach 1965), which it took Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) to give theoretical shape to; and (iii) the phenomenon of expressivity, which Frege discussed under the term Färbung “colouring” (see Horn 2013 [this volume] as well as Dummett 1978: 93 and Green & Kortum 2007).\(^3\)

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1 A very good overview over that field is still provided by Lyons (1977). Among the many other sources are von Stechow & Wunderlich 1991, Lappin 1996, and, more recently, Maienborn et al. 2011.

2 See Beaver & Geurts 2011, and references cited there.

3 Many philosophers, disenchanted with the positivist undercurrents of 20th century philosophy of language, have pointed out the relevance of emotive meaning for the study of ethics and aesthetics (Hare 1952; Stevenson 1937). Stevenson (1937: 23) credits Ogden & Richards (1923) with the term emotive meaning. Likewise, Jakobson (1960), who uses the term for a function of language, credits Marty (1908) for it.
At the same time, researchers conceiving of language as a tool for communication (in the broadest sense possible) have always taken expressivity to constitute one of language’s major functions (Bühler 1934; Jakobson 1960). Although the need for unification was perhaps in the back of the minds of a lot of people, it took until the development of the field of pragmatics, beginning sometime in the late 1960s, that (one of) the missing link(s) between formalist and functionalist approaches to meaning was forged. Pragmatics, of course, started out as an extremely heterogeneous enterprise, sometimes considered a “wastebasket” (Bar-Hillel 1971) or whatever “meaning minus truth conditions” (Gazdar 1979) amounts to. However, the conception that semantics focusses only on those aspects that are truth-conditionally relevant, leaving the rest to pragmatics, has been questioned. At least, as Kaplan (1999: 42) notes, semantics should also deal with those “non-descriptive features of language that are associated with certain expressions by linguistic convention”. As I hope to show in this survey, the empirical domain of conventional non-truth-conditional meaning proves to be very rich.

And even if non-truth-conditional meaning has more or less been neglected or at least excluded from formal studies of natural language meaning from the very beginning, expressions that are associated with non-truth-conditional meaning by linguistic convention have increasingly found their way into formally or analytically oriented literature since the “pragmatic turn”, and recent decades have seen considerable steps toward integrating those aspects of meaning into semantic theory. In particular, building on previous efforts by Kaplan (1999), Chris Potts (2005, 2007c) managed to develop the formal tools to analyze expressives like damn, which have been well studied since then.

The following survey shall convince the skeptical reader that conventional non-truth-conditional meaning goes beyond expressives and is by no means a marginal phenomenon. Indeed, it can be found across all layers of language, from the word level down to the phonological level and

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4 Concern with this aspect of language use can be traced back—at least—to Aristotle’s study of rhetoric.

5 Still one of the most useful introductions to pragmatics is the one by Levinson (1983). For further work, see, among other things, Horn & Ward 2004.

6 The most famous deviation, emerging in the 1980s, is the development of dynamic semantic theories like discourse representation theory (DRT, e.g. see Beaver & Geurts 2007; Kamp & Reyle 1993, Heim’s (1982) file change semantics or dynamic semantics see Groenendijk & Stokhof 1991).