PRAGMATICS AND INDEXICALITY

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One current conception of pragmatics distinguishes
pragmatics from semantics proper in terms of indexicality:
semantics is conceived as the quest for a truth definition
for languages without indexical expressions; pragmatics is
conceived as a quest for a truth definition for languages with
indexical expressions. The clearest expression of this pos-
ition I can find is Donald Kalish's. (Donald Kalish 'Semantics',
The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards, (1967),
Vol. VII, 355-356; see also Richard Montague 'Pragmatics and
Intensional Logic', Semantics of Natural Language, eds. Donald
Davidson and Gilbert Harman, 142-143. Both Kalish and Montague
say their view is derived from Bar Hillel's 'Indexical
Expressions' Mind, 63, (1954), 359-379.)

In setting out the view just described Kalish limits his
attention to artificial languages. Thus he offers a definition
of what Carnap called pure pragmatics. In what follows my
remarks are intended to apply primarily to any reasonable
extension of Kalish's account to a definition of pragmatics
generally. But they will also apply, I think, to the more
limited definition.

Elsewhere I have argued that the distinction between
syntax, semantics and pragmatics as originally set out by
Morris and Carnap is defective in various respects. (C.
Sayward, 'The Received Distinction between Pragmatics,

Semantics and Syntax', Foundations of Language, 11, (1974), 97-104.) Any attempt to improve on their formulations is to be welcomed. However, no such attempt will be successful if it is as far removed from what Carnap and Morris originally had in mind as, I shall argue, Kalish's proves to be.

I

In his paper 'Truth and Meaning' Donald Davidson introduces a truth predicate different in important respects from the more customary 'is true' or 'is true in English':

The theory of meaning undergoes a systematic but not puzzling change: corresponding to each expression with a demonstrative element there must in the theory be a phrase that relates truth conditions of sentences in which the expression occurs to changing times and speakers. Thus the theory will entail sentences like the following:

'I am tired' is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if p is tired at t.

'The book was stolen' is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if the book demonstrated by p at t is stolen prior to t.

(Donald Davidson, 'Truth and Meaning', Synthese, 17, (1967), 304-323, pp. 319-320.)

The basic form of the truth predicate introduced is:

(T) x is true in L at index i.

For Davidson an index is just an ordered pair consisting of a person and time; for others an index is a more complicated

affair. (See Richard Montague 'Pragmatics' Contemporary
Philosophy: A Survey, ed. Raymond Klibansky, (1968), Vol. I;
Dana Scott, 'Advice on Modal Logic' Philosophical Problems in
Logic: Recent Developments, ed. Karel Lambert, (1970),
esp. Sections II, V; David Lewis 'General Semantics',
Semantics of Natural Languages, esp. Section III and Appendix.)
But there is little disagreement that (T) represents the
basic form of truth predicates for indexical languages. Thus
Kalish's characterization amounts to saying that pragmatics'
concern is to define for indexical languages predicates of
form (T) ('(T)-predicates' for short).

II

It is worthwhile to recall how Morris and Carnap used
the terms 'pragmatics'.

First Morris (Foundations of the Theory of Signs, [Vol. I,
No. 2, International Encyclopedia of Unified Science] (1938),
pp. 6-7):

> In terms of the three correlates (sign vehicle, designatum,
> interpreter) of the triadic relation of semiosis, a
> number of other dyadic relations may be abstracted for
> study. One may study the relation of signs to the
> objects to which the signs are applicable. This rel-
> ation will be called the semantical dimension of semiosis
> . . . . or the subject of study may be the relation of
> signs to interpreters. This relation will be called
> the pragmatical dimension of semiosis.
> The relation of signs to one another is the syntactical

dimension of semiosis. The study of each dimension is called, respectively, semantics, pragmatics and syntactics.

Next Carnap (Introduction to Semantics and Formalization of Logic, (1959) p. 9):

> . . . we distinguish three fields of investigation of languages. If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or, to put it in more general terms, to the user of a language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics . . . . If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics. And if, finally, we abstract from the designata also and analyze only the relations between expressions we are in (logical) syntax. The whole science of language consisting of the three parts mentioned is called semiotic.

Now just how does the Carnap-Morris account of pragmatics relate to Kalish's?

Kalish argues in this way regarding the relation: '[Kalish's characterization of pragmatics is] easy to reconcile with C. W. Morris' classification, for the truth value of a sentence with an indexical term seems to be related to both the person asserting the sentence and his space-time position' ('Semantics', p. 356).

On the contrary, I find Kalish's account impossible to reconcile with Morris'.

Where the truth predicate of the language relates sentence,

language and index, a truth theory of that language will
refer to its speakers just in case the index includes those
speakers among its items. On Kalish's account a theory about
language is pragmatical just in case it is a truth theory
and the truth predicate involved is a (T)-predicate. On the
Carnap-Morris account a theory of a language is pragmatical
just in case it refers to speakers of the language. It is
plain that the two accounts are not equivalent. Just consider
a language whose appropriate truth predicate is of the form

x is true in L at time t.

The metatheory of L will be pragmatic in Kalish's sense but
not on the Carnap-Morris account. (This example shows, by
the way, that Kalish's argument regarding the relation be-
tween his account of pragmatics and Morris' account is based
on a false premise.)

In fact, truth theories for languages without any
indexical items are just limiting cases of truth theories
for languages with such features. For in the former case
the appropriate truth predicate can always be defined in
terms of a (T)-predicate:

x is true in L = df. for any index i, x is true in L at i.

Thus, for any adequate truth theory for a language without
indexical expressions, one could, by making use of definitions
like the one just given, devise an equivalent truth theory
with indexical references.

It was Carnap's intent, certainly, that any significant
theory of language should belong to one of the three areas--

syntax, semantics or pragmatics. And it is not very hard to show that there is more to significant investigation of a language, even an artificial language, than determining its syntax and providing it with a truth definition.

Suppose there is available an adequate syntactical theory and an adequate truth definition of that portion of English consisting of its sentences which have truth conditions, and that a non-speaker of English masters these two theories. It seems plain that the non-speaker does not thereby know enough about this portion of English to converse with a native speaker, who, we shall suppose, limits himself to the utterances of sentences of English having truth conditions. The non-speaker will not in general be able to understand the illocutionary force of these utterances. A case in point: the native speaker utters

(a) I will see you tomorrow

and, in so doing, promises to see the non-speaker tomorrow. The non-speaker has no way of distinguishing assertions from promises made by the utterance of English sentences. Hence he does not understand the illocutionary force of (a).

The same point can be made with regard to artificial languages. It is hard to see what would rule out the possibility of constructing an artificial language in such a way that rules govern utterances of its sentences. And these rules would determine when an utterance is an assertion, when it is a promise, when it has some other illocutionary

force."

The Carnap-Morris distinction between syntax, semantics
and pragmatics does need reformulation. But Kalish's account
will not do. Indexicality is not a feature that can be
used to capture anything like what Morris and Carnap had in
mind.

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