



1 Introduction: Foundational Issues in Philosophical Semantics

2 Carlotta Pavese¹ · Andrea Iacona²

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5 This issue encompasses eight papers that have been pre-
6 sented at the Topoi Conference 2018—*Foundational Issues*
7 *in Philosophical Semantics*—which took place in Turin in
8 June 2018 and was organized by the *Center for Logic, Lan-*
9 *guage, and Cognition* (LLC) at the University of Turin. The
10 issue also includes five more papers that have been invited
11 or obtained through a call. The papers are topically divided
12 into three main sections that reflect quite closely the origi-
13 nal structure of the conference: *Choice of paradigm*, *Core*
14 *topics in philosophical semantics*, and *Pragmatics and*
15 *Communication*.

16 1 Section I: Choice of Paradigm

17 The five papers in this section discuss different foundational
18 frameworks in the theory of meaning. In “Fostering Liars”,
19 Pietroski argues that two classical problems for a David-
20 sonian theory of meaning are fatal for it, when combined.
21 Davidson conjectured that suitably formulated Tarski-style
22 theories of truth can “do duty” as theories of meaning for
23 the spoken languages that humans naturally acquire. But this
24 conjecture faces at least two old objections: Foster’s problem
25 and the Liar Paradox. Foster noted that given a theory of the
26 sort Davidson envisioned, for a language L, there will be
27 many equally true theories whose theorems pair endlessly
28 many sentences of L with very different specifications of
29 whether or not those sentences are true. And if L includes
30 the word ‘true’, then for reasons stressed by Tarski, it is hard
31 to see how any truth theory for L could be correct. Pietroski

mounts a sustained argument that appealing to possible
worlds will not help with Foster’s Problem, for reasons that
Chomsky discussed in the 1950s, and appealing to trivalent
models of truth will not avoid concerns illustrated with Liar
Sentences.

In “Behavioral Foundations for Expression Meaning,”
Megan Stotts proposes an alternative to a well-established
tradition in the philosophy of language, according to which
we can understand what makes an arbitrary sound, gesture,
or marking into a meaningful linguistic expression only by
appealing to mental states, such as beliefs and intentions.
Stotts explores the possibility of understanding the meaning-
fulness of linguistic expressions just in terms of observable
linguistic behavior. Specifically, the view explored is one on
which a type of sound (or other item) becomes a meaningful
linguistic expression within a group in virtue of the produc-
tion of that type of item becoming that group’s widespread,
copied way of getting others to involve an object or relation
in their activity. After discussing a preliminary version of
the view, Stotts defends it against some key concerns about
whether it really does eschew mental states, and about its
adequacy as an account of linguistic meaning.

In “Truth conditional cognitivism and the lexical prob-
lem”, Fabrizio Calzavarini discusses a foundational problem
for *truth-conditional cognitivism*—the view that truth-con-
ditional formal semantics for natural language is a theory
of semantic competence. Calzavarini rehearses the concern
that a number of other authors have expressed according
to which truth-conditional formal semantics is unable to
provide a complete account of lexical competence, and,
therefore, it suffers from incompleteness. The problem is a
consequence of Kripke’s and Putnam’s arguments against
the view that semantic values (intension, reference) of words
are cognitively determined. According to Calzavarini, these
arguments undermine the idea that formal semantics can be,
at the same time, a theory of truth-conditions and a theory
of semantic competence.

In “Proof-Theoretic Semantics for Natural Language”,
Nissim Francez introduces us to a proof-theoretical frame-
work for the semantics for natural language. On this

A1 ✉ Andrea Iacona
A2 andrea.iacona@unito.it

A3 Carlotta Pavese
A4 cp645@cornell.edu

A5 ¹ Sage School of Philosophy, Cornell University, 218 Goldwin
A6 Smith Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA

A7 ² Department of Philosophy and Education, Center for Logic,
A8 Language, and Cognition, University of Turin, Via S. Ottavio
A9 20, 10124 Torino, Italy

72 framework, the meaning of a linguistic expression can be
73 fully specified in terms of its introduction and elimination
74 rules. The first part of the article presents a brief exposition
75 of proof-theoretic semantics, not necessarily in connection
76 to natural language. The second part reviews some
77 of the applications of proof-theoretic semantics to natural
78 languages with an indication of some advantages of this
79 approach over the model-theoretic approach.

80 In “Mistakes about meaning and conventions,” Cosmo
81 Grant advances a novel problem for the view according to
82 which meanings are transparent to speakers. This view takes
83 speakers’ judgements about the meanings of sentences of
84 their languages to be, other things being equal, accurate. As
85 Grant points out, this view is rather standard and underlies
86 the Elicitation Method—a typical method in semantic field-
87 work, according to which we should work out the truth-con-
88 ditions of a sentence by eliciting speakers’ judgments about
89 its truth-value in different situations. Grant aims to put pres-
90 sure on this rather standard view and, therefore, on the Elici-
91 tation Method. Lewis (1969) gave a theory of convention
92 in a game-theoretic framework that shows how conventions
93 can arise from repeated coordination games, and, as a spe-
94 cial case, how meanings could arise from repeated signaling
95 games. In order to show that meanings are in some cases
96 not transparent to their speaker, Grant constructs coordina-
97 tion games in which the players can be wrong about their
98 conventions, and signaling games in which the players can
99 be wrong about their messages’ meanings. As Grant shows,
100 knowing your own strategy and payoff need not determine
101 what the others do, so it leaves room for false beliefs about
102 the convention and meanings. Therefore, perhaps the most
103 prominent theory of how conventions and meaning arise is
104 demonstrably in tension with a view on which messages’
105 meanings are transparent.

106 2 Section II: Core Topics in Philosophical 107 Semantics

108 The four articles collected in this section address four core
109 issues in the philosophy of language: conditionals, Frege’s
110 puzzle, presuppositions, and generic sentences. Each of
111 these issues poses serious challenges to any systematic
112 account of natural language semantics, and has deep theo-
113 retical implications.

114 In “Definable Conditionals,” Eric Raidl deals with the
115 logic of conditionals. More specifically, it considers the clas-
116 sical analysis due to Stalnaker and Lewis, which is based on
117 a modal reading of the Ramsey Test, and some alternative
118 accounts that have been discussed in the last few years. Raidl
119 shows how these accounts, just as many others, can be treated
120 as definitional variants of one and the same basic account, and
121 develops a formal technique for specifying the logic for each

defined conditional by considering them as strengthening or
weakening of the basic conditional. Since we have a sound and
complete axiom system for the basic conditional, by means of
this technique we can prove derived soundness and complete-
ness results for each defined conditional.

In “Transparent Coreference,” Francois Recanati out-
lines and defends an original perspective on the distinction
between transparent and non-transparent coreference, which
is crucial to the classical problem of identity statements
raised by Frege. Recanati explains non-transparent corefer-
ence in terms of distinct coreferential files being associated
with two token singular terms. The subject may not know
that the two files corefer, and thus ascribe contradictory
properties to the same object. On the other hand, he argues
that, when the same mental file is deployed twice, the subject
is bound to know that there is coreference. In such cases,
coreference is achieved at the level of referential content,
but in addition there is a matching relation holding at the
level of cognitive content between constituents of the mental
representation.

In “Who’s sitting in that chair? Multiple failing pre-
suppositions and truth-value judgments,” Martina Rosola
examines a debated account of presuppositions due to von
Fintel and raises a problem in connection with it. The prob-
lem concerns multiple failing presuppositions, a phenom-
enon illustrated by sentences which contain more than one
empty definite description, such as “The person sitting in
that chair is the king of France.” As her discussion of von
Fintel’s account and its variants show, the case of multiple
failing presuppositions deserves careful attention, and can
be adopted as a test for any theory of presupposition. At the
end of the article, Rosola explains how von Fintel’s proposal
could be revised in order to handle the examples considered.

In “A Causal Power Semantics for Generics sentences,”
Robert Van Rooij articulates an analysis of generic sentences
in terms of causal powers. More specifically, he investigates
the possibility that a sentence of the form ‘As are Bs’, such as
‘Tigers are striped’ or ‘Wolves attack people’, is true because
there is a causal connection between the property A and
the property B. The initial plausibility of this claim is due
to the fact that many generic sentences express inductive
generalizations, which typically hold in virtue of causal con-
nections. The article compares the causal analysis with the
probabilistic analysis according to which ‘As are Bs’ is true
when relatively many As have feature B, and considers some
problems that arise in connection with it.

3 Section III: Pragmatics & Communication

The last section mainly focuses on pragmatics and language
use. The four articles it contains can be divided into two
groups. Abreu Zalaveta and Mena address general issues

- 172 concerning assertion and communication, while Bianchi and
 173 Caponetto discuss the phenomena of illocutionary disable-
 174 ment and silencing.
- 175 In “Communication and Variance,” Martin Abreu
 176 Zavaleta questions the widely accepted view according to
 177 which successful communication through assertoric utter-
 178 ances depends on the fact that speakers normally have the
 179 same beliefs about the truth-conditions of the sentences
 180 they utter. Against this view, Abreu Zavaleta argues that the
 181 participants in a conversation often differ as far as those
 182 beliefs are concerned. More precisely, nearly every utterance
 183 is such that there is no proposition which more than one
 184 language user believes to be the truth-conditional content
 185 of the utterance. The article develops an alternative picture
 186 of communication, and suggests that successful communi-
 187 cative exchanges can be explained in terms of conditions
 188 that do not entail sameness of beliefs about truth-conditional
 189 content.
- 190 In “The Bridge Principle and Stigmatized Truth-Values”,
 191 Ricardo Mena highlights some difficulties for a standard
 192 Stalnakerian theory of pragmatic presuppositions. Accord-
 193 ing to this theory, an utterance u pragmatically presupposes
 194 a proposition q if and only if u cannot be felicitous relative
 195 to a conversation in which q is not taken for granted. This
 196 theory of pragmatic presuppositions encompasses a princi-
 197 ple of rational communication—the Bridge Principle—that
 198 links pragmatic and semantic presuppositions. According
 199 to this principle, an utterance of a sentence cannot be felici-
 200 tious unless the semantic presuppositions of that sentence
 201 are taken for granted by the participants of the conversation.
 202 Mena argues that this principle cannot be true as formulated
 203 by Stalnaker. If it were, a good number of sentences contain-
 204 ing vague predicates would be infelicitous, whereas they
 205 are not. In light of this problem, Mena offers an alternative
 206 formulation of the Bridge Principle, which is intended to
 207 take vagueness into account.
- 208 In “Discursive Injustice: The Role of Uptake,” Claudia
 209 Bianchi aims to develop a theory of discursive injustice
 210 that is more plausible and more effective for a critique of
 211 the structures of power and oppression. The phenomena of
 “conversational asymmetry” have become a lively object
 of study for linguists, philosophers of language, and moral
 philosophers—under various labels: illocutionary disable-
 ment and silencing, discursive injustice, and illocutionary
 distortion. The common idea is that members of underprivi-
 leged groups sometimes have trouble performing particular
 speech acts that they are entitled to perform: in certain con-
 texts, their performative potential is somehow undermined,
 and their capacity to do things with words is distorted or
 even annulled. In this article, Bianchi assesses this idea,
 focusing on Rebecca Kukla’s and Rae Langton’s accounts.
 Bianchi criticizes the role the notion of uptake plays in these
 accounts, and makes the case that this notion of uptake may
 ultimately undermine the very idea of discursive injustice.
 While according to Kukla and Langton, members of dis-
 advantaged groups are victims of a kind of *uptake failure*,
 leading to illocutionary disablement and even silencing, on
 the account Bianchi defends they are better understood as
 victims of a kind of communicative (neither illocutionary
 nor perlocutionary) disablement.
- In “A Comprehensive Definition of Illocutionary Silenc-
 ing,” Laura Caponetto also discusses the mechanism of illo-
 cutionary silencing. Moving beyond the traditional concep-
 tion of silencing as uptake failure, McGowan (2003, 2004,
 2009) has claimed that silencing also involves other forms
 of recognition failure. Caponetto first offers a supportive
 elaboration of McGowan’s claims by developing a social
 account of speech act performance, according to which the
 success of an illocutionary act is not only a function of the
 intentions of and the conventions deployed by the speaker
 but partly depends on how the act is recognized or taken up
 by the hearer. Then Caponetto provides a comprehensive
 definition of illocutionary silencing and spells out what it
 means for it to occur in a systematic manner.
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