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REMARKS ON THE LITERAL MEANING OF "IT'S COLD IN HERE"

In their well-known paper Gordon and Lakoff /1971/ set off by discussing a conversation between the Duke of Bordello and his butler:

"...if the Duke of Bordello says to his butler, "It's cold in here", he may be giving an order to close the window. This does not mean that the meaning of "It's cold in here" is the same as the meaning of "Close the window". It only means that under certain circumstances, saying one thing may entail the communication of another." /Gordon and Lakoff 1971:63/

Gordon and Lakoff's explanation of the above conversation is a combination of Gricean implicature and their own original attempt to incorporate conversational principles into the framework of generative semantics. Then, they go on and explain the so-called conveyed meaning of "It's cold in here" on grounds which can hardly be associated with any existing linguistic theory of meaning:<sup>1</sup>

"What we would like to say about such a case is that "It's cold in here" has its usual literal meaning. In such a situation, it is an expression of discomfort and is said by a person in authority to a person whose job it is, in part, to relieve the discomforts of his employer as far as possible. If, in a context, the most obvious way to relieve the discomfort cited is to close the window, then an order to do that is

being communicated." /Gordon and Lakoff, loc cit/

Gordon and Lakoff also provide a more formalized account of the conversation between the Duke and his butler. Namely, they say that "It's cold in here" entails "Open the window" and this relation between the two sentences is accounted for in terms of the notion of "conversational implication in a class of contexts  $CON_1$ ", which, in turn, is formally expressed in the following formula:

$$\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{"L conversationally implies P in } CON_1 \text{ IFF } CON_1 \cup CP \cup \\ \{L\} \models P \end{array} \right\} \text{IP}$$

/In context  $CON_1$ , given conversational postulates CP,  
L entails P/.

/Gordon and Lakoff 1971:64/

The conversation between the Duke of Bordello and his butler, i.e. 1-2 above, has also been analysed by Cole /1975/ who undertakes to explain the relationship holding between the two sentences along the lines which I call "pragmatic", i.e. in keeping with the suggestions contained in the nonformalized account offered by Gordon and Lakoff.<sup>2</sup>

For the sake of clarity, the examples quoted above from Gordon and Lakoff's paper and the one provided by Cole /1975/ will be numbered.

1. It's cold in here.
2. I'll close the window, sir.
3. Close the window.

It is clear from the above conversation that the butler/who uttered 2/ has taken 1 /which was uttered by the Duke/ to mean 3. Yet, continues Cole, it would be counterintuitive to claim that the logical structure of 1 is the same as the logical structure of 3. The meaning of 1 as represented in 3, concludes Cole, is the result of inference, or deduction on the part of the butler. Cole reconstructs what may have gone in the butler's mind on hearing 1 as follows:

"The butler realizes that his occupational goal is to cater to his master's wants. Upon hearing and understanding the literal sense of 6 /our 1/, the butler asks himself why the duke is telling him about the temperature. Dismissing as improbable that the duke is merely commenting on the end of summer, the butler concludes that the duke is uncomfortable and that he, the butler, had better correct this state of affairs. Thus he replies as in 7"/our 2/." Cole /1975:260/.

Thus, under Cole's interpretation, there is little in the referential meaning of 1 that the butler could hang on to for the correct understanding of 1. He simply says that the butler has interpreted 1 nonliterally, i.e. he has interpreted the Duke's utterance as a request or an order to close the window and not as a statement expressing the Duke's opinion on the temperature of the room in which the conversation takes place. Cole also implies that the butler resorted to his ability to reason, to his knowledge of the world, and above all to his commonsense. he knows that he has to please his master. After all, this is what he has been hired for.

As it stands, it must be admitted, Cole's interpretation remains unclear; he does not explain how the butler might have concluded that the Duke had been uncomfortable upon uttering 1.

In what follows an attempt will be made to give some ground to Cole's statements concerning an analysis of 1-2. In particular, I shall try to elaborate on Cole's suggestion to the effect that "the butler concludes that the Duke is uncomfortable". Contrary to Cole who seems to have connected the butler's assessment of the Duke's state of mind solely with the ability of the former to reason and his commonsense. I shall try to show that the butler had a good reason to arrive at this conclusion /i.e. the Duke's being uncomfortable/ on the basis of the literal meaning of 1.

Let X stand for "the speaker", i.e. the Duke, Y for the

"addressee", i.e. the butler, L for the "place" in which the conversation takes place represented in 1 by "in here", R for the "state of affairs", i.e. it's being cold in L, and T for the "time" of the speech act Rq performed by X.

It is worth pointing out that 1 can be treated as an overt representation of 4 below.

4. I /X/ say to you /Y/ that it's cold in here.

It is possible now to analyse 4 with the aid of the symbolization given below.

5. X- the speaker making the predication "it's cold in here"
6. Y- the addressee to whom the predication is made
7. L- the place in which the predication was made
8. R- the /extralinguistic/ state of affairs
9. T- the time in which X uttered 1 in to Y
10. Rq- the speech act that X has performed in saying 1

Now it is crucial for the account of the literal meaning of 1 proposed here to realize the following:

Firstly, T, the time of the speech act Rq performed by X in saying 1 is identical for both the act of uttering 1 and for the state of affairs R. In other words, T characterizes not only Rq but also R.

Secondly, the state of affairs R characterizes the place L in which the predication was made. Moreover, I want to claim that R also characterizes the speaker X and, additionally, it may characterize the addressee Y as well. Therefore, R/L/ holds and R/X/ holds, and R/Y/ may hold. This simply means that for utterances such as the one in 1 the speaker is reporting on his own condition for it would be a rather strange case if he said that it was cold in wherever he found himself without his feeling cold. As for the addressee, he does not have to share the speaker's opinion on the temperature of the place in which they both happen to be talking. In the case under consideration the addressee, i.e. the butler, is not even supposed to openly disclose his opinions in front of his master. For this reason it is immaterial for my purposes here whether R/Y/ holds or

not. I shall repeat though that in saying 1 the speaker has stated that R/L/ holds and he has also implied that R/X/holds. In other words, the Duke has, in fact, expressed 11 in saying 1.

11. I am cold /I feel cold/ in here.

Notice in this connection that if 1 is uttered by X to Y over the telephone Y can say something like 12.

12. Put on something warm, OK? I'll hang on for a while. However, notice the oddity of 13.

13. It's cold in here but I don't feel cold.

The above discussion seems to support Cole's claim that the butler's conclusion upon hearing 1 was "the Duke is uncomfortable". In the above I have tried to show why the butler has concluded that the Duke is uncomfortable; it is cold in the room and he feels cold as well. Thus I have tried to show that it is difficult to understand the butler's conclusion/ or rather it is difficult to explain the butler's conclusion/ if something like 11 is not incorporated into the analysis of the literal meaning of 1. Summing up, it is time now to add the following to the analysis of 1 presented in 5-10 above.

14. R/L/ = a relation holding between the place L of the speech act and the state of affairs R such that L is cold

15. R/X/ = a relation holding between the speaker X and the state of affairs R such that X is cold

On the basis of 5-10 and 14-15 it is now possible to formulate 16.

16. In stating that R/L/ at T, X has implied that R/X/ On the basis of 16 the butler /upon hearing 1/ has concluded that his master was uncomfortable. 16 makes sense, seems to me, due to the presence of "in here" in 1. This adverbial phrase is peculiar in that it not only has a locative function in 1 but also it has a "deictic function", i.e. it points to the presence of the speaker on the scene being referred to in the utterance. This sounds very trivial but 17 below makes one realize that it is not always the case that the speaker is present on the scene being referred to in his utterance.

17. It's cold in Alaska.

The speaker who has uttered 17 does not have to be "in Alaska" to be able to utter 17 felicitously.

In the above discussion I wanted to demonstrate that whatever the butler has inferred from 1 he must have relied on the meaning of 1 which is paraphrased in 18.

18. I, the speaker, say to you that the place in which I am at this moment is cold and I, the speaker, am cold as well.

It seems to me that this is about all one can infer from the literal meaning of 1. While Gordon and Lakoff /1971/ and Cole /1975/ have interpreted the butler's inferring 3 from 1 as being related to "conversational implicature" I have tried to show that the literal meaning of 1 also plays a role in the interpretation of the exchange between the Duke and the butler. An analysis of this exchange which disregards the literal meaning of 1 seems to be less valid because it does not explain on what grounds the butler might have deduced from 1 that the Duke was uncomfortable. In my analysis, the interpretation of the Duke's discomfort has been connected with the literal meaning of 1 and not solely with the butler's "knowledge of the world".

A more complete explanation of the above exchange has to resort to the type of analysis which has been referred to by T. Van Dijk as "social psychology".

"Social psychology, ... is a hybrid domain, as one might suspect from its very name. On the one hand it deals with problems and phenomena which seem to belong to cognitive psychology, on the other hand it has to do with genuine sociological issues. Of course, the interesting perspectives are precisely the links between these two areas. And at that point, language use, communication and interaction should be localized. ... as soon as we talk about mutual understanding, about communicative interaction, about strategies of persuasion, and so on, we are in the heart of this interdisciplinary." Dijk /1981: 131/.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In the literature there exists a variety of terms to qualify "meaning": e.g. "indirect meaning", "derived meaning", "inferred meaning", "non-literal meaning", etc. Cf. Olekey/1979/ for a brief discussion on that
- <sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that few scholars would deny the need for the investigation of pragmatic aspects of language use opinions are divided as to how one should delimit between semantics and pragmatics and what are the proper domains of the two. The introductory chapter in Gazdar /1979/ can be recommended in this respect. Cf, also Katz /1977/, Thomason /1977/, and Leech /1980/. Quite recently, the question of delimitation between semantics and pragmatics has been taken up by Auwera /1981:20/ whose views are worth quoting here:
- "...I am interested ...in linguistic meanings. They reflect in two ways. One is studied in pragmatics and the other in semantics. Pragmatics will be described as a study of the meanings of speech acts that makes an essential reference to a reflection of one or more of the speaker's mental states, i.e. to the speaker's beliefs, desires, intentions, and/or consciousness. Semantics will be taken as a study of the meanings of speech acts that does not essentially involve a reflection of the speaker's beliefs, desires, intentions or consciousness. Instead, it crucially involves a reflection of conceptualizations."

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#### UWAGI O DOSŁOWNYM ZNACZENIU "IT'S COLD IN HERE"

##### Streszczenie

Artykuł jest polemiką w nawiązaniu do interpretacji tekstu 1-2 autorstwa Cole /1975/.

1. It's cold in here. /zimno tu/.

2. I'll close the window, sir. /Zamknę okno, proszę pana/  
Cole twierdzi, że można wydedukować znaczenie rozkazu zawarte w niedosłownym znaczeniu 1, ale nie wyjaśnia tej operacji.

Autor natomiast twierdzi, że dosłowne znaczenie 1 może być pomocne w wyjaśnieniu przyczyn, które skłoniły odbiorcę do wypowiedzenia 2. jeżeli uwzględni się, że wypowiedzenia typu "zimno tu" zawierają w sobie znaczenie "mnie jest tu zimno".