



**LOGIC
&
CONVERSATION**
H. P. Grice

'and': logic vs. natural language

She got married and had a baby.

↳ The marriage was first.

She had a baby and got married.

↳ The baby was first.

Stocks dipped and demand plunged.

↳ The dip preceded (caused?) the plunge.

'or': logic vs. natural language

You can have a dog or you can have a cat.
↳ Not both!

'if': logic vs. natural language

If Beyoncé releases a death metal album, it will be awesome.

↳ The speaker thinks there is some possibility that this will happen.

If the moon is made of cheese, then Hunter College is a lunar colony.

(This seems false, but is true according to classical logic.)

Assuming that logic doesn't work like language, two options:

The Formalist

The simplified, well-behaved logical meanings are more useful for doing philosophy and science. For some purposes, we should work with the logical versions.

The Informalist

Throw logic on the garbage fire. It doesn't tell us anything interesting about natural language, and it misses all kinds of important inference.

Implicature

The Banker Case

Suppose that A and B are talking about a mutual friend, C, who is now working in a bank. A asks B how C is getting on in his job, and B replies, *Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet.*

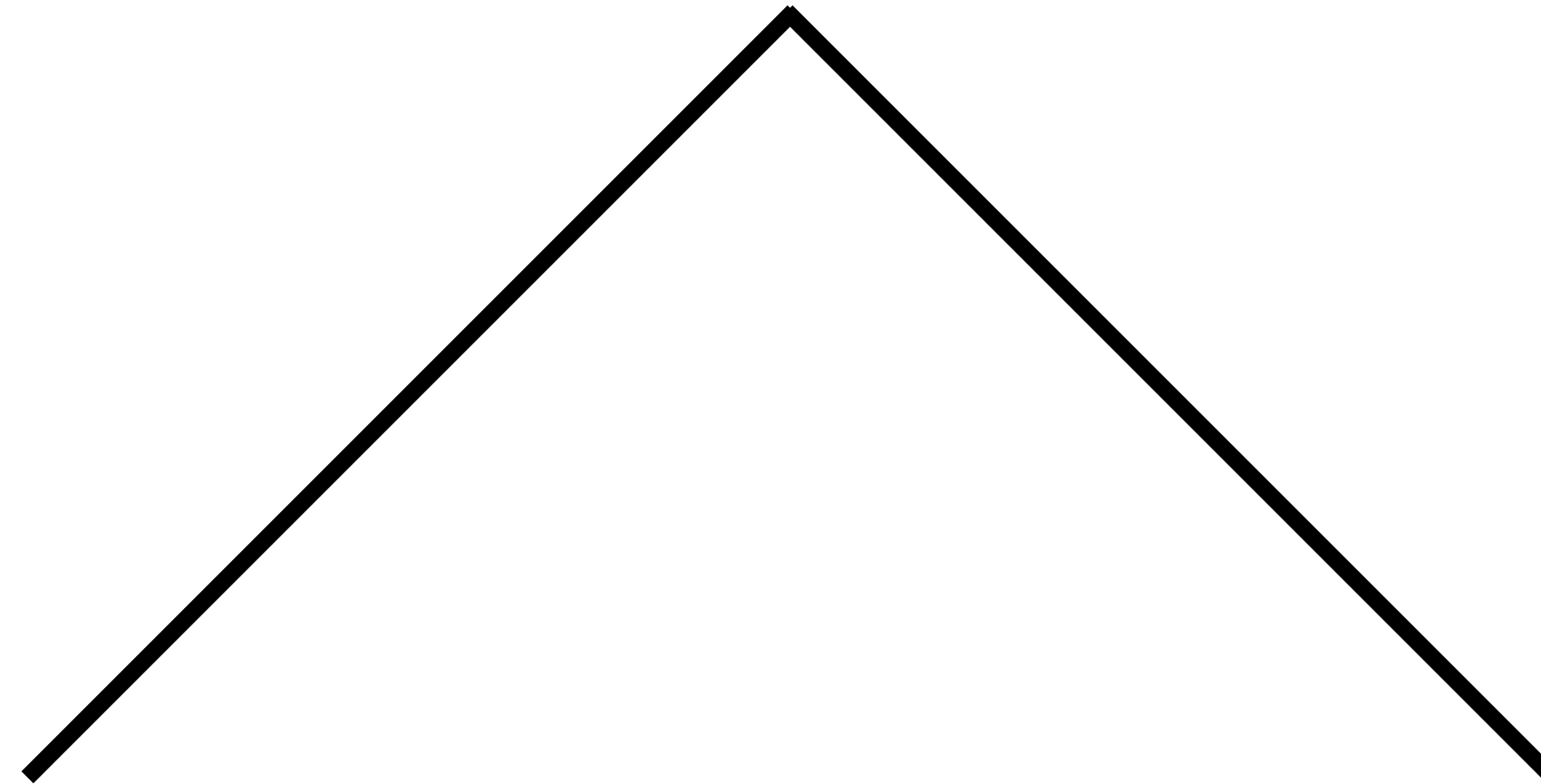
The Reference Letter Case

A is writing a testimonial about a pupil who is a candidate for a philosophy job, and his letter reads as follows: "Dear Sir, Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc."

The “Fine Friend” Case

X, with whom A has been on close terms until now, has betrayed a secret of A's to a business rival. A and his audience both know this. A says X is a fine friend.

What an utterer (speaker) means



**What an utterer
(speaker) says**

**What an utterer
conversationally
implicates**

Saying p

VS.

Making as if to say p

S said *p*

VS.

S made as if to say *p*



entails that *S meant p*

Grice's Banker Case

In uttering 'quite well...he hasn't been to prison yet', A :

...**said** that the banker is doing well and hasn't been to prison.

...and **con conversationally implicated** that the banker is up to no good (or that his colleagues are out to get him, etc.).

Grice's Fine Friend Case

In uttering 'X is a fine friend', A:

...made as if to say that X is a fine friend.

...and conversationally implicated that X is not a good friend.

Grice's Reference Letter Case

In uttering 'Mr. X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular', A :

... **said** (or **made as if to say?**) that Mr. X is fluent and punctual.

...and **con conversationally implicated** that Mr.X is not a good philosopher.

Question

How does a hearer correctly interpret a conversational implicature, given that it goes beyond what can be semantically decoded from their utterance?

Grice's Answer:

We infer that they meant something beyond what they said (or made as if to say) by assuming that they were being cooperative, and inferring what they must have meant in order to count as cooperative.

Cooperative Principle:

"Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."

Maxim of Quantity: Information

- Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality: Truth

- Do not say what you believe to be false.
- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relation: Relevance

- Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner: Clarity ("be perspicuous")

- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- Be orderly.

Non-Conventionality

"...conversational implicata are not part of the meaning of the expressions to the employment of which they attach." [38]

Calculability

"The presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out; for even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument, the implicature (if present at all) will not count as a conversational implicature; it will be a conventional implicature."

Cancelability

"...a putative conversational implicature is explicitly cancelable if, to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that p, it is admissible to add but not p, or I do not mean to imply that p, and it is contextually cancelable if one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature." [38]

Nondetachability

"The implicature is nondetachable insofar as it is not possible to find another way of saying the same thing (or approximately the same thing) which simply lacks the implicature." [37]

**The Philosophy Club of Hunter College, in partnership with the
Philosophy Department, presents:**

***Two Philosophical Views of the 2016 Election
Featuring Professors Omar Dahbour and Frank Kirkland***

**Thursday, November 17th, 7:00pm dinner, 7:30pm talk.
West 1441**



MEANING

H. P. Grice

What is meaning?

Or, put in linguistic terms:

**What do the words ‘meaning’ and
‘means’ mean?**

In particular:

**What are we saying when we say
that a word ‘means’ something, or
that someone ‘means’ something by
what they say?**

meaning

[**mee**-ning]

Spell

Syllables

[Synonyms](#)

[Examples](#)

[Word Origin](#)

[See more synonyms on Thesaurus.com](#)

noun

1. what is intended to be, or actually is, expressed or indicated; signification; import:
the three meanings of a word.
2. the end, purpose, or significance of something:
What is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of this intrusion?
3. *Linguistics.*
 - a. the nonlinguistic cultural correlate, reference, or denotation of a linguistic form; expression.
 - b. linguistic content (opposed to [expression](#)).

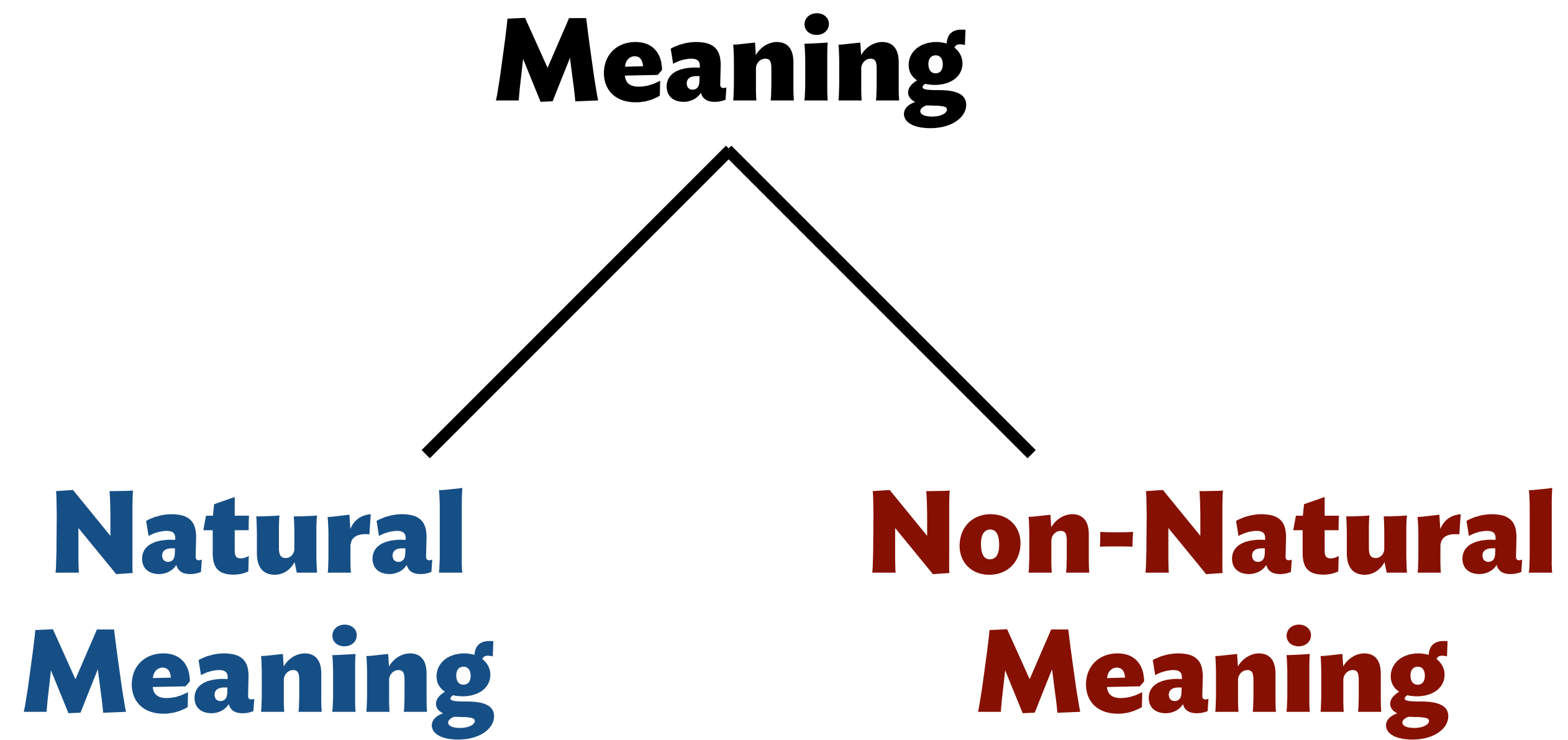
adjective

4. intensioned (usually used in combination):
She's a well-meaning person.
5. full of significance; expressive:
a meaning look.

Comparison

The word 'newspaper' has (at least) the following two senses:

1. A printed publication with unstapled sheets consisting of news, articles, and advertisements.
2. An organization that produces publications of this kind.



*note: there are also other senses of 'meaning'
e.g., 'the meaning of life'

Examples of ‘means’ in its natural sense:

“Those spots **meant** measles.”

“The budget **means** we will have a hard year.”

Examples of ‘means’ in its non-natural sense:

“Those rings on the bell **mean** that the bus is full”

“That remark, ‘Smith couldn’t get along without his trouble and strife’ **meant** that Smith found his wife indispensable.”

‘meant_N’ = ‘naturally meant’

‘meant_{NN}’ = ‘non-naturally meant’

Two Questions:

How can we be sure that these really are two different senses of 'means'?

How can we test which sense of 'means' is being used in a given case?

Grice offers us five usage tests.

Test 1: **Means_N** is Factive, **Means_{NN}** Is Not

I cannot say, “Those spots meant measles, but he hadn't got measles” ... That is to say, in cases like the above, *x meant that p* and *x means that p* entail *p*.

I can use [“Those rings on the bell mean that the bus is full”] and go on to say, “But it isn't in fact full—the conductor has made a mistake”.

More generally:

If *X means_N P* is true, then *P* has to be true too

But if *X means_{NN} P* is true, *P* might be false.

Test 3: Means_{NN} is Agential, Means_N is Not

I cannot argue from “Those spots meant measles” to any conclusion to the effect that somebody or other meant by those spots so-and-so.

I can argue from [“Those rings on the bell mean that the bus is full”] to the conclusion that somebody (viz., the conductor) meant, or at any rate should have meant, by the rings that the bus is full...

More generally:

But if X **means_{NN}** something, then someone meant something by X.

If X **means_N** P is true, then P has to be true too

Meaning

**Natural
Meaning**

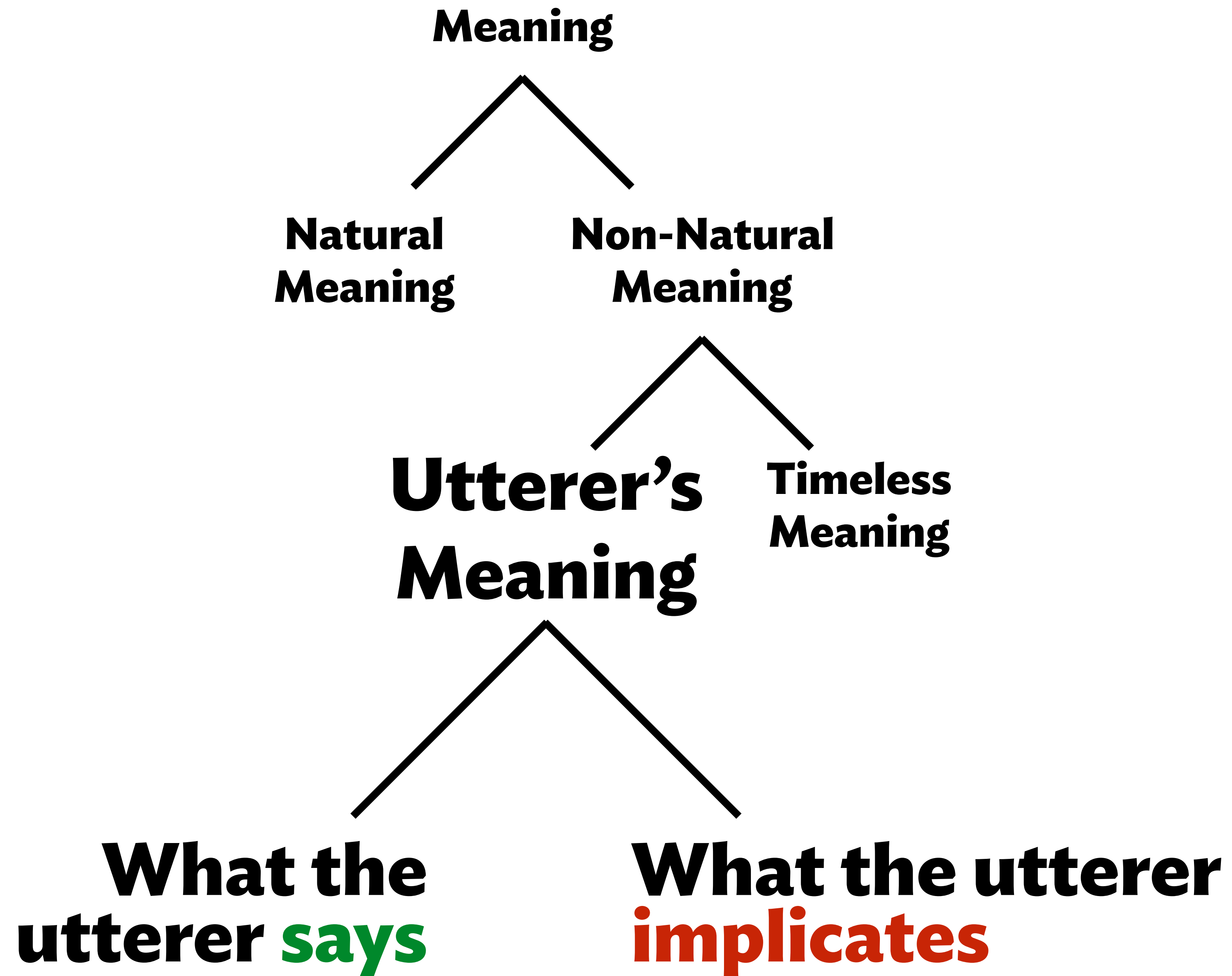
**Non-Natural
Meaning**

**Utterer's
Meaning**

**Timeless
Meaning**

What a person means by
a particular utterance on
a particular occasion.

What a type of word or sentence
means, independent of any
particular occasion of use.



Expression Meaning

(a.k.a linguistic meaning, timeless meaning)

EXPLAINED IN TERMS OF

Speaker Meaning

(a.k.a utterer's meaning)

EXPLAINED IN TERMS OF

Mental States

Specifically:

Communicative Intentions

Grice's 1957 Theory of Utterer's Meaning:

“A meant_{NN} something by [an utterance] x” is (roughly) equivalent to “A intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention”

(A is an arbitrary speaker)

(x is an arbitrary utterance)

Grice's 1968 Update

S means something by uttering u if and only if S utters u intending:

- (1) to produce thereby a certain response Δ in a certain addressee A;
- (2) that A recognize S's intention (1);
- (3) that A's response Δ be at least partly based on of her recognition of (1).

(This is a *communicative intention*.)

An Example:

By staring at student A, I meant that student A should not come in late iff, by staring at them I intended:

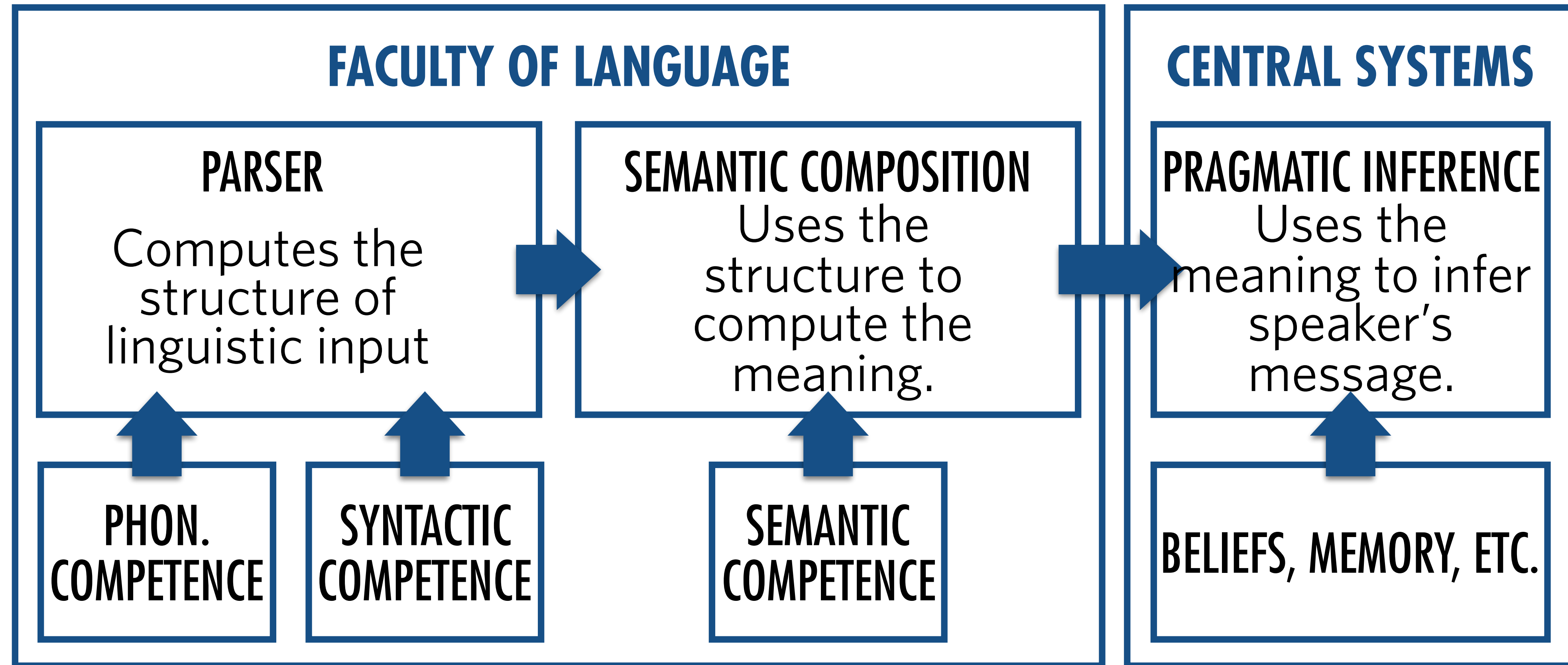
- (1) to produce in A a belief that they should not come to class late anymore;
- (2) that A recognize my intention (1);
- (3) that A's belief that they should not come to class anymore be at least partly based on their recognition of (1).

“He’s a fine friend.”

“Bill is a bulldozer.”

“Texas has a lot of
electrical votes.”

SPEECH COMPREHENSION



1957 Expression Meaning:

“x means_{NN} (timeless) that so-and-so”
might as a first shot be equated with
some statement or disjunction of
statements about what
“people” (vague) intend (with
qualifications about “recognition”) to
effect by x

(x is an arbitrary utterance-type)

Expression Meaning

(a.k.a linguistic meaning, timeless meaning)

EXPLAINED IN TERMS OF

Speaker Meaning

(a.k.a utterer's meaning)

EXPLAINED IN TERMS OF

Mental States

Specifically:

Communicative Intentions

John Searle's German Soldier Objection

Malapropisms

"Texas has a lot of electrical votes"

(Yogi Berra)

"Bicycling in New York is dangerous
because everyone drives so erotically."

Spoonerisms

"Three cheers for our queer old dean!"

"Is it kisstomary to cuss the bride?"

"The Lord is a shoving leopard."

(taken from Wikipedia, 'Spoonerisms')

Upshots

- A (somewhat) systematic account of how indirect communication is possible.
- A way of connecting communication to all other cooperative activities.
- A way for Frege-style semantics to be compatible with Wittgenstein's observations about language use?