• This should remind you of Grice:

  “Any account we give of meaning in general (in the relevant sense) must square with the account we give of what it is for particular expressions to have particular meanings...” (110)

• Strawson draws our attention to 2 types of theories of meaning: communication-intention and formal semantics.

  “According to the former, it is impossible to give an adequate account of the concept of meaning without reference to the possession by speakers of audience-directed intentions of a certain complex kind...The opposed view, at least in its negative aspect, is that this doctrine simply gets things the wrong way round...” (110)


• Let’s begin with the communication-intention theorists. They take communication as the more fundamental concept, and then attempt to account for linguistic meaning in terms of communication. Most fundamental of all is the concept of a speaker meaning something by an utterance.

  “An utterance is something produced or executed by an utterer; it need not be vocal; it could be a gesture or a drawing or the moving or disposing of objects in a certain way. What an utterer means by his utterance is incidentally specified in specifying the complex intention with which he produces the utterance.” (111)

  ○ Semantic and syntactic rules/conventions essentially aid in communication.

  ○ The boot-strapping proposal:

    “And it looks as if we can explain the notion of conventions of communication in terms of the notion of pre-conventional communication at a rather basic level.” (112)
“So it is easy to see how the utterance of $x$ could become established as between this utterer and this audience as a mean of meaning that $p$. Because it has worked, it becomes established; and then it works because it is established.” (112)

○ Q: But how can such a story account for the *compositionality* of meaning? Strawson: Pre-conventional utterances can have structure.

• Now on to the formal semantics crowd . . . They deny that the semantic and syntactic rules are grounded in communicative intentions, so: “What is the general character of these meaning-determining rules?” (113)

○ Candidate Answer: The meaning of a sentence is given by its truth conditions.

Here is a worry though: Some declarative sentences seem to differ in meaning, though not in truth conditions. E.g., “Fortunately, Socrates is dead.” vs. “Unfortunately, Socrates is dead.”

Here is a bigger worry: Can truth-conditions be understood without reference to communicative intentions?

• Strawson argues, on pages 115–116, that this “alternative” account of meaning also depends on communicative intentions.

  “For when we set out from the agreed point that the rules which determine truth-conditions thereby determine meaning, the conclusion to which we were led was precisely that those rules determined what statement was made by one who, in uttering the sentence, made a statement. So the agreed point, so far from being an alternative to a communication theory of meaning, leads us straight in to such a theory of meaning.” (116)

○ The formal semanticist could argue that assertions are expressions of beliefs, but deny that assertion requires an *intention*, say, to convey this belief to the audience.

But this allows for the possibility of a private language. This view makes it wholly contingent that language is public and social in nature. But this role is not contingent.