Social meaning
at the semantics-sociolinguistics interface

Ai Taniguchi

Carleton University

ai.taniguchi@carleton.ca

(Slides available at: http://aitaniguchi.github.io)

University of Oxford

Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics

Jesus College

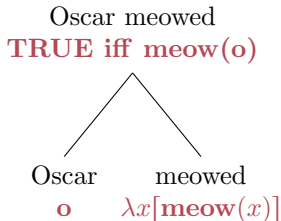Brasenose College

3 December 2019

On meaning

"*I regard the construction of* **a theory of truth** ... *the basic work of serious syntax and semantics.*"

(Montague 1970)

On meaning

(1)   a.   It is true that Oscar meowed
         b.   * It is true that Oscar
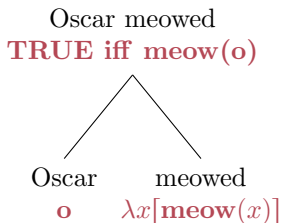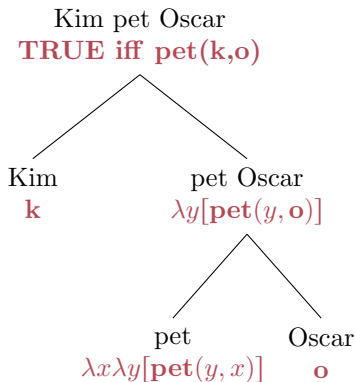   c.   * It is true that meowed

(2)

Oscar meowed
TRUE iff meow(o)

Oscar   meowed
o $\lambda x[\mathbf{meow}(x)]$

On meaning

(1) a.   It is true that Oscar meowed
     b.   * It is true that Oscar
     c.   * It is true that meowed

(2)

Oscar meowed
TRUE iff meow(o)

Oscar   meowed
o $\lambda x[\mathbf{meow}(x)]$

(3)

Kim pet Oscar
TRUE iff pet(k,o)

Kim   pet Oscar
k $\lambda y[\mathbf{pet}(y, \mathbf{o})]$

pet   Oscar
$\lambda x \lambda y[\mathbf{pet}(y, x)]$ **o**

On meaning

*"When a problem appears to be unsolvable in its full generality, one should **temporarily restrict it**; perhaps it can then be conquered by a gradual advance."*

(Frege 1879)

On meaning

*"It makes no difference to the thought whether I use the word **'horse'** or **'steed'** . . . Such conversational suggestions make no difference to the thought. . . . Naturally such transformations are not indifferent in every respect but they do not touch the thought, **they do not touch what is true or false**."*

(Frege 1918-19)

Puzzle: not about true or false

(4) pi [paɪ] vs. pi [paː]

(5) Emma: The seventh digit of pi [paː] is five [faːv]
     ‘The seventh digit of pi is five’ + ‘I am from the South’

    Ai: That’s not true!

➤ Yes: ‘That’s not true, it’s six!’   (**at-issue**)

➤ No: ‘That’s not true, you’re not from the South!’ (**non-at-issue**)

(Smith et al. 2010; Taniguchi under review)
(See also: Potts 2005)
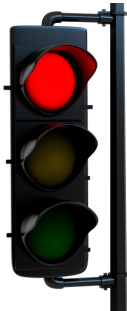
Social meaning

(6)   Two plus three is $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{five [faɪv]} \\ \text{five [faːv]} \end{array} \right\}$

(Allbritten 2011; Smith et al. 2010)

(7)   I took the $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{elevator} \\ \text{lift} \end{array} \right\}$

Question: lexical competence

What do we know when we know the meaning of words?

Types of social meaning

(8)   You should $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \varnothing \\ \text{totally} \end{array} \right\}$ click the link

(Beltrama and Staum Casasanto 2017)

Types of social meaning

(8)   You should $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \emptyset \\ \text{totally} \end{array} \right\}$ click the link

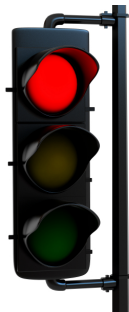(Beltrama and Staum Casasanto 2017)

Types of social meaning

(8)   You should $\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \varnothing \\ \text{totally} \end{array} \right\}$ click the link

(Beltrama and Staum Casasanto 2017)

(Eckert 1989)

Non-linguistic meaning

Non-linguistic meaning

Is this still about language?

Why should we model social meaning formally?

A theory of sentence meaning as context change

(9) ^{C} The seventh digit of pi is five $^{C'}$

(10) $\lambda C \lambda C'$ $\big[$ this is how C should relate to C' $\big]$

$$\uparrow$$

$$\begin{pmatrix} \text{give} \\ \text{me} \\ \cdots \end{pmatrix}$$

➠ **Context change potential** (CCP) of a sentence

(cf., Heim 1983)

Question Under Discussion

(11) A: The seventh digit of pi is five.
      B: That's not true!

(**Question Under Discussion**)
$\downarrow$

$$\mathbf{assert}(p) = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{in } C', \text{ update the } \mathbf{QUD} \text{ in } C \text{ with } \{p\} \ \& \\ \text{my beliefs in } C' \text{ is my beliefs in } C \text{ plus } p \end{array} \right]$$

'Let's discuss this: is p true? I think it's true.'

★ **at-issue** meaning

(Roberts 1996; Farkas and Bruce 2010; among others)
(Taniguchi 2017b; Taniguchi under review)

Some things we know about social meaning

1. There is a "field" of meanings and personas, not just a singleton meaning (Eckert 2008)

   ➥ 'The speaker is from the South, the speaker is friendly, the speaker is unintelligent'

   (based on perception studies in Allbritten 2011)

2. What the hearer thinks of you in the first place affects what the perceived persona is

   (Podesva et al. 2015; Burnett 2019; among others)

Some things we know about social meaning

1. There is a "field" of meanings and personas, not just a singleton meaning   (Eckert 2008)
   - ➤ 'The speaker is from the South, the speaker is friendly, the speaker is unintelligent'
     (based on perception studies in Allbritten 2011)

2. What the hearer thinks of you in the first place affects what the perceived persona is
   (Podesva et al. 2015; Burnett 2019; among others)

   - ➤ vs.

The CCP of social meaning

$$[\textbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\text{ this is how } C \text{ and } C' \text{ should relate } \right]$$

The CCP of social meaning

$$[\mathbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\text{ this is how } C \text{ and } C' \text{ should relate } \right]$$

the social meaning associated with [aː]

∪

what the hearer already thinks of you

The CCP of social meaning

$$[\textbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\text{ this is how } C \text{ and } C' \text{ should relate } \right]$$

$$\mathcal{F}_{\textbf{a:}} \text{ (Field)}$$
$$\cup$$
$$SP \text{ (Stored Persona)}$$

(Taniguchi under review)

The CCP of social meaning

$$[\mathbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\text{ this is how } C \text{ and } C' \text{ should relate } \right]$$

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{The speaker is from the South,} \\ \text{The speaker is friendly, The speaker is unintelligent} \end{array} \right\}$$

$$\cup$$

$$\left\{ \text{ The speaker is high energy } \right\}$$

The CCP of social meaning

$$[\textbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\text{ this is how } C \text{ and } C' \text{ should relate } \right]$$

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{The speaker is from the South,} \\ \text{The speaker is friendly, The speaker is unintelligent} \end{array} \right\}$$

$\cup$

$$\left\{ \text{ The speaker is high energy } \right\}$$

$\Rightarrow$

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{c} \text{The speaker is from the South, The speaker is friendly,} \\ \text{The speaker is unintelligent, The speaker is high energy} \end{array} \right\}$$

$\Rightarrow$

'The speaker is a zany southerner'

The CCP of social meaning

'The speaker is a zany southerner'

$$[\textbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\text{ this is how } C \text{ and } C' \text{ should relate } \right]$$

(12) A: The seventh digit of pi [paː] is six
       B: ?? That's not true! You're not from the South!

(13) A: The seventh digit of pi [paː] is six
       B: Poser! You're not from the South!

(Taniguchi under review)

Persona Under Consideration

'The speaker is a zany southerner'

$$[\textbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\text{ in } C', \text{ update the } \textbf{PUC} \text{ in C with } \mathcal{F}_{\textbf{a:}} \cup SP \right]$$

↑

(Persona Under Consideration)

'I'm proposing **this** as my persona in C''

Persona Under Consideration

'The speaker is a zany southerner'

$[\textbf{pa:}] = \lambda C \lambda C' \left[\ \text{in } C', \text{ update the } \textbf{PUC} \text{ in C with } \mathcal{F}_{\textbf{a:}} \cup SP\ \right]$

↑

(**Persona Under Consideration**)

'I'm proposing **this** as my persona in C''

- The **PUC** helps with resolving the **QUD**
- When you put a topic in the **QUD**, you're saying, 'I believe this is true. Do you?'
- In order to answer this, useful to answer things like '**Can I trust this person's words?**'
- **PUC** and the **QUD** are related in this way

The PUC sounds useful . . . but is this an isolated instance of it?

The PUC sounds useful . . . but is this an isolated instance of it?

- Is this an invention just for this particular phenomenon?
- Or is there motivation for proposing this kind of thing?

Re: why formalize social meaning?

Japanese role language:

(14)   itta { **-nya** / **-wan** / **-chuu** / **-hamu** }
        went ROLE

        'I went there (I'm speaking a
        { cat / dog / mouse / hamster } dialect)'

(15)   ganbaru **-ccha**!
        try.hard ROLE

        'Good luck! (I'm [some persona])'

(Kinsui 2003; Taniguchi 2019)

Conclusion

1. A lot of types of meanings can be treated as a **context change potential**
2. You want to decide what's **true vs. false** in discourse
3. You want to express your **identity** in discourse too
4. Your **persona** can affect whether people will believe you
5. In some languages, there is **morphosyntactic marking** whose sole purpose is to mark social meaning, and it's productive

My research

1. What is meaning? What kinds of meanings are there in language?
2. Is social meaning a part of lexical competence?
3. How can context-oriented meaning be formally represented?
4. What sorts of things make up a context?

5. How do different context-oriented expressions interact?

6. How does meaning vary and change, and how does an expression acquire social meaning?

My research

1. What is meaning? What kinds of meanings are there in language?
2. Is social meaning a part of lexical competence?
3. How can context-oriented meaning be formally represented?
4. What sorts of things make up a context?

5. How do different context-oriented expressions interact?

6. How does meaning vary and change, and how does an expression acquire social meaning?

My research

1. What is meaning? What kinds of meanings are there in language?
2. Is social meaning a part of lexical competence?
3. How can context-oriented meaning be formally represented?
4. What sorts of things make up a context?
   - *I DO like cats!*, *Aren't YOU a cute cat!*　　(Taniguchi 2017b)

5. How do different context-oriented expressions interact?
   - -nya 'cat' + -wa 'delicate' = *-nyawa (Intended: 'delicate cat')
   - -ka 'question' + -yo 'FYI' = ???　　(Taniguchi 2017b; 2016a;b)

6. How does meaning vary and change, and how does an expression acquire social meaning?
   - *nanka* 'etc' → *nanka* 'I look down on this'　　(Taniguchi 2017a)

Acknowledgements - thank you!

- Undergraduate students from my LING4009 (Formal Approaches to Social Meaning) class at Carleton University (WS19)
    - This work has made immense progress thanks to class discussions
    - Natasha Baytaluk, Eddie Cai, Ceciley Foreman, Amy Hamilton, Ying Leclair, Tarah Lemours, Hannah Manierka, Klaus Maquiling, Sarah Musclow, Emma Panneton-Levasseur, Sarah Redekop, Mercedes Van Noppen, Michelle Vu, William Wright, Lisa Xu
- Carleton University (Canada): Ash Asudeh, Karen Jesney, Raj Singh, Ida Toivonen, Dan Siddiqi, Lev Blumenfeld, Beth MacLeod, Tamara Sorenson-Duncan, Mako Hirotani, Kumiko Murasugi, Erik Anonby, Chris Cox, Marie-Odile Junker, David Wood
- Carleton University (Canada): Kathryn Carreau, Mounissa Moussa, Tori Novelli, Jackson Mitchell
- University of Ottawa (Canada): Vesela Simeonova, Deniss Ott, Kevin McMullin
- University of Toronto (Canada): Marisa Brook, Nathan Sanders, Language Variation Group
- University of British Columbia (Canada): Marcin Morzycki
- HHU-Düsseldorf (Germany): Curt Anderson, Hana Filip, Sebastian Löbner, Semantics and Pragmatics Exchange group
- Michigan State University (USA): Alan Munn, Cristina Schmitt
- MIST workshop: Heather Burnett (CNRS, France), Andrea Beltrama (UPenn, USA), Bruce Mannheim (UMich, USA), Deb Cameron (Oxford, UK), Sally McConnell-Ginet (Cornell, USA)
- IASM2 workshop: Elin McCready (Aoyamagakuin, Japan), Chris Davis (Ryukyu, Japan), Grégoire Winterstein (UQAM, Canada)
- Newcastle University (UK): Becky Woods

Thank you! (-nya)

References I

Allbritten, R. (2011). *Sounding southern: Phonetic features and dialect perceptions*. PhD thesis, Georgetown University.

Beltrama, A. and Staum Casasanto, L. (2017). *Totally* tall sounds *totally* younger: Intensification at the socio-semantics interface. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 21(2):154–182.

Burnett, H. (2019). Signalling games, sociolinguistic variation and the construction of style. *Linguistics and Philosophy*. (in press).

Eckert, P. (1989). *Jocks and burnouts: Social categories and identity in the high school*. Teachers College Press.

Eckert, P. (2008). Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12(4):453–476.

Farkas, D. F. and Bruce, K. B. (2010). On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics*, 27(1):81–118.

Frege, G. (1879). Begriffsschrift, a formula language, modeled upon that of arithmetic, for pure thought. *From Frege to Gödel: A source book in mathematical logic*, 1931:1–82.

Frege, G. (1918-19). Thought (trans. pt geach and rh stoothoff). In *Gottlob Frege: Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logic, and Philosophy*. Wiley-Blackwell.

References II

Heim, I. (1983). File change semantics and the familiarity theory of definiteness. In Bäuerle, R., Schwarze, C., and von Stechow, A., editors, *Meaning, use, and interpretation of language*, pages 164–189. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.

Kinsui, S. (2003). *vaacharu nihongo yakuwarigo no nazo [Virtual Japanese: enigmas of role language]*. Kuroshio Shuppan.

Montague, R. (1970). English as a formal language. In Visentini, B., editor, *Linguaggi nella societa e nella tecnica*, pages 188–221. Edizioni di Communita.

Podesva, R. J., Reynolds, J., Callier, P., and Baptiste, J. (2015). Constraints on the social meaning of released/t: A production and perception study of us politicians. *Language Variation and Change*, 27(1):59–87.

Potts, C. (2005). *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures*. Oxford University Press.

Roberts, C. (1996). Information structure in discourse: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics. *Working Papers in Linguistics-Ohio State University Department of Linguistics*, pages 91–136.

Smith, E. A., Hall, K. C., and Munson, B. (2010). Bringing semantics to sociophonetics: Social variables and secondary entailments. *Laboratory Phonology*, 1(1):121–155.

References III

Taniguchi, A. (2016a). Demanding an answer: The CCP semantics of anti-rhetorical questions in Japanese. Handout for oral presentation at the Semantics and Syntax Workshop of the American Midwest and Prairies 2016.

Taniguchi, A. (2016b). Sentence-final -ka-yo in Japanese: A compositional account. Proceedings of FAJL8: Formal Approaches to Japanese Linguistics.

Taniguchi, A. (2017a). Exhaustification and pejorativity: The case of japanese nanka. Presentation at Integrating Approaches to Social Meaning (ESSLLI 29).

Taniguchi, A. (2017b). *The formal pragmatics of non-at-issue intensification in English and Japanese*. PhD thesis, Michigan State University.

Taniguchi, A. (2019). Why we say stuff. Talk for 5-Minute Linguist competition at 2019 LSA.

Taniguchi, A. (under review). Social meaning at the semantics-sociolinguistics interface. Submitted to Linguistics and Philosophy.