

## 1. The objective of the project

The objective of this project is to elaborate a new programme in the philosophy of language and cognitive science by developing a family of interrelated ideas to be found in the literature. A central assumption of the proposed programme comes from John L. Austin, a British philosopher, who claimed that our linguistic practice could be best understood as a rule-governed and norm-guided form of social interaction. For this reason, we call the approach in question *Austinian*.

We believe that the Austinian programme may be an attractive alternative to the Gricean tradition, according to which our linguistic practice is a form of social behaviour coordinated by audience-directed intentions and communicative plans. The Gricean programme has a wide scope of application and shapes the majority of research in semantics, pragmatics, cognitive science, and communication studies. Our contention is that despite its many achievements it leads to an inadequate picture of linguistic practice. We argue that the inadequacy of the Gricean approach stems from the fact that it attempts to account for all communicative phenomena in a uniform manner by interpreting them as cases of expressing sophisticated communicative intentions; as a matter of fact, however, the domain of communicative acts is heterogeneous and as such is not subject to a uniform explanation.

## 2. The description of the research to be carried out

We start with critically assessing the role that the Gricean notion of communicative intention plays in theorizing about (i) the varieties and constitution of linguistic meaning, (ii) the structure and content of communicative acts, (iii) the mechanisms and cognitive underpinnings of verbal communication, and (iv) the evolutionary and developmental emergence of linguistic and communicative skills. Next, we collect the Austinian ideas to be found in the literature and develop them into a comprehensive research programme. A central assumption underlying the Austinian approach is that the class of communicative acts is heterogeneous; more specifically, it is assumed that what plays the key role in determining the force and content of a speech act can vary from one case to another: in some cases, the meaning of a conversational contribution is constituted by the intention with which it is made — or, more generally, by what the speaker has in mind — whereas in other cases it depends on the rules or norms followed by the interacting agents. This *assumption of heterogeneity* supports the principle of *methodological pluralism*, according to which the diversity of our research methods and explanatory standards should reflect the variety of the communicative phenomena under investigation. Finally, we use the tenets of the Austinian programme to consider and solve the individual problems of the project. After arguing for the Austinian model of *extended semantics*, we account for the mechanisms responsible for the emergence and persistence of linguistic rules and norms, develop a model of diverse mechanisms underlying verbal communication, and offer an Austinian conceptualization of the task of explaining the cognitive underpinnings, evolutionary emergence, and development of uniquely human communicative skills.

The individual research tasks of the project are metatheoretical in that they concern the *nature*, *constitution* and *conceptualization* of the phenomena studied in such sciences as semantics, pragmatics, communication studies, developmental psychology, and language evolution studies. For this reason, the project uses the philosophical method of conceptual analysis or, more accurately, the *concept construction method* that consists in developing new conceptual frameworks and using them to integrate and explain available empirical data. It is worth stressing that explaining various communicative phenomena we act in accordance with the principle of methodological pluralism described above. To collect the empirical data relevant for answering the research questions of the project, we not only review the literature, but also design and carry out our own empirical research using the methods of experimental philosophy and experimental pragmatics.

## 3. Reasons for choosing the research topic

We believe that considering and solving the individual research problems of the project can help us better understand the nature and dynamics of communicative phenomena. We are convinced that developing Austinian ideas into a comprehensive and coherent research programme we can balance the impact of the Gricean approach and, as a result, enhance the critical potential of the dispute over the philosophical foundations of cognitive science and communication studies. The project results can also have an important societal impact by contributing to building a reflective society more aware of the role that conventional and normative rules play in shaping our communicative practice.