

Pragmatics Without Idealisation: Toward a Non-Ideal Philosophy of Language

Contexts in which interlocutors do not fully cooperate with one another are by no means new in language — lies, manipulations, dogwhistles, and silence are just a few among many non-cooperative forms of communication. However, no single, coherent philosophical theory that offers a comprehensive account of all such communicative acts has yet been proposed. Traditional approaches (e.g. Gricean or Stalnakerian) rely on a range of idealizations, including the transparency of the speaker's communicative intentions and their full cooperativeness. Precisely because of this, they encounter certain difficulties in analyzing utterances that violate these assumptions.

In this project, I will propose a solution to this problem: a new non-ideal theory of language, which will primarily allow for an adequate analysis of non-cooperative communicative behaviors. Non-idealness here means abandoning at least some (or even all) of the traditional idealizations adopted in the philosophy of language, particularly those concerning the speaker's communicative intentions and cooperation. In this project, I thus adopt two main hypotheses: first, (H1) that the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theories within the philosophy of language is justified, and that accepting it can positively influence the resolution of certain problems generated by traditional theories; and second, (H2) that it is possible to propose a new non-ideal theory of language that will satisfactorily characterize and interpret non-cooperative communicative behaviors, in particular lies, dogwhistles, and silence.

The first step toward achieving the project's goal will be a detailed analysis of the existing philosophical literature on the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theories within the philosophy of language, along with a comprehensive review of works dedicated to non-cooperativeness — particularly those addressing lies, dogwhistles, and silence. In the second step, I will respond to the main objections to adopting the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theories. The third stage will involve presenting positive arguments in favor of adopting this distinction. The next phase of the project will focus on developing a new non-ideal theory and testing it against both classic examples from the literature and new cases that existing theories have failed to adequately describe.

Successfully completing this project will achieve several goals. First, it will contribute to a better grounding of the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theories within the philosophy of language and present this distinction as offering explanatory possibilities unattainable within traditional frameworks. Second, the project will develop a new theory capable of adequately analyzing non-cooperative communicative behaviors, which so far have not been covered by any unified theory of this kind. Furthermore, the developed theory may prove useful in analyzing media content for potential manipulations or in uncovering other hidden intentions of the speaker.