

ON INTENTION, COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTIONS AND ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE

O. For about half a century, when a new branch of language research, called after Charles Morris (Morris 1938:6) pragmatics, started to develop dynamically, the notion of intention has been put in the centre of interest of scholars dealing with the problem of communication. Actually, pragmatics was based on the assumption that communication is a matter of expressing an intention by a speaker and assigning an intention of a speaker by a hearer (Haugh 2008:99). It seems that in numerous contemporary works on communication the notion of intention is somehow associated with the idea of functions of language (or communicative functions) as well as with the concept of illocutionary force. The present paper is aimed at comparing the mentioned concepts and displaying possible inconsistencies that may occur if one treats those terms overly loosely, and in fact we find instances of such inaccuracies in literature¹.

1. The term *intention* (Polish *intencja*) comes from Latin *intentio* derived from *intendere*, which means more or less ‘to aim at something’, thus it indicates a certain goal, point of reference. The concept of intention is connected with the term of intentionality that functions mainly in the field of philosophy, especially philosophy of language and philosophy of action. As J. Bobryk maintains, it was adapted with much bigger interest in the philosophy of language than in psychology although Brentano, who in his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* from 1874 introduced the term *intentional* to the contemporary scope of research, was both a philosopher and a psychologist (Bobryk 1996). Scholastic philosophy by *intentional* meant more or less ‘mental, existing in mind’. In Brentano’s conception, and then in Husserl’s works, intentionality and intention are considered equivalent (Prechtel 2009:120). The intentionality was understood as a property characteristic to mental states that are directed towards an object which is beyond them, a reference to some content, aboutness². In a later period many philosophers made intentionality together or apart from intention a key subject of philosophy of language and philosophy of mind (inter alia: Anscombe 1963; Grice 1957 and 1975; Searle 1983; Strawson 1964), comparing them with such vital ideas as intentionality, reference or convention.

At the beginning let us make some preliminary remarks to the communicative intention. The intention does not occur *in vacuo*, it is always an intention of something. The intention does not exist outside a situation of a generally understood activity. A communicative intention does not exist outside a speech act, which assumes presence of a speaker and a specific context of a speech act. One also ought to realize that we never

¹ In the following deliberation I shall refer mostly to examples taken from the Polish linguistic literature and referring to *intention* as it is a natural language expression I shall also describe its functioning especially in Polish language.

² Brentano writes: “Jedes psychische Phänomen ist durch das charakterisiert, was die Scholastiker des Mittelalters die intentionale (auch wohl mentale) Inexistenz eines Gegenstandes genannt haben, und was wir, obwohl mit nicht ganz unzweideutigen Ausdrücken, die Beziehung auf einen Inhalt, die Richtung auf ein Objekt (worunter hier nicht eine Realität zu verstehen ist), oder die immanente Gegenständlichkeit nennen würden. Jedes enthält etwas als Objekt in sich, obwohl nicht jedes in gleicher Weise. In der Vorstellung ist etwas vorgestellt, in dem Urteile ist etwas anerkannt oder verworfen, in der Liebe geliebt, in dem Hasse gehasst, in dem Begehren begehrt usw. Diese intentionale Inexistenz ist den psychischen Phänomenen ausschließlich eigentümlich. Kein physisches Phänomen zeigt etwas Ähnliches. Und somit können wir die psychischen Phänomene definieren indem wir sagen sie seien solche Phänomene, welche intentional einen Gegenstand in sich enthalten.“ (Brentano 1874:115f.).

have a full cognition of the speaker's intention. In every situation we may accept (or not) all or part of what he announces but we can be never sure if what we accepted as a true intention of the speaker is really his intention. For the audience the consciousness of the speaker is always, to put it metaphorically, 'a black box'. We infer about its content from what comes out. Seeing screws or springs we work out a certain structure inside, however we are never ultimately sure if this is the case. To avoid misunderstanding, I do not mean any kind of monadism, solipsism or extreme epistemological subjectivity. Thus I do not sustain any concept of the impossibility of communication or recognition of the idea which is presented by an interlocutor. The only thing I want to remark on is that the absolute sureness whether the intention we recognized is the real speaker's intention is for us out of reach (in extreme cases people even inflict tortures on the others to maximize the probability that what was said had no other intention). Making use of pragmatic terms we may just say that the described conviction is based on the Grice's Cooperation Principle (and on the maxim of quality: "try to make your contribution one that is true"; Grice 1975). However, even if the speaker confirms that our assumption is true and we recognized his intention, there is always a possibility that he had another hidden intention. We simply must take into consideration that speakers sometimes want to communicate their real intentions and sometimes prefer to hide them. It is notable that the language offers instruments that allow us to perform both kinds of communicative activity.

In the research dealing with intention one can observe two kinds of explanatory approach. In philosophy and theoretical studies the reflection on intention goes from consciousness (the centre of mental acts) towards the objects to which it is directed. On the contrary, in conversational analysis and linguistic studies based on concrete material, observations go from products of speech acts towards intentions³.

What is important, not all mental states may be claimed to be intentional (e.g. feeling dizzy). Similarly, not all intentional states are conscious (Jaszczółt 2009:256); they may be unconscious as it is for instance with some prejudices or superstitions.

The Polish *intencja* is defined in dictionaries as a synonym or rather as a quasi-synonym to *motyw* 'motive', *cel działania* 'aim of action', *zamiar* 'intention', *zamysł* 'idea, conception'. On the other hand *intencjonalny* 'intentional' is defined by means of so close in meaning expressions as *umyślny* 'purposeful', *zamierzony* 'deliberate' (SJP, USJP, ISJP). In Polish the noun *intencja* has no corresponding verb (as in English *to intend*). However, there exists another word *zamiar*, which is normally translated into English as 'intention' and it has a corresponding verb *zamierzać* translated into English as 'to intend, to plan'. The connection with the idea of aim is also indicated in M. Grochowski's work (1980:47ff.). The author claims that a unit *X ma zamiar v_{inf}* 'X has an intention v_{inf}' equals *X ma intencję v_{inf}*, where *v_{inf}* means a verb in infinitive. For the unit he gives the following explication:

- (1) X ma zamiar robić A. ≈ X chce zrobić A i x sądzi, że jest gotów robić A 'X intends to do A. ≈ X

³ Thus many models of communicative situations (or more precisely – the authors of those models) presented throughout the time of modern linguistics lack the knowledge that they describe in two dimensions something that is dynamic. As a result when what pictured on the left is true – what on the right of the model has not yet happened, and when it happens what was described on the left is already gone. Therefore, models simplify, sometimes to a great extent. Moreover, it seems that authors of many models (I do not mean only charts or pictures but conceptions generally) do not take into consideration how many factors they assume – e.g. models are made with the assumption of recognition of a certain intention. As Lalewicz (1975) puts it, commenting Jakobson's and Bühler's models, these are models quoted everywhere but not used in practical research, they do not have an operational value, only a theoretical one.

wants to do A and thinks he is ready to do A’.

Although I generally agree with the explication, I am not of the same opinion as regards to the unit *X ma intencję* v_{inf} ⁴. My disagreement arises from syntactical rather than semantic causes. Namely, it seems to me that, though *intencja* by and large may be distinguished by the same features as *zamiar*, they do not ultimately create the same syntactical constructions. Let us have a look at some examples:

- (2) Jan ma zamiar odpocząć / zrobić zakupy ‘John intends to relax / to do the shopping’.
(3) *Jan ma intencję odpocząć / zrobić zakupy ‘John has the intention of relaxing / doing the shopping’.

The first sentence is completely acceptable, whereas in my opinion no competent Polish speaker would ever utter the next sentence. Nevertheless, the other units with *intencja* and *zamiar* numbered by Grochowski seem to be absolutely acceptable⁵:

- (4) Zamiarem / intencją X_g jest Z ‘Z is the X’s intention’.
(5) X robi coś z zamiarem / intencją y_g / żeby v_{inf} / że v_{fut} ‘X does something with the intention of y / to v_{inf} / that he v_{fut} ’.

There are also other contexts in which *intencja* and *zamiar* may be exchanged, for instance:

- (6) Anna ma dobre zamiary / intencje ‘Anna has got good intentions’.
(7) Anna chciała ukryć złe zamiary / intencje ‘Anna wanted to hide her bad intentions’.

Both units with *zamiar* and units with *intencja* are limited in the same way: the action being the subject of intention must refer to the person who has the intention (who intends). It is differently with a close in meaning to the above mentioned expression *X robi y w celu z_g* ‘X does y with the aim of z’, which does not demand the identity of person performing an action and a person having the intention.

J.L. Austin (1970:279f.) makes another interesting remark concerning expression *I intend to X* (*X* should be treated as a verb⁶). He writes that one should treat such kinds of sentences as a form of future tense of the verb *X*⁷. In English in most cases the construction *I intend X* may be replaced by *I am going to X*. However, as Anscombe

⁴ The author does not quote any examples for this unit.

⁵ In the examples *g* means genitive, *fut* means future.

⁶ One should have in mind that not all verbs may be used in such construction; not all actions may be the object of an intention. Nobody would rather say *I intend to understand / hope / be afraid / be angry / be nervous / intend* etc. We might mention here a comment made by L. Wittgenstein in his *Zettel* (note number 51), where he writes that some verbs may not function as imperative (e.g. we cannot give an order: *Feel ache!* or *Intend to do so!* – cf. Wittgenstein 1970).

⁷ Austin writes as follows: “The use of ‘I intend’ (and, so far as it exists, of ‘I purpose’) is quite different from ‘I deliberate’, which if it exists could only be a habitual present, describing what I ordinarily do, as in ‘I deliberate before I act’. ‘I intend to X’ is, as it were, a sort of ‘future tense’ of the verb ‘to X’. It has a vector, committal effect like ‘I promise to X’, and, again, like ‘I promise to X’, it is one of the possible formulas for making explicit, on occasion, the force of ‘I shall X’ (namely, that it was a declaration and not, for example, a forecast or an undertaking). We might feel inclined to say: it is almost an ‘auxiliary verb’. But the fact of the matter is that terms like ‘future tense’ and ‘auxiliary verb’ were not invented with the need to do justice to such a word as ‘intend’ in mind. A complete reclassification of these archaic terms is needed. That reclassification is needed is shown, for example, by the fact that there is some oddity about the combination ‘I shall intend’” (Austin 1970: 279-280).

(1957) pointed out aptly, the last expression may be used when one speaks about plans and when one says about predictions or conjectures, for instance:

- (8) Anna is going to visit her aunt in Hamburg.
- (9) Anna is going to fall. / Anna is going to faint.

Reading some works on communication theory or general communication models, one may notice that the term *intention* is sometimes replaced by such terms as: *communicative function*, *illocutionary force*, *the aim of communication*. In the following paragraphs I shall refer to those notions and attempt to substantiate that in many situations such replacements trigger off mistakes preventing the right comprehension of communicative processes.

2. R. Grzegorzczkova in her article (Grzegorzczkova 1991) classified communicative functions grounding on the notion of a speech act and on Austinian division performatives – constatives. The author rightly points out the limitations and inconsistencies of Bühler's and Jakobson's models of communication. Among them she mentions the mistake of ascribing functions to individual elements of communicative acts (such as speaker, audience, code etc.). In fact, these are not those elements that fulfil any communicative functions but a sign itself in reference to those elements (e.g. a sign in reference to a speaker may have an emotive function). Subsequently, Grzegorzczkova aptly makes a distinction between language functions and communicative functions. The first ones, as generative function (ability to create texts – Kurkowska 1974) or cognitive function (language as an instrument classifying the world – Furdal 1977) belong to language system (Saussurean *langue*). The second ones, which throughout the years attracted linguists' attention in a greater extent, belong to the very process of communication (Saussurean *parole*, language in use).

It seems, however, that the author of the mentioned article does not differentiate the notions of communicative intention and communicative function sufficiently. Reading the article, several times one comes across wording that in some sense (implicitly or explicitly) makes those terms equal⁸. And in fact they do not mean the same. Function, as above mentioned, may refer to system of language (yet not as a communicative function). Intention in no way may refer to the *langue*. It always refers to a certain communicative situation. What is important, a communicative function is normally ascribed to an utterance. Whereas a communicative intention – to a speaker. Even if one asks:

- (10) Jaka była intencja tego przemówienia / maila 'What was the intention of that speech / mail'?

The question is only an elliptic or indirect form of another question in which one asks about the intention of the speaker:

- (11) Jaka była intencja autora tego przemówienia / maila 'What was the intention of the author of that speech / mail'?

⁸ Here are some examples: "Przechodzimy do omówienia podstawowych funkcji wypowiedzi, a więc niejako rejestru celów (intencji) którym służą wypowiedzi" ('Now we are going to discuss the basic functions of an utterance, so to speak aims (intentions) whom the utterances serve'; Grzegorzczkova 1991:21); "Typy funkcji (intencji) wypowiedzi" ('Types of functions (intentions) of utterances'; Grzegorzczkova 1991:23).

These are functions not intentions that may be ascribed to an utterance. Intentions are entitled only to a speaker. However, both communicative functions and communicative intentions cannot occur beyond a specific context of situation. Moreover, the knowledge that a sentence should be treated as an authentic utterance, i.e. it was written or uttered by someone, is not enough to determine the function of the utterance or the intention of the speaker. For example, having a sentence written on a piece of paper or taped as a recording and having no clues on the situation in which it was produced, we have not enough information to claim on its function or speaker's intentions. To determine functions or intentions we must know the precise context in which such a sentence was uttered. We cannot talk on communicative intentions or communicative functions beyond a specific situation of the use of language (at least a hypothetical situation as it takes place in building a hypothetical situation in different kinds of models or giving examples of possible language usage). One may oppose saying that sentences have their functions even in a null context (cf. Katz's claim on the meaning in a null context)⁹. However, saying that a sentence *John has measles* fulfils for instance an informative function we only state what possible function can be fulfilled by that sentence. Such a sentence may occur in numerous situations and it may have many different functions. As long as such a sentence is not a real utterance but a sentence *in abstracto*, it has no real communicative function. Moreover, it is not uttered by any speaker so no one can speak about any intentions¹⁰ if he does not know to whose intentions he should refer.

3. Illocutionary force describes what one wants to achieve by means of uttering specific words. It is a performance of an act *in* saying something (Austin 1962). Thus illocutionary force is closely related to speaker's intentions. Yet one must differentiate between illocutionary force and illocutionary act. Speaking with a certain illocutionary force is not equal realizing a certain illocutionary act¹¹, the latter should be accompanied by a certain effect to be successful (Avramides 2003:67). Nevertheless, as it was already mentioned in relation to communicative functions, illocutionary force concerns a speech act, not a speaker (intention, the opposite). By and large, one may state that illocutionary force of a speech act corresponds to the speaker's intention.

The speaker uttering certain words intends to achieve a certain effect by saying them. However, a perlocutionary effect may be in accordance or at variance with the speaker's intention. The consequences of a speech act may be unintentional (Austin 1962:105f.). One can speak in such a situation about a side effect. Generally, intentions may differ from perlocutionary effects in two ways: either one does not achieve an intended effect

⁹ Katz writes: "sentence meaning is the information that determines use in the null context" (Katz 1977:21) and "what an ideal speaker would know about a sentence when no information is available about its context" (ibid. 14).

¹⁰ It has also no speaker's meaning, which is dependent on speaker's intention (cf. Gricean distinction into *linguistic meaning* and *speaker's meaning* and earlier *natural meaning* and *non-natural meaning*; Grice 1957 and 1975). F. Recanati says: "As Grice emphasized, speaker's meaning is not a matter of rules but a matter of intentions: what someone means is what he or she overtly intends (or, as Grice says, 'M-intends') to get across through his or her utterance. Communication succeeds when the M-intentions of the speaker are recognized by the hearer. Part of the evidence used by the hearer in figuring out what the speaker means is provided by the literal content of the uttered sentence, to which the hearer has independent access via his knowledge of the language. In ideal cases of linguistic communication, the speaker means exactly what she says, and no more is required to understand the speech act than a correct understanding of the sentence uttered in performing it. In real life, however, what the speaker means typically goes beyond, or otherwise diverges from, what the uttered sentence literally says. In such cases the hearer must rely on background knowledge to determine what the speaker means – what her communicative intentions are." (Recanati 2004:8).

¹¹ Illocutionary acts were treated by Austin as conventional ones (Austin 1962). Strawson, however, makes a distinction dividing them into communicative acts, where a successful expression of speaker's intention is important, and conventional acts where conventional rules are central (Strawson 1971).

(e.g. one wanted to amuse the audience but hearers did not find his joke funny), or the audience may ascribe such intentions to the speaker which were not intended (the case of overinterpretation of a message that subsequently triggers off an unintentional effect).

Normally, when we talk on function of an utterance, we ask for instance such a question:

(12) Jaką funkcję pełni ta wypowiedź ‘What function does this utterance fulfil’?

and we usually answer:

(13) Ta wypowiedź pełni funkcję fatyczną ‘This utterance has a phatic function’.

(14) Ta wypowiedź pełni funkcję zawiadomienia ‘This message fulfils an announcement function’¹².

In such cases we are inclined to interpret the notion *function* in terms of goals, i.e. what is the aim of a certain utterance, what was the intention of the speaker. If, for instance, someone says that his particular speech act is a threat, we would ascribe to such a speech act an illocutionary force of threat. Thus we say that an utterance:

(15) Odwiedzę cię jutro ‘I’ll visit you tomorrow’.

has an illocutionary force of a threat. One also says that in such a situation it fulfils a threat function. To sum up, in the given examples of use function corresponds with an illocutionary force or speaker’s intention. Yet, let us consider the following examples where we use verbs in different aspects (imperfective and perfective):

(16) Jaką funkcję pełniło przemówienie prezydenta ‘What function did the president’s speech fulfil / was fulfilling’?

(17) Jaką funkcję spełniło przemówienie prezydenta ‘What function has the president’s speech fulfilled’?

We categorise the first of the given utterances as the previous ones – here one also asks about the intention of the speaker. However, it is significant that the answers given to these two questions may be dissimilar. Responding to the second question one would rather describe the achieved effect, not the aim of the utterance. Hence, the perlocutionary effect, which is important here, may fail to meet speaker’s intentions (and thereby illocutionary force), as it happens when one wants to evoke interest of an audience but he evokes boredom. For that reason the subsequent statement is completely acceptable:

(18) Wypowiedź X-a spełniła funkcję y (np. zadziałała jako groźba), choć X tego nie zamierzył / nie miał takiej intencji ‘The X’s utterance has fulfilled a function y (e.g. worked as a threat), although X didn’t intend that’.

Consequently, the following statement is also acceptable:

(19) Wypowiedź X-a spełniła funkcję y, mimo że nie pełniła funkcji y ‘The X’s utterance has fulfilled a function y, although it was not fulfilling such a function’.

¹² The second use of the lexeme *funkcja* ‘function’ has not a terminological character – at least in linguistics such uses occur mainly when one speaks about different speech genres; then one treats the expression *wypowiedź pełni funkcję czegoś* ‘an utterance fulfils a function of something’ as more or less synonymous to *wypowiedź jest czymś* ‘an utterance is something’. Speaking about functions understood as linguistic terms, one says *wypowiedź pełni jakąś funkcję* ‘an utterance fulfils a certain function’.

Thus we can see that the term *communicative function* carries an ambiguity, which must be taken into consideration when one strives to describe a certain communicative situation or builds a general model of a communicative situation. One may examine the utterances from speaker's or from audience's perspectives. The ultimate sureness whether the alleged intention is true is beyond reach for the audience. On the other hand, the absolute control of the perlocutionary effect is beyond reach for the speaker. Studying the communicative situation from such a point of view, one may notice some kind of discontinuity in what seems to be continuous in many models of communication (such as Bühler's or Jakobson's), when they display the process of conveying messages.

In the present article only Bühler's and Jakobson's models of communication were taken into consideration. My aim was to point out the inconsistencies caused by equating communicative functions (taken from the most quoted models) with some terms taken from pragmatics. However, it could be interesting to study other models and other proposals of communicative functions distinctions. Moreover, neither a detailed analysis of intention (as it is made by Grice, Strawson or Searle), nor the relation between intention and convention were taken into account here. One can also ask a reasonable question how it happens that a specific audience is able to infer the speaker's intentions from indirect utterances (as it is in the theory of so-called mind-reading) but such an endeavour lies beyond the scope of the current article.

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Streszczenie

Badając różne przejawy *parole* (czy to w języku pisanym, czy mówionym) lingwista wielokrotnie stara się wskazać funkcje, jakie dana wypowiedź pełni. Językoznawcy proponują także nowe klasyfikacje funkcji wypowiedzi (względnie funkcji języka). W literaturze przedmiotu spotkać się też można z sytuacjami, gdzie funkcje wypowiedzi są jawnie lub implicytnie utożsamiane z pojęciem intencji czy z siłą illokucyjną. W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono kwestię relacji między tymi terminami. Wskazano, że pojęcie funkcji odnosi się do tekstu, natomiast pojęcie intencji do nadawcy. Ponadto zwrócono uwagę, że na funkcje wypowiedzi można patrzeć z dwóch perspektyw: nadawcy i odbiorcy komunikatu. Stąd niekiedy pojęcie funkcji językowej odnosi się do intencji nadawcy (illokucji), a niekiedy do efektu osiąganego przez daną wypowiedź (perlokucji).

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