

Gricean and Confucian Pragmatics: A Contrastive Analysis

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Abstract: A contrastive study confronting the influential paradigm of Gricean pragmatics with Confucius' rather less well-known doctrines on language and language usage may explicate the hidden assumptions in both, and suggest new lines of research. Grice's famous account of conversational implicature not only assumes speaker's intentions (that is, private mental states) as basic explanatory notions; it also appears to rely on strong assumptions about speaker's agency, and about communication as normally or essentially cooperative and power-free. In other words, Grice presumes both methodological individualism and what we may call a social contract view of communication.

The Confucian *Analects* share neither of these assumptions. They attach little importance to the inner, and even less to mental states as explanatory notions. They do not assume individual actors' agency to be given or primitive, and do not take language to be consensual or contractual in nature. Instead, the famous doctrine of the 'correction of names' (正名) displays an articulate awareness of both the performative dimensions of communication and the role of authority or power in it; in correcting names, the ruler constitutes the very social realities he is describing, and the social roles (and by extension, the very personalities or subjectivities) of the persons he is naming.

When contrasted with the Gricean framework, Confucian pragmatics allows for a more radical questioning of, among others, the role of speaker's intentions in explaining communication; the relation between literal and figurative usage; and strategies and aims of indirect language usage. The absence of any appeal to the law and to any universal or codified rules of correct language usage in Confucius also opens up new dimensions for the discussion of linguistic normativity. Finally, a contrastive study raises questions about the variable interrelationship between folk theories or language ideologies and linguistic practices.

1. Introduction

In contemporary linguistics, there is an initially plausible, and relatively persistent, division of labor between semantics as dealing with structural features of language, and more precisely with the conventional, literal meaning of sentences, and pragmatics as dealing with the intention-governed use that speakers make of language, and hence with indirect and non-literal forms of meaning expressed in utterances, that is, sentences uttered on particular occasions and with specific aims in mind.

One persuasive, and still extremely influential, statement of this division of labor, and of the relation between the meaning and the use of sentences, is H. P. Grice's theory of conversational implicature, which has commanded the attention of both linguists and philosophers ever since it was first publicly presented in 1967. It has not only inspired major present-day theoretical and cognitively oriented perspectives, such as Relevance Theory and the neo-Gricean framework; it has also informed more empirically and socially inclined work, such as, most famously, Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness.

Yet, Gricean and Gricean-inspired forms of pragmatics rest on a number of strong cognitive assumptions about human agency as conscious, autonomous, and rational; and a number of equally strong social assumptions about linguistic behavior as a normally cooperative activity. Once made explicit, however, these turn out to be not only debatable but actually rather implausible. There are two major ways of teasing out such hidden or implicit views: on the one hand, by theoretical or conceptual analysis and argument; and on the other, by more empirical, and especially contrastive, study.

The theoretical line of argument is that in the social sciences, the long-standing opposition between structural and conventional or agency-based or intentional aspects of social action has been rendered problematic, if not obsolete, by the emergence of so-called practice approaches that take linguistic and other practices as prior to both structure and agency. In the language sciences, by extension, there appears room for a similar ‘practice turn’ (cf. Leezenberg 2005). The contrastive line of argument is that a closer look at other traditions, such as those of pre-Han China, may bring out widely shared present-day assumptions, and suggest how contingent and indeed problematic they are. One should proceed here with some caution, however. This kind of contrastive analysis involves not merely the search for empirical counterexamples; it does not just boil down to the claim that, in some pre-modern and/or non-Western tradition, things do not work the way some theory predicts; such kinds of argument have been raised against Grice’s framework long ago. Rather, a contrastive analysis may explicate possibly problematic conceptualizations of language and its users, and make room for criticisms and alternatives. Put differently, contrastive analysis may help to uncover folk theories, language ideologies, or cognitive models, which may inform not only linguistic theorizing, but also linguistic practices themselves.

Further, I would like to distance myself from oft-heard sweeping characterizations of Chinese thought (or, even more broadly, ‘Chinese culture’ or ‘Confucian civilization’) as correlational rather than causal, as communitarian rather than individualist in its emphasis of loyalty towards the family and other institutions, and as oriented towards harmony and face saving rather than individual self-assertion; the main thrust of such characterizations is, of course, the alleged predominance in Chinese and other oriental languages of indirect, polite language as opposed to more direct forms of communication. There are reasons to be reticent here. First, in various Western traditions, communitarian or group-oriented, consensus-oriented and face-or honor-based ideas and ideals may be just as strongly present as in Eastern ones; second, sweeping cultural or civilizational generalizations risk overlooking the fact that in all traditions, major and radical local and especially historical variations may occur; third, such generalizations are no substitute for exploring how allegedly shared principles are articulated, reproduced, and operationalized in concrete circumstances. Thus, the Confucian tradition not only has a rich and complex history that spans some 2,500 years, an entire subcontinent; it also knows a large number of innovative thinkers who disagree with each other on various central points. In any case, the argument about Confucius presented below should not be read as implying any such generalizations about ‘Chinese culture’ or ‘Confucian civilization.’ Things are already quite different for other pre-Han thinkers, even those of Confucianist affinities like Mencius and Xunzi; the differences with ancient Daoist and Buddhist thinkers are even greater. ^①

^① As another disclaimer, I would like to note that I am not a sinologist or a specialist in early Chinese thought by training. Hence, I would not have ventured into this foreign territory if it were not for the inherent interest I think it has for contemporary linguistic theorizing.

2. Gricean Pragmatics

Grice's most famous contribution to pragmatics is undoubtedly his account of conversational implicature. While this is probably familiar to most readers, some of its salient features may be recaptured here in brief. In his 1967 William James lectures, Grice presents a sophisticated account of the relation between linguistic meaning and language usage. In the first lecture, he criticizes attempts at reducing the one to the other in either direction, arguing for the need to keep questions of linguistic meaning clearly distinct from questions of language usage. Thus, he implicitly criticizes the claim of Austin's Speech Act Theory that the semantic notions of truth and falsity are just one variety of more general notions of appropriateness or felicity. Against this conflation of meaning and use, Grice argues for the special status of the notion of truth, and by extension, of truth-conditional semantics (1989:4). And this is indeed the starting point of his second lecture, 'Logic and Conversation,' undoubtedly Grice's most famous text. It opens with a rejection of the general strategy of accounting for apparently semantic complexities and ambiguities by enriching one's semantic representation language; rather, Grice argues, one should stick to the relatively sober extensional truth-conditional semantics expressed in classical first order logic, and account for apparent deviations from this logic in terms of a small number of general principles of language usage, which are captured in his famous 'maxims of conversation'; these in turn are but specific instantiations of an overarching *Cooperative Principle*, which states that conversation participants should make their contribution as informative as is required at that particular stage of the interaction. Next, Grice introduces the famous notion of an implicature: if a speaker visibly, and indeed blatantly, violates one of the maxims without opting out of the Cooperative Principle altogether, he must be intentionally communicating something else; in other words, he is *exploiting* the maxims, and communicating what Grice calls a *conversational implicature*. Such implicatures are not part of the semantic content of, or otherwise conventionally associated with, an expression; rather, Grice argues, they arise – and are reconstructed by the hearer – as a function of the speaker's intentions.^②

There is a vast literature on Grice's characterization of implicatures; but here, I would like to focus on his underlying assumptions about human agency and intentionality. First, he appears to take intentions (which are private, or if you like 'subjective,' mental entities) as basic explanatory notions; second, he characterizes conversation as a specific case of rational purposive behavior, i. e., cooperative linguistic action as the most rational way of securing one's own goals (1989:28). Whether by accident or design, both features are strongly reminiscent of the sociologist Max Weber's views on social action; Weber, too, took 'subjective meaning' (*subjektiver Sinn*) as a basic concept, and virtually defined social action as 'goal-rational' (*zwecksrational*). More generally, Grice presupposes a strongly universalist (dare I say Kantian?) conception of rationality: given a specific situation, there seems to be just one optimally ration-

^② In Grice's own view, conversational implicatures are not, as is often thought, calculated on the basis on an initially established conventional semantic content found to be wanting; but this is how it has been read by, among others, many scholars working in formal semantic frameworks. Grice himself held that sentence meaning is logically posterior to speaker's meaning, rather than the other way around. This is in line with his attempt in 'Meaning' (1957; reprinted in Grice 1989:213-223), to do away with the conceptual need for conventional meanings altogether; for him, 'non-natural' meaning is *exclusively* a matter of speaker's intentions, and of hearer's recognizing those intentions.

al course of action, which is the same for all humans.

Let us look at these two components one by one. First, the primacy of intentions is, in this lecture at least, not necessarily a psychological or ontological claim; it can be taken as a purely methodological choice. In that case, intentions function as theoretical entities which, although not themselves observable, capture and explain what is in fact observed. Grice himself emphasizes that his use of psychological concepts and intensional notions like intending and believing is no more than a methodological strategy; he explicitly allows for the possibility that they may be reduced to purely extensional terms, or to a vocabulary of (public) language and language usage, although he expresses skepticism about both possibilities (1989: 157). In practice, however, Gricean mechanisms of inference have often been taken as psychologically real (most famously, by the adherents of Relevance Theory).

Now the intriguing fact is that this line of argument, which seeks to explain observable forms of human action in terms of non-observable mental notions, has been severely criticized in both the philosophy of language and in the social sciences; but in empirical linguistics, it has not only gone largely unchallenged but today appears stronger than ever, especially because of its promises of linking linguistics with the cognitive sciences. Surprisingly little attention has been given to the forceful Wittgensteinian line of argument that mental states (typically conceived of in purely causal cognitive or physiological terms) cannot explain our public and normative practices of using a language or following a rule. Rather, Wittgenstein suggests, the order of explanation should be reversed (1953). Likewise, in the social sciences, a concern with public practices has increasingly replaced the Weberian reliance on ‘subjective meanings’, and a concern with sub-or semi-conscious routines has undermined the reliance on conscious rational calculation.^③ Such developments, however, have gone virtually unnoticed in currently influential branches of theoretical linguistics, such as Chomskyan-style generative grammar, Sperber & Wilson’s Relevance Theory (1986), and the brand of Cognitive Linguistics initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980); all of these seek to explain overt linguistic phenomena in terms of inner mental or cognitive structures and mappings.

Here, though, it is not the unobservable or private character of these mentalist notions that concerns me; rather, it is the widely, indeed virtually universally, assumed notion of human agency or subjectivity. In social science literature, this position is often, but inadequately, referred to as ‘methodological individualism:’ it involves not only the truism that individuals are the basic building blocks of society, but more importantly the belief that individual speaker’s intentions are ultimate explanatory notion. Below, it will appear that this view of human agency as grounded in intentions is not as self-evident as it might seem. Like many others, Grice assumes that language users are fully autonomous, conscious, and rationally calculating adults. Even if it is acknowledged that this picture is complicated by, for example, the complexities of language acquisition, such developmental and other factors are held to be largely irrelevant for the characteristics of mature language users. The consequences of such abstractions have rarely been explored, however.

The same holds for the assumption of conscious rationality. For example, Brown & Levinson (1987: 84-85) note that politeness strategies are not necessarily pursued consciously, but admit that they simply skirt the enormous methodological problems raised by the notion of unconscious strategies. They

^③ Cf. Bourdieu (1991, 1998) for an influential statement of such a perspective.

also acknowledge that this is a far more general problem for the theory of action. Likewise, Searle (1969:17) argues that ultimately, a theory of language is part of a more general theory of action, because he sees both language usage and social action as forms of rule-governed behavior; but such statements have rarely been followed up by more systematic attention for contemporary social-scientific theories of action, especially the turn towards practices as prior to both structures and intentions (cf. Bourdieu 1991). Searle's own attempt to extend the speech act theory framework to the foundations of social science only in part completes the shift from conscious or subconscious rule following towards a more strictly practice-oriented view (Searle 1995; esp. ch. 6).

The second point concerns the question of rational and cooperative linguistic behavior. As said, Grice appears to assume not only that (conscious) intentions are methodologically basic, but also that conversation partners are, on the whole, free and equal. In so far as power relations appear in his writings at all, they tend to do so under the guise of different forms of censorship. Moreover, he assumes that social interaction normally is, or should be, harmonious and cooperative. That is, for Grice – and indeed for many another analytical philosopher – the prototype of linguistic communication is polite teatime conversation, in which small bits of inconsequential information are exchanged.^④ In such a situation, speakers are generally free to say what they want, and constraints on what is said are societal rather than legal or political in nature; they involve concerns of politeness, respect, and face, rather than a fear of prosecution or other sanctions.

Influential frameworks for investigating linguistic politeness (Leech 1977, Brown & Levinson 1987), inherit such assumptions about agency, rationality, and social action.^⑤ Thus, Brown & Levinson define power in explicitly Weberian terms as the degree to which one partner in an interaction can impose his own plans and face at the expense of those of another (1987:77). This definition, to be sure, allows for power to be either legitimate or contested; but like Weber and Grice, Brown & Levinson tacitly assume human agency as given, witness their employment of terms like 'plans' and 'face' or self-evaluation; more importantly, they conceptualize power as essentially negative, and as restricting or constraining other actors' plans and face. Below, it will appear that Confucius sees power not as repressive but as productive, especially of well-educated and fully human actors; this view implies a rather different view of human agency.

Such approaches appear to treat language as a social contract, that is, a tacit agreement to behave cooperatively and peacefully for the greater benefit of individuals and the community at large; on such an assumption, rational linguistic behavior is simply defined as polite and cooperative. In political philosophy, the notion of a social contract was elaborated by European Enlightenment thinkers like Hobbes, Rousseau, and Kant, as a way of accounting for, or justifying, liberal-constitutional forms of government. According to Kant, such a social contract is not a historical reality as the origin of existing political practices, but a conceptual necessity in accounting for their legitimacy. An analogous assumption, or picture, of a shared language as a set of laws or a constitution to which all adhere for the sake of both individual goals and mutual understanding, is demonstrably present in the writings of many twentieth-century Western

^④ This somewhat provocative characterization was first given by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2, p. 634 (Paris: Gallimard 1994)).

^⑤ Cf. Leech 2005 for a convenient overview of both approaches.

theorists on language (cf. Leezenberg 2002). I think it is no accident in this connection that Grice regularly employs a vocabulary that is strongly reminiscent of the rationalist Enlightenment thinker Kant, for example when he characterizes the maxims in an explicitly Kantian vein as those of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner (1989:26).^⑥ Intriguingly, in discussing the question of why language users not only in fact adhere to the Cooperative Principle and its attendant maxims but also expect others to do so, Grice briefly mentions – and rejects – the idea that cooperative linguistic behavior occurs on a quasi-contractual basis (1989:29 – 30). His reasons for doing so are not entirely clear, and largely turn around an argument that there are forms of communication like quarrelling that do not fit the idea of a contract. The problem with this point is, of course that in his own subsequent discussion, with its presumption of the Cooperative Principle, such forms of non-cooperative conversation are precisely excluded as abnormal. I suspect, however, that Grice’s hesitation regarding contracts is expressive of his more general argument against communication as based on conventions or agreements of any kind, witness his famous analysis of ‘non-natural meaning’ (1957).

Be that as it may, Grice does share a number of assumptions regarding legitimacy, free human agency and normally peaceful and cooperative social action with social contract theorists more broadly conceived. The central point here is that a social contract or a ‘first convention,’ as Rousseau calls it, presupposes free and equal contract partners who have to make a prior decision to enter into such an agreement. On this account, even a first convention is posterior to a prior intention.^⑦ This becomes clearer from the discussion that Brown & Levinson (1987:84 – 87) devote to these matters. The Gricean maxims, they argue, are not language-specific norms, rules, or conventions, but universal principles of rational communicative action. Rational language users, to speak in Kantian terms once again, adhere to a universal law of reason rather than to the rules, norms, or conventions of a specific language. In short, Gricean pragmatics shares a number of non-trivial assumptions about individual autonomy and agency, cooperativeness and rationality with the liberal-contractarian tradition in European political philosophy.

3. Confucius on Conventions and Intentions

Confucius could hardly be further removed from this – ultimately Kantian – position: he shares none of Grice’s assumptions. In modern Western philosophical circles, he is largely but wrongly known as a moralizing sage rather than a systematic or analytical thinker. Indeed it is tempting, but quite mistaken, to see the *Analects*, the most important collection of his sayings, a series of loose and relatively trivial injunctions to behave virtuously, to show respect towards one’s parents, and so on. If this were really the case, Confucius would hardly merit his position as perhaps the most authoritative thinker in the entire Chinese tradition.

Much of this depreciative misunderstanding concerns the central notion of *de* (德). Starting with the

^⑥ In *Aspects of Reason* (2001), Grice analyses human reason not so much as a specific mental faculty, but rather in terms of the practice of reasoning, which is based on essentially normative rules or principles of correct inference; but he draws no more radical, practice-oriented consequences from this.

^⑦ Incidentally, Lewis (1969), whose ideas on the relation between convention and intentions are almost diametrically opposed to Grice’s, likewise rejects the notion of a social contract in the more specific and technical sense of a particular kind of convention, while demonstrably clinging to more generically contractual assumptions of voluntarily engaging in cooperative social action.

famous translator James Legge (1893) if not earlier, this term has been identified with the Christian-inspired moral and religious concept of virtue; in combination with references to ‘heaven’ (天), this identification has enabled readers like Legge to depict Confucianism as an essentially religious moral doctrine close to Christianity. In fact, however, Confucius rarely if ever justifies his moral teachings in the religious or cosmological terms of either divine ordainment or human nature. He expresses no generic belief that fate, or the ‘mandate of heaven’ (天命), predetermines the course of human action. Generally, he appears to consider such broadly religious or metaphysical considerations simply irrelevant for the conduct of human life.

Likewise, he does not ground his moral doctrines in any innate or species-specific notion of human nature; he displays no greater interest in psychology than in metaphysics.^⑧ It is not until the later Confucianist Mencius (371 – 289 BCE) that we find a first attempt to ground ethical doctrines in human nature (性). In other words, the world with which Confucius is concerned is the pre-eminently human sphere of practical everyday action; it is not expressed in terms of human laws or the laws of nature, and does not seem to be reducible to either. Neither do Confucius’s doctrines rely on the assumption of man as either an autonomous, rational foundation of knowledge, or as an ultimately free and self-sufficient being wholly responsible for his actions. Put differently: mentalistic or psychological terms of intentions, beliefs, and the like play no important explanatory role in his accounts of social and linguistic action.^⑨

These divergences become apparent when one traces how Confucius actually uses the famous concepts of *dao* (道) and *de* (德). He sees the Way (道) as the proper course of action that people should follow with respect to themselves and others, and *de* as the ability to act in accordance with this Way. Usually, the latter term is translated with ‘virtue;’ but such a rendering carries rather misleading moralistic, and specifically Christian, overtones of a religiously sanctioned morality, which is precisely what Confucius does not propagate. The concept of *de* has no specifically religious value; but it does have an unmistakably political dimension, as Confucius systematically links it with the practice of governing a state. The ruler or administrator who possesses *de* and who follows the Way, he argues, can rule successfully by selectively imitating the rites *li* (礼), norms, and traditions of past times (*Analects* 2.11). He does not, however, preach a return to the practices and institutions of the Zhou era (eleventh century-722 BCE), let alone to some mythological Golden Age, but rather a judicious selection of those rituals and governmental practices of ancient dynasties that have proven their value for the art of governing.

According to the *Analects*, then, the *li* or rites are essential to effective government. These do not merely consist in religious rituals of sacrifice, worship and oracle consultation, but more generally involve the customs and conventions that should structure the whole of human social life. On this point, following the Way is very nearly identical to adhering to the rites. Governing, Confucius emphasizes, is easy if done with the aid of the rites (*li*) (3.11); that is, he identifies an effortless practice of government, which functions through the proper performance of ritual practice rather than the codification and application of laws.

⑧ There are only a few locations in the *Analects* in which Confucius speaks about human nature (*xing*); moreover, these are widely believed to be later interpolations. Cf. also Graham 1986.

⑨ Fingarette (1972) was the first to argue for this point in detail.

In other words, the *Analects* do not rely on any idea of laws as collections of codified norms. It was in fact Confucius' contemporary Zizhan, a reforming government official in the nearby state of Zhang, who was the first to establish a codified corpus of laws. Although Confucius speaks respectfully of Zizhan (5.15; 14.9 – 10), he himself clearly does not assume a concept of law, let alone codified law, as the basis for his moral doctrines. For him, populations are ruled, and are to be ruled, by rites rather than laws.^⑩ He even suggests that government through rites ideally *replaces* the rule of law: if the people follow the ruler and abide by the rites, he claims, the very need for laws or court settlements will not even arise (12.13). Apparently, Confucius holds that once the people have acquired the rites, they will unthinkingly act in accordance with them, thus doing away with the need for the continuous active intervention of the ruler or the continuous application of laws and punishments. This is what makes government by rites easy and effortless.

The *acquisition* of the rites, by contrast, is a lengthy educational process: the Way (*dao*) is transmitted, and virtue (*de*) is instilled, through education that comprises the study of the rites, music, history, and classical poetry. According to Confucius, education, or more precisely the love of learning, is essential for moral self-cultivation *wen* (文) and for the achievement of *ren* (仁), the specifically human virtues (cf. Ivanhoe 2000: ch. 1). Education, he says, is a crucial prerequisite for the nobleman, -specifically a government official. The nobleman's virtue (德) that is acquired in education does not consist of just knowledge or cultivation, but also includes the ability to act in accordance with the Way. Regarding himself, Confucius observes: "in cultivation, I may be equal to others; but I have not yet reached the level of the nobleman, whose acts are in agreement with his words" (7.32). In short, the true nobleman is not just knowledgeable, but also acts in accordance with his knowledge; he does not just study ancient words, but also make sure that his own words are in harmony with his actions. This is of special importance in matters of government (13.5).

De (德) as a capacity for effortless government should not be thought of in terms of magical or supernatural powers (cf. Fingarette 1982:342), but rather as a form of linguistic and conceptual authority: as transmitted through education, it shapes or determines what is commonsensical for others to say and do. Unlike modern European educational ideals, however, the Confucian concepts of *wen* (文) and *de* are not crucially based on conceptual distinctions like those between man as a cultural being and the domain of nature; between mind or spirit (*Geist*) and matter; or between the ethical and aesthetic domains of values and freedom and the scientific domain of value-neutral facts and laws of nature; or on the assumption that man as a transcendental knowing subject has a status fundamentally different from the objects of empirical knowledge. In short, the whole complex of post-Kantian dichotomies between the subjective and the objective, between the human mind and the natural world, nature and culture, or facts and norms or values, so characteristic for modern Western philosophy, is absent in Confucius. There is little or nothing in the *Analects* to suggest that Confucius attaches any epistemological or moral importance to such oppositions, which for us seem self-evident if not inevitable.

^⑩ Pocock (1971:44) characterizes the distinction between rite and law as one between nonverbal practice as opposed to verbal commands; but he thus seems to underestimate the verbal dimension of the rite, and especially the ritual role of language itself. As a result, he attributes to Confucius an overly strong antipathy to words (p. 48).

In a famous but controversial study, Herbert Fingarette (1972) has even argued that Confucius has no notion of any inner psychic life at all; if this argument holds, notions like *li* and *ren* (仁) would not apply to inner mental states at all, but rather to public conduct. Fingarette persuasively argues that early translators like, most famously, James Legge (who also engaged in missionary activity) tended to read and render Confucius's writings not only in mentalistic terms, but also as a precursor to a Christian moralizing ethics. Such later European background assumptions, in particular an emphasis on the individual and the inner, inform what Fingarette calls a misleadingly subjective-psychologist reading of Confucius. Instead, he argues, Confucius develops a moral theory that needs no recourse to the inner or to desires or intentions in explaining and justifying actions.

This point, though of a primarily ethical thrust, also constitutes an interesting challenge to intention- and cognition – based approaches in pragmatics like the Gricean framework. These and other frameworks explain overt linguistic behavior in terms of inner states or episodes. Famously, J. L. Austin in *How To Do Things With Words* (1975 [1962]) and Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) have suggested that this order of explanation should be reversed; if Fingarette is right, Confucius is an equally radical thinker in this respect. The *Analects* make no appeal to such dichotomies between the inner and the outer as crucial for the understanding of linguistic and other action. The implications of such a view for cognition- and intention-based forms of linguistics are yet to be assessed. Be that as it may, it is uncontroversial that practical- and more specifically political-action, rather than psychological or metaphysical speculation, forms the main topic of concern in the *Analects*.

It next remains to be established precisely what conception of power or authority is involved here. The most remarkable feature of Confucius' view of government is that, unlike modern Western authors, he sees power as not essentially connected with coercion or sanctions. He does not treat government as primarily consisting in promulgating laws or in meting out punishments, but rather in correcting or rectifying (正): “to govern is to rectify” (12.17). This rectification consists in instilling proper conduct or, to put it more anachronistically, proper consciousness. In ancient China, a thoroughly civilian-administrative view of government was predominant; the general belief was that, although it may be possible to gain control over a state by violence or military force, one can only maintain an enduring rule by civilian bureaucracy and administration. The rectification involved in this process of civilian-administrative government should not merely instill the proper conduct in both rulers and subjects; it should also lead to the correct rites and music (9.14).^⑩ Education or instruction, too, is a matter of rectification (1.14), and in this respect it is likewise a form of governing or exercising power. He who has rectified himself, and hence possesses *de* and *ren*, Confucius says, may govern without having to give commands (13.6). Hence, for Confucius, governing or ruling is not a matter of threatening with sanctions, i. e., of force or coercion; rather, it involves constraining, delimiting or indeed *defining* the actions of one's subjects: “to govern is to rectify: if one gives the example in correcting, who dares not to be rectified?” (12.17). At first blush, this may seem to amount to governing by example (cf. Legge 1893:258); but Confucius adds that “the ruler's *de* is like the wind, the common man's *de* is like grass: when the wind blows across it, the grass must bend”

^⑩ Pace Hall & Ames 1987, this emphasis on music reflects less a sense of aesthetic harmony than (much as in Plato's *Republic*) a sense of practical politics.

(12.19). Here, he explicitly contrasts the ruler's *de* with that of his subjects: successful government involves not the imitation of the ruler but the tacit recognition of his power as legitimate, if not self-evident. That is, people do not even consciously obey the rulers, as their very thoughts, desires and intentions are shaped in and through government.

The implications for the second language ideology assumed by Grice should be obvious: Confucius appears to have no notion of a social contract in his doctrines on either social life or language usage. First, he has no sense of free and autonomous individuals as voluntarily entering into a contractual relationship; or put differently, he does not treat social power as resting on the consent or consensus of such actors. As said, he takes actions and intentions as themselves shaped by education and rectification, that is, by forms of power. Second, given the absence of any strict nature-culture or nature-society opposition, there is no clear distinction either between a conflictuous state of nature and a state of law and civil society as based on the end of conflict. Finally, Confucius expresses no sense of civil society or peaceful social life as founded on laws or constitutions at all, given his general idea that governing is a matter of rites rather than laws. These considerations are as important in reconstructing a Confucian account of language as in getting a more solid grasp on his views on government. In short, Confucius's doctrines of social life and action do not take either intentions or conventions as basic; he explicitly takes both as resulting from – or posterior to – instruction and rectification. Both methodological individualism and a social contract view, that is, are alien to Confucius.

4. Confucian Semantics: 'Political Correctness'

Given these more general dimensions of Confucius's views on social life, it becomes possible to get a better understanding of his views on language. To begin with, Confucius hardly appears to think of language as a structure or a system of rules; he speaks not of 'language' or 'languages,' but rather of 'words' (言), 'names' (名), and 'speaking' (zi 字). By extension, he expresses no elaborate sense of the classical Chinese language (文言) as distinct from other languages, or from various local Chinese dialects.

In the second place, the *Analects* display little sense of linguistic expressions as involving concepts, expressing meanings, or referring to objects. Confucius lacks the mentalist or psychological vocabulary that attaches importance to the inner; neither does he have anything like a semantic vocabulary of meaning, understanding, and interpreting. The closest he appears to come is *Analects* 15.40, which Legge (1897: 305) somewhat tendentiously translates as "The master said: 'In language it is simply required that it convey the meaning'." Problematic about this translation is, first, the suggestion that Confucius refers to 'language' as an abstract entity, structure, or set of rules, whereas the character employed (zi) is more adequately rendered as 'speaking;' and secondly, its use of the expression 'meaning', which is simply absent in the original Chinese text, which merely features *da* (达), 'to reach', or 'to achieve one's purpose.' A more precise approximation of this phrase would be that speaking is simply a matter of getting the point across, of reaching a conversational aim, or of being in some broad sense understood. It is equally difficult to find semantic doctrine of words as referring to things in the *Analects*: the names (名) Confucius talks about do not simply refer to objects antecedently or independently given, but in a real sense constitute and regulate the very realities they name. When he talks about names, he does not typi-

cally speak of proper names, natural kind terms or words for physical objects, such as *The Morning Star*, *snow* or *chair*, as in many a European and American analytical philosopher. Rather, he discusses terms for social roles, like *father*, *son*, and *ruler*. Moreover, the descriptive or referential role of such expressions is not strictly distinguished from their normative and regulative force. I will return to this point below.

Finally, it has been claimed by several authors (cf., e. g., Hansen 1985; Defoort 2001) that ancient Chinese has no semantic concept of truth, as anything like a correspondence between a sentence or utterance and a fact. This matches the oft-made observation that unlike the classical Greek philosophers, pre-Han Chinese thinkers were not primarily concerned with metaphysical or epistemological questions of Truth, but rather with social-and political-philosophical questions of the Way.^⑫ In Hansen's view, the most likely candidates for a truth concept, like *shi* (实), *zhen* (真), and *ke* (可), are standards for pragmatic appropriateness rather than for semantic fit, correspondence, or factual correctness. Hence, by extension, one might argue that something like the truth-conditional forms of semantics assumed by Grice would be largely alien to ancient Confucianists.^⑬ Hansen (1985) argues that not only Confucius but the entire early Chinese philosophical tradition, up to and including the later Mohist Canons, lacks semantic concepts like those of truth as correspondence to facts, or reference to objects; rather, the focus is on pragmatic notions of social appropriateness. In so far as I am competent to judge on these matters, I am by and large in agreement with his analyses; but I think one could go even further, and emphasize that the form of correctness that informs Confucius's views on language usage is not only pragmatic, but – for want of a more appropriate expression – downright political.

On the basis of such and similar considerations, the French sinologist François Jullien (2000: ch. 10) has even argued, more controversially, that Confucius does not see names as symbols at all. Ancient Chinese texts, he argues, contain no general theory of the sign or symbol, or no semiotics, as they lack the vocabulary opposing subject to object, inner to outer, and mental to physical, that he sees as indispensable for such a theory. But these are deep epistemological and metaphysical waters into which I shall not venture on this occasion (cf. Ames 1991). For our present purposes, though, the conclusion is as simple as it is radical: there is no Confucian semantics, there is only a Confucian pragmatics.

5. Confucian Pragmatics: The Correction of Names'

Given this absence of a theory of meaning, let us look at what Confucius has to say about language usage and users. First, in the *Analects*, considerations of face and politeness are remarkable for their relative lack of emphasis; this is the more surprising as oriental forms of politeness and communitarian group orientation are so often referred to as Confucian in origin. For Confucius, the prototypical form of communication seems to be not the polite conversation or exchange of information between free and equal part-

^⑫ This difference should not be construed as one between theoretical and practical concerns, as even the most abstract metaphysical speculations have practical implications and imply a complex 'politics of knowledge' (witness Plato); the point is rather that ancient Greek and Chinese traditions proceed from rather different preconceptions as to what constitutes knowledge in the first place.

^⑬ If correct, the idea that ancient Chinese lacks a concept of truth would be an interesting challenge to Donald Davidson's contention that a concept of objective truth is not only a convenient metalinguistic tool in a theory of interpretation, but even an essential component of any communication and even thought (Davidson 2001: xvii, 209); but a discussion of this complex matter would take us too far afield here.

ners, but rather the asymmetric instruction between a master and a pupil. More interesting than tracing the implications of this lack of emphasis for politeness theory, however, would be to look what strategies of indirectness are used, and why. Thus, Jullien (2000) contrasts different strategies of indirectness and figurative meaning in ancient China with those in ancient Greece. The Chinese tradition, he argues, has no sense of an inner or spiritual meaning, and hence no notion of the symbolic or the allegorical. By extension, he argues, linguistic and especially literary meaning is allusive, rather than allegorical or abstract. This view, if correct, would imply that ancient Chinese words do not so much represent things as obliquely indicate them. It would also suggest that we may look at phenomena like metaphor anew in the light of an awareness of how distinct ancient Chinese linguistic practices may be.

But more intriguing still is what Confucius has to say about the role of language and language use in matters of government. Here, he gives an interesting linguistic turn, so to speak, to his view of ruling by the rites. On his view, the very first task of the administrator is not the correction of either the ruler or his subjects, nor attention to the proper practice of rituals, but rather the 'correction of names' (正名), as appears from a famous passage in the *Analects*:

子路曰：“卫君待子而为政，子将奚先？”子曰：“必也正名乎！”子路曰：“有是哉，子之迂也！奚其正？”子曰：“野哉由也！君子于其所不知，盖阙如也。名不正则言不顺，言不顺则事不成，事不成则礼乐不兴，礼乐不兴则刑罚不中，刑罚不中则民无所措手足。故君子名之必可言也，言之必可行也。君子于其言，无所苟而已矣。”
(《论语·子路第十三》)

Zilu said: "If the king of Wei were to entrust you with the administration of government, what would be the first thing you would do?"

The master said: "What is necessary is the correction of names (正名)."

Zilu said: "You are wide of the mark! Why must there be such a correction?"

The master said: "You, what a barbarian you are! A superior man shows caution towards what he does not know. If names are not correct, language is not used effectively; if language is not used effectively, affairs cannot be carried on to success. When affairs are not carried on to success, rites and music will not flourish; when rites and music do not flourish, laws and punishments will not be properly carried out; when laws and punishments are not properly carried out, the people do not know how to move hand and foot. Therefore, the superior man ensures that the names he uses may be uttered, and that what he says may be performed. What the superior man requires is just that in his words there may be nothing incorrect."

(*Analects*, 13.3)

Wing-tsit Chan (1963:40–41) was among the first to point out the central importance of this idea for Confucius's doctrines, and, by extension, for Chinese thought in general. As said, it should not be interpreted as expressing a primitive and magical worldview or a confusion of the sphere of human action and speech with the non-human or even inanimate sphere of nature: the names Confucius wishes to correct do not in the first instance denote natural phenomena, but primarily indicate social rank, like father, king, or minister. That is, they do not refer to pre-existing or antecedently given objects but are partly constitutive of social roles. In naming, categorizing or classifying people by distinct names or titles, one also makes social distinctions; and making the proper distinctions by rectifying names (that is, by ensuring

that persons are not incorrectly named), is also a way of creating and maintaining social order. As appears from the quote, correct naming also precedes the successful performance of rites and the promulgation of laws and punishments; that is, the practice of naming is conceptually prior to established norms and conventions in a broader sense. Naming also has a formative influence on human intentions; by rectifying people, one poses limits to what they can wish; by rectifying names, one imposes boundaries on what they can do.

The possession of a name or title, for example that of ‘king’ or ‘father’, implies that the bearer will, or should, act in accordance with that name. The assumption here is that when people are correctly named, they will also behave correctly, that is, in agreement with their title. It is no coincidence that Confucius repeatedly objects against individuals who arrogate royal titles, and against sons who take over their fathers’ roles and thus no longer behave like sons. Thus, in the Zuo commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, we find the story of an army commander, who in reward for his bravery was offered a city, but refused, asking if instead he could get some of the insignia and emblems of a prince. The request was granted, to the dismay of Confucius, who is described as reacting as follows:

仲尼闻之曰:“惜也,不如多与之邑。唯器与名,不可以假人,君之所司也。名以出信,信以守器,器以藏礼,礼以行义,义以生利,利以平民,政之大节也。若以假人,与人政也。政亡,则国家从之,弗可止也已。”
《左传·成公二年》

“Alas! It would have been better to give him many cities. *It is only peculiar articles of use and names that cannot be borrowed (jia) to others*; to them a ruler has particularly to attend. It is by names that he secures confidence; it is by that confidence that he preserves the articles of rank; it is in those articles that the ceremonial distinctions of rank are hid; those ceremonial distinctions of rank are essential to the practice of righteousness; it is righteousness which contributes to the advantage of the State; and it is that advantage which secures the quiet of the people. Attention to these things is the condition of good government. If they be conceded where they ought not to be conceded, it is giving away the government to the recipients.”

(cf. Legge (1897:344), Ames & Rosemont (1998:253); emph. added).

For Confucius, therefore, language is no mere vehicle for communication but also an instrument of power, which precedes even laws, rites, and conventions. It is the ruler who should take care of the establishment and continued maintenance of these conventions; their enduring existence is the result of a continuous exercise of power. That is, he does not primarily associate language with thought and knowledge, but rather with action, and more specifically with the exercise of government.^⑭ This point has radical implications for linguistic theorizing. As Harbsmeier (1998: 52 – 3) observes for ancient Chinese thought in general, Confucius’s predominant concern is not with the relation between names and objects but between names and behavior. This primary concern with practice, and the lack of interest in metaphysical and religious notions like truth, the mental, or divine authority, have tempted some recent commentators to qualify early Confucian thought as ‘pragmatist’; but this assimilation tends to downplay Confucius’s

^⑭ Confucius appears to be discussing the correction of names primarily in the context of spoken language; for a detailed discussion of the relation between written language and social authority, see Lewis 2000.

concern with matters of authority and government.

Naming and correcting names are ways of constituting the social world as much as of describing it; as such, they are forms of what J. L. Austin (1975) calls *performative* language usage. Fingarette (1972) was the first to draw attention to the performative dimension of language usage, and specifically of naming, in Confucius; in this respect, Confucian pragmatics has an Austinian rather than a Gricean character. Like Austin, however, Fingarette tends to take for granted the matter of linguistic authority; that is, he does not in any detail address the question of who can felicitously and legitimately say what. But obviously, not just anybody can declare or dissolve marriages by merely saying he or she is doing so; not just anybody can fire employees by merely saying “You are fired.” Confucius is more aware of the essential and indeed constitutive role of power in language usage than either Austin or Grice. The felicitous utterance of performative sentences requires a specific authority or power that is explicitly acknowledged or tacitly accepted by others. In his recent work on the construction of social reality, Searle (1995: ch. 4) argues that this power rests on a prior collective agreement among language users, or members of a specific society, to grant a specific person specific powers, which once again introduces a social-contract view into the analysis; but regardless of whether this consensus-based picture holds in general (it appears not to, cf. Leezenberg 2002), Confucius at least does not make any such assumption. That is, he presupposes no social contract: for him, social power or *de* is the result of education rather than agreement.

The specific kind of authority that Confucius discusses in connection with the correction of names bears remarkable similarities to what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls *symbolic power*, i. e. , a ‘power of constituting the given through utterances’, which involves a kind of magic in so far as it effortlessly brings about the complex social realities it merely purports to describe (1991:170). Symbolic power, that is, amounts to something very much like the authority to carry out performative acts of naming, and thus to define the social reality within which others may act. Bourdieu is adamant that this quasi-magical performative power resides not in words themselves (e. g. , in the guise of a formalist illocutionary force) but in the relation between speakers and hearers; more precisely, he locates it in the relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it. Moreover, he argues that symbolic power can only function in so far as it is not recognized as such, and is mistaken for the harmonious consensual relations of communication that are in all language users’ best interests. That is, he redescribes the apparent consensus involved in cooperative (if not polite) language usage as masking an underlying form of symbolic domination.

Finally, Bourdieu suggests that symbolic power is a misrecognized and subordinate form of power, and is ultimately derived from a more basic economic power (ibid.). That is, this attention to the symbolic seems subservient to a preoccupation with political economy.¹⁵ The anthropologist Eric Wolf (1990) likewise speaks of the correction of names as a form of what he calls ‘structural power’, that is, the power that defines other actors’ field of possible actions rather than forcing or blocking those actions themselves. He explicitly assimilates this to other example of structural power, primarily factors of political economy such as colonial domination. On this view, a colonial context not only forces people to behave in specific

¹⁵ In later work, such as *Practical Reason* (1998), Bourdieu seems to move towards the position that symbolic power is the most basic form of power, conceptually prior even to economic domination.

ways, but also constrains their possible alternative courses of action. Naming, however, would seem to involve a power of a rather different order than macrosociological considerations of political economy. I will not engage in a debate about the relative priority of the symbolic order and the economy here; but their interrelationship appears to be more complex and variable than such Marxist-inspired analyses would have it. Such approaches tend to take the sphere of culture (including language) as secondary with respect to a more basic, or 'objective', economic or otherwise material basis. The view of such cultural superstructural phenomena as 'ideology', moreover, suggests that the social power informing the cultural sphere is essentially negative, repressive, or distorting. On the account suggested here, by contrast, linguistic (and more generally, symbolic) action may be seen as performatively constitutive of 'material' and 'objective' social realities, and the power relations involved are productive of both realities and actors, rather than a merely repressive, disruptive, or distorting factor.^⑩ Confucian pragmatics, in other words, involves no methodological individualism and no social contract; instead, it displays an awareness of the performative character of naming, and of the power relations involved in it. Confucius betrays a clear conviction that the symbolic power of *de* is a crucial prerequisite for effortless and invisible governing; he also suggests that naming is crucial to the successful exercise of government.

6. Concepts, Beliefs, and Practices

Now, it might be objected, doesn't all this turn Confucius into much more of a philosopher of language than he really was? Wasn't he an archaic moralizing sage rather than a systematic thinker, let alone a precocious social scientist? It has indeed been claimed that even in slightly later authors like Xunzi and the later Mohists, discussion concerning the correction of names is already carried out in terms radically different from those in Confucius: whereas the latter confines himself to terms of ritual and public office, it is argued, the Mohist Canons already engage in a debate of a wholly logical rather than a ritual order.^⑪ Against this, it may be noted that Confucius's views are hardly less explicit, elaborated, or systematic than Grice's methodological individualism and his idea of language as a social contract. Rather, the assumptions of both thinkers qualify as what have variously been called *language ideologies*, *folk theories*, or *implicit cognitive models*. Confucius, in other words, is not merely a source of flawed and outdated views on language, which are interesting only as a piece of folklore. Their relevance to modern theorizing consists in bringing out hidden assumptions in other writings and showing that they are likewise contingent,

^⑩ Another aspect of Bourdieu's theory of social action that is particularly relevant here is the notion of *habitus*, that is, the collection of internalized dispositions to act in specific ways. Such apparently natural but in fact socially acquired and reproduced ways of acting as eating with one's right hand, with knife and fork, or with chopsticks, are a matter of *habitus*; so are our virtually automatic but socially significant and distinctive ways of speaking, such as using a particular register or dialect. Levinson (2000:386) has suggested that his notion of a Generalized Conversational Implicature as a preferred interpretation shows a convergence with Bourdieu's notion of social action as driven by a semi-conscious *habitus*; but the implications of the latter's approach are more radical: it leads to a questioning of the explanatory predominance of linguistic structure in semantics, and of speaker's (conscious) intentions, deliberations and calculations in (Gricean) pragmatics; moreover, it is also much more explicit on the role of power and domination in communication, as in social action more generally (cf. Leezenberg 2005, 2006).

^⑪ François Jullien has even argued, once again more controversially, that the very structure of the *Analects* revolts against universally valid definitions and logically consistent patterns of argument; rather, Jullien holds, Confucius achieves generality by means of indirectness and indication (2000:ch. 10).

non-trivial, and open for criticism. Thus, a contrastive approach may take us beyond Wittgenstein's suggestion that our understanding is bewitched by our language (1953: § 109): it makes the more constructive suggestion that conceptions, distinctions, and beliefs may shape, guide, and even constitute various linguistic practices, -whether everyday conversation, academic debate, or governmental decrees; linguistic structures, conceptions, and beliefs may be partly constitutive of our conceptual and other practices.

This suggestion should not be confused with familiar doctrines of linguistically determined conceptual relativism like the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which reappear in many a discussion of ancient Chinese thought; on the one hand, what is involved here seems to be piecemeal and practical constitution rather than a sweeping determination of styles of thought; on the other, conceptual schemes are not wholly prior or autonomous with respect to the practices they inform. Thus, Wittgenstein famously argued that we may be said to have concepts only against a practical background or language game, 'which is not only public and variable, but also essentially normative.

This brings us to the related but distinct question of linguistic normativity. The doctrine of the correction of names appears to have both a descriptive and a prescriptive dimension; but no explicit, let alone systematic, distinction is made between the two:

齐景公问政于孔子。孔子对曰：“君君，臣臣，父父，子子。” (《论语·颜渊第十二》)

Duke Jing of Qi asked Confucius about governing effectively. Confucius replied: “The ruler must rule, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son” (12.11)

The rites, that is, are not merely descriptive regularities concerning the way people actually behave; they are also prescriptive of how people *should* act. The *Analects* do not explicate where this normative force comes from; more in general, Confucius does not systematically discuss the distinction between the factual disposition and the normative injunction to act in a specific way, -a sign that the distinction between fact and norm is less central to his work than it is to many modern authors.¹⁸ This may be methodologically problematic; but it is philosophically significant. In other words: I do not wish to suggest that the vexing question of linguistic normativity is actually *solved* by Confucius; rather, it is posed in terms that are instructive because of their relative unfamiliarity.

Confucius does not conceive of linguistic normativity, and normativity in general, in terms of universal laws or rules. The *Analects* display no sense of laws as essential to government, nor anything corresponding to our structuralist notion of a language as either a realization of a biological endowment, a social fact, or an autonomous system of rules. The normativity of language, that is, appears here in the form of ritual rather than law; it is not conceptualized in juridical terms of codification, precedent, or general rules. Likewise, one finds nothing resembling the widely-held modern structuralist conceptualization of languages in terms of systems of rules. For Confucius, effortless social action is not a matter of mechanical rule-following, but of acquired and spontaneous action. Likewise, ritual actions are not simply mechanical executions of prescriptions or rules, but genuine performances (cf. Fingarette 1972:53). In other words, the *Analects* involve no strict or unproblematic distinction between linguistic structure, language usage,

¹⁸ Bourdieu, incidentally, does not systematically address the normative dimensions or implications of his account of habitus as (factual) dispositions, either.

and language ideologies.

Especially important for both semantic and pragmatic theorizing is the fact that the *Analects* treat the rites, rather than the law, as the basis of a harmonious social order. As said, the successful ruler reduces the need to promulgate laws or to proclaim punishments at all. Neither linguistic nor social consensus, on this perspective, is based on anything law-like, in particular, on anything like a social contract (cf. Leezenberg 2002); rather, harmonious and cooperative linguistic and other actions depend on the invisible and thus effortlessly effective power exercised by the ruler and his officials. This brings out the idea that the stabilization and maintenance of literal meanings, or the ‘correct use’ of names, involves the continued exercise of symbolic forms of power that are not recognized as such. Confucius bemoans the improper use of names as inextricably linked to the illegitimate arrogation of the rights and privileges associated with those names. This would suggest that literal and figurative language usage may not only be fruitfully treated as cognitive processes, but also as social and indeed political practices. The interrelation between these cognitive and social dimensions remains a relatively unexplored topic of investigation. The *Analects* suggest that the relation between concepts, folk beliefs, linguistic practices, and norms, is radically variable, and indeed that these notions are at least in part mutually constitutive.

7. Conclusions

Confucian pragmatics is intriguingly complex in its own right; its relevance and potential for modern linguistic theory become even clearer when it is contrasted with Gricean pragmatics. Hence, a contrastive study may serve not merely as a source of empirical counterexamples to an approach like Grice’s, but also as a way of exposing its hidden conceptual, methodological, and normative assumptions, and even of suggesting alternatives. Let us tease out some of these in conclusion.

First, Confucius emphasizes the performative dimensions of language usage. For him, naming things is not a matter of describing a world already given in advance; rather, language users constitute that very world in and through naming. This attention to performative language is, of course, familiar from Speech Act Theory; but secondly, and much more strongly than authors like Austin and Fingarette, Confucius elaborates on the forms of power or authority, and in particular the non-coercive, non-violent and effortless forms of symbolic power, that are involved in successful naming and other linguistic behavior. Thus, with Confucius, we may see incorrect naming or misuse of language as socially disruptive, and as a challenge to the powers that be. In this way, the doctrine of the correction of names provides an interesting challenge to the assumption, pervasive in analytical philosophy and its offshoots in pragmatics (in both its Austinian and Gricean varieties), that language usage is essentially cooperative (cf. Leezenberg 2002). On a Confucian approach, power of a specifically symbolic character is constitutive not only of language and its literal meanings, but also of those who speak it: the correction of names does not only constitute and constrain what words may denote, but also what people may mean. Confucius, in other words, suggests an alternative to the currently pervasive social contract views of language.

A third point concerns methodological individualism. If the above argument is tenable, practices of education, ritual, and language shape the *de* or habitus of individuals as much as they are shaped by them; one need not, in other words, assume the individual actor as given or autonomous with respect to such practices. This is somewhat reminiscent of the ways in which, according to Foucault (1983), disci-

plinary or pastoral forms of power are productive of specific kinds of individuals or subjects; but the linguistic implications of this suggestion have yet to be teased out. The considerable amount of post-Gricean research on phenomena like conversational implicature and politeness appears to take individual, conscious and autonomous agency for granted. On an approach informed by Bourdieu and Confucius-style considerations, however, correct and polite language usage is driven not only by semi-conscious habit rather than fully conscious consideration and calculation; also the role of different forms of power in the shaping of such habits is brought out much more explicitly and systematically. All of this suggests an alternative to taking intentions or intentionality, and more generally the inner, as the ultimate explanatory notions in accounting for linguistic and other action. It also invites us to explore anew the relation between the cognitive and social dimensions of language usage.

Finally, Confucius appears to conceive of linguistic normativity in terms of rites rather than rules or laws. This way of looking at things opens up a whole new array of questions concerning the sociology of literal and non-literal language usage. If ‘improper’ or non-literal language usage is not represented as a transgression of a law or a breaking of a rule, but as a form of conduct that clashes with specific forms of symbolic power, what does this imply for the linguistic (and indeed social) status of, for example, metaphor and other deviant usages?

Currently, such questions are wide open. Here, I have done no more than suggesting that they have both an interesting formulation in ancient Chinese thought and a relevance for contemporary pragmatics. In an unexpected way, by their specific way of linking language with social action and the exercise of power, they also reaffirm the intimate link between pragmatics as the study of language usage and the theory of action, and more generally between the linguistic and cognitive and the social sciences. Both social consensus and shared language are the result of the ruler’s exercise of a symbolic power *de* (德). For Confucius, this power results from the social distinction achieved through education and the learning of the rites, rather than from the prior consent of those governed. According to him, someone who has acquired *de* and wisdom will not merely mind his words in the conviction that they should be in accordance with his actions, and may performatively create social facts. For him, words even provide the access to that very wisdom, as becomes clear from the very last words of the *Analects*:

“不知言，无以知人也。”

(《论语·尧曰第二十》)

“Without knowledge of words, there can be no knowledge of man”

(20.3).

Some final words of warning: the differences described in the preceding should not be reduced to an allegedly sweeping opposition between a “Western bias towards individualism” and an “Eastern group orientation;” rather, they focus attention anew on questions of how both individuals and groups are articulated, and indeed constituted, in and through culturally and historically variable linguistic practices. Likewise, the interesting question is not whether Confucius preaches an unquestioning acceptance of authority, but rather how he conceptualizes various forms of such authority, and what role such conceptualizations play in his linguistic practices. Most importantly, Confucius’s notion of *de* or symbolic power is not a restrictive, coercive, or censoring force, but rather a productive phenomenon, which makes individuals fully human. It remains to be assessed how such conceptions and beliefs inform the very different and variable linguistic practices of, say, pre-Han China and twentieth-century England; but the strategy of research suggested

here involves looking for significant divergences rather than for common patterns, while remaining systematically attentive to the significance of regional and historical variations. In this way, one need not commit oneself either to a premature universalism or to a facile, and equally misguided, relativism.¹⁹

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