

Individual Paper Session 14
Pragmatics
Wednesday, July 5
4:45-5:15pm

Figuring Intention

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What's meant by *intention* can generate a certain circularity. The ontological angst which this question can occasion is, perhaps, a function of its posing as timeless and context-free.

Beyond the genre of metaphysics, however, the move to locate intention in some "constellation of absolute presuppositions"¹ is an empty one. Certainly, intention figures in talk in and about many domains of human action, both linguistic and nonlinguistic. It might be useful here to recall Anscombe's (1957) characterization of intention as a descriptive regime under which actions can be construed. However, while Anscombe distinguishes kinds of intentional talk, her insistence on an essential homogeneity risks making of intention an immutable explanatory category.

Explanations, however, are context emergent and context bound, and their use of particular descriptive regimes and classifications constitutes kinds and ways of knowing (different genre worlds and categories).

If we grant, then, that classifications exist not "in the empty space of language but in institutions, practices, material interactions with things and people,"² the question of what constitutes intention becomes one of what counts as intention *in a particular domain* – what is intention in the philosophy of language or in literary theory, for example.

The meaning of intention is thus usefully construed as a question of its use, and its use raises issues of what intention enables and constrains. Like other figures, intention does different jobs in different places. The following comments indicatively on some of the uses to which intention has been put in parts of linguistic pragmatics and literary theory. I try to construe intention, from a rhetorical perspective, as an index of generic or disciplinary difference to ask what jobs are done and what's at stake in talk of intention in relation to politeness implicatures and the intentional fallacy.

¹ R. G. Collingwood in Skinner (1969: 7).

² Hacking's (1999: 31) remark pertains to actions, but the point pertains equally to descriptors and acts of describing.