

The Evolution of Linguistic Dimensions and the Emergence of Aletheiatrics: From Semantic Foundations to the Recognition of Speech's Inherent Falsity

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Keywords	Abstract
Aletheiatrics philosophy of language disambiguation truth silence	This paper examines the historical development of linguistic theory through its three traditional dimensions—semantics, syntax, and pragmatics—arguing that each represents an evolutionary step toward disambiguation that ultimately fails to achieve its goal. Drawing from classical, modern, and contemporary theorists, we demonstrate how persistent misunderstandings reveal the fundamental incompatibility between language and truth. We propose "Aletheiatrics" as a fourth dimension that recognizes silence as the only authentic expression of truth, not as surrender but as acknowledgment of the inherent contradiction between speech and certainty.

1. Introduction

The quest for perfect communication has driven linguistic theory for millennia, yet misunderstandings persist despite increasingly sophisticated theoretical frameworks. From Aristotle's foundational work on meaning to contemporary pragmatic theories, each linguistic dimension has promised greater clarity while simultaneously revealing new layers of ambiguity (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Grice, 1975). This paper argues that the persistence of miscommunication is not a failure of theory but an inevitable consequence of language's fundamental nature.

The trajectory from semantics through syntax to pragmatics represents humanity's attempt to achieve what we term "perfect disambiguation"—the ideal state where meaning is fully transparent and misunderstanding impossible. However, as Wittgenstein (1953) demonstrated in his later philosophy, the very attempt to fix meaning creates new forms of uncertainty. We propose that this pattern reveals something essential about the relationship between language and truth.

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Classical approaches, beginning with Aristotle's *Organon*, positioned miscommunication as a technical problem solvable through logical precision and definitional rigor. Medieval scholastics developed elaborate taxonomies of meaning, while Enlightenment thinkers like Leibniz pursued the dream of a *characteristica universalis*—a perfect symbolic system that would eliminate ambiguity through mathematical formalization. Each of these projects promised transparent communication while inadvertently generating new forms of opacity.

The twentieth century's pragmatic revolution, exemplified by Austin's speech act theory and Grice's cooperative principle, attempted to account for language's contextual dimensions. Yet these sophisticated frameworks revealed that successful communication depends upon vast networks of shared assumptions that can never be fully articulated or controlled. The more precisely we attempt to specify the conditions for clear communication, the more complex those conditions appear to become.

Wittgenstein's concept of language games exposed this "hermeneutic paradox" most clearly. His analysis showed that meaning emerges from participation in forms of life rather than correspondence to reality, making context not an addendum to meaning but its foundation. The rule-following considerations revealed an infinite regress within any attempt to fix meaning *definitively*—every rule requires interpretation, and every interpretation can be interpreted differently.

Contemporary developments in poststructuralism and deconstruction have pushed these insights further. Derrida's analysis of *différance* suggests that meaning is always deferred, always dependent upon what is absent or other. The very conditions that make communication possible simultaneously make miscommunication inevitable. This is not a regrettable limitation but a structural necessity of language's operation.

We argue that this historical pattern reveals miscommunication as not an accidental feature of linguistic systems but as constitutive of meaning itself. Meaning exists as an emergent phenomenon arising from interactions between speakers, contexts, and interpretive frameworks—emergence that cannot be predicted or controlled through theoretical analysis because it depends upon creative responses of situated agents.

This reconceptualization has significant implications for how we approach language in educational, political, and interpersonal contexts. Rather than seeking to eliminate misunderstanding, we might develop practices that make misunderstanding productive. The acknowledgment that perfect clarity is impossible does not counsel despair but opens new possibilities for engagement that do not depend upon eliminating difference but upon its creative exploration.

The following analysis will demonstrate that the quest for *perfect disambiguation*, while impossible to achieve, remains valuable as a regulative ideal that motivates increasingly sophisticated approaches to understanding. Like an asymptotic mathematical limit, our theoretical frameworks become more refined even as perfect clarity remains forever beyond reach. This



infinite task reveals not the poverty of human communication but its inexhaustible creativity and generative potential.

2. The Semantic Foundation: Meaning as the First Attempt at Order

2.1 Classical Origins

Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* established the foundational principle that "spoken words are the symbols of mental experience" (Aristotle, 16a3-8). This correspondence theory of meaning suggested that words could transparently represent thoughts, which in turn corresponded to reality. Augustine (397-400 CE) further developed this ostensive theory of language learning, proposing that meaning emerges through direct pointing and naming of objects in the world.

However, even these early theories contained the seeds of their own contradiction. As Frege (1892) would later formalize, the distinction between sense (Sinn) and reference (Bedeutung) revealed that meaning cannot be reduced to *simple correspondence*. The morning star and evening star refer to the same object (Venus) yet possess different meanings, demonstrating that semantic content transcends mere reference.

This classical framework established what we might call the "transparency assumption"—the belief that language could serve as a clear window onto reality. Augustine's Confessions illustrates this assumption through his account of language acquisition: the child observes adults pointing to objects while uttering sounds, gradually building a vocabulary that maps directly onto the world's structure. This ostensive model implies that successful communication depends upon shared access to a common reality that language merely labels.

Yet Augustine himself recognized complications within this seemingly straightforward account. His analysis of time in Book XI of the Confessions revealed that even apparently simple concepts resist stable definition. When asked "What is time?," Augustine famously responded, "*If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone who asks, I do not know.*" This paradox suggests that our most basic conceptual vocabulary depends upon tacit understanding that explicit definition cannot capture.

The medieval development of Augustine's insights further complicated the transparency assumption. Aquinas's distinction between *suppositum* and *natura* revealed that reference involves complex metaphysical commitments about the relationship between individual substances and universal categories. The apparently simple act of referring to "this horse" presupposes an entire ontological framework distinguishing between particular instances and general kinds.

2.2 Modern Semantic Theory

Twentieth-century semantics attempted to resolve these classical problems through increasingly formal approaches. Tarski's (1933) semantic theory of truth provided a meta-linguistic framework for defining truth conditions, while Carnap (1947) pursued the ideal of a perfectly unambiguous



logical language. These efforts represented semantics at its most ambitious: the belief that meaning could be mathematically precise.

Tarski's achievement was remarkable: he showed how to define truth for formal languages without falling into the semantic paradoxes that had plagued earlier attempts. The T-schema—"Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white"—appeared to provide a rigorous foundation for semantic theory. Natural languages, however, proved more resistant to this treatment. The indexical expressions, context-dependent meanings, and creative metaphorical uses that characterize ordinary discourse resisted translation into Tarski's formal framework.

Carnap's project of rational reconstruction aimed to replace the confusions of natural language with the precision of logical syntax. His *Logical Syntax of Language* (1934) proposed that philosophical problems arose from insufficient attention to the formal structure of linguistic expressions. Once we distinguished clearly between object language and meta-language, between use and mention, the apparent paradoxes of meaning would dissolve.

Yet as Quine (1960) demonstrated in his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, even the most rigorous semantic theories fail to eliminate ambiguity. His thought experiment of radical translation showed that multiple, incompatible interpretations of meaning remain possible even with complete behavioral evidence. The very attempt to ground meaning in objective reality revealed the circular nature of semantic explanation.

Quine's argument struck at the heart of semantic foundationalism. Even if we observe all possible behavioral evidence—every stimulus-response pattern, every verbal disposition—we cannot uniquely determine which translation manual correctly captures the native speaker's meanings. The field linguist might construct multiple, systematically different translations, each consistent with all observable data. This indeterminacy suggests that meaning is not an objective feature of linguistic expressions waiting to be discovered but rather a theoretical construction imposed upon behavioral patterns.

The implications extended beyond translation to semantic theory generally. If meanings are not determinate facts about speakers' mental states or linguistic expressions, then the entire project of semantic theory becomes problematic. Davidson's (1967) truth-conditional semantics attempted to address this challenge by focusing on truth conditions rather than meanings, but this move merely displaced rather than resolved the fundamental indeterminacy.

2.3 The Failure of Pure Semantics

The limitations of semantic approaches became apparent in ordinary language use. Consider the simple statement "The present King of France is bald" (Russell, 1905). This sentence appears meaningful yet refers to a non-existent entity, revealing that semantic theories struggle with the relationship between meaning and existence. Russell's theory of descriptions attempted to resolve this paradox, but only by creating increasingly complex logical structures that diverged further from actual language use.



Russell's solution involved analyzing the sentence as making three claims: there exists someone who is King of France, there is only one such person, and that person is bald. Since the first claim is false, the entire sentence is false rather than meaningless. This analysis preserved classical logic but at the cost of making the logical form of sentences radically different from their surface grammar. Ordinary speakers who find "The present King of France is bald" meaningful but neither true nor false seem to operate with intuitions that Russell's theory cannot accommodate.

Strawson's (1950) critique revealed deeper problems with Russell's approach. Strawson argued that sentences like "The present King of France is bald" involve presupposition rather than assertion. The sentence presupposes the existence of a unique present King of France and then predicates baldness of that individual. When the presupposition fails, the sentence lacks a truth value altogether rather than being false. This analysis better captured ordinary linguistic intuitions but created new problems for semantic theory: how do we distinguish presuppositions from assertions, and how do presuppositions relate to truth conditions?

More fundamentally, semantics assumes that words possess stable meanings independent of context—an assumption that everyday communication consistently violates. The word "bank" might refer to a financial institution or a riverbank, with context supposedly disambiguating between meanings. But this solution merely pushes the problem up one level: how do we determine the relevant context without already knowing the intended meaning?

The problem deepens when we consider that most lexical items exhibit systematic polysemy rather than discrete multiple meanings. The verb "run" can describe human locomotion, machine operation, political candidacy, liquid flow, software execution, and countless other activities. Attempts to enumerate distinct senses quickly multiply beyond practical utility, suggesting that lexical meaning involves creative extension from prototypical cases rather than selection from fixed inventories.

Furthermore, compositional semantics—the principle that sentence meaning derives systematically from word meanings plus syntactic structure—faces persistent challenges from idioms, metaphors, and context-dependent interpretations. The sentence "John spilled the beans" might be interpreted literally (about legumes) or idiomatically (about revealing secrets), with no formal semantic rule determining which interpretation applies in a given context.

These empirical challenges revealed a deeper theoretical problem: semantic theories assume that meaning precedes use, but linguistic evidence suggests the opposite relationship. Words acquire their meanings through patterns of use within communities of speakers, and these patterns constantly evolve in response to communicative needs and cultural changes. The attempt to fix meanings independently of use contexts reflects what Wittgenstein would later diagnose as a fundamental confusion about the relationship between language and reality.

3. The Syntactic Revolution: Structure as Salvation

3.1 The Chomskyan Transform



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Recognizing the limitations of pure semantic approaches, Chomsky (1957) revolutionized linguistic theory by focusing on *syntactic structure*. His *generative grammar* proposed that meaning emerges not just from individual words but from their systematic arrangement according to universal principles. This represented a profound shift: if semantics had failed to achieve transparency, perhaps syntax could provide the missing foundation.

Chomsky's Syntactic Structures marked a decisive break with behavioral linguistics by positing that speakers possess unconscious knowledge of grammatical rules. This competence/performance distinction suggested that linguistic behavior results from the interaction between perfect grammatical knowledge and imperfect processing mechanisms. Errors, false starts, and ambiguities belonged to performance, while competence remained systematic and rule-governed. Syntax could thus reclaim the precision that semantics had lost by focusing on the abstract structural principles underlying actual usage.

The revolutionary insight lay in recognizing that natural languages exhibit *infinite creativity* based on *finite means*. Phrase structure rules like "S → NP VP" could generate unlimited novel sentences by recursive application. This suggested that human linguistic capacity depended not on memorizing specific expressions but on internalizing generative procedures. The apparent chaos of ordinary language use masked underlying systematic principles that syntactic theory could reveal.

Chomsky's distinction between *surface structure* and *deep structure* suggested that beneath apparent ambiguity lay a clearer logical form. The sentence "Visiting relatives can be boring" (that is, "visiting" as an adjective or as a verb) possesses surface ambiguity but presumably clear deep structures corresponding to its two interpretations. Transformational rules mediated between these levels, converting deep structures into surface forms through systematic operations like deletion, movement, and insertion. Syntax appeared to offer what semantics could not: a systematic method for resolving ambiguity through structural analysis.

This approach promised to resolve longstanding philosophical puzzles about meaning. The sentence "John is easy to please" and "John is eager to please" appear structurally similar but exhibit different logical relations. Transformational analysis revealed that "John" functions as the deep structure object of "please" in the first case but as subject in the second. Syntactic theory could thus distinguish sentences that surface similarities made confusing, providing objective criteria for semantic interpretation.

The implications extended beyond linguistic theory to cognitive science generally. If syntactic competence involved rule-governed procedures operating on symbolic representations, this suggested that human cognition might itself be *computational*. The mind became a kind of biological computer, with syntactic rules functioning as mental software. This mechanistic vision promised to naturalize human linguistic capacity while preserving its systematic character.

3.2 The Promise of Formal Grammar



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Syntactic theory promised unprecedented precision in language analysis. Phrase structure rules, transformational grammar, and later developments in Government and Binding theory (Chomsky, 1981) created increasingly sophisticated models of syntactic competence. These theories suggested that grammatical knowledge could be formalized to the point where ambiguity became a solved problem—merely a matter of applying the correct analytical tools.

The development of X-bar theory in the 1970s exemplified this formal ambition. By proposing that all syntactic categories conform to uniform structural principles, X-bar theory suggested that apparent diversity in syntactic constructions masked deeper unity. Noun phrases, verb phrases, and prepositional phrases all exhibited the same basic structure: specifier, head, and complement positions organized according to universal templates. This architectural approach promised to reduce syntactic complexity to manageable proportions.

Government and Binding theory pushed formalization even further. The modular architecture divided syntactic competence into autonomous subsystems—case theory, theta theory, binding theory, control theory—each governed by specific principles and parameters. This division of labor suggested that syntactic complexity could be decomposed into simpler components, making the entire system more tractable for analysis. Universal Grammar provided the general framework, while individual languages represented specific parameter settings within this universal space.

The appeal of syntactic approaches lay in their apparent objectivity. Unlike semantic theories, which seemed to depend on subjective judgments about meaning, syntactic analysis could be mechanized. Parsing algorithms and computational linguistics emerged as practical applications of this theoretical promise, suggesting that perfect disambiguation might be achievable through sufficient computational power.

Chart parsers, Earley algorithms, and other computational techniques demonstrated that formal grammars could be implemented mechanically. The apparent success of these systems in parsing restricted domains suggested that natural language processing might eventually achieve human-level performance through better grammatical theories. Syntactic ambiguity became a technical problem requiring better algorithms rather than a fundamental limitation of formal approaches.

The minimalist program of the 1990s represented the ultimate expression of formal syntactic ambitions. By reducing syntactic operations to the simplest possible mechanisms—merge and move—minimalism sought to derive complex syntactic phenomena from elementary computational procedures. The goal was a theory of syntax so austere that its principles approached logical necessity, making alternative grammatical systems inconceivable.

3.3 Syntactic Limitations

Yet syntactic theory encountered its own contradictions. Garden path sentences like "The horse raced past the barn fell" demonstrate that structural parsing alone cannot resolve ambiguity (Bever, 1970). Readers initially parse "raced" as the main verb, only to discover that it functions as part of a reduced relative clause modifying "horse" (the horse that was raced past the barn fell), making



“fell” the main verb. The sentence's ultimate meaning becomes clear only through semantic and pragmatic inference—precisely the processes syntax was meant to replace.

Garden path effects revealed that syntactic processing involves far more than mechanical rule application. Human parsers exhibit systematic preferences for certain structural analyses over others—preferring main clause over subordinate clause interpretations, avoiding complex center-embedded structures, favoring attachments to recent constituents. These preferences cannot be derived from grammatical rules alone but depend upon processing limitations, frequency effects, and semantic plausibility judgments.

More problematically, attempts to formalize these parsing preferences led to increasingly complex grammatical theories that diverged from the elegant simplicity originally promised. Optimality Theory proposed that grammars involve ranked constraints that can be violated when higher-ranked constraints require it. This approach could handle garden path phenomena but only by abandoning the notion of inviolable grammatical rules. Syntax became a matter of better or worse rather than grammatical or ungrammatical.

The competence/performance distinction also proved more problematic than initially supposed. If competence represents perfect grammatical knowledge while performance involves various error-inducing factors, how do we distinguish between the two empirically? Every actual linguistic utterance belongs to performance, making competence essentially *unobservable*. Attempts to idealize away from performance factors led to increasingly abstract theoretical constructs with tenuous connections to actual language use.

Furthermore, cross-linguistic variation revealed that many supposedly universal syntactic principles admitted extensive parametric variation. The principles and parameters approach suggested that languages differ only in specific parameter settings, but the parameters required to handle observed variation multiplied beyond theoretical manageability. Some languages appeared to violate fundamental principles like structure-dependence, suggesting that Universal Grammar might be far more permissive than originally envisioned.

More problematically, syntactic theory revealed the same self-referential issues that plagued semantics. The rules governing syntactic structure must themselves be stated in language, creating an infinite regress of meta-languages. As Montague (1970) observed, the distinction between syntax and semantics proves ultimately *untenable*—syntactic rules are themselves meaningful statements about language structure.

This meta-linguistic problem extends to the psychological reality of grammatical theories. If syntactic rules describe speakers' unconscious knowledge, these rules must somehow be represented in speakers' minds. But mental representations require a language of thought, which itself must have syntactic structure. The attempt to explain syntactic competence through syntactic rules thus presupposes what it seeks to explain.

The Chomskyan program also faced the poverty of stimulus problem in reverse: if children acquire grammatical competence despite limited input, this suggests that much syntactic knowledge is *innate*. But innate grammatical knowledge presupposes a biological basis for linguistic structure



that syntax alone cannot explain. The attempted reduction of language to formal rules revealed the irreducible role of pragmatic factors in actual communication.

Recent developments in usage-based linguistics have challenged the fundamental assumptions of formal syntactic theory. Construction grammar proposes that speakers learn specific form-meaning pairings rather than abstract rules, suggesting that syntactic generalizations emerge from usage patterns rather than innate principles. Corpus linguistics reveals that much of what formal theory treats as rule-governed behavior actually reflects statistical regularities in linguistic input.

These empirical challenges point to a deeper theoretical limitation: syntactic theory attempts to isolate structural properties from semantic and pragmatic factors, but actual linguistic competence appears to integrate all these dimensions inseparably. The dream of *pure syntax*—structure independent of meaning and use—may reflect the same *foundationalist* aspirations that undermined semantic theory. Syntax promised salvation from semantic complexity but discovered that structure itself cannot be divorced from the interpretive processes it was meant to replace.

4. The Pragmatic Turn: Context as the Final Solution

4.1 Speech Act Theory and the Discovery of Language as Action

Austin's (1962) *How to Do Things with Words* represented a fundamental reconceptualization of language function. Rather than viewing language primarily as description, Austin demonstrated that utterances perform actions in the world. "I pronounce you husband and wife" does not describe a marriage ceremony—it constitutes the ceremony itself. This insight suggested that previous approaches had fundamentally misunderstood language's nature.

Austin's initial distinction between constative utterances (which describe and can be true or false) and performative utterances (which act and can be felicitous or infelicitous) seemed to provide a clear theoretical foundation. Performatives like "I promise," "I bet," and "I apologize" appeared to constitute a distinct class of utterances whose function was action rather than description. This discovery suggested that much of the confusion surrounding meaning arose from applying descriptive criteria to inherently active uses of language.

However, Austin's own analysis revealed that the constative/performative distinction could not be maintained. Every utterance, he realized, performs some action—even apparently descriptive statements like "The cat is on the mat" perform the act of assertion. The *locutionary act* of saying something simultaneously constitutes an *illocutionary act* of doing something in saying it, and potentially a *perlocutionary act* of achieving something by saying it. The performative dimension of language proved not to be a special case but the general condition of linguistic communication. This recognition transformed the theoretical landscape. If all utterances are performative, then meaning cannot be separated from the *social* and *institutional* contexts that make speech acts possible. The utterance "I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison" achieves its effect not through correspondence to reality but through the speaker's *position* within legal institutions. Context



became not an additional factor complicating linguistic analysis but the *very foundation* that makes meaning possible.

Searle (1969) systematized Austin's insights into a comprehensive theory of speech acts, distinguishing between locutionary acts (the saying), illocutionary acts (what is done in saying), and perlocutionary acts (what is done by saying). This tripartite analysis promised to resolve the ambiguities that had plagued semantic and syntactic approaches by grounding meaning in communicative intention and social context.

Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts—representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations—provided a systematic framework for analyzing the action-oriented dimension of language use. Each category carried specific felicity conditions: promises require sincerity and ability to fulfill, commands require authority relationships, declarations require appropriate institutional standing. These conditions suggested that successful communication depends not merely on semantic content or syntactic well-formedness but on complex social and institutional arrangements.

The speech act approach also promised to resolve puzzles about fictional discourse, questions, and other problematic cases for truth-conditional semantics. When Dickens writes "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," he performs not an assertion about historical conditions but a fictional narration that creates rather than describes a literary world. Questions like "What time is it?" perform acts of inquiry rather than making truth-apt claims. Speech act theory could handle these cases naturally by focusing on what speakers do with utterances rather than what utterances correspond to.

4.2 Gricean Pragmatics and the Cooperative Principle

Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature provided the most systematic account of how context resolves ambiguity. His Cooperative Principle and associated maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner) explained how speakers and hearers collaborate to achieve successful communication despite the apparent inadequacy of literal meaning.

The maxim of Quality enjoins speakers to try to make their contribution true, avoiding false statements and claims for which they lack evidence. The maxim of Quantity requires speakers to be as informative as required but not more informative than necessary. The maxim of Relation demands relevance to the ongoing conversation, while the maxim of Manner requires clarity, brevity, and orderliness. Together, these maxims were supposed to provide the *rational* foundation for successful communication.

Consider the exchange: "Can you pass the salt?" "Yes." Standard Gricean analysis treats this as problematic—the literal response supposedly satisfies the semantic content of the question but violates conversational expectations by failing to recognize the utterance as an indirect request for action rather than a genuine inquiry about capability.

However, this analysis reveals more about theoretical assumptions than about actual communicative practice. The claim that "Yes" violates expectations presupposes universal



pragmatic conventions that may not exist. In many contexts, responding "Yes" while simultaneously passing the salt would be perfectly cooperative, fulfilling both the literal question and the implied request. The supposed violation depends upon cultural assumptions about politeness, directness, and appropriate response patterns that vary significantly across communities and relationships.

More problematically, determining what counts as a "violated expectation" requires *prior specification* of normative communicative behavior. But these norms cannot be established *independently* of the very pragmatic processes they are meant to regulate. The analysis builds assumptions about "normal" expectations into its foundational concepts, then treats deviations from these built-in norms as evidence for pragmatic principles. That is, the "oddness" or "violation" only exists relative to the norms the theory already built in. The theory essentially says: "We assume X is normal, therefore when people don't do X, it proves our theory about why X is normal". The evidence for the theory depends on accepting the theory's own assumptions about what's normal

This *circularity* illustrates a deeper problem with pragmatic approaches to disambiguation. Rather than providing objective criteria for resolving ambiguity, pragmatic theory often simply relocates interpretive decisions to the level of contextual expectations—expectations that are themselves culturally *variable*, contextually *dependent*, and theoretically constructed rather than empirically given. The mechanism of conversational implicature provided elegant solutions to numerous puzzles in linguistic theory.

When someone says "Some students passed the exam," they implicate that not all students passed, even though "some" is logically compatible with "all" (the first is a subset of the second). This implicature arises through the maxim of Quantity: if the speaker knew that all students passed, they would have said so. The failure to provide the stronger information implicates that the stronger claim is false.

Similarly, irony and metaphor could be analyzed as systematic violations of the Quality maxim. When someone says "What lovely weather!" during a thunderstorm, they obviously violate the requirement to be truthful. The hearer recognizes this violation and infers that the speaker means the opposite of what they literally say. Metaphorical utterances like "Juliet is the sun" work similarly—the literal falsity signals that a non-literal interpretation is intended.

This approach appeared to solve the disambiguation problem definitively. Ambiguity arose not from inadequate semantic or syntactic theories but from the failure to consider pragmatic factors. Once communicative context was properly analyzed, meaning became clear and misunderstanding preventable. The Gricean program promised to complete the linguistic project by providing the missing pragmatic component that would make perfect communication finally achievable.

Grice's distinction between *conventional meaning* (encoded in the linguistic system) and *conversational meaning* (arising from rational inference about speaker intentions) seemed to provide a principled division of labor between different components of linguistic theory. Semantics could handle conventional meaning, while pragmatics managed the context-dependent aspects of



communication. This modular approach suggested that the complexity of natural language communication could be systematically analyzed without sacrificing theoretical precision.

4.3 The Pragmatic Paradox

Yet pragmatic theory encountered the same self-referential problems that had defeated its predecessors. Grice's maxims must themselves be communicated and understood, but this communication is subject to the same *pragmatic processes the maxims are meant to explain*. The Cooperative Principle presupposes the very cooperative understanding it purports to create.

The circularity runs deeper than initial appearances suggest. For the Quality maxim to function, speakers and hearers must share criteria for truth, evidence, and sincerity. But these criteria cannot be established independently of communicative practices that presuppose their operation. The maxim of Quantity requires shared judgments about what information is relevant and sufficient, but relevance and sufficiency can only be determined relative to communicative purposes that the maxim is meant to regulate.

More fundamentally, pragmatic theory reveals the impossibility of separating *context* from *content*. Every attempt to specify context completely requires additional context, leading to an infinite regress. The notion of "relevant context" assumes prior understanding of *what counts as relevant*—but relevance cannot be determined without already knowing the communicative intention the context is meant to clarify.

This problem manifests in the phenomenon of pragmatic ambiguity. The utterance "John has three children" might implicate that John has *exactly* three children (via Quantity), or it might merely assert that he has *at least* three (conventional semantic meaning). Which interpretation applies depends upon contextual factors, but specifying these factors completely would require unlimited information about the speaker's beliefs, intentions, and assumptions about the hearer's knowledge state.

Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory attempted to resolve this circularity by grounding pragmatic inference in cognitive principles of optimal relevance. Their approach promised to reduce pragmatic complexity to a single principle: utterances carry a presumption of optimal relevance, achieved when the processing effort required to derive contextual effects is minimized relative to the cognitive benefits obtained.

However, optimal relevance presupposes shared cognitive architecture and processing capabilities that cannot be verified without the very communicative processes the theory attempts to explain. The notion of "cognitive effects" requires prior specification of what counts as an effect, while "processing effort" depends upon assumptions about mental architecture that remain empirically contentious. The theory achieves precision by building substantive assumptions about cognition into its foundational concepts.

Recent developments in experimental pragmatics have revealed additional complications. Studies of scalar implicature show that supposedly automatic pragmatic inferences are actually effortful, context-dependent, and subject to individual variation. Cross-cultural pragmatic research has



similarly revealed that communicative norms vary dramatically across linguistic communities, suggesting that pragmatic principles are culturally specific rather than universal.

Perhaps most problematically, pragmatic theory reveals that successful communication often depends upon productive misunderstanding rather than perfect disambiguation. Literary communication, humor, and creative language use exploit the gaps between literal meaning and contextual interpretation. The attempt to eliminate ambiguity through pragmatic analysis might eliminate the very indeterminacy that makes creative communication possible.

5. The Pattern of Failure: Why Disambiguation Remains Impossible

5.1 The Recursive Nature of Linguistic Explanation

Each linguistic dimension—semantic, syntactic, pragmatic—follows the same pattern: initial promise of disambiguation, increasing theoretical sophistication, and ultimate encounter with self-referential paradox. This pattern is not accidental but reveals something fundamental about the nature of language itself.

Semantic theories require meta-semantic theories to explain their meaning. Syntactic rules must be formulated in language and thus presuppose the very linguistic competence they claim to explain. Pragmatic theories depend on communicative understanding that cannot be achieved without the pragmatic competence the theories are meant to provide.

This recursive structure suggests that language cannot be its own foundation. Any attempt to ground linguistic meaning leads to *infinite regress* or *circular reasoning*. As Wittgenstein (1953) observed, the attempt to justify language practices with further language practices is like trying to lift oneself by pulling on one's own bootstraps.

Despite centuries of theoretical development, misunderstandings persist at every level of linguistic analysis. Semantic ambiguity remains rampant in ordinary discourse. Syntactic parsing fails regularly, even with sophisticated computational tools. Pragmatic interpretation generates new forms of misunderstanding as speakers and hearers navigate increasingly complex contextual factors.

This persistence cannot be attributed to theoretical inadequacy. Contemporary linguistic theory is vastly more sophisticated than its historical predecessors, yet communication remains as uncertain as ever. The problem lies not in the theories but in the assumption that language can achieve *perfect transparency*.

5.2 The Fundamental Incompatibility

The failure of all three linguistic dimensions points to a deeper truth: language and certainty are fundamentally *incompatible*. Every utterance creates the possibility of misunderstanding because



language necessarily involves the attempt to make the private public, the internal external, the subjective objective.

This incompatibility reveals the ultimate paradox of disambiguation theory. As we observed earlier, if we could know exactly "how much, what, about what, and only about that what we should say, *there would be no conversation*, since theoretically there would be only *one thing to be said*." Perfect disambiguation would eliminate not just ambiguity but *language itself*.

The logical conclusion of linguistic analysis seeking perfect clarity is therefore the *elimination of language*—not as surrender, but as the inevitable result of *successful disambiguation*. A world without "errors" (where error is merely an arbitrary declaration that something is "wrong" or incompatible with particular interests) would be a *world without language*. Error, misunderstanding, and interpretive multiplicity are not obstacles to overcome but the very conditions that make linguistic communication necessary and possible.

The quest for perfect communication thus reveals its own contradiction: the complete success of disambiguation would render communication obsolete. Language exists precisely because understanding is uncertain, meaning is unstable, and truth cannot be directly transmitted from one mind to another. The persistence of miscommunication across all theoretical frameworks is not evidence of theoretical inadequacy but proof of language's essential nature.

6. Aletheiatrics: The Recognition of Language's Essential Falsity

6.1 Beyond the Three Dimensions

The failure of semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic approaches to achieve perfect disambiguation points toward a *fourth dimension* of linguistic analysis: *Aletheiatrics*. This term, derived from the Greek *aletheia* (truth), does not represent another attempt at disambiguation but rather the recognition that all linguistic attempts at truth-telling are *necessarily false*.

This recognition finds precedent in several philosophical traditions. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* pointed toward "*ineffable truths*" that resist linguistic expression (MORRIS, 2018), while his later work revealed how language games operate within forms of life that cannot be fully articulated. Heidegger's analysis of language as the "*house of being*" similarly recognized that language both reveals and conceals truth, creating what he called the fundamental tension between unconcealment (*aletheia*) and hiddenness.

Most significantly, Adorno's *negative dialectics* (BUCK-MORSS, 1977) provides a crucial foundation for Aletheiatric thinking. Adorno argued that philosophy "must strive, by way of the concept, to transcend the concept" to indicate "that concept and the principle of exchange fail to know the particular, the non-identical, non-conceptual" (SHERRATT, 2018). Negative dialectics rejects the idea of a final synthesis or reconciliation and instead embraces the non-identical—what escapes conceptual capture.



Aletheiatrics begins with a fundamental insight: if truth is absolute and indivisible, then any attempt to speak truth divides it into speaker, utterance, and hearer. This division *necessarily falsifies* truth by making it partial, perspectival, and temporal. The only authentic relationship to truth is *silence*—not the silence of ignorance but the silence of recognition.

6.2 The Aletheiatic Principle

The foundational principle of Aletheiatrics can be stated as follows: Every utterance is false by virtue of being uttered. This includes *the statement of the principle itself*, creating not a logical paradox but a *performative* demonstration of the principle's validity.

This principle resonates with Adorno's insight that art "has truth as the semblance of that which has no semblance" (SHERRATT, 2018)—truth can only appear through acknowledged falsity. Similarly, Derrida's deconstruction revealed how "final meanings remain indeterminate and without origin" (CLARK, 2021), suggesting that the very attempt to fix meaning in language creates the conditions of its own undoing.

This is not relativism, which merely multiplies falsehoods. Nor is it skepticism, which doubts the existence of truth. Aletheiatrics affirms absolute truth while recognizing that this truth cannot be spoken without being falsified in the speaking. The approach parallels what Adorno called "*nonidentity*" (JAY, 1984) asserting that philosophical inquiry must acknowledge the remainder that escapes conceptualization.

The Aletheiatic dimension thus represents not an evolution beyond pragmatics but a revolutionary recognition of what all previous dimensions have obscured: the inherent mendacity of language itself.

6.3 Silence as Linguistic Act

In Aletheiatic analysis, silence becomes the primary linguistic phenomenon. Not the silence of having nothing to say, but the silence of having everything to say and recognizing that saying it would destroy it. This silence is not empty but full—pregnant with all possible utterances while committed to none.

This recalls the Buddhist concept of noble silence and the mystical traditions' recognition that ultimate reality *transcends* linguistic expression. Lyotard's concept of the "*differend*" similarly pointed to "the forced silence of those who were outside the dialectic" (CLARK, 2021)—those whose experience cannot be articulated within existing linguistic frameworks.

However, Aletheiatrics does not retreat into mysticism but maintains rigorous theoretical precision. Silence functions as a linguistic act with its own conditions of success and failure. This approach finds support in Wittgenstein's recognition that "if the words 'language', 'experience', 'world', have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words 'table', 'lamp', 'door'" (HACKER, 2019)—suggesting that our most profound concepts operate through the same mechanisms as ordinary language, with all its limitations.



6.4 The Practice of Aletheiatics

letheiatic practice involves the systematic recognition of linguistic falsity in all utterances, including one's own. This is not nihilistic but *liberating*—freeing communication from the impossible burden of perfect truth-telling while acknowledging the essential role of acknowledged falsity in human interaction.

This practice aligns with Adorno's recognition that "identities are always the result of a negation, a recoil from an unreconciled, unemancipated state" (JAY, 1984). Rather than seeking positive identification of truth through language, Aletheiatics embraces what Adorno called "determinate negation"—the precise articulation of what cannot be said.

In Aletheiatic analysis, successful communication occurs not despite misunderstanding but *because* of it. Misunderstanding creates the gap that allows genuine encounter between minds. Perfect understanding would eliminate the other as other, reducing communication to solipsistic echo. This insight extends Adorno's critique of "affirmative essence" in dialectical thinking (ADORNO, 1966) to the domain of linguistic theory itself.

The Aletheiatic approach thus represents not another failed attempt at disambiguation but the recognition that the failure of disambiguation is language's *essential achievement*—the creation of interpretive spaces where meaning can emerge precisely because it cannot be fixed.

7. Implications and Applications

7.1 Theoretical Implications

Aletheiatics reframes all previous linguistic theory as elaborate attempts to avoid confronting language's essential nature. Semantic theories, syntactic frameworks, and pragmatic analyses become symptoms of what we might call "linguistic anxiety"—the desperate attempt to ground language in something more solid than language itself.

This reframing does not invalidate previous theoretical work but reveals its true function: not the achievement of perfect communication but the systematic exploration of communication's impossibility. Each theoretical advance reveals new dimensions of linguistic inadequacy, bringing us closer to the Aletheiatic recognition.

7.2 Practical Applications

Aletheiatic principles have profound implications for education, therapy, legal discourse, and interpersonal communication. Rather than striving for perfect clarity, Aletheiatic practice embraces *productive ambiguity* while maintaining rigorous attention to the falsification process inherent in all utterance.

In educational contexts, Aletheiatic pedagogy would focus not on transmitting information but on developing students' capacity to recognize the systematic distortion involved in all knowledge



claims. This is not skepticism but a more sophisticated relationship to truth that acknowledges both its absolute nature and its linguistic inaccessibility.

7.3 Ethical Dimensions

Aletheiatrics has profound ethical implications. If all utterances are false, then the traditional distinction between truth-telling and lying collapses. What matters is not whether one speaks truth (impossible) but how one relates to the falsity of one's speech.

Aletheiatric ethics involves taking responsibility for the systematic distortion one introduces into discourse while maintaining commitment to the truth that cannot be spoken. This creates a new form of intellectual honesty based not on the claim to possess truth but on the recognition of one's inevitable falsification of it.

8. Aletheiatric Principles in Practice: Real Conversations

8.1 Educational Context: Philosophy Seminar

Professor Chen: Today we're discussing Heidegger's concept of authenticity. Sarah, what does "authentic existence" mean to you?

Sarah: Well, I think it means being true to yourself, but... *pauses* Actually, the moment I say "true to yourself," I'm already creating a false division between some essential self and the performance of that self. So maybe authentic existence is recognizing that any attempt to define it destroys what we're trying to capture.

Professor Chen: You're demonstrating something important—the recognition that your own statement falsifies what it attempts to express. This isn't failure; it's the beginning of genuine philosophical thinking. What happens if we sit with that contradiction rather than trying to resolve it?

Marcus: It's frustrating though. How can we learn anything if we can't say anything true?

Professor Chen: What if learning isn't about accumulating true statements but about developing sensitivity to how language both reveals and conceals? Your frustration itself is telling us something that no definition of learning could capture.

The class continues, with students learning to work within and through linguistic limitations rather than despite them.



8.2 Therapeutic Context: Therapy Session

Dr. Rodriguez: You mentioned feeling "trapped" in your relationship. Can you say more about that?

Client: I... well, when I say trapped, that's not quite right either. It's more like... *long pause* Every word I use—trapped, suffocated, confined—they all miss something. Maybe the problem is that I keep trying to name what can't be named.

Dr. Rodriguez: What's it like to notice that gap between experience and language?

Client: Strange. Like I'm finally admitting something I've always known but couldn't say. The words always felt like lies, but I thought that meant I was just bad at explaining myself.

Dr. Rodriguez: What if being "bad at explaining" is actually being honest about the limits of explanation? What opens up when you stop trying to get the words exactly right?

Client: *tears* I feel less alone, somehow. Like you're meeting me in the place where words fail instead of where they succeed.

Dr. Rodriguez: That space where words fail—is that where you actually live?

The session continues, working in the gaps rather than trying to close them.

8.3 Legal Context: Contract Negotiation

Lawyer A (Jennifer): The clause states "reasonable efforts," but we both know that's essentially meaningless from a legal standpoint.

Lawyer B (David): Exactly. And maybe that's why it works. The moment we define "reasonable efforts" precisely, we create a thousand ways to circumvent the definition.

Jennifer: So you're saying the ambiguity is functional?

David: I'm saying the ambiguity acknowledges what we both know but can't say—that this relationship will require ongoing negotiation that no contract can fully anticipate. The vague language creates space for that negotiation.

Jennifer: My client is uncomfortable with uncertainty.

David: All language in contracts is uncertain. We're just being honest about it. The question is: do we want uncertainty that pretends to be certainty, or uncertainty that knows itself?



Jennifer: *pauses* What if we add a clause that explicitly acknowledges the interpretive space? Something like "The parties recognize that this language requires ongoing interpretation and good faith collaboration to determine meaning in specific circumstances."

David: Now you're thinking aletheiatically. We're not hiding from the falsity—we're building it into the structure.

8.4 Interpersonal Context: Intimate Relationship

Alex: I feel like you don't understand me.

Jordan: I'm trying to understand. Tell me what you mean.

Alex: See, that's just it. The moment I tell you, it becomes something else. What I'm feeling right now, watching you try to fix this—it's changing as I speak about it.

Jordan: So talking about it changes it?

Alex: Yes, but not talking about it means staying isolated. It's impossible.

Jordan: *sits quietly for a moment* What if we just... stayed with the impossibility for a minute? Not trying to solve it.

Alex: *exhales* That's... actually a relief. Like you're not trying to translate me into something you can manage.

Jordan: I love you in ways I can't say. And saying that I love you in ways I can't say is still not saying it.

Alex: But somehow that gets closer than trying to explain it would.

Jordan: Yeah. The failure feels more honest than success would.

They sit together in comfortable silence

8.5 Academic Context: Dissertation Defense

Committee Chair: Your thesis argues that postcolonial theory has reached an impasse. Can you elaborate?

Candidate: I argue that, but then I have to acknowledge that my argument participates in the very discourse I'm critiquing. I can't stand outside postcolonial theory to judge it without already being shaped by it.



Committee Member 1: Isn't that just relativism?

Candidate: No, because I'm not saying all positions are equal. I'm saying that the position from which I speak is necessarily partial and false, including this statement of partiality. But that doesn't make the critique meaningless—it makes it honest.

Committee Member 2: So how do we evaluate your claims?

Candidate: By how productively they fail. Does the failure open new spaces for thinking, or does it close them down? My thesis succeeds by demonstrating its own limitations in ways that might be useful for others.

Committee Chair: You're asking us to evaluate not just your argument but your method of undermining your own argument.

Candidate: I'm asking you to consider whether rigorous attention to falsification might be more valuable than the illusion of final truth. The question isn't whether I'm right, but whether this way of being wrong is generative.

The defense continues with committee members engaging the productive contradictions rather than trying to resolve them

8.6 Medical Context: Doctor-Patient Consultation

Dr. Kim: How would you describe your pain?

Patient: It's... burning? But not like fire. Stabbing? But not sharp. Every word I use is wrong.

Dr. Kim: What if the wrongness of the words is information too?

Patient: What do you mean?

Dr. Kim: Your pain exists in the space between burning and not-burning, between stabbing and not-stabbing. That space is real, even if we can't name it precisely.

Patient: So you believe me even though I can't describe it right?

Dr. Kim: I believe you because you can't describe it right. The inadequacy of language is telling me something about what you're experiencing that perfect description couldn't convey.

Patient: That's the first time I've felt heard by a doctor.

Dr. Kim: The space between your experience and your words—that's where we'll work together. Not trying to eliminate the gap, but learning from it.



8.7 Analysis: How These Conversations Demonstrate Aletheiatic Principles

Educational Benefits:

- Students learn to work *with* rather than *against* linguistic limitations
- Critical thinking develops through engagement with contradiction rather than its resolution
- Knowledge emerges in the space between questions and answers

Therapeutic Applications

- Clients feel met in their actual *experience* rather than in linguistic approximations
- The therapy happens in recognition of shared limitation rather than expert interpretation
- Healing occurs through acknowledged mutual incomprehension rather than false clarity

Legal Implications

- Contracts become more robust by acknowledging their interpretive nature
- Disputes are anticipated and structured rather than hidden
- Legal language becomes more *honest* about its own limitations

Interpersonal Communication

- Intimacy deepens through shared recognition of expressive failure
- Conflict transforms when both parties acknowledge the impossibility of perfect understanding
- Love is expressed through the acknowledgment of its *inexpressibility*

Professional Discourse

- Academic rigor increases through systematic attention to one's own *falsification*
- Medical practice becomes more responsive to lived experience
- Professional relationships become more authentic through acknowledged limitation

In each case, the recognition of linguistic falsity doesn't paralyze communication but liberates it from impossible standards, creating space for genuine encounter in the gaps between speaker and hearer, experience and expression.

8. Conclusion: The End of the Beginning



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The development of linguistic theory from semantics through syntax to pragmatics represents humanity's systematic exploration of communication's impossibility. Each dimension has contributed essential insights while ultimately demonstrating its own inadequacy. Aletheiatrics does not solve the problems these dimensions encountered but reveals why they are unsolvable.

This recognition is not defeat but liberation. Once we abandon the impossible goal of perfect communication, we can begin to appreciate communication's actual wonders: the miracle that understanding occurs at all, the creativity involved in productive misunderstanding, and the profound intimacy possible when minds encounter each other across the unbridgeable gap that language simultaneously creates and attempts to span.

The silence that Aletheiatrics advocates is not the end of language but its beginning—the recognition that allows authentic speech to emerge from the acknowledgment of its own impossibility. In this silence, finally, something true can be heard: not in what is said, but in the recognition of what cannot be said and the saying of it anyway.

The fourth dimension of linguistic analysis thus reveals that the first three dimensions were always already Aletheiatic—systematic explorations of language's essential falsity dressed up as attempts at disambiguation. Once this is recognized, linguistics can begin its real work: not the impossible task of making language true, but the possible task of understanding how truth makes language necessary by making it impossible.

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