ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Conditionals, Meaning and Mood

by WILLIAM B. STARR

Dissertation Directors:

Ernest Lepore and Jason Stanley

This work explores the hypothesis that natural language is a tool for changing a language user's state of mind and, more specifically, the hypothesis that a sentence's meaning is constituted by its characteristic role in fulfilling this purpose. This view contrasts with the dominant approach to semantics due to Frege, Tarski and others' work on artificial languages: language is first and foremost a tool for representing the world. Adapted to natural language by Davidson, Lewis, Montague, *et. al.* this dominant approach has crystalized as *truth-conditional semantics*: to know the meaning of a sentence is to know the conditions under which that sentence is true. Chapter 1 details the animating ideas of my alternative approach and shows that the representational function of language can be understood in terms of the more general function of changing representational mental states. Chapters 2-4 argue that the additional resources of this more general conception of meaning allow us to explain certain phenomena involving conditionals (e.g. *if Bob danced then Leland danced*) and grammatical mood (e.g. declarative, interrogative, imperative mood) that truth-conditional semantics does not. In the analysis of these specific phenomena and the articulation of the general approach on offer, it emerges that this approach combines insights and benefits from both use-theoretic and truth-theoretic work on meaning.