# LINGUISTICS AND PHILOSOPHY

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## 1. How philosophers became linguists

> *Alle Philosophie ist "Sprachkritik".*
> *Wittgenstein (1922, §4.0031)*

During the first half of the present century a number of outstanding philosophers realized that language theory could profitably be viewed as far more than merely a means of studying one among the many human faculties, or merely sharpening the tool we use to philosophize - they realized that there is a sense in which philosophy of language comprises (almost) the whole of philosophy. This was the famous *linguistic turn*: philosophers came to accept that everything that is is in a sense through language, and that to study what there is is to study what our words mean.[1]

The enigma of the language-world relationship was brought to the centre of philosophical discussion early in this century by Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Austin and others. Their original point was that we cannot take the representing capacities of language at face value, that in order to treat of things - which cannot be done save with the help of words - we must first treat of words and make sure which of them are really capable of treating of things. Thus the philosophers undergoing the linguistic turn slowly gave up asking *what is consciousness* (*matter*, *evil* etc.)? in favour of asking *what is the meaning of 'consciousness'* (*'matter'*, *'evil'* etc.)?

This simple turn seemed to have tremendous consequences for philosophy. By replacing the question *what is consciousness?* by the question *what is the meaning of 'consciousness'?* we seem to lose nothing (any meaningful answer to the former question seems to be recoverable from an answer to the latter), and yet it seems to take us from the weird realms of mind to the commonplace domain of language, from the troublesome immersing into people's heads to straightforward observing how they use words. It also seems to guard against the "bewitchment of our reason by language" (Wittgenstein) caused by words which are only seemingly meaningful: such questions as *what does the word 'ether' stand for?* can be answered simply by *nothing*, whereas the question *what is ether?* presupposes that there *is* something as *ether* (as

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[1]This concerns especially those philosophers who later came to be called *analytic* (see Rorty, 1967); but not only them - Heidegger, e.g., has accomplished a turn of a very similar kind.

that about the nature of which we are asking) and hence that there is something for which the word stands; thus the latter question, in contrast to the former, forces a certain view of the world on us, simply by our acceptance of it as a question.

Ayer (1936, p.35), for one, concludes that

> The propositions of philosophy are not factual, but linguistic in character - that is, they do not describe the behaviour of physical, or even mental, objects; they express definitions, or the formal consequences of definitions.

Therefore, the proponents of the linguistic turn argue, philosophy can be nothing more and nothing else than a certain kind of analysis of language, "the pursuit of meaning", as Schlick (1932) puts it. Metaphysics is thus *aufgehoben* - it is exposed as a worthless enterprise stemming from the failure to understand the true role of language; it boils down to expressing one's "life feeling" (Carnap, 1931). Thus, philosophers became linguists.

## 2. How linguists became philosophers

> *I've puzzled for a long time about what the difference is between certain kinds of philosophy and certain kinds of linguistics and finally decided that the main difference lies in whether you're embarrassed about not knowing about a paper in 'Linguistic Inquiry' or the 'Journal of Philosophy'*
> *Bach (1985, p.593)*

Linguists, of course, have been in pursuit of meaning - in their own way - since the very time linguistics came into being; some of them, the semanticians, being even the specialists. And it was only several decades after the linguistic turn of philosophy that something which could be called the *model-theoretic turn* of semantics occured: many of the linguists who tried to get hold of meaning in an explicit way have come to appreciate the usefulness of Tarskian logical semantics and model theory. This way of approaching the problem of meaning appeared to be particularly promising to the purposes of philosophy; and, in fact, this turn was to a large extent inspired by the heirs of the linguistic turn (especially by Carnap, 1957).

It was this approach which seemed to provide the needed framework for making meanings explicit, by reconstructing them as set-theoretical objects. It apparently augured the reconciliation of the intuition of the platonistic character of meanings with the modern mistrust of any 'ghostly entities' like ideas: we only have to presuppose the existence of the ordinary things and the possibility to group entities together - set theory has taught us that this alone is enough to yield us a platonistic heaven.

However, the traditional logic with its extensional semantics was quickly deemed to be insufficient - the range of natural language phenomena which could be directly captured by its means was only had to be found scanty. It was necessary either to develop a more sophisticated logical system, or to find ways how to capture the interesting aspects of natural language in an indirect fashion. The first such new way is inseparably connected with the name of Richard Montague (1974), who was the first to show (or at least the first to persuade a broad audience)

that if we accept intensional logic with possible-world semantics, we can account for many nontrivial problems of natural language which are beyond the scope of extensional logic. The key concept was that of *possible world* - a concept introduced implicitly by Rudolf Carnap (esp. 1957; under the name of *state of affairs*) and explicitly by Saul Kripke (1963).[2]

Some philosophers, like Quine and Davidson, rejected intensional logic in favour of the good, old, austere classical first-order logic. Davidson (1967), e.g., tried to show how it is possible to analyze certain nontrivial natural language locutions if we let the first-order quantifiers range over what he called *events* - thus he rejected logic which would implicitly necessitate *possible worlds* (as objects in the universe of its metatheory) in favour of logic which would explicitly necessitate *events* (as objects inside the universe of the logic itself). There were others who rejected the concept of *possible world* on the grounds of the incomprehensible immensity of such an entity - they proposed to replace it by something smaller and more comprehensible, such as *situation* (thus Barwise and Perry, 1983). Others urged the necessity of having something like situations, which, however, would be the subject of dynamic development (Kamp's, 1981, *discourse representational structures,* or the *informational states* of dynamic predicate logic as expounded by Groenendijk & Stokhof, 1991). And others felt the necessity to work with still other entities of diverse natures, like, e.g., Hintikka's (1978) *impossible possible worlds*, Heim's (1982) *files*, Tichý's (1988) *constructions*, etc.

All in all, the activities of linguists-semanticians have come increasingly to resemble those of philosophers-metaphysicians; and some of the semanticians have explicitly spoken about doing metaphysics (see, e.g., Cresswell, 1973), or at least 'natural language metaphysics' (Bach, 1986 - but see the motto of this section). Thus, the old monsters of metaphysics, once thrown out through the front door, now strike back through the window; and hence linguists became philosophers.

My point in this paper is that this alliance of linguistics and philosophy, or, more precisely, of semantics and metaphysics, is, despite all its apparent fruitfulness, rather tricky; and I would like to indicate some of its dangers. On the general level we can say that it is tricky in that it fosters dangerous vicious circularities: linguists explicate some phenomena by relying on certain philosophical entities or doctrines, whose explanation, however, has in turn come to rest on the linguistic phenomena being explicated. A simple example: linguists sometimes like to explain words like *necessary* simply by referring to possible worlds, whose real nature they take as something they need not bother very much about, because it is explained by philosophers. However, the (post-linguistic-turn) philosophers would reduce explaining possible worlds to explaining the *talk about* possible worlds, which is nothing but the linguistic (or logico-linguistic) talk about words like *necessary*.


## 3. Two senses of 'semantics'

I think that it is of crucial importance to point out immediately that the term *semantics* is used to cover what are in fact two different enterprises, only one of which is directly relevant for linguistics and philosophy. The term covers themes pertaining to two essentially distinct realms: the realm of language and the realm of the links between language and things in the world. Let

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[2]See also Peregrin (1993).

us call that part of semantics which addresses the issues of the former kind *semantics$_L$*, while calling the part addressing those of the latter kind *semantics$_W$*. The central theme of semantics$_L$ is *meaning*, and consequently also analytic truth (for analytic truth is "truth in virtue of meaning"). The central theme of semantics$_W$ is (contingent) *truth*, and consequently reference (for reference is what is needed to compositionally yield truth). The crucial difference is that semantics$_L$ addresses things which one knows *in virtue of knowing language*: to know the meaning of, say, *the king of France* it is enough to know English[3], there is no need to know anything about the present state of the world. Semantics$_W$, on the other hand, addresses things which one knows when she knows language *and* something about the present state of the world: to know what the phrase *the king of France* refers to one has to know its meaning plus certain facts about France.[4]

Roots of many puzzles and problems of modern semantic theory can be traced back to confusions between semantics$_L$ and semantics$_W$. These confusions begin with the unhappy way in which Frege used the term *meaning* (*Bedeutung*) for what we now call reference; this usage had the consequence that the knowledge of language seemed to presuppose and to imply knowledge of many extralinguistic facts (for a detailed analysis see Tichý, 1992). This move instantiated an undesirable ambiguity of the term *meaning* - we should now rather speak about *meaning$_L$*, which is, in accordance with common sense, a matter of language alone, and about *meaning$_W$* which is, in accordance with Frege, a matter of relating words to things[5].

*Meaning$_W$* of an expression amounts to some causal or "intentional" link between the expression and an extralinguistic thing (a real thing, a 'content of consciousness' or something like that). *Meaning$_L$*, on the other hand, is the matter of relations between expressions; hence the meaning$_L$ of an expression is best seen as something like materialisation of the place of the expression within the system of language, or of its role within the actual language game.[6] Approaches to language may then be classified according to which of these notions of meaning they grant primacy: the *"nomenclatural"*, or *representational*, ones take the relations between

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[3]This is not literally true because of the proper name; but this is clearly peculiar to the Russellian example.

[4]The opposition between meaningL and meaningW is sometimes, especially in the context of Saussurian linguistics, reflected by such distinctions as 'meaning' vs. 'content', 'Bedeutung' vs. 'Bezeichnung.' or 'form of content' vs. 'substance of content'. Cf. Sgall et. al. (1986, p. 13).

[5]It follows from the considerations of Dummett (1974), that even if we consider that of the Fregean terms which is really closer to the intuitive concept of meaning, namely his *Sinn* (*sense*), we are likely to encounter a parallel ambiguity, for Fregean senses have come to be taken to play two incompatible roles: to explicate what a linguistic agent *grasps* when she grasps words, and to determine the corresponding *Bedeutung*, i.e. *extension*. In this way, it appears caught on the horns of the dilemma popularized by Putnam (1975).

[6]This is not to say that we must accept an absolute boundary between meaning$_L$ and meaning$_W$. As Quine showed, the holistic character of language makes it impossible to distribute the relatively clearcut boundary between semantics$_L$ and semantics$_W$ to individual statements and expressions in any unique way; and this makes the boundary between meaning$_L$ and meaning$_W$ of an individual linguistic item rather illusory. However, an expression surely can be seen as fulfilling two distinct, however inextricably linked, functions: to cope with the world and to collaborate with its fellow expressions.

expressions to be parasitic upon the way words are linked to things; whereas the *structural*, or *inferential*, approaches claim that the relations between words and things are, the other way around, grounded in the interrelations of words.[7]

Anyway, it seems to be quite clear that what is in the province of a linguist or a philosopher of language is meaning$_L$, not meaning$_W$: the project of discovering who is the present king of France, required in order to determine the meaning$_W$ of the expression *the king of France* and hence belonging to the project of semantics$_W$, is clearly not a part of the semantic theory of English. (As Dummett, 1991, p.151 puts it, "in so far as a knowledge of the semantic value of an expression goes beyond what is required for an understanding of it ... its semantic value is not an ingredient in its meaning, and the specification of it no part of a meaning theory.") Meaning, in the ordinary sense of the word, is a matter of semantics$_L$ - knowing meaning is a part of knowing language, not of knowing facts about the extralinguistic world. This implies that the meaning of an expression is not a thing to be discovered within the extralinguistic world, but rather something as the value of the expression, the materialisation of the role of the expression within the system of language and within the language games that we play. Wittgenstein (1984, §64) writes: "Compare the meaning of a word with the 'function' of a clerk. And 'different meanings' with 'different functions'."


## 4. What is a 'semantic analysis'?

This seems to indicate that it is misguided to see the semantic analysis of language as a matter of pairing words and things; that it is more appropriate to see it as a matter of 'finding the position of the expression within the structure of language'. Let us look how things are in practise; let us inspect what the semanticians do when they analyze language.
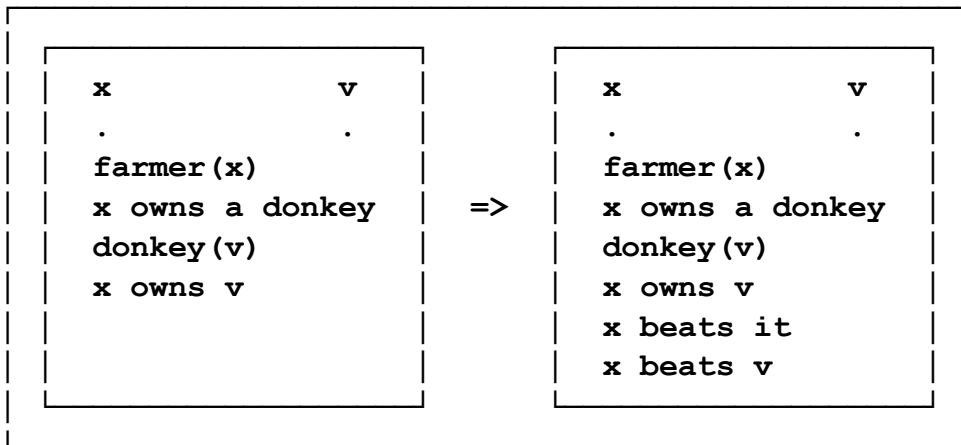
Doing semantic analysis of an expression usually results in providing a formula, a diagram or another expression. Let consider some examples, chosen more or less at random, of various kinds of formulas and diagrams which one can find in books about semantics - (1) is Montague's (1974, p. 238) logical analysis of one of the reading of the sentence *John seeks a unicorn*; (2) is Chomsky's (1986, s. 76) description of the logical form of the sentence *I wonder who gave the book to whom*; (3) is Kamp's (15) discourse representation structure (DRS) corresponding to the sentence *Every farmer who owns a donkey beats it*; and (4) is the 'tectogrammatical representation' of one of the articulations of the sentence *The professor of chemistry will come tomorrow* as given by Sgall et al. (1986).

$$\textbf{seek'}(\widehat{\ } j, \ \widehat{P} \vee u[\textbf{unicorn'}_*(u) \wedge \textbf{\textit{P}}\{\widehat{\ } u\}]) \tag{1}$$

I wonder [whom$_j$, who$_i$ [e$_i$ gave the book to e$_j$ ]] $\hspace{3cm}$ (2)

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 _____        (3)
|                                                                |
|   _____        _____     |
|  |  x            v        |      |  x            v        |    |
|  |  .            .        |      |  .            .        |    |
|  |  farmer(x)             |      |  farmer(x)             |    |
|  |  x owns a donkey       |  =>  |  x owns a donkey       |    |
|  |  donkey(v)             |      |  donkey(v)             |    |
|  |  x owns v              |      |  x owns v              |    |
|  |                        |      |  x beats it            |    |
|  |                        |      |  x beats v             |    |
|  |_____|      |_____|    |
|                                                                |
|_____|
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                         come_Posterior                          (4)
                        / |       \
               Dir    Act |         Time-when
                /         |             \
            here      professor         tomorrow
                          \
                           Obj
                            \
                          chemistry
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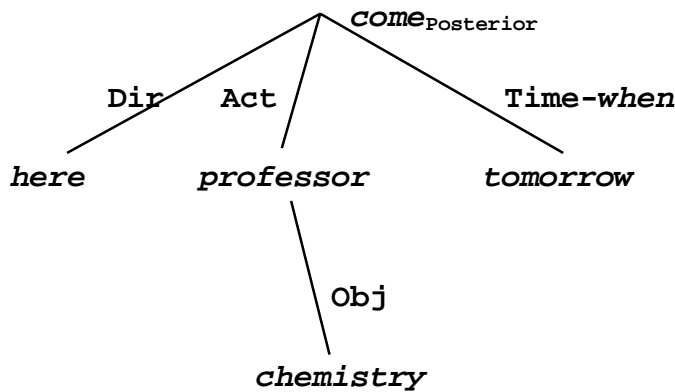
What are we doing in furnishing some such formula or some such diagram? In what sense do we explain the analyzed sentence?

In general, providing a diagram may encapsule one of two essentially different enterprises: providing a *translation*, or providing a *description*. Providing a translation of the analyzed expression into a language which is taken as understood, or which is in some sense more "semantically transparent", surely means explicating meaning - but, equally of course, only relatively to the uncritical acceptance of the language into which we translate. Providing a description elucidates the meaning to the extent to which it is the description of the meaning, or of that to which we hold the meaning to be reducible, e.g. the use of the expression, or a 'cognitive content' for which the expression is supposed to stand.

Restricting ourselves to the two most prominent reducienda of *the meaning of an expression*, namely *the use of the expression* and *the mental entity ('cognitive content') 'behind' the expression*, the following main possibilities seem to emerge as to what a diagram associated with a sentence, or, more generally, with an expression, can amount to:
   (i) a description of the meaning of the expression
   (ii) a description of the way the expression is used

(iii) a description of a mental entity associated with the expression

(iv) a translation of the sentence into another language

The first alternative seems to offer the most promising route: what could be a more direct realisation of the task of semantics than displaying expressions alongside with their meanings?[8] However, this proposal is rather tricky; for what could count as a description of meaning, which, as we have concluded in the preceding section, is best seen not as a 'real' object, but rather as a *value*? The most secure way to describe the meaning of an expression is to use the expression itself - to describe the meaning of, say *every farmer owns a donkey* we best use the description *the meaning of 'every farmer owns a donkey'* or, possibly, *that every farmer owns a donkey*. However, using these would lead to trivialities like

> *The meaning of 'Every farmer' is the meaning of 'every farmer'*
> *'Every farmer owns a donkey' means that every farmer owns a donkey*

We may, of course, also say something less trivial, e.g.

> *'Every farmer owns a donkey' means that for every x, if x is a farmer,*
> *then x owns a donkey*;

however, what is nontrivial with this is the purported synonymy of *'Every farmer owns a donkey'* and *'For every x, if x is a farmer, then x owns a donkey'*; i.e. the fact that the latter is - in a certain sense - a faithful translation of the former. Thus it seems that there is no interesting direct describing of the meaning of an expression which would not rest on finding an interesting translation of the expression into another language (or an interesting paraphrase of the expression in the same language); and providing (i) seems to be in this sense parasitic upon providing (iv)[9]. As Quine (1969, p. 53) puts it, "A question of the form 'What is an F?' can be answered only by recourse to a further term: 'An F is a G.'"

It is important to realize that the same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to (ii). The most straightforward way to characterize the use of *'Every farmer owns a donkey'* is to say something like *The sentence 'Every farmer owns a donkey' is (correctly) produced if and only if every farmer owns a donkey* (this is, of course, a severe oversimplification, but not one that affects the point made here). And if we use another sentence on the right hand side of the biconditional, then it is the purported synonymy of this sentence with the characterized sentence which is nontrivial.

Moreover, despite appearances, the situation does not differ substantially even in the case of (iii). It might seem that in this case we may be able to pick up some relevant 'content of consciousness' independently of any linguistic articulation; however, it is hard to see how we could identify contentful mental entities save by way of language; we cannot describe the mental entity 'beyond' the sentence *'Every farmer owns a donkey'* save by saying that it is the thought (or idea, or whatever) that every farmer owns a donkey, or the thought that for every x, if x is a farmer, then x owns a donkey etc. What is worse, even if we could give an independent

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[8]See Chomsky (1967).

[9]For details see Peregrin (1993; 1995a, Chapter 11).

characterization of such a mental entity (e.g. by means of some 'mentographic coordinates'), this would not really further our attempts to grip meaning: being told that an expression is associated with such or another lump of a mental stuff can never by itself reveal us what the expression means, for knowing what it means involves knowing how it behaves relatively to other expressions, what follows from it etc.[10] There is also no help in recourse to talking of 'neural events' or the like: it is true that these, unlike mental entities, are specifiable independently of the sentences whose usage they may accompany (at least in principle); however they are quite like thoughts in that if they are specified in this way, they cannot really provide us with meanings.[11]

So it seems that diagrams offered by semantic analysts cannot be taken as descriptions of meanings in a direct sense (in the sense in which a photo is the description of the bearer of a name). This indicates that the only real sense which can be made of formulas and diagrams as exemplified above is in terms of translating the analyzed language into another language. However, does this not suggest that this kind of semantic analysis is circular and consequently futile?


## 5. The Myth of the Structure

One of the common way to avoid this 'intractability of meaning' is to move the concept of meaning to the periphery of one's teaching and to concentrate on the word *struture*. The enterprise of semantic analysis, it is then claimed, consists in revealing the "semantic structure" of an expression (or of the mental content of an expression). Thus, for many theoreticians of language, meaning has come to coincide with something like *the semantic structure*; and semantic analysis with pinpointing this structure.

This might be understood as accepting the structural approach to language urged above - but usually it is not. The point is whereas what we have urged is an approach which sees meaning of an expression as the possitionof the expression within the network of language, the common way of engaging the concept of structure is based on the picture that an expression is like, say, a mineral: that it can be analyzed and examined with tools akin to microscopes up to the point where we *see* its structure. This picture essentially obscures the fact that an expression does not have any inherent structure in the sense in which a mineral has - at least no *interesting* inherent structure. (An expression does have an inherent structure in that it consists of words and letters - but this is not the structure held in mind by those who use the term *structure* to make sense of semantics.)

The fact that the structures which linguistic theories ascribe to an expression are not really to be found on the expression itself has forced many linguists to acquire the conviction that what they are studying are - ultimately - not expressions, but rather mental objects which the

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[10]This is, of course, only an anecdotic hint at the case made against mentalism by Frege, Wittgenstein and others. It is, of course, also only another expression of the fact spelled out earlier in the paper: namely that meaning is not a thing, but rather a value.

[11]Hans Kamp has suggested to me that one of the ways to express this is  the following: „A theory of the implementation of memory presupposes a theory of understanding of meaning".

expressions stand for. The structure of the expression, the story goes, is the structure of a mental entity behind the expression - be it called an idea, an intention, a cognitive content, or whatever. Thus the situation has arisen where many linguists begin calling themselves 'cognitive scientists'.

This semantic mentalism is often complemented with a kind of 'reduction axiom': *everything mental is physical*, *every event in the mind is (in fact) an event in the underlying brain* etc. This seems to guard against the suspicion that what is going on is the old mentalism which has been seriously challenged by so many philosophers - the structures which are studied are ultimately tangible structures of the human brain. However, this is illusiory - the structures postulated by linguists are clearly *not* results of studying the brain - the books which present them do not map neural synapses nor anything of their kind (and, in fact, as pointed out in the previous section, if they did so, they would not be about semantics). The structures are obviously the results of studying *language* - which is, however, understood as studying mind, which is in turn postulated to be studying brain.

The thesis advocated here is that the structure of an expression is essentially a quite different kind - it is a theoretical construct which locates the expression within the system of the language to which it belongs. We first reconstruct language as a rule-based system; and this reconstruction causes expressions to fall into certain categories. If the rules which we consider are the rules of syntax (i.e. if they provide for the criterial reconstruction of well-formedness), then the resulting categories are known as *syntactic categories* (they express the expressions' behaviour from the viewpoint of constituting well-formed expressions and statements); if they are the rules of semantics (i.e. if they amount to truth, assertibility, or use in general), then the categories are *meanings* (they express the expressions' behaviour from the viewpoint of truth, or, more generally, from the viewpoint of their employability within language games). Anyway, given such a reconstruction we come to observe every expression as a construct built according to certain rules from parts of certain categories[12]. And this is a *holistic* matter - the expression only has this kind of structure when considered as belonging to the system of language.

In fact, this applies to *all* abstract entities and their structures - in contrast to concrete entities like minerals. A mineral does have its structure independently of (the existence of) any other minerals (at least independently of those which are not its spatial parts) - it is enough to use a microscope which would enable us to identify it. The structure of an abstract entity, on the other hand, is always the matter of the entity's position within the web of other abstract entities of the same category - there is no "mental microscope" to examine it in isolation and penetrate inside it. This has become especially clear with the development of the mathematical *theory of categories* (see, e.g., Herrlich and Strecker, 1973), whereby *any* kind of formal structure is defined solely by means of morphisms between objects displaying this kind of structure (thus, e.g., to be a set is to be a member of a family of objects interrelated by a certain web of relationships).

Let's, for the sake of illustration take a diagram of the kind of the Kampian DRS (3). What does it depict? As far as my experience goes, the majority of people practising DRT would answer to the effect that it depicts something like the (structure of the) mental content which is expressed by the expression analyzed, or that it somehow records what is going on with speakers' and/or hearers' mental representations. However, this is nothing but a cheap ready-made universal answer - (3) is not the result of an introspection or of an extrospective

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[12]For details see Peregrin (1995b; 1997).

psychological analysis, it is the result of examining the linguistic properties of the analyzed sentence, namely its relations to other sentences, especially to those which imply it and those which are implied by it.

Another story, however, can be told: a story which construes the switch from the more traditional, "static" semantic theories to the more recent, "dynamic" ones, like DRT, in terms of acknowledging certain *inferential* properties of certain sentences (prototypically those involving anaphora) - properties which are hard to account for with recourse only to traditional tools. Evincing Kamp's own example (personal communication), if we analyze the sentences *One of the three candidates is over forty* and *Two of the three candidates are under forty* by traditional means, we are unable to account for the important difference between them, namely that the former can, while the latter cannot, be followed by *We eliminate him*. This vantage point lets us see DRT, and semantic theory in general, as an explicit reconstruction of structural, inferential patterns governing our use of language carried out via explicating the roles of individual expressions within these patterns.

## 6. Semantic analysis as envisaging inferential structure

This line of thought leads to a picture of semantic analysis quite different from the one envisaged by the usual uncritical construal. What we do in explicating semantics of words and sentences via formulas and diagrams is not picturing extralinguistic things or concepts or structures purported to be the meanings of the expressions; we rather envisage the roles of the words and sentences within the structure (esp. inferential structure) of language[13]. We achieve this by developing languages (or quasilanguages) whose expressions wear their inferential roles more or less on their sleeves.

To assess the adequacy and reasonability of a diagram used to pursue semantic analysis we thus should not try to probe the speaker's and hearer's minds to find out whether we glimpse something which could be pictured by the diagram, but we should rather consider the following two points:

(A) Is the *analysandum* adequate to the *analysatum*, does the inferential role of the former within the analyzing language 'reasonably approximate' that of the latter within the analyzed one?; and

(B) is the inferential role of the *analysatum*, as a part of the analyzing formal language, in some sense explicit?

Let us return to (3) once more. Does it provide us with a useful semantic analysis of *Every farmer who owns a donkey beats it*? To answer this question, it is not enough to consider (3) in isolation: if it is isolated from the body of DRT, it obviously provides us with no semantic analysis at all, for any formula or diagram can successfully play the role of semantic *analysatum* only as a node within a large structure expounding relevant relations. (Note that this would *not* be the case if (3) were the *picture* of the meaning of the analyzed sentence.) To ask whether (3) is a reasonable semantic analysis is to ask whether DRS's can be put into correspondence with English sentences in such a way that (A) there is a 'reasonable' extent to which DRS's defined to imply (to be implied by) other DRS's correspond to sentences intuitively implying (being

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[13] Thus providing what Sellars (1974) calls their *functional classification*.

implied by) sentences corresponding to the other DRS's; (B) the inferential properties of DRS's are in some sense more explicit than those of English sentences (the properties can be somehow read off from the DRS's themselves); and (C) (3) corresponds to *Every farmer who owns a donkey beats it*.

This yields an understanding of the nature of the praxis of semantic analysis which may differ dramatically from the commonsense view. It may not really tackle the praxis itself; for this praxis largely consists in collecting and cataloguing facts about language, and this is something that is largely independent of an 'ideologic' background. However, it has tremendous consequences for grasping the possibilities and limitations of drawing philosophical consequences from such a semantic analysis; and by corollary also for understanding the nature of semantic analysis itself.


## 7. Realism?

Some of the arguments of the last two sections can rightly be seen as decrying mentalism in semantics. Does this mean that I am siding with 'realism' as against 'conceptualism' in the sense of Katz and Postal (1991)? Not quite - for the best way to see this paper is as fighting on two fronts: against the construal of semantics as parasitic upon psychology, and against its construal as based on a realistic metaphysics.

One reason for my reluctance to be seen as engaging myself in the struggle for realism is that there is a straightforward sense of 'realism' for which no such struggle would warrant itself - for *every* minimally plausible semantic theory trivially *has* to be 'realistic' in this sense. I am convinced that nobody, not even the most diehard mentalists and conceptualists, would claim that semantics is the matter of describing some mental (neural) particulars within the head of an individual speaker - for this would be no theory of English (nor of any other language), but rather the theory of some features of a particuar person. Even if we accept the assumption that semantics is a matter of particulars of such a kind, we simply have to assume that these particulars can be somehow equated over speakers; that they have some properties which make them treatable as different tokens of same types[14]. So the semanticist must talk about some non-particulars - be they construed as intersubjective identities of particulars, or some abstract entities borne by these identities. In any case, talk about meaning is in the clear sense talk about types, not about tokens; and semantics is - in this sense - *inevitably* realistic.

On the other hand, even the most diehard realist has to assume that there are some contingent facts that elicit which meaning an individual expression has. We do not discover meaning by an 'intellectual trip' into a realm of abstracta where we would *see* them attached to expressions; but rather by observing and recording certain concreta. It is the occurrence of certain particular events or entities (the occurrence of certain contents within the heads of speakers, or the occurrence of certain utterances of speakers) which establishes the meaning of an expression[15].

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[14]A detailed argument against a particularistic construal of mind in general has been presented in the famous paper of Sellars (1956).

[15]It is precisely this fact which Quine (1960) took seriously to gain his well-known robust 'behavioristic' constraints of the theory of meaning, which then led to the indeterminacy theses and subsequent dismantling of the atomistic view of language.

Therefore, both the conceptualist and the realist apparently must agree that meanings are abstracta (universals) which are in a certain sense determined by (parasitic upon) certain concreta (particulars).

So, if the only thing that realism claimed were that semantics is a matter of abstracta rather than of concreta, of types rather than of tokens, then realism would seem to be unobjectionable. And if the only thing which conceptualism asserted were that abstracta make no sense unless they are in the sense outlined 'parasitic' upon concreta, then it too would be unobjectionable. Hence, this modest conceptualism and modest realism coincide - for our knowledge (in general) arises out of apprehending particular occurrences as displaying universal structures. The only clash is then a terminological one: whether this situation justifies us in saying that linguistics is about the particular occurrences, or about the universal structures. This is a legitimate subject of a quarrel, but not of one which would go very deep.[16]

The trouble is that both of them seem to claim something more. Conceptualism seems to claim that, first, the particulars which are relevant in lingustics are mental entities (or contents of consciousness, or the internal wirings of our 'language faculty'), and, second, that the theoretician of language has no use of abstract entities whatsoever. I have indicated why I think this conception of a theory of language is futile: I have indicated why the mentalistic conception of meaning is problematic (only hinting at all the complexities discussed at length by Wittgenstein and his direct and indirect followers - in the American context especially by Sellars, Quine and Davidson); and I have also indicated that any theory worth its name must concern itself with public universals rather than with private particulars, and must envisage an intersubjectively understandable "form" or "structure".

Realism (in the spirit of Katz and Postal), on the other hand, seems to claim not only that linguistic data, to be construable as such, must display some regularities and appear as instances of a realistic "form"; they seem to claim also that these realistic entities are accessible in a direct way. Katz and Postal write about "sentential structure" which can be examined to see if it is "at some grammatical level logically significant" (ibid., 519). This invokes the picture of our descending into the depths of the sentence in question, and inspecting a certain floor in its underground to see whether it displays a certain feature; the picture criticised in Section 5.

This is why I prefer adjudicating between that which I argue to be an adequate theory of language and that which I claim to be inadequate not in terms of the realist versus conceptualist distinction, but in terms of the difference between the structuralistic, or inferentialistic, and the nomenclaturistic, or representationalistic, theory.

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[16]This is to say that there is one sense of *"about"* in which linguistics is about concreta, and *another* sense of *"about"* in which linguistics is about abstracta. It is, of course, a severe error to construe linguistics to be about abstract entities *in the former sense of "about"* (i.e., roughly speaking, in the sense of having abstract entities as the ultimate source of evidence). If this is what Chomsky criticises, then he is surely right.

## 8. Conclusion

> *We must not try to resolve the metaphysical questions first, and then construct a meaning-theory in the light of the answers. We should investigate how our language actually functions, and how we can construct a workable systematic description of how it functions; the answers to those questions will then determine the answers to the metaphysical ones.*
>
> *Dummett (1991, p.338)*

Philosophy, at least in its analytic variety, has in a certain sense come to rest on the analysis of language; any notion of metaphysics over and above 'natural language metaphysics' has proven itself to be rather precarious. Therefore it is hardly possible to base natural language semantics on a metaphysics. It is futile to see the enterprise of semantics as secondary to that of some (real or would-be) metaphysics; to think that we must first clarify and formally depict the structure of the word and only then to pair expressions with the elements of the word thus depicted. At the same time it is futile to see semantics as parasitic upon a psychology of language use. Semantics is primarily neither a matter of relating words with things, or of words with thoughts, it is a matter of displaying a certain kind of structure of language.

Thus, semantic analysis is always ultimately a matter of translating the language that is to be analyzed into another language - it makes sense if the latter is in some relevant sense more perspicuous than the former. There is no absolute measure of what is or is not more perspicuous - it all depends on the purpose and on the visual angle. Montague grammar, e.g., can be extremely perspicuous for some people (those educated in logic and model theory and familiar with the symbolism), while extremely obscure for others. Lewis (1972) correctly points out that trading expressions for other expressions is not in itself a semantic analysis, but this should not be understood as saying that the touchstone of a true semantic analysis is that it pairs expressions with things (for no *theory* can do better than to pair expressions with *expressions*); the touchstone is rather that it pairs expressions with expressions of a specific kind, namely with expressions of a (quasi)formal language with its (inferential) structure explicitly articulated. The paradigmatic cases of such 'inferentially explicit' languages are, of course, the languages of logic.

One of the important consequences of this view of semantics is that there is nothing as *the* structure of language. Every structure we ascribe to language and to individual expressions is the result of our theoretical reconstruction, and every theory is guided by a purpose. Therefore, there is not much sense in striving for something as "*the* right and absolutely adequate semantic theory". A theory is like a scheme someone draws up to help us see the principles of operation of a complicated machine, or to help us find our way through a town: it makes us see something which is otherwise obscured - and this may be accomplished at the cost of purposefully neglecting something else.

The analysis of language is indeed crucial for many (if not all) traditional philosophical problems. Unfortunately not all the philosophers who have undergone the linguistic turn have really bothered to penetrate into the depths of the true semantic structure of language; and not all of those linguists who have succeeded in discerning the real nature and perplexities of various

parts of language have avoided seeing language uncritically as a kind of nomenclature of some 'cognitive contents'. True, it is not the business of philosophers to study details of our grammar; and it is not the business of linguists to answer the philosophical questions about the nature of our language. However, the sagest abstract philosophical conception of language is empty if it does not reflect the facts of how language really works; and the most detailed atlas of the landscape of language is impotent if it is not clear which questions it purports to answer.

I think that the recent results of semantics are overwhelming. Take for example the large body of studies concerning the nature of definite and indefinite descriptions, which have persuasively shown that to see these locutions directly in terms of classical, Fregean quantification is inadequate and may be severely misguiding. Or take the interesting results of the systematic investigations of the linguistic evidence for the count/mass, event/process or individual/stage distinctions. Or take the rich results of the inquiry into the vast gallery of kinds and workings of presuppositions. All these results have greatly advanced us in our understanding of the nature and structures of our language; however, I think that to become really operative, they must be placed within the framework of a more sophisticated theory of language; a theory which would not rest on some naive picture of expressions as signs which we use to label exhibits of the world-museum, or to externalize our thoughts.

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