ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Linguistic Mistakes

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Abstract
Ever since the publication of Kripke's Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language, there's been a raging debate in philosophy of language over whether meaning and thought are, in some sense, normative. Most participants in the normativity wars seem to agree that some uses of meaningful expressions are semantically correct while disagreeing over whether this entails anything normative. But what is it to say that a use of an expression is semantically correct? On the so-called orthodox construal, it is to say that it doesn't result in a factual mistake, that is, in saying or thinking something false. On an alternative construal it is instead to say that it doesn't result in a distinctively linguistic mistake, that is, in misusing the expression. It is natural to think that these two construals of semantic correctness are simply about different things and not necessarily in competition with each other. However, this is not the common view. Instead, several philosophers who subscribe to the orthodox construal have argued that the alternative construal of correctness as use in accordance with meaning doesn't make any sense, partly because there are no clear cases of linguistic mistakes (Whiting in Inquiry, 59:219–238, 2016, Wikforss in Philos Stud 102:203–226, 2001). In this paper I develop and defend the idea that there's a distinctively linguistic notion of correctness as use in accordance with meaning and argue that there are clear cases of linguistic mistakes.

1 Introduction

Ever since the publication of Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, there has been a raging debate in philosophy of language over whether meaning and thought are, in some sense, normative (Kripke, 1982). Most participants in the normativity wars seem to agree that some *uses* of meaningful expressions and/or some sorts of thoughts are *semantically correct* while others are incorrect. What they mainly disagree over is whether this, by itself, entails anything normative, for example, that they are also semantically permissible or forbidden. Many philosophers

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have assumed or argued that it does (Boghossian, 1989; Glock, 2019; McGinn, 1984; Millar, 2002; Whiting, 2007, 2009, 2016). Many others have argued that it doesn't (Glüer, 2001, 2013; Glüer & Wikforss, 2009, 2015; Hattiangadi, 2006, 2007; Wikforss, 2001).

But what is it to say that a use of an expression or a thought is semantically correct? On the so-called orthodox construal, it is to say that it doesn't amount to or result in a *factual mistake*, that is, in saying or thinking something false (Hattiangadi, 2006, 2007; Whiting, 2007, 2009, 2016). In slogan form: correctness consists in truth. This conception is usually taken to apply to both uses of meaningful expressions and certain sorts of thoughts and its putative normative consequences or lack thereof have been discussed to death (see e. g. Glüer & Wikforss, 2015, 2018; Miller, 2020; Whiting, 2009).

However, there is also an alternative construal on which to say that a use of an expression is semantically correct is instead to say that it doesn't result in a distinctively *linguistic mistake*, that is, in misusing the expression (Buleandra, 2008; Dummett, 1991; Glock, 2019; McGinn, 1984; Millar, 2002, 2004; Moore, 1954). In slogan form: correctness is accordance with meaning. This conception is supposed to primarily apply to uses of linguistic expressions and its putative normative consequences have not been as widely discussed.[1]

It is entirely natural to think that these two construals of semantic correctness are simply about different things and not in competition with each other. Semantic correctness as consisting of truth is one thing, semantic correctness as accordance with meaning is another, and both should be discussed. However, perhaps surprisingly, this is not the common view. Instead, several philosophers who subscribe to the orthodox construal have argued that the alternative construal of correctness as use in accordance with meaning doesn't make any sense, partly because there are no clear cases of linguistic mistakes (Whiting, 2016; Wikforss, 2001).

My aim in this paper is not to argue against the orthodox construal which I think is interesting and important in its own right, though of limited applicability in the case of language use. Instead, I want to develop and defend the idea that there is a distinctively *linguistic* notion of correctness as use in accordance with meaning and argue that there are clear cases of linguistic mistakes. I will do this in three steps.

First, since part of the resistance to the notion of linguistic correctness as use in accordance with meaning is that it is supposed to be unclear what this amounts to, I will explicate it in more detail. I'll start by briefly discussing the orthodox construal, only to make clear that if we are interested a distinctively *linguistic* notion, one that derives from the nature of linguistic meaning itself, then this is not what we have in mind. This is because the orthodox construal applies to only acts or states that are governed by a norm of truth. However, at best, only uses of declarative sentences are governed by such a norm which means the orthodox construal only applies to them. Yet, if we're after a distinctively linguistic sense of correctness then we're interested

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[1] Though see Burge 1979/2003 for a view on which it applies to both language and concept use, Millar (2004) for an attempt to extend it to concepts and Glüer and Wifkorss (2018) for discussion.

in something that should apply to all relevant uses of all meaningful expressions. (Sect. 2).

Second, I'll argue that the distinctively linguistic notion of correctness makes sense if pursued from what I will call the public language perspective. On this common-sensical and entirely familiar point of view that dominates contemporary philosophy of language, linguistic meanings belong to expression-types in public languages like English, Estonian, or Esperanto. I'll argue that this notion of linguistic meaning can be usefully explicated in terms of what the expression is *semantically for* doing in the language, and that this idea can further be explained in terms of its having use-conditions. To use an expression in accordance with its meaning is just to use it while being in its use-conditions. In contrast to the orthodox construal, this notion applies to all relevant uses of all meaningful expressions. (Sect. 3).

Even given something like the above explication, the skeptics have insisted that the notion of use in accordance with meaning is problematic since there are no clear cases of linguistic mistakes. One standard suggestion is that uses by speakers who are mistaken about an expression's meaning constitute misuses (Dummett, 1986; Glock, 2019; Millar, 2002, 2004). It is sometimes objected that these should be rather reinterpreted as cases of speaking a different language or engaging in linguistic innovation. I will argue that once we distinguish between complete incompetence and being mistaken about meaning there is very little plausibility to the claim that these cases should be reinterpreted. The skeptics then claim that the appearance of a linguistic mistake is due to the presence of a desire to communicate or intentions to speak properly which are *extrinsic* to meaning and language (Bilgrami, 1993, 2012; Whiting, 2016; Wikforss, 2001). I'll argue that this interesting response depends on an implicit shift to a Davidsonian individualist perspective which denies the significance of public language and operates with a radically different notion of "meaning". I will show that from the public language perspective, the relevant intentions are *intrinsic* to meaning and language. Absent such intentions there is no speaking a public language like English or Estonian. The upshot is that from the public language perspective from which the notion of linguistic correctness is pursued, uses by speakers who are mistaken about meaning constitute perfectly good cases of linguistic mistakes. (Sect. 4).

2 The Orthodox Construal

Part of the resistance to the notion of linguistic correctness as use in accordance with meaning is that it is supposed to be unclear what this amounts to. My aim in this first, preparatory section, is to briefly discuss the orthodox construal, only to make clear that if we are interested a distinctively linguistic notion then this is not what we have in mind.

On the orthodox construal, to say that a use of an expression or a thought is semantically correct is to say that it doesn't result in a *factual mistake*, that is, in saying or thinking something false. The paradigm cases here are the following. Suppose you apply a predicate like 'is British' to Gottlob, perhaps in using the declarative sentence 'Gottlob is British' with its meaning in English and saying that Gottlob

is British. Then to say that your use was incorrect is just to say that you misapplied the predicate, applied it to something to which it doesn't apply, and said something *false*. Similarly, suppose you judged that Ludwig is German. Then to say that your judgment is incorrect is just to say that it is false.

This sort of correctness applies to all acts or states that satisfy the following two conditions:

(*Content*)   they have representational content and truth-conditions; and
(*Norm*)   they are governed by a norm of truth (or one that entails truth, like knowledge)

Hence, we can talk about this sort of correctness of judgments, beliefs, and certain sorts of uses of predicates and declarative sentences, e. g. to say things or make assertions. This can be called *semantic* correctness in the sense of 'semantic' in which the word is used to talk about representation and truth-conditions in general and not exclusively about linguistic meaning. Semantic correctness on this construal amounts to nothing more than representational correctness, satisfying the relevant norm of truth.

It is paramount, in understanding this notion, that an act or state must have both of the above characteristics to be correctness-apt. Being characterized by *Content* alone doesn't suffice. If we hypostasize representational contents into propositions, then we can of course say that they have truth-conditions and are true or false. But from this alone absolutely nothing follows about the correctness or incorrectness of uses of sentences or thoughts. When you perform the act of *entertaining* the proposition that Gottlob is British in the sense of simply calling it to mind you don't do anything correct or incorrect no matter whether the proposition is true or false. This is because entertaining is a state that isn't characterized by *Norm*. This in stark contrast with judgments and beliefs which are governed by a norm of truth or knowledge.

The orthodox construal captures a perfectly acceptable thing one can mean by 'semantic correctness'. We might call it *representational* correctness. However, suppose you are interested in a distinctively *linguistic* notion of correctness, one that derives from the nature of linguistic meaning itself.[2] Then you have in mind a quite

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[2] Right at the beginning of his discussion Kripke writes (my emphasis):

 I am confident, perhaps after checking my work, that 125 is the correct answer. It is correct both in the **arithmetical** sense that 125 is the sum of 68 and 57, and in the **metalinguistic** sense that 'plus', as I intended to use that word in the past, denoted a function which, when applied to the numbers called '68' and '57', yields the value 125. (Kripke 1982: 8).

 In this passage the arithmetical sense of correctness is the factual sense of correctness and the "metalinguistic" sense is the distinctively linguistic sense. This becomes clearer if we consider what Kripke would say about his other example of using 'table' to talk about tables and not tabairs (where a tabair is anything that is a table not found at the base of the Eiffel tower, or a chair found there). If you apply 'table' to a table found at the base of the Eiffel tower then your use is correct both in the factual sense that the thing is a table, and also in the "metalinguistic" sense that in your idiolect, 'table' is for talking about tables and not tabairs.

 Things are complicated here by the fact that Kripke seems to think that the "metalinguistic" sense is dependent on past intentions to use words with particular meanings. One reason for this might be that Kripke is presupposing a substantive view about what it is for an expression to have a meaning in a speaker's idiolect to the effect that it has to do with past intentions to use words to talk about particular things (see Bilgrami's discussion of this as one way to intrerpret Kripke in Bilgrami 1993). Then to use

different notion. This is not a new claim and the standard reason given for it is that you can use a sentence linguistically correctly while still making a factual, representational mistake (Moore, 1954: 308, see also Schroeder, 2008). This is true, but I want to make the point a bit differently. Let's start from the fact that if you thought that there is a distinctively linguistic notion of correctness then, since it's supposed to derive from the nature of linguistic meaning, it should apply to all relevant uses of *all* meaningful expressions.[3] But then it's easy to see that you must have something else in mind than representational correctness because that applies at best only to uses of *declarative* sentences since only these are governed by a norm of truth.

To see why, compare the following five sentences in different moods:

1. 'Bertrand is British'
2. 'Is Bertrand British?'
3. 'What time is it?'
4. 'Read the paper!'
5. 'Ouch!'

At best, only (1) can be used to say something and is thereby governed by a norm of truth. In contrast, (2) and (3) are used to ask questions. Acts of asking questions are not governed by a norm of truth. And even though they have answerhood-conditions, they're not correct or incorrect dependent on receiving an answer. Similarly, (4) is used to tell someone to do something. Acts of telling someone to do something are not governed by a norm of truth either. And even though they have fulfilment-conditions, they're not themselves correct or incorrect depending on being fulfilled. Finally, (5) is used to express pain and such acts are clearly not governed by a norm of truth nor do they involve any sorts of satisfaction-conditions. Can (2)—(5) still be linguistically misused? It's natural to think that they can, but the orthodox construal can't capture this.[4]

To sum up, there's absolutely nothing wrong in using 'semantic correctness' to talk about representational correctness, asking whether this entails anything

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Footnote 2 (continued)

an expression in accordance with its meaning at a time is to use it in accordance with one's past intentions. However, another thing that might be going on is that the talk of past intentions is a quirk due to Kripke's initial presentation of the skeptic's doubts as being about one's past use that is later done away with (see the discussion first on p. 12 and then on p. 21). This deserves further discussion elsewhere.

[3] I add the hedge 'relevant' since the notion of 'use' of an expression is itself ambiguous between what I call *mere uses*, any productions of tokens or what Austin called phonetic acts, and *uses with meaning* or productions of tokens while also "activating" the meaning or what Austin called rhetic acts (Austin, 1962). Clearly only the latter are of interest to us here. I will come back to this in Sect. 3, below.

[4] I added the hedge 'at best' above since some people think that the notion of representational correctness doesn't even apply to all uses of declarative sentences, but only uses of them to make *assertions*. For example, Jeff Speaks has argued that if you used 'Bertrand is German' while making a *joke*, then, even though you would say something *false*, you wouldn't intuitively use it incorrectly (Speaks, 2009: 410–411). It is only if you used 'Bertrand is German' while making a genuine *assertion* that you would use it incorrectly. This would entail that, even declarative sentences by themselves are not semantically governed by a norm of truth. However, this is a separate debate having to do with whether mood encodes force which I discuss elsewhere.

normative and doing it under the rubric of 'normativity of meaning'. However, it should be also clear that those who think there's a distinctively *linguistic* notion of correctness have something very different in mind.

3 Linguistic Correctness

On the alternative construal, to say that a use is semantically correct is to say that it doesn't result in a distinctively *linguistic mistake*, that is, in misusing the expression. In other words, it is to say that it is used *in accordance* with the expression's *meaning* (McGinn, 1984; Millar, 2002, 2004). Part of the resistance to this notion consists in the claim that it is unclear what this amounts to (e. g. see the discussion of McGinn's and Millar's explications in Wikforss, 2001: 210–211 and Whiting, 2016: 227–229). Thus, our first task is to arrive at a clear conception of what this means.

The notion of linguistic correctness as use in accordance with meaning makes sense if pursued from what I call the *public language perspective*. This is a common-sensical and entirely familiar point of view which clearly dominates contemporary philosophy of language and is common to philosophers otherwise as different as Burge, Brandom, Dummett, Evans, Kaplan, Lewis, Millikan, McDowell, Kripke, Perry, Recanati, Searle, Soames, Stalnaker etc., the main two outliers being Chomsky and later Davidson. Its essence can be captured with the following statement: linguistic meanings belong to expression-types in public languages like English, Estonian, or Esperanto. We can elaborate on this as follows:

1. *Types*: The primary units of importance are expressions qua *types* and not their individual uses on particular occasions.
2. *Meaning*: An expression's *linguistic meaning* in a language is what competent speakers of the language have a grasp of. It is what makes it possible for them to *use* the expression to *speak* that language. It is what language-learners aim to grasp. It is a standing, stable, context-invariant property of the expression.
3. *Language*: Languages like English, Estonian, or Esperanto are some sorts of public, communal, or, minimally, shared entities, sociolects rather than idiolects. For example, philosophers from Dummett to Burge to Kaplan would think of them as historically embedded, ongoing, rule-governed social *practices* (Dummett, 1991: Ch. 4, Jackman, 1999, Ridge, 2020). However, one could think of them also in a somewhat more local and temporary manner (e. g. see Armstrong, 2016).

This perspective constitutes a core take on the phenomena of meaning and language while being compatible with different ways of spelling out the details.[5]

The relevant notion of linguistic meaning can be usefully explicated in terms of what the expression is *semantically for* doing in the language. What an expression is semantically for doing in the particular language is what its meaning enables us to use it to *do*, such that we couldn't use meaningless expressions or expressions which have a different meaning to do these things.[6] For example, names and other referential expressions are plausibly for talking about particular people and objects while predicates are for expressing properties. For example, it is widely assumed that in English 'Bertrand' is for talking about some specific person, 'I' is for talking about oneself, and 'is British' is for expressing the property of being British. Moving to sentences, declaratives are for saying things, interrogatives for asking questions, imperatives for telling people to do things, and expressives for expressing one's mental states.

It is a short step from the idea that expressions are semantically for doing certain things to the idea that expressions have conditions of correct use or *use-conditions*. For example, and please treat these just as illustrative, 'Bertrand' is perhaps for using while you're thinking or referring to Bertrand and thus its use-conditions are that one has to be performing these mental acts (Hanks, 2015; Soames, 2010b). Similarly, 'I' is for using while you're thinking of yourself in a first-personal or *de se* way, and 'is British' while you're expressing the property of being British. Finally, a declarative sentence like 'Bertrand is British' is for using when one is doing the above acts and further predicating the property of the person, resulting in your entertaining the proposition that Bertrand is British (Soames), or judging it to be the case (Hanks). To take a different sort of example, the expressive interjection 'Ouch!' is for using while you're in pain whereas 'Oops!' is for using when you've just observed a minor mishap (Kaplan MS). Finally, situational terms like 'Hello!' or 'Goodbye!' might be for using while you're meeting someone or parting from them etc.

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[5] Two comments. First, I said above that one of the outliers is Davidson. Of course, Davidson does think that meaning itself is public in that there can't be nothing more to it than is available to the radical interpreter, in other words, that it can't outrun publicly available evidence for it (e. g. see Davidson, 2005: 55; Glüer, 2011: 24–26, 2013: 340). But that's publicity about meaning and not language, and in quite a different sense of 'public'.

Second, a public language in the relevant sense can be a very minimal thing, for example, a local and temporary code established between two people. All that is required is that the expression-types of this code have meaning in the relevant sense and that the code is shared in the relevant sense. Thanks to two different anonymous referees for asking me to comment on these points.

[6] Francois Recanati and Scott Soames have used something like this intuitive notion of "semantically for" in providing their favored theory of demonstratives on which 'this' is for talking about or referring to something proximal, 'he' for talking about or referring to something that is male etc. (Recanati, 2001; Soames, 2010a). Note that the idea is not that we analyze the meaning of an expression in terms of what it is semantically for doing in the sense in which the analysans needs to be antecedently understood. Rather, the idea is simply that talking about what an expression is semantically for is a useful way of talking about its meaning that relates it to its use. Thanks to an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify this.

Given this this understanding, the most straightforward gloss on the notion of use in accordance with meaning is as follows:

Linguistic Correctness: To use an expression in accordance with its meaning is to use it while being in its *use-conditions*

I think that this amounts to a perfectly clear explication of the notion and fits the bill in applying to all relevant uses of all meaningful expressions.[7]

Now, even given something like the above explication, the skeptics have claimed that the notion is still problematic since there are no clear cases of linguistic mistakes. In the next section I will argue that there are.

4 Mistakes About Meaning

It is a standard suggestion that uses by speakers who are mistaken about an expression's meaning constitute misuses (Dummett, 1986, 1994: 265, Glock, 2019: 302–303, Millar, 2004: 162–164, Moore, 1954: 309). Consider Millar:

If, though I aspire to use a word in keeping with its received meaning, I am wrong about its received meaning, then I may misuse it. If I thought 'arcane' meant *ancient* then I would be liable to use the word as if that is what it meant. (Millar, 2004: 162)

Let's add some non-predicate examples. Imagine a student who mistakenly thinks that 'Bertrand' is Gottlob's name, confusing the two philosophers. Suppose further that she *tries* to use 'Bertrand' to talk about Gottlob on a particular occasion, namely, by using it and thinking of Gottlob. If you would ask her who she's talking about she'd tell you that she's talking about the German guy, inventor of modern logic and so forth. The suggestion is that she's used 'Bertrand' incorrectly because 'Bertrand' is for talking about Bertrand, and not about Gottlob.

To take another example, consider a variant of the story of the cyclops Polyphemus from Homer's Odyssey on which he is mistaken about the fact that 'I' is for talking about oneself because he thinks that it is Odysseus's name.[8] Suppose he uses 'I' while trying to talk about Odysseus, namely, by using it and thinking of Odysseus in screaming 'I did it' as a response to the question who blinded him. If you would've asked him to point to who he was talking about he would've pointed to

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[7] Notice that the notion of use-conditions is compatible with both normativist and anti-normativist construals of what it is for an expression to *have* use-conditions in a public, communal, or shared language. Of course, traditionally the most salient view has been that it is for the expression to be governed by a constitutive rule of use that tells us in which conditions it can be permissibly used (Alston, 2000; Dummett, 1991; Reiland, 2020; Searle, 1969; Stenius, 1967). On this conception, conditions of correct use = conditions of permissible use. However, a Lewis-influenced conventionalist could argue that for an expression to have use-conditions is instead for the expression to be regularly and conventionally used in these conditions. Similarly, a Davidson-influenced dispositionalist who thinks there is a role for shared languages could argue that it is for the speakers of the language to have overlapping dispositions to use the expressions in these conditions. I discuss the debate between these three views elsewhere.

[8] In the actual story he was mistaken about the meaning of 'Nobody' by thinking that it was Odysseus's name.

Odysseus. The suggestion is that Polyphemus has used 'I' semantically incorrectly because 'I' is for talking about oneself, and not about others.

To take a final and in many ways the simplest example, suppose you're going for a trip to Tallinn and I teach you the Estonian words for 'Hello!' and 'Goodbye!', 'Tere!' and 'Nägemist!'. However, you misunderstand or misremember and come away thinking that 'Nägemist' means 'Hello!' not 'Goodbye!'. You then go on to use the expression while meeting your hosts, wanting to greet them. The suggestion is that you would be misusing it because 'Nägemist!' is for using on parting and not on meeting.

It's natural to think that in all of the above cases one is making a linguistic mistake. Skeptics like Daniel Whiting disagree:

> ...if I use a word which in English signifies the colour red to signify or speak of the colour blue, it hardly follows that I have made a mistake – perhaps I am speaking some variant of English, or have introduced a linguistic innovation, or am speaking a different language. (Whiting, 2016: 230).

The idea seems to be that we don't have to think of the speakers in the above cases as using the relevant expressions while lacking a grip on their use-conditions, rather we could reinterpret them as speaking a different language or engaging in linguistic innovation.

There is something to Whiting's suggestion, but we have to look at the cases in more detail and one by one (compare Burge 2003: 118–119). The issues here are complicated by the fact that 'use' is crucially ambiguous. In the most basic sense, to use a word is just to produce a token of it by uttering or inscribing it. Meaning need not be involved at all. In Austin's terms, such mere uses result in phonetic acts. This can be compared with merely moving chess pieces around on the board when enacting a play for the kids, say. Rules of chess need not be involved at all. However, for our purposes the relevant sorts of uses are what I like to call *uses with meaning* (compare Kaplan, 1989: 602). In Austin's terms, such uses result in rhetic or locutionary acts. These can be compared with moving a chess piece to make a move in the game.[9] It should be obvious that only the second sorts of uses can result in linguistically correct or incorrect uses.

Now, completely incompetent speakers, those who have no grip on the expression's meaning nor even any thoughts about what it might be, can't even *try* to use an expression with its meaning. For example, suppose I teach you how to pronounce the Estonian sentence: 'Lumi on valge' without telling you what it means (and suppose you also don't form any hypothesis about what it means). It should be clear

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[9] Austin thought that a *phonetic* act is an act of making certain noises (or scribbling down marks) whereas a *phatic* act is an act of making noises where those noises belong to a language with a grammar and where the noises are made *as* belonging to the language. A parrot can perform phonetic, but not phatic acts. Furthermore, a *rhetic* act is an act of making certain noises where those noises belong to a language and where the noises are made *as* belonging to the language and *with* their meaning and while fixing their reference. As we will see, a semantically incompetent speaker can perform phonetic, but not rhetic acts. (Austin, 1962: 92–98, for discussion see Ball, 2020). Mere uses result in either phonetic or phatic acts, whereas uses with meaning of at least whole sentences result in rhetic acts.

that in such a situation you can't even *try* to use it with its meaning, try to speak Estonian (compare Austin, 1962: 97, Burge, 2003: 118). If you'd utter the sentence then perhaps we should indeed reinterpret you as innovating or speaking a different language.[10]

But our cases are not cases of complete incompetence, but of being mistaken about the meaning. I teach you to say 'Nägemist!', but you misunderstand or misremember what it means. Is your predicament like complete incompetence in that you can't even try to speak Estonian? No. It's natural to think that in such a situation you can at least *try* to speak Estonian. You do that by using the sentence with the intentions to participate in the practice. Your use thereby goes beyond a mere use and is a use with meaning, and if you're not in the use-conditions then you count as misusing the expression. And in this case there seem to be no independent reasons to reinterpret you as *not* trying to speak Estonian but engaging in linguistic innovation or speaking a different language. That is clearly not what you yourself think you're doing! Similarly, it's hard to see what reasons there are to think that speakers who are mistaken about what 'arcane' means, whose name 'Bertrand' is, and what 'I' is for talking about, should be reinterpreted. After all, what the speakers actually do in such cases if their error is pointed out to them is simply adjust their understanding and usage (Burge, 2003: 131, compare Dummett, 1986: 462).

There is a standard response to this which was first forcefully made by Bilgrami:

> What sense of norm, then, do I accept? It emerges form the fact that individuals *intend* to speak like others in the community speak and they *intend* to speak as they have in the past rather than waywardly. This means that individuals do intend to speak in a way that is natural to describe as, and that they themselves describe as, *correctly*. … we have a norm that is perfectly sensitive to the social linguistic practices that surround an individual. But the pragmatic explanations underlying the norm make it clear that it is … an extrinsic norm. It says "Speak like others do, *if it pays to do so*". Or more specifically it might say "I ought to use words as others do, *if I want to be easily understood*."

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[10] The above distinction bears on different sorts of cases that are mentioned by Millar as an example of misuses, slips of the tongue:

 I might say 'That tree is an oak', but my use of the word 'oak' is a slip of the tongue—I meant to say 'beech'. Here I apply the term 'oak' to a certain tree picked out demonstratively. My application of 'oak' to the tree may well be incorrect in the sense of being false. But however that may be, it is certainly incorrect in that it is a misuse—a use that is not in keeping with the relevant meaning of the term. This meaning dictates that, when applied to something, the word ascribes the property of being an oak. It is not in question that I said of the tree that it is an oak, for what I said is fixed in part by the relevant meaning of the term 'oak'. So I have ascribed to the tree the property of being an oak. But what I said is not what I meant to say. The word is not a suitable word for ascribing the property I meant to ascribe—that of being a beech. (Millar, 2004: 163).

 Millar seems to say that insofar as you uttered 'oak', your use was a misuse. However, in the light of the above distinction I think the right thing to say about such a case is that you *tried* to use 'beech' with its meaning, but due to some performance interference, you failed to produce a token of that word and produced a token of another word, 'oak'. However, as far as the token of the word you produced, 'oak', you didn't even *try* to use this one with its meaning. Thus, contrary to what Millar says, you didn't plausibly say of the tree that it is an oak and hence you didn't misuse the word after all. Hence, slips of the tongue are not examples of linguistic mistakes (compare also Unnsteinsson, 2017).

(Bilgrami, 1993: 134–135, compare Davidson, 1992: 261, 1994: 9, Wikforss, 2001: 211)

The basic idea behind the rejoinder is that the appearance that the above cases constitute misuses and the reasons why we adjust our understanding and usage are due to the presence of intentions to speak like others do. Such intentions are *extrinsic* to language and meaning. As applied to our central case of 'Nägemist!', you have a desire to be understood and an intention to speak like others do, and it is only because of these extrinsic factors that your use while not being in the use-conditions counts as some sort of a mistake. But it's not a linguistic mistake or misuse in the relevant sense.[11]

Similarly, consider how Whiting continues the passage I quoted above:

Of course, if I'm intending to speak ('proper') English, then I am making a mistake insofar as I am failing to execute my intention. But any norm that would deliver the verdict that such a mistake has been made would, once more, be instrumental. (Whiting, 2016: 230)

Like Bilgrami, Whiting seems to say that the appearance that the above cases constitute misuses depends on the presence of intentions to speak "properly". Again, such intentions are *extrinsic* to language and meaning. As applied to our case of 'Nägemist!', you have an intention to speak "proper" Estonian and that's why your use while not being in the use-conditions counts as a mistake.

I must confess that it took me years to understand this line of thought. I finally got it when I realized that it relies on an implicit rejection of the public language perspective and subscription to the Davidsonian individualist persrpective which denies the significance of public language and operates with a different notion of "meaning". Let me elaborate.

The rejoinder relies on the Davidsonian view that we have an independent power to imbue our uses of words with "meaning" by using them with meaning-intentions (see Davidson, 1986, Bilgrami, 1993: 142, Bilgrami, 2012: 113, for useful discussion see Glüer, 2011: Ch. 2, Glüer, 2013: 341–342, also Camp, 2013). From this point of view, the primary units of importance are particular uses of expressions, that is, *token* utterances and inscriptions. The role of intention is to imbue these

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[11] An interesting and unappreciated aspect of Bilgrami's discussion is that he clearly seems to think, contrary to later anti-normativists like Hattiangadi, Glüer, Wikforss etc. that the sense of linguistic correctness and incorrectness in play in the context of issues discussed by not only Burge, but also Kripke is not the orthodox one of saying something true or false, but ours:

I'm certainly not going to deny that we sometimes misperceive things or that we have other similar kinds of false beliefs. And no doubt when we do these amount to some kind of failure or wrong. But to think of it as the sort of failure that Kripke's discussion of normativity centrally demanded seems to me to be changing Kripke's subject (and McDowell's and mine) altogether." (Bilgrami, 1993: 43, for an even more explicit discussion, see Bilgrami, 2012: 101–102).

Thus, in contrast to later anti-normativists, Bilgrami straightforwardly denies that there is a language-intrinsic notion of correctness of use. I tend to think that this is a much better way for anti-normativists to think about their view rather than granting the notion of correctness of use but arguing that correctness doesn't entail normativity (compare also Kaplan, 2020).

particular uses with "meaning" on that occasion (Glüer) or context-locally (Camp). Thus, when we use an expression, we can choose to imbue the particular use with the same "meaning" that it has in the shared "language", understood in terms of an overlap in dispositions to use, or with a different "meaning". This depends on whether we have a further desire or intention to speak like others do or "properly". On this view, what happens when you utter 'Nägemist!' in our case is that you imbue your utterance with a "meaning" to the effect that you are greeting your hosts. But then the utterance by itself doesn't constitute a mistake. It only constitutes a mistake given an extra, optional desire or intention to speak like others do (Bilgrami) or "properly" (Whiting). From such a Davidsonian perspective there is no need for the notion of a distinctively linguistic mistake, one that derives from the nature of linguistic meaning itself, nor is there any room for it since "meaning" is a one-off property of uses.

From the public language perspective this gets things completely backwards. First, those who subscribe to this perspective balk at the idea that we have an independent power to imbue our uses of words with meaning.[12] At best, one can use words while having things in mind or speaker mean things a la Grice. Second, as was emphasized above, on this picture the primary units of importance are expressions thought of as *types* and not particular uses. It is these that have linguistic meanings in languages like English or Estonian. The role of intention is not to imbue the use with meaning, but to make it the case that the use is a use of the expression-type which has a meaning and thereby activate the meaning that is already there (compare, again, Kaplan, 1989: 602). In other words, when we use an expression we can either merely use it or try to use it *with* its meaning in the particular language and thereby participate in the relevant practice (compare Reimer, 2004: 328–329). What happens when you utter 'Nägemist' in our case is that you try to speak Estonian and try to use the sentence with its meaning. Your use thereby goes beyond a mere use and is a use with meaning, but since you're mistaken about what the meaning is, you do so while not being in the use-conditions and thereby count as misusing it. The

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[12] Here are two examples. First, Lewis considers something like the Davidsonian idea of imbuing words with meaning in his "Languages and Language" by considering the proposal that instead of conventions of truthfulness and trust we could have conventions of "bestowing a meaning" and simply dismisses it by saying that there is no such action as bestowing a meaning (Lewis 1975: 22–23).

Second, Dummett attributes such a view not only to Davidson (see Dummett 1986: 471), but also to Husserl, and criticizes it as follows (my emphasis):

It in effect presupposes Humpty Dumpty's theory, that a word, as uttered on a particular occasion, bears whatever meaning it does because the speaker invests it with that meaning. It may be added that, if a large number of people invest it with the same meaning, the fact will come to be widely known that that is what an utterance of it usually means, and that in consequence that meaning will accrue to it as a word of the common language. **But, on the contrary, a word of a language does not bear the meaning that it does because a large number of people have chosen to confer that meaning upon it; they use it as having that meaning because that is the meaning it has in the language**. … It is only from learning language that anyone acquires the very conception of a word's having a meaning. We do not have meanings in our heads waiting for us to attach them to words, whether of the common language or of our own invention; we learn the *practice* of speaking a language … **the fundamental concept is not that of the private meaning-conferring act, but of the social practice of using language**. (Dummett 1993: 47, compare Kaplan 1989: 602).

crucial role is played by the intention to use the expression with its meaning in Estonian, and this intention is *intrinsically* related to language and meaning. Absent such intentions there is no speaking a public language like English or Estonian. But once we have this intention in place, no further extrinsic desire or intention to speak like others do or "properly" is relevant or required to deliver the verdict that the above use is a misuse.

Let's sum up. The skeptics claimed that the notion of linguistic correctness is problematic since there are no clear cases of linguistic mistakes. I have discussed the standard suggestion that uses by speakers who are mistaken about an expression's meaning are misuses. It is sometimes objected that these should be rather reinterpreted as cases of speaking a different language or engaging in linguistic innovation. I've argued that once we distinguish between complete incompetence and being mistaken about meaning there is very little plausibility to the claim that these cases should be reinterpreted. The skeptics then claim that the appearance of a linguistic mistake is due to the presence of a desire to communicate or intentions to speak properly which are *extrinsic* to meaning and language. I have argued that this depends on an implicit shift to a Davidsonian individualist perspective which denies the significance of public language and operates with a radically different notion of "meaning". And I have argued that from the public language perspective the relevant intentions are *intrinsic* to meaning and language.

One might wonder whether this doesn't ultimately show that the viability of the notion of distinctively linguistic correctness as use with accordance to meaning depends on whether the public language versus Davidsonian individualist perspective is correct. Quite so! The problem is that this is not at all how the dialectic is generally presented in the literature. Those skeptical of linguistic correctness tend to make it seem like there are no clear cases of linguistic mistakes, no matter one's background perspective.[13] This is emphatically not the case and the notions of public language, linguistic correctness, and linguistic mistake form a package deal. If one wants to call the latter into question one should tackle the public language perspective head on. In sum, from the public language perspective from which the notion of linguistic correctness is pursued, uses by speakers who are mistaken about meaning constitute perfectly good cases of linguistic mistakes.[14]

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[13] While with Bilgrami the reliance on the Davidsonian background picture is explicit and with Wikforss it's still visible, with many other skeptics like Whiting it goes unnoticed or at least unacknowledged. For example, Whiting seems to think that his arguments make also sense on the public language picture (Whiting 2016: 219fn).

[14] These are not the only cases of linguistic mistakes. On certain plausible assumptions about their meanings, we can use at least some expressions to intentionally deceive. For example, if the use-conditions of 'Ouch!' are that one is in pain then one can use 'Ouch!' with its meaning while not being in pain and thereby intentionally deceive one's audience. This would be an intentional linguistic mistake comparable to an intentional foul in sport. Furthermore, consider the idea that slurs like 'queer' can and have been reappropriated which has caused the derogatory part to evaporate. The process of reappropriation plausibly involves intentional linguistic mistakes as well since in the process one uses the expressions with their meaning while not being in their use-conditions that require having the derogatory attitudes (for discussion, see Gray & Lennertz 2020). For considerations of space, I will leave discussion of such intentional mistakes for another time.

5 Conclusion

Where does this leave the debate over normativity? Is it plausible, on this construal of linguistic correctness, that correct uses are also, in some sense, *permissible*? As indicated above (see fn. 7), thinking of meaning in terms of use-conditions is by itself compatible with both normative and non-normative construals. One can think of it in terms of rules of use and permissibility, but also in terms of conventional regularities in use or overlap in dispositions to use. Of course, the people coming from the public language perspective like Burge, Dummett, Kaplan, Searle etc. have most frequently thought of them in terms of rules of use. That seems to suggest that for the concept of linguistic meaning that has been under discussion, normativism is relatively plausible. However, ultimately, this will depend on which of the three indicated ways of thinking about it is best, and this can only be settled by weighing the costs and benefits of the three packages as wholes.

Be that as it may, it is important to understand that even if linguistic meaning is normative, it would be normative only in the way that law, etiquette, and games are. In Derek Parfit's terms, the notion of normativity in play here is that of *rules* and not of (authoritative, genuine) *reasons*—what more recently has come to be called *formal* versus *authoritative* normativity (Baker, 2017, Finlay, 2019: 204–208 Parfit, 2011: 144–146). This sort of normativity isn't by itself in any way reason-giving or authoritative like prudence or morality are usually taken to be. But the thesis of normativity of meaning is therefore no less interesting. Even formal normativity sets strong constraints on theories of meaning. To come back full circle to Kripke's discussion, it seems to rule out dispositionalism all by itself.[15]

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[15] Some participants in the normativity wars seem to think that the only interesting thesis of normativity of meaning is one which would automatically conflict with naturalism. For example, consider Hattiangadi's take on the debate. She distinguishes between what she calls 'norm-relativity' and 'genuine normativity' and would say that the sort of normativity characteristic of law, etiquette, games etc. is mere norm-relativity. It is only the latter that is supposed to provide problems for naturalistic reduction and bears on solving the "hard problem of intentionality". However, she thinks that neither meaning nor content is genuinely normative and thus the issue has no bearing on the hard problem (Hattiangadi 2017).

My take on the debate is diametrically opposed as far as terminology, but I actually agree in almost all of the substance. I just use 'normativity' for 'norm-relativity' and *authoritative* normativity for her 'genuine normativity'. I think it's very plausible that meaning is normative, but completely agree that neither meaning nor thought are authoritative (perhaps nothing is… see Finlay 2014).

What is important is that even formal normativity or 'norm-relativity' of meaning is an interesting and substantive thesis despite not conflicting with naturalism (compare Kaplan 2020). In fact, I think it is very plausible that this is all Kripke and other defenders of normativity ever had in mind.

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