Meaning and Publicity
Edited by Richard N. Manning

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Speaking Your Mind: Expression in Locke’s Theory of Language

Lewis Powell

Abstract

There is a tension between John Locke’s awareness of the fundamental importance of a shared public language and the manner in which his theorizing appears limited to offering a psychologistic account of the idiolects of individual speakers. I argue that a correct understanding of Locke’s central notion of signification can resolve this tension. I start by examining a long standing objection to Locke’s view, according to which his theory of meaning systematically gets the subject matter of our discourse wrong, by making our ideas the meanings of our words. By examining Locke’s definition of “truth”, I show that Lockean signification is an expression relation, rather than a descriptive or referential relation. Consequently, the sense in which our words signify our ideas is roughly that our utterances advertise our otherwise undisclosed mental lives to each other. While this resolves one aspect of the public/private tension, I close with a brief discussion of the remaining tension, and the role for normative constraints on signification to play in generating a genuinely shared public language.

Introduction

John Locke opens book three of his Essay Concerning Human Understanding by highlighting the social role of language. It is because we are social creatures, Locke tells us, that we require language. At the same time, the actual account of the workings of language that he offers is hyper-individualized and based in the psychologies of particular speakers. Locke explains the importance to humans of having a shared language, but, in essence, offers a theory on which each speaker has their own idiolect. So, there is a prima facie tension between Locke’s view of language’s fundamentally social purpose and his account of its fundamentally individualistic mechanisms. In this paper, I show how Locke resolves this tension between the social purpose of language and its individualistic mechanisms.

One of the most common concerns about Locke’s theory, from his own day forward, was the objection that his individualistic, psychologistic account of the meaning of language winds up getting the subject matter of our discourse wrong. Locke has long been accused of incorrectly maintaining that when we
Meaning, Communication, and the Mental

Patrick Rysiew

Abstract

Thomas Reid (1710–1796) rejected 'the theory of ideas' in favor of perceptual direct realism and a fallibilist foundationalism. According to Reid, contact with the common and public extra-mental world is as much a part of our natural psychological and epistemological starting point as whatever special type of relation we have to the contents of our own minds. Like the general perceptual and epistemological views Reid was countering, an individualistic, idea-centered approach to language and communication continues to have a grip on theorists. But Reid's heterodox counter to the latter is much less well known than his response to the former, even though it marks a complementary and equally clear departure from the views of his contemporaries. Reid holds that while mental phenomena are indeed implicated in language, the meaning of a term is the typically public object to which it directly refers. Further, Reid argues that for linguistic communication to be possible, we must already have some measure of access to others' intentional states. While we each might enjoy a special kind of access to our thoughts, they are not 'private' in any epistemologically troubling sense: the fact that we have language shows that we already have communicative abilities and an epistemological toehold with regard to others' mental states.

1. Introduction

Thomas Reid (1710–1796) is perhaps best known for his rejection of 'the theory of ideas'. According to this theory, one is directly acquainted only with one's own ideas; from there, the task is (for the individual) to recover and (for the theorist) to explain engagement with the familiar public world of things and persons. As to language, on this approach meaning is ideational, with language enabling us to communicate thoughts, to which others would otherwise have no access. As Locke states the view, “words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them”; and we invent language so as to have some “external sensible signs, whereof those invisible ideas … might be made known to others” (1690/1959 III.2.2; Vol. 2, 8–9).

Much of the recent interest in Reid centers on the alternative he offers to the theory of ideas and its implications. Reid defends perceptual direct realism and a fallibilist foundationalism, according to which our contact with the common and public extra-mental world is as much a part of our
Intentionality and Publicity
Madeleine L. Arseneault

Abstract
This paper analyzes the central relation between publicity, linguistic meaning, and the mental in the light of philosophical issues concerning intentionality. The concept of intentionality provides a way to articulate how the determinants of linguistic meaning are both public and private. A strength of this approach is that it accommodates desiderata of explaining compositionality and successful communication that initially seemed at odds with each other. A further benefit is that thinking about the case of linguistic meaning can help re-focus our understanding of the metaphysical status of the intentional objects of our thoughts.

Introduction

Is linguistic meaning determined by external conditions (environment, conventions) or internal ones (relations among beliefs and other mental representations, biological faculties)? Something makes my utterance of “Hastings is not very good at catching mice” a meaningful expression of English. It may not be the same thing that explains the meaningfulness of each part: the semantics for proper names like “Hastings” may be different from the semantics for logical constants like “not.” But in any case, are the determinants of linguistic meaning public or private? This paper will be concerned with the central relation between publicity, linguistic meaning, and the mental. My general aim is to analyze this central relation in the light of philosophical issues concerning intentionality. My specific goals are to argue that the concept of intentionality can help clarify some debates about whether determinants of linguistic meaning are public or private, and that thinking about the case of linguistic meaning helps us reexamine a debate about the status of the intentional objects of our thoughts.

There are some generally agreed upon desiderata for any account of linguistic meaning: the account must accommodate semantic compositionality, must explain how successful communication is possible (which seems to require that words uttered by different speakers can the same meaning), and must accommodate context-sensitivity (for at least indexical and demonstrative expressions, if not for an even larger class of expressions that arguably to depend on
both internal and external: it is a bridge between the thinking mind and the external world, and so the very notion of representational content requires both public and private characterization. One cannot analyze representational content without the concept of the object represented (though one can analyze “object” without the concept of representational content). If one cannot analyze intentional object without the concept of intentional inexistence, then one cannot analyze intentional object without the concept of representational content. The public and the private each find their foothold: insofar as our intentional states can be about publicly available objects, and insofar as intentional states contain representations and representatives.

The point of considering the history of the concept of intentionality, of considering alternative understandings of ‘intentional inexistence’ and the metaphysical status of intentional objects, is to show that these topics are not merely a quaint issue relegated to those interested in the Scholastic spin of Medieval Philosophy. Interest in intentionality is alive and well in contemporary cognitive science. More specifically for our inquiry, thinking about intentionality and ‘intentional inexistence’ helps us get at the issue of whether the public ‘goes private’ into thought or whether instead intentional content ‘goes public’ in determining the object our thought is about. What we see is that the issue, so described, may be improperly setting-up these options as exclusive and independent. Some of the classic worry about how the content of a representation can be determined by its object when the object does not exist may be dissolved rather than resolved, insofar as the worry is generated by notions of object and content more akin to those described at the start of our historical tour of ‘intentionality.’ The answer proposed here is that we revise our thinking about intentionality, directedness and intentional inexistence, as the projectionality of representation: the intentional feature of our mental states means that while the objects of our thoughts are represented in our thoughts and in that sense are determined by the content of our mental states, it’s an essential feature of the representational content and of feature of intentionality that it be directed outside of itself, that it projects to the public. More work is needed to develop an account of projection and intentional inexistence, though

8 See Dreyfus (1982) and Chisholm (1966) for discussions of how contemporary cognitive science is re-examining phenomenology and intentionality.

9 Heil’s (2004) dispositional account of intentionality gives him a naturalistic account of the intentionality of physical states, and also helps him to avoid the metaphysical Meinongian morass. Dispositionality is used as a way to account for projection, and grounds intentionality in the intrinsic properties of the physical state rather than in a relation between the state and some object. Heil argues that this natural notion of intentionality could be used to explain the intentionality of mental states.
Reflections on Davidsonian Semantic Publicity

Richard N. Manning

Abstract

The topic of the present essay is the proper understanding of Donald Davidson’s version of the publicity requirement for the determinants of linguistic meaning. On the understanding I promote, the requirement is very strict indeed. My narrow aim is to show how such a strict conception of the publicity requirement can be maintained despite the evident need for interpreters to go beyond what is public on that conception in the process of constructing Davidsonian theories of meaning. Towards that aim, I engage dialectically with treatments of Davidson’s principle of charity owing to Lepore and Ludwig and to Bar-On and Risjord, each of which, in different ways, recommend a more permissive approach to the publicity requirement than the one I recommended here. A broader aim is to shed some light on what would be required to take seriously the larger ambitions of Davidson’s semantic program.

I.

With stunning ambition, Donald Davidson argues that skepticism and conceptual relativism are both incoherent, that thought is essentially intersubjective, and that psycho-physical reduction is impossible. Central to his arguments for these grand theses is his approach to semantic theory, and central to that approach is a very strict conception of the sense in which the determinants of meaning must be public. The proper understanding of this conception is the topic of the present paper. I will not blaze any entirely new trail. Were the matter of interpreting Davidson not such a gnarled thicket, one could even say the path I will take is well worn. But because it is such a thicket, I should make clear that I do not pretend that the reading I offer is unimpeachably correct about what Davidson’s precise views might have been at any stage of his career. My narrow aim is to show how the strict conception of the publicity requirement can be maintained despite the evident need for interpreters to go beyond what is public on that conception in the process of constructing Davidsonian theories of meaning. Towards that aim, I engage dialectically with treatments of Davidson’s principle of charity owing to Lepore and Ludwig and to Bar-On and Risjord, each of which, in different ways, recommend a more permissive approach to the publicity requirement than the one I recommend.
Meaning, Publicity and Knowledge

Marija Jankovic and Greg Ray

Abstract

An influential view about the relationship between publicity and linguistic meaning is brought into question. It has been thought that since public languages are essentially public, linguistic meaning is subject to a kind of epistemic cap so that there can be nothing more to linguistic meaning than can be determinately known on the basis of publicly available evidence (Epistemic Thesis). Given the thinness of such evidence, a well-known thesis follows to the effect that linguistic meaning is substantially indeterminate. In this paper, we consider the sort of reasons offered for the Epistemic Thesis and uncover an unexamined presupposition about the epistemic requirements of communication and the establishment of meaning conventions. We show this presupposition is undermined by independently motivated considerations about communication and convention, giving us good reason to reject the Epistemic Thesis and its corollary about indeterminacy.

Both Donald Davidson and W.V. Quine held a strong view about the relationship between publicity and linguistic meaning – one that crucially informed their highly influential theories about language. Public languages are public and linguistic meaning is subject to a kind of epistemic cap owing to this publicity.

Epistemic Thesis (ET): There can be nothing more to linguistic meaning than can be determinately known on the basis of publicly available evidence.

So, what a sentence/expression/word in a public language means could never be more determinate than what can be genuinely settled by publicly available evidence. For both these philosophers, the Epistemic Thesis (ET) implies an indeterminacy result.

Indeterminacy Thesis (IT): Linguistic meaning is substantially indeterminate.

The argument for this is straightforward. From the ET it follows that, if assignments of meaning are underdetermined by the public evidence, then to that extent linguistic meaning is indeterminate. For Quine such assignments (for
A Puzzle about Context and Communicative Acts

Daniel W. Harris

Abstract

A context-directed theory of communicative acts is one that thinks of a communicative act as a proposal to change the context in some way. I focus on three influential examples: Robert Stalnaker’s theory of assertion, Craig Roberts’ theory of questions, and Paul Portner’s theory of directives. These theories distinguish different categories of communicative acts by distinguishing the components of context that they aim to change. I argue that the components of context they posit turn out not to be distinct after all, and that these theories therefore collapse the taxonomic distinctions that they set out to draw. Although it might be possible to avoid this problem by devising a more adequate theory of the nature of context, I argue that it should be taken as a reductio of context-directed theories.

1 Communicative Acts

A communicative act is the speaker’s contribution to a potential episode of communication. It is whatever it is that a speaker has to do, and that their addressee must correctly interpret, in order for communication to happen. Suppose, for example, that Sam uses (1) to request that Ann buy him a drink.

(1) You should buy me a drink.

In order for Sam to thereby communicate with Ann, she must interpret him as performing a request rather than an observation or a prediction, as addressing her rather than someone else, as requesting that she buy him a drink now, rather than next month, and so on.

The central task of a theory of communicative acts is to tell us what it takes

1 Communicative acts are most often referred to as ‘speech acts’ or, more specifically, ‘illocutionary acts’. My terminology, which follows Bach and Harnish (1979), is meant to signal that I am not interested in conventional illocutionary acts, such as performing a ceremony or testifying in court, that are performable only against the background of social or institutional conventions.
Abstract
The paper presents a number of empirical arguments for the perceptual view of speech comprehension. It then argues that a particular version of phenomenal dogmatism can confer immediate justification upon belief. In combination, these two views can bypass Davidsonian skepticism toward knowledge of meanings. The perceptual view alone, however, can bypass a variation on the Davidsonian argument. One reason Davidson thought meanings were not truly graspable was that he believed meanings were private (unlike behavior). But if the perceptual view of speech comprehension is correct, then meanings (or at least conveyed meanings) are public objects like other perceivable entities. Hence, there is no particular problem of language comprehension, even if meanings originate in “private” mental states.

Introduction
Consider the following two views of language comprehension:

**Inferential view:** We hear the sounds associated with a speaker’s utterance and infer (likely unconsciously but not necessarily on a subpersonal level) what was said, drawing on our competence in the syntax and semantics of the language together with background information.

**Perceptual view:** Fluent speakers of a language have a non-inferential capacity to auditorily (or otherwise) perceive not just the sounds of speech but also what was said or conveyed by the speaker.

There are no doubt circumstances in which the inferential view of language comprehension is correct. Suppose upon your return from the mall I hear you say ‘I just bought a new goat’ (Balcerak-Jackson, manuscript). It perceptually seems to me that you just said that you bought a new goat. But I make the
Local Meaning, Public Offense

Robert Shanklin

Abstract

The internalist-externalist debate about semantic and mental contents concerns whether
the contents of certain claims and beliefs depend on facts external to the people having those
beliefs or not. However, rather than just join up with either side, I argue for re-casting the
debate so as to allow for hybrid internalist-externalist views, on the grounds that such views
can help explain certain phenomena associated with slurs and pejoratives. If the debate can
indeed be recast in this way and if hybrid views offer significant explanatory power, then
they deserve further exploration.

1. Introduction

When Maria is feeling pain in her thigh and says she has arthritis, what are the
contents of that assertion and its corresponding belief? An externalist might
argue that, because ‘arthritis’ refers only to inflammations of the joints, Maria
speaks falsely and moreover does not actually believe she has arthritis. An inter-

nalist, on the other hand, might argue that Maria does believe she has arthritis,
though her belief is false on the grounds that arthritis is a condition only of the
joints. The internalist-externalist debate about semantic and mental contents
thus concerns whether the contents of certain claims and beliefs depend on
facts external to the people having those beliefs or not. However, rather than
just join up with either side, I argue that we should re-frame the debate so as
to allow for hybrid internalist-externalist views, on the grounds that such views
can help explain certain phenomena associated with slurs and pejoratives.1 If
the debate can indeed be recast in this way and if hybrid views offer significant
explanatory power, then such views deserve further exploration.

1 Insofar as it is pragmatistic (by appealing to the usefulness of its theses), my argument is
not unique in the debate; for instance, see Fodor's (1987) as well as Loar's (1988) arguments
for Internalism. However, hybrid views are importantly distinct from their views, as will be
discussed below in Section 3.4
Analyses on Arbitrariness of Chinese Characters from the Perspective of Morphology

Feng Li

Abstract
The arbitrariness of a sign is considered a universal feature and a well-established property of the world’s languages by many linguists, which makes languages flexible and facilitates distinguishing the particular referents to words. However, there are some exceptions in the case of Chinese, a language quite different from western languages. This article analyzes Chinese’s arbitrariness mainly from the perspective of word formation and will show that Chinese characters, which were iconic originally, depart from this universal feature to a great extent. Through many transformations and changes, Chinese characters continue to display three features: iconicity, systematicity and arbitrariness.

Preface

Human beings are in possession of a unique capacity – the use of language, which sets us apart from all other creatures on earth. Armed with it, we are able to communicate about our abstract feelings or emotions as well as matters seen, heard and felt; Armed with it, we are able to reason logically as well as make small talk; Armed with it, we are able to summarize and analyze the past as well as predict the future. An individual can acquire a language in a certain social environment and by this means he can convey complicated and abstract concepts besides daily social communications, which is a distinctive talent all other animals lack. What makes human language so complicated yet so flexible? What makes human language so creative in its capacity for novel expression without being restricted by direct contexts? In short, what sets human language apart from the languages of other creatures?

According to the Bible, in the beginning the world had but one language and one common speech. It was Adam who named the animals, plants and other objects in the world. People strove to build a Tower of Babel so high it could reach the heavens; their effort irritated the Lord so much that He chose to con-
Formal Semantics of English Sentences with Tense and Aspect

Wenyan Zhang

Abstract

As common expressions in natural language, sentences with tense and aspect play a very important role. There are many ways to encode their contributions to meaning, but I believe their function is best understood as exhibiting relations among related eventualities (events and states). Accordingly, contra other efforts to explain tense and aspect by appeal to temporal logics or interval logics, I believe the most basic and correct way to explain tense and aspect is to articulate these relations between eventualities. Building on these ideas, I will characterize a formal semantics – Event-State Semantics (ESS) – which differs from all formal semantics based on temporal logics; in particular, one with which sentences with tense and aspect can be adequately explained, including molecular sentences and those with adverbial clauses.

0. Introduction

Derczynski and Gaizauskas (2013) assert that natural language is the most important tool for conveying temporal information. A necessary part of language is temporal ordering, through which speakers can discuss change, describe what happened, and communicate plans for what will happen.

Unlike other theories of tense and aspect, according to this monograph, relations among eventualities are more basic than temporal information in natural language. Altshuler (2016) considers eventualities denote events and states. And the central thesis is that people can discuss change, describe what has happened and communicate plans for what will happen without appealing to temporal ordering or temporal information.

Eventualities include events and states. I acknowledge an ontological distinction between events and states, but, just the same, events and states are both widely used in semantics and pragmatics.

Standardly, events correspond to activities, processes or changes; and states to static conditions. Whereas “John broke a bowl.” denotes an event, “John was sleeping.” denotes a state. I presuppose that when people cognize an event they cognize its parts as states. Under this presupposition, an event should be treated as a chain of states rather than a chain of events. It is hard to demarcate
The Axial Age and Modernity: From Max Weber to Karl Jaspers and Shmuel Eisenstadt

Vittorio Cotesta

Abstract
This essay highlights the theoretical relations between Weber, Jaspers and Eisenstadt on the issue of the axial age and modernity. For Weber Modernity is an “axial age” but also an event in the history of Western rationalization. So we can’t say which is his idea on this topic. For Jaspers the axial revolution took place at the same time in China, India, and Greece. Modernity can’t be an “axial age” because it took place in the West and only after in these three civilizations. For Eisenstadt, on the contrary, modernity is a second “axial age”. He thinks the XX and the XXI century as an era of multiple modernities.

Introduction

Jaspers was one of the students closest to Weber. Maybe only Paul Honigsheim was closer. Weber appreciated him. We all know how cutting his judgments could be. In his essays on the Sociology of Religion, where he may have been addressing Stefan George, he exclaims: “Anyone who wants ‘visions’ should go to the cinema!” but, in a note immediately following this he hastens to add that “this does not refer to Psychologie der Weltanschauungen by K. Jaspers (Weber 1988 (1920), Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie, I, p. 14). It is to him that his last letter was addressed. A small gesture of kindness. Weber had received a book from Jaspers and wrote to him saying:

Esteemed Mr. Jaspers, thank you for your much appreciated book (2nd edition). I shall be able to “read it” in August. In Wirtschaft und Gesellschafts (Vorbemerkung, Kap. I., §1) I have already quoted your Allgemeine Psychopathologie and you know how much I appreciate it. Kindest regards/ Max Weber. (Weber 2012, p. 1101)

After Weber’s death, Jaspers remained very close to the widow Marianne Weber. Both were anxious lest something Weber had written (a report he had drawn up for the doctors) might fall into the hands of the Nazis. Frau Weber gave this report to Jaspers who, afraid he might not be able to keep it safe, gave it back to her. Frau Weber then destroyed it in agreement with Jaspers.¹

¹ Perhaps there is some exaggeration in this. But if we consider what Johannes Haller said about him in 1944/45 we can understand Jaspers and Marianne Weber’s caution. Haller accused...
Contributors

Madeleine Arseneault, Associated Professor, Department of Philosophy, SUNY New Paltz, New Paltz, United States of America.

Berit Brogaard, Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, University of Miami, Coral Gables, United States of America.

Vittorio Cotesta, Professore di Sociologia, Università degli Studi Roma Tre Dipartimento di scienze della formazione, Roma, Italy.

Daniel Harris, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Hunter College Cuny, The City University of New York, New York, United States of America.

Marija Jankovic, Assistant Professor, Departments of Philosophy, Davidson College, Davidson North Caroline, United States of America.

Gary Kemp, Dr. Senior Lecture, School of Humanity, University of Glasgow, Scotland.

Feng Li, Assistant Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Jinling Institute of Technology, Nanjing, People’s Republic of China.

Richard N. Manning, Associate Professor, College of Arts and Sciences, University of South Florida, Tampa, United States of America.

Lewis Powell, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Suny Buffalo, Buffalo, New York, United States of America.

Greg Ray, Associated Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Florida, Gainesville, United States of America.

Patrick Rysiew, Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, University of Victoria, Victoria BC, Canada.

Robert Shanklin, Lecture, Colleague of Arts and Science, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, United States of America.

Zhang Wenyan, Dr., Postdoctorial, Department of Chinese, Capital Normal University, Beijing, People’s Republic of China.
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The Borders of Global Theory – Reflections from Within and Without

*Edited by Barrie Axford*

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**Introduction: Global Scholarship from Within and Without**

*Barrie Axford*

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Making and Un-Making Modern Japan
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Ritu Vij

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