

uAnalytiCon “What Do We Need to Do Analytic Philosophy: Methods and Research Strategies”

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Philosophical and Linguistic Intuitions and the Core-Periphery Distinction

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Introduction

Aims of the talk

1. Notions of intuitions and their roles in philosophy and linguistics
 2. Philosophical notions or ‘philosophies’ implicit in natural language
 3. The core-periphery distinction for natural language ontology and other philosophical domains implicit in natural language
 4. Linguistic and philosophical intuitions to be identical when it comes to the core of language and need to be sharply distinguished from acceptance (and thus belief)
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1. Intuitions in philosophy and in linguistics and the connection between the two

The notion of a philosophical intuition

- Philosophical intuitions concern philosophically relevant propositions: e.g., knowledge as justified true belief, mental activity without particular physical organs, what is morally wrong, what is essential, ontological dependence (Socrates, singleton of Socrates)
- What are intuitions?
Beliefs of a special sort? Problematic: for having an intuition that p it is neither necessary nor sufficient to believe that p (Pust 2019).
Intuitions as ‘seemings’, quasi- perception or ‘intuiting’, as a sui generis attitude
- Intuitions considered evidence in philosophy, premises in philosophical arguments, even if they are not generally easily and quickly available (Bengson 2020)

Controversies about intuitions

do intuitions really act as evidence in philosophy (Cappelen, Deutsch, ..)

Intuitive beliefs as knowledge? Intuitions need not be factive.

Experimental philosophy

Intuitions as the subject of empirical study, with their potential interpersonal inconsistencies

General facts about philosophical intuitions

are not easy and immediate, but require work, need to be brought out, for example, through well-worked-out thought experiments (Bengson 2020)

Intuitions in linguistics

- Intuitions about the grammaticality and acceptability of sentences and constructions
- Linguistic intuitions (like all intuitions) come in degrees
- Linguistic intuitions are not easy and immediate either: require a particular sense for data, development of fine-tuning, sense for linguistic intuitions developed over time – in the history of linguistics and in the development of individual linguists

Philosophical intuitions reflected in natural language

- Intuitions in different areas of philosophy that have a linguistic reflection: intuitions about notions of metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind
- Linguistic intuitions serve to uncover philosophical intuitions

2. 'Philosophies' implicit in natural languageEpistemology

- The semantics of *know*, *may*, *must*, *seem*, *appear*, *look*, *taste*, *sound*
- Semantics of different complementizers: e.g. knowledge how and knowledge that

Philosophy of language

- *Refer* as an intensional transitive verb (d'Ambrosio 2019)
- *Mean* as relating two direct quotes, rather than an expression and an entity:

(1) a. 'Rouge' means 'red'.

b. * 'Rouge' means the concept / meaning / denotation of 'red'.

- The semantics of *true* and *correct*

Philosophy of mind

- The semantics of attitude verbs *believe*, *intend*, *think*, *hope* etc.
- Clausal complements of different sort (influencing the understanding of the attitude):
that-clauses, infinitival clauses, *wh*-clauses
- Generic *one* (as involving generic mental simulation, cf. Moltmann 2010)
- Mental states and events in the semantics of verbs and nominalizations

Using linguistic intuitions in order to uncover or sharpen philosophical intuitions

philosophical intuitions about notions that are *implicit* in natural language

The content of such linguistically reflected intuitions

generally not single propositions with philosophical content, but various linguistic facts, including constructional meaning

Important

Distinguish notions *implicit* in natural language from philosophical notions that can be described, upon *reflection*, by using natural language, in an ordinary or non-ordinary (technical) way, such as philosophers' uses of *knowledge*, *mental state*, *belief*, *perception*, *taste* etc.

Question

Can all of language be used that way?

If not, then there is a core-periphery distinction for those philosophical domains

3. Natural language ontology

A special case of a philosophical domain *implicit* in natural language

The subject matter of natural language ontology

The ontology *implicit* in natural language, not an ontology that can be described, upon reflection, *by using* natural language.

Two manifestations of natural language ontology

- [1] a practice throughout the history of philosophy (as part of descriptive metaphysics)
- [2] an emerging discipline that is part of linguistics and philosophy

Natural language ontology as a practice in philosophy throughout history

Use of natural language data for the purpose of uncovering or clarifying metaphysical intuitions.

Example 1

The statue and the clay (Fine 2005)

- (3) a. The statue is impressive / new / nice.
- b. The clay is impressive / new / nice.
- (4) a. The statue no longer exists.
- b. The clay no longer exists.

Example 2

Events and material objects

Exist vs happen, occur, take place, go on, spatial and temporal location (Fine 2003)

- (5) a. The rain is still going on.
- b. ??? The rain still exists.
- (6) a. The destruction of the temple really occurred / ??? really existed.
- b. The temple really existed / ??? occurred / ??? took place / ??? happened.
- (7) a. The vase still exists.
- b. ??? The vase exists in that room.
- c. The attack took place / happened / occurred in Paris.

Example 3

Events and facts (Vendler 1967)

- (8) a. The speech lasted two hours / triggered an applause.
- b. ?? The fact that John spoke lasted two hours / triggered an applause.

Example 4

Mental and illocutionary acts or states and their products or corresponding attitudinal objects -
- bearers of truth or satisfaction conditions (Twardowski 1911)

(9) a. The promise was fulfilled

b. ?? The act of promising was fulfilled.

(10) a. The claim was correct.

b. ?? The act of claiming was correct.

Natural language ontology as an emerging subdiscipline of linguistics – and philosophy

Bach (1986), Fiorin/Delfitto (2021):

Natural language ontology is just part of linguistics. Its purpose is positing semantic values as part of compositional semantics and capturing ontologically relevant properties and relations as determined by linguistic meaning.

Agnosticism regarding the ontological status of the semantic values and their properties and relations

Issues with agnosticism

1. Philosophers and linguists use similar methods to arrive at ontological notions
 2. Philosophers would benefit from taking into account a much greater range of linguist facts
- There is no reason to distinguish natural language ontology as a philosophical practice and as an emerging subdiscipline of both linguistics and philosophy

A general worry:

Intuitions of natural language ontology are not ‘caused’ by what they represent (reality) (i.e. language is not a guide to real ontology), whereas linguistic intuitions are caused by the language faculty.

Response:

not obviously a problem: reality itself may be shaped by our linguistic access (linguistic idealism, cf. Gaskin 2021)

Natural language ontology (as a development of descriptive metaphysics) should take into account the full range of linguistic facts and theories made available by contemporary semantics and syntax.

Not just various referential NPs and the predicates they may take, but also:

- Other syntactic categories, e.g. quantifiers, pronouns

- Syntactic constructions as analysed within a particular syntactic theory
- Silent elements
- Functional elements and syntactic features
- Syntactic positions
- Crosslinguistic generalizations

Two ways of describing the subject matter of natural language ontology

[1] Metaphysical intuitions with their more complex linguistic reflection

[2] The *ontologies* implicit in natural languages with their potential crosslinguistic differences

Extending the generative linguistic perspective

Pursuit of a universal ontology that goes along with universal grammar

4. The data relevant for natural language ontology and the core-periphery distinction

4.1. What sorts of linguistic data are indicative of the ontology implicit in natural language?

Not metaphysical assertions:

(12) a. There are events.

b. There are abstract objects.

Presuppositions, e.g. ontological category restrictions of predicates for implicit arguments:

Davidsonian event semantics:

(13) John buttered the toast with a knife.

Natural language ontology is not *folkmetaphysics* ('naïve' metaphysics):

Folkmetaphysics would take metaphysical assertions into account, but not natural language ontology

Examples of divergences

- Unrestricted sum formation with plurals and conjunctions, but not for the ordinary ontology of folkmetaphysics (*the stuff in my room, Quine and the Eiffeltower*)
- The verb *exist* applies only to enduring and abstract objects, the noun *existence* may convey a univocal notion, which arguably is part of folkmetaphysics.

- The mass-count distinction does not generally reflect the distinction between stuff and objects, but is better viewed as a matter of ‘grammaticized individuation’: *clothes* – *clothing*, *shoes* - *footwear*, Engl. *pasta* – French *pâtes*

4.2. The distinction between core and periphery of language

General observation

Philosophers and semanticists engaged in natural language ontology do not take certain sorts of expressions or uses of expressions into account.

[1] Technical expressions:

The nothing, to nothing (Heidegger)

Essence, ontological dependence, the fundamental, the part-of-relation, possible world, sum

[2] Non-ordinary, philosophical uses of expressions

Proposition, existence, property, object, group

[3] Certain types of constructions, e.g. reifying terms

Reifying terms

(14) a. the truth value true

b. the number eight

c. the proposition that it might rain

d. the event of raining

e. the sum of John and Mary

Some observations about the use of reifying terms in the philosophical literature

- The existence of the term *the truth value true* was not used by Frege to motivate truth values as objects,
- Frege did not motivate numbers of objects on the basis of terms like *the number eight*, but on the basis of *the number of planets* and *eight*
- Propositions are generally not motivated by appealing to *the proposition that S* –
- Davidson argued for events on the basis of inference patterns with adverbials, not on the basis of terms like *the event of raining*

- Link did not motivate sums of individuals as part of the ontology of natural language on the basis of terms like *the sum of John and Mary*, but on the basis of the semantic behavior of plurals and conjunctions (*the students, John and Mary*).

Generalization

Philosophers and semanticists make tacit use of a distinction between core and periphery of language: only the core, not the periphery, reflects the ontology of natural language.

The periphery of natural language

Expressions or uses of expressions are not indicative of the ontology implicit in natural language: expressions or uses of expressions that involve *reflection*

The core-periphery distinction also obtains also for other philosophical domains than ontology that are reflected in natural language: epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind

4.3. How can the core-periphery distinction for natural language ontology be characterized content-wise?

The contrast involved

Implicit 'acceptance' vs. inferential acceptance, reasoning, reflection

What is not involved is a distinction in the *nature of the ontology* itself:

An ontological notion that is arrived at through reasoning and acts the intended meaning of a peripheral (use of an) expression may turn out to be part of the core.

(15) (Preliminary) characterization of the ontology of natural language (core ontology)

The ontology implicit in natural language is the ontology a speaker *implicitly accepts* or adopts by way of using the *core* of the language.

Hypothesis about reifying terms

The structure of reifying terms:

(16) *the* - sortal noun - quotation

Reifying terms involve an operation of abstraction based on a nonreferential expression or use of an expression, which involves a form of reflection.

4.4. Is the core-periphery distinction grounded in grammar?

Division between the lexical and the functional part of grammar

Does not quite match the core-periphery distinction: the example of *exist* vs *existence*

But the lexical-functional divide plays a role:

the core includes the functional part of language, the periphery includes all nouns with their lexical meanings

Relation to Chomsky's (1981, 1986) core-periphery distinction?

Very roughly, the core of the syntactic system of a language represents universal grammar and the periphery exceptions and outside influences.

5. The status of core ontology

Observations

[1] The ontology implicit in natural language does not permit rejection:

Even when a speaker rejects upon reflection an ontological notion conveyed by an expression or construction in the core of language, she will automatically be committed to it when she uses the language.

[2] The core of language does not permit non-ordinary, 'philosophical' use.

Example

The verb *exist* does not permit a 'philosophical' use conveying a univocal notion of existence:

(17) a. ??? *The rain still exists.*

b. ??? *The protest existed (yesterday).*

Rejection of the non-univocal notion of existence (as endurance) conveyed by *exists* in favor of a univocal notion of existence is impossible.

Observation:

Distinction between nouns and verbs:

(18) a. the existence of everything there is

b. We discussed the notion of existence

c. Inwagen takes existence to be a univocal notion.

(19) ? the existence of the rain

Properties:

(20) a. the property of being happy / of being asleep

b. ??? the property of walking / talking / sleeping

(21) a. Semanticists take properties to be denotations of predicates

b. the notion of an abundant property

Distinguish between nouns and nouns in construction / a syntactic context (including internal arguments)

Back to acceptance of the linguistic core

The impossibility of rejection is not tied to the *implicitness* of apparent acceptance of core ontology. The notion of acceptance of the ontology of natural language must be distinct from the *implicit acceptance or bias in ethics*, which does allow for rejection

What notion of *acceptance* is involved in the ontology implicit in natural language?

Perhaps not acceptance at all, but a relation on a par with *knowledge* of language (grammar): possession of an ontology that goes along with 'knowing' the core of language.

The ontology of the core of language could go along with a reflective acceptance of other ontologies, given a permissive (plenitudinous) conception of reality.

The same would hold for other philosophical domains implicit in natural language

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