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**The Philosophy-Linguistics Interface: New Perspectives**

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**1. General remarks about the linguistics – philosophy interface:**

Two directions of influence

1. Philosophy influencing linguistics

Philosophical notions that are presupposed by linguistics, especially semantics:

Reference, meaning, ontological categories and structures

Possible worlds, philosophical analyses of modality and attitudes, philosophical conceptions of propositions

Philosophy provide notions and philosophical semantics tools for semantic analysis.

2. Linguistics influencing philosophy

Throughout of the history of philosophy: use of linguistic data to clarify philosophical intuitions

Philosophical analyses based on linguistic analyses of particular types of sentences

e.g. attitude reports

Standard view:

In *John thought that* S: *that* S is a proposition-referring term; *think* expresses a two-place relation between agents and propositions.

Plan 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

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**1. Intuitions in philosophy and in linguistics and the connection between the two**

The notion of a philosophical intuition

Beliefs of a special sort, ‘seemings’ (similar to perception), or ‘intuiting’ (a sui generis attitude), concern philosophically relevant propositions

Intuitions considered evidence in philosophy, premises in philosophical arguments

Controversies about intuitions

Do intuitions really act as evidence in philosophy? (Deutsch, Cappelen)

Experimental philosophy: intuitions with their potential crosscultural differences subject to empirical study

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

Concern the grammaticality and acceptability of sentences and constructions, including philosophically relevant sentences and constructions.

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

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**2. Philosophical domains reflected in natural language**

Epistemology

* 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 a verb 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*
* Constructions reflecting truthmaking in the sense of truthmaker semantics (Moltmann 2020)

(2) a. That it is raining is not the case.

b. the cases in which it rained on a Sunday.

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 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

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**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

The older view (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.

But there is no reason to distinguish natural language ontology as a philosophical practice and as an emerging subdiscipline of both linguistics and philosophy

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 (quantifiers, pronouns, …)
* Syntactic constructions as analysed within a particular syntactic theory
* Functional elements and syntactic features
* Syntactic positions
* Crosslinguistic generalizations

Exapmple where syntactic research has become relevant

*That*-clauses

Emerging view that *that*-clauses are not referential terms referring to propositions, but act as predicates of content-bearers (Kratzer, Moulton, Moltmann)

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

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**4. Linguistic data relevant for philosophical intuitions: 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.

**4.2. The distinction between core and periphery of language**

General observation

Philosophers and semanticists engaged e.g. in natural language ontology (or any other linguistically reflected philosophical domain) do not take certain sorts of expressions or uses of expressions into account.

For ontology:

[1] Technical expressions:

*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

* The existence of the term *the truth value* true was not used by Frege to motivate truth values as objects,
* 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*

Generalization

Philosophers make tacit use of a distinction between core and periphery of language when appealing to natural language to clarify philosophical intuitions

The periphery of natural language

Expressions or uses of expressions are not indicative of a philosophical notion implicit in natural language: expressions or uses of expressions that involve *reflection*

**4.3. How can the core-periphery distinction 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 philosophical domain* itself:

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

(15) Characterization of a philosophical domain implicit in natural language (core ontology)

A philosophical notion implicit in natural language is a notion a speaker *implicitly*

*accepts* or adopts by way of using the *core* of the language.

**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

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**5. Philosophical domains reflected in the core of language**

Observations

[1] ‘Philosophies’ implicit in natural language do not permit rejection:

Even when a speaker rejects upon reflection a philosophical 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.

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 philosophical domains implicit in natural language?

Perhaps not acceptance at all, but a relation on a par with knowledge of language (grammar)

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