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Chomsky's Science of Language & the Social View:

I-semantics and Semantic Internalism v. Semantic Externalism

(Research Trajectory) During my early years as a BA student, my interest in philosophy was directed toward philosophers who wrote literary works (Plato, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, Iris Murdoch) but also toward novelists whose work I found profoundly philosophical. In my final year at McGill, I developed an interest in analytic philosophy after reading Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art*. According to Israel Scheffler, *Languages of Art* "brought art and science into communication, providing an ingenious common framework for analyses of musical scores, literary scripts, scientific discourses, pictorial depictions, architecture and dance."

Just as words and music form languages, so does language in its wider sense include many symbol systems, (e.g., maps, graphs, scores, and paintings). It is this view of language that is the foundation of my research interests. How do these systems intersect? To begin any project in the philosophy of language requires that we distinguish the languages of the sciences from natural language (languages that children naturally acquire) and from artistic languages, while appreciating the role the arts play in how we understand our world. To some extent, I see the arts as experiments on human nature. Artists and their public seek universality. They are engaged in an experiment on human psychology.

This combination of factors, (my background as a visual artist and filmmaker, my interest in language-kinds) led naturally to Noam Chomsky's revolutionary work on the innateness of language. As far as we can tell, no species does language at the level we do. We attach an unbounded number of meanings to symbols. In 1980, Chomsky reiterated Bertrand Russell's question naming it Plato's Problem: "How comes it that human beings, whose contacts with the world are brief and personal and limited, are nevertheless able to know as much as they know?" Just how innate is language? In attempting to "face Plato's problem" Chomsky claimed infants are born with a universal grammar that includes a wide array of innate concepts. His data and resulting observations are extraordinarily interesting. Though Chomsky's theses may seem shocking at first, empirical studies by Susan Carey, Elizabeth Spelke, Aniruddh Patel, and Cathy Hinde, on infants and animals do support his views. For example, children are born knowing the difference between verbs and nouns prior to learning these words; they are born knowing about numerical identity; they anticipate gravity. And so on.

The study of language faculties (our own and those of other species) as well as language generating technologies are spawning a revolution. How will we react to these changes? What are the limits of AI?

Briefly summarizing the main argument of my thesis: if we can justifiably regard any viable science of language as an aspect of the science of human nature, then we do, nonetheless, need an avenue from which to consider the many ways we use language, and possibly also, a structured way of contrasting language-use with what we should be using language for (morality, making a better, more hopeful, world).

One of the goals of my research is to rescue philosophical work from a kind of misinterpretation of Chomskyan naturalism, which is often mischaracterized as fundamentally individualist. I do think that Chomskyan naturalism is on the right track; human language is, in technical terms, a faculty that generates mature idiolects (called I-languages¹) in the context of dialects or instituted languages (called E-languages²). However, I introduce the notion of C-language³ in my thesis answering Chomsky's challenge that researchers precisely define their object of enquiry in scientific terms. My approach will provide researchers with a stronger foundation from which to approach topics like linguistic diversity, propaganda, feminism, norms, political constitutions, and so on, without arguing against necessary innate biological structures and atomic concepts. In other words, one can accept that Chomskyan naturalism may define what language *is*, without giving up on significant philosophical concerns, and without opting for the

¹ The 'I' is a placeholder for internal, individual, idealization (see glossary in the foregoing).

² The 'E' is a placeholder for externalized (see glossary in the foregoing).

³ The 'C' a placeholder for terms such as communication, social cohesion, creativity, creating trust, being caretakers of the Earth, and the other species that inhabit it. But it also stands for a host of negative facts (see glossary in the foregoing).

ontologically problematic dualism accepted by many researchers who see naturalism as making society, culture, and linguistic identity scientifically irrelevant.⁴

(Motivations) Never have we needed to better understand our place in nature. We are destroying species and ecosystems daily. Although it is likely best that we approach science as fallibilists, the science of human nature can only truly develop when we characterize our biological place. Individual minds and I-languages are biological entities, which are linked to society and environment, but which can only grow by innate structure. We are not creatures whose “existence precedes [our] essence” entirely. Although it is true that our social niches are constructed, and that we create ourselves in many ways, we should not forget that there is a hierarchy involved in all causal explanation, and that in many very significant ways, our “essence precedes our existence.”

My thesis is entitled *I-semantics: What's Within?* It focuses on an internalist approach to semantics (essentially as more syntax) based on a recent book by Paul Pietroski entitled *Conjoining Meanings: Semantics without truth values*. What is it about our language faculty that makes us able to use words in such a creative way? There are three revolutionary theses held by semantic internalists that answer this question: (1) meanings are not things in the world, rather they are instructions to fetch and assemble concepts (2) meanings in natural languages do not have extensions (3) words do not in themselves refer and sentences do not have truth conditions. Like lexical meanings, sentences too are instructions.

In Chapter 1, I outline Biolinguistics, Chomskyan Minimalism, and Semantic Internalism. In Chapter 2, I survey the negative evidence that externalists face. In Chapter 3, I provide a summary of Pietroski's semantic theory. In Chapter 4, I tackle the question of whether a firm line can be drawn between meanings in science and meanings in natural language. This thesis of discontinuity is crucial for the I-semantics project but seems to argue against Hilary Putnam's division of linguistic labor. Without discontinuity, science is rendered subjective. I am intending to prepare this chapter for publication.

(Method) I have read and analyzed many of the most significant contributions made by naturalists (Chomsky, Pietroski, James McGilvray), and dualist/communitarian philosophers of language. I have been keeping track of developments in biolinguistics and cognitive science. Because I am aware that working on language raises significant issues involving personal and cultural identity, I have been accumulating essays and works by authors who focus on language and identity. As I am a proficient French and Italian reader, I will be including more works from researchers who have contributed in these languages.

(Contributors and Current Stage) I am currently on Chapter 3 of the first draft of my thesis with the guidance of my generous supervisors Ian Gold and Brendan Gillon. Significant contributions have been made by Noam Chomsky, James McGilvray, and Norbert Hornstein. I am also hoping to collaborate with linguists Denis Bouchard and Anna Maria di Sciullo. My thesis is intended to be of interest to linguists, cognitive scientists, bio-linguists, and psychologists.

(Conferences) I presented my paper “Meanings with Sounds, Signs, and Gestures” at Congress2019 to *The Canadian Philosophical Association*, and I chaired a conference on *Platonism and Language* offered by Christina Behme, and Paul Postal (also at Congress2019). I was also asked to comment on a paper about Grice's notion of Conversational Implicatures.

(Post-Doc) I am in contact with Anna Maria di Sciullo regarding the development of questions worth exploring during a post doc. 1) How can or should biolinguists handle language identity issues? I have had some difficulties with this. Perhaps biolinguists could have more to say about identity. 2) I have been in contact with Geoffrey Pullum because of his views targeting universal grammar. I read his response to Norbert Hornstein's and Paul Pietroski's article in *Current Controversies in the Philosophy of Cognitive Science*. Mostly, Pullum argues that there is no internalized grammar and that the Poverty of the Stimulus arguments are flawed because he thinks there is a huge amount of negative evidence deriving from children not (or rarely) hearing certain word combinations from the corpus. But, the corpus-first approach is nothing new and is, for reasons to be outlined, untenable.

⁴ We should keep in mind also, that many of Chomsky's political works (e.g., *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* which he co-authored with Edward S. Herman) would, in this framework, be understood to be in the domain of C-language studies.

(Glossary of Complex Terms)

I-language: The science of language's notion of language which allows for a biological explanation of a psychologically represented language in individuals. I-language is a procedure that generates expressions.

E-language: E-language can be a way of referring to languages in society; it is the sociological and political notion of an instituted language, a slang, a pidgin, or a creole. Chomsky has argued that E-languages are "folk notions" that have no purpose in a "natural science of language" and that essentially, E-languages are vaguely defined sets of externalized expressions (or outputs) i.e., whatever is not an I-language.

C-language: By C-language I wish to refer to the sociological explanation of what language is used for; for instance, language can create a sense of identity; it allows for social cohesion, creativity, and communication. While language is used for social cohesion, it can be used for negative facticity, (e.g., lying, oppression, and propaganda). These are social facts that can be described scientifically.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Sociolinguistics, Chomsky, Wittgenstein, Human nature

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