
Introduction

Speakers, in the course of their conversations, use language to talk about language. Doing this is by no means an unusual occurrence; it is rather a prevalent and commonplace aspect of our everyday linguistic practice. Talk about language may be about many different things; we may ask what words mean, or what the right word is for a certain purpose. We may worry about whether we have made ourselves clear, or whether we have correctly expressed what we meant to say. That we can make such inquiries implies that we have a certain degree of conscious access to the various kinds of knowledge and the complex array of skills that underlie our ability to speak. While this access is by no means complete, we nevertheless often do form on this basis beliefs about linguistic matters of considerable subtlety, both about ourselves and about others.

The topic of this book is beliefs of this sort, beliefs speakers have about the language they know and use: *de lingua* beliefs. That speakers have linguistic beliefs is undeniable. For instance, readers of this book all have the belief that they are speakers of English; people have very definite beliefs about what language they speak, and what language other people speak. These beliefs are useful beliefs. Conversation is greatly enhanced when the participants all believe they are speaking the same language. Believing that one speaks English is a very substantive belief to have—it is not the same as believing that one speaks French—and it is also a very complex one, under which many subbeliefs may fall. These too may play an important role in our use of language. For instance, we have conscious command of the relation between the expressions of our language and what they refer to, of whether we have managed to refer to the same thing twice by the use of such expressions, and of whether two (distinct) expressions refer to the same thing. Admittedly, we sometimes get these

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things wrong. Nevertheless, success in communicating depends on getting them right, because for conversants to agree that they are all talking about the same things depends in large part on their believing that they share beliefs such as that “Frege” refers to Frege, and not Russell, and that “Cicero” and “Tully” refer to the same person, or that “chair” means chair, and not table, and that “bellies” and “tummies” mean the same thing.

It might be thought that while beliefs like those we are describing reflect an underlying linguistic reality, they are nonetheless epiphenomenal, a mere sideshow to the underlying principles and conditions that *explain* our knowledge and use of language. This would not be to say that ascertaining the grounds speakers have for linguistic beliefs, and how they come to hold them, is a topic without interest. To the contrary. Unfolding the nexus of linguistic, communicative, conventional, and intentional factors that give rise to such beliefs is a topic of some subtlety, to which we will devote considerable attention. In our view, however, the significance of *de lingua* beliefs goes considerably beyond this. As we have already indicated, beliefs of this sort are essential for explaining at least some aspects of the success of communication, and it is with their explanatory roles, we believe, that the ultimate interest in linguistic beliefs resides. Our goal in the chapters to follow will be to endeavor to understand how *de lingua* beliefs infiltrate our use of language, in doing so trying to reveal their genesis as well as to unravel the explanatory roles they play.

Our analysis of *de lingua* beliefs will be conceptual. We call it conceptual, not philosophical, because its intent is to reveal aspects of the conceptual structure of an underlying scientific theory. In this regard, our inquiries will be much like Frege’s. For Frege, the concern was with the analysis of the conceptual structure of the underlying theory of logic. But although that theory failed, as consequently did his logicist program, nevertheless many of the notions he employed that constitute much of what we think of as Frege’s philosophical contribution, most notably, the distinction between sense and reference, have persisted, but now detached from the conceptual milieu in which they were conceived. In large part because of the power of the applications that Frege made of these notions, primarily to statements of identity and belief, they have become matters of persistent philosophical curiosity, largely in the philosophy of language, and have engendered issues at considerable remove from Frege’s conceptual concerns.

Part of our purpose in this book is to recapture these cases under a conceptual analysis. As they were for Frege, they will be for us important test cases for the validity of central theoretical concepts, and also as in the case of Frege, these concepts will be at the heart of characterizing the sort of things the theory is about. But for us, the underlying theory is not logic, but linguistic theory; the relevant objects not numbers, but the expressions that make up the sentences of a language. They are cases, we believe, that reflect the nature of concepts that we find at the foundation of empirical theories of language.

In this vein, the project we envisage is one of considerable extent and complexity, in large part because the beliefs that speakers can have about language are themselves quite extensive and complex. Consequently, our approach is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, we have chosen to restrict our attention to linguistic beliefs of two specific sorts:

- 1 Beliefs about the semantic values of linguistic expressions
- 2 Beliefs about the syntactic identity of linguistic expressions

Our choice to focus on these sorts of linguistic beliefs is not random. One reason for doing so is that in a very general sense, beliefs of these sorts are intimately involved in what it means to say of speakers that they properly know, and are able to properly use, their language. Without doubt, beliefs speakers have about reference and coreference of the sort we remarked on above, beliefs that directly depend on (1) and (2), reflect fundamental aspects of our underlying linguistic competence, as well as how we employ that competence to further our communicative ends. A second reason is that we can explore such beliefs in the context of cases that, for the reasons just cited, are well known in the philosophical and linguistic literature—the informativeness of identity statements, and the failure of substitutions in attributions of propositional attitudes. Although the extent of the discussion of these cases is vast, there is a persistent insight about what is at issue, namely, that speakers can fail to believe of two distinct expressions that they are coreferential, even though they are. They fail to have certain *de lingua* beliefs. Part of our goal in this book is to understand this failure, and its connection to the apparent breakdown of an otherwise intuitive principle of meaning—that we expect terms with the same reference to make the same contribution to content in all contexts in which they occur. Now tilling for new insight in these areas where matters of reference and coreference take

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center stage might seem like trying to grow corn from hardscrabble earth, but we think not. Once we understand what it is to hold *de lingua* beliefs falling under (1) and (2), and to believe that others hold them too, and have explicated the roles they play in the referential use of language, there will be considerable new insight to be had about these famously puzzling phenomena.

Although each of the essays that form the chapters of this book can be read as a self-contained study, they all have a common dialectic and reflect shared themes. By way of orientation, we can broadly divide these themes topically along the dimensions to which we have already alluded: understanding (1) the nature and genesis of linguistic beliefs, and (2) the explanatory roles such beliefs play in language use. The first theme takes flight by posing the question of the objects of linguistic beliefs: What *are* the linguistic entities that such beliefs are about? How are they to be characterized and individuated, so that we can tell when we have the same or different beliefs? These questions we take to be of a fundamentally grammatical order, their answers to be sought within the provinces of linguistic theory, wherein we seek descriptions of the resources available to speakers for generating linguistic beliefs. To properly understand *de lingua* beliefs, we must first understand the structure of the language they are about, for it is through the ontology of language that we will be able to say whether *de lingua* beliefs are the same or different. Beliefs about language can be imposed on us in various ways; the structure of the language itself, the rational use of language to communicate, the conventions of naming, and speakers' referential intentions can all give rise to linguistic beliefs, as we will see. But that they are *linguistic* beliefs depends on our prior characterization of the language they are about, and to do this is to concern ourselves with linguistic theory.

The first theme broached in these essays, then, focuses on what linguistic beliefs are, and under what circumstances it is appropriate for speakers to hold them. The second theme builds on the first, addressing the question of how attributing such beliefs to speakers accounts for properties of their use of language. The answer to this latter question flows from a key insight, namely, that when certain conditions are met, the content of beliefs about the reference of expressions can be taken to be part of what we *say* by our utterances, part of the propositional content; to put it a little differently, they can be part of the *interpretation* of

our utterances, by ourselves and by others. By “part of” here we mean *formal* part—that is, as constituents of the logical form that expresses this interpretation, that represents what we say. From this, as we will see, it follows that logical forms may contain mention of, and hence reference to, expressions otherwise used. When such mention is within the context of a propositional-attitude verb, the result is, we believe, a *de dicto* attribution, as this notion has been traditionally understood, and we will label them as such, (as opposed to *non-de dicto* beliefs, inclusive of, but not to be identified with, *de re* beliefs). Our beliefs about the identity conditions of expressions will come into play at this point, in assessing the logical forms of our sentences, including those of the sort just mentioned. Our recognition of whether the same linguistic expression is repeated in such forms will fix the circumstances under which two expression-tokens may be taken to corefer, for sometimes it is tokens of distinct expressions that corefer, while at others it is tokens of the same expression. Which way it is will matter. It will matter because whether sentences can be taken to have logical forms in which substitution can be validly carried out, or are informative, will depend on our beliefs about how anaphoric relations between expressions are ultimately fixed (or not) by the structure of the language we speak.

It might seem that the project we have been introducing is somewhat quixotic, given the central explanatory role played by linguistic aspects of beliefs. Perhaps the best-known occasion in which language figured so prominently is in Carnap’s discussion of propositional attitudes in *Meaning and Necessity* (1947). But even as its author admitted, this was not a wholly successful venture, withering primarily under the attacks of Church, so much so that today virtually any account that gives language pride of place is largely discredited. Nevertheless, our goal is to resurrect such a view, and to rectify the neglect that linguistic structure—syntax—has received, particularly in philosophical discussions of reference. Indeed, as Putnam pointed out early on, in response to what was perceived as one of the central difficulties of Carnap’s theory, so-called Mates cases, this is not wholly fair. We can make no judgment about such cases, Putnam rightly emphasizes, until we have a proper analysis of their logical structure, and to know this we must ascertain whether the same expression (or variable) is repeated or not. Putnam has set us in the right direction, for reasons that are not hard to see. Unless we get the identity

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conditions right, we will not know what sort of sentence or sentences we are confronting analytically. We would not have a definite fix on the structure—the *logical forms*—of the sentences we use in making our utterances. The common sense here is that in order for the analytic questions to be clearly posed, much less answered, the first thing on the table must be a proper accounting of linguistic structure that allows us to know whether one is encountering two occurrences of the same expression or not. It is right here, at the beginning, that we find the contribution of natural-language syntax to the understanding of philosophical problems. Because information about the linguistic identity of expressions is exploitable by speakers in the context of belief attributions and identity statements, we can have an account of substitution and informativeness that is at heart formal. So, although our theory does place significant and substantial formal constraints on how speakers can report, attribute, or interpret the contents of mental states, and so constrains the information that can be propositionally expressed, it is nevertheless independent of any specific theory of propositions or depiction of the content of mental states.

As a guide to our readers, we should mention that the ideas we will be pursuing find their roots in our previous monograph, *Indices and Identity*, and our current work represents an outgrowth of the primarily linguistic research presented there. Readers of that work will recognize its central theme, that the relation of expression identity to coreference is essential for understanding pronominal anaphora, wending its way through the chapters of this book, and the research developed there (and elsewhere in the linguistics literature) is intended to provide the empirical terra firma for the current investigations. We have assumed, however, no familiarity with our prior book here. Moreover, readers may approach the current volume as a monograph, or as a collection of essays. Those who choose the former strategy will be privy to the chronological unfolding of our thinking, the second, third, and fourth chapters having been written in that order for the most part, the first chapter having been written last. For those who choose the latter approach, and wish to read chapters selectively, or in a different order, we have left in overlapping material, at pain of some repetition, so that each chapter may be read on its own as an independent essay.