



Book Reviews

Sounding out semantics: The limits of philosophy (book review)

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In semantics, we examine the literal meaning of words and the meaning that emerges from the way they are combined, which together form the core of meaning, or the starting point from which a particular statement derives its meaning. Many theories presume or assert that words are signs or symbols with literal meanings that can be determined without any consideration for where the word appears in larger grammatical constructions, the context in which it is used upon any specific occasion, or the speaker's machinations. Despite this, this view of meaning poses problems and puzzles. In *Sounding out Semantics: The Limits of Philosophy*, the author presents original theories concerning the philosophy of language, mind, mathematics, and epistemology as a culmination of years of research. In seven chapters, this book synthesises contemporary philosophy in all these fields into a cohesive whole.

The historical context for semantics, puzzles in modern semantics, and truth conditional semantics are discussed in the first chapter, and the author believes that despite the numerous efforts that have been made in attempts to explain the way language works, or how semantics works, no clear conclusion can be drawn. There is a pressing need for a convincing explanation of what happens when people engage in verbal communication, and how humans came to have this ability, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically. This book attempts to provide both the

theoretical support and a broad outline for a revived non-semantic explanation of how language is acquired and used in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 addresses semantic fallacies regarding semantic symbols. Literal or lexical meanings are said to be carried by both the written and vocal symbols as they are transmitted from person to person. Chapter 3 discusses dualism and consciousness by addressing the question of why humans are left with the duality of physical entities and processes juxtaposed with mental entities and processes: because it gives them a monumental dollop of survival value. The third-party perspective allows humans to explain their subjective experience by recognising that word sounds enable them to tact and infer knowledge, beliefs, ideas, concepts, intentions, thoughts, and all the assorted flora and fauna of the self, whether conscious or unconscious, happy, or sad. They could not think or talk about consciousness or mental entities without these sounds produced by their bodies.

Chapter 4 offers a comparison between conventional philosophical thinking about word use as symbolic representational activity and an alternative view of word use as non-semantic functional behaviour with acoustic devices, action with consequences. It is hoped that the contrast will persuade people that the orthodox semantic theories do not adequately explain the human behaviour with regard to sounds and their derivative

symbols. Chapter 5 provides the way people speak and think about mathematics is fundamentally misguided. It is misguided by the same assumptions that theorists make about what we humans do with word sounds and symbols. The author hopes to persuade the readers that all of mathematics, from counting to calculus, is conditioned behaviour with acoustic devices. Because of the natural selection process, individual humans and whole societies have been conditioned to utilise number sounds and symbols for those sounds in very productive ways. Humans have survived and prospered because of our conditioned ability to do mathematics. The last two chapters explore the epistemological cognation of mind and language regarding the nature of knowledge and universe. When people use natural language in a declarative knowledge claim, the inherent imprecision of word use creates the indeterminacy that frustrates the attempts of logicians and linguists to find their absolute truth, certainty, and logical necessity. Furthermore, pragmatic scientists focus on results, however, the philosophical issues will not go away unless they recognise the functional value of their speech behaviour and the concomitant common-sense intuitions it produces.

The author believes that words provide us with a sense of mystery. Our common-sense beliefs about words have been shaped by thousands of years of misguided philosophical speculation about human languages. In turn, that speculation has been incorporated into the way we think about speech. Under the microscope of empirical investigation, the most pernicious of these speculations about words and language lack any explanatory power whatsoever. The belief is based on wildly speculative metaphysical speculation that has been accepted without question.

Three characteristics make this book stand out. First, it begins the discussion of language and semantics by acknowledging the inherent difficulties in talking about language, explores philosophical limits in light of humans' knowledge, cognition of language and consciousness of the self. Second, the author believes that the puzzles and enigmas persist as a result of the misguided philosophy of language. They remain not only in the philosophy of language, but also in the philosophy of mathematics, epistemology, and science. There is a great need to abandon that misguided semantic premise and to eliminate the mind/body dualism underlying its success. Finally, the author also provides some insight into the human use of word sounds from a new non-semantic perspective that eliminates the age-old conundrums about language. Even though abandoning the semantic paradigm may prove difficult, there are many reasons to pursue this course of action. Upon proper analysis from a non-semantic perspective, humankind can obtain an accurate framework from which to successfully analyse the human use of sounds and resolve the puzzles and enigmas resulting from our mistaken beliefs about ourselves and our verbal behaviour in all areas of intellectual inquiry. Despite these aspects, this book offers some new insights that could assist us in understanding how language works and what we do with words. Although sufficient information is presented about how this knowledge can be

utilised to explore other areas of analytical philosophy, it is important for readers to recognise that language presents inherent difficulties. The difficulty arises from the fact that we must speak a language to discuss a language. The nature of language is not limited to individual existence; it always takes the form of discourse. Overall, since this book presents a comprehensive and in-depth study that crosses disciplines to challenge common perceptions and linguistic descriptions, it is particularly recommended for scholars and students of linguistics, philosophy, and epistemology. Those interested in language and speech origins will find this book to be a valuable resource.

'Much of what is considered philosophy these days consists of advice, practical philosophies that do not explain, but offer platitudes meant to guide everyday living. These philosophies, while offering solace to those who need it, offer no understanding. The preachers and their followers are in full scale retreat from any attempt to explain or understand this world. Coping is the message they preach. Peace of mind, solace and hope are the ultimate objectives. So, the traditional philosophical conundrums and puzzles remain.' This book presents a truly unique approach to the study of language and knowledge that sets it apart from mainstream philosophical thought. Whereas conventional semantics views words as fixed symbols with determinable literal meanings independent of context, this book develops original theoretical frameworks arguing that word meaning emerges from practical usage rather than representation. It advocates a 'non-semantic' perspective of language as conditioned behaviour employing acoustic symbols, seeking to resolve long-debated puzzles in philosophy of language, mathematics, and epistemology. Through its comprehensive synthesis spanning seven in-depth chapters, the book offers the first integrated treatment of these fields informed by its alternative behaviourist paradigm. In challenging foundational assumptions around dualism, semantics, and literalism, it provides new conceptual tools that could transform understanding across disciplines if validated. Most significantly, the book comprehensively addresses the inherent difficulties of discussing language that have hindered philosophy, hypothesising revised explanatory models to overcome these limitations. By comprehensively critiquing prior approaches and developing an ambitious new research program grounded in empirical investigation, this publication offers a truly unique contribution with potential for paradigm change.

This book aims to make contributions across multiple fields by challenging conventional semantic philosophy of language and knowledge with original, integrated theoretical frameworks. It proposes that prevailing theories do not adequately explain language acquisition and use, and that word meanings are not fixed symbols but emerge from contextual use. By advocating an alternative 'non-semantic' perspective of language as conditioned behaviour with acoustic symbols rather than representational tools, it seeks to resolve longstanding puzzles in philosophy of language, mathematics, and epistemology. If successful, its unified frameworks could provide more accurate analyses of human symbol use with profound implications for various fields

like linguistics, cognitive science, and education. Specifically, understanding language as a functionally conditioned behaviour deeply influenced by social and cultural contexts may yield insights into second-language acquisition and intercultural communication challenges. Apprehending the fluid, relational nature of word meanings could inform best practices for language pedagogy and translation. Additionally, its emphasis on usage over semantics suggests an opportunity to re-evaluate cultural biases and assumptions embedded in linguistic symbols. However, the

work also acknowledges the inherent difficulties of discussing language using language itself, and that fully realising its ambitious integrations may prove challenging. Nonetheless, by disputing semantic and dualistic foundations underpinning mainstream views, rejecting literalism about word meanings, and emphasising linguistic use over abstract representation, the book aims to offer valuable new insights into the nature of human symbolic thought and communication with potential to transform perspectives across disciplines and societies.

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