Issues in Philosophy of Language and Linguistics

Edited by
Piotr Stalmaszczyk

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Łódzkie Studia z Językoznawstwa Angielskiego i Ogólnego
Łódź Studies in English and General Linguistics

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Introduction

Papers collected in this volume investigate several important issues in philosophy of language and linguistics, both traditional (such as the influences of analytic philosophy on language planning movements; concepts of truth and falsehood), and most recent (including accounts of semantics and pragmatics of pejoratives and slurs; John MacFarlane's views on disagreement; the status of Universal Grammar in linguistics and philosophy; and the emerging field of etholinguistics).

Başak Aray examines the relation of C. K. Ogden's Basic English (BE) to early analytic philosophy. Ogden's engagement in the movement for an international auxiliary language (IAL) can be related to his affiliation to empiricist and analytic traditions in philosophy of language. The need to develop an alternative language in order to overcome the misleading common-sense ontology was shared with several early founders of analytic philosophy such as Frege, Russell and Carnap. While analytic philosophers chose formal languages to accomplish this critical task, Ogden had a more pragmatic approach and proceeded to restructure an existing language (English) for international communication. An investigation into BE's philosophical background reveals influences of empiricists and analytic philosophers on various language planning movements of the first half of the 20th century.

Alicja Chybińska discusses the question of truth and falsehood as analysed by Kazimierz Twardowski, the founder of the Lvov-Warsaw School. Her aim is to introduce Twardowski's ideas regarding the field in question and to place them in context. She presents the influence of Bernard Bolzano's view of truth on Twardowski's philosophy, the methodological consequences of his Twardowski's theory, the role of logic in constructing this theory, and the views on the issue of truth and falsehood held by other members of the Lvov-Warsaw School (such as Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Stanisław Leśniewski and Alfred Tarski).

Cristina Corredor examines some recent accounts of the semantics and pragmatics of pejorative names and suggests that a normative approach in line with interactional pragmatics can help provide a complete account of some phenomena related to their use. One seemingly common idea in the theoretical treatment of pejoratives is that they have, together with a semantic level of descriptive meaning, a pragmatic level of evaluative meaning, where the latter is viewed as dependent on the expression of a (negative) attitude. Corredor's contention is that, in order to adequately account for the paradigmatic derogatory effect of pejoratives, the social setting of institutions and practices that give support to such derogation have to be seen as not only instituting, but also partially instituted by such language use.

Aldo Frigerio and **Maria Paola Tenchini** investigate the semantic status of slurs, and of connotative words in general. They sketch a map of the main positions regarding this topic and show that some of them fail, and propose a positive solution to the debate. The positions concerning the semantics of slurs can be divided into three groups: (1) the silentist position, to which slurs do not possess a derogatory content; (2) the literalist position, to which the derogatory content is part of the truth conditions; and (3) the position to which a derogatory content exists, but is not part of the truth conditions. Within the third family, the authors further distinguish (3.1) pragmatic positions, which identify the derogatory content with presuppositions or felicity conditions, and (3.2) semantic positions, which identify it with Gricean conventional implicatures. Although the discussed proposal is close to the theories (3.2), Frigerio and Tenchini advance a somewhat different thesis by exploiting Searle's speech act classification. They believe that by uttering words, such as 'nigger', a speaker performs two speech acts: a representative corresponding to the act performed by means of the sentence containing the neutral counterpart of 'nigger' and an expressive act by which the speaker expresses her contempt toward black people.

Natalia Karczewska offers a critique of John MacFarlane's view on disagreement. MacFarlane develops his classification of various kinds of disagreement in order to show that there are more than one plausible construal of the notion of 'faultless disagreement' which has been provided by one of its most prominent adherents – Max Kölbel. In her paper, Karczewska presents Kölbel's definition of faultless disagreement and shows how he comes to the conclusion that the only semantic theory which can account for it is his 'genuine' relativism. Further, she presents MacFarlane's kinds of disagreement along with his argumentation to the point that relativism is not the only semantic theory which makes space for faultless disagreement, and finally, the author tries to show that some of MacFarlane's kinds are too artificial to deserve to be distinguished, and that they are all reducible to one.

Wiktor Pskit discusses the status of Universal Grammar (UG) in linguistic and philosophical inquiry in the light of a recent proposal by Wolfram Hinzen. Based on the advances within the Minimalist Program, especially its abandonment of the Principles-and-Parameters (P&P) framework and biolinguistic orientation, Hinzen argues for a reconceptualisation of UG, where UG gives human thought a "uniquely linguistic structural format". According to Hinzen, this reconceptualisation brings the philosophical dimension back to a science of grammar in the spirit of a number of pre-twentieth-century approaches (such as, for example A. Arnauld and C. Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée de Port Royal*, 1660). Thus understood UG no longer seems to be concerned with the explanation for linguistic variation, because while it appears to capture what is common to all natural languages (the principles of the P&P approach), it loses sight of cross-linguistic grammatical differences (the parameters of the P&P framework). Given that certain aspects of the conception UG have remained unchanged since the inception of the generative enterprise, an account of grammatical variation might lie in the treatment of grammars of particular languages as 'implementations' or 'realisations' of UG. However, these realisations vary in terms of the ways in which syntax is externalised by morpho-phonology. The current treatment of UG in syntactic theory and in Hinzen's approach illustrates the interaction between linguistics and philosophy. The history of UG seems to be a history of the mutual influence of philosophy and linguistics on one another.

Jiří Raclavský proposes a model of "language in a synchronic and diachronic sense". The author assumes that language is a normative phenomenon enabling speakers to communicate. At any particular time language is used, however, it is possible to determine a function which maps the expressions produced using this language to their meanings. Raclavský first proposes a functional model of language in a synchronic sense (which also solves various complications with ambivalence, etc.). Next, he proposes a model of language in a diachronic sense as a function from possible worlds and time instants to languages in a synchronic sense. In this way, the intuitive idea that language changes is captured. Both models are constructed to be convenient tools mainly for the investigation of semantic properties of expressions of that language.

Urszula Zaliwska-Okrutna focuses on several parameters of etholinguistic investigation, especially locational, temporal and socio-ideological aspects of language functioning, i.e. the place, the time and the socio-cultural background of one's language use. The chapter investigates the relationship between language and reality, especially within the tradition of recognizing the individual-oriented and context-bound character of language, but also the classic theories exposing

interrelationship between language and world-view, and the modern influences and research on thought and language. The author mentions the genetic-biological parameters not only for the sake of chronological accuracy of etholinguistic investigation, but primarily in order to indicate their significance for one's body and other identity, she also signals the prospective ways of studying glottic identity.

The papers gathered in this volume demonstrate that the investigation into the interface of philosophy of language and linguistics brings interesting results, and opens new avenues for philosophical and linguistic research.

Contributions gathered in this volume were presented at the third International Conference on Philosophy of Language and Linguistics, *PhiLang2013*. The conference was held in Łódź in May 2013, and was organized by the Chair of English and General Linguistics at the University of Łódź. Two other volumes, dealing with the legacy of Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein, and with philosophical and linguistic investigations into semantics and beyond, have been published by Walter de Gruyter.

I am grateful to all invited participants for stimulating presentations and discussions, to the reviewers of this volume, and to my colleagues from the organizational committee (Ryszard Rasiński, Sylwia Dżereń-Głowacka, Wiktor Pskit) for help with the organizational issues.

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Basic English and Early Analytic Philosophy

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Abstract: This paper examines the relation of C. K. Ogden's Basic English (BE) to early analytic philosophy. Ogden's engagement in the movement for an international auxiliary language (IAL) will be related to his affiliation to empiricist and analytic traditions in philosophy of language. The need to develop an alternative language in order to overcome the misleading common-sense ontology is shared with several early founders of analytic philosophy such as Frege, Russell and Carnap. While analytic philosophers chose formal languages to accomplish this critical task, Ogden had a more pragmatic approach and proceeded to restructure an existing language (English) for international communication. A study of BE's philosophical background reveals influences of empiricists and analytic philosophers on various language planning movements of the first half of the 20th century.

Key words: Ogden, Basic English, early analytic philosophy, Vienna Circle, logical empiricism, language planning, international auxiliary language.

1. Introduction

Charles K. Ogden is known for Basic English (BE), a condensed version of the English language with a reduced vocabulary. This paper aims to situate Basic in its philosophical context, showing its affinities with analytical and empiricist traditions in philosophy of language. An examination of Ogden's life-long work on semiotics reveals his close connection to early analytic philosophy, as well as his roots in British empiricism. We will consider the philosophical foundations of Basic English in light of biographical elements and a range of recurring references in Ogden's writing. Parallels will be drawn especially with Frege, Russell and the Vienna Circle.

Ogden's work on BE began in 1925. He founded the Orthological Institute in 1927, and the following year he started editing BE textbooks. The idea of an

international auxiliary language (IAL) derived from standard English stems from Ogden's reflections on meaning since his Cambridge days, including his early specialization on "the influence of the Greek language on Greek thought" and his intensive correspondence with Lady Victoria Welby.[1] He set out the theory of language grounding BE in *The Meaning of Meaning* (Ogden, Richards 1923). Later, he traced the major influence on Basic to Jeremy Bentham's neglected philosophy of language (Ogden 1932). During the 1930s Basic received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as Churchill's official support in 1943. In 1947, the Basic English Foundation benefited from a grant by the Ministry of Education.

Besides his linguistic work, Ogden was an active editor and translator. He translated Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with Frank Ramsey and edited other works in analytic philosophy, e.g. Russell's *The Analysis of Matter* and Carnap's *The Logical Syntax of Language*. The editorial line of the International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method reveals the philosophical background of the inventor of Basic and his primary contemporary influences: early analytic philosophers, such as Frege and Russell, and their empiricist successors of the Vienna Circle.

2. The method of Basic English

With a small set of elementary words and a regularized grammar, Basic was constructed as an economic alternative to standard English. The elementary words were chosen not for their statistical frequency in English texts, but for their semantic value, thought to be constitutive for the rest of the current vocabulary. With a vocabulary of 850 words replacing ten thousands, Basic aimed to accelerate learning by diminishing the number of words a speaker must retain. Ogden called this reductivist system a "vertical translation", i.e. a translation into a smaller vocabulary. In virtue of the dominantly physicalist character of the Basic words, vertical translation requires a decomposition of meaning into its empirical counterparts – an outcome praised by Ogden for its critical function in avoiding philosophical problems generated by language (besides its obvious efficiency in teaching an international language).

Basic combines a restricted vocabulary with an analytic treatment of complex meaning, expressed through a decomposition into selected basic semantic units. Such an atomistic conception for an ideal language is shared by 17th-century

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[1] Part of the correspondence, as well as Ogden's reading notes on Welby's "significs", can be found in the C. K. Ogden Archive, McMaster University: http://library.mcmaster.ca/archives/findaids/o/ogden.htm (accessed 10.06.2014).

philosophical languages (projected or created, such as Leibniz's *Characteristica Universalis*, or Dalgarno's and Wilkins' similar endeavours). However, Ogden stresses that the reduction in Basic is not a mechanical process: there is no algorithm to simply substitute an expression in BE into its equivalent in regular English. This complexity makes vertical translation an interesting intellectual exercise requiring a real understanding of the expression to be translated. In the 20th century, others like Otto Neurath (1936a) and Charles Bliss (1949) adopted the architectural model for their visual languages, although Neurath also stressed the importance of flexibility and the irreducibility of a minimum of vagueness in any language, be it verbal or visual. With Isotype (**I**nternational **S**ystem **o**f **T**ypographic **P**icture **E**ducation), Neurath became a pioneer in visualizing statistical information about social and economic facts.[2] Unlike scientific graphs and pie charts, Isotype applies the atomistic model of representation to social statistics. It represents quantities by serialization of a single pictogram, to which a definite quantity is associated, so that different amounts are rendered by a proportional repetition of the pictorial unit (fig. 1). Complex information is represented by combination of basic graphic elements (shoe + factory = shoe factory; coal + worker = coal worker, etc.). Bliss' pictorial writing adopts the same compositional system in which meaning is analyzed into its basic constituents (letter + electricity = telegram; language + bridge = translation; man + language + bridge = translator, etc.). Adoption of a minimal "visual alphabet" and standardization of combination rules ("pictorial syntax") make Isotype a transparent system of pictorial writing for social statistics, of which the overall reductivist scheme guarantees universal application and communicative efficiency.

The decomposition of verbs in Basic reveals the ontological decision taken by Ogden regarding the set of elementary vocabulary. Analysis of verbs in Basic follows the principle of physicalist reduction. Inspired primarily by Locke and Bridgman, Ogden worked to make the empirical origins of abstract ideas visible through BE's translation process, which aims to overcome metaphysical associations of words. For this purpose, Basic has 11 operators (*do*, *make*, *take*, *give*, *put*, *have*, *keep*, *let*, *make*, *be*, *seem*), which correspond to 11 elementary physical operations, to render every verb in Standard English. These are used in conjunction with 20 directives (*through*, *from*, *to*, *over*, *under*, *by*, *at*, *against*, *up*, *down*, *about*, *among*, *across*, *on*, *off*, *after*, *before*, *between*, *within*, *out*), expressing the elementary directions of physical operations in space. For example, 'to disembark' would be translated as 'to get off a ship', 'to insert' – 'to put in', 'to pass' – 'to go by', 'to climb' – 'to go over', 'to break a rule' – 'to go against a rule'. Thus even the most abstract concepts are expressed in empirical terms, which has a double

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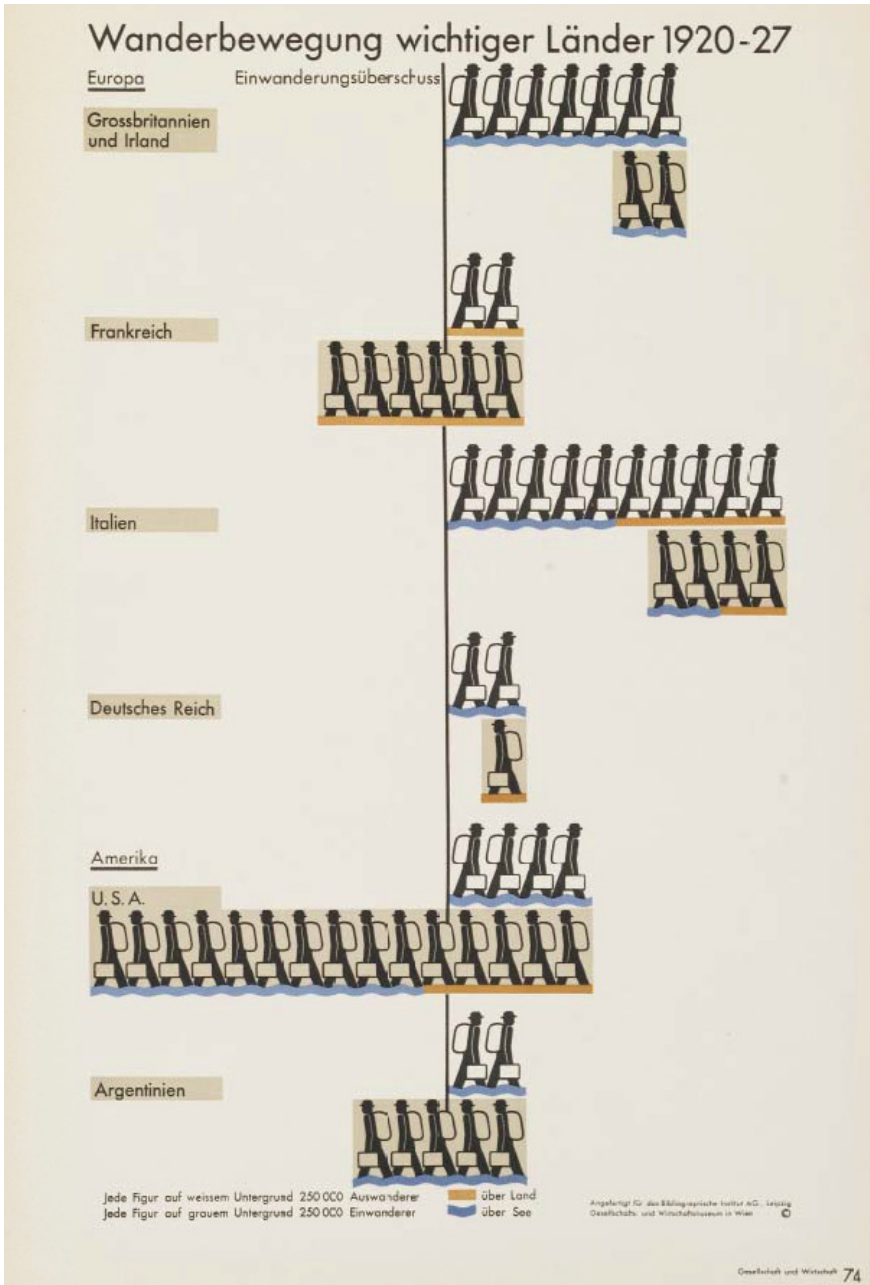[2] See Neurath, Kinross (2009) for the history of Isotype.

Fig. 1. The Isotype chart
(from: Neurath 1930: 74, retrieved from http://isotyperevisited.org)

advantage of linguistic economy (pedagogic advantage) and ontological transparency (empirical reduction reveals the long forgotten physical roots of the signification, the loss of which causes the mythical conception of language criticized by Ogden[3]). Finally, irregularities in matters of spelling and conjugation are minimized, which avoids unnecessary complications for beginners. As a result, translation of verbs into BE equates to breaking them down into their physical constituents. Thus vertical translation becomes a reformulation in physicalist terms, making the empirical content of the sentence explicit. Parallels with the logical empiricists' reduction of propositions to protocol-statements (statements expressing the data of basic sense-experience) as a criterion of signification can be legitimately drawn here, especially if one considers the common philosophical background of Ogden and Vienna Circle. Both sought to apply British empiricism to language-related philosophical problems.

3. Language and ontological misconceptions

A decisive connection between language and mind was stated by empiricists as early as Francis Bacon, who identified the influence of language upon thought as one of the epistemic idols to overcome in order to attain knowledge. Bacon mentions traditional languages among the "idols of the marketplace", i.e. epistemic bias rooted in society. This view inspired universal language schemes in 17th-century England. The official establishment of experimental science following Bacon went hand in hand with the flourishing of various philosophical languages. Those were designed as artificial tools reflecting the real structure of the natural world as opposed to many insufficient or erroneous representations in natural languages.

In the 20th century, logical empiricists adopted a similar attitude toward natural language as a legitimately alterable sign-system, but followed a slightly different path. Their criticism of natural language went beyond lexical concerns and put its underlying logical structure in question. Thus, alongside words lacking empirically definable cognitive meaning, Carnap admits a second kind of metaphysical pseudo-statement – a combination of meaningful words resulting in nonsense. He points at the lack of a logical syntax in natural languages as the source of

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[3] "For the modern scientist and technologist, no less than for Bergson or the man in the street, language is first and foremost an apparatus for dealing with things in space. What is 'there' to be talked about is primarily a nexus of individual bodies; and only through metaphor do we seem to be talking about other sorts of entities. All such metaphorical and fictional jargon is capable of translation, and for technological purposes must be translated, into something less deceptive." (Ogden 1936: 193).