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What I shall be calling "the use theory of meaning" is intended to answer the question: in virtue of which of its underlying properties does a word come to possess the particular meaning it has? The theory I am going to articulate bears certain affinities to ideas in the works of Wittgenstein, Sellars, Field, Harman, Block, Peacocke, Brandom, Cozzo, and other philosophers whose views could reasonably be labelled use theories of meaning. But when I deploy this term I will be referring to my own specific version of the approach. My plan for this chapter is to sketch the main features of this account, to supply several arguments in its favour, to compare it with alternative theories, and to clarify and defend the proposal by responding to a large collection of old and new objections.

A Sketch of the Theory

The picture I intend to develop involves three principal claims.

(I) **Meanings are concepts.** A word or phrase—whether it be spoken, written, signed, or merely thought (i.e. an item of ‘mentalese’)—expresses a ‘concept’, which is an abstract entity from which beliefs, desires, and other states of mind are composed. Thus, what a linguistic expression *means*—what it gives us reason to regard as present in the mental state of the speaker—is a concept. For example, the property of believing one has a dog consists in standing in the belief relation to the concept, *I have a dog*, i.e. to the meaning of “I have a dog”. And such concepts, expressed by sentences, are somehow engendered by the concepts expressed by words. Thus the concept, *I have a dog*, is made in part from the concept *dog*, which is the meaning of “dog”. I would argue, moreover, that one can identify properties with predicative concepts (that, for example, *dog* = doggyness); but this further suggestion will play little role in what follows.

(II) **The overall use of each word stems from its possession of a basic acceptance property.** For each word there is a small set of simple properties which (in conjunction with other factors and with the basic properties of other words) explain total linguistic behaviour with respect to that word. These explanatorily basic properties fall into various kinds—the so-called phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic—where each such kind is defined by the distinctive

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2 Belief states are normally categorized in one of two alternative ways. One way is in terms of the proposition believed—e.g. the state of believing *that I have a dog*—a state which anyone who has that belief about me will share, though he might articulate it by thinking to himself, “He has a dog”, or “Paul has a dog”, etc. The other way is in terms of how the belief is articulated—e.g. the I-have-a-dog belief state which is shared by anyone who thinks to himself either “I have a dog”, “Ho un cane”, or something else with that meaning. Adapting Kaplan’s terminology, the first is a relation to a thought content; the second a relation to a thought character. When I say that concepts are the constituents of belief states, I have in mind the latter kind. More specifically, they are the constituents of the second abstract relatum in such states—a thought character. Although we cannot generally identify the constituents of propositions with concepts, this may be possible for context-insensitive constituents of *de dicto* propositions. The relationship between meanings and propositions is discussed later in this chapter, in the response to Objection 12.
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form of its members and by the range of phenomena they are needed to account for. The present theory is focused on the semantic feature of a word. The distinctive form of that feature is that it designates the circumstances in which certain specified sentences containing the word are accepted; and the primary explanatory role of a word’s acceptance property is to account for the acceptance of other sentences containing the word. For example, it may be that

(a) the acceptance property that governs a speaker’s overall use of “and” is (roughly) his tendency to accept “p and q” if and only if he accepts both “p” and “q”;

(b) the explanatorily fundamental acceptance property underlying our use of “red” is (roughly) the disposition to apply “red” to an observed surface when and only when it is clearly red;

(c) the acceptance property governing our total use of the word “true” is the inclination to accept instances of the schema ‘the proposition that p is true if and only if p’.

Thus for each word, w, there is a regularity of the form

All uses of w stem from its possession of acceptance property A(x),

where A(x) gives the circumstances in which certain specified sentences containing w are accepted. Think of all the facts regarding a person’s linguistic behaviour—the sum of everything he will say, and in what circumstances. The thesis is that this constellation of data may be unified and explained in terms of a relatively small and simple body of factors and principles including, for each word, a basic use regularity. Statements (a), (b), and (c) indicate (to a first approximation) the sort of generalizations I have in mind. It is not implausible that something like these regularities are what explain our overall use of the words “and”, “red”, and “true”.³

³ For an important refinement of this position see Objection 17, and a fuller discussion in Chapter 6. In a nutshell: a fundamental acceptance property will not imply substantive commitments, but will merely specify how such commitments are to be
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(III) Two words express the same concept in virtue of having the same basic acceptance property. Thus \( w \) expresses the same concept as "dog"—hence \( w \) means DOG—because a certain acceptance property is responsible for the overall use of \( w \): namely, the one that is responsible for the overall use of "dog". Therefore the meaning property of a word is constituted by its having a certain basic acceptance property (or, in other words, by its conforming to the regularity, 'All uses of \( w \) stem from such-and-such acceptance property'). For example, the properties, '\( x \) means AND', '\( x \) means RED', and '\( x \) means TRUE' are constituted by something like the use properties described in (II). Note that the thesis is not that meanings are uses; nor is it even that meaning properties are identical to use properties. The proposal is rather that meaning properties are constituted by use properties of roughly the sort just illustrated. The relevant notion of 'constitution' is quite familiar. (I give a brief account of it in section 2 of Chapter 2, and later in the present Chapter, in the response to objection 4.) Just as 'being water' is constituted by 'being made of \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \) molecules' and 'being red' is constituted by 'emitting light of such-and-such a wavelength', so 'meaning AND' is constituted by the property characterized in (a) above.

These three theses form the core of the theory of meaning that I want to propose. I will elaborate them in the course of giving various reasons for believing the theory and in responding to a series of twenty-four objections.

Seven Arguments in Favour of the Use Theory of Meaning

(1) The Univocality-of-"Meaning" Argument

As we saw in Chapter 2, one thing to be said on behalf of the use theory—especially the first component of it—is that it accommodates our ordinary way of speaking of meanings as a species of entity formulated if they are adopted. For example, what constitutes the meaning of "true" is the conditional commitment to accept instances of 'The proposition that \( p \) is true iff \( p \)' given a commitment, for some \( $ \), to accept instances of "The proposition that \( p \) is \( $ \) iff \( p \)".
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(2) The Explanation Argument

One of the properties of meaning that we recognize pretheoretically is that what people say is due, in part, to what they mean. For example, I assent to "That's red", when I do, partly because of what I mean by the word "red". And this explanatory feature of meaning is immediately accounted for by the use theory. For the central component of that theory is that the property which constitutes a word's having the meaning it does is that its use is governed by a certain explanatorily fundamental acceptance property. And it is indeed quite clear (as we have just seen) how the total use of a word might be derived, in light of circumstantial factors, from a basic 'law' of use—whereas it is relatively unclear how any other sort of property of a word (such as a reference, a normative characteristic, or some neurological correlate) would constrain its overall use.

Notice, by the way, that there is no conflict between my proposal to reduce meaning properties to use properties and the present observation that meaning explains use. For the aspect of use to which meaning properties reduce is quite different from the aspects of use that meaning properties explain. The former are generalizations to the effect that every use of a given word stems from a specified acceptance property; the latter are particular uses of that word. So it is
to which words stand in the relation ‘x means y’. Moreover it makes do with the familiar, non-semantic use of the word “means”. When we say, for example, that black clouds mean it will rain, or that the expression on his face means that he is sad, we are deploying a notion of means which is, roughly speaking, the notion of indication. To say, in this sense, that x means y, is to say, roughly, that x provides a good reason to believe in the presence of y. Now, according to the above theory, when we specify the meaning of a word, we are claiming that someone's use of the word would provide a good reason to expect the occurrence in his mental state of a certain concept. Thus, according to this account, the notion of meaning we deploy in connection with language—in speaking of the meanings of words—is exactly the same as the notion we deploy in non-semantic contexts. It is a virtue of this account that it respects the relational appearance of meaning attributions and that it calls for no special, ad hoc assumption about the meaning of “means” in semantic contexts.
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perfectly natural to explain one in terms of the other. The generalizations about use explain particular utterances; therefore the theory that meaning properties are constituted by such generalizations accommodates the intuition that the things we say may be explained, in part, by reference to what we mean.

(3) The Meaning-Attribution Argument

Another strong argument in favour of the use theory is that it rationalizes our practice of meaning attribution: it squares with the procedures we actually follow to arrive at judgements about the meanings of words. For clearly we do establish what is meant by a word by observation of how it is used—more specifically, by recognizing an appropriate similarity between its use and the use of one of our already understood terms. Thus we judge that the Italian “cane” means DOG on the basis of discovering an appropriate similarity in the use of “cane” and our use of “dog”. Such ‘appropriate’ similarity does not preclude divergences in use—just as long as they can be explained away as resulting from circumstantial differences. For example, the fact that someone accepts “It is true that God exists” while someone else denies it, is not taken to show that they mean different things by “true”, because this difference in their use of the word is explained by the fact that one of them accepts “God exists” while the other does not. Similarly, a disagreement about whether to apply “red” to the colour of some unexamined tomatoes in the fridge would not suggest any variation in what is meant by that word. For again the divergence in use is plausibly explained away as the product of differences that are unrelated to what the speakers mean. On the other hand, if someone assents to the sentence “Even though it is true that God exists, nevertheless God does not exist”, we might well conclude that he does not mean what we do by the word “true”. And if someone applies the word “red” to a surface that is obviously green, we will be inclined to think that his understanding of the word differs from ours.

These sentiments are exactly what one would expect in light of the use theory. For the way we are deciding whether the use of one word is ‘appropriately’ similar to the use of another is by determining whether the divergence in their use can be explained away, i.e. recon-
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ciled with there being an identity in the basic regularity that governs them. That is, their uses are regarded as ‘appropriately’ similar just in case they are governed by the same basic regularity. When this is thought to hold of some foreign term \( w \) and one of our words “\( f \)”, then we conclude (as the use theory predicts) that the concepts expressed by \( w \) and “\( f \)” are identical—hence (since trivially “\( f \)” expresses the concept \( F \)) that \( w \) expresses the concept \( F \)—or, in other words, that \( w \) means \( F \). (Davidson’s account of meaning attribution, based on his Principle of Charity, does not significantly diverge from the present suggestion, as we shall see in the response to Objection 6.)

(4) The Synonymy Argument

A further piece of evidence derives from the fact that synonyms are pretty freely substituted for one another. Suppose that terms \( w \) and \( v \) belong to the same language and have the same meaning. In that case speakers of the language, when they are prepared to accept something containing \( w \), will usually be just as prepared to accept the sentence derived from it by replacing \( w \) with \( v \). And this fact about synonyms calls for explanation. What account of the nature of meaning properties will explain that if two terms have the same one then they are ‘co-accepted’ in this way? Notice that if understanding a predicate were simply a matter of knowing what it is true of, this phenomenon would remain unexplained. For one might perfectly well know of some object both that \( w \) is true of it and that \( v \) is true of it, yet not be aware that those words are true of the same thing. The use theory, on the other hand, provides a natural answer; for the co-acceptance of synonyms is exactly what one should expect if the meaning property of a word is constituted by whatever explains the assertive utterances in which it figures—that is, by the fact that a certain basic regularity governs its use. For if \( w \) and \( v \) are governed by the same basic regularity, then, provided that all the other factors influencing the deployment of those words are the same—as they will be for a single person at a single time—the overall dispositions for their use by a given person at a given time will be the same, and so they will indeed be co-accepted. Thus the use theory derives a good measure of confirmation from the co-acceptance of synonyms.
(5) The Implicit Definition Argument

A fifth source of support for the theory lies in the phenomenon of implicit definition. One may introduce a new term, “/”, and give it a meaning, simply by accepting a body of postulates, “#/”, containing the term. This is how the non-observation vocabulary of a scientific theory is typically defined. But there is a question as to how such ‘definitions’ could work. What does meaning have to be like in order for there to be a possibility of conferring it in such a way? And it is hard to think of a plausible alternative to the answer that “/” means what it does

is constituted by the fact that

The basic acceptance property of “/” is that “#/” is regarded as true.

Thus “/” means what it does in virtue of possessing the property that accounts for its overall use. (This point is developed in Chapter 6.)

(6) The Translation Argument

The way in which we operate with manuals of translation (i.e. mappings that preserve meaning) is explained—and can only be explained—by means of the use theory of meaning. To see this, notice that a translation manual $T$ (which maps our words, $w_1, w_2, \ldots$, into foreign words $T(w_1), T(w_2), \ldots$, and vice versa) is an instrument intended to enable us to manage successfully in a foreign community. To that end it is used as a device of ‘expectation replacement’: when we are abroad, instead of asserting our sentences, we assert the translations of them, supposing that this will generate the same relevant expectations in the audience as our sentences would at home. Conversely, when a foreigner says something, we are to have the expectations normally associated with the translation of what he said. What this suggests is that our expectations at home are engendered by an implicit psychological–behavioural theory, $S[w_1, w_2, \ldots]$, specifying the uses of our words, $w_1, w_2, \ldots$, in relation to one
another and to environmental and other circumstances; and that our deployment of translation manual $T$ in a foreign community consists in our operating there with the same implicit theory, but transformed by $T$. That is, we operate abroad with $T(\$)$, i.e. with $\$[T(w_1), T(w_2), \ldots]$. And this is useful if $T(\$)$ is as good at enabling accurate predictions there as $\$ is here—which will be the case if and only if $T(\$)$ is as true as $\$$. But the difference between $\$ and $T(\$)$ is merely that the theory structure, $\$(x_1, x_2, \ldots)$, is occupied on the one hand by our words and on the other hand by the associated foreign words. That is to say, the property of $w_1$ that any adequate translation of $w_1$ must also have, is $(\exists x_2)(\exists x_3) \ldots \$$(x_1, x_2, x_3, \ldots)$—which specifies a basic regularity of use. Thus the function of translation manuals (as devices of expectation replacement) is explained by the theory that a good translation manual preserves the basic explanatory roles of words—i.e. by the theory that meanings consist in basic regularities of use. (See Chapter 9 for further discussion.)

(7) The Pragmatic Argument

A related point in favour of the theory is that, in so far as it explains why we should seek manuals of translation, it explains, a fortiori, why it is valuable to possess the concept of translation and therefore the concept of meaning; hence it accounts for our having those concepts. In other words, there is a pragmatic rationale for our deploying the notions of meaning and translation that are characterized by my initial theses (I), (II), and (III). Since these use-theoretic notions are valuable for us to deploy, they are notions we can be expected to have. Thus the use theory explains the fact that we possess the concept of meaning.

Alternative Theories

At a different level, some support for the use theory derives from the inadequacy of its rivals. To see this, let us review a range of alternative proposals, indicating where they fall short. In this connection it should be borne in mind that so-called ‘theories of meaning’ divide
into two groups. There are those, like the use theory, whose primary
purpose is to specify the underlying non-semantic properties of
expressions in virtue of which they possess their particular meanings;
and there are those that remain at the semantic level, aiming at a sys-
tematization of familiar meaning facts in terms of theoretical seman-
tic notions. Included in this second category are Frege’s theory of
sense, Katz’s structural ‘markerese’, the Kripke/Lewis/Stalnaker pos-
sible-world approach, Barwise and Perry’s situation semantics, and
Davidson’s truth-conditional theory of meaning. Such theories are
not addressing the same question as the use theory, and so I will not
consider them in the present survey of alternatives. Nor, for similar
reasons, will I consider the Gricean approach, since, in not engaging
the problem of how beliefs and their component concepts are con-
stituted, it also offers no answer to the main question at issue here.
Finally I will not at this point examine alternative use-theoretic
accounts such as verificationism or the above-mentioned views of
Wittgenstein, Sellars, Field, Harman, Block, Peacocke, Brandom,
and Cozzo; the merits of the present version will emerge later. What
I do want to consider briefly are some very different approaches to
the issue of where a word’s meaning comes from: specifically

1. **The Definition Theory**: that the meaning property of a
word consists in there being a certain definition of it—i.e.
in there being certain conceptually necessary and sufficient
conditions for its applicability.

2. **The Mental Image Theory**: that the meaning property of a
word consists in its being associated with a certain mental
picture.

3. **The Prototype Theory**: that the meaning property of a
word consists in there being certain paradigm cases of its
applicability and there being a ‘similarity metric’ which
determines how close other things are to these exemplars.

4. **The Informational Theory**: \( x \) means \( F = \) In ‘suitable’ cir-
cumstances instances of \( f \)-ness cause tokenings of \( x \).

5. **The Teleological Theory**: \( x \) means \( F = \) The (evolutionary)
function of \( x \) is to indicate \( fs \).
Two principal considerations favour the use theory over these alternatives. In the first place, there is its generality. It is evident that none of these rival accounts can purport to deal with the meanings of all words. Definitions are notoriously few and far between; and even if they were common, there would have to be a certain residue of indefinable primitives. Not everything has an imaginable visual appearance. Exemplars and similarity metrics seem out of place in connection with the theoretical vocabulary of science. And the informational and teleological theories cannot aspire to deal with the terms of logic and mathematics. Thus a virtue of the use theory is its universal scope. It alone can hope to offer an account of every single meaning property.

The second peculiar virtue of the use theory is its explanatory power. Most of the arguments sketched above were inferences to the best explanation. A range of phenomena were cited—such as the co-acceptance of synonyms, the dependence of use upon meaning, the possibility of implicit definition, and our methods of meaning attribution—and it was shown in each case how the use theory provides an explanation. The present point—obviously crucial—is to suggest that this explanatory prowess is not matched by the alternative theories of meaning. In fact it is not clear how any of them would reliably explain any of the cited phenomena.

Consider, for example, the informational theory

\[ x \text{ means } F = \text{in conditions } I, \text{ an } F \text{ would cause a tokening of } x. \]

How, on this account, might we account for the influence on linguistic behaviour of what we mean by our words? In particular, how might we explain why virtually no one who understands the words in the sentence “Some bachelors are married” will accept it? From a use-theoretic perspective this is a relatively easy question; for it can be supposed that the meaning of “bachelor” is constituted by the fact that the basic regularity in its use is our maintaining “A bachelor is an unmarried man”. But from the informational perspective our understanding of “bachelor” and “married” consists in the tendency of their tokens to be produced by the presence of bachelors and married people. This, together with the fact that bachelors are unmarried, might perhaps explain a propensity to assert, after many observations, “Bachelors are married” and hence a propensity to
deny “Some bachelors are married”. But it does not explain the strength of that belief, nor the speed with which it is acquired.

I don’t want to deny that some of the rival theories might roughly work some of the time—specifying more or less the correct meaning-constituting properties of certain terms. For example, perhaps the meaning of “bachelor” does consist in the above definition; perhaps the meaning of “red” derives from its tendency to be caused by red things. But this is no retreat from the use theory. For such successes will occur only if and when what is specified by the rival theory happens to correspond to the word’s basic regularity of use. The general objection to the rivals is that the forms of meaning-constituting property to which they are committed will not reliably satisfy the explanatory demands on such properties (primarily, to account for the overall use of the words that possess them), unlike the use-theoretic answers, which are tailor-made to do so. And this is why the use theory alone will be able to accommodate the various phenomena (such as the co-acceptance of synonyms, the possibility of implicit definition, the methods by which meanings are inferred, and the utility of translation manuals) which were cited on its behalf above.4

Objections to the Use Theory of Meaning

Let me continue to flesh out the theory, and the above reasons for maintaining it, by saying something in response to each of the numerous difficulties that have been thought to preclude use-theoretic accounts of meaning. Some of these issues have already been mentioned, and some will need more detailed attention, which they will receive in subsequent chapters. But, at the cost of a certain repetitiveness, I think it worth while to assemble a fairly complete list of the objections that have been made against use theories of meaning, together with preliminary indications of how they can be deflected.

The complaints, in brief, are as follows:

(1) The notion of ‘use’ is too obscure for there to be such a thing as the so-called ‘use theory’ of meaning. (Quine)

4 See Chapter 2, n. 7, for some references to literature critical of various non-use-theoretic theories of meaning.
(2) If meaning were use, then any change in what we say, no matter how minor (for example, our coming to accept a single sentence that we once denied), would entail at least some change of meaning—which is absurd. (Fodor and LePore)

(3) The radical indeterminacy of meaning precludes its constitution either by use or by any other non-semantic substratum. (Quine)

(4) Given any meaning-constituting property, one should be able to see why it constitutes the particular meaning that it does; but use properties would not satisfy this explanatory requirement. (Kripke)

(5) The use of a predicate cannot fix its extension, but its meaning can and does. (Kripke)

(6) The meanings of sentences are truth conditions and the meanings of predicates are satisfaction conditions. (Davidson)

(7) The meaning of a complex expression depends on the meanings of its parts and on how they are put together; but this fact cannot be squared with the use theory. In other words, use is not compositional, but meaning is. (Davidson)

(8) Even if compositionality per se does not preclude the use theory, still not all possible patterns of use for a word are consistent with the requirement of compositionality; therefore they cannot all constitute meanings. (Dummett)

(9) There are (very complex) expressions with meanings but no uses. (Katz)

(10) A characterization of the use of a word fails to provide it with a definition and hence fails to specify what it means. (Frege)

(11) A word type derives its meaning (or meanings, if it is ambiguous) from the meanings of its tokens; but a theory which constructs meanings from regularities of use must take type meaning to be fundamental.
Even after ambiguities have been resolved, a given sentence (e.g. “I am at the bank”) can express different propositions on different occasions; but the use theory gives no account of this fact.

A word’s usage may vary radically from one person to another, whereas its meaning is fixed by the linguistic community. (Putnam, Burge)

A scientifically valuable account of meaning would have to be internalistic—the alleged meaning-constituting properties would have to be neural (or something like that); but use properties sometimes make reference to the environment—to the fact that certain sentences are asserted in certain external conditions. (Chomsky)

The use theory cannot be applied to names, because they have referents but no meanings. (Kripke)

We typically know the meaning of a word without knowing the regularities governing its use.

Any alleged meaning-constituting use for a word (any postulates containing it) can be coherently doubted, and even rejected, without affecting the word’s meaning. (Carnap)

The use theory implies that certain terms are implicitly defined by the acceptance of postulates containing them—and those postulates must therefore be knowable a priori. But in light of epistemological holism (i.e. Quine’s web-of-belief model) we can see that nothing is a priori.

Use is not a normative notion, but meaning is; for the meaning of a word determines how it ought to be applied. (Kripke, Brandom, Putnam, Gibbard)

A sound may be produced in accordance with some definite regularity, and yet none the less have no conceptual content.

In so far as the uses of words are characterized by reference
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to sentences containing them that are accepted (asserted, held true), then use is not fully explicable in non-semantic terms; for acceptance is a semantic notion.

(22) There are expressions (e.g. “and” and “but”) with the same meaning (or semantic content, at least), but different uses. (Katz)

(23) The meaning of an utterance is the mental state it expresses, which is obviously not a use.

(24) The use theory implies that two predicates, “f” and “g”, can have exactly the same meaning as one another. And given that the meaning of a word is the concept it expresses, such synonymy would imply their intersubstitutivity salve veritate in belief (and other propositional-attitude) contexts. But, as Benson Mates has shown, someone (somewhat confused) may come to believe that not all /s are gs, yet not be so benighted as to think that not all fs are fs.

1. Obscurity

It is often said that the trouble with the use theory is not so much falsity as unintelligibility, on the grounds that it is completely unclear what is meant by the “use” of a word. But this complaint is surely an exaggeration. After all, expressions of the form “the use of X” and “how x is used” are common bits of ordinary language (applied, for example, to tools or to pieces in a game); and there is no particular difficulty in understanding someone who says he is going to tell us how some unfamiliar word is used. Moreover, I can be quite specific about what sort of thing is intended, in the present theoretical context, by the “use” of a word.

To begin, I have in mind some property of a word type. This property is specified by a generalization about tokens of that type—by the claim that they are all explained in terms of a certain acceptance property, a property specifying the circumstances in which designated sentences containing the word are held true. A couple of examples of such explanatorily basic acceptance properties, already mentioned, are (a) that we have the disposition to assert “That is red”
in the presence of evidently red things; and (b) that we have the tendency to accept instances of the schema, "The proposition that $p$ is true if and only if $p$". Notice that what I am taking to be the meaning-constituting use of a word is not merely that the word pos-
sesses a certain acceptance property, but that this fact about it is 
explanatorily basic—that it accounts for all uses of the word. Thus $w$'s meaning what it does is constituted by a regularity of the form, 'All uses of $w$ stem from the fact that $A(w)$'—where $A(x)$ is an accep-
tance property.

Second, one should refrain from referring to such regularities as 
rules, so as not to encourage the idea that they are explicitly repre-
sented and deliberately followed. Such self-conscious following of 
rules for the use of words may sometimes occur, and may be associ-
ated with particular meanings; but it cannot constitute the meanings 
of all words because (as Wittgenstein emphasized) the rules them-

Third, a use property must be non-semantic. In order to specify 
one it will not do, for example, to say 'Instances of “bachelor” mean UNMARRIED MAN' or "“Napoleon” is used to refer to Napoleon'. For the whole point is to demystify meaning and affiliated notions by characterising them in such terms that their explanatory relations to verbal behaviour become understandable.

Fourth, a use property should be readily detectable. For we can tell whether someone understands a word by the way he uses it. Therefore a property such as 'associated with such-and-such brain activity' could not be a use property; whereas a property such as 'applied in the presence of red things' would be fine.

A fifth point is that uses need not be restricted to inference pat-
terns, or other purely internal phenomena. That sort of restriction—
which sometimes goes under the name, "narrow conceptual-role (or inferential-role) semantics"—provides a notion of use that is too weak to capture meaning in the ordinary sense of the word.

5 The reason for supposing that $w$'s meaning is constituted by a regularity of the form 'w's possession of acceptance property $A(x)$ is explanatorily basic', rather than merely 'w possesses $A(x)$', is that there could be another word, $v$, whose basic accept-
tance property is '$A(x)$ and $B(x)$', and in that case the second strategy would compel us to conclude, wrongly, that since $w$ and $v$ both possess $A(x)$, then $v$ means the same as $w$. See Chapter 6, sect. 1, for further discussion.

6 See the response to Objection 14 for discussion of an attempt—known as the 'two-factor theory'—to rectify this weakness.
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meanings of certain terms (e.g. "true") may be given by purely inter-
internal regularities of use; but others (e.g. "red") will call for reference to
the environment. It should be noticed that given the above-men-
tioned point—namely, that the use regularities are not to be regarded
as explicitly formulated, deliberately followed rules—there can be no
objection (on grounds of circularity) to the idea that the use regular-
ity of a given term may be characterized using that very term.

Finally, a use regularity for one word relates its occurrence to
occurrences of other words. That is to say, the regularities governing
the deployment of different words are not entirely separable from
one another. In example (b) above, the regularity concerns not merely
the word "true" but also the expressions "proposition" and "if and
only if".

2. Holism

The fact that the regularities governing our use of any word will
inevitably specify the occurrence of other terms (and hence the fact
that the meanings of different words are inextricably interconnected
with one another) provides one sense in which language is to some
extent ‘holistic’. But we can imagine a different, and more clearly
implausible, form of holism; and it is sometimes alleged against the
use theory of meaning that it must be wrong because it entails holism
in this bad sense. Here is the argument.

If the meaning of a word were its use, then any discovery, in so far
as it leads to the affirmation of previously unaffirmed sentences that
contain the word, would give it a slightly new use—and therefore a
slightly new meaning. But we do not regard such small changes of
use as changes of meaning. So the use theory is false.

In response, it should be pointed out that one would not say, for
example, that a hammer is being given a new use when it is used to
hammer in a particular nail it has never hammered in before; one
would not say that the queen in chess is being given a new use when
it happens to be moved into a position that has never before been
reached. And similarly, if a planet beyond Pluto were discovered, and
we started to say “There are ten planets”, we would not thereby have
given the word “planet” a new use. So the objection fails.

But, it will be asked in reply, what is the basis of the distinction
that is being assumed here between the use facts (like, perhaps, our
disposition to accept "Planets orbit stars") which could plausibly be held to constitute the use of "planet", and other use facts (like our disposition to accept "There are nine planets") which surely could not? Are we not committing ourselves (as Fodor and LePore have argued), to some form of the analytic–synthetic distinction which Quine has persuaded us does not exist?

Perhaps. However, the fact that we sometimes do, and sometimes do not, recognize that the use of a word has changed, suggests that we do draw some sort of distinction here. What we have in mind, I would suggest, in differentiating between those use properties which comprise what we call “the use” and those which do not is simply the difference between the explanatory basic use property and the rest. In other words, the way to pick out the particular use property of a word that comprises what we call “the use” is to find the use property that provides the best explanation of all the others.

The outcome of this sort of procedure may no doubt be indeterminate. There will sometimes be alternative, equally good ways of finding a simple regularity in the use of a word that (in conjunction with the use regularities of other terms and with general psychological laws) will account for all other aspects of its use. Therefore there will sometimes be no objective fact of the matter as to where the boundary lies between the pattern of use that constitutes the meaning of the expression, and other facts about its deployment. But a distinction with unclear boundaries is a distinction none the less—one that puts us in a position to say of certain novel deployments of a word that they definitely do not amount to changes in its use. Thus the use theory of meaning does not in fact lead to the counterintuitive form of holism.

3. Indeterminacy

I have conceded that there may be a degree of holism and indeterminacy in the constitution of meaning. But it might be thought, given Quine’s profoundly sceptical analysis of meaning and translation, that the situation is much worse than this—that the indeterminacy-cum-holism with which we are faced is so radical as to preclude

7 Fodor and Lepore, Holism.
altogether the naive assumption, endorsed by the use theory, that each word possesses its very own meaning.

In order to clarify and settle this matter it is vital to distinguish some very different forms of scepticism, holism, and indeterminacy regarding meaning.

First, there is what I will call MEANING HOLISM. This is the above-mentioned view that the meaning of a term depends on every single aspect of its overall use. It implies that no two people mean exactly the same thing by any of their words, and therefore that they never fully disagree with one another; similarly for a single person at two different times. Thus (pace Davidson and Block) MEANING HOLISM is highly implausible. But as we have just seen, our version of the use theory does not entail it.

Second, there is the somewhat more palatable idea, MEANING INDETERMINACY, that there may be no objective fact of the matter as to whether a given property of a word is, or is not, part of what constitutes the meaning property of that word: for example, no objective fact as to whether a given acceptance property is explanatorily basic. Evidently, this view comes in degrees. In its extreme form it covers just about every word and just about every acceptance property of every word. Notice that MEANING HOLISM and MEANING INDETERMINACY (to whatever degree) are incompatible with one another. It would be a blunder to infer, from the impossibility of drawing a sharp line around the meaning-constituting uses of a word, that all uses are meaning constituting.9

Third, there is another position that is sometimes called “meaning holism” but which, for the sake of disambiguation, I will call MEANING INTERDEPENDENCE. This is the thesis that in order for a given meaning to be expressed, there must exist terms with certain other specific meanings. Suppose that what constitutes the meanings of a particular pair of words, w and v, is the (non-conjunctive) relational fact, Rwv. In that case, w’s meaning-constituting property is (∃y)Rxy, and v’s is (∃x)Ryx; therefore w can have the meaning it has only if there is a word with the meaning that v has, and vice versa. As we have seen, the use theory requires a


9 This fallacy is noted by Paul Boghossian in his “Analyticity Reconsidered”, *Nous* 30 (1996), 360–91, at 384.
degree of MEANING INTERDEPENDENCE, because the meaning-constituting use regularity of a word will involve the acceptance of sentences which inevitably contain certain other words as well. But the use theory does not require the extreme version of the view—namely, the thesis that every word’s meaning is dependent on every other word’s meaning (which would be the case if the fact that constituted the meaning of all of the words \( w_1, w_2, \ldots, w_N \) were the N-place relational fact, \( R^* (w_1, w_2, \ldots, w_N) \)). Notice that, even in this extreme form, MEANING INTERDEPENDENCE does not imply MEANING HOLISM (though it is implied by MEANING HOLISM). Two people may well both satisfy \( R^* \) (hence give the same interdependent meanings to their words), yet not be disposed to make all the same utterances; for there may well be a difference between them with respect to the non-linguistic factors that determine (together with \( R^* \)) what they will be inclined to say.

Fourth, there is a view I will call MEANING DISTRIBUTION, according to which a given word might not have any underlying meaning-constituting property of its own; rather, the meaning-constituting fact might concern a pair, or cluster, of words, and be ‘spread’ over its members. To see what I have in mind here, imagine that the above meaning-constituting relation, \( R_{xy} \), is strongly symmetric: i.e. \( R_{xy} = R_{yx} \). In that case, even though the words \( w \) and \( v \) are not synonyms, the only available individual meaning-constituting properties—which are \( (\exists y)R_{xy} \) and \( (\exists x)R_{xy} \)—would be identical. Consequently we cannot suppose that \( w \) and \( v \) have distinct meaning-constituting properties; rather the meanings of the pair of terms \( \langle w, v \rangle \) are jointly constituted by their having the relational use property, \( R_{xy} \). It seems to me that MEANING DISTRIBUTION is the view for which Quine argues in Chapter 2 of \textit{Word and Object}.\(^{10}\) He assumes, moreover, that in such circumstances \( w \) and \( v \) would not have distinct meanings; and since he argues that MEANING DISTRIBUTION is a common phenomenon, he takes himself to have undermined the naive idea (which he calls “the museum myth”) that each expression is associated with a distinct meaning. However, as we shall see in Chapter 9, there is an alternative moral one might prefer to draw from MEANING DISTRIBUTION. For, even in the face of that phenomenon, one might nevertheless decide to retain the trivial

\(^{10}\) See also his “Ontological Relativity”, \textit{Ontological Relativity and Other Essays} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).
schema, "f" means F'. If so, one will maintain that w and v do have distinct meanings, while acknowledging that their individual meaning properties are not separately constituted.

It should be noted that this position is very different from what I called MEANING INDETERMINACY. For the latter does not deny the existence of individual meaning-constituting properties, but says rather that it can be objectively unclear what they are. Both positions, however, have implications for the indeterminacy of translation. MEANING INDETERMINACY with respect to a pair of terms, e and f, in different languages allows for the possibility that there may be no determinate fact of the matter as to which basic regularity governs the use of e—and similarly for f. Consequently there may be no determinate fact as to whether e and f are governed by the same basic use regularity, and hence whether they have the same meaning. MEANING DISTRIBUTION with respect to terms w and v, belonging to our language, implies that if there were a behaviourally identical linguistic community—but one that used w* and v* instead of our w and v—then there could be no determinate fact of the matter as to whether to translate w* as w or as v.

However, it remains to be seen how often, if ever, instances of MEANING INDETERMINACY and MEANING DISTRIBUTION actually arise. According to Quine, MEANING DISTRIBUTION is pervasive: proxy functions provide an unlimited supply of examples (such as "rabbit" and "cosmic complement of a rabbit"). And if he is right, then words do not typically have individually constituted meaning properties. It seems to me, however, that Quine's argument takes too narrow a view of the linguistic data that are available for the identification of meanings (focusing exclusively on which sentences we would be disposed to accept under interrogation, and neglecting both what we spontaneously accept and the inferential relations amongst what we accept. When this situation is rectified, it becomes difficult (though not impossible) to find cases of MEANING DISTRIBUTION. (See Chapter 9 for extensive discussion of these issues.)

A fifth form of indeterminacy, quite different from the varieties just distinguished, concerns everyday properties (such as 'x is red', 'x is a table', etc.) rather than meaning properties (such as 'x means RED', 'x means TABLE', etc.). We have seen that it may be indeterminate what constitute the latter; for it may be indeterminate which regularities in the use of the words "red", "table", etc. are explana-
torily basic. And this implies that there may be words such that it is indeterminate whether or not a given meaning property is exemplified by them. In addition, however—and this is a quite separate phenomenon—it may be indeterminate whether an ordinary predicate ("x is red", "x is a table", etc.) applies to a given thing. This will be so when the (determinate) basic regularities of use for the predicate (a) do not determine that it is applied to that thing, (b) do not determine that its negation is applied, and (c) will not determine either of these outcomes no matter what further discoveries are made.

Two forms of this fifth type of indeterminacy are notable. One of them occurs when the regularities for the use of a predicate say nothing and imply nothing about its application to a given object; they can yield no inclination either to apply or to withhold the predicate. Vagueness comes from this type of indeterminacy. The other especially interesting case is when the regularities give rise to conflicting inclinations—both to apply the predicate and not to apply it. This can come about when the predicate is normally used within a certain restricted domain and when the simplest regularity that would accommodate that practice, if it were extended beyond that domain, would conflict with other use regularities. Philosophical paradoxes often originate in this way.

In summary, I have distinguished five forms of indeterminacy/holism phenomena and argued that none of them poses any difficulty for the use theory of meaning. The theory rules out MEANING

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11 The rough idea is that the explanatorily basic regularities of use, in the case of vague predicates, have a ‘gappy’ character, specifying that the predicate is applied to objects possessing some underlying property to a least a certain specified degree, \(x\), and that its negation is applied to objects possessing that property to less than a certain specified degree, \(y\), where \(y\) is less than \(x\), and that neither the predicate nor its negation is applied to objects possessing the property to some degree between \(x\) and \(y\). Therefore, in so far as the regularity is explanatorily fundamental, it can be seen that no further discoveries could alter that situation: there could never be a stable inclination to apply either the predicate, or its negation, to such objects. See my “The Nature of Vagueness”, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 57 (1997), 929–36.

12 This is similar to Stephen Schiffer’s diagnosis of philosophical paradoxes. See his “Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism”, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 96 (1995–6), 317–33. Consider, for example, the ‘liar’ paradoxes. The fact that explains our deployment of the truth predicate in ‘normal’ contexts (i.e. to propositions that do not themselves involve the concept of truth) is that we accept all instances of the schema, ‘The proposition that \(p\) is true if and only if \(\neg p\). But if this regularity is extended beyond the normal domain (e.g. if we substitute “This proposition is not true” into the schema), then contradictions can be derived whose acceptance would be incompatible with the regularity underlying our use of the word “not”.

HOLISM (whereby the meaning of a word depends on its overall use); it engenders only mild cases of MEANING INDETERMINACY (whereby it is unclear whether a given property of a word does or does not help to constitute its meaning); it happily embraces a degree of MEANING INTERDEPENDENCE (whereby a word's meaning what it does depends upon there being words with certain other meanings); it allows for the very occasional case of MEANING DISTRIBUTION (whereby the meanings of different words are not separately constituted); and it illuminates the special kinds of indeterminacy associated with vagueness and with philosophical paradoxes.

4. Explanation

It is commonly felt that if a meaning property, say

\[ x \text{ means } \text{DOG}, \]

is to be constituted by some specific underlying property, ‘\(u(x)\)’; then one should be able to explain why this is so: one should be able to explain why ‘\(u(x)\)’ constitutes that meaning property rather than some slightly different one. As Kripke puts it: one should be able to scrutinize any given meaning-constituting property and “read off” which meaning it engenders.\(^{13}\) This sentiment requires that there be a theory of meaning of the form

\[ x \text{ means } F = T(x, f), \]

where \(T\) is fairly independent of “\(f\)”. For how else could we have a rule that puts us in a position to read off, for any given meaning-constituting property, which meaning it determines, and thereby puts us in a position to explain why that particular meaning should be the

one that is determined? But the use theory does not have this form. It may happen that the use regularity constituting ‘x means DOG’ will advert to dogs in some way. But this need not be so. It all depends on what the explanatory basis for our overall use of the word “dog” turns out to be. And even if dogs do turn out to be an aspect of this regularity, we should not expect other meaning properties to be constituted in a similar way. We should not expect that the use regularity underlying ‘x means ELECTRON’ will advert to electrons in a way that parallels the reference to dogs in the regularity underlying ‘x means DOG’. And we might expect there to be many meaning properties (e.g. ‘x means TRUE’) whose constituting use regularities make no reference at all to the kind of thing in the extension of words with those properties. Thus there will be no way to read off which meaning is constituted by a given use property. The best we can do, in order to get from one to the other, is to appreciate that some word (say, “glub”) has the use property—i.e. actually to use it in that way; in which case we can deploy that very word to characterize the constituted meaning (as “x means GLUB”).

Thus the use theory does indeed violate the commonly assumed requirement that there be explanations of the links between given meaning-constituting properties and given meanings. But this requirement is misconceived; so our violation of it is not objectionable. To see why this is so, notice, in the first place, that no such requirement is generally imposed in other contexts. We do not expect to be able to explain why ‘being water’ is constituted by ‘being made of H₂O molecules’, or why ‘being red’ is constituted by ‘emitting light of such-and-such wavelength’. Nor, in such cases, is there any way of reading off which superficial property is constituted. All that can be explained is why we suppose that the relation of property constitution obtains—but not why it in fact obtains.

What no doubt seems relevantly different in the case of meaning is that the properties we are trying to reduce—e.g. ‘x means DOG’—are relational. Consider, for example,

\[ x \text{ is the capital of England} \]
\[ x \text{ is the capital of France} \]
\[ \ldots \text{ and so on.} \]

Here we can expect a level of reduction to properties of the form

\[ x \text{ bears } R \text{ to England} \]
\( x \) bears \( R \) to France

\ldots and so on,

from any of which we can read off which ‘capital property’ is constituted. Moreover we can explain why

‘\( x \) bears \( R \) to England’ constitutes ‘\( x \) is the capital of England’

in terms of the more basic fact that

‘\( x \) bears \( R \) to \( y \)’ constitutes ‘\( x \) is the capital of \( y \)’.

Similarly, it might well be thought that the relational properties

\[ x \text{ means DOG} \]
\[ x \text{ means ELECTRON} \]
\ldots and so on

must be constituted by relational properties of the form

\[ x \text{ bears } S \text{ to DOG} \]
\[ x \text{ bears } S \text{ to ELECTRON} \]
\ldots and so on,

which, in order to eliminate all the semantic notions (and given the identity of properties and concepts) must be reduced to

\[ x \text{ bears } T \text{ to instances of doggyness} \]
\[ x \text{ bears } T \text{ to instances of electronhood} \]
\ldots and so on,

or in other words

\[ x \text{ bears } T \text{ to dogs} \]
\[ x \text{ bears } T \text{ to electrons} \]
\ldots and so on.

And so we will be able to explain why

‘\( x \) bears \( T \) to dogs’ constitutes ‘\( x \) means DOG’
in terms of the more basic fact that

‘x bears T to f’s’ constitutes ‘x means F’,

i.e.

\[ x \text{ means } F = T(x, f). \]

However, although this line of thought is natural, it is far from compulsory—and the use theory rejects it. As we saw in Chapter 2 (section 2), it is a fallacy to assume that what constitutes a given fact must have the same logical structure as that fact: “Fido exemplifies stinkiness” is constituted by “Fido stinks”; “The proposition that John loves Mary is true” is constituted by “John loves Mary”. Similarly, ‘x means DOG’ may be constituted by some use regularity that does not amount to x standing in some non-semantic relation to dogs. That this is indeed the case can be established by showing that this use regularity accounts for the characteristics of the meaning property which it allegedly constitutes. If that is so, then we must abandon any expectation of there being a theory with the form

\[ x \text{ means } F = T(x, f), \]

and therefore abandon any hope of being able to explain why certain non-semantic properties engender the meanings they do. The situation, rather, is that we will obtain a series of reductive analyses,

\[ x \text{ means DOG } = u(x), \]
\[ x \text{ means ELECTRON } = v(x) \]
\[ \ldots \text{ and so on,} \]

where the underlying use regularities ‘u(x)’, ‘v(x)’, . . . , and so on, enable us neither to ‘read off’ nor to explain which particular meaning properties they constitute.

5. Reference

Here is a closely related objection. It is often said that the meaning of a word cannot be constituted by its use because its meaning deter-
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mines its reference whereas its use could not do that. It is argued that, fallible finite creatures that we are, the set of things to which we are disposed to apply a predicate will inevitably diverge from its true extension. Thus the use of a predicate does not fix its extension, whereas its meaning obviously does.14

However, this reasoning is fallacious, for it equivocates on the sense of “determine”. The meaning of a predicate does indeed determine its extension, in the sense that any two expressions with the same meaning must have the same extension (ignoring context sensitivity). But we have been given no reason to think that the use of a predicate fails in that sense to determine its extension. On the contrary, in so far as our predicates “f” and “g” have the same use, we must surely hold true “(x)(fx ↔ gx)”, and so cannot suppose that their extensions diverge. What we have been given instead (but irrelevantly) is an argument to show that, in some much stronger sense of “determine” (call it “DETERMINE”) the use of a predicate does not DETERMINE its extension.

Let me elaborate the notion of ‘DETERMINATION’ that appears to be presupposed in this argument. What seems to be understood by saying that the use of a predicate, x, must DETERMINE its extension is that there must be some use relation, ‘a(xy)’, linking x with each member of its extension. It must be, in other words, that

\[ x \text{ is true of } y \text{ iff } a(xy), \]

where \( a(xy) \) is some such relation as

We are disposed to apply predicate x to object y in (ideal) circumstances I.

And this requirement implies that

The extension of x is the set of fs iff \( (y)[a(xy) ↔ y \text{ is f}] \).

But the meaning of x fixes its extension. The conclusion is therefore drawn that the meaning property

14 This reasoning can arguably be extracted from Kripke’s Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language. A closer reading of his text is offered in Chapter 10. Kripke’s difficulty, which is widely thought to plague all accounts of meaning constitution, is known as ‘the problem of error’.
$x$ means $F$

could be constituted by a certain use property only if that use property were to entail

$$(y)[a(xy) \rightarrow y \text{ is } f],$$

for only then would $x$'s extension be DETERMINED by what constitutes its meaning. But it turns out that no such use properties can be found; and that is because we cannot think of any use relation, $a(xy)$, that connects each predicate with the members of its extension. So the use theory of meaning must be wrong.

The obvious response, however, is that in the absence of any initial reason to think that the extension of a predicate should be DETERMINED by the property constituting its meaning, the fact that it is not so DETERMINED by any use regularity provides no basis for doubting the constitution of meaning by use.

But perhaps there is some motivation for the DETERMINATION requirement? Might one not argue as follows? Since ‘$x$ is true of $y$’ surely has some sort of analysis—i.e. there is surely some underlying relation, $r(xy)$, such that

$$x \text{ is true of } y = r(xy)$$

—then whatever constitutes

$x$ means $F$

must indeed entail something of the form

$$(y)[r(xy) \leftrightarrow y \text{ is } f].$$

I suspect that this is indeed the implicit rationale for the DETERMINATION requirement. I can think of no other motivation for it. However, it can and should be resisted. For the assumption that the relation

$$x \text{ is true of } y$$

has a non-semantic analysis is highly controversial. Indeed, the next
chapter elaborates a *deflationist* view of the truth-theoretic properties, according to which there is no such analysis.

Such a view is an instance of what we saw in the previous section: namely, that what constitutes a relational fact need not involve an analysis of that relation. From the deflationary perspective, the fact that constitutes "dog" being *true* of Fido does not incorporate any analysis of "*x* is *true* of *y*"; what constitutes that fact, rather, is simply that Fido is a dog (and that "dog" means DOG). In general, "*x* is *true* of *y*" is implicitly defined by a combination of the equivalence schema

\[(v)\text{(Concept } F \text{ is } \text{true of } v \leftrightarrow fa)}\]

and the definition of "*true of*" for predicates in terms of "*true of*" for concepts

\[(x)(y)[x \text{ is } \text{true of } y \leftrightarrow (\exists z)(x \text{ expresses } z \& z \text{ is true of } y)].\]

Thus there is no non-semantic reductive analysis of "*x* is *true of* *y*"; so there is no reason to force the properties that constitute meanings into the above mould. Consequently, the fact that the basic regularity of use of a predicate does not DETERMINE an extension provides no ground for denying that it constitutes the meaning property of the predicate. For elaboration of this discussion, see Chapter 4.15

6. *Truth Conditions*

A very widespread opinion, promoted especially in the work of Donald Davidson,16 is that the meaning of a sentence is its truth condition: for example, that the meaning of "snow is white" consists in the property of "being *true* if and only if snow is white". And it is generally taken to follow from this theory that the meaning of a sentence does not derive from its use.

15 Christopher Peacocke, in his *A Study of Concepts*, combines a form of the use theory of meaning with the view that meaning-constituting properties must DETERMINE reference. From our point of view this position falls foul both of Kripke’s arguments that no such DETERMINATION is possible, and of the present argument that no such DETERMINATION is necessary.

16 Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. 
But, in the first place, this inference is far from obvious. As we saw earlier in this chapter, accounts of meaning that remain at the semantic level do not conflict with the use theory. On the contrary, they stand in need of some further theory that will characterize the underlying nature of whatever semantic properties they postulate. Thus, even if one accepts the Davidsonian picture, it remains to be said what it is for a sentence to have a certain truth condition: how does this come about? And the use theory offers an answer to this question: namely, that the property of ‘being true if and only if snow is white’ consists in the property of ‘being constructed in a certain way from words with certain uses’. Indeed I believe that this account is what Davidson is committed to by his own way of answering the reductive question, which is based on the ‘Principle of Charity’. For his view, put crudely, is that we should assign truth conditions to foreign utterances in such a way that as many of them as is reasonably possible turn out to be in accord with what we also hold true. But deciding what is ‘reasonably possible’ involves (a) looking for a manual of translation that is simple (ideally, one that is induced by a word-to-word mapping) and (b) accommodating predictable disagreement (i.e. not expecting a foreigner to agree with us if we can see that his evidence is misleading, but translating his utterance into something we would accept in those circumstances). Implicit in this elaboration of the Principle of Charity, it seems to me, are the following ideas: (1) that what a person holds true is determined by various factors, including the observable circumstances, background beliefs, inferential propensities, and basic regularities of use of words—regularities that specify, as a function of the other factors, which sentences are held true; and (2) that a good assignment of truth conditions should ‘optimize agreement’ in the sense of preserving these basic regularities. Thus, once its precise content is elaborated, Davidson’s Principle of Charity arguably boils down to the use theory of meaning. Consequently the truth-conditional and use-theoretic characterizations of meaning by no means preclude one another.

None the less, it must be conceded that there is some tension between the two approaches. For even if Davidson were to accept a use theory of truth conditions, this approach would conflict on the question of explanatory order with the use theory of meaning. For on the latter view a sentence’s truth condition is a consequence of its meaning, not constitutive of it. More specifically, according to the use
theory of meaning, our grasp of the truth condition of (say) "snow is white" is the product of the following three-stage process. First, we know the meaning of "snow is white" by knowing its mode of construction and the uses of its component words. Second, we know the meaning of "true" by accepting instances of 'The proposition that \( p \) is true iff \( p' \) and accepting '(\( u \) is true iff (\( \exists x \))(\( u \) expresses \( x \) & \( x \) is true))', and then inferring instances of the disquotation schema, "\( p \) is true iff \( p' \)"—including ""snow is white"" is true if and only if snow is white'. And third, in so far as we understand all the constituents of that biconditional, we can be said to know that "snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white. Thus our knowledge of the truth conditions of "snow is white" derives from our knowledge of its meaning.\(^{17}\)

A virtue of this way of thinking, as opposed to Davidson's, is that it gives a more plausible account of the relationship between meaning and truth conditions. It is agreed on all sides that

\[ u \text{ means that snow is white } \rightarrow \]
\[ u \text{ is true if and only if snow is white.} \]

But Davidson's approach requires that the truth condition of a sentence constitutes its meaning; and this is problematic since it is not the case that

\[ u \text{ is true if and only if snow is white } \rightarrow \]
\[ u \text{ means that snow is white} \]

For example, "grass is green" has the same truth value as "snow is white"; therefore, given the material construal of "if and only if" (which Davidson employs), "grass is green" is true if and only if snow is white: but obviously it is not the case that "grass is green" means that snow is white. In order to overcome this difficulty we would have to find a conception of "\( x \)'s truth condition is that \( p \)' that is stronger than "\( x \) is true iff \( p \)'. To this end Davidson has suggested 'It is a law of nature that \( x \) is true iff \( p \)'. But neither this suggestion, nor various other proposed manoeuvres, look as though they will work. (Could it

\(^{17}\) This anti-Davidsonian position is urged by Gilbert Harman in his "Meaning and Semantics", in M. K. Munitz and P. Unger (eds.), Semantics and Philosophy (New York: New York University Press, 1974); and in his "Conceptual Role Semantics".)
ever be a law of nature that an expression has the truth condition that it has? If it were, could it not be a law of nature that two distinct truth conditions invariably coincide?) Faced with such difficulties, and the series of revisions, objections and further modifications that they provoke, the whole approach quickly loses its initial appealing simplicity and begins to look rather contrived and implausible. It seems better first to explain meaning in terms of the use theory (or the Principle of Charity), and then to derive truth conditions by means of the disquotation schema. There is simply no need for a route from truth conditions to meanings.18

7. Compositionality

But not so fast! A decisive advantage of the truth conditional approach, according to Davidson, is that it alone can account for the fact that each of us is able to understand a virtually limitless number of expressions of our language, including sentences we have never heard before.19 The explanation proceeds in two stages. First, we postulate that the meanings of complex expressions are explained by the meanings of their parts. If this is so, then anyone who has the (relatively simple) ability to use the primitive terms in accordance with their meanings is in a position to understand all the complex expressions too. Second, this postulate of compositionality is in turn explained by the truth-conditional approach. For Tarski showed how

18 Davidson's position on the relationship between meanings and truth conditions is not as unequivocal as this summary suggests. In some of his earlier writings he does appear to maintain that the truth condition of a sentence is what constitutes its meaning. But in later writings (and presumably in reaction to the difficulties discussed in the text) he appears to fall back on a more hedged and elusive position in which, although it is still maintained that we somehow interpret a person's language (attributing meanings to his sentences) by invoking a Tarski-style truth theory, it is no longer so clear how this happens—i.e. which truth-theoretic property of a sentence constitutes its meaning. For useful discussion, see John Foster's “Meaning and Truth Theory”, and John McDowell's “Truth Conditions, Bivalence, and Verificationism”, both in G. Evans and J. McDowell (eds), Truth and Meaning (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); and Mark Sainsbury's “Understanding and Theories of Meaning”, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 80 (1979–80), 127–44.

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the truth (or reference) condition of each complex expression is entailed by the truth (or reference) conditions of its parts. Therefore, in so far as meanings are constituted by truth (or reference) conditions, we can see how the meanings of complexes are engendered by the meanings of their component words.

Unfortunately this explanation of our linguistic abilities suffers from the just-mentioned difficulty of needing, but not having, a satisfactory conception of *truth condition*. Moreover, contrary to what is typically assumed, it is far from clear that the truth-conditional approach is really the only way to account for compositionality. In particular, it is a fairly simple matter to see how compositionality would arise within a use conception of meaning. For a reasonable assumption about the state of understanding a complex expression of our own language is that it consists in nothing more than understanding the parts of that expression and appreciating how they have been combined with one another. This idea is developed and defended in Chapter 7. If it is correct then we can see very easily how our knowledge of the uses of words (in so far as it engenders our understanding of them) gives rise to our understanding of sentences. Moreover, it is also a fairly simple matter to see how our vast linguistic repertoire—i.e. our ability to deploy such a huge number of complex expressions—can be explained on the basis of the use theory. For our knowledge of how to use our complex expressions is very plausibly a consequence of our knowledge of the uses of the relatively small number of primitives.

Consider, for example, the sentence “All emeralds are green”. Suppose (enormously oversimplifying) that the meaning of “emerald” is given by the fact that

There is a disposition to accept “Something is an emerald if and only if it has characteristics, $f_1$, $f_2$, and $f_3$”.

Suppose that the meaning of “green” is given by the fact that

There is a disposition to accept “That is green” in the presence of something clearly green, and otherwise to deny it.

And suppose that the meaning of “All $A$s are $B$s” is given by a tendency to conform to certain classical rules of inference, including, for example,
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From “All As are Bs” infer “All CAs are Bs”.

These facts constrain the use of “All emeralds are green”. They tell us something about what will be inferred from it, and about the circumstances in which it will be accepted. They tell us, for example, that we will infer “All big emeralds are green” from it; and that, given the presence of a red object known to be \( f_1, f_2, \) and \( f_3 \), we will deny the sentence. Thus, from the use-theoretic perspective, our grasp of the meanings of the constituents of the sentence will indeed determine the ways in which it is deployed.

Let us also suppose, in accord with the just-mentioned general view of what it is to understand a complex, that the meaning of “All emeralds are green” consists in nothing more or less than the fact that

“All emeralds are green” results from substituting words meaning EMERALD and GREEN into a generalization schema whose meaning is ALL AS ARE B.

In that case it is a triviality that anyone who understands the constituents of the sentence and knows how it is put together from them will understand the whole sentence.

Thus, both the deployment of complex expressions and the compositionality of their meanings square perfectly well with a conception of meaning as use.

8. Dummett’s Objection

Michael Dummett has argued that not every possible regularity of use for a word can establish a meaning, because not every such pattern of use is consistent with the compositional character of language. For he takes compositionality to imply not merely that the meanings of complex expressions are determined by the meanings of their words and by the way the words are combined with one another, but also that there cannot be a substantial degree of MEANING INTERDEPENDENCE amongst the words: there cannot be a ‘large’ class of words whose meanings can be expressed only because the meanings of the other words in the class are also expressed. What this amounts to is that in order for our language to be properly ‘com-
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In Dummett’s strong sense, there cannot be a ‘large’ class of words whose meaning-constituting regularities of use concern their deployment in relation to one another; it cannot be that their meanings are simultaneously determined by conditions for the acceptance of sentences containing them all. In particular, it cannot be that the meanings of all the logical constants (including “not” and “or”) are constituted by the practice of conformity with the basic rules of classical logic (including the disposition to accept instances of “p or not p”). To the extent that this condition is violated then, according to Dummett, “the functioning of language [is] unintelligible”.

However, it is left quite unclear what it would be for “the functioning of language [to be] unintelligible” and why we should mind if this is so. Granted, any class of MEANING INTERDEPENDENT words has to be learned all at once; for if merely some of them are deployed initially, then acquisition of the others would dictate some revision in what is meant by the initially learned ones. But why should this need for simultaneous acquisition be thought either undesirable or mysterious? Why should it become problematic only when the class of such terms becomes ‘large’? And how large is too large? In the absence of answers to these questions, we have no reason to think that language either does satisfy or should satisfy Dummett’s strong compositionality requirement.

What is eminently plausible, as we have seen, is that the facts constituting our grasp of words and basic syntactic operations explain our capacity to understand and use the sentences that can be constructed from them. This is how compositionality is normally and properly understood. But compositionality, in this sense, does not preclude the possibility that, amongst the explanatorily basic, meaning-constituting facts there will be specifications of the joint use of several (indeed many) primitives in relation to one another. Therefore compositionality, as it uncontroversially holds, does not motivate ‘atomistic’ constitution of meaning. In particular, it could

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20 M. Dummett, Elements of Intuitionism (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1977): “What would render the functioning of language unintelligible would be to suppose that the relations of (immediate or remote) dependence of the meaning of one word on that of another might not be asymmetrical, that, in tracing out what is required for an understanding of a given sentence, and, therefore, of the words in it, we should be led in a circle” (p. 368). See also his The Logical Basis of Metaphysics, ch. 10 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).
well be that the disposition to accept instances of “p or not p” is what, in part, fixes the meanings of “or” and “not”. If so, then the meanings of “or” and “not” will be interdependent. But (as we saw in the response to Objection 3) this form of ‘holism’—whereby the meanings of some words depend for their existence on there being words with other particular meanings—is neither bad nor implausible.

9. Useless Expressions

Consider: “The boy the cat the dog bit scratched cried.” An objection made by Jerry Katz is that there are many such sentences which are too long and/or complicated to be used in ordinary language, but none the less have meanings. So their meanings cannot reside in their uses.21

The moral to be drawn from this point, I think, is that we have a notion of

What complex expression e means in the language of speaker S

which differs from our conception of

What e means to S

or

How S understands e.

For what we are inclined to say about the incomprehensibly complex sentences to which Katz is alluding is that they might well have a definite meaning in a speaker’s language despite meaning nothing to that speaker.

But this observation poses no threat to the use theory of meaning since both conceptions of ‘the meaning of e’ can be captured in use-theoretic terms. On the one hand

e’s meaning what it does to S

is constituted by

S’s taking it that e is constructed in a certain way from primitives with certain uses.

And on the other hand

e’s meaning what it does in S’s language

is constituted by

e’s being constructed in a certain way (given the syntactic rules that best explain the verbal behaviour of the speakers of the language) from primitives with certain uses.

(This view of how the meaning properties of complex expressions are constituted was mentioned in the response to Objection 7 and is defended at length in Chapter 7.) Thus it must be conceded that the meaning of a complex expression in a speaker’s language is not necessarily manifested in his use of it. However, a use-theoretic property is none the less associated with it: namely, that it is constructed in a certain way from words with certain uses. And this, we can suppose, is the property in which its meaning in the language consists. We can suppose, in other words, that the syntactic principles that best explain linguistic behaviour will permit the composition of sentences so complex that an individual is not able to identify their mode of construction. In such a case, the sentence will not be understood and will not be used, but it none the less has a meaning in the speaker’s language—a meaning that is constituted by the uses of its parts and the way those parts are combined.

10. Definition

It might be supposed that in order to specify the meaning of a word it is necessary to explicitly define it (in the style of “bachelor” means UNMARRIED MAN, and therefore that the use regularity of a word is inadequate in that it fails to provide any such formula. However, we must keep in mind that the two questions
What does “f” mean?

and

What provides “f” with its meaning?

are different from one another. The first is supposed to be answered in the form

“f” means G

—that is, via a synonym “g”, a different expression with the same meaning. And of course there is often no such thing—in which case the question has no good answer. The second is answered by identifying the underlying characteristic that constitutes the meaning property, ‘x means F’. It is only this question that the use theory is intended to address, and so its inability to specify what a word means can be no basis for criticism.

Notice, moreover, that the explicit definition of a term should not be regarded as an alternative (let alone a preferable alternative) to the specification of its meaning-constituting use. For even when explicit definition is feasible—for instance, when we wish to introduce a new word with the same meaning as an existing expression—it can only be in virtue of some practice with the word—the instigation of some use regularity—that we succeed in giving it the desired meaning. See Chapter 6 for further discussion.

11. Tokens, Types, and Ambiguity

Which is more fundamental, the meaning of a word token or the meaning of the type to which it belongs? Should we first give an account of how a specific utterance, made at a definite place and time, means what it does, and then proceed to explain, in terms of that account, how it comes about that the general type that the utterance exemplifies has a certain meaning in the language? Or is it better to proceed in the opposite direction, beginning with a theory of what it is for a type of expression to have a certain meaning, and then deriving from that theory an account of how tokens of that type acquire their meaning?
Evidently the use theory, in so far as it supposes that meanings derive from regularities of use, is committed to the second of these strategies. And this may seem to be a mark against it, since the first approach might appear to be more logical and more promising. For it is tempting to suppose that a person can mean whatever he wants by a given utterance token, unconstrained by how physically similar utterances are typically meant. This intuition is bolstered by the phenomenon of ambiguity: some word types have more than one meaning; therefore it is mysterious how a token could inherit a definite meaning from its type; and so one is tempted to explain the various meanings of the type by reference to the different meanings that are given to its tokens.

However, on reflection it seems clear that these considerations are misleading, and that the correct explanatory order is from type meanings to token meanings—just as the use theory requires. For although ambiguity indeed exists, it is strikingly limited: there are billions more word tokens than there are word types. And this suggests that the physical character of a token—the type to which it belongs—plays a central role in determining its meaning. That indeed leaves us with the problem of ambiguity; but it can be handled as follows.

We must look for the simplest way of explaining the overall use of a given phonological type. Such a type has a single meaning when there is a single, simple acceptance property, such that all instances of the type may be explained in terms of it. However, if the type has more than one meaning this will be manifested by the need (for the sake of simplicity) to invoke more than one regularity of use in the explanation of its instances. In that case the phonological type divides into various subtypes, whose instances have in common that they stem from the same basic regularity of use. Thus the meaning of a token derives from the meaning of its subtype; and the meaning of that subtype is constituted by the regularity needed to account for the occurrence of its members.

12. Propositions

What about indexicals (such as “I”, “now”, and “here”), demonstratives (such as “this” and “that”), and other context-sensitive terms? On the face of it, each such term has a constant use which is mastered by those who understand it; yet what it ‘means’, in some sense,
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can vary from one occasion to another. For example, speakers of English know how to use “I am hungry”—they know its unique meaning. However, on different occasions it expresses different propositions: I used it yesterday to say *that I was hungry*; whereas John will use it tomorrow to say *that he is (then) hungry*. So it would seem that there is an important conception of ‘meaning’ on which the use theory sheds no light.

Certainly it is vital to distinguish between (1) the meaning (or meanings) of a sentence type, (2) the meaning of one of its tokens, and (3) the proposition expressed by that token. And similarly for the constituent words of a sentence. Moreover, we must acknowledge that the use theory applies primarily to the first of these notions, and derivatively to the second (in so far as the meaning of a sentence token is simply one of the meanings of the ambiguous sentence type). As for the third notion of meaning—the proposition expressed—the use theory does not purport to give a complete account of it. However, since the meaning of an utterance token is a major determinant of which proposition is expressed, it would be unjust to say that we can shed no light at all on the character of propositions and their constituents.

Let me indicate how the use theory of meaning may be extended into an account of propositions. This is a big and complicated topic; and what follows is very sketchy indeed—but hopefully better than nothing.

The simplest way of accommodating the inferential character of belief attributions (e.g. that “John believes that dogs bark” entails “John believes something”) is to suppose that such attributions have a relational form, i.e. to suppose that that-clauses are singular, referring terms; and it is a matter of stipulation to call the entities to which they refer, “propositions”. Thus propositions certainly exist; it merely remains to specify, for each such thing, the circumstances in which it is expressed and to indicate what kind of entity it is. When is it correct to deploy a given that-clause, “that $p$”, to designate what is expressed by a given utterance, $u$? In other words, under which conditions is it correct to give an *interpretation* of $u$ by saying

$$u \text{ expresses the proposition that } p.$$  

And what is the nature of the proposition (or propositions) designated by such that-clauses?
As in the case of meanings, the proposition expressed by an utterance is determined by how that utterance is constructed from its parts and by which propositional constituents those parts express (see Chapter 7, Objection 12). For example, the proposition that I am hungry (which I express by now saying “I am hungry”) is a function of the propositional constituents expressed by my words “I”, “am”, and “hungry”—call these constituents \( \langle I \rangle \), \( \langle \text{am} \rangle \), and \( \langle \text{hungry} \rangle \). Thus our initial questions reduce to a pair of more fundamental ones—questions regarding words rather than sentences: namely, (1) what is the relation between a term, \( x \), and one of our terms, “\( e \)” such that “\( e \)” may be deployed to give an interpretation of \( x \); i.e. what relation between \( x \) and “\( e \)” must exist in order that

\[ x \text{ expresses the propositional constituent } \langle e \rangle; \]

and (2) what kinds of entity are designated by “\( \langle e \rangle \)”—what sorts of things are propositional constituents?

If \( x \) is a predicate, the answers to these questions are relatively straightforward. In that case, we articulate what is expressed by \( x \) by using a term with the same meaning as \( x \), i.e. the same use as \( x \): for example

“rouge” expresses \( \langle \text{red} \rangle \).

And as for the nature of that propositional constituent, it is a meaning: the predicate, \( x \), expresses the meaning of \( x \), for example

\[ \langle \text{red} \rangle = \text{RED}. \]

If, on the other hand, \( x \) is a singular term, then the situation is complicated in a couple of respects. The first complication derives from the fact that \( x \) may or may not be context-sensitive. It may be a term, such as “\( I \)”, “now”, and “that”, whose referent depends on the circumstances of utterance; or it may be a term, such as “Saturn” or “the smallest prime number”, whose referent is constant. The second complication derives from the difference between three kinds of attitude attribution, known as de dicto, de re, and de se. For example, “Mary said that she saw the last dodo” is ambiguous. It may or may not be intended that Mary conceives of the last dodo using the concept, THE LAST DODO; perhaps she merely said of the last dodo
(conceived of in some other way), that she saw it. Similarly, the word “she” may be intended merely to designate a certain person, and not to indicate how Mary thinks of that person. Alternatively, it may be intended to convey that Mary is thinking of herself from the first-person perspective, as “I”.

In order to accommodate these phenomena we must acknowledge that when term “e” occurs within a that-clause it may articulate three distinct propositional constituents: namely, ⟨e⟩(dd), ⟨e⟩(dr) and ⟨e⟩(ds). And we must distinguish, for each of these entities, the conditions in which a given singular term expresses it.

Consider, to begin, the de dicto case. In order that the singular term, x, expresses ⟨e⟩(dd), it is necessary that “e” have the same meaning as x. But in addition it is necessary either that x and “e” be context-insensitive terms or, if they are not, that they be deployed in the same (relevant) context as one another. Thus, “You said that that man is Marlon Brando” will be a correct de dicto attribution by me, if the person I am addressing uttered something with the same meaning as “That man is Marlon Brando” and if this person was in the same context as I am when he made the utterance. As for the nature of the propositional constituents expressed, when “e” is context-insensitive (e.g. “Marlon Brando”) then ⟨e⟩(dd) is the concept e (e.g. MARLON BRANDO); and when “e” is context-sensitive (e.g. “That man”) then ⟨e⟩(dd) is an ordered pair consisting of the concept, E, and the context of x’s deployment.

Second there is the de re case. In order that x expresses ⟨e⟩(dr), it is necessary that “e” and x be coreferential. If x is context-insensitive, then what is required for such coreferentiality is (as we shall see in Chapter 5) that there be some singular term of ours, “g”, such that (1) x and “g” have the same meaning, and (2) e is the same thing as g. Thus when Mary utters “I saw the animal pictured on page 341 of the Encyclopaedia Britannica”, she is saying, de re, that she saw the last dodo. If x is context-sensitive—if it is an indexical or a demonstrative—then “e” is constrained by a batch of rules, including

\[
\begin{align*}
    x \text{ means } I & \rightarrow [x \text{ expresses } ⟨e⟩(dr) \leftrightarrow e = \text{the speaker of the utterance}] \\
    x \text{ means NOW} & \rightarrow [x \text{ expresses } ⟨e⟩(dr) \leftrightarrow e = \text{the time of the utterance}] \\
    x \text{ means THAT } F & \rightarrow [x \text{ expresses } ⟨e⟩(dr) \leftrightarrow e = \text{the } F \text{ to which the speaker is attending}].
\end{align*}
\]
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As for the identity of a de re propositional constituent, it is simply the referent of the term used to articulate it. For example, what is expressed, de re, by “the animal pictured on page 341 of the Encyclopaedia Britannica” is simply the last dodo. And, in general, \( \langle e \rangle (dr) \) is the same thing as \( e \).

Finally there is the de se case: the case in which an element, “\( e \)”, of a that-clause neither articulates the meaning of the term, \( x \), which it is used to interpret, nor gives its referent, but is intended rather to indicate that \( x \) means the same as a certain indexical or demonstrative. For example, “Mary said that she was happy” can be understood de se to convey that Mary uttered something meaning “I am happy”; “John said that Fred is a doctor” might be intended to communicate that John uttered something meaning the same as “He is a doctor”. Here, the condition for \( x \) to express \( \langle e \rangle (ds) \) is that \( x \) and “\( e \)” be related by one of the above batch of principles for indexicals and demonstratives. However, in the present case, the propositional constituent is not an object, but (as in the case of de dicto, context-sensitive constituents) it is an ordered pair consisting of the meaning of \( x \) and the context of its utterance.

Let me repeat emphatically that these few cryptic remarks are not intended to comprise a theory of propositions, but merely to give some hint as to how such an account, based on a use theory of meaning, might be given. 22

13. Communal Meanings

As Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam, and Tyler Burge have made clear, 23 members of a linguistic community typically mean exactly the same

22 Besides (i) the meaning of a sentence type in a language, (ii) the meaning of a given utterance of it, and (iii) the proposition expressed by that utterance, a further notion of meaning relates, somewhat vaguely, to what the speaker ‘has in mind’ in making the utterance—to what, putting it literally, he intends to communicate. For example, someone might say, “The Porsche is in a hurry,” meaning (in this fourth sense), “The driver of the Porsche is in a hurry.” The use theory does not purport to give an account of this phenomenon. It is plausible, however, that an analysis of the literal meaning of an expression type (which the use theory does provide) will be an important part of such an account. I owe this example to Jean-Yves Pollock, who cites Ray Jackendoff’s The Architecture of the Language Faculty (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

as one another by a given word, even when their uses of it diverge, not merely in superficial respects (which might be explained away on the basis of differences in evidential circumstances), but also in fundamental respects (stemming from different basic regularities). Thus someone may always be at a loss as to whether to apply “beech” rather than “elm”, or may not appreciate that “arthritis” names a disease of the joints; yet he may none the less qualify as an English speaker who means what we do by these words.

This fact about meaning can be dealt with in use-theoretic terms by bringing to bear Putnam’s idea of ‘the division of linguistic labour’. In order for an individual member of the community to mean a certain thing by a given word, it is not necessary that he himself uses it precisely in accordance with the regularity that fixes the meaning of the word type. What is needed is, first, that there are acknowledged experts in the deployment of the term—experts whose usage is determined by some such regularity; second, that the individual is disposed to defer to the experts—i.e. to accept correction by them; and consequently, third, that his use of the term conforms to that regularity at least to some extent. In these circumstances, even when the speaker’s use of a word is fundamentally abnormal, we none the less attribute the normal meaning to him; and that normal meaning is constituted by the regularity that explains the overall use of the word by those ‘specialists’ to whom the rest of us are prepared to defer.


An objection from the opposite direction can well be imagined: namely, that the use theory is not internalistic enough; for the meaning-constituting regularities of use that it postulates sometimes relate the deployment of words to aspects of the environment. But, as Chomsky has argued, the properties that are going to be explanatorily valuable in scientific linguistics are likely to be properties that supervene on internal states of the brain.


24 See, for example, Chomsky’s Knowledge of Language (New York: Praeger, 1986).
Chomsky’s view strikes me as quite plausible, but not really to count against the theory under consideration. For the aim of the present use theory is to give an account of ‘meaning’ in the ordinary, non-scientific sense of the word—to say what we have in mind in our everyday attribution of meanings to expressions in public languages such as English and Spanish. The purpose of the account is not scientific explanation, but rather a demystification of the ordinary concept of meaning, followed by the philosophically beneficial consequences of that demystification: namely, solutions to the numerous problems (mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1) that are produced, or at least exacerbated, by confusion about that concept. Thus the use theory is not intended to be a part of science, and so cannot be impugned for failing to meet Chomsky’s constraints on an adequate linguistic theory, reasonable as they may be. Moreover, the present account, though perhaps unsuited, as it stands, to the needs of science, might none the less provide a helpful clue to the sort of meaning property that will be explanatorily valuable in linguistics. For some of the considerations that favour the use theory of public-language meaning will suggest an analogous account of the meanings of I-language expressions: namely, that they are basic regularities of internal use in the conceptual system of the individual.25

Some philosophers (for example, Ned Block, Brian Loar, and Colin McGinn)26 have expressed sympathy for a so-called ‘two-factor’ theory of meaning according to which the meaning of each term is made up of two distinct components: (1) an internal conceptual role (intended to account for the causal/explanatory power of meaning); and (2) some relation between the term and the external world (intended to account for the reference-determining character of meaning). But this idea seems to me to involve various misconceptions. First, in so far as the aim of the theory is to account for meaning in the ordinary sense, then many of the uses of a word that its meaning should help to explain will not be internal— they will be uses of the word in relation to the environment. Consequently, the conceptual roles (= basic use regularities) needed to explain them will

25 For further discussion see my “Meaning and its Place in the Language Faculty”.
also have to be not wholly internal. Second, we cannot expect to be able to split up the explanatorily basic use regularity of a word into an internal component (which will explain the internal use facts) and an external component (which will explain the relational ones). (How, for example, could such a division be made of the regularity: "Uses of the word "red" stem from the tendency to apply it to observed surfaces that are determinately red"?) Third, the problem with purely internal conceptual roles is not that they are incapable of fixing referential or truth-conditional properties. The problem is rather that purely internal conceptual roles do not constitute the ordinary meanings of our words. Consequently, it will be impossible for us to apply the schema

\[ x \text{ has the same conceptual role as our "f" } \rightarrow x \text{ is true of } f \]

to the terms, \( x \), with purely internal conceptual roles in order to articulate, in ordinary language, the referents and truth conditions of those terms. And fourth, not only is there no need to supplement the causal/explanatory aspect of a meaning with something to determine a referent, but there is little likelihood of being able to do so successfully. In light of the plausibility of deflationism about the truth-theoretic notions, we should not expect to find any particular non-semantic relation that is responsible for reference.

15. Names

Names provide the occasion for two contrary objections to the use theory of meaning. On the one hand it might be thought that although any given name has a use, it does not (as Kripke has shown) have a meaning, but merely a referent.\(^{27}\) On the other hand—and from the opposite direction—it might be alleged that although a name does have a meaning, no single use regularity could possibly constitute it; for the use of a name varies dramatically from one person to another—depending, for example, on whether the speaker is, or is not, acquainted with its referent.

But neither of these criticisms stands up to scrutiny (as we shall see in detail in Chapter 5). In the first place, Kripke showed merely

\(^{27}\) Kripke, Naming and Necessity.
that names do not have the same meanings as definite descriptions; he gives no reason to think that they do not have meanings at all. And we do, after all, speak quite properly of translating names and of understanding them—i.e. of knowing their meanings. In the second place, the striking differences between various peoples' use of a given name can be explained away as various divergences from the common use of ‘experts’—of those who are familiar with the referent—and it is the basic regularities in ‘expert’ use which constitutes the meanings of names.

16. Knowledge of Meaning

Surely, understanding a word consists in knowing what it means. But we generally do not know what are the fundamental regularities in the use of our words. Indeed, most of us would be hard-pressed to state any of them. So the use theory fails to specify correctly the knowledge we have about a word that constitutes our understanding of it. Or so it might seem.

However, although we are not normally in a position to articulate the regularities underlying the use of our words—and consequently cannot be said to have explicit knowledge of them—we can none the less be said, simply in virtue of implementing those regularities, to implicitly know what they are. Moreover, there is no compelling reason to think that the sort of knowledge of meanings that constitutes understanding must be explicit. And so it is not implausible that, when we speak of knowing the meaning of a word, what we have in mind is simply that we know implicitly how the word is used and hence what it means. This issue was discussed in more detail in section 1 of Chapter 2.

A related concern about our knowledge of what we mean derives from the ‘externalist’ character of certain regularities of use. For it might seem that, from the plausible premises

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We know a priori that our word “water” means WATER
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and

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We know a priori that (x means WATER → water exists in the environment of x)
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one could argue to the counterintuitive conclusion that

We know a priori that water exists in our environment.\(^{28}\)

The trouble with this reasoning is that it again involves neglecting the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge. Perhaps we do have explicit a priori knowledge that “water” means WATER; for that type of knowledge is arguably trivial—deriving from nothing more than the capitalizing convention for designating meanings. But explicit knowledge of the second premise—of how the property underlying ‘x means WATER’ is constituted (and, in particular, that it consists in some relation to environmental water)—is surely not a priori. In order to acquire it, one must first observe how the word “water” is deployed and then infer that the basic regularity for its use makes reference to water.

Perhaps ordinary, unreflective users of the word might be said to know such things implicitly. And any such knowledge would plausibly be a priori, since a person’s implicit knowledge is not contained in his ‘web of belief’ and so is not hostage to considerations of empirical adequacy and overall simplicity. So let us concede that we do have implicit a priori knowledge that water exists in the environment of any word meaning WATER, and also that our word “water” means WATER. Moreover it is natural to regard implicit knowledge as closed under entailment. It would then indeed follow that we know a priori that water exists in our environment. But in so far as that knowledge is merely implicit (and in so far as all implicit knowledge is trivially a priori), such a conclusion is not at all counterintuitive.

17. Scepticism

Someone could surely mean what is generally meant by a word, even though he does not endorse the statements that would seem to provide its basic pattern of use. So, for example, we can mean PHLO-

\(^{28}\) This argument comes (slightly modified) from Paul Boghossian’s “What the Externalist can Know A Priori”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 97 (1996–7), 161–75, where it is deployed to show a tension between externalism regarding meaning and the doctrine that we know what we mean. See also M. McKinsey “Anti-individualism and Privileged Access”, *Analysis* 51 (1991), 9–16.
GISTON by the word “phlogiston” even though we do not maintain the phlogiston theory which supposedly fixes the word’s meaning. Similarly, it would seem that a fan of intuitionistic logic might be aware of the meanings of our words “not”, “and”, etc., despite rejecting the classical principles whose general acceptance implicitly defines these terms.

In order to accommodate this point, which is surely correct, it is necessary to distinguish two closely affiliated acceptance commitments of a word. First, there is the unconditional practice of using that word to formulate one’s acceptance of certain substantive principles. Second there is the conditional commitment to use that word to articulate those principles if they are to be accepted. And it is the second of these commitments that is fundamentally meaning constituting. The first fixes meaning only in so far as it implies the second. Thus the word “phlogiston” may be used as the phlogiston theory specifies; and this unconditional regularity of use will indeed be sufficient to fix its meaning—but not necessary. What really constitutes the meaning of “phlogiston” is the conditional acceptance property: of using that word on condition the theory is accepted. In the first of these cases the word is given a meaning and that meaning (i.e. that concept) is canonically deployed; whereas in the second case the assigned meaning is not canonically deployed. It is like the difference between playing a game and merely being aware of the rules, or between employing a tool and merely knowing how to use it. Either way, the word is assigned a function—a conditional acceptance property specifying the circumstances in which certain sentences containing the word are accepted. But the resulting linguistic instrument may or may not be found attractive and put to normal work—the unconditional regularity may or may not be actualized. See Chapter 6 for further discussion.

18. A Priori Knowledge

Is the use theory of meaning able to account for a priori knowledge? And should it be able to? One might well suppose that it both can and must. For it might be thought that we would have a priori knowledge of any sentence whose acceptance constitutes the basic use of one of its constituent terms. After all, if the meaning of “\(f\)” stems from the decision to accept the sentence “\(#f\)”, then “\(f\)” will surely receive the
Meaning necessary and sufficient for "#f" to be true; so given what it means, "#f" must be true. How else are we to explain our a priori knowledge of logic, geometry, and arithmetic, amongst other things, if not as resulting in this way from the implicit definition of terms?

But this reasoning is defective. In the first place, even though our meaning-constituting commitments are maintained a priori, they may none the less be false—and this would not in the slightest diminish their capacity to confer meaning. For a term acquires its meaning from our regarding certain sentences containing it as true—from our using it in that way—indepenedently of whether they are in fact true. So it is not the case that we can infer the truth of these sentences from the fact that they are implicit definitions.

In the second place, as we have just seen, the acceptance properties that are constitutive of a meaning are conditional. A meaning may indeed be associated with the role of a term "f" in a body of substantive postulates, "#f". But in order to assign "f" to that role, hence to that meaning, it is not necessary to maintain those postulates; it suffices to be committed to the conditional "\(\exists x(#x) \rightarrow #f\)" , which says that were anything to be given that role then "f" would be. Consequently, even though meaning-constituting commitments are indeed a priori, we cannot thereby demonstrate the aprioricity of logic, arithmetic, or geometry.

Moreover, we should not suppose that the use theory's failure to explain substantive a priori knowledge is in any way objectionable. For in light of Quine's web-of-belief model of theoretical development it is far from obvious that there is a priori scientific knowledge of substantive domains such as logic, arithmetic, and geometry; so it certainly can't be taken for granted that a decent theory of meaning must be able to account for such a thing. For elaboration of these points see Chapter 6.

19. Normativity

From the meaning of a word various conclusions about how it ought to be applied may be drawn; but no such conclusions flow from its actual use—or so it would seem. For example, if a word means DOG, then it is proper to apply it to dogs and it would be wrong to apply it to cats. But from the fact that the word is typically applied to dog-like objects and occasionally (in foggy conditions) to cat-like objects,
nothing follows at all about how one ought to apply it: we cannot conclude that the cat applications are wrong. Thus it may seem that use and meaning have different normative implications and must therefore be distinct properties.

But there is a fallacy lurking in this line of thought. Let us allow that

\[ x \text{ means } \text{DOG} \rightarrow x \text{ ought to be applied only to dogs}. \]

However, it is by no means evident that the explanation of this conditional is that the property ‘\( x \text{ means } \text{DOG} \)’ is constituted (in part) by the property ‘\( x \text{ ought to be applied only to dogs} \)’: the normative implications of the meaning property do not necessarily make it intrinsically normative. Therefore the fact that use properties are not intrinsically normative—the fact that nothing can be immediately deduced (i.e. without further premises) about how the words that possess them ought to be applied—does not disqualify them from being the basis of meaning. To nail down this conclusion, notice that no one would dream of arguing from the conviction that

\[ x \text{ is a human being} \rightarrow x \text{ ought to be treated with respect} \]

to the conclusion that ‘being a human being’ could not be constituted by an intrinsically non-normative, biological property—perhaps something of the form ‘possessing such-and-such genotype’. Similarly the normative import of a meaning property does not preclude its reduction to an intrinsically non-normative, use property.

But what, more specifically, could account for the normative import of a meaning property? A promising strategy is to begin with the pragmatic value of true belief and then to show, given the correlation between accepting a sentence and believing the proposition it expresses, that each predicate ought, in virtue of its meaning, to be applied to certain things and not others. This idea is developed in Chapter 8.

20. Regularities without Meaning

It seems clear that there are many possible regularities of use that do not coincide with meanings. For example, one might fall into the
habit of making a certain noise while sleeping in the afternoon; and this practice would surely not provide that noise with any conceptual content.

We must grant, of course, that not every regularity of use constitutes a meaning of the relevant kind: namely a concept, a constituent of beliefs, desires, and so on. But we have been supposing all along that in order for a type of sound or mark to have the kind of meaning in which we are interested—that is, *conceptual* meaning—the regularity for its use must concern the circumstances in which certain sentences containing it are *accepted* (see the next section for an account of this notion). Moreover the use of a new term must cohere with the regularities that constitute the meanings of the other words. So, for example, in so far as we are disposed (in light of the meaning of “or”) to accept instances of “*p or not p*”, then, if “glub” is a new predicate, we must accept “That is glub or it isn’t glub”. Thus the particular use theory recommended here is not committed to the absurd claim that any old pattern of noise-making is associated with the expression of a concept.

There may be a residual doubt as to whether, even within our *restricted* class of use regularities, every member will constitute a meaning; for it may be thought that not all such regularities could determine a referent or extension. However, this doubt—as we saw in responding to Objection 5—derives from a misguided, ‘inflationary’ view of reference. From the deflationary point of view, the conceptually fundamental principle governing the relation ‘being true of’ is the schema

\[(y)\text{(Predicates meaning } F \text{ are } true \text{ of } y \leftrightarrow fy)\].

And this will trivially fix the extension of any predicate, regardless of how its meaning is constituted.

21. *Acceptance*

The regularities of use that (I am suggesting) constitute the meanings of words concern the circumstances in which specified sentences are privately *accepted* (i.e. uttered assertively to oneself). Therefore, in so far as the aim of the theory is to give a general account of meaning properties through a non-semantic reductive analysis of them, it is
essential to make it plausible that the psychological relation ‘Person S accepts the sentence “p”’ can be explicated in non-semantic terms.\(^{29}\)

To that end I would like to do two things: first, rebut a popular argument that is supposed to show that the relevant notion of acceptance \textit{is} semantic; and second, sketch a positive account suggesting that it isn’t.

The argument for the conclusion that ‘acceptance’ is a semantic concept goes like this. The difference between accepting a sentence and merely uttering it (e.g. as a joke, a linguistic example, etc.) consists in the presence or absence of a commitment to the sentence’s being \textit{true}; but \textit{truth} is a semantic notion; therefore so is acceptance.

However, there is a decisive response to this line of thought. Granted, accepting a sentence goes hand in hand with accepting its \textit{truth}. But, equally well, supposing something goes hand in hand with supposing its \textit{truth}, doubting something goes hand in hand with doubting its \textit{truth}, and so on. All of these correlations are fully explained by the obviousness of the schema

\[ “p” \text{ is true } \leftrightarrow p. \]

Consequently, its relationship to truth is not what distinguishes acceptance from other attitudes (such as doubting, conjecturing, etc.) and does not help to constitute its nature. Thus the relevant concept of acceptance does not presuppose the notion of truth.

A reason for thinking, on the contrary, that acceptance is a \textit{non}-semantic notion would be provided by an account of it in purely physical, behavioural, and psychological terms. Let me therefore offer an extremely crude first approximation of such an account: a functional theory that simultaneously characterizes ‘acceptance’, ‘desire’, ‘observation’, and ‘action’ by means of five principles that relate these notions to one another, to behaviour, and to environmental conditions:

\(^{29}\) In ordinary language the word “acceptance” designates an attitude to \textit{propositions}—one might accept, for example, \textit{that dogs bark}. Here, however, I am using the word in a non-standard sense, to refer to the corresponding attitude to \textit{s}entences—what Davidson calls “holding true”. Thus in the sense deployed here one may ‘accept’ (i.e. hold true) “dogs bark” and thereby accept (in the ordinary sense) the proposition it expresses.
(1) For each observable fact $O$ there is a sentence type “$o$” such that:

$O$ is instantiated in view of $S \leftrightarrow S$ accepts “$o$”.

(2) For each basic action type $A$ there is a sentence type “$a$” such that:

$S$ does $A \leftrightarrow S$ wants “$a$”.

(3) The set of things $S$ accepts conforms to principles of consistency, simplicity, and conservatism.

(4) $S$ accepts “$p \rightarrow q$” iff $S$ is disposed to accept “$q$” should he come to accept “$p$”.

(5) $(S$ wants “$q$” and $S$ accepts “$p \rightarrow q$”) $\rightarrow S$ wants “$p$”.

Thus what $S$ accepts may be inferred, given principles of inference and decision theory, on the basis of what he utters and what he does. No doubt this account is grotesquely over-simple. For one thing, the practical syllogism, expressed in (5), should be replaced with a more sophisticated decision theory, such as the principle of expected utility maximization. However, the theory does appear to capture some of the central characteristics of acceptance—and it does not presuppose any semantic ideas. Therefore one may not unreasonably hope that an adequate account, along roughly these preliminary lines, might be forthcoming. In which case acceptance is indeed a non-semantic notion and hence legitimate for deployment in a reductive account of meaning.

22. The Semantic/Pragmatic Distinction

If there are terms with the same meaning but different uses, then obviously meaning is not constituted by use; and it is often maintained—for example, by Jerry Katz—\cite{katz1970}—that there exist many such pairs of words. Some alleged examples are:

- and —— but
- dog —— cur
- American —— Yank

\cite{katz1970} Katz, *Language and other Abstract Objects* and *The Metaphysics of Meaning*. 
For each such case, the claim is made that we must distinguish between the descriptive (semantic, truth-conditional) content (which is the same whichever of the words is used) and the further implications of selecting one way, rather than another, of expressing that content. Thus if one wants to warn the listener that the second conjunct is somewhat surprising given the first, one might use “but” instead of “and”; if one wants to be insulting, one uses “Yank” instead of “American”, and so on. Consequently, the members of each pair have the same meaning but different uses.

An initial response to this objection would be to deny that the words in question are synonyms. It could be argued that there is a broad, non-technical notion of meaning in which the members of the above pairs of expressions do not have exactly the same meaning—and precisely because of the differences in how they are used; so meaning, in this broad sense, might well be identified with use. However this response would not be adequate as it stands. For it would leave unexplained the contrast between semantic and non-semantic (i.e. descriptive and non-descriptive) aspects of meaning. In so far as this distinction is intuitively clear, then the use theoretician owes some account of how, in his terms, it might be drawn.

However, the rough shape of such an account is not hard to discern. It is plausible to suppose that there are some facts regarding the use of a term that constitute its semantic content, and further facts that underlie other aspects of its meaning. The difference between these two different types of fact is that those constituting the semantic content of a word make reference merely to the beliefs of the speaker—to the circumstances in which certain sentences involving the word are accepted; whereas the other facts—those constituting non-descriptive content—specify the use of a word as a function of desires or intentions of the speaker that go beyond articulating his belief. For example, the use of both “and” and “but” may be governed by the acceptance property:

We tend to infer “p” and “q” from “p C q” and to infer “q C p” from “p” and “q”.

However, the overall use of “but” may be governed by the further principle:

“but” is used to warn the hearer that the second conjunct will be found surprising in light of the first.
Thus two words may have the same basic acceptance property; but given a speaker's desire not merely to describe a situation, but to effect some further speech act as well, he will pick one of these words rather than the other.  

23. Thought

Language is an expression of thought, a means by which statements are made, questions asked, instructions given, and so on. Therefore, to understand a language—to know the significance of its expressions—is to be able to tell which thoughts underlie their use: to know what is being asserted, asked, demanded, and so on. Thus the meaning of a sentence is the propositional character it typically expresses, and the meaning of a word is the element of such a character (i.e. the concept) that it expresses.

This eminently natural conception of meaning may appear to be quite distinct from, and incompatible with, the conception of meaning as use. But in fact these views are easy to reconcile with one another (as we saw in Chapter 2). For the concept DOG is most directly identified as the concept that is normally expressed in English by using the word “dog” and expressed in other languages by words with the same use as “dog”. And on that basis, after the appropriate investigation into the nature of that shared use, we will be led to a characterization of DOG as that entity whose engagement by the speaker’s mind is manifested by his deployment of a word with use regularity \( u(x) \). In other words, we will arrive at a theory of the form

\[
x \text{ expresses the concept } \text{DOG} = u(x)
\]

which reduces the meaning property to a basic use regularity. Thus the natural view that the meaning of an expression is the concept it expresses is quite consistent with the further claim that such concepts are identified by means of the use regularities of the words that express them.

\[31\] David Ryan reminded me that some words (e.g. “hello” and “ouch”) appear to have no descriptive content, though they are clearly meaningful. On the present account, what is special about the regularities of use that constitute the meanings of such terms is that they will not allude to the acceptance of sentences containing them.
Notice that, in so far as ‘x means F’ implies a correlation between a speaker’s use of the term, x, and his engagement with the concept, F, then there must also be a correlation between acceptance properties of the term and belief properties of the concept. Moreover, if it is explanatorily fundamental, vis-à-vis the overall use of x, that certain specified sentences containing it are accepted in certain specified circumstances, then it will be explanatorily fundamental, vis-à-vis the overall use of the concept F, that the correlated propositions are believed in those circumstances. Thus the use theory of meaning could equally well have been formulated by beginning at the level of thought and maintaining that each concept is individuated by certain explanatorily basic patterns of deployment, and then adding that the meaning of a term is the concept, so individuated, with which it is correlated. This (roughly speaking) is the way things are done by Christopher Peacocke.\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, I see no fundamental difference between the use theory and the views of those (such as David Lewis and Frank Jackson)\textsuperscript{33} who favour ‘functionalist’ accounts whereby each mental element is identified as that which plays a certain causal role, and the meaning of a term is then identified with the element it expresses.

\textsuperscript{32} See Peacocke, \textit{A Study of Concepts}. The principal difference between Peacocke’s account and what is argued here concerns truth and reference. Peacocke supposes that there must be something he calls a “Determination Theory” whose job it is to explain, given the individuating (“possession”) conditions for a concept, why it has the particular extension it does. More specifically, he assumes that if a concept is individuated by the acceptance of certain propositions containing it, then the extension it must have is the one that will render those propositions true. This assumption leads him to suppose that not every pattern of use can constitute a coherent concept (for not every such pattern will, given the Determination Theory, be able to have an extension). And on this basis he concludes that we know certain propositions a priori, in virtue of our possession of their constituent concepts; for when the acceptance of a proposition is an individuating condition for one of its constituents, then that proposition must be true. However, according to the account I am developing here, this line of thought goes wrong at the outset. For (as we saw in the response to Objection 4) the demand for a Determination Theory presupposes an inflationary view of truth and reference—a view that should be rejected. And in that case there will no reason to think certain patterns of acceptance cannot constitute concepts, and no basis for inferring that concept-possession engenders a priori knowledge. For further discussion of Peacocke’s epistemological proposal, see Chapter 6.

As Benson Mates first observed, no two expressions in the same language—even those regarded as synonyms—are reliably interchangeable. However close in meaning the predicates “/” and “g” may be, a given speaker might understand one of them imperfectly, leading him to say “Not all /s are gs”, and leading us to suppose that

He said that not all /s are gs, but he didn’t say that not all /s are /s,

and to suppose moreover that

He believes that not all /s are gs, but he doesn’t believe that not all /s are /s.

This phenomenon evidently causes trouble for the thesis that the meanings of words are concepts—that is, the components of belief states. For if they are, then it follows from the assumption that “/” and “g” are synonyms that the state of believing that . . . / . . . is the same as the state of believing that . . . g . . . . Thus it would seem that we have either to deny that expressions can ever be synonyms or else to reject the Mates intuitions; and neither step is appealing.

The best way out of this dilemma, it seems to me, is to retain the idea that the meaning of a word is a concept (a constituent of propositional-attitude states), to accept that two terms “/” and “g” can have the same meaning, and to acknowledge with Mates that someone, perhaps somewhat confused, might none the less say and believe that not all /s are gs. However, it seems to me that we must then be prepared to allow that, ipso facto, the subject is saying and believing that not all /s are /s.

It can be no objection to this characterization of the situation that he did not utter the words “Not all /s are /s”, because he did, after

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all, utter something synonymous with that sentence. And such grounds are precisely the basis for maintaining, for example, that Pierre, who came out with “Il pleut”, said that it is raining.

A deeper source of resistance to the suggestion, I would guess, is our reluctance to attribute self-contradictory beliefs to the subject. For although he is indeed making a mistake, it seems unfair to attribute such gross irrationality to him. In response, however, it is crucial to appreciate that not all self-contradictory belief is irrational. What certainly is irrational is knowingly believing a contradiction—a state which more or less coincides with thinking to one’s self something of the form “p & ¬p”, “Not all fs are fs”, etc. But, as our example shows, it is quite possible to believe a contradiction without recognizing that one is doing so. And such a belief may well not be irrational. Thus no accusation of barefaced irrationality is implicit in supposing that our subject believes that not all /s are /s, and so we should not shrink, out of a reluctance to be unfair, from attributing that belief to him.

Thus the situation here resembles Kripke’s case of Pierre, who asserts “Londres est joli” on the basis of hearsay but who comes to maintain “London is not pretty” after he has spent a little time there—not realizing that “Londres” and “London” name the same place.35 There is overwhelming reason to suppose that Pierre believes that London is pretty (for he continues to accept “Londres est joli”), although he clearly also believes what he now says in English: namely, that London is not pretty. Again, our resistance to this natural characterization of Pierre’s state of mind is the feeling that, misguided though he may be, he does not deserve to be convicted of contradicting himself. But this resistance should be dispelled once we appreciate that the ‘crime’ is deliberate self-contradiction, not contradictory belief per se.

I have attempted in this chapter to respond briefly to all the objections that I can imagine being made against the use theory of meaning. Amongst these difficulties, some are critical—namely those relating to truth, reference, a priori knowledge, compositionality,

linguistic norms, the indeterminacy of translation, and the prospects for any non-semantic reductive analysis of meaning properties. These issues will be addressed thoroughly, one at a time, in the chapters that remain.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{36} I would like to thank Malcom Budd, Jakob Hohwy, Pierre Jacob, Jerry Katz, Huw Price, and Barry C. Smith for suggestions that helped me improve this chapter.