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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Edited by

ERNEST LEPORE

and

BARRY C. SMITH

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'female' turns out to be not quite *le mot juste* for that one side of a familiar recognizable distinction.) Answerability is, perhaps, the most central concept in our thinking, and thus an exception to the rule that concepts alone do not make things true. (For there to be such a thing as being F, and for such-and-such propositions to be true is, except in particular circumstances, not just two sides of a single coin.) One need not doubt answerability's centrality. One might doubt that the normal plasticity of thought ossifies in the face of that centrality when it comes to thinking about answerability. To the extent that it does not, Frege's picture of logic is a very subtle form of psychologism.

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CHAPTER 5

LANGUAGE AS INTERNAL

ANNE L. BEZUIDENHOUT

ACCORDING to internalist conceptions of language, languages are properties of the mind/brains of individuals and supervene entirely on the internal states of these mind/brains. Hence, languages are primarily to be studied by the mind and/or brain sciences—psychology, neuroscience, and the cognitive sciences more generally (including linguistics and philosophy). This is not to deny that other sciences may contribute to our understanding too (e.g. evolutionary biology). The internalist conception of language is most associated with Chomsky, who has argued for it in many of his writings. See Chomsky (1986, 1990a,b, 1993, 1995, 2000). Chomsky calls this conception 'I-language' (where 'I' stands for 'internal' and 'individual') and he contrasts it with a conception that he labels 'E-language' (where 'E' stands for 'external'). Chomsky thinks that only I-languages are proper objects for scientific study. (For more on what Chomsky takes to be the prospects for and the requirements on a science of language, see entry by Stainton on 'Meaning and Reference: Some Chomskian Themes'.)

Chomsky argues that one part of the human brain is specialized for language. This language system has an innate specification. All normal humans, in virtue of their membership in the species *Homo sapiens*, are born with their language systems configured in the same way. Call the initial state of the language system S_0. A universal grammar (UG) is a theory of S_0. Language acquisition on this view is the development and maturation of the language system in the brain. A language is

Thanks to Robert M. Harnish for reading two earlier drafts of this entry and offering excellent advice for improving the presentation of my arguments. There are undoubtedly still places where he would see room for improvement, but this is a much better piece for having had his critical eye pass over it. Thanks also to Rob Stainton and Ernie Lepore for their suggestions. They too are not to be blamed for any remaining infelicities.

simply the mature state of an individual's language system. Call this mature state S_m. Of course, language development requires exposure to linguistic input. A child growing up in an English-language environment will end up speaking English, a child in a Japanese-language environment will end up speaking Japanese, and so on. (Talk of English-language speakers is simply a shorthand way of talking of a group of speakers whose language systems are very similar. Languages are more properly thought of as *idiolects*. A language is a "way to speak and understand" (Chomsky, 1993: 49)). What is theorized about in a grammar for one's language is what one knows when one knows a language—i.e. one's linguistic competence. (For more on this, see Smith's entry, 'What I know when I know a Language'). That is, a grammar for one's language is a theory of S_m, the mature state of one's language system.

Connectionists, such as Elman (1999); Seidenberg (1997); Seidenberg, MacDonald, and Saffran (2002), have been critical of various aspects of Chomsky's views. They are not persuaded by Chomsky's "poverty of the stimulus" argument for the innateness of what is described by UG. Thus, they think that far more of language has to be learned and far less is pre-programmed than Chomsky assumes. They also think that Chomsky's focus on linguistic competence is misplaced. They think that language acquisition must be studied in the context of linguistic performance (i.e. of language production and comprehension). This is because factors that influence performance are also important in acquisition. For example, sensitivity to the functional or pragmatic roles of expressions is important in acquisition. Moreover, the statistical properties of words that have been shown to affect performance, such as frequencies of use, also play a role in acquisition (see Saffran *et al.*, 1996).

However, it is important to note that these critics of Chomsky are as committed to an internalist conception of language as is Chomsky. Languages are still properties of the mind/brains of individuals according to this connectionist view. It is just that the mature state of a competent speaker of a language is achieved via a route different from the one envisaged by Chomsky. Multiple constraints are at work, and some of the mechanisms involved in language learning (e.g. those involved in learning to segment a stream of speech into words, or the ones involved in perceiving phonemic contrasts) are the same mechanisms that are at work in learning and performing other *non*-linguistic perceptual tasks. Nevertheless, these connectionists would not deny that the changes being wrought are changes to an individual brain, and that the end result of this process will be a competent adult speaker of a language in the internalist sense.

Connectionists think that Chomsky's emphasis on competence, as opposed to performance, is misplaced. However, their conception of performance is as internalist as Chomsky's conception of competence. Linguistic performance involves the interaction of multiple cognitive "systems"—perceptual systems, general learning systems, motor systems, memory systems, etc. But all of these are internally individuated. Also, although these connectionists emphasize the role of experience in language acquisition, this does not make them externalists. Chomsky too sees a role for experience. All parties to this debate agree that users of a language are embedded in a wider world, and that this wider world impinges on language users in some way.

Internalists agree that had one's experience been different one would have ended up with a different language—with a different S_m. But two people have similar languages if they share something internal, not if they have similar experiential histories. Perhaps it is possible in some cases for different histories to lead to the same internal state S_m. Then these people would share a language, despite having different histories.

5.1 Internalism vs. Externalism

There are various views about the nature of language and meaning that can be labeled 'externalist', and Chomsky has been critical of them all. It is useful to see Chomsky's anti-externalism as directed towards two distinct targets, which can be called *language externalism* and *semantic externalism* respectively. Language externalists deny that languages are objects whose properties supervene on the internal states of an individual's mind/brain. E-languages are not psychological objects, but exist independently of language users. Semantic externalists on the other hand deny that the referential or intensional properties of the expressions in a language can be fixed independently of the physical and/or social environments of the speakers of that language.

It is possible to be a language externalist but a semantic internalist. For instance, one might hold that languages are abstract objects, and so not psychological in nature, but also hold that linguistic expressions have their reference-fixing properties independently of the physical and/or social contexts of language users. On this view, a single expression-type would have the same reference-fixing powers across different physical/social contexts. It is also possible to accept at least a modified form of language internalism and yet to be a semantic externalist. On this view, which is arguably the view held by Fodor (1987, 1990), languages are systems of mental representations in the mind/brains of individuals. However, while the computational and conceptual role properties of these representations supervene on the internal states of individuals, the referential or intensional properties of these mental representations depend on the wider physical context of language users.

5.1.1 Chomsky's Critique of Language Externalism

Language externalists deny that languages are systems of internal mental representations. (The way in which 'representation' is here understood is broad enough to cover both the traditional symbol system view according to which the things with representational properties are mental *symbols* and the connectionist view according to which objects and properties are represented in a distributed way by *networks of interconnected nodes*. Thus both Chomsky's view and the connectionist view count as internalist conceptions of language.) According to one version of language externalism, languages are systems of abstract rules, where the rules for a language

generate all the (possibly infinite) grammatical strings for that language. This is a view of language defended by Katz (1981). Katz argues that such abstract objects can be studied independently of any psychological investigations of language users. Of course, language users must be able to represent one (or more) of these abstract languages in their mind/brains. However, the question as to which of these E-languages a speaker has actually mastered is a completely separate question from the question as to the properties of these abstract objects.

This abstractionist conception of language treats natural languages as akin to the artificial, constructed languages of formal logic. One internalist response will be that constructed languages bear very little resemblance to natural languages. Logical notation strives to eliminate ambiguity, vagueness and other such properties that are characteristic of natural languages. Formal languages are designed for special purposes and need not be constrained by the conditions imposed on human languages by the architecture of the mind/brain. So, using formal logic as a model for natural language is not helpful, as it gives us no purchase on questions about how language is acquired, how it is represented in the brain, or on how our knowledge of language plays a role in language production and comprehension. See Chomsky (2000: 12). The abstractionist might reply that the abstract rules that he posits will reflect the way knowledge is represented and organized in the brain. Language in this sense is an abstract structure that is an image of the causal structures in the mind/brain. However, such an approach concedes the conceptual primacy of I-languages. As Chomsky (2000: 73) says: "Since the language in this sense is completely determined by the I-language, though abstracted from it, it is not entirely clear that this further step [of abstraction] is motivated."

Croft (2000: 2) raises a second problem. If languages are abstract systems of rules then languages are *abstract particulars*. But then languages can't be objects of scientific theorizing, since science is concerned with types, or at any rate with particulars only as instances of types. The abstractionist is likely to respond that it is possible to make generalizations about languages on the basis of a study of abstract particulars. The study of language is like the study of geometry or any other formal, mathematical science and has its own laws or rules. However, such laws would not be empirical laws or generalizations and hence the study of natural languages would not be a part of natural science. On the face of it this is problematic, since human languages share some of the characteristics of other animal communication systems, and to take the study of human languages out of the arena of natural science is to forgo the opportunity to see human languages as evolutionarily continuous with other animal communication systems. Of course, formal sciences can be applied to the natural world, and so a formal science of language could be applied to human and animal communication. But the critic of abstractionism is likely to feel that this reverses the order of investigation. Human languages should in the first instance be thought of as psychological constructs that can be studied by naturalistic means. Insights from other parts of natural science (e.g. ethology, evolutionary biology) might then prove relevant to the study of human languages. When we start with logic and mathematics as the model for human languages we are pointed in the wrong direction.

Another conception of language that denies its psychological nature is the conception that identifies languages with the *products* of linguistic acts, namely with sets of written or spoken or signed expressions (words, phrases, and sentences). Structuralists, hermeneuticists, deconstructionists and others who think that texts are the primary objects of study presumably would advocate such a conception of language. Note that what is produced by a linguistic act is an expression-*token* rather than an expression-*type*. As Smith (1999: 37–8) notes, if languages are identified with sets of *actual* expression-tokens, then languages will not be coherent objects of scientific study, because such sets will consist of both grammatical and ungrammatical strings. One might try to avoid this problem by identifying languages with those possible expression-tokens that conform to certain rules of correct usage. The trouble with this is that if these rules are thought of as abstract, then this view collapses into the abstractionist view discussed in the previous paragraph. On the other hand, if these rules are thought of as mentally represented, then this view is not after all a competitor to internalism.

One might suggest that languages be identified with the linguistic acts themselves, rather than the products of these acts. On this conception, languages would be sets of *utterances*. This view faces problems similar to those just mentioned. Actual utterances are dated particulars (events) and include both correct and incorrect uses of language. If one tries to exclude utterances that involve incorrect uses by appeal to rules for correct usage, then once again the view collapses into either abstractionism or internalism, depending on the nature of the rules that are invoked. Besides, utterances, in virtue of being intentional actions of speakers, are internally related to the mental states that produced these actions, and thus this view treats languages as psychological objects that depend on language users.

Yet another externalist conception of language that is the target of Chomsky's attacks is the "commonsense" view of language advocated by Dummett (1986, 1989). According to this view, languages are social practices that are governed by social conventions. Dummett writes: "The natural choice for the fundamental notion of a language, from the viewpoint that sees language as a practice, is a language in the ordinary sense in which English is a language, or, perhaps, a dialect of such a language" (1986: 473). Dummett is concerned to argue against Davidson (1986), whom he takes to be denying that there are languages in the ordinary sense. Davidson instead takes idiolects as primary (as does Chomsky, although their reasons for making this choice are very different). Dummett protests by saying: "Oppressive governments, such as those of Franco and Mussolini, attempt to suppress minority languages; under such regimes teachers punish children for speaking those languages in the playground . . . Bretons, Catalans, Basques, and Kurds each declare that their language is the soul of their culture. The option does not seem to be open to us to declare that such governments and such peoples are under the illusion that there is anything they are suppressing or cherishing"(1986: 465). Dummett also argues that languages in this sense are independent of any particular speakers of the language (1986: 473), and that such a conception is needed to make sense of Putnam's principle of the division of linguistic labor (462), and more generally of the idea that we

can be mistaken about the meanings of the words in our language. Only if languages are independent of individuals does it make sense to say that we have a partial, and partially erroneous, grasp of our own language (468–9).

Chomsky does not deny that there is this commonsense conception of language, or that it is invoked in various sorts of social contexts. However, he is skeptical that this commonsense conception can play a role in the language sciences. He writes: "The concept of language that Dummett takes to be essential involves complex and obscure sociopolitical, historical, cultural, and normative-teleological elements. Such elements may be of some interest for the sociology of identification within various social and political communities and the study of authority structure, but they plainly lie far beyond any useful inquiry into the nature of language or the psychology of users of language" (2000: 49). Chomsky thinks that this social conception of language will be unable to explain certain facts about the structures of languages. For example, consider the ways in which we interpret the pronouns 'herself' and 'her' in the following sentences:

(a) Mary_i expects e_i to pay for herself_i.
(b) I wonder who_i $\text{Mary}_{*i/j}$ expects e_i to pay for herself_i.
(c) Mary_i expects e_i to pay for $\text{her}_{*i/j}$.
(d) I wonder who_i Mary_j expects e_i to pay for $\text{her}_{j/k}$.

In (a), 'herself' must be coreferential with 'Mary', whereas in (b) it cannot refer to Mary but must refer to someone else. On the other hand, if we replace the reflexive pronoun by 'her', we get a different pattern of co-reference. In (c), 'her' would have to refer to someone other than Mary, whereas in (d), 'her' can refer to either Mary or some other contextually salient female. These facts about the binding properties of pronouns do not seem to be explicable by appeal to any social norm, custom, or practice. Chomsky's answer as to what explains these facts is that certain principles (the principles described in Binding Theory) are built into the initial state of our language systems, and "when certain options left undetermined in the initial state are fixed by elementary experience" (2000: 50), then we have no choice but to interpret examples (a)–(d) in the way we do.

Of course, linguists who hold a social conception of language could graft Chomsky's account of such patterns of co-reference onto their social accounts of other aspects of language (e.g. onto accounts of the ways in which power relations determine linguistic choices). So, in this sense Chomsky's account is not incompatible with social accounts. But the point is that there does not seem to be a purely social explanation for linguistic patterns such as those illustrated in (a)–(d). Following such patterns in one's use of language is not like following the rules of the road or other such social conventions. Learning a language is not like learning the rules of the road, and we couldn't decide to change the way we speak in the same way that we could decide to start driving on the opposite side of the road (as the Swedes did starting on early Sunday morning on September 3, 1967) or decide to start using a metric system of weights and measures (as they did in South Africa starting on September 15, 1967).

Chomsky also thinks that the study of language in Dummett's social sense would come dangerously close to the "study of everything", and so language in this sense "is not a useful topic of inquiry" (2000: 50). Furthermore, there are certain facts about language acquisition that Dummett cannot explain. We say that a child of five is on its way to acquiring a language, say English. But if all adult speakers were to die, and all the five-year-old children were somehow to survive, then whatever these children are speaking would be a human language. Chomsky writes: "Ordinary usage provides no useful way to describe any of this, since it involves too many disparate and obscure concerns and interests, which is one reason why the concept that Dummett adopts is useless for actual inquiry" (2000: 49). (For more on Chomsky's critique of the commonsense conception of language, see the entry by Stainton on 'Meaning and Reference: Some Chomskian Themes'.)

Finally, Chomsky thinks that Dummett's conception of language as a social practice leads to the idea that learning a language is learning how to engage in such a practice, and thus that knowledge of language is a learned ability to engage in such practices. Chomsky attributes a similar idea to Kenny (1984: 138), who argues that to know a language is to have the ability to speak, read, talk to oneself, etc. Dummett and Kenny appear to think that knowing a language is just like knowing how to ride a bike. Linguistic knowledge for these philosophers is knowledge-how rather than propositional knowledge-that. Chomsky (2000: 50–2; 1990: 586–8) thinks this is an absurd view. For one thing, he thinks that it is possible to lose the ability to speak English (e.g. because one is a sufferer of Parkinson's disease) and then to recover that ability (e.g. because one is given a drug that enhances the levels of the chemical L-Dopa in one's brain). He thinks that if Dummett and Kenny maintain that the Parkinson's patient's ability to speak English was there all along (because the patient's knowledge of English was there all along), they will simply have invented a special meaning for the word 'ability' different from the commonsense one. Call ability in this special sense 'K-ability'. Chomsky thinks that K-abilities are introduced merely to avoid the problem that one can lose and regain the ability (in the commonsense sense) to speak a language. Besides, even if knowledge of language involves know-how, know-how cannot be completely analyzed in terms of abilities or dispositions. All know-how involves an irreducible cognitive element (2000: 52). Chomsky writes: 'knowing-how involves a crucial cognitive element, some internal representation of a system of knowledge' (Chomsky, 1990: 565). (For more on Chomsky's notion of knowledge of language, see Smith's entry, 'What I know when I know a Language).

5.1.2 Chomsky's Critique of Semantic Externalism

As noted above, semantic externalists deny that the referential or intentional properties of the expressions in a language can be fixed independently of the physical and/or social environments of the speakers of that language. Chomsky opposes both physical and social versions of semantic externalism. The former version of semantic externalism is associated with work in psychosemantics by Dretske (1981, 1988) and

Fodor (1987, 1990), but also with arguments offered by Putnam (1975). According to this view, to determine the semantic properties of words, we have to take account of the external, causal relations that hold between words and the world. Putnam's Twin-Earth thought experiments are meant to dramatize this point.

Suppose that Fred and Twin-Fred are two individuals who are molecule for molecule duplicates of each other. Fred lives on Earth, where the substance that fills the lakes and seas and falls as precipitation has the chemical structure H_2O. Twin-Fred lives on Twin-Earth, where the substance that fills the lakes and seas and falls as precipitation has the chemical structure XYZ. Also, suppose that Fred and Twin-Fred are ignorant about the chemical composition of the stuffs they call 'water' (either because they live in a time prior to the discovery of the chemical composition of these substances, or because they are exceptionally naive and uneducated people). Since Fred and his twin are molecule-for-molecule duplicates, their language systems are identical from the internal perspective. However, Putnam argues, in Fred's mouth 'water' refers to the substance on Earth whose chemical composition is H_2O, whereas in his twin's mouth the word refers to the substance on Twin-Earth whose chemical composition is XYZ. So, it seems, the referential properties of our terms depend on our relations to external objects, and do not supervene on our internal psychological states. The exact nature of this external, causal relation is a matter of some dispute, and Dretske, Fodor and others have given different answers to this question.

Chomsky (2000: 148–55, 189–94) argues that we should not put too much weight on these Twin-Earth cases. For one thing, such thought experiments appeal to our intuitions, but we can have no intuitions about such cases, because they are framed using technical terms, such as 'extension' or 'reference'. These terms mean exactly what their inventors tell us they mean (2000: 148–9). Moreover, our intuitions here are malleable. If Fred and Twin-Fred were to switch places, unbeknown to themselves and to the others with whom they interact, nothing about the behavior of either would change, and others would treat them as before, as though no switch had taken place. This suggests that 'water' in their mouths means the *same* thing, something that can be characterized from the internal perspective—perhaps something like *the stuff that fills the lakes and seas and falls as precipitation*. (Externalists would dispute Chomsky's internalist characterization of such switching cases. They are happy to assert that after such a switch Twin-Fred's uses of 'water' would refer to H_2O and Fred's to XYZ. Externalists disagree amongst themselves as to whether at least some post-switch uses of such natural kind terms would retain their old, pre-switch meanings. This would depend on such factors as the length of time the person has spent in the new environment, as well as on the context in which the term is being used—e.g. whether it is being used to describe something perceptually present or to reminisce about something from pre-switch days. See Ludlow (1995) and Gibbons (1996) for differing views on this matter.)

If what is at issue is whether or not attributions of meaning to linguistic symbols sometimes appeal to factors beyond the internal resources of the users of those symbols, then Chomsky concedes that sometimes they do. Sometimes we make meaning attributions in a way that overrides the speaker's own internal perspective. Moreover,

we don't need exotic examples to show that this is so. Suppose someone is talking to you in 2006 about the battle for Baghdad and the war against Saddam but as the conversation evolves you begin to suspect that your interlocutor is a seriously disturbed ex-soldier who believes the previous Gulf War is still raging. Does one take an external perspective and regard the person as making false claims about the war in Iraq in 2006, or does one adopt the speaker's own perspective and regard him as making true claims about a war that ended more than ten years ago? In different circumstances one might make different decisions about this. Chomsky thinks that the way in which meaning attributions vary with circumstances "is a legitimate topic of linguistic semantics and ethnoscience", but a scientific psychology of language "will proceed along its separate course" (2000: 154).

Chomsky is generally critical of the enterprise of philosophical semantics. He suggests that there is no semantics in the philosopher's sense. Language has only a syntax and a pragmatics. The only notion of semantics that makes sense is *lexical* semantics, and that is a thoroughly internalist enterprise. It does not purport to be characterizing word–world relations, but at most word–word relations. See Chomsky (1995: 26–7). Furthermore, an internalist might argue that it is incoherent to try to theorize about word–world relations. To ask about how words refer to items in the world, we would need some way of characterizing objects in the world that is independent of our linguistic means of referring to them. But such an independent characterization is impossible. Thus this word–world relation cannot be scientifically studied. Only internal aspects of language are scientifically tractable. (For more on Chomsky's critique of the idea that semantics studies word–world relations, see the entry by Stainton on 'Meaning and Reference: Some Chomskian Themes'.)

Chomsky is also critical of the social form of semantic externalism associated with the work of Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979, 1989b). According to this view, the semantic properties of the words of language depend on features of the social environment of the speaker. So, for example, when someone with a pain in his thigh complains to his doctor that he has arthritis, because he does not realize that arthritis is a disease of the joints, his doctor will take him to have expressed a false belief about arthritis, not a true belief about a disease that afflicts joints and other bones equally. Thus it seems as though the semantic properties of an individual's words depend on facts about the linguistic community to which he belongs. As Putnam (1975: 227) says: " 'meanings' just ain't in the *head*!"

Related to this idea of the externalist individuation of meanings is Putnam's thesis of "the division of linguistic labor". This thesis is that we do not always know (or fully know) the meanings of our own words, and in these cases we defer to experts. Thus 'elm' and 'beech' mean two different things in my idiolect, even though the entries in my mental lexicon for these two words contain the same information—something like *deciduous tree*. These words have different meanings because I live in a linguistic community in which there are experts whose knowledge of elms and beeches is sufficiently rich that they are able to tell elms and beeches apart, and to whom I am disposed to defer, when the need arises to be more precise than my own

internal resources allow. (For more on semantic externalism see the entry by farkas on 'Semantic Internalism and Externalism').

Burge (1989b), in arguing that there is a social aspect to language, makes a similar point. He distinguishes between concepts and conceptions. Concepts are individuated widely, although conceptions are internalist. My concepts *elm* and *beech* are distinct, even if the conceptions associated with my words 'elm' and beech' are identical. The references of my words 'elm' and beech' are different and hence they must express different concepts. But nothing in my head fixes reference or individuates concepts. Others are often in a better position to determine empirical features of the referents of my terms, and their activity thus plays a role in determining the reference of my words and hence in individuating my concepts.

Chomsky is skeptical about the scientific worth of the social semantic externalist's idea that there is a division of linguistic labor, and the claim that there are experts to whom we defer to determine the referents of our terms. He also denies that the meanings of an individual's words are determined in any interesting sense by community norms. Chomsky identifies three senses in which we can speak of a misuse of language. He calls these the 'individual', the 'community', and the 'expert' senses of misuse of language (2000: 70–3, 143). The first sort of misuse is a case in which a speaker uses a word not in accordance with his own I-language. For example, due to a slip of the tongue one might say 'odd hack' instead of '*ad hoc*'. Such a notion of misuse can be explained from the internal perspective. In the example given, the vowel sounds in the two words are interchanged during the process of articulation.

A second sort of misuse is when speakers use words in ways that violate some sort of community standard. For example, many people say things like 'Me and him are going to the movies', but language purists like William Safire object to these uses on the grounds that these are not correct uses of English. Chomsky thinks that such misuses and their corrections "may be of interest for the study of the sociology of group identification, authority structure, and the like, but they have little bearing on the study of language... to say that one variety of English is "right" and another "wrong" makes as much sense as saying that Spanish is right and English is wrong" (2000: 71).

Finally, Chomsky agrees that one's lexical entries for 'elm' and 'beech' may be indistinguishable, and this may lead to misuses, in the sense that one applies these terms in ways that do not accord with the uses of the experts to whom one is disposed to defer. However, Chomsky denies that this establishes that meanings are individuated widely, by reference to one's linguistic community. For one thing, the expert to whom one defers about elms and beeches may be an Italian gardener who corrects one's usage through reference to technical Latin names that one shares. In other words, the network of 'experts' that one relies upon might not line up in any straightforward way with any linguistic community to which one can plausibly be said to belong. So, the fact that one has a disposition to be guided by expert knowledge does not support the social theory of reference.

Burge (1989a) claims that an examination of work in cognitive psychology shows that even practicing scientists assume that concepts/meanings are individuated

widely. Patterson (1991) takes issue with this. She discusses the models that are used by developmental psychologists working on children's acquisition of semantic knowledge. She shows that these scientists are not committed to describing the concepts a child attaches to words in terms of the concepts normally attached to those words in the child's linguistic community. The semantic content of the child's representational states is thus not individuated with reference to linguistic environment in the way Burge claims it is. Patterson's arguments support Chomsky's claim that scientific work in linguistics and cognitive science more generally is conducted from an internalist perspective, as there is "no realistic alternative" (2000: 156; see also 158–63).

5.2 The Connection between Internalism and Individualism

We have seen that internalism about language is the view according to which language supervenes on the internal psychological and/or neurological states of an individual. Such a view is in opposition to externalist conceptions of various sorts, such as abstractionist, product-oriented and commonsense conceptions of language. Chomsky's internalism is connected to his acceptance of individualism. According to individualism, the individual and his idiolect are the primary objects of scientific study. We can of course make generalizations across language users, provided that the individual users live in a homogeneous environment. But the order of explanation is from the individual level to the social level, rather than vice-versa. Thus social generalizations are explained by appeal to facts about individuals.

For example, the pronunciation of English vowel sounds has changed a great deal since the time of Chaucer. In particular there were dramatic shifts in pronunciation that occurred some time during the fifteenth century. This is traditionally known as the Great Vowel Shift. Linguists explain this shift by appeal to facts about how vowel sounds are articulated in the mouth. The long vowels became articulated with the tongue higher up in the mouth. So what may look to be a sociological fact (namely how words are pronounced in some linguistic community) is explained by appeal to a physiological fact about individuals (namely how sounds are articulated in the mouth and the fact that changes in the place of articulation of one sound will force a compensatory change in the place of articulation of other sounds).

One could argue that there are certain social generalizations that cannot be accounted for in individualist terms. For example, speakers choose to use polite forms of address when talking to those in authority. Here it seems we cannot explain the speaker's linguistic choices without appeal to social factors, such as power relations, and the social institutions that realize and sustain these power relations. An individualist would respond that the real explanation lies at the level of the individual and his mental states, for the speaker would not behave in the way he does unless he

wanted to. The anti-individualist might reply that the individual's wants are themselves socially constructed. The individualist in turn is likely to respond that the social forces at work here have nothing to do with language or linguistic choices in particular. They are equally at work (if at all) in explaining people's choices of dress, foods to eat, places to dine, movies to watch, and so on. Thus any such social explanations are orthogonal to the concerns of linguists. This is not to say that these social explanations are uninteresting or misguided. It is simply to say that they are not aimed at a level of explanation that would account for linguistic choices in a way that they wouldn't equally account for non-linguistic choices.

Chomsky does not deny that individuals live in social environments and that these social environments can have an impact on language. For example, Chomsky does not deny that the way in which one speaks can be socially stigmatized, because one's language differs from the language of those in power. Chomsky is sometimes taken to be claiming that the social factors influencing language that are studied by sociolinguists are uninteresting or unimportant. But Chomsky strenuously denies that this is his view (2000: 156). On the contrary, he thinks that these topics may be among the most important that face humanity. However, he also thinks that these topics are unlikely to yield to scientific study, and that insights here are more likely to come from the study of literature or from branches of learning other than natural science. Chomsky argues that the forces that drive social life are too diverse and obscure, and even if we could identify them, they are likely to prove irrelevant to the questions of concern to the language sciences (namely to questions about how language is acquired, how it is represented in the brain, and how it is used in production and comprehension). Chomsky also thinks that inasmuch as we do make scientific progress in this field (e.g. in theories of discourse processing) it will be because we've adopted an internalist perspective.

Chomsky's own writings on all the topics discussed above are very clear and accessible. The essays collected in Chomsky (2000) are especially recommended for further study. The commentaries on Chomsky's ideas by Smith (1999) and by Stone and Davies (2002) are also excellent sources for further information on these topics. The former contains useful characterizations of empirical findings (e.g. about language impairment) that support Chomsky's position. The latter contains a challenge to Chomsky's naturalism and to his privileging of the methods of science in the study of natural language.

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