Plural Articulation

Since the early times of philosophy, words and their meaning have been discussed in connection with several branches of knowledge: logic, grammar, rhetoric, etymology, and ethics, to mention just a few. In this paper, we focus on a particular aspect of the philosophical conversation on words, i.e., the debate about their metaphysical status, and aim to propose a pluralist account of a specific issue surrounding the metaphysics of words.

Before laying out our target issue and our agenda, an important preliminary. The term "word" is highly polysemous (Di Sciullo and Williams 1987, Booij 2007, Lieber 2010) and one should bear in mind that there are at least two different kinds of entities the term is used for referring to. On the one hand, we use "word" for referring to abstract linguistic units or vocabulary items which can be inscribed or uttered many times; on the other hand, we use "word" for referring to the concrete, unique, spatio-temporally individuated inscriptions or utterances of such abstract entities (Quine 1987, Szabó 1999, Hawthorne and Lepore 2011).

Call words in the first sense simply *words* and words in the second sense *articulations* of words. Let us use small caps to notate words and single quotes to notate articulations. So, 'cat', '*cat*' and '*cat*' are three unique written articulations of the word CAT. Likewise, a normal utterance of the sentence "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right" will feature three unique spoken articulations of the word WITH (nota bene: we are talking about an *utterance* of the sentence, not about the sentence itself, which rather contains three *occurrences* of the word WITH; in this paper we won't dwell on the metaphysical status of occurrences). The inquiry into the metaphysics of words and articulations, thus defined, faces a series of fundamental questions (cf. Kaplan 1990; 2001; Hawthorne and Lepore 2011). The basic list can be summarized as follows:

1. What are words?
2. What are the conditions of individuation of words?
3. What are articulations (utterances and inscriptions)?
4. What are the conditions of individuation of articulations?
5. What is the relationship between words and articulations?
6. What are the conditions of individuation of the relationship between articulations and words?

In this paper, we aim to give a closer look at question (6) and propose a novel take on it while remaining as agnostic as possible about questions (1-5). Our focus, thus, is not on the nature of words and on their conditions of individuation, nor on the nature of articulations and on their conditions of individuation (e.g., whether utterances are best construed as strings of articulatory events, as oscillations of pressure in an elastic medium, or as perceptual objects). Nor is it on the nature of the relation connecting words and articulations (whether that is best defined in terms of classic type-token talk or as instantiation, exemplification, class-membership, or what have you). Rather, our focus is on the conditions of individuation of the relationship between articulations and words, i.e., on the facts one should observe in order to determine which words

are articulated by a given utterance or a given inscription, and thereby establish what individual, word-sized utterances and inscriptions are articulations *of*.

Our plan for this paper runs in *five* main steps. First, we present two allegedly mutually exclusive answers to the issue of establishing the conditions of individuation of the relationship between articulations and words: Kaplan's (1990, 2011) *common currency conception* and Cappelen's (1999) *conventionalism*. Second, we test these two allegedly incompatible answers and argue that they are in fact compatible: they are both viable ways of specifying the facts one should observe in order to determine which words are articulated by a given utterance or a given inscription. Third, we lay out and defend a pluralist solution to question (6): contra the received understanding, there is more than one appropriate methodology for spelling out what articulations are articulations *of*, even when the methodologies at stake produce distinct and apparently rival diagnoses of what word is articulated by a given utterance or inscription. Our main claim, inspired by the varieties of pluralism defended in neighboring philosophical provinces (most notably, species pluralism in the philosophy of biology; e.g., Ereshefsky 2002), will be that spelling out the conditions of individuation of the relationship between articulations and words is a domain-sensitive task which admits a plurality of correct answers, relative to different explanatory goals. Fourth, we show that by embracing the pluralist position, one is able to account in an effective way for malapropisms, mispronunciations, spoonerisms, typos, speech impairments, effects of iconic articulation (e.g., "The presentation was looooong"), functional double entendres (a single utterance of /ˈfaɪn/ used to simultaneously convey the adverb 'fine' and the adjective 'fine'), and neighboring linguistic phenomena. Finally, we illustrate some simple strictures on the range of positions and alternative diagnoses of problematic cases that are accepted by our pluralist view.

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