

Words as Communicative Tools – A Functionalist Account of Word Individuation

Herman Cappelen divides metaphysical theories of words into intentional and non-intentional. A theory of words is intentional, if it holds that for an entity (a material object, event etc.) to be a token of a word it is either necessary or sufficient that its producer was in a certain intentional state at the production time (Cappelen 1999: 92). Non-intentional theories would be those that deny such a condition. Among the most influential non-intentional theories are standard Peircean Type-Token Model (implicit in works e.g. Ramsey 1923, Quine 1982, also analyzed in Wetzel 2009: 53-72) and Cappelen's own „conventional” theory, while the main proponent of intentionalism is David Kaplan (1990, 2011). In our talk we want to argue in favor of intentionalism and present a form of it differing in a few key respect from Kaplan's account. We believe that this form has an independent philosophical motivation in widely shared views on the nature of communication, as well as is immune from the counterarguments presented against Kaplan's theory.

As our first point, we will argue that non-intentional theories cannot be reconciled with a Standard Picture of Communication (SPC), which we take to be prevalent in philosophical analysis of language. According to this picture, communication is a process of production and interpretation of messages composed of sign tokens by linguistic agents in order to provide or gain access to each other's mental states. Interpretation of the message by the receiver rests, within this view, purely on the right recognition and understanding of the signs produced by the sender.

Consider, for example, the following sentence:

(*), „Yesterday I saw three beautiful cranes”.

Notice that this sentence has two different interpretations:

(*1) „Yesterday I saw three beautiful cranes [birds]”.

(*2) „Yesterday I saw three beautiful cranes [construction equipment]”

Suppose, that neither an external context of the utterance of (*) nor a discourse in which it appears specify which one of those interpretations is true (e.g. it may be the first sentence written via on-line communicator in the conversation of two strangers). Then the only way for the interpreter to specify the context in order to properly interpret this sentence is to ask the speaker: „Did you mean a bird or a construction equipment?”, which is a question about the speaker's

intention. We believe that such question in fact concerns the syntactical properties of (*) in order to sustain the SPC. Under the non-intentionalist view, the question of which of the sentences – (*1) or (*2) – was uttered is not decidable. Hence, the interpretation of it cannot be determined according to SPC. Basing on Kaplan's (1990) analysis of individual, historical or regional differences in spelling and pronunciation of words (especially on the matter of intrinsically indistinguishable, though intuitively essentially different articulations), we take this objection to be easily extendable on the variety of cases. Among others, this problem can be articulated within the discussion concerning proper names with several bearers (see: Fiengo & May 2006). We will argue that in order to keep the SPC, we need an appeal to intention of the word-producer in our theory of word individuation.

We notice, however, that the intentional theory of words proposed by David Kaplan is susceptible to strong counterarguments. Kaplan holds that words are natural structures composed of articulations (in broad sense of the term) connected by speaker's intentions. The necessary and sufficient condition for two articulations to be articulations of the same word is that they were produced with an intention of using the very same word. But, as showed by Cappelen (1999: 94-95) and Hawthorne & Lepore (2011: 15-17) this view forces us to accept unintelligible articulations as tokens of words. If only the articulation was produced with a certain intention, we cannot exclude it from the set of tokens of a word – even if it is impossible for it to be recognized as such. Also, such articulations are troubling for Kaplan's metaphysical stance, since unintelligible articulations may still give birth to 'deviant chains' of uses of a word. By 'deviant chain' we mean a chain of articulations, which are normally associated with separate words – though still possibly connected *via* speaker's intention. Existence of such chains (as articulations of *one word*) is strongly counterintuitive and inconsistent with the word typology provided in descriptive linguistics.

Moreover, Kaplan's theory seems to entail the existence of 'private words'. One can introduce the word without saying or writing it down. There are no external conditions that an articulation (even an inner articulation) must satisfy to become a token of a word – the intention of the utterer is the only thing that matters. We believe, that 'private words', like 'private languages', are sensitive to classical arguments presented in (Wittgenstein 1953) and (Kripke 1982). Both of these objections show, that Kaplan's theory cannot satisfy Bromberger's Desiderata (Bromberger 2011: 503) which expects a correct theory of words to explain what are the truth makers of linguistic facts, since it allows communicatively infertile articulations (which cannot be reasonably thought of as parts of natural language) to be word tokens.

In order to both give a plausible account of communication with accordance to SPC and maintain Kaplan's naturalistic metaphysical framework, we believe that Kaplan's account should be severely revised. To meet this condition, in our view, words ought to be seen as tools for communication (similarly to the treatment of (Irmak 2018)) and differentiated accordingly to their

function in the communication process. We believe that this goal could be met by adding to the Kaplan's condition a possibility of truly ascribing to the sender by the receiver an intention to produce the very word. Such ascriptions should be possible to make with the use of diverse criteria or heuristics concerning word differentiation and recognition studied in cognitive psychology, such as syntactical frequency, similarity in shape or use of semantic clues. This additional condition allows receivers to accurately recognize the word, which is crucial in fulfilling its proper function as a communicative tool.

Such conditions are immune to the presented counterarguments against intentional theories of words, since they don't recognize communicatively infertile articulations ('private words' or unintelligible articulations) as word tokens, as well as don't allow 'deviant chains' of uses. In our talk we will elaborate further on the question of how such conditions may be useful in bringing together widely accepted views on communication, Kaplan's metaphysical framework for linguistic entities and satisfaction of Bromberger's Desiderata, making use of the formalism proposed in (Epstein 2009).

Maciej Głowacki & Maciej Tarnowski

Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw

References:

- Bromberger S. (2011), *What are words? Comments on Kaplan (1990), on Hawthorne and Lepore, and on the issue*, "The Journal of Philosophy", Vol. 108, No. 9: 486-503
- Cappelen H. (1999), *Intentions in Words*, „Nous”, Vol. 33, No. 1, p. 92–102.
- Epstein B. (2009), *Grounds, Convention, and the Metaphysics of Linguistic Tokens*, "Croatian Journal of Philosophy" Vol. 9, No. 25, p. 1-33.
- Fiengo R., May R. (2006), *De Lingua Belief*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Hawthorne J., Lepore E. (2011), *On words*, „The Journal of Philosophy”, Vol. 108, No. 9, p. 447-485.
- Irmak N. (2018), *Ontology of words*, "Erkenntnis" (forthcoming).
- Kaplan D. (2011), *Words on words*, „The Journal of Philosophy”, Vol. 108, No. 9, p. 504-529
- Kaplan D. (1990), *Words*, „Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society”, Supplementary Volumes, Vol. 64 (1990), p. 93-119
- Kripke (1982), *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.
- Quine W. V. O. (1982), *Mathematical Logic*, Cambridge M.A.: Harvard University Press.

Ramsey F. (1923), *Critical Notice on Wittgenstein's Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, "Mind", 1923, p. 465-478

Wetzel L. (2009), *Types and tokens: on abstract objects*, Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press.

Wittgenstein L. (1953), *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.