
Amsterdam Graduate Philosophy Conference
— Meaning and Truth —
Amsterdam, October 1–3, 2009

Book of Abstracts

Department of Philosophy/ILLC
Universiteit van Amsterdam

CONFERENCE THEME:
MEANING & TRUTH

The conference is dedicated to exploring new ideas on what has been and remains a fundamental theme in the philosophy of language, namely, the relation between meaning and truth. We invite papers from researchers who have an original contribution to make regarding the role of truth in a theory of meaning, the role of meaning in a theory of truth, or even the question of whether meaning and truth are actually related in an interesting way.

The conference is motivated by the ongoing debates and discussions that pose new challenges on how to conceive of meaning and of truth, and the relation between them. Some areas of interest here include: truth-functional vs. proof-theoretic semantics; semantic theories of truth; the role of context in interpretation; semantic normativity; deflationism; meaning as use; inferentialism; compositionality; vagueness; the semantics-pragmatics interface; language evolution.

KEYNOTE TALKS

Kathrin Glüer-Pagin (Stockholm)

Alex Miller (Birmingham)

Peter Pagin (Stockholm)

François Recanati (Paris / St Andrews)

Martin Stokhof (Amsterdam)

CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

Organising Committee

The Amsterdam Graduate Philosophy Conference is organised by the Department of Philosophy and the Institute for Logic, Language and Computation of the Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Organizers

The organisers are Dora Achourioti, Edgar Andrade, and Marc Staudacher.

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The conference organisers have consulted: Dr. Maria Aloni, Dr. Paul Dekker, Dr. Catarina Dutilh Novaes, Prof. Dr. Jeroen Groenendijk, Prof. Dr. Wolfram Hinzen, Prof. Dr. Michiel van Lambalgen, Dr. Benedikt Löwe, Dr. Robert van Rooij, Prof. Dr. Martin Stokhof, and Prof. Dr. Frank Veltman.

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The conference organisers appreciate and acknowledge local support on finances and administration from the ILLC buro, in particular from Peter van Ormondt, Ingrid van Loon, Tanja Tanja Kassenaar and Marco Vervoort.

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Thursday, October 1st

09:00–10:00	Welcome and Registration
10:00–10:15	Opening Note of the Conference Committee

Morning Session — Chair: Marc Staudacher

10:15–11:15	Keynote Speech Martin Stokhof	Title: <i>Abstraction and Construction</i>
11:15–11:30	Coffee Break	
11:30–12:10	Graduate Talk David Ripley	Title: <i>Contradiction at the Borders</i> Commentator: Robert van Rooij
12:15–12:55	Graduate Talk Carlos Márquez David Rey	Title: <i>Do we still need compositionality in a contextualist framework?</i> <i>Some remarks on Recanati's contextualism</i> Commentator: Maria Aloni
13:00–15:00	Lunch	

Afternoon Session — Chair: Angelika Port

15:00–15:40	Graduate Talk David Löwenstein	Title: <i>Anaphoric Deflationism and Theories of Meaning</i> Commentator: David Hunter
15:40–16:00	Coffee Break	
16:00–17:00	Keynote Speech Kathrin Glüer-Pagin	Title: <i>Empty Names in Switcher Semantics</i>
17:00–18:30	Opening Reception	

Friday, October 2nd

Morning Session — Chair: Dora Achourioti

10:00–10:40	Graduate Talk Julien Murzi	Title: <i>Carnap's categoricity problem and the meaning of the logical constants</i> Commentator: Dick de Jongh
10:45–11:25	Graduate Talk Stefan Wintein	Title: <i>The computational power of self-referential truth</i> Commentator: Frank Veltman
11:30–12:10	Graduate Talk Florian Demont	Title: <i>Against Crude Semantic Realism</i> Commentator: Martin Stokhof
12:10–14:15	Lunch	

Afternoon Session — Chair: Michael Franke

14:15–14:55	Graduate Talk Dan Cristian Zeman	Title: <i>Meteorological Sentences, Unarticulated Constituents and Relativism</i> Commentator: Katrin Schultz
15:00–15:40	Graduate Talk Craig French	Title: <i>Is Simplicity of a Theory of Meaning an Alethic Virtue?</i> Commentator: Catarina Dutilh Novaes
15:40–16:00	Coffee Break	
16:00–17:00	Keynote Speech Alexander Miller	Title: <i>Meaning, Truth-Conditions and Kripke's Wittgenstein</i>
17:00–18:30	Conference Boat Trip	

Saturday, October 3rd

Morning Session — Chair: Lucian Zagan

10:15–11:15	Keynote Speech Peter Pagin	Title: <i>Assertion and Actuality</i>
11:15–11:30	Coffee Break	
11:30–12:10	Graduate Talk Markus Kneer	Title: <i>Meaning Hidden under the Surface</i> Commentator: Robert van Rooij
12:15–12:55	Graduate Talk Miguel Hoeltje	Title: <i>Truth, Meaning, Triviality?</i> Commentator: Paul Dekker
13:00–15:00	Lunch	

Afternoon Session — Chair: Edgar Andrade

15:00–15:40	Graduate Talk Meredith Plug	Title: <i>HOT theories of thought, autistic speakers and the concept of truth and falsity</i> Commentator: Michiel van Lambalgen
15:40–16:00	Coffee Break	
16:00–17:00	Keynote Speech François Recanati	Title: <i>Varieties of Contextualism</i>
19:00–22:00	Conference Dinner	

Empty Names in Switcher Semantics

Kathrin Glüer-Pagin
University of Stockholm

In ‘Proper Names and Relational Modality’ (2006), Peter Pagin and I have suggested what we call a ‘switcher semantics’ for (non-empty) proper names and modal operators. This semantics allows proper names to have descriptive content while at the same time accounting for their behavior in modal contexts. Its basic idea consists in using two different semantic evaluation functions, and construing intensional operators as evaluation switchers. In this paper, I extend switcher semantics to empty names.

Meaning, Truth-Conditions and Kripke’s Wittgenstein

Alex Miller
University of Birmingham

Following the publication of Saul Kripke’s *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, the most influential commentators (e.g. Paul Boghossian, Crispin Wright, and Colin McGinn) took Kripke’s Wittgenstein to be advocating a non-factualist view of ascriptions of meaning: Kripke’s Wittgenstein, it was held, was advocating a view on which ascriptions of truth-conditions do not themselves possess truth-conditions. In recent years, a number of philosophers—in particular, David Davies and George Wilson—have argued that the non-factualist interpretation of Kripke’s Wittgenstein is mistaken. Instead, Kripke’s Wittgenstein is taken to be proposing a form of factualism about ascriptions of meaning on which there is no attempt to deny that ascriptions of truth-conditions are themselves truth-conditional. In this paper I will focus on Wilson, and will argue against Wilson’s factualist interpretation, on the grounds that—whether or not it is yoked to a minimalist account of truth-aptitude—it is either prey to the Sceptical Paradox which Kripke’s Wittgenstein is attempting to defuse, or at odds with Kripke’s Wittgenstein’s dialectical commitments. I grant, though, that some of Wilson’s criticisms of the non-factualist interpretation are plausible, but—time-permitting—I’ll suggest a non-factualist interpretation that avoids those criticisms.

Assertion and Actuality

Peter Pagin
University of Stockholm

Intuitions about cross-world disagreement suggest that assertions are /concerned/ with the actual world in the sense not captured by their propositional content. It seems hard to characterize this in terms of content at all. An alternative is to say that the concerning derives from the force of the utterance. How come force has this role? And why the actual world? Answers to these questions are suggested.

Varieties of Contextualism

François Recanati
CNRS in Paris and University of St. Andrews

In this talk, I will enquire into how we can define ‘contextualism’ as a general position (or family of positions) in the philosophy of language. Contextualism, I will suggest, is the view according to which context-sensitivity generalizes. What this means exactly will be the topic of the talk. I will distinguish three varieties of contextualism: methodological contextualism, modulation-based contextualism, and radical contextualism. In each case I will ask whether contextualism, thus characterized, threatens the project of constructing a systematic semantics for natural language, and I will argue that it doesn’t really.

Abstraction and Construction

Martin Stokhof
University of Amsterdam

The talk takes another look at the ways in which abstraction enters into the construction of core concepts in linguistics, such as language, competence, meaning, and communication. It compares how abstraction functions in linguistics with the role it plays in other sciences. It suggests that there are a number of differences, some which may be due to the nature of the phenomena that are being studied. Some tentative consequences for the status of core concepts and for methodology will be outlined.

Against Crude Semantic Realism

Florian Demont

King's College London and University of Zurich

A common way of spelling out a factualist conception of meaning, what appears to be the canonical option, is Semantic Realism. I shall not discuss Semantic Realism in general, but a crude version of it, one that holds that there is 1) exactly one relation between proper names and objects (the word-bearer relation), 2) that this relation is paradigmatic for semantics, and 3) that the relation is not normative, i.e. does not entail what one should say if it holds. According to this view, the prime fact about meaning is the word-bearer relation which Frege had introduced for complete expressions minus a specific conception of linguistic normativity that often goes together with it. In the first section, Semantic Realism and linguistic normativity will be introduced. Crude Semantic Realism will then be explained as a departure from these specific notions. The second section will present linguistic considerations against it. The third section will present philosophical considerations which attempt to show that Crude Semantic Realism cannot fully explain the fundamental character of meaning.

Is Simplicity of a Theory of Meaning an Alethic Virtue?

Craig French

University College London

Crispin Wright suggests that by taking simplicity as alethic in the context of Quinean scepticism about meaning we can secure determinacy of meaning. I examine and elaborate Wright's response. I argue that it is flawed in such a way that we should doubt the plausibility of simplicity moves in similar contexts.

Truth, Meaning, Triviality?

Miguel Hoeltje

Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

Proponents of truth theoretic semantics claim (minimally) that a truth theory for a language must play an important part in a meaning theory for that language. But forcing natural languages into the tight corset of truth theories requires technical ingenuity and frequently results in treating

apparently simple sentences by sophisticated constructions. Hence, the project of truth theoretic semantics seems to lend support to what I will call the Discovery Claim:

Many sentences of natural languages have semantic structures that differ significantly from their apparent surface structures. Such semantic structures are uncovered by giving a meaning theory for the language in question and in particular by the truth theoretic component of that theory.

Stock case examples include the treatment of event sentences by imposing a quantificational structure invisible at the surface level, or the so-called paratactic account of intensional constructions such as 'says that'. If we must be able to give meaning theories and if we cannot give meaning theories without imposing significant deviations from surface form, then there seems to be something real and important about these 'uncovered' structures.

My aim in this paper is to cast doubt on this familiar picture. In particular, I want to call attention to the following fact: Since truth theories are not themselves meaning theories, there is the need to bridge the gap between a truth theory for a language and a genuine meaning theory for that language. Recent proposals can be understood as attempts to close this gap by adding a non-standard rule of inference to a truth theory or by construing a meaning theory for a language as a theory about a truth theory for that language, where the meaning theory states that the move from certain truth theoretic theorems to explicit meaning specifications is legitimate. However, pursuing this path from truth to meaning threatens to lead to triviality. For there seems to be a natural way of extending these proposals which makes it very easy to give meaning theories without imposing any significant deviation from the surface form of object language constructions. The fact that such theories don't shed much light on their object-languages calls the current trend into question. For, these 'easy theories' are so close in spirit to the current proposals that it seems unclear how to oppose one without opposing the other. On the other hand, abandoning the current trend leaves truth theoretic semantics with an unsolved problem at its very foundation: How are we supposed to close the gap between a truth theory for a language and a meaning theory for it?

Meaning Hidden under the Surface

Markus Kneer

Institut Nicod, Paris

Semantic minimalists hold that literal meaning is entirely independent of context. Some contextualists contend that such a clear-cut distinc-

tion between literal meaning and “what is said” (communicated content) cannot be drawn. In certain cases, they hold, sentences can only express a truth-evaluable proposition if contextual features are taken into consideration. While minimalism has successfully managed to accommodate indexicals and demonstratives, a more recent challenge from the contextualist repertoire has proven more troublesome, namely “unarticulated constituents.”

Unarticulated constituents are propositional elements which do not figure explicitly in the surface structure of a sentence, but whose presence is nonetheless required for it to convey a truth-evaluable proposition. A classic example is the location-unspecific utterance “It’s raining” which, according to John Perry, only expresses a proposition if context supplies a specific place at which the event is to occur. This essay focuses on the groundwork necessary to draw conclusions in the larger debate between minimalists and contextualists, namely evidence for the existence of unarticulated constituents. I will survey a variety of arguments against Perry’s position and attempt to refute them. Moreover I will propose some methodological revisions aimed to increase the use-value of imagined contexts in semantic analysis in general.

Anaphoric Deflationism and Theories of Meaning

David Löwenstein
Freie Universität Berlin

It is widely held that truth and reference play an indispensable explanatory role in theories of meaning. By contrast, so-called deflationists argue that the functions of these concepts are merely expressive and never explanatory. Robert Brandom (1994) has proposed both a variety of deflationism, the anaphoric theory, and a theory of meaning which doesn’t rely on truth or reference, inferentialism. He argues that the anaphoric theory counts against his (chiefly referentialist) rivals in the debate on meaning and thereby paves the way for inferentialism.

I give a friendly reconstruction of the anaphoric theory and its status as a variety of deflationism as opposed to its substantivist rivals. Then, I point to its most radically deflationary claim that truth and reference talk involve anaphoric operators as opposed to predicates. While this distinction is crucial for the anaphoric theory in general and for its metaphysical neutrality in particular, I show that Brandom hasn’t fully earned it. However, I propose a friendly extension of his theory which can fill this gap.

Further, I join Mark Lance (1997) in arguing that even if the anaphoric theory holds, substantial accounts of truth and reference can be maintained.

But contrary to Lance’s claims, I show that this doesn’t come for free. It requires giving away the semantics of ordinary language truth and reference talk to the anaphoric theorist. Nevertheless, Lance is right in claiming that the core of the substantivist position remains untouched. Among other things, this implies that the anaphoric theory is entirely neutral on theories of meaning. Chiefly, the debate between referentialism and inferentialism is independent from this deflationist proposal. Thus, neither is Brandom entitled to argue from the anaphoric theory against referentialist and other substantivist explanations of meaning. Nor is it possible to argue from a variety of substantivism such as referentialism against the anaphoric theory.

I conclude that the disagreement about how to account for truth and reference talk in ordinary language remains the only disagreement between proponents of the anaphoric theory and their substantivist rivals.

Do we still need compositionality in a contextualist framework? Some Remarks on Recanati’s Contextualism

Carlos Márquez and David Rey
Universidad Nacional de Colombia

The topic of this paper is the relation between compositionality and context-sensitivity. Our aim is to criticize a recent proposal, due to François Recanati, about how these phenomena can be reconciled. In section 1 we describe the conflict between two traditions in the philosophy of language: semanticism and contextualism. The truth-conditional conception of compositionality that we have inherited from the former tradition seems to conflict with the conception of context-sensitivity proposed by the supporters of the latter tradition. Semanticist philosophers have established a profound connection between truth and meaning based on the idea that theories of truth can reveal the compositional structure of languages. But contextualist philosophers have challenged the very assumption that truth-conditional contents are compositional.

In section 2 we present Recanati’s attempt to reconcile compositionality with contextualism, as it is developed in his paper “Compositionality, Flexibility, and Context-Dependence”. Recanati’s proposal is based on a two-step model of semantic interpretation in which obligatory pragmatic processes of saturation are combined with optional pragmatic processes of modulation. In section 3 we argue that this model is flawed because it presupposes that sub-sentential expressions have literal semantic values independently of the context of utterance. This assumption, in our view, is contrary to the spirit of contextualism. If we reject

it, we obtain a radical version of contextualism in which there is no room for literal meanings of primitive expressions understood as specific semantic values. Finally, we suggest that this outcome does not affect the core idea behind the Davidsonian program. Even though words only acquire truth-conditional contents in pragmatic contexts, traditional semantics can still be pursued as the study of logical form.

Carnap's categoricity problem and the meaning of the logical constants

Julien Murzi

*University of Sheffield and
University of St Andrews*

The paper focuses on an objection, first raised by Carnap, to so-called inferentialist approaches to the meanings of the logical constants. Inferentialists hold that the meanings of 'and', 'or', 'not' etc. are determined by the rules for their correct use. However, they seem to have overlooked two counterexamples to this claim: Carnap's discovery of non-normal valuations for negation and disjunction suggests that there is a very precise sense in which the standard rules for negation and disjunction fail to determine the intuitive meanings of, respectively, 'not' and 'or'. I argue that inferentialists, intuitionist and classicist alike, need not worry about the Carnap problem, and I offer, along the way, a harmonious formalisation of classical logic—one according to which the disagreement between the intuitionist and the classicist ultimately lies in their interpretation of disjunction, rather than negation.

HOT theories of thought, autistic speakers and the concept of truth and falsity

Meredith Plug

King's College London

In their 2003 article, Kathrin Glüer and Peter Pagin attack Higher-Order-Thought ("HOT") theories of meaning, such as the one offered by Paul Grice (Grice, 1989), by highlighting psychological research on a certain subset of autistic children: autistic children who have a high verbal mental age, as measured by standard vocabulary tests, and yet have trouble attributing thoughts to others (as measured by so-called "false-belief" tests). A HOT theory of meaning such as Grice's posits that in order to mean something with one's words (in order to assert something, for example), one has to attribute certain complicated beliefs to one's audience. These attributions seem outside the capability of those who can't pass false belief tests, it is

argued, and yet autistic children do seem to mean something with their words. Some have criticised Glüer and Pagin (Reboul, 2006) because data on the communicative abilities of autistic children is widely taken to be confirming Grice's account of linguistic communication (the theory of conversational maxims). Why, Reboul wonders, do Glüer and Pagin take the data to be disconfirming when it is widely taken to be confirming Grice's theory (this puzzlement is the basis on which Reboul build further arguments against Glüer and Pagin)? I will argue that Reboul's criticism (and further arguments) miss their mark because Glüer and Pagin attack Grice's theory of meaning, not his theory of communication—Reboul does not properly distinguish between the two. However, distinguishing properly between the two theories also highlights the connections that exist between Grice's theory of meaning and theory of communication, and then it becomes clear that the Gricean theory of meaning can't be refuted in the way Glüer and Pagin attempt to do, by simply referring to the high verbal mental age (based on vocabulary measures) of autistic children. Glüer and Pagin assume that a verbal mental age of between 8 and 10 years old, based on vocabulary measure alone (and considerations around language development), is proof of the capability of making the speech act of assertion (See also Pagin (2007)) but this is just something that Grice could deny, given the fact that autistic children have severe problems in communicating, and given his argument that assertions are essentially communicative, an argument which comes online before the analysis in terms of intentions which is under attack. In addition to referring to the psychological data, one needs to give a separate argument why the linguistic performance of autistic children counts as making assertions, among other speech acts. I will argue contra Grice (and Strawson and Recanati—and even Pagin (2004) takes assertion to involve an intention for a social effect, albeit that this intention does not determine the content of the assertion) that speech acts, especially the speech act of asserting, are not essentially communicative. To prove that speakers are making assertions it is sufficient (but probably not necessary) to prove that the representational character, the difference between a true sentence and a false sentence is understood (the speaker possesses the concept of objectivity)—which requires more than just applying the terms 'true' and 'false' correctly—and that the behaviour surrounding an utterance showed that the speaker had the intention to utter a sentence with a truth value (and not a mock sentence). To prove that a subset of autistic children have this ability before passing false belief tests requires looking into more than just vocabulary development. One has to look at

grammar development and other specific linguistic performance, all in relation to false belief test performance. I will briefly review this data and conclude that Grice's theory of meaning is indeed refuted by data on autistic children.

Contradictions at the Borders

David Ripley

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

The purpose of this essay is to shed some light on a certain type of sentence, which I call a borderline contradiction. A borderline contradiction is a sentence of the form "*Fa* and not *Fa*," for some vague predicate *F* and some borderline case *a* of *F*, or a sentence equivalent to such a sentence. For example, if Jackie is a borderline case of 'rich', then 'Jackie is rich and Jackie isn't rich' is a borderline contradiction. Many theories of vague language have entailments about borderline contradictions; correctly describing the behavior of borderline contradictions is one of the many tasks facing anyone offering a theory of vague language.

Here, I present and discuss an experiment intended to gather relevant data about the behavior of ordinary speakers, to see what explanations are available. I draw potential explanations from contextual, fuzzy, and dialethic theories of vagueness. My conclusions are necessarily tentative; I do not attempt to use the present experiment to demonstrate that any single theory is incontrovertibly true. Rather, I try to sketch the auxiliary hypotheses that would need to be conjoined to these theories of vague language to predict the present result.

In the end, I conclude that two of the theories I consider are better-positioned to account for the observed data than are the others. But the field of logically-informed research on people's actual responses to vague predicates is young; surely as more data come in we will learn a great deal more about which (if any) of these theories best accounts for the behavior of ordinary speakers.

The computational power of self-referential truth

Stefan Wintein

Tilburg University

There is no consensus as to whether a Liar sentence is meaningful or not. Still, a widespread conviction with respect to Liar sentences (and other ungrounded sentences) is that, whether or not they are meaningful, they are useless. The philosophical contribution of this paper is to show that this conviction is false. In order to do so, we define the notion of a query problem and show that an agent

equipped with self-referential resources (amongst which are Liar sentences) can solve query problems more efficiently than an agent with only classical resources. That is, we establish the computational power of self-referential truth.

Meteorological Sentences, Unarticulated Constituents and Relativism

Dan Cristian Zeman

LOGOS — University of Barcelona

My focus in the paper is on meteorological sentences such as "It is raining" as they are representative for the debate between literalism and contextualism in contemporary philosophy of language. In the first part I have a close look on two criteria for unarticulateness that have been proposed (Recanati's "Optionality Criterion" and Stanley's "Binding Criterion"), and point out that they overgeneralize. I then take issue with the main challenge to contextualism—that it cannot account for the so-called "bound readings"—and present Recanati's way of answering the challenge, by employing variadic functions. I conclude that in the debate between the two authors the dialectical advantage is on Recanati's side. In the second part I apply the machinery of variadic functions to other sentences, such as those comprising predicates of personal taste, epistemic modals or epistemic terms. The upshot is that variadic functions support (moderate) relativism for those domains.