Semantic Externalism, Language Variation, and Sociolinguistic Accommodation

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Abstract: Chomsky (1986) has claimed that the *prima facie* incompatibility between descriptive linguistics and semantic externalism proves that an externalist semantics is impossible. Although it is true that a strong form of externalism does not cohere with descriptive linguistics, sociolinguistic theory can unify the two approaches. The resulting two–level theory reconciles descriptivism, mentalism, and externalism by construing community languages as a function of social identification. This approach allows a fresh look at names and definite descriptions while also responding to Chomsky's (1993, 1995) challenge to articulate an externalist theory of meaning that can be used in the scientific investigation of language.

> *Nobody can be forbidden to use any arbitrarily*
> *producible event or object as a sign for something.*
> G. Frege, 'On Sense and Reference'

1. Semantic Individualism and Semantic Externalism

Semantic externalism is rejected by many linguists, as is well known, because it seems to conflict with the mentalist presuppositions of generative linguistics in the Chomskyan tradition: see Chomsky (1986, 1995, 2000) for extensive discussion. Even linguists who reject mentalism and generative linguistics, however, have occasionally objected to externalism on quite different grounds. Some of the mundane truths of philosophy of language seem to be in conflict with equally mundane truths of descriptive linguistics: in particular, descriptive linguists typically see variation and change as a ubiquitous part of language, while philosophers and formal semanticists, for the most part, view a language as a static object. Indeed, many philosophers adopt positions that make substantive predictions about how natural language should work in its everyday *use*, in particular those of an externalist persuasion, as I will show. However, insufficient

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attention has been paid to the issue of whether these predictions are borne out empirically.

The Chomskyan revolution has received much well deserved attention, but we do not need to assume his theoretical position in order to derive philosophically interesting results from linguistics. Rather, undeniable results of descriptive linguistics seem to militate against dominant trends in philosophy of language. Many linguists have taken these problems to indicate that we must choose between externalism and descriptivism, and this is generally taken to be a sufficient reason to prefer an individualist approach to language. I will argue that this is a false dichotomy, and that both sides have misconstrued the terms of the debate. Recent results of sociolinguistic theory, I will show, suggest a way to bridge the gap between individualist and externalist accounts of meaning and language in general without abandoning the basic commitments of either position.

The broad outlines of the debate are as follows. Individualists believe that the proper object of the scientific study of language is the language of an individual, his *idiolect* or, in Chomskyan terms, his *mental grammar, knowledge of language,* or *I-language*. Individualists typically believe that semantic notions such as reference and meaning are dependent on such individualistic facts. This does not necessarily mean that social aspects of language are unimportant or that they do not admit of a scientific description, though some individualists have made this further claim: cf. Chomsky (1975). However, most individualists do believe that only individualistic aspects of language can be formalized and used to make predictions (e.g. about entailment and grammaticality).

Semantic externalists, on the other hand, hold that a language belongs to a community of language users, and that common languages or *communalects* exist above and beyond individuals. According to this conception, a language has an ontology (e.g. words and grammatical rules, or social practices and/or conventions) and norms (standards of correctness) that are in some sense independent of the linguistic competence of individual speakers. In the words of Michael Dummett, an idiolect is merely 'a second–order theory: a partial, and partly incorrect, theory about what the meanings of the expressions are in the common language, that may be represented as a partial theory of what the correct theory of meaning for the language is' (1986, p. 469). As Dummett makes clear, it is possible for speakers to be simply *wrong* in their use of language because a language exists independently of its speakers. In contrast, under the individualist view, 'incorrect usage' is a murky social concept, usually a simple failure of communication or a *faux pas*.

The debate is important because the side we choose will determine where we locate crucial semantic notions such as reference, meaning, and truth. Intuitively, though, Dummett's approach makes sense: sometimes an individual's use of language is just *wrong*, and individuals often acknowledge making mistakes upon reflection or correction. Individualism simply cannot account convincingly for this fact.

Our discussion of these issues will rely on several works that have made this point clearly. For reasons of space I will merely summarize these well-known arguments of Wittgenstein, Putnam, Kripke, and Burge very briefly and will not attempt to argue for their conclusions in detail. I take them to show persuasively that we have strong intuitions of linguistic correctness that, like intuitions of grammaticality, are an important empirical bound on the construction of a complete theory of language. Whether or not this assessment is correct, I hope it will become clear even to the sceptical that externalism properly construed is not in competition with descriptivism or mentalism and should not be rejected on these grounds alone.

Wittgenstein argues in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) that rule-following and meaning cannot be explicated by mere description of what an individual is doing: to say that an individual is following a particular rule already presupposes community standards about *correct* application of the rule (though, unlike Wittgenstein, I see no reason why this could not be a community of one). Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1980) undermines the claim that reference depends on a speaker's knowledge; in Kripke's example, I could believe nothing but falsehoods about Gödel, and yet the name 'Gödel' would still refer to Gödel when I say it. Kripke argues instead that names are rigid designators and that the reference of a name is fixed by a causal chain leading to an initial baptism. Putnam's paper 'The Meaning of "Meaning"' (1975) uses the famous twin-Earth thought experiment to show that the reference of natural kind terms like 'water' is also insensitive to speakers' *knowledge* of reference. Putnam argues that their reference is fixed partly by environmental facts, in this case the *actual* chemical structure of water. Finally, Burge argues in 'Individualism and the Mental' (1979) that Putnam's argument, suitably modified, extends to all terms. Burge shows that, if a speaker of English were to believe that rheumatism is called 'arthritis' and that he has arthritis in his thigh, the latter belief would be false (since arthritis is an ailment of the joints), rather than being true-in-his-idiolect as a descriptive theory emphasizing *knowledge* of language would predict. Burge concludes that the meaning of 'arthritis' is fixed by the word's use in a community, whether or not an individual speaker happens to know how his community uses the word. So, it seems, individual knowledge is not sufficient to determine reference: environmental and sociohistorical facts are also relevant.[1]

To repeat, individualism faces a serious problem in accounting for these systematic intuitions about meaning.[2] However, the significance of the arguments

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[1] In what follows I am primarily interested in externalism about linguistic meaning, rather than externalism about mental content. Burge is primarily interested in mental content, as is much of the philosophical work that has followed his articles. However, this tradition focuses on the analysis of language, usually taking for granted that this method can elucidate questions about the nature of mind. I doubt that this line of research will turn out to be very illuminating about the nature of mind, but I will not discuss my reservations here.

for externalism has often been misconstrued. Individualists hold that an individual's language *just is* her idiolect; the arguments just mentioned show that this position is too strong. Environmental and sociohistorical facts *are* relevant to the determination of reference, but we have seen no reason to believe that these factors are sufficient for the purpose. A common approach (perhaps 'common' is too strong, since it is rarely made explicit and less often argued for) is to bite the bullet and hold that individualistic properties are in fact irrelevant to determining the character of the language. Idiolects, then, are of interest only to psychologists. Dummett's quote above exemplifies this claim: he takes 'the language' to be an external entity that is an object of knowledge for speakers—not like tables and chairs, to be sure, but like social objects such as burial customs or money, which individuals participate in but do not normally create. A different but related characterization is due to Lewis (1975, p. 6), who writes that the social aspects of language are mediated by the fact that 'a given language L is *used by,* or is a (or the) language of, a given population *P*'. Lewis takes for granted that there is such an object as the population *P* to be found (an extremely dubious assumption, as we will see). I will call this strong form of externalism *communitarianism* because it holds that a language is possessed jointly by a community and that the identity of an individual's language is *fully determined* by the community to which he belongs (note the analogy with communitarianism in political philosophy). Communitarianism implies that speech communities pre-exist individual speakers and are capable of determining a unique community language with or without their cooperation.[3]

The upshot of semantic externalism is that there may be a difference between an individual's language and what she *thinks* her language is: there must be some place for normativity of meaning. This clearly falls short of establishing

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[2]   It is not sufficient to reject this normativity as uninteresting, as Chomsky and Davidson do. For example Davidson (2005, p. 121): 'I am not impressed by Michael [Dummett]'s or Burge's or Putnam's insistence that words have a meaning of which both speaker and hearer are ignorant. I don't doubt that we say this, and it's fairly clear what we have in mind: speaker and hearer are ignorant of what would be found in some dictionary, or of how people with a better or different education or a higher income use the words. This is still meaning based on successful communication, but it imports into the theory of meaning an elitist norm by implying that people not in the right social swim don't know what they mean'. In many cases Davidson's comments are very much to the point, but we cannot explain all the externalist arguments as relying subtly on elitism. First, speakers often impose norms on themselves. Second, it is easy to imagine—or indeed locate—situations in which the 'correct' usage is not included in dictionaries or prescriptive grammars, or is associated with groups outside the elite. Third, our intuitions about linguistic correctness display a systematicity closely akin to the grammaticality intuitions of theoretical linguistics. Many linguists think, as I once did, that externalism is no more than a philosophical justification for linguistic chauvinism. My task, then, is to outline a theoretically interesting position that accounts for the subtleties of the intuitive, pre-theoretical notion of correctness.

[3]   A communitarian can, of course, hold that individualistic properties are relevant to determining *which* language is being spoken. Lewis seems to hold this position.

communitarianism, yet many externalists rely heavily on an unanalyzed notion of a linguistic community, effectively making this leap without argument. It is true that communitarianism gives a simple account of the normativity of meaning and the possibility of error, and we might prefer it as the best available explanation of externalism for this reason. However, as the next section will show, communitarianism is fatally incompatible with basic descriptive facts of human language. Details of this failure point toward a new form of externalism that is compatible with the insights of semantic individualism, which I will develop in Section 3. I argue that communalects are neither functions of individual *knowledge* nor monolithic objects somehow possessed by a community, but are determined instead by individuals' sociolinguistic dispositions. If this is that case, neither the individual nor the social level of language can be ignored in semantics (or in other areas of language, I believe). Rather, a theory of human language that respects the empirical facts must connect the descriptive and the normative in an illuminating way without disposing of either.

2. Communitarianism and Descriptive Linguistics

Communitarians often downplay or ignore problems relating to language variation and change. It is easy to see why: if languages exist apart from the linguistic competence of individuals, only two analyses of linguistic difference seem to be available—either one or both of the speakers does not know how to use the language correctly, or they are speaking different languages.[4] In either case, the interesting questions about variation are not about individuals, but about languages as the joint property of a community. Once we have given content to the notion of a 'speech community', then, variation *within* the community can be neatly dismissed as incomplete knowledge of the language. But this tactic leads us quickly into trouble, for it is extremely difficult to give a descriptively adequate account of speech communities.

2.1 Individuating Languages

Our ordinary conception of language seems at first to be unproblematic: usually it seems clear whether two people speak the same language. However, the obviousness of this fact to well-educated speakers of modern English does not apply to human language in general. To see this, we need to distinguish two meanings of the term 'language'. The first is political: a language such as English or Urdu is defined

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[4] If we want, we can call this 'speaking different dialects' or 'belonging to different speech communities'. The terminological difference does not matter as long as it is clear that the only way for communitarians to avoid analyzing variation as incorrect usage is to invoke distinct *non-individualistic* standards.

primarily as the speech of a certain community of people, often corresponding roughly to political boundaries. The second notion of 'language' involves *mutual intelligibility*. These two concepts do not coincide, and only the second has any real interest for philosophers and formal linguists. For instance, standard Swedish and standard Norwegian are mostly mutually intelligible, but some dialects of Swedish are not. Such situations are commonplace throughout the world; as a result, politically defined languages are not useful for the externalist.

The mutual intelligibility standard is a more promising way to individuate languages: two people speak the same language if and only if they can communicate successfully. An immediate problem is that successful communication is graded and relative to communicative purposes. In addition, mutual intelligibility is not transitive. There was presumably an unbroken chain of generations between my distant ancestors and me such that each generation could speak to its parents and to its children, and yet it would be absurd to say that I speak the same language as my distant ancestors. Clearly, then, there is no natural break in the history of English that is sufficient to distinguish community languages.

Synchronic linguistic variation is often gradual as well, although the facts are less familiar. Although sharp boundaries between languages sometimes exist due to geographical or sociopolitical boundaries, in their absence language tends to vary gradually over geographical and sociopolitical space, simply because people usually talk more like people they have contact with and less like those they have little or no contact with. In highly developed and/or recently settled countries this can lead to a high degree of linguistic homogeneity across vast geographical areas. However, in less developed countries with poor communication and transport there is usually far more linguistic variation: for instance, with roughly the area of California or New Zealand, New Guinea has perhaps 1000 languages (or more or fewer, depending on your preferred criteria of individuation). An interesting effect of these sociological facts is the existence of *dialect continua*:

> …[S]harp divisions are rare … . They normally occur only where there is a geographical or sociopolitical barrier of such proportions that it severely restricts communication between subregions. Otherwise, there is likely to be a single complex of communalects which extends over the entire language area. Any one communalect will share a few special features with its neighbors to one side, and a few with those on other sides. No large clearly demarcated dialect regions will be found. Often communalects spoken at different ends of a dialect chain may exhibit considerable differences—they may even be mutually unintelligible—but there will exist intermediate transitional communalects which are mutually intelligible with both extremes (Pawley, 1970, p. 3).

An extreme example of this phenomenon is found among the Indo–Aryan languages of the Indian subcontinent, where '[t]he speech of each village differs slightly from the next, without loss of mutual intelligibility, all the way from

Assam to Afghanistan' (Masica, 1991, p. 25). This vast area—millions of square kilometres—has hundreds of millions of Indo-Aryan speakers who use hundreds of mutually unintelligible forms of speech.

The existence of dialect continua shows clearly that mutual intelligibility is not sufficient to individuate speech communities. Mutual intelligibility is graded and intransitive, and language variation and change do not proceed smoothly or along well-defined boundaries. If we were to locate an individual at an arbitrary point on the map of the Indo-Aryan, Germanic, Fijian, Scandinavian, or Romance dialect continua, the fact that he shares some feature with certain other individuals in no way entails that he will share *any* other linguistic feature with the same individuals. All we can say is that he will probably share some linguistic features with them, and how much is shared will be determined by complex sociological and historical facts. It would be extremely presumptuous to divide groups of speakers so related into speech communities capable of sustaining the normative notions of meaning and reference.

It is worth pausing here to be clear about the precise nature of the problem. Several people have pointed out to me that communitarians seem to be in the same position as many investigators with regard to their subject matter: psychologists, for example, investigate memory without a precise definition of which mental processes constitute memory, and biologists make good use of the species concept despite its well-known problems and exceptions.[5] Why, then, is the impossibility of precise definition of speech communities damning for communitarians, as I claim? The basic problem is that (as Aristotle emphasizes in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, ch. 3) different subjects require different levels of precision. The concept of a language is perfectly workable for describing clusters of speakers whose speech is roughly similar: indeed, I have freely made use of labels such as 'English' and 'Norwegian' throughout this essay, and this vague conception of a community language is indispensable for language description.

Semantics, however, requires a much greater level of precision than these areas of inquiry. To see this, consider the discussion of the notion 'species' by the biologist Edward O. Wilson, a prominent defender of the use of this concept in biology:

> Searching for an anchor, willing to compromise in order to find some process shared by a large fraction of organisms, biologists keep returning to the biological-species concept. In spite of its difficulties, regardless of the fact that it can never be employed as an abstract entity like the electron to make exact quantitative calculations, the concept is likely to continue to hold center stage for the simple reason that it works well enough in enough studies on most kins of organisms, most of the time (Wilson, 1999, p. 49).

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[5] Thanks to Charles Pigden and an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing the need for this clarification.

The vague concept of a language that is possible in light of the empirical facts of language resembles the species concept in many respects. (Actually, languages display fewer and much less clear lines of demarcation than species, since languages mix quite freely while species are, by definition, incapable of interbreeding.) However, a language concept that is similar to the species concept Wilson envisions is not useable in semantics precisely because 'it can never be employed as an abstract entity like the electron to make *exact quantitative calculations*'. The entire point of semantics, as I understand it, is to be able to make exact quantitative calculations. Truth, reference, and truth–preserving inference make sense only if the subject matter, the language, is articulated in a precise fashion.

I conclude, therefore, that in light of the sociological and dialectological facts of human language, terms such as 'language', 'dialect' and 'speech community' cannot be defined precisely without doing violence to the empirical facts of human language. We must, as virtually everyone in linguistics has concluded, 'give up any attempt to find objective and absolute criteria for defining speech communities' (Hudson, 2001, p. 69). We should reject communitarianism first of all because it predicts that speech communities should be real objects in the world, but we have found absolutely no evidence that this empirical prediction is borne out. More to the point, though, a communitarian semantics is doomed because the things closest to speech communities in the real world are incapable of supporting the basic concepts of semantics.

To be sure, communitarianism has an initial plausibility, so much so that many thinkers assume it uncritically. The real reason for this plausibility, I think, is that most analytic philosophers are native speakers of one of the standardized languages of developed countries. But such highly 'focused' languages are not natural or representative of human language in general. Many communities are linguistically 'diffuse', and in such communities 'speakers may have no clear idea about what language they are speaking; and what does and does not constitute the language will be perceived as an issue of no great importance' (Trudgill, 1986, pp. 85-6). A semantic theory must account not just for the languages of privileged groups with writing systems, dictionaries and grammars, but for human language in general: to do otherwise would be to embrace an unjustifiable elitism. Furthermore, the fact that we often use 'speech community' and 'language' in a way that seems to suggest that these terms refer to discrete objects in the world is irrelevant, for the mere fact that a concept occurs in ordinary thinking about a subject in no way guarantees that it will appear in a scientific explanation. Given the chaotic nature of variation and change in human language, I believe, any formal theory of meaning that relies on the claim that 'shared languages' or 'speech communities' are something given in the world is hopeless.

2.2 A Problem about Semantic Change
In order to construct an externalist theory of language that avoids the pitfalls of communitarianism, we must look closely at another descriptive failure of the

theory. Semantic change is acknowledged as a difficulty for externalism already by Kripke in *Naming and Necessity* (1980), who mentions that he has no account for what he calls 'reference shift' except to stipulate that sometimes 'present intention to refer to a given entity (or to refer fictionally) overrides the original intention to preserve reference in the historical chain of transmission' (p. 163). This is supposed to explain how 'Indians' refers to Native Americans, for instance, and how 'Madagascar' refers to an island off the coast of Africa: both names originated in geographical errors made by European explorers, so that the actual causal source of the name is not its referent in modern English. But Kripke's account is in conflict with his thesis that 'it is not how the speaker thinks he got the reference, but the actual chain of communication, which is relevant' (p. 93).[6]

An externalist account of language change must address three separate questions. (i) How does speech behaviour change over time and between individuals? (ii) How do linguistic norms change? (iii) What is the connection between changes in individual speech behaviour and changes in linguistic norms? (ii) and (iii) are crucial in a complete philosophical account of language, but communitarianism is unable to answer them convincingly. The problem is not that communitarianism rules out change, but rather that, without any specific story about the relationship between individual use and the nature of communalects, a communitarian account of language change amounts to hand-waving.

Let's return to Burge's (1979) patient who thinks that he has arthritis in his thigh; we'll call him 'Jim'. Jim does not know that arthritis is defined as an ailment of the joints, and has formed a theory about the meaning of 'arthritis' that does not match his community's usage. Now suppose Jim tells his wife that he has arthritis in his thigh. She believes him and also forms an incorrect theory of the meaning of 'arthritis'. Add Jim's children and neighbours to the equation, and we can easily imagine how Jim's entire neighbourhood might begin to use the term 'arthritis' to refer to both arthritis and rheumatism. This process could be stopped if someone were to consult a dictionary or a doctor, but suppose for the sake of argument that no one does.

Changes of this sort—reanalyses and other sorts of mistakes diffusing through a community—are a primary mechanism of language change, accumulating slowly to the point of mutual unintelligibility and beyond. Language change relies crucially on mistakes made by individuals, and just as crucially on other speakers adopting mistaken usages. For example, the English word *bead* is derived from Old English *bed*, which meant 'prayer'. This change seems bizarre until we consider the social context:

> Prayers were, as now, often recited while being counted on rosary beads, and a phrase like *to count* (or *tell*) *one's beads* had at least two possible interpretations

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6   Kripke himself did not intend to divorce reference from speakers' intentions, but his theory is often invoked in an effort to do just this.

for someone who did not already know what was meant by *bead*: it could conceivably refer to the prayers that were being counted, or the beads (in the modern sense) that were being used for the counting. Some speakers apparently interpreted the meaning of *bead* as 'perforated ball on a string' (Fortson, 2003, p. 651).

This reanalysis, though very much a mistake when it was made, is now correct in English; indeed, it would be incorrect to use *bead* to mean 'prayer'. Somehow, one or more speakers or learners of English made a mistake which went uncorrected, and the mistake spread until, somehow, it became *the* correct usage.[7]

On the communitarian theory, though, an individual's actual use of language and her linguistic dispositions are irrelevant to the meaning of her words: only the 'sociolinguistic state of the collective body' matters (Putnam, 1975, p. 229). Thus Jim's use of 'arthritis' is incorrect; if his wife thinks he has arthritis in his thigh, she is wrong as well; add a third person and he is wrong; and so on. Yet this sort of slow diffusion of mistakes through a population is, in fact, how language change takes place. Only when we try to ask the obvious question—How does incorrect usage snowball into correct usage?—does it become apparent how little communitarianism explains about the relationship between individual speech and community language. The usual response is that 'the usage of a community can change'; but the community is not a well-defined object, as we saw in the previous section. Likewise, the slow metamorphosis of mistakes into correct usages does not mesh nicely with the well-defined notions of meaning, reference, and truth that many of us hold dear. We should not allow lightly that a particular use can be partly correct, or that a sentence containing a contested term can be sort-of-true, as we would seem to if heterogeneous usage in a poorly defined linguistic body determines reference.

Communitarians have several options here. One is to allow that communication is divorced from reference: speakers can use a term incorrectly yet understand it in the same way. However, this tactic would seem to exclude the possibility of communalect change, so that, unbeknownst to us, all of our sentences are false or meaningless because their semantics are determined by the communalect of our distant ancestors. Obviously, this result cannot be countenanced. The other option seems to be to allow that a group of deviant speakers constitutes a separate

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7   The change need not be so drastic, however: it may affect only certain dialects or speakers, introducing new synchronic variation into a community. Nor is this type of change restricted to semantics. An example illustrating both possibilities is the merger of *f* and *th* in some varieties of English, so that *thin* is pronounced like *fin, three* like *free*, and so on. The difference between these two sounds is relatively difficult to hear, and the *th* sound is normally acquired rather late by language learners and is cross-linguistically uncommon. Thus it appears that the innovation occurred because some children simply did not acquire the *th* sound, and the merger was adopted by other children learning English.

speech community, so that, in Jim's neighbourhood, 'arthritis' actually does mean 'either arthritis or rheumatism'. But this response also leads to strange results. We can hardly avoid asking: how many people must use a term incorrectly, and how often, before a new communalect pops into existence to validate their usage? If we allow that Jim's neighbourhood can create a separate communalect, why not Jim and his wife, or Jim alone? Does one small difference in a sufficiently large group bring a new communalect into existence, or must the speech behaviour of two groups of speakers differ in many respects before their communalects are different as well? These questions cry out for an answer, but communitarians have no story to tell about how any of this happens beyond unhelpful formulas like 'meaning is use'. Indeed, any specific answer would be absurd.

Again, we have not derived a contradiction from communitarianism, but rather shown that it is fatally unable to explain basic facts about human language except by hand-waving. We could simply take it on faith that communitarianism is correct and that there must be some correct answer to these questions, even if we could never find out what it is (as Williamson (1994) does with structurally similar but more general problems about vagueness). But this response gives far too much leeway to our philosophical preferences to override the normal procedure of constructing reasonable theories and integrating them with other areas of inquiry. In any case, Williamson's is a strategy of desperation that should be adopted only as a last resort. I think we should look for another way out, a theory of language that is able to relate meaning and use in specific and descriptively correct terms.

3. Underdetermination, Theory–Building, and Sociolinguistics

We have seen that individualism and communitarianism encounter serious issues of different kinds: individualism has no way to account for systematic and often shared intuitions about correct usage, and communitarianism makes false empirical predictions. Our problem, then, is to construct a theory that can account for the normativity of meaning without taking languages or speech communities as shared objects. Communitarianism's difficulties with semantic change allowed us to focus in on three questions that will guide our search for a solution. The earlier questions were about language change, but each has a synchronic counterpart. If we can answer the synchronic questions, I contend, their diachronic variants will be answered as well. The questions are:

(i⋆) What explains an individual's speech behaviour?
(ii⋆) Which norms are relevant to an individual's speech behaviour in a particular situation?
(iii⋆) What is the synchronic relationship between speech behaviour and linguistic norms?

We will try to answer these questions with minimal theoretical assumptions, instead attempting to establish boundary conditions for *any* successful externalist theory.[8]

3.1 Individual Speech Behaviour

As for (i★), most theorists agree that individual speech behaviour relies on theory-building of some sort. For example, Fortson's explanation of the history of *bead* quoted above relied implicitly on this notion. A language learner obviously cannot reach directly into other speakers' heads to learn what they mean by a word. As a result, '[a]ny speaker without direct access to the intentions of the speakers around him or her must figure out what words mean from the contexts in which he or she encounters them' (Fortson, 2003, p. 648). When the context is ambiguous, language learners or interpreters may form a theory of the meaning of a word, expression, etc. that does not match the intentions of other speakers. When these mistakes are not corrected, language change results.

Fortson's observation about language learning is suggestively similar to Quine's claim that 'the learner has no data to work with but the overt behavior of other speakers' (1968, p. 187). In the practice of historical linguistics, Quinean reasoning about translation and interpretation is basically taken for granted. Fortson's language learner is basically Quine's radical translator (or perhaps better Davidson's radical interpreter), who must build up a translation manual from scratch using contextual clues and considerations of coherence, simplicity, etc. (Quine, 1960).[9] As a result, '[m]eaning and belief play interlocking and complementary roles in the interpretation of speech' (Davidson, 1984, p. 141): at a minimum, theories are formed by attributing beliefs and linguistic forms simultaneously to the interpretee. However interpretive theories are to be analyzed in a synchronic sense (atomistic, molecular, or holistic), they are *tested* holistically against the evidence of the speech a learner is exposed to.

Despite these similarities, though, Fortson fails to draw Quine's conclusion that 'there are no meanings … beyond what is implicit in people's dispositions to overt behavior' (Quine, 1968, p. 187): rather, his account presupposes the reality of meaning and reference. The difference between Old English *bed* 'prayer' and English *bead* can perhaps be described in purely behavioural terms, but the process

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[8] My discussion will focus almost exclusively on word-meaning simply because this is the main topic of the relevant philosophical literature, but my eventual conclusion is intended to be a more general theory of language. Detailed justification of this claim is not possible here, but note 16 below (inserted after the main proposal has been outlined, where it will hopefully make more sense) gives several suggestions as to how the approach of this essay could be extended beyond word-meaning to structural aspects of language.

[9] Language learning is far more complex and constrained than this characterization might seem to suggest. In particular, there appear to be many constraints specific to language learning beyond the normal considerations of explanatory power, coherence, simplicity, etc. But there do seem to be at least these standard theory-building constraints.

of reanalysis by which the latter was created cannot be described without reference to someone's mental states. In order to account for change, we must allow that the theories formed by learners and interpreters of language are psychologically real.

(Incidentally, this conclusion makes it possible to endorse mentalism while also advocating an externalist theory of meaning. The reason is that the interpretive theories being discussed are crucially involved in the determination of reference, as I will argue in detail below, especially in section 3.4. Since they are psychologically real it is an empirical question whether they are partially innate, what the learning mechanisms (or theory-forming mechanisms) are, and so on for the standard questions of linguistic theory and psychology of language. Whatever the answer to these questions is, it will constitute a constraint on the space of possible interpretive theories; as Chomsky has often emphasized, learning (or interpretation, from my perspective) is much easier with a small space of available theories, and it is doubtful that interpretation or learning would be possible if there were no constraints on theory formation. These psychological objects, whatever they are, will figure crucially into the determination of reference in a community language in my eventual theory. Thus, in contrast to the assumptions of thinkers from Chomsky to Putnam, I do not think that externalism and mentalism are incompatible: I think mental grammars are fully real, though I do deny the further claim that a language just is a mental grammar.)

Returning to the main point of the section, it should be clear that adopting Quine's holistic model of translation/interpretation does not commit us to rejecting the reality of meaning. Quine reasons that, since meaning, reference, and grammatical structure are underdetermined by observable facts, in cases of ambiguity there is no fact of the matter about which assignment of meaning, reference, or grammatical structure is correct. This clearly follows only on Quine's behaviourist and verificationist assumptions, which I will reject without further comment. However, Quine is correct about underdetermination, which explains how it is possible for an interpreter to form mistaken theories about an interpretee's communicative intentions and thus plays a crucial role in language change. Ironically, rather than undermining the 'museum myth of meaning' as he intended, Quine's observations turn out to explain how this myth can be true without contravening the truism that 'the learner has no data to work with but the overt behavior of other speakers' (ibid., p. 187).[10]

Thus Quine's observations about underdetermination and Fortson's theory of semantic change show that an explanation of individual speech behavior involving

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[10] Actually, historical linguists do not need anything as strong as Quinean indeterminacy: all that is needed is that the evidence that a learner or interpreter is *actually* exposed to, as a matter of contingent fact, underdetermines the analysis of certain linguistic features. At the crucial moment, there were surely ways that Old English speakers could have used *bed* 'prayer' unambiguously so that their children would have formed a correct theory of the word's meaning; but, for whatever reason, they did not. Thus we may wish to say 'underdetermined by the *observed* data' rather than 'observable data'.

theory-building also provides a simple explanation for change in speech behavior: an answer to (i★) gives us an answer to (i) for free.

3.2 Individuals and Communities in Sociolinguistics

All of this addresses only descriptive issues, however, and says nothing about semantic change in the sense of question (ii). How do linguistic norms change? By parity with (i) and (i★), we may suppose that, if we have an answer to the synchronic question, the diachronic question will answer itself; so we must give a general account of what norms are relevant to a given individual's speech behavior in a given situation. The obvious place to look for such an account is the study of sociolinguistics. Although theories of language often focus on the propositional content of utterances, sociolinguists have shown that the form of an utterance also carries important social information.[11]

A robust finding of sociolinguistics is that everyone is in command of multiple forms of speech that are appropriate in different social contexts. Because forms of speech are associated with certain groups and social situations, the form of an utterance conveys social information. Speech patterns may be marked for social status, region, gender, etc.: for example, in the United States, the speech of southeasterners and Bostonians is often perceived as undesirable, while certain other dialects are heard as being more refined. These perceptions are closely correlated with non-linguistic stereotypes and presumably derived from them. As a result, speakers can indicate their social relationship to listeners by manipulating linguistic form. For instance, speakers are likely to use more standard forms in a job interview than at the pub, and to speak differently to friends than to acquaintances. One particularly interesting finding is that, in a face-to-face encounter between A and B, A's speech style will influence the form of B's utterances. This is known as *accommodation* (Giles, 1994). *Convergence* occurs when A wishes to express solidarity with B and so adopts a speech style closer to B's; *divergence* occurs when A wishes to emphasize social differences from B and so adopts a dissimilar speech style.

Accommodation theory suggests that the social functions of language cannot be explained without reference to facts about the social desires of individuals and their beliefs about the relationship between language and social identity. Individuals use language to express a social identity, but they can also make mistakes in the process. Speaker A may use a formal speech style that he thinks is appropriate and be evaluated as stuffy or pretentious by B; or A may think that a particular speech style will be evaluated as regionally marked by B, while B interprets the style as

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[11]   For the sake of simplicity I will pretend that variation is categorical, i.e. that speakers use variation to indicate social facts by using either form x or form y, etc. In reality the situation is far more complicated: usually style-shifting is accomplished by manipulating *percentages of use* of x and y. Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) and much following work have shown convincingly that 'structured variation', not categorical usage, is the crucial notion here.

suggesting a low social class instead. Thus a speaker must guess what speech forms will be most effective in getting his audience to evaluate him in the way that he wants. Like other aspects of language, then, accommodation crucially involves fallible theory-building about the social information that a speech form will convey to a listener.[12]

A further implication of accommodation theory is that the social functions of language are implemented not on the basis of *actual* correlations between linguistic form and social reality, but on *perceived* connections relative to an audience. As Le Page (1997, p. 28) puts it, '*we do not necessarily adapt to the style of our interlocutor, but rather to the image we have of ourselves in relation to our interlocutor*' (emphasis in original). Le Page argues for a model of 'speakers projecting an image … of themselves in relation to their universe, and getting feedback as to the extent to which their images coincide—and then either collectively focusing, or allowing these images to remain diffuse' (p. 29). *Projection* is the crucial notion providing a connection between individual speech behaviour and the social functions of language. On this approach, the social functions of language are explained by individuals modifying their speech behaviour on the basis of rather complex theories involving two crucial components: (a) How the speaker wants to present herself to her audience, i.e. where she falls in her projected social world; and (b) What speech forms the speaker thinks will be evaluated by her audience as placing her socially where she wants to be. Again, mistakes can be made in implementing (b).

If this is the case, we cannot banish communities altogether: they are fully real, but defined by the social identification of individuals. In particular, *the composition of the relevant community* is determined by the speaker's social desires: (b) can be evaluated as correct or incorrect only in light of (a). Thus, in the sociolinguistic realm, individual theories of language and social facts are inextricably linked.

3.3 Reference and Deference

I want to suggest that the approach of sociolinguistic accommodation theory can be extended to semantics and other aspects of language. Not only the social information carried by the form of an utterance, but *all* of the publicly available information it carries, is determined by facts about *a community which exists only as a projection of an individual*. This is, I claim, the level at which the concepts of meaning, reference, and truth are relevant. We can see how this works by looking at Putnam's (1975) argument for the 'division of linguistic labor': the meanings of natural-kind terms are determined by criteria that are known and reliably applied only by certain specialists, and other speakers are often willing to defer to these experts. Putnam suggests further that this sort of 'structured cooperation' is a

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[12] Success in accommodation is further constrained by knowledge of or familiarity with the relevant forms of speech. Obviously I can accommodate less successfully to an Australian or a monolingual speaker of French than I can to a fellow American, and probably not at all to a monolingual speaker of a language that I do not know.

human universal. I think that Putnam is right on both counts, though natural kind terms are only a special case: deference (or refusal to defer) is crucial to normativity of meaning in general.

In the case of an obscure difference such as that between 'elm' and 'beech', it is not sufficient to build instructions to defer into the lexical entry for the terms as Chomsky (1986, p. 18) has suggested. The reason is that someone with incomplete knowledge might not *know* that his knowledge was incomplete, as Burge's rheumatic patient Jim did not before his doctor's appointment. But since intentions to defer with regard to specific terms are not sufficient—Jim might never have gone to the doctor, but would still have been wrong about having arthritis in his thigh—word-meaning must be determined by something else.

Since deference in specific cases of which speakers are aware is insufficient, I suggest we turn to *dispositions* to defer. In other words, the meaning of Jim's words is determined by who he would defer to, and in what fashion, given appropriate information. 'Appropriate information' is not a dodge, but rather indicates that what a term means must be resolved on a case-by-case basis: if we wish to know what 'arthritis' means in Jim's mouth, we must ask who Jim would defer to with regard to the meaning of this word. (In fact Jim may or may not be disposed to defer to his doctor's use of the term, just as you may or may not agree with Putnam's judgment that 'water' in twin-English does not refer to water. This turns out to affect meaning and play a crucial role in semantic change, as I will argue in this and the following section.) If this is correct, then the totality of Jim's dispositions to defer in a particular communicative situation generate a linguistic system that we can call his communalect. Of course, it is far beyond our powers to determine what Jim's communalect actually looks like; but then, we are in the same predicament with regard to his idiolect, and for most purposes a complete knowledge is not needed.

The relationship between individuals and communities in semantics is, I claim, essentially the same as Le Page's account of this relationship in sociolinguistics. Jim identifies himself socially with certain groups of people, and defines his language in relation to theirs by an (un)willingness to accept correction: in short, he projects a speech community. As in the sociolinguistic case, the correct interpretation of Jim's utterances may not be what he *thinks* the correct interpretation is. Rather, Jim forms fallible theories about what forms of language will best communicate the social *and* propositional information he wishes to convey. But 'best communicate' cannot be analyzed without reference to the people Jim identifies with in a social sense; thus the identity of his s*peech community* is determined by individualistic facts, and the identity of his *language* is determined by facts about this community.

I have not yet made it clear whether accepting correction is supposed to involve modifying meanings/concepts or modifying the *mapping* between sounds and pre-existing meanings.[13] The conception I have in mind is the latter:

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[13]   Thanks to a referee for emphasizing this point and for suggesting 'mapping' as a label for the type of interpretive theories I have in mind.

interpretive theories are models of a sound-meaning correspondence of this type. I assume that concepts are at least partly independent of linguistic items, and that agreement on the sound-meaning correspondence is generally needed for successful communication. Thus if Jim accepts correction from his doctor about the meaning of 'arthritis' it is because he wishes to use a word that successfully communicates the nature of his ailment to the doctor. If the relevant concepts exist independently of the labels, as I believe, the speaker/interpreter's problem is to match up words and meanings in a way that facilitates communication, rather than to have the right concepts (whatever that would mean).

My theory, then, is that the meaning of a word in the mouth of a speaker S is determined by S's dispositions to defer to other speakers with regard to the meaning and use of this word. Returning to Burge's example, our intuition that Jim's use of 'arthritis' was wrong before his visit to the doctor is causally related to the fact that, when he visited the doctor, he modified his use of the word 'arthritis'. Pre-theoretically, the explanation for this communicative difficulty does not seem to be that Jim and the doctor are speaking different languages. The reason for this feeling, I think, is that (in my elaboration of Burge's story) Jim is willing to modify his usage when he learns that it did not match that of the people he wants to communicate with. Jim's use would be wrong even if he were never to go to the doctor because (*ex hypothese*) Jim would be willing change his use if he *were* to go. As a result, the counterfactual/dispositional element of this theory is crucial to an explanation of our quite systematic intuitions about the correct meaning of 'arthritis' and, I believe, words in general.

Now let's elaborate the story a bit and suppose that Jim accepts what the doctor says for the purposes of his encounters with the doctor, but continues to use 'arthritis' to refer to rheumatism when speaking to his family and neighbours. Here he has developed a translation manual between Ours and Theirs, as Quine would say. We should analyze the word 'arthritis' as having different meanings in Jim's neighbourhood on the one hand and in the doctor's mouth and medical textbooks on the other: between home and the doctor's office, Jim is switching dialects. As users of language, we create translation manuals for such situations on a regular basis, and quite unconsciously.

The same analysis accounts neatly for the facts adduced by Putnam and Kripke. Putnam's twin-Earth scenario relied on epistemic differences between the inhabitants of the two planets. Speakers of English visiting Twin Earth might use 'water' to refer to XYZ, but only if they did not know its chemical makeup; if they did, they would presumably reserve the term for water. Putnam's example of Archimedes' use of '*khrusós*' is also parallel to Jim's predicament above. In these cases, though, it is environmental rather than social information that is at issue. If Archimedes used '*khrusós*' to refer to fool's gold, he was wrong because, if confronted with modern chemistry, he would modify

his usage.[14] If other Greek speakers also made the same error, they were wrong because they would be willing to defer to experts such as Archimedes, who was willing in turn to defer to, e.g., the results of an experiment capable of distinguishing gold and fool's gold. In all of these cases, linguistic error does not depend on whether the relevant speaker is ever *actually* confronted with information of the relevant kind, but only on how he would change his speech if he *were* (as Kripke (1979, pp. 11–12) also suggests).

The latter example illustrates a sort of deference chain that is similar to the causal chains discussed by Kripke (1980). Kripke's causal chains are, on my theory, just a special case of this more general phenomenon. Causal chains operate only within a background of general dispositions to defer: in normal circumstances people are disposed to defer to someone's parents regarding his name. In contrast, the historical origin of 'Madagascar' or 'Indians' is a mere curiosity. *The people we are interested in communicating with* do not use the term in this way, and they are the only ones that are relevant in determining reference. The fact that causal chains so often do correctly predict the reference of names turns out to be the result of a sociological fact about humans: often, we are willing to defer to others about the reference of a name, and they are willing to defer to others, and so on. But this works only if the people in question are socially relevant to us and communication with them is

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[14]   A reviewer notes that no evidence has been provided to support the empirical claims about speakers' willingness to defer with regard to the term 'water', or Archimedes' supposed reaction to the results of modern chemistry: perhaps Archimedes would simply reply that there are two types of '*khrusós*'. Indeed, Machery *et al.* (2004) present an intriguing experiment which suggests that thought experiments of the twin-earth and Gödel-Schmidt type provoke different modal intuitions of reference in American and Chinese university students. The reviewer is correct that I have assumed Putnam's empirical claims uncritically, but this is only for expository purposes: the possibility of variation in deferential dispositions is part and parcel of my theory. We expect different speakers to display different dispositions to defer, and individual speakers' dispositions to defer may change over time. Thus my theory predicts that there exist worlds in which the meaning of '*khrusós*' in Archimedes' mouth is the same as that of English 'gold', and other worlds in which the meaning is the same as that of English 'gold or fool's gold'. A world of the latter type could be similar to the former in every respect except for Archimedes' dispositions to defer with regard to the term '*khrusós*' at a particular moment (a new Twin Earth phenomenon, I suppose).

Likewise, if Kripke's story about Gödel and Schmidt were true, then 'Gödel' would indeed refer to Schmidt in the mouths of Machery *et al.*'s Chinese subjects, assuming that Machery *et al.*'s conclusions are sound. Of course, westerners would be liable to understand the term as referring to Gödel. This interpretive problem between the western and Chinese subjects would then be similar to that of the two meanings of 'tea', discussed in section 3.4 below. It follows that the direct reference theory of names is not universally or necessarily true, but is contingent on speakers' sound-meaning mapping and their deferential dispositions like any other term. A speaker or group of speakers *could* map a name to a description, just as a speaker could make up a word as a shorthand for anything he likes (cf. the quote from Frege which is at the head of this essay). As a result the semantics of names could in principle vary from speaker to speaker or even from name to name, though it may turn out to be a sociological fact about humans that we prefer to map names to an individual rather than a description (or even that 'name' is nothing but the linguistic label for a term that is mapped to an individual).

important to us. People who are geographically, temporally, or linguistically remote, on the other hand, may not be judged socially relevant. Thus we would be willing to defer to Gödel's parents, but not to the Arab traders that Marco Polo misunderstood when he heard the name 'Madagascar'. *These* are the facts that make it true that 'Gödel' refers to Gödel and that 'Madagascar' refers to Madagascar. As with Gödel, an English speaker need not *know* anything particular about Madagascar in order to be able to refer to it—all that is necessary is that she would be willing to defer to English-speaking cartographers regarding its use.

A reviewer suggests the following counterargument. The account of the reference of names given here seems just as much as those I have been arguing against to rely on the existence of some sort of 'superspeakers'. Now suppose that my parents, having named me Daniel shortly after birth, lost their minds several years later and began to call me 'Flapadoodle'. Would my name then become 'Flapadoodle'? It seems not; thus, the reviewer concludes, 'reference is more like an economic fact'. My answer to this question will become clearer in the following section (see especially the discussion of 'tea'), but it is already implicit in the theory I am arguing for. Basically, I agree with the intuition behind the example and its conclusion, and I think that my theory can account for both if we sharpen the issue of 'deference'. Recall that, in the case of Jim and his community's deviant use of 'arthritis', we came to the conclusion that the deviant usage could be incorrect in certain circumstances (e.g. talking to the doctor), but it could just as well involve dialect-switching in which both usages are correct in different social contexts. In the latter case, some sort of translation manual would be in order.

The following section will explore in much greater detail the conditions under which the concept of incorrect usage can be usefully employed. Briefly, though, I see no reason why my name would not, in a certain sense, become 'Flapadoodle' in the situation described. But it would 'become' my name only in the specific sense that the sequence of sounds 'Flapadoodle', when used by my parents in an appropriate context—say, while communicating with each other—would in fact succeed in referring to me. Nicknames and pet names, in fact, seem to work on this principle. 'Flapadoodle' might or might not refer to me in a broader social context. This would depend on the knowledge and deferential dispositions of other speakers: whether they know that this nickname is intended to refer to me, and especially whether they are inclined to defer first to my parents, to me, to the law (for my legal name), etc. (Also, the facts that my parents in the story have gone crazy, and that the name sounds ridiculous, contribute to the intuition that 'Flapadoodle' would not refer to me; try substituting 'Jimmy'.) The conclusion, then, is that there is no necessary connection between reference and any sort of 'superspeakers', or any other natural or human phenomenon. Instead, reference relies crucially on sociological facts which can exhibit considerable variation; the tendency to defer to parents or other sources of authority is merely a manifestation of this more general phenomenon.

If this account is right, then we have a new account of the old Humpty Dumpty problem. Can Humpty use 'glory' to mean 'a nice knock-down argument'? Well, if he is willing to isolate himself socially, yes. But very few, and only very strange,

people would behave like this. Furthermore, the affirmative answer makes little sense in Carroll's story simply because Humpty is talking to Alice: he must place her *somewhere* in his social world in order to do so, and the story is strange and funny precisely because Humpty violates this norm of communication. Of course almost no one acts like Humpty in the real world, but we should not take this to imply that it is impossible to do so. People are just normally too practical or polite to act in this way. Nothing about meaning or reference hinges on these facts, nor should it. Shared meaning, then, is no more than a reasonable guess—it is where theorizing *begins*, not where it ends.

3.4 Intentions and Semantic Change

Section 3.3 proposed an answer to (ii★), the question of what norms are relevant in a given situation. Now what about (ii), the diachronic question? Our new approach implies that the composition of someone's speech community has no necessary connection to facts about the distribution of any particular way of talking, and it may or may not be the same as anyone else's speech community. Yet there is a fact of the matter about what the correct theory of meaning for a speaker's projected community is; thus it is possible for her theory to be incorrect.[15]

Kripke (1979), following the discussion in Donnelan (1966), discusses cases in which a description seems to succeed in referring even though it is technically inaccurate. For example, someone at a party might say, 'The man over there drinking champagne is happy tonight'. If it turns out that the man is actually drinking water, the description seems to refer in some sense, even if there is no one over there drinking champagne. Kripke suggests that we can explain this by distinguishing *speaker's reference* from *semantic reference*. Semantic reference is determined by 'the conventions of our language … together with the intentions of the speaker and various contextual features' (1979, p. 14). Speaker's reference,

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[15] Actually, it is more likely that a speaker's projected community will be linguistically heterogeneous, so that there may be many correct theories that differ in points of detail. A speaker is unlikely to identify in this way with a group that shows extreme linguistic diversity, and so the correct theories will usually agree in most respects, though this is entirely contingent. For most purposes, this is no problem: as noted above, we usually look for correct theories on a case-by-case basis, rather than trying to isolate entire systems, and we can note ambiguities when they arise. Anyway, we don't *want* to build conformity into the theory, since we must allow for groups of speakers 'either collectively focusing, or allowing [their] images to remain diffuse' (Le Page, 1997, p. 29). This heterogeneity suggests that, in contested cases, the labels 'correct' and 'incorrect' are too simplistic. But this is no cause for alarm: linguistic correctness is merely a pretheoretical concept derived from our intuitions as speakers of highly focused languages, and we should not expect a theory of meaning to endorse them without qualification. On the other hand, our new theory may actually match our instincts about correctness better than communitarianism precisely because of this heterogeneity. It would be strange to ask whether it is correct or incorrect to speak with a Cockney accent, or to use 'shit' to mean 'stuff, things' as in youth slang, or to write 'color' instead of 'colour'. At a minimum, we would need a clarification of the question: 'Correct in what sense?'

on the other hand, is 'that object which the speaker wishes to talk about, on a given occasion, and believes fulfils the conditions for being the semantic referent of the designator' (1979, p. 15).

Though Kripke does not discuss the issue in his paper, interpretive difficulties caused by variation can also be absorbed to this model. Suppose a New Zealander says to me, 'Tea will be at 6:30'. Being a foreigner in New Zealand, I interpret this as an indication that we will be drinking a particular hot beverage at 6:30; but the speaker's reference of 'tea' here is dinner. As Kripke's formulation suggests, the crucial condition for something being the speaker's referent is that the speaker must *believe* that the object satisfies the conditions for being the semantic referent. In my terms, the speaker must intend to communicate some social and/or propositional information (roughly as described by Grice (1957/1967)). Speaker's reference and semantic reference will differ, however, if the speaker has formed an incorrect theory about what forms of language will actually produce this effect. There are two ways in which this mismatch can occur, as our two examples make clear. In the example of 'Tea will be at 6:30', speaker's reference fails to match semantic reference because the speaker has an incorrect theory of what forms of language will induce me to acquire the belief that dinner will be at 6:30. In the case of 'The man over there drinking champagne is happy tonight', however, the mismatch is a result of the speaker having a false belief. The two ways in which communication can go wrong indicate again the inextricability in communication of theories of meaning and theories of the world.[16]

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[16] In this essay my discussion has focused on word-meaning, primarily because it is the historical focus of the debate on externalism. Several commentators have asked, do my conclusions about (a) the relationship between individual speakers and word-meaning, and (b) the inextricability of theories of language and theories of the world in interpretation, generalize to grammatical aspects of language? I think that the answer is yes, because these aspects of language figure as importantly in the communication of social and propositional information as word-meaning. Suppose that word-meaning were partly determined by non-individualistic factors as I have argued, but grammatical structure were given by purely individualistic factors—say, whatever grammatical structure the speaker had in mind. Such a theory would fail to answer the questions about meaning that externalist theorists have raised on the level of sentence-meaning, if sentence-meaning is compositional. That is, I have claimed that a speaker can be *wrong* about the reference of a word like 'arthritis' because there is a mismatch between his intended meaning and the generally understood meaning in his projected speech community. But it is easy to find cases of grammatical mismatch—a string of sounds is assigned a different grammatical structure by the speaker and members of his community—which will encounter precisely the same problems that motivated my version of externalism. The same logic should apply to these:

Phonology. A word, phrase, or sentence may be misunderstood because of a difference in the phonologies employed by interlocutors: for example, British speakers often hear American English *latter* as *ladder*, and I have often witnessed non-southerners misinterpreting southeastern US English *life* as *laugh*, *height* as *hat*, and so on (because of a rule changing [ay] to [a:] in certain contexts in many forms of southeastern English).

Morphology. To some English speakers, *you all* is equivalent to *all of you*. To others, it is simply the 2nd person plural pronoun. We can verify this by noting that speakers of the latter type use *all you all* (or *all y'all*) to express the concept *all of you*. The potential for confusion is clear.

This conclusion provides a link between the proposed theory of speech communities, the problem of language change, and our model of individual speech behaviour. The potential mismatch between speaker's reference and semantic reference relies not only on the speaker's beliefs about what sort of utterance would get her audience to form some belief, but also on the speaker's *desire* to get her audience to form this belief. Thus the theory presupposes some social connection between speaker and audience. General dispositions to defer—e.g. the fact that my friend from New Zealand would be willing to say 'dinner' instead of 'tea' if he realized that I am liable to misinterpret the latter—are to be explained in light of Gricean intentions. Such intentions are not, of course, the whole story: sometimes speaker's reference may be different from semantic reference *even if no communicative difficulty results*. Putnam's twin-Earth arguments made this point clearly. Communication through shared errors can also be successful when a description fails to refer semantically, e.g. if we both believe that the man over there is drinking champagne when he is not. This is because we would both be willing to withdraw the presupposition that the man in question is drinking champagne if we were to learn that he is not. All of this presupposes the model of speakers both as individualistic theory-builders and as social beings that we adopted above. (It is worth noting further that, though Kripke presents speaker's reference as

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Syntax. I once saw a sign in a Delhi post office that read, 'For slow and uncourteous service please see Chief Postmaster'. English is a well-established language in India with millions of native speakers, but Indian English has numerous grammatical and lexical differences from standard English that are influenced by Indian languages, particularly Hindi (and a great deal of internal variation). To an Indian speaker of English living in Delhi the sign mentioned would presumably communicate the meaning that I would express by '*In case of* slow *or* uncourteous service please see Chief Postmaster'. (Hindi uses the equivalent of 'and' under negation in some cases where we would use *or*. Another time I saw a sign reading 'Do not sit and run in the station', which I interpreted at first as forbidding an impossibility.) Depending on who the sign was addressed to, then, we may or may not want to call this a 'mistake'; it would depend on the intended audience, the sociolinguistic aspirations of the sign's author, and other factors.

In all of these cases, misunderstanding of the type we have been discussing is possible even if all lexical items in the language are understood in the same way by all participants in a conversation. The reason is that world knowledge is needed in order to form a correct theory of the communicative intentions of the interpretee, for grammar as much as for word-meaning. Consider the reasoning you would have to go through in a potentially ambiguous situation in order to correctly interpret an utterance of *you all*. Relevant facts might include your own grammatical knowledge; your knowledge of the immediate non-linguistic situation; your knowledge of the speaker's social and regional background and stereotypical features of the associated dialect, especially differences between this dialect and your own idiolect; special knowledge, if any, of the speaker's speech habits (verbal peculiarities beyond social or regional stereotypes), and an unlimited amount of further knowledge (say, whether there is a person in the audience to whom the utterance could not be addressed appropriately). Thus I think that we can conclude that, just as I have for word meaning in the main text, that there is (relative to a communicative situation and a choice of social identification) a correct grammatical form in each situation, viz. the one that will correctly communicate the intended social and propositional information to the intended audience and other members of the speaker's projected speech community.

Thanks to Txuss Martín and an anonymous referee for pointing out the need for this clarification.

a pragmatic phenomenon, I conceive of both speaker's reference and semantic reference as being semantic in the sense of being involving a sound–meaning mapping, although they belong to different levels of language.)

Kripke (1979) suggests further that the possible mismatch between speaker's reference and semantic reference may explain semantic change, since 'what was originally a mere speaker's reference may, if it becomes habitual in a community, evolve into a semantic reference' (p. 22). Admittedly, the notion of becoming 'habitual in a community' is obscure since speech communities are not stable or discrete objects in the world. However, Kripke's suggestion provides a simple account for semantic change in the normative sense once our new notion of ' speech community' is implemented. Let's return to the example of 'bead'.

Imagine that Karl is learning Old English. Karl sees someone praying with rosary beads and asks his mother, 'What's he doing?' His mother answers, 'He's counting his beads'. Karl's mother intends for 'beads' to refer to prayers, but Karl surmises that 'beads' refers to beads. Thereafter, Karl always uses 'beads' to refer to beads, while his mother always uses 'beads' to refer to prayers. If Karl tells his mother 'I'm counting my beads', his intention is to induce in her the belief that he is counting his beads, and the speaker's reference is therefore to beads. But 'beads' refers semantically to prayers; and the belief that Karl's mother will form is that Karl is counting his prayers. In a strict sense, then, Karl's utterance is false, and communication between Karl and his mother has failed. However, neither of them ever uses the word 'beads' in an unambiguous context, and thus neither ever learns that the beliefs that they induce in each other using the word 'beads' are systematically different from the beliefs that they intend to induce in each other. Though communication has failed, no communicative difficulty arises because of contingent features of the environmental and social context.

Now, suppose that Karl teaches other children the word 'beads' by ostention. These children now use 'beads' intending to induce beliefs in each other about beads, not about prayers. As long as they would be willing to defer to adults who do not use 'beads' in this way, however, this is another case of successful communication via mistakes. This use of 'beads' becomes correct only when speakers who share this error begin to identify themselves as a sub-population with a distinct social identity. Thus the children will identify *separately* with each other and with the broader community: in this case, they project two distinct speech communities. They would, it seems, now accept correction from adults, but only as relevant in speaking to adults, and switch between dialects in different social contexts (as I do with 'tea'). When they speak to other members of their sub-population, though, the historical origin of the word 'bead' is beside the point, as it is for 'Madagascar': they now defer to the people who made the mistake, and this is enough for correct usage. Their theory of the meaning of 'beads' is correct in one social context and incorrect in the other.[17]

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[17]   Rather than being a cause for alarm, it is descriptively a good result that speakers can project multiple external standards. As noted above, everyone is in command of multiple forms of speech—dialects, registers, and often languages, although often they are so similar that we do not notice—each with its own normative standards and social functions.

Thus an answer to (ii), the question of change in semantic norms, seems to involve two factors. First, there may be some change in social identification, i.e. in individuals' projections of the social world; second, there may be changes in the correct theory for the projected communities, because of changes in other speakers' understanding, misapprehensions, etc. Either of these factors is sufficient for change, though they often occur together. We can now refine our earlier discussion of what the 'correct theory' would be in this light. The correct theory is the theory that would actually cause the audience to form the belief that the speaker intends, *unless* the audience would be willing to change this theory in light of recalcitrant social or environmental facts. The second clause is important to allow for the two types of shared error. Shared *social* errors occur when all parties in a communicative situation are under the same misapprehension about a word's meaning, but would be willing to modify their behaviour if they were corrected because they both project more or less the same community. Shared *environmental* errors include both the example of 'The man over there drinking champagne' and Putnam's cases involving '*khrusós*' and 'water': all parties would be willing to defer to facts about the world. In both cases, the errors result from epistemic limitations, either in a speaker's abilities to infer other speakers' linguistic intentions, or in speakers' knowledge of the world.

4. Conclusion

From the preceding considerations I conclude that the choice between individualism and externalism is a false one. Crucial semantic *and* social facts can be explained only by a theory that takes both levels to be philosophically relevant and explores the relationship between them.

These considerations also show a considerable symmetry in the two levels of meaning. For example, an idiolect is a theory of the communalect in the same way that an individual's non-linguistic beliefs are a theory of the actual world. Semantic reference is jointly determined by the communalect and facts about the world, just as speaker's reference is jointly determined by a speaker's idiolect and her beliefs about the world. If an idiolect and a communalect are both word-meaning mappings as I have suggested, it may be possible to articulate a two-level formal semantics with individual- and community-level operators. This may turn out to have interesting applications to issues in formal semantics. For instance, I am exploring the possibility of using such a two-level semantics of this type in combination with a 'permissive' notion of epistemic possibility (i.e. one in which there are conceptually possible worlds that are not metaphysically possible; cf. Gendler and Hawthorne, 2002) to address problems of substitutivity in opaque contexts. (See Muskens, 2005 for a sketch of an implementation of a somewhat similar idea.)

To sum up, I have argued that three aspects of individual language broadly construed—dispositions to defer, idealized communicative success, and social

identification—map out the same community language. This community language is systematic and makes predictions about meaning and reference that are, I think, intuitively correct to those without a stake in the individualism-externalism debate. In this way we have met Chomsky's challenge to articulate a 'notion of "shared public language" that comes even close to meeting the requirements of empirical enquiry or serious philosophical reflection on language and its use' (1995, p. 51).

Furthermore, if I have described the interplay between individual and social aspects of meaning accurately, we may conclude that a good deal of the philosophical debate between individualists and externalists has been misguided. Chomsky, for instance, insists that only the 'internalist' aspects of language can admit of a truly scientific description. I have attempted to provide several counter-examples to this claim in the form of explanations of problems that cannot be addressed or even formulated without externalist concepts.[18] Putnam responds to Chomsky by rejecting the claim that meaning has anything at all to do with facts about individuals; Dummett relegates the study of individual behaviour to the 'philosophically irrelevant' realm of psychology; and so on. None of these extremes is correct, because, as we have seen, neither the social nor the individual levels of meaning can be explained without reference to the other. For instance, speaker's reference and semantic reference both play important roles in a complete theory of human language: no straightforward reduction is possible, but it is possible to devise a theory detailing the relationships between these types of meaning. If this is the case, individualists and externalists have in many cases simply been talking past one another, and in reality both the individual and the social aspects of language are interesting (philosophically, linguistically, and psychologically) and worth investigating.

In section three, we saw how to rescue speech communities from the difficulties raised by empirical results of descriptive linguistics. This was necessary to explain the normativity of meaning. The primary role of speech communities in this theory is to account for externalist *intuitions* about meaning. However, we should not take for granted that our reconstructed speech communities can do the philosophical work that communalects have been called upon to do in much previous work. They are certainly not able to provide, as Dummett (1978, p. 218) requires, a guarantee of mutual understanding. Dummett argues that communalects must be able to do so because otherwise, 'for all [a speaker] knows, or can ever know, everyone else may attach to his words or to the symbols which he employs a meaning quite different from that which he attaches to them' (ibid.). This consequence is intended as a *reductio*, but attention to the empirical facts of language

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18   I do not mean to suggest that Chomsky categorically rejects externalist inquiry into language. For instance, he admits that sociolinguistics is 'a perfectly legitimate inquiry, externalist by definition' (1995, p. 50). However, sociolinguistics 'borrows from internalist inquiry into humans, but suggests no alternative to it' (ibid.); the thrust of his argument in the quoted passage and the surrounding text is that a scientific theory of language, i.e. a theory capable of making testable predictions, will be thoroughly individualistic.

shows it to be a positive boon: only a theory that does not provide such a guarantee can provide a convincing account of language variation and change.

Although communalects are real, meaning is not their exclusive provenance. Speaker's reference is equally real and, from the point of view of interpersonal communication, sometimes more interesting: after all, we are normally more interested in understanding than in correcting one another. Likewise, meaning construed as semantic reference is indeed normative, but this normativity relies crucially on individualistic facts. Externalism is correct, it seems, but the rumours of individualism's death have been greatly exaggerated.

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