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The Autonomy of Grammar and Semantic Internalism

Abstract *In his post-Tractatus work on natural language use, Wittgenstein defended the notion of what he dubbed the autonomy of grammar. According to this thought, grammar – or semantics, in a more recent idiom – is essentially autonomous from metaphysical considerations, and is not answerable to the nature of things. The argument has several related incarnations in Wittgenstein's post-Tractatus writings, and has given rise to a number of important insights, both critical and constructive. In this paper I will argue for a potential connection between Wittgenstein's autonomy argument and some more recent internalist arguments for the autonomy of semantics. My main motivation for establishing this connection comes from the fact that the later Wittgenstein's comments on grammar and meaning stand in opposition to some of the core assumptions of semantic externalism.*

Keywords: *Later Wittgenstein, grammar, autonomy, arbitrariness, meaning as use, semantic internalism and externalism, reference, mentalism*

144

1. Introduction

Wittgenstein's later comments on meaning as use, with their emphasis on the significance of social practices, activities, circumstances, contexts, occasions of use etc., are sometimes taken to lend support for some form of semantic externalism. Thus, it is argued for instance, that Wittgenstein's contextualism about meaning entails semantic externalism, and that his views on meaning and grammar are perfectly consistent with Putnam's version of externalism (see Child 2010; Putnam *forthcoming*). This is understandable given that Wittgenstein strongly criticised mentalist accounts of meaning, which are typically of an internalist bent.

That said, however, in this paper I want to focus on those aspects of the later Wittgenstein's arguments regarding meaning and grammar, which are aimed directly against certain core externalist ideas; e.g. the idea that the meaning of a word is the object to which the word refers, and so that the objects to which words refer should play a key role in semantic explanations.

My aim here is to show that there are important connections between Wittgenstein's arguments against externalism and certain contemporary

arguments for semantic internalism, where the latter are aimed at denying the kinds of metaphysical commitments brought about by an outlook I shall refer to as *mentalist referentialism*. I shall argue that drawing such a connection puts us in a position to maintain a strong opposition to a certain form of mentalism *without* having to adopt standard externalist commitments.

The main focus on this paper will be on a particular post-*Tractatus* argument for the autonomy of grammar. The idea is that the grammar of language, and in particular linguistic meaning, is constituted independently of metaphysical considerations concerning the nature of things that words are used to refer to. According to some commentators, the argument regarding the autonomous grammar forms part of Wittgenstein's critical response to the treatment of grammar in the *Tractatus*.[1] For the purpose of this paper I will stay neutral as to whether the argument is aimed at the *Tractatus* or not; I shall assume that the target is a certain generic form of externalism regardless of whether this is the position Wittgenstein adopted in the *Tractatus*.[2]

145

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 introduces and offers an analysis of the later Wittgenstein's argument for the autonomy of grammar. To prepare the ground for a comparison with semantic internalism in later sections of the essay, I shall distinguish what I understand to be the main critical import of Wittgenstein's argument from his constructive response to it. As we shall see, despite it motivating a number of new positive assumptions about meaning, the argument is still fundamentally negative. Section 3 turns to a contemporary debate concerning the role that external objects play in the determination and explanation of linguistic meaning. I explain and distinguish two different brands of semantic internalism according to which meanings are internally individuated and found 'in the head'. I argue that there are some striking similarities between Wittgenstein and methodological internalists, especially vis-à-vis their rejection of the referentialist theory of meaning. Section 4 then examines Wittgenstein's

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1 Peter Hacker is the most prominent representative of this view. See e.g. Hacker 2000.

2 To be sure, there are some important indications that the *Tractatus* is indeed committed to externalist semantics. For instance, the analysis of nonsensical sentences makes reference to non-existing properties: "The reason why 'Socrates is identical' means nothing", Wittgenstein maintains, "is that there is no property called 'identical'" (TLP 5.473). And even more patently, objects that constitute states of affairs in the world are considered to be meanings (semantic or referential values) of lexical items (TLP 3.203).

anti-referentialism and his use conception of meaning in more detail. In section 5, I critically discuss several notions all of which represent Wittgenstein's attempt to constructively respond to the autonomy argument: the conventionality of meaning, the arbitrariness thesis, and the role of nature in the determination of meaning. Although these, on the face of it, seem to be inconsistent with semantic internalism, a closer scrutiny reveals that these notions do not seem to carry a lot of weight in Wittgenstein's account of grammar and meaning. Section 6 considers and rejects two additional problems for drawing the parallel with internalism: Wittgenstein's contextualism and his opposition to the mentalist account of meaning. Finally, section 7 concludes the discussion and briefly lists several remaining points of disagreement between the later Wittgenstein and methodological internalists.

146   2. The autonomy of grammar

In analysing Wittgenstein's argument for the autonomy of grammar it is helpful to differentiate its main *critical* import from Wittgenstein's *constructive* responses to the argument. As a critical reaction against the externalist construal of semantics by reference to the nature of things, the argument aims to show what does *not* figure in the determination of semantic facts. Its main purpose is to convince us that grammar (semantics) doesn't have any external source of determination but is, instead, "self-contained and autonomous".[3]

Wittgenstein's argument against the world-dependent grammar turns on the idea that grammatical rules cannot be *justified* as correct by reference to the nature of the things represented. This is because, as part of justification, we would need to mention how things are, or how things are not, and "any such description already presupposes the grammatical rules" (PR 9). Wittgenstein expresses the same point by saying that "[one] cannot use language to get outside language" (PR 54). There are different variants of the argument for autonomy that attempt to show that the justification of grammatical rules is futile.[4]

We may have certain reservations about this particular argumentative strategy, but the conclusion Wittgenstein reaches is important for present purposes; namely that, in contrast to what the externalist would

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3 "The connection between "language and reality" is made by definitions of words, and these belong to grammar, so that language remains self-contained and autonomous." (Wittgenstein 1974: 55)
4 For the discussion see Hacker 2000, 74ff.

maintain, the grammar of language – i.e. the rules that assign meanings to words and regulate how words are put together to form meaningful sentences – is independent, and not answerable to the nature of external objects and their combinatorial properties. In Wittgenstein's words, "grammar is not accountable to any reality" (Wittgenstein 1974: 184; also 2005: 184). However, once grammar is shown to be autonomous, there are some more positive suggestions as to what constitutes linguistic meaning. First of all, Wittgenstein would now characterise the nature of linguistic meaning as *arbitrary* rather than answerable to something extra-linguistic. He writes, "[grammatical rules] are not answerable to any meaning and to that extent are arbitrary" (Wittgenstein 1974: 184; also 2005: 184). Another positive suggestion concerns the way in which meaning is determined and explained once the idea that the external objects play this role is rejected. It consists in the notion that grammar and grammatical rules are *constitutive* of meaning.[5] Grammatical rules are characterised as conventions[6], and grammar is taken to consist of conventions (Wittgenstein 1974: 190).

147

Wittgenstein does not discuss the idea of conventionality of meaning in any great detail. So we are somewhat left wondering how we ought to understand his positive proposal. It seems certain, however, that he wants to say that the determination of meaning, which is governed by rules understood as conventions, is in some sense "up to us", and definitely not fixed by the way the world happens to be independent of human interests, activities, practices, etc. But does Wittgenstein's notion of conventionality exclude the determination of meaning by *human* nature, or even the nature of the *human mind*? I shall return to this question in section 5. Now I want to examine a more contemporary version of the idea that grammar is not answerable to *what there is*.

3. Semantic Internalism

The main aim of this essay, as mentioned in the introduction, is to argue for a potentially interesting connection between Wittgenstein's argument for the autonomy of grammar and some recent attempts to defend the autonomy of semantics. However, the connection I want to

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5 'It is grammatical rules that determine meaning (constitute it)' (Wittgenstein 1974: 184)
6 "We said that by "meaning" we meant what an explanation of meaning explains. And an explanation of meaning is not an empirical proposition and not a causal explanation, but a rule, a convention" (Wittgenstein 1974: 68).

establish between these two philosophical positions concerning the idea of autonomy applies only to a particular brand of internalism defended by Chomsky (2000) and his supporters (e.g. Collins 2009, *internet*; Pietroski 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2006; McGilvray 1998) This internalist position is known as the *methodological internalism* (MI). So, what is MI and how does it differ from other versions of internalist semantics?

MI is a fairly thin version of internalism: "a very modest, metaphysically light-weight doctrine, which neither denies any first-order metaphysical claims nor introduces a new internalist metaphysics" (Collins, *forthcoming*). According to Collins, what characterises linguistic internalism is that "the explanations offered by successful linguistic theory neither presuppose nor entail externalia. There are externalia, but they do not enter into the explanations of linguistics *qua* externalia. Linguistics is methodologically solipsistic" (Collins, *forthcoming*). In contrast, semantic externalism is a heavy-duty metaphysical doctrine according to which semantic explanations essentially depend on the nature of external objects and their ontological status, and ought to reflect how things are anyway. Semantic externalism thus makes semantics fundamentally intertwined with metaphysics. As any other version of internalism, MI takes linguistic meanings to be individuated internally rather than by reference to any external objects or properties that expressions are used to refer to.

However, there are versions of semantic internalism that are metaphysically more substantial. An example is Jackendoff's brand of internalism, which is, essentially, a form of idealism. Jackedoff (1983, 2002) maintains that the referents of words are internal, mental objects rather than external objects. In this way he simply exchanges one variant of the referentialist theory of meaning (with all its difficulties) for another. But a methodological brand of internalism, according to its advocates, has no such commitments; the methodological internalist "is someone who rejects the entwinement of semantics with general metaphysical doctrines, including idealist ones" (Collins, *forthcoming*). The methodological internalist, unlike an idealist, doesn't deny the existence of externalia, or that we refer to externalia when we communicate.

According to methodological internalists, the theory of meaning is not a theory of reference and truth; the latter phenomena are not, strictly speaking, semantic and are not scientifically intractable. As Pietroski writes,

> Sentences, as products of (largely innate and modular) language systems, have truth-conditions only by virtue of their relation to other cognitive systems and the environments in which the sentences are used. But sentences have their *meanings* by virtue of more local facts concerning the psychology (and hence biology) of language-users. So a semantics that makes the right theoretical cuts will not *itself* associate sentences with truth-conditions. (Pietroski 2003a: 218)

On this view, semantic features, which are systematically tractable, supervene on syntax, which is to say that semantics is basically a species of syntax.[7] The kinds of semantic facts that for internalist semanticists stand in need of explanation are, for instance, structural effects on interpretation brought about by the meanings of lexical items[8], other interpretive effects recorded in alternations[9], certain structurally based semantic entailments[10], structural non-ambiguities[11], etc.

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7   But, as Chomsky explains, there is an important difference between this conception of semantics and what is typically considered by this name. He writes, "Virtually all work in syntax in the narrower sense has been intimately related to questions of semantic (and of course phonetic) interpretation, and motivated by such questions. The fact has often been misunderstood because many researchers have chosen to call this work "syntax," reserving the term "semantics" for relations of expressions to something extra-linguistic. (Chomsky 2000: 174). As suggested here, for a MI like Chomsky, semantics is importantly linked to the study of syntax rather than to the study of the nature of extra-linguistic things.

8   The parade case is the contrast between *eager* and *easy* in the following constructions:

  (i) John is eager to please
  (ii) John is easy to please
  (iii) It is easy to please John
  (iv) *It is eager to please John (on the intended interpretation; i.e. with pleonastic 'it')

In (i) *John* is understood as the subject of *eager*, whilst in (ii), it is the object of *easy*. This structural difference is confirmed by the fact that (ii) has a paraphrase formulated in (iii), whilst (i) cannot be paraphrased as (iv) (here 'it' must be construed as a referring expression rather than an expletive in order to preserve interpretability). See Chomsky 2000, Pietroski 2006, Collins 2012

9   The parade case is the contrast between ergative and non-ergative verbs as regards the THEME argument alternation:

  (v) Bill broke the bed
  (vi) The bed broke
  (vii) Bill made the bed
  (viii) *The bed made

So whereas ergative verbs admit of alternation of their THEME argument, non-ergative verbs don't, this being a result of their inherent lexical structure (see Levin 1993, Collins 2011).

10   Certain structurally founded relations of entailment are considered to be part and parcel of an internalist semantic inquiry. Some examples in the literature are relations between *chase* and *follow*, *persuade* and *intend* (Chomsky 2000), *kill* and *cause to die* (Pietroski 2003b).

11   Pietroski (2005, 2006) calls attention to 'negative facts' (e.g. non-ambiguity) about the interpretability of certain constructions that stand in need of explanation:

There are some classic examples that internalists use in support of their claim that semantics explanations are not answerable to the nature of external, mind-independent things. Chomsky, for instance, asks whether we must assume that there is a unique kind of object (or set of objects) in the world that the word *London* or *book* refers to in the following examples:

(1) a. The book weighs five pounds
    b. He wrote a book
    c. He wrote a book and it weighs five pounds
    d. London is polluted
    e. London has a population of 8 million people
    f. London is polluted and it has a population of 8 million people

150

We refer to objects such as books from various perspectives: as concrete objects, from an abstract perspective, or from both perspectives simultaneously (cf. Chomsky 2000: 21). Similarly, London can be spoken of in different ways: as a given portion of the atmosphere, as a population, or as both. However, none of this warrants any ontological commitment to the existence of a particular object, corresponding to the name *London* that possesses all these properties at once.

Collins (*forthcoming*) calls attention to some cases of inter-sentential co-reference, which he also considers problematic for semantic externalists.

(2) a. [Barack Obama]$_i$ has been damaged by the health care issue, but he$_i$ remains likely to achieve a second term.
    b. [The average American]$_i$ is optimistic no matter the setbacks he$_i$ faces.

As Collins explains, the coherence of intra-sentential co-reference in the examples of (2) remains invariant even though the way that *Barack Obama* denotes seems radically different from the way that *the average American* denotes.

Another kind of cases that can't be successfully explained within a standard externalist framework concerns the interpretation of generics. Consider the following sentences:

(ix) The millionaire called the senator from Texas
(x) The millionaire called the senator, and the senator is from Texas
(xi) The millionaire called the senator, and the call was from Texas
(xii) #The millionaire called the senator, and the millionaire is from Texas
Clearly (ix) is ambiguous and can be interpreted either as (x) or (xi) but not as (xii).

(3) a. Beavers are mammals
    b. Beavers build dams

As Pietroski (2006) notes, whereas (3a) requires that *all* beavers are mammals (3b) requires that *only typical* beavers build dams. Externalist semantics that associates a standard semantic value with a lexical item *beaver* is unable to explain this contrast.

Lastly, we might add to this list the cases of logical metonymy. Consider (4):

(4) Bill enjoyed the book

We typically interpret (4) as meaning that Bill enjoyed some *event* that involves the book (some claim that this, by default, is the event of reading the book). So, when combined with the verb *enjoy*, the noun *book* doesn't have its typical denotation (an individual) but rather it denotes an event, or, more precisely, it has an 'eventish' construal. All these different examples are aimed at showing that subtle semantic differences that affect interpretation are not properly captured by a referentialist theory of meaning, which makes semantic explanations reliant on the nature of external objects and their ontological status.

Those who defend methodological internalism about natural language semantics are usually also committed to methodological naturalism and methodological individualism. This basically means that scientifically tractable semantic features are considered to be part and parcel of individual minds. Knowledge of language is individualistic and internal to the human mind/brain, and this 'I-language' is treated as a proper subject for a scientific study of natural languages. As Chomsky argues, it is naturalistic inquiry of the human mind in particular that imposes internalist, individualist limits: "if we are interested in accounting for what people do, and why, insofar as that is possible through naturalistic inquiry, the argument for keeping to these limits seems persuasive" (Chomsky 2000: 32). On the first blush, this particular aspect of MI is in a strong disagreement with the spirit of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. Still, although Wittgenstein is deeply skeptical of the science of meaning, Chomsky, in fact, shares his skepticism. In other words, Wittgenstein and Chomsky have a common enemy: the referentialist theory of meaning. The latter represents an attempt to systematically explain meaning by means of the objects referred to, and to reduce semantic explanation to the procedure of assigning standard semantic values to linguistic expressions.

4. Wittgenstein's anti-referentialism and the use-conception of meaning

It is notable that Chomsky explicitly mentions Wittgenstein and Turing as key forerunners to anti-externalism (cf. Chomsky 2000: 44-45). In his opinion, Wittgenstein (like Turing) "does not adopt the standard externalist account", and indeed, an "internalist perspective... seems suitable to [his] intuitions" (*ibid.*). What brings Chomsky to view the later Wittgenstein as a latent internalist?

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein appears highly critical of attempts to conceive of a word's meaning in terms of objects, properties, relations, or processes referred to via uses of that word. The opening discussion in *Philosophical Investigations* is set against "a particular picture of the essence of human language" according to which a word's meaning is the object for which the word stands (Wittgenstein 1953: §1). On this picture of linguistic meaning, *naming* worldly objects, activities, processes, etc. is "the foundation, the be all and end all of language" (Wittgenstein 1974: 56). One reason the semanticists, Wittgenstein maintains, think of words as labels for 'things' is that they are inclined to take common nouns and proper names as paradigmatic examples of linguistic items: one is "thinking primarily of nouns like "table", "chair", "bread", and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself" (*ibid.*).

The referentialist picture of meaning, Wittgenstein argues, oversimplifies the ways we use language, and can lead to serious distortions of our ordinary notion of names and their meaning. The paramount example of how adherence to referentialism can create such distortions comes from Russell's theory of logically proper names, where a set of putatively legitimate requirements stemming from the referentialist framework led to the view that only demonstratives qualify as 'real' names. Wittgenstein rejects this conclusion, arguing that it should lead us to question referentialist assumptions and seek alternatives to the view that the meaning of a name is its bearer (cf. Wittgenstein 1953: §40). To facilitate this, his later work illustrates how our understanding of the meanings of words is at least partially revealed in our ability to put those words to different uses on different occasions – a thought summarised in the slogan 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language' (Wittgenstein 1953: §43).

Wittgenstein's *use-based* conception of meaning emerged in the early 1930s in the context of discussions concerning the foundations of mathematics. Wittgenstein disagreed with the formalists that mathematics is merely about signs, but he also disagrees with Frege who thinks that there must be something corresponding with the mere signs which gives them meaning:

> Frege was right in objecting to the conception that the numbers of arithmetic are signs. The sign 'o', after all, does not have the property of yielding the sign '1' when it is added to the sign '1'. Frege was right in this criticism. Only he did not see the other, justified side of formalism, that the symbols of mathematics, although they are not signs, lack a meaning. For Frege the alternative was this: either we deal with strokes of ink on paper or these strokes of ink are signs of something and their meaning is what they go proxy for. The game of chess itself shows that these alternatives are wrongly conceived--although it is not the wooden chessmen we are dealing with, these figures do not go proxy for anything, they have no meaning in Frege's sense. There is still a third possibility, the signs can be used the way they are in the game. (Wittgenstein 1979: 105)

The central idea in this early version of the theory is that *rules* regulating the employment of expressions in sentential and extra-sentential contexts determine their meaning. As we saw earlier, according to the autonomy thesis, these rules are not answerable to the nature of things. *Pace* Frege there need be nothing to which expressions correspond that gives them meaning, if they have a use. If we compare language and its use to a game like chess it is clear that the rules that govern the possible moves of particular pieces constitute their role, and not some object they go proxy for. The actual playing of a game on a particular occasion (namely, an act of communication by means of language) represents an implementation of what is set forth in the rules for that game. Nothing external to a sign is responsible for its having a particular meaning.

In *Philosophical Investigations* a more mature version of the use conception of meaning is demonstrated in a number of examples, the key point being that our language is analogous to a toolbox with different types of tools that serve different functions and have different possibilities of use. "The functions of words", Wittgenstein stresses, "are as diverse as the functions of [tools]" (Wittgenstein 1953: §11). Words fall into different classes or parts of speech in accordance with the kind of function they serve; there are number-words that generally serve (are used for) for counting and calculating, colour-words that serve for distinguishing objects based on their colour, common nouns that serve

153

for distinguishing and grouping objects based on their generic type, and so on.

To sum up then, on adopting a use-based conception of meaning, we come to the view that to understand the meaning of an expression is just to understand how that expression might be employed in sentential and extra-sentential contexts. This marks a significant departure from the view that the meaning of an expression is some extra-linguistic (mental or physical) entity that somehow corresponds to that expression.[12] Both Wittgenstein and MI are in favour of characterising the semantics of expressions in terms of their employment (broadly construed) and they are equally opposed to views that characterise meaning in terms of reference. But is this enough to establish the connection between these two positions? Doesn't Wittgenstein have qualms regarding the mentalist construal of meaning? And doesn't he think that meaning is conventional and arbitrary? In the next two sections I turn to these concerns.

5. Reinforcing the connection: arbitrariness, conventionality and human nature

I have argued that there seems to be an interesting connection between Wittgenstein's argument for the autonomy of grammar – in particular, its critical part – and several arguments for the independence of semantics from ontology recently put forward by semantic internalists. But we have also seen that, for semantic internalists, all semantic facts, although not derivable from, or answerable to, the external world, are still a product of the human mind, and are, to that extent, certainly *not* arbitrary. So, there seems to be an unquestionable conflict between Wittgenstein's and the internalist's response to the autonomy argument. I am ready to concede that a gap between these two positions cannot ever be fully closed; however, I want to give a few reasons in favour of reducing the gap. In this section I examine a few potential problems that are directly related to the autonomy thesis and in the next section two more general problems are considered.

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12   It is crucial that the methodological internalist doesn't subscribe to a mentalist variant of referentialism, which is what distinguishes this view from that of Katz and Fodor's (1963), Lakoff's (1970, 1987), or Jackendoff's (1997, 2002). As Pietroski stresses, the MI proposal is not that "linguistic expressions have *Bedeutungen* that are mental as opposed to environmental" (Pietroski 2005: 270). A similar point is argued for in McGilvray (1999: 164ff.). I shall discuss this objection to MI in more detail below.

(i) Wittgenstein's idea of arbitrariness of grammar as merely negative

Wittgenstein calls grammatical rules arbitrary and this qualification seems to imply that they are dispensable, alterable, or a matter of choice or decision. However, Wittgenstein's notion of arbitrariness is purely negative and, therefore, *very thin*. So, to say that a rule of grammar is arbitrary is merely to say that it cannot be justified by reference to the nature of external objects: "the saying that the rules of grammar are arbitrary is directed against the possibility of this justification, which is constructed on the model of justifying a sentence by pointing to what verifies it" (Wittgenstein 1967: 331). With such a thin notion of arbitrariness Wittgenstein's conception of grammar is definitely not up against the idea that the meaning and use of words is constrained in a way that is not easily alterable by an individual or social decision, and, to that extent, he is on the side of semantic internalists. Furthermore, in his mature work (*Zettel, Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*) he holds that grammar is equally akin to what is arbitrary and what is non-arbitrary (Wittgenstein 1967: 358), and that grammatical systems, such as the semantics of colours or numbers, "may 'reside in our nature' but certainly not in the nature of things (Wittgenstein 1967: 357)".

155

(ii) Conventionality, choice and human nature

I finished off section 3 by asking the question: does Wittgenstein's notion of conventionality exclude the determination of meaning by human nature, or the nature of human mind? Insofar as conventionality may imply some degree of choice then the answer should be affirmative since the facts of nature cannot be easily tampered with. Certainly, Wittgenstein sometimes compares the arbitrariness of grammatical rules to the arbitrariness of the choice of the unit of measurement.[13] I can choose to measure the length of a table in centimetres or in inches.[14] But who chooses grammatical rules? And how? Can they be changed? Are there some constrains on which grammatical rules we could choose to follow?

I noted earlier that Wittgenstein maintains that the rules cannot simply be altered or substituted. To be sure, one could attempt to change

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13   He writes, "the rules of grammar are arbitrary in the same sense as the choice of a unit of measurement" (Wittgenstein 1974: 184).
14   We should bear in mind that the choice of measurement is constrained by various practical considerations. It wouldn't be at all practical to measure the length of a shelf in light-years, for instance.

a convention but this, Wittgenstein argues, would not be sufficient for changing the use of a word, hence, also its meaning:

> [...] If what gives a proposition sense is its agreement with grammatical rules then let's make just this rule, to permit the sentence "red and green are both at this point at the same time". Very well; but that doesn't fix the grammar of the expression. Further stipulations have yet to be made about how such a sentence is to be used; e.g. how it is to be verified (Wittgenstein 1974: 127).

So, even though grammatical rules *qua* conventions are said to determine use, any modification of grammatical rules seems to be importantly constrained by the history of current use. But is this particular history of use just a matter of our *habituation*? Wittgenstein's answer here is 'no'. In fact, in his more mature work Wittgenstein's commitment to the idea of arbitrariness of grammar is even more diluted. Now he is prepared to admit the possibility that our colour grammar, for instance, *could* even have a physical substrate, and, furthermore, the way we use colour words or number words is not merely a matter of our habituation to the current colour or number concepts:

> But doesn't anything physical correspond to [the gap between red and green]? I do not deny that. (And suppose it were merely our habituation to *these* concepts, to these language-games? But I am not saying that it is so.) (Wittgenstein 1980: 424.) [Wittgenstein 1967: 355.]

It bears emphasis that, in his mature works, Wittgenstein's view *vis-à-vis* grammar does not relapse into referentialism: not for a moment would he accept the view that grammar is after all answerable to the nature of the objects referred to by words. As he stresses, "[we] have a colour system as we have a number system. Do the systems reside in *our* nature or in the nature of things? [...] *Not* in the nature of numbers or colours" (Wittgenstein 1967: 357). So semantic externalism is definitely ruled out. But what we witness now is a reluctance to call grammar arbitrary: insofar as grammar may 'reside in *our* nature', it is akin both to what is arbitrary and to what is not arbitrary (Wittgenstein 1967: 358). That is, the grammar of some concepts (colours, numbers) seems to be more hard-wired and thus more resistant to a change by stipulation, whilst the grammar of other concepts (e.g. technical terms) seems to be more arbitrary, flexible and open to modification. Or, more precisely, some *aspects* of meaning are arbitrary and open to fluctuation whilst some are fixed and constant.

The reference to '*our* nature' as opposed to the nature of external objects, and the radical dilution of the arbitrariness thesis, brings the

mature Wittgenstein's views on grammar even closer to contemporary semantic internalists. However, an important caveat is in order: although both positions are in some sense *naturalist*, for Wittgenstein, *human nature*, which gives rise to the systematicity that characterises language use, is to a critical degree *nurtured*; in other words, it represents a result of training and experience:

> If we teach a human being such-and-such a technique by means of examples,--that he then proceeds like *this* and not like *that* in a particular new case, or that in this case he gets stuck, and thus that this and not that is the 'natural' continuation for him: this of itself is an extremely important fact of nature. (Wittgenstein 1980: 424)

Semantic internalists are devoted rationalists, and when they say that semantics is answerable to human nature and to facts that are internal to the human mind, this certainly doesn't mean that they originate in learning and experience, but are part and parcel of an innate biological endowment of human beings. So where Wittgenstein would focus on learning and training as a source of natural tendencies of human beings, that is, those that are manifested in language use, an internalist would tend to emphasise human innate capacities.[15]

6. Are Wittgenstein's contextualism and anti-mentalism fatal for establishing the connection with internalism?

The final two points I want to make concern two additional worries that arise in connection with an attempt to associate the later Wittgenstein with semantic internalism. The first obvious problem is Wittgenstein's widespread anti-mentalism, and the second is the special significance for interpretation he assigns to contexts of use. I take these points in turn.

In *The Blue and Brown Books*, *Philosophical Investigations,* and other later writings Wittgenstein argues against postulating hidden psychological mechanisms and processes as a method of explaining what we mean by the words we use. The picture Wittgenstein tries to eschew is one in which the act of using expressions must be accompanied by hidden mental processes or images that give those expressions the meanings they have. Wittgenstein argues that use itself should be enough to explain their meaning or significance. As he notes:

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15   However, Wittgenstein's scepticism about learning language (in particular, what individual words mean) by ostensive methods (PI 28-31) could be construed as some sort of the poverty of stimulus argument, which would then lend support to the innateness thesis, but this possibility can't be explored here.

> The mistake we are liable to make could be expressed thus: We are
> looking for the use of a sign, but we look for it as though it were an
> object *co-existing* with the sign... [One] is tempted to imagine that
> which gives the sentence life as something in an occult sphere, ac-
> companying the sentence. (Wittgenstein 1958: 5)

One might rightly see a semantic internalist as succumbing to exact-
ly this temptation. However, it should be clear by now that the matter
is not all that simple. Wittgenstein's target here seems to be a particu-
lar version of the psychological conception of meaning where words go
proxy for internal, mental *referents* ('the objects co-existing with the
sign') that are their meanings. However, we have seen earlier that, in
contrast to *metaphysical* internalists, *methodological* internalists, to
whose views Wittgenstein's autonomy thesis was compared in this es-
say, do not defend this sort of naïve, mentalist referentialism where the
only significant difference with the standard, externalist referential-
ism is replacing environmental *Bedeutungen* with their supposed men-
tal counterparts (see Pietroski 2005: 270). Methodological internalists,
like Wittgenstein, understand linguistic meaning as the potential to
use an expression in a certain (linguistic) context (i.e. its syntactic em-
ployment) rather than something that corresponds to the expression.
So, Wittgenstein's opposition to internalism is restricted to a particular
kind of mentalist or internalist referentialism, which inherits the simi-
lar difficulties as the externalist referentialism. Furthermore, as empha-
sised in the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein has nothing against the attempts to
scientifically explain certain aspects of language, and, moreover, noth-
ing against a *psychological* explanation of certain aspects of the mind,
where the internal basis for language use might be located. But, as he
clearly states, "this aspect of the mind does not interest us. The prob-
lems which it may set are psychological problems, and the method of
their solution is that of natural science" (Wittgenstein 1958: 6).

The second worry stems from Wittgenstein's endorsement of radical
contextualism. Wittgenstein maintains that "[one knows] what a word
means *in certain contexts*" (Wittgenstein 1958: 9). Some authors, how-
ever, take for granted that contextualism inevitably supports semantic
externalism. Namely, they assume that insofar as the facts about particu-
lar contexts of language use play a role in the determination of meaning,
meaning is therefore determined by the facts that are external to an indi-
vidual mind/brain.[16] There are three possible responses to this objection.

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16   Child (2010) defends this view.

First, there is a widespread confusion about what 'internalism' means. So it is common to run internalism about the linguistic meaning and internalism about mental content together. However, these two positions are importantly different in that former is restricted to the language faculty whilst the latter concerns the whole of mental operations. Thus, it is possible to be an internalist about linguistic meaning (LMI) and an externalist about mental content (MCE) (see Pietroski 2006), or both an LMI and a mental content internalist (MCI). One could therefore argue that Wittgenstein's contextualism is compatible with LMI even though he is an externalist about the mental content.

Second, an internalist (MCI) might argue that there is an important difference between a *constitutive* and *epistemic* (diagnostic) role of context; on this view, context plays an important epistemic role for an interpreter who needs to identify the thought expressed by an utterance; context, however, has *no constitutive* role in determining the semantics of the speaker's utterance, which is achieved completely internally. So, when Wittgenstein speaks about knowing what a word means in a certain context (as per the above quotation) what he has in mind is the interpreter's perspective and the epistemological role of context.

Third, an internalist (MCI) might argue that insofar as the knowledge and beliefs about context are formally represented in the mind, they are also internally individuated. These formal internal mental/computational structures will not strictly 'mean' anything external like 'shared social practices' (except by stipulation or for explanatory purposes) for the reasons inherent in the MC internalism – these (and all mental states) are not individuated in relation to the world in virtue of being, by hypothesis, computations. An internalist can tell a causal story up to a point as to how the particular formal states in the mind were formed, but she can't claim any external content for such states. Wittgenstein's contextualism, on this account, would be strictly speaking orthogonal to the issues concerning the individuation of mental states.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I argued for a particular connection between Wittgenstein's views regarding the autonomy of grammar and some more contemporary attempts to distinguish the study of meaning from considerations concerning the ontological status of external objects. It should be emphasised, however, that I do *not* intend to claim that this itself is

sufficient to prove that Wittgenstein is an internalist. My argument certainly does not rule out other possible areas of disagreement and here I want to briefly mention what I think these are.

First, the most prominent point of contrast between Wittgenstein and semantic internalist lies in their radically different conceptions of *language*. An essential mark of Chomsky's 'cognitive turn' in linguistics is his novel conception of language as an internal, psychological state of an individual human organism. Language, in other words, is a psychological (biological) phenomenon, which we can put to use in various activities: "a mental reality underlying actual behaviour" (Chomsky 1965: 3). What we learn by observing the use of language in the context of activities represents a source of evidence for what makes such use possible (i.e. grammatical competence). For Wittgenstein, by contrast, an essential thing about language is precisely that it is woven with activities and practices, and its communal, practical nature, the fact that it is usable and used. There is, moreover, nothing further that matters about language apart from what one might observe by studying different social practices and adopted techniques (i.e. language use). From that point of view, the theorist's appeals to individual psychologies as a way to explain meaning is seen as a kind of explanation that is *not* strictly speaking linguistic, since it appeals to entities and processes that are outside the domain of language. For Chomsky, however, individual mental states are exactly what counts as the proper domain of linguistics.

Another area of disagreement worth highlighting concerns language acquisition. As noted above, Chomsky's generative linguistics is a species of the rationalist theory of knowledge whereby vital linguistic structures are considered innate. The role of experience is to *stimulate* the acquisition of linguistic knowledge, rather than representing the main source or origin of linguistic knowledge. The main motivation for the nativist view comes from 'the poverty of stimulus argument', which trades on the fact that a child typically acquires language in certain minimal environmental conditions, whereas a non-human animal doesn't. On this view, the difference between us and other animals is due to the fact that the child possesses a certain biological property that the animal lacks. Given that they focus on a radically different conception of language, Wittgenstein's views often seem to be geared towards some form of empiricism rather than rationalism.[17] Hence, not infrequent-

17   See Chomsky (1969) for a critique of Wittgenstein's empiricist leanings in the discussion of language learning.

ly, he talks about language learning in terms of training or drilling, as one trains an animal to react to certain stimuli. On Wittgenstein's view, a child acquires a language in the context of getting initiated into everyday practices (language games), and in the course of mastering techniques of using signs within those practices. This process is essentially normative in that there are correct and incorrect reactions to certain prompts in teaching; a child normally learns to do things by using language 'as we do' and it 'comes naturally' to the child to react to certain tasks as the rest of us do. Although Wittgenstein undoubtedly takes teaching and initiation into practices to be the key aspect of a child's acquiring a language, he also seems to be aware that there is perhaps more to this process than what the child may receive in the form of instructions by adults. This additional component he calls 'the (very general) facts of nature'[18], however, the strictly conceptual character of his philosophical project simply rules out any further interest in such facts.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive account of the potential contrasts between the two positions but merely an illustration of the most obvious differences that might give us a good reason to pause before we decide that Wittgenstein could be a semantic internalist. However, I hope to have shown that in spite of such contrasts, there is a great deal that unites these positions. In particular, both reject the prevailing externalist view that to investigate a language is just to investigate those relations that supposedly hold between linguistic expressions and the extra-linguistic world. Accordingly, there is no need to look to such relations as constitutive of our notions of grammar and linguistic meaning.[19]

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18   "If we teach a human being such-and-such a technique by means of examples,--that he then proceeds like *this* and not like *that* in a particular new case, or that in this case he gets stuck, and thus that this and not that is the 'natural' continuation for him: this of itself is an extremely important fact of nature" (Wittgenstein 1967: §355).
19   A version of this paper was presented at the conference "The contemporary significance of Wittgenstein's later philosophy" at University of East Anglia in November 2013. I want to thank the audience for useful feedback.

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162

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Tamara Dobler

Autonomija gramatike i semantički internalizam

Apstrakt

U svojim radovima o prirodnoj upotrebi jezika nakon *Tractatusa* Vitgen-štajn je branio pojam autonomije gramatike, kako ga je nazivao. Prema ovom mišljenju, gramatika – ili semantika, prema recentnijem idiomu – suštinski je autonomna u odnosu na metafizička razmatranja i nije saobrazna prirodi stvari. Ovaj argument je imao nekoliko srodnih otelovljenja u Vitgenštajnovim radovima nakon *Tractatusa* i doveo je do pojave brojnih važnih uvida, kako kritičkih, tako i konstruktivnih. U ovom radu zastupa-ću stav o potencijalnoj vezi između Vitgenštajnovog argumenta autonomije i nešto recentnijih internalističkih argumenata za autonomiju semantike. Moj glavni podstrek za uspostavljanje ove veze potiče iz činjenice da su komentari kasnijeg Vitgeštajna o gramatici i značenju protivstavljeni određenim središnjim postavkama semantičkog eksternalizma.

Ključne reči: Vitgenštajn, gramatika, autonomija, arbitrarnost, značenje kao upotreba, semantički internalizam i eksternalizam, referencija, mentalizam.

163