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Should We Be Modest? Dummett And McDowell On Theories of Meaning

Abstract: In this paper I engage with a certain debate between Michael Dummett and John McDowell on the possibility of the full-blooded theories of meaning. This is a debate on what sort of semantic theories can be of use in giving an account of the speaker's knowledge of a language. After defining modesty and full-bloodedness for a theory of meaning, I proceed to uncover Dummett's reasons for his two central claims: *Truth-conditional theories of meaning are modest* and *a theory of meaning must be full-blooded*. Then I critically evaluate McDowell's and Richard Kimberly Heck's takes on the latter claim. I conclude that with the same descriptions of our linguistic competence it is impossible to characterize our language use as a rational activity and also give a full-blooded theory of meaning that can be used to study thought.

Keywords: Davidson, Dummett, McDowell, truth-conditional semantic theories, theories of meaning, theories of understanding, modest and full-blooded theories

Mütevazı mı olmalıyız? Dummett ve McDowell Anlam Kuramları Üzerine

Öz: Bu makale Michael Dummett and John McDowell'in güçlü anlam kuramlarının imkânı üzerine yürüttükleri tartışmayı incelemeyi hedefler. Bu tartışma, bir dilin kullanıcılarının o dile dair bilgisini açıklamakta ne tür semantik kuramların faydalı olacağına odaklanır. Bir anlam teorisini betimlemek için kullanılan mütevazı ve güçlü kavramları tanımlandıktan sonra, Dummett'in, "Doğruluk koşullu anlam kuramları mütevazıdır" ve "Anlam kuramları güçlü olmalıdır" biçimindeki iki temel iddiasının dayandığı nedenler açıklanır. Ardından, McDowell ve Heck'in ikinci iddiaya

ilişkin düşüncelerinin bir eleştirisi sunulur. İncelemenin sonunda ise, aynı betimleyicilere başvurarak hem dili kullanımımızı rasyonel bir eylem olarak tasvir etmenin hem de düşünceyi irdelemeye yetkin güçlü bir anlam kuramı inşa etmenin mümkün olmadığı sonucuna varılır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Davidson, Dummett, McDowell, Doğruluk koşullu anlam kuramları

Human language is differentiated from other arbitrary sounds or arbitrary strings of symbols in its expressions being meaningful. Everyday questions of the form “what does ‘X’ mean?” where ‘X’ is an expression of a language, seek specifications of the meanings of the particular expressions of a given language. Semantic theories, or theories of meaning¹, are aimed at answering this sort of question in a systematic and exhaustive way for a specific language. However intuitive their job might be, the shape these theories must take is far from being clear. One venerable attempt is to conceive a semantic theory as a theory of truth. In such theories the unit of meaning must be an expression to which truth may apply, that is, a declarative sentence. Roughly speaking giving the meaning of a sentence amounts to stating the states of affairs that would make the sentence a true sentence. For example,

(1) ‘Snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white.

Where the left hand side of the biconditional is the name of an expression in the object language and the right-hand side is in meta-language. If the states of affairs that we can express with the proposition ‘snow is white’ obtains then the sentence ‘snow is white’ is true and otherwise, not. According to truth-conditional semantic theories (1) is equivalent to

(2) ‘Snow is white’ means snow is white.

Thus a truth-conditional semantic theory is a body of (1)-type sentences where each one of these sentences is either an axiom or a theorem of the theory.

¹ The use of the expression of “theory of meaning” to refer to a detailed theory relating to a particular language that gives the meanings of all words and sentences of that language, as opposed to a branch of philosophy, goes back to the earliest writings of Donald Davidson on language. Michael Dummett also adopts this use. See (Dummett 1993: ix)

The literature is full of discussions on the vices and virtues of such theories. In this paper I focus on a debate that concerns the use of such theories in a philosophical understanding of the essence of linguistic competence. This is a debate on whether a truth-conditional semantic theory ought, so can, be of use in giving an account of the speaker's knowledge of a language. My aim is to locate Michael Dummett's, John McDowell's and Richard Kimberly Heck's views in this debate. First I will define modesty and full-bloodedness for a theory and then proceed to uncover Dummett's reasons for his two central claims:

- 1) Truth-conditional theories of meaning are modest.
- 2) A theory of meaning must be full-blooded.

Then I will critically evaluate McDowell's and Heck's takes on the second claim.

I. Modest vs. Full-blooded theories of meaning

In his "What is a Theory of Meaning I" Dummett defines *modesty* and *full-bloodedness* for a theory of meaning by contrasting them with each other as follows:

...To demand of the theory of meaning that it should serve to explain new concepts to someone who does not already have them is to place too heavy a burden upon it, and that all that we can require is that it give the interpretation of the language to someone who already has the concepts required. Let us call a theory of meaning, which purports to accomplish only this restricted task a *modest* theory of meaning, and one which seeks to actually to explain the concepts expressed by primitive terms of the language as *full-blooded* theory. (Dummett 1993b: 5)

According to Dummett a satisfactory theory of meaning should be full-blooded. But why? To answer, we need to first understand why we ask for a theory of meaning in the first place. In the very beginning of the same paper Dummett tells us, not very informatively, that "a theory of meaning is required to make the workings of language open to our view" (Dummett 1993b: 4). A modest

theory, i.e. a theory which associates the concepts that are expressible in that language with the expressions of the language, cannot, he must think, fulfill this requirement of “making the workings of the language open to view”. In order to see what this requirement amounts to, we need dig deeper into Dummett’s views on the relation of language to thought:

If a theory of meaning gives an account of the working of the language to which it relates...it must embody an explanation of all the concepts expressible in that language, at least by unitary ones. (Dummett 1993b: 4)

By claiming that *a theory of meaning is a theory of understanding* Dummett emphasizes the intimate relationship between concepts and linguistic expressions, which cannot be accounted for by a theory that only associates some concepts with expressions, *as if* we had a storage of concepts *represented non-verbally beforehand*. And he states this is exactly what we cannot have:

...[T]he concept has no representation intermediate between it and the verbal expression. Or if it does, we still have the question what makes it a representation of that concept. (Dummett 1993a: 98)

Dummett proceeds to show that two well-known proposals are modest and also cannot fulfill his requirement. First he considers Quine’s. There is no difficulty in rejecting Quine’s translation manuals as good candidates for theories of meaning: A translation manual explains the meanings of expressions of one language by appealing to the meaning of expressions of another language. So a translation manual can serve as a theory of meaning for a specific language only if we have already mastered another language. The worry is that the theory itself explains nothing about what the mastery of a language is in the first place: it only tells us how we can master another language if we have mastered one. We might say Quine’s proposal is overtly modest: it does not even try to be a theory of understanding.

II. Dummett on Davidson's theory of meaning

Dummett spends more time on Davidson's proposal as it at least aspires to be a full-blooded theory. Davidson is aware of the insufficiency of a translation manual to serve for a theory of meaning and he seems to agree with Dummett in that a theory of meaning must be a theory of understanding. Moreover, his theory does not appeal to the master of another language.

Davidson's theory of meaning is based on a Tarskian theory of truth. According to this theory, the meaning of a sentence *S* is given by the appropriate *T*-sentence for *S* that is derived from the axioms of the truth theory. The axioms give the denotation of proper names and the satisfaction conditions of the primitive predicates of the language. At least for the homophonic theories the truth of the axioms is evident, that is, I can grasp their truth by just observing their structural features. For example "Moses' denotes Moses." Suppose I do not have any understanding of the name 'Moses' prior to being introduced to the axiom that governs this name. In that case my grasp of the axiom is limited to my knowing its truth and my knowing that this is the axiom that governs the name Moses. Now the question is whether this much knowledge is enough for mastery or use of the name 'Moses' in the language. The only thing I know about Moses, who or what ever it may be, is that it is the bearer of the name 'Moses'. The grasping the truth of the axioms does not entail grasping the proposition that is expressed by the axiom, and the latter is crucial to the mastery of the word of which the meaning is given by the axiom. Dummett concludes that Davidson's theory must be presupposing a stricter knowledge of the axioms of the truth theory. Hence Davidson's theory of meaning presupposes a grasp not of all the concepts that can be expressible by the language as a translation manual does, but it at least presupposes the grasp of the primitive concepts involved in the axioms, which makes it short of being a theory of understanding of the workings of the language. Therefore, Davidson's theory is, perhaps not overtly, but *essentially* modest.

Can this be the end of the story? Another important element in Davidson's account is the way he combines holism with a molecular notion of truth. Maybe the gap between the knowledge of the truth of the axioms and the knowledge of the proposition expressed by the axioms can be filled by some holistic account. Dummett considers this possibility.

One option for Davidson would be to maintain that knowledge of the truth theory as a whole is the theoretical model of our practical ability to use the language. But if he chooses this option then the truth theory cannot give an answer to the question "what do I need to know besides knowing the truth of the T-sentence in order to grasp the proposition expressed by a particular sentence, or the concept expressed by a particular word?"

Davidson takes a different route and introduces the notion of a radical interpreter. A radical interpreter is someone who is observing a linguistic community speaking a language, and he knows nothing about their language. He has a theory of truth that is given for that language. This theory consists of a set of T-sentences, whose right-hand sides state conditions under which the speakers of the language hold invariably true the sentences named on the left-hand side. So the radical interpreter, by observing that the speakers of the language give assent to which sentences and what conditions obtain when they give assent, will verify the theory. And the meaning of the sentences of the language will be nothing but the conditions that obtain whenever the sentence is true. By means of the notion of a radical interpreter, now we can define the condition that should be imposed on the theory of truth if it is to serve as a theorem of meaning: it must be verifiable by a radical interpreter. The idea is that not every theory of truth for a language can serve as a semantic theory, but only the ones that can be verified by the radical interpreter. In the process of verification the radical interpreter's knowledge of the truth of the T-sentences will turn into knowledge of the propositions that are expressed by the axioms. The gap will be filled in the process of verification of the

theory as a whole. There are certain assumptions that must hold for such verification to take place: We must grant the observability of assent and observability of the relevant states of affairs that accompanies each act of assent.

Dummett argues that even if we grant to Davidson the observability of some lower level beliefs like assent or dissent in outward behavior, still radical interpretation cannot uncover the meanings. First, considering cases like irony, jokes, roleplay, it is easy to see that the speaker's knowledge of the conditions that must hold in order for a specific sentence to be true, will *not* make her assent to the utterance of that sentence *only when* those conditions hold. Second, we cannot differentiate disputes on meaning and on facts from the outside. Therefore, radical interpretation may not lead a unique semantic theory from a given theory of truth. The second point is related to another important issue. According to Dummett, what determines the meaning of a word is not so much what in practice normally prompts its application, but rather what is agreed on to be conclusively establishing its correct application in cases of dispute (see Dummett 2007). Since we cannot differentiate disputes on meaning from outside, what determines the meaning is not available to the radical interpreter. Dummett concludes that

a theory of meaning, if one is possible at all, must accord with an atomistic, or at least molecular, conception of language, not a holistic one; that it must be full-blooded, not modest...It need not issue in any direct ascriptions of meaning; but it must give an explicit account, not only of what anyone must know in order to know the meaning of any given expression, but *of what constitutes having such knowledge*. (Dummett 1993b: 22)

III. The Code Conception Theory of Language

We have seen why Davidson's theory is not full-blooded for Dummett, but not yet the problem with modesty in general. Dummett's criticism of modesty goes beyond showing that the available modest theories of meaning are unsatisfactory. He insists that none such theory can be satisfactory. He argues that the search for a modest theory of meaning relies heavily on a mistaken conception of language

and thought. According to this mistaken view, formation of thought and its verbalization are two distinct acts of mind, and so, it is possible to examine the latter taking the former granted. Dummett calls this view *the code conception view of language*.

The conception of language as a code requires that we may ascribe concepts and thoughts to people independently of their language. (Dummett 1993a: 97)

According to the code conception, a language user would have at least some concepts prior to mastery of her mother tongue, and in learning her mother tongue she simply associates those concepts with the words. Even if we grant the prior grasp of some concepts, Dummett argues, this grasp cannot be used to account for our understanding of the word that corresponds to that concept. Consider Dummett's own example. It is conceivable that prelinguistic children have the concept square, in the sense that they can differentiate square things from non-square ones. Suppose now such a child learns the word square. How would she manifest her mastery of "square"? By calling square things with "square". The association of "square" with the concept square is manifested by verbally differentiating square things from others. In order to account for her verbal ability, we still need to explain what it means to associate a concept with a word. The prior grasp of the concept square does not explain the association of this concept with a word. Hence, it is an illusion to think that having a grasp of the concept prior to gaining linguistic competence will make the relationship between word and concept less problematic.² Having the concept prior to verbal representation is not sufficient to explain what it means for a speaker to use the word to represent that concept. Hence whether the concept or the word is epistemically prior will have no

² The illusion might be due to a false analogy: one might think that word-concept association is analogous to the association of a word with its synonym. To associate one linguistic expression with another is to consider them as the representations of the very same concept. But this association presupposes the association of each word with the concept, therefore it cannot be used to explain what it is to be a verbal representation of a concept.

bearing on the question “What is it for a word to mean what it means?” The question is metaphysical.

Dummett’s criticism of the code-conception does not stop here. He does not urge the code-conception theorist for an explanation of the association of the word with concept, but to abandon this conception altogether. Behind the code-conception, he detects a tacit assumption which misconstrues language’s relation to concepts as constituents of thought. We have seen above that the ability to distinguish squares from non-squares can be manifested prior to linguistic abilities and accepted as the mark of having the concept square. Nevertheless, having the concept in this sense does not entail having also a prelinguistic representation of the concept which can be constituents of thoughts involving that concept. If one presupposes such a representation then the code-conception might look plausible: the relationship of the word with the concept could be explained by appeal to an association of verbal representation with that non-verbal representation, bypassing a need for an account of the metaphysical relationship between representation and the represented. But the pre-linguistic manifestations of concept-possession do not entail availability of a more basic and intelligible representation of concepts. Moreover even if we assume such non-verbal representations, the relationship between a concept and its non-verbal representation must be explained. Instead of iterating the metaphysical question one step further by positing a form of representation that we have no characterization of, Dummett chooses to take verbal expression as the most immediate representation of concepts, and so of thoughts, that we can make sense of.

[T]he concept has no representation intermediate between it and the verbal expression. Or if it does, we still have the question what makes it a representation of that concept. (Dummett 1993a: 98)

Only if we take language to be a code can we hope to strip off the linguistic clothing and penetrate to the pure naked thought beneath: the only

effective means of studying thought is by the study of language, which is its vehicle. (Dummett 1993a: 99)

Under my reading of this passage, the dictum “language is the vehicle of thought” means for Dummett³ that language is the most immediate conscious representation of thought, and by the same token words are the most immediate representations of concepts. Thus, an investigation of the problems of meaning and understanding must be conducted at the level of language; there is no deeper level to go for us. This is the underlying understanding of language-thought relation that animates Dummett’s claim that a theory of meaning must be a theory of understanding, that is *full-blooded*.⁴

IV. What is wrong with Modesty?

We use language to express our thoughts and the capacity to express thoughts is a feature of linguistic activity which should not be taken for granted while constructing a theory of meaning. For Dummett, the question “what is it for an utterance of a sentence to express the thought it does?” is one of the questions that philosophers of language need to address. We have seen in the previous section that the most immediate conscious representation of thought is the linguistic expression of it, that is, thought is not available to us by any means independent of linguistic practice. If we can give an account of the workings of the language without appealing to thoughts or the concepts represented in it, the same account can also be used to study thought itself! Modest theories, by taking thought for granted and explaining the linguistic practice by means of it, are missing this point, and consequently, they give up on the most important project of

³ For a detailed study of the vehicle thesis with its different versions in Dummett and Davidson see Özaltun 2021.

⁴ It is important to note that by this reading I present Dummett’s claim as a methodological claim about how to study meaning dictated by the metaphysical relation of language and thought, of representation and represented. It is not a claim about epistemic or metaphysical priority of language over thought.

analytic philosophy: studying thought by means of language. But we do not need to give up this project as Dummett maintains that we can make sense of linguistic practice without invoking the contents of particular speech acts. Unlike thoughts, meanings are directly available to speakers of that language, and thoughts are known by means of meaningful speech acts, not the other way around. We understand what someone says not because we infer what he wants to express, but rather, we understand him because we understand what he says. This is how Dummett interprets and incorporates a famous dictum from Wittgenstein: *meaning lies open to view in linguistic practice*. In appealing to thoughts expressed to explain the meanings of sentences, modest theorists are rejecting that meaning is open to view and commits themselves to a code conception view of language. Modesty implies code-conception view of language, and that is what is wrong with it.

V. McDowell for Modesty

McDowell's defense of modesty is a set of arguments targeted both at Dummett's arguments against modesty and directly at the notion of full-bloodedness itself. I will examine the former in this section and proceed to the latter in the next.

According to McDowell modesty implies the code conception of language only if thoughts are hidden. But thoughts are hidden only if we have a very limited conception of what we are given in linguistic communication. McDowell calls this limited conception "sense-datum conception of linguistic communication" in analogy with sense-datum theories of perception, according to which what we are given in perception is not the world but merely sense impressions. Similarly, according to the sense-datum conception of linguistic communication what is given to us in speech is merely certain sounds and body movements but not the contents. Now if this is all we are given, meaning would be open to view only if we

can construct the meanings out of these sounds and bodily movements just like a radical interpreter. If meaning cannot be fully characterized by what is given in linguistic communication in this limited sense, we have to infer what is said by conjecturing the psychological states of the agent. Consequently, the proponents of Modesty must embrace what Dummett calls the code-conception view of language. But are thoughts hidden? Should we adopt sense-datum conception of linguistic communication?

In adopting the sense-datum conception, Dummett separates sharply the outward and inward aspects of linguistic practice and conceives the former in a behaviorist spirit: it consists in purely physical manifestations and is content-free. McDowell argues that what is available to us in linguistic practice are not just some sounds and gestures but also the contents themselves. When we hear words we immediately hear their contents. For a speaker of a language, it is not possible to hear the words of that language without the contents they carry. She is never in the predicament of a radical interpreter. In speech we are given much more than what Dummett allows in the outward aspect. Hence, McDowell questions whether we can separate sharply the content-free aspects of linguistic practice from its contentful aspects.

If there is no such sharp separation, a non-behaviorist characterization of the outward aspect of language will be available to the proponents of modesty. They can insist both that we *cannot* make sense of meanings without appealing to contents, and that the outward aspect of language *is* sufficient to provide meanings. According to McDowell it is true that the outward aspect of language is capable of characterizing meaning, but only because it is already content involving. In McDowell's version (McDowell, 1998b) *meaning lies open to view in linguistic practice* only because *thought is open to view in linguistic practice*. Meaning is no hidden because nothing is hidden including the contents of mind! Therefore, McDowell concludes modesty does not imply the code conception, if one is not also

committed to the Dummett's behavioristic version of 'meaning lies open to view' thesis.

This point is made not only to undercut one of Dummett's arguments against modesty, but also to raise doubts about the possibility of the project Dummett is advocating. Dummett himself demands a theory of meaning must satisfy two conditions. The first condition is a precaution against behaviorism: a theory of meaning must characterize language use as a rational activity. The second condition, on the other hand, is a precaution against psychologism: a theory of meaning should not imply a picture of linguistic communication which makes our understanding of others a mere hypothesis about other minds. McDowell agrees with Dummett's demands; however, he argues that it is impossible to give a theory of meaning that meets them by employing only the means that Dummett permits. Dummett's behavioristic conception of the outward aspect of language is the very obstacle in the way of meeting these demands. If thoughts are hidden and a theory of meaning cannot employ them, then such a theory cannot situate the mind in its proper place in linguistic practice. If the outward aspect of language is not content involving, then a theory of meaning based on this aspect cannot capture the rationality of linguistic activity, nor can it be compatible with the fact that we get to know each other's mind in linguistic communication.

This is a serious objection to the feasibility of Dummett's project, however does it also diminish the project's appeal? As we have seen in §III, full-blooded theory aims to examine the metaphysical relationship between the representation and the represented: linguistic expressions and their contents. McDowell seems to think only against a background of a bifurcated picture of the inward and outward aspects of language, this relationship requires an explanation. In such a setting, the question of how we can understand what is said, which is a matter of content, by the direct perception of the content-free aspects of speech acts needs to be addressed. According to McDowell, this is the setting which provides significance

for Dummett's quest for a full-blooded theory. If we reject the sharp distinction between contentful and content-free aspects of language, and accept that the outward aspect of language is rich enough to supply us with contents, the question "What is it for a word to mean what it means?" also becomes uninteresting.

And yet, I think Dummett would still want to know in virtue of what words represent the contents they do. Even though McDowell is right in that it is impossible to separate those two in linguistic practice, even though they are indistinguishable in the experience of a language speaker, still linguistic items are not identical to their content. Moreover, I think Dummett agrees with McDowell in that there are no distinct acts of the mind that correspond to hearing and understanding speech, or thinking and verbalizing. Nevertheless, this only shows how immediate the relationship between representation and represented is; it does not account for the relationship.

VI. McDowell against full-bloodedness

The appeal of the full-blooded theories will last as long as a non-content-involving description of linguistic practice that accounts for the meanings of its expressions is logically possible. Not pursuing this possibility would be defeatist. Assuming the logical possibility, McDowell questions whether such descriptions will be adequate by Dummett's own standards: can a theory of meaning that employs non-content involving descriptions characterize language use as a rational activity? Can we make sense of the rationality of language use without appealing to the contents of speech acts?

There are two ways in which we can understand this worry. I believe that both of them are meant by McDowell. The weak version is a descriptive claim and reads as follows:

[O]ur capacity for rational understanding gets its grip on linguistic behavior precisely under the descriptions of the sort Dummett disallows. (McDowell 1998a: 112)

Linguistic behavior can be characterized by different sorts of descriptions. The way *we* see our linguistic practice as a rational activity is under the propositional description of language. We do not know whether there is another kind of description that captures the rationality of linguistic activity without invoking the contents of speech acts. Therefore, it is not clear that Dummett's project is feasible. Perhaps Dummett is asking for the moon.

The strong version is a metaphysical claim and reads as follows:

[W]e can see that there is no plausibility in the idea that linguistic behavior would still present itself to us as rationally intelligible, if we were restricted to viewing it in terms that Dummett allows. (McDowell 1998a: 114)

According to the strong version there is no hope of finding a description that will do the job Dummett requires. The propositional descriptions by which we ordinarily make sense of the rationality of language are the *only* descriptions under which linguistic practice is rational. I believe that McDowell makes both claims and the strong one can lead to a principled, non-defeatist rejection of the possibility of full-blooded theories. I take it McDowell proceeds from the weak to strong version in a Wittgensteinian manner, by raising doubts about the metaphysical urge that motivates Dummett's enquiry.

[W]hat reason is there to suppose that the sense we make of linguistic behavior is still available to us, if when we contemplate the behavior we are required to deny ourselves the very terms in which we ordinarily make sense of it? (McDowell 1998a: 114)

Our ordinary practices in which we make sense of linguistic behavior presuppose descriptions that invoke notions like thought, content, etc. It is not clear whether the same practices would make sense to us as linguistic behavior or even rationality will mean the same thing it usually does, when we restrict ourselves to descriptions that do not invoke thought.

Perhaps this is not enough to give up the project but certainly we need more than the logical possibility of non-content involving and rationalizing descriptions of language use to go on. Dummett did not give us such a notion of language use. I think McDowell is successful in shifting the burden to the full-blooded theorist: we need at least one description of language use under which we recognize linguistic practice as rational and that this description of linguistic practice is more fundamental for the discussions of the rationality of speech than the propositional description, so that the notion of rationality captured by this description is already a part of our ordinary understanding of rationality as it functions in our ordinary practices.

VII. The way out?

In this penultimate section I will consider whether the verbal descriptions of linguistic performances might be just what the full-blooded theorist needs. We find such a proposal in Heck 2007. I will not follow their proposal closely but focus on the practical aspect of language that underlies it. Dummett claims that language use, and so understanding, is a practical ability. This is no doubt true in one sense: if you know how to speak a language, this knowledge would be manifest in your use of the language. However, Dummett seems to say something more here, something which has a bearing on the question of what it is for a word to mean what it does. In knowing how to use a word, I must know what it means, but is there anything more to this knowledge than my ability to use the word in the relevant circumstances, that is, to manifest the verbal behavior that constitutes its use? Dummett seems to think the answer is no and this is the significance of his characterization of language use as a practical ability: an ability the description of which does not require attribution of mental states whose content explains the having of the ability. Let us consider another learned practical ability: cycling. In describing someone as cycling, I characterize her cycling as intentional, and in

doing so, I attribute her the knowledge of what she is doing: the knowledge that she is cycling and also a practical ability to cycle, the knowledge-how to cycle. In attributing the latter, I take it she will know how to move her arms and legs and balance in the way one does in order to cycle. Now none of these sub-parts of her cycling need to be intentional and she does not need to know that she moves her arms as the way she does. The means by which she cycles, which manifest her practical ability, can be described purely behavioristically without appeal to her conscious mental states. And her having the practical ability to cycle is just her ability to move in such and such ways.

We use words to express our thoughts. Language use is an intentional activity under the description of expressing a thought. To express a thought, I need to utter a sentence. Uttering a sentence is my means of thought expression. Is uttering a sentence similar to moving my legs when I cycle? Can we make sense of the intentionality of thought expression while describing our ability to utter the words in such an expression purely behavioristically? Can we give a description of linguistic competence without appeal to mental states? In calling linguistic competence a practical ability, Dummett wants to say yes. However, the analogy to practical abilities such as cycling does not hold. Language use is different in a crucial respect: it is intentional even at the level of utterance. Uttering a sentence is not like subpersonally registered movements of the body in performing an intentional action. Suppose an agent intended to express her belief that snow is white and so she uttered the sentence 'snow is white'. One way to describe what happened here is by appealing to the propositional content of the utterance: She told that snow is white. One cannot tell that p without having conscious attitudes that p (belief, disbelief, doubt, wonder, etc.) But we could also describe what happened under its verbal description: She uttered the sentence "snow is white". Can we describe what happened under this verbal description purely behavioristically? Unless the agent is a parrot, or a child that imitates certain sounds he heard in a parrot like fashion, the answer is no.

Taken as a means of thought expression, and not just blabbering of words, uttering a sentence is acting intentionally. Hence in describing someone as uttering a sentence, we *ipso facto* attribute her conscious mental states. Even in those cases that we do not assume that people believe what they say—cases of irony, lying, joking, etc.—we assume that they know the meaning of the words that they utter. We assume that we speak the same language. Thus, we attribute beliefs about the meanings of the words to the agents, and that is the way we explain their word choice in their utterances. Of course, the word choice does not need to take the shape of explicit consideration of alternatives, say as in cases like writing a difficult letter or paper. Nevertheless, in each case we conceive the agent to have drawn on her knowledge of the meanings of the words in uttering them. The mind is involved even at the level of uttering. The language use is intentional even under its verbal descriptions. This fact also explains our “strong intuition that only rational agents are capable of using language, that one is not *using language* unless what one says is connected in the right kind of way with one thinks” (Heck 2007: 543).

We can make sense of language use as a rational activity under the verbal description of speech acts without invoking the contents of particular speech acts. But we still need to invoke mental contents that store semantic knowledge. Hence, we seem to have found a non-propositional description of language use which nevertheless describes it as rational. This is what motivates Heck to use the verbal expressions in constructing a Dummettian notion of language use that meets McDowell’s challenge.

Yet I think neither Dummett nor McDowell would be satisfied with this proposal. Neither of them would take such an account of language use as able to support a full-blooded theory. Recall that we need such a theory to give us a theory of meaning which is a theory of understanding. The verbal description being intentional, is a description that invokes the mental states of the agent, the states

that store semantic knowledge. It is true that they are not the same mental states that McDowell invoked, since they are not about the content of particular utterances. Nevertheless, they are not states that are “open to view” to the extent that by means of them we can distinguish a difference between our language and a Martian language that sounds like English but differs from it semantically. Thus, Dummett’s requirement of transparency of meaning in use might not be satisfied if we characterize use by those mental states. A characterization of language use in its verbal description relies on understanding of words if not of the contents expressed with those words. So, it does presuppose a capacity for thought in general. Hence it cannot be used to study thought as Dummett demands it. If it were not for this demand, I think Dummett would not insist on the behavioristic characterizations of language use. McDowell is vindicated in thinking that fullbloodedness preclude nothing but behavioristic descriptions of language use and our language use is unrecognizable as the rational activity it is under such description

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