Review of: "How to cure the Wittgensteinian anxiety? A two-dimensional approach to speakers' intuitions in linguistics"

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There are various reasons for recommending this article as an interesting proposal that usefully contributes to the discussion of important themes. The status of intuitions raises serious questions about any theory based on them, and this central concern of the paper is addressed with originality and depth. Those readers mostly interested in the epistemological validity of a scientific investigation that is empirical, but rests on private experiences, may or may not revise their convictions (probably not), but they will certainly refine them on an informed basis. Readers mostly interested in the philosophy of language will find a stimulating test case for assessing the merits of rival conceptions of reference, which here are shown to tie in with foundational questions about cognitive science and the inter-subjectivity of mental representations. Cognitive scientists and linguists will find here an informed discussion about intuitions, which may problematize the notion for some, vindicate its use for others, and hopefully raise new questions for most.

This last sentence may sound surprisingly non-committal. Surely, if this article is informative and its argument is sound, its value should go beyond just raising questions?

The reason is that the argument articulated in the second half of this paper has a deliberately circumscribed goal – and to good effect. It does not purport to neutralize the reservations raised by intuitions-driven theories of language, to show that these theories are epistemologically secure, to argue for a mentalist view of the language faculty, or to take a position on whether linguistic meaning is ultimately anchored outside the mind. And yet, it touches on all these aspects. The last sentence of the abstract makes this absolutely clear: 'with two-dimensional semantics as a guide, intuitionist linguistics is compatible with the structuralist vision of science, at least in principle.' The argument is not a defence of 'intuitionist linguistics', but a claim that intuitions, whatever their metaphysical value (which would need to be made clear), have a dual nature, and under one of these two aspects they meet requirements often imposed on scientific theories. The distinction between definitional, world-invariant properties and world-contingent ones is not argued for, but presupposed (although it is presented as plausible). Given this schema, facts about intuitions can be subdivided into two: on the one hand, contingent properties (linked to the ability to communicate) which could change across worlds but allow for public reporting and place linguistic intuitions in a network of observable and verifiable phenomena; on the other hand, a primary, definitional 'sense' of deviancy which can be reported and recognized in others by their reports but is a strictly private experience, much like pain.

The 'cure' promised in the title is in fact, then, a negative argument: it is not true that the undeniable private character of linguistic intuitions entails, as a matter of principle, that they cannot possibly be the subject of scientific inquiry. A scientific investigation of language based on intuition patterns, then, is possible in principle, although it requires some theoretical assumptions. In particular, there is no assurance that the purely private experience correlated to the perception of deviance is in fact as invariant as would be necessary. But this is not, and should not be, an empirical matter. The objections to speakers' intuitions are not so much based on disagreements among speakers, as on the philosophically more interesting point that speakers could disagree, or report inaccurately, or refer to different experiences, without there being any objective, mind-external check on the uniformity of their mind-internal experiences. Disagreements in judgments are there (see for instance Adli 2005, Gradedness and consistency in grammaticality judgments, in Kepser & reis, Linguistic Evidence, De Gruyter) but they are in fact quite marginal when compared to the immense mass of consistent judgments that stands behind trivial descriptive statements like 'the French negative marker *pas*, when present, occurs after the first tensed verbal form'. What matters for rejecting intuitions as the object of scientific inquiry is not that they are inconsistent (they are not), but that they are in principle inaccessible to inspection by a third party. In the face of this, the argument here developed shows that, in a more articulated conception of what we mean by 'intuition', there is a component that is, in principle and in fact, observable and publicly available to report and verification, and another component which, while not inspectable, is there and is no more variable than a notion like 'pain'. The objection in principle, then, is substantially weaker than it is usually made out to be – quite apart from the empirical evidence. Empirically, while reports of intuitions can indeed be unreliable, the systematic intersubjective agreement behind every morphological, syntactic, and semantic regularity in natural language is a fact that calls for explanation. Denying that acceptability intuitions are an observable fact is not a prudent choice, given that speakers have intuitions even though we can’t always pinpoint them (and given that these intuitions are shared enough to allow for stable if ever-evolving states of language among communities).

I have distinguished intuitions about different levels of linguistic description (something adumbrated in the author’s choice of examples in the opening section). But when we discusss the nature of intuitions, are we speaking of states of the mind, or of speakers’ interpretation of linguistic facts? It should be noted, perhaps more clearly than the article does, that the conceptual analysis underlying the distinction between contingent/variable and necessary/rigid properties, is semantic: it elucidates the full meaning range of words like 'water', 'pain', and also 'intuition'. But a mental state is not identical to the content of a word. The author explicitly characterizes in two-dimensional terms the content of mental experiences, but the distinction should be remembered. Fear, for instance, apparently consists of two neurologically quite distinct responses, conscious and subconscious (LeDoux, 2017, Semantics, surplus meaning, and the science of fear, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 21), not necessarily co-occurring; but the meaning of the word conflates the two. So there might not be 'one' fixed denotation for what we understand as 'intuition', or better for the invariant, definitional part of this type of experience.

These critical considerations invite a final comment. A substantial part in the centre of the article is devoted to spelling out the dual-semantic approach to Putnam's Twin Earth scenario. Quite independently of the paper's argument about the legitimacy of introspective judgments as basis for the scientific study of knowledge of language, it is worth noting that intuitions are routinely the (mostly unstated) source of much work in the philosophy of language. What mind-external

evidence, be it experimental or otherwise, is there to suggest that the term 'water' could not refer at the same time to XYZ and to H2O? This is said to be 'counterintuitive' – surely this is also an intuition? Similarly, there seems to be nothing more than speakers' intuitions about linguistic meaning behind the distinction between 'Franklin could have failed to be Franklin' and 'Franklin could have failed to be the inventor of bifocals'. I think that the weight (justly) given to such precise semantic intuitions makes it very implausible to deny any importance to intuitions about the combinatoric part of knowledge of language.