A linguistic theory of speech. Preliminaries

SUMMARY

Preface

The author declares his intention to supplement his previous theoretical linguistic and philosophical works by submitting an account of what he proposes as „preliminaries" of a *linguistic* theory of **speech** (in, approximately, saussurian sense of *parole*). The substantial goal of the book is not an overview of other authors' contributions to speech theory, but a presentation of the author's own insights into the phenomenon of speech. These concern, in particular, *intersubjective generalizing* observations of *linguistic* clues, based, foremostly, on **reports** of specific products of natural-language *codes* („langues") in *discourse* (where 'discourse' is broadly understood, e.g., by also encompassing literature or soliloquy). Such observations are claimed to ensure a substantive, non-impressionistic, view of speech and its subdomains (even if they cannot provide a panacea for *all* kinds of trouble that haunt those who try to make the workings of language and speech clear [or at least clearer than they have been heretofore]).

This kind of personal outlook does not prescind the author's confrontation with certain selected parts or aspects of the vast literature on language and speech, including some philosophical works.

A note on the content of the Summary.

In the *Summary*, schemata and formal deductions introduced in the main text of the book are, in *most* cases, only mentioned, but not replicated in detail.

Introduction

I. Scope and character of the work

1. Speech.

What is understood by *speech* is the entirety of *whole / complete / self-contained* (possibly, many-layer) tokens of any elements of any natural-language code as used in an individual situation, in their contraposition to bare *parts* of such tokens (e.g., syllables *as* syllables).

    The main relevant claim reads: there is a h i e r a r c h y of „linguoacts / linguo-products” (in the sense of the author's nonce words as explained in the first paragraph above). **The *foundation* of speech are homogeneous denotata of phrasally stressed utterances** (stressed *not by way of a purely corrective emphasis*) **which embody a real solution to the following *yes-no question*:** „did NN s|ay [to someone] / t|ell [someone] *that* a state of affairs p, not: ~ p, holds” [the solution amounts, e.g., to the following utterance: „yes, NN s|aid that”, where *what was said* by NN is a *denotatum* in the category just mentioned as „foundation of speech”].

    In other words, utterances characterized in possible true reports thereof in the way just indicated involve NN's purported responsibility for the *truth* of what constitutes the relevant string(s) of expressions used by him/her, in their comprehension as members of *a fully spelled tautological alternative* (this kind of understanding being proper to both parties to the discourse, i.e. speaker and adressee(s)).

2. Theory.

What is understood by *theory* are serious, at least intentionally serious, *generalizations*, as opposed to bare registration of isolated empirical items; in our case: registration of specific linguistic expressions or their particular features.

3. Linguistics.

What is understood by *linguistic* nature of a theory of speech or its part / fragment is the fact that the respective generalizing insight or its part is concerned with the use of *natural-language codes* as **wholes**, not: with the use of these or other particular *parts* or *aspects* of the codes and their exploitation in *special* domains or for *special* purposes of social life (e.g., in pedagogy, marketing, or military intelligence service).

4. Preliminaries.

The study submitted in the book is confined to the *most essential* (according to the author's evaluation) properties of the entirety of elements of speech (in its *linguistic*

understanding as explained above) and their internal differentiation. A full linguistic theory of speech, with a *complete* account of its internal differentiation, is a task for teams of scholars in many future generations, a task for whose final accomplishment there is no warrant (the most productive period of linguistic theorizing is now almost exactly, i.e. no more than, 150 years old; thus, the glorious period is a miniscule part of the otherwise very short time given to speaking entities *on this Earth*). The author's own relevant competence is very narrow.

II. General linguistic-philosophical premises.

1. The main logico-linguistic-philosophical premise (adopted within the author's version of „linguistic phenomenology", as the school of thought was called by J.L. Austin) can be formulated in the following way.

There are two universal natural-language functors which map two separate **simple, self-understandable properties** that serve as the pivotstones of the existence of *any* l i v i n g   b e i n g. The short English symbols of the functors are *did* and *know(s)*. The two phenomena are inherently bound together (one can say: in the sense of Kant's idea of „synthetic *a priori*").

A reasoning presented by the author shows that what may seem to be, on the face of it, a fundamental fact, viz. 'existence', is ultimately based on 'did' and 'know' as real „primitive" concepts (unlike 'existence' which is derivable from them).

2. Both phenomena: 'doing' and 'knowing', are non-empirical: they are not objects of sensual experience.

The relevant crucial fact is the priority of the *totality* of real **doings** as proper to living beings, including humans, *vis-à-vis* other phenomena, such as intentions or decisions. This has been made manifest by Libet's biological experiments. But it is also easy to ascertain the same thing by common down-to-earth observation and self-observation, if only made in a duly dilligent way.

3. Speaking beings, due to expressions making up their languages (their natural-language codes) have not only knowledge about individual objects and their attributes, but also knowledge about attributes, or contradictory contrasts (specifying the general phenomenon of knowledge), themselves, i.e. attributes or contrasts that recur in different individual objects. Thus, speaking beings are endowed with *knowledge about knowledge itself*, 'knowledge as such'.

That kind of knowledge embraces, in a constitutive way, speaking beings' **knowledge** of their extremely far-reaching *ignorance*.

A series of schemata in the book visualizes, first, the overall relation „language – reality", second, „knowledge" in general, and, finally, its main specimen: „verbal

knowledge" of speaking beings. All the schemata represent proportional arrangements of the predicative units corresponding to the primitives mentioned above, in their abridged form, as 'did', 'knows', and the units' valency partners known as 'someone' and 'something' (with subscripts showing the *necessary* multiple filling of the valency places of the predicative units by the two „pronominal" partners: 'someone' and 'something', cf., e.g., *someone$_i$ knows about someone$_j$ something$_k$*).

The application of the primitives 'someone' and 'something' in the schemata results from what the author calls „expansive metonymy". This metonymical claim is substantiated by the fact that *literal* concatenations in the shape of '* something did something' or '* something knows something' are unequivocally deviant. The author admits that his theory is made vulnerable by that kind of metonymy inherent in it, given that literal usage restricts 'someone', by and large, to speaking beings, and 'doing' as well as 'knowing' – to speaking beings and only marginally to some representatives of fauna, with, practically speaking, complete exclusion of representatives of flora as denotata of either 'someone' or 'did' and 'know'. Yet he shows that incidental circumstances of linguistic usage cannot change the facts that point to the non-empirical *contrastive* **interrelations** between all living beings (**including flora**), on the one hand, and all non-living entities, on the other. These interrelations are adequately mirrored (in the admittedly metonymical way) as applied in the schemata where all kinds of action-*cum*-knowing are paired with one member of the binary opposition of inherently singular terms: 'someone' : 'something', viz. with 'someone', and where whatever is far removed from 'subjecthood' in action and knowing is paired with the only remaining partner of the opposition, viz. 'something'.

A formal deduction from the concept 'organism' is presented where the author shows the rationale of the idea according to which representatives of flora are subjects of action and knowing, an idea previously voiced (explicitly, but not in a formalized way) by Popper.

The crucial difference between *non-speaking living beings* and *speaking living beings* is characterized as consisting in the former entities being confined to operations on **conjunctions** (i.e. to their unidirectionally passing from a conjunction to one of the conjuncts), whereas speaking beings operate on **alternatives** embodied in products of their linguistic codes, with a two-way direction: from external objects to verbal objects and *vice versa* (a parallel of this can be seen in Searle's „two directions of fit" as proper to linguistic expressions).

A fragment of the picture developed in this part of *Introduction* contains the author's claim of primary *perfective* vs. imperfective understanding of action, the „imperfective understanding" being reduced to statements of necessary, *not sufficient*, action conditions of accomplished feats. The author makes comments on certain controversies pertaining to this problem.

III. Saying and saying about saying.

1. The main claim of the proposed theory of speech.

There are two really separate and mutually irreducible *basic* functors describing „linguoacts" / „linguoproducts". These are:
the primary functor 'say', often represented by such expressions as **s|*aid that* _**
/ Polish ***powi|edział, że* _,**
the secondary functor 'say' with its foremost expression in the form of **said: |_**
/ Polish ***powiedział:* | _.**
The primary functor is distinguished by
I. the shape of the selected expressions making up the complement of the functor: the complement is fully canonical in terms of a relevant natural-language code, with its requirements concerning the functor (in its contraposition to the secondary functor),

II. the capacity proper to the relevant metatextual reporting segment, such as *said*, to carry n o n - c o r r e c t i v e p h r a s a l s t r e s s, i.e. stress conveying speaker's avowed responsibility for the truth of the string of expressions s/he uses.

One of the crucial characteristics of the primary functor 'say' is its having a special, *separate*, valency place for an epistemic object (the „*about*-place"), in a full correspondence with the properties of the prime 'know about ... that ...'. This can be shown by pointing to such utterances as *NN said something about someone / something*. coupled with such utterances as *NN knows something about someone / something*. A formal proof of the indicated valency situation is presented.

2. The basic differentiation of philosophical standpoints with regard to language and speech.

The author introduces a simplified picture of the relevant ramifications in the indicated field.
e assumes that the most general standpoints in matters of language and speech are oriented by the two following questions (in their criss-crossing relationship):
(i) does language and speech play a key role in the life of a human society [let the object of the corresponding tautological alternative be symbolized with ✿]?
(ii) does 'knowledge' play a key role in language and speech [let the object of the corresponding tautological alternative be symbolized with ◉]?
The corresponding combinatorics (cartesian product) yields the following schema:
1. –✿ –◉
2. –✿ +◉
3. +✿ –◉
4. +✿ +◉

The proposed labels for the four combinations are: 1. *skepticism*, 2. *psychocentrism*, 3. *expressive logocentrism*, 4. *gnosicentric logocentrism*. The author suggests, as examples: for 1., Protagoras, Zhuangzi, for 2., Aristotle's *Hermeneutica*, with its school tradition dominating the overall scene up to the present day, for 3., de Saussure and „later" Wittgenstein, for 4., Leibniz and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

In the author's view, expressive logocentrism excessively emphasizes the otherwise undeniable *non-factivity* of 'saying that ...'.; whereas a categorical declarative statement made in earnest is not only non-factive, but also **counterantifactive**. In his view, the most important controversy in the described area is that between psychocentrism and logocentrism, whether expressive or gnosicentric.

He summarizes the main arguments in favour of psychocentrism and shows its being based on the error called *petitio principii*. In addition, he presents certain *positive* arguments against psychocentrism. Among them, the principal role is attributed to the ontogenetic argument which states that speaking beings speak before they can be described, *literally*, as „thinking something".

An important argument against psychocentrism is the observation that the true entailment: *a is silent ⇒ a does not say anything*. is a fallacious argument in favour of psychocentrism.

This entailment invokes the real similarity between silence and lack of speaking as ascribed to, e.g., animals. At the same time, as soon as we pay attention to the obvious difference between silence and animals' permanent state of non-speaking, we are bound to see that the entailment illegitimately suggests the idea of the existence, in the predicament of speaking beings, of something *independent* of their language and speech, as well as *independent* of anything endowed with a physical, chemical or biological character. The resulting confusion makes one think: „a human being who is silent is such that it is not just true that s/he is not speaking; more must be said about him / her: something special, something beyond speech and independent of speech, happens to be true of him / her, unlike what happens to be true, e.g., of a [non-speaking] dog".