

THE CITY OF LANGUAGE

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THE CITY OF LANGUAGE

An Exploration of Different Accounts
of Language Through the Prism of
Normativity

Ignatianum University Press

Krakow 2020

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Cover design
PHOTO DESIGN – Lesław Stawiński

Photo on the cover
Plan of the city of Krakow (1881)
J.A. Heimberger / Aureliusz Pruszyński Lithographic Workshop (Krakow)

ISBN 978-83-7614-469-6

Publisher

Ignatianum University Press
ul. Kopernika 26 • 31-501 Krakow, PL
tel. +48 12 39 99 620
wydawnictwo@ignatianum.edu.pl
<http://wydawnictwo.ignatianum.edu.pl>

Distribution

WAM Publishing House
ul. Kopernika 26 • 31-501 Krakow, PL
tel. +48 12 62 93 254/255
www.wydawnictwowam.pl
e-mail: handel@wydawnictwowam.pl

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Acknowledgements

The saying has it that it takes a village to raise a child. In this case, it took raising two children to make a book. Watching my two sons grow and develop made me sure that there was something not quite right with everything I had been taught and read about language acquisition. Rather than being something strictly logical and systematic, the way in which they have acquired both English and Polish made me certain that something else was at play: they used language as a tool for particular goals and ends. The work of Daniel Everett confirmed and explained this feeling, particularly his notion of language as a cultural tool. Together with the work of Michael Tomasello, Guy Deutscher, Mark Pagel and Dean Falk, it opened up a completely different way of viewing language, one which found its own personal confirmation in the language acquisition of my children and helped set me on my way through the city of language and down all of its meandering highways and byways.

Suffice to say I am eternally grateful to everyone who has shared their thoughts, opinions and advice over the last 7 years—if you have been omitted below, I humbly apologise.

My particular thanks go to Michał Heller and his pioneering team at the Copernicus Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Krakow for their support and cooperation over the last 9 years. It has been both a pleasure and an honour to be part of something very special.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mateusz Hohol was of invaluable help throughout my PhD and his comments and suggestions in his review of this work have helped to make it infinitely better. I am indebted to Roman Małecki, who had the unenviable task of editing this book, and any errors that remain are entirely my own.

To my family, especially my mother, for the time to write and a place to do so—*Diolch yn fawr!*

To Jerzy Stelmach for his unfailing support, confidence, coffee and kindness—*Danke schön!* To Bartosz Brożek, for the inspiration to write this thesis, the means to do so and the determination to get me here—*Merci beaucoup, mon brave!*

To Aneirin and Elijah, my inspirations in terms of linguistic theory (since they disprove so much of it) and in so much else—Thank you!

To Karo, for everything else.

Language is a labyrinth of paths.
You approach from one side and know your way about;
you approach the same place from another side
and no longer know your way about.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 203.

Our language can be seen as an ancient city:
a maze of little streets and squares,
of old and new houses,
and of houses with additions from various periods;
and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs
with straight regular streets and uniform houses.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 18.

Introduction

1. Some introductory remarks

The Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, often referred to as the later Wittgenstein, developed a very different view of language to that of his earlier self. Perhaps once, as Robert J. Ackerman has indicated, he “had first surveyed the City while standing in a borough or suburb, the severely regular Levittown of the *Tractatus*, in which the total plan could be easily grasped. The later image ... recognizes that the *Tractatus* explores only one borough of language” (Ackerman 1988: 13). This encapsulates my own feelings about language, developed over years of teaching and learning about it and fuelled by watching the development of my children. Increasingly, I have come to feel that standard accounts are only focused on one borough of language and cannot see the city itself—nor how it operates. Rather than being centrally planned or controlled, the use of language has traced functional routes through the city of language, with various byways and highways being formed by centuries of its practice. In the same way that a human settlement develops along the lines and routes determined by our everyday habits, so language has developed according to particular uses and needs.

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Yet if one were to ask the average person their views on the functioning and structure of language, the majority would probably give an account containing terms like “universal grammar” or “deep structure” or at least variations on the same theme. They would also probably agree that language is a uniquely human, innate property and that, ultimately, all languages are essentially the same. The widespread nature of this view is largely the legacy of one man: Noam Chomsky. For the last half century, the fields of linguistics and linguistic philosophy, as well as the popular discourse on the subject, have been dominated by this imposing figure and largely conditioned by the impact and responses to his theory of Generative Grammar.

Chomsky’s creation arose in opposition to Burrhus Frederic Skinner’s Behaviourism, the previously dominant paradigm of the 1940’s and early 1950’s. Skinner’s work *Verbal Behavior* (1957) had set out a complex and nuanced account of how language was acquired and functioned. Broadly speaking, this was that language consists of habits which can be acquired by different types of conditioning, from both internal and external stimuli. In other words, language was just like any other behaviour: it can be learned and is shaped by both our internal physiology and the environment around us.

Yet this previous orthodoxy was overthrown by the publication of an influential review of Skinner’s book by Chomsky, a work that was successful not so much because of the nature of the critique or the soundness of its argumentation¹ but because it served the needs of the growing discipline of cognitive science. It hinged, ironically, on Skinner’s use of language

¹ See MacQuorcodale (1970: 83–99) for some compelling arguments as to why exactly Chomsky’s critique was perhaps both unfair and misguided.

and the notion that Skinner had applied the language of the animal lab too eagerly in relation to human behaviour. As Frank Robert Palmer puts it, "In effect, Chomsky was betting that human verbal behaviour is qualitatively different from the behaviour of nonverbal organisms; Skinner was betting that it isn't ... Chomsky's review raised the flag of a competing paradigm, but he did not, in my opinion, succeed in capturing Skinner's" (Palmer 2006: 258). Chomsky went on to posit that there was a deep, unique and universal structure to language which mediates with the surface structure of language via transformational grammar, rather than a behaviour which is learnt. Chomsky's appealing and egalitarian picture won him many adherents and, apparently singlehandedly, Chomsky turned the world of linguistics on its head, ostensibly settling all of the main issues in the process. Indeed, one could argue that if philosophy is footnotes to Plato, as the well-worn phrase has it, much of the linguistics that followed Chomsky may be seen in the same light.

It was around this time that the celebrated sentence *colorless green ideas sleep furiously* emerged. This was utilised by Chomsky as an example of an apparently grammatically correct sentence (it abides by the rules of English syntax) which is essentially meaningless, no matter how one chooses to parse it. Despite some creative (and amusing) attempts to do otherwise,² ideas cannot really be said to sleep, nor can something be both colorless and green at the same time. However, this nonsensical nature hinges on a crucial distinction which

² See Policar (1997) for a particularly creative interpretation. After breaking it down into its various components, Policar comes to the conclusion that it amounts to "an admittedly poetic way of asserting that ideas which have not been well thought-out tend not to be thought about much, even when strong attempts are made by thinking systems to think them."

has been largely overlooked in recent years, namely that between semantics and pragmatics, between the “meanings” of words and the uses that we put them to. Considered in this way, the sentence does become meaningful—it is used to try to prove Chomsky’s point that it is possible to formulate sentences which abide by the usual norms of English syntax yet are meaningless. Despite Chomsky’s best efforts and intentions, this utterance does in fact become meaningful by means of the use that it is put to. Considered literally, a colour can obviously not be considered to be angry. Metaphorically, the colour purple has many associations, from royalty to pomposity, to the celebrated work of the same name by Alice Walker: but anger is not usually one of them. In turn, herrings are usually silvery when uncooked and, when smoked, a reddish colour—and they are also not renowned for their anger. Thus, this sentence may appear to be nonsensical—until it is placed in a context of use. Consider the sentence below:

Chomsky’s Universal Grammar is a case of furious purple herrings—things which look appealing and intuitively true but are actually misleading.

Now one may be semantically primed to consider “purple herrings” as cognates of red herrings³—and that would be intentional. The phrase “furious purple herrings” is used here to mean “polemicized misleading statements” and this novel sentence attains meaning precisely through this use. We cannot separate meaning and use, as Chomsky seems to do, but

³ Red herrings were used to exercise hunting dogs in the absence of a fox to catch. The particularly smelly fish would be dragged across country and then the dogs would have a very clear scent to follow. This use came to signify the current meaning of a red herring as something which misleads or confuses.

must rather consider language in a fuller sense than the flat one which emerges from *Syntactic Structures*.

Indeed, the Chomsky of today, despite using the same language and terminology of the Generative Grammar of *Syntactic Structures*, is a proponent of a theory which bears little or no resemblance to the popular understanding described above—a view which is termed the folk-Chomskyan in this book. The view is termed as such since it denotes the collection of ideas concerning language which many people continue to (falsely) ascribe to Chomsky and regard as fundamental to any Chomskyan theory of language. Furthermore, a number of alternative views of language are emerging which are coalescing around the biological and cultural origins of language and which challenge many of the fundamental elements of the folk-Chomskyan view—indeed, in some cases, its proponents go as far as to pronounce the death of Generative Grammar (Tomasello 2009b: 470–471). Consisting of contributions from linguists, cognitive scientists, psychologists and philosophers, these new perspectives all have rich antecedents but which have been largely overlooked. An aspect they all share, for example, is that they have their roots in the work of largely unpopular, unknown or forgotten philosophers from Central and Eastern Europe (Vygotsky, Post and Jakobson, for example).

Why choose to present and examine a theory which has largely been abandoned by its author? Precisely because some of the notions concerning language which underpin it continue to be regarded as “true” in a number of fields, as well as in the popular or folk understanding of language. From fields as diverse as English language teaching to philosophy and the law, certain folk-Chomskyan notions regarding the essence and nature of language continue to influence and direct both theory and practice. This has considerable implications in terms of how we imagine language to work, with resulting

consequences for how we teach, learn and talk about language. Thus, this is not a “straw man” constructed to rhetorically claim the high ground for a competing theory, but a collection of assumptions and notions which continue to exert a powerful influence on our considerations of all things linguistic, despite not having an adherent in the field itself.

If one examines the current Chomskyan view, it becomes clear that it actually shares very little in common with the folk-Chomskyan position mentioned above. This competing perspective can be broadly described using the umbrella term of the Bio-Logical account, understood as a set of notions and ideas concerning language championed especially by Noam Chomsky and Steven Pinker.⁴ The Bio-Logical account sees language as an innate, uniquely human property which may (or may not) be attributed to a particular module in the brain. Just as there is no entry in any encyclopaedia of philosophy under “folk-Chomsky”—or, at least, not yet—the reader would struggle to find adherents of the Bio-Logical account *sensu stricto*. Rather, this label is used to encompass a set of beliefs and notions about the workings of language which may be grouped together.

A third, alternative collection of ideas about language may be subsumed under the term Bio-Cultural. Figures that may be linked together under this banner include Merlin Donald, Michael Tomasello and Mark Pagel in terms of the origins of

⁴ The capitalization of “Logical” is a deliberate one, since the two defining features of the thinkers grouped under this umbrella term are a conviction of the biological “hardwiring” of language and its ultimately “logical” structure. Whilst adherents collected under the Bio-Cultural label also see a role for human physiology, they do not necessarily see the need for dedicated, language specific biological structure nor do they recognize the primacy of logical factors over cultural in determining the functioning of language.

language and subsequently championed by Guy Deutscher and Daniel Everett in terms of its functioning. The Bio-Cultural account, whilst it lacks a commonly expressed and unified theory à la Chomsky, is increasingly coalescing around a view of language which draws on findings in philosophy, neuroscience, genetics and linguistics to show how usage is the determining factor in all of the manifold functions of language, where grammar is rather something which emerges through a post-hoc process of grammaticalization, rather than being something innate. Its origins may be traced back to the early work of Vygotsky and his notion of cultural tools. In his view, “human activities take place in cultural settings and cannot be understood apart from these settings” (Woolfolk 2004: 45) and this has led to a conception where language is a socially determined tool, where there are no universal linguistic values, only universal human needs which are served by various linguistic tools.

2. A caveat

Before we begin to trace our route through the city of language, a caveat should be made. This work focuses on just one small fragment of the vast edifice of language—normativity. This limited scope is due to the fact that no work could possibly encompass a consideration of the three perspectives in terms of all aspects of language and thus one needed to be selected. It could equally have chosen other aspects from philosophy, such as negation or modality, to serve as its examples but the choice of normativity arose from a series of enlightening discussions with Jerzy Stelmach and Bartosz Brożek back in 2014, where

they convinced me that normativity was precisely the map needed to navigate the streets of language and to show that it is more than just an isolated, planned borough but a vibrant, dynamic city. Let us begin our journey with a consideration of the origins of the debate at hand.

3. The philosophical roots of the debate

The origins of a logical account for language (and a “universal grammar”) are deep and enduring: one could seek them, as Chomsky did, in the work of Plato, and especially the *Meno*. This famous dialogue provides us with what Chomsky termed Plato’s Problem or the problem of the poverty of the stimulus. This concerned the apparent disparity between input and output, the fact that speakers are able to utter novel sentences that they have not been exposed to before. Plato had in mind Socrates’ extraction of the Pythagorean theorem by means of the Socratic method. Chomsky, by analogy, sought to show that one cannot explain the derivation of *is he happy* from *he is happy*, the inversion of subject-auxiliary, by means of external stimuli alone. We will return to this matter and question later on as it represents a linchpin in Chomsky’s argumentation.

One could also seek an origin for universal grammar in the twin ideas of Babel and Pentecost in the Bible. Whereas the former encapsulates a time when “Now the whole world had one language and a common speech” (Genesis 11:1), the latter concerns the common understanding bestowed upon the chosen few by the Holy Spirit:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?" (Acts 2:4–8)

Whilst Babel deals with a universal language shared by all, Pentecost is concerned with a universal understanding. Neither, it should be noted, are concerned with a universal grammar. Arguably the first scholar to put this notion forward was Roger Bacon when he claimed that "Grammar is substantially the same in all languages, even though it may undergo in them accidental variations" (Bacon, after: Ranta 2006: 116).

Another medieval scholar, Ramon Llull, also pursued a universal grammar through the creation of an *Ars* or science which would help to provide the basis of dialogue between the three faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. This was to be "that language which can melt the heart of human beings, so as to make the unwilling willing—a perfect vernacular for conversion" (Hames 2003: 43). Llull saw the problem between the three faiths as ultimately being as a result of a common vocabulary of terms which resulted in a retreat into dogmatism and convoluted theological reasoning. By creating a common ground in which participants shared the same definitions and meanings of terms, Llull saw no room for disagreement—logically, both Jews and Muslims would have to accept the primacy of Christianity. Yet this hardly seems to be a universal grammar, in the true sense of the word, but rather a set of conceptual railway tracks to guide the interlocutors to their inevitable conclusion. As Harvey Hames puts it,

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If a language is made up of vocabulary, syntax, and grammar that allow one to express a broad variety of ideas, including those illogical or contradictory in nature, the principles and conditions governing Llull's *Ars* create a framework in which the seemingly endless propositions and questions that can be formed are, in reality, so contrived as to lead eventually to a preconceived truth. (Hames 2003: 47)

Despite its grandiloquent claims to the contrary, the *Ars* was little more than a philosophical and linguistic straitjacket, a fact perhaps underlined by Llull's spirited attempts to translate Arabic and Hebrew grammatical forms into Latin and Catalan: he saw the importance of capturing the meaning utilized in theological reasoning and transposing this into a shared language. The problem, however, is as Hames describes: "what makes sense in Hebrew and Arabic, deriving transitive and passive forms from a noun in order to express agent and patient (i.e., the object doing good and the subject receiving that good), did not work very well in Latin and Romance languages" (Hames 2003: 53). Unwittingly, Llull's attempts at universalization arguably reveal the impossibility of such an undertaking: some things simply do not work as well in translation.⁵

Some three hundred years later, and greatly influenced by Llull, Leibniz developed his *characteristica universalis*. This essentially constituted an alphabet of ideas which would allow the substitution of the multitudinous different terms in various languages for a unified system somewhat akin to a logographic system such as Chinese. Thus instead of the French *croyance*, the Polish *wiara* or the English *belief*, we could have a single symbol encapsulating them all. This would result in the elimination of confusion, the establishment of a common, clear language in which we could all be understood. However,

⁵ For more on Llull, see Olszewski (2010: 97–116).

Leibniz's conception, as is the case with Descartes and Jungius, conflates two key ideas concerning language, namely "the idea of the characteristic as a perspicacious representation of relations among concepts, and the idea of the characteristic as a mirror of reality" (Smith 1992: 49). The first factor is captured by the deployment of the logographic system: given that there is a clear set of relations between concepts, this can be modelled perfectly in a logographic system. The second intuition, related to the notion of a mirror of reality, suggests that this is rooted in the world itself: something harder for Llull to prove, for example.

Descartes, in turn, pours scorn on a reputed salesman in his celebrated letter to Mersenne for hawking his own variety of "universal grammar" and outlines his own conception at the same time. As he puts it,

There are only two things to learn in any language: the meaning of the words and the grammar. As for the meaning of the words, your man does not promise anything extraordinary; because in his fourth proposition he says that *the language is to be translated with a dictionary*. Any linguist can do as much in all common languages without his aid. (*Descartes to Mersenne...* 1970)

For Descartes, the way forward is rather to organise the underlying thoughts and collate this into a sort of universal glossary:

Order is what is needed: all the thoughts which can come into the human mind must be arranged in an order like the natural order of the numbers. In a single day one can learn to name every one of the infinite series of numbers, and thus to write infinitely many different words in an unknown language. The same could be done for all the other words necessary to express all the other things which fall within the purview of the human mind. If this

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secret were discovered I am sure that the language would soon spread throughout the world. (*Descartes to Mersenne...* 1970)

Again, however, Descartes is conflating the same aspects of language and, especially, the differences between different languages. The matter of untranslatability or that of anisomorphism, were not ones which troubled Descartes unduly yet his project was abandoned quietly and without any further comment.

Up until this point, however, it should be stressed that most authors had striven to develop a universal language, a precursor to Esperanto as it were, rather than seeking to unearth the roots of a universal grammar in the manifold languages of the world. It was only when the 1660 Port-Royal *Grammaire générale et raisonnée*, at least according to Chomsky, sought to unearth the semantic roots of syntax that this universality came to fruition. In the words of Chomsky, they “assumed that there are universal features in the grammars of all languages and that linguistic productivity—putting words together to make endless numbers of sentences—can be described by an appeal to a system of rules” (Chomsky 2009: 27). This is the idea, rightly or wrongly, which has persisted and come to underpin much of modern philosophy of language. Drawing on the Logical Atomism of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, early analytic philosophy as pioneered by Rudolf Carnap and Bertrand Russell sought to rid philosophical discourse of the impurities of natural language and to identify the logical skeleton which supported it. To focus on this logical language would enable them to formulate meaningful propositions. As Jaroslav Peregrin notes, they

... wanted to abstract from the way language is actually put to use and account for the semantics of language as an abstract system.

The pioneers of this approach to semantics also concentrated on language as a means of encoding knowledge: and hence first and foremost as a means of expressing context-independent propositions, which thus appeared as the primary subject matter of semantics. (Peregrin 2003: 2)

Stripped of context, such propositions would not only reveal more about the terms in question but also the underlying logic of language. The role of analytical philosophy was to strip away the imprecision of natural, everyday language and bring it closer to the underlying, logical structure which underpinned it. Moreover, since the logical structure of language was believed to be isomorphic with the ontological structure of the world, early analytical philosophers, such as the members of the Vienna Circle, believed that one could make meaningful statements about the world by analysing language.

In the 1950's and 1960's, and with the advent of the later Wittgenstein inspired Ordinary Language Philosophy, this view was abandoned in favour of a focus on natural, everyday language. Rather than seeking to "reform" an unruly language and bind it closer to an underlying logical structure, OLP sought to analyse how language was used and, led by healthy common sense, examine our presuppositions and notions more closely. We will return to OLP later in the thesis as, it is argued, the emerging view of language supports the kind of analysis afforded by the Oxford Circle of G.E. Moore and Gilbert Ryle.

However, the pendulum swung back towards the kind of analytical approach advocated by Russell at the end of the 1960's and it was not until the early 1980's and the return of context dependency to the philosophy of language that use began to feature again. Indeed, even though contemporary semantic analysis incorporates context-dependent utterances,

it contains within it the ghost and spirit of this logical-philosophical model and is underpinned by what this thesis will argue is an folk-Chomskyan view of language. Focusing once more on the underlying logical “bones” of language rather than the use it is put to, the philosophy of language has enjoyed a somewhat symbiotic relationship with linguistics, with the findings of one used to disqualify alternative views in the other. Furthermore, the later Chomsky and the Bio-Logical school have served to further muddy the waters by focusing the debate on how utterances are generated rather than on what they mean or, as this thesis will investigate, how they are used.

However, as we shall see, there is a growing belief that the view of language upon which some aspects of the philosophy of language are founded is faulty. The division between semantics and pragmatics widely introduced by Paul Grice⁶ and expanded by David Kaplan, Robert Stalnaker and others is now being tentatively challenged by a resurgence of OLP. The previously dominant folk-Chomskyan model has been largely abandoned within linguistics, including by its original proponent. Yet this shift has not been mirrored in the philosophy of language and, moreover, the view advocated by the later Chomsky and Pinker does not necessarily support the kind of analysis still being conducted in the field.

Thus the debate framed within this thesis can be seen as the revival of one which stretches back over 2000 years, essentially one which has swung back and forth between the two poles ever since Plato. Essentially, there have always been two competing camps in terms of how we understand and approach language: one which is primarily logical and nativist,

⁶ Although the groundwork had been done in 1938 by Charles Morris in his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938).

and another which sees language as social and developed by a particular culture. As such, the relative domination in linguistics enjoyed by the camp championed by Chomsky over the last 50 years can be seen as more of an aberration than the orthodoxy that many of its adherents claim. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the principles of universal grammar are “for many contemporary linguists ... a notion that only an “armchair linguist” can maintain” (Ranta 2006: 115)—and yet Chomsky still bestrides the philosophical world like a colossus and his ideas, many of which he himself now disavows, still hold weight in philosophical, linguistic and related deliberations.

In undertaking a work such as this, to give even a token overview of the main positions requires a somewhat cursory approach and one can certainly not begin with Plato and Aristotle. Furthermore, the author firmly believes that enough ink has been spilled over Chomsky and, as a result, more attention will be paid to the emerging Bio-Cultural account.

Chapter One will present the formal or logical conception of language and an overview of the development of the thought of Chomsky, tracing in the process the elements that have given rise to the folk-Chomskyan conception of language which is to be found elsewhere. It will begin with an examination of the contribution made by Chomsky through Standard Theory, Extended Standard Theory (EST) in the late 1960’s—early 1970’s and, in turn, Revised Extended Standard Theory (REST). This, it will be argued, in tandem with the long history of the idea and term “universal grammar” constitutes the dominant folk-Chomsky which is at the heart of many philosophical conceptions and deliberations involving language.

Chomsky’s more recent work concerns his so-called Minimalist Program and, it will be argued, this belongs firmly in Chapter Two. This chapter will be devoted to the outline of the

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Bio-Logical accounts of language, taking up where Chapter One left off in the thought of Chomsky and then considering the contributions of Steven Pinker and Joseph Greenberg. Chapter Three will consist of an analysis of the theories of Donald, Tomasello and Pagel in terms of the Bio-Cultural origins of language and Deutscher and Everett with regards the functioning of language. It will serve as the basis for the thesis that within the Bio-Cultural approach one can define a genuine concept of language with explanatory force.

Having provided a theoretical overview, the second part of the thesis will turn to an examination of some of the philosophical “hard cases” which may be attributed to this confusion over the status of language, such as the contemporary debate around the concept of the normativity of meaning. It will be argued that these debates, revolving around the controversy of normative force, are based on a misunderstanding, i.e. that they are based simultaneously on both the Logical and Bio-Logical conceptions of language. This methodological defect is responsible, or so it will be argued, for the apparent problems with explaining normativity. Chapter Six will pursue this further via an examination of the problems which have arisen in terms of normativity with regards meaning and colour. It will also show how the Bio-Cultural account as outlined by the author—consisting of not one but many concepts which are theoretical considerations—is able to address some of the outstanding issues which are beyond the scope of the Logical or Bio-Logical accounts. Finally, in the Conclusion, the main theses of the work will be formulated and their implications for philosophy and linguistics highlighted.

4. Features of the Logical, Bio-Logical and Bio-Cultural accounts

Let us now turn to some definitions which will be key in our further deliberations. The accounts mentioned above (the Logical, Bio-Logical and the Bio-Cultural) may be broadly subsumed under two more general labels: the formal and the usage based views of language.

The formal view of language encompasses a broad swathe of what seem to be mutually antagonistic conceptions in terms of the formal and biological accounts, but they are united by a set of common features. A word is needed here with regards the choice of thinkers and philosophies which are seen to underpin the formal view thus described. Figure One below shows the thinkers chosen and serves as a convenient depiction of what is intended: the work does not seek to outline the entirety of Chomsky's thought, for example, but rather the elements which have contributed to this idea of a deep, universal structure to language. As such, where the concepts and thinkers overlap is to be considered as constituting the formal view (and, later, the usage based view) rather than the whole corpus of their work.

Broadly speaking they can be seen to be the heirs to a Platonic view of language and share some, if not all, of the following features. The first would be that language ultimately operates on two levels—a surface, "natural" level and an underlying, "deep" structure. In essence, this means that languages may seem to be different on the surface—they may utilize various scripts, orthographic or phonological systems etc.—but their internal logic, the means of expression possible within their frames, are the same. This leads to the second assumption, namely that all languages are ultimately governed by

this underlying deep structure and this is variously referred to as Deep Structure, Universal Grammar or the logic of language. Connected to this is the idea that the surface level is somehow inferior to the deeper one—that linguistic form is arbitrary or unimportant and the underlying logical structure is paramount. Finally, another notion held in common is that there is a disparity between input and output which cannot be explained by usage based acquisition. This led to the formulation of Chomsky's famous poverty of the stimulus argument and has manifested itself in different variations in the work of a number of thinkers collected under the formal banner.

Tomasello provides a useful definition for what constitutes a formal theory and which will be adopted for this thesis. He holds that formal theories may be understood as treating natural languages as being akin to formal ones. As such:

Natural languages are thus characterised in terms of (1) a unified set of abstract algebraic rules that are both meaningless themselves and insensitive to the meanings of the elements they algorithmically combine, and (2) a lexicon containing meaningful linguistic elements that serve as variables in the rules. (Tomasello 2003: 5)

In this picture, feature (1) represents the underlying "deep structure" of a language whilst feature (2) is akin to the surface structure of the language itself. In a similar vein, creating a unified position for the usage based approach is also a matter of teasing out the overlapping and intertwining strands which constitute it.

The usage based approaches, whilst similarly diverse to the logical ones, may be seen to share the following ideological common ground. Firstly, since particular languages are formed and shaped by use, they are thus by definition unique entities.

They may share similar features, but this is due to the fact that they enjoy similar phylogenetic⁷ or ontogenetic origins, rather than them being underpinned by a common formal structure or universal grammar. Secondly, there is no gap between input and output but rather the poverty of the stimulus argument stems from a fundamental misapprehension of how input functions and how the brain processes language. Finally, they share the idea that grammar is something which is socially constructed and, ultimately, a result of post hoc reasoning rather than having a basis in some deeper logical structure. Obviously, this list is by no means exhaustive and later sections will detail a number of additional features which delineate the two positions further.

5. A word on philosophy in science

This work will partially utilise an approach which borrows heavily from Michał Heller's conception of philosophy in science and the insights of Ordinary Language Philosophy. A key element of the former is the utilisation of scientific research and findings to shape and develop philosophical thought. The latter, rather than retreating into metaphysical speculations regarding language, aims to utilise the findings of linguistic research in order to shed light on common philosophical problems, all of which are considered through the prism of normativity. We will return to both of these elements during the philosophical bridge of the book.

⁷ See Tomasello (2003) for more on this aspect.