MIŠČEVIĆ'S REPLY TO DUNJA JUTRONIĆ
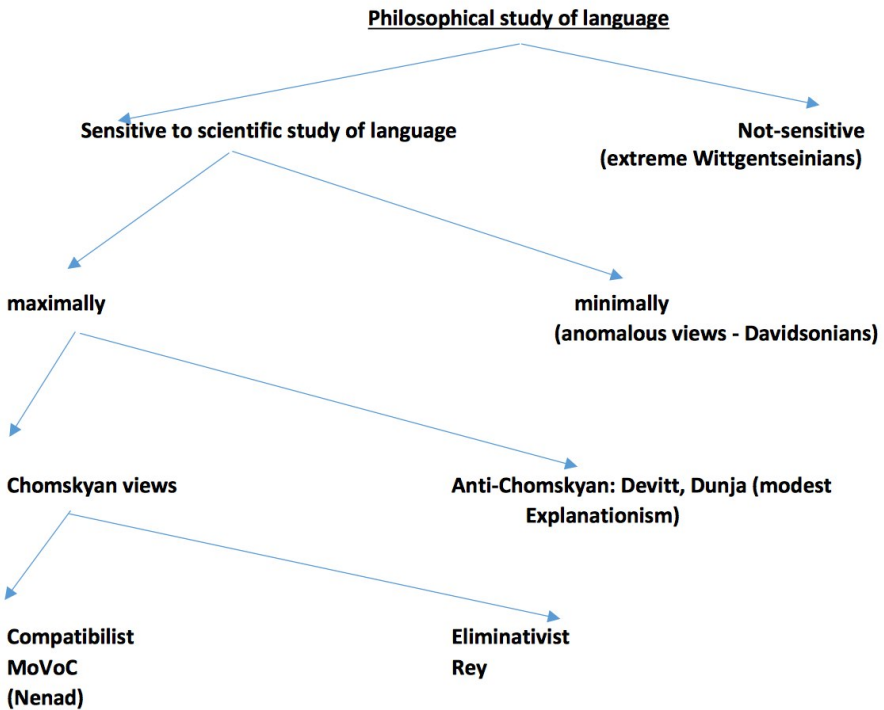
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ABSTRACT

How does one understand a sentence, in particular its syntactic structure? We have reason to think that the competence, in particular the parser in the competence analyses the sentence, and ends up with some mental equivalent of the tree diagram. And this is the main job to be done. If competence is doing this, then it plays the main role. If Dunja admits this, how can she be an ordinarist, rather that a competentialist? If Devitt agrees with her, how can he be an ordinarist? Alternatively, further research might show that competence does also issue a verdict, and I hope this is what will happen. My reason for thinking it is that I think competence participates in other linguistic tasks, in particular in immediate linguistic understanding. The ordinarists about linguistic intuitions suggest that „given what else we know about the mind" we should believe that ordinary human central processor can read SDs of complicated sentences with more than one embedding, and that it is just our general intelligence that deciphers them. It is argued that this proposal is quite unconvincing.

Keywords: *linguistic competence, linguistic production, ordinarism, competentionalism*

First, lot of thanks to Dunja, for her support, patience and understanding. It is thanks to her constant help over three and a half decades that philosophy of language emerged as a subject first in the philosophy department in Zadar (in early eightees), and then in Maribor and Rijeka, as well as in the IUC conferences-courses in Dubrovnik, where she has managed, with the help of Devitt, of course, to recruit some of the best known names in the field. We have discussed philosophy of language and linguistics endlessly, and I sadly miss her presence in Maribor and Rijeka now.

Now, to the work. Let me start with the common ground. First, at the totally general methodological level Dunja, Michael and I agree that explanation of intuition is one of the main desiderata of the work on methodology. And we agree about a broadly naturalistic framework as the

desideratum on explanation. And indeed, we all accept that the framework should be generous, compatible with commonsense as far as possible; we avoid eliminativist naturalism, and look for compromises. I had originally started more on a non-naturalistic side of ordinary language philosphy and moved to Davidsonian approach; then I have learned a lot about more naturalistic alternative from discussing issues of naturalistic semantics with both Dunja and Michael (my further source of inspiration was Dretske). Let me briefly propose a division of approaches in philosophy of language, in relation to naturalism, mentioning some examples.

Philosophical study of language

Sensitive to scientific study of language

Not-sensitive
(extreme Wittgentseinians)

maximally

minimally
(anomalous views - Davidsonians)

Chomskyan views

Anti-Chomskyan: Devitt, Dunja (modest Explanationism)

Compatibilist
MoVoC
(Nenad)

Eliminativist
Rey

Of course, I believe that my MoVoC proposal goes well with naturalism; it is broadly Chomskyan and Chomsky has always been a naturalist.

Let me now pass to the main issues . Let me again start with the common ground, in more specific areas. Here is Dunja:
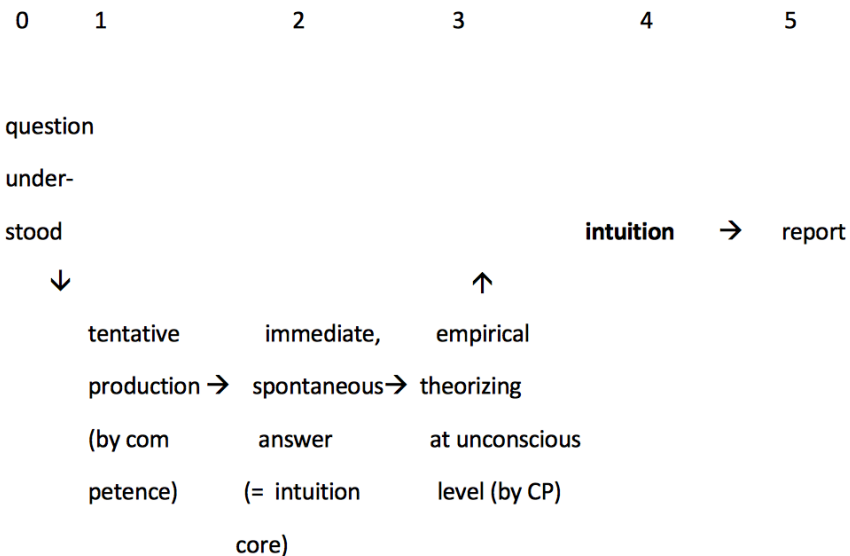
> We can take it as agreed by both sides that the first stage is a normal production of the sentence, i. e. the actual linguistic production (primary linguistic data - pld) by the competence, but then Nenad adds that the sentence is being rehearsed and analyzed by Ann's competence (...), which is not accepted by the ordinarist.

In other words, Nenad is claiming that competence presumably comes out with some kind of answer, some Yes or No signal about the sentence, and he argues that this is the most important element, the core, of the final intuition. However, to repeat, what is agreed upon by both sides (competentionalist's and ordinarist's) is only that the first state/step is a linguistic production. The doubtful part in Nenad's interpretation is "…and analyzed by Ann's competence." Obviously the parser in the competence has to "make decisions," that is analyze in order to come out with a sentence that linguist usually presents in a tree-like diagram but that does NOT mean that the competence comes out "with some kind of answer, some yes or no signal" about the sentence.

We should then distinguish the two levels: dealing with the proposed sentence, at the object-level, and reaching the verdict about its grammaticality, at the meta-level.

Dunja follows Devitt in his claim that intuitive judgments about language, like intuitive judgments in general, 'are empirical theory-laden central-processor responses to phenomena, differing from many other such responses only in being fairly immediate and unreflective, based on little if any conscious reasoning' (2006a: 103; see the references in Devitt's paper). Let us discuss her version of the story.

Object level first. I admitt of having been unclear in my formulation of the stages, in particular Stage 1 below. Here is the shematic picture again:

0	1	2	3	4	5

question

under-

stood   **intuition** → report

↓   ↑

   tentative   immediate,   empirical

   production → spontaneous→ theorizing

   (by com   answer   at unconscious

   petence)   (= intuition   level (by CP)

           core)

Let me try again, and make the picture of the Stage 1 richer. The context

of my proposal was given by the issue of the recognition of gramaticality of some given sentence: " Intuitions reported are formulated in an austere vocabulary, featuring mainly "acceptable" vs. "non-acceptable"", I write in my (2009) paper.

I have started from the assumption that the native speaker's cognitive mechanism goes into simulating the production of the sentence. I was even then thinking that there might be other contexts, and other activities of the mechanism; now Devitt has made clear that he is particularly interested in the linguistic „perception", and I am addressing that context in my reply to him.

Here, I propose to stay within the original context of recognizing (un-)gramaticality. We first look at the object level. Dunja joins Devitt's criticism that I have not explained how competence moves from production of correct strings to a Yes or No signal" about the acceptability of these strings. Dunja agrees with me that

> " Obviously the parser in the competence has to "make decisions," that is analyze in order to come out with a sentence that linguist usually presents in a tree-like diagram...

She is more cautious in the context of the litmus analogy:

> Let us ask ourselves: What is the purpose (job) of litmus? How does litmus function? The job of litmus is to show color (red) just as the job of competence is to produce sentences (the language usage). Thus Nenad begs the question to suppose its job is more than that. The so-called information that Nenad mentions in litmus case is simply the mere workings of litmus just as the so-called information of competence is to produce sentences. Just as you cannot but hear the words of your language in the same way you cannot but see red in the case of litmus.

Litmus does not show by itself that the liquid is acidic; the lab-person has to know that redness corresponds to acidity. But even here, the crucial new info is being brought by litmus. She almost agrees a few sentences later:

> Nenad further continues: Let us assume that the person successfully produces the sentence. Is not that success like the information about the color of litmus? My answer is: Yes, sure it is - but this is part of the production - either of litmus or of competence - which does not carry with it any judgement!

But this is all I need at the object-level. The „parser in the competence" analyses the sentence, and ends up with some mental equivalent of the tree diagram. And this is the main job to be done. If competence is doing this, then it plays the main role. And if Dunja admits this, how can she be an ordinarist, rather that a competentialist? If Devitt agrees with here, how can he be an ordinarist?

Alternatively, further research might show that competence does also issue a verdict, and I hope this is what will happen. My reason for thinking it is that I think competence participates in other linguistic tasks, in particular in immediate linguistic understanding.

Now take the understanding of co-reference:

(1) John seems to Bill to want to help himself.

The only way to come to know that „himself" refers to John is by syntactically parsing the sentence; in other words, one's cognitive apparatus needs an SD (structured decription) of its syntax, a tree. Competence is the only instance that can produce an SD. Now, which instance reads the relevant SD, and suggests that „himself" refers to John? Can in be the CP? I doubt: unless you are Chomsky, you general intelligence does not spontaneously read and analyze SDs. I conclude that only competence can do it. This yields the picture of the stages of its participation that I have sketched in my reply to Devitt above:

0	1	2	3	4
sentence (1)				
presented				
to				
competence				
	tentative	immediate	competence	CP informed
	parsing →	SD →	decides	about
	(by com-	of S	about	decisions
	petence)		co-reference	of competence
			etc.	

Why think that competence decides about coreference of „John" and „himself"? Because there is nothing else that can do it; we have inference to the only explanation available.

Here I really start wondering about the third objection, common to Michael and Dunja:

So far as I can see, Nenad has not addressed my third point, a point also emphasized by Jutronić: whichever way VoC is understood, given what else we know about mind, VoC seems most unlikely to be true. (Devitt, see the paper above)

Can it be that „given what else we know about the mind" we should believe that ordinary human central processor can read SDs of complicated sentences with more than one embedding, that it is just general intelligence that deciphers them? Devitt claims that „although a speaker's competence in a language obviously gives her ready access to the data of that language, the data that the intuitions are about, it does not give her ready access to the truth about the data; the competence does not provide the informational content of the intuition." So, the speaker, no professional in linguistics, gets from the competence the datum, say an SD of a complex sentence. Now, her general intelligence decides if the analysis proposed by the competence is true! How does it do it? Does her general intelligence understand grammar better than her specialized competence? I keep wondering.

Let us return to the simulation case. How can one be an ordinarist, and accept that competence does the very important work? Well, we should look at the production of the verdict, Dunja would answer. We thus pass to the meta-level. Here is her defense:

The main hero for the ordinarist is the central processing unit. CP has access to the resulting output of a particular competence so, it does some reflection about the output, i.e., about the data provided by the competence. CP appeals to empirical evidence, the data, says the ordinarist. So it is not true, as competentionalist claims, that production itself yields the verdict (for example: "the sentence is not O.K., "the sentence is not to be said" or "the sentence is ambiguous"). It is the central processor that yields that verdict (and it decides: "I would not say this" or "the sentence is ambiguous"), claims the ordinarist.

There are two assumptions behind this line of arguing. The first is that there should be a sharp separation between the analysis and the verdict, the object-level and the meta-level. Dunja makes it clear by criticizing my analogy of competence with the spokesperson:

My answer is the following: Spokesperson indicates how the office functions. It does not past judgments on the workings or decision of the office. Thus this is an invalid comparison because all it shows is how office (equaling competence) functions not how judgements follow from the office (competence). In Nenad's own words: Intuitions are a shortcut to the functioning of competence. But pure functioning of competence is not in question. The question (to repeat) is: Does competence give us judgements about

its own workings? Now, as it was stressed in the first part of this paper, the nature of the parser is to go through the analysis and in doing this it has to "make decisions" in order to come out with a sentence, but that does not entail that is coming out with the intuition about the sentence The same way the spokesperson is not commenting on the police reports, she is just passing them on – showing how the police functions. Thus contrary to Nenad's claim his own comparison supports ordinarist's and not competentionalist's view of the functioning of linguistic competence (police department)!

Let me stay for a second with the police analogy. The spokesmen comments and says: „Joe was killed by Thomas Mair". That's an object-level statement. „And we are quite sure this is how things happened", she might add, either spontaneously, or in response to a question. There, she has passed to the meta-level, and there is nothing unusual about it. The report of the (alleged) fact and the report about the report's epistemic standing (that „we" are sure about it) go naturally together.

The second assumption is the centrality of the meta-level. CP is the main hero, the protagonist, Dunja thinks. What should we think of it? Assume that the labor is divided, as Dunja proposes. The parser has analysed the sentence. It would then have to present the analyses, the tree, to the CP, and the CP would then produce its verdict. Have we any reason to believe that people's general intelligence can, all by itself, and with no training, read and understand the parsing trees? Dunja has been teaching linguistics very competently her whole life, and she knows how much extra preparation even very good speakers need in order to even start understanding the trees analysing the sentences they produce and/or hear. Trees just are complicated. To quote Paulo Coelho's Aleph: "In a forest of a hundred thousand trees, no two leaves are alike. And no two journeys along the same path are alike."

Finally, even if the proposed picture were correct, and the labor were divided as Dunja proposes, why would CP be the main hero, the protagonist? The main work has been done by the parser in the competence. Either there is a good parsing tree of the sentence, and CP is being confronted with it, or there is none. Haven't things been hereby decided? And indeed by the parser in the competence?

Let me again state my view. First, in the context of explicit recognition of grammaticality, in which the work of the languge module starts by simulating theproduction of the sentence, and continues by the parsing process, the analytic work is done by the competence, as Dunja agrees. Further, the general intelligence, and its equivalent, the CP, does not read parsing trees. Therefore, it cannot reach the first verdict. It is then reasonable to suppose that the verdict is also reached by specialized competence. I conclude that Devitt's hope that „Jutronić (this volume) shows that this argument fails" is a vain hope.

Let us then pass to explicitly meta-level judgments. To stay with our example, the conscious response that „himself" refers to „John" certainly comes from the CP. But so does the judgment that this piece of paper is white. This does not mean that CP can see colors; the judgment of whiteness is primarily based on seeing, and nobody claims that CP is the protagonist in our seeing colors. Dunja quotes an interesting passage from Pim Levelt:

> Psychologists talking about linguistic intuitions say: "It is obvious that intuitive judgements are metalinguistic judgements. The object of a judgement of grammaticality such as the sentence "John lives in town" is good English is a linguistic object (the sentence S), and the judgement is made on it as a linguistic object" (Levelt 1974 : 8, in his Formal Grammars in Linguistics and Psycholinguistics. Vol. III). It is as simple as that. Or more to the point: "…the linguist or informant who considers the grammaticality of a sentence tries to imagine an actual situation of "primary" performance in order to decide whether the sentence "could be said", i. e. is grammatical. Intuitions would then be secondary refections of primary performance" (Levelt 1972 : 22= Levelt, W. J. M. „Some Psychological Aspects of Linguistic Data". *Linguistische Berichte* 17).

I have no reasons to disagree. But then comes the ordinarist point:

> Levelt also points out that "there is a complete absence of arguments in the literature in favor of the thesis that linguistic intuitions reveal the underlying linguistic competence" (1972 : 23), and thus stressing that, contrary to the competentionalist's belief, intuitions do not flow directly from competence. One could go on citing but this should suffice. The fact that the output of competence are sentences, and intuitions are judgements made on those sentences is exactly what psychologists and ordinarists claim. Competentionalist is wrong because "linguistic intuiting is a kind of behavior, rather than a clairvoyant window on linguistic competence" (Levelt 1972 : 33; couldn't find the quote-NM)

The only argument I can discern is that „intuitions do not flow directly from competence". But consider seeing white. The judgment „This is white" is „a kind of behavior" and it does not flow directly from my eye, say from my low level neural structures, mostly in the retina, that detect color (rods and cones, bipolar cells and ganlion cells engaged in opponent processing). These cells don't make judgments, especially not in language, like English or Croatian. Seeing white does not flow directly from the eye. It does not mean that it does not flow, and does not mean that the main work is not done by visual system, but by CP. It is done by the visual system, indeed. The trick is in the word „directly". But directness and indirectness simply do not have the power implicit in the

trick. If I kill you with a bullet, I didn't kill you „directly"; it's the bullet that did the job. But I shall go to prison for manslaughter, not the bullet. In short, indirectness is not clearly correlated with the lack of causal authorship, so that the „indirect" cause can be and often is the cause. Equally the contrast between the „behaviour" and the „clairvoyant window on linguistic competence" is unclear: isn't the performance, i.e. the behaviour, of a pianist often a clear window, almost a clairvoyant window, on her musical competence (and the same for cooking, acting and scoring: Ronaldo's scoring is a clear window on his sporting competence)?[1] He is just skeptical about the evidence that competence alone underlies our intuitions. But „M" in „MoVoC" stands for „Moderate": the proposal explicitly claims that there might be other factors in producing intuitions. To keep the analogy with color, the surrounding light can change the apparent color of an object, the same way in which contrast classes, priming and the like can change the apparent acceptability of a string.

Let me end with a word of gratitude and praise for Dunja: had it not been for her constant prompting I would not have developed even these rudiments of my MoVoC proposal; I hope the two of us (or three, with Michael's participation) will continue to discuss them, and that the next time I shall be able to propose more.

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[1] In fairness to Levelt is should be noted that he accepts the idea of specialized linguistic competence:

> The status of "competence", therefore, is comparable to the place of the notion "intelligence" in psychology. It is a theoretical construct to denote a relatively autonomous factor, which underlies a large variety of human behaviours. Such constructs have to prove their usefulness. After seven decades of intelligence research, there is little doubt about the notion of intelligence in this respect. Similarly, "linguistic competence" may prove to be equally efficacious. Just as the strong interrelations between different forms of "intelligent behaviour" justify the construct "intelligence", empirical facts about relations between various types of linguistic performance should justify the notion of "linguistic competence". (1972: 21).