

PHIL 4233: Philosophy of Language
Prof. Funkhouser
Martinich, Introduction

I.

• Martinich begins by providing four reasons why philosophers might be interested in studying language:

1. It is distinctively human, so studying language is to study part of what it is to be human.
2. A misunderstanding of language can lead to philosophical mistakes. E.g., “Nothing came down the road” and “Justice is a virtue.”
3. Perhaps language mirrors reality (e.g., see Plato or Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*), or at least mirrors our thought about reality.
4. It is interesting study in its own right.

II.

• In this section Martinich distinguishes among syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

III.

• The use/mention distinction:

When a word, phrase, or sentence is being mentioned, as opposed to being used, that word, phrase, or sentence will be put inside single quotes. For example: ‘Eric’ is a name with four letters. ‘Eric’ is not almost 6 feet tall. Eric is not a name with four letters. Eric is almost 6 feet tall.

◦ So, remember, when we put words in single quotes, we are referring to the words themselves. We can even do silly things like name words. And do not think that ‘Eric’ in some sense *should* be named ‘Eric’. We might want to use the word ‘four’ to name ‘Eric’.

◦ Answer Martinich’s question:

Suppose we want to talk about the word “Cicero” extensively. We might name that word “Harry”. If we do, then the sentence “Harry is a word with six letters” is true. Question: Is the sentence “Harry’ has six letters” true or false?

IV.

- Generalizing the use/mention distinction to languages: meta-language and object language. Keep this distinction in mind when you read “dumb” sounding passages like:

“Snow is white” means snow is white.

Here the meta-language and the object language are both English. This form of statement would not sound nearly as “dumb” were the object language something other than English.

V.

- Distinguish sentences, meanings, and propositions:

Different sentences can have the same meaning.

For most purposes, when we translate passages we are trying to preserve meaning.

Sentences with the same meaning express the same proposition.

Context can help determine meaning (and, hence, which proposition is being expressed).

One might think that propositions, but not sentences, have truth-values.

- Also note the type/token distinction. We can speak of sentence-types and sentence-tokens.

VI.

- Corner quotes: These function like single quotes, except that the metavariables inside the corner quotes are used (not mentioned).

VII.

- An artificial language — Languish. Martinich first presents the syntax for this language. Syntax consists of *vocabulary* and *formation rules*. Semantics also consists of two parts: the meanings of the simplest elements, and rules for how the meanings of more complex strings are determined.

- Important image to remember:

To think about language syntactically is to think about it as consisting of sequences of sounds or physical shapes without regard to its having any meaning, as if the sentences had no significance, no truth-value, no reference beyond themselves, and no symbolic value at all.

- Note the vocabulary and formation rules for Languish. These can be used to generate an infinite supply of sentences. Run through some of the generations.

Some formation rules bring in new sentences at the ground level, if you will — the *syntactic base rules*. Others provide rules for making new sentences from already generated sentences — the *syntactic projection rules*.

- At this point, think of these sentences of Languish purely syntactically. Martinich introduces different languages to reinforce this point.

VIII.

- Recall the distinction between metalanguage and object language when you read the semantic rules for the natural numbers.
- Run through the semantics for Languish.
- The truth of an expression is a function of both the meanings of the expression and the conditions in the world. Note the comment:

The intuition behind such a semantics is that to know the meaning of a sentence is to know the conditions under which that sentence is true and the conditions under which it is false.

This view will come up again when we talk about the logical positivists.

Skip to pp. 18–19: **Subject and Predicate**

- Compare the subject/predicate distinction to the individual(particular)/category (universal) distinction.

Skip to pp. 22–23: **Identity**

- Be clear as to the stringency of numerical identity claims.
- Identity is an *equivalence relation*.

- 2 Leibnizian principles: the Principle of the Indiscernibility of Identicals and the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles. Catch the initial problems these principles raise in some contexts.