

## *Meaning and truth: What ain't in the head?*

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### Abstract

In their perceptual and categorizational labor, humans incessantly endeavor to access, describe and internalize truth. Perception involves activating conceptual resources, internalization results in concept building or reshaping and description is inevitably related to using lexical items. Mental representations (concrete concepts) and categorisations (abstract concepts) as well as units of description (propositions) reflect the exterior reality in subjective ways which comply with the rules inscribed in the mind. The inner semantic universe mirrors the outer world to the extent that perceptual categorizational labor is carried out correctly. This process is performed by the mind whose properties belong to the species and therefore display similar features in different individuals, although cognitive histories vary and so do internalizations. The latter are expressed by sequences of lexical items whose semantic content participates in (re)constructing inner belief. In this way, conceptual content is translated into denotational content which is meant to describe inner states related to the truth. The truth itself does not depend on and is not affected by inner states of observers, their viewpoints or opinions, and it exists the way it does whether or not perceived and internalized correctly. The present article explores the ways in which conceptual content may correspond to the truth and in which lexical items may reliably transmit statements related to it.

*Keywords:* meaning; truth; categorization; cognition; concept

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary cognitive science is concerned with, among other things, the discussion of how meaning is mentally represented (e.g., Aitchison, 2003; Anderson, 1983; Carruthers, 1996; Clark, 1993; Dennett, 1998; Dirven, 1994; Eco, Santambrogio, & Violi 1988; Fodor, 1987; Jackendoff, 1988; Johnson-Laird, 1988; Keil, 1989; Kurcz, 1995; Lakoff, 1988; Owens, 1988; Rosch, 1975; Schwanenflugel, 1991; Ungerer & Schmid, 1996). The structure of the reality is exterior to this approach unless somehow related to the workings of human categorization. In short, meaning is in the mind. However, we have also been offered the proposition that it is not, that it *ain't in the head*. The rationale behind such an approach has been that the structure of entities imposes itself on the structure of mental representations or meanings (e.g., Putnam, 1973, 1988; Wilson, 2003). One of the embodiments of this approach has been Putnam's *division of linguistic labor*, in which he postulated that the "correct" meanings are in the particular entities and, to use words correctly, speakers need to get acquainted with the structure of those entities, but to different degrees. While most speakers are content with merely superficial knowledge of the properties of an entity, scientists have more cognitive access to such properties and therefore their meanings are "more complete" and as if closer to the objective state of affairs. The meaning is "out there", not "in the head" until accessed and internalized.

This assumption is almost completely wrong. Almost – because I believe the exterior reality comprises entities whose structure or properties do get inscribed in the mind in one way or another, as I shall argue below, but nevertheless wrong. It is wrong not because we have no reasons to believe that the objective exists, for it does exist, and it is doing fine even without our awareness of most of its goings-on; it is wrong because what exists objectively is not meaning but merely the truth. Below I argue that meaning *is in the head* and, if it is not, it is not meaning. It is truth. While we can still discuss "attempting to learn a meaning" from the pedagogical perspective, we cannot, it appears, do so from the ontological one. Learning a meaning for a word consists in internalizing what is already in most or some native speakers' minds (e.g., Corder, 1983) – from this perspective the meaning is "out there" in that it is in other peoples' minds and should be copied. This is a completely different matter, though. Before a society comes up with a meaning, the latter does not exist. It is not to be accessed by a society, it is to be created.

I do not challenge issues related to reality broader than the here and now in the phylogenetic or even anthropocentric sense. This issue needs to be clarified. Philosophical heritage abounds in theories which hold that "language", on certain levels, exists as an independent entity. We are told in the Bible that "in

the beginning there was Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (J 1 1-3, 1971, p. 976). Within this description, the organization of the whole reality was a product of an original plan which consisted of labels of the things to be created and a sort of blueprint which screened the unfolding of the creation. As such, the paradigm concerns matters which are to be localized temporally and ontologically beyond the existence of the human mind. Therefore, linguistics, a product of the mind, can hardly aspire to come up with reliable descriptions of the manner in which the divine plan was carried out. It has no legitimacy to either vindicate or attempt to refute the biblical message because its descriptive power does not reach that far. The biblical notion of *the Word* may be associated with Plato's *ideas* which are constant, unchangeable, and on which actual objects are to be molded (Tatarkiewicz, 1995, pp. 86-87). I believe it is not out of place to clarify this at this point because without doing it I might be accused of attempting to refute what I am not even dealing with. I am concerned with the process which leads to the "arrival of meaning" in the mind, where "meaning" resides in the phylogenetic here and now.

## 2. Reference and truth

Reference, as opposed to denotation or extension, consists in indicating an individual entity in a particular context (Palmer, 1991, p. 18), where *entity* may not only signal an object or person, but also an event, state, process, action (Leech, 1990, p. 312) and more complex or abstract ideas (Leech, 1990, p. 313). Each expression has its reference, either in physical or psychological sense, save ones which state nonsense. So when Frege (2003, p. 38) says that the noun phrase *the celestial body most distant from the Earth* has only sense rather than reference, he is right in the physical sense, though here *sense* may be equated with "psychological reference" – an (imaginary) entity in the mind of the speaker or listener.

The entity in the mind may be different even if the referent is the same, as when referring to *the evening star* and *the morning star*. Although Frege claims that it is only the sense which is different here (2003, p. 37), a great deal more may be argued. More specifically, it can be argued that the same entity is coded in the mind as different concepts when, for example, the categorizer is not aware of the identity of *the evening star* and *the morning star*. They may be perceived as distinct entities, roughly speaking like the sun and the moon. The question which emerges is this: what is reference instantiated by? By the speaker thinking he refers to different objects or by the object being the same? Do *the evening star* and *the morning star* have one reference in that the perceived entity is the same or do they have two referents in that there may be two

concepts to go with them? The answer would be that, in the physical sense, there is one referent, but in the psychological – there are two.

The claim that there are two referents in the psychological sense should not be dismissed by the observation that there is only one relevant object, because reference is also discussed in psychological terms. The “psychological reference” can further be exemplified by such mental entities as abstract concepts like “love”, “hatred” or “inspiration” (Palmer, 1991, p. 19) which do not have referents beyond the human mind. It can be answered that they do, for the referent of “love” is somebody’s emotion which truly exists as a certain configuration of neural and hormonal states, but then what about “quality” or “relationship”? Superordinate categories in hyponymic taxonomies can only exist in the human mind and they do not have exterior referents other than their basic-level specifications (see e.g., Miller & Fellbaum, 1991).

When referring to a whale by saying *Look at this large fish!*, a child does make a reference and the referent is in the mind as a big fish and in the physical world as a big mammal. Both references are true: the child’s concept of the big fish truly exists and *is* objective reality as a set of neurosensory traces which make the concept in the child’s mind, and the mammal also is objective reality which is referred to by being seen and pointed at. That the “interior referent” has some properties which the “exterior referent” lacks is not a problem inasmuch as we remember that we have two referents here. The first is what the child sees and refers to directly, and the other – the child’s concept of what he thinks he is referring to. After due education the child will have his concept adjusted to that of the rest of the society, but, still, he will know less about the mammal than zoologists do. In accordance with *division of linguistic labor*, he will be content with less thorough knowledge of the entity. Zoologists will know more, but surely not all. They will entertain their more sophisticated concept of “whale” but their “internal reference” will still be at odds with the “external reference” to the degree the creature has not yet revealed some of its properties to the biological scrutiny.

Incidentally, neither folk nor the expert can usually stand good chances of getting fully acquainted with such “referents”, as Aristotle (Kripke, 2003, p. 63) claimed. Our mental representation thereof is confined to a set of the most famous intellectual achievements. Moreover, the mental representation may contain features which are untrue of the “referent”, which happens when we say a historical figure was born or died several years or even centuries later than s/he really did. This just does not matter for reference; it would matter for truth. The word *Aristotle* can be said to have its metonymic meaning which is used when philosophers remark on someone’s piece of writing by saying *Looks to me there is more Aristotle in it than any contemporary thought*. This is intended to further show that meanings are not “out there”; they are in the mind.

What emerges is that the referent has properties, some of which are not cognitively accessible to the mind of the subject making the reference. Some of the truth related to the referent has not been learnt yet. The hidden truth is not any part of the meaning of the word used to make the reference; it is a part of some potentially accessible knowledge. When more is learnt about the particular entity, the meaning of the label may be extended by adding new attributes to the already-existing meaning. What is accessed is the truth; meaning (its part here) is then created. Reference involves using words with their meanings stored in the mind in order to talk about entities, but the structure of the entities may not be completely known to humanity as yet. By making a reference we do not usually indicate things which we do not know but those which we do know. The society-wide-shared knowledge is encapsulated into meanings while the hidden truth awaits discovery and, perhaps, conceptualization. Shared conceptualization will then lead to the creation or refinement of meaning. There is no meaning which is "out there". There is truth. Meaning follows if the scientist is lucky enough to be followed by most ordinary people.

### 3. Denotation, extension and truth

The notion of conceptualization mentioned in the previous paragraph is related to denotation in the first place; meanings are not usually developed to cover individual entities but rather their classes. Names such as *John Smith* have only got reference; they do not have denotation (Palmer, 1991, p. 20) and in this sense they do not have lexical meaning. Polański (1999, p. 111) defines denotation as the totality of entities which can be designated by a verbal expression. This makes denotation very much akin to the notion of extension, which matches verbal expressions with collections of entities or truths in the exterior reality (Richard, 2003). Entities fall under the same denotation or extension if they share a particular set of attributes, and this way of categorizing reality can be tracked back to Antiquity (Taylor, 1995).

Viewed from this perspective, meaning is solely in the mind for a few reasons. Firstly, let us consider the idea of "empty extensions" (Wilson, 2003, p. 104). We are able to create expressions or terms which are intended to refer to entities that, at first, may for some reason seem to exist but later turn out to be a misconception (he exemplifies it with the word *orgone* used in the verb phrase *contains orgone*). We could keep on inventing other "null-set" expressions, such as *a CD-eater*, *a vacuum-drinker* or *a book-sower* and even attempt to create fairy tales where such entities exist in a metaphorical or other manner. "Empty extension" by definition means that no segment of reality corresponds to a created meaning. Humanity has created a multitude of empty extensions used in

fiction, science fiction, fairy tales and other genres. The property of displacement enables our species to use language in such ways (Yule, 1996) which do not depend upon the visible or, indeed, truly existing. Claiming that *meaning ain't in the head* would have to contradict all this.

The second reason why the meaning must be *in the head* stems from the fact that, although denotation changes, the reality often remains unaffected. Wilson (2003, p. 83) exemplifies it with primitive tribes which may at first conceptualize all flying entities as birds and only later come to the realization that some of the "birds" are flying machines. Prior to such a discovery, the tribe members may refer to all kinds of "birds" in mutually intelligible ways because the meaning of the word *bird* is socially shared and successfully used in communication. From this perspective, some essential knowledge about some "birds" is lacking in the same ways as in the cases where scientists happen to call a *star* what eventually turns out to be a distant body of another kind. When the truth is discovered, birds continue to be birds, stars continue to be stars, and the corresponding word meanings merely cease to be taken as related to the miscategorized entities.

Putnam (1988) claimed that human categorization may not always overlap with the properties of objects themselves. He exemplifies his observation with oranges and lemons: what people are used to calling lemons could sometimes turn out to be oranges and vice versa. Or, an already considered example, what is commonly referred to as fish may come to be categorized as a mammal. Murphy (1991) appears to follow up this line of reasoning by claiming that such instances exemplify misusing the language, where the mental representations of lemons or fish do not correspond to true intensions of these words. By claiming this, both authors inevitably contend that in many cases the meaning is "out there". But these examples, compelling though they are, need not make us agree that meaning is "out there" and that "it ain't in the head" (Putnam, 1973, p. 704). Apart from the obvious cases such as "Odysseus", which have no reference in the physical world (Frege, 2003, p. 42), word meanings which are related to referents present in the reality are produced by minds and societies, not by the referents.

What we have is merely a clash between two mental representations: those made by lay people and those made by experts. While folk categorizations may be motivated primarily by perceptive or functional properties of entities because lay people "often don't know which are the relevant features to compare" (Greene, 1987, p. 25), experts are able to "dig inside" the structure of the entity, examining its morphological or other structure, thus building category typologies which are at variance with folk categories. The meaning is not "out there" but still in the mind – in the mind of single individuals or groups of individuals higher on the social ladder, who have the power to say that "their meanings are right". I therefore reject the premise that object "miscategorization"

points at the existence of meanings in the exterior reality and I accept as obvious the position that "meanings are not in the things" (Dakowska, 2001, p. 103) but in minds (following e.g., Pariente, 1973; Schwanenflugel, 1991; Schwarz, 1994; Shore, 1996; Skehan, 1998, and many others).

The experts' meanings need not be "right", a possibility from which it will follow that Putnam's *linguistic division of labor* (1973) is not a proof that "meanings" are "out there". As has been upheld, this "division" theory postulates that common people are content with having access to only a part of the "true meaning" of words, and the task of defining it more precisely is designated to scientists. But, still, scientists go wrong many a time, occasionally admitting to calling a natural satellite what eventually is a comet. There is an enormous number of what Wilson calls "undiscovered laws or structural facts" (2003, p. 94). Thus if we agree that intensions are true properties of objects, we need to add that there are a lot of meanings waiting to be discovered. There are, beyond doubt, a multitude of phenomena to which science does not have cognitive access or the knowledge of which is distorted by fragmentary data or wrong categorization. In such circumstances, the relationship between the experts' meaning and the true properties of objects is more or less like the relationship between folk categories and expert categories.

The true properties of many an object or phenomenon are in nobody's mind yet, except for God, in which case it is implausible to claim that linguistic division of labor settles the issue of intensions of all words the way which leads us to say that meanings are truly "out there". Meanings are entities from one level of the linguistic system, whereas exterior phenomena take place as a "continuous flow of matter in the physical world" which "does not on the whole come neatly segmented into events, a language would have it" (Jackendoff, 1988, p. 86). Murphy (1991, p. 31) claims that when some new true facts about entities are discovered, word meanings need to be changed, a possibility I have mentioned. The point is that it is only a possibility and quite often they are not changed. Most society members continue to use a word together with its meaning regardless of the discoveries concerning the entity in question made in the meantime. Most language users do not even know about such discoveries soon enough.

The above could be erroneously exploited to put forward the claim that meanings are indeed out there, even more truly than Putnam proposes, because they are often elusive also to the expert. I shall, however, exploit it to give a boost to a philosophical standing: it appears that, indeed, the truth is out there and does not need anybody's knowledge or approval to exist, and to what extent the individual or the expert is familiar with it is his own problem, not the truth's. "The world appears to be made up of an extremely complex causal network constantly unfolding through time of which we encounter just fragments" (Croft, 1998, p. 68) and therefore not all truth is accessible to the human mind.

But meanings are a different matter. We have a separate word *truth* and a separate word *meaning* because they denote different foci of investigation. Meanings are concerned with relationships between words or phrases and the ways in which societies categorize the *conceivable and commonly perceptible* reality. Murphy (1991) points out that both scientists and ordinary people need a theory about a domain to categorize phenomena, which makes them much alike. Both of them, as we have seen, can go wrong, at different levels. However, their categorizations, when lexicalized, make communication possible because they use the lexical items in mutually intelligible ways – they do have meanings which are a result of shared (to different extent) categorization. Meanings do not wait to be discovered by humanity, the way the truth does; the expert does not just “grab them from ‘out there’ and hand them down to the folk”.

Some of the arguments put forward by Putnam (1973) which were meant to convince semanticists that “meanings were out there” are actually a proof that “meanings are in the head”. This author asks the reader to imagine that there is a Twin-Earth on which a Twin-Me lives who interacts with objects made of gold, the way true-I do, with the exception that true I’s gold is genuine and Twin-Me’s gold is an alloy of some kind which has perceptibly identical properties to true gold. He then postulates that when I interact perceptibly with Twin-Me’s gold, my intension of gold will be wrong because my assumptions about its ontological properties are misled by my perceptions and the resulting conclusions – that because the golds are identical, they are the same substance. I received with admiration the fact that this picture deserved a huge amount of attention of linguists who study meaning in terms of reference (in the case of philosophers it is just fine). In view of the discussion on meaning and reference, one cannot but pay respect to huge amounts of intellectual effort devoted to things which do not exist and do not have reference other than that created for the purpose of discussing reference. Such cognitive labor with no reference to reality is something of a sacrifice indeed. What can be said here is that, at times, not all intensions are out there – they are solely in the mind of an individual, in this case Putnam and those who followed trail. Truly, the meaning is in the head. The meaning of a word can then hardly be believed to be an internalization of the properties of a particular object. “A word, even of the simplest kind, does not pick out an entity of the world (...)” (Chomsky, 2000, p. 17).

#### 4. Concept, meaning and truth

The little that has been put forward so far about meaning creates room for the following mechanism: as a result of exposure to or interaction with reality, subjects create mental representations. Some components of those representations



are unique for the particular subject and some others are shared among individuals. As an example, let us consider the segment of reality "school". The unique attributes of its mental representation in the mind of the subject will result from his personal experiences and the resulting internal processes. For example, being repetitively nudged in the hallway by a group of "class bosses" will evoke subjective negative associations with "school", which will perhaps be connected to an image of the school hallway and the faces of the perpetrators. This associative attribute is not shared by the majority of society members because they do not have such experiences – it is a "unique mental experience" (Chafe, 1998, p. 95). What is shared across individuals with reference to "school" is what all or most individuals experience with connection to this fraction of reality – its educational function and perhaps structure. The shared bundle of attributes is lexicalized by being given the label school and this bundle is the meaning of the word. Therefore, word meanings are perceived here as a result of the society's categorization of a particular entity. Word meaning is distinct from meaning in the mind or concept inasmuch as personal records/classifications of experience and socially shared components of such classifications and records remain distinct. Our notion of meaning thus emerges as a common ground from the totality of concepts held by all speakers of a language who interact with each other, as a result of which "minds are connected into networks of other minds" (Chafe, 1998, p. 97). If so, it seems obvious that Putnam's notion of "correct meanings from out there" is untenable. It is not the expert who establishes meaning, it is the society. Such a "democratization" of semantics does not preclude additional, expert semantics, but such a semantics would still need to create meanings rather than search for them in the universe (at least in the "post-creation" notion of language).

As I have argued, different members of society share meanings of words but have different ideas about the entities signified by those words. Such a position was proposed by Clark and Clark (1977). Word meanings are not concepts but they are built from concepts, the subjective meanings, which come into existence as a result of "different cognitive experiences" of language users (Schwanenflugel, Blout, & Lin, 1991, p. 72). When I say that a person learns a word meaning, I refer to an attempt of making one's meaning correspond to that of the rest of the community (Murphy, 1991, p. 32). When this has been done, the subject can be said to be using a word in its "correct" sense in that the core of its conceptual specifications is shared by the community (Givon, 1998, p. 43). Because he or she will use it many times, the association between the "right" meaning and the form will become so strong that both will be experienced as one "phenomenological reality" (Miller & Fellbaum, 1991, p. 198). Both the meaning and the concept will then be stored in the mind, but they will not be isomorphic: the natural concepts will continue to do the categorizational

labor of the mind, whereas what Dunbar (1991) calls “lexical concepts” will be called upon when communication is launched.

What about truth? How is it related to meaning? To claim that there is no relationship would be ignorant of the nature of interaction between the exterior world and collective, social cognition. Meanings are not “out there”, but what there is does affect the construction of some meanings. There are several reasons for arguing this.

## 5. Universal meanings and truth

Corder admits that there is a certain degree of “cultural overlap” (1983, p. 77) between societies. He even goes on to postulate that cultural similarities will often result in structural similarities as far as language is concerned (1983, p. 99). In addition, Wierzbicka (1992, p. 16) admits that it is the concepts shared by many cultures that facilitate cross-linguistic research. She calls such culture-independent concepts “God’s truth”, because they seem to be more objective and less affected by different categorizations of reality (1992, p. 25). They are less affected because humans all over the globe have “the same perceptual apparatus, the same spatial orientation” and many similar experiences (Hatch & Brown, 1995, p. 116). There is no human being who is not present in the “3-D world of movable objects and shapes” (Carruthers, 1996, p. 93) – each of us shares with all the others certain living conditions (Wierzbicka, 1992, p. 7). There is also no healthy human being who is not capable of thinking and talking about events remote in time and space, a reference to the “displacement property” of language (Chomsky, 2000, p. 12).

If the underlying structure of certain reality displays similarity and if certain referents are “universally available” (Lucy, 1992, p. 146), concepts and often their linguistic labels will behave similarly (Arabski, 1996; Barnett, 1977). For example, the compound concept expressed by the phrase *one hundred degrees Celsius* has content which is determined by the objective, physical properties of the referent. A similar example is discussed by Wilson (2003). Even color categorization, although in many respects culture-dependent, seems to be “anchored in focal colors” (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996, p. 5), though a study by Berlin and Kay (1969) has narrowed this phenomenon down to eleven colors. Be that as it may, some attributes of some concepts come from physics here, and we have reasons to believe that physics knows lots of truth.

Nevertheless, once again, cognitive content related to perceptible invariables must not be confused with word meaning. There are, for example, cultures speaking languages which have only two terms for colors, but this lexical modesty has nothing to do with deficit in color perception (Miller & Fellbaum, 1991, p. 213). An interesting phenomenon related to this was observed by Heider (1972). When a

group of members of the Dani culture, who originally knew only two color terms, learnt more color terms, the terms were identified with color focal areas in a way similar to the way colors are identified by speakers of English. This can be taken to support the claim that some meanings in the mind are causally related to the properties of nature. At least to a certain extent "language structure and cognitive structure (...) are determined by underlying perceptual regularities" (Lucy, 1992, p. 184). But we have only vague understanding of the extent to which this is the case. To quote Chomsky (2000, p. 16), "no one knows to what extent the specific properties of human language are a consequence of general biochemical laws applying to objects with general features of the brain, another important problem at a still distant horizon". We do not know whether the convergence "of properties of the mind and properties of the extra-mental world" is accidental, as Chomsky argues (2000, p. 74), but there must be some interface level between the properties of nature and the general properties of the mind and the generality of properties of cognition is a factor anticipating a certain amount of universally recognized content.

Another argument in favor of the existence of certain universal cognitive content comes from what Schwanenflugel et al. (1991, p. 74) call "World Structure View", which supports the claims made about the interaction between cognition and properties of objects from nature. Under this view, certain semantic cuts are predetermined by the structure of objects and events in the world. Such structure (I have already mentioned focal spectra in colors, for example) is mapped onto the mind in a prototypical manner, that is, the subject is predisposed to have such and such a mental representation owing to the true nature of things. Such a nature of objects can often be discussed in terms of what Wilsson calls "objective features" (2003, p. 90). The subject's cognitive freedom in organizing cognitive content is constrained by the attributes which present themselves in certain configurations in the exterior reality. To a certain extent, "the physical determines the semantic and psychological" (Richard, 2003, p. 29).

Universals in the categorization of certain biological matter, for example, may also come from the fact that biological classification of both experts and non-experts tends to converge (Boster, Berlin, & O'Neill, 1986), despite the "division of labor" mentioned before. It can be said metaphorically here that some meanings, those which are likely to be more universal or present in the minds of all society, come from nature. Metaphorically, because it is up to humanity to draw dividing lines between entities in some of the ways which are suggested by nature itself. In this sense, Putnam's position is acceptable. He contends that semantic space exists "out there" and it is up to the mind how it "cuts up the pie" (1973, p. 704). Some characteristics of objects and phenomena are more easily observable by humans, some others less so, but whether the more easily noticeable ones are ontologically more important for the entities involved is another matter.

Admitting to the existence of universal content will not, however, lead me to accept Putnam's (1973) position that meanings, even those universal, are independent of the mind. Despite the points I have made about certain ways in which nature can by itself "impose" certain ways of categorization, I reject this notion. Meanings are built from concepts and meanings of words are the common ground of concepts existing in members of society who use names to refer to such semantic entities. As a consequence, universal semantic content is the result of similar cognitive activity across cultures which takes place owing to similar conditions of human existence. If meanings existed independently of human cognition, humanity would have no current or possible access to many meanings, simply because it does not have access to many true phenomena remote in time and space.

As I have mentioned, the rejection of Putnam's position is related to my belief that he confused "meaning" with "truth". By rejecting the notion of objective and mind-independent meaning, I do not reject, however, the notion of objective truth, a real fact about the world. It is indeed the case that the human mind does not have access to a lot of objective truth and that objective truth does not need our cognition and acknowledgement to exist. Let us consider the following situation: Three fighter helicopters are flying above the desert, a hundred meters apart, searching for rebels who are supposedly hiding there. Suddenly one of the pilots reports to the other that he has spotted one rebel. The pilot in the other helicopter responds by saying that there are two rebels, not one, and prompts his colleague to have a better look, urging him to gather perceptive strength and sobriety. But the latter insists that there is one rebel, not two. This is caused by the situation that one of the helicopters is positioned in such a way that one of the rebels is behind the other, which gives the picture of just one man. The pilot in the other helicopter is positioned at a different angle and can see two rebels. So does this mean that he was right? No, because there was a third rebel behind a hill.

This is the nature of the objective truth. It does not need human perception to exist and its nature does not depend on human point of view or cognitive perspective. The more access humans have to the truth, the better for them, but it is often the case that full access is not achieved or even achievable. Let us refer to this as cognitive or epistemological relativity. Our point of view depends on our standpoint, but the truth does not depend on our standpoint. What it depends on is solely the distance between our cognitive state and the true nature of things. And this is very much unlike meaning, even universal. Meaning is by nature the result of cognitive endeavor, either individual or collective, but it is never "out there". Different languages "cut the pie in different ways" or they can cut some pieces the same way, whereby different and similar positions towards objectively existing matter are established. Languages could be compared to the helicopters and language users to the pilots. If we translate into Polish the question *How many*

*fingers have you got?*, the answer will be *twenty*. The answer to the same question in English will be different because the English language positions its user at a different angle to this segment of the somatic reality. Meaning is relative, often culture-bound, but the entity involved (here) is culture-independent. The semantic content of *finger* is different from that of *palec*, but the underlying entities exist preserving their inner structure no matter what label is used. Facts about the world or, more generally, objective truth, are one thing, whereas meaning is another.

When Putnam says that "the extension of our terms depends on the actual nature of the particular things that serve as paradigms, and this actual nature is not, in general, fully known to the speaker" (1973, p. 711), he is referring to what above was labelled "a fact about the world" or the truth, not meaning. The confusion related to the objectivity of meaning did not result from a disagreement as to the ontological properties of meaning but rather from a terminological disorganization, where "meaning" was used in place of "truth" and vice versa. The properties of the world are not inscribed in the mind (even that of an expert) by the world, except for the cases like those I have considered in connection with universal cognitive content. "The world's effect on the mind is a function of the relationship of the knower to that world. Concepts do not have referential or objective properties but rather *interactional properties* (highlight in original) that index the position of the knower. There is no God's-eye view of reality for human beings" (Shore, 1996, p. 333).

Such a God's-eye view might have been taken by Katz (1981), who argues that word meanings are a part of a valid linguistic system which would exist regardless of whether there are any beings which know and speak it, just like mathematics was a valid system before humans invented it. Again, the analogy with mathematics will not be accepted here, because mathematics is not understood as true facts about the world. No component of the universe could be identified as  $e=mc^2$  or  $2 + 2 = 4$ . These are merely instances of the organization of human cognition and exist solely in the human mind. Why not put forward the claim, certainly legitimate, that there are millions of other possible ways of organizing knowledge and billions of other possible languages with their own words and word meanings? English is a valid system because a group of human beings use it for successful communication, but there would be no English if it had not been "invented" or if it had not evolved the way it has. It is valid because it was inventable and viable for social purposes, but in this sense validity is indeterminable in that no one knows where languages will evolve until they actually get there.

## 6. Conclusion

Meanings are units of socially conceptualized and lexicalized knowledge. Correct knowledge corresponds to, among other things, objective truth, but only

its part is accessible. The universe is organized in ways some of which are inscrutable to the human cognitive and scientific faculty. Such undiscovered components correspond to (yet) inaccessible knowledge about the objective truth. On the other hand, some of the organizational principles have been identified and conceptualized. When a conceptualization is available society-wide, it is lexicalized (Wierzbicka, 1992). The lexical item's meaning does not correspond to the structure of an entity but to the socially-shared aspects of the structure (or/and function) which are usually confined to a subset of the ontological and interactional properties of the entity. The mind does not pick out entities but merely their "extracts" which are relevant to the mind's interaction with the universe. No matter if we take the folk or experts, they work on extracts, except that the expert's extract is often more extensive. The meaning therefore comes from the individual's interaction with the universe and the interaction is bound to be focused in merely selected attributes.

Some of the categorizational principles are shared across societies on account of a more direct relationship between the most salient attributes of an entity and the perceptive potential of our whole species. However, meaning does not take its source in the entity itself here but in the categorizational potential of our species which was pre-wired genetically. The genetic pre-wiring causes individuals world-wide to focus on convergent attributes because the latter affect our well-being. The overlapping categorization stems from human utilitative or interactive behavior, but the meanings come from categorizational potential with only some of the attributes. Societies world-wide categorize *water* in terms of its utilitative and dynamic properties, while they do not usually categorize it in terms of its origin on our planet. The origin is not part of the meaning. But it is a part of the truth. Yet there are entities, such as *a meteor*, whose origin is a part of its meaning. We make different semantic cuts according to the entity's place in our existence. We thus create meanings. They are the subjective collections of attributes which serve our utilitative, scientific, artistic or other goals. By doing so, we do not distort the truth about entities because it remains unchanged.

As I stated in the introduction, the matter is solved when the words *meaning* and *truth* are used the way I have done it in this article. *Division of labor* is still true, and to a certain extent it can also be called *division of linguistic labor*. However, I believe it will be better if *linguistic* is replaced here with *epistemological*. The folk learn less about an entity, the expert more – thus missing out on less of the truth. In this *division of epistemological labor*, we may no longer claim that meanings are in the things. As I have argued, the truth about them is out there, and it is available to people to different degrees. Because Putnam claimed meanings were in things, he may have brought into being a misguided sort of relativism, where "meanings" displace "truth" to the effect that everything

is bound to be relative. Because meaning *is* relative and subjective. Once used in the place of "truth", it may paint a picture of the universe being relative. It may happen when an individual conceptualizes "truth" as "meaning" and then discovers meanings are relative.

What is relative is our knowledge, or epistemological state. Conceptualized and socially shared units of knowledge – meanings – are also relative. Relativity is then true inasmuch as it concerns human knowledge; it is false when it is taken to refer to the truth as such. Many an undiscovered phenomenon takes place the way it does no matter whether or not humans find it out, conceptualize, then share with others and lexicalize as words plus meanings to go with them. For the truth it does not matter whether we find it out or not: it does not matter for a remote planet if we call it a star or comet; it does not matter for a mammal if a child calls it a fish; it does not matter for gravity if we measure it on a scale and it does not matter for velocity whether we call some movement fast or slow; whether we believe in extraterrestrials or not does not affect whether they exist or not. I might also want to think it does not matter for God whether I believe in Him or not, but I'm told it does; however, this is only because "truth" no longer merges into "meaning" here but rather into "love".

To sum up, I believe *division of linguistic labor* is true, but it does not imply meanings "out there". I believe that what I have called *division of epistemological labor* is even truer and it is related to the notion of *epistemological relativity* which has things seen in different ways by different people because they look at those things from different angles and with different knowledge. This relativity has nothing to do with any kind of relativism which would hold that the truth itself is relative. With just one stipulation: some things *are* relative when we consider aesthetics and tastes. There is no objective truth on the basis of which one might judge the following statements: *This cake is tasty, This cake is not tasty, Electric Light Orchestra made nice music, Electric Light Orchestra made boring music*, and others like them. When predication is only related to the variability in human receptivity, relativity would seem to be an adequate notion.

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