GARY KEMP

THIRD EDITION

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE?

Praise for previous editions

- 'This book is an outstanding pedagogical tool, which will be useful to anyone looking to gain a foothold in the subject. The second edition, which features new chapters on key figures, prominent topics, and recent developments in the field, is a substantial and welcome development of the excellent first edition.'

  — **Brett Sherman**, University of South Carolina, USA

'Will become the standard textbook for survey courses in the philosophy of language.'

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'To my mind this is the best introductory textbook for undergraduates looking to get a feel for the subject, without getting bogged down in advanced technical details. Gary Kemp covers all the traditional topics in the field and presents them in an accessible, engaging, and always rigorous style. Appended to each chapter are useful historical notes, a summary, a few questions, and some bibliographical recommendations for further research – a complete set of study aids that ought to be welcomed by students and teachers alike.'

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'Kemp has written a genuine introduction to the philosophy of language with beginning students in mind. Focusing on the issue of the meaning of natural language, he begins with a naive and, for students, very natural view of linguistic meaning. He then motivates and explains the distinctions, problems, solutions and development of the philosophy of language with the patience and understanding of a master teacher.'

  — **Michael Losonsky**, Colorado State University, USA

What is this thing called Philosophy of Language?

- Philosophy of language explores some of the most abstract yet most fundamental questions in philosophy. The ideas of some of the subject's great founding figures, such as Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell, as well as of more recent figures such as Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam, are central to a great many philosophical debates to this day and are widely studied. In this clear and carefully structured introduction to the subject Gary Kemp explains the following key topics:

  - the basic nature of philosophy of language, its concepts and its historical development
  - Frege's theory of sense and reference; Russell's theory of definite descriptions
  - Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Ayer, and the Logical Positivists
  - recent perspectives including Kripke, Kaplan, Putnam, Chomsky, Quine and Davidson; arguments concerning translation, necessity, indexicals, rigid designation and natural kinds
  - the pragmatics of language, including speech-acts, presupposition and conversational implicature
  - puzzles surrounding the propositional attitudes (sentences which ascribe beliefs to people)
  - the challenges presented by the later Wittgenstein
  - contemporary directions, including contextualism, fictional objects and the phenomenon of slurs.

The third edition has been thoroughly revised throughout and includes a new chapter on Noam Chomsky's theory of Universal Grammar. In addition, the concluding chapter on modern directions in philosophy of language has been expanded to two chapters, which now cover crucial emergent areas of study such as slurs, conceptual engineering and experimental philosophy.

Chapter summaries, annotated further reading and a glossary make *What is this thing called Philosophy of Language?* an indispensable introduction to those teaching

philosophy of language and will be particularly useful for students coming to the subject for the first time.

Gary Kemp is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, UK. He has authored or edited various books and articles in the philosophy of language, including *Quine versus Davidson: Truth, Reference and Meaning* and *Quine's Philosophy: An Introduction*.

What is this thing called?

The Routledge Philosophy *What is this thing called?* series of concise textbooks have been designed for use by students coming to a core area of the discipline for the first time. Each volume explores the relevant central questions with clear explanation of complex ideas and engaging contemporary examples. Features to aid study include text boxes, chapter summaries, study questions, further reading and glossaries.

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What is this thing called Philosophy of Language?

THIRD EDITION

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preface to the third edition

Many students approaching the philosophy of language for the first time are baffled by it. They are baffled in a way that they are not baffled by moral philosophy, political philosophy or the theory of knowledge. Partly because some of the hardest steps come right at the beginning, they find it excruciatingly difficult to find their feet with the subject, as if they were learning to surf or to ski.

The situation is not helped by the fact that most of the primary materials are written at the highest philosophical level, with many technical terms and principles assumed to be already understood that will be Greek to the neophyte. This textbook is meant to help the beginning student into the subject. There are some excellent textbooks already but few for the genuine beginner. I'll name one that is pitched at roughly the same level as this: William Lycan's *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, third edition, 2018). The book is outstanding, but there are large differences between his book and this one. His book is arranged topically; it is full of names and isms, and the problems, replies and counter-replies come thick and fast. By contrast, this book is for the most part theory-based and often theorist-based, more concerned to keep one's eyes fixed on the larger and deeper issues and themes, with fewer names mentioned, a smaller range of problems considered and – crucially – a slower pace. There is no getting around the difficulty of the first steps, but this book attempts to immerse the student into a few paramount theories and their authors – Frege, Russell etc. – in order to get them used to thinking within the author's point of view, and to get them to see why one would think as the author does.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, I hope the student will come away with a coherent picture of the history of the subject. The history will not be thorough. The sketch is only of the main lines, and only of those lines – if such there be – which are for the newcomer both interesting and relatively easy to learn. There is nothing or precious little of Burge, Church, Dummett, Evans, Fodor, Geach, D. Lewis, Millikan, Montague, Schiffer, Sellars, Stalnaker and Tarski, and only selected bits of Carnap, Ayer, Grice, Searle and Kaplan. Nothing or precious little of teleosemantics, truth-maker semantics, conceptual role semantics, situation semantics, game-theoretic semantics, dynamic semantics, intention-based semantics, semantical

minimalism, expressivist semantics, realism versus anti-realism, relevance theory or the theory of truth. I hope that students will be able to pursue those topics once they've got their feet wet in the philosophy of language by studying this book and the authors it discusses.

Likely criticisms of the book are that it is too much weighted towards the drier end of the subject, and towards the history of the subject. These are connected. To take the first one first, its connections with the philosophy of mathematics and of mind, with metaphysics and epistemology, have historically driven the subject – indeed, one might say, have constituted its main reason for existing. Such earlier figures as Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein and Carnap, and later figures such as Quine, Davidson and Kripke, thought of philosophical reflection on language as being the key towards progress on those fundamental subjects. And there is no getting around the fact that the most interesting ideas in this sector are abstract and difficult. Some students will gravitate away from this end of the subject, towards the more political and ethical end that has grown in the past thirty years, but it is eminently arguable that in order to speak with penetration at that end, one needs a foundation in the drier end, to use with finesse such concepts as reference, truth-condition, speech-act and so on. The complaint about history, meanwhile, boils down to a philosophical difference about how to teach the philosophy of language. In my view the subject is not like geometry or mathematical logic, which normally are taught in complete detachment from their histories. The subject of philosophy of language is too contentious, as evinced by the broad range of isms and theories mentioned in the last paragraph. I think that one is better placed to review more recent material and controversies – a taste of which is included at the end of this book – if one first has a solid understanding of the basics of Frege, Russell and others.

Another likely criticism is that, outside the study questions, it is not very critical. I admit but do not repent. I feel that a big mistake that is often made in teaching the philosophy of language is to criticise a position almost the moment it's on the table. In my experience, it takes some time for a position to sink in, especially to see why one might hold it. If the teacher criticises the view from the get-go, the student is unlikely to think it worth spending time on it – aside from exam-taking purposes – and may wonder why the position is being taught if it is so obviously full of holes. At the risk of betraying my Californian roots, I want to put a more positive spin on the material.

Thus, after a modicum of stage-setting in the form of an ahistorical introduction and first chapter, this book considers Frege, Russell, the early Wittgenstein and the Logical Empiricists, including Ayer's early view and parts of Carnap; then the later Wittgenstein, Quine, Kripke, elementary possible worlds semantics, Putnam, indexicals and the basics of pragmatics – Austin, Grice and Searle – then Davidson, then the propositional attitudes centring on the problems raised by Frege and Quine but with a modern dimension as well, then Chomsky's Universal Grammar, with an eye on the more philosophical aspects. In the last two chapters, I review some of the principal developments in recent years including some subjects at the more political and ethical end of the subject: assertion, context-relativity, fictional objects,

inferentialism, slurs/pejoratives, conceptual engineering, and X-Phi (Experimental Philosophy).

The chapters are supposed to be read in sequence, but the chapters are written so as to be relatively self-contained; it is not impossible to depart from the order in which the chapters are presented. Two chapters – Chapter 8 on possible worlds and indexicals and Chapter 11 on the propositional attitudes – are slightly more difficult than the others (and Chapter 4 is more historical than the others). You won't hurt my feelings if you skip them (or any others for whatever reason). Since not everyone will read every chapter, there is some repetition of points, conceptual and historical.

At the end of each chapter are four items (with the exceptions of Chapters 13 and 14, which lack the first item on the list):

1 Some historical notes, including some gossipy material.
2 A chapter summary.
3 Study questions, which are not just questions for which the answers are present in the chapter but are designed to get one to think more reflectively and critically about and with the material.
4 Suggested further reading; I take it every reader knows how to obtain the relevant entries in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, so I save a little space by not listing them except when I think what they offer is especially valuable. I list the crucial references from, for instance, Frege, as 'Primary reading'; and in most chapters I've also listed some items under 'Secondary reading'.

At the end, you'll find a glossary of terms introduced in the book.

I stress that the primary reading is essential to any serious course using this book. I don't think any textbook can *replace* the original works; as mentioned above, the subject is too contentious to be like chemistry or calculus, with only historians interested in the original texts. This book, I hope, will serve as an initial exposure to the writers, issues and arguments in the philosophy of language, and as a concise map, serving to orient the reader through the primary reading.

In the third edition: Chapter 12 (Chomsky's Universal Grammar) is new; plus there is a substantial expansion of what was Chapter 12 ('Modern directions') into two, Chapters 13 and 14. I have revamped the order of chapters from Chapter 5 on, into a more straightforward chronical order, and added sections to the chapter on Davidson. And there are smaller-scale adjustments, many at the urging of reviewers for Routledge; I thank them. Also I single out David Lumsden and Michael Lumsden for thanks, and also the many students who have commented.

Dr Gary Kemp
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introduction

Western philosophy has been explicitly concerned with language since the early twentieth century and implicitly for much longer. Indeed, for much of the twentieth century – the period of the so-called 'linguistic turn', discussed explicitly in Chapter 4 – some people were convinced that the philosophy of language just *was* philosophy. Why? What exactly has language got to do with philosophy, or philosophy with language?

Here are some preliminary ideas, ones that have tended to motivate the philosophy of language:

- As philosophers we ask 'What is justice?' or 'What is the nature of justice?'; but we can also ask 'What is the meaning of the word "justice"?' Questions about the essences, or natures of things, can seemingly be transformed into questions about semantics or the meaning of words. Some see such shifts as philosophical progress (others reckon that it trivialises philosophy).
- Language expresses thought; it mirrors thought. The study of language is one way to study thought – its character, its structure and its relation to the world. 'The limits of my world are the limits of my language', once said Ludwig Wittgenstein. Furthermore, language being a social thing, the study of language is the study of the ways in which our thoughts are shaped and moulded by society. And unlike thought itself, language is out in the open, open to objective scrutiny in ways that thought is not.
- Language represents the world. It mirrors it. Thus the study of the more general or abstract features of language might be thought to reveal the more general or abstract features of the world.
- The study of language is itself partly a philosophical enterprise: language exists in the real world and is thus open to scientific scrutiny, but it is not immediately obvious what a scientific theory of language would be like or what exactly the relevant data would be. So we have to reflect in an *a priori* way before we know what sorts of questions to ask.
- The analysis of language – especially the theory of meaning as informed by logic – enables us to understand what *clarity* is. Since one of the defining features of philosophy is its struggle to clarify difficult or otherwise problematic ideas, the enterprise assists philosophy in its task.

Each of these might be denied or quibbled with in various ways. However, they are collectively plausible enough to motivate the philosophical investigation of language.

From its beginnings in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the theoretical study of language has standardly been divided into three main areas: **syntax, semantics** and **pragmatics**.

Syntax deals with relations between symbols and symbols, between signs and signs. It is most fundamentally concerned with **grammar**: among other things, it aims to discover those basic principles that determine whether a given string of signs is grammatically 'well formed'.

Semantics deals with relations between symbols and what they mean, express or are about. How to characterise its fundamental concern is more contested, but a dominant tradition conceives it as formulating a system of rules which determine the **truth-condition** of an arbitrary declarative sentence.

Pragmatics is yet more various in its aims, but, broadly speaking, it is concerned with the **use** of sentences – given that a certain sentence has certain basic semantic properties, what sorts of act can be accomplished in actual communicative situations by uttering it?

These divisions should by no means be regarded as absolute. Considerations from one sub-discipline may have repercussions for another, disputes break out over which of two sub-disciplines is the more fundamental or what it means to call it 'fundamental', and sometimes the rationale is called into question for maintaining the tripartite division in the first place.

As intimated by the fourth bullet point in the list above, there is a scientific discipline known as linguistics. What is the relation between that science and the philosophy of language?

There is no single, neat way of distinguishing them. The distinction is partly one of degree rather than of kind, and partly an historical matter of institutional arrangements – those which explain, for example, the fact you can study formal logic in computer science, mathematics or philosophy. But we can say some further things.

First, to a much greater degree than linguistics, philosophy is concerned with the interface of language with problems of knowledge, metaphysics, ethics, politics and aesthetics.

Second, linguistics is much more concerned with empirical facts, with real, contingently existing languages in all their diversity, with the perplexing puzzles thrown up by actual languages in the wild. Philosophy tends to be concerned with the *a priori* side of things, perhaps risking jokes about armchairs and port.

And, lastly, we can divide linguistics into the theoretical side and the applied side. Philosophy of language has more in common with the theoretical side, especially in its interest in the theory of **meaning**. The theory of meaning, broadly speaking, is the same as semantics, both in linguistics and as pursued by philosophers. But in philosophy the domain tends to be narrower on the one hand and, we like to think,

deeper on the other, than that of theoretical linguistics. Standard philosophical and linguistic theories employ the concepts of **reference** – of *aboutness*, or *of-ness* – of truth, **cognitive content** and many others. But questions of the status of those concepts, of their justification, place and nature, are philosophical. An imprecise but useful analogy is with the relation of mathematics to the philosophy of mathematics: in mathematics you use things such as numbers, fractions and functions, methods such as algebra, trigonometry and the calculus. But when you ask 'What is the ultimate basis of algebra, trigonometry and the calculus? How do we know about them? What *are* numbers, fractions and functions? Do they really exist along with stones and cats?' you are engaged in the philosophy of mathematics. Philosophy of language is likewise more reflective than linguistics, more likely to adopt a 'meta-perspective' on theories of meaning (sometimes philosophers say that what they are doing is 'meta-semantics').

Until much later, when we introduce the views of Noam Chomsky, we will say comparatively little about syntax as linguists understand the term, covering only the rudiments needed to convey the various approaches to the theory of meaning. We will have more to say about pragmatics in the middle of the book, not only for its intrinsic philosophical interest and importance, but also because pragmatic considerations tend to relieve some of the lingering worries one might have about the main ideas of semantics or the theory of meaning.

● WHAT'S AHEAD

This book begins by exploring certain classical theories of meaning – classical in the sense that they continue to serve as the reference points for more recent theories of meaning, and as the kernel of philosophy of language with which most philosophers in other fields are familiar. Although it has its precursors in such figures as Plato, Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole (authors of the *Port Royal Logic*), and John Locke, the philosophy of language reached its first maturity relatively recently, with the work of Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), both of whose ideas are very much part of the contemporary scene; these are the subjects of Chapters 2 and 3. Those chapters are prefaced by Chapter 1, a discussion of a relatively simple theory that appeals to common sense; we call it 'Naïve Semantics'. In describing the theory, we take the opportunity to introduce some elementary logical notions – singular term, predicate, truth-functional connective and so on (those who have already studied logic can easily skip over some of the chapter).

Chapter 4 concentrates on a famous movement – 'Logical Positivism' or 'Logical Empiricism' – that happened in the 1920s and 30s and dominated philosophy of language and analytic philosophy generally until the 1950s. We will discuss two of its leading figures, Rudolf Carnap (1891–1970) and A. J. Ayer (1910–89), plus the early work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951); his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) was a powerful influence. In Chapter 5 we encounter a famous note of scepticism concerning the theoretical ambitions of the philosophy language that arose in the 1950s, namely Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy as expressed

in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Chapter 6 deals with another angle of doubt for the prospects for a theory of meaning, but with a positive theoretical programme for addressing many of its main concerns: the programme of W. V. Quine (1908–2000).

In Chapter 7 we get back on the bus of orthodoxy, discussing a modern alternative that arose in the 1960s and 70s, largely in response to Frege and Russell but also in opposition to Logical Positivism, namely the direct reference theory popularly associated with Saul Kripke (1940–2022); the theory has various ramifications for other branches of philosophy, especially for metaphysics and epistemology. Chapter 8 deals with a topic that grew in stature from the late 1960s on, namely the context-variability of what are known as **indexicals**, such as 'I' and 'here'; we'll consider the topic through the lens provided by David Kaplan, and its philosophical ramifications as articulated by Hilary Putnam (1926–2016) and Frank Jackson.

Pragmatics, the use of language, is the subject of Chapter 9, especially as first presented by J. L. Austin (1911–60), H. P. Grice (1913–88), and John Searle in the 1960s and 70s. Chapter 10 discusses a celebrated theory that arose in the 1970s and 80s due to Donald Davidson (1917–2003), that attempts to describe the facts underlying meaning and reference without simply helping itself to those concepts. Chapter 11 delves more thoroughly into a puzzling area that inspired many of the main moves in both Frege's and Russell's philosophies of language, and which continues both to puzzle and inspire students at all levels. This is the semantics of **propositional attitudes**, such as 'Darwin believed that human beings and gorillas have a common ancestor'.

Chapter 12 presents the views of Noam Chomsky largely as a contribution to philosophy, rather as than a contribution to the science of linguistics. A sketch of **'Universal Grammar'** will be provided, but only as a necessary background for Chomsky's most striking philosophical pronouncements, such as that rationalism rather than empiricism is correct, that all human languages are fundamentally the same, and that it's not the case that the function of language is communication.

Our final two chapters explore topics which are currently receiving a lot of attention. Chapter 13 covers **assertion**, **fictional objects**, **context-relativity** (the idea that meaning shifts with context even for ordinary terms such as 'know') and **inferentialism** (the idea that inference rather than reference determines meaning); Chapter 14 covers **slurs**/pejorative language, demeaning language which has a certain political or ethical dimension (especially the language of gender and race but also more generally); **X-phi** or experimental philosophy (surveys etc. rather than the philosopher's intuitions as philosophical data); and **conceptual engineering**. Other subjects that might have been considered include lying, propaganda, silencing, dynamic semantics, hate speech and free speech; but there are space constraints.

By the end of the book, you should know the most celebrated names and theories in the philosophy of language and be conversant in its paradigmatic arguments, theories and kinds of criticism. But if you really want to know your stuff, it is essential that you study the works listed as primary reading. Of course, there is *much* more to the field; look to the historical notes and initial secondary reading for guidance.

We begin with a few foundational points, and, crucially, we begin to introduce some special terminology. Some of what follows is eminently debatable, but it will help to have certain structures before us that, in one sense or another, are more or less accepted by all of the main figures that we discuss except perhaps Wittgenstein and Quine.

● EIGHT PREPARATORY NOTES

1 You have may have noticed already that key technical or theoretical terms, when first used, are printed in **boldface**; these terms are in the glossary.

2 A few later sections are marked 'Further discussion'; naturally, they are philosophically interesting, but they are harder than our main concerns or just less essential to them.

3 Ask yourself: how many words does the following sentence contain?

      Your dog bit my dog.

   Trick question! It depends on what we mean by a 'word'. The sentence has two **tokens** of the **type** 'dog'. So the sentence has five words counted as tokens, four counted as types. We also say that the word-type 'dog' *occurs* twice in the sentence.

4 A word about what 'is' is. An argument-parody concerning the great blues musician Ray Charles runs: 'God is love; and love is blind; but Ray Charles is blind; therefore Ray Charles is God'. Maybe Ray Charles is indeed God, but the reasoning doesn't support that conclusion. The fallacy is to interpret 'is', at every occurrence, as indicating *identity* – as in '=' or 'is the very same thing as' or 'is identical with' – rather than as indicating **predication**, as in 'The cat is hungry.' Charles is blind, but he is not *identical* with blindness. Stevie Wonder is also blind, but he is not identical with blindness either. Indeed, if we thought otherwise, then according to the symmetry of identity (that if a=b then b=a) and its transitivity (that if a=b and b=c, then a=c), Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles would be the same man! But they are two men, not one. So we must distinguish the two senses. In this book, we will tend to use the equals sign, the identity sign '=', for the 'is' of identity, reserving 'is' for predication.

5 Philosophers of language use terms of ordinary language, but we try to mean them in a more specific way than the sometimes slipshod way they are used ordinarily. Especially important is the way the ordinary term 'reference' is employed in the philosophy of language. Consider the relation between 'Boston' and Boston. Without violating ordinary usage, we can say that that word *designates*, *labels*, *means*, *denotes*, *indicates*, *picks out*, *mentions*, *names*, *is the name of*, *is about*, *stands for*, *has the content of*, *signifies* the city. Maybe these differ slightly, but what is arguably common to them is the relation that we call 'reference'. We say that the word *refers* to the city: Boston is the *referent* of 'Boston'.

6 We need to be clear about the use of *quotation* marks to talk *about* language. For example, the following are true:

(a)   Boston is a city on the east coast of the USA.
(b)   'Boston' contains six letters.

(a) says something about a city, whereas (b) says something about a *word*, the name of a city. As we say, (a) **uses** the word 'Boston', whereas (b) only **mentions** the word. Strictly speaking, (b) does not say anything about Boston, only about its name. The following sentence both uses and mentions 'Boston':

(c)   'Boston' refers to Boston.

We can go further, nesting quotation marks within quotation marks. For example:

(d)   '"Boston"' refers to 'Boston'.

Compare (d) with (c). Whereas (c) says that a name of Boston refers to Boston, (d) says that a name of a name of Boston refers to a name of Boston.

In some contexts, this small detail can make all the difference. If we are going to talk about language, then we had better make sure we know which bit of language we are talking about, and we had better make sure we are not talking about the world when we mean to talk about language, or language when we mean to talk about the world. Serious philosophical errors have been made precisely by being sloppy over this (the logician-philosophers Quine and Kurt Gödel (1906–78) famously took none other than Russell to task over it).

A word to the wise: when writing philosophy essays, certainly essays in the philosophy of language, be careful about using quotation marks for any other purpose. That is, try to avoid the use of 'scare quotes', as I just used them, in speaking of scare quotes. For I meant to say something about scare quotes, not about 'scare quotes'. At its worst, the use of scare quotes is an evasive way of using a bit of language while at the same time distancing yourself from it, leaving your reader wondering whether you quite stand by what you say.

7 We will often speak of the **truth-conditions** of sentences or statements, and of their truth-value. By the former we mean 'the circumstances under which the statement is true', or 'the set of circumstances under which the statement is true'. Thus the truth-condition of 'Spot is hungry' is simply that Spot is hungry. Its truth-value is truth if Spot is indeed hungry, and falsity if Spot is not hungry. The truth-value is not the *value of the statement's being true*, or *how much truth it has in it*. It is not rocket science, but it does make the language we employ for doing the philosophy of language more precise and stable, better for making sure we understand one another.

8 The notion of an analytic sentence is appealed to and used by many philosophers in this book. The basic idea is that an analytic truth is one that can be known to be true *just from the meaning of the sentence* (similarly, an analytic falsehood is one can that be known in that way to be false). One can't understand an analytic truth without accepting it. To take the hackneyed example:

(1)   No bachelor is married.

Anyone familiar with those words, who knows what they mean (and the significance of assembling them in this way), can see on that basis that the sentence is true; one can see that it would be *contradictory* to deny it; a married bachelor is impossible, a contradiction in terms. One does not have to take a poll of bachelors to know that they are not married. For *non*-analytic truths, *synthetic* truths, the case is otherwise:

(2)   King Charles is not a bachelor.

Or:

(3)   No bachelor is tidy.

To establish these as true (if they are true) it is not enough merely to reflect on the meaning of the words involved; one needs empirical information, hard data of some sort concerning King Charles and bachelors.

There is a connection via the notion of *synonymy* with the notion of logical truth. 'Bachelor' and 'unmarried man', we assume, are synonyms, mean the same. One can replace any occurrence of the one with an occurrence of the other (except where it is mentioned rather than used) without disturbing the meaning of the overall sentence. So from (1), replacing 'bachelor' with 'unmarried man', we derive:

(4)   No unmarried man is married.

This is also an analytic truth, but it is also explicitly a truth of logic. If a truth can be transformed into logical truth by substituting synonyms, then it is an analytic truth.

● COGNITIVE MEANING AND EXPRESSIVE MEANING

Consider the following pair of sentences:

Karen's small cat died.

Karen's wee pussycat passed away.

Do these sentences mean the same or not? In one sense, they do; in another sense, they don't. What they have in common is generally called **cognitive meaning**. The two sentences can be used to *convey the same objective fact* or the *same information*, namely the death of a certain feline. They have the same truth-condition: in any conceivable circumstance, they are either both true or neither is (assuming that 'Karen' refers to the same person).

The other dimension is the domain of rhetoric and spin: the same information, it seems, can be conveyed in different ways, conveying different subjective attitudes or feelings about it. We call this **expressive meaning**. Not all language is equally

possessed of expressive meaning; in our example, the first sentence is relatively flat or colourless in comparison with the second. The expressive meaning of scientific language, especially when mathematical, seems to be minimal or absent.

Until Chapter 14, the lion's share of our concern will be with cognitive meaning, as this is what links up most directly with enduring philosophical issues of epistemology and metaphysics. Except where ambiguity threatens, we will speak simply of meaning, as short for 'cognitive meaning'.

● MEANING AND FORCE

The most conspicuous purpose of language, if not its only purpose, is *communication*. Communication is normally achieved by means of *linguistic acts*, or **speech-acts**.

With some exceptions, one performs a speech act, says something, by uttering a complete sentence, or by uttering something that is intended in such a way as to be equivalent, for the purposes at hand, to a complete sentence. For example, if questioned 'Are you a student?', you might answer 'Yes'. What you say is not a complete sentence, but it is equivalent for the purposes at hand to 'I am a student'. (The obvious exceptions are greetings such as 'Hello!' and exclamations and the like, such as 'Crikey!')

Consider now the following sentences (pretend they are addressed to yourself):

(5) You are going to eat raw fish.
(6) Are you going to eat raw fish?
(7) Eat raw fish!

The first is a sentence in the **declarative** (also called indicative) **mood**, the second in the *interrogative mood*, the third in the *imperative mood*. They have a certain something in common, namely the idea *that you are going to eat raw fish*. The first would normally be used to assert, or say that, you are going to eat raw fish; the second would normally be used to ask whether you are going to eat raw fish; the third would normally be used to suggest, command or enjoin you (the listener) to eat raw fish.

What is this thing that these have in common, which we can express by means of the clause *that you are going to eat raw fish*. We will say that this common element is a **proposition** – the proposition that you are going to eat raw fish. As used in a normal context, (5) to (7) all express this proposition, but the forms are normally used to (5) assert that it is true; (6) ask whether it is true; (7) suggest or enjoin that it be made true. We sum this up by saying: (5) to (7) are used to attach a different **force** to the self-same proposition. (5) is normally used to attach **assertoric** force to it, (6) *interrogative* force to it and (7) *imperative* force to it. Of course, one can *utter* 'You are going to eat raw fish' without actually asserting anything, as a stage actor might do. By varying one's intonation, one could ask a question using that form of

words – 'You are going to eat raw fish?', a friend might ask incredulously. And so on. Whether one actually attaches a given type of force to a proposition is determined, in typical circumstances, by the intention with which one speaks and the context in which one speaks, not just by the form of words uttered. Still, each of the three *grammatical moods* exemplified by (5) to (7) is normally used to express a characteristic force: it is by using the appropriate mood that we typically make it known which force we attach to the proposition expressed. Mood is a feature of grammar or, more technically, of syntax; force is a feature of pragmatics.

From now on, we are mostly going to *ignore* non-declarative sentences. Thus when speaking of 'sentences' we are usually speaking of declarative sentences. We need to say more about the relation of the proposition to the sentence. Consider:

> Snow is white.
>
> La neige est blanche.
>
> Schnee ist weiss.

These declarative sentences, we should naturally say, are *synonymous*, in the sense that they are correct translations of each other. They mean the same thing, namely that snow is white. They all *express* the proposition that snow is white: the meaning of a sentence is the proposition it expresses. The common element, the proposition, is *not* any particular form of words – not a sentence, and not a clause of English such as 'that snow is white'. Another way to put the same point is that these sentences all have the same *content*.

Notice that we are speaking of a *meaning* as if it were a special kind of *entity*: we have said that propositions are sentence-meanings, different from sentences or clauses. They are what is common to synonymous sentences, just as the number four is what is common to the Beatles, the Evangelists and the John Coltrane Quartet, along with every other four-membered set or collection. As we will see, it is very natural and useful to speak as if there really are these abstract entities, namely propositions, just as there are numbers. Later, in Chapters 5 and 6, we will consider reasons for scepticism about the idea.

● CONTEXT-DEPENDENCE

Now that we have declared that a proposition is the meaning of a sentence, we have to take it back slightly. Consider the sentence:

> I am the father of Julius Caesar.

What is the meaning of this sentence? If propositions, as we are assuming, are the meanings of sentences, then *it does not have a complete meaning*. For the same sentence expresses different propositions depending on *who utters it* (and when, since there was a time when the man who became the father of Julius Caesar was not

yet his father). The word 'I' picks out or refers to different persons depending on who utters it. The sentence expresses a certain proposition if uttered by Julius Caesar's dad, another one if uttered by Groucho Marx. There are many words like this – words that refer to different things depending on time, place, identity of speaker or hearer and other facts, concerning what we call the **context of utterance**. Further examples:

here	refers to place of utterance
now	refers to time of utterance
you	refers to person addressed by the speaker
this, that	refers to object indicated by the speaker

These are called **indexicals** (or 'deictic' expressions). They are simple and obvious examples of context-dependent expressions.

Somewhat less obvious sources of context-dependence include the tenses of verbs. Consider:

Octavian is Emperor of the Roman Empire.

The indexicality resides in the present tense of the verb 'is'. This sentence would have expressed a false proposition before Octavian (Augustus Caesar) became Emperor in 27 BC, but a different, true one for a while after that (until his death in 14 BC, when the sentence reverted to expressing a false proposition). Parallel remarks go for other tenses, such as the future tense of 'is' – 'will be' – and the past – 'was'. Since almost everything we say includes a tensed verb, almost everything we say is context-dependent at least with respect to time of utterance.

Terms such as 'this' and 'that' constitute a special class of indexicals called **demonstratives**: they often require an accompanying pointing gesture or suchlike in order to pick out a referent. It is standard to call the accompanying gesture or other device a **demonstration**.

For these reasons, it is really more accurate to say that propositions are features of *utterances* of sentences (actual or possible); better still, a proposition is determined by a sentence *with respect to*, or *at*, a context. A context, we will say, is a set containing at least the time of utterance, place of utterance, identity of speaker and audience, and objects indicated by demonstrations, if any. Thus associated with a sentence is a rule, or function, that determines what proposition, if any, the sentence would express at a given context (equally, the **statement** that would be made by uttering it at a given context). The picture is like this:

Sentence + Context → Proposition

In fact, for the time being, we are mostly going to *ignore* all forms of context-dependence. We will pretend that declarative sentences always express the same proposition. We will return to this issue much later, in Chapters 8, 9 and 13.

● THE ROLES OF PROPOSITIONS

A proposition, we are assuming, is neither animal, mineral nor vegetable. It is not something that might be inspected with a microscope or a telescope. Like the number two, it is not a material object at all; it is an *abstract entity*. (Nor are they *mental entities*, as will emerge presently.) But we can characterise propositions in terms of certain roles they play and relations in which they stand. Similarly, we might not be able to say what the number two is 'in itself', or point to it, but we can say that it follows one, precedes three, is the number of ears belonging to King Charles, and so on. We have just said that the proposition that snow is white is the meaning of the three sentences above. That is one role of propositions: to be the meaning of a sentence (at a context of utterance). There are two more.

The second role of propositions concerns what Russell called the **propositional attitudes**. Consider John, Pierre and Hans. They speak respectively only English, only French, only German. But they all believe that snow is white.

We have:

(8) John believes that snow is white.
(9) Pierre believes that snow is white.
(10) Hans believes that snow is white.

Intuitively, John, Pierre and Hans *believe the same thing*. That is, there is at least one thing that John, Pierre and Hans all believe. That thing is the proposition that snow is white. We shall regard the that-clause *that snow is white* simply as a singular term which stands for the proposition.

Consider the inference from (8) to (10) above to:

(11) There is something that is believed by John, Pierre and Hans.

The reasoning from (8)–(10) to (11) certainly seems valid. If so, *then our normal way of reasoning about beliefs commits us to the existence of propositions*. And the reasoning seems to show that propositions cannot be mental entities: whereas the self-same proposition is common to all three believers, mental entities – an emotion, a dream, a pain – cannot be in several minds at once. Each mental entity can only be in one mind.

Propositions, then, are the objects of belief. To believe is to stand in a certain relation to a proposition. Belief is a propositional attitude: an attitude towards a proposition. There are other propositional attitudes: one may *believe* that the fish is fresh, but one may also *doubt* that the fish is fresh, *wonder whether* the fish is fresh, *hope* that the fish is fresh, and so on.

The third role that propositions play is that of truth-vehicles. Here it is useful to delve back again into context-relativity for a moment. Consider the following exchange:

Phocas: *I* am the rightful Emperor of the Roman Empire.
Maurius: *I* am the rightful Emperor of the Roman Empire.

Phocas and Maurius, of course, disagree. They correctly take it for granted that there is only one rightful Emperor of the Roman Empire. But they utter the very same sentence (two tokens of the same type). The semantical difference is that Phocas says that Phocas is Emperor, but Maurius says that Maurius is. Phocas implicitly denies what Maurius asserts, and Maurius implicitly denies what Phocas asserts. In fact, if Gibbon is to be believed, Maurius speaks truly, Phocas falsely. They use the *same* sentence but express *different* propositions. One and the same thing cannot be both true and not true (similarly, the same light cannot be both on and not on at a given moment). Thus this thing cannot be the sentence. The thing that is true is the proposition that Maurius is the rightful Emperor of Rome.

> **Propositions**, then, are:
>
> (i) the meanings or contents of sentences (in contexts of utterance);
> (ii) the objects of propositional attitudes;
> (iii) the vehicles of truth and falsity (the things that can directly be true or false).

● COMPOSITIONALITY, STRUCTURE AND UNDERSTANDING

It is plausible that to understand a sentence is to *know what it means*. In view of the foregoing discussion, we can take this quite literally: since what a sentence means is the proposition it expresses, to understand a sentence is to *know which proposition it expresses*. But if you think about it, merely knowing what a sentence means is not quite sufficient for *understanding* it. If someone reliably tells me that a certain sentence of Urdu means that snow is white, I might thereby come to know that that sentence means that snow is white; but it seems wrong to say that I thereby come to understand the sentence. In order to understand a sentence I must also *know the meanings of the individual words and grasp its meaning on the basis of how it is put together*. Consider 'Snow is white'. What makes it right to say that I understand this sentence is that I know the meaning of 'snow', 'is' and 'white', and I understand the significance of putting those words together in that way.

So, still abstracting from the context of utterance, we can formulate and set off for emphasis:

> **The principle of compositionality:** the meaning of a sentence is determined by
>
> (i) the *meanings of the words* it comprises; and
> (ii) the *semantic significance* of the *grammatical structure* of the sentence.

The first requirement is relatively transparent, but we must also stress the importance of the second requirement. It implies, for example, that merely having an

English–Burmese dictionary would not enable a Burmese speaker to understand sentences of English. To take an obvious illustration, the same words constitute 'The dog bit the baby' and 'The baby bit the dog', but the *order* of the words makes all the difference to the meaning.

We can dig a bit deeper. There are countless possible sentences of your language that you have never heard, spoken or read, but which you would readily understand if you did hear or read them. Similarly, one is endlessly creative; one's ability to produce novel sentences is amazing but seldom remarked because it is so commonplace. How is that possible? Answer: because you know the meanings of the words they comprise, and you know the semantic significance of the syntactic structure of sentences.

In fact, even though each of us alas has a finite brain, and knows only finitely many words and grammatical principles, there are infinitely many sentences that this finite knowledge enables us potentially to understand. A trivial illustration: competent speakers of English can understand 'He is her father', 'He is her father's father', 'He is her father's father's father' and so on, without upper bound. Of course, if it gets too long, then we might get confused or fall asleep before understanding it; the point is that the understanding one has of 'father' is sufficient, *in principle*, to determine the meaning of any of these sentences. This behaviour of 'father' is known as its being **recursive** (its being 'iterative'): it is a basic example of the sort of thing that underlies the capacity for genuine creativity, of the capacity to comprehend novel sentences. It makes a potentially infinite capacity out of finite means. Insofar as we are like digital computers, the finitude of our actual capacity is due merely to the hardware, not to intrinsic limitations of the program, the software.

This capacity is often thought to mark the difference between human language and language-like behaviour of parrots, gorillas, dolphins etc. – they may use or respond appropriately to an impressive array of individual words or signs, and may even use them in combination to approximate rudimentary sentences, but it is controversial whether they show any evidence of genuine recursion. (On the other hand, there are movements afoot that seek to deny that compositionality is a feature of *all* human languages; Daniel Everett (2008) claims that it is not a feature of the language of the Pirahã of the Amazon basin, which is thought by some to be evidence that compositional structure is not hardwired as part of the human genetic endowment in the way that Noam Chomsky has famously argued.) But we have no need to take a stand on this; recursion is integral to the sorts of language we'll be concerned with, and the exploits and potentials of other animals do not bear on the concerns of this book.

We leave this ahistorical introduction with a famous quote from Gottlob Frege, in his essay 'Compound Thoughts' of 1923 (part of the extended essay 'Logical Investigations'; perhaps the first to enunciate the principle clearly was Alexander von Humboldt, in the first half the nineteenth century):

> It is astonishing what language can do. With a few syllables it can express an incalculable number of thoughts, so that even a thought grasped by a human

being for the very first time can be put into a form of words which will be understood by someone to whom the thought is entirely new. This would be impossible, were we not able to distinguish parts in the thought corresponding to the parts of a sentence, so that the structure of the sentence serves as an image of the structure of the thought.

(Frege 1984, p. 390)

1

naïve semantics and the language of logic

Language is an enormously complex phenomenon. As with many complex phenomena, it would be pedagogically extremely hard, in one fell swoop, to begin with a complicated theory covering all its many aspects. Compare physics, in which one studies a model of a ball rolling down a plane – ignoring friction, air pressure and resistance, imperfections in the ball and in the surface of the plane, and so on. We can learn a lot from the model, and think profitably about its most important features, without forgetting that the actual phenomenon is more complicated.

We will thus begin by considering a simple theory of language, one grounded in common-sense ideas of how language functions: **naïve semantics**. Later, one can adjust the theory or start over from a more informed perspective. It is not perhaps a theory which was explicitly held by anyone, and many philosophers and linguists hold that naïve semantics is almost *completely wrong*. But if so, it is wrong in something like the way that Newton's classical physics was: it is a good start and is intuitively satisfying in many respects. Further, in order to see why a different theory is needed, it's useful to see where it breaks down. This, then, will provide a basis from which to consider the more elaborate Frege–Russell outlook, which might be called *classical semantics* or the *classical theory of meaning*. They are the subjects of Chapters 2 and 3.

This chapter is a bit dry as well as philosophically comparatively barren, but it will serve to introduce some terminology, to introduce some notions and lingo that are pretty sure to remain standing in what comes after. It is not long.

NAÏVE THEORY: SINGULAR TERMS, PREDICATES AND REFERENCE

A sentence is made of words. Words fall into different grammatical types or classes – *syntactical categories*. To these categories correspond different *semantical*