

THE ROLE OF INTUITIONS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE
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1. THE RECEIVED VIEW

How should we go about finding the truth about language? The received view is that we should proceed by consulting our intuitive judgments about language, our “intuitions.” Indeed, it would be hard to exaggerate both the apparently dominant role of such intuitions in the philosophy of language and the agreement among philosophers that these intuitions should have this role. This emphasis on intuitions reflects, of course, a widely held view about the methodology of “armchair philosophy” in general.

Saul Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity*, one of the most influential works in the philosophy of language, is often, and rightly, cited as an example of heavy reliance on intuitions. And Kripke is explicit that intuitions should have this important role:

Of course, some philosophers think that something’s having intuitive content is very inconclusive evidence in favor of it. I think it is very heavy evidence in favor of anything, myself. I really don’t know, in a way, what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything, ultimately speaking. (1980: 42)

Stephen Neale gives another statement of the received view:

Our intuitive judgments about what *A* meant, said, and implied, and judgments about whether what *A* said was true or false in specified situations constitute the primary data for a theory of interpretation, the data it is the theory’s business to explain. (2004: 79)

These statements are quite general. Here are some typical claims about particular topics in the theory of language:

Semantic Content: Herman Cappelan and Ernie Lepore attribute to a range of philosophers versions of the following, which they regard as the “Mistaken Assumption”: “A theory of semantic content is adequate just in case it accounts for all or most of the intuitions speakers have about speech act content, i.e., intuitions about what speakers say, assert, claim, and state by uttering sentences” (2005: 53).

Reference: Stephen Stich thinks that the following view is “favored, albeit tacitly, by most philosophers”: “the theory of reference is attempting to capture the details of a commonsense theory about the link between words and the world” where that theory involves, at least, a generalization of referential intuitions (1996: 6).

Truth Conditions: Jason Stanley and Zoltan Szabo endorse the view that “accounting for our ordinary judgements about the truth-conditions of various sentences is the central aim of semantics” (2000: 240).

What Is Said: Robyn Carston thinks that the various criteria in the pragmatics literature for placing “pragmatic meanings” into “what is said”, “in the end,...all rest...on speaker/hearer intuitions” (2004: 10). François Recanati claims that ““what is said’ must be analysed in conformity to the intuitions shared by those who fully understand the utterance” (2004: 14).

Syntax: Noam Chomsky claims that ‘linguistics...is characterized by attention to certain kinds of evidence...largely, the judgments of native speakers’ (1986: 36). Liliane Haegeman, in a popular textbook, says that ‘all the linguist has to go by...is the native speaker’s intuitions’ (1994: 8).

2. THE TASK?

It is clear from these claims, and other similar ones, that intuitive judgments are commonly thought to provide *the evidence* or, at least, *the main evidence* for theories of language. Yet, often, such claims seem to suggest a stronger view: *the very task* of theories of language is to explain or systematize competent speakers’ intuitions about language.

This view of the task is very puzzling. For, the obvious way to describe the task of the theory of language is to *explain the nature of language*, to explain properties like *meaning*, *truth*, *reference*, and *grammaticality*, real properties of linguistic expressions playing some sort of explanatory role. If we start from this view, surely as good a starting place as one could have, why take the task to be to capture *ordinary intuitions about* such properties, intuitions that must simply reflect folk theory? That would seem to be appropriate only if we assume that the folk must be right about language. But why assume that? We don’t suppose that the folk are authorities on physics, biology, or economics, why suppose that they are authorities on linguistics and semantics?

So let us set aside the idea that the study of linguistic intuitions is the task of theories of language and turn to the more plausible view that these intuitions are evidence for those theories.

3. EXPERIMENTAL SEMANTICS

The evidential role of intuitions in semantics, indeed, the evidential role of intuitions in philosophy generally, has recently grabbed the attention of a group known as “experimental philosophers.” They have noted that the intuitions that play this evidential role are usually not those of the folk but rather those of the philosophers themselves. In response, they have conducted experiments to test whether the folk share these intuitions. Thus, in a well-known experiment, the intuitions that Kripke airs about reference were tested against those of undergraduates in Rutgers and Hong Kong (Machery *et al* 2004). The results raised serious doubts in the experimenters’ minds about Kripke’s refutation of the description theory of names. There is plenty of room for debate about whether, and to what extent, the results *should* raise these doubts (Marti 2009, Devitt 2011a, Ichikawa *et al* 2011). But one thing such experiments surely should do is focus our attention on two important questions: Why is the evidential role

given to intuitions thought to be appropriate? Is it really appropriate? These questions will be the focus of this paper.

4. “CARTESIANISM”

It would, of course, be appropriate to give a person’s intuitions an important evidential role if we could be confident that they reflected *knowledge*. And the received view is that a competent speaker of a language does indeed have knowledge about her language, *propositional* knowledge, “tacitly” at least, *simply in virtue of being competent* in the language:

It is an undeniable feature of the notion of meaning... that meaning is *transparent* in the sense that, if someone attaches a meaning to each of two words, he must know whether these meanings are the same. (Dummett 1978: 131)

The natural view is that one has *some kind of* privileged semantic self-knowledge. (Loar 1987: 97)

The idea of this sort of privileged access - that we are in a special position to know about our own competence - is an instance of general “Cartesianism”:

Since Descartes, it has seemed undeniable to most philosophers that each of us has a privileged way of knowing about his or her own mental states. . . . whenever we have a thought, belief, intention, or desire, we can in principle come to know *what* we think, believe, intend, or desire just by internal examination, without engaging in an empirical investigation of the external world. (McKinsey 1994: 308)

The idea that we have a Cartesian access to semantic facts seems to be an almost unquestioned part of the semantic traditions of Frege and Russell. Consider, for example, the assumption that our competence consists in propositional knowledge of truth conditions. Herbert Heidelberger (1980) has shown how widespread this assumption is with references to Wiggins, Strawson, Davidson, Frege, Wittgenstein, Quine, and Carnap. He points out that it seems to be regarded as “uncontroversial . . .harmless...perhaps unworthy of serious discussion” (p. 402). Gareth Evans says, “perhaps no one will deny it” (1982: 106).

It is worth noting that one of the most famous arguments in the philosophy of language seems to rest on Cartesianism. This is the Fregean argument that ‘Hesperus = Hesperus’ and ‘Hesperus = Phosphorus’ must differ in meaning, hence ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ must differ in meaning, because they differ in cognitive significance or informativeness. But why would the latter *epistemic* difference be taken to establish the former *semantic* difference? The reason, I suggest (1996: 172-3), is that it is taken for granted that two sentences mean the same only if competent speakers *know* that they do; see Dummett above. And speakers could know this only if sentences did not differ in cognitive significance for them. For, if they differed in significance, speakers would not think that they were synonymous.

5. A PRIORI KNOWLEDGE?

Why should we suppose that ordinary competent speakers have this knowledge of semantic facts? Many seem to think that the knowledge is a priori. Thus Jerrold Katz claims: “We know sense properties and relations of expressions on the basis [of] the speaker’s a priori linguistic intuitions in clear cases” (1997: 21). And Michael McKinsey thinks that it is “fairly clear” that “the principle that the meanings of words are knowable a priori...is taken for granted by most philosophers of language and by many linguists” (1987: 1).

Now, of course, the idea that some knowledge is a priori is widespread in philosophy. Nonetheless, Quine has raised serious doubts about it. The main problem with the idea, in my view (1994, 1996; 1998; 2010a), is that we do not have even the beginnings of an account of what a priori knowledge *is*. We are simply told what it *isn't*, namely empirical knowledge. Still, suppose we set such general doubts aside and accept that at least our knowledge of mathematics and logic is a priori, what could be the basis for supposing that our knowledge of *meanings* is too? The meaning of a word is presumably constituted by relational properties of some sort: “internal” ones involving inferential relations among words and/or “external” ones involving certain direct causal relations to the world referred to. Where the meaning is partly constituted by a certain external relation – plausible examples are the meanings of ‘Cicero’, ‘elm’, and ‘water’ – then it is hard to see how a priori reflection on what is “inside the head” could establish that such a relation constituted a meaning. But even the meaning-constituting internal relations pose serious problems for the a priori view. Let Susan be a competent speaker alleged to have a priori knowledge that, say, the inferential relation between ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried’ is part of the meaning of ‘bachelor’. The first problem for the a priori view is that it requires that Susan comes to this belief about meaning rather than the belief that the inferential relation is simply the reflection of familiar knowledge about bachelors. Why should we suppose that her competence alone leads her to make this apparently large *theoretical* step? Suppose, however, that she does make it. The second and more serious problem for the a priori view is that we seem to have no basis for thinking that, simply in virtue of her competence, Susan’s belief about meaning is *justified*. We have no basis for giving her belief any special epistemic authority, and thus turning it into *knowledge*. We need a plausible explanation of these allegedly nonempirical processes of belief formation and justification and some reasons for believing in them.

6. EMBODIED THEORY?

If the view that competent speakers have a priori knowledge of linguistic facts does not hold up, what else could justify the ubiquitous reliance on intuitions in the philosophy of language? Philosophers provide little in the way of an answer. As Jaakko Hintikka remarks, talking of philosophy generally: “One searches the literature in vain for a serious attempt to provide” a justification for the appeal to intuitions (1999: 130). In similar vein, Timothy Williamson remarks: “there is no agreed or even popular account of how intuition works, no accepted explanation of the hoped-for correlation between our having an intuition that P and its being true that P.” He describes this as “a methodological scandal” (2007: 215). Still, we can look to linguistics for a possible answer for *semantic* intuitions. (Perhaps we should see this answer as an explication of the obscure a priori answer.)

The common linguistic view of intuitive judgments is expressed in passages like the following:

it seems reasonably clear, both in principle and in many specific cases, how unconscious knowledge issues in conscious knowledge...it follows by computations similar to straight deduction. (Chomsky [1986], p. 270)

I have described the common view as follows: linguistic competence, all on its own,

provides information about the linguistic facts....So these judgments are not arrived at by the sort of empirical investigation that judgments about the world usually require. Rather, a speaker has a privileged access to facts about the language, facts captured by the intuitions, simply in virtue of being competent... (2006a: 483-4; 2006b: 96)

On this view, intuitive syntactic judgments are, “noise” aside, “the voice of competence.” Let’s call this thesis “VoC.” We can identify two versions of it, a “standard” one which requires linguistic rules (and principles) to be *represented* in the mind and a “nonstandard” one which does not. According to the standard version, suggested by the Chomsky quote, speakers derive their intuitive judgments from their representations of linguistic rules by a causal and rational process like a deduction. According to the nonstandard version, the intuitions must be provided somehow by embodied but unrepresented rules (2006a: 482-6; 2006b: 96-8).

Stich has suggested that philosophers of language might be guided by linguistics in seeking a justification for the authoritative role given to semantic intuitions (1996: 40; see also Hintikka 1999, Williamson 2007). Stich’s particular concern is with referential intuitions. He suggests that philosophers may think that speakers derive their referential intuitions from a representation of referential principles. Indeed, Gabriel Segal (2001) has later urged this line. So, just as, according to the standard version of VoC, the true grammar that linguists seek to discover is already represented in the mind of every speaker, so too, according to this suggestion, are true semantic theories of reference, meaning, and the like. Semantic intuitions, like syntactic ones, are the result of something like a deduction from a represented theory. Thus, speakers have Cartesian access to linguistic facts simply in virtue of being competent.

Stich’s suggestion concerns the standard version of VoC, which posits representations of theories of language in the minds of ordinary speakers. What about the nonstandard version which does not posit these representations? Stich does not consider this version as a model for semantic intuitions but if the model worked for syntax it should work for semantics as well.

Someone who took the usual linguistic view of grammatical intuitions might well be tempted by this analogous view of semantic intuitions. So, it is interesting to note that Chomsky is not tempted. He expresses skepticism about “contemporary philosophy of language” and its practice of “exploring intuitions about the technical notions ‘denote’, ‘refer’, ‘true of’, etc.” He claims that

there can be no intuitions about these notions, just as there can be none about ‘angular velocity’ or ‘protein’. These are technical terms of philosophical discourse with a stipulated sense that has no counterpart in ordinary language. (1995: 24)

So Chomsky is skeptical about the use philosophers make of semantic intuitions. But he is not, of course, similarly skeptical about the use linguists make of syntactic ones. Why the difference? If skepticism about semantic intuitions is appropriate, then surely just the same skepticism is appropriate about the syntactic ones, and for just the same reason. All the terms in linguistic theory are, in the relevant sense, technical and theory-laden. A few like ‘grammatical’ and ‘sentence’ have counterparts in ordinary language but so too do ‘denote’ and ‘refer’. Semantic and syntactic intuitions are on a par. Chomsky seems to have given a good reason for rejecting VoC altogether.

In the last section we looked dimly on the idea that linguistic intuitions are a priori. We have just raised a preliminary doubt about VoC. Before raising more doubts, we need to describe an alternative view. This alternative accompanies the view that linguistic competence is simply a skill.

7. COMPETENCE AS A SKILL

It is natural to follow the folk in talking of a person’s linguistic competence as a form of “knowledge.” We noted in section 4 that it is common to think of this knowledge as *propositional*, knowledge-*that*, leading to the idea that speakers have Cartesian access to linguistic facts. But there is an alternative. If we must follow the folk in talking of competence as knowledge, we can think of it as mere knowledge-*how*. However, I think it is better to talk of the competence as simply a skill or ability.

What skill or ability is the competence? Accepting, as we should, that “language expresses thought”, I give the following answer:

the competence is the ability to use a sound of the language to express a thought with the meaning that the sound has in the language in the context of utterance; and the ability (together with some pragmatic abilities) to assign to a sound a thought with the meaning that the sound has in the language in the context of utterance (similarly for inscriptions, etc.). (2006b: 148)

We can move to a more theory-laden view of competence if we adopt the popular, and in my view correct, representational theory of the mind according to which any thought involves standing in a certain functional relation to a mental representation. Competence is then “the ability to *translate* back and forth between meaningful mental representations and the sounds of the language.” And if we go further to the controversial language-of-thought hypothesis according to which the mental representation is language-like, the translation is “between mental *sentences* and the sounds of the language” (*ibid*). Finally, linguistic competence is complex, consisting of syntactic competence and lexical competence. Thus, going along with the language-of-thought hypothesis, syntactic competence is the ability to translate back and forth between the syntactic structures of the sounds of the language and the structures of mental sentences. And lexical competence is the ability to translate back and forth between the words of the language and mental words.

Why think that that linguistic competence is just a skill or ability? Briefly, because it has all the marks of one: it has limited plasticity; it is extraordinarily fast; the process of exercising it is unavailable to consciousness; once established, it is “automatic” with the result that it can be performed whilst attention is elsewhere (2006b: 209-10); it is very likely acquired by “implicit

learning” (2006b: 219). But shouldn’t we suppose that in the case of linguistic competence, the skill involves knowledge-that? I argue not (2006b). We should suppose that only if we have some powerful reasons for doing so. Otherwise the supposition seems gratuitous. Why suppose that simply in virtue of being competent in a language a person must have propositional knowledge about the language? Why suppose that speakers have this sort of Cartesian access to linguistic facts? Why not suppose, rather, the modest view that any knowledge of these facts that a speaker may have comes from ordinary empirical reflection on linguistic phenomena?

Assumptions that competence involves propositional knowledge are very immodest. One would expect, therefore, that they would be well supported by arguments. This is not what we find. Arguments for them are few and far between and remarkably thin. (Stanley and Williamson 2001 may rate as an exception; Devitt 2011b is a response.) One gets the impression that these propositional assumptions are thought to be too obvious to need argument.

8. INTUITIONS AS EMPIRICAL JUDGMENTS

If linguistic competence is simply a skill, requiring no propositional linguistic knowledge, it is hard to see how it could be the source of our linguistic intuitions as VoC requires. But what is the alternative? I think that we should see intuitions as ordinary empirical judgments (1994; 1996; 2006a,b,c; 2011a; see also Kornblith 1998). Like the skill-view of competence, this alternative is modest: it makes do with cognitive states and processes we were already committed to.

The alternative is based on a view of intuitions *in general*: they “are empirical theory-laden central-processor responses to phenomena, differing from many other such responses only in being fairly immediate and unreflective, based on little if any conscious reasoning” (2006a: 491; 2006b: 103). From this perspective, we should trust a person’s intuitions to the degree that we have confidence in her empirically based expertise about the kinds under investigation. Sometimes the folk may be as expert as anyone: intuitions laden with “folk theory” are the best we have to go on. Perhaps this is the case for a range of psychological kinds. For most kinds, it clearly is not: we should trust intuitions laden with established scientific theories. Consider, for example, a paleontologist in the field searching for fossils. She sees a bit of white stone sticking through grey rock, and responds immediately “a pig’s jawbone.” We trust her intuitive judgment in a way that we would not trust folk judgments because we know that it is the result of years of study and experience of old bones; she has become a *reliable indicator* of the properties of fossils. Similarly we trust the intuitions of the physicist over those of the folk about many aspects of the physical world where the folk have proved notoriously unreliable. And recent experiments have shown that we should have a similar attitude to many psychological intuitions. Thus, the cognitive psychologist, Edward Wisniewski, points out that

researchers who study behavior and thought within an experimental framework develop *better* intuitions about these phenomena than those of the intuition researchers or lay people who do not study these phenomena within such a framework. The intuitions are better in the sense that they are more likely to be correct when subjected to experimental testing (1998: 45).

Although we may often be right to trust an intuition in the short run, it is crucial to see that nothing rests on it in the long run. We can look for more direct evidence in scientific tests. In such a scientific test we examine the reality the intuition is *about*. These scientific examinations of reality, not intuitions about reality, are the primary source of evidence. The examinations may lead us to revise some of our initial intuitions. They will surely show us that the intuitions are far from a complete account of the relevant bit of reality.

What then should we make of *linguistic* intuitions? All these intuitions arise from reflection on linguistic data (understood as pieces of linguistic usage, on the model of “primary linguistic data”). The competent speaker has ready access to a great deal of linguistic data just as the competent typist has to a great deal of typing data and the competent thinker has to a great deal of thinking data: the competent speaker and her competent fellows produce linguistic data day in and day out. So she is surrounded by tokens that may, *as a matter of fact*, refer to so and so, be true in such and such circumstances, be grammatical, be ambiguous, and so on. So she is in a position to have well-based opinions about language by reflecting on these tokens. This is not to say that she will reflect. Indeed, a totally uneducated person may reflect very little and hence have few if any intuitive judgments about her language. Still it is clear that the normal competent speaker with even a little education *does* reflect on linguistic reality just as she reflects on many other striking aspects of the world she lives in. And this education will usually provide her with the terms and concepts of folk semantics and linguistics, at least. As a result she is likely to be able to judge in a fairly immediate and unreflective way that a token *does* refer to so and so, *is* true in such and such circumstances, *is* grammatical, *is* ambiguous, and so on. Such intuitive opinions are empirical central-processor responses to linguistic phenomena. They have no special authority: although the speaker’s competence gives her ready access to data it does not give her Cartesian access to the truth about the data.

Still, are these intuitions likely to be right? I think we need to be cautious in accepting them: thinking about language is notoriously hard and the folk are a long way from being experts. Still it does seem to me that their “simplest” intuitions, involving syntactic and semantic vocabulary that we suppose the folk have mastered well enough, are quite likely to be right. So we can often be confident about judgments that a name “refers” to *x*, that this pronoun must “refer to the same thing” as that name, and that this expression is “ambiguous.” In sum, we have good reason to suppose that the core judgments of folk linguistics, reflecting the “linguistic wisdom of the ages,” are good evidence for linguistic theories.

This having been said, the intuitions that philosophers and linguists should prefer are the ones that they do, as a matter of fact, mostly prefer: those of philosophers and linguists themselves. For, they are much more expert. This is particularly so when we get beyond the simple cases to fanciful ones like Kripke’s Gödel (1980) and Putnam’s Twin Earth (1975). Just as the intuitions of paleontologists, physicists, and psychologists in their respective domains are likely to be better than those of the folk, so too the intuitions of philosophers and linguists (c.f. Machery et al 2004).

To say that intuitions, whether those of philosophers or of the folk, are evidence is not to say that they are the only, or even the primary, evidence. Indeed, we can look for more direct, less theory-laden, evidence by studying what the intuitions are *about*, the linguistic reality itself. But how do we do that? I shall address this briefly in section 10.

9. REJECTING VOC

I think (2006a,b,c) that there are several reasons for preferring this modest explanation of intuitions to VoC, whether as a proposal for syntactic intuitions or as one, following Stich's suggestion, for semantic intuitions. (For discussion, see Textor 2009, Fitzgerald 2010, Devitt 2010c,d.) I shall mention the main ones.

The main consideration against the *standard* version of VoC is as follows. It is of course *possible* that the competent speaker's intuitions about her language are reliable because they are derived from her mental representations of theories of the language. It has been argued, mistakenly in my view, that we need to posit such representations to explain language acquisition and use. In any case, we surely do not need the posit to explain the reliability of intuitions about language. Consider the analogous phenomena for typing and thinking. We can explain the reliability of intuitions about those processes by adverting to cognitive states and processes that we are already committed to, without positing representations of the rules that govern the processes. These modest explanations seemed perfectly adequate for the job and, indeed, much more plausible than their representational rivals. So do the similarly modest explanations in the linguistics case. Language is an important part of the human environment. It is not surprising that empirical reflection on linguistic data, aided by some education, should make people fairly reliable detectors of the most obvious facts about language. We are surely similarly reliable about other important parts of the environment, for example, the physical, biological, and psychological parts.

The main consideration against the *nonstandard* version of VoC is that we do not have *any idea* how embodied but unrepresented rules might provide linguistic intuitions. Not only do we lack the details needed for a plausible explanation but attention to other similar systems gives good reason to suppose that the linguistic system does not provide these intuitions and so we *could never* have the details. The explanation would require a relatively direct cognitive path from the embodied rules of the language to beliefs about expressions of that language, a path that does not go via central-processor reflection on the data. What could that path be? Consider some other examples. It is very likely that rules that are embodied but not represented govern our swimming, bicycle riding, catching, typing, and thinking. Yet there does not seem to be any direct path from these rules to relevant beliefs. Why suppose that there is such a path for linguistic beliefs? Why suppose that we can have privileged access to linguistic facts when we cannot to facts about these other activities? We do not have the beginnings of a positive answer to these questions and it seems unlikely that the future will bring answers.

10. OTHER EVIDENCE

On the view I have presented linguistic intuitions are fallible empirical judgments that are, at best, only indirect evidence of linguistic reality. Where can we find more direct evidence? This is a large question beyond the scope of this paper. I shall briefly mention some points made elsewhere (1994, 1996, 2006a,b, 2008, 2011a; see also Marti 2008).

We should start by identifying the "linguistic reality" in question. This reality is to be found in the utterances of language users. But what is it about these utterances that is theoretically

interesting? It is natural to think that our interest is in their *meanings*. Related to this, since “language expresses thought,” it is natural to think that we are interested in the meanings (contents) of thoughts. But this talk of meanings is sadly vague, as many have noted: it is far from clear what counts as a meaning that needs explaining. We need to be much more precise in identifying the subject matter of semantics. We should identify the meanings of utterances and thoughts with certain properties of them that are crucial to their causal roles. Of particular interest here are the roles of thoughts and utterances in causing intentional behaviors and informing us about the world. So we can identify the reality that concerns us with the properties of thoughts and utterances in virtue of which they play those causal roles.

This reality can provide lots of direct evidence of its nature. The main source is “the corpus,” the utterances that the folk have produced and are producing as they go about their lives. We can look at the circumstances and consequences of these productions. Indeed, the linguistic intuitions that are indirect evidence – for example, that people ignorant about Einstein nonetheless refer to him by ‘Einstein’ (Kripke 1980) - come largely from reflecting on these features of linguistic usage. The technique of “elicited production” could provide further direct evidence: experimental situations “are designed to be uniquely felicitous for production of the target structure” (Thornton 1995, p. 140). Next, rather than *creating* situations in which we see what people say or understand, we can *describe* such situations and ask people what they *would* say or understand. Finally, and relatedly, we can look to ordinary opaque attitude ascriptions. Day in and day out, folk, and social scientists, use “content clauses,” usually ‘that’ clauses like that in “Frank said that Madonna is gorgeous,” to ascribe properties to thoughts and utterances for the very purpose of explaining behavior and learning about the world. Insofar as these ascriptions are right – and we have good reason to suppose that they mostly are right because they are mostly *successful* – they provide evidence of the nature of the reality that concerns us.

This direct evidence often involves behaviors that are aptly called “intuitive” but it is very different from the indirect evidence provided by the intuitions that that have concerned us here: for the behaviors are linguistic *performances* whereas those intuitions are *judgments about* language.

11. CONCLUSION

Intuitive metalinguistic judgments seem to be the main source of evidence in the philosophy of language. We should reject the idea that this is justified because those intuitions are a priori or “the voice of competence.” Rather, we should see the intuitions as empirical judgments. As such, they are often good, albeit indirect, evidence. And the intuitions we should prefer are those of philosophers and linguists, because they are more expert. However, we can find more direct evidence by looking to the linguistic reality that these intuitions are about.

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RELATED TOPICS: A Priority, Semantic Competence, The Role of Experiment, The Role of Linguistics

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