

SEMANTIC NORMS AND TEMPORAL EXTERNALISM

by

Henry James Duncan Jackman

BA, Columbia, 1988

MA, Pittsburgh, 1991

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

1996

## SEMANTIC NORMS AND TEMPORAL EXTERNALISM

Henry Jackman, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 1996

We typically understand an individual's thoughts and utterances in a way that ties their contents to the make-up of her physical environment and the linguistic usage of her community. This practice has frequently been taken to be in tension with the intuition that the content of one's thoughts and utterances must ultimately be explained in terms of facts about one's *own* attitudes and behavior. This perceived tension is manifested in cases where the individual's own beliefs and usage purportedly underdetermine or even misidentify what she is standardly treated as referring to by her terms. I argue that the individual's beliefs only seem to underdetermine or misidentify the referents of her terms in these cases if one presupposes a comparatively impoverished conception of what her beliefs are. The beliefs an individual speaker associates with a given term extend far beyond the handful of sentences she would produce if asked to list such beliefs. Speakers have an implicit, but rich, understanding of their language as a shared temporally extended practices about which they can be mistaken. Once this implicit understanding of language is factored in, our practice of tying what an individual means to her physical and social environment turns out to be justified by consistency requirements upon the individual's own beliefs.

Indeed, our implicit understanding of language justifies more than merely tying a speaker's thoughts and utterances to her social and physical environment. Our implicit understanding of languages as temporally extended practices turns out to justify our important, but seldom noticed, habit of reading present conceptual developments back into the thoughts and utterances of our past selves and our ancestors. We can both endorse a picture of linguistic norms that is methodologically individualistic and allow that future use (as with communal use) contributes to what we mean by our terms. External factors are relevant to what we mean because we implicitly take them to be so, and our practice of incorporating physical, social and temporal factors into our understanding of others reflects our often deep commitment to a picture of language as a shared practice extending through time.

## Preface

I've profited from conversations with many people while writing this dissertation, in particular I'd like to thank Dave Beiseker, Akeel Bilgrami, Jim Conant, Dan Everett, Richard Gale, Mitch Green, Mark Mcculaugh, and Ram Neta.

Most of all, I'd like to thank Robert Brandom, Joe Camp and John McDowell for their advice and encouragement over the past six years. My weekly meetings with Robert Brandom not only provided me with valuable insights and advice at almost every stage of the writing process, but also prevented me from falling into any of those prolonged fallow periods distressingly characteristic of graduate life. While Joe Camp remained the most elusive member of my committee, his pointed questions about various chapter drafts continually forced me to rethink the central presuppositions of the project, and the dissertation would be considerably worse without them. In addition to improving the style, spelling and punctuation of virtually every sentence in the dissertation, John Mcdowell's generous and patient comments have greatly contributed to my understanding of all of the issued discussed, and others besides.

Finally, I'd like to thank the Canada Council, whose generous support allowed me to complete this dissertation considerably more quickly than I would have otherwise.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Semantic Equilibria	6
1. Putative extensions and general characterizations	
2. Tension between the two	
3. How both are central to meaning	
4. Equilibrium and a regulative ideal governing our linguistic practices	
5. How there might not be any (or any <i>single</i> ) endpoint	
6. How to understand the dialectical ‘development’	
7. Some general beliefs about meaning	
8. Attitude ascriptions	
9. The possibility of many equilibrium points: indeterminacy	
10. The possibility of no equilibrium points: bifurcationism	
11. Self-reflexive character of dispute when applied to meaning	
12. Conclusion	
Chapter Two: The Expressive Constraint	56
1. Introduction	
2. Reasons for rejecting the expressive constraint	
3. Reasons for keeping the constraint	
4. Explaining the constraint	
5. Conclusion	
Chapter Three: Individualism, Non-Individualism and Anti-Individualism	90
1. The ascriptional practices	
2. The general characterizations	
3. Conclusion	
Chapter Four: Linguistic Norms and Future Behavior	142
1. Introduction	
2. T-externalism: the ascriptional practice	
3. T-externalism: arguments for the view	
4. T-externalism: an elaboration of the view	
5. T-externalism: three further consequences	
6. T-externalism: some objections and replies	
7. Non-temporalist interpretations of the phenomena	
8. Conclusion	
Summary and Conclusion	185
Appendices	188
Appendix A: Causal theories of reference	
Appendix B: Semantic defects as epistemological virtue	
Appendix C: On “The Methodology of Naturalistic Semantics”	
Appendix D: Methodological and Ascriptional Individualism	
Appendix E: Ascriptions <i>de dicto</i> and <i>de re</i>	
Appendix F: Internalism, Individualism and the Background	
Bibliography	229