
Holding words accountable

Luca Gasparri*¹

¹Savoirs, Textes, Langage (STL) - UMR 8163 – Université de Lille, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique : UMR8163 – France

Résumé

Under what conditions does an externale (a sequence of speech sounds, a mark of ink) qualify as an articulation of a given word? Classical treatments of the problem appeal to two principles: (Intentionalism) and (Tolerance). (Intentionalism) is the view that for every externale e and every word w , e counts as an articulation of w just in case e originates from the intention to token w (Kaplan 1999; 2011). (Tolerance) is the view that for every e and every w , e counts as an articulation of w just in case e meets the local performance standards on w (Hawthorne & Lepore 2011). Both (Intentionalism) and (Tolerance) face difficulties. (Intentionalism) is threatened by the conceivability of unintentional articulations; (Tolerance) by the conceivability of locally anomalous articulations (Cappelen 1999; Bromberger 2011). Stojnić (2022) offers an alternative: Originalism-Plus-Transfer (OPT). On (OPT), for every e and every w , e is an articulation of w just in case e tokens (selects) w from the speaker’s mental lexicon, grounded in the network of causal-historical chains leading back to w ’s neologizing event. In this talk, I plan to: a) show that while (OPT) improves upon treatments based on (Intentionalism) and (Tolerance), it suffers in turn from additional difficulties; b) derive the desiderata on an improved treatment of the problem; and c) propose an alternative. The gist of the view is that for every e and every w , e is an articulation of w just in case e originates from an utterance template that reproduces the local grammatical standards on w . I will offer an argument that the account has the resources required to address all the difficulties on the table (including those incurred by the classical accounts), and aligns with psychological data on utterance production (a.o., Levelt 1999; Harley & MacAndrew 2001; McClelland et al. 2014).

Key references

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*Intervenant

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(Word count, excl. references: 299)

Mots-Clés: words, articulations, utterances, intentions, tolerance