Paweł Grabarczyk
University Of Lodz
pagrab@gmail.com

Directival theory of meaning as a theory of narrow content

The first part of the workshop explains why treating the directival theory of meaning as a theory of narrow content may prove fruitful.

Directival theory of meaning formulated by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz in 1930's ranks amongst the most original achievements of Polish philosophy of language. A the time of its creation it was a completely novel theory and it is even hard to point at its precursors – neither in Polish nor in international philosophy. One of its most original features is that it construes the meaning of expressions purely from syntax and pragmatics. This unique aspect of the theory makes it relevant and attractive even today.

Some of the elements of the directival theory of meaning have resurfaced in the West in the subsequent years (unfortunately Ajdukiewicz has never been properly credited). For example – a theory of meaning created in the 1950's by Wilfrid Sellars introduces a notion of "language rules" that is analogous to Ajdukiewicz's "meaning directives".

What is important for our purposes is that there exists a whole branch of contemporary semantics in modern philosophy (called "conceptual role semantics" or "functional role semantics") which originate from the same set of intuitions and assumptions as the directival theory. The theories in question construe the meaning of expressions from the role they play in the network of language rules. For example - such theories have been proposed by Ned Block and Gilbert Harman.

I plan to exploit these similarities and propose to treat the directival theory of meaning as a contemporary narrow theory of content. I believe that it has two important advantages over most of contemporary approaches.

First of all – modern functional role semantics are almost always sketchy – they were presented rather as outlines of future theories than full blown accounts. Contrary to this the directival theory of meaning is a detailed proposition which can be easily developed further. Second of all modern functional role semantics were quickly shown to contain serious flaws (for example the so called Fodor-Lepore dilemma). It can be shown that some of the specific features of the directival theory enable us to easily overcome these flaws.

It is also important to note that treating the directival theory of meaning as a theory of narrow content automatically solves it's biggest issue, that is a counterintuitive consequence shown by Alfred Tarski. Tarski realized that the directival theory does not respect the Fregean rule which demands the reference of the expression to be determined by the meaning of the expression. Tarski used an example of a very simple language and showed that the directival theory allows for two synonymous expressions to refer to different objects. Since most theories of narrow content do not adhere to abovementioned Fregean rule anyway, we can simply disregard it.

Thus, reconstructing the directival theory as a theory of narrow content opens the possibility of creating a modern functional role semantics free of problems characteristic to its counterparts.

The second part of the workshop will be devoted to a discussion of possible applications of the directival theory of meaning reconstructed as a theory of narrow content. Some of the applications proposed for the discussion are:

- This type of narrow content enables us to explain the notion of *having a meaning*
- It helps us to explain the mechanism of *becoming meaningful*
- It can be used to explain the notion of *understanding an expression*
- It can be used as a building block of a definition of *translation*
- It helps us to individuate *beliefs*
- It explains the connection between agent's beliefs and her behavior
- It helps us understand how fictional beliefs which are "about nothing" can nonetheless determine agent's actions.
- This type of narrow content may be useful for applications in the field of Artificial Intelligence because it reduces vague notions of *meaning* and *understanding* to a combination of syntax and observable behavior of agents.