Book Note on Adrienne Lehrer, Wine and Conversation

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Review
Reviewed Work(s): Wine and Conversation by Adrienne Lehrer
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casual listening to films etc., is open to the objection that F could have listened selectively. However, F’s evidence is presented not as an end in itself, but merely as exemplary of his larger point about discourse: even when his elicitation format does not permit a fully realistic response, or his own (limited) English changes a surface form, his argument can stand unaffected. It is on the basis of his theoretical claims that we must judge his work.

Unfortunately, the focus of these articles is so diffuse as to limit our ability to appreciate F’s argument. Although there is an index, it is, in F’s own words, ‘aussi partiel que l’ouvrage’ (147). He might have added that the format of the index is not consistent: although it includes many of the phrases, it omits many others, and still others are indexed in a format which precludes ready accessibility. This is especially unfortunate in a work of this nature, which F maintains was initially visualized as a ‘dictionnaire des phrases en situation’ (123). Although the book makes a plea for a re-assessment of our linguistic models, and for an expansion to allow for interpretation of the material which F presents, he has not presented a model. Though his material, qua data, may be interesting, his analysis qua thesis is inadequate.

Nonetheless, as in any of F’s books, we find buried nuggets of information. Who knew that the first linguist to assume the situation as the point of departure for the turn at talk was Philip Wegener? The fact that the reference is given in the text as 1886, but in the bibliography as 1885, is a trivial point, but unfortunately is typical of the host of details which mar our understanding of F’s text. In sum, while F does not do what he apparently set out to do, the reader can follow up individual lines of thought, if he has the leisure and the perseverance to do so. [MALCAH YAEGER-DROR, Ben Gurion University.]


In this volume, L turns to her hobby—wine tasting—for a corpus of words for semantic study. The results are interesting in parts, somewhat confusing in others.

In the first section, L discusses the semantics of wine words (dry, robust etc.) After proposing a semantic taxonomy for a large corpus of terms, she shows how the wine vocabulary enlarges by morphological derivation and by semantic extension. L suggests that most wine words have (or could have) denotative, natural meaning, though relationships among words are conventional. Within a given context (light for a burgundy is not the same as for a chablis), there are empirical criteria for the appropriate use of a term—criteria which have been, or could be, established by experts. Even evaluative terms like good and metaphorical ones like honest can, in the wine context, be empirically defined.

However, not everyone who talks about wine is an expert; and in Section 2, L describes experiments designed to test whether people talking about wine in fact use wine words in mutually consistent ways, and to what extent they manage to communicate with them. The experiments are interesting, though not very rigorous, and are presented in a confusingly discursive way. With two groups of sophisticated but non-professional wine tasters, L discovered very little consensus on the meanings of wine words; stable norms for the application of the terms did not develop over time. Subjects were not able to describe wines so that others could reliably pick them out of an unlabeled set. A third group of subjects were enologists; they were better able to agree on descriptions of wines, but also performed poorly on matching tests.

The third section of the book is about the communicative functions of wine talk. L summarizes a number of ways of classifying the uses of language (speech-act theory, Jakobsonian functions); but she makes little use of these in the ensuing discussions of scientific, ‘precise’ language and of ‘critical communication’, the goal of which is to create ‘sameness of vision’ (168). L claims that it is possible for professionals to learn to use terms in consistent ways (though the evidence is skimpy); non-professionals do not need to use wine words consistently, though they feel they should, since the purpose of their talk is phatic.

Section 4 consists of one chapter, in which L shows how descriptions of personality parallel descriptions of wine; she questions whether psychiatrists really use terms like schizophrenia in consistent ways, and whether the ‘critical communication’ of therapeutic discourse influences diagnoses which are supposed to be precise.

Perhaps because six of L’s twelve chapters have appeared at least partially in other publi-

The starting point of this book consists of two claims made by Quine: (1) No distinction between analytic and synthetic sentences can be drawn; and (2) translation is indeterminate. In Quine's hypothetical language, gavagi could as well be translated by 'rabbit stages' or 'collection of rabbit parts' as by 'rabbit'. Contra Quine, P argues that a semantic metatheory can be an empirical theory; hence there are some things about which we can be correct (or incorrect).

With respect to the issue of analyticity, P argues that some statements are analytic, e.g. Circles are round or Bachelors are unmarried, because we cannot imagine anything not round being a circle. However, statements like Cats are animals are not analytic, for we can imagine cats being robots. P accepts Kripke's analysis that it is metaphysically necessary for cats to be animals, given that the world is the way it is.

According to P, we can provide necessary conditions in our definitions, but we are not likely to find sufficient conditions: our definitions will be conditional, but not biconditional. With respect to the nature of definitions, P rejects semantic primes, and advocates using a natural language as the metalanguage; thus John is a bachelor means that John is a physical object, living, human adult (if that is what bachelor means). The definition looks similar to that of Katz, but the status of the terms is different. They are simply English words, not semantic markers.

P's line of attack against Quine's other thesis, the indeterminacy of translation, is to build on psychology to show that all human beings conceive of at least some things, e.g. physical objects, in the same way. P provides an account of nameables—'things which have proper names, and things which can be referred to by a single non-collective countable noun' (60).

Four principles of nameability are proposed:

(N1) Individuals which are (relatively) homogenous, continuous, and bounded are nameable. (p. 63)

(N2) An individual which is a proper part of an N1 nameable is itself nameable if and only if it has a characteristic function, appearance, or behavior. (64).

(N3) A sum of N1 nameables is itself nameable if they are (relatively) spatio-temporally contiguous, or the product of human (or animal?) agency, or jointly fulfill a function not served by any of them (67).

(N4) A sum of N2 nameables is nameable only if the individuals making up the sum are adjacent to each other (69).

N1 is obvious. N2 allows us to have a word for the wing of an airplane, but not for the left half of a wing. N3 accounts for names of stellar constellations and widely separated and dispersed geographical and political entities, e.g. Oceania or the Commonwealth. N4 rules out a word that would designate only the four legs of a dog. Unfortunately, P does not go into the question of which kinds of nameables are (or could be) given proper names.

After we have principles for nameability, the next task is to discover the principles of categorization. Similarity—principally of appearance, behavior, and function—is the basis for categorization, but it 'can be overruled by more specific beliefs about the internal structure of the member' (73). P summarizes the work of Berlin on folk-botanical taxonomies, and of Rosch on prototypes and basic-level categories. Experiments conducted by P, using Rosch's experimental methods, are reported; but P uses verbs, whereas Rosch concentrates on nouns. P is surprised to find that subjects do indeed judge some verbs as significantly more prototypical of their category than other co-hyponyms: murder is more prototypical of kill than commit suicide, and survey is more prototypical of look than squint. P finds that Rosch's conclusions about the correlation between shared attributes and prototypicality may exist for concrete nouns, but that another explanation must be found for verbs. P asked subjects to rate the similarity for each hyponym of a term with the category name, e.g. kill with murder, kill with execute etc. P suggests that 'the members of the category which are most prototypical are always those members which are closest in meaning to the category name itself' (129).

In the final chapter, Pulman discusses Putnam