

Incomplete Understanding Without Analyticity: Prototype Semantics and Social Externalism

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Keywords: social externalism, incomplete understanding, analytic truth, conceptual truth, prototype

Abstract

Social externalism or anti-individualism is the view that meaning and mental content depend on the speaker's social environment, her internal state being insufficient for their individuation. Thought experiments in support of social externalism relies on the notion of incomplete misunderstanding as opposed to linguistic error and non-standard theorizing. Thus, according to Burge (1979/2007), a person who utters or thinks, 'I have arthritis in my thigh', betrays an incomplete understanding of the concept of *arthritis*, and the possibility of incomplete understanding is sufficient for the externalist thesis to follow. A question arises as to whether the notion of incomplete understanding is necessary for social externalism, or, equivalently, whether social externalism *essentially* relies on incomplete understanding. Wikforss (2001, 2004) maintains, as against Sawyer (2003), that the answer is affirmative and that incomplete understanding presupposes analyticity, a notion Quine (1951) famously dismissed as ill-grounded. This paper argues that social externalism essentially relies on incomplete understanding without analyticity, stemming from misunderstanding of certain (but not all) prototypes. A person who does not think that birds fly betrays an incomplete understanding of the concept of *bird* while perfectly understanding the meaning of the word 'bird', insofar as 'meaning' is equated with 'intension and extension'. That birds fly is a conceptual truth about birds, but it is nevertheless not an analytic truth. Wikforss (2001, 2004) is right in claiming that social externalism essentially relies on incomplete understanding, but is mistaken in claiming that incomplete understanding presupposes analyticity. Prototype semantics as assumed in cognitive linguistics favors social externalism, contrary to the official view of the school.

1. Social Externalism and Incomplete Understanding

1.1 Social externalism: 'arthritis'

'Arthritis' is one of the best-known words in philosophy. While it seldom appears in the linguistics literature, the word has famously been used in philosophical thought experiments in support of social externalism (Burge 1979/2007), an antithesis to internalism commonly embraced by modern linguistics (Chomsky 1965, 1986, Langacker 1987, 2008). According to social externalism, meaning and mental content depend on the speaker's social environment, her internal state being insufficient for their

individuation. Burge's (1979) best-known thought experiment consists of three steps. First, suppose that Adam, a rational person generally competent in English, expresses his fear to his doctor by uttering (1):

- (1) "I have arthritis in my thigh."

The doctor tells the patient that this cannot be the case, because arthritis is specifically an inflammation of joints. The patient relinquishes his view and now believes that some disease distinct from arthritis lodges in his thigh. As a second step, we are to conceive of a hypothetical community in which Adam₂, a near duplicate of Adam, expresses his fear to his doctor by uttering (1). Up to this point exactly the same things happen to Adam and Adam₂. A major difference emerges when the doctor replies to Adam₂. In the hypothetical community, the word 'arthritis' is defined to apply to various rheumatoid ailments, including not only arthritis but also ailments afflicting a person's thigh. It follows that, unlike Adam's fear expressed by (1), Adam₂'s fear expressed by (1) is well grounded and may even be true. Finally, the counterfactual situation is interpreted. It is reasonable, according to Burge, to suppose that the community in which Adam₂ lives has no concept of *arthritis*, Adam's 'arthritis' and Adam₂'s 'arthritis' being two homonymous words which happen to share the same phonological form. Although the hypothetical community has a word spelled as 'arthritis' and pronounced as /ɑ:θ'ɑrtɪs/, it nevertheless lacks the concept of *arthritis*. Adam₂'s 'arthritis' denotes a disease distinct from arthritis, say *tharthritis*¹. On the standard conception of meaning, intension or concept uniquely determines extension (but not vice versa) and a difference in extension entails a difference in intension or concept. Thus, as Burge (1979: 79/2007: 106) puts it, "[t]he word 'arthritis' in the counterfactual community does not mean *arthritis*", since it is not even extensionally equivalent to the actual word 'arthritis'. Since a thought consists of concepts, it also follows that Adam and Adam₂ have different thoughts about what they call 'arthritis'. Even though Adam and Adam₂ are internally identical, their thoughts differ, due to the fact that different meanings are associated with the same phonological form:

The upshot of these reflections is that the patient's mental contents differ while his entire physical and non-intentional mental histories, considered in isolation from their social context, remain the same. (We could have supposed that he dropped dead at the time he first expressed his fear to the doctor.) The differences seem to stem from differences "outside" the patient considered as an isolated physical organism, causal mechanism, or seat of consciousness. The difference in his mental contents is attributable to differences in his social environment.

(Burge 1979: 79/2007: 106)

Meaning and mental content are not in the head but dependent for their individuation on one's social environment, contrary to what Langacker, one of the founders of modern linguistics, assumes:

Our concern is with the meanings of linguistic expressions. Where are these meanings to be found? From a cognitive linguistic perspective, the answer is evident: meanings are in the minds of the

¹ A term coined by Burge (1979: 94/2007: 123).

speakers who produce and understand the expressions. It is hard to imagine where else they might be. (Langacker 2008: 27)

1.2 Incomplete Understanding of Concepts

Burge's (1979/2007) thought experiment makes use of what he calls "incomplete understanding". As seen above, Adam in the actual community believes that arthritis may afflict his thigh. This belief is not empirically but conceptually false, because by definition the disease afflicts the joints only. It is a conceptual truth that no disease that lodges in one's thigh can be arthritis. On the traditional conception, an individual's understanding of meaning is either (2) or (3).

- (2) The individual associates the correct or standard meaning/concept C with the word W.
- (3) The individual associates an incorrect or non-standard meaning/concept C' with the word W.

An example of (3) is illustrated in (4), discussed by Burge (1979: 90-91/2007: 119-120).

- (4) "I have been drinking orangutans for breakfast for the last few weeks."

We would not reasonably ascribe to a man who utters (4) the belief that he has been drinking orangutans for the last few weeks. A more reasonable move would be to take his 'orangutans' to mean *orange juice*². In this move, the word 'orangutan' is reinterpreted as 'what he calls 'orangutans'', in conformity with the principle of charity³. As the result of the reinterpretation, the man is taken to express, with the utterance of (4), the true belief that he has been drinking what he calls 'orangutans', namely orange juice, for breakfast for the last few weeks, rather than the irrational belief that he has been drinking orangutans. In uttering (4), the man is not talking about orangutans but about orange juice. The same would apply to cases in which someone believes 'arthritis' to be a tree name or fish name. The gist of Burge's (1979/2007) thought experiment is that there is a third possibility distinct from both (2) and (3), namely (5):

- (5) The individual associates the correct or standard meaning/concept C with the word W and partially misunderstands C.

The option in (5) admits the possibility that one may use a concept which one misunderstands. When uttering (1) above, Adam expresses the belief in (6), and not the belief in (7).

- (6) Adam has arthritis in his thigh.

² Burge (1979: 91/2007: 120) qualifies the conclusion: "Contrary to philosophical lore, I am not convinced that such a man cannot correctly and literally be attributed a belief that an orangutan is a kind of fruit drink." But I shall not pursue the possibility suggested by his remark.

³ The following is the definition given by *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: "The principle of charity governs the interpretation of the beliefs and utterances of others. It urges charitable interpretation, meaning interpretation that maximizes the truth or rationality of what others think and say."

(7) Adam has what he calls ‘arthritis’, namely tharthritis, in his thigh.

Both Adam and his doctor talk about arthritis, even though they understand the concept differently. Burge (1979: 79/2007: 107) claims that “[o]ne need only thumb through a dictionary for an hour or so to develop a sense of the extent to which one’s beliefs are infected by incomplete understanding” and that “[t]he phenomenon is rampant in our pluralistic age”⁴.

Now, a question arises as to whether the thought experiment *essentially* makes use of the notion of incomplete understanding. The following remark indicates that Burge considers the possibility of incomplete understanding to be sufficient for the establishment of social externalism.

For purposes of defending the thought experiment and the arguments I draw from it, I can afford to be flexible about exactly how to generalize about these various phenomena. The thought experiment depends only on there being some cases in which a person’s incomplete understanding does not force reinterpretation of his expressions in describing his mental contents. Such cases appear to be legion. (Burge 1979: 92/2007: 121)

The question to be asked is whether incomplete understanding is also necessary for the externalist thesis to follow. Wikforss (2001, 2004) maintains that it is, on the ground that mere empirical errors would not suffice to draw the externalist conclusion. On Wikforss’s (2008: 164) construal, “what is distinctive about social externalism is not so much that it represents a break with traditional accounts of the determination of meaning (and content), as that it represents a break with traditional accounts of linguistic (and conceptual) competence”. This is to say that the validity of the thought experiment goes with that of the notion of incomplete understanding illustrated in (5). If Adam’s error were merely empirical rather than conceptual, the externalist thesis that Adam and Adam2 think differently despite their internal identity would not follow. Suppose, for example, that arthritis is estimated to afflict less than one million people in Adam’s community, while tharthritis (i.e. what Adam2 calls ‘arthritis’) is estimated to afflict more than one million people in Adam2’s community. In this scenario, Adam’s utterance of (8) is false, while Adam2’s utterance of (8) is true.

(8) “Arthritis afflicts more than one million people in the community.”

Does this show that Adam and Adam2 express distinct thoughts by uttering (8)? The answer is negative, because the scenario is perfectly compatible with the possibility that arthritis and tharthritis may be one and

⁴ In the postscript to Burge (1979/2007), Burge (2007: 175) goes so far as to claim that incomplete understanding is part of the human condition:

Reading ‘Individualism and the Mental’ again, I was struck by my insistent emphasis on the idea that one can have thoughts that one incompletely understands. This emphasis had an autobiographical root. A primary impetus for my discovering the thought experiments was recognizing how many words or concepts I went around using which I found, on pressing myself, that I did not fully understand. I came to realize that this was not just a personal weakness. It was part of the human condition, at least in complex societies. (Burge 2007: 115)

the same disease. On this construal, Adam’s community and Adam2’s community adopt different theories about the same disease. What makes the truth values of Adam’s and Adam2’s utterance of (8) different is not the difference in meaning between Adam’s ‘arthritis’ and Adam2’s ‘arthritis’, but the fact that their communities evaluate the thought expressed by (8) with respect to different theories. There is no incomplete understanding here; Adam and Adam2 understand the concept of *arthritis* perfectly. The case depicted here is an example of (2) above. Adam’s utterance or thought of (8) is false simply because he makes an empirical error, and not a conceptual one; he merely adopts a non-standard theory about arthritis. If (8) is an empirical claim, Adam’s mistake is empirical, failing to establish that Adam’s and Adam2’s mental contents differ. Wikforss concludes that what is needed in the thought experiment supporting social externalism is the possibility of incomplete understanding illustrated in (5):

An ordinary empirical error appears not to be sufficient. It should be clear why this is so. If Burge’s arthritis-patient in uttering ‘I have arthritis in my thigh’ does not make a conceptual error, and if ‘Arthritis afflicts the joints only’ is an empirical claim, then the fact that the counterfactual community rejects this claim would imply not that their word ‘arthritis’ must have a different meaning, but that the disagreement between the two communities is one of theory. That is, the conclusion to be drawn would be that the counterfactual community has developed a slightly different theory about the same disease, not that the counterfactual community has a different ‘arthritis’-concept and speaks of a different disease. There would then be no reason to say that the speaker in the counterfactual world, when uttering ‘I have arthritis in my thigh’, expresses a belief different from that of the speaker in the actual world. (Wikforss 2001: 220)

Let me summarize the types of errors discussed so far in Figure 1.

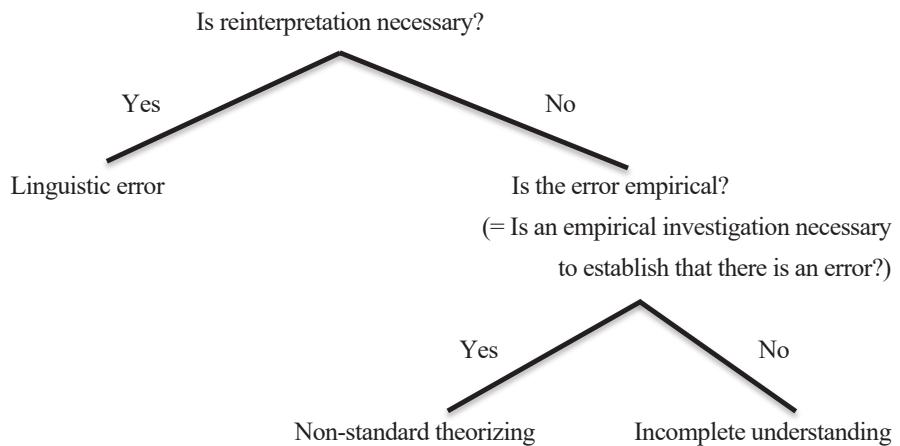


Figure 1: Types of errors

Genuine cases of incomplete understanding are detected only when the possibility of linguistic error and non-standard theory is carefully set aside. A person makes a linguistic error if, in uttering ‘X’, he refers to

and thinks about non-*X*, as in (4) above. A person adopts a non-standard theory about *X* if, in uttering ‘*X*’, he refers to and thinks about *X*, but disagrees with his community as to whether the proposition that *X* is *Q*, where ‘*Q*’ is a predicate conceptually independent from ‘*X*’, is empirically valid, as in (8). In this case, it is in principle possible that the proposition that *X* is *Q* will turn out to be true, contrary to the community standard. For instance, further investigations conducted in the actual community may someday establish the validity of the proposition in (8), which, unlike other members of the community, Adam believes to be true. Finally, a person has an incomplete understanding of the concept *X* if, in uttering ‘*X*’, he refers to and thinks about *X*, but accepts the proposition that *X* is *P*, where ‘*P*’ is a predicate conceptually incompatible with ‘*X*’ in light of the standard dictionary definition of ‘*X*’, as in (1). In this case, no empirical investigation will be needed to show that the proposition that *X* is *P* is false.

In what follows, I will argue that social externalism rests on the possibility of incomplete understanding, but not in the way Wikforss thinks. As will be seen in Section 3, Wikforss worries that the notion of incomplete understanding entails that of analytical truth, a notion which has been dismissed by many philosophers since Quine’s (1951) pioneering work. This worry is dissipated if we take into account the notion of prototype, which allows for the possibility that one can partially misunderstand a concept without yet misunderstanding the corresponding linguistic meaning in the narrow sense of the term required for the notion of analytic truth.

2. Sawyer’s (2003) objection to Wikforss (2001): ‘sofa’

Sawyer (2003) objects to Wikforss (2001) that thought experiments in support of social externalism do not essentially rest on the notion of incomplete misunderstanding, on the ground that Burge presents elsewhere a thought experiment which makes no use of that notion (Burge 1986). According to Sawyer (2003), Wikforss should have looked more in detail into Burge’s (1986) thought experiment concerning ‘sofa’, instead of Burge’s (1979) thought experiment concerning ‘arthritis’. Burge (1986: 707ff/2007: 263ff) imagines that Adam, a rational person competent in English, begins to doubt the truism that sofas are pieces of furniture and hypothesizes that sofas are works of art. While admitting that some sofas have been sat upon, Adam suspects that most sofas will collapse under any considerable weight. He then tests his hypothesis using reasonable methods and concludes that his theory is mistaken. The second step of the thought experiment consists in imagining that Adam₂, a near duplicate of Adam living in some other community, comes up with the same hypothesis, which he tests using reasonable methods. But in Adam₂’s community, that sofas are pieces of furniture is not a truism. In his community, what are called ‘sofas’ are indeed works of art, and his hypothesis is borne out. According to Burge (1986: 708/2007: 263), it is reasonable to say that there are no sofas in Adam₂’s community and that the word form ‘sofa’ means objects different from sofas, translated into our English as ‘safos’⁵. Adam’s utterance of (9) expresses the truism that sofas are pieces of furniture, whereas Adam₂’s utterance of (9) expresses the false proposition that safos are pieces of furniture.

(9) “Sofas are pieces of furniture.”

⁵ A term coined by Burge (1986: 708/2007: 263).

Although Adam and Adam2 are internally identical, the contents of their thoughts are different. This thought experiment may at first glance appear similar to the thought experiment concerning ‘arthritis’. But, as Burge (1986) and Sawyer (2003) point out, there is one crucial difference: when Adam and Adam2 utter (9), neither of them makes any conceptual error:

The arguments of “Individualism and the Mental” [= Burge (1979/2007)] and “Other Bodies” [= Burge (1982/2007)] ascribe incomplete linguistic understanding and ignorance of expert knowledge (respectively) to the relevant protagonists⁶. By contrast, *A* [= Adam] may be a sophisticate. He need not lack linguistic understanding or be unapprised of expert or common opinion. The present argument features not incomplete understanding or ignorance of specialized knowledge, but nonstandard theory. (Burge 1986: 709)

An ability to discriminate some but not all Fs from non-Fs typically betrays a partial grasp of the concept F. If a subject were to apply the term ‘sofa’ to overstuffed armchairs as well as to sofas, for example, it would be most plausible to diagnose an incomplete grasp of the concept *sofa*. This kind of error is surely best thought of as conceptual. In contrast, ability to discriminate Fs from non-Fs combined with inability correctly to characterize the nature of Fs typically signals incorrect empirical theory. Thus in the second thought experiment above, *A* is able reliably to distinguish sofas from non-sofas, but characterizes the nature of sofas incorrectly. In this case it is most plausible to attribute to *A* a full grasp of the concept *sofa*, but an incorrect empirical theory of sofas.

(Sawyer 2003: 271)

Sawyer (2003: 273) concludes that social externalism is not essentially dependent upon incomplete misunderstanding⁷.

⁶ In Burge’s (1982/2007) thought experiment, it is hypothesized, following Putnam (1973, 1975), that “the scientific community on Earth has determined that the chemical structure of water is H₂O” and that “there are numerous scattered individuals on Earth [...] untouched by the scientific developments” (Burge 1982: 100-101/2007: 85). On Burge’s view, even though the terms ‘water’ and ‘H₂O’ denote one and the same kind, *water* and *H₂O* are still different concepts, in that “[w]ater’ may express or indicate one way of thinking of the kind – ‘H₂O’ another” (Burge 1982: 120, n. 15/2007: 94, n. 15). Consequently, ignorance of expert knowledge does not entail any incomplete linguistic understanding of ‘water’. The two concepts should not be confused. This position is highly compatible with Putnam’s (1975):

[...] when we said [...] that to be water something has to be H₂O we did not mean, as we made clear, that the speaker has to know this. It is only by confusing metaphysical necessity with epistemological necessity that one can conclude that, if the (metaphysically necessary) truth-condition for being water is being H₂O, then “water” must be synonymous with H₂O – in which case it is certainly a term of science. (Putnam 1975: 158)

⁷ Sawyer (2003: 267, n. 7) leaves open the question whether Burge shared this view at the time of his 1979 paper. Burge’s following remark made in that paper seems to suggest a negative answer:

It would be a mistake, however, to think that incomplete understanding, in the sense that the argument *requires*, is in general an unusual or even deviant phenomenon. [...] The sort of “incomplete understanding” *required* by the thought experiment includes quite ordinary, nondeviant phenomena. (Burge’s 1979: 83-84/2007: 112, emphases mine)

This argument is fallacious, however. Adam certainly has the ability to discriminate sofas from non-sofas. This allows us to say that he correctly understands the extension of the term ‘sofa’. But it does not follow that he has a full grasp of the concept *sofa*, because the sameness of extension does not entail that of intension or concept. Thus, a person who associates with the word ‘cat’ the intension characterized by descriptions such as ‘x is a cat or a round square’ would have the ability to discriminate cats from non-cats, but he would not be considered to have a full grasp of the concept *cat*. In the case at hand, it may be difficult to attribute a full grasp of the concept *sofa* to a person who associates with the word ‘sofa’ the intension characterized by descriptions such as ‘x is not a piece of furniture to be sat upon, but a work of art’. That sofas are pieces of furniture would plausibly be considered part of what Putnam (1970) called core facts about sofas. Core facts about the term ‘X’, Putnam says (1970: 197, emphasis in the original), are facts “such that one can convey the use of [‘X’] by simply conveying those facts” and that “one cannot convey the approximate use *unless* one gets [those] facts across”. But we may grant for purposes of argument that it is not a core fact about the term ‘sofa’ that sofas are pieces of furniture to be sat upon. Still, the externalist thesis does not follow without begging the question. Wikforss (2004) points out that the real problem arises from what Sawyer (2003) takes to be “the unifying principle of externalism” (Sawyer 2003: 272). Sawyer (2003: 272) contends that “[t]he notion of conceptual error is secondary and derivative” and that the unifying principle underlying various externalist thought experiments is the claim that “[c]oncepts are individuated partly by their referents rather than entirely by what the subject thinks is true of the referents”⁸, incomplete understanding being just “[o]ne way to bring out our commitment to the claim”. Sawyer’s unifying principle can be formulated as “*a difference in reference (extension) implies a difference in concepts*” (Wikforss 2004: 75, emphasis in the original)⁹. Since, according to Burge (1986), the term ‘sofa’ has different extensions in actual and hypothetical communities, it follows that Adam and Adam2 associate different concepts with the term. This argument begs the question, however. What makes the extensions of ‘X’ in the two communities different in the first place? A moment’s reflection will reveal that a difference in extension does not suffice for a conceptual difference. Following Wikforss (2004: 191), let us imagine a world in which all sofas are made of leather. Given that, as a matter of fact, there are not only sofas made of leather but also sofas made of cloth, the term ‘sofa’ has different extensions in the actual and imagined

⁸ Sawyer (1972: 272) acknowledges that “[t]he so-called ‘empty case’, in which a concept lacks a referent, poses special problems” which she sets aside. Thus, her alleged unifying principle does not enable one to distinguish the concept of centaurs and that of unicorns. But the problems raised by empty cases are not specific to Sawyer’s position, threatening virtually any theory of meaning. Goodman (1949: 5) reminds us that “[a] centaur-picture differs from a unicorn-picture not by virtue of its resemblance to a centaur and lack of resemblance to a unicorn; for there are neither centaurs nor unicorns”. Any theory of meaning must take into account the fact that “although two words have the same extension, certain predicates composed by making identical additions to these two words may have different extensions” (Goodman 1949: 5).

⁹ As Wikforss (2004: 291, n. 6) points out, Sawyer’s principle is supported by Burge’s writings:

Although the reference of these words is not all there is to their semantics, their reference places a constraint on their meaning, or on what concept they express. In particular, any such word *w* has a different meaning (or expresses a different concept) from a given word *w'* if their constant referents, or ranges of application, are different. That is part of what it is to be a non-indexical word of this type. (Burge 1989: 181/2007: 283)

On any systematic theory, differences in the extension – the actual denotation, referent, or application – of counterpart expressions in that-clauses will be semantically represented, and will, in our terms, make for differences in content. (Burge 1979: 75/2007: 102)

worlds. As Wikforss (2004: 191) makes clear, however, this fact “does not yield the externalist conclusion that the word has a different meaning and expresses a different concept” in the imagined world. Such a reasoning would lead to conceptual and referential fragmentation, as Wikforss (2001: 218) calls it, resulting in a thesis completely orthogonal to externalism to the effect that no two communities or individuals would share the same concept. In order to avert such an absurd consequence, we might interpret ‘a difference in reference (extension)’ in Sawyer’s principle in such a narrow way that our word ‘sofa’ never applies to any objects found in the hypothetical world. Presumably this is the correct interpretation of the thought experiment, in view of Burge’s (1986: 708/2007: 263) remark that “[t]here are no sofas in [Adam2]’s situation” and that “the word form ‘sofa’ does not mean *sofa*”. This may also be what Sawyer has in mind when she states that the two communities “do not have different theories about the same things, but have, rather, different theories about *different things*” (Sawyer 2003: 272, emphasis in the original). But, again, the question arises as to what makes the extensions of ‘sofas’ in the two communities different in this narrow sense. Wikforss (2004: 292-293) emphasizes that this question cannot be answered without appealing to the notion of incomplete understanding:

It is no doubt true that many people share the view that ‘sofa’ does not apply to the objects in [Adam2]’s world. The most straightforward explanation of this is that the belief that sofas are to be sat upon is so central to the meaning of our word ‘sofa’ that the objects in [Adam2]’s world could not possibly fall within its extension, since they are so brittle that they cannot be sat upon. After all, terms for artefacts are typically given functional definitions, and it is not implausible that ‘sofa’ should be given such a definition. However, it is obvious that this reply is not available to Sawyer. If this is the reason why our term ‘sofa’ does not apply to the objects in [Adam2]’s world, then it follows that [Adam], who doubts that sofas are furnishings to be sat upon, *does* display an incomplete understanding of the concept of sofa. That is, the thought-experiment would rely on the assumption of incomplete understanding after all. The challenge Sawyer faces (along with Burge) is therefore to show that the objects in [Adam2]’s world are not sofas, without appealing to the conventional meaning of ‘sofa’¹⁰. I think this is a formidable challenge, and that it is one reason why

¹⁰ This challenge can be met in the case of natural kind terms such as ‘water’. Applied to natural kind terms, externalism generally takes some form of physical externalism rather than social externalism. Physical externalism rests on the assumption that “[t]he extension of our terms depends upon the actual nature of the particular things that serve as paradigms” and that “this actual nature is not, in general, fully known to the speaker” (Putnam 1975: 164). What determines the meaning of the term ‘water’ is not the convention of the linguistic community, but the underlying chemical structure of what is called ‘water’. Thus, as Putnam (1973: 702, 1975: 141) famously puts it, “the extension of the term “water” was just as much H₂O on Earth in 1750 as in 1950”. Conversely, no stuff which has a molecular structure distinct from H₂O is water, no matter how similar it is to water. Kripke defends a similar view concerning the term ‘tiger’:

We might find animals in some part of the world which, though they look just like a tiger, on examination were discovered not even to be mammals. Let’s say they were in fact very peculiar looking reptiles. Do we then conclude on the basis of this description that some tigers are reptiles? We don’t. We would rather conclude that these animals, though they have the external marks by which we originally identified tigers, are not in fact tigers, because they are not of the same species as the species which we called ‘the species of tigers’. Now this, I think, is not because, as some people would say, the old concept of tiger has been replaced by a new scientific definition.

Burge's later externalism [= Burge (1986/2007)] has achieved much less attention than his earlier social externalism [= Burge (1979/2007)]. (Wikforss 2004: 292-293)

Wikforss's (2004) argument is so convincing as to leave little doubt that thought experiments in support of social externalism are *essentially* dependent upon the notion of incomplete understanding. One may now wonder why the presence or absence of incomplete understanding matters so much to the externalist, or at what cost incomplete understanding comes. The answer has to do with the fact that, construed straightforwardly, that notion seems to presuppose an unwelcome distinction between the analytic vs. the synthetic, as will be seen in the next section.

3. Conceptual, or Analytic Truth

3.1 Incomplete Understanding and Conceptual Truth

On Burge's (1979, 1986) view, in uttering (1) above, Adam betrays an incomplete understanding of the concept of *arthritis*. While Burge (1979/2007) uses the term 'incomplete understanding' dozens of times to characterize his thought experiments, the same does not hold for the term 'conceptual error'. Although Wikforss (2001: 219) claims that "[a] central component of Burge's reasoning is the notion of a non-empirical or conceptual error", Burge (1979/2007) seems to be rather skeptical about the philosophical significance of the distinction between empirical and conceptual errors:

In fact, I do not believe that understanding, in our examples, can be explicated as independent of empirical knowledge, or that the conceptual errors of our subjects are best seen as "purely" mistakes about concepts and as involving no "admixture" of error about "the world." With Quine, I find such talk about purity and mixture devoid of illumination or explanatory power. But my views on this matter neither entail nor are entailed by the premises of the arguments I give [...] Those arguments seem to me to remain plausible under any of the relevant philosophical interpretations of the conceptual-ordinary-empirical distinction. (Burge 1979: 88/2007: 117)

This passage indicates that, when Burge (1979: 100/2007: 129) states that "[t]here is nothing irrational or stupid about the linguistic or conceptual errors we attribute to our subjects", the term 'linguistic or conceptual error' should be understood in an ordinary non-technical sense. Nevertheless, Wikforss (2001, 2004) construes Burge's thought experiments to rely on the notion of conceptual error on the ground that without that notion "the externalist conclusions are blocked" (Wikforss 2001: 226). For Wikforss (2001, 2004), the notion of incomplete understanding entails that of conceptual error in the technical sense of the term, and "Burge must rely on the assumption that the speaker in the actual world [= Adam] makes a conceptual error" (Wikforss 2001: 226). If Wikforss is right, Burge's view rests essentially on the notion

I think this is true of the concept of tiger *before* the internal structure of tigers has been investigated. (Kripke 1980: 120, emphasis in the original)

As Bach (1987: 276) indicates, however, not everyone shares the physical externalist assumption and there is a sense in which "what is essential to water is not its chemical make-up but its functional role". On this view, there may be several kinds of water in the universe, only one of which consists of H₂O.

of conceptual truth in the technical sense of the term, without which the notion of conceptual error would have no essential role to play. If, in uttering (1) above, Adam makes a conceptual error in the technical sense of the term, the sentence in (10) must be interpreted as expressing a conceptual truth.

(10) Arthritis does not afflict one's thigh.

Wikforss then equates conceptual truths with analytic truths, i.e. statements which are “true by virtue of meanings and independently of fact” (Quine 1951: 21)¹¹, by saying that “Burge's talk of *conceptual* errors and *conceptual* truths seems to suggest that he rejects Quine's criticisms of the analytic/synthetic distinction” (Wikforss 2001: 221, emphases in the original). This is at odds with Burge's official view on analyticity, which entails no specific philosophical position, as indicated by his remark: “Both the ‘analytically’ true and the ‘analytically’ false attitudes are linguistic in the sense that they are tested by consulting a dictionary or native linguistic intuitions, rather than by ordinary empirical investigation” (Burge 1979: 100/2007: 129).

It must be stressed here that in developing her argument Wikforss is fully aware that Burge's view is different from hers.

Burge's suggestion, therefore, is that we can endorse what might be called a ‘weak’ notion of analytic or conceptual truths, one which is quite compatible with Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction. ‘Arthritis afflicts the joints only’ is a conceptual truth in the sense that this is what the dictionary tells us. To say that the speaker uttering ‘I have arthritis in my thigh’ makes a conceptual error is just to say that he goes against the dictionary definition. It does not require a commitment to a strong notion of conceptual truths. (Wikforss 2001: 222)

Wikforss (2001: 222) dismisses Burge's view as “clearly unsatisfactory”, because the mere fact that (10) is what the dictionaries tell us in the actual community does not allow us to conclude that there is a difference in meaning between Adam's ‘arthritis’ and Adam2's ‘arthritis’. The dictionary description in (10) might turn out to be false after scientific investigations, just as the dictionary description in (11) did in the course of history (Putnam 1962a: 396).

(11) Atoms are indivisible.

The fact that (11) turned out to be false after scientific investigations suggests that the actual community once adopted a theory which is now considered a non-standard theory. Accordingly, a person who believes (11) today can plausibly be viewed as developing a non-standard theory illustrated in Figure 1 above. The present community which rejects (11) and the past community which accepts (11) talk about one and the

¹¹ The notion of analyticity is notoriously difficult to define. The definition presented here is the one which serves as the starting point for Quine's (1951) long argument. Intuitively, analytic statements are defined as statements whose negation reduces to contradiction (Quine 1951: 20, Putnam 1983: 87, 95). Quine (1951: 20) is suspicious about the explanatory value of this definition, which can be traced back to Kant, because analyticity and self-contradictoriness are “the two sides of a single dubious coin”, both standing in “exactly the same need of clarification”.

same concept of *atom*. No one would say that the present word ‘atom’ and the past word ‘atom’ are homonyms which happen to share the same word form. Likewise, it is perfectly conceivable that the actual community which accepts (10) and the hypothetical community which rejects (10) talk about one and the same concept of *arthritis*. If so, both Adam and Adam2, who believe (10), can plausibly be viewed as developing a theory about arthritis which is deemed non-standard in the actual community but which conforms to the convention followed by the hypothetical community. It does not follow that they have different concepts corresponding to the word form ‘arthritis’; they are rather developing the same theory about the same disease, which only the hypothetical community evaluates as true. The fact that (10) has different truth values in the actual and hypothetical communities is not sufficient for the externalist thesis to follow; what yields a difference in truth values must be a difference in meaning rather than a difference in theory. For there to be a difference in meaning, it must be the case that (10) expresses a conceptual truth in the strong sense of the term, namely an analytic truth, in the actual community but not in the hypothetical community. If (10) expresses an analytic truth (in the actual community), anyone who denies (10) (in the actual community) betrays an incomplete understanding of the concept of *arthritis* in the sense that no empirical investigation can ever invalidate (10). Burge (1986: 714) rightly points out that “[t]he consensus of the most competent speakers can be challenged” and that “truths of meaning are dubitable”, but this undermines his very point. What is needed is not the consensus of the most competent speakers nor the dictionary compiled on the basis of their consensus, but analytic truths such that denying them entails making a conceptual error as opposed to developing a non-standard theory. Or equivalently, in Burge’s (1993) terminology, what is needed is not “epistemic definitions” (Burge 1993: 316/2007: 297)¹², but “metaphysical or essence-determining definitions” (Burge 1993: 311/2007: 293)¹³. This is what Wikforss means when she says that “Burge’s talk of *conceptual* errors and *conceptual* truths seems to suggest that he rejects Quine’s criticisms of the analytic/synthetic distinction” (Wikforss 2001: 226).

3.2 Overview of Quine’s criticism of the analytic-synthetic distinction

Quine’s (1951) argument is widely known to have attacked the analytic-synthetic distinction (Putnam 1983: 87) and is generally considered a “very satisfactory demolition” of that distinction (Haiman 1980: 349). It is nevertheless not well understood exactly how Quine attacked the distinction. His argument is divided into two parts. The first half of the argument consists in showing that “all attempts to define the distinction are *circular*” (Putnam 1983: 87, emphasis in the original), or more specifically that “[a]nalyticity within a language can be defined only in terms of synonymy [...], which in turn, however, can be defined within a language only in terms of analyticity” (Haiman 1980: 349). The argument starts from the statement in (12).

¹² “Where they are possible, epistemic definitions do articulate the meanings of a speaker’s words in one important sense. They articulate what the word means for the speaker, and what conception he associates with his concept. They constitute a summary or explanation of speaker usage that provides the speaker’s most considered explication of his term.” (Burge 1993: 316/2007: 297)

¹³ “A metaphysically correct definition – one that states actual necessary and sufficient conditions, indeed essential or fundamental individuating conditions for instantiating a kind – need not be known, or knowable on mere reflection, by someone who has the concept.” (Burge 1993: 314-315/2007: 296)

(12) No unmarried man is married.

This statement is equivalent to the logical truth given in (13a), and, more generally, that given in (13b), each of which “is true and remains true under all reinterpretations of its components other than the logical particles” (Quine 1951: 23).

(13) a. $\neg \exists x (\neg \text{married}(x) \wedge \text{man}(x) \wedge \text{married}(x))$
 b. $\neg \exists x (\neg P(x) \wedge Q(x) \wedge P(x))$

Quine has nothing to add to this fact. The problem for him lies in the second class of analytic statements exemplified by (14).

(14) No bachelor is married.

The statement in (14) is not a logical truth insofar as (15a) and (15b) do not remain true under all reinterpretations of their components other than the logical particles

(15) a. $\neg \exists x (\text{bachelor}(x) \wedge \text{married}(x))$
 b. $\neg \exists x (R(x) \wedge P(x))$

Intuitively, however, (14) is analytically true in that its negation seems to reduce to contradiction. This intuition is supported by the fact that (14) “can be turned into logical truth by putting synonyms for synonyms” (Quine 1951: 23). The intuitive equivalence between (12) and (14) is thus assured by the synonymy between the expressions ‘unmarried man’ and ‘bachelor’. This means that analyticity may possibly be defined in terms of synonymy. Quine cautions that “we are not concerned here with synonymy in the sense of complete identity in psychological associations or poetic quality; indeed no two expressions are synonymous in such a sense” and that “[w]e are concerned only with what may be called *cognitive synonymy*” (Quine 1951: 28, emphasis in the original). This remark anticipates Taylor’s (2003: 59) remark, made from a cognitive linguistic perspective, that “perfect synonyms – lexical items with the same meaning and which are therefore interchangeable in all contexts – are exceedingly rare”¹⁴. Now, the question is how to define cognitive synonymy. Arguably the most promising idea is that “the [cognitive] synonymy of two linguistic forms consists simply in their interchangeability in all contexts without change of truth value” (Quine 1951: 27)¹⁵. One may think that to say that ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried man’ are interchangeable in

¹⁴ The first edition of Taylor (2003) was published in 1989.

¹⁵ Quine (1951: 27-28) carefully sets aside the cases in which the expression in question occurs within a complex word or within quotation marks. Thus, ‘bachelor of arts’ and ‘bachelor’s button’ cannot be turned into ‘unmarried man of arts’ and ‘unmarried man’s button’, and (i) cannot be turned into (ii) *salva veritate*.

(i) ‘Bachelor’ has less than ten letters.

(ii) ‘Unmarried man’ has less than ten letters.

Quine (1951: 27-28) proposed to treat a complex word and the whole of ‘noun + quotation marks’ as a single indivisible word, applying the interchangeability *salva veritate* to single indivisible words but not to

all contexts *salva veritate* is to say that (16) is true.

(16) All and only bachelors are unmarried men.

But the truth of (16) is no more sufficient for the cognitive synonymy between ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried man’ than the truth of (17) is for the cognitive synonymy between ‘creature with a heart’ and ‘creature with a kidney’.

(17) All and only creatures with a heart are creatures with a kidney.

The notion of interchangeability *salva veritate* needed for the definition of cognitive synonymy is that of interchangeability *salva veritate* in a language whose vocabulary contains intensional expressions such as ‘necessarily’. In the case at hand, what is required is the truth of (18).

(18) Necessarily, all and only bachelors are unmarried men.

The fact that (18) is intuitively true while the addition of ‘necessarily’ to (17) makes the sentence intuitively false indicates that ‘bachelor’ and ‘unmarried man’ are synonyms while ‘creature with a heart’ and ‘creature with a kidney’ are not. The crucial point is that a language whose vocabulary contains intensional expressions “is intelligible only if the notion of analyticity is already clearly understood in advance” (ibid.: 30), because to say that (18) is true is to say that (16) is analytically true. In this attempt to define analyticity, analyticity is reduced to synonymy, which is reduced to interchangeability, which is reduced to analyticity. Quine (1951: 29) concludes that “[o]ur argument is not flatly circular, but something like that”.

So far, as Putnam (1983: 87) puts it, “Quine’s argument is little more than that Quine cannot think how to define ‘synonymy’”. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, Quine’s argument is far from declaring the demise of the analytic-synthetic distinction, because, as Grice and Strawson (1956: 142) point out, “[t]here are doubtless plenty of distinctions, drawn in philosophy and outside it, which still await adequate philosophical elucidation, but which few would want on this account to declare illusory”. The notion of grammaticality is a case in point. Although it has never been defined in a satisfactory manner, Putnam (1983: 89) says, “no one proposes to do linguistics without the notion”. Putnam (1983: 89) evaluates that the first part of Quine’s argument, which, on Putnam’s (1983: 87) construal, is directed against “the linguistic notion of analyticity”, is a bad argument¹⁶. The second half of Quine’s argument, on the contrary, is directed against “the notion of an analytic truth as one that is *confirmed no matter what*” (Putnam 1983: 87, cf. Quine 1951: 35). According to Putnam, this part of Quine’s argument, even less familiar to linguists, is “of historical importance” (Putnam 1983: 87), but here Quine should have talked about the “distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* truths” (Putnam 1983: 89) instead of analytic and

subparts thereof. He admits that this approach has a drawback of presupposing a prior definition of words.
¹⁶ Analyticity *qua* linguistic notion is defined such that “a sentence is analytic if it can be obtained from a truth of logic by putting synonyms for synonyms” (Putnam 1983: 87).

synthetic truths¹⁷. In order to argue against (the second notion of) analyticity, Quine calls into question reductionism endorsed by empiricism, namely “the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience” (Quine 1951: 20). This belief goes with “the supposition that each statement, taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or infirmation at all” (Quine 1951: 38). Reductionism in this sense lends support to the (second notion of) analyticity in such a way that “as long as it is taken to be significant in general to speak of the confirmation and infirmation of a statement, it seems significant to speak also of a limiting kind of statement which is vacuously confirmed, *ipso facto*, come what may [= analytic statement]” (Quine 1951: 38). Quine claims that this view is misguided, because “our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body” (ibid.). As Putnam (1983: 91) puts it, “[o]pen-mindedness even to the extent of being prepared to revise logical laws is necessary in the scientific enterprise”:

[...] no statement is immune to revision. Revision even of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what difference is there in principle between such a shift and the shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolemy, or Einstein Newton, or Darwin Aristotle? (Quine 1951: 40)

The following passage at the end of the first part of Quine’s argument anticipates the conclusion of the whole argument¹⁸:

It is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact. The statement ‘Brutus killed Caesar’ would be false if the world had been different in certain ways, but it would also be false if the word ‘killed’ happened rather to have the sense of ‘begat’. Hence the temptation to suppose in general that the truth of a statement is somehow analyzable into a linguistic component and a factual component. Given this supposition, it next seems reasonable that in some statements the factual component should be null; and these are the analytic statements. But, for all its a priori reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith. (Quine 1951: 33)

¹⁷ According to Putnam (1983: 92), Quine’s confusion of analyticity and apriority stems from the positivist assumption that a priori statements are true by meaning alone. For positivism, “a priori truths must be necessary” and “if there is necessity, it has to be linguistic/conceptual” (Fodor 1998: 86). In attacking reductionism endorsed by positivism, Quine accepted its basic assumption. Putnam (1983: 96) raises a question whether it is possible to endorse the first notion of analyticity (= analytic truths *qua* linguistic notion) without endorsing the second one (= *a priori* truths), to which he provides an affirmative answer. In this paper, however, I will make no essential distinction between the two notions of analyticity.

¹⁸ A similar remark can be found in the second half of the paper as well:

My present suggestion is that it is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement. Taken collectively, science has its double dependence upon language and experience; but this duality is not significantly traceable into the statements of science taken one by one. (Quine 1951: 39)

If one wishes to be open-minded, one should treat the statement in (10) above as a revisable theoretical statement rather than an analytic truth which is confirmed no matter what. Wikforss's (2001, 2004) argument we have seen in 3.1 shows that Burge's (1979) thought experiments make no room for such open-mindedness.

3.3 One-Criterion Word and Law-cluster Word

As Hale (1997: 487, emphases in the original) tells us, Quine (1951) "is not claiming that any statement accepted at any time is one which we *will* at some time *in fact* reject; what he is denying is the existence of statements which we *could not* be led to reject". In this connection, Putnam (1962a, 1962b, 1970, 1975, 1983) provides more linguistic considerations for the issue than Quine (1951). Putnam (1962a: 360) takes as his point of departure Grice's and Strawson's (1956: 143) observation that those who use the terms 'analytic' and 'synthetic' "apply the term 'analytic' to more or less the same cases, withhold it from more or less the same cases, and hesitate over more or less the same cases" and that "[t]his agreement extends not only to cases which they have been *taught* so to characterize, but to new cases". The claim that there is an analytic-synthetic distinction should be kept apart from the fact that one cannot offer a satisfactory account of the nature of that distinction. It is beyond any doubt that there is an intuitive distinction between (19a) and (19b).

- (19) a. All bachelors are unmarried. (for the analytic side of the dichotomy)
 b. There is a book on this table. (for the synthetic side)

(Putnam 1962a: 360)

Anyone who undertakes an empirical investigation to test the validity of (16) or (19a) would be deemed incompetent in English. As Fodor (1998: 86) notes, "intuitions deserve respect"¹⁹. There is no doubt that Quine is wrong in not respecting intuitions (Putnam 1962a: 361). Quine is right, however, "in a deeper sense", i.e. in the sense that "it is less of a philosophic error, although it is an error, to maintain that there is no distinction at all than it is to employ the distinction in the way that it has been employed by some of the leading analytic philosophers of our generation" (ibid.). Putnam's point is that there are only a few hundred words in English that have an analytic definition (Putnam 1962b: 659, 1970: 189, 1983: 89) and that what is the case with these words has wrongly been taken to hold for the tens of thousands of words (Putnam 1970: 189). Putnam (1962a: 396) introduced the term 'one-criterion word' to distinguish such special words from other words called 'law-cluster words'²⁰. Among the one-criterion words in English are 'bachelor' and 'vixen', whose characteristics Putnam (1983: 89) articulates in some detail:

¹⁹ Fodor goes on to state that intuition-based arguments are not decisive, because "*that As and Bs are different is one thing; what they differ in is quite another*" (Fodor 1998: 86, emphases in the original).

²⁰ Putnam (1962a: 379) reserved the term 'law-cluster concept' for concepts of science such as *energy* which "are constituted not by a bundle of properties as are the typical general names like 'man' and 'crow,' but by a cluster of laws which, as it were, determine the identity of the concept". I shall use the term more widely to cover both scientific and general concepts, because the distinction between 'property' and 'law' is irrelevant to the discussion presented in this paper.

The idea, in a nutshell, is that there is an exceptionless ‘law’ associated with the noun ‘bachelor’, namely, that someone is a bachelor *if and only if* he has never been married; an exceptionless law associated with the noun ‘vixen’, namely, that something is a vixen *if and only if* it is a female fox; etc. Moreover, this exceptionless law has, in each case, two important characteristics:

[(i)] that no other exceptionless ‘if and only if’ statement is associated with the noun by speakers; and [(ii)] that the exceptionless ‘if and only if’ statement in question is a *criterion*, i.e., speakers can and do tell whether or not something is a bachelor by seeing whether or not it is an unmarried man; whether or not something is a vixen by seeing whether or not it is a female fox; etc.

(Putnam 1983: 89)

As we have seen in Section 2, core facts about the term ‘X’ are facts “such that one can convey the use of [‘X’] by simply conveying those facts” and that “one cannot convey the approximate use *unless* one gets [those] facts across” (Putnam 1970: 197). It is worth noting that in one-criterion words, “the core fact is just the analytical necessary and sufficient condition” (Putnam 1970: 201)²¹. This implies that, insofar as conceptual errors are errors about core facts, alleged cases of conceptual error about one-criterion words are always reduced to linguistic errors in Figure 1 above. Thus, a person who utters (20a) or (20b) makes a linguistic error.

- (20) a. “I saw a married bachelor.”
 b. “I have a fear of male vixens.”

If the utterer is rational, the word forms ‘bachelor’/‘vixen’ in (20) do not express the concepts of *bachelor/vixen*, some reinterpretation being called for. As a consequence, there can be no incomplete understanding of one-criterion concepts.

Cases of incomplete understanding in the sense discussed here, if any, must be sought for in statements in which law-cluster words (as opposed to one-criterion words) are employed. If, as discussed in 3.1, incomplete understanding presupposes analyticity, however, there can hardly be incomplete understanding of law-cluster words, because, on Putnam’s view, the notion of analyticity is in conflict with the notion of law-cluster word. Thus, Putnam (1970: 189) claims that “[t]here are no *analytic* truths of the form *every lemon has P*”. Or suppose that cats turn out to be robots remotely controlled from Mars. Putnam

²¹ Wikforss (2001: 222) states that one-criterion words “are not caught up with theory but could plausibly be given simple definitions”. This characterization is mistaken, however, because one-criterion words as well as law-cluster words can be (and usually are) associated with theories. Indeed, Putnam (1962a: 395) observes that “there are various things that we might call indications of bachelorhood : being young, high spirited, living alone”. The theory about ‘bachelor’ characterized by these indications plays an essential role when the word is modified by the adjective ‘regular’. G. Lakoff (1973: 474) observes that (i) “might be said of a married man who acts like a bachelor – dates a lot, feels unbound by marital responsibilities, etc.”. See also R. Lakoff (1973: 66-67).

(i) John is a regular bachelor.

(1975: 162) observes that, as a sentence describing this scenario, (21a) is more natural than (21b) and (21c)²².

- (21) a. Cats have turned out not to be animals, but robots.
 b. The things I am referring to as ‘cats’ have turned out not to be animals, but robots.
 c. It has turned out that there are no cats in the world.

That (21a) is a natural statement suggests that ‘Cats are animals’ does not express an analytic truth. In a similar vein, Taylor (2003: 86) states that (22) does not express an analytic truth, to the extent that it is possible that, “as a consequence of scientific discoveries, our understanding of life forms [may] undergo radical change, resulting in a major re-classification of biological kinds”.

- (22) Dogs are animals.

Textbooks on semantics tell us that ‘Fido is a dog’ entails ‘Fido is an animal’. A closer look reveals, however, that even a sentence like (22) is not analytic, “in that its truth is ultimately dependent on real-world contingencies and of [sic.] our understanding of them” (ibid.). Alleged cases of incomplete understanding of a law-cluster concept are thus reduced to non-standard theorizing. Now, it is obvious that ‘arthritis’ is a law-cluster word. If Putnam’s view is correct, it follows that there can hardly be any analytic truth about arthritis. This is the reason why the statement in (1) above, which Burge takes to be a case of incomplete understanding, can turn out to be a case of non-standard theorizing, as seen in 1.2.

4. Prototypes and Incomplete Understanding

4.1 A forever absolutely true synthetic statement

As discussed in Section 2, thought experiments in support of social externalism are *essentially* dependent upon the notion of incomplete understanding. As discussed in Section 3.1, the notion of incomplete understanding entails the notion of conceptual error in the technical sense of the term, that is, the notion of conceptual error which presupposes the existence of analytic truths, truths characterized either as statements which are “true by virtue of meanings and independently of fact” (Quine 1951: 21) or as *a priori* statements which are “confirmed no matter what” (ibid.: 35). As discussed in 3.3, conceptual errors in this sense can hardly be found, because, in the case of one-criterion words, alleged conceptual errors are

²² More subtle cases are discussed by Putnam (1962b: 660-661). These cases reveal that even competent speakers of English have no firm intuition about the use of the word ‘cat’. To be sure, we can decide which use keeps the original meaning of the word, but the decision is orthogonal to the notion of meaning relevant to the everyday use of language.

Today it doesn’t seem to make much difference what we say; while in the context of a developed linguistic theory it may make a difference whether we say that talking in one of these ways is changing the meaning and talking in another of these ways is keeping the meaning unchanged. But that is hardly relevant here and now; when linguistic theory becomes that developed, then ‘meaning’ will itself have become a technical term, and presumably our question now is not which decision is changing the meaning in some future technical sense of ‘meaning’, but what we can say in our present language. (Putnam 1962b: 661)

always reduced to linguistic errors, while, in the case of law-cluster words, alleged conceptual errors are in most cases reduced to non-standard theorizing illustrated in Figure 1. Thus, even the negation of ‘Cats are animals’ can be interpreted as a statement based on a non-standard theory which can turn out to be true. As is the case with ‘lemon’ discussed by Putnam (1970), there may be no analytic truth about cats. What has been discussed so far then seems to suggest (i) that conceptual errors, if any, can only be found in statements containing law-cluster words, (ii) conceptual errors, if any, must be distinguished from non-standard theorizing in that it is impossible (in the ordinary as opposed to philosophical sense of the term) that what is considered a conceptual error will turn out not to be one, and (iii) that conceptual errors about law-cluster words, if any, presuppose no analytic truth. Given (i)-(iii), the notion of incomplete understanding on which thought experiments supporting social externalism is essentially dependent must be independent from analyticity. So the question is whether there can be incomplete understanding without analyticity.

It may at first blush appear that the desiderata stated in (ii) and (iii) are mutually incompatible to the extent that the combination of the two clauses requires that there be forever absolutely true synthetic statements. A moment’s non-philosophical and non-scientific reflection, however, will reveal that there are such facts everywhere: Emmanuel Macron is the President of the French Republic in 2022, Japan has a constitution in 2022, I am writing this paper in 2022, and so on. Someday some people may doubt the truthfulness (and are even convinced of the falsity) of these sentences, but such doubt (or confidence) will never alter their truthfulness. The real challenge lies rather in the desideratum stated in (i). Together with (ii) and (iii), (i) requires that there be forever absolutely true synthetic statements which conceptually characterize the entities denoted by the law-cluster word under consideration. The statement that Emmanuel Macron is the President of the French Republic in 2022, for instance, fails to conceptually characterize Emmanuel Macron, since Emmanuel Macron will be Emmanuel Macron even after his retirement. Forever absolutely true synthetic statements which conceptually characterize the entities in question, if any, concern what Putnam (1970) calls core facts about law-cluster terms. Among the few statements satisfying the desiderata, it seems to me, is (23), a statement to which the following discussion is devoted exclusively.

(23) Birds fly.

(23) is obviously not an analytic statement, because there are many birds that do not fly. Indeed, there can hardly be any analytic truths about birds, insofar as ‘bird’ is a law-cluster word. As Hampton (2015: 131) expounds, “BIRD has a clear-cut definition – ‘feathered bipedal creature’ – and no borderline cases”. But this alleged clear-cut definition does not seem to fulfil clause (ii) of the definition of exceptionless law, reproduced here as (24):

(24) (ii) that the exceptionless ‘if and only if’ statement in question is a *criterion*, i.e., speakers can and do tell whether or not something is a bachelor by seeing whether or not it is an unmarried man; whether or not something is a vixen by seeing whether or not it is a female fox; etc. (Putnam 1983: 89)

It is doubtful that ordinary speakers can and do tell whether or not something is a bird by seeing whether or not it is a feathered bipedal creature. The feature in question is not sufficient to define ‘bird’, because we would hesitate to say that a feathered bipedal creature we encountered was a bird if it were more than ten meters in body length, for example. The feature is certainly necessary for the definition of ‘bird’, but, as Hampton (2006: 11) points out, when describing birds, people will commonly start with ‘have wings’ and ‘fly’, instead of ‘have feathers’, “in spite of the fact that there are well-known examples of flightless birds, and many species of insect that fly, whereas all birds (at least before they are prepared for the oven) and only birds have feathers”. Given that the word ‘bird’ does not satisfy (24ii), one of the conditions imposed on one-criterion words, it should be viewed as a law-cluster word rather than a one-criterion word²³.

The remaining question is whether (23) is a forever absolutely true statement which conceptually characterizes birds. This question is divided into two parts: (i) is (23) a forever absolutely true statement?, and (ii) does (23) conceptually characterize birds? Regarding (i), it must be noticed, first, that the sentence in (23) is largely idiomatic in Taylor’s (2012) sense. In addition to the traditional notion of idiomaticity which characterizes idioms as “expressions whose properties (phonological, syntactic, or semantic) cannot be derived from more general principles and which therefore have to be learned” (Taylors 2012: 282), Taylor puts forward another notion of idiomaticity, according to which “understanding the idiomatic concerns the appropriate thing to say in a given context” (ibid.: 283). To ask a person’s age in English, for instance, the appropriate expression to employ is ‘How old are you’, rather than ‘What is your age?’ (ibid.). To give another example, when reporting what they did, ‘They swam across the river’ is more appropriate than ‘They crossed the river by swimming’ (ibid.). Likewise, one may note that (23) is a more appropriate thing to say than (25a-d)²⁴.

- (25) a. Birds usually fly.
- b. Normally birds fly.
- c. Most birds fly.
- d. Typical birds fly.

²³ There is another fact that may support this conclusion. As we have seen in 3.3, what Putnam (1970) called the core fact can be equated with the analytical necessary and sufficient condition in the case of one-criterion words. It is hardly the case, however, that one can convey the use of ‘bird’ by simply conveying the fact that birds are feathered bipedal creatures, or that one cannot convey the approximate use unless one gets this fact across.

²⁴ Idioms (in both senses) may differ from language to language. For instance, the Japanese counterpart of (23) is either (i) or (ii), the latter sounding somewhat more idiomatic in Taylor’s (2012) sense.

- (i) Tori wa tobu.
bird TOP fly
Lit.: A bird flies. / Bird fly.
- (ii) Tori wa sora o tobu.
bird TOP sky ACC fly
Lit.: A bird flies the sky. / Bird fly the sky.

A person who seriously says in response to (23), ‘That’s false. There are birds that do not fly’, would not be deemed competent in English; ability to assent to (23) is part of competence in English. This competence does not concern syntax or semantics, but the way to talk about birds. Competent speakers are required to recognize “the fact that many sentences may be neither universally true, nor simply false, but may instead be true under some notion of ‘generally true’ or ‘typically true’” (Hampton 2006: 11). The second point to be made about (i) is that (23) concerns what Putnam (1975) calls the stereotype of a bird, namely a conventional idea of what a bird looks like or acts like or is (cf. Putnam 1975: 169)²⁵. According to Putnam (1975: 171), “[w]hat it means to say that being striped is part of the (linguistic) stereotype of ‘tiger’ is that it is obligatory to acquire the information that stereotypical tigers are striped if one acquires the word ‘tiger’”. The same holds for (23); it is obligatory to acquire the information conveyed by (23). By putting together the two points that have been just made, it can be concluded that a competent speaker of English is expected to assent to the statement in (23) by interpreting it as expressing the truth literally conveyed by (25). The statement in (23) interpreted in this manner is indisputably a forever absolutely true statement. It will never turn out that birds do not fly, in contrast to the case of arthritis, where it is possible to imagine that, contrary to the common wisdom, the disease turns out to afflict the thigh.

The second question raised above, namely (ii) does (23) conceptually characterize birds?, is closely tied to the consideration provided for the first question. Since ‘bird’ is one of the most basic words of English, anyone who wishes to be competent in the language is required to acquire the concept of *bird* expressed by that word. If (23) does not conceptually characterize birds, the understanding of (23) is not needed for competence in English. As has just be shown, however, this is not the case. (23) is a core fact about the word ‘bird’, insofar as one cannot convey the approximate use of the word unless one gets across the fact represented by (23). To be sure, (23) is not part of the meaning of ‘bird’ in the sense of intension and extension, as evidenced by the fact that penguins and ostriches are in the extension of the word, too (Fodor 1998: 92). In this respect, (23) is arguably different from (9), which may plausibly be viewed as constituting the intension of the word ‘sofa’, so that denying (9) would betray an incomplete understanding of the meaning of the word. Understanding the meaning of a word, however, is sometimes insufficient for acquiring the concept expressed by the word. As Haiman (1980: 348) puts it, “analytic is to synthetic as dictionary is to encyclopedia”. Sticking to the pure notion of meaning to the exclusion of encyclopedic knowledge amounts to reviving the analytic-synthetic distinction even for law-cluster words. The sharp dichotomy between dictionary and encyclopedia is not motivated, because, as Taylor (2003: 87) points out, “[t]he acceptability – and interpretability – of linguistic expressions depends, very often, on the activation of knowledge about the world”. The question to be asked is whether this “very often” includes the cases concerning (23). The answer is likely to be affirmative. First of all, a person ignorant of the truth expressed by (23) would not be able to understand the meaning of such simple sentences as (26a) and (26b).

- (26) a. If I were a bird, I would fly to you.
 b. I wish I could fly like a bird.

²⁵ Putnam (1975: 369) stresses that stereotypes may be “malicious” or “widely inaccurate”. But it is not the case that every stereotype is malicious or inaccurate.

This confirms the point that encyclopedic knowledge affects the interpretability of basic linguistic expressions that any competent speaker is expected to understand. Secondly, a person who dissents from (23) would not share with other speakers the judgment about sentences containing a ‘hedge’, an expression which signals “degree of category membership” (Taylor 2003: 79)²⁶. Lakoff (1973) famously provided the following data:

- (27) a. A robin is a bird par excellence. (true)
 b. A chicken is a bird par excellence. (false)
 c. A penguin is a bird par excellence. (false) ((27a-c): Lakoff 1973: 473)
- (28) a. A robin is sort of a bird. (False – it is a bird, no question, about it)
 b. A chicken is sort of a bird. (True, or very close to true)
 c. A penguin is sort of a bird. (True, or close to true) ((28a-c): Lakoff 1973: 471)

Psychological experiments show that robins and sparrows are good examples (or prototypes, in the present terminology) of bird, while penguins, ostriches and chickens are not (Rosch 1975: 232). One of the relevant factors is, obviously, whether the bird in question flies. Such judgements about goodness of example are not purely psychological, but are mirrored in linguistic judgements as illustrated in (27) and (28).

4.2 ‘Bird’ vs. ‘arthritis’ and ‘sofa’

It might be objected that what the data in (27) and (28) mirror is the standard theory about birds, rather than the concept of *bird* per se. This objection fails to recognize that the sentences in (27) and (28) concern what counts as birds, and not what birds look like or act like. To this one may still object that (27) and (28) are not statements about birds, on the ground that, at least from a semantic point of view, ‘bird par excellence’ in (27) and ‘sort of bird’ in (28) can be analyzed as complex predicates denoting the concepts of, say, *typical bird* and *marginal bird*, respectively. This view may be adequate, but it does not help solve the problem at hand. While hedges like ‘par excellence’ and ‘sort of’ serve to tighten the category, so that *typical bird* and *marginal bird* are narrower concepts than *bird*, there are also hedges operating in the opposite direction. Thus, ‘loosely speaking’ serves to “[extend] the category by accommodating things that would not ordinarily be considered members” (Taylor 2003: 80).

- (29) a. Loosely speaking, a whale is a fish. (Lakoff 1973: 475, Kay 1983: 131)
 b. Loosely speaking, a bat is a bird. (true, or at least not patently false) (Taylor 2003: 80)

No intersection of the category of fish with any other categories includes whales as members and no intersection of the category of birds with any other categories includes bats as members. A similar remark

²⁶ Hedges are originally defined by G. Lakoff (1973: 471) as “words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness – words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy”.

can be made for ‘in a manner of speaking’.

- (30) In a manner of speaking, a bat is a bird. (true, or close to true) (G. Lakoff 1973: 473)

One might think that hedges like ‘loosely speaking’ and ‘in a manner of speaking’, when applied to ‘bird’ for instance, generate the category of, say, *bird in an extended sense*, just as the adjectival construction ‘fake N’ serves to extend the category of N, as seen in ‘fake gun’. I have nothing to say about this analysis insofar as it is intended as an approximate semantic description of the phenomena under consideration²⁷. What is important to realize is that this analysis as such cannot answer the question why the concept of *bird* is extended so as to include *bat* but not *cow*, as shown by the date in (31):

- (31) a. Loosely speaking, a cow is a bird. (false)
b. In a manner of speaking, a cow is a bird. (false) (G. Lakoff 1973: 473)

The answer to the question is evident. As Taylor (2003: 80) maintains, hedges such as ‘loosely speaking’ and ‘in a manner of speaking’ are used to accommodate “things that would not ordinarily be considered members, but which might nevertheless be associated with the category on the basis of one or two non-essential attributes which they share with it”. The fact that bats but not cows share with birds the attribute of flying determines the truthfulness or falsity of the statements in (31). Indeed, Taylor (2003: 80) observes that (29b) above, not acceptable for some speakers, can be improved by making explicit the reason for the extension of the category as in (32).

- (32) Loosely speaking, a bat is a bird, in that it has wings and can fly. (Taylor 2003: 80)

This suggests that the statement in (23) plays an essential role in determining what falls under the concept of bird, whether the concept be *bird*, *typical bird*, *marginal bird* or *bird in an extended sense*.

There is yet another point to be made about the idea that what the data in (27) and (28) mirror is the standard theory about birds, rather than the concept of *bird* per se. The point cannot be fully developed in this paper and what follows is more a story than an argument. It is widely known that cognitive linguistics commonly adopts prototype semantics inspired by Rosch (1975) instead of classical Montague semantics. What is relevant to the present discussion is how, on the prototype-semantic view, categories come into existence and are organized. Langacker (1987: 371) depicts a scenario in which “[a] prototype is a typical instance of a category, and other elements are assimilated to the category on the basis of their perceived resemblance to the prototype”. A similar view is defended by Hampton (2006: 9-11) and the works cited there. If this picture captures the reality, albeit partially, then what triggers the formation of a category is the prototype. This implies that the category, hence concept, of birds cannot come into being unless the state of affairs expressed by the statement in (23) holds. If such is the case, it is reasonable to conclude that

²⁷ This semantic description can only be approximate, because, as Kay (1983: 132) makes clear, the utterance of ‘Loosely speaking, P’ consists of two acts, both of which make no reference to categorization: (i) an act of asserting that P and (ii) an act of warning that (i) is in some way a deviant act of assertion.

(23) is a forever absolutely true statement which conceptually characterizes birds.

It must be emphasized that I am not arguing that prototypicality is always part of a concept. For instance, “being young, high spirited, living alone” (Putnam 1962a: 395) may constitute the prototype of ‘bachelor’ at a given time and place. Since these are not among the core facts about ‘bachelor’, however, they do not define the concept of *bachelor*. We do not have to think that those who believe that bachelors are usually high-spirited have a different concept of *bachelor* from those who believe that bachelors are usually low-spirited; it is just that they have different theories about the same concept. Such a difference in theory would best be accounted for by what Löhr (2020: 2183) calls a “theory of categorization” as opposed to “theory of conceptualization”. The prototype of ‘bachelor’ does not meet the condition of “conceptual stability” or “content publicity” proposed by Löhr (2020: 2183-2184). In this respect, as Hampton (2006: 11) points out, birds may be “a rather special” case. Fodor (1998: 93) claims that, in general, “[c]oncepts can’t be prototypes, *pace* all the evidence that everybody who has a concept is highly likely to have its prototype as well”. What is characteristic of ‘bird’ is that it is not only that everybody who has the concept of *bird* is highly likely to have its prototype as well, but it is also that everyone who fails to have its prototype is likely to fail to have the concept as well. Fodor’s claim rests on the assumption that “concepts are compositional” (Fodor 1998: 94, Löhr 2020: 2184-2186). Given, for example, that the prototype of ‘pet fish’ is neither the prototype of ‘pet’ nor the prototype of ‘fish’ (Fodor 1998: 102, cf. Osherson and Smith 1981: 45), “prototypes don’t compose” (Fodor 1998: 94, 101). It follows that “concepts can’t be prototypes” (ibid.: 93, 94, 100). To be sure, the concept of *bird* as advocated here is not compositional, since no constituent of that concept corresponds to the concept of *fly*. But the point is that, even if it is conceded that concepts are generally compositional, the idea that concepts cannot be prototypes cannot account for the fact that competent speakers of English are required to have the prototype of ‘bird’. The concept of *bird* may constitute a genuine exception to Fodor’s and Löhr’s idea that concepts are compositional.

If the argument so far is on the right track, the statement in (23) is what may yield incomplete understanding without analyticity, a notion needed for thought experiments in support of social externalism. Suppose as a first step that Adam, a rational person competent in English, believes (33).

(33) “Birds are feathered bipedal creatures that live on the ground.”

Although birds fly, Adam has never seen birds fly. When he encountered birds, they happened to be on the ground, walking or running. For him, flying things include insects, bats, airplanes and so on, but not birds. People have never told Adam that birds fly, because it is so obvious a fact for them that it has never occurred to them that he is ignorant of the fact. The second step of the thought experiment consists in imagining that Adam2, a near duplicate of Adam living in some other community, believes (33) just as much as Adam in the actual community does. The only difference resides in the habits of birds. In Adam2’s community, ordinary people believe that birds do not fly. Still, what are called ‘birds’ in that community are birds. The nature of birds is exactly the same in the actual and hypothetical communities as far as biology is concerned, and the word ‘bird’ has exactly the same meaning, namely the same intension and extension. The situation is thus different from those imagined in Burge’s thought experiments concerning ‘arthritis’ and ‘sofa’, in which the same word form has different meanings in the two communities. The situation is also different

from that imagined in Putnam’s thought experiment concerning ‘cat’, in which cats turn out to be automata remotely controlled from Mars. The peculiar habits of birds supposed in the present thought experiment is ultimately attributed to the policy adopted by the government of Adam2’s community, rather than the genetic properties of birds. The hypothetical government gives an order, unknown to the general public, to its special forces to administer a drug to every bird as soon as it is born, in order to prevent it from flying. Every year there are a few birds that successfully escape from the injection, but their number is not large enough to undermine the widely accepted idea that birds do not fly. It is a truism in the community of Adam2 that birds do not fly. Finally, the imagined situation is interpreted. Intuitively, Adam’s thought is false, while Adam2’s thought is true. Although Adam and Adam2 are internally identical, and the meaning of the words they employ are the same, the contents of their thoughts are different, due to the difference of the conceptual truths accepted by their communities. Adam, but not Adam2, betrays an incomplete understanding of the concept of *bird* insofar as he dissents from the forever absolutely true statement which conceptually characterizes birds. In conclusion, social externalism essentially relies on incomplete understanding without analyticity. Wikforss (2001, 2004) is right in claiming that social externalism essentially relies on incomplete understanding, but is mistaken in claiming that incomplete understanding presupposes analyticity.

4.3 Summary

The argument developed in this paper suggests the classification of errors illustrated in Figure 2.

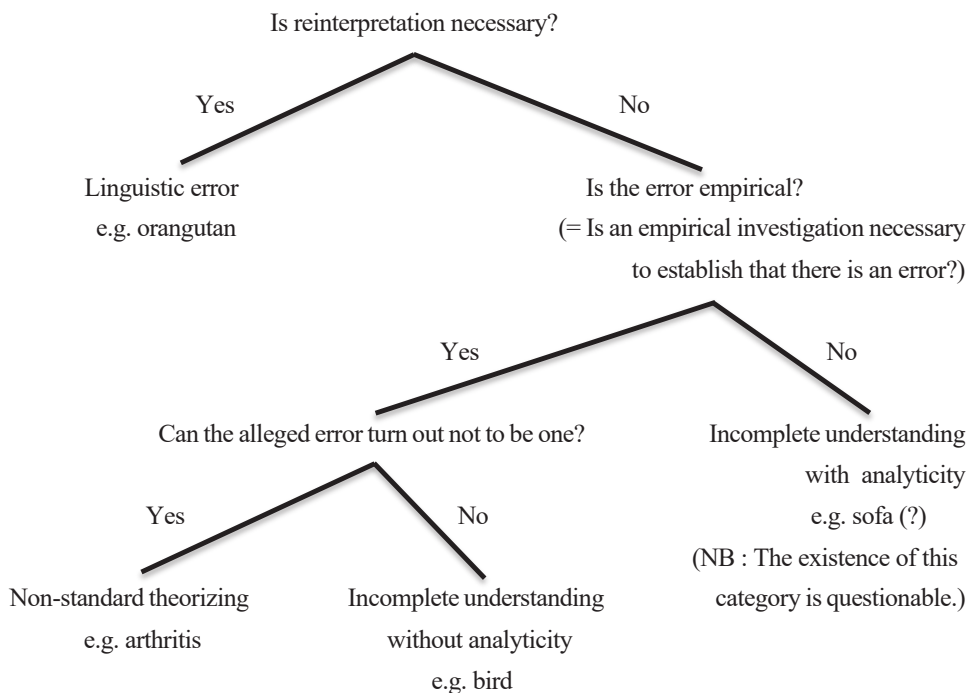


Figure 2: Types of errors (Revised)

The existence of genuine cases of incomplete understanding with analyticity is questionable. What falls within this category is cases in which someone makes an error about one-criterion word which nevertheless does not count as a linguistic error. Someone who thinks that there may be married bachelors makes a linguistic error about the word ‘bachelor’ rather than betraying an incomplete understanding of the concept of *bachelor*, thus failing to fit the category of incomplete understanding with analyticity. A potential candidate may be given by the case where Adam hypothesizes that sofas are works of art. It is not certain, however, whether ‘sofa’ is a one-criterion word as characterized by Putnam (1983: 89). Burge (1986: 715) proposes the definition “sofas are all and only pieces of furniture of a certain construction meant or made for sitting” and Sawyer (2003: 269) proposes the definition “Sofas are upholstered pieces of furniture for two or more people ... used for sitting on”. These descriptions cannot be considered a criterion for ‘sofa’ unless the content of “certain” and “...” are specified. It is disputable whether ordinary speakers can and do tell what further specifications are needed.

5. Concluding Remarks

Social externalism essentially relies on the notion of incomplete understanding. This notion appears to presuppose the notion of analyticity. A person who thinks that arthritis afflicts one’s thigh, Burge (1979) claims, betrays an incomplete understanding of the concept of *arthritis*. As Wikforss (2001, 2004) remarks, rightly I think, Burge’s view requires that it be a conceptual truth in the strong sense of the term, namely an analytic truth, that arthritis afflicts the joints only. Insofar as ‘arthritis’ is a law-cluster word, however, it is both theoretically and empirically difficult to postulate any analytic truths about arthritis. Theoretically, because “a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn” and “[t]hat there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists” (Quine 1951: 33). Empirically, because further scientific investigations may reveal that arthritis can afflict the thigh in exceptional cases and dictionary descriptions may be revised accordingly. A person who thinks that arthritis afflicts one’s thigh may more plausibly be characterized as developing a non-standard theory about the concept of *arthritis*.

A person who thinks that sofas are works of art, Burge (1986/2007) claims, has no incomplete understanding of the concept of *sofa*, and she should merely be attributed a non-standard theory about sofas. This idea rests on the assumption that “ability to discriminate Fs from non-Fs combined with inability correctly to characterize the nature of Fs typically signals incorrect empirical theory” (Sawyer 2003: 271). That person’s theory is incorrect because sofas are not works of art but pieces of furniture to be sat upon. According to Burge (1986/2007: *passim*), a statement such as ‘Sofas are pieces of furniture to be sat upon’ is a “meaning-giving normative characterization” for the term ‘sofa’. Meaning giving normative characterizations, Burge tells us, are not analytic truths in that they are dubitable (Burge 1986: 701/2007: 258). As Burge (1986: 714) puts it, “truths of meaning are dubitable”. However, as Wikforss (2001, 2004) points out, again rightly I think, an analytic truth is smuggled into the thought experiment concerning ‘sofa’ when Burge (1986: 708/2007: 263) states that “[t]here are no sofas” in his hypothetical community in which what are called ‘sofas’ are “objects that look like sofas, but are, and are widely known to be, works of art or religious artifacts sold in showrooms and displayed in people’s houses”. This implies that a person in the actual community who thinks that sofas are works of art believes non-sofas to be sofas. There seems

to be no fundamental difference between this case and the case of ‘arthritis’; both cases appeal to analyticity, a notion hardly compatible with law-cluster words like ‘arthritis’ and ‘sofa’.

Incomplete understanding without analyticity, if any, stems from misunderstanding of certain (but not all) prototypes. A person who does not think that birds fly betrays an incomplete understanding of the law-cluster concept of *bird* while perfectly understanding the meaning of the word ‘bird’, insofar as ‘meaning’ is equated with ‘intension and extension’. That birds fly is a conceptual truth about birds, but it is nonetheless not an analytic truth. Social externalism is thus essentially dependent on incomplete understanding without analyticity.

Prototype semantics is commonly considered part of cognitive linguistics, as evidenced by the fact that virtually every textbook on this discipline has a chapter devoted to that semantics. Prototype semantics favors social externalism, contrary to the official view of cognitive linguistics, commonly known as an internalist theory or a group of internalist theories. Cognitive linguistics shares with its rival, generative linguistics (Chomsky 1965, 1986), the internalist assumption that “language is part of cognition” (Langacker 2008: 7) and “meanings are in the minds of the speakers who produce and understand the expressions” (ibid.: 27). The following remarks voice a strongly internalist flavor of both camps:

The distinction between the theory of reference and the theory of meaning is an important one [...] The citation of Quine and Tarski in support of the theory of meaning must itself be a confusion of meaning and reference, since both Tarski and Quine have done important work in the theory of reference. This is the branch where real progress has been made; but it is also the branch that has little interest for linguists. (Chomsky 1955: 40-41)

Countless aspects of our surroundings do carry meaning potential [...]. Thus, if a doctor extends a tongue depressor toward my mouth and says *Open wide*, my understanding of what the doctor intends and what I am supposed to do is far more comprehensive than anything derivable from the linguistic expression alone. (I know, for example, that I will not satisfy the request by approaching a cabinet and pulling a drawer out all the way.) It would not be unreasonable to describe the relevant circumstances as being “imbued with meaning” or as “part of the meaning” an expression has in context. Yet I think we gain in clarity and analytical precision by reserving the term “meaning” for how a speaker understands an expression (in either a speaking or a listening capacity). It thus incorporates a speaker’s apprehension of the circumstances, and exploits the meaning potential they carry, but cannot be identified with those circumstances. So defined, an expression’s meaning resides in the conceptualizing activity of individual speakers. (Langacker 2008: 29)

The idea that the misunderstanding of prototypes is what is necessary and sufficient for the social externalist thesis to follow is *prima facie* at odds with the official view of cognitive linguistics. Before attempting to respond to the challenge, it should be borne in mind that even in cognitive linguistics convention plays an essential part, as seen in Taylor’s (2003: 86) remark that “the relevant background information for the characterization of word meanings [is] a network of shared, conventionalized, and to some extent perhaps idealized knowledge, embedded in a pattern for cultural beliefs and practices” as well as in Langacker’s

remark that “[a]t a given time, at a given speech community, a large body of conventions are firmly enough established that speakers invoke them as the basis for apprehending expressions” (Langacker 2008: 227). In the latter remark, “speakers invoke” should be interpreted normatively as well as factually, to the extent that “[s]peakers must have some preconception of what the words they use are normally expected to mean” (ibid.: 30). If what an individual had in mind entirely determined what concept she had, there would be as many concepts of *arthritis*, *sofas*, *bird*, etc. as individual speakers, with there being no possibility of conceptual errors²⁸. Such fragmentation of concepts, as Wikforss (2001) calls it, is as much a non-starter for cognitive linguists as for other theorists.

Now, how should cognitive linguists cope with the threat of social externalism without discarding the thesis that meanings, equated with various processes of conceptualization (Langacker 2008: 30), are in the head (ibid.: 27)? This is indisputably a formidable question requiring further work, but one simple answer suggests itself: This is the wrong question, because there is no threat at all. I have used the term ‘externalism’ throughout this paper for the sake of intelligibility. In fact, this is not the term Burge prefers. It is rather the term ‘anti-individualism’ that he uses in his arguments. ‘Internalism/externalism’ and ‘individualism/anti-individualism’ are “approximately interchangeable” and “[u]sage here is obviously a matter of taste” (Burge 2007: 154). Still, Burge prefers the terms ‘individualism/anti-individualism’ mainly because the terms ‘internalism/externalism’ would wrongly suggest that “the main issue is essentially concerned with spatial location” (ibid.). Indeed, when Langacker (2008: 27) claims that “meanings are in the minds of the speakers who produce and understand the expressions”, he may well be talking about spatial location. But the main issue concerns not spatial location but “the role of the individual and the individual’s relations to a wider order” and the social environment is “a prominent subclass” of such relations (Burge 2007: 155). Externalism is not the view that meaning and mental content are outside the head, but the view that their nature depends on “relations that are not reducible to matters that concern the individual alone” (ibid.: 154). This is the reason why, on Burge’s view, ‘individualism/anti-individualism’ are more appropriate terms than ‘internalism/externalism’ to characterize the issue. Then, the right question to ask is whether anti-individualism is compatible with cognitive linguistics. Langacker (2008: 28) states that “[s]ince mental development is stimulated and guided by social interaction, the skills and knowledge acquired are very much attuned to the sociocultural surroundings”. Now, when Adam and Adam2 utter or think, “I have arthritis in my thigh” and dismiss nearly as categorically the thought(s) expressed by ‘In a manner of speaking, a bat is a bird’ as the thought(s) expressed by ‘In a manner of speaking, a cow is a bird’, can we say that their skills and knowledge are equally attuned to their sociocultural surroundings? If we can, what makes Adam2’s thought but not Adam’s correct? If, on the contrary, we cannot, we will be confronted with the idea that their skills and knowledge are different, despite their internal identity.

N.B. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 22K00540.

²⁸ Davidson (1987: 449) puts forward the view that ‘Carl has arthritis’ expresses different thoughts, depending on what the subject thinks causes the disease. Wikforss (2001: 227) worries that this view will lead to conceptual fragmentation.

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分析性なき不完全理解

—プロトタイプ意味論と社会的外在主義—

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キーワード: 社会的外在主義 不完全理解 分析的真理 概念的真理 プロトタイプ

要旨

社会的外在主義ないし反個体主義とは、意味および心的内容が個人/個体の社会的環境に依存し、個人/個体の内的状態のみによっては決定されないとする立場である。この立場を支持する思考実験は「(概念の)不完全理解」と呼ばれる状態を仮定する。これは「言語上の誤り」および「非標準的な考え方」と対置される状態である。Burge (1979/2007)によると、たとえば英語で *I have arthritis* と発話/思考する主体は *arthritis* という概念を不完全に理解しており、この不完全理解の仮定から社会的外在主義のテーゼが帰結する。ここで、社会的外在主義にとって不完全理解の概念が必要であるかどうか、言い換えると社会的外在主義が不完全理解の概念に本質的に依拠するかどうか問われる。Wikforss (2001, 2004)はこの問いにイエスと答え、Sawyer (2003)の説を退ける。そのうえで、不完全理解という想定は Quine (1951)によって葬り去られたはずの分析的真理という悪しき考え方を蘇らせるものであると主張する。この論文では、社会的外在主義が分析性なき不完全理解という概念に本質的に依拠することを論じる。分析性なき不完全理解はある種のプロトタイプに関する誤解から生じる。「鳥は空を飛ぶ」と思っていない主体は、鳥概念を不完全に理解しつつ、「鳥」という語の意味(すなわち内包と外延)は正しく理解している。このとき、「鳥は飛ぶ」は概念的真理ではあるものの分析的真理ではない。Wikforss (2001, 2004)は社会的外在主義が不完全理解の概念に本質的に依拠すると考える点では正しいが、不完全理解が分析性を前提とすると考える点で誤っている。認知言語学の採用するプロトタイプ意味論は、この学派の公式見解とは裏腹に、社会的外在主義をサポートする。

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