Philosophy and science – linguistics and philosophy of language
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Detta är en brainstormingtext som första utkast för ett avslutande kapitel. Det handlar om (1) distinktionen begrepslig-empirisk som argument, liksom (2) det svävande målet med ”språkfilosofiska teorier”. (3) Analytiska filosofins scientism och hur detta ger upphov till filosofiska problem. För att komma åt frågorna försöker jag kontrastera olika beskrivningar av vad filosofin borde göra men också relationen mellan filosofi och vetenskap (närmare bestämt lingvistik och språkfilosofi). Det inget vettigt att säga om de här frågorna, men det stora målet jag har, att visa att på hur delar av den analytiska filosofin ruvar på en implicit scientism som skapar filosofiska problem, vill jag gärna ha uppslag för att kunna utföra. Jag ser det också som ett mål i sig att tänka på papper om hur filosofin förhåller sig till vetenskapen eftersom det förvirrar mig. Min tänkta läsarskara inte är wittgensteinianer utan något slags analytiker och därför använder jag mig av sådana källor (men jag tar gärna emot förslag på vilka Wittgensteinklicheer jag måste ha med!).

Jag hör gärna”metodologiska” idéer om hur de här frågorna kunde diskuteras och tips på hur det gjorts innan. Och särskilt, om det är något jag borde spara, såg det!

Up to now I have discussed attempts at solutions to Moore’s paradox by Moore, pragmatist philosophers (with Searle as the foremost representative), formalist philosophers and philosophers inspired by the later Wittgenstein. I have tried to show how Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* maintains a view of both language (especially in connection to nonsense, and the concept of a proposition) as well as of the task of philosophy, which is very different form that of modern analytic philosophy.

In this last chapter I would like to take a closer look at these distinctions and the suggestion that there are lines to draw, and that these may be used as philosophical arguments.

What is the difference between linguistics and the philosophy of language?

Some philosophers, like Quine, sees philosophy as a sub-discipline to science. Doing philosophy is doing scientific work. I will not discuss Quine’s individual and interesting conception of philosophy as a scientific endeavor, but try to take a look at the question in a more concrete manner.

One important thing to note, is that philosophers, like scientists, often work within universities. Philosophy is part of a larger context of human intellectual endeavors. The question about the organization of the sciences is a question dealt with within philosophy of science, but also within theory of science in the disciplines. And this sort of discussion is set off on many different grounds; the question why a certain work was published in a certain journal, why a professor of this and that is allowed to examine a dissertation about this and that when the professor of something else at the same university has more knowledge about the topic, although perhaps not the specific statistical methods used or the like. These debates are science-internal (science-theoretical) or part of academic life, like any human life.

There is a philosophical discussion, which has a more general profile. If we are unable to distinguish between the sciences and philosophy in principle, is this not evidence that the distinction does not exist? And what consequences should this have for philosophy? I am not happy with this setup, but I do see that the question cannot be dismissed immediately, but demands further treatment before it – perhaps – can be.

I will enter the discussion by taking a look at some thoughts on how the line is drawn on a less general level – first how the distinction between linguistics and the philosophy of language is drawn. At a first glance, it may seem that the subject matter, language, is the same.
Some distinctions drawn

Searle, in his *Speech Acts*, distinguishes between linguistic philosophy and philosophy of language. According to him, “the philosophy of language” is “the attempt to give philosophically illuminating descriptions of certain general features of language, such as reference, truth, meaning and necessity”. Philosophy of language is the name of a subject, whereas linguistic philosophy is primarily the name of a method. This method is for example practiced by Jerrold J. Katz, who takes philosophical problems to be problems, which may be solved with the use of results and methods from empirical linguistics.

“Linguistic philosophy”, is, according to Searle, the attempt to solve particular philosophical problems by attending to the ordinary use of particular words or other elements in a particular language. I take it that he means that it is linguistics put to use for philosophical purposes. Linguistics is not what Searle sees himself as engaging in either. Linguistics, he writes, attempts to describe the actual structures of natural human languages. He writes that his essay is not about languages like French, Swahili etc. but about language.

I agree with Searle that there are important differences to be made out between the areas of study, as well as with his description of linguistics. However, I would like to express my reservation towards his description of the philosophy of language, and this has to do with our disagreement (discussed in the earlier chapters) about the role and task of philosophical work. Philosophy of language certainly involves the attempt to solve particular philosophical problems, but Searle ascribes this activity to “linguistic philosophy”. To solve or resolve philosophical problems is usually taken to be the task of philosophy (but what these “solutions” are taken to consist in is a further question). However, the tools are not, as in Searle’s description of linguistic philosophy, etymology or grammar. The task of philosophy is not, even though the contrary is a commonly held (or rather, practiced) view within contemporary analytic philosophy, to give “accounts” of certain concepts, such as ‘truth’ etc.

These “accounts”, or in Searle’s expression “philosophically illuminating descriptions of general features of language”, sometimes have an unclear status. The accounts of certain concepts give the impression of being intended to hold, to be discoveries which are generally valid and sometimes taken to be cumulative in nature, i.e. once you have established something, you may take it for granted and build on it. In this view, they become “philosophical theses”, something which philosophers inspired by the later Wittgenstein do not see as the aim of philosophy to produce – quite the opposite. However, these ‘accounts’ are not results of empirical investigations and are not new knowledge in a scientific sense. They are not to reveal truths which we do not already agree with. The results are not claims as to the way things actually are. And they cannot be immediately used within linguistics, and hence, they are not theories to be handed over to the sciences to be tested, but in some way self-sufficient.

Should philosophy build theories or put forth positive theses about the world at all? The later Wittgenstein was not of that opinion. This answer has worried many contemporary analytic philosophers of language and it has been taken as a threat of “quietism”, of a silencing philosophy which produces no results. The idea that philosophy should produce results or outcomes, establish generally valid truths is the view that Wittgenstein opposes, and a view of philosophy which one may call “a mistaken analogy to science”. The idea within modern analytic philosophy of

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1 Searle 1969 p. 4.
3 Searle 1969 p. 4.
4 The concept of “linguistic philosophy” is clearly loose here. A detail to note is that Russell, among others, accused Wittgenstein’s later philosophy of being “linguistic” (or merely “semantic”) but Ludwig Boltzmann, one of Wittgenstein’s influences, saw the earlier philosophy (the distinction between positions as idealism, realism, phenomenalism etc.) as “merely linguistic”
5 By this I do not mean to suggest that philosophy is “based on intuitions” or to defend it as not being that. There is an entire debate on this question (cf. Timothy Williamson, “Philosophical “Intuitions” and Skepticism about Judgment”, *Dialectica*, 58: 109-153 and especially Avner Baz: *Who Knows? In Defense of Ordinary Language Philosophy*, forthcoming 2009.)
6 Although John W. Cook disagrees, and there is an ongoing debate about what Wittgenstein’s view of philosophy is in the end.
“accounts” which, if they are taken to be more than temporary auxiliary statements up for discussion, is the modern version of philosophical theories.

As is obvious from the earlier chapters of this work, I side with Wittgenstein against Searle’s view of philosophy. In a therapeutic view of philosophy, many different ways of coming to grips with philosophical tangles are available. The end result, if you allow me to use the expression, is clarification, or as popularly presented in neo-Wittgensteinian terms a “perspicuous presentation” of the tangle. Philosophical work is a reaction to a specific problem at hand, and it does not aim at a general description of the way things are for the sake of description (this general description is one instance of “theory”). Hutchinson and Read refer to the difference as the radically therapeutic intent of the “perspicuous presentation” concept which is “an achievement-term”, as opposed to “a kind of ‘objective’ mapping of a ‘conceptual landscape’”.

There is still room for misunderstanding the therapeutic viewpoint in the version I support. In a therapeutic view of philosophy, the point is not merely to come up with winning arguments for an alternative standpoint. This view of philosophy, an extreme belief in arguments, is also common within analytic philosophy today. The method of philosophy is building arguments, which take into consideration the theses posed by another philosopher, imaginary or real, the representative of another standpoint or view. The task is to “win” by producing arguments which show that the opponent’s view is faulty or insufficient for the question posed. A classical setup would be idealism against realism, rationalism against empiricism or newer versions of the dichotomies, which then struggle against each other forever. This problematic picture of what a philosophical discussion should be is also foreign to the therapeutic view, because there, the point in philosophy is an increased understanding of a particular problem and the untangling of it for its own sake. Arguments, one could say, do not solve problems, they are reformulations of them. Philosophy is not about taking “stances”, but of understanding.

The difference in the view of arguments against or in support of a stance is related to the differences in view of how reasoning works. The idea of reasoning as formal arguments with premises which lead to a conclusion by rules of combination supports the argumentative view, the battle view of philosophy. In Wittgenstein’s thought, these formal schemata are heuristic devices, and they contain no guarantee that a piece of correct reasoning has been performed. Therefore, if nothing is at stake in a philosophical tangle, there is no point in pursuing it – it simply would never have occurred. Philosophy, Wittgenstein says, GRIPER IN I VÅRA LIV (varifrån, Camilla?).

Philosophy as a handmaiden to linguistics

Introductory books to the philosophy of language often point out that philosophy of language is a subcategory to analytic philosophy and that this has to do with the fact that the linguistic turn and the birth of analytic philosophy took place at the same time. The relation between linguistics and philosophy is sometimes said to be that philosophy deals with conceptual questions whereas linguistics deals with empirical questions; that linguistics is interested in language as an empirical phenomenon...
whereas philosophy of language is a philosophical study of language and therefore mainly is concerned with fundamental conceptual questions.12 This distinction is often drawn, with the disclaimer that it is a rough distinction or that it is difficult to distinguish clearly between the two. A catalogue of questions is often also presented as containing the targets of a philosophy of language: questions about meaning, it is often pointed out, cannot be answered within linguistics, as linguistics takes language to be a system of signs. Questions of meaning, it is proposed, are external to this.13

Is there any way to settle the question at all? Philosophical or conceptual questions arise, in a sense, within all sciences, also within linguistics. This is Strawson’s point about philosophy in general: that there are certain terms which have a more general employment, which the special scientist must also use. And these terms, such as “explanation”, “hypothesis”, “truth”, are what the philosopher may be able to give “a clear and general account or explanation of what is characteristic of their employment in this specialism” and by doing this, he may bring out also the relations, which hold “between different departments of our intellectual and human life”.14 The philosopher’s task in Strawson’s opinion is about unification and giving a broader view.15

On the one hand, the picture we have now lets philosophy and science take care of different types of tasks in connection with the study of language. They are stablemates. On the other, there also seem to be questions or theories which include elements which fall in between philosophy and science. One example of theory for which the status is unclear is Noam Chomsky’s universal grammar, which is a structure, which all languages in the world have in common. It is innate to every newborn child. And its existence is proven or shown by practical methods – it manifests itself in how the child develops language without “teaching”. The concept or phenomenon is presented as a solution to the challenge of solipsism and an argument to explain how the social or common communicative feature of language is possible. Within linguistics, the idea of universal grammar is both challenged and supported, with theoretical and empirical arguments.16 The stipulation of universal grammar involves philosophical tensions – is it because of its unclear status? To empirical linguists, this does not pose a problem. I hope that my discussion in what follows will serve to clarify this issue.

Empirical-conceptual: contrasts in the concept of ‘language’

Rorty writes in his Consequences of Pragmatism on “Keeping philosophy pure” that the whole notion of “ontology” – since he claims that in the TLP, it made sense to attempt to derive ontology from logic – was abandoned in Wittgenstein’s Investigations, and that “the paradox created by the lack of contrastive force in the notion of “language” is redoubled”.17 What he means is that there is nothing which would be the clear opposite to “language”.

Attempts to supply some [contrastive] force [in the notion of “language”] have resulted in an immense amount of talk about the need to distinguish “conceptual” (or “grammatical” or “semantic”) from “empirical” questions.18

Rorty sets the stage: today, after Wittgenstein’s move “away from precision, away from argument, away from the Kantian attempt to “place philosophy on the secure path of science” he claims, philosophers are torn between “systematic linguistic philosophy” and “Wittgensteinian philosophy”.19 Either, he says, they must reject

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13 Svendsen & Säätelä 2004, p. 98.
15 Strawson is often described as an “ordinary language philosopher” as opposed to mainstream analytic philosophy today. Wittgenstein has often been mistaken for an ordinary language philosopher. A discussion of this problem is to be found in Chapter 1. Wittgenstein’s conception of ‘language’ differs from that of the ordinary language philosophers, cf [AJAJ HITTAR INTE TEXTEN, tror det var Sören Stenlund: Language and Philosophical Problems.]
16 One who claims that the existence of Chomsky’s universal grammar cannot be proven by practical methods is Charles Henry: “Universal Grammar” in Communication and Cognition - Artificial Intelligence, Vol. 12, Nos. 1-2, pp. 45-61, Special Issue Self-Reference in Biological and Cognitive Systems, Luis Rocha (ed.).
17 Rorty p. 25.
18 Rorty p. 25.
Wittgenstein’s characterization of “what philosophy has been or find something new for philosophy to be”. Wittgenstein stands for “post-professional, redemptive, private purity of heart”.

There is a tension between philosophy and science in Wittgenstein’s work. In Pears’ words, there is something to be called “Wittgenstein’s resistance to science”. Pears asks whether philosophy should avoid being a science or not, and is sympathetic to Wittgenstein’s resistance.20 According to Rorty, there is a split in post-Wittgensteinian philosophy – one party being of the conviction that Wittgenstein is “collecting facts about language” and that philosophy needs to get back into the safe sector of science. “This urge to put philosophy back on the secure path of a science has ramified into a whole series of programs in recent philosophy of language, few of which any longer have much connection with Wittgenstein’s own interests.”21 The other party, again, worries about this, and sees that there is another way for philosophy to be. According to Pears, philosophy must become “linguistic” because it must seek the necessary – since Aristotle saw necessity in things, Kant in our Anschauungsformen, the structure of our minds – and in Rorty’s words, now, after the so-called linguistic turn, we have seen that it is in language. Pears believes in the limits of language, that language is constrained, and that this has to do with what philosophy is. The limits draw out what is necessary, and those limits also draw the line around philosophy.

In which different ways can one see what “philosophy” could be? Rorty’s examples are down to earth and practical: is philosophy an academic subject, a collection of topics discussed by the “greatest philosophers” or in Wilfrid Sellars’ words a discussion of “how things, in the largest sense of the term, hang together, in the largest sense of the term”?22 Rorty chooses to discard “philosophy-as-vision” and “philosophy-as-academic-specialty” and takes the best description of what philosophy is to be “a name for the study of certain definite and permanent problems”, because the question of the purity of philosophy will not arise and in this light, the possibility of an “end to philosophy” will be clear.23 The examples he gives are “The Nature of Being, The Nature of Man, the Relation of Subject and Object… Necessary Truth” etc.

Now I am not convinced that there is an answer to be found in the direction Rorty takes. He goes through a catalogue of possible ways to take philosophy, and he does, in the end want to end up with a single good idea. Philosophy, in a therapeutic view, cannot be “brought to an end”. The tangles which stand in need of untangling, the questions, will arise again and again (and I do not intend this in any chronological sense).24 Philosophy does not progress in the way which many of those who support the idea of a linguistic turn as progress see it (I will return to this thought shortly). And philosophy is not a unified discipline.25 (I would not be prepared to claim that philosophy is “eternal” either – that would be a statement which is problematic in the same way as the claim that philosophy will come to an end.)

Rorty’s thoughts on the question of the purity of philosophy miss one very important aspect, which I have tried to examined or expose to some extent in this thesis (with Moore’s paradox as an example): that the discussion or discourse, which is the very form of philosophy, is also about finding out what the questions really are, and the investigations, the philosophical ones, at least, attempt to find out how they can be dealt with. Often, the answer will not be simply the expression of support of an earlier suggestion, but a reformulation of the question. This is why no catalogue of problems, nor a loser reference to “the deep problems”, will do to answer a question of principle about what philosophy is.

21 Rorty p. 26. For clarity: that something is not in Wittgenstein’s own interest is not a good argument against it.
22 Rorty pp. 29-30.
23 Rorty p. 31.
24 There is room for a discussion of what makes a philosophical question “the same as” another – pointing that out is itself a philosophical move.
25 I have earlier on in this work matched different ways of doing philosophy against each other on specific issues. That I prefer one conception of philosophy to the other does not mean that for example pragmatist conceptions of language could never be of any use – what I have criticized is a lack of philosophical self-awareness (something which could also be called methodological awareness). It is important to distinguish the rejection of an area of research as altogether useless or faulty and to carry out a debate on philosophical method in specific issue – the first is a question of interest and insight (or lack of it), perhaps a mere territory fight between two philosophers as academics and the second may be genuine engagement with, an attempt to understand a standpoint which seems foreign to oneself.
Rorty is perhaps to some extent right when he writes that Wittgenstein’s “resistance to science” is best interpreted as “a resistance to the entire cultural tradition which made truth – the successful crossing of the void which divides man from the world – a central virtue”. This is turning the question from being posed as some kind of question of essence or principle to a question of psychology and inclination. Let’s not leave it at that, but take a look at some other discussions.

*Where are the questions of philosophy to be found, and which are worthy ones?*

Putnam, in his *Words and Life*, talks about how there are common-sense pre-philosophical answers to questions like “How can you refer to external things such as the desk?” These are answers like “I see the darn thing!” He writes about seeing things as ‘questions’ and ‘answers’ to them in philosophy:

> In a nutshell, the suggestion is, what if the common-sense pre-philosophical answer is the only answer? What if being convinced that it is not an answer to both questions (how do you know the desk exists? how can you so much as refer to the desk?) to say “I see the darn thing” is not coming to “see the problem” but falling into a deep confusion? (Putnam 1994: 95)

... what he should say is that the philosopher’s questions gain their very sense from the supposition that certain possibilities make sense, and that once we see that we cannot consistently suppose that they do, we should also see that the enterprise of “a theory of the nature of intentionality” or of “the nature of perception” is an enterprise of answering questions we cannot understand we know not how. Note that if saying this is saying that the questions are “pseudo-questions,” it is in a very different sense of “pseudo-question” than any that Carnap or Reichenbach had in mind. Their notion of a pseudo-question derived from the Machian (they called it “empiricist”) idea that the whole purpose of cognition is prediction; the dissolution of the question of intentionality just suggested derives instead from an exploration of what Strawson called “the bounds of sense”: (Putnam 1995: 95-96)

Putnam shows the contrast with the fact that there could be “common-sense pre-philosophical answers” to the questions of philosophy, and suggests that the questions often are pseudo-questions, which we in some sense do not understand. Putnam’s suggestion goes well with Wittgenstein’s thought that philosophical problems arise because of our craving for generality.

Nevertheless, Putnam wishes to say something general about seeing things as philosophical questions and answers.

The question about the division of labor between philosophy and science is not a mere practical question about how things actually stand. That would be a question about how the departments are organized, in which journals articles are published by persons with this or that degree etc. An answer to the question of what the difference between the two is involves also taking a stand on what “philosophy” should mean, but also what “science” should mean. In this sense, taking that question as a kind of general one will lead to further general questions.

The way the relation between the two is characterized has consequences for both. If the division of the field and of labor on language is taken to be that philosophy takes care of theoretical questions and problems having to do with the theory of linguistics, then philosophy becomes not a field in its own right alongside the special sciences, but instead the theory of theory, “a handmaiden to science”. This scientism is not an

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26 Rorty p. 35.
uncommon view of how things stand or should stand. Strictly speaking, this view does not allow for philosophical or conceptual questions to arise within the sciences, unless they are directly connected to theory or the application of a theory.

In a picture of linguistics, in which methods are distinguishable from theory in principle, and in which they are applied to an empirical material which is not affected by places philosophical work at the theory level; philosophy devises theories and then the scientists test them. The philosophers find the right theory and conceptual system to describe and explain the observations. In this view, philosophy is the head of the house, and not the handmaiden.

If, on the other hand, the division of labor is taken to be given from the outset, i.e. certain questions are as such philosophical in character, this would not accord with the therapeutic idea that philosophical questions are questions in which one gets entangled, and that when one is there, to quote Wittgenstein, “you do not know your way about”. If certain questions were as such, in themselves philosophical, then the discovery that a certain question is philosophical in character is not a discovery from within the question, and it is not (as I have suggested earlier) an expression for the realization of a way out of the tangle.

To sum up, there are three different views of philosophical questions which affect the view of the relation between philosophy and the special sciences, in this case linguistics. If philosophical questions are taken to exist as such, and hence, that it is possible to produce a complete catalogue of them, then philosophy cannot be a mere handmaiden to science, taking care of whatever problems arise there. The problem with the idea that a complete catalogue could be produced is also that it excludes the possibility for new philosophical questions to arise within or outside the special sciences – philosophical questions, in this picture, are not as such conceptual tangles but they may be solved with the help of other sciences (Katz’ linguistic philosophy is of this kind). If again philosophical questions cannot be listed, it is difficult to say what philosophy is to take care of. Philosophy in the Wittgensteinian sense, as an activity intimately connected to the other activities people are engaged in, is not a science or an area of expertise. It is difficult to describe and present.

What kind of question is the question about philosophy? It is both a question of practice and principle? At what point one will be content and feel that the question is settled depends on one’s philosophical attitude.

Above, I have drawn up a few ways to characterize the tensions in the far too general question “What is the relation between philosophy and science?” In practice, there is a vivid interchange going on. In principle, the question could be important to be clear about since there is a risk in not being able to discern the two – a practical risk, that philosophy would be threatened as an independent area of study, and a risk in principle, since no difference leaves an important question unanswered – whether it is fair or not to, following Wittgenstein, accuse philosophers like Searle of mistakenly mixing up the two, as a general description of a problem prevailing in his work.

Implicit scientism – a historical approach


In many introductory works of linguistics and philosophy of language, a short chronology of the most important events and figures in the study of language through

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28 Collin & Guldmann p. 11, even think that in the process of devising theories, philosophers work where linguistics is underdeveloped, in areas where empirical science has not yet “got foothold”. This is a common view of philosophy, not as the handmaiden of science but the master, the leader of the pack. Collin & Guldmann compare the situation of language theories today to the situation of the physical theories in the middle ages, right before the scientific revolution.

29 Wittgenstein Philosophical Investigations 1953 §123.
the ages. For the philosophy of language, two dominant version of this chronology are available. The first starts with Plato, goes over at least Locke, takes a longer stop around 1900 and ends today. The second places the birth of the philosophy of language at around the year 1900, the time of the linguistic turn.30 In the history of linguistics, the same division exists – modern linguistics, it is claimed, with the linguistic turn, but the history of language studies go much further back, they start with Panini, the Indian “grammarian”, who created a grammar for Sanskrit around 400 BC.31 This grammar was intended for the use in deciphering older texts. Adam and the tower of Babel from the Old Testament are also mentioned as milestones, and the Western grammatical heritage can be traced to the ancient Greeks, who asked themselves, whether there is something essential in the relation between a word and the thing it refers to, or if it is random.32 They also, he writes, entertained the idea that the elements of language can be classified in parts of speech, like nouns, verbs and conjunctions, as well as casus. During the 1800s, fantastic progress was made within linguistics – something new was born when the realization was made that linguistic features can be borrowed over from one to another part of a language, and that there was a regularity to this development. During the same time, progress was made within phonology. It is a shame, according to Langacker, that not only until “[i]n recent years, linguists have recognized that meaning and syntax are crucial to an understanding of language”. Language is “basically a psychological phenomenon, one that cannot be studied fruitfully just by observing linguistic behaviour”. Generative grammar (as introduced by Chomsky), in Langacker’s view, is the culmination of this development.

It is unfair to contrast Sören Stenlund’s essay “On the Linguistic Turn in Philosophy”33 to Langacker’s popular account, but since my intention is not to provide an accurate historical overview, but to show how even innocent historical accounts sometimes display scientistic tendencies, I will go on. My aim here is to indicate how deep these thoughts go, and this in turn, I do to underline one of my main themes in this work, that there are implicit contentions at work in philosophy, which sometimes are accessory to the philosophical tangles themselves.

The linguistic turn

Around 1900, researchers became interested in language like never before, and the thought is that there must be an explanation to this sudden interest. Language came tot the focus of interest in a manner never seen before in philosophy, and the interest in language as a subject or area of research flourished. Also, according to Stenlund, a new way of approaching philosophical problems in general came to be. This change is usually connected to the birth of analytic philosophy, but also, many of today’s linguistic schools of thought came to be – in other words, a common origin for analytic philosophy and modern linguistics.

The linguistic turn is commonly described as a philosophical insight, an abrupt development within philosophy – it seems as if philosophers before that time had been blind to the role which language plays for our reasoning and suddenly realized that language is crucial to the human quest for knowledge.34 In linguistics, the parallel description is that progress was made and as in Langacker’s account above, that radical new insights about the way language works came about. Stenlund’s discussion of the linguistic turn is much more nuanced.

30 For the first version, see Collin & Guldmann 1998, for the second, XXX: An example of a philosopher who takes Plato to have “a philosophy of language” and an “epistemology” – a very anachronistic way of describing the fact that Plato said something about words is Anders Wedberg: Plato’s Philosophy of Mathematics, Greenwood Press Reprint 1977.
32 The idea of a grammar as a meaning giving structure in any language is new – originally grammars were aids for ‘foreigners’ to learn a language (especially Latin and Greek for the subjects or citizens in distant parts of the Roman and Greek empires). ‘Grammar’ was a tool, it had a normative side to it, and was not taken to be a neutral description of the underlying structure of language. See Saara Haapamäki: Svensk Grammatikhistoria 1997.
34 Collin & Guldmann are examples of believers in progress for the philosophy of language and for linguistics. Philosophical work is a part of this enhancement and improvement of the sciences, the scientific enterprise. In philosophy of language, we can create ever better theories of language. This same story is to be found in the common description of the linguistic turn, as in Langacker’s short introduction to the history of linguistics.
Already in this first description of the linguistic turn, there are two somewhat uncomfortable ingredients. First, the idea that Descartes, Galileo or other educated people did not see that language was worth investigating. This account presupposes a serious blindness in the biggest thinkers who ever lived up to that time. Stenlund suggests instead, that the shift was not due to purely philosophical insights, but that many external, societal factors played a role and that there were reasons why these earlier thinkers simply were not interested in language in the same way as later. The linguistic turn, which is perhaps more aptly described as a shift of focus than a “turn”, depended on a historical consciousness and the scientific developments, such as the realization, thanks to the excursions to what was seen as distant corners of the world, that people are quite different and that not everyone understands everyone else easily. The difference between people spurs the need to explain how it is possible to communicate at all, something which was taken to be clear before. The mentalistic language of Locke and Berkeley had as its starting point this problem. It was no longer seen as possible to step outside of language, and therefore, it was no longer possible to look in (introspection). Psychologistic investigations were carried out, and subjectivity became a problem. Behaviouristic thought entered. Earlier philosophers were not blind, but there was a shift in worldview and the view of how human beings differ, and that made language a possible object of study.

Second, the description of the linguistic turn as depending on a pure philosophical insight is related to a view of the history of science as ever progressing through internally scientific developments. This view of science is problematic because it hardly ever does justice to, or bases itself on a detailed investigation of the historical sources available. Also, it does not accord with the idea that philosophical problems are not chronistic – it contains the idea that philosophical problems are solved and left, that philosophy as a whole progresses (and is in some sense cumulative).

To understand the linguistic turn, according to Stenlund, one must see how it came about that the mentalistic vocabulary of the philosophers of the 1600s and 1700s slowly lost its original vitality and importance, and came to be seen by among others Frege as a dangerous and untenable “psychologism”. The shift was a shift in degrees, which was connected to other changes in the West, in society, such as (1) secularization, (2) the loss of belief in a human nature of the same sort in every human being, and (3) the development of empirical psychology.

At the end of the 19th Century, these changes had made it natural, and even necessary, to see language not as an external instrument for the transfer of mental contents, which can be identified separately (Locke and others), but as the medium of thought, which thoughts and reasons must already be articulated in to be able to be definite thoughts and reasons. This thought, that we cannot step outside of language, Stenlund calls “the idea that reason and thought are immanent in language”. Linguistic immanence, that one is caught in language, is a metaphysical thesis just like the view of language in which it is an external tool for the transfer or thoughts which can be discerned and identified as such. Stenlund criticizes both of these pictures. The new thing was not that language can cause problems, but that it is in language that everything we can think is already, it is already there. This thought is not only Wittgenstein’s in the TLP but also shared by Saussure. This idea was central to the development of formal logic – which is often taken to be that which we share, and which is the ultimate limit to language/world/thought.

[Stenlund forts]

Conclusion=?