

WORD MEANING
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1. My proposal:

- (WM) If w is a word and m is a meaning then by ‘ w means m ’ we mean:
- a. that w is used to mean m ; or
 - b. that events in which w is used to mean something are events in which it is used to mean m ; or
 - c. that events in which w is used to mean something are fashionably events in which it is used to mean m .

For instance, by “‘London’ means London” we mean:

- a. that ‘London’ is used to mean London; or
- b. that events in which ‘London’ is used to mean something are events in which it is used to mean London; or
- c. that events in which ‘London’ is used to mean something are fashionably events in which it is used to mean London.

2. Why? Because I believe that we can better answer questions about word meaning by first getting clear about what we mean when we talk about what words mean. Eg: How do words acquire meaning? How do words change meaning? Why are there normative facts about word use? What is the connection between the meaning of a word and its use?

3. Clarifications:

- a. WM.a, WM.b, and WM.c make increasingly more explicit what we mean by ‘ w means m ’.
- b. WM is not trivial. It claims, for one thing, that we use ‘ w means m ’ to quantify over events. This has much explanatory power.
- c. WM is not circular. It is an account of what we mean by ‘ w means m ’, not an account of what we mean by ‘mean’. So it can use ‘mean’ without being circular. Compare: By ‘Mops clean floors’ we mean that mops are used to clean floors.
- d. But I do have an account of what we mean by ‘mean’: by ‘mean’ we (unambiguously) mean a kind of event. A meaning event is one in which someone uses something to mean something. This is *the* fundamental semantic phenomenon, in terms of which all other semantic phenomena are to be explained. WM is the first step in this grand plan.
- e. Grice was in the ball park. But unlike him I don’t think there are two kinds of meaning. WM does not offer an account of one kind of meaning in terms of another. Nor do I think that what a speaker means can be analysed in terms of what she intends.
- f. I take it that there are such things as meanings – things that are meant. They are nothing particularly special, just like gifts – things that are given.
- g. I think that when a speaker uses a word to mean something, there are two things that count as what the speaker means by the word – one is what is often called the *content* of the word, the other is often called its *sense*. Here I am only interested in the first kind of meaning.
- h. WM.a is not meant to suggest that our use of ‘ w means m ’ is particularly special. It is just one instance of a general pattern of use: ‘Mops clean floors’, ‘Guns kill people’, ‘Newspapers keep us informed’. In fact, the use it claims is just what we would expect.

- i. The move from WM.a to WM.b is not meant to be controversial. It is just like claiming that by ‘Mary jogs in the park’ we mean that events in which Mary jogs are events in which she jogs in the park.
- j. The kind of move from WM.b to WM.c is not meant to be controversial either. It is just like claiming that by ‘events in which Mary jogs are events in which she jogs in the park’ we mean that events in which Mary jogs are *generally* events in which she jogs in the park.
- k. The choice of ‘fashionably’ in WM.c is more controversial. I am *not* happy to replace it by ‘always’, ‘sometimes’, ‘typically’, ‘usually’, ‘generally’, or ‘often’, but I *might* be talked into replacing it by ‘conventionally’ or ‘customarily’.

4. Some answers:

- a. **What is the connection between the meaning of a word and its use?** The meaning of a word is its use, in this sense: what a word means is what it is used to mean. This does *not* mean that there are no such things as meanings over and above use. A word can only be used (in the relevant sense) if there is a meaning for it to be used to mean.
- b. **How do words acquire meaning?** A word *w* acquires the meaning *m* by it becoming true that *w* is fashionably used to mean *m*. It is neither necessary nor sufficient for there to be a Kripke-style baptism (that is, an explicit declaration that *w* is to mean *m*). This is a specific instance of a general fact about fashion.

Note: I take it that if a speaker can mean *m* at all, then she can use *any word she likes* to mean *m* (although some choices are more prudent than others). It is an interesting and difficult question what it takes for a speaker to be able to mean *m*, but that is not a question about words.

- c. **How do words change meaning?** By there being a change in the facts about what they are used to mean. Word meanings change in the same way that fashions do. Example: ‘cat’ changing meaning from cat to dog.
 - d. **Why are there normative facts about word use?** Because there are normative facts about fashion. There is a sense in which a speaker *should* use ‘red’ to mean red, because there is a sense in which one *should* follow fashion. There are benefits to following fashion, and if one wants these benefits then one *should* follow fashion.
5. WM allows us to say that for a word to have meaning is not for there to be some thing that it means, but for there to be facts about what it is used to mean. This provides some more answers:
- a. **What is the meaning of ‘here’?** Not a Kaplanian character.
 - b. **How do ‘he’ and ‘she’ differ in meaning?**
6. Final point.