

# Carnapian Frameworks Revisited\*

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## 1. Introduction

In his (2021), Gabriel Broughton criticizes my work on Carnap on ontology and puts forward his own interpretation of what Carnap's external/internal distinction amounts to. I will here first argue that Broughton's main claims about my work are based on a misinterpretation, and then turn to some issues of broader interest. I will argue that Broughton's own, potentially interesting interpretation of Carnap's external/internal distinction does not work. And in light of the remarks on Broughton's discussion I will present a sharpened version of what I have earlier said about this distinction.

## 2. On Carnap's metaontology

Let me first, as background, go through what I have argued in earlier work regarding Carnap on ontology, and specifically the distinction between internal and external questions (Eklund 2009, 2013, 2016<sup>1</sup>). The focus has been slightly different in my different articles, but a common theme has concerned what Carnap's distinction between external and internal questions amounts to. My main points have, in brief, been the following.

Somehow or other, the distinction between internal and external questions is a distinction between questions internal and external to *frameworks*. So a basic question concerns what a framework is. Some Carnap commentators have taken

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\* Many thanks to Nils Franzén and to an anonymous referee (for a journal which in the end unfortunately decided against publishing this paper).

<sup>1</sup> Compare also my (2011) and (forthcoming), which are parallel but focus on Carnap's views on logic.

frameworks to be *languages*, or, better, *language-fragments*; others (or the same commentators in different contexts) have taken frameworks to be something more controversial, something which involves an interesting sort of *relativity* of the truth of a claim to a framework. On the former, *language pluralist* interpretation, an internal question becomes, in some way, simply a question internal to a language and an external question becomes, in some way, a question external to a language. The existence of frameworks becomes uncontroversial, but one may wonder how this is philosophically significant, and one can wonder what a question external to a language even might be. On the latter, *relativist* interpretation, Carnap is something more like a, well, relativist, holding that the truth of *claims* is relative to frameworks (where this is different from the trivial relativity of truth of *sentences* to languages). The claim that there are numbers may be true, and analytically so, relative to some framework, but have a different status relative to some other framework.

One contribution I sought to make is simply that of highlighting this choice point, and the fact that different interpreters of Carnap have made different choices at this point. But I also argued that the language pluralist interpretation is more plausible. Let me just quote my (2013) summary of the reasons for holding this:

Carnap calls the frameworks *linguistic frameworks* (when the article was first published he used the label *frameworks of entities*, but this was changed for when the article was reprinted in *Meaning and Necessity*). Where Carnap introduces the notion of a framework, he says, "If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a linguistic *framework* for the new entities in question". In other words: to speak in one's language about some entities one needs to introduce the expressions by means of which to do so. Later, Carnap uses "thing language" to denote a framework. This is clear evidence that for Carnap, frameworks are fragments of languages. Moreover, if Carnap were a relativist, one would expect him to emphasize that truths of the relevant kind are true *only relative to some framework*, but such formulations are entirely absent from his article; generally,

Carnap treats frameworks as something straightforward. (Eklund 2013, 233–34)

I also noted that there are some reasons for caution about both interpretations mentioned, understood as general interpretations of what is going on in Carnap's discussion of external and internal questions. Critics of Carnap, such as Quine, have taken the external/internal distinction to be bound up with the analytic/synthetic distinction, and Carnap seemed to *agree* (Eklund 2013, 236). But, as I discussed, on neither of the two interpretations offered is there a tight connection between the distinctions.

In my articles, I have pushed back on interpretations of Carnap which impute to Carnap relativism or some other kind of reliance on an interesting form of relativity. Start with relativism. In my (2009) and (2013), I brought up André Gallois (1998), David Chalmers (2009), Ted Sider (2001) and Scott Soames (2009) as (sometimes) speaking of Carnap as a relativist. Chalmers (2009) speaks of Carnap as holding that "there are many different ontological frameworks, holding that different sorts of entities exist" – different entities exist according to different ontological frameworks (Chalmers 2009, 78). That is, for obvious reasons, very different from saying merely that in different frameworks, different sentences of the form "there are \_\_\_\_s" come out true. Turning to other forms of relativity, in my (2011) I criticized Warren Goldfarb and Thomas Ricketts' talk of what "can be made sense of only within a linguistic framework" (Goldfarb and Ricketts 1992, 69). If "linguistic framework" just means *language* then this talk just amounts to talk of what can only be made sense of within a language. This sounds rather more trivial than one may suspect Goldfarb and Ricketts intend. Don't we need a language when making sense of anything at all? Further, Goldfarb and Ricketts take Carnap to "reject language-transcendence." They take this to be a central feature of Carnap's philosophy. Again, I noted that there is a somewhat trivializing understanding of what they say: to reject language-transcendence could just be to emphasize that we must always employ some language or other.

### 3. Broughton on Eklund on Carnapian frameworks

Enter Gabriel Broughton's recent (2021). Broughton's article is a largely framed as a critical discussion of what I have had to say about Carnap. Broughton declares his intentions early on, saying "In this paper, I show that Eklund misreads Carnap, and I argue that this misreading obscures fundamental features of Carnap's philosophy" (Broughton 2021, 4098).

As I will get to later, there are some genuine, and potentially interesting, differences between Broughton's own preferred interpretation of Carnap and the interpretation that I have defended. But most of Broughton's discussion of my work is devoted to attacking a position that simply is not mine, and much of my discussion here will be aimed at getting those matters out of the way.

Describing my view, Broughton says, "A Carnapian framework, [Eklund] says, is just a natural language" (Broughton 2021, 4098). He thus ascribes to me the following thesis:

*The natural language thesis.* A Carnapian framework is a natural language.

It follows from the natural language thesis that constructed formal languages are not frameworks. Opposing this thesis, Broughton says, *inter alia*,

First, if we assume that frameworks are natural languages, then it is hard to make sense of a whole bunch of things that Carnap says in 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology' (henceforth: ESO), including his ubiquitous references to *constructing* and *establishing* frameworks, his insistence that a crucial step in the formation of a framework is the introduction of certain *variables*, and his explicit focus on the *specialized* languages of science and semantics. (Broughton 2021, 4098)

and:

... since Carnap says in ESO that a variety of sentences are analytic in this or that framework, Eklund's interpretation of frameworks as natural languages conflicts with Carnap's repeated insistence, both before and after ESO, that no natural language sentence is properly called analytic. (Broughton 2021, 4099)

He concludes, “[t]ogether, these considerations show that frameworks are not natural languages.”<sup>2</sup> (In what follows, I will, like Broughton, refer to Carnap (1950) as ESO.)

Broughton is attacking a straw man. I do not subscribe to the natural language thesis. A first and main point to make is that the notion of a *natural language* plays no role what so ever in any of my main claims, summarized above. I speak generally about *languages*, and there is no obvious reason at all, given the nature of my claims, why the languages specifically would have to be natural languages. In my texts on Carnap, the important contrast is between the language pluralist interpretation according to which frameworks are languages, and a different, relativist interpretation according to which they are something which is bound up with relative truth in some interesting sense. Nowhere in my works do I say that frameworks are *natural* languages. Nor do I ever argue for such a claim. Any thesis of mine to the effect that frameworks are natural languages would be unstated, unargued, and unnecessary. These points alone should, to put it mildly, make one a bit skeptical of the view that I hold or have held such a thesis. Moreover, given Carnap’s seemingly evident interest in and fondness for constructed languages, and the evident focus on such languages in ESO, any thesis to the effect that frameworks are natural languages would be surprising, not to say bizarre. And it would be all the more bizarre to maintain such a thesis without bothering to either state it or defend it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I have here elided some considerations Broughton brings up in the longer passage I am quoting from, having to do with so-called pragmatic-external questions. I will introduce these considerations only later.

<sup>3</sup> I might add that in a blog post from January 28, 2021, André Carus (2021), one of the two authors of the (2020) *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry “Rudolf Carnap,” brings up Broughton’s article and describes Broughton as someone who “has now decided that enough is enough, and sprayed some serious ant killer on irruption of philosophical insect life.” Generally, Carus says that “during the past few years a lot of rubbish has been circulating about Carnapian frameworks.” (As examples of “rubbish,” Carus mentions not only my work on Carnap but also that of David Chalmers (2009).) Turning to specifics, what Carus mentions Broughton as having shown, as against me, is that frameworks are not natural languages. Again, the thesis under attack simply is not mine.

Consider also Broughton's own summary of my main claims:

An internal question—a question posed *within* a framework—is thus a question posed in a language. An external question, understood as a question about a matter of fact, would be a question posed in no language at all. No wonder Carnap found such questions unintelligible. On the other hand, Eklund suggests, the practical question of which language to speak seems perfectly intelligible. Again, just as Carnap suggested.

If this reading is correct, then it refutes Quine's claim that the internal/external (I/E) distinction is bound up with the analytic/synthetic (A/S) distinction. In fact, on this reading, the I/E distinction does not seem to be bound up with much of anything that one might find problematic. The notion of a framework looks downright trivial. (Broughton 2021, 4098)

I basically find this a fair summary of my view, even if I will get to some complications below. But note that on Broughton's own summary of my view, any insistence on the frameworks being *natural* languages would be completely otiose. What reasonable work could "natural" even do, when inserted before the particular occurrences of "language"?

There is even an internal tension between different theses Broughton appears to ascribe to me. In the passage just quoted, he ascribes to me the view that internal questions are questions posed in languages, and external questions would *hence* be questions posed in no language at all. The "hence" is unstated but I take it to be conveyed by Broughton's "would." But if we take frameworks to be natural languages and only natural languages, the reasoning would seem to amount to: "An internal question is a question posed in a natural language; an external question would be a question posed in no language at all." There would be an obvious retort: couldn't an external question be asked in a non-natural, constructed language?<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In the main text, I am concerned to show how Broughton misreads me. One question that arises is what explains Broughton's misreading. One possibility is that Broughton (to my mind somewhat reasonably) thinks it is so obvious that frameworks are languages of some kind that it cannot possibly be that obvious point I am making—and so he reinterprets me as

#### 4. Broughton's reasoning

The natural language thesis would be quite startling given common knowledge of Carnap. Moreover, I neither state it nor argue for it, and it is unnecessary for my purposes. But of course, none of these points *conclusively* shows that I have not relied any such thesis in my work on Carnap. I could have surreptitiously relied on such a thesis. So let us take a look at the reasons Broughton adduces, and otherwise might have, for ascribing the thesis to me.

First, Broughton fastens on the fact that I use natural language examples when discussing Carnapian theses. In my discussions, I do keep using natural language examples when discussing frameworks and one may take this to be a reason for ascribing to me the natural language thesis. But the mere fact that I use natural language examples should not be accorded much weight: as Broughton himself notes, Carnap does too.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, already if it does not matter what kind of language is used, one can stick to natural language examples, which have the advantage of being familiar. Moreover, and more specifically, consider the following alternatives to the natural language thesis given which it is perfectly natural and reasonable to use natural language examples:

*The permissive thesis.* Both natural and other languages are frameworks in Carnap's sense.

*The indifference thesis.* Carnap's aims when drawing the external/internal distinction are such that it doesn't matter exactly which sorts of languages are at issue.

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meaning something more specific, natural languages, where he speaks of "languages." But as described in the last section, there are various interpretations of Carnap which take him to invoke something relativism-like.

<sup>5</sup> In section 5 of his article, Broughton argues that Carnap's own use of such examples is compatible with rejection of the natural language thesis. I agree, but would disagree with the further claim that this is in tension with my interpretation—for the reason I do not ascribe the natural language thesis to Carnap.



Both these theses are compatible with Carnap's having independently held views, e.g., about the messiness of natural language, which led him to focus on constructed languages.

There are two slightly different versions of the indifference thesis. One (immodest) version claims that Carnap's overall outlook was such that he was indifferent to the question of what sorts of languages are at issue. Another (modest) version claims merely that for a general understanding of the internal/external distinction and its use in metaontology it does not matter whether natural or constructed languages are at issue. The modest version is compatible with the claim that Carnap for independent reasons, perhaps a desire to exclude natural languages due to their messiness, would only have counted constructed languages among frameworks.

Given either of these theses, the use of natural language examples is natural and justified. Given the permissive thesis, natural languages are some of the frameworks there are. Given the indifference thesis, it is a matter of indifference, as far as the external/internal distinction and its uses are concerned, whether natural languages are among the frameworks. Again, it makes sense to use natural language examples, for they do not do any harm and they do not require as much set-up.

Neither the permissive thesis nor the indifference thesis involves the bizarre claim that constructed languages would fail to count as frameworks. And return now to some central points Broughton brings up against me. In a passage already quoted, Broughton emphasizes Carnap's "ubiquitous references to *constructing* and *establishing* frameworks, his insistence that a crucial step in the formation of a framework is the introduction of certain variables, and his explicit focus on the *specialized* languages of science and semantics" (Broughton 2021, 4098), and the claim (which I will return to later) that Carnap held that no natural language sentence is analytic. These points are perfectly compatible with both the permissive thesis and the indifference thesis. All that they show is that constructed languages can be counted among the frameworks.

Either of the weaker theses would justify my use of natural language examples. But it is not even clear that the weaker theses are needed for what Broughton himself summarizes as



my main claims. Again, all I need is that frameworks are *languages*.<sup>6</sup> No further details about the status of these languages as natural or constructed are relevant given my aims.

In addition to focusing on my use of examples from natural language, Broughton adduces the following piece of evidence. It has to do with my talk of what language we “actually employ” and “actually use” in my (2009). I think those formulations of mine were somewhat unhelpful. But they do not indicate what Broughton seems to think they indicate. Here is the relevant bit from my paper, quoted by Broughton:

If “framework” means language-fragment, the internal questions are those that concern what comes out true in the language we actually employ; pragmatic-external [questions] concern which language it is useful to employ; and factual-external questions are neither and thus by Carnap’s lights make no sense. Here is an analogy. One can imagine three different debates, two of which are in order and one confused, that all can be brought under the heading “Is the tomato a fruit or a vegetable?” (1) Most straightforwardly, we can conceive of a debate over whether the [sentence] “the tomato is a fruit” is true as turning on what actually comes out true in our common language, English. When you and I discuss the matter, then you win if you say “the tomato is a fruit” and this sentence actually

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<sup>6</sup> Here is a further reason why it is odd to ascribe the natural language thesis to me. In (2013), discussing Scott Soames, I quote Soames saying “[Carnap’s] key thesis is that ontological questions are intelligible only within a scientific framework for describing the world. Such a framework is a formalized (or formalizable) language, with semantic rules interpreting its expressions, and assigning truth conditions to its sentences” (Soames 2009, 428, quoted in Eklund 2013, 235). Soames is here explicit that he holds that for Carnap a framework is a formalized or formalizable language. But when discussing this, I only discuss the fact that for Soames, a framework is a language (and notes that this seems incompatible with other things Soames goes on to say). If I subscribed to the natural language thesis, or even generally found it important that natural languages must be counted among frameworks, one would expect me to somehow mark disagreement here. The alternative would be to take me just to simply fail to notice the disagreement with Soames over this point. Thanks here to the anonymous referee I mentioned in the general acknowledgments.

is what comes out true in our language. Taken thus, it is an internal question. (2) Somewhat less straightforwardly, perhaps, we can imagine a debate where the disputants are less concerned with what comes out true in English as actually spoken, but are concerned with whether it would be more pragmatically useful to speak a version of English just like English except for the possible difference that “the tomato is a fruit” comes out true there. Taken thus, the debate is over a pragmatic-external question. (3) Most obscurely, we can imagine two disputants who announce that they are not concerned with what comes out true in English—perhaps both agree that “the tomato is a fruit” is best English—and who further announce that they are not concerned with a pragmatic question of how we should speak. They announce that what they are concerned with is whether, in some language-independent sense, the tomato really is a fruit. If it is hard to wrap one’s mind around what this would amount to, that is because these disputants would be seriously confused.<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on this, Broughton says:

The first point that I want to make is just the one that I flagged above, viz. that Eklund takes Carnapian frameworks to be *natural* languages. He arguably suggests as much when he says that internal questions concern what comes out *true in the language we actually employ*, since we actually employ natural languages. But his commitment to this reading comes out even more clearly in the course of his discussion of the debates over “The tomato is a fruit” and “There are numbers.” In the tomato example, Eklund tells us that the internal question concerns whether “The tomato is a fruit” comes out true *in English*. Meanwhile, the pragmatic-external question concerns whether it would be useful to speak an *English-like* language in which “The tomato is a fruit” comes out true. And similarly in the numbers dispute. I conclude that, in general, Eklund takes Carnapian frameworks to be natural languages or slight variations thereof. (Broughton 2021, 4103–04)

The fact that the example is from natural language is a feature that is irrelevant for the argument. To show this, let me

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<sup>7</sup> Eklund 2009, 133. Quoted in Broughton 2021, 4103.

switch the example to one involving some formalism. Consider a sentence of the form “ $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$ ,” of some given constructed language, and consider different sorts of disputes between a classical logician and a dialetheist concerning this sentence. First, there is a possible object-level dispute. One assertively utters this sentence; the other utters its negation and adduces evidence for it, and the dispute concerns whether that sentence, in the language they both employ, is true. If the language to which the sentence belongs is a constructed framework with explicitly laid down rules, that dispute can be easily settled. Second, while *using* that same sentence they can in fact be engaged in a dispute over whether, for pragmatic purposes, it would be best to use a (formal) language where this sentence comes out true. This would be an instance of metalinguistic negotiation, in Plunkett and Sundell’s (2013) terms: non-metalinguistic sentences are used to issue conflicting metalinguistic recommendations. Third, the disputants are agreed both on what truth-value the sentence has in their common language (or their respective languages if they use different ones) and on pragmatic matters, but still have an attempted dispute over whether “it *really* is the case that  $\sim(p \ \& \ \sim p)$ .”

This is exactly the tripartite distinction I draw in the passage quoted. The distinction is obviously as applicable in the case of constructed languages as in the case of natural languages. Again to stress, one can certainly use a natural language example without thereby committing to the natural language thesis.

What then about the use of the “actually”? The use of the “actually” is there in order to distinguish one kind of use of a sentence from other kinds of uses that can be made of it. In the relevant use what matters is what comes out true in the language the disputants employ; and it is natural to use “actually” to emphasize the point.<sup>8</sup> In the revised formulation of

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<sup>8</sup> In a footnote Broughton mentions the possibility of this alternative reading of the use of “actually” (Broughton 2021, 4103, fn. 6), which makes it odd to stress the use of “actually” to support his reading of me. (In the passage at issue, I speak of our “actual language” in the singular. It would be in line with Broughton’s reading of me to say that on Carnap’s view, internal questions can only be raised in one language: the one language

my point, the object-level dispute turns on what constructed language the logicians in fact – or “actually” – use.

## 5. The weaker theses

Broughton ascribes the natural language thesis to me. The natural language thesis is obviously false. Moreover, as I have shown, it is not reasonable to ascribe it to me. One may think that none of this need matter much in the grander scheme of things, if Broughton also showed that the weaker theses discussed in the last section are false. But first, as already stressed, I do not even need the weaker theses. Second, Broughton shows no such thing. Arguing against the natural language thesis, Broughton makes points such as the following:

... ESO is filled with creation talk. We hear about *constructing* frameworks and *establishing* them. We hear about *introducing* expressions and *laying down* rules. None of this would be at home in a discussion of the properties of a natural language. What's more, Carnap says that a crucial step in the construction of a framework is the introduction of certain *variables*. Yet everyday English makes no use of variables. Carnap also makes frequent reference in ESO to *specialized* languages, specifically languages associated with the sciences and philosophical semantics.

Carnap seems to be concerned less with ordinary English than with, as he puts it, the language (or, perhaps, the mere *calculus*) of mathematics, the language of physics, and so on. (Broughton 2021, 4105)

These are relevant points against the natural language thesis. But the fact that Carnap is so preoccupied with constructed languages can show nothing more than that constructed languages of a certain type are among what Carnap calls frameworks, and that Carnap finds these constructed languages to be of special interest. None of this speaks against either of the weaker theses.

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we currently use. That would be an interesting, but decidedly odd, interpretation of Carnap...)

As for it being an, as Carnap puts it, “essential” step in the construction of a framework to introduce variables, a main point to stress is that it is one thing to say, as Carnap does, that this step is crucial in the construction of a given framework and another to say that this step is crucial in the construction of any framework.<sup>9</sup>

Attention to the context where Carnap says this also shows that what is going on is that Carnap thinks, following Quine, that it is existential quantification in a formal language that carries ontological commitment. Recall here the modest version of what I called the indifference thesis. This view on existence talk and ontological commitment may provide a reason to focus exclusively on formal, constructed languages in discussions of ontology, but it is a view on existence talk that is separable from any appeal to an internal/external distinction.

Later in his discussion, Broughton appeals to the supposed fact that Carnap denied that sentences of natural languages are properly called analytic and notes that in ESO, Carnap “is perfectly happy to apply the term [“analytic”] to sentences formulated in a framework” (Broughton 2021, 4108). I am not as sure as Broughton seems to be that Carnap’s considered view was that natural language sentences are never analytic. But however that may be, Broughton’s argument here again at most shows that some sentences of some frameworks are not natural language sentences. This again is compatible with either of the weaker theses.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> One may in principle question whether it is so obvious that English does not use variables. But let this pass.

<sup>10</sup> The remarks in the main text suffice as a response to what Broughton says about analyticity, but there is more to add. Broughton does adduce seemingly compelling evidence for the claim that for Carnap no natural language sentences are analytic. He quotes Carnap saying:

the analytic-synthetic distinction can be drawn always and only with respect to a *language system*, i.e., a language organized according to explicitly formulated rules, not with respect to a historically given natural language (Carnap 1990, 432, quoted in Broughton 2021, 4108; Broughton’s emphasis added).

As noted early on, I have stressed in earlier work that given my interpretation of Carnap, the internal/external distinction is not bound up with the analytic/synthetic distinction. Given that it at least seems that Carnap agrees with Quine that the two distinctions are closely connected, this is a potential problem for me. Broughton takes it to be a point in favor of his view that he respects Carnap's view on the connection, saying "While it's always possible that Carnap somehow misunderstood his own views, surely, all else being equal, we should prefer an interpretation that avoids this result" (Broughton 2021, 4119). The idea is that given his proposal there is the following connection: if frameworks are formal languages and formal languages are characterized in part by semantic rules, then formal languages will contain analytic sentences, corresponding somehow to these semantic rules. But I am doubtful regarding the truth of this conditional claim.

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One may think no further evidence is needed. This is as explicit as it gets. But other things that Carnap says blur the picture. The very same paper that Broughton quotes from begins as follows:

It must be emphasized that the concept of analyticity has an exact definition only in the case of a language system, namely a system of semantical rules, not in the case of an ordinary language, because in the latter the words have no clearly defined meaning. (Carnap 1990, 427)

This is different. Here Carnap is not saying that the analytic-synthetic distinction *cannot be drawn* with respect to ordinary language, but only that analyticity does not have an "exact definition" with respect to ordinary language. I think the evidence regarding Carnap and the analyticity of ordinary language sentences is equivocal. Moreover, the whole of Carnap (1955) is an apparently constructive attempt to make sense of synonymy – and hence, by Carnap's lights, analyticity – in natural languages.

What is more, some things Broughton himself says are in tension with holding that for Carnap no natural language sentences are analytic. In connection with defending (I/E), Broughton, as I will get to, allows that some natural language sentences can be straightforwardly translated into what by Broughton's lights are framework sentences. But then these natural language sentences can be said to be governed by semantic rules corresponding to framework sentences, and generally have semantic features corresponding to the framework sentences, including analyticity.

Broughton says that if, like me, one denies that the two distinctions are bound up with each other, then one holds that Carnap *misunderstood* his own views, given that Carnap held that the distinctions are related. But there are other possibilities. For example, one possibility is that Carnap simply held further views given which the views are bound up with each other. And in fact, what Carnap says is:

Quine does not acknowledge the distinction which I emphasize above, because according to his general conception there are no sharp boundary lines between logical and factual truth, between questions of meaning and questions of fact, between the acceptance of a language structure and the acceptance of an assertion formulated in the language. (Carnap 1950, 215, fn. 5)

Here Carnap appears to equate acceptance of the analytic/synthetic distinction (that there is a “sharp boundary” between “logical” and “factual” truth), with accepting that there is a distinction between “acceptance of a language structure and the acceptance of an assertion formulated in the language.” But it seems that one can agree with Quine regarding the analytic/synthetic distinction even while holding that it is one thing to decide to speak a language and another to accept given assertions formulated in that language. To put things more plainly: Quine took his rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction to allow him to play fast and loose with the distinction between languages and theories, and Carnap seemed to agree, but there is no reason to go along with this.

## 6. Broughton’s positive proposal

Let me now turn to Broughton’s own positive proposal regarding what Carnap’s internal/external distinction amounts to. I will both discuss the proposal in its own right, and how the positive proposal relates to my understanding of Carnap and Broughton’s criticisms of me. The proposal is this:

(I/E) An internal question is a question that can be straightforwardly translated as the question whether  $\phi$ , where  $\phi$  is a sentence of some framework  $S$ , and  $\phi$  is understood to have the meaning assigned to it by the semantical rules of  $S$ . An external



question is a question that is not an internal question.  
(Broughton 2021, 4118)

A framework is, in turn, a formal language “endowed with a syntax, a semantics, and a confirmation theory” (Broughton 2021, 4099). Broughton further thinks that for Carnap many (questions corresponding to) sentences of natural language – all sentences such that it is too unclear what they mean – fail the test for being internal in this sense, and so fall on the side of external questions. As formulated, Broughton’s proposal of course straightforwardly entails that frameworks are not natural languages.

I have expressed concerns about how Broughton discusses my work on Carnap. But even if Broughton’s criticisms of me are misguided, it could be that his own positive proposal is a better proposal than what I have presented.

Before assessing Broughton’s proposal, let me stress that Broughton’s positive view actually is congenial to much of what I want to say. On Broughton’s view as on mine, Carnap has no truck with relativism, and the talk of frameworks itself is relatively straightforward and uncontroversial. Moreover, note that an internal question can for Broughton be one formulated in natural language. It is fully consistent with Broughton’s proposal to use natural language examples of internal questions. All that is needed is that it be possible to translate the natural language sentences into sentences of a suitable formal language. (Although Broughton adds, reasonably, that Carnap thought that due to the messiness of natural languages such translation will seldom or never be determinately correct (Broughton 2021, 4117).<sup>11</sup>) Moreover, there is nothing in Broughton’s proposal that is in tension with the alternatives to the natural language thesis that I discussed earlier.

It is independently plausible that for Carnap, translatability into a framework sentence is a necessary condition for (cognitive) meaningfulness. But then the translatability condition in Broughton’s (I/E) just amounts to a meaningfulness condition.

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<sup>11</sup> Broughton does think that for Carnap what users of natural language mean in the sense of speaker meaning may be more determinate.

That said, I am not persuaded by Broughton's proposal. My concerns are straightforward. For Broughton, any question that is deficient in meaning in such a way that it cannot be translated into a sentence of a framework—i.e., for Broughton, of a suitable constructed language—is an external question. But Carnap is clear that he has in mind something much more specific by "external" than Broughton allows: he has in mind a certain kind of philosophical question. In his *Intellectual Autobiography* (1963)—which Broughton himself centrally appeals to—he says:

In accord with my old principle of tolerance, I proposed to admit any forms of expression as soon as sufficient logical rules for their use are given. If a philosopher asks a question like "are there natural numbers?", he means it as a question so-to-speak outside the given language, raised for the purpose of examining the admissibility of such a language. Therefore I called philosophical questions of existence of this kind external questions. (Carnap 1963, 66)

Remarks like this leave no doubt that Carnap meant something rather specific by "external" in such a way that not every question that fails to be internal in Broughton's sense is external. Earlier, in *ESO*, Carnap says, "From the internal questions we must clearly distinguish external questions, i.e., philosophical questions concerning the existence or reality of the total system of the new entities" (Carnap 1950, 214)—and on Broughton's interpretation, the "i.e." should have been an "e.g." Carnap, I might add, throughout only uses philosophical questions about the existence or reality of some new entities as examples of external questions. By itself that may be meagre evidence against Broughton's proposal: Carnap could be using these specific examples just because ontology happens to be the topic at hand. But together with Carnap's explicit statements about what he takes external questions to be, these facts about what examples Carnap uses provide further evidence against Broughton's interpretation. Carnap's external questions all have a certain distinctive philosophical flavor; the class of vague or unclear questions posed in natural language is certainly bigger than that.

A central feature of Broughton's own proposal is that it treats the internal/external distinction as exhaustive. All

questions are either internal or external: any question that does not meet the conditions for being internal counts as external. The labels "internal" and "external" do of course suggest that the distinction is exhaustive: a question is either *inside* or *outside*, whatever exactly this means. But I see no reason to think that the distinction in fact must be exhaustive or that Carnap's discussion indicates that it has to be. And if the class of external questions is narrow in the way I have argued, it would be odd to take the internal/external distinction to be exhaustive. For what it is worth, Carnap's examples of internal questions indicate that they too always in some way concern existence. I do not see that anything I have said commits me to a particular stance on the issue. More importantly, I do not see that I need to take a stand on this. The important point for me is that what an internal question is internal to, and what an external question is external to, is a language, and it is of less importance whether all questions internal to languages count as "internal" and all questions external to languages count as "external."

Even if Carnap's distinction is not intended as exhaustive, a modified version of his proposal still could work. Broughton might say:

(I/E\*) An internal question is a question that can be straightforwardly translated as the question whether  $\varphi$ , where  $\varphi$  is a sentence of some framework  $S$ , and  $\varphi$  is understood to have the meaning assigned to it by the semantical rules of  $S$ . An external question is a *certain type of* purported non-internal question concerned with the existence of the entities postulated by the framework.

As I will get to in the next section, one may want to add a restriction regarding what counts as an internal question parallel to that added regarding external questions. I will not get into further discussion of (I/E\*). For reasons noted above in connection with (I/E), it would not be problematic for me to accept that thesis. And I do not see that anything in my general outlook on Carnap commits me to thinking that the internal/external distinction is exhaustive, so I have no problem with the modification involved in (I/E\*). Of course, the "certain type" is vague and anyone defending (I/E\*) may wish to say more about that clause.

## 7. “Internal” and “external” revisited

I have defended my interpretation of Carnap against what I take to be Broughton’s chief objections, which involves gratuitously imputing to me the natural language thesis, and I have criticized (I/E), Broughton’s alternative interpretation of Carnap’s distinction between internal and external questions. But let me end on a more constructive note, and by making a concession to Broughton. In addition to other points he seeks to make, Broughton criticizes my take on “external” versus “internal” for being unduly simple. For example, if an internal question is simply one internal to a language and an external question is one where one tries to stand outside language and so asks no question at all, where do the pragmatic-external questions fit in?<sup>12</sup>) More specifically, can’t a supposed pragmatic-external question be raised perfectly well in a suitable language and would it not then be internal? At least in natural language one can certainly ask things like: ought we to use this language or that?

I believe Broughton is entirely right to raise questions regarding this aspect of my discussion. Before returning to what I have earlier said, let me first focus on how best to describe the distinction between internal, pragmatic-external and factual-external questions within the overall picture that I present.

Let me first note that perhaps one ought not to expect very much precision. Carnap’s labels “internal” and “external” may be evocative and useful—indeed, the popularity of appeal to the distinction may have to do with how evocative the labels are—but Carnap did not offer necessary and sufficient conditions for falling in either category. This omission may be perfectly justifiable: a distinction can be useful despite failing to be completely clear and sharp. Moreover, the specific labels “pragmatic-external” and “factual-external” are from me. While the distinction is there in Carnap, it is less emphasized and Carnap does not even try to label the distinction. There is then some reason to suspect that problems may arise when

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<sup>12</sup> Broughton 2021, p. 4098–99. This point about pragmatic-external questions is the part from Broughton’s summary of his criticisms of me that I elided earlier.

one tries to be more careful about what that distinction amounts to.

However, that said, there actually are some helpful things to say.

I have already criticized the assumption that the internal-external distinction is exhaustive. Given that the distinction is not exhaustive, the question "where do the pragmatic questions fit in" does not have the same bite. They could form a separate category. But there still remains the question: why are these pragmatic questions not a subspecies of internal questions?

One way to respond to this question is to say that not all questions in some sense internal to the kinds of languages at issue (whether these are natural languages, constructed languages, or both) are internal in Carnap's sense. Just as all external questions in Carnap's sense are intended as having to do with existence, all internal questions have to do with existence. Pragmatic-external questions are not internal because they are not themselves existence questions.

Getting more specific, I find the following passage in ESO very helpful:

On the other hand, the external questions of the reality of physical space and physical time are pseudo-questions. A question like: "Are there (really) space-time points?" is ambiguous. It may be meant as an internal question; then the affirmative answer is, of course, analytic and trivial. Or it may be meant in the external sense: "Shall we introduce such and such forms into our language?"; in this case it is not a theoretical but a practical question, a matter of decision rather than assertion, and hence the proposed formulation would be misleading. Or finally, it may be meant in the following sense: "Are our experiences such that the use of the linguistic forms in question will be expedient and fruitful?" This is a theoretical question of a factual, empirical nature. But it concerns a matter of degree; therefore a formulation in the form "real or not?" would be inadequate. (Carnap 1950, 213)

What Carnap speaks of as "ambiguity" seems to be the fact that a given form of words may be used to convey different things. The form of words "are there space-time points?" can, first, simply be used to ask whether there are space-time

points, as in general “are there *F*s?” can be used to ask whether there are *F*s. But the form of words may also be used in different ways. It can be used to raise a practical question—the pragmatic-external question. The form of words is then used to convey something other than convey what the sentence semantically expresses. The label “external” is rather apt because the questioner seeks to view the language from the outside, even if, of course, the sentence “should we speak a language in which ‘there are space-time points’ comes out true?” would express the same thing, and count as internal. The form of words can also be used to ask the “factual, empirical” question Carnap mentions at the end of this passage.

Finally, although he does not say so in the passage just quoted, I take Carnap to hold that there are philosophers who would be apt to use the same form of words to try to ask a different question, one that is not the internal question, not the practical one, and not the factual, empirical one about efficiency, but is a philosophical question about the reality of the entities in question. It is this question that Carnap takes to be a chimera.

As should be clear, Carnap actually distinguishes between *four* different kinds of questions. There is the internal question, the practical (pragmatic-external) question, the “theoretical question of a factual, empirical nature”—and then the kind of (confused) external question that purports to be a genuine theoretical question. I wonder if there is not yet another problem for Broughton here. I do not see why the “theoretical question of a factual, empirical nature” could not be an internal question in the sense of Broughton’s Carnap. But Carnap evidently does not class such a question as internal.

I think that my reasoning in the “the tomato is a fruit” case very well captures the sort of issue that Carnap’s internal/external distinction concerns.<sup>13</sup> There too we have the one and the same form of words that may be used to raise different issues. There is the straightforward issue of whether “the tomato is a fruit” is true in the language used by the speaker (this is what I spoke of as the language actually employed). There is the practical—pragmatic-external—question

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<sup>13</sup> Leaving aside the fact that Carnap focused on existence questions, of course.

of which language to speak (and the corresponding question about efficiency). And there is the confused, supposedly deep philosophical question.

While both the practical and the confused question may be called “external,” they are “external” in quite different ways. The confused question is external in that it aims to be a question raised in no language at all and in that sense external to all language. A pragmatic-external question is external not in that sense but in the sense that it serves to ask questions *about* languages, *assessing* them. Both kinds of questions can be called external, but they are external in different ways.

## 8. Concluding remarks

Broughton ascribes to me the view that for Carnap, frameworks are exclusively natural languages. This is a misunderstanding on Broughton’s part. Broughton’s discussion of his own positive thesis regarding Carnap’s external/internal distinction is better, and his positive ideas hold more promise, but I have explained why this positive thesis should be rejected. Finally, I turned to the constructive task of, within my general picture, accounting for Carnap’s distinction between internal questions, pragmatic-external, and (supposed) factual-external questions. Along the way, I have discussed whether the internal/external distinction is exhaustive, and I have noted that in Carnap there is a distinction between four kinds of questions.

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