Meaning and Linguistic Sound:
Why Are Sounds Imposed on Our Minds?

Abolfazl Sabramiz
University of Mofid

ABSTRACT: An interesting fact about the meaning of words is the compulsion to perceive them; when we encounter a symbol, we perceive its meaning without the least mental effort. In this paper, I answer the questions, "How does the meaning of a word impose itself on us?" and "How does a symbol become meaningful and what is the meaning of a symbol?" By emphasizing the time when we understand a word, I introduce the reality of words versus the language convention. By distinguishing between giving meaning to words and their having a meaning, I show how, just like a reality, a word has a function appropriate to its unique character. We replace an independent entity called "meaning" with this function of understanding. Eventually, by distinguishing between the language act and the speaker's act, I show that the creative aspect of language is related to the layer of the language act rather than the speaker's act.

Introduction

The question of meaning is one of the persistent questions in philosophy. Colin McGinn states that meaning, selves, and consciousness are among the redoubtable traditional philosophical subjects (63). Questions regarding meaning are usually formalized in the form of various categorizations. Ned Block writes that we should differentiate between the two projects of linguistic semantics and metaphysical semantics. For instance, linguistic semantics asks how particular expressions in a particular language fit together to make up the meaning of a longer expression, but metaphysical semantics is about investigating the fundamental nature of meaning. Also, Jeff Speaks argues that the question of meaning can be divided into the two questions: "What is the meaning of this or that symbol (for a particular person or group)?" and "In virtue of what facts about that person or group does the symbol have that meaning?"

Generally, two responses are given to the question, "What is the meaning of a particular symbol?" One response tries to search for the meaning of a symbol in relation to a specific object in the external world or representation of the world according to the sentence. The other response seeks to search for the meaning of a symbol in relation to other linguistic signs, which together form a system of signs.

It is generally accepted that the sound or symbol itself is not significant. By "sound," I mean linguistic symbols, and it does not make any difference whether the symbol is a sound or text. But in order to maintain coherence in this study, I discuss only linguistic sounds instead of symbols. What gives significance to a linguistic sound is usually considered to be something beyond that sound that somehow makes that sound meaningful to us in a way that, by using sounds, we can speak beyond our current time and place, perceive the combination of unseen sounds, and have the capability of describing the world; through these symbols we communicate satisfactorily with one another.

It is often assumed that meaning cannot be a sound itself, because, as arbitrary elements, sounds cannot transcend our current time or speak about the future. Also, sound as a physical thing cannot be a presentation of a part of the physical world, since a physical thing cannot have the about-ness of another physical thing (Putnam). In other words, the sounds do not communicate with one another; rather, their meanings make communication possible.

Nevertheless, when we hear or read a linguistic symbol, we perceive that symbol easily. In a way, it could be said that symbols are imposed on the mind. William Lycan writes: "Those certain kinds of marks and noises have meaning, and that we human beings grasp those meanings without even thinking about it, are very striking facts" (1). In other words, when we face a linguistic sound, we not only understand it easily but we also cannot not have an understanding of it. This issue becomes more conspicuous when we notice that the expressions that we normally hear are mostly new and original and that we have no prior familiarity with the set of sounds that we are hearing (Chomsky, *Language and Mind*, 10). Thomas Nagel asks: "What do we all have in our minds when, for instance, we think 'Tobacco is getting more expensive every year'?" And he answers: "Consciously, at least, I don't need anything more than the word itself in my mind to think, 'Tobacco is getting more expensive every year'" (42).

What Nagel is expressing here is the same "striking fact" about meaning that Lycan also states: that a linguistic sound is imposed on the mind. In this paper, I show how an answer to the question, "Why are sounds or symbols imposed on the mind?" is an answer to the question "What is the meaning of a particular symbol?" Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty, in answer to Alice's question of "The question is, whether you CAN make words mean so many different things," replies, "The question is, which is to be master – that's all." When Humpty Dumpty states that a word "means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less" (57), he is saying that we are the masters of words, not their slaves. But apparently, what really happens when we face linguistic sounds is that we are slaves of words, not their masters. In this paper, I show how words (linguistic sounds) cannot not have the meaning that they have.

Sign: Real vs. Arbitrary

Generally, we learn the phonetic part of language from the environment. Linguistic sounds and the behavior of the members of the language community in response to hearing these sounds are naturally the only available data. W. V. Quine believes that "what the naturalist insists on is that even in the complex and obscure parts of language learning, the learner has no data to work with but the overt behavior of other speakers" (28). Even Noam Chomsky holds that although a child might have a list of concepts prior to any experience, yet the learner is looking at the world to figure out which sound goes with the concept (*Language and Problems*, 191).

Likewise, the principle of the arbitrary nature of signs that is mentioned by Ferdinand Saussure is a principle for illustrating the relationship between sound and meaning (67). Here, arbitrariness means that human language uses neutral sound symbols. There is no connection between the word "dog" and the four-legged animal it symbolizes (Aitchison, 21).

To consider language as a convention in this sense is generally opposed to considering sounds to be natural as Plato ascribes to Cratylus. Cratylus believes that just as the shape, size, and form of an animal such as a horse are among its natural properties, the word "horse" must also be considered its natural property (Robins, 18). The idea of the conventionality of language or the arbitrariness of the relationship between form and meaning in this sense seems to be acceptable; otherwise, the conventionality of language does not mean that we are free to choose a particular linguistic sound.

What is meant by the conventionality of the relationship between form and meaning usually is that what is referred to as the meaning of a particular symbol is one side of the convention, and sound (a written, audio, visual, etc. sign) is the other side of the convention; it is this bilateral relationship that makes a partic-

ular sign meaningful. The other side of the conventional relationship, which is called the "meaning" of a sound, can be an external object or the state of affairs – as mentioned in the theory of direct reference – or it can be an idea in the mind, as Locke believes.

However, we know that neither individuals nor society are free to change linguistic signs. For example, we are not free to use the word "sky" instead of the word "tree" and intend the same meaning. In this regard, Saussure writes:

> The signifier, though to all appearances freely chosen with respect to the idea that it represents, is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it. The masses have no voice in the matter, and the signifier chosen by language could be replaced by no other. This fact, which seems to embody a contradiction, might be called colloquially 'the stacked deck'. […] No individual, even if he willed it, could modify in any way at all the choice that has been made; and what is more, the community itself cannot control so much as a single word; it is bound to the existing language. [71]

Therefore, although the relationship between form and meaning is an arbitrary one, this arbitrariness does not mean that we are free to interfere with this relationship. On the other hand, as I mentioned in the introduction, one fact about meaning is the imposition of the word on the mind, just as Lycan or, in my opinion, Nagel states. The imposition of linguistic sounds on the mind challenges their arbitrariness at the individual level. At the social level, society's inability to change a linguistic sign arbitrarily also challenges the arbitrary relationship between form and meaning. If we leave establishing a conventional relationship between sound and meaning to language itself, then we face the question of how language can select a sound for a concept independently of individuals or society. In order to reconcile

the arbitrariness of signs and their compulsoriness once a linguistic sign gains currency, Saussure introduced the idea of "compulsory choice." But it seems that compulsory choice is less a solution for reconciling arbitrariness and compulsoriness in the relationship between form and meaning than merely a description of an existing fact.

It appears that by distinguishing between two different times in our discussion of a linguistic sign, we may expect to reconcile the arbitrariness of linguistic signs and the compulsoriness of understanding linguistic signs while encountering them; when we say a sound is imposed on the mind, we are speaking of a time that a certain person encounters a linguistic sound, that is, he or she is perceiving or producing a linguistic sign. From now on, I refer to this time as the live time of understanding. On the other hand, when we speak of the arbitrariness or compulsoriness of the relationship between form and meaning, we are discussing a linguistic sign without being primarily concerned with the understanding of that linguistic sign. For instance, when we say that we could have used another word instead of the word "dog" that would convey the same concept, we are speaking of a specific sound that, historically, could have been otherwise chosen for a particular concept. In fact, when we do not have the understanding of a linguistic symbol in mind but rather speak *about* that linguistic symbol, we can defend the conventionality or arbitrariness of the relationship between form and meaning. I refer to this time as the non-live time of understanding.

In brief, distinguishing between the live and non-live time of understanding can explain why we can regard the relationship between form and meaning as arbitrary and also can consider the understanding of a sound as compulsory. The compulsoriness of understanding refers to the time when the understanding of a linguistic sound is active and we encounter that sound in our everyday life. Also, considering the relationship arbitrary or

compulsory occurs when we speak *about* that sound and are not primarily concerned with understanding that sound.

In the introduction to this paper, I mentioned that taking into consideration the fact that a sound is imposed on the mind, I seek to find an answer to the question, "What is the meaning of a symbol?" Considering what was stated above, what I mean by the imposition of a sound on the mind is a concentration on the live time of understanding. Also, what I intend by the imposition of a sound is somewhat identical to Nagel's statement that in order to understand a word, we do not need anything more than the word itself. In fact, we can speak of the relationship between form or sound and meaning only when we are discussing a linguistic sign. But in the live time of understanding, all that is real is the sound (the sign's form), which, when we encounter it, we are compelled to understand.

To be more accurate, at the live time of understanding, there is no relationship between sound and meaning. This does not mean that our symbols are meaningless but rather that the meaning of a symbol or sound is that sound itself and there is no relationship to be found. The relationship here is restricted to the time when we are discussing symbols, that is, the non-live time of understanding. But, at the live time of understanding, what is real is the imposition of a sound on the mind in a way that the sound also provides us with an understanding.

Therefore, my answer to the question, "What is the meaning of a particular symbol or sound?" is that the meaning of a sound is the sound itself. Speaking of the relationship between the meaning and the sound is also related to the non-live time of understanding, but at the live time of understanding, the meaning of a sound is identical to the understanding we have when encountering that sound. If we accept this response, we will have to deal with at least two main questions. The first question is, "If the meaning of a sound is the sound itself, then why are some sounds meaningful and some meaning-less?" In other words, why should a particular linguistic sound create a certain understanding and not some other understanding? The second question is "How can a symbol, which is a physical thing like sound, arise from the creative aspect of language and meaning?" In the other sections of this paper, I answer these questions.

I have borrowed the idea of this paper and the provided answers from the notion of the *reality of words,* which was introduced by Behin Arbabi.

Giving Meaning vs. Having a Meaning

In the previous section, I distinguished between the live time of understanding, that is, when a particular linguistic sound is active, and the non-live time of understanding, that is, when we speak *about* a particular sound. To answer the question, "Why should a linguistic sound create a certain understanding?" we must distinguish between a sound's having a meaning and giving meaning to a sound.

At the live time of understanding, that is, when we encounter a linguistic sound, that sound is meaningful to us or creates an understanding. This understanding, which I regard as equivalent to the meaning of the symbol, is a compulsory understanding that is imposed on the mind. On the other hand, I mentioned that when we discuss a linguistic sign, we speak of something called meaning, which is in a conventional relationship with a sound. Thus, here we have to distinguish between the understanding that is created in a certain person's mind when he encounters a sound and the meaning of the sound that is intended while discussing (or talking *about*) a sign.

Usually, the meaning of a word such as "tree" is considered in two ways. First, and above all, the meaning of this word, which is an element in the language system, depends on its relationship with other words within that system. Second, its meaning depends on a particular object in the external world. In fact, these two aspects are the meaning of a symbol

when speaking *about* the symbol. This meaning refers to the non-live time of understanding, and it is here that we can place this meaning in a conventional relationship with a sound.

Normally, what is intended by the meaning of a linguistic sound are the factors that give meaning to it. The external world, the relationships of a sign in a system of signs, the speakers' behavior while encountering a particular sound, and so on, which are often considered to be the meaning of a sound, can be among the factors that give meaning to a sound rather than being the understanding of that sound at the live time of understanding. The distinction between having a meaning and giving meaning can be explained in this way: just as giving directions to a particular place is different from being in that place, giving meaning to a sound is different from understanding the sound itself.

Therefore, when we say that the meaning of a sound is the sound itself, it does not mean that we should ignore the factors that give meaning to a sound. It means that what is intended by the meaning of a sound can justify the conventional relationship between a physical symbol and a concept rather than explaining why a sound is imposed on the mind. In fact, in order to understand a word while hearing it in everyday life (for instance, while reading a text or listening to the words of another person), we do not need anything else; we neither think of the relationship of that word with the external world nor with other linguistic symbols nor a particular social behavior, but when we want to talk about that word, then we can mention any of these factors or other relationships.

I previously mentioned that in the live time of understanding, the linguistic convention cannot be taken into consideration the way it is discussed at the non-live time of understanding. As a matter of fact, during the live time of understanding, no conventional relationship can be traced between a sound and its meaning. For the linguistic convention during the live time of understanding, Arbabi uses the term *reality of word* (*Zaban-e Fahmha*). "Reality of word" means that when we face a linguistic sound or symbol, this sound imposes itself on the mind as a reality like any other reality. What I mean by "as a reality like any other reality" is that, just as when encountering a tree, for instance, we see only a tree and nothing else, when facing a linguistic sound we are somehow compelled to understand that sound and nothing else.

In semantics, there is no such thing as the meaning of objects. Facing objects or the state of affairs in the external world, we just perceive and understand them. But it is when we discuss language that the issue of meaning is raised. Apparently, the most important reason for this is that a linguistic symbol is regarded as a neutral element, the meaning of which should come from something beyond it. But, if we accept the distinction between the live time of understanding and the non-live time of understanding and grant that during the live time of understanding the relationship between a sound and its meaning is not conventional, then a sound, like any other physical object, will create the same understanding that it possesses.

Just as some of the factors that help us recognize a state of affairs in the world or an object are related to society and culture and some of them are related to human vision and the physical organism, the factors that give meaning to a sound, including external facts, social behavior, and being in a sign system, lead to a particular understanding of a sound and are not the understanding or meaning of that sound.

The reality of a sound is like the reality of a tree or a car and, just like a car, has a unique function that suits its features and character. Just as the components of a machine, such as the history of its development, its compatibility with the road and human anatomy, and so on, comprise the character and features of that machine and not the

machine itself, all of the things that add meaning to a sound and specify it are not the understanding of that sound but rather merely give meaning to it.

The factors that give meaning to a linguistic sound comprise the "character" of that sound. This character and its characteristics are made by the sound's relationship with the world, its relationship with other linguistic signs, and its relationship with the behaviors of the society's members. When a linguistic sound gained its character, it functions based on that character and produces an understanding. This understanding is imposed on the mind because it functions based on the sound's character.

The factors that give meaning to a linguistic sound comprise the "character" of that sound. What I mean by "character" are the characteristics that a word gains. And these characteristics can be the relationship with the world, relationship with other linguistic signs, and relationship of the words with the members of society, as when a linguistic sound gained its character, it functions based on that character and produces an understanding. This understanding is imposed on the mind because it functions based on the sound's character.

Therefore, it could be said that a particular understanding of a linguistic sound is the result of factors that make it meaningful. This particular understanding cannot go beyond the range of factors that make it meaningful or produce an understanding that is not a product from a process of meaning-giving or is not part of the character of that sound.

In brief, considering words as conventional implies that there is a relationship between a sound and its meaning. But considering words as real implies the idea that there is not a relationship between a sound and what has made the sound meaningful at the time of encountering it (live time of understanding). In order to understand a sound, we do not need anything more than the sound itself, and sounds are perceived effortlessly (Lycan, 1; Nagel, 42). Therefore, if what

is meant by meaning is understanding a linguistic sound, then the reality of words can explain how this linguistic sound is perceived. But if what is intended by meaning is what makes a linguistic sound meaningful, then we must doubt the existence of something called meaning that is responsible for understanding a linguistic sound.

Skepticism about an entity called "meaning" can also be found in the late works of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Quine. Wittgenstein states that "If we had to name anything which is the life of the sign, we should have to say that it was its *use*" (4). As John Lyons puts it, Wittgenstein's answer to the question of meaning is that there is no such thing as meaning. In fact, all we need regarding meaning is using a sign in a particular linguistic game (41).

Quine also considered uncritical semantics as the myth of a museum and, following Dewey, believed that meaning is primarily a property of behavior (27). He writes: "Surely one has no choice but to be an empiricist so far as one's theory of linguistic meaning is concerned" (81). Here, empiricism for Quine is linguistic behaviorism. By introducing the discussion of radical translation, which starts from home, he shows that not only is meaning neither fixed nor definite but that even extension is never definite (48). Here, the meaning of a sentence is not determined by reality but rather depends on our translation guide. And the reference of a word depends on the ontology created in our translation guide (Medina, 73-4), so we can no longer speak of a fixed and definite entity called "meaning."

What I mentioned about understanding a linguistic sound or symbol during the live time of understanding also included skepticism about an entity called "meaning," but not exactly in the same way that Wittgenstein or Quine believed. Both of them recognize a relationship between the sound and what they mention instead of meaning. But I stated that what is often referred to as meaning is, in fact, a factor that gives meaning to a lin-

guistic sound rather than meaning's being an entity that we are transferred to while encountering a linguistic sound. So we can doubt the existence of an entity called "meaning" but not through the ways mentioned so far.

Function of Language vs. Function of the Speaker

In the previous section, I explained how at the live time of understanding, a linguistic sound creates a particular understanding. In the following, I offer an answer to the question, "How can a linguistic sound, which has already become meaningful and has gained its own character of understanding, also explain the creative aspect of language?"

One of Chomsky's most important works is answering the question that he refers to as "Plato's problem." Plato's problem asks "How can we know so much when the evidence is so slight?" As Chomsky notes, Bertrand Russell asks a similar question: "How comes it that human beings, whose contacts with the world are brief and personal and limited, are nevertheless able to know as much as they do know?" (Russell, quoted in Chomsky, *Knowledge*, xxv). I think Quine is raising the same issue when he says that what has prompted epistemology has always been to find out how evidence relates to theory and in what ways one's theory of nature transcends any available evidence, or in other words, how mind can have a meager input and a torrential output (83).

The idea of the reality of words – considering words as real just like any other real thing – dims the distinction between language and non-language (the ultimate goal of this idea is to remove this distinction). Therefore, creativity is a characteristic of our understanding and not just a characteristic of language. Plato, Russell, and Quine all ask about creativity in understanding and not merely in language. In fact, just as in numerous situations, which are often new, we can understand the meaning of a word, in numerous different situations we can also understand an external reality. Just as the word "chair" might create different understandings in various situations, the external chair creates different understandings in various contexts.

In order to discuss creativity, we must distinguish between two layers of discussion. One discussion layer is the function of the speaker, and the other is the function of the words. Here, since we consider a person's understanding as the result of the function of the word, then the function of the speaker is meaningless and is just a discussion layer. The creativity aspect of our cognition is related to the function of the words or our understandings and not the functions of the speaker or perceiver.

For instance, consider the phrase "five chairs"; we call the understanding of the first word A and the understanding of the second word, that is, "chair," B. Now the question is how do we reach the understanding of AB, that is, "five chairs"? Any possible understanding may be replaced with A and B, and even each AB can be a new A or B in the next stage. The third understanding, which is obtained through the multiplication or combination of the primary understandings A and B, is new, original, and creative. The idea of the reality of words expresses that the third AB understanding is formed based on the character of understanding of each A or B. In fact, just as two chemical agents can combine and form a new substance based on their characteristics, any new understanding that is produced as a result of previous understandings follows a similar function.

Introducing limited rules – for example, biological rules, as Chomsky states or even Wittgenstein's rule-following – in order to justify creativity, confuses these two levels, and more attention is paid to the layer of the function of the speaker. Whereas by accepting the idea of the reality of words, each word or linguistic phrase is a reality that has its own unique behavior that fits its character and that

can or cannot be combined with other words. Here, the speaker or perceiver is only the place/location where these realities function. Raising the discussion of limited rules in order to justify the creativity of cognition (language) is similar to considering the creation of a new chemical substance from two other substances as the act of the chemist rather than as characteristics of those substances. The idea of the conventionality of language is one of the reasons why the difference between these two layers is not noticed. Regarding language as conventional implies that the speaker must establish a mutual relationship between sound and meaning whether consciously or institutionalized.

One objection may be that I consider language as consisting merely of words, while words are just part of language. In fact, the role of grammar and syntax and the significance of semantic discussions cannot be easily ignored. The idea of the reality of words can be extended to sentences and larger units. The central point of this idea is that when we hear a linguistic sound or set of sounds, we have an understanding of them. This understanding is always a single understanding. For example, when we hear a sentence like "Snow is white," we eventually reach an understanding of the sentence that is a simple understanding. As a matter of fact, it does not matter how many words our sentence includes; what matters is that we eventually reach a final, single understanding of that sentence. Although it could be said that while hearing this sentence, we have understandings of its components, eventually we form an understanding of the entire sentence.

The expressive innovation that Alfred Tarski uses in order to introduce his theory of truth can be helpful in clarifying what is meant by words in this article. Tarski states his theory of truth in this way: "Snow is white" is true if, and only if, snow is white. He adds: "Let me point out that the phrase 'snow is white' occurs on the left side of this equivalence in quotation marks, and on the right without quotation marks. On the right side we have the sentence itself, and on the left the name of the sentence" (343). When a listener hears an expression such as S, there is an evident external sound *and* an understanding corresponding to it that is the understanding of this S. Here, this understanding or "S" is a single understanding and a name/word for that sentence or expression S.

From this perspective, we can explain how frequently used expressions – such as proverbs – are capable of being quickly transferred and understood just like words. Frequently used expressions such as "How are you?" "Good morning," and so on have been loaded as a single word. In fact, frequently used expressions, although composed of several different sounds, cognitively form a distinctive and meaningful totality. When a person encounters one of these expressions, the entire expression is understood, just like a single word. In fact, such expressions are comprised of several sounds externally but cognitively are as a distinct single word because their components may not be understood individually.

In order to explain the quick understanding of frequently used expressions, Danny Steinberg states that frequently used expressions, just like single words, are kept as a whole in the memory (124). There is no need to create or to analyze these linguistic forms like new expressions or sentences. In order to express and to understand these stored elements, language users consider them as a whole, and there is no need to apply grammatical principles. The higher the frequency of using a word, phrase, or sentence, the higher its accessibility for quick use will be. By introducing *agglutination*, Saussure also tries to answer this issue. He says that the basis of agglutination is that two or more elements, which have originally been distinct from one another but have been juxtaposed in the chain of frequency, have turned into an irresolvable, or rarely resolvable, unit (175-6). When a combined concept is expressed

using a series of highly common meaningful units, by using a so-called shortcut, the mind ignores the analysis and generally matches the concept with a group of signs that hereafter turn into a simple unit.

But the important point is that we cannot determine the boundary between frequently used and not frequently used expressions. Some expressions are used more frequently than others; some expressions are used more frequently by certain groups of experts or social groups than others. Also, some expressions may be frequently used by one individual in regard to his or her condition.

Storing these entirely in memory – what Steinberg mentions – or the mind's adopting the shortcut path – which is discussed by Saussure – does not seem to be a suitable solution for this problem. This is especially because taking into consideration the relativity of the concept of frequent use, there are too many frequently used expressions to be stored in memory. In such cases, we had better say that the entire expression becomes meaningful, and consequently, the function of understanding the entire expression is similar to a single word. In fact, an expression such as S gains a final single understanding "S," and according to the character of this expression, of which the factor of being frequently used is a part, it is quickly understood.

I draw two conclusions from this discussion. First, there may be one or more frequently used or relatively frequently used expressions in a sentence; for example, the phrase "table and chair" is more frequently used than "chair and book." Here, the way we use these expressions in a sentence leads to the conclusion that understanding frequently used expressions is formed more quickly than understanding other expressions. Therefore, unlike the imposed system of senses, which makes the linguistic sound linear, ours is a step-by-step understanding.

The second conclusion that I want to draw from this discussion is that in frequently used expressions – I mentioned that frequency is relative and probably has a wide range – single words produce almost no understanding and it is the entirety of the expression that has been loaded and characterized as a word. For example, the word "take" does not exist in regard to understanding in expressions like "take it easy," "take the bus," "take care," and so on where it is used; it is the entire expression that is meaningful. In most metaphors and phrases, in regard to cognition, words do not exist at all, and it is the entire expression that has a meaningful character. Prepositions, prefixes, suffixes, and so on, usually are not perceived in sentences and, in fact, are dissolved into the total understanding of the sentence.

Conclusion

In order to understand a linguistic sound, we do not need anything more than the sound itself, because the meaning of a linguistic sound is identical to the sound itself. Sounds are real – just like any other real thing – and are understood just as any other thing is understood. This was my answer to the question, "What is the meaning of a symbol?" This answer can satisfactorily explain why, when we face a linguistic sound, we cannot not understand that sound.

The issue of linguistic convention is the most important challenge facing this response. But by distinguishing between the live time of understanding and the non-live time of understanding, I showed that the issue of linguistic convention refers to the non-live time of understanding, and the issue of reality and not the arbitrariness of a linguistic symbol is related to the live time of understanding. Thus, in the live time of understanding, that is, when a particular individual encounters a linguistic sound, he or she perceives that sound like any other reality that he or she is faced with. In fact, just as when we see, for example, a tree, we are compelled to perceive it, while hearing a sound, we are forced to understand it. Both are real, and in accordance with

the character they have gained, they create an understanding in us.

If the relationship between a sound and its meaning is conventional and optional, then the question is raised as to why, when encountering an arbitrary sign that is considered neutral, the mind is compelled to understand it. Why does the juxtaposition of two dissimilar signs, such as "evening" and "sun," create an understanding that is not to be found in either one of these signs?

The answer provided by this article is that a linguistic sound gains meaning in various ways and finds its own character and then functions according to this character, just as an object in the external world does. The idea of the conventionality of language confuses the methods of giving meaning to a sound with the meaning of that sound. Then, to preserve the creative aspect of language, this idea has to resort to some rules that are always threatened by any new expression within the language and have to be revised or to be replaced by new rules. But if a word is real, then it can be shown that the creative aspect of language is related to the layer of words rather than to the individual who is compelled to understand them.

Works Cited

Aitchison, Jean. *The Articulate Mammal: An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. 5th ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

Arbabi, Behin. *Yadgiri-e Zaban-e Kazeb* [*Learning of Pseudo Language*]. Tehran: Arbabi, 2010.

————. *Zaban-e Fahmha, Zaban-e Chizha* [*Language of Understandings, Language of Things*]. Tehran: Arbabi, 2007.

————. *Zarb-e Fahmha* [*Multiplication of Understandings*]. Tehran: Arbabi, 2010.

Block, Ned. "Semantics, Conceptual Role." http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/ConceptualRoleSemantics.html 1997.

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking Glass*. New York: Dover Publications, 1999.

Chomsky, Noam. *Knowledge of Language*. New York: Praeger, 1986.

————. *Language and Mind*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

————. *Language and Problems of Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988.

Lycan, William G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

Lyons, John. *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

McGinn, Colin. *Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Inquiry*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993.

Medina, Jose. *Language: Key Concepts in Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2005.

Nagel, Thomas. *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Putnam, Hilary. "Brains in a Vat." In *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. 1-22.

Quine, W. V. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

Robins, H. R. *A Short History of Linguistics*. London: Longman, 1967.

Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1915.

Speaks, Jeff. "Theories of Meaning." In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/meaning/>* 2010.

Steinberg, Danny. *An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*. London: Longman, 1993.

Tarski, Alfred. "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4, 3 (1994). 341-76.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1958.