

# Words and Intentions

## Abstract

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Notoriously, the term *word* is ambiguous between a type and a token. The metaphysics of word, among other things, is supposed to clarify such ambiguity. Linguists and philosophers of language typically acknowledge that there is a subtle relationship between words on one hand and the means by which we convey and recognize them on the other. In our speeches or texts we convey words by means of a counterpart which "take[s] on a physical embodiment" (Kaplan 1990, p. 97): utterances, inscriptions, gestures, smoke signals and so on and so forth. In common and technical parlance we tend to use the term *word* in both cases: "Such are two contrasting sense in which we use the word *word*" (Quine 1987, p. 216).

Firstly, I shall present the ambiguity within the Classical Type-Token Model (TTM). I shall show the reasons that led Kaplan (1990) to refuse the TTM and shall discuss his alternative: the Stage-Continuant Model (SCM). The SCM fits a naturalistic conception of words: words are cultural artifacts living in the concrete world as naturalistic objects. Words are in this respect non-eternal continuants without a fixed form which has to be resembled by their utterances or inscriptions in any sense of *resemblance*. In order for, say, an inscription to count as an inscription of a given word, it has to be performed intentionally by a person with the intention of continuing the transmission of that word (s)he mastered.

Cappelen (1999) calls Kaplan's view *intentional theory of words*: "A theory of words is intentional if it says that it is a necessary or sufficient condition for something being a token a word that the producer of the token was in a certain intentional state at the production time" (Cappelen 1999, p. 92). Cappelen provides two arguments against the SCM: the Sufficiency Argument (SA) and the Necessity Argument (NA). They are both meant to reject the intention as a constitutive part of the way in which we track the distinction between words and their utterances or inscriptions. In the end, I claim that the sufficiency argument misses the point, while the necessity argument might be accommodated in a kaplanian approach provided a reasonable specification on the SCM.

The SA runs as follows: Cappelen maintains that if Kaplan is right then every physical event which is produced during the relevant intentional state S counts as, say, an inscription of the word O related to S. According to Cappelen, this forces us to consider a given scribble as an inscription of O if S obtains. ("The strange result could be due to an entirely non-intentional mechanical malfunctioning at the 'output end' of my action", as Cappelen (1999, p. 94) puts it.) The conclusion is that this is an "evidence that Kaplan doesn't correctly describe how we individuate words" (Cappelen 1999, p. 94). I shall show why this consideration misses the point.

The NA runs as follows: consider a cat without any intention to communicate who steps on my keyboard and types this: "Can you spare a quarter?". If I use this very same token to ask someone whether (s)he can spare a quarter, I manage to do that in so far as I use a fragment of English appropriate for the task. However, "a proponent of the necessity thesis would have to say both that the ink mark isn't a token of an English sentence and that I never used it to ask anyone to spare a quarter (because I can't ask a

question in English without using tokens of English words). Both claims are preposterous. I have used a token of an English sentence, whatever its production history might be" (Cappelen 1999, p. 95). I shall explain why I believe that what Cappelen says above is not at odd with Kaplan's SCM.

## References

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