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*Meaning, Expression, and Thought*

This philosophical treatise on the foundations of semantics is a systematic effort to clarify, deepen, and defend the classical doctrine that words are conventional signs of mental states, principally thoughts and ideas, and that meaning consists in their expression. This expression theory of meaning is developed by carrying out the Gricean program, explaining what it is for words to have meaning in terms of speaker meaning, and what it is for a speaker to mean something in terms of intention. But Grice's own formulations are rejected, and alternatives are developed. The foundations of the expression theory are explored at length, and the author develops the theory of thought as a fundamental cognitive phenomenon distinct from belief and desire and argues for the thesis that thoughts have parts, identifying ideas or concepts with parts of thoughts.

This book will appeal to students and professionals interested in the philosophy of language.

Wayne A. Davis is a professor of philosophy at Georgetown University.

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WAYNE A. DAVIS

*Georgetown University*



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[More information](#)

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*Dedicated to David K. Lewis, model philosopher,  
with deep gratitude.*

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xv</i>
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Meaning as the Expression of Thought	1
1.2 The Gricean Program	7
1.3 Systematization	10
1.4 Analyses	12
<b>Part One Semantic Acts and Intentions</b>	
2 Speaker Meaning	19
2.1 Speaker, Word, and Evidential Senses	19
2.2 Cogitative versus Cognitive Speaker Meaning	25
2.3 Meaning, Implication, and Expression	29
2.4 Cogitative Speaker Meaning (Exclusive)	31
2.5 Nonideational Meaning	40
2.6 The Senses of Meaning	42
3 Expression	43
3.1 Speaker, Word, and Evidential Senses	43
3.2 Indication	44
3.3 Intention	47
3.4 Simulation	54
3.5 Occurrence	56
3.6 General Definition	58
4 Alternative Analyses	63
4.1 Production of Belief	64
4.2 Recognition of Intention	70

Cambridge University Press  
 0521555132 - Meaning, Expression, and Thought  
 Wayne A. Davis  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

4.3	Higher-Order Intentions	71
4.4	Commitment and Truth Conditions	75
4.5	Cogitative Speaker Meaning	79
5	Communication	85
5.1	The Gricean Analysis	86
5.2	Communicating <i>with</i>	88
5.3	Telling and Informing	92
5.4	Communicating <i>to</i>	93
5.5	The Transmission Model	96
6	Reference	100
6.1	Speaker Reference	101
6.2	The Opaque-Transparent Distinction	104
6.3	Intentionality	116
6.4	Quantifying In	118

### ***Part Two Languages and Semantic Acts***

7	Languages	125
7.1	Language Models	126
7.2	Systems of Modes of Expression	129
7.3	Word Meaning and Expression	131
7.4	Linguistic Variation	134
7.5	Language Rules	137
7.6	Rules for Ideo-Reflexive Reference	141
7.7	Word Reference	151
7.8	Using a Language	152
7.9	Applied Word Meaning	158
8	Basic Word Meaning	162
8.1	Associational Analyses	164
8.2	The Gricean Analysis	166
8.3	The Truth Conditional Analysis	170
8.4	The Sentential Primacy Thesis	174
8.5	The Basic Neo-Gricean Analysis	189
8.6	The Use-Interpretation Equivalences	198
8.7	The Expression-Communication Equivalence	201
8.8	The Expression-Indication Equivalence	202
9	Conventions	204
9.1	Definition	204
9.2	Social Utility	207

Cambridge University Press  
 0521555132 - Meaning, Expression, and Thought  
 Wayne A. Davis  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

9.3	Self-Perpetuation	207
9.4	Arbitrariness	212
9.5	Regularity	216
9.6	Correct Usage	219
9.7	Lewis's Equilibrium Condition	225
9.8	Mutual Knowledge	226
10	Compositional Word Meaning	229
10.1	The Productivity Problem	230
10.2	The Potential Meaning Analysis	231
10.3	The Recursive Neo-Gricean Analysis	233
10.4	Implicature Conventions	241
10.5	Nonspecific Conventions	244
10.6	Objections to Compositionality	247
10.7	The Grammaticality Restriction	257
10.8	Anomalous Sentences	260
11	Living Languages	265
11.1	Linguistic Relativity	265
11.2	Convention Dependence	267
11.3	Linguistic Lineages	272
11.4	Boundaries	276
11.5	Language Death	280
11.6	Natural and Artificial Languages	282
11.7	Idiolects	286
11.8	Conventions of Truthfulness	288
11.9	The Kinds of Word Meaning	292

### ***Part Three Thoughts and Ideas***

12	Thought	295
12.1	The Cogitative Sense of Thought	296
12.2	Belief versus Occurrent Thought	301
12.3	Thinking as the Occurrence of Thoughts	312
12.4	Thinking of Objects	317
12.5	Occurrent Belief	321
12.6	The First Law of Occurrence	326
13	Sentences, Propositions, and Thoughts	331
13.1	Thoughts versus Sentences	332
13.2	Thinking Not a Relation to Sentences	337
13.3	Propositions as Thoughts	342
13.4	The Proposition that p	345



Cambridge University Press  
 0521555132 - Meaning, Expression, and Thought  
 Wayne A. Davis  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

13.5	Situations and Possible Worlds	351
13.6	Semantic Theorems and the Mates Objection	353
14	The Constituency Thesis	368
14.1	Ideas as Thought-Parts	369
14.2	The Constituency Thesis for Thoughts	377
14.3	Subpropositional Constituents	393
14.4	The General Constituency Thesis	399
14.5	Mereological versus Logical Containment	404
15	Ideas or Concepts	407
15.1	Formal Definition	407
15.2	Atomic Ideas	413
15.3	The Conception of Concepts	416
15.4	Content, Object, and Representation	419
15.5	Extension or Reference	422
15.6	The Content of a Thought	425
16	The Possession of Concepts	428
16.1	Possessing Concepts	428
16.2	Nominalist Theories	432
16.3	Recognition Theory	433
16.4	Information Semantics	436
16.5	Memory and Knowledge Theories	438
16.6	Inferentialist Theories	441
16.7	Understanding and Mastering	442
17	The Acquisition of Concepts	447
17.1	Acquiring Concepts	447
17.2	Concept Learning and Innate Ideas	451
17.3	Abstraction as a Basic Psychophysical Process	455
18	The Association of Ideas	461
18.1	Association	462
18.2	Associationist Networks	470
18.3	Association versus Constituency	473
18.4	Connectionist Models	476
19	Objects, Images, and Conceptions	481
19.1	Ideas versus Objects of Thought	482
19.2	Ideas versus Images	488
19.3	Thinking versus Inner Speech	495
19.4	Concepts versus Conceptions	500

Cambridge University Press  
 0521555132 - Meaning, Expression, and Thought  
 Wayne A. Davis  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

19.5	Prototype Structures	513
19.6	What Is Left	517
20	The Language of Thought Hypothesis	519
20.1	Natural Language Theories	521
20.2	Mental Language Theories	524
20.3	Hidden Language Theories	533
20.4	Uninterpreted Language Theories	535
20.5	Computational Theories: Content	542
20.6	Computational Theories: Process	547
<b>Part Four Ideational Theories of Meaning</b>		
21	Objections to Ideational Theories	553
21.1	The Non-Entity Objection	555
21.2	The Naming Objection	562
21.3	The Sensationist Objection	567
21.4	The Privacy Objection	571
21.5	The Synonymy Objection	572
21.6	The Identity Objection	574
22	Priority Objections	579
22.1	The Reflection-or-Ignorance Objection	580
22.2	The Regress Objection	586
22.3	The Definitional Circularity Objection	588
22.4	The Metalinguistic Circularity Objection	594
23	Incompleteness Objections	599
23.1	Undefined Terms	599
23.2	Defining Thought	601
23.3	Referential Semantics	606
	<i>References</i>	608
	<i>Index</i>	645

Cambridge University Press  
0521555132 - Meaning, Expression, and Thought  
Wayne A. Davis  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## Preface

I began work on thought, belief, and desire shortly after I graduated from the University of Michigan in 1973, inspired by Alvin Goldman and his *A Theory of Human Action*, along with Stephen Stich, Arthur Burks, John Perry, and Jaegwon Kim. That work grew into my doctoral dissertation (Princeton University, 1977), directed by David Lewis, Gilbert Harman, and Richard Jeffrey. I remain indebted to these outstanding philosophers not only for key ideas but also for instilling a love of philosophy. The dissertation became a book-length manuscript entitled “Elements of Psychology: Belief, Desire, and Thought.” When a chapter on meaning took on the proportions of a book all by itself, I decided to first complete the present volume, *Meaning, Expression, and Thought*. Many of the ideas on thought presented in Part III were first developed in my dissertation and elaborated in “Belief, Desire, and Thought.” I use them here to provide the psychological foundations for the theory of meaning developed in the rest of this work. This book was delayed by my recent *Implicature* (1998), which explains why Grice’s great “synthetic” project gets so much less attention here than his “analytic” project. I wrote *Meaning, Expression, and Thought*, furthermore, in tandem with my forthcoming *Nondescriptive Meaning and Reference*, which applies the expression theory of meaning to names, indexicals, and other special cases, develops the expression theory of reference in greater depth, and shows how referential semantics can be treated in the expression theory.

While revised and reorganized here, most of the material in Chapters 1–4 has appeared in the following publications: “Expression of Emotion,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988): 279–291; “Speaker Meaning,” *Linguistics and Philosophy* 15 (1992): 223–253; “Cogitative and Cognitive Speaker Meaning,” *Philosophical Studies* 67 (1992): 71–88; and

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“Communicating, Telling, and Informing,” *Philosophical Inquiry* 21 (1999): 21–43. A summary of Chapter 9, “Conventions,” appeared in my *Implication* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). The rest is new. I am grateful for the editors of these journals for permission to reprint.

In the interest of readability, I adopt a casual approach to the use-mention distinction. I use either italics or quotation marks when using words to refer to themselves or to give meanings. I also use them as corner quotes around variables to form placeholders for quoted or italicized words. And, of course, I use quotation marks for direct quotation and scare quotes, and italics for emphasis. I will ensure that context makes my meaning clear (to the charitable reader). Thus in “*vixen* means ‘female fox,’” the meaning of the word *means* dictates that the italicized word to its left refers to a word, and that the quoted words to its right give the meaning of the word referred to.

In footnotes, I use “cf.” when citing authors who defend views similar to the one under discussion, and “contrast” when citing authors who reject such views.

My treasured colleagues and graduate students at Georgetown University deserve many thanks, especially Mark Lance, Linda Wetzel, Joseph Rahill, and Matt Burstein. I cannot thank Steven Kuhn enough for going over early drafts of the entire manuscript with a fine-toothed comb, and providing pages and pages of useful and incisive criticism. I am also grateful to Georg Meggle, Mark Siebel, Christian Plunze, Christoph Jäger, Thomas Bartelborth, and Oliver Scholz at the University of Leipzig for the hospitality they showed both me and my ideas. John Hawthorne, Mark Heller, Dan Sperber, Michael Slote, Georges Rey, Adrienne Lehrer, Andrew Milne, Stephen Rieber, and Christoph Doerge, along with Ernie Sosa, Francis J. Pelletier, and numerous reviewers, provided many helpful comments. Russell Hahn did a wonderful job as copyeditor and production editor. I am especially grateful to Robert Audi, William Lycan, Robert and Marilyn Adams, Daniel Robinson, Terry Pinkard, and Tom Beauchamp for their support and friendship over the years. Georgetown University provided the resources that enabled me to do the bulk of my research. Jack Bender gets credit not only for comments and friendship but also for helping to form my psycho-philosophical mind at Michigan. Alan Spiro has provided friendship and support since our Princeton days. Most of all, I am indebted to my wife, Kathy Olesko, for more than twenty-seven years of intellectual stimulation and love.

Terry Moore at Cambridge University Press showed the patience of a saint in waiting for the final manuscript, as did Ernie Sosa, the series

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[More information](#)

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editor. In addition to the vast literature on meaning, expression, and thought that existed before I began work on this book, new literature has been published faster than this human being, at least, could keep up with. It seems that every time I completed a draft, Jerry Fodor published another book. I apologize to the authors as well as to the reader for the many omissions I have found to be inevitable.

As a consequence of their long gestation, many of my ideas have been anticipated in print. Research showed that others were not new at all. While I may have lost the right to claim priority, I have benefited immeasurably from the work of others on “my” ideas. I hope I repay the authors I cite here by taking their ideas further.

*Washington, D.C.*  
*July 2001*