



## Languages for the Analytic Tradition

Diana I. Pérez

To cite this article: Diana I. Pérez (2018): Languages for the Analytic Tradition, Philosophical Papers, DOI: [10.1080/05568641.2018.1429738](https://doi.org/10.1080/05568641.2018.1429738)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/05568641.2018.1429738>



Published online: 24 Apr 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 6



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## Languages for the Analytic Tradition

*Diana I. Pérez*

**Abstract:** In this paper I propose a series of arguments in order to show that it is preferable for analytic philosophy to be practiced in different languages. In the first section, I show that the analytic tradition includes people developing their philosophical work in different natural languages. In the second section, I will address the question of the role of language in thought, and more specifically in philosophical thought, concluding that it is preferable to allow for the use of different languages as a vehicle for philosophical ideas. Finally, I make some suggestions regarding changes that could be made in academic practices to better allow a plurality of languages and voices within the analytic tradition.

In this paper I will propose a series of arguments in order to show that it is preferable for analytic philosophy to be practiced in different languages.<sup>1</sup> I will present different kinds of arguments: (1) I will offer an argument based on the plurality of philosophical approaches within the analytic tradition that predisposes us to include philosophical reflections in different natural languages as a constitutive part of this tradition; (2) I will offer some explanations concerning the role of language in thought, and more specifically in philosophical thought, which also will lead us to conclude that it is preferable to allow for the use of different languages as a vehicle for philosophical ideas. Finally, I would like to make some suggestions regarding changes that could be made in academic practices to better allow a plurality of languages and voices within the analytic tradition (3).

---

I belong to multiple minorities within philosophy: I am from Latin America, a part of the world where the analytic tradition is not part of the mainstream tradition, I am a Spanish native-speaker, and I am a woman. My area of expertise is philosophy of mind.

## (1)

Nobody can deny that among the list of the ‘fathers’ of the analytic tradition we will find Frege, Russell, Moore, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Popper, Quine, Strawson, Austin, Sellars, Ryle, Smart, Davidson, Putnam, Kripke, Lewis, among other important philosophers of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> If we ask if there is any one common thesis accepted by all of them, we will find none (Rabossi 1975). Moreover, there is not a single philosophical method that all of them shared, and ‘analysis’ was understood in very different ways within this tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Some people identify (wrongly) analytic philosophy with logical positivism, and claim that analytic philosophers reject metaphysics, but Russell’s ‘logical atomism’ is the metaphysical worldview from which analytic philosophy, as opposed to idealism, was born, and Lewis, Kripke and Armstrong are perfect more recent counterexamples to this claim.

The ‘linguistic turn’ seems to be a common denominator for analytic philosophers but it also goes beyond the analytic tradition. Moreover, many analytic philosophers would not accept the extremism of Dummett’s (1993) thesis according to which philosophy of language should be understood as first philosophy. Even if the majority of analytic philosophers care about language, many of them develop their own philosophical theories without focusing on language, for example Thomas Nagel, Christopher Peacocke; some naturalists such as Quine reject the idea of a ‘first philosophy’ entirely.<sup>4</sup>

Hacker (1999) proposed a sharp distinction between the scientific enterprise and philosophical practice, identifying philosophy with an *a priori* task. But this is hardly an individuating feature of *analytic* philosophy. As a matter of fact, there is a huge part of analytic philosophy which does not think about itself as an *a priori* enterprise; Quine’s naturalism is the obvious

2 It is important to note that some of these authors wrote their works in English while others wrote in German. English is not the ‘natural’ language for analytic philosophy (if there is such a thing as a natural language for any human activity: see Pérez 2013a).

3 See Ezcurdia 2015.

4 See Glock 1997.

example, but most of the current philosophy of mind, philosophy of cognitive science, and even philosophy of language, thought of as philosophy of linguistics, is concerned with empirical findings; we can note the growing amount and participation of philosophers in the many conferences on consciousness organized around the world in order to understand that Hacker's proposal is hard to accept.

We are led to ask, then, what unifies all these philosophers under the heading 'analytic'? Following Glock (2008) I assume that what binds us together are (intellectual) family ties, historical and social bonds established and constructed in the process of being accepted as a member of a specific academic practice.<sup>5</sup> In the end, all who accept for ourselves the label of 'analytic' have read the philosophers I mentioned above, and we are all familiar with the kind of philosophical arguments and problems that can be found in the works published by the members of this tradition. From now on I will be concerned with the 'Analytic Tradition' rather with 'Analytic Philosophy'.

The analytic tradition was born with Frege in Germany and Moore and Russell in England; it was later developed in the inter-war period in the Vienna Circle; during World War II it was disseminated in many countries where its members were exiled. Even if it is true that the analytic tradition was born in England, Germany and Austria, the Second World War created a diaspora that led many analytic philosophers to the US. Thus, in the second half of the twentieth century analytic philosophy flourished in English-speaking countries, but at nearly the same time it began to be imported to some Latin American countries, mainly Argentina, Mexico and Brazil (see Salmerón 2003 and Pérez and Ortiz Millán 2010) and the rest of Europe. The *Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas* (UNAM) was dominated by the analytic tradition beginning in the 60's, and in 1972 the *Sociedad Argentina de Análisis Filosófico* was founded. At more or less the same time the analytic tradition landed in Brazil, where the *Centro de lógica, epistemología e história da ciência* (University of Campinas) was created in 1976. In the 1990s many national societies for analytic philosophy were founded in the

---

<sup>5</sup> See also Gracia 2010.

rest of Europe, including the European Society for Analytic Philosophy (1990), the *Gesellschaft für analytische Philosophie* (Germany, 1990), the *Società Italiana di Filosofia Analitica* (Italy, 1992), the *Sociedad Española de Filosofía Analítica* (Spain, 1995); the *Société de Philosophie Analytique* (France, 1997), the *Sociedade Portuguesa de Filosofia Analítica* (Portugal, 2004) and later the *Hrvatskog društva za analitičku filozofiju* (Croatia) and the *Societatea Română de Filosofie Analitică* (Romania), among many others; and in Latin America this century the *Asociación Latinoamericana de Filosofía Analítica* (2010), the *Sociedade Brasileira de Filosofia Analítica* (Brazil), the *Sociedad Chilena de Filosofía Analítica* (Chile), among others, were founded. All of these institutions aim at promoting analytic philosophy within their countries and have established many cooperative ties between them. It is important to note that many of these national societies, as well as some non-Anglophone philosophy departments and institutes where the analytic tradition has grown in the last few years publish their own journals, where we can find papers written in different languages, many of them within the analytic tradition. I will name just a few examples, indicating the institution to which they belong and the year of creation: *Theoria* (University of the Basque Country, 1952), *Rivista di Estetica* (University of Turin, 1960), *Crítica* (IIF-UNAM, 1967), *Grazer Philosophische Studien—Internationale Zeitschrift für Analytische Philosophie* (Institute of Philosophy of the University of Graz, Austria 1975), *Manuscrito* (UNICAMP, 1977), *Análisis Filosófico* (SADAF, 1981), *Disputatio* (Philosophy Centre, University of Lisbon, 1996). As we can see, as a matter of fact, there are many different languages through which the analytic tradition has grown in the last 50 years.

Going back to the origins of the analytic tradition, it is worth noting the importance of how the role of language within this tradition is conceived. It is well known that the analytic tradition involves two different approaches to philosophy giving two different roles to natural languages in the philosophical enterprise. On the one hand, Frege's and Russell's ideas about the existence of a 'logically perfect language' to which all meaningful sentences should be translated, discredit natural languages as imperfect, ambiguous and rejectable from serious philosophical work. Within this line of

thought, philosophy aims at finding a formal language in order to solve philosophical problems with formal tools (modeling, for example, belief change or the logical relationships between norms, to name just a few developments in this line). For these philosophers, natural language is merely the imperfect tool we have in order to introduce the real language we need in order to contribute to the growing knowledge enterprise that we, human beings, collectively develop.

On the other hand, there is a different line within the analytic tradition that takes natural language as the starting (and sometimes also the final) point of the philosophical enterprise. Moore devoted almost all the pages of his ‘Proof of an External World’ to the meaning of the words ‘proof’, ‘external’, etc., before giving his emblematic and widely discussed answer (‘Here is a hand!’) to the philosophical question he intended to address (1939). And philosophers such as (the late) Wittgenstein, Ryle, Strawson and Austin, even with their very different purposes and philosophical and metaphilosophical ideas, devoted their reflections to natural language.<sup>6</sup> If the philosophical enterprise gives such a central role to natural languages it is at least worth considering the idea that it would be preferable, for it will enrich philosophy itself, to allow for different natural languages as the starting point in doing philosophy. Conversely, if we limit the natural languages in which we allow people to make their philosophical work, philosophy will be poorer.

Let me give an example concerning the role of personal pronouns in philosophy. Since the seventeenth century philosophical reflections about subjectivity have been at the center of theoretical philosophy. In Spanish we use the first-person singular pronoun ‘Yo’ in order to talk about these issues, where in English we do not usually use ‘I’ but ‘Self’, as a noun, when dealing with this kind of philosophical problems.<sup>7</sup> But ‘Self’ involves

---

6 English or German!

7 Hofstadter and Dennett’s book, *The Mind’s I. Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul* is an exception, but the aim of the authors is to make a language game. It was translated into Spanish as *El ojo de la mente. Fantasías y reflexiones sobre el yo y el alma*. Notice that ‘ojo’ means

a second-order stance towards the subject, a reflexive stance that the first-personal pronoun does not involve.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Descartes famously proclaimed as the first truth *Ego cogito*, a proposition that would be true even if nothing else existed. But there are languages where this ‘first truth’ cannot even be asserted. Arisaka reminds us that

in contemporary Japanese, there are more than fifteen ways to say ‘I’, depending upon one’s gender, age, social status, situation, levels of formality, or a combination of any of these. In any given social situation (private, informal or official) one must know the appropriate term by which to refer to oneself, *given* the situation one finds oneself in. Unlike English, in which ‘I’ has a fixed referent (the speaker), the Japanese ‘I’ points not to the person *per se* but rather indicates a social position in the context of a given situation. One’s self-identity necessarily is highly context-dependent, and one tends to perceive oneself always *in relation to* those around her and the social situation which would define her ‘place’ in the overall transaction. It is linguistically transparent that the self is always a self-in-a-situation and a self-with-another speaking Japanese. (Arisaka 2001: 199)

Probably Descartes could have never written the *Meditations on First Philosophy* in Japanese.

Let us consider another problem concerning personal pronouns. We are convinced that there are three grammatical persons: first, second and third (singular and plural). Many recent philosophical and psychological debates on the status of ‘Folk Psychology’<sup>9</sup> assume that we explain, predict and understand other people’s behavior by adopting a third-person perspective

‘eye’ and the translator chose to make explicit the language game that the authors made in the title. And also note how ‘Self’ was translated into ‘yo’.

8 ‘Self’ is a prefix or suffix that is added to other English terms, in order to form words that indicate self-reference, as in *Self*knowledge, or *myself*. In Spanish we have different suffixes and prefixes doing the same job, such as ‘auto’ (in ‘autoconocimiento’, the Spanish translation for ‘Self-Knowledge’), or ‘*mismo*’ (in ‘*mi mismo*’, the translation for ‘myself’), but ‘auto’ and ‘*mismo*’ cannot be used as nouns, and do not play the role that ‘Self’ has in philosophical contexts. The Cartesian *cogito* is a case of *Self*-consciousness, and so ‘Ego’ is usually translated into ‘Self’ whereas in Spanish the translation for ‘Ego’ is ‘Yo’, which, as I said, does not involve a second-order stance.

9 ‘Folk Psychology’ or ‘Theory of Mind’ or ‘Mindreading’ are the labels used to refer to the ordinary ways in which we explain, predict and understand other people’s behavior attributing mental states such as desires, beliefs, hopes, fears, etc.

(as theory-theorists assume) or a first-person one (as some simulation theorists assume). And a small group of people—including myself (Gomila 2002; Scotto 2002; Pérez 2013b)—defends a second-person perspective locating intersubjective exchanges at the basic level in order to give an account of these cognitive abilities. But I recently realized that there are languages where there are more than three grammatical persons, such as Aymara, Guaraní and Quechua (Mannheim 1982; Bossong 2009). Of course, there will always be a speaker, an addressee and third parties in human conversations, but we cannot take for granted that every human language has three grammatical persons in their lexicon.

I am not claiming that we are not able to translate Descartes into Japanese, or some recent work on mental attribution into Aymara (more on translating philosophical works in the next paragraph). I am trying to suggest that natural language as a starting point to philosophy directs our enquiry to one place or another: language is not a neutral vehicle for our thoughts. Taking different languages as a starting point for philosophical reflection would allow us to explore more philosophical options and will enrich philosophical discussions.<sup>10</sup>

## (2)

I will now go a bit further and momentarily leave aside the analytic tradition and its historical, social and geographical contingencies to focus on a more general question about the relation between language, thought and action, outside of academic practices. The question I would like to ask is the following: why is it so important to establish which linguistic expressions are allowed or forbidden within a human community? Why is it, for instance, so important to forbid people to utter the ‘n ...’ word in certain social contexts? Why is it so important to use gender-neutral expressions, in languages like Spanish, where gender is otherwise explicit in most sentences? Why is it so important to speak (and write) in a ‘politically correct’ language? One answer seems to me quite obvious: it is important because we believe that

---

<sup>10</sup> See also Siegel 2014.



the way in which we speak (and write) influences the way we think, the way we act, the attitudes we adopt with each other, and so on: language affects our worldview. Even if, as a theoretical discussion, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on linguistic determinism is not popular today,<sup>11</sup> it is still with us because we do care about the language we use, believing that it affects our thoughts and actions. Therefore, in general, the preference for one language over another does matter to us, and has relevance for our thought, practice and our lives.

Let us return to philosophy. As philosophy students we learn that it is important to read philosophical works in their original language and we are warned against translations of philosophical works.<sup>12</sup> We are told that we will never be good Kant scholars unless we are able to read his works in German, and we will not be good Aristotle specialists unless we learn ancient Greek. The underlying assumption is that language is relevant to the expression of philosophical ideas; otherwise reading Aristotle in Spanish or English would be as good as reading it in Greek in order to understand his thought. Following these rules for the proper practice of the philosophical profession, we implicitly acknowledge that language is not merely a transparent media through which we incarnate our non-linguistic, abstract, universal, unpolluted thoughts. Language matters to philosophy.

The reason for this is easy to understand. Everyone would accept the following facts about the differences between natural languages: some words have different extensions in different languages (for example color terms); some connections between words, depending on their etymology, are not present in their literal translation; some words are composed by

---

11 There are different formulations of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. According to this hypothesis language is not a transparent medium with which we express our thoughts; on the contrary, language influences the way we see the world, and/or augments our cognitive capacities, and/or influences the way in which we make category distinctions: in a nutshell it makes a cognitive difference. This is still a matter of philosophical and empirical concern: for discussion see Gentner & Goldin-Meadow 2003; Gomila 2011.

12 See also Gracia 2014.

others in a certain language, but are atomic in another; even the way words sound is relevant in some cases, and of course the sound changes from language to language.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the web of psychological associations that a word in a given language activates in our minds is not exactly the same in all languages, even if the informational content we express is (more or less) the same. Sometimes we must even transliterate certain words ('robot')<sup>14</sup> or add some new words to our language in order to express the ideas of another culture (e.g., the Portuguese notion of '*saudade*'). And philosophers sometimes exploit the sonority, the psychological associations, the etymology of the words in their natural language in order to make a philosophical point.<sup>15</sup> It is clear now why the task of

---

13 As a philosophical example we can consider the case of the verb 'to mean' and its translation into Spanish, 'significar'. In English 'to mean' is etymologically tied to individual intentions, and hence it is used with human agents as subjects. In Spanish, 'significar' is etymologically tied to the idea of 'fixing a sign' which is not something that a person alone can do. Hence, in Spanish the verb 'significar' is not used with humans as subjects; objects mean, but subjects do not mean (I thank Eleonora Orlando for calling my attention to this case). For an example of the way in which philosophers take advantage of the sonority of the words, playing with the words to develop a philosophically interesting idea, consider this passage from Bar-On (2013: 362): 'As suggested elsewhere, we should perhaps recognize a category of *prepositional* attitudes—fear *of* x, anger *at* y, attending *to* z—as precursors of full-blown *propositional* attitudes. That is to say, creatures who are not yet (phylogenetically speaking) capable of having attitudes with complete propositional content may well be capable of having attitudes with intentional objects.' See more on this in footnote 15.

14 Robot is a word of Czech origin. Its origin is the Czech noun 'robotá', meaning 'forced labor slavery'. That is, a robot is a mechanical slave working at our command.

15 Analytic philosophers are less prone to word games than philosophers of other traditions, but these facts about language are still relevant whether the author is aware of the psychological associations involved or not. As a philosopher of mind, I am concerned with the different linguistic categories we use in order to express our mental states and subjective feelings, and these categories vary immensely from one natural language to another. The closer an expression is to our more basic experiences, the more difficult it becomes to translate it into other languages. To give a simple example, the word 'feeling' has no good translation into Spanish. We will probably translate it as 'sensación' o 'sentimiento' but English also possesses the words 'sensation' and 'sentiment', and Spanish does not have a third word with a non-Latin root in order to talk about feelings. Translating all the recent literature on the 'feeling' theory of emotions is not an easy task. Not to mention the famous Nagelian expression 'what is it like' Nagel (1974): Spanish does not have a good translation of this expression involving the idea of similarity/likeness. See also footnote 13.

translating philosophy from one language to another is so difficult. Because the materiality, psychological impact and history of the language in which any philosophical work is written is part of the work itself.

But there is also another reason why philosophical translations are so complicated, and it has to do with the fact that, *ceteris paribus*, a philosopher is better at translating a philosophical work than a non-philosopher, no matter how well trained as a translator the latter may be. The reason being that every translation of a philosophical work is also an interpretation of that work. And a person trained as a philosopher (all else being equal) is better as an interpreter of a philosophical piece than a non-philosopher.<sup>16</sup> Translating literature is also a difficult task, and again, someone who writes literature is better as a translator than someone who does not.<sup>17</sup> In both cases, in philosophy and in literature, the translator makes his own 'interpretation' (whether philosophical or literary) of the text he aims to translate. Translation is not a mechanical task, it involves an enormous amount of knowledge of the matter being translated and an almost perfect mastery of both languages, because the subtleties of the original language should be translated into the parallel subtleties of the other language. Notice that usually all translators translate from a foreign language to their own language, but not vice-versa, which is a far more complicated task, because the degree of mastery needed in order to make a good translation to a foreign language is very high. Of course, this also means that trying to couch our original philosophical thoughts in a language which is not our mother tongue is not simply a matter of having a basic knowledge of the foreign language's grammar and an array of technical terms.

---

16 This is why checking a philosophical paper with a 'native speaker' does not guarantee that the paper is better as an expression of the author's ideas, if the 'native speaker' is not a philosopher with whom the author can discuss the philosophical points she makes. For the 'Myth of the Native Speaker' see Pérez 2013a.

17 Sometimes we do have trouble trying to guess which of the two authors we are reading, the author of the novel or his translator (at least this was my experience while reading Borges's translation of Woolf's *Orlando*). In any case this translation was better than any other translation I have read of Woolf's works. See also Borges 2000.

There is also a third difficulty concerning philosophical translation, and it is the difficulty inherent in the technical use of certain common words made by philosophers. Oftentimes, translators choose to transliterate a given word in order to highlight the fact that it is a special and technical use of a word, and not the common usage. Some examples that come to my mind are Heidegger's use of the word '*Dasein*', or Aristotle's use of the word '*ousia*' or Russell's use of the expression 'knowledge by acquaintance'. Let us think for a moment about the latter case, which belongs to the core of the analytic tradition. The verb 'to know' can be translated into two different Spanish words: '*saber*' and '*conocer*.'<sup>18</sup> In Spanish we use '*saber*' when we want to say that we know facts ('*Sé que p*'), or have some abilities, know-how constructions ('*Sé jugar al ajedrez*'), but we use '*conocer*' for our epistemic relation with people and places ('*Conozco a Juan*', '*Conozco París*'), although we can use the expression '*Conozco a Juan*' meaning 'I met Juan' which is not exactly an epistemic relation (at least in English it is not expressed using an epistemic verb). '*Conozco a Juan*' is an ambiguous expression which can be used to express the idea that we have met Juan or alternatively that we know Juan profoundly, for example because he is a longtime friend of ours. In the same line, '*Conozco París*' is true if we stay for a day in Paris (meaning in this case 'I went to Paris'), or if we lived in that city for a long period and know it well. This is troublesome when we want to translate epistemological papers from English into Spanish (and vice-versa), because for us it is not obvious that both words are expressing the same concept, and we sometimes use epistemic verbs in order to talk about relationships which in English are not usually expressed in a non-epistemic way.

Things become worse when we realize that in analytic philosophy, at least since Russell and Ryle, we are used to distinguishing three different kinds of knowledge: *knowledge that* (propositional knowledge), *knowledge how* and *knowledge by acquaintance*. The expression of 'know-hows' is different in

---

18 In French there are also two verbs, '*savoir*' and '*connaître*', which work in the same way as their Spanish counterparts.

Spanish than in English, because we have two different grammatical constructions in the case of abilities: one of them is the same as in English: ‘*Yo sé cómo jugar al ajedrez*’ (‘I know how to play chess’) and the other has no parallel in English: it is the grammatical construction we make using the verb ‘*saber*’ plus another verb in the infinitive form: ‘*Yo sé jugar al ajedrez*’.<sup>19</sup> And even worse: we do not have any word for ‘acquaintance’, because we do not have the ordinary notion of someone being acquainted with someone else; we will probably say that someone is ‘*conocido*’ of someone else, but in this way we are using the same word as before, we are not adding a qualification to the verb ‘to know’ (*conocer*).

Of course one could argue that all I have said is futile, because ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ is a technical expression, introduced by Russell (1911), in order to explain the special kind of relationship that we have with *sense data* and *platonic universals*; ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ is a direct relationship with a specific kind of epistemic object.<sup>20</sup> In Russell’s view, it is opposed to ‘knowledge by description’, which is the kind of knowledge we have of physical objects: knowledge which is inferential, mediated by descriptions, and never direct. And of course this would be correct. But the point is that the non-technical sense infiltrates technical philosophical discussion.

For example, in response to the famous ‘Knowledge Argument’ by Jackson (1982), some physicalist philosophers hold that what changes for Mary when she sees an apple for the very first time is not her learning a

---

19 This linguistic fact is at the core of Rumfitt’s (2003) objection to Stanley and Williamson’s (2001) reading of ‘knowing how’. If, as in Stanley and Williamson (2001), you defend a philosophical point based on the grammar of an expression, you had better check the universality of that kind of linguistic phenomena. Otherwise the universality of the philosophical thesis does not follow.

20 The translation into Spanish of Russell’s idea could be ‘*conocimiento directo*’—in order to remark that it is opposed to knowledge by description, which is indirect—or ‘*conocimiento por familiaridad*’ (as Villoro 1982 translates it)—in order to remark the idea of something being familiar to us, belonging to our everyday life. But of course the idea of ‘familiarity’ has many connotations that ‘acquaintance’ seems not to have. And ‘*directo*’ is in no way connected to the everyday notion of acquaintance in English.

fact or acquiring an ability, but that she becomes acquainted with something new. This response, if successful, would defuse the challenge to physicalism posed by the Knowledge Argument, insofar as there would be nothing non-physical that explains the change in Mary. However, as physicalists, these philosophers are not allowed to claim that Mary becomes acquainted with a *sense datum* (there is no such thing in the physicalist worldview: for a physicalist everything is physical). For them, Mary becomes acquainted with a physical object with physical properties. Therefore, if someone wants to argue that Mary acquires knowledge of this type (by acquaintance) they must extend the Russellian idea of knowledge by acquaintance in such a way that would encompass physical properties; in other words physical properties should be directly knowable, something that is very hard to accept, at least in Russell's view (the whole point of his introducing the distinction was to deny that physical entities could be directly known). It is unclear how a physicalist could account for this kind of knowledge within the physicalist framework. It seems clear that what is involved here is not Mary's acquaintance with Mary's own neurons, and it is not clear that it is possible to give a proper explanation of the object known in this case, while avoiding dualism.

What is happening is that the physicalists who endorse this response mix the technical sense of 'acquaintance' proposed by Russell with the ordinary use of this expression. For example Conee (1994) says at the end of a paper endorsing the physicalist response in question:

The present response to the knowledge argument is epistemologically substantial but it is very lean. The claim is that there is a kind of knowledge of a phenomenal quality, knowledge by acquaintance, which can consist in attentively experiencing the quality rather than possessing information or abilities. This is not an exotic epistemic state. It is neither ineffable nor unmistakable. *It is the familiar sort of knowledge to which we refer when we discuss knowing people and places as well as experiences.* (Conee 1994: 147, my italics).

It is important to note that this is not the technical use of the expression introduced by Russell. In fact, Russell's main point was to present a distinction between the way in which we are epistemically connected to *sense data*

vs. the way in which we are connected to physical objects (persons and cities, i.e., things we know by description, not by acquaintance). He wanted to argue that they are different kinds of ‘knowledge’, whereas the physicalist response exemplified by Conee entails exactly the opposite. This is just one example of the way in which technical and natural languages are interwoven in philosophical texts. But it is also an example that shows that one needs more than just some technical language and basic grammatical knowledge to understand a philosophical paper, otherwise we cannot be able to understand Conee’s quotation above.<sup>21</sup>

If I am right about the difficulties involved in the translation of philosophical works, we should also accept that we will never be able to express as acutely, precisely, and properly the thoughts we have as Spanish native speakers in any other language than Spanish. Unless we are native bilingual, we will not be able to express our thoughts with the same accuracy in another language as in our own. (Of course, we might be encouraged to leave our own countries and move to an English-speaking country and live there for 20 or 30 years in order to properly acquire a second language, but that is not something anyone can be asked to do.) And if I am correct, why should I be asked to change my mother language in order to express my philosophical ideas? If someone wants to truly understand my philosophical views he should make an effort and try and understand my native language. It is in this language that I will probably express my thoughts in the best way I can. The reasons to prefer (as a writer) one language to another are not merely in the number of potential readers one can reach. Even if some technical terms are needed to do philosophy, as I have tried to show, those are intertwined with non-technical language.

Even more importantly, ideas are developed while writing, as we do philosophy while we write philosophy. So it is important that everyone can be

---

21 Note the difference with a technical paper in chemistry or biology, where one only needs technical chemical or biological lexicon plus basic English grammar. The point is that technical words in philosophy are not clearly separated from ordinary language, and hence a deeper understanding of everyday language is needed in order to understand and write philosophical papers.

free to develop their ideas in the language they feel most comfortable with. Sometimes the language someone chooses is not their mother tongue, but the language in which they learned philosophy.<sup>22</sup> But where we started to learn philosophy is a contingent fact, just as much as our mother tongue (I will say more about this issue in the next paragraph). Moreover, having two different languages to express our ideas is also something of value: we can examine the way in which what we think is determined by the peculiarities of the natural language through which we are trying to develop our thoughts.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the varieties of languages used while doing philosophy enrich the practice of philosophy.

### (3)

If I am right and it is better for analytic philosophy to promote its development in different languages, what can we do in order to increase the number of quality philosophical publications in languages other than English? How can current practices be modified to make the academic world fairer with speakers of other languages? In this last part of the paper I would like to address more practical issues regarding the question of justice, and the geopolitical problem involved in the pressure to write in English. As mentioned before, we do not choose our mother tongue. It depends on: (1) the language of the community in which we were raised, (2) the language that our parents speak, and (3) the decisions our parents have made regarding the languages to which we are exposed as children. None of these facts are things we in a position to choose. It is also well known that no-one can dominate a second language with the same mastery as the first (unless we are native bilingual, but as I said this is not something that we choose).

---

22 As Gracia (2014) remarks, this is a central difference between the role of Latin as a *lingua franca* in the Middle Ages, and English nowadays. In the majority of non-English-speaking countries people are not trained in philosophy in English, but in their national languages.

23 See Siegel 2014.



Moreover, in the acquisition of knowledge, we learn some discipline or activity in a given community with a given language, and in that way learn how to do X in the community language; all human cultural practices are intertwined with linguistic practices. In such cases it would be difficult to try to do the task through another language. It is easier if there is a clear set of technical words to learn in the new language. It is instead harder if natural language is interwoven with technical language, as in philosophy, and it is impossible if it is a formal language, which is constitutive of the knowledge itself, as in the case of mathematics (this is not surprising, given that mathematical symbolism is the only tool we have in order to develop mathematical ideas). Something similar occurs with philosophy and natural languages, because natural language is the tool we need in order to develop philosophical ideas. For example, if someone whose first language is X moves to another country with a different majority language and learns a new activity or new discipline in the other language, say Y, this person will probably be able to do this activity using Y and have difficulties doing it in X. Of course, if X and Y are both natural languages everyone can translate what they learn in Y to X, but in any case it will be easier for her to do this activity in Y than in X. Once again, we do not choose the language in which we learn philosophy; we learn it in the language of the country where we live and go to college/university. And for economic and political reasons, and migratory legislation, we are not able to freely choose where we go to college. And even if we do choose, the reasons for choosing in which country (or in which cultural and linguistic community) we would like to live do not exclusively relate to the academic life we want to live. All these facts lead me to conclude that it is not fair to ask someone to do philosophy in any specific language. Philosophical ideas and arguments do not have gender, race, religion, or nationality, and they can be expressed in whatever language we want. But ideas and arguments are held by particular persons embedded in different contexts and with different histories, races, genders, religions, nationalities and natural languages. No matter what language we choose, what gender, religion or nationality we have, we can be as bad or as good as philosophers as anyone else, but we will be better

if we are allowed to do philosophy in our own native language, or alternatively in the language in which we were trained in philosophy.

For non-English speakers there is an obvious tension between the two different communicational maxims we have to take into consideration when we decide how to express our thoughts. On the one hand, we want to have the most extended possible audience. On the other hand, we want to express our thoughts as accurately as they can be expressed. The second maxim always makes us prefer our native (academic) language. But the first is sometimes in conflict with the second, because we can reach a wider audience using a language other than our own. Sometimes we may decide to prioritize the first maxim. Always putting the second maxim in the first place leads us to the impossibility of communicating with a greater audience, and in the end to isolation. Always prioritizing the first leads us to abandon our own language as a genuine way of expressing our thoughts, and as a consequence the dialogue will become poorer because the subtleties that we can express in our own language—but not in others—will be forgotten. The decision will be highly contextual: there is not a single rule to follow in all cases.

Can institutions do anything to help individuals conciliate these two maxims which we, non-English native speakers dedicated to analytic philosophy, are torn between? The following are a couple of suggestions. They would constitute a first step in respecting the production of philosophical thinking in languages other than English.

- Journals should accept contributions in different languages, and when a paper written in a language other than English is accepted for publication, the journal should publish it in both languages.<sup>24</sup> Of course, there are many practical issues to address, for example the editors should be competent in different languages;<sup>25</sup> there should be a

---

24 I am not naïve and I know that there are economic interests behind publishing companies, which are not academic institutions. But I will not address this problem here.

25 I know that there are many philosophers in English-speaking countries who are competent in more than one language, and could do the job. Also, there are many philosophers in

limited list of allowed languages to deal with.<sup>26</sup> But with this change in the policies of many journals, things would be fairer to a huge amount of people who want to publish their works.

- Conferences held in non-English-speaking countries should encourage presentations in multiple languages: the national language and English (the *lingua franca*). This means not only that non-English speakers should make an effort to present their ideas in English (in a written paper, handout, Powerpoint, or talk), but also that English speakers will present their ideas in the other language (or at least a version of those ideas in a written summary or handout). Everybody should be encouraged to speak (to give a talk, to discuss, etc.) in their own language: there are always some bilingual people in the audience who can translate in order for the dialogue to flow. Of course this change would require a lot of patience and goodwill to understand each other. However, philosophy, at least as I understand it, is a cooperative human enterprise, not a competitive one. The point is to get a better understanding of different issues, to clarify ideas, to expand our horizons, rather than to win a debate, or to show that one is smarter than another.

The analytic tradition has developed for the last 50 years outside English-speaking countries. A plurality of voices is flourishing and it is time to allow them a place within this tradition. The twentieth century witnessed many different social and cultural changes concerning respect for minorities, and many policies were adopted in order to rebalance the imbalances produced by years (or centuries) of injustices to many groups. Maybe it is time to work towards a

---

non-English speaking countries who are also competent in more than one language: if we are asked to do an evaluation of an English paper for a given journal, we could be also asked to do the same job in our first language for that same journal. There are many people nowadays who publish in English but whose first language is different.

<sup>26</sup> Some European journals already accept contributions in French, German, Italian and English. In Latin America many journal accept papers in Spanish, Portuguese and English.

similar rebalancing in the case of non-English native speakers within the analytic tradition.

*University of Buenos Aires—CONICET/IIIF/SADAF*  
*dperez@filo.uba.ar*

### References

- Arisaka, Y. (2001) 'The Co-Emergence of "Self and Other" in Japanese Philosophy', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8 (5-7): 197–208.
- Bar-On, D. (2013) 'Origins of Meaning: Must We "Go Gricean"?', *Mind and Language*, 28 (3): 342–375.
- Borges, J.L. (2000), *This Craft of Verse*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bossong, G. (2009) 'The Typology of Tupi-Guarani as Reflected in the Grammars of Four Jesuit Missionaries', *Historiographia Linguistica*, 36 (2/3): 225–258.
- Conee, E. (1994) 'Phenomenal Knowledge', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 72 (2): 136–150.
- Dummett, M. (1993) *The Origins of Analytic Philosophy*. London: Duckworth.
- Ezcurdia, Maite (2015) 'El Lenguaje y la Mente en Iberoamérica', in Guariglia, O., Reyes Mate, & Olivé, L. (comps.), *La Filosofía Iberoamericana en el Siglo XX*. Madrid: Ed. Trotta.
- Gentner, D. & Goldin-Meadow, S. (eds) (2003) *Language in Mind*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Glock, H. (1997) *The Rise of Analytic Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- (2008) *What is Analytic Philosophy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gomila, A. (2002) 'La Perspectiva de Segunda Persona de la Atribución Mental' *Azafea*, 4: 123–138.
- (2011) *Verbal Minds. Language and the Architecture of Cognition*. London: Elsevier.
- Gracia, J. (2010) 'Cánones Filosóficos y Tradiciones Filosóficas. El caso de la Filosofía Latinoamericana', *Análisis Filosófico*, 30 (1): 17–34.
- (2014) 'Equivalencia Semántica y el Lenguaje del Análisis Filosófico', in Siegel, S. (coord.), *Reflexiones Sobre el uso del Inglés y el Español en Filosofía*

- Analítica. Informes del Observatorio / Observatorio Reports*. 006-12/2014SP Harvard University Press. doi: [10.15427/OR006-12/2014SP](https://doi.org/10.15427/OR006-12/2014SP)
- Hacker, P.S.M. (1999) 'La Filosofía Analítica de la Mente', in López Cuenca, A. (comp.), *Resistiendo el Oleaje. Reflexiones Tras un Siglo de Filosofía Analítica, Cuaderno Gris no. 4*. Madrid: UAM.
- Hofstadter, D.R. & Dennett, D.C. (eds), *The Mind's I. Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul*. New York: Basic Books.
- Jackson, F. (1982), 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 32: 127–136.
- Mannheim, B. (1982) 'Person, Number and Inclusivity in Two Andean Languages', *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia*, 17 (2): 139–156.
- Moore, G.E. (1939) 'Proof of an External World', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25: 273–300.
- Nagel, T. (1974), 'What is it Like to be a Bat?', *Philosophical Review*, 83: 435–450.
- Pérez, D. (2013a) 'The Will to Communicate', *Crítica*, 45 (133): 91–97
- (2013b) *Sentir, Desear, Creer. Una Aproximación Filosófica a los Conceptos Psicológicos*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo.
- Pérez, D. & Ortiz-Millán, G. (2010) 'Analytic Philosophy in Latin America', in Nuccetelli, Susana, Schutte, Ofelia, & Bueno, Otávio (eds), *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Rabossi, E. (1975). *Análisis Filosófico, Lenguaje y Metafísica*. Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores.
- Rumfitt, I. (2003) 'Savoir Faire', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 100 (3): 158–166.
- Russell, B. (1911) 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 11, 108–128; repr. in Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, New York & London: Longmans & Green & Co., 1918: 209–232.
- Salmerón, F. (2003) 'The Reception of Analytical Philosophy in Latin America', in Fløistad, G. (ed.), *Contemporary Philosophy. Vol 8. Philosophy of Latin America*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Scotto, C. (2002) 'Interacción y Atribución Mental: La Perspectiva de la Segunda Persona', *Análisis Filosófico*, 22 (2): 135–151.
- Siegel, S. (2014) 'Introducción al Diálogo Sobre Filosofía en Español', in Siegel, S. (coord.), *Reflexiones Sobre el Uso Del Inglés y el Español en Filosofía Analítica*.

*Informes del Observatorio / Observatorio Reports*. 006-12/2014SP Harvard University Press. doi: [10.15427/OR006-12/2014SP](https://doi.org/10.15427/OR006-12/2014SP)

Stanley, J., & Williamson. T. (2001) 'Know How', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 98 (8): 411–444.

Villoro, L. (1982) *Saber, Creer, Conocer*. México: Siglo XXI.