1. Folk psychologies

1.1. Folk psychologies as social practices

Imagine that we had a device that enabled us to sample the communicative behaviours of our ancestors at any time in the past. Starting at, say, two million years ago, forms of communication might not be strikingly different from those seen in present-day great apes, but moving forward in time we would begin to discern uses of word-like expressions, which after a while were combined into the first sentences. Initially, these budding linguistic exchanges would be confined to the humdrum and concrete, but in due course more abstract meanings would appear, and eventually our samples would begin to show up utterances that in English might be rendered like these:

I don't *mind*.	Why are you *angry*?	He did it *on purpose*.
I *like* you.	What do you *mean*?	She's *considering* it.
I *feel bad*.	*Think* about it.	They *agree* on that.
I *forgot* to do it.	*Look!*	They are one *mind*.
I lost my *sense of smell*.	You're *stupid*.	Her *soul* is pure.
I wasn't *expecting* this.	You don't *understand*.	He *suspects* it will rain.
I did it against my *will*.	You don't *love* me.	Her *memory* is fading.

Of course, all these forms didn't arrive at once, and some will have appeared much later than others, but all share a feature that is of special interest to us: they convey meanings that in English would be expressed in psychological terms, such as "feeling", "thinking", "suspecting", "being angry", and so on.

This peculiar style of social behaviour, which has been studied by ethnographers, anthropologists, lexicographers, and etymologists, among others, deserves the epithet "folk psychology" if anything does, and that is how the term will be used in this section. Folk psychologies, thus understood, are inevitably associated with languages, and the "folk" engaging in folk psychology may be any culture or group with a shared language. However, folk psychology is first and foremost a form of interaction that involves language *use*, and therefore our main quarry are the social practices rather than the languages used.

1.2. Diversity

All folk psychologies are not alike. Different cultures have different folk psychologies, and the differences run deep. To begin with, whereas some languages, like English or Indonesian, have large psychological vocabularies containing thousands of words, much lower numbers are reported for other languages, like Chewong, for example:

> The people to be discussed are the Chewong, a small aboriginal group of hunters, gatherers, and shifting cultivators in the tropical rain forest of Peninsular Malaysia. In the West, inner states are openly acknowledged and manifested both verbally and in bodily expressions. Among the Chewong there is little such overt evidence. [...] I was soon puzzled by the seeming paucity of words referring to the emotions, and I decided to make special efforts to record as large a vocabulary as possible in this area. [...] I met with little success, however, and was forced to conclude that their vocabulary is, in this respect, very limited and undifferentiated by comparison with Indo-European languages. (Howell (1981: xxxx))

After several years of painstaking research, Howell had managed to collect a psychological vocabulary of no more than twenty indigenous words and eight loan words from Malay. These remarkably modest figures are in line with her observation that the Chewong rarely talk about psychological states. They are by no means unique in this respect. In many societies of the Pacific, but also elsewhere, mental talk is infrequent, and even actively discouraged, usually on the grounds that one cannot know what others think, feel, or intend (Robbins xxxx). These attitudes and practices are in stark contrast with the situation in anglophone populations, where folk-psychological talk is rife, and although it has been claimed that in these societies, too, it is a marginal phenomenon, at best, the statistics suggest otherwise. In two major corpora of English, the British National Corpus (BNC, Burnard and Aston 1998) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, Davies 2010), five psychological verbs rank among the 25 most frequent verbs of English, with "know", "think" and "see" even being in the top 15.[1] Apparently, in anglophone cultures, speaking about the things people know, think, and see is anything but a marginal phenomenon.

Given these quantitative disparities, it is only to be expected that there will be considerable qualitative variation, too, and there is. As documented at length by Lillard's (1998) survey, folk psychologies differ markedly in their treatments of thinking, knowledge, intentionality, agency, feelings and emotions, minds and souls, other-worldly influences on the mind, and mind/body relations. Here we highlight two topics that are especially relevant to our concerns:

- Whereas Western cultures tend to hold agents responsible for their actions, on the premiss that "there is a conceptual tie between genuine action, on the one hand, and intention, on the other" (Wilson and Shpall 2016: 1), elsewhere in the world the tie between intention and action is not nearly as strong, with responsibility being assigned to, or at least shared with, other people, dead ancestors, ghosts, or gods (Lillard 1998: 15). Apparently, intentions aren't valued equally across cultures, if they are recognised at all.

1. Word frequencies from ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/bncfreq (BNC) and wordfrequency.info (COCA).

- One recurring theme in ethnographical accounts is that many folk psychologies fail to support the distinction between thinking and feeling that is central to Western culture (Lillard 1998: 23). For example, Chewong folk psychology lacks synonyms or near-synonyms for "think" and "feel". A handful of subspecies of thinking and feeling are lexicalised, but these are uniformly attributed to the liver. Thus, the Chewong will say "My liver did not remember" ("I did not remember") or "My liver is good" ("I'm feeling fine"). (Howell 1984: 153)

As the Chewong examples show, even if a folk psychology lacks a custom-made word similar to English "believe", for example, it may still provide other means of attributing beliefs. It is not uncommon for internal organs to be recruited for this purpose, and different cultures may pick different organs, but there is a lot more cross-cultural variation than that. It is a well-attested observation, for example, that in many cultures perception verbs like "see" and "hear" have been extended to talk about epistemic states, as in English "I see what you mean" or "I hear what you're saying" (Sweetser 1990, Evans and Wilkins 2000). But there are also languages in which verbs of saying play the lead role in mental-state attribution (Pascual 2014, Geurts 2021). Many Australian Aboriginal languages, for example, feature a single verb whose primary meaning is "say/tell", but which is also used to attribute thoughts, wishes, among others. A case in point is Ungarinyin, an Aboriginal language spoken in North-Western Australia:

ngurrba	nya$_2$-nga$_1$-yi-minda	a$_1$-ma	jirri	
hit	her$_2$ I$_1$ will take	he$_1$ SAY	he	(Spronck 2016: 259)

According to Spronck, this sentence can be used to convey a range of meanings, including: "He says: 'I will hit her' ", "He thinks: 'I will hit her' ", "He thinks that he will hit her", and "He wants to hit her".

And here's an example from Yurakaré, a nearly extinct language of central Bolivia (Pascual 2014: 92, crediting Sonja Gipper, p.c.):

a-teshe	ti-yurujre	ku-ta-ja	otto-ja	mala-ti	ana	tumumu
sleeping	my owner	SAID	go out	go	that	frog

Pascual translates this as "Knowing that his owner was sleeping, the frog went outside and left", but we surmise that the same sentence might be used to attribute a belief.

Summing up, there are various ways in which folk psychologies may enable the attribution of mental states that they lack specialised words for. To some degree, this mitigates the gravity of our observation that there are serious quantitative disparities between folk-psychological vocabularies. But to some degree only, because it is doubtful that, even in aggregate, the various alternatives we have sampled could be nearly as expressive and effective as a copious vocabu-

lary of psychological words.

1.3. Polysemy, flexibility, and indeterminacy

All or nearly all words have more than one conventional uses, and if you pick an arbitrary word from your lexicon, it is a practical certainty that it will be polysemous: it will have several related uses. For example, the adjective "red" is used differently when applied to tomatoes, wine, hair, skin, or grapefruits. What counts as "red" depends on the context, but nevertheless its various uses are clearly related.

Another case is the word "school", which according to the OED has the following senses (among others):

(a) an institution for educating children
(b) the buildings used by a school
(c) the pupils and staff of a school

If I say, "The headmaster addressed the whole school", then (c) is the relevant sense, but note that this doesn't mean that (a) and (b) are simply discarded. At least (a) is part of the message, too. The various senses of a polysemous word are *connected*, and if you select one, others may come along. Different from "red".

Given that, except perhaps for a trifling minority of technical terms, all words are polysemous, it is practically an *a priori* truth that mental-state words are polysemous, too. Examples: "belief", "knowledge", "pain", "intention".

> Philosophical perplexity about intention begins with its appearance in three guises: intention for the future, as when I intend to complete this entry by the end of the month; the intention with which someone acts, as I am typing with the further intention of writing an introductory sentence; and intentional action, as in the fact that I am typing these words intentionally. [...] The principal task of the philosophy of intention is to uncover and describe the unity of these three forms. (Setiya 2018: 1)

In addition to polesemy, there is prototypicality. Content-words (or the concepts associated with them) are associated with "prototype effects", which may depend on the context. E.g., prototypical red is different for wine, hair, skin, ... Concomitant with prototypicality is vagueness or zones of indeterminacy, which we also observe in psychological words.

In the foregoing we said that speakers of such languages as Chewong, Ungarinyin, and Yurakaré employ alternative linguistic ways for attributing thoughts, beliefs, intentions, wishes, and other mental states. We also said that speakers of languages that do have specialised words for beliefs (say) quite freely attribute beliefs to babies, pets, and even to inanimate objects like telephones,

cars, and triangles; and ditto for other mental states. How seriously should such claims be taken?

A Chewong produces an utterance that, transcribed word by word, reads "My liver is good", but which we *interpret* as "I'm feeling good". Now, if one of us were to say "I'm feeling good", we wouldn't hesitate to affirm that she attributed a feeling to herself. But was the Chewong *really* doing the same thing, only with different linguistic means? Howell, who is our main source of information about Chewong culture and language, suggests that it is a figure of speech (1984: 153). But is it really? Would the Chewong agree that their psychological uses of the word that Howell translates as "liver" are merely figurative, and not to be understood literally? For that matter, would everyone who shares Howell's cultural background agree with her judgment?

Closer to home, similar quandaries arise. If Betty says, "My phone thinks it's in Norway", she probably would admit that she was speaking figuratively. But if she said, "The cat believes it's feeding time", she might very well insist that her pet *really* believes that it is feeding time, while Barney and other, equally competent speakers of English would shake their heads in disbelief at so much naivety, for surely cats don't have beliefs?

These observations show that our folk psychological practices have zones of indeterminacy in which even competent users disagree about the applicability of mental-state words. This shouldn't come as a surprise, since practically all our words are indeterminate in some way or other. Competent users of English may disagree about whether this colour swatch is blue or green, about how many spelling errors count as "many", and so on. Zones of indeterminacy are rife, and it would have been surprising if our folk psychologies didn't have them.

Outside academia, these indeterminacies rarely matter. Even if Barney is convinced that cats don't have beliefs, and therefore dismisses Wilma's utterance as patently false, he may still be able to gauge what she means when she says that "the cat believes it's feeding time." One person's literal truth is another person's figure of speech. However, in academia the distinction may matter a great deal, if only because, in many cases, it is precisely the borderline cases that are of special interest.

1.4. Folk psychology in academia

Folk psychology plays a central role in many academic disciplines: philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, psychiatry, history, sociology, linguistics, medicine, economics, law, etc.

Three ways in which folk psychology is involved in academic research:

- *Naive use:* All of us use folk psychology naively, and not only in our interac-

tions with one another ("Professor Butterfill seems oblivious to the fact that $1+1=2$.")

- *Rational reconstruction:* For many of us, folk psychology is a point of departure for constructing theories of various kinds, some of which are formal and quite rigorous (e.g. probability theory, decision theory, doxastic logic), while others are informal, if not casual. The last class includes much theorising in philosophy and psychology about beliefs, intentions, emotions, and so on.
- *Object of study:* Some of us study folk psychology in its own right, as we are doing here. But long before us there were ethnographers, anthropologists, lexicographers, and etymologists.

Discuss each of these in turn, with special emphasis on the last one. Topics to be addressed in this discussion:

- Data: easy to obtain though hard to interpret. Informants are important. People not only engage in folk psychology, they are also capable of reflecting on it and sharing thoughts (meta folk psychology).
- Empirical studies reveal various kinds of systematicity, many of which suggested by informants.
- Confused arguments and messy debates.
- …

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