On what we experience when we hear people speak

Abstract

According to perceptualism, fluent comprehension of speech is a perceptual achievement, in as much as it is akin to such high-level perception as the perceptual of objects as cups or as trees, or of people as happy or as sad. Accordingly to liberalism, grasp of meaning is partially constitutive of the phenomenology of fluent comprehension. I here defend an influential line of argument for liberal perceptualism, resting on phenomenal contrasts in our comprehension of speech, due to Susanna Siegel and Tim Bayne, against objections from Casey O’Callaghan and Indrek Reiland. I concentrate on the contrast between the putative immediacy of meaning-assignment in fluent comprehension, as compared with other, non-fluent, perhaps translation-based ways of getting at the meaning of speech. I argue this putative immediacy is difficult to capture on a non-perceptual view (whether liberal or non-liberal), and that the immediacy in question has much in common with that which applies in other cases of high-level perception.

Keywords

speech perception; experience of high-level properties; perception and thought; cognitive phenomenology

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