

Workshop: Empirical Data and Philosophical Theorizing (EDPT)  
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"Reference, Intuitions, and the Expertise Defense"

Abstract

(presentation of work co-authored by Jussi Haukioja)

Michael Devitt (2011, 2012) argues that the empirical results about lay speakers' responses to thought experiments (as reported in Machery et al. 2004) are not relevant for determining the correct theory of reference. Since philosophers of language are experts about reference, their intuitions should be trusted more than the intuitions of ordinary speakers. Edouard Machery (2011, 2012) responds that the expertise defense is not promising in the case of philosophy, since it is not clear whether philosophers have any expertise, nor does the relevant expertise seem to influence the intuitive judgment. We believe that the whole discussion rests on a mistaken view about the role of intuitions in determining which theory of reference is correct. We believe that semantic intuitions, properly understood, have a *constitutive* role for reference. The (standard) expertise defense (as well as Machery's criticism) assumes, however, that intuitions have an *evidential* role. We conclude the paper explaining how the relevant intuitions of ordinary speakers should be tested empirically.