Partial meaning eliminativism and literalness

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My contribution addresses the question of the literalness of referential uses. It does that via the question of meaning eliminativism and the distinctions its (partial) acknowledgment calls for. Meaning eliminativism denies that words have meanings in the traditional sense, whether abstract or knowledge-rich (Recanati 2004: 141): word meanings are elaborated contextually without the input of context-invariant meanings. Meaning eliminativism obviously undermines the distinction between a literal and a non-literal use of a given referential expression. Unqualified, such a view has little appeal. Nevertheless, I argue that *partial* meaning eliminativism is plausible, provided we split linguistic meaning in two and distinguish lexical meaning from conventional meaning. *Lexical meaning*, on the one hand, is the mentally encoded meaning and can be construed in a way compatible with eliminativism. *Conventional meaning*, on the other hand, is the objective meaning, out there in the world, and can be construed as partially independent from speakers' representations (and misrepresentations), along the lines of Millikan's biological model for language (1984; 2005). Conventional meaning resists eliminativism. I claim that this bipartite reconstruction of linguistic meaning allows us to distinguish between two senses in which a referential use of a given expression can be treated as being a literal use: a weak intersubjective sense and a strong objective sense.

References: • **Millikan**, R. G. (1984): *Language, thought, and other biological categories: new foundations for realism*. MIT Press. • **Millikan**, R. G. (2005): *Language: A Biological Model*. Clarendon Press. • **Recanati**, F. (2004): *Literal Meaning*. Cambridge University Press.