

The Objectivity of Language



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"The Self Owner" is an original column appearing every Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Spencer W. Morgan. Spencer is a husband and father, and has studied History and Philosophy at the University of Utah. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

In this week's brief column I want to take a few minutes to address something that should have been dealt with in my very first entry. In "Foundations of A Philosophic Conversation" we examined the context of conversation and some of the inescapable implications of the very act.

One thing that seems to keep popping up in articles and attacks on the ideas of liberty that I've encountered this week, is the notion of the subjectivity of language. This notion is most often, I've found, a confusion based on the fact that words in a given language can have more than one specific definition, and this definition often has to be derived or presumed from context. Yes, it leads to mistaken assumptions of meaning... but that does not demonstrate that language itself is subjective. The fact that a word can have multiple, objectively understandable meanings does not mean language is subjective. It just means more specificity or reasoning from context is required to determine which objective meaning is being conveyed. The fact that language conveys objective meaning is evident by virtue of what language is. It's entire communicative purpose is to do so. And to the extent that your statement "language is subjective" succeeds with the hearer understanding that statement, you have proven your assertion wrong. A conversation might go like this:

Person A: *"Language is subjective!"*

Person B: *"Interesting... and how have you chosen to convey that conclusion to me?"*

Person A: *"I'm telling you right now"*

Person B: *"Why did you think I would understand this statement?"*

Person A: *"Because you can read the English language"*

Person B: *"Yes, I can. So by saying this to me, you assumed that I could assign meanings to the words you were speaking, based on a set of mutually understood definitions?"*

We can see here that in the very act of stating "Language is subjective," the proponent of

this assertion has affirmed, and depended upon, his conclusion being incorrect.