Aristotle's Theory of Language

Aristotle's Systems

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Considering the vast range of subjects on which Aristotle thought and wrote, the consideration given to language is surprisingly small. A purely linguistic investigation takes place only incidentally in Aristotle's corpus, and when it does appear, it is considered for other primary interests. The *De Interpretatione*, the *Poetics*, and the *Rhetoric* are the three works which most pay attention to linguistic concerns,[1] but even in these, Aristotle's study of language is secondary. The *De Interpretatione*, usually thought of as a part of Aristotle's "Organon", focusses on logical reasoning through statements of truth and falsity, and its sketch of language in chapters 1–4 is built up for that purpose.[2] In the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*, language is considered through the term "diction" (λέξις, also sometimes rendered as "style"[3]). The *Poetics* has Aristotle's most detailed in-

[1] These books constitute Aristotle's three "verbal arts" of logic, rhetoric and poetry, as noted by Miriam Larkin; Larkin 1971, 21. Versions of the texts used in this essay are: for English translations, J. L. Ackrill's *De Interpretatione*, and W. Rhys Roberts' *Rhetoric* in Barnes 1984, and for the *Poetics*, Halliwell 1987; Greek texts come from the Loeb series for each of these texts.

[2] For a recent overview of scholars' positions as to the linguistic content of the *De Interpretatione*, see Kasabova and Marinov 2016, 240–241

[3] For a detailed analysis of λέξις in Aristotle, see Kotarcic 2020. Kotartic considers there to be

vestigation of linguistic grammar over chapters 20–21, but this is only one of the six elements that constitute tragedy, and in relative terms, it is a fairly minor one. The *Rhetoric*'s third book, on language and the arrangement of speeches, is subservient to its first two books that consider the "sources of persuasion".

In contrast to the relatively humble position of language in Aristotle, his philosophical predecessors swarmed over the subject. Sophists in particular were associated with questions around language, with interest in semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, pragmatics and style, rhythm and metre.[4] Plato's *Cratylus* is often cited as the earliest extant study of linguistics.[5]

Out of these observations two questions begin to form. Firstly, why did Aristotle not give more attention to language, especially since the topic was so debated by his immediate philosophical forebears? Secondly, what was Aristotle's view of language, and it is possible to piece together his view from these scattered works? Through answering the former, I hope to illuminate the latter. I therefore take up Plato's *Cratylus* as a starting point,[6] to look at some of the major questions it raises about language, and then I will set out how Aristotle responded to those questions, especially drawing on the three works of the *De Interpretatione*, the *Poetics*, and the *Rhetoric*.

I chose the *Cratylus* as a partner text, not only because of the importance of

three "levels" of λέξις, describing linguistic elements, correctness of style, and the skill of using language as a whole.

[4]On semantics: Prodicus' interest in synonymy and polysemy, Cratylus and Democritus' use of etymology, Antiphon's consideration of how best to make new words. Protagoras' interest covered style (ὀρθοέπεια), different kinds of sentence, distinctions of gender. He and Plato also separated syntactic word-classes such as nouns and verbs. Hippias' musical interest lead to study of rhythm and metre. Kotarcic 2020, 14–15

[5]E.g. Fischer 2005, 144–146 and Robins 2013, 19. Robins points out that Diogenes Laertius said that Plato first investigated grammar.

[6]In quoting from English translation I use C. D. C. Reeve's *Plato's Cratylus* 1998, and Burnet's Oxford Classical Text for Greek.

the questions it raises, and the engagement it has with sophistic thought, but also because the *De Interpretatione* replies directly to the arguments raised in Plato's dialogue.[7] The *De Interpretatione* responds directly to three arguments that appear in the *Cratylus*: that words are significant by convention (κατὰ συνθήκην 2, 16a20); that the constituent parts of a word are non-significant (4, 16a21); and that words—and sentences—are *not* a tool (ὄργανον 4, 17a1) for differentiating things. The first of these arguments, part of the wider νόμος—φύσις debate, is the stated topic of the whole of Plato's dialogue. Hermogenes and Cratylus respectively speak for the positions of words being conventionally or naturally correct. Secondly, Socrates relies on an argument—both against Hermogenes and against Cratylus—that the constituent parts of a word are meaningful, just as the whole words are. Indeed, the etymologies which fill the dialogue include semantic etymologies of individual sounds within words (426*c*–427*c*). Finally, the analogy of a word as a tool is important in the *Cratylus*, since it establishes that words are part of a skill of naming, and Socrates infers from this that there is an art to naming things, which is done well when someone gives a name according to the thing's nature (387*d*–389*e*). Without understanding the background of this debate, it would be difficult to interpret Aristotle's clarification in the *De Interpretatione*, when he explains that a sentence is significant "not as a tool, but, as we said, by convention" (4, 17a1). Aristotle assumes his reader will know that the tool analogy was an argument for language to be meaningful by nature.

The *Cratylus* is therefore a very relevant text for comparison with Aristotle's

[7] Pierre Aubenque argues that Aristotle is responding to the sophists, not to Plato—Aubenque 2013. The argument that follows sets out why I think that Aristotle is directly responding to the *Cratylus*, but even if he is not, the important thing is the arguments, not the persons.

work. It does have a problem, however, for our analysis, as the interpretation of Socrates' position has caused some difficulty. How seriously should we take Socrates' arguments, and especially, how seriously should we take the rhapsody of etymologies which forms the bulk of the dialogue? How tongue-in-cheek is Socrates being, for example, when he ascribes his initial deluge of etymologies to an inspiration from Euthyphro, the self-righteous zealot depicted in his own dialogue? (396*d–e*; Socrates even jokes that he and Hermogenes will have to "purify" themselves of this influence once their etymologising is done.) How serious—and how specific—is Socrates being, when he warns Cratylus at the end of the dialogue that "surely no one with any understanding will commit himself or the cultivation of his soul to names, or trust them and their givers to the point of firmly stating that he knows something" (440*c*)?

Deborah Modrak accounts for the irony by seeing the dialogue as "a sustained attack on the theories of meaning that were currently in vogue"[8], namely the naturalist and conventionalist views of language. Where Cratylus takes the extreme naturalist stance and Hermogenes a hard-line conventionalist, Modrak sees Socrates as holding the middle position to coax down each interlocutor in turn.[9] Does this mean Socrates' methods, and in particular his lengthy etymologies, are merely arguments of convenience?

David Sedley is the clearest defender of the etymological programme in the *Cratylus* as a serious philosophical exploration by Plato.[10] Sedley does not miss the humour in the dialogue, but he does dispute that the humour undermines

[8]Modrak 2001, 14.

[9]Interestingly, this was also the reading of the ancient commentator of Aristotle, Ammonius, according to to Chriti 2021. Ammonius believed that Aristotle's thinking was consistent with this moderate view.

[10]Sedley 2003, esp. 25-50.

the actual etymological attempts. Nor does factual criticism of the etymologies hold water for Sedley as an indication of insincerity, since this presumes a view and understanding of historical language change only developed in the 18th century. The most important evidence Sedley points to is the general acceptance of etymological argument throughout antiquity, in Plato's other works,[11] and, importantly for our questions here, in Plato's most celebrated student, Aristotle.[12]

Moreover, the dialogue itself is strong evidence of the seriousness with which apparently extreme views were held. If Plato himself did not take seriously all of the arguments he deploys in the *Cratylus* it is clear that those he was engaged with did. There are several references to other sophist thinkers in the *Cratylus*, especially influencing the young Hermogenes. His brother Callias is said to have paid for lessons from Protagoras (391*b*–*c*), and Socrates jokes about having missed Prodicus' fifty-drachma course (384*b*). Presumably the reference to Euthryphro indicates that he was also known for etymologising. Equally, Aristotle fends off sophistic arguments in several places when concerned with arguments about language.[13] It is enough for our purposes then, to note: the importance of etymological argument in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, even if the observations are erroneous in historical linguistic terms;[14] and to realise that Plato and Aristotle are already in and amongst debates that accept some of

[11] Such as the *Philebus*, which receives specific attention in Sedley 2003, 25–8

[12] Sedley investigates Aristotle's etymologies on αἰών *De Caelo* (1.9, 279a18-28), and αἰθήρ *De Caelo* (1.3, 270b16-25), Sedley 2003, 30–4.

[13] See, for example *Soph. el.* (1, 165a6-10); *De. Int.* (6, 17a34-6); *Rh.* (24, 1402a24-5).

[14] "Authors of antiquity did not aim at reconstructing the origins of a word, as contemporary etymological research is bound to do, but they were interested in the relation between a word and its meaning, a meaning that ancient etymologists were not interested in identifying, since they concentrated on detecting its relation with a specific vocal sound." Chriti 2021, 37.

the more outlandish claims of the *Cratylus*.

Whilst the interpretation of Plato's position is controversial, scholars do tend to agree that some progress is made in the *Cratylus*. Here is Modrak:

> In spite of the rejection [in her view] of both conventionalism and naturalism, the dialogue has affirmed a number of theses about language that go unchallenged. Words are tools that enable us to distinguish between objects. All languages that carve up reality correctly will have the same deep structure (389d). Such languages will differ only at the phonetic level, where different sounds will indicate the same object. A correct name indicates the nature of the thing named (426d), and it is a verbal representation (δήλωμα) of its referent.[15]

Sedley lists twenty principles of etymology which he sees maintained throughout the dialogue.[16] He would agree with the first and fourth affirmations that Modrak notes (words as tools; names are correct insofar as they indicate/imitate its referent), though disagreement exists around on the subject of foreign languages.

Let us return to consider how Aristotle responds to the particular problems set out in the *Cratylus*. Aristotle does not sidestep the debate between nature and convention. His definition of a noun (or, as it is translated here, "name") is clear: "A name (ὄνομα) is a spoken sound significant by convention (κατὰ συνθήκην), without time, none of whose parts is significant in separation." (2, 16a20-1) However, the role of convention here is not that of Hermogenes. Hermogenes stated his position at the opening of the *Cratylus* as "I believe that any name you

[15] Modrak 2001, 18.
[16] Sedley 2003, 149–50.

give a thing is its correct name." (384*d*), in direct contrast to the position he sees Cratylus as taking: "that there is a correctness of name for each thing, one that belongs to it by nature." (383*a*) The two debaters framed convention as being related to the "correctness" (ὀρθότης) of a word, but for Aristotle convention is what makes a sound "significant" (σημαντική). Aristotle is very much concerned with correctness in the *De Interpretatione*, but in this work it is a logical category of certain elements in language. (Aristotle will go on to consider the different ways in which logical statements are contradictory or not.) Only some parts of language are capable of being logically "true" or "false", namely certain kinds of sentence, the affirmation and negation (4-5, 17a1-10). But nouns, verbs, and non-statement-forming sentences (such as prayers and commands) all are defined in terms of being significant, not as being true or false.

What is the difference, then, between a word being correct, in Plato's terminology, and it being significant, in Aristotle's? In the *Cratylus*, the dialogue begins with a discussion around proper names, and specifically with Cratylus' objection that Hermogenes is the wrong name for the man who goes by that name. Socrates suggests to Hermogenes that Cratylus may think this because he is making an etymological joke,[17] but Cratylus himself makes the objection (at 429*c*) that "People take [the name Hermogenes] to have been given to him, but it is really the name of someone else, namely, the very one who also has the nature." In addition to the inference Socrates has made, Cratylus appears to be objecting that the word has been given the wrong referent. "Hermogenes" is a perfectly good name, but just not for this person, since he doesn't display

[17] 384*c*; "Hermogenes" is taken to be "son-of-Hermes", and whereas Hermes was the god associated with merchants and profit, Hermogenes apparently has a reputation for losing money.

the qualities described by the name. The word's referent is, however, assumed to be a person, that is, an external object in reality. On the contrary, Aristotle flatly disagrees with the direct connection between a word and its external object: "spoken sounds," he writes at the very opening of the *De Interpretatione* (1, 16a4) "are symbols of affections in the soul." (ἔστι μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα...) Rather like modern linguistics assumption of a mental lexicon, Aristotle imputes a relationship between words and our inner understanding of the world. His use of the word "significant" (σημαντική, see also σημαίνει, σημεῖον, and σύμβολα[18]) indicates that words are signs or symbols[19] of an internal imagination, not imitations of external things. Socrates' analogy of painting does not hold, then, in relation to words, since there is not the need for signs or symbols to imitate their referent. So, one of the key differences between Aristotle and Plato's conception of words is that Aristotle regards words as pointers to mental conceptions of things, whereas Plato sees them as imitations of the things in the world.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle accepts what in modern linguistics would be called "double articulation"[20]—that language's significant units are made up of smaller, non-significant units. This is made quite clear in *De Interpretatione* (2–4, 16a19–17a6) in Aristotle's definition of a noun (ὄνομα) and verb (ῥῆμα), which are significant sounds, of which no part is significant. (Contrast the defini-

[18]In *Soph. el.* 1, 165a6-10, Aristotle uses a metaphor of counters as an imperfect analogy for a symbol. "Σύμβολον and σημεῖον, two terms for sign or token, have well-established senses as signs by convention, agreement, or social practice; for instance, the custom amongst parties to a contract was to break a coin between them and the pieces of the coin were called σύμβολα." Modrak 2001, 20

[19]For a discussion of the difference between sign and symbol as it is relevant to *De Interpretatione*, see Kasabova and Marinov 2016, 243–4

[20]The term was coined by André Martinet in Martinet 1949. It is also known by Charles Hockett's phrase "duality of patterning": Hockett 1960

tion of sentence—λόγος—which is significant and includes at least one element that is significant by itself.) The meaningful units of language therefore have "parts", which themselves either are or are not meaningful. The same classification of significant and non-significant sounds can be found in the *Poetics* (20–1, 1456b20–1458a16), where the non-significant elements are the ultimate building-blocks for the ones which are significant—nouns, verbs, and sentences.

In contrast, Socrates in the *Cratylus* argues that because a word is meaningful, so must its elements be. He pursues this logic both when talking to Hermogenes and to Cratylus, suggesting that this was one of the arguments Plato found more convincing. In his discussion with Hermogenes, Socrates attempts to solve the problem of where the original ("primary") words, from which all other ("secondary") words derive, get their meaning from. He proposes that these original words are imitations of their referent objects, and that the imitation is done in terms of letters and syllables (423*b*–*e*). Letters and syllables are brought in to the theory because Socrates is looking for something analogous to the elements used in other prime examples of imitation: music uses musical tones, and painting uses colours on a palette. Letters and syllables must, it therefore appears to Socrates and Hermogenes, be the elements a "giver of law" (νομοθέτης) uses to imitate the concepts which a word expresses. This analogy doesn't receive much interrogation. It isn't clear, for example, that it is the colours and musical tones, rather than the finished painting and musical phrase, which does the imitative work. But while the two interlocutors do admit the difficulty of analysing the sound-semantic relationship, the theory is held to be "entirely unavoidable", if only because any other theoretical framework is considered ridiculous (425*d*–426*b*).

Why does Aristotle not think the natural meaningfulness of words is "entirely unavoidable"? It is because Aristotle, unlike Plato, differentiates the sounds of human language and other kinds of sound, whether of other animals or the natural environment. Aristotle brings out this distinction the *De Interpretatione*, when he expounds what he means by the term "by convention": "no name is a name naturally but only when it has become a symbol. Even inarticulate noises (of beasts, for instance) do indeed reveal something, yet none of them is a name." (2, 16a27–29) But the distinction is also found in other parts of the corpus: e.g. the *Hist. an.* 4.9, 534b29 ("Voice (φωνή) and sound (ψόφος) are different from one another; and language (διάλεκτος) differs from voice and sound.") and the *De Anima* 2.8, 419b3–21a7 ("Voice is a kind of sound characteristic of what has soul in it; nothing that is without soul utters voice" and "voice is a sound with a meaning, and is not the result of any impact of the breath as in coughing.") These passages show a distinction as a result of the soul, and the intention behind making a sound. In the *Poetics* (20, 1456b20ff.) this distinction is even maintained on the level of the "letter" or "element" (στοιχεῖον) as well as the word. "The element is an indivisible sound—not of any kind, but one from which a composite sound can naturally arise. (There are also indivisible animal sounds, none of which do I call an element.)" The structure of Aristotle's στοιχεῖον is a unit of sound, but like the modern conception of the phoneme, it has a structural and a psychological aspect to it, which differentiate it from other kinds of sound. The psychological aspect is the intention that comes from a speaker that has soul. The structural side is that the στοιχεῖον which is a building block for the syllable and word. Syllables and words are the "composite sounds" which the definition relates to, and which chapter 20 of the

Poetics goes on to explain. Aristotle splits the στοιχεῖον into vowels, continuants (e.g. /s/ and /r/) and stops (e.g. /g/ and /d/), each of which have rules as to how they can be built up into larger units. Vowels, for instance, are audible by themselves, whereas stops are only audible when they are in conjunction with other sounds. In the *Cratylus*, Plato was familiar with these grammatical terms, and Socrates notes that they are the language of certain specialists (424*c*). But whereas Socrates concludes that the importance of knowing these terms is so that the specialist can discern the meaning of these individual sounds (and he attempts to do so at 426*c*, trying to show that the Greek letter rho has an intrinsic link to motion), Aristotle's elements remain part of language's not significant parts.

Aristotle's categorisation of the parts of language is different to modern linguistics. "The linguistic categories presented in *Poetics* 20 straddle phonetics and grammar—that is, they mix definitions of speech-sounds with definitions of functional units of language."[21] But Aristotle is not in a muddle—his structure is clear, and surprisingly complex for only a few pages of text. In Aristotle's classification there is a central semantic division: some sounds mean something, others don't. All the given definitions share an element in that each unit, noun, verb, and sentence, is a kind of sound (φωνή). *De Interpretatione* began by differentiating spoken and written sounds, and it is tempting to jump to the conclusion that language for Aristotle is a kind of upside-down pyramid, in which sounds are at the bottom, they make up all the nouns and the verbs, and the nouns and the verbs make up all the sentences. In the *Poetics* (20) language's non-significant units are described: the letter (στοχεῖον), the syllable (συλλαβή),

[21] Halliwell 1987, p.158.

the conjunction (σύνδεσμος), and the article (ἄρθρον; the examples given are actually not the definite article, which may or not be included in this category, but the prepositions ἀμφί, περί). The first two of these are the building blocks of all words, including conjunctions and articles that we tend to classify as words in modern linguistics. The division by semantics, rather than by syntax (classifying language into different words, or word-classes), prevents the upside-down pyramid. But in addition to this, just as Aristotle differentiated between different kinds of sound, so there are different kinds of meaning-bearing parts of language which behave differently. The noun and the verb are different in that the latter includes a sense of time. But the highest level of language, the "sentence" (λόγος) is not just one thing.

> Not every sentence is a statement-making sentence, but only those in which there is truth or falsity. There is not truth or falsity in all sentences: a prayer is a sentence but is neither true or false. The present investigation deals with the statement-making sentence; the others we can dismiss, since consideration of them belongs rather to the study of rhetoric or poetry.
>
> *De Interpretatione* 17a2–6

This key little passage is the justification for Larkin's observation that Aristotle has three "verbal arts" of logic, rhetoric and poetry.[22] The three texts of the *De Interpretatione*, the *Poetics*, and the *Rhetoric* all refer readers to each other at certain parts of their study. In the *Poetics*, for example, consideration of the element of tragedy, "thought" (νούς), is left entirely to the *Rhetoric*, since it

[22]Larkin 1971, 21.

concerns language for the purpose of "demonstration, refutation, the arousal of emotions such as pity, fear, anger, and the like, and arguing for the importance or unimportance of things." (19, 1456a33–b1) The genus of language seems to have separate species, and interestingly enough, each belongs to a different discipline. Hence they require different treatments, and we should not expect the *De Interpretatione*, the *Poetics*, and the *Rhetoric* to be all alike.

The above quotation is also noteworthy for its recognition of what in modern pragmatics is known as "speech act theory".[23] Interestingly, Aristotle never does get around to fully expounding this topic in the extant corpus. In chapter 19 of the *Poetics*, it is seen as a certain kind of "verbal style", but one belonging more to rhetoric than poetry, and in the *Rhetoric* no more consideration is given to the matter. But Aristotle does tellingly connect the subject to Protagoras' philosophy, whom he chastises for "finding fault with Homer for purporting to address a prayer, but in fact delivering a command, by saying 'Sing, Goddess, of the wrath...'" (*Poetics* 19, 1456b10–16) Aristotle's criticism is of Protagoras' pedantry, and in Aristotle's mind, the criticism is irrelevant to the poetic quality of the poem.

What then, are the differences of language in poetry and rhetoric? My favourite line of Aristotle's is emblematic: "Nobody uses fine language when teaching geometry." (*Rhetoric* 1, 1404a13) Certain subjects and modes of speech require particular kinds of language, and other kinds of language are incongruous. The *Poetics* lists different kinds of "nouns", although the term ὄνομα may perhaps here be better conceived of as "noun phrases" or figures of speech, since the list is clearly not just of individual words: "whatever its structure, a noun

[23] Austin 1962.

must always be either the ordinary word for the thing, or a strange word, or a metaphor, or an ornamental word, or a coined word, or a word lengthened out, or curtailed, or altered in form." (*Poetics* 21, 1457b1-3) The *Rhetoric* makes use of the same list of terms (and in fact refers the reader to the list), and though Aristotle provides an in-depth study of the metaphor there, he warns against overuse of strange words, compound words, or invented words. We shall see why shortly. But there is consistency across the different verbal arts as to what kind of terms may be used. Even in an explanatory work, "it may sometimes be necessary even to invent names, if no name exists in relation to which a thing would be given in a familiar way." (*Categories* 7a5–7) Consequently, Halliwell sees a "scale" or "spectrum" of language, running from ordinary words to the most poetic terminology, and each of these has its time and place to be used.[24]

Within Aristotle's classification of terms, there is also an implicit qualification of the conventional nature of language. One of the perceived problems with conventionalist views of language is the extreme view taken by Hermogenes in the *Cratylus*, who considers that every person can make for themselves a new word for something and it be "correct". (Incidentally, I think such a view has more in it that is sometimes supposed, as a certain range of language is centred on the ideolect—pet names for instance, or shorthand references with close family and friends.) Aristotle's qualification of conventionalism is that words take their conventional meaning in relation to a particular language community. The definitions of standard terms and foreign terms are explicitly concerned with the sociolinguistic aspect of language communities; standard terms are those "in the usage of a particular group" and foreign terms are those "borrowed from oth-

[24]Halliwell 1993, 56.

ers." This means that "the same word may obviously be at once strange and ordinary, though not in reference to the same people." (*Poetics* 21, 1457b3–6) It is natural that Aristotle should have this as an underlying aspect of his theory of language, because, as we saw, the important question is not concerning the "correctness" of words—that is, the closeness of relationship between the word and its referent—but the communicative power of a word and sentence.

Aristotle is explicit that the primary function of language is to communicate. It is the common element of the excellence in poetry ("Excellence of style consists in clarity without banality." *Poetics* 22, 1458a17) and rhetoric (Language, "to be good must be clear, as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what the speech has to do." *Rhetoric* 3.2, 1404b1-4). Clarity is also the effect of using standard terms ("the greatest clarity comes from the use of standard terms"), and since explicative speech, such as philosophical dialogue, uses such standard terminology, it must also be the purpose of language in that mode. Indeed, Aristotle goes some way into investigating how to remove ambiguity from philosophical discourse, hence his consideration of homonymy, synonymy and paronymy in the *Categories*. Ambiguity is seen as a positive evil in the *Rhetoric* (3.5, 1407a32ff.) due to the way it allows speakers to claim that their predictions were correct, since it is less likely that the result will contradict their pronouncement. Aristotle criticises Empedocles for his long-windedness, for example, and compares him to unscrupulous priests or oracles that seek to garner awe by not being specific.

Common also to poetry and rhetoric is Aristotle's conception of the appropriateness of language. In the *Poetics*, even the most ornate language should be used sparingly, and it is the mixture of clarity through use of ordinary words

and ornament through use of unusual words, that produces great poems. (*Poetics* 22, 1458a18ff.) In fact, overuse of unusual terminology leads to absurdity, and this might be appropriate to comedy, but certainly not to the tragedy which is the subject of the *Poetics*' study as it survives. But Aristotle does argue that those finding fault with poetic language per se are making a categorical error; the use of poetic pronunciations, vocabulary, or other elements, is the proper realm of poetry because it gives the language a certain "grandness". In rhetoric, appropriateness of language requires—and results in—a certain naturalness, so as to prevent an audience from suspecting artifice in a speech. (*Rhetoric* 3.2, 1404b1ff.) In both instances, it is the effect on the audience which is the test of how well the language is deployed.[25]

What can we say, in summary, about Aristotle's view of language? He does, as has been clear from the *De Interpretatione* and elsewhere, engage with the debates on language that had been raging through the decades before his writings. Most importantly he rejects a naturalistic explanation of meaning, and to this end he asserts that words refer to one's inner conception of the world, not to the world objects themselves. This frees him from having to relate the basic elements of language to the world through mimesis or any other method. Instead, Aristotle considers there to be two halves of language—one set of its parts are not meaningful, and the other is meaningful. All of this is in contrast with the apparent conclusions of the Plato's *Cratylus*. Aristotle does accept that language can be deployed better or worse, but this does not lead to Socrates'

[25]Theophrastus is reported as having stated that 'poetry and rhetoric are directed to their hearers; philosophy is directed to actuality (pragmata).' But communication is nevertheless the primary goal across all three language arts. Halliwell 1993, quoting Theophrastus fr. 65 Wimmer.

conclusion that language must therefore be naturally determined.

We can glean some considerable insight into Aristotle's view of language, even without a substantial and exclusive work on the subject. But it appears that one of the reasons why Aristotle avoids a deeper engagement, is that he views the quarrels over language as frequently being trivial non-philosophical questions. Sophistic games are, in Aristotle's mind, bad writing that fails to achieve language's primary goal of communication, and sometimes a pedantic attention to "correctness" that is inappropriate to the particular mode of language in question.

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