

Stephen Schiffer (NYU)

Linguistic competence and knowledge of meaning

A speaker of a language is able to understand indefinitely many of its sentences never before encountered by her or anyone else. How is this remarkable ability to be explained? I argue that a certain feature of every vague expression that I call Penumbral Shift casts doubt on the answer currently favored by linguists and philosophers of language, and in opposition to that answer I sketch how a speaker's ability to understand novel sentences of her language may be explained without supposing her to have an internalized generative grammar of her language.