Looking at foundational theories of meaning—theories of how meaning emerges out of lower level phenomena. For Grice, the phenomena are individual intentions.   For Lewis, they're social conventions.

"[N]o one is able to persuade me that the correctness of names is determined by anything besides convention… No name belongs to a particular thing by nature, but only because of the rules and usages of those who establish the usage and call it by that name" (Plato, Cratylus, 384c-d),

Can this be right? Language does seem like a system of conventions. But, one might think conventions are things we sit down and agree to, and that never happened with language. Bertrand Russell: "[w]e can hardly suppose a parliament of hitherto speechless elders meeting together and agreeing to call a cow a cow and a wolf a wolf" (1921, p. 190)

Take the convention that one drives on the right (not on the left), or that the original caller will re-call if a phone conversation is interrupted, etc. What do these have in common? They solve coordination problems.

A coordination problem is a situation where our interests do not conflict, but what it makes sense for you to do depends on what I do and vice versa. We might sit down and discuss it. But we might equally hit on a solution by trial and error, or dumb luck.

Conventions (roughly): regularities in behavior to which people conform because they think others do too, and because it's better if are all on the same page.

Conventions (more precise analysis): a regularity R in behavior is a convention in population P iff

(i) everyone conforms to R
(ii) everyone believes others conform to R
(iii) this belief about others gives everyone a good reason to conform to R him- or herself
(iv) everyone prefers this to salient alternatives (compare deadlocked conflict, e.g. nuclear deterrence)
(v) R is not the only possible regularity meeting these conditions
(vi) all this is common knowledge in the population.

Thesis. A language is a formal object, a mapping from sentences σ to propositions (intensions) p.
Antithesis. Language is a rational, rule-governed activity, to do with how people use words.

Synthesis: A language $£$ is indeed a formal mapping.   But when we ask, what mustP be like for $£$ to be the language they speak, the answer is they must use words in a certain sort of rule-governed way. What way?

A sentence of $£$ is true iff the proposition $£$ maps it to is true, that is, it contains the actual world.

$£$ is used by a population of speakers Just in case a convention of *truthfulness* and *trust* prevails, sustained by a common interest in communication.

> o   truthfulness, in that the speakers try to utter only true sentences of $£$;
> o   trust, in that they believe others to be truthful in $£$, and so come to believe what they say.

Note, none of this tells us what exactly happens in P to associate the right propositions with the right sentences. Take names. Maybe Kripke is right that it's matter of causal connections. Maybe Frege is right and it's a matter of how we conceive the referent.   This suggests there could be two communities, both speaking $£$, such that Kripke is right about one and Frege is right about the other.   Is that a problem for Lewis's definition?

Objections.

(1) The picture is too simple. What about ambiguity; indexicals; imperatives, questions, etc? (661ff)

(2) What about the meanings of words? What about compositionality? This is crucial if languages are going to be learnable by finite beings like ourselves.   (664ff)…..see Davidson.

(3) Can't I speak a language all by myself? (669)

(4) Can't a community of inveterate liars nevertheless speak a language? (669ff)

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