

DONALD DAVIDSON: BETWEEN COMPOSITIONALITY AND HOLISM

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ABSTRACT

DONALD DAVIDSON: BETWEEN COMPOSITIONALITY AND HOLISM

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Donald Davidson adopts both the principle of compositionality and holism in his earlier papers and keeps them intact through revisions he did in his philosophy through the years. This dissertation aims to clarify his position by showing that these principles are interdependent in his construal. The obstacle that could undermine this conclusion is the so-called learnability argument attributed to Davidson and said to justify the compositionality of natural languages. It will be shown that Davidson never attributes a justificatory role to it in the historical and argumentation contexts. The learnability argument will be reformulated as presupposing an informal account of compositionality to establish the finiteness of natural languages and to constrain the form of any semantic theory. Davidson proposes that Tarski style truth theory modified for a natural language satisfies the finiteness and gives an account of the compositionality. However, when the translation assumption is dropped and the theory goes empirical, the axioms of the theory are abstracted from the pattern of truth in language holistically. The principle of charity will be presented as a constitutive feature of language and communication that guides such a process and sheds light on Davidson's informal account of compositionality.

Keywords: Principle of Compositionality, Holism, Learnability



ÖZ

DONALD DAVIDSON: BİLEŞİMSELLİK VE BÜTÜNCÜLÜK ARASINDA

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Doktora, Felsefe Bölümü

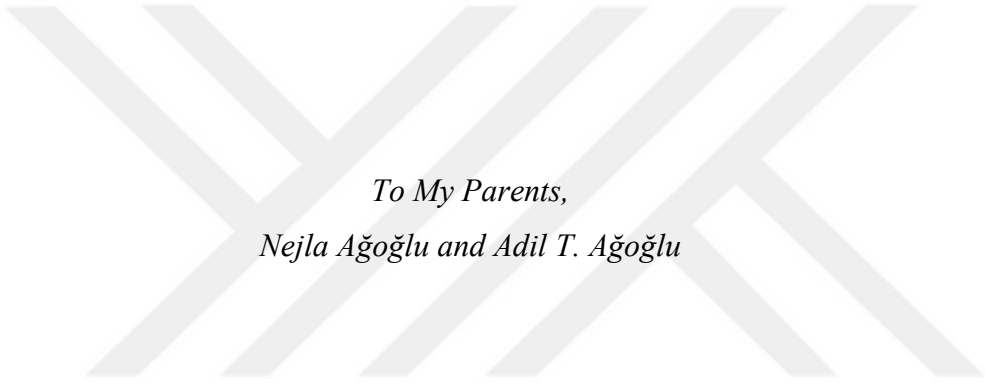
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Donald Davidson, bileşimsellik ilkesi ve bütüncülüğü erken makalelerinde benimsemiş ve yıllar boyunca felsefesinde yaptığı değişikliklerde bu ikisini sabit tutmuştur. Bu tez, Davidson'ın felsefesinde bu ilkelerin birbirine bağlı olduğunu göstererek konumunu açıklığa kavuşturmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu sonucu zayıflatacak engel, Davidson'a atfedilen ve doğal dillerin bileşimselliğini gerekçelendirdiği söylenen sözde öğrenilebilirlik argümanıdır. Davidson'ın tarihsel ve tartışma bağlamlarında bu argümana hiçbir zaman gerekçelendirici bir rol atfetmediği gösterilecektir. Öğrenilebilirlik argümanı, doğal dillerin sonluluğunu tesis etmek ve herhangi bir semantik teorinin biçimini kısıtlamak için bileşimsellik ilkesinin enformel bir yorumunu varsayan bir şekilde yeniden formüle edilecektir. Davidson, doğal bir dil için uyarlanmış Tarski tarzı doğruluk teorisinin sonluluğu sağladığını ve bileşimsellik ilkesinin bir açıklamasını verdiğini öne sürmektedir. Bununla birlikte, çeviri varsayımı terk edildiğinde ve teori görgül hale geldiğinde, teorinin aksiyomları bütüncül olarak dildeki doğruluk biçiminden soyutlanır. İyiniyet ilkesi, böyle bir sürece rehberlik eden ve Davidson'ın bileşimsellik ilkesine ilişkin enformel açıklamasına ışık tutan, dil ve iletişimin kurucu bir özelliği olarak sunulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bileşimsellik İlkesi, Bütüncülük, Öğrenilebilirlik.





*To My Parents,
Nejla Ađođlu and Adil T. Ađođlu*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

iff: if and only if



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Setting up Stage and General Outline

The word “compositionality” has been used in different contexts by philosophers. Davidson, though, rarely makes reference to the word, but when he does, it is always included in reply to a question that emphasizes this notion. He prefers a dictum that he reformulates slightly to match relevant contexts: The meaning of the sentence (whole) depends on the meanings of its words (parts) (and structure). Notwithstanding the term's popularity in literature (Werning et al., 2012), Davidson's relative indifference is intriguing. Katz and Fodor (1963) baptized the term as a contribution to linguistics around the time Davidson started publishing his works on the philosophy of language. Although Davidson was well aware of the developments in linguistics and was inspired by them, his approach differs substantially despite his initial willingness to establish an interdisciplinary study (Section 2.1).

The contemporary definition of compositionality requires a semantical rule for every syntactic rule (Partee et al., 1990, p. 319). Such a formal approach is silent about the meanings as the principle is only concerned with the sameness of meaning, and any further discussion about the nature of these meanings is irrelevant to its formulation (Hodges, 1998, pp. 7, 11). Lepore and Ludwig (2005) attribute a similarly restricted endeavor to Davidson's early work, which they label as *the initial project* in contrast to “the extended project [which] involves not only explaining the meanings of complex expressions on the basis of their structure and the meanings of their significant parts, but also illuminating what it is for any words, including semantical

primitives, to mean what they do” (p. 22). However, Davidson (1999c) rejects this interpretation by claiming that semantics should necessarily “specify the semantic roles of the parts” (p. 46).

Davidson (2005g) traces the source of the dictum to Plato’s *Sophist*,¹ where *The Stranger* claims that even though no facts make false sentences false, they are comprehensible nonetheless by virtue of the existence of things that correspond to the parts of them (p. 81). The Stranger’s resolution marks the beginning of the discussion, which stretches over two millennia, on the roles of parts of sentences and their connection to sentence meanings (or, as stated metaphysically, on the relationship between particulars and universals). On the one hand, the most fundamental property of a sentence is its *unity*; in such unity, it is true or false. On the other hand, when meanings are assigned to the parts as entities, we cannot achieve this unity without confusion. If one explains the relationship between the subject and the predicate as an instantiation or exemplification, an infinite regress arises due to the demand to postulate further entities to connect these to the existing ones (p. 87). And without an explanation of this unity, we cannot reach the truth or falsity of the sentence: “It is as if a child who has taken a watch apart cannot put it back together” (Davidson, 2005g, p. 4). While it is customary in analytic philosophy to initiate the talk about compositionality with Frege, it is the same ancient worry that leads him to define predicates as *unsaturated* to explain their role in the sentence (Frege, 1892/1997h)². Thus, talk about structure should include what sake of the sentence got such structure, and the explanation of the roles of the parts is not a luxury that Davidson could save for later.

¹ Davidson distinctly examines this connection in *Truth and Predication* (2005g), a late work published posthumously. Joseph (2004, pp. 13–14) is unique among commentators for highlighting it in the introduction to Davidson’s semantic theory.

² See Davidson (2005g, pp. 131–132) for Davidson’s reception of the term “unsaturated” and alike.

Sentences are the semantically significant units for Davidson (2005g). They are complete and capable of expressing something true or false; they are the primary means of linguistic communication. Whatever different ends and motives people have to use words, they accomplish them using sentences. The primacy of sentences is a challenge to theories that aim to give the meaning of sentences starting from giving meanings to parts. When theoreticians impose roles on parts based on some metaphysical or epistemological ideology independent from the function sentences play in communication, the resulting union loses its connection with the very thing the theory aims to explain. However, the sentence meanings are interdependent. A sentence cannot stand in isolation from the others; if it has a role to play in language, it should fit into countless other sentences that are related to such a role. The truth or falsity of a sentence implies and is implied by other sentences. The resulting holism partly identifies a sentence in a network of different sentences. The question that arises is how such a web of sentences is connected. One natural answer leads us back to where we start: By the parts of the sentences that appear in countless different sentences whose sole function is abstracted as its role in such totality.

It is the truth of sentences where two analyses of meanings met from opposing directions, top-down and vice versa. Accordingly, Davidson's (2005g) solution to such a dilemma is to take the concept of truth as basic and undefined on which the theory of language is built (pp. 34–35). The result is that the roles of parts of the sentences are what they contribute to the truth conditions of an empirical theory of truth. Such a truth theory gives explicit content to the dictum about compositionality otherwise vague by showing how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meaning of parts.

This dissertation will develop an interpretation of Davidson's philosophy of language which is roughly summarized above. The first thing to notice is that it circumvents the standard narrative, according to which Davidson invokes the *learnability argument* to prove that natural languages are compositional and sets it as a constraint on meaning theories. While the conclusion is true, the reason for adoption is misleading. The learnability argument is, at most, an inference to the

best explanation in its standing form, if not clearly wrong. So, it seems to be a weak start for what comes after, a sophisticated and influential account of meaning that reshapes semantics. Moreover, it led to fruitless arguments where criticisms take the form of fighting with an edifice. Consequently, it is necessary to expose the main reasons why Davidson adopts compositionality and clarify the mistreated argument to reach a coherent picture.

Section 2 focuses on the early days of transformational linguistics and establishes a link between Davidson's bold proposal to take Tarski's truth theory as a meaning theory and Chomsky's methodology in linguistics. While their approaches to language and notions of theory differ, there is more common ground than appreciated. Chomsky developed the idea that recursive mathematical methods can be applied to studying natural language syntax. The creativity argument, which is parallel to the learnability argument by appealing to the same asymmetry between the infinitude of language and the finite nature of humans, is said to justify the use of recursion in linguistics. The chapter aims to demarcate two different notions of creativity in Chomsky's theory and reveal their relation to the incorporation of recursion into the methodology of linguistics. In its first sense, the creativity of language amounts to the productivity of the machinery of the theory that is capable of generating all and only the grammatical sentences of the subject matter language. Accordingly, Chomsky initially takes recursion as a methodological assumption for the simplicity of theory and then transforms it into an empirical one in the process of the development of his model. The recursive machinery generates a potentially infinite number of sentences, and there is no argument for the recursion from infinity in his construal. Along these lines, productivity is a property of *competence*, an empirical theory about innate language faculty. Creativity, in its second sense, is a phenomenon we see in people's language use, and the explanation of it belongs to an upcoming *theory of performance*. However, Chomsky is skeptical if such a theory could be given in principle, and it is possible that the phenomenon is beyond human comprehension. The theory of competence is necessarily part of this so-called theory of performance, and it could shed some light on by means of its structure but nothing more.

Section 3 introduces the compositionality principle from its historical and contemporary perspectives. The exposition will reveal that the status of the compositionality in natural languages is problematic. The issue centered on arguments that aim to show that natural languages are compositional and justify using compositional methods in semantic theories. The standard argument for it is based on a familiar idea from the previous chapter on linguistics, namely the creativity (in the productivity sense) of natural languages, but with a semantic twist. The argument is based on an asymmetry between the finiteness of human beings and the infinite nature of language. The main tenet in the literature is that there is no successful argument for compositionality, and it is a methodological assumption in formal semantics. Thus, the formulation of compositionality is made on formal grounds, and in this formulation, it is required that the parts of the sentences have meanings in isolation from the sentence and language as a whole. The main consequence of this approach is that compositionality is incompatible with context principle and holism.

A prime example of the standard arguments for compositionality is the learnability argument attributed to Donald Davidson. It is customary to interpret it as the reason why Davidson is committed to compositionality: Natural languages are compositional, as proved by the argument, and semantic theories should be compositional accordingly. However, this interpretation misrepresents Davidson's commitments and places Davidson's philosophy on shaky foundations. The success of the learnability argument in its standard formulation is questionable. For Davidson, assigning meanings to the parts of the sentences leads us to an explanatory muddle and contradicts the primacy of sentences in language use, as indicated above. The meanings of the parts are their contribution to the meanings of sentences as per context principle, and further, they are abstractions from their use in the overall language. Thus, compositionality and holism amount to the same thing on the condition that parts do not have meaning in isolation. The rest of Chapter 3 is devoted to showing that Davidson never intended to argue for the compositionality of natural languages in the form of learnability or creativity. The question is not if compositionality holds but how. Although the primary papers under focus will be

“Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages” (Davidson, 1965/1984m) and “Truth and Meaning” (Davidson, 1967/1984p), Davidson’s late remarks on the subject will be presented to defend such a position. An alternative interpretation will be developed to show that Davidson’s argument is for the finiteness of natural languages, which is a formal constraint on the form of semantic theories. Accordingly, Davidson assumes that the natural languages are compositional in the informal sense given above, and the subject matter of the mentioned papers is to provide an account of how compositionality holds in the framework of Tarski-style recursive truth definition. The analogy with Chomskian recursive linguistic theory is complete. Davidson claims that such a truth definition accomplishes its task by generating the meanings of infinitely many sentences of a language from a finite base and could be a model of semantic competence. Moreover, the truth of the theory is tested on the level of sentences, and the primacy of the sentence thesis is secured.

Section 4 will commence with the presentation of Tarski’s truth definition and Davidson’s initial proposal that it could serve as a theory of meaning for a natural language. Davidson’s adoption of Frege’s context principle and extending it to holism from the very start of his project will be emphasized, and Davidson’s idea of how axioms of the definition could serve their purpose without assigning entities will be explained. The connection between the truth conditions of sentences and their meanings is weak in this initial proposal; understanding the truth conditions of sentences is sufficient to understand the meanings. As long as both sides of the predicate “means that” remain unchanged, it does not matter what replaces it as long as it holds for all sentences of the language. However, the failure of the proposal is evident as it presupposes the notion of translation in *Convention T* that ensures the defined predicate amounts to the intuitive notion of truth. Both contents of axioms are given, and the correctness of the resulting sentences is tested by assumed translation. Thus, compositionality and holism amount to the same thing trivially by means of the formal apparatus stating translation. For Davidson’s purposes, the definition presupposes what Davidson aims to arrive at. Davidson admits that one cannot devise a truth definition and a meaning theory at the same time and quits the

translation assumption. It also becomes evident that Tarski fails to give a general definition of truth, but it was not his purpose in the first place, as he aimed for definitions for particular languages. Davidson diagnoses that both failures are the result of the missing connection with language users. T-sentences are not logical truths but empirical descriptions. If the definition aims to be about a natural language, it must go empirical. Davidson proposes to develop an empirical truth theory for the language of a group of speakers and quit the task of defining truth. So, he redefines his holism as words got their content by abstraction from instances of language use. People can use language for endless means and ends and use the same sentence to realize many different intentions. His proposal is to take truth as the basic concept that underlies all language use and independent of further intentions. Accordingly, the contents of axioms are determined holistically from the pattern of truth implicit in language use. An empirical truth theory devised in accordance with the formal and additional empirical constraints then ipso facto satisfies Convention T.

Chapter 5 details how an empirical theory of truth *could* be devised and tested for a natural language and idiolect of a speaker. The notion of interpretation is a philosopher's artifact that reveals how holistic content determination could work; otherwise remains abstract. At the beginning of the Chapter, three different senses of interpretation, which Davidson uses in different contexts, are identified. Although Davidson himself admits at least two different uses of the term, fixing its interpretation to Quineian thought experiment causes great confusion in the literature. In the first sense, interpretation models everyday linguistic exchange where conversing parties have working theories about each other's language (or expectations about the language the other party use). When communication fails, the radical interpretation takes the scene; one of the parties uses all the evidence she has to understand the other's words. The first two senses of the term intertwine and usually collapse into one; as Davidson says, all communication is a radical interpretation. The third sense amounts to the thought experiment just referred to above. In this case, the interpreter tries to come to an understanding of someone to whom he has no theory to apply, and the evidence is limited to the speaker's hold

true attitudes directed to some utterances and the circumstances under which they are uttered. The success of interpretation depends on the *principle of charity*. According to Davidson, the principle has a constitutive role in language and guides interpretation accordingly. Charity (as described by Davidson in his later works) requires that people's beliefs about their immediate environment are usually true and consistent with their many other beliefs. On the linguistics side, it comes to claim that people's utterances are usually true and consistent with others. The formal constraint was derived from the assumption that languages have compositional structures. It will be argued that the charity gives substance to this claim by supplying the grounds why all natural languages should have such a structure. Consequently, T-sentences satisfy the empirical constraints if they are devised in accordance with the requirements of charity.

As the truth is basic, Davidson considers the axioms of the theory as theoretical constructs whose roles in language are exhausted in giving the truth conditions of the sentences in which they take part. So, there is nothing like the notion of reference, which establishes a direct link with the parts of the sentences and particulars in the world in isolation. Thus, the semantic theories that are based on such a relationship are in despair. Nevertheless, compositionality holds as holism supplies the parts' roles indirectly.

The last section focuses on Davidson's two late papers, "Communication and Convention" (1984b) and "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (1986/2005d), to evaluate if they mark a radical departure from Davidson's earlier views and undermine the details of the elaborate picture presented so far. The answer to both questions will be negative.

1.2. Overview of Literature and Methodological Considerations

It is always a challenge to interpret Davidson, and it is not uncommon that he pointed out misunderstandings in the commentaries of his students on several occasions. The difficulty does not arise because of the obscurity of the ideas or

writing style but rests on three interconnected issues. The first one stems from the nature of his philosophical work. He produced novel ideas in the philosophy of language (truth theoretical semantics), action (reasons can be causes), mind (anomalous monism), and epistemology (triangulation). Furthermore, Davidson's philosophy is systematic in the sense that none of these stands in isolation from the others but form a web of arguments supporting each other. Any interpretation that concentrates only one part of this web faces the danger of missing a key ingredient available in others. As this dissertation follows such a narrow path, the same issues apply to it equally. Nevertheless, to avoid complexity to shadow understanding, the argument that will be developed in the following pages will employ resources other than the philosophy of language where necessary.

Secondly, Davidson did not have a book-length magnum opus, but his works stretched over 80 papers published in different magazines for around 40 years. While the release of collected works at the beginning of the 2000s alleviates the challenge resulting from such scattered work, the absence of a complete account by Davidson that matches these pieces together is still an issue. *Truth and Predication* (2005g) is an unfinished manuscript published after Davidson's demise. It is valuable as Davidson links his general philosophical concerns about language with the contents of the previous "The Structure and Content of Truth" (1990) in a historical context.

Evnine (1991), Glüer (2011), and Joseph (2004) aim to close the gap by giving a complete account of Davidson's philosophy. While the former two works are sympathetic to their subject matter, the latter stands neutral. Lepore and Ludwig (2005) is the prime example of a formal approach to Davidson's philosophy, supplemented by Lepore and Ludwig (2007a), through which the writers develop their truth theoretic semantics in detail. Davidson's main concerns are not distinct from traditional philosophical problems, and he uses truth theory to create a new approach to old ones. However, Lepore and Ludwig (2005) is highly critical of the conclusions of Davidson's program in general philosophy. Compositionality, in its formal sense, is the leading actor. The main arguments in their book derive from

previously published papers to which Davidson already responded (Davidson, 1993, 1999c), so it is crucial to read it with Davidson's clarifications to get the right picture. Platts (1997) is an alternative to them which also proceeds formally.

Malpas (1992) focuses on Davidson's late philosophy and builds upon it with continental philosophy. Malpas (2019) takes holism as central but claims that "commitment to holism also entails a commitment to a *compositional* approach" (Sect. 3.1). Malpas' interpretation belongs to the approach that considers "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (Davidson, 1986/2005d) as a shift similar to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.³ Ramberg (1989) emphasizes the dynamic nature of interpretation in parallel lines.

Apart from these two main lines of approaches, Myers and Verheggen (2016) is a relatively new one that focuses on the epistemological consequences of the triangulation argument of the late Davidson. The cognitive approach, exemplified by Larson and Segal (1995), incorporates truth theoretic semantics into linguistics. Although all books mentioned above are based on or related to Davidson's original philosophy, the last one differs from them by advocating representational theory in mind, an idea that Davidson explicitly rejects.

It is evident from the first paragraph of the dissertation that it will not adopt the formal approach. However, it will also resist the push from the other direction to jettison the formal semantics. The project aims to clarify its subject matter, not propose a revision or extension of Davidson's ideas with anything external. In these lines, Davidson's interaction with linguistics is a delicate matter and requires a longer explanation. Undeniably, Davidson was inspired by the early developments of linguistics, and there is a parallelism in methodology. Chomsky and Davidson developed their theories around the same time under the influence of the same developments in formal systems and the same thinkers. However, nothing on these

³ Rorty (1986) is an important figure in this circle. See also "The Rorty Discussion" (Fara, 1997b) and Davidson (1995, pp. 78–79).

pages should be taken more than that, and the reason is simple: There is no *conclusive* textual evidence. However, their views on creative language use and the role and limits of formal theorizing coincide with each other at a later date.

LePore (1986) and LePore and McLaughlin (1985) are early collections of papers themed by language for the former and action and mind for the latter. Lepore and Ludwig (2013) follows the previous volumes to extend the scope to cover Davidson's later work. While Malpas (2011) devoted mainly to establishing a connection with Gadamer's hermeneutics, Dasenbrock (1993) takes on the similar task but with literary theory. Baghranian (2012) is a collection of obituaries and previously published papers on interpretive issues, including *Stoutland – Lepore and Ludwig debate*.⁴ Although secondary literature on Davidson continues to grow with the addition of new compilations of essays year by year, this thesis mainly focuses on the works to which Davidson responds personally.

Hahn (1999) is the volume of "The Library of Living Philosophers" series dedicated to Davidson. Apart from his responses to the essays, it includes an intellectual autobiography that sheds light on influences on his thinking. Other collections which contain Davidson's responses are Stoecker (1993), Zeglen (1999), and Kotatko et al. (2001). "Donald Davidson Video Series" (Fara, 1997a) includes 19 video tapes through which several notable philosophers (including M. Dummett, W.V. Quine, R. Rorty, and P. Strawson) raise their questions against Davidson. "The Segal Discussion" (Fara, 1997d) and "The Sainsbury Discussion" (Fara, 1997c) are vital resources for overcoming uncertainties and misunderstandings about the relationship between truth and meaning. Notable interviews include the one with Lepore (Davidson, 2004a), which is on par with his intellectual autobiography in content,

⁴ Lepore and Ludwig (2005) is unsympathetic to revisions that Davidson makes in his philosophy and the resulting conclusions. The debate is initiated by the appearance of Stoutland (2006), which is a highly critical review of it. Stoutland (1982) advocates an anti-realist approach to Davidson in contrast to the formal account. The correspondence continued with responses from Lepore and Ludwig (2007b) and Stoutland (2007). The debate is directly linked to the status of compositionality. See Section 3.3.

with Glüer (Davidson, 1995), with Bergström and Føllesdal (2008) and Borradori (1994). The last one mainly inquires into the roots of Davidson's thinking in *American Pragmatism*. Davidson's direct clarifications on several issues in all these sources provide critical information that would remain concealed without them, and they will be used in supplementing the ideas derived from the primary papers throughout this dissertation.

Apart from these general works, a vast amount of criticism and correspondence also spread over the years. That raises the third difficulty in interpreting Davidson. He made several adjustments in his theory that built up on the rest of each paper to face criticisms. "Truth and Meaning" (Davidson, 1967/1984p) presents the initial claim that a Tarski-style truth definition could function as a meaning theory. With the addition of the concept of interpretation, the definition turns into an empirical theory (Davidson, 1973/1984i). "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (Davidson, 1986/2005d) sets the limits of such theory and semantics in the context of communication and language use. One can take these changes as radical departures from previous views. The alternative is to see them as turning points that result from gradual development. The general approach in the following pages will adopt the latter strategy and aim to maximize agreement and sustain consistency by presenting the early work in light of the overall picture.

CHAPTER 2

RECURSION AND CREATIVITY IN SYNTAX

2.1. Davidson and Chomsky

Davidson (1967/1984p) states that it is accepted by “most philosophers of language, and recently by some linguists, that a satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words” (p. 17) to explain learnability. Even though such compositionality is the conclusion of the so-called learnability argument, and Davidson refers to his “Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages” (1965/1984m) for further discussion, he considers it a “kernel of truth” (1967/1984p, p. 17). Davidson’s reference to an existing view is confusing as the introduction of the learnability argument is attributed to Davidson. The immediate question arises whether Davidson presents a novel argument or even an argument for compositionality as taken for granted. It is a mistake to present the argument as a stand-alone one in isolation from the background of discussions and developments in linguistics and semantics in its historical context that clouds its real significance.

Linguistics in the United States has transformed with Chomsky’s (1957/2002, 1965/2015) introduction of transformational grammar. Chomsky added formal methods of mathematicians and logicians to linguistics and set its task to devise an axiomatic-deductive theory instead of an empiricist taxonomic one. However, he followed post-Bloomfieldians to exclude semantics for being unfit for a scientific theory and made syntax central instead of phonology and morphology as opposed to them. Debates on the subject matter, limits, and methodology of linguistics characterize the era. Bar-Hillel’s (1954) suggestion that linguists and philosophers

are coworkers and the idea of incorporating the semantic methods developed in philosophy into linguistics initially received strong opposition from Chomsky (1955). Nevertheless, Katz and Fodor (1963) take up the task of adding the missing semantic part to transformational grammar.⁵

Around that time, Davidson (1999b, pp. 34–35, 1999a, p. 159, 2004a, p. 257) was troubled by the debate on the logical form of belief sentences, about which several proposals were clashing without any sign of resolution. Davidson realized there was no common framework for evaluating the adequacy of proposals, and all were advising ad hoc arguments. Moreover, the philosophy of language was mainly struck by the problem of analyzing the predicate *means* without any advance. Davidson's solution to both problems was changing the subject matter of the study to constructing a meaning theory: A theory that gives meanings of all sentences of a language would bypass not only the metaphysical discussions but also guide logical forms. Although their notions of theories are different, the analogy with Chomsky's strategy in linguistics appears complete. Davidson's (2004a) "dream was to try to do for the semantics for natural language what Noam Chomsky was doing for the syntax of natural language" (p. 259).

Davidson never explicitly stated who the linguists he refers to are at the beginning of "Truth and Meaning" (1967/1984p) except Chomsky, for sure. Davidson also did not refer to Katz and Fodor (1963) before introducing the learnability argument, at least in published form. However, it is undisputable that he is aware of their theory at a later date as he (Davidson, 1967/1984p, p. 22, 1970/1984l, p. 63) cites the works of Chomsky (1966/1978, 1965/2015), respectively, through which Chomsky evaluate Katz and Fodor's contribution to the field. Moreover, Davidson (1967/1984p, p. 21) not only criticizes an alternative approach to semantics which seems to be Katz and Fodor's but also uses the terms such as "semantic markers and

⁵ See Newmeyer (1986b) for a classical historical exposition and Tomalin (2006) for an elaborate exploration of the formal (mathematical, logical) and philosophical foundations of transformational grammar.

restriction rules” (2020, p. 30), which they introduce. Consequently, Davidson’s direct and indirect references to linguists and the use of key ideas and concepts, such as the infinity of language, finite resources of humans, and recursion in both disciplines, also suggest a cross-examination.⁶

Lastly, Davidson was one of the philosophers of his era who was interested in the recently transformed discipline and drew attention to its possible impact on philosophy.⁷ He was active in building a bridge between philosophy and linguistics by organizing interdisciplinary conferences (Partee, 2010, pp. 30–33). Davidson’s idea is that the recent formalization by linguists and the extension of philosophers’ interests and methods to the workings of natural languages reveal that they “are converging ... on a common set of interrelated problems” (Davidson & Harman, 1972, Sec. Introduction). It is no surprise that he usually compares his approach with the linguistic theories in the early days of his truth theoretic semantics (Davidson, 1967/1984p, pp. 22,30, 1970/1984l, pp. 63–64, 2020, pp. 29–30, 34–35) and once proposed that Chomsky’s deep structure is the same as his logical form (Davidson, 1970/1984l, p. 63, 2020, p. 35).

2.2. Form of Linguistic Theory

Searle (1974) summarizes Chomsky’s revolution in linguistics with changes in the discipline’s subject matter, goal, and method.⁸ For Chomsky, the subject matter of linguistics is the speakers/hearers’ linguistic competence, their knowledge which

⁶ The central thrust of the presentation will be on similarities in arguments instead of exegesis. Davidson (1999b) was indeed concerned with the already present question of “how can a finite mind understand a potential infinity of sentences” (p. 35), but his solution springs from Tarski.

⁷ On the other side, Katz and Fodor (1962) and Katz (1966) question the philosophy and examine the prospect of a novel approach to philosophical problems within the framework of generative grammar and their nascent semantic theory.

⁸ See Newmeyer (1986a) for a debate on whether Chomsky genuinely revolutionized linguistics.

enables them to produce indefinitely many novel sentences of their language, instead of the set of utterances that linguists gather from the field. Consequently, the goal is no longer the “classification of the elements of the corpus” but the “specification of the grammatical rules underlying the construction of sentences” (Searle, 1974, p. 7). The linguist’s method to achieve this is no longer finding *discovery procedures* that give mechanical procedures for the classification of elements out of the corpus; instead, devising an *evaluation procedure* at the metatheoretical level that allows choosing the best theory under specified adequacy conditions.

One of Chomsky’s motivations for remodeling linguistics stems from the difficulties he faces while working on the structuralist framework for discovery procedures. The standard methodology of the day, inspired by logical empiricism, is to find procedures to categorize linguistic elements from phonological to morphological and to syntactic levels, respectively, based on raw data derived from a corpus of utterances. Thus, the linguist’s task was to find the correct discovery procedure that justifies the resulting grammar. This methodology has not only had the internal problems of its failure to account for the interconnection of levels and supply a satisfactory output despite efforts but also fell short of giving an account of syntactic complexity.⁹ The results are arbitrary and fail to be generally predictive beyond the available corpus (Chomsky, 1955/1975, pp. 31–33).¹⁰

According to Chomsky’s alternative account, the linguist undertakes interrelated tasks of devising a general “theory of linguistic structure” (Chomsky, 1955/1975, p. 77), a justification method for selecting the correct grammar and a resulting particular grammar for a language. Grammar for a particular language should generate all grammatical sentences (but not the ungrammatical ones) (Chomsky, 1957/2002, p. 13). The particular grammar accomplishes this by employing rules and elements that assign a structural description to each grammatical sentence. On

⁹ See also Chomsky (1965/2015, p. 3).

¹⁰ Some take Chomsky’s early ideas as poor but somehow persuasive for his time (see Chater et al., 2015).

the other hand, the general linguistic theory defines the general form of possible abstract structures, and each particular grammar is an “exemplification” (Chomsky, 1955/1975, p. 77). Thus, while general linguistic theory constraint possible grammar structure, for example, by imposing the same categories such as “phoneme” and “phrase” (Chomsky, 1957/2002, p. 50), their “interrelations” (Chomsky, 1955/1975, p. 85) and general rules across languages, the success of particular grammars provide information for generalization as feedback.

As grammar is a “scientific theory” (Chomsky, 1955/1975, p. 77, 1957/2002, p. 49), its adequacy is tested against the correctness of its predictions, namely the sentences it generates. However, this *external adequacy condition*¹¹ does not guarantee that the proposed structure is correct. Consider the following simple corpus of observed sentences:¹²

- 1) abcd
- 2) aecd
- 3) afcg

There are at least two ways to formalize rules that generate such an outcome (the blank places between parentheses are placeholders for the subscript elements):

R1) $a()_{b,e,f}cd$ and $a()_{b,e,f}cg$

R2) $a()_{b,e,f}c()_{d,g}$

The prediction sets of both rules will be the same, namely $p=\{abcd, abcg, aecd, aecg, afcd, afcg\}$; thus, if one satisfies the external adequacy condition, the other

¹¹ Chomsky (1957/2002) points out some “operational, behavioral tests” (p. 53) that apply grammar to determine their external adequacy instead of relying only on intuition.

¹² The example is informal and illustrational as it presupposes one type of syntactic category and a merge operation (spaces between elements).

will also. When devising an underlying rule or a structure that is not directly open to observation, it is always possible to give at least two or many alternatives.¹³

Chomsky proposes to place another constraint in general theory to choose the correct one, namely an “evaluation procedure” (1955/1975, p. 79, 1957/2002, p. 52). This procedure measures the competing grammars by their *simplicity* and chooses the one that reduces the lengths and number of rules by consolidations and fewer exceptions.¹⁴ In this initial form, the simplicity condition is in accord with the standard scientific enterprise that aims to capture the greatest generality in its formulas. Thus, (R2) should be preferred to (R1) above.

Now suppose that the above example also contains recurring elements such as:

- 1) abcdabcdabcdabcd
- 2) aecdaecdaecd
- 3) afcgafcg

One can generate these sentences by devising their own rules or using (R2) above several times separately. In each case, three different rules give an account of the sample. An alternative is introducing a recursive rule that takes its output as input to merge each successive application:¹⁵

$s()_s$ where $s: \mathbf{a}()_{b,e,f} \mathbf{c}()_{d,g}$

¹³ See also Chomsky (1965/2015, p. 37) for a discussion about the possibility of a unique grammar with no alternative.

¹⁴ See Chomsky (1955/1975, pp. 119–124) for a formal presentation of simplicity.

¹⁵ Early Chomsky employs the term “recursion” to mean iteration and self-embedding. See Tomalin (2007, 2011) for a detailed discussion about alternative receptions of the term in Chomsky’s works, such as computable.

Let the output of each application of the rule be a grammatical sentence. This single formula will generate all the members of the corpus, many others, and infinitely many. Chomsky (1957/2002) introduces recursive rules for the sake of simplicity.¹⁶ The main idea is, "if a grammar does not have recursive devices (...), it will be prohibitively complex" (p. 24): "it will, in fact, turn out to be little better than a list of strings or of morpheme class sequences in the case of natural languages." (Chomsky, 1956, pp. 116). As a result, the language the grammar describes turns out infinite, which Chomsky (1957/2002) considers as an *assumption* "made in order to simplify the description of ... languages" accordingly (p. 23–24).¹⁷

One can limit the application number of recursive rules, say 5 for the above sample, and make the defined language finite. In that case, the scope of the theory would be limited to the corpus of sentences. Of course, it would be an unacceptable result as the subject matter of the grammar is all sentences of a language. One can choose an arbitrary number, or a number based on memory limitations. In the former case, such ad hoc restrictions populating the grammar are against the generality condition,¹⁸ and the latter adds extra-linguistic elements that require an already established language use theory.

Apart from such intra-grammar difficulties, the essential role of simplicity emerges at the level of general linguistic theory. The demand for simplicity and general rules amounts to the "demand that there be a system at all" (Chomsky, 1955/1975, p.

¹⁶ Chomsky uses the term "simplicity" as a technical term within linguistics as opposed to an intuitive understanding of the general notion (Chomsky, 1965/2015, p. 38). See below for more discussion.

¹⁷ See Mallory (2021) for an alternative account of the justification of recursive rules in the context of Chomsky's early works. Mallory points out a regress in using a natural language as the metalanguage of a grammar and claims that formal recursive rules are introduced to avoid it and replace the intuition of grammatician.

¹⁸ See Harris (1957, pp. 338–339) for an earlier argument against restrictions. Chomsky (1965/2015) follows his tutor and objects to ad hoc argumentation in a similar manner (p. 26). See also Katz (1966, pp. 121–122) for a lengthy footnote devoted to the subject.

114): Devising simple rules amounts to devising a theory. Just like a physical theory that seeks universal rules governing the universe, the general linguistic theory aims to capture the system of rules applicable to all languages. Moreover, simplicity not only makes theorizing possible and is also “one test of truth” (Goodman, 1958, p. 1064) for the theory.¹⁹ Under the assumption that natural languages are infinite, one could devise grammars with simple recursive rules to account for grammatical sentences of particular languages and devise a general theory that selects all and only such grammars. Thus, the whole system achieves empirical correctness by exhausting all possible alternatives in a principled way.

The resulting grammar predicts that strings with recurring elements in unlimited lengths are part of the language, and if it meets “the external conditions of adequacy” (Chomsky, 1957/2002, p. 54), whether they are “acceptable to the native speaker” (pp. 49–50), then we have a good theory for a particular language. Moreover, a good case explaining “how can a speaker produce and understands new sentences?” (Chomsky, 1955/1975, p. 293):

Any grammar of a language will project the finite and somewhat accidental corpus of observed utterances to a set (presumably infinite) of grammatical utterances. In this respect, a grammar mirrors the behavior of the speaker who, on the basis of a finite and accidental experience with language, can produce or understand an indefinite number of new sentences. (Chomsky, 1957/2002, p. 15)

Of course, confirmation of the theory will face the problem of induction, but it is typical for all scientific theories. The theory is open to falsification, and in our sample theory, if “aecdaecdaecg” is not one of the grammatical strings, then it is wrong. Under those circumstances, the theory does not determine the structure uniquely by being overgenerative. Such failure corresponds to Chomsky’s case

¹⁹ Tomalin (2006, pp. 112–121) discusses Chomsky’s application of simplicity as developed by Goodman (Tomalin, 2006, pp. 80–84) on linguistics and points out that the requirement of simplicity rests on the thesis that simple grammars have greater generality than the complex ones and they are more successful in representing the facts about language consequently (pp. 116, 118).

against *finite state grammar*;²⁰ as a result, he introduces additional phrase structures, but as they also fail to supply a simple grammar, he continues to add transformation rules in linguistic theory to give an account of natural languages (Chomsky, 1957/2002, p. 44).²¹

Chomsky's early reference to language *use* quoted above hints at his later elaboration on the nature of linguistic theory and language. At first sight, the linguistic theory seems to be about an infinite class of sentences and methods to categorize them by their grammaticalness. However, the empirical nature of the theory contrasts with such an abstract characterization. The theory is not a device that labels sentences according to their grammaticalness but aims to reveal the mental reality beneath them (Chomsky, 1959). Chomsky does not settle with such a semi-formal approach and elaborates on his case later with a realist²² one, which requires the structure described by the theory to represent a structure in language users. Such is the transformation of linguistics' subject matter that Searle presents as a part of the Chomskian revolution. The linguistic theory aims to describe competence, the idealized language user's unconscious knowledge that underlies performance, which is "the actual use of language in concrete situations" (Chomsky, 1965/2015, p. 2). Grammar is the description of this competence that "aims to discover and exhibit the mechanisms that make" the "ability of a speaker to understand an arbitrary sentence of his language and to produce an appropriate sentence on a given occasion" (Chomsky, 1966/1978, p. 10) *possible*.²³

²⁰ See Chomsky (1956) for formal proof against finite state grammar.

²¹ Further details of transformative generative grammar are irrelevant to the issue at stake and out of the scope of this work.

²² Chomsky (1955/1975) later claims that such a realist conception was already present implicitly in his earliest works. Still, at the time, he considered it "too audacious" (p. 35) to state. See Matthews (1993, pp. 192–193) for a discussion of whether it is the case.

²³ It is crucial that competence should not be confused with ability. See Taylor (1988) for a detailed discussion.

Chomsky (1965/2015) smoothly modifies the previous structure of his generative grammar by blurring the distinction between the task of constructing grammar of the linguist and language learning. The general linguistic theory amounts to the *universal grammar*, that is the initial state of *language acquisition device* containing general rules and principles for all humanly possible natural languages. The corpus of observation sentences is the limited number of stimuli an infant encounters while learning a language, and a particular grammar is the final state of the language faculty. The device lists different possible grammars allowed by the universal grammar compatible with the data and selects one for its simplicity relative to others (pp. 25, 33).

The status of simplicity in this updated framework is the same as above but only with an emphasis on mental reality. Chomsky (1965/2015) claims that the *evaluation measure* that assesses the competing grammars is not an external a priori or theoretical postulation but “an empirical hypothesis about the nature of language” (p. 38) that is intrinsic to the theory.²⁴ As the general linguistic theory is the direct source of the possible particular grammars, the new task is to find innate linguistic universals capable of choosing them by aiming for simplicity for arbitrary stimulus (pp. 38–39). In practice, the work includes devising general structures for particular languages and incorporating them by abstraction into linguistic theory. While we do not know what they are, the study aims to reach *explanatory adequacy* that reveals empirical facts about language and its acquisition. Accordingly, the selection of simplicity as the measure and its application has “empirical consequences” (p. 39), resulting chose of different grammar that cross-language studies can test.²⁵

²⁴ See also Chomsky (1966/1978, p. 24).

²⁵ Over the years, Chomsky revised his position more than once as researchers revealed further data.

2.3. Creative Aspect of Language

Until now, Chomsky does not justify using recursive rules or general methodology by appealing to the existence of infinitely many sentences in natural languages. So, there is no a priori argument for it. However, Chomsky's talk about the creativity of language shadowed such a simple picture in linguistics: Chomsky claims that creativity is the fundamental property of natural languages which manifests itself in language users' ability to entertain indefinitely many novel sentences geared to new thoughts and circumstances, despite the fact that they are different from the ones already encountered (Chomsky, 1964/1970, p. 23, 1966/1978, p. 11, 1965/2015, p. 4).

The creativity of language invited the thought of what Pullum and Scholz (2010) later label "the standard argument" (p. 115), according to which natural languages have infinitely many sentences, and a linguistic theory should explain it.²⁶ Their attitude is negative; they claim that such infinitude cannot be justified by observations utilizing "inductive generalization" or "mathematical induction" (p. 118).²⁷ Moreover, they add that recursion is neither necessary nor sufficient to explain creativity. A finite but apparently massive endeavor is typically labeled as creative, so there is no necessity. It is not sufficient because the limitations of vocabulary could block the actualization of the recursive rules; moreover, the mere application of an iterative procedure is hardly a thing that can be called creative. Mallory (2021) observes a similar line of argument in linguistics:

Infinitude: Natural languages contain infinitely many sentences.

Recursion: To finitely represent an infinite set, you must use a recursive device.

²⁶ See also Nefdt (2019).

²⁷ Pullum and Scholz (2010) rightly point out that the assumption about the infinity of natural languages could not be the rationale behind accepting the methodology of Chomsky in linguistics but just the natural result of its structure (p. 133). However, they further criticize the infinity assumption by stating that generative grammars are not the only form of theory, and there is no reason to accept it.

Conclusion: Therefore, people's knowledge of language must use a recursive device. (sec. 2)

For both Pullum and Scholz, and for Mallory, such a line of argument is circular. The main problem is that there is no way to establish the first assumption without adopting recursion. If the infinity of language is an assumption similar to the frictionless surfaces in physics, then it is absurd to take it as the explanandum of the theory: "Physicists don't attempt to capture how a surface in a model is frictionless" (Mallory, 2021, sec. 2). For early Chomsky, as we have seen, the infinity claim is not the explanandum of the theory, but a theoretical assumption justified by the condition of simplicity; thus, circularity is not an issue. So, the relationship between Chomsky's notion of creativity does not result from the recursive character of rules, and its relation with infinity is tricky:²⁸

A number of professional linguists have repeatedly confused what I refer to here as 'the creative aspect of language use' with the recursive property of generative grammars, a very different matter. (Chomsky, 2006, p. xiv)

People can master *indefinitely* many novel sentences in their everyday life. Such creative use of language "involves unboundedness, novelty, freedom from stimulus control, coherence and appropriateness to situations" (Chomsky, 1982, p. 424). Chomsky considers this a self-evident linguistic fact that requires no justification but an explanation (Chomsky, 1964/1970, p. 7, 1982, p. 431). The creativity of language is a property of performance (Chomsky, 1982, p. 430; Chomsky in Parret, 1974, p. 28). As stated above, Chomsky aims to describe language users' knowledge

²⁸ Chomsky's views on creativity are heavily criticized: According to Lakoff, Chomsky uses the word in a unique way that is completely different from its conventional meaning (Parret, 1974, p. 174). While Bouveresse (Parret, 1974, p. 304) claims that Chomsky uses the word ambiguously to refer to different concepts of productivity and genuine creativity, Drach (1981) considers it academic cheating. Although the criticisms seem to be based on the confusion about the relationship between creativity, rule-breaking creativity, recursion, and infinity, it is impossible to evaluate all and reach a definite answer within the scope of this thesis. See also Asoulin (2013) and D'Agostino (1984) for the defense of Chomsky.

(competence) that makes this possible. Although the knowledge of the language by itself is a “necessary crucial condition” (Chomsky, 1982, p. 426) for the performance and hence provides *insight* into the creative use of language, it is not “sufficient” (p. 424) alone. A theory of performance should also include several factors that participate in the actual speech production. Moreover, the theory of competence is, by definition, about what the rules are, not how they are used (Chomsky, 1964/1970, p. 10, 1982, p. 429, 1965/2015, p. 7).

Natural languages are creative because “the limitless possibilities of thought and imagination are reflected in the creative aspect of language use” (Chomsky, 1966/2009, p. 76). If we continue to use the term ambiguously as before, the theory of competence can shed light on such creativity in two different ways, one in a practical way in which it will necessarily participate in the linguist’s theory of performance. On the other hand, an explanatorily adequate theory will provide *rules* that enable humans to acquire and use language; using a natural language is using it creatively. Thus, the existence of rules (universal grammar in the broad sense) is not a constraint on creativity; quite the contrary, they are the reason why we can talk about creativity. Chomsky contrasts human language as a unique, innate capacity with the stimulus-controlled behavior of animals. Descartes’ parrot using sounds to respond to a stimulus is not using language in a non-creative fashion; it is not using language at all (Chomsky, 1966/2009, p. 60). On the opposite side, the random creation of sounds is also not using language. The rules aimed by the theory draw the framework of creative use and even guides artistic creativity; for example, poets’ rule-breaking creativity by providing the rules to break.

The point of introducing recursion into the theory is not to give an account of the existence of infinitely many sentences in natural language but to define a structure within the theory, that is, to devise rules that generate structural descriptions underlying grammatical sentences. Chomsky (1966/2009) points out that general creativity and creative language use were problems that arose against the mechanistic worldview of Cartesian philosophers, who invented a second substance to give an account. For Chomsky, such a move was understandable as it was the

developments in mathematics in the early 1900s introduced formal methods to make “infinite use of finite means” (Chomsky, 1965/2015, p. 6), such as recursion, which allows us to enlighten the creativity²⁹. Consequently, the creativity of language is a phenomenon that needs to be explained by a theory of language use, and the theory of competence necessarily participates in its explanation by providing rules. As the developments in computation theory make the formulation of these rules possible, creativity indirectly links the recursive character of these rules.

Chomsky’s generative grammar is developed on the idea of applying recursive methods to natural languages (Tomalin, 2006), which was first pointed out by Bar-Hillel (1953).³⁰ However, Chomsky’s distinction between competence and performance rules out a mechanical procedure that will determine the grammaticalness of a sentence in use. It is unclear if such an indirect connection could be defended with consistency. The same issue will resurface with Davidson’s account of truth theoretic semantics in the final section of this thesis. While Davidson’s project is philosophical and does not aim to explain the actual mechanisms, he could settle with the indirect connection.³¹ Chomsky does not elaborate on how the computational mechanism could participate in creative language use. Interestingly, while Davidson follows the indirect route, his theory is more intimately connected with use.

²⁹ Compare with Pelletier (2012, pp. 166–167).

³⁰ Bar-Hillel (1963) later proposes the incorporation of semantic work done in logic to linguistics. While Carnap (1963b) expresses his sympathies, he points out the difficulties as he is concerned with forms of possible languages but not actual ones. Davidson’s first published paper on the philosophy of language (Davidson, 1963/1984m) is under the same volume (Schilpp, 1963).

³¹ There is an extensive discussion on the role of recursion in linguistics that requires its own specialty (Lobina, 2014, 2017; Tomalin, 2007, 2011; Wilks, 1971).

CHAPTER 3

REVISITING THE LEARNABILITY ARGUMENT

3.1. Compositionality and its Brief History

Szabo (1995) offers the following pre-theoretical formulation, which he takes to be a thesis about *natural languages*: “The meaning of a complex expression is determined by the meanings of its constituents and its structure” (p. 11). Pagin and Westerstahl (2010) propose a similar formulation but extend the scope to cover interpreted formal languages. Accordingly, compositionality is a property that these languages could possess. Janssen (2011) starts with the functional version: “The meaning of a compound expression is a function of the meanings of its parts” (p. 495). While Janssen takes the formulation holds for specific formal languages like the propositional logic, its status is unclear for natural languages. For Hodges (1998), while attributing compositionality to languages is innocuous, it is essentially a property that should be attributed to a (particular) semantics (pp. 8–9). Pelletier (1994) follows others but emphasizes that “the meaning of an expression is a function of, and only of, the meanings of its parts together with the method by which those parts are combined” (p. 11) but concludes that natural languages are not compositional. Janssen (2011) agrees with Hodges by completing that it is a “methodological principle” (p. 495) that semantic theories maintain. Nevertheless, departing from the same definition, Dowty (2007) claims the “fact that natural languages *are* compositional is beyond any serious doubt” (p. 23) and states that we should justify why compositionality is a good methodology for natural languages if we adopt methodological approach (p. 28).

The variations in the reception of the compositionality divert more by different interpretations of the vague wording in its statement. As it stands, it is silent about what the meanings are and what kind of determination is under focus. While meanings can be considered senses and references in particular or semantic values in general, the determination may be interpreted as causal, functional, computational, and mereological. It can also be said that the formulation includes hidden arguments qualifying over the parts such as *only* and *imminent*, making it a stronger claim. In the other direction, if no restrictions placed on what are the meanings and functions are, compositionality becomes trivial as it would be possible to define these in the required way.³² Thus issues about the exact formulation of the pre-theoretical conception and its status are not settled (Pagin & Westerståhl, 2001), and it is questionable if it could be resolved.

The beginning of the ideas about compositionality can be traced back to ancient Indian thinkers (Pagin & Westerståhl, 2010, p. 250), or Aristotle in the antiques and the following commentators and scholars of the Medieval Ages (Hodges, 2012, p. 246).³³ Another starting point is Plato's *Sofist* (Pagin & Westerståhl, 2010, fn. 1) and Chapter 1.1. proposes that it is what Davidson takes to be the case. While the discussion about compositionality in modern literature begins with Frege (Dowty, 2007, p. 23; Janssen, 2011, p. 496, 2012, p. 19; Pagin & Westerståhl, 2010, p. 251), it is controversial if he adopts the notion (Janssen, 2001; Pelletier, 2001).

Carnap (1947) extracts compositionality from "Frege's Principles of Interchangeability" (p. 121). Accordingly, if two names have the same reference or meaning, substituting them in a name containing them does not change that name's reference or meaning. For Carnap, that amounts to the proposition that the reference or meaning of the whole expression is a function of the reference or meaning of the names occurring in it. Not everybody is happy with this kind of identification. Szabo

³² Compare with Cohnitz (2005, pp. 27–34).

³³ Compare with Davidson (2005g, pp. 90–97).

(1995) claims that the principle of substitution is distinct from compositionality, and further constraints should be placed on the expressions that will be substituted to keep the structure intact (pp. 22–27). Hodges (2001) defines compositionality based on substitutability with the addition that substituted synonymies belong to the same grammatical category, namely “*Husserlian*” (p. 11) and can be substituted in all contexts (Janssen, 2001, p. 123).³⁴ Compositionality, in the formal sense, requires the parts of the compound expressions to have independent and definite meanings.

Katz and Fodor (1963) is a milestone in which they not only introduce the idea of a semantic theory to linguistics but also baptize the term compositionality and present an argument for it.³⁵ Accordingly, language users understand sentences compositionally, with their knowledge of syntax and lexicon, and a semantical theory should reveal this fact (pp. 171–172). In this conception, compositionality is a property of natural languages but with a psychological twist referring to the competence of language users. Montague (1970) took another route by claiming that there is “no important theoretical difference between natural languages and the artificial languages of logicians” (p. 373) and developed a mathematical model that would cover both. Compositionality that establishes the link between “syntax and semantics in a natural language such as English could be viewed as not essentially different from the relation between syntax and semantics in a formal language such as the language of first-order logic” (Partee et al., 1990, p. 317). Although Montague’s work is based on Tarski and Carnap, his bold move radically breaks up their skepticism about the applicability of their system to actual natural languages. Partee developed the current formal account compositionality, which is a homomorphism between syntactic and semantics rules (Partee et al., 1990, pp. 318–

³⁴ Werning (2005, p. 305) proposes that substitutability could be a reason to adopt compositionality.

³⁵ Pagin and Westerstahl (2010, p. 251) attributed the baptism to Putnam (1975, p. 77), which is based on a presentation in 1960.

319).³⁶ This functional version of compositionality is “given by recursion over syntax, but that does not imply that the meaning operations are defined by recursion over *meaning*, in which case we have *recursive semantics*” (Pagin & Westerståhl, 2010, p. 254). Nevertheless, Montague was not alone in the application of formal methods to natural languages; Davidson (1967/1984p) also proposes that Tarski’s truth definition could guide us in natural language semantics by providing the formal machinery that is compositional and recursive.³⁷

Although there are numerous arguments against the compositionality of natural languages, they are countered only by a few (Pelletier, 1994, p. 11). These are the arguments from novelty, creativity, systematicity, and learnability. The former two of them originated in Frege’s writings:

The possibility of our understanding propositions which we have never heard before rests evidently on this, that we construct the sense of a proposition out of parts that correspond to the words. (Frege, 1914/1997c, p. 320)

It is astonishing what language can do. With a few syllables it can express an incalculable number of thoughts, so that even a thought grasped by a human being for the very first time can be put into a form of words which will be understood by someone to whom the thought is entirely new. (Frege, 1923/1963, p. 1)

In the above quotations, Frege seems to claim that unless we do not understand sentences based on the senses of their parts, it would be impossible for us to understand an indefinite number of novel sentences. Frege scholars dispute whether it is the case. The main problem is that Frege’s celebrated context principle is at odds with compositionality (which requires words to have a meaning in isolation): “Never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a

³⁶ See Hodges (2001) for an alternative formulation.

³⁷ Glüer (2011) states that although Davidson does not distinguish between recursion and compositionality as Tarski-style truth theories are both. A recursive semantic could fail to be compositional but still computable (p. 37). Pagin (2021) argues that compositionality ensures the theory is humanly computable.

proposition” (Frege, 1884/1959, p. xxii). The inconclusive discussion ranges over whether Frege holds one of them all the time or for a particular duration, holds both principles simultaneously on the same or different subjects, or ever holds compositionality alone (Cohnitz, 2005, pp. 24–25; Janssen, 2001; Pelletier, 2001, pp. 94–95). However, in a nutshell, a loose account of compositionality consistent with the context principle is possible.

Katz and Fodor (1963) argue for compositionality in a similar fashion, but their aim is psychological to reveal the actual process of understanding. Accordingly, a competent speaker of a language can use and understand an indefinite number of novel sentences, and a natural language contains an infinite number of sentences that a speaker can use. Since component speakers of a language only encounter a finite number of sentences, their knowledge should consist of rules projected from a finite number of sentences to the infinite, and a semantic theory should state these rules. Through the fact that each of the infinitely many sentences is built up from finitely many morphemes, such rules should be compositional: Competent speakers of language should determine sentence meanings from the meaning of morphemes and grammar of the language (pp. 171–172).

Although their *projection rules* are said to be compositional, they are based on a process they call *amalgamation*. A dictionary item is placed for each terminal node of the phrase marker tree, and amalgamation moves forward mechanically to reach the meaning of the sentence (or meanings if it is semantically ambiguous) (Katz & Fodor, 1963, p. 194). A dictionary item includes grammatical and semantic information about the lexical item, and rules basically choose the right meaning from alternatives in accordance with the available data (p. 193). The problem is that the projection rules are just working on selecting the right meaning to get rid of semantic ambiguity and say nothing about how the meanings of the parts are combined to give the meaning of the sentences (Gochet, 1980, pp. 115–116; see also Newmeyer, 1986b, p. 68). Davidson (1967/1984p) rejects this approach by claiming that “recursive syntax with dictionary added is not necessarily recursive semantics” (p. 21).

Katz and Fodor's argument is in accord with what can be called the standard form of learnability argument:

- 1) Humans can master infinitely many non-synonymous sentences of a natural language.
- 2) Humans can learn a finite number of rules that give meanings of sentences.
- 3) Unless a finite number of rules suffice to determine the meanings of sentences, the language will be unlearnable.
- 4) A finite number of rules suffice to determine the meanings of sentences.
- 5) A finite number of rules determine the meanings of sentences compositionally.

One can adjust the premises by omitting learnability to formulate creativity or replace the first premise with understanding sentences never encountered before to get the argument from novelty (Pelletier, 2012, p. 166; Szabó, 2022, Sec. 3). However, all these arguments suffer from a similar defect, namely, the move from 4 to 5 is not warranted. Although the sufficiency claim in (4) can be hidden as follows, it is not possible to get rid of it:

- 3*) Unless a finite number of rules determine the meanings of sentences compositionally, the language will be unlearnable.

There is no reason to assume that the finite number of rules is exclusively constrained to compositional ones or that they are compositional at all. In this respect, the argument can be an *inference to the best explanation*.³⁸ However, Szabo (1995) points out that the validity of the best explanation claims should be supported by the usefulness of its consequences other than what it aims to explain, but “we have no evidence that it is anything more than an ad hoc solution to a single

³⁸ See Szabo (1995) for a detailed criticism of such arguments in the context of compositionality and Cohnitz (2005, p. 42) for the evaluation of Szabo's alternative.

problem” (p. 87). Moreover, in a similar fashion to the discussion on recursion in Section 2.2, it is not clear that we can justify the premise that natural languages contain infinitely many sentences without presupposing the compositional rules apply unboundedly. If we cannot, circularity threatens the validity of the argument.

3.2. The Finiteness Constraint

Davidson (1965/1984m) recognizes that we could establish “what we shall count as knowing a language, how we shall describe the skill or ability of a person who has learned to speak a language” (pp. 7–8) prior to any empirical study of language. The description should take a form of a theory; knowing such a theory is knowing the language. Davidson sets two conditions that such a theory of language should satisfy. Regarding syntax, it should define a predicate whose extension is all and only the grammatical sentences. On the semantic side, it must supply a way to identify the meaning of any random sentence, and it should “specify, in a way that depends effectively and solely on formal considerations, what every sentence means” (p. 8). Davidson proposes that Tarski’s truth definition offers such an “effective method” (p. 8) for semantics. Glüer (2011) identifies such a method as one humanly computable based on finite primitives and computational steps (p. 33).

These matters appear to be connected in the following informal way with the possibility of learning a language. When we can regard the meaning of each sentence as a function of a finite number of features of the sentences, we have an insight not only into what there is to be learned; we also understand how an infinite aptitude can be encompassed by finite accomplishments. (Davidson, 1965/1984m, p. 8)³⁹

The *matters* Davidson discusses up to this point are about the semantic theory, not the language itself. Thus, it is natural to interpret Davidson as talking here about what would happen if we adopt a truth definition as a meaning theory. Tarski’s truth definition is recursive, compositional, and based on a finite set of axioms. When such a definition is applied to a natural language, it will *enable* us to see *how* their

³⁹ Compare with Chapter 2.3 and Chomsky’s *infinite use of finite means*.

meanings are determined from a finite set of axioms accordingly. Those axioms will reveal what is there to be learned, and the recursive character of theory will make it explicit how finite axioms give meaning to a potentially infinite number of sentences.

For suppose that a language lacks this feature; then no matter how many sentences a would-be speaker learns to produce and understand, there will remain others whose meanings are not given by the rules already mastered. It is natural to say such a language is unlearnable. (Davidson, 1965/1984m, p. 8)

The *feature* Davidson examines can be taken individually as compositionality, recursiveness, finiteness, and all of them combined. The language under discussion is the natural language, so what is at stake is its connection with the effective method. Davidson asks to consider the case where the sentence meanings are not determined by a finite set of rules in natural languages. So, the matter is independent of the internal mechanism of the theory; it is the case when there exist infinitely many rules in a natural language. Then, it is no surprise that we cannot give an effective procedure for such a language. However, it will also be unlearnable for humans. Davidson gives an empirical argument about natural languages that shows that humans can only learn a finite number of rules for vocabulary and grammar:

This argument depends, of course, on a number of empirical assumptions: for example, that we do not at some point suddenly acquire an ability to intuit the meanings of sentences on no rule at all; that each new item of vocabulary, or new grammatical rule, takes some finite time to be learned; that man is mortal. (Davidson, 1965/1984m, pp. 8–9)

It is crucial to itemize the empirical assumptions Davidson explicitly states and see what follows them:

EA1) Humans learn languages; thus, languages are learnable.

EA2) Learning a language is learning rules that give the meaning of sentences.

EA3) Learning a language is learning rules for vocabulary and grammar (that give the meaning of sentences).

EA4) Learning each rule for a new item in vocabulary or a new grammar rule takes a finite time.

EA5) Humans learn a language in a finite time.

C1) Humans can only learn a finite number of rules for vocabulary and grammar that give the meaning of sentences. (EA4, EA5)

C2) A learnable language has a finite number of rules for vocabulary and grammar that give the meaning of sentences. (EA1, EA2, EA3, C1)

Now, for a moment, ignore the part between parentheses in EA3; it is unclear what relation holds between the rules for vocabulary and grammar and the rules that give the meaning of sentences in EA2. To bridge the gap, it is necessary to clarify what the terms “vocabulary” and “grammar” stand for. When taken in isolation, their meanings are open to interpretation. They may refer to common sense notions of words and the surface form of a syntax about which people have an intuitive grasp. Or, in a linguistic and technical sense, the vocabulary can consist of morphemes, and the syntax could be any underlying structure resulting in surface forms. Another option is that they refer to the axioms of the semantic theory. The latter alternatives are untenable as the empirical nature of the assumptions makes it clear that the argument is about natural languages independent of any theory about them. Thus, the term vocabulary cannot be taken to be ambiguous in a theoretical sense that can refer to either sub-sentential expressions or sentences themselves. The context of the enumeration of assumptions (EA3 follows EA2) makes this last point clear and ignoring it would also make the argument's conclusion ambiguous. In that case, it would be possible that while the vocabulary refers to sentences, the grammar refers to the syntax of propositional logic. Thus, to avoid a theoretical muddle (which we will return to later), we should add the part between parentheses to EA3. One possible objection would be to propose a looser connection between EA2 and EA3:

Learning a language is learning rules that give the meaning of sentences, and these rules *necessarily involve* learning rules for vocabulary and grammar.

Here, although rules for vocabulary and grammar are necessary, they are not sufficient. Moreover, their relation to the rules that give the meaning of sentences is left obscure. Thus, even if we find a way to incorporate them in such rules, it is always possible to have infinitely many rules that give the meaning of sentences besides finite rules for vocabulary and grammar. It may be true that:

C2*) A learnable language has a finite number of rules for vocabulary and grammar that *participates* in giving the meaning of sentences.

But not all languages with a finite number of rules for vocabulary and grammar would be, in principle, learnable. This is because how such rules participate in giving the meanings of sentences is left unqualified by the interpretation, and there could be a further infinite number of rules that also participate in determining the meanings of the sentences.

If the relationship between EA2 and EA3 is settled in the way described, we get the following assumption:

EA3) Learning a language is learning rules for vocabulary and grammar that give the meaning of sentences.

The first thing to consider is that this assumption implicitly includes the dictum that the meaning of the sentence depends on the meanings of its constituent words and structure. If the learnability argument aims to justify that natural languages are compositional, then including a premise that follows from it as an assumption will be an error. However, we have seen that Davidson considers a case that would block the possibility of giving an effective procedure that would provide the sentence meanings.

People can master a potentially infinite number of sentences, including those they have not encountered before. They can always add a word into a sentence to form a new one with a different meaning *unboundedly* and would usually understand *novel*

sentences without difficulty when uttered by others. If someone says, “Sam loves Mary,” and the other says, “Mary loves Sam,” people know that they mean quite different things despite consisting of exact words. If someone says, “Henry loves Marry,” they know that it means something different because of the involvement of a different word. If they miss the meaning, they could ask for clarification about the meaning of an unfamiliar word, and they choose their words and rephrase themselves to be understood. Moreover, people learn to accomplish these in early childhood in a limited time. These natural observations form the bases for arguments from creativity, novelty, understanding, systematicity, and learnability for the compositionality of natural languages. However, it turns out Davidson does not argue for compositionality in terms of learnability but contends that a semantic theory should account for how a natural language is learnable. These phenomena form the explanandum of a semantic theory. In fact, a successful semantic theory should also account for how the meanings of sentences depend on their words and structure for the same reason.

These pre-theoretical observations set the stage for scientific and philosophical investigations. Although the creativity of language fascinated and puzzled many throughout history, people got the tools to deal with these phenomena theoretically only after the development of mathematical models of inductive definitions and recursion (Chomsky, 1966/2009). Science aims to explain how people *actually* do all these things with language; its method is empirical. Of course, it could turn out that some or all of our commonsense views are wrong, but science is complete when it explains why we had these illusionary beliefs in the first place.

On the philosophical side, Davidson (1967/1984p) assumes that “the speakers of a language can effectively determine the meaning or meanings of an arbitrary expression (if it has a meaning), and that it is the central task of a theory of meaning to show how this is possible” (p. 35). Davidson’s point is that this ability is not mystical but based on a mechanical procedure that the philosopher can explain in terms of knowledge learned by and attributed to competent speakers. The

philosopher's task is not an empirical one that reveals the actual mechanisms but to form a theory that would suffice⁴⁰ to explain these abilities.⁴¹

Davidson (2004a) states his “dream was to try to do for the semantics for natural language what Noam Chomsky was doing for the syntax of natural language. But he didn’t have quite the same concept of a theory” (p. 259). The difference between their conceptions of theory corresponds to the labor division which Davidson sets between philosophy and science above. In Chapter 2.2, we see that Chomsky is after the explanatory adequacy of the theory, but Davidson explicitly states that his aims are not directed to actual mechanisms, even in the earliest papers. Davidson’s strong opposition to the possibility of a cognitive approach to truth theoretic semantics puzzled commentators but did not prevent them from developing ideas accordingly (see Larson and Segal (1995) for a classical account).⁴² These matters are connected with the ability which Davidson assumes pre-theoretically speakers possess, namely that they can effectively determine the meanings of sentences. Davidson rejects attributing the mechanism, which the theory suggests, to actual speakers because Davidson already assumes some effective mechanism at work from the very start (Davidson, 1999e, p. 251). However, the theorist cannot “describe what an interpreter can do except by appeal to a recursive theory of a certain sort” (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 96). Thus, the requirements that Davidson sets are

⁴⁰ When Davidson claims that Philosopher explains “how this is possible,” he is not after a transcendental argumentation that reveals the necessary condition of the possibility but simply what would suffice.

⁴¹ See Fara (1997d). The beginning of the video discussion contains Davidson’s precise answer to Gabriel Segal’s question about the relation between scientific and philosophical explanations of competence.

⁴² Lepore and Ludwig (2005) explored the relationship between speakers’ competence and truth theory in Davidson’s overall philosophy and proposed a mild version of the cognitive approach in terms of dispositions on the level of semantical primitives (pp. 121–124). They establish a more intimate relationship between the axioms of the theory and people’s ability to use words when compared to the interpretation developed throughout this thesis.

directed to the theory, not to language itself, and leads to his proposal that Tarski style truth theory satisfies them.⁴³

3.3. On the Notions of Semantical Primitives and Constructive Account

Davidson (1965/1984m) concludes the argument by introducing the notion of *semantical primitive*:

Let us call an expression a semantical primitive provided the rules which give the meaning for the sentences in which it does not appear do not suffice to determine the meaning of the sentences in which it does appear. (p. 9)

The explicit exposition of the assumptions that Davidson makes while introducing semantical primitives will be helpful to reinforce the ongoing interpretation. Let E be an expression. Let S_1 be a set of sentences that do not have E as a part and R_1 be a set of rules that gives the meaning of sentences in S_1 . Also, let S_2 be a set of sentences with E as a part and R_2 be a set of rules that gives the meaning of sentences in S_2 . The question is how some members of R_1 could suffice to give the meaning of a sentence in S_2 .

- 1) “John is a bachelor” is in S_2 , “John is unmarried” and “John is a man” are in S_1 .

In this case, the word “appear” is in force with its strict sense. For example, the word “ant” appears in the sentence “this is a red ant.” So, if such a sentence is in S_2 , the

⁴³ Chomsky utilizes the term *theory* ambiguously to indicate the linguist’s work in theory construction and the language acquisition device of actual people and moves toward the latter conception in favor of the latter throughout his career. He co-wrote the controversial paper “The faculty of language: What is it, who has it, and how did it evolve?” (Hauser et al., 2002) that marks a turning point where recursion is defined as a uniquely human adaptation in the human brain. Although Davidson is clear that his endeavor is not empirical from the start, he also adopts the ambiguous conception paradoxically but moves in the opposite direction of Chomsky. In his later work, the theory is the theory of the philosopher.

set S_1 can be the set of sentences of a language that does not contain it, and R_1 would not include a rule for the word “ant.” If the remaining rules are insufficient to give the sentence's meaning, then the word “ant” is a semantical primitive. As in 1, it could be argued that rules for the meanings of the sentences on S_1 are sufficient to understand the sentence:

“John is a bachelor” means that John is unmarried and John is a man.

The primitive, in this sense, amounts to undefined and contrasts with the expressions that are defined in terms of primitives.⁴⁴ Haack (1978) proposes a similar interpretation according to which Davidson's definition is “a counterpart of the usual definition of primitiveness for the connectives in elementary logics” (p. 232). Haack's example is logical biconditional in that if we have rules for conditionals and conjunction, or alternatively negation and conjunction, these rules would “suffice to specify the role or meaning of formulas” (p. 232) in which biconditional sign appears. In logic, such a practice simplifies formal language by eliminating redundant ones (Quine, 1970/1986, pp. 23–25). Unfortunately, Haack does not explain what would natural language equivalence of his analogy look like. However, so-called analytical sentences suggest themselves, as shown in the example.

Carnap (1952) uses *meaning postulates* to defend analyticity against Quine's (1951) attack on this notion. There are intuitively valid inferences from sentences like “John is a bachelor” to “John is not married,” “John is a man,” etc. For Carnap, these relations can be stated as postulates during the construction of the language system, and their conjunction gives analytical sentences. Carnap (1958/1975) later developed the use of meaning postulates to connect observational terms and theoretical terms in scientific theories. Davidson (1965/1984m) rejects modification of Carnapian tools to model language learning, describing the process as: “Then

⁴⁴ Primitiveness, in this sense, appears in philosophy in different contexts. For example, in his epistemology, Russell (1911) builds described knowledge on primitives that are acquired directly.

come theoretical terms, learned perhaps by way of 'meaning postulates' or by dint of being embedded in suitably scientific discourse" (p. 4). Moreover, Davidson not only follows Quine in rejecting analytic-syntactic distinction but also rejects to view that a semantic theory should explicitly concern with "the analysis of individual words or expressions (which are treated as primitive by the theory)" (Davidson, 1967/1984p, p. 31).

The main problem with the definitional interpretation of primitives, in general, is that it is null when the issue is learning the vocabulary of a natural language. Suppose that a set of semantical primitives can be used to give the meanings of all other words of a language by defining or describing them. Then, learning a language amounts to learning these semantic primitives and the definitions themselves. If the expression "bachelor" appears in a language, knowing the meanings of "unmarried" and "men" is insufficient to understand its meaning; one also has to learn that such a particular word means "unmarried men." For a language to be learnable, the definitions should be finite, or there should be a general rule to form these definitions. However, such a rule for neology seems impossible for a natural language.

2) "This is a red ant" is in S_2 , "This is an ant" and "This is red" are in S_1 .

The expression "red ant" appears as a syntactic compound in this example. So, if the sentence containing it is in S_2 , the set S_1 can be the set of sentences of a language in which the expressions "red" and "ant" appear separately. Now the set R_1 *could* include rules for the words "ant" and "red" and a semantic rule corresponding to the syntactic one. If there are, they will suffice to determine the meaning of the expression "red ant," which could not be a semantical primitive. This conception of primitiveness is based on a contrast between basic and compound expressions. It is evident that it presupposes a kind of compositionality as it requires the existence of a semantic rule that gives the meaning of the compound expression. Consider the following:

- 3) “This is an antbear” is in S_2 , “This is an ant” and “This is a bear” are in S_1 .

Suppose that the set R_1 contains rules for “ant” and “bear.” There is a syntactic rule which forms a compound name from two different names. However, there seems to be no compositional rule which gives the meaning of the compound. It could be objected that even though there is no compositional rule, there may exist a rule which somehow gives the meaning of the compound; maybe it is just an abbreviation of a description:

The antbear means a small bear-looking animal that exclusively eats ants.

However, it just refers back to the discussion on the definitional interpretation of primitives above. Consider the following:

- 3*) “This is an aardvark” is in S_2 , “This is an ant” and “This is a bear” are in S_1 .

Although the word “aardvark” is synonymous with “antbear,” it is not composed of the corresponding basic words. The same description given above is also applicable to it. Now, when the case is learning the word, they do not differ from each other semantically; each of them should be learned individually. And only after learning the meaning of the expression “antbear” would the description make sense. Otherwise, a knowledgeable guess is not a semantic rule in the proper sense. Still, some caution is necessary here. It is clear that there is a connection between the meaning of the basics and the compound name in natural language. Consider the following example to contrast:

“This is an antrum” is in S_2 , “This is an ant” and “This is rum” are in S_1 .

There is no connection in any form between the names of the “ant” as an animal, “rum” a kind of alcoholic beverage, and “antrum,” which is a cavity in the body.

Thus, no definition or description is possible in that case. Davidson claims that creativity is essential in everyday language *use*, and knowledge of the word is critical for it (Davidson, 1986/2005d; Fara, 1997c).⁴⁵ However, what is claimed here is that there cannot be a rule at the theoretical level, at least for Davidson.

Consequently, the definition of semantical primitives *uses* compositional rules in its description. However, it is silent about the level at which these rules could operate, the number of primitives, or even if such rules exist. Consider the ambiguous usage of the term vocabulary in the previous section. The semantical primitives could be a finite or infinite number of sentences, and such sentences could be combined with the resources of propositional logic to form an infinite language. An expression is a semantical primitive relative to rules and so to a theory: “Red ant” or “antbear” are primitives or compounds relative to the available semantical rules.

A learnable natural language has a finite number of rules for vocabulary and grammar that give the meaning of sentences. So, the definition trivially applies to natural languages: A learnable *natural* “language has a finite number of semantical primitives” (Davidson, 1965/1984m, p. 9). But it becomes a constraint when applied to a theory about a natural language. Given that the theory has an axiom for each semantic primitive, a theory about a natural language should have a finite number of axioms.

A number of recent theories of meaning are not, even in principle, applicable to natural languages, for the languages to which they apply are not learnable in the sense described. (Davidson, 1965/1984m, p. 9)

Davidson uses the constraint to evaluate different semantic theories. Any theory for a natural language that contains an infinite number of axioms will fail as the

⁴⁵ Katz and Fodor (1963) reflect on the difference between “(1) *Our store sells alligator shoes* and (2) *Our store sells horse shoes*” (p. 178) and claim that knowledge required to discriminate the meanings of alligator shoes (shoes made out of alligator skin) and horse shoes (metal apparatuses that are nailed to horses’ toes) is not within the scope of a semantic theory.

language they describe would not be humanly learnable, so it would not give an account of the ability of language users. Moreover, for the fact that natural languages contain a potentially infinite number of sentences, the constraint will rule out semantic theories that do not give the meaning of these sentences based on semantical primitives. In that case, it will turn the informal requirement of compositionality into a formal one concerning the form of possible theories.

Commentators usually do not focus on Davidson's notion of primitives.⁴⁶ Evnine (1991) states that "a semantic primitive is something which has its own axiom" (p. 75). Sayward (1975) is one of the few who elaborates on the issue (p. 38). Sayward's formulation is an extensional counterpart of the above interpretation in the context of a truth theory. According to Lepore and Ludwig (2005), Davidson defines primitives by assuming some vaguely stated meaning-giving rules, but it turns out that these rules are compositional in the discussed sense (pp. 27–28).

Consequently, the discussion on semantical primitives reveals that the very notion is a theoretical term that presupposes compositional rules in its definition. Thus, using it inside the classical formulation of the learnability argument makes it suspiciously close to circular.

Lepore and Pelletier (2008) define primitives as "expressions whose meanings are not predictable on the basis of prior learning" (p. 194). Their initial example is:

- 4) "He is a skier" is in S_2 , "He skies," "He swims," and "He is a swimmer" are in S_1 .

Although it is a matter of luck to predict the meaning of a sentence containing the expression "antbear," thanks to the semantic rule that converts the verb swimmer to a name that refers to the one who swims, one does not need to learn the meaning of swimmer individually. However, the word "prediction" in the definition serves to

⁴⁶ Davis (1981/2020) is an exception that will be discussed in Chapter 3.4.

circumvent mentioning such compositional semantic rules. No matter how many sample pairs are learned, unless the relevant semantic compositional rule is not learned, one cannot determine (or predict by a rule) the meaning of the next instantiation.

It is unclear if Lepore and Pelletier's (2008) aim is to give a pre-theoretical definition of semantical primitives in terms of predictivity. If it could be given, then the term could be legitimately used inside the classical formulation of the learnability argument. They argue that natural languages contain recursive devices that construct an unbound number of non-synonymous sentences from the primitives and such productivity is a "fundamental and important features of natural languages" (p. 196). Thus, it is an empirical fact that natural language contains a recursive syntax, a recursive and compositional semantics. If so, it is crystal clear that a semantic theory should be compositional (and also recursive). However, they further invoke the learnability argument on the same page, arguing that "linguistic comprehension must depend not only on understanding primitives, but also understanding how primitives are combined" (p. 196).

Davidson (1965/1984m) also summarizes the main point of the argument as follows:

I propose what seems to me clearly to be a necessary feature of a learnable language: it must be possible to give a constructive account of the meaning of the sentences in the language. Such an account I call a theory of meaning for the language, and I suggest that a theory of meaning that conflicts with this condition, whether put forward by philosopher, linguist, or psychologist, cannot be a theory of a natural language; and if it ignores this condition, it fails to deal with something central to the concept of a language. (p. 3)

Taken literally, what Davidson requires in this paragraph is confusing. Natural languages have features independent of what we think or know about them, and they are learnable whether we could account for these features or not. The constructive account under discussion is taken to be a compositional one in literature. Thus, a necessary feature of a natural language is that we can give a compositional account of it. It turns out some quantification is necessary to make sense of the condition:

We can provide a compositional account of a language only if it is actually compositional. So, a necessary feature of a natural language is being compositional. Such a line of ad hoc argument ignores what Davidson (1965/1984m) explicitly stated at the end of his discussion: “Then we may state the condition under discussion by saying: a learnable language has a finite number of semantical primitives” (p. 9).

According to the dictionary definition, a constructive method is one that "uses an algorithm or other effective procedure to prove the result or yield answers" (Earl & Nicholson, 2021). However, the term constructive has many canonizations in logic and mathematics, and it is hard to trace back to the sources Davidson refers to in using it. In one sense, the constructive method is a way to introduce a system of objects to mathematics, just like the introduction of numbers with an “inductive definition” (Kleene, 1952/1971, p. 26). Gödel (1934/1965) requires the mathematical systems to be based on constructive rules:

We require that the rules of inference, and the definitions of meaningful formulas and axioms, be constructive; that is, for each rule of inference there shall be a finite procedure for determining whether a given formula B is an immediate consequence (by that rule) of given formulas $A_1, \dots, A_n$, and there shall be a finite procedure for determining whether a given formula A is a meaningful formula or an axiom. (p. 41)

Quine (1960/1976) defines predicate logic as constructive, which means a “halfway effectiveness” (p. 37). Accordingly, even if there is no way to determine if a proposition is true or false, there exists a procedure (“a general routine of computation” (p. 39)) that can show the truth of the proposition if it is true.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Kleene (1952/1971) is the leading textbook on metamathematics of its time. The book compiled by Davis (1965) comprises the papers and presentations of the founders of computation theory, including Gödel. Quine’s relation to the subject is problematic as he departs from the others by not mentioning the recursive functions in the definition. See also Quine (1940/1981, pp. 87, 291). However, Quine (1953/1961) discusses the philosophical sense of the grammarian’s task of giving rules for a potentially infinite number of sentences in a language (pp. 53–54). The

Davidson did not use the term constructive in his papers except when discussing the logical form of action sentences. Adverbial modification in natural languages is problematic for a semantic theory. While “John walked slowly” entails that “John walked,” the formal structure of the existing theories fails to explain this fact. Moreover, they result in positing an infinite number of semantic primitives as the verb can be modified unboundedly. Davidson’s (1967/2001d) solution is to give the logical form of these sentences as quantifying over events. In that case, the relation between adverbs and verbs is the same as between adjectives and names. Davidson (1967/2001d) concludes:

As a result, nothing now stands in the way of giving a standard theory of meaning for action sentences, in the form of a Tarski-type truth definition; nothing stands in the way, that is, of giving a coherent and constructive account of how the meanings (truth conditions) of these sentences depend upon their structure. (p. 119)

The paragraph links the constructive account with a Tarskian truth definition. So, the notion refers to the same effective procedure in which finiteness is the leading property. When Davidson says *it must be possible* to give such an account, he points out the impossibility of it in case natural languages contain infinitely many semantical primitives. The inadequacy of interpreting the term constructive as compositional is evident: A language can be compositional but unlearnable. In fact, when Frege (1892/1997h) introduces *sense* to serve as the reference of an expression in opaque contexts (p. 160), his aim is directed to save compositionality (in a substitutional sense) (Pagin & Westerståhl, 2010, p. 262, fn.13; cf. Pelletier, 2001, p. 106), and this is what Davidson (1965/1984m) rules out as introducing an infinite hierarchy of senses (pp. 14–15). Consequently, one could revise the condition as compositional and finite, but it will fall short of capturing the recursive character of the original formulation.

Index labels a similar procedure of semantics as constructive (Quine, 1953/1961, p. 59). These examples are not deemed to be exhaustive but aim to shed light on the terms’ reception during the 1960s.

3.4. In Defense of Finiteness

The previous Chapters entirely focused on developing an interpretation of the departure point of Davidson's truth theoretic semantics. The following propositions summarize the conclusions thus far:

1) Davidson assumes that natural languages are compositional in the informal sense. This fact manifests itself in the learnability, creativity, systematicity, and novelty of language use. The ability of language users is not mystical but based on an effective procedure that enables such usage. So, an adequate semantic theory should account for this ability by developing a theory whose knowledge *could* allow them to do what they do. Tarski's truth definition modified for a language provides such an effective method.

2) An adequate semantic theory must have a finite number of axioms for semantical primitives. Several theories fail to account for the learnability of language by posing infinite semantical primitives. Through the fact that natural languages contain a potentially unlimited number of sentences, the theory should possess the necessary formal resources (such as recursiveness and compositionality) to build meanings of sentences on the finite number of semantical primitives.

The present interpretation is consistent with Davidson's summary in the "Introduction" section of "Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation" (Davidson, 1984c), according to which the issue under discussion is the theory:

'Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages', urges that a satisfactory theory must discover a finite basic vocabulary in the verbal phenomena to be interpreted if it is to prove useful to a creature with finite powers. If this is so, there is no escape from the need to treat the semantic features of the potential infinity of sentences as owed to the semantic features of the items in a finite vocabulary. (p. xiii)

Davidson repeats the learnability argument in his reply to a paper by Fodor and Lepore (1993), but the finiteness constraint is isolated. Davidson (1993) states that

the argument reveals a property of a *natural language* and constraints interpretation and theory (p. 78):

A learnable (or interpretable) language must have a finite primitive vocabulary. The argument is that we are not born knowing the languages we come to speak, so we must learn the meaning (interpretation) of each independent item in the vocabulary. Given that it takes a finite length of time to learn each item, and that men and women are mortal - well, you see how it goes. The point may be trivial, but a number of semantic theories have failed to observe it. (p. 79)

Horwich (1998) proposes a deflationary account of compositionality, according to which understanding a sentence is nothing more than understanding the meanings of primitives and their composition mode. He considers the account as contra-Davidson because it takes compositionality as *basic*. He states that the meaning of sentences can be given with the assumption that compositionality holds, and it is not part of the bargain to provide an “explanation of *why* it holds” (Horwich, 2001, p. 101) by a truth definition. In his reply, Davidson (2001b) states: “I have never asked for an explanation of why compositionality holds; like Horwich, I assume that compositionality must hold, for reasons on which we might agree” (p. 305). Davidson’s point is that the truth theory does not justify the compositionality but explains *how* it could work.

Pagin (1999) chased the same justification issue of the compositionality of natural languages. Although he believes that it is an essential property that needs explanation (p. 59), he is suspicious of any conclusive argument in favor of it except for the availability of good reasons (p. 60). Pagin argues that the classical formulation of the learnability argument fails, so its justification should be present in the assumptions and procedure of radical interpretation (p. 62). Pagin’s case against the argument is analogous to the objection against justification of recursion by appeal to infinity in linguistics (See Chapter 2.3). Both have the unjustified assumption that natural languages have infinite sentences (considered non-synonymous in semantics). It can be justified either by appealing to compositionality itself or showing that language speakers can learn these sentences by some other

means. In the former case, the argument is circular, and the latter indicates that compositionality is not required for infinity. Pagin claims the argument fails (pp. 61–62). Davidson (1999d) replies that he considers semantic theories necessarily compositional and assumes “(on the basis of learnability, creativity and common sense) that any successful interpretation of an utterance must fit that utterance into a compositional scheme” (p. 74). Pagin (2019) returns to the issue later with a crucial but undermined paper that clarifies the learnability argument similar to the interpretation developed above. He claims that Davidson assumes that natural languages are computable and “our general *meaning theory* should *bring this out*” (p. 85). Accordingly, the pre-theoretical account of compositionality included in the concept of computation justifies the infinity assumption, but the subject matter of the argument is the theory, not the language itself.

Pagin (2019) reached his conclusion by focusing on Davidson’s demand for a general account of meaning, which will cover all the expressions of the language (pp. 79–83). Such an account is presented in Chapter 3.1, through which Davidson proposes that a truth theory could guide to reveal the logical form of sentences (1999b, pp. 34–35, 1999a, p. 159, 2004a, p. 257). Pagin does not go into the argument itself, so details presented above, such as the finiteness constraint, are missing in his presentation. However, he rightly interprets that the following paragraph is about the theory and not directed to the natural language itself:

It is conceded by most philosophers of language, and recently by some linguists, that a satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words. Unless such an account could be supplied for a particular language, it is argued, there would be no explaining the fact that we can learn the language: no explaining the fact that, on mastering a finite vocabulary and a finitely stated set of rules, we are prepared to produce and to understand any of a potential infinitude of sentences. I do not dispute these vague claims, in which I sense more than a kernel of truth. Instead I want to ask what it is for a theory to give an account of the kind adumbrated. (Davidson, 1967/1984p, p. 17)

The vague claim is the dictum or informal account of compositionality Davidson presents as a *fact* (see also Davidson, 1970/1984l, p. 61).

Grandy (1990) claims that the learnability argument does not necessarily depend upon the questionable premise about the infinity of sentences; it is enough to point out that their number is vast enough (pp. 558–559). If we consider the argument an inference to the best explanation, Grandy’s proposal amounts to the same as the original one. However, it would face the same objection directed to the original version: How could we know a vast number of sentences exist without assuming the language is compositional? It seems the same common sense considerations are the base for both of the claims.

Haack (1978) criticizes the argument by claiming that there exist formal languages that do not have finite primitives but are learned by humans nevertheless (pp. 233–234). Matthews (1986) counters this type of criticism by stating that the languages which Davidson considers are natural languages “learnability constraints of the sort that Davidson proposes are intended as necessary features of languages that are learnable *under the given conditions of access to data*; they are not intended to preclude the possibility that languages failing to satisfy these constraints might be learnable, or indeed learned, under different conditions of access to data” (p. 52). The conditions Matthews proposes are the ones in how people *actually* learn a language. Given Davidson’s hesitation to speculate how people acquire their languages (Davidson, 1965/1984m, pp. 3, 7), Matthew’s defense also seems to miss the mark. The reason criticisms from formal languages cannot even get off the ground is that such an extension does not follow from the premises, and Davidson never intends to.⁴⁸

Lepore (1982) claims that a theory of meaning must display what we know when we know a language, and such a statement should be in a finite form as “we cannot give an infinite enumeration: otherwise, we cannot complete its statement” (p. 283; see

⁴⁸ Lepore and Ludwig (2005) state that “Davidson’s requirement is on a learnable language, not a learnable theory. Learning a language is not learning a theory. Thus, it is a mistake to recast it as a requirement on a learnable theory.” (p. 34)

also Lepore & Loewer, 1983, p. 441). Lepore's point is an echo of Tarski where he considers the method of *enumeration* of sentences for defining truth:

Whenever a language contains infinitely many sentences, the definition constructed automatically according to the above scheme would have to consist of infinitely many words, and such sentences cannot be formulated either in the metalanguage or in any other language. (Tarski, 1933/1983, pp. 188–189)

Lepore's defense of Davidson is based on the idea that Davidson never intended to argue for the compositionality of natural language. However, it leaves the finiteness of the defined language itself unspecified. If the language itself has infinite vocabulary, the endeavor to fit it into a finite form would require further justification. Thus, despite Lepore's effort to abstract from learning language altogether (1982, p. 282), the finiteness cannot be omitted.

Davies (1981/2020) also requires a meaning theory to specify a theorem that gives the meanings of all sentences of a language in the usual form: "s means (in L) that p." However, finite axiomatization is not a requirement as long as a way exists to devise the theorems (or axioms resulting from an axiom schema) (p. 5). According to Davies, while there is no methodological reason for finiteness, it results from another requirement (together with the fact that the subject matter language is learnable) (p. 57). Moreover, Davies criticizes Davidson's account because a theory could cope with a language with finitely many predicates and names by simply giving an axiom for each sentence and ignoring the sub-sentential structure (p. 61). Davies' alternative requirement is what he calls *structural constraint*:

If, but only if, it would be possible for someone to proceed by rational inductive means from knowing what $s_1, \dots, s_n$ mean to knowing what s means then the meaning specifications for $s_1, \dots, s_n$ should d-determine the meaning specification for s. (p. 56)

Such formulation applies to a process through which a hypothetical rational agent tries to reveal an abstract mathematical structure for the language under

investigation utilizing the available inductive resources. Starting point is a set of sentences whose meanings are determinate; the project is to extend such knowledge to include all of the sentences of the language by abstracting the contribution of similar parts of sentences to sentence meanings (Davies, 1981/2020, pp. 55, 56).⁴⁹ And if it is possible, then it is hard to see why a theorist should not follow the lead unless the theory's aim is not psychological.⁵⁰ Here, Davies justifies attributing the resulting structure to a language by claiming that the structure is “that an ideally rational creature would recognize” (Davies, 1986, p. 132). The constraint above roughly amounts to the informal account of compositionality stated in an exotic language, and Davies’ reason for its adoption is not unacceptable from Davidson’s position. Next, he continues to define primitiveness in a similar fashion to Davidson’s original formulation:

Let us say that p is a semantic primitive according to a theory θ just in case an axiom of θ deals non-semantically with p . And let us say that p is a semantic primitive of a language L just in case p is a semantic primitive according to some theory of meaning for L which meets SC. Then p is a semantic primitive of L just in case it is not possible to come to know the meaning of any sentence of L which contains p simply by projecting from the meanings of sentences not containing p . (Davies, 1981/2020, p. 59)

Accordingly, the definition of primitives explicitly uses compositionality and takes this concept relative to a theory. The point of departure is that it is not silent about the level of expressions on which these rules operate. Davies (1981/2020) argues

⁴⁹ If axioms used to derive the meanings of a set of sentences suffices to derive the meaning of another particular one, then the members of this set are said to d-determine the meaning of the latter collectively (Davies, 1981/2020, p. 53). However, Davies gives a number of similar formulations of the same constraint that do not cite the term d-determinate (Davies, 1981, p. 138, 1983, p. 18, 1986, p. 132)

⁵⁰ Davies (1986) categorizes possible semantic theories under two broad approaches: Abstract mathematical ones (like the one under discussion) and psychological ones that try to describe the inner workings of actual or ideal language users (pp. 131–135). It is already clear that Davidson does not aim for the latter kind, and Davies’ discussion here is about Davidson’s approach.

that since primitives should be learned in finite time individually, there must be a finite number of them and concludes that the semantic theory should contain finite axioms for the primitives revealing compositional structure (pp. 59–60).

When the language under discussion is natural, Davies's conclusion is identical to Davidson's. So, on which point do they disagree? We see above that in Davidson's definition, the compositional rules are used vaguely, and the finiteness of primitives cannot be used to rule out a semantic theory for a language that is infinite but with a finite number of sentences. First, although a language described by a theory that fails to meet the finiteness requirement is not a natural language, it does not mean that every language that satisfies the requirement is one. A toy language with one singleton sentence is hardly a natural language or a language without a quantificational structure. Davidson aims to rule out theories that fail to account for structure found in natural languages, and some of these treat sentences as semantical primitives; the definition does not rule out that. However, if they do, they would present the language under discussion as unlearnable.

Lepore and Ludwig (2005) seem to formalize the argument as aiming a compositional *theory*:

(1) Natural languages have an infinite number of nonsynonymous expressions and, in particular, an infinite number of nonsynonymous sentences.

....

(6) Thus, natural languages have "a finite number of semantical primitives"...

(7) Thus, it must be possible to account for how an infinite number of nonprimitive expressions in natural languages can be understood in terms of a finite vocabulary of semantical primitives. (p. 28)⁵¹

However, when explaining their presentation, they take it to be about the compositionality of *natural languages*:

⁵¹ The omitted formulation restates Davidson's empirical assumptions.

Therefore, our understanding of at least many sentences depends on our understanding of semantically primitive expressions—by way of rules providing, from the meaning of primitives and their mode of combination, a specification of the meaning of the complex expressions. (Lepore & Ludwig, 2005, p. 29)

The former case amounts to Davidson's constraint that a semantic theory should be compositional in a compressed form. But they base this constraint on an argument about compositionality from learnability where there is none, as discussed above. If the second quotation is basic, they reiterate the unsuccessful standard argument. Moreover, they incorporate the notion of "semantical primitives" into the main argument to justify compositionality without quantifying if it refers to sentential or sub-sentential expressions. Again, it has been shown above that the argument fails in that case. And if they take the notion to specify sub-sentential expressions, the justification attempt turns out to be circular.

Stoutland (2006) criticizes Lepore and Ludwig's presentation by claiming that Davidson never argues about the compositionality of natural languages, but theories about them contra semantical theories should be compositional because language actually is (p. 581). Lepore and Ludwig (2007b) responded to him by rephrasing themselves, but this time, in a way of talking about the informal compositionality of language, not arguing about it.

CHAPTER 4

THE EMPIRICAL TRUTH THEORY

4.1. Davidson's Initial Proposal

The previous chapter mentioned Davidson's suggestion that a Tarski-style truth theory provides an "effective method for determining what every sentence means" (Davidson, 1965/1984m, p. 8). Tarski's truth definition does not *directly* state what being true amounts to for sentences; for instance, it does not relate sentences with extra-linguistic reality, facts, or propositions, which sentences correspond to be true. Instead, it defines a predicate for a specific object language (for formal languages) in a metalanguage that is applicable to all and only the true sentences of that object language. Convention T tests the definition by matching object language sentences with their translations in the metalanguage (Tarski, 1933/1983, pp. 187–188) by the following scheme:

S is T in L iff P

(S is the structural description of the object language sentence, and P is the translation of the very same sentence in metalanguage)

Accordingly, a definition that gives *all and the only* true instances of the scheme is said to satisfy Convention T and is *materially adequate*, meaning that the predicate *is T* amounts to our intuitive concept of truth (Tarski, 1944, p. 353). In that sense, Tarski uses the notion of meaning to define truth. Thus, a definition that satisfies Convention T would generate the following form of T-sentences for all sentences of the object language:

“Snow is white” is true iff snow is white.

When the number of sentences of the object language is finite, instances of *such partial truth definitions* can be included in a general one which would simply quantify over disjunction of them all. However, when the object language contains truth-functional connectives, such a strategy would fail as one could not wholly enumerate the infinite number of sentences (Tarski, 1933/1983, p. 188). Tarski (1933/1983) states that “the idea of using the recursive method suggests itself” (p. 189): The definition would include compositional rules showing how the simple ones determine the truth of compound sentences *unboundedly*.⁵² The same strategy will extend to cover sentences with quantificational structure. But in this case, the rules should apply to open sentences in addition to closed ones. Tarski invokes the notion of satisfaction, gives its recursive definition, and defines truth indirectly in terms of it (pp. 193–195).

Davidson proposes that such a definition could serve as a meaning theory. Some commentators claim that Frege considers the truth conditions as the meanings of sentences (Wiggins, 2022; see also Frege, 1891/1997b). And Wittgenstein (1921/2001) clearly states that “to understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true” (p. 25). However, it is hard to directly connect these considerations to Davidson’s proposal. First, Frege’s and Wittgenstein’s accounts are theory-laden, and second, as explored in the remaining chapters, the truth conditions of sentences do not give the meanings when taken in isolation for Davidson. He initially follows an indirect way to develop his ideas.

Davidson claims that the classical Platonic idea of assigning entities as meanings of parts of the sentences convolute matters by leading to regress, and Frege offers a solution by treating predicates as unsaturated entities (Chapter 1.1). However,

⁵² Hintikka and Sandu (1999) claim that the compositionality is Tarski’s secret in giving his truth definition (p. 221).

calling an entity unsaturated or incomplete is metaphorical⁵³ at best and derives its content from its role in determining the meaning of the complete sentence. Davidson states that when such a role is appreciated, there is no further reason to posit an entity for it. Consider the following Fregean theory of reference for a toy language (Davidson, 1967/1984p, pp. 17–18):

Syntax

- Single Referring terms (RT): $x_1, x_2, \dots x_n$
- Functor (F): y
- Complex Referring Terms (CT): $CT = F + RT$

(The concatenation of referring terms with functor is a complex referring term)

- Nothing else is a referring term.

Semantics:

- “Aristotle” refers to Aristotle.
- “Plato” refers to Plato.
- For all single referring terms α , the concatenation of “the teacher of” with α refers to the teacher of what α refers to.

Thus, the basic theory of reference will give the reference of complex referring terms compositionally, and anyone who knows the theory would know what the complexes refer to.⁵⁴ The axiom provides a *rule* which establishes how the complex term’s reference is determined by its components. The objects corresponding to the referring terms are the only ontology that the theory uses. Consider the additional axiom in the theory that assigns an entity to the functor:

⁵³ Davidson (2005g) explains the metaphor: “Divide a line at some point. The point itself must go with one of the segments or the other. The lucky segment, which gets the point, is complete; the other segment is incomplete” (p. 132).

⁵⁴ Of course, the theory will not generate “‘The Teacher of Aristotle’ refers to Plato” but this is not the aim of the theory. It is an empirical matter that could be answered by history.

- “The teacher of” refers to the teacher of.
- For all referring terms α , and Functor F, the concatenation of F with α refers to the value of the function denoted by F with the referent of α as an argument.⁵⁵

The original question was to give an account of what the complex terms refer to, but it seems it is not a great improvement “The teacher of Aristotle” refers to the value of the function “The teacher of” with “Aristotle” as an argument. In the former formulation, the axiom states the *role* of the functor plays in referring. However, axioms can state the reference of the complex terms directly in a similar fashion as their number is finite.

“The Teacher of Aristotle” refers to the teacher of Aristotle.

“The Teacher of Plato” refers to the teacher of Plato.

In that case, the theory will not invoke any ontology at all. Neither the syntax nor semantics is recursive. If the number of single referring terms were infinite, then the language would be infinite; and if there were no effective procedure to determine such references, the language it defines would be unlearnable. Nevertheless, neither is the case. Nonetheless, the syntax could be revised to be recursive easily:

- Referring Terms (RT): $RT = F + RT$

In that case, the number of sentences will be potentially infinite (even the number of singular referring terms is finite), and it is not possible to give the finite axioms for all the referring terms, and the theory necessarily invokes an ontology. The corresponding recursive semantic rule will be:

⁵⁵ The sample language is taken and revised to match the presentation from Lepore and Ludwig (2005, p. 47)

- For all terms α , the concatenation of “the teacher of” with α means the teacher of what α refers to (Lepore & Ludwig, 2005, p. 46).

The theory will supply an effective procedure dealing with infinitely many referring terms (1967/1984p, pp. 17–18): “The Teacher of the teacher of Aristotle” refers to the teacher of the teacher of Aristotle. Lepore and Ludwig (2005) draw an analogy with the success condition of the sample theory of reference and Convention T by invoking the following scheme:

t refers to r (p. 48)

The theory satisfies the adequacy condition if it supplies an instance of the scheme for all the referring terms of the language. The moral Davidson derives from such sample reference theory is that using meanings as entities is neither necessary nor sufficient for devising a theory whose knowledge will enable us to give references to complex terms:

It behoves us then to rephrase our demand on a satisfactory theory of meaning so as not to suggest that individual words must have meanings at all, in any sense that transcends the fact that they have a systematic effect on the meanings of the sentences in which they occur. (Davidson, 1967/1984p, p. 18)

These considerations become the pivotal point when Davidson considers the alternative form for the meaning theories through which P gives the meaning of S:

S means P

S means that P

The first alternative requires a meaning entity to replace P. Consider the following example that Davidson (1967/1984p) presents. Suppose one takes the meaning of “Theaetetus” as an argument, the meaning of “flies” as an unsaturated functional entity that gives the meaning of “Theaetetus flies” as value. Davidson claims that “The vacuity of this answer is obvious. We wanted to know what the meaning of

'Theaetetus flies' is; it is no progress to be told that it is the meaning of 'Theaetetus flies'" (p. 20). The problem is the same one that is explored in the sample reference theory; positing an entity for the isolated role of the predicate amounts to restating the issue that one begins with.⁵⁶ Davidson (1967/1984p) invokes the context principle and claims that the unsaturated part's role should be used as a rule to get to the meaning of the sentence:

We decided a while back not to assume that parts of sentences have meanings except in the ontologically neutral sense of making a systematic contribution to the meaning of the sentences in which they occur. Since postulating meanings has netted nothing, let us return to that insight. One direction in which it points is a certain holistic view of meaning. If sentences depend for their meaning on their structure, and we understand the meaning of each item in the structure only as an abstraction from the totality of sentences in which it features, then we can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language. Frege said that only in the context of a sentence does a word have meaning; in the same vein he might have added that only in the context of the language does a sentence (and therefore a word) have meaning. (p. 22)

Although the second alternative for the selection of the predicate possesses the required structure for such treatment, Davidson rejects it on the ground that the required intentional logic would lead to identical problems that we start. (Davidson, 1967/1984p, p. 22). After rejecting alternatives as inadequate to be the form of meaning theory that would lead to the sentence meanings systematically, Davidson turns to the scheme which appears in Tarski's Convention T:

S (is true in L iff) P.

If one has a truth definition for a language that satisfies Convention T, it will systematically match object language sentences with their translations in the metalanguage. Davidson (1967/1984p) states that "the success of our venture depends not on the filling but on what it fills" (p. 23), and such a definition could be

⁵⁶ Davidson's reasons for such a conclusion are presented in Chapter 1.1. See Ramberg (1989, p. 34) for a similar exposition.

used as a meaning theory (pp. 22–24). It will include axioms for each of the semantical primitives in the following type to accomplish such a task:

$$(s)(\text{ref}(\text{"Theaetetus"}, s) = \text{Theaetetus})$$

$$(s)(n)(s \text{ satisfies "n sits" iff ref}(n, s) \text{ sits.})^{57}$$

The resulting T-sentence will be:

"Theaetetus sits" is true iff Theaetetus sits.

Frege (1884/1959) introduces the context principle in the preface of *The Foundations of Arithmetic* together with two other interconnected principles, which all are said to be fundamental to his investigation:

In the inquiry that follows, I have kept three fundamental principles:
always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective;
never to ask for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a proposition;
never to lose sight of the distinction between concept and object. (p. xxii)

Frege (1893/1964) explains his project to "make it plausible that arithmetic is a branch of logic and need not borrow any ground of proof whether from experience or intuition" (p. 29). The first principle is directed against his contemporary empiristic (and psychological) account of arithmetic, mainly developed by John Stuart Mill. According to Mill, numbers are properties of external things whose knowledge is acquired by experience (Kessler, 1980). Frege (1884/1959) claims that such an approach cannot give an account of the objectivity of arithmetic and cannot be tenable. Frege sets the second principle because if it is "not observed, one is almost forced to take the meanings of words mental pictures of acts of the individual

⁵⁷ For technical reasons, both reference and satisfaction axioms are relativized to a sequence s .

mind, and so to offend against the first principle as well” (p. xxii). Frege later restates the context principle to explain how we can comprehend numbers by claiming that they are presented by “the sense of a proposition in which a number word occurs” (p. 73). Accordingly, “numbers are given to us as those objects number-designators contribute to the conceptual content of a particular kind of identity statement” (Textor, 2011, p. 73).

Frege initially takes circumstances as conceptual contents of propositions (Textor, 2011, p. 82). In such a conception, the conceptual content of a word is its role in the constitution of the circumstance as an object or a concept. As the structure of the circumstance is mirrored in the logical structure of the sentence, logical analysis of the sentence gives content to the constituent parts in the light of the full sentence (Textor, 2011, p. 54). According to Frege’s third dictum stated above, only through a full proposition we can identify the logical role of a constituent part as an object or a concept, as such constituents cannot possess such roles standing alone (Hacker, 1979, p. 218).⁵⁸

After splitting up conceptual content into sense and reference due to the inability of it to be the inferential role and circumstances together (Frege, 1892/1997h; Textor, 2011, p. 108), Frege (1892/1997i) introduces thoughts as senses of sentences:

Thoughts are senses of sentences...The thought, in itself imperceptible by the senses, gets clothed in the perceptible garb of a sentence, and thereby we are enabled to grasp it. We say a sentence expresses a thought. (p. 328)

Thoughts are objective but not physical (compared to the previous notion of circumstances); they could be true or false, do not depend on anyone thinking them, but only can be grasped by thinking subjects. Frege (1892/1997i) claims that they populate “a third realm” (p. 337) apart from physical and mental. Nevertheless,

⁵⁸ Wittgenstein also adopts the context principle: “Only propositions have sense; only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning” (Wittgenstein, 1921/2001, p. 16).

thoughts are not unbreakable wholes; on the contrary, they are composed of thought parts and structured. A thought corresponds to the sense of a sentence, and a part of thought corresponds to the sense of a word. The sentence structure mirrors the structure of a thought.⁵⁹ Such tidiness has a counterpart in the realm of reference. Sentences are unities that refer to the *True* or the *False*, and while the names refer to objects, the unsaturated parts refer to concepts (Frege, 1892/1997h, p. 158, see also 1891/1997b).

The context principle is at the epicenter of the inconclusive debate (mentioned in Chapter 3.1) regarding Frege's adoption of compositionality. While the context principle takes the sentences as primary, the picture that emerges after sense and reference distinction and his late comments on language creativity suggest that Frege abandons it in favor of compositionality. The views vary between Frege adopts each at different times, or adopts both, but for distinct aspects of language, or for the same aspect in a compatible way, or never adopts the compositionality in the first place (Janssen, 2001; Pelletier, 2001). Apart from the controversies in Frege-scholarship, it is clear that Davidson considers him adopting compositionality as well as the context principle (Davidson, 2005g, p. 133).

Frege was right in taking predicates' meanings as their role in the whole sentences as the context principle requires. The problem was that assigning them entities strips away the explanatory power attained by the context principle (Davidson, 2005g, p. 139). Moreover, Frege's account would work out only if the unity of a sentence is of a name so that predicates could be function entities. Davidson broadens the context principle to holism in the framework of a truth definition to a principle of content determination. If the meanings of the words are taken to be their contributions to the truth conditions of sentences, such meanings will be determined by the truth conditions of the totality of sentences in which they take part. Moreover, through the fact that each sentence consists of other words, a word's meaning will be

⁵⁹ See Frege (1906/1997a, p. 294, 1914/1997d, p. 313, 1919/1997f, p. 363, 1918/1997e, pp. 351, 358–359)

interconnected with the meanings of others. Holism fixes the word and sentence meanings relative to the whole language. Consequently, when the axioms of the truth theory are set, a potential infinity of sentences will follow from them compositionally.⁶⁰ Of course, this way of formulating holism is highly abstract and provides no hint of how it could apply to natural languages. Consider the following T-sentences:

“The sky is blue” is true iff the sky is blue.

“The sea is blue” is true iff the sea is blue.

Both will use the same axiom:

(s)(n)(s satisfies “n is blue” iff ref(n, s) is blue.)

Neither the truth of both sentences nor the role of the part “is blue” is a formal property in natural languages. The T-sentences turn to logical truths when the translation has presupposed in the formulation of axioms (Putnam, 1985, pp. 63–64). Moreover, devising axioms by homophonic translation guarantees that the definition satisfies Convention T. As a result, compositionality and holism amount to the same thing vacuously. These properties are legitimate when one’s interests are limited to formal languages, as to Tarski. But if one aims to apply the definition to a natural language, the role “is blue” plays is an empirical issue that should be settled by considering how the sentences are used.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The Fregean third realm is the background that gives semantic content to sentences. A holistic approach to Frege’s philosophy would define the meaning of a word relative to it. The sense of a sentence is a thought, and the sense of a word is what it contributes to the sense of the thought in which it takes part. The same part also appears in other thoughts in the third realm, so the thought and corresponding sentences are all interconnected as a web with nodes at parts that they share. See Hacker (1979) for an example of an interpretation in these lines.

⁶¹ It does not mean that the project of devising a truth definition with the assumption of translation is a worthless endeavor. Such a project could reveal important facts

Lastly, how do these considerations square with learnability? Recall that Davidson uses empirical assumptions in the statement of the finiteness requirement:

EA3) Learning a language is learning rules for vocabulary and grammar (that give the meaning of sentences).

EA4) Learning each rule for a new item in vocabulary or a new grammar rule takes a finite time.

The empirical assumptions are neutral about how these rules are learned. They do not claim that each rule is learned in isolation from the rest of the language. In the case of actual language acquisition, Davidson (1965/1984m) states that “we cannot accurately describe the first steps towards its conquest as learning part of the language; rather it is a matter of partly learning” (p. 7). The argument is that no matter how they are learned, they should be finite in number.

4.2. From a Truth Definition to a Truth Theory

Frege (1892/1997g) points out the peculiarity of natural languages when we say that “the concept ‘horse’ is a concept” (p. 184); we transform the concept into an object. The paradoxical nature of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* reveals itself explicitly at the end when he concludes, “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein, 1921/2001, p. 89), after all his talk about meanings. Carnap (1963a) states Tarski was the first to develop a systematic semantics that lets us talk about truth and related semantic concepts in a scientifically respectable way apart from syntax. Tarski was pessimistic about the reception his work would receive, and after he presented them to logicians and philosophers with encouragement from Carnap, his skepticism turned out to be true (pp. 60–61). Doubt about Tarski’s accomplishments continues in the preceding years through criticism and underestimation. Tarski said he aims to capture the Aristotelian conception of truth

about the language under study, namely the *logical form* of sentences and language’s ontological commitments (Davidson, 1977/1984f, 2005g, p. 150, 1993/2005c).

(1944, pp. 342–343),⁶² but Putnam (1985) puts it bluntly: “As a philosophical account of truth, Tarski's theory fails as badly as it is possible for an account to fail” (p. 64). Convention T uses a basic understanding of truth and translation to show that the defined predicate amounts to the intuitive concept of truth, but to many, such a move ends up with a truth predicate for *a* particular language but fails to give the *general account* (Davidson, 2005g, p. 149). Frege (1892/1997h) claims that such a predicate adds nothing to the sentence to which it is predicated (p. 158), and Ramsey (1927) stresses that calling a proposition true is no more than expressing the proposition (p. 157). Quine (1970/1986) interprets Tarski's definition in similar lines: “The truth predicate is a device of disquotation” (p. 12). Davidson (2005g) defends Tarski by claiming that his assumptions make clear that he is not after a general definition that could be applied to all languages (p. 30), and the disquotation view is the result of limiting the cases to a homophonic translation (p. 151). For Davidson, the real problem with Tarski's definition is its dependence on the notion of translation, which is “far more obscure than that of truth” (p. 30).

The failure of Davidson's initial proposal also is evident. Tarski presupposes meaning to check if the defined predicate amounts to a truth predicate, namely whether or not it satisfies Convention T. In Davidson's case, as the notions of truth and meaning cannot be presupposed simultaneously, it is unclear how someone can determine whether Convention T is satisfied. Moreover, presupposing metalanguage to contain the object language amounts to taking meaning for granted, which the theory is supposed to give an account of. Davidson later admits such fallacy (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 134) and contrasts his aims with Tarski's: “I have the reverse in mind. I considered truth to be the central primitive concept, and hoped, by detailing truth's structure, to get at meaning” (Davidson, 1984d, p. xiv). Davidson (1990) settles that he must quit translation assumption together with the ambition to define the concept of truth and aim to devise an “empirical theory about the truth

⁶² Aristotelian conception of truth is from *Metaphysics*: “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true” (Aristoteles, 1995, 1011b25).

conditions of every sentence in some corpus of sentences” (p. 309). Taking truth as basic and primitive concept amounts to taking it to apply generally to all languages (idiolects and speakers) *generally*. Thus, the aim is not to define truth but to reveal “how it works” (Fara, 1997d).

When one quits the aim of defining truth and does not proceed to turn the recursive definition to an explicit one, the powerful machinery remains intact to be incorporated into an empirical account (Davidson, 2005g, pp. 31–34, 154). However, the machinery is just a formal characterization of relations between the notions of truth, satisfaction, and reference, and it is neutral about how the theory gets empirical content. One way is proposed by Field (1972) that connects elements of language with reality. He states that although Tarski accomplishes to reduce “the notion of truth *to certain other semantic notions*; but that he did not in a way explicate these other notions, so that his results ought to make the word ‘true’ acceptable only to someone who has already regarded these other semantic notions as acceptable” (p. 347). Field’s proposal is to add direct reference theory to Tarski’s definition through which axioms gain empirical content. Subsequently, Tarski’s account turns out to be a compositionally satisfactory theory that “*explains the properties of complex expressions ... in terms of semantic properties of their primitive components*” (p. 351).

Field’s proposal exemplifies what Davidson calls “Building-Block theory” (Davidson, 1965/1984m, p. 4, 1977/1984j, p. 220, see also 1990, pp. 299–300). This kind of theory aims to connect words with “events, actions, or objects described in non-linguistic terms” (Davidson, 1977/1984j, p. 219) to explain the meaning of sentences. However, there is not any hint about how the meanings of the sentences given by such theories are connected by the “extra-linguistic interests and activities that language serves, and these are served by words only in so far as the words are incorporated in (or an occasion happen to be) sentences” (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 127). It is not an accidental or secondary property of sentences to be used in a social setting; quite the contrary, how sentences are used is constitutive of what they mean. Davidson rejects such a solution in a similar line to the context principle:

Words have no function save as they play a role in sentences: their semantic features are abstracted from the semantic features of sentences, just as the semantic features of sentences are abstracted from their part in helping people achieve goals or realize intentions. (Davidson, 1977/1984j, p. 220)⁶³

It is at the sentential level that language connects with the interests and intentions language serves, and this is also the level at which the evidence for interpretation emerges. But just as words have a meaning only in the context of a sentence, a sentence has a meaning only in a context of use, as part, in some sense, of a particular language. (Davidson, 1993/2005b, p. 170)

Convention T was meant to settle the question of whether the defined predicate was a truth predicate for that language by matching sentences with their translations; when we quit the translation assumption and take the truth basic, the problem turns into how to decide if the truth theory applies to a language correctly. The translation assumption bypasses language users by letting us talk about meanings in the abstract, and when it is dropped, the theory should incorporate the use of language (Davidson, 2005g, p. 36).

People use language to achieve endless goals and realize their countless intentions. They use words to assert, promise, order, lie, and perform all kinds of speech acts and reach their motives. This diversity led the late Wittgenstein to renounce the Tractarian project of explaining meaning by a simple formula, such as picture theory, and adopt an anti-theoretical approach. The present labor division between semantics and pragmatics aims to warrant the systematic study of language by limiting the subject matter of the former to literal meanings and leaving the considerations of use to pragmatics.

⁶³ Stoutland (1982) presents an interpretation of this passage that is distinct from the one developed here. According to him, such abstraction from goals and intentions takes place in the formation or evolution of the language and is not related to current use. Stoutland claims that the language which Davidson is interested in is the modern developed language in which abstraction is related to truth conditions (p. 40). While our conclusions coincide, the reasoning which leads to them differs considerably. However, Davidson's replacement of translation with *language use* to make the theory empirical makes Stoutland's interpretation unlikely.

What is Davidson's reference to language users in his above statement of holism amount to? The answer to this question also clarifies what it means for a truth theory to serve as a meaning theory. Recall that Davidson's initial proposal proceeds by indirect reasoning by eliminating the possible predicates of "means" and "means that."⁶⁴ But taking the truth basic calls for a more intimate relationship between truth and meaning. Davidson's standard response to demands about the clear-cut establishment of the connection between truth and meaning is that the former shed light on the latter. The proposal was that the knowledge of a truth definition for a language could qualify us to produce and understand sentences of that language.

Consider the situation in which Kurt utters the sentence, "Nobody eats alone in this house," with the intention of uttering the words that will be interpreted by the audience as true iff (or to mean) nobody eats alone in this house, and this with the intention to mean everybody should gather around to table for meals, and with the intention to warn the little boy that he could not eat alone while watching cartoons, and with the intention to teach him some manners (Davidson, 1969/1984o, p. 45). Only the first two of these intentions are linguistic, and only the first one indicates what the utterance literally means.

Davidson claims that *speaking the truth* is unique that "simply by knowing the language, one can state a criterion determining whether that action is performed" and "when someone speaks the truth, speaker, language, and the world come into a relation that is worthy of, and amenable to, systematic study" (Davidson, 2020, p. 21). The truth theory deals with *literal meanings*, and the first linguistic intention in the chain would enable one to understand the sentence's literal meaning (Davidson, 1969/1984o, p. 45, 1984b, p. 269, 1990, p. 312, 2005g, p. 53). Speaking the truth is unique as it "is never an end in itself" (Davidson, 1984b, p. 268), thus amendable to systematic study, independent of following intentions. The theory will reveal the

⁶⁴ Davidson states that "it was in the nature of a discovery that such a predicate would apply exactly to the true sentences" (Davidson, 1967/1984p, pp. 23–24) and "since the words 'is true if and only if' are invariant, we may interpret them if we please as meaning 'means that'" (Davidson, 1970/1984l, p. 60).

literal meaning of sentences and words, but in the sense that they are what the theory reveals. This semantic core enables us to use language for endless deeds.⁶⁵

The creativity of language in the pragmatic sense depends on but is distinct from semantic creativity. If it is the case, there is no way to abstract meanings of sentences and words from the last element in the chain of intentions. When evaluating the claim that *meaning is use* and it is a distinct matter from the truth, Davidson explains that the dictum does not contradict by taking truth conditions as literal meanings:

This simple claim doesn't rule out an account of meaning which holds that sentences mean what they do because of how they are used; it may be that they are used as they are because of their truth conditions, and they have the truth conditions they do because of how they are used. (Davidson, 2000/2005h, p. 13)

Consequently, the meanings of sentences and words should be abstracted holistically from the general *pattern* of truth implicit in language use, which reveals itself in the instances of true sentences. The knowledge of an empirical theory of truth will reveal this pattern through T-sentences and enable us to understand the literal meanings of all the sentences of a language (Davidson, 1984d, p. xvii, 1977/1984f, p. 214, 1977/1984j, p. 225, 1975/1984n, p. 162, 2005g, pp. 35,61). If one searches for a more comprehensible concept of meaning, for example, one including the speaker's meanings, the theory can be said to shed light on it by making it possible, namely by providing the literal meanings.

When we quit the translation assumption and treat the instances of T-sentences as empirical theorems that express substantial facts about how sentences are used, then Convention T can be restated as: "An acceptable theory of truth must entail, for every sentence *s* of the object language, a sentence of the form: *s* is true if and only

⁶⁵ Speaking the truth differs from asserting; asserting is based on non-linguistic intention.

if p , where ' p ' is replaced by any sentence that is true if and only if s is" (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 134, see also 1977/1984j, p. 215). This revised form is too weak when T-sentences are taken in *isolation*, and as expressing a logical relation between the mentioned and used sentences. All one requires is to write a true sentence at the right side of the material biconditional such as:

"Snow is white" is true iff snow is white.

"Snow is white" is true iff coal is black.

"Snow is white" is true iff snow is white and coal is black.

"Snow is white" is true iff snow is white and $4+4=8$.

"Snow is white" is true iff snow is white and coal is black or coal is not black.

However, the revised formulation is only seemingly different from the original one. While translations are given by stimulation in the original one, they are arrived at by empirical means in the revised one, but the reformulation is silent about how. Davidson's presentation of the reformulation precedes a clarification stating that what is under consideration is not the truth of the T-theorem as given above but those that satisfy further empirical restrictions.⁶⁶ When these restrictions are met, "then the T-sentences that flow from that theory will in fact have translations of s replacing ' p '" (Davidson, 1976/1984k, pp. 173–174).

Consequently, while Davidson does not abandon Convention T, it "remains a desideratum of a theory, but is no longer available as a formal test" (Davidson, 1977/1984f, p. 204).⁶⁷ Accordingly, if the truth is taken as the basic concept, an empirically correct theory of truth for a language is the one that satisfies Convention

⁶⁶ See Davidson (1973/1984i, p. 134) and Davidson (1974/1984a, p. 150).

⁶⁷ See Glüer (2011, p. 45) and Ludwig (2014, pp. 466–467)

T, whose knowledge could enable us the understand any arbitrary sentence of that language.⁶⁸



⁶⁸ According to so-called replacement theories, Davidson substitutes the concept of meaning with the concept of truth (Ludwig, 2015); by contrast, Lepore and Ludwig (2005) claim Davidson sticks to the original proposal. Both of these views are untenable. Davidson arrives at meaning by explicating truth. Lepore and Ludwig exhibit great effort to keep the predicate “means that” in theory, Davidson is indifferent to such endeavor by claiming that such predicate would depend on truth at the end (Fara, 1997c).

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

5.1. Radical Interpretation

What is it to interpret somebody else's words? Kurt utters the words, "It is raining," when he is about to go out. I am in another room and not in a position to see outside. What do I know about Kurt, his utterance, and the circumstances of his utterance in his moment? The list contains but is not limited to the following. (1) I know that Kurt holds the sentence "It is raining" true, and (2) his words are true iff it is raining. Given that Kurt uses the words to express his beliefs, (3) I infer Kurt believes it's raining. I respond to him: "The umbrella is here." But I do not know if it is really raining. I do not see with my eyes but conclude that it's raining and respond to him accordingly. Why? I know that Kurt is a speaker of truth. (4) I know Kurt's beliefs about his *immediate environment are usually true and consistent with his many other beliefs*⁶⁹ (which are not only generally true but also true as related to particular circumstances).⁷⁰ Although I did not see the rain myself, I know that the circumstances in which Kurt uttered caused him to believe that it was raining, and if I was the one who saw outside, the same circumstances would cause me to believe the same. I also assume that Kurt believes that rain is wet, an umbrella is a thing that is used on rainy days, he should open it to use, etc. (5) If I doubt that Kurt fails to speak the truth, I would look out the window, see it's raining, and confirm my conclusion. However, if I did not already assume (4), I cannot even infer what Kurt

⁶⁹ (4) states the principle of charity, details follow below.

⁷⁰ Compare with Lepore and Ludwig (2005, pp. 200–202).

believes, so I would have no reason to go and check. And also no reason to inform him about the whereabouts of the umbrella.

However, such an account of interpretation does not aim to describe how people actually interpret each other. We do not usually say people interpret each other; we just say they understand each other. When Davidson says that people interpret each other, it means no more than they understand each other, and communication succeeds. The term interpretation has an application only when we raise questions about how such understanding could be reached.⁷¹ And when Davidson claims that “all understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation” (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 125), he does not mean people utilize the procedure of radical interpretation to understand others; he points out a phenomenon in language use that could be explained by it. We got observable utterances at the one side of the explanation and circumstances under which such words were uttered at the other end. What remains in between is the art of a philosopher, which explains how understanding *could* succeed by invoking notions like truth, beliefs, and meanings and relating them with each other in theories (Davidson, 1973/1984i, pp. 137–138, 1990, pp. 324–325, 1993, p. 83)⁷². Of course, one can always object that philosophers should aim for more ambitious results, such as reducing one of these concepts to others and ultimately to physical facts.⁷³

The term interpretation has three interrelated meanings in Davidson’s philosophy, depending on the situation under discussion. The first one is the general case presented at this chapter’s beginning. The interpreter and speaker come into communication equipped with theories about literal meanings of each other’s languages (or idiolects) and aim to understand what the other means in the sense of

⁷¹ Compare with Hacking (1986, pp. 450–451) and Dummett (1986, pp. 464–471).

⁷² Davidson (1994/2005f) states that people understand each other spontaneously, not by actually constructing a theory of the kind he proposes or actively looking for evidence that could be used to confirm it (p. 112).

⁷³ See Davidson (1990, p. 315).

the speaker's meaning. This situation is *closest* to actual linguistic exchange. In the above example, when Kurt utters, "It's raining," I use my knowledge of the literal meanings of his words to arrive at the conclusion that he asks where the umbrella is. Of course, the process is regimented for theoretical purposes; in the actual exchange, I simply understand that Kurt wants to know where the umbrella is. In the second sense, if I fail to interpret one of the utterances of Kurt, I will radically interpret him; I will use *all available evidence* and clue for me to figure out what he means. And when the issue comes to actual interpretation, to determine what the speaker means, the knowledge of the interpreter becomes indistinguishable from "knowing our way around in the world generally" (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 107).

The radical interpretation in the third sense, Davidson considers a similar scenario but with a difference, (2) and as a conclusion (3) are missing as the utterance belongs to an unknown language and *evidence* is limited for the purposes of the philosopher:

Kurt utters the words 'Es regnet' and under the right conditions we know that he has said that it is raining. Having identified his utterance as intentional and linguistic, we are able to go on to interpret his words: we can say what his words, on that occasion, meant. What could we know that would enable us to do this? How could we come to know it? (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 125)

Radical interpretation⁷⁴ is a process through which an interpreter comes to an understanding of the utterances of an unfamiliar language without any available dictionary and grammatical rules or any assistance of a bilingual speaker. It should be clear that the thought experiment does not aim to be a model of first language acquisition or actual work of field linguists but a conceptual exercise to reveal what evidence and knowledge would suffice for such an understanding (Davidson,

⁷⁴ Radical interpretation is a thought experiment derived from Quine's *radical translation* (Quine, 1960/2013). Glock (1996) and Hopkins (1999) trace back the origins of this type of argumentation to the late Wittgenstein. Davidson (1999f) also traces the methodology to Wittgenstein during explaining the influence of Quine on himself and establish a connection with the dictum that *meaning is use* (p. 80).

1973/1984i, p. 125, 1993, p. 83). Contrary to the conception of general interpretation, the radical interpreter does not have a theory at hand to start with, and the purpose of the radical interpretation is devising such a theory of literal meanings with a limited evidential base.

Davidson keeps his stance about the aim of semantics that has been explored up to now; accordingly, the knowledge of a theory would make interpretation possible (radical or not). The first requirement of such a theory is the familiar one: It must be stated in finite form. The other one is that “it can be supported or verified by evidence plausibly available to an interpreter” (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 128). For a language that the interpreter knows, the evidence could be a corpus of sample sentences. However, Davidson excludes this option for the sake of generalizing to theory to include radical interpretation.⁷⁵

Davidson (1973/1984i) claims that the knowledge of a truth theory could suffice for understanding (p. 130), thus making interpretation possible. So, the task of the radical interpreter is to show how one could form a theory that satisfies Convention T from the evidence without presupposing meanings or requiring any knowledge about the contents of the speaker's beliefs. Radical interpretation is the paradigmatic case in which truth theory gets its empirical content through use by answering how we could come to know a truth theory that would enable us to understand a random utterance of a language speaker.

Recall that the empirical content will be abstracted from instances of sentences where language users speak the truth. Accordingly, Davidson (1973/1984i) states that the interpreter “may know that a person intends to express a truth in uttering a sentence without having any idea what *truth*” (p. 135).⁷⁶ Thus, the starting point is

⁷⁵ See Davidson (1993, p. 81) for an explicit statement of what Davidson takes his radical interpreter knows.

⁷⁶ Ramberg (1989) claims that we must take speakers as “creatures who asserts” (p. 68) but later describes them as speakers of truth (p. 99).

the utterances that radical interpreter detects the speaker *holds true* and the observation of circumstances under which they are uttered.

(E) Kurt belongs to the German speech community and Kurt holds true 'Es regnet' on Saturday at noon and it is raining near Kurt on Saturday at noon. (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 135)

The radical interpreter will gather more evidence about when people hold the sentence true to form an inductive generalization as:

(GE) (x)(t)(if x belongs to the German speech community then (x holds true 'Es regnet' at t if and only if it is raining near x at t)). (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 135)

The challenge is to move from (GE) to (T):

(T) 'Es regnet' is true-in-German when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t. (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 135)

Someone holds a sentence to be true because he knows what the sentence means and believes that is the case. So, “knowing that he holds the sentence to be true, and knowing the meaning, we can infer his belief; given enough information about his beliefs, we could perhaps infer the meaning” (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 134–135). But a radical interpreter cannot read minds, and direct knowledge of meanings and beliefs is not available to him. When the interpreter forms the evidence as “Kurt holds ‘Es regnet’ is true iff it is raining,” he projects his beliefs about the circumstances of the utterance to Kurt. The problem is that Kurt can have false or weird beliefs about his environment, at least by the radical interpreter’s standards. In that case, neither (E) nor (GE) could be evidence for (T). Davidson invokes *the principle of charity* “that maximizes agreement, in the sense of making Kurt (and others) right, as far as we can tell, as often as possible” (p. 136). Thus, the interpreter's task is to simultaneously devise a theory of meaning and belief for the speaker. The principle of charity fixes what Kurt and other language users can believe according to the interpreter’s standards to justify taking (GE) as evidence of

(T). And when the interpreter assumes that Kurt holds the sentence “Es regnet” true, and he believes that it is raining at his vicinity at that moment, then we can infer that “‘Es regnet’ is true iff it is raining.”

According to Davidson (Davidson, 1973/1984i), when some corpus of empirical T-sentences emerges, the radical interpreter will project her logic (first-order quantificational) onto the object language as a whole. The logical constants could be identified via sentences that the speaker holds true no matter what (logical truths) and sentences that are true conditionally (inferences). This projection will reveal the subsentential expressions, predicates, names, and alike. The sentences whose truth conditions change in accordance with the speaker and objects in the environment would show indexical and demonstrative terms. The interpretation of predicates would be clearer with the truth conditions of sentences that contain indexical and demonstrative elements (p. 136). The radical interpreter will test the T-sentences that stem from the theory with further cases and revise the theory when necessary.

Davidson’s reformulation of Convention-T requires T-sentences to be true and satisfy further formal and empirical restrictions. In Chapter 3, we see that there is a formal requirement based on an empirical argument about natural languages which concludes natural languages have a finite number of semantical primitives and a theory that takes up the task of describing a natural language should do it by finite means. If a semantic theory is meant to describe natural language, finiteness is forced on us. The requirement rules out semantic theories that posit infinite semantical primitives as making the defined language unlearnable. As the success of the theory depends on its capacity to enable us to understand all meaningful sentences of a language, together with the fact that natural languages have a potentially infinite number of sentences, the theory should employ recursive devices to show how the meaning of them depends on the meanings of semantic primitives compositionally. This is the formal constraint that Davidson refers to, so the radical interpreter has to project his logic, precisely the first-order quantificational logic of the truth theory, to the sentences of the speaker (Davidson, 1974/1984a, pp. 150–151).

Glüer (2011) claims, quite confusingly, that according to formal constraint, the theory should “satisfy the Davidsonian reformulation of Convention T” (p. 47) and adds that “the first formal requirement on a T-theory is that its theorems are *true*” (p. 63). Convention T is the aim of the theory, it cannot be the formal constraint itself, and the truth of the T-sentences amounts to empirical constraint instead (Davidson, 1974/1984a, pp. 150–151). Lepore and Ludwig (2005) rephrase Davidson as “the formal constraints are that the theory entail, from a finite base, a *T*-form sentence for every object language sentence (and that there be a mechanical procedure for identifying a privileged class of *T*-form sentences which draw only on the content of the axioms)” (p. 155).

Davidson (1974/1984a) states that “the conditions under which a T-sentence may be accepted as correct” (p. 152) are the empirical constraints. So according to the empirical constraint, the evidence available for a radical interpretation is that T-sentences are true but with the qualification that they are formed charitably, which just amounts that they state empirical facts. However, interpretation is a holistic enterprise, and there is no straightforward way to fix them permanently; they are the result of optimization, prone to change in accordance with further data of hold true attitudes, so they are “prima-facie evidence” (p. 152).

Let’s return to the initial example, when interpretation is in a known language, in which Kurt utters, “It’s raining,” and infer that Kurt believes that it’s raining. But this time I doubt that It’s raining. I look outside, and it is just cloudy without any single drop of rain. Kurt fails to speak the truth. He may be wrong for whatever reason. But if the same conversation repeats itself several times in the same circumstances with the same conclusion, and Kurt takes the umbrella when going outside, I will suspect that either he gives another meaning to his utterance or has some strange beliefs about rain; maybe it’s invisible. Even at that point, Kurt’s idiosyncrasy can be tolerated by attributing him to a *different language*. I have to interpret him radically; while I got (1), (4), and (5), his beliefs and meanings are unknown (2 and 3). I can conclude that “‘it’s raining’ is true iff it’s going to rain necessarily” in his language and revise the meaning of related sentences

accordingly. If I cannot find a way to incorporate its meaning to *Kurt's language* in accordance with external circumstances and its relation to his other sentences, I would have no choice but to exclude the sentence from *any* language. However, if such similar cases built up to the degree that cannot be explained consistently with the facts I observe, I would have no choice but to conclude that he is not a speaker of truth anymore, he is rational, and he is not speaking any language (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 137). Communicating with someone else is communicating charitably. Davidson claims that “charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters” (Davidson, 1974/1984h, p. 197).

According to the formal constraint, the interpreter should *fit* the speaker's language into the structure of first-order quantificational logic. However, it is only possible if the object language's structure contains resources suitable for such projection. When we were devising a truth theory for our language, it was a pretty straightforward process. We know that at least a core of our language can fit into it, and the task was to give logical forms of sentences and reveal our language's ontology by the theory's axioms. In this case, our knowledge of the correctness of the axioms is based on assumed translation. When the assumption is dropped, ontology cannot be revealed or posited formally, and the axiom's correctness is an empirical matter. Nonetheless, the very existence of the axiom is ultimately based on the assumption that natural languages are compositional (finiteness argument). Therefore, answering the question of why the object language should have the resources expressible in first-order quantification logic also answers why natural languages are compositional.

Charity restricts the contents from the clusters of sentences to single sentences as well as the other direction from the very beginning of Davidson's semantics (Davidson, 1967/1984p, p. 27). While Quine's theory of translation depends on charity to determine the logical constants, the project of interpretation, which takes the structure of truth theory as essential, lets Davidson to apply charity “across the board” (Davidson, 1973/1984i, p. 136, 1984d, p. xvii). Such two faces of charity

force the interpreter to optimize. Davidson (1991/2001f) formulates the charity in a more principled way at a later date:

The process of separating meaning and opinion invokes two key principles which must be applicable if a speaker is interpretable: the Principle of Coherence and the Principle of Correspondence. The Principle of Coherence prompts the interpreter to discover a degree of logical consistency in the thought of the speaker; the Principle of Correspondence prompts the interpreter to take the speaker to be responding to the same features of the world that he (the interpreter) would be responding to under similar circumstances. Both principles can be (and have been) called principles of charity: one principle endows the speaker with a modicum of logic, the other endows him with a degree of what the interpreter takes to be true belief about the world. Successful interpretation necessarily invests the person interpreted with basic rationality. (p. 211)

It is the principle of charity that gives substance to the formal structure and provides an account of its necessity for the semantic theories. Davidson states that the coherence and correspondence principles are independent of the radical interpretation and are thesis about properties of natural languages as par with the learnability argument (Davidson, 1993, pp. 78–80).⁷⁷ According to the principle of coherence, the interpreter cannot assign truth conditions that will result in logical consistencies. The principle is based on the thesis that beliefs are identified and described by their “location in a pattern of beliefs” (Davidson, 1975/1984n, p. 168, see also 1977/1984f, p. 200). The counterpart of this thesis in the language is that

⁷⁷ Fodor and Lepore (1993) imply that charity depends on radical interpretation (p. 74). In his reply, Davidson (1993) states that: “It is true that I believe that all successful interpretation depends upon the application of the principle of charity, and so, of course, that radical interpretation depends on it. But I do not believe I have presented any argument that makes the need for charity depend on *radical* interpretation; the argument goes the other way around” (p. 78). At a later date, LePore and Ludwig (2005) argue for the same case: “We will argue there is good reason to think that if the principle of charity is to be justified in a form which will do the work required of it, it looks as if that justification must rest on the assumption that the radical interpreter can correctly interpret a speaker, and that charity is required for this” (p. 171). Through the fact that this latter work does not directly discuss Davidson’s reply, the charity will be interpreted as an independent thesis in the context of this work. For further discussion, see Glüer (2011, pp. 143–144) and Ludwig (2014, pp. 468–470).

truth conditions of sentences are identified and described by their “semantic location in a pattern of sentences” (Davidson, 1977/1984j, p. 225, see also 1975/1984n, pp. 158, 162). The thesis is that beliefs come by their nature with consistent wholes. One cannot believe that it’s raining without believing rain consists of water drops, they are formed in the clouds, they fall to the ground, etc. The number of beliefs that is necessary for one is indefinite and huge.⁷⁸ The thesis is based impossibility of having a single belief. One simple argument is that if it was possible to have one belief, then the content of such belief would be determined in isolation from other beliefs. If it was possible, then the contents of all beliefs could be determined independently. In that case, there would be no restriction on holding inconsistent beliefs together. For instance, there would be nothing wrong with believing it’s raining and the sky is clear (Davidson, 1995/2004b, p. 11) and holding the sentence “it’s raining and the sky is clear” or even “it’s raining and it’s not raining” true. The other argument is that such holistic nature of belief differentiates it from simple conditioning.⁷⁹ To attribute belief to another creature, one needs to show that the creature can believe it falsely, and it is possible only if it has different beliefs. The possibility of holding the sentence “horse is running” depends on the existence of other sentences, “zebra is running,” “horse is walking,” etc. (see Davidson, 1995/2004b, p. 12).

So, if the speaker holds the sentence $p \& q$ true in a situation, the interpreter cannot form a T-sentences that would make p and q false in this situation. It is based on the fact that a speaker cannot believe “Snow is white and snow is cold” but “snow is not cold” (see Davidson, 1993, p. 79). The dependencies between sentences also restrict the interpretation of sub-sentential expressions; If the speaker believes “Snow is white and cold,” she would believe “Snow is white and snow is cold.” A speaker cannot consistently believe that “Kurt is older than Sally” and “Sally is older than

⁷⁸ Glüer (2011) states that the holistic nature of the mental is different from the semantic holism discussed so far or holistic content determination (p. 116). However, Davidson states (1995/2004b) that he does not make any distinction between holism about language and holism about thought (p. 11).

⁷⁹ See Davidson (1975/1984n, 1982/2001e).

Kurt” together, or if she thinks the former, the interpreter would expect her also to hold the sentence “Sally is younger than Kurt” (see Davidson, 2001/2004c, p. 138).

The correspondence is a thesis that basic perceptual beliefs are true, or in other words, “belief is in its nature veridical” (Davidson, 1983/2001a, p. 146), which means that the contents of basic beliefs are causally determined by external objects and events. Accordingly, “many basic sentences must be true at those times when they are held true by a speaker” (Davidson, 1993, p. 80). The empirical relations will restrict the interpretation in which the principle of correspondence and ontology have a major part to play. If the speakers hold the sentence “that’s a horse” true in one circumstance, the interpreter would expect her to hold the same sentence true when there is a horse in the perceptual field of the speaker. If some light reflection blurs the speaker’s vision, the interpreter could expect she holds the sentence “that’s a zebra” true, while she will also expect the speaker to correct herself when the reflection ends. However, continuous mistakes or a constant flux in the ontology will make the interpretation impossible as nothing in the world could be determined as the cause of the utterance with the hold true attitude.⁸⁰ Again, the two faces of charity are applied together. If the speaker constantly holds the sentence “that’s a horse” true but “that’s an animal” false, the interpreter should revise the meaning that she gave to one of these sentences or searches for another common cause in the circumstances which would resolve the confusion.

If charity is a constitutive feature of language, interpretation and communication, the structure necessitated by it should be present in all natural languages. The principle of coherence and correspondence reveals that a logic, *at least* rich enough to sustain consistency and quantify over particulars, is necessary to describe the language. Thus, if a language does not relate words with the particulars in the world, there is no reason to call it a natural language. Likewise, if a semantic theory does not have

⁸⁰ Davidson attributes a more essential role to causality in communication throughout the years to the point that he claims “communication begins where causes converge (Davidson, 1983/2001a, p. 151).

axioms to reflect this fact, it cannot be a theory for a natural language. Davidson's claim is that logic of first-order quantificational logic is sufficient to capture this structure. Thus, "there is no way to tell this story, which, being about truth, is about sentences or their occasions of use, without assigning semantical roles to the parts of sentences. But there is no appeal to a prior understanding of the concept of reference." (Davidson, 2005g, p. 35)

What is open to observation is the utterances that are held true by language users under specific circumstances. Such behavior forms a pattern that the formal machinery of a truth theory could capture. By taking truth basic, Davidson regards such machinery as "theoretical constructs"⁸¹ (Davidson, 1977/1984j, p. 223, see also 1973/1984i, p. 133). The evidence for theory arises at the sentential level, and it is tested at the same level. So, the axioms and logical forms are theoretical posits which have no direct contact with evidence. "A theory of this kind does not...explain reference, at least in this sense: it assigns no empirical content directly to relations between names or predicates and objects. These relations are given a content *indirectly* when the T sentences are" (Davidson, 1977/1984j, p. 223). The content of the satisfaction axioms will be determined by both their logical relations to other parts of the language and the ontology of particulars in the world in which the speaker and interpreter causally interact.⁸² However, it makes no sense to ask or check if one axiom is correct by relating it to something in the world. It's hardly a surprise as the whole point of the enterprise is to determine the role of the parts in the unity of a sentence. The part does not play its role because it relates directly to something in reality by a special relation such as reference and satisfaction. According to Davidson, there are no such relations. Things go the other way around; they are related by the theory (Davidson, 1977/1984j, p. 219).

⁸¹ There is a higher order of explanation in which notions of truth, meaning, and belief are also theoretical notions that belong to the art of the philosopher, who relates these notions with each other to explain intentionality and commonsense psychology.

⁸² See Davidson (2001/2004c, p. 137) for the casual relationship of concepts with the world.

Davidson (1977/1984j) concludes quite provocatively that “we don't need concept of reference; neither do we need reference itself, whatever that may be” (p. 224). The following three schemes can explain Davidson's point:

- (T) The sentence “s” is true iff s
- (R) The singular term “t” refers to t.
- (P) The predicate “p” is true of things that are p.

When we give a truth definition for our language, translation assumption fixes the schemes (R) and (P), and “this generates the illusion that the relations of reference and being-true-of are unique” (Davidson, 1995/2005e, p. 72). Davidson (1979/1984e) restates his position as: “Perhaps someone (not Quine) will be tempted to say, ‘But at least the speaker knows what he is referring to.’ One should stand firm against this thought. The semantic features of language are public features” (p. 235). This does not mean that someone does not know what role a word or a predicate plays in giving the truth condition of a sentence. If it were, compositionality would fail. It means that the speaker is not using the parts for the sake of prior understanding of fixed reference: “For imagine there was evidence that words, when *not* employed in sentences, had a certain causal connection with objects but that this fact had no bearing on how the words were used in sentences. Surely we would conclude that the first phenomena were irrelevant to an account of the language” (Davidson, 1979/1984e, p. 236).

Reference and satisfaction axioms are theoretical constructs, theorems of the theory are formed and tested at the sentence level, and axioms of the theory gain content indirectly by abstraction. Thus, on the condition that they do not change the truth conditions of the theorems, different reference axioms are acceptable. Taking these concepts as theoretical goes hand in hand with their indeterminacy. Davidson (1979/1984e) lists three types of indeterminacy that Quine points out in his translation manuals. First, two manuals could assign different conditions to at least one of the object language sentences. Second, there could be different but acceptable ways of assigning roles to parts of the sentences, including logical constants. Third,

manuals may differ in the references they assign to parts. The name inscrutability of reference has coined this last indeterminacy. Davidson admits that these indeterminacies can arise in his own account but to an innocuous degree. Davidson not only fixes the form of the theory in Tarski style but also applies the charity all abroad, as we have seen above (Davidson, 1974/1984a, pp. 153–154).

According to the inscrutability of reference, there could be at least two different reference schemes both agree with all evidence. The classic example is of a permutation, given that everything has a shadow:

“Kurt is a person” iff Kurt is a person.

“Kurt is a person” iff Shadow of Kurt is a shadow of a person.

“Rome is a city in Italy” is true iff Rome is a city in Italy.

“Rome is a city in Italy” is true iff the area 100 miles south of Rome is an area 100 miles south of a city in Italy.⁸³

Quine proposes to relativize ontology to metalanguage to deal with troublesome axioms:

“Kurt” refers to Kurt.

“Kurt” refers to the shadow of Kurt.

(s)(n)(s satisfies “n is a person” iff ref(n, s) is a person.)

(s)(n)(s satisfies “n is a person” iff ref(n, s) is a shadow of a person.)

“Rome” refers to Rome.

“Rome” refers to the area 100 miles south of Rome.

(s)(n)(s satisfies “n is a city in Italy” iff ref(n, s) is a city in Italy.)

(s)(n)(s satisfies “n is a city in Italy” iff ref(n, s) is an area 100 miles south of a city in Italy.)

⁸³ The first example is itemized from Davidson (1979/1984e, p. 230), and the latter is from Davidson (1997/2001c, p. 78).

Davidson objects to such a move as it implies that there exists a *unique* relationship between words and objects to be relativized.⁸⁴ Instead, Davidson draws an analogy with measurement to explicate the indeterminacy allowed in his account. Consider the following statements through which we keep track of water's behavior under different temperatures:

Water freezes at 0 °C.

Water freezes at 32 °F.

Water boils at 100 °C.

Water freezes at 212 °F.

Just as arbitrary numbers are used to keep track of such behavior, different reference schemes can be used to track the linguistic behavior of language users. In interpretation, all that matters to the correctness of one scheme is the empirical evidence (hold true attitudes of a speaker and the circumstances under which sentences hold true). The location of a sentence between infinitely many is determined uniquely by a scheme, and it is this invariant location fixed by the interpreter in her language. Thus, according to analogy, the interpreter's task is to devise a theory that converts the speaker's measurement scale (°C) to his own (°F). There is no more fact of the matter if the measurement is done in (°C) or (°F); there is no *real* measurement method in relation to which other methods are evaluated. So, it turns out it is meaningless to ask if one reference scheme is the correct one as to ask if measuring in (°C) is the correct one. In this regard, indeterminacy is different from the underdetermination of the theory by evidence; there is no fact of the matter to which the theory fails to reach, "no amount of evidence, finite or infinite, would decide whether to measure areas in acres or hectares" (Davidson, 1998/2005a, p. 318). Davidson's solution to all the indeterminacies that could arise is to is a simple

⁸⁴ See Glock (2003, Chapter 7), Hookway (1988, Part III), and Kemp (2012, Chapter 4) for a comparison of Quine and Davidson's views on indeterminacy and inscrutability.

one: “There is, then, a reasonable way to relativize truth and reference: sentences are true, and words refer, relative to a language” (Davidson, 1979/1984e, p. 240).

The existence of alternative reference schemes does not imply that the speaker holds both of the following axioms as correct or cannot distinguish them:

“Kurt” refers to Kurt.

“Kurt” refers to the shadow of Kurt.

When a reference scheme is relativized to a language, one of the alternative axioms is chosen in that language *together with the alternative scheme*. The point of holism is that an axiom cannot be chosen independently of others. I know that these axioms cannot be substituted in my language because “Kurt” refers to Kurt in my language. Just like, if “Kurt” refers to the shadow of Kurt in the speaker’s language, the speaker will know that it cannot be consistently used in sentences to refer to Kurt. The point of reference axiom is to identify the role of the word in the language and nothing more.⁸⁵ Neither the number 5 nor 5 °C refer to anything in reality, but if it is 5 °C, I will take my coat on when I am going outside, and the speaker of F will do the same when it is 41°F. I will utter the word “It’s raining” if it’s raining outside and a German speaker would utter “Es regnet.”

5.2. Interpretation and Communication

The interpreter (I₁) devises a theory for the speaker, enabling him to understand the speaker's (I₂) arbitrary utterances. Suppose also that the speaker (I₂) is also a radical interpreter, and she also devises a theory for our interpreter (I₁) that would enable her to understand our initial interpreter (I₁). Now, in conversation, it is perfectly possible that each speaks in their own language and they will communicate successfully. For instance, I₁ will use the numbers in °C without indicating it, and I₂ will respond by numbers °F in the same way in a conversation and decide to take

⁸⁵ See Davidson (1997/2001c, p. 80).

their coats because it would be 5 and 41 that day. I_1 would offer to meet in Rome, I_2 would agree to meet in Rome, and they will meet at the exact location they discussed even though they are talking about very different locations. In both cases, the success of the communication depends on the condition that both I_1 and I_2 continue to talk in the same way, and their knowledge of the other party will continue to talk in the same way. So, it seems that the success of communication depends on a previous *convention* about going the same way or *regularity* in use (Davidson, 1984b, pp. 276–277, 1986/2005d, p. 102).

Cratylus (Plato, 388 B.C.E./1997) is one of the first philosophical works that takes language as its subject matter. The dialogue starts with Hermogenes' invitation of Socrates to the discussion between him and Cratylus about the correctness of names. Cratylus is said to advocate a naturalistic account according to which "there is a correctness of name for each thing, one that belongs to it by nature" (383b). By contrast, Hermogenes advocates a conventionalist account according to which the "correctness of names is determined by...convention and agreement" (384d). The conventionalist account is considered intuitively clear, and no argument is given in favor. A person or a community can give a name freely to a thing (or change the name of a thing), which will be correct for that thing (385–385b1). Accordingly: (1) there is a correctness of names, (2) such correctness is determined conventionally. Socrates opposes this view as being radically relativist along the lines of Protagoras (386). Socrates' argument proceeds by showing that such a strong interpretation of (2) undermines (1). If (2) is taken to be that every name upon which a community or a person decides to use for a thing will be correct, then (1) will not be an issue as it will make incorrect naming impossible. Socrates claims that we cannot abandon (1) as the truth and falsehood of statements requires the truth and falsehood of their constituents (387d). Socrates counters such relativism by stating that "things have...fixed being or essence of their own" (386e) independent from how we conceive them, and naming is an action that must be performed by a "namemaker" (389) in accordance with such nature (387c6, 390). Consequently, (1) there is a correctness of names, (2*) such correctness is determined by the name's accordance with the nature of the thing.

Modern philosophy makes no more use of Platonic forms but continues to adhere to a form of view that (1) and (2) or (1) and (2*) where it is reformulated in modern ideas. Accordingly, words (and sentences) have literal meanings, and these are determined conventionally. Although the connection between the words and their meanings is arbitrary, the appointment of such meanings to them is based on rules which explain why these words have the meaning. Now, we do not have *namemakers*; we have social norms that determine such correct uses conventionally. An individual cannot name a thing, but the community decides the correct usage of a name for a thing. The literal meanings are conventional, and the conventional uses define the language. Consequently, if one wants to communicate with someone else, say in English, she *ought to* follow the conventional rules of English, and the success of communication depends on the mastery of these rules by communicating parties. Davidson's objection to conventions lies in his objection to explaining linguistic meanings by means of non-linguistic intentions. First, identification of these detailed intentions and beliefs requires language; second, it would damage the *autonomy of meaning*. Although people can use the same utterance to realize their further intentions and reach ulterior motives, it is possible only because its linguistic meanings are independent of them (Davidson, 1979/1984g, p. 113, 1975/1984n, p. 164, 1984b, p. 274).⁸⁶

The interpretive model of Davidson already shows that talking in the same conventional language is not a necessary condition for communication to succeed. Communication is secure as long as the communicating parties know which language (idiolect) the other one is talking in. So, in theory, it is possible that each person speaks in their idiolect but is *capable of determining* the idiolect of others and understands them accordingly. Of course, it would be an infinitely difficult task

⁸⁶ Of course, such a brief presentation of a vast subject does not aim to give an account of different approaches. However, the main focus of this work is the relationship between Davidson's early works with the late ones. The point of introducing the subject from Plato marks this aim. See Davidson (1984b, 1994/2005f, 1986/2005d) for Davidson's views on modern conventionalist theories.

if we started the process of radical interpretation for each person we met, and thanks to the fact that the radical interpretation is a thought experiment and not a recipe to actually interpret people by limiting evidence.⁸⁷ However, this is possible because each language can be said to have a conventional base. Although (1) cannot be held because of the inscrutability of reference, (2) in an altered form could survive. In that case, T-sentences could be taken to describe *regularities* about particular idiolects. The oddity of the idea of someone following his own conventions is clear; it is just meant to indicate that such a person continues to speak in the same way as before.

One can devise a truth theory for a speaker's idiolect whose knowledge is *sufficient* to understand any arbitrary utterance of that speaker on the condition that the speaker continues to speak in a regular way. The theory will model the speaker's linguistic competence in the sense that it will effectively generate a T-sentence for every sentence of the speaker from a predetermined axiom base. The T-sentences will give the literal meanings of the speaker's sentences in the *loose* sense (enable us to understand the meanings). The speaker's idiolect is also static. The speaker *learns* the meanings of a finite number of semantical primitives (again in a loose, ontologically neutral sense) and recursive-compositional rules together, which enable her to *produce* infinitely many sentences of her idiolect. Such production forms the regularity that would enable us to formulate our theory. In the conventional language model of communication, the previously mastered rules for semantic primitives were the same for everyone, and thus we freely talk about producing and understanding together. There was one set of rules for communicating with someone else, but there are *at least* two in the interpretive model.

In "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" (1986/2005d), Davidson discusses a number of phenomena in communication exemplified by malapropism which "threaten standard descriptions of linguistic competence (including descriptions for which I

⁸⁷ See Chapter 5.1 for three varieties of interpretation.

am responsible)” (p. 95). His discussion aims to prove two separate claims: (1) “Mutual understanding does not require that people speak the same language.” and (2) “Speakers can deviate not only from other speakers, but from their own earlier regularities, and can still (often) be understood.” (Davidson, 1999d, p. 73)

The explicit separation of the claims is not available in the original paper. Davidson (1998/2005a) clarifies his point as “I failed to distinguish sufficiently clearly between two points I wanted to make: that people don’t need to speak the same language in order to understand each other, and that the same person needn’t continue to speak as he has in the past in order to be intelligible” (p. 323).

The first claim is no surprise as they just follow from the possibility of radical interpretation. Yet, the latter seems to undermine Davidson’s own project, just summarized above, which is the description Davidson is responsible for. It does not, but only if one accepts a temporary shift in the employment of his usual concepts to carry out a critical task.⁸⁸ The semantic theory is said to model the speaker’s linguistic competence. Now, is the speaker *obligated* to speak in accordance with the theory? Does the speaker is *obligated* to continue to speak in a regular way? When the theorist claims that the knowledge of the theory is *sufficient* to understand any arbitrary sentence of the speaker, does it mean that the theory will cover every instance of the speaker’s *actual language use*? Or, in other words, as discussed in Chapter 2.3 on Chomsky’s views on the creative aspect of language use, is a theory of truth a theory of performance? Davidson’s answer to these questions is a negative one revealed by his story about *prior* and *passing* theories through which he *speculates* how the rules could be applied to particular language use cases. However, Davidson’s aim is not to develop a theory of performance but to discredit the

⁸⁸ The interpretation that would be developed here is based on (but not limited to) Davidson’s discussion with Mark Sainsbury on the place of “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs” in his philosophical project (Fara, 1997c). One notable alternative is developed by Ramberg (1989, pp. 98–113), according to which Davidson quits the *static* model of interpretation in favor of a *dynamic* one. However, in Davidson’s (1990, 2005g) late works, there is nothing like the proposed change, but Davidson sticks to his usual earlier ideas.

uncritical application of theoretical considerations to actual use. Consequently, the focus of the discussion will be the second claim which can be taken in tension with Davidson's views about compositionality.

Mrs. Malaprop utters the sentence "This is a nice derangement of epitaphs" *intending* to literally mean "This is a nice arrangement of epithets." Although the *conventional* meaning of her utterance is "this is a nice derangement of epitaphs," she is understood as meaning as she intended. The absurdity of the conventional meaning gives the interpreter clue that something has gone wrong, and she interprets Mrs. Malaprop as she intended, and communication succeeds. Now, it cannot be the case that the interpreter derives the literal meaning of the utterance from the conventional meaning, as this will "blur the distinction between speaker's meaning and literal meaning" (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 91). Suppose that the literal meaning of Mrs. Malaprop's words is its conventional meaning. Now, Mrs. Malaprop is interpreted as meaning, "This is a nice arrangement of epithets" and this is how she intends to be interpreted, but she does not know what she means by her words (Davidson, 2005g, pp. 50–51). Davidson concludes that the literal meaning of Mrs. Malaprop's utterance cannot be its conventional meaning.

Recall the chain of intentions when Kurt utters the sentence, "Nobody eats alone in this house," with the intention of uttering the words that will be interpreted by the audience as true iff (or to mean) nobody eats alone in this house, in order to mean everybody should gather around to table for meals, in order to warn the little boy that he could not eat alone while watching cartoons, in order to teach him some manners (Davidson, 1993/2005b, p. 173, 2020, pp. 26–27). Davidson calls the first intention in this chain the *first meaning* of the particular utterance of someone on a specific occasion, which comes "first in the order of interpretation" (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 91). In the original formulation, Kurt's utterance's intended meaning coincides with the conventional meaning. Davidson's idea was that literal meanings (first meanings in the present case) should be truth conditions of the utterances as they could be understood by anybody who knows the conventional meanings of the words independent from further non-linguistic intentions. The existence of

conventions enables us to identify the first meaning as the linguistic intention. When Davidson takes the truth as basic, this picture changes. The literal meanings are, again, the truth conditions as a condition of interpretability. Someone who consistently fails to speak the truth or deliberately averts the interpreter about what she holds true cannot be interpreted or can communicate with someone else. If the speaker wants to be understood, then she should speak truly.

In Mrs. Malaprop's case, the first meaning and the conventional meaning of her utterance do not agree with each other. If Mrs. Malaprop wants her sentence to be understood, then she *intends* to utter the words that a *hearer will interpret* as true iff this is a nice arrangement of epithets, and some shared knowledge should guide both parties in the conversation as she interpreted as she intended to be interpreted. (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 93). Shared knowledge cannot be the previously mastered convention but a temporary agreement on that particular occasion about the truth conditions of the utterance.⁸⁹

According to Davidson, malapropism belongs to a family of linguistic phenomena such as "our ability to perceive a well-formed sentence when the actual utterance was incomplete or grammatically garbled, our ability to interpret words we have never heard before, to correct slips of the tongue, or to cope with new idiolects" (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 95). Explaining how the interpreter understands Mrs. Malaprop's utterance is fairly simple; she interprets her speaking in an idiolect in which "derangement" stand for her "arrangement" and "epithet" stand for her "epitaphs." The interpreter can continue to the conversation by adopting such a new reference scheme where all the connections of previous ones are replaced by the new

⁸⁹ Talmage (1994) claims that Davidson should refer to radical interpretation to give the first meanings, and he did not. However, it seems Davidson did not change his position about the condition of interpretability in this paper. If Mrs. Malaprop wants to be understood, she cannot intend to say something that she knows cannot be understood and "an utterance has certain truth conditions only if the speaker intends it to be interpreted as having those truth conditions" (Davidson, 2005g, p. 50). The confusion arises because Davidson invokes radical interpretation in the second sense that does not limit the evidence limited to hold true attitudes.

ones (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 103, 1998/2005a, p. 325). In general, each party comes into conversation with their own idiolects and expectations about the other party's idiolects (prior theories) and communicates in a new idiolect geared for that occasion (passing theories). Nevertheless, there cannot be any procedure to arrive at the passing theories. The conversating parties use everything they know and any intuition they have (Davidson, 1984b, p. 279, 1986/2005d, p. 107, 1998/2005a, p. 327) to arrive at an understanding; in this sense, knowing a language is knowing the "way around in the world generally" (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 107).

What is shared when communication succeeds is the passing theories (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 101). People's expectations about which idiolect the other party will use varies beyond to be captured by any formulation changing with too many variables: How close the person knows the other, which part of the world or country they are in, what is the social setting in which they will talk to each other, etc. Clearly, the prior theories are not what we can call a language with a clearly defined structure by conventions. Passing theories, on the other hand, are only ephemeral; if there is a convention about how to use words and grammar on that occasion is useful only for that occasion. When the conversation is completed, they are no more useful. Thus, there are no conventions in which people's ability to communicate. The communication model based on the necessity of conventional languages is an artifact of philosophers and linguists, and it does not square with the empirical facts.⁹⁰

I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases. And we should try again to say how convention in any important sense is involved in language; or, as I think, we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions. (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 107)

⁹⁰ See Davidson (1984b, p. 265)

Davidson does not deny the practical usefulness of the conventions, “what is conventional about language, if anything is, is that people tend to speak much as their neighbours do” (Davidson, 1984b, p. 278), but denies its theoretical import. The existence of conventions in the sense that people tend to speak in similar ways would enchant practical work of interpretation, but in the end, it is not necessary and could be thrown away in radical situations (Davidson, 1984b, p. 279). What he means is that theoreticians represent the facts in reverse order: The idiolects are not deviations from the conventional languages; conventional languages are approximations of idiolects.

Unsurprisingly, the article comes under fire from philosophers who take conventions as a necessity, at least in theorizing about language. Two outstanding criticisms are Dummett (1986) and Hacking (1986). The latter questions the applicability of the notion of interpretation in actual linguistic exchange. Dummett claims that it is a mistake to explain the phenomena of malapropism and alike “in such a way as to make expression of meaning depend wholly upon the intentions of the speaker, and thus to liberate speakers from all responsibility to the language as a social institution” (Dummett, 1986, p. 473). Accordingly, Davidson throws the baby out with the bathwater to cope with such exceptions. Interestingly, Rorty (1998) questions why Davidson just does not do that and quits formal semantics altogether. Davidson (1994/2005f) replies to Dummett on malapropism and alike by pointing out that “it is false in all those cases when we will be better understood if we deviate from the ‘socially accepted’ use. If we want to be understood, all we need to worry about is how our actual audience will take our words” (p. 118)⁹¹

The line of thought which would undermine Davidson’s earlier account can be summarized as follows. (1) It is possible for the radical interpreter to devise a theory whose knowledge would suffice to understand the utterances of someone else who is following different conventional rules from herself. The speaker can do the same for

⁹¹ See also Pereda (1998), Stroud (1998), and Davidson’s (1998/2005a) response on no language claim.

the interpreter whose conventions differ from hers. Both parties communicate with each other successfully as long as they know their interpretation theories for each other. Thus, quite trivially, the success of communication does not depend on speaking the same conventional language. However, communication succeeds as long as each party continues to talk with regularity captured by each theory indicates. (2) Each person (can) have their own regular use of words; thus, the radical interpreter should devise a theory for each person with whom she wants to communicate. While this is theoretically possible, it would make communication tremendously hard in practice. In fact, the main motive for invoking conventions to explain communication in the first place is that fact. Moreover, people change the rules of their idiolects intentionally or unintentionally in conversation, but communication succeeds anyway. So, talking in a regular language is not necessary for communication to succeed. (3) Consequently, the interpreters cannot have theories that would suffice to understand the utterances of someone else. It seems Davidson goes on a full circle to refute the fundamental assumption at the very beginning of his project: The ability of language users is not mystical but based on an effective procedure that enables such usage. So, an adequate semantic theory should account for this ability by developing a theory whose knowledge could allow them to do what they do. Tarski's truth definition modified for a language provides such an effective method.

The procedure in (1) describes neither how people learn languages nor communicate in actual situations. It is a conceptual exercise to show how a natural language is or could be radically interpreted with the limited evidence available and reveal what evidence could be sufficient in the process. It does not claim that it is possible for actual people to interpret natural languages radically.

Davidson is clear on this last point beyond any doubt: "Not only have I never argued that every language is radically interpretable...I do not think, and have not argued, that radical interpretation of natural languages *must* be possible; I have argued only

that it *is* possible” (Davidson, 1993, pp. 77–78).⁹² Davidson assumes in the process that speakers hold the same utterances true under the same circumstances regularly. However, such regularity amounts to no more than the existence of a repeating phenomenon for which an empirical induction can be carried on. The regularity is limited to data of upcoming theory on meaning and does not presuppose any detail about their contents. If there is no consistent data, one cannot have a theory at all (Fara, 1997c).

The radical interpreter of (2) is quite different from the interpreter of (1). Davidson speculates about actual interpretation. In fact, radical interpretation just indicates the situation the interpreter of Mrs. Malaprop faces when he is confused about the meaning of her utterance. When he argues that “the fact that radical interpretation is so commonplace...is hidden from us” (Davidson, 1984b, p. 279), he does not continue to refer back to the circumstances that Mrs. Malaprop holds the sentence true or principle of charity. He just admits that “we can formalize the considerations that lead us to adjust our theory to fit the inflow of new information” (Davidson, 1984b, p. 279) as expected. In that case, we do not need conventions; on the contrary, conventions would hinder communication.

(3) is true, but not because the chain of arguments continues from (1) to (2). It has been shown that (1) and (2) are quite distinct. The knowledge of an empirical truth theory would not suffice to understand the *actual* utterances of someone else or a group of speakers because it is not a theory of performance. When people learn to speak a language and acquire a body of knowledge, they do not learn something which would suffice to understand any random utterance of other people anywhere and anytime in the world. The theory should be applied to actual cases, but the

⁹² The quoted passage is from Davidson’s reply to Fodor and Lepore (1993), arguing that radical interpretation of natural languages is impossible. Davidson’s overall response is compact as it covers and sheds light on several obscure and controversial points of his philosophy and has been cited several times in this work. Davidson admits that the question is intelligible and also suspects that natural languages are not radically interpretable but adds that Fodor and Lepore did not discuss what he argues about, namely how he thinks “it might be done” (Davidson, 1993, p. 77).

theory itself does not contain information on how to do it (Davidson, 1998/2005a, pp. 326–327). However, they learn something that will suffice when geared to the occasion (passing theory). Consider the asymmetry between learning a first language and a second one after that. When people learn their first language, they also acquire the ability to learn any other language.

Chomsky (2006) contends that the creative use of language will remain unknown to us and expresses his doubts about the possibility of a theory of performance, even in principle (pp. 88–89). In Chapter 2.3, it has been shown that Chomskian linguistics aims to describe language users' knowledge (competence) that makes creative use possible. Although the knowledge of the language by itself is a “necessary crucial condition” (Chomsky, 1982, p. 426) for the performance and hence provides insight into the creative use of language, it is not “sufficient” (Chomsky, 1982, p. 424) alone. Davidson seems to agree with Chomsky; although a truth theory cannot by itself be a theory of performance, it sheds light on it by necessarily participating in it. Reconsider how the interpreter understands the utterance of Mrs. Malaprop. When the interpreter rearranges her scheme of reference as “derangement” for “arrangement,” what is replaced is not just a particular word in a particular utterance; their roles in the overall language are replaced, and the passing theories in totality synchronized. The interpreter would go on the conversation with Mrs. Malaprop using the same word by using in countless other novel utterances without ease. What makes this smooth translation possible is the existence of the compositional structure; without it, the interpreter would remain without any clue how to proceed (Davidson, 1999d, p. 73, 1998/2005a, p. 325).⁹³ Consequently, the process of language use is not a mystical one. Tarski's truth definition modified for a language provides an effective method that defines and captures what is within the scope of the systematic study and sheds light on what is beyond. Of course, it does not mean that actual speakers have prior theories or form passing theories;

⁹³ Davidson (1998/2005a) sticks to the formal part by claiming that he “did not say that knowing one's way around in the world didn't include skills that can only be described by appeal to a formal theory” (p. 316).

Davidson's stance never changes on this issue; they are just philosopher's tools to state what could suffice and what is necessary.

One last issue is whether Davidson's account undermines the finiteness requirement or learnability argument. In Chapter 3.3, it has been claimed that the finiteness argument is an empirical one about natural languages. Recall that the first empirical assumption states that "we do not at some point suddenly acquire an ability to intuit the meanings of sentences on no rule at all": (EA2) Learning a language is learning rules that give the meaning of sentences. Davidson does not deny that people learn rules for vocabulary and grammar when they learn languages, nor he claims that people can communicate without them. His main objection is that "sharing such a previously mastered ability was neither necessary nor sufficient for successful linguistic communication" (Davidson, 1994/2005f, p. 110). Such is the faulty view in which he considers himself also responsible (Davidson, 1986/2005d, p. 95) stems from his initial formulation of radical interpretation where the theory is defined for a natural language. However, it does not imply that what should be learned to be a competent speaker of a language is infinite in number. The case that one day the word "derangement" will mean "arrangement" is not a thing to be learned. The finiteness requirement remains untouched. However, the standard argument for compositionality, given in Chapter 3.1, of natural languages fails again. The argument is based on an assumption: (3*) Unless a finite number of rules determine the meanings of sentences compositionally, the language will be unlearnable. It was stated that there is no reason to suppose that the finite number of rules is exclusively limited only to compositional ones or that they are compositional at all. If it is, there is no reason to invoke them; the knowledge of knowing the world around would suffice.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Davidson famously proposes that a Tarski-style truth definition modified for a natural language could be used as a meaning theory for that language. The proposal greatly impacted the philosophy of language and semantics and gave birth to the *Davidsonian program* in the late 60s and 70s. While the program is carried out by Davidson himself and others by trying to reveal the logical form of ordinary language sentences to incorporate them into a truth theory, the original proposal is criticized heavily on the grounds that truth and meaning cannot be related as proposed by Davidson. Nevertheless, the connection between the meaning and truth or truth conditions was not new in the philosophical scene, as the idea's roots could be followed back to Frege and Wittgenstein in modern times. What separates Davidson from them is that his treatment is systematic. Davidson proposes a method to work on natural language sentences by explaining how the meaning of sentences depends on the meaning of their parts and their structure. Today we call that a meaning theory is compositional. The other point of difference is that sentences' truth conditions do not give meanings when taken in isolation for Davidson; instead, they should be evaluated holistically in light of the whole theory and language. Davidson adopts compositionality and holism explicitly when he makes his proposal and keeps them as critical notions of his philosophy through the revisions he makes over the years to counter criticism.

In general, compositionality and holism are taken to be incompatible or in tension with each other in literature (Fodor & Lepore, 1992). Also, there are brief remarks about Davidson's treatment of them side by side (Pagin, 2008). However, such a comment is rarely followed by a systematic exposition. While both of these notions

are attractive as they express some of our intuitions about language, vagueness in their definition presents difficulties to the task of revealing their relationship outside a theory. This thesis developed a consistent interpretation of Davidson's philosophy on language in light of these notions. It undertook a clarificatory project about Davidson's treatment of compositionality to accomplish this and gave answers to the questions of what Davidson takes to be compositionality and why he is committed to it.

According to the standard reception of the learnability argument, the argument justifies the claim that natural languages are compositional, and this justifies the form of the meaning theory as being compositional. In turn, a Tarski-style truth theory could serve as a meaning theory because it satisfies the requirement for form. It has been shown that this line of thought has at least three shortcomings: First, It misrepresents Davidson's starting point for his bold proposal and disconnects it from its historical place. Second, It puts Davidson's philosophy on weak foundations, and finally, it strips away the connection of compositionality with holism.

Chapter 2 presented the developments in linguistics in the early 60s as the background of Davidson's proposal. Chomsky's idea of using recursive devices to generate all and only the grammatical sentences of a natural language is identified as one of the inspirations for Davidson when he alters the task of a meaning theory to systematically give the meaning of all sentences in a natural language. The chapter also explored Chomsky's employment of recursion in the study and countered the claim that it is introduced to deal with the so-called infinity of language. Accordingly, the creativity of language belongs to the theory of language use, and a theory of competence aims to participate in such theory by supplying rules but is silent about how these are applied to actual use.

Chapter 3 presented the learnability argument as arguing for the compositionality of language and identified two weak points. The justification of the argument's first premise, which states that humans can produce and understand infinitely many non-synonymous sentences, cannot be established without invoking the mastery of

compositional rules. Thus, the argument is circular. Even if the problem with the premise is resolved, the argument is an inference to the best explanation. The chapter defended the view that Davidson accepts an informal account of compositionality and uses it to argue for the finiteness of semantical primitives in natural languages. Such finiteness places a formal constraint on any meaning theory by forcing them to posit a finite number of axioms. Thus, Davidson accepts the unbounded nature of language use and takes the meaning theory's task to give an account of this fact by making the underlying informal compositionality explicit. Thus, the weaknesses generally attributed to the argument do not arise in Davidson's case.

Chapter 4 presented Davidson's proposal that a Tarski-style truth definition, which is recursive, compositional, and based on a finite set of axioms, could accomplish what we require from a meaning theory. In this initial proposal, Davidson considers the axioms to be revealing the roles of the expressions in determining the truth conditions of the sentences. However, both contents of axioms are given, and the correctness of the resulting sentences is tested by assumed translation. Thus, compositionality and holism amount to the same thing trivially by means of the formal apparatus stating translation. Failure of the initial proposal is evident; while Tarski presupposes meaning to get to the truth, Davidson has the opposite in mind. Moreover, meaning is a more obscure notion than truth. What is missing in Tarski's account is the connection with language users. Davidson drops the translation assumption and takes truth to be an undefined and basic concept. Making the notion of truth basic marks a more intimate relationship between truth and meaning than he previously anticipated; truth conditions of sentences state their literal meanings. The interpretation developed in this chapter differed from both so-called replacement theories, according to which Davidson substitutes the notion of meaning with the notion of truth, and Lepore and Ludwig's (2005) account, according to which Davidson sticks to the original proposal. In this construal, Davidson arrives at meaning by explicating truth.

Chapter 5 presented interpretation as the process through which the meanings of sentences and words are abstracted holistically from the general pattern of truth implicit in language use. So, the task of the radical interpreter is to show how one could form a theory that satisfies Convention T from the evidence without presupposing meanings or requiring any knowledge about the contents of the speaker's beliefs. Davidson claims that formal and empirical restrictions on interpretation ensure that it satisfies Convention T. The finiteness argument already gives the formal restriction. Natural languages contain a finite number of semantic primitives, and the theory should contain a finite number of axioms. The theory should employ recursive devices to show how the meaning of them depends on the meanings of semantic primitives compositionally. The radical interpreter has no choice but to project his logic, precisely the first-order quantificational logic of the truth theory, to the speaker's sentences.

According to the empirical constraint, T-sentences are formed charitably in accordance with the coherence and correspondence principles. The chapter identifies these principles are independent of the radical interpretation and are thesis about properties of natural languages as par with the finiteness argument. The principle of coherence is based on a holistic nature of meaning: Truth conditions of sentences are identified and described by their position relative to the relational network of the other sentences in a language. The principle of correspondence requires casually relevant particulars to contribute to the meaning of sentences. Charity is a constitutive feature of language, interpretation, and communication, and the structure necessitated by it should be present in all natural languages. It is concluded that the principle of charity gives content to the formal structure and explains why natural languages should contain the compositional structure.

While the clarificatory project of the thesis is completed at this point, Chapter 5 focuses on Davidson's *no-language* claim, which causes confusion among commentators and is also seen as Davidson's rejection of his earlier views. Thus, the establishment of the consistency of Davidson's claim with his earlier views in the light of the interpretation developed in this thesis is a test of truth for it.

Accordingly, the target of Davidson is the regulative role of conventions in language use, and the only fallback position for him is the rejection of reference to natural languages in the process of interpretation. Davidson employs the notion of interpretation in a speculative way to argue about how actual communication could succeed. However, his discussion is hardly constructive but aims to set the limits of our semantic theories. Davidson's story about prior and passing theories will be evaluated along the lines of Chomsky's views on the creative aspect of language use. Although Davidson agrees with Chomsky about the impossibility of the systematic study of language use, he presents an account of how the mechanism identified in competence could shed light on performance.

The dissertation identified several focal points for the interpretation of Davidson's philosophy as summarized above, including the connection with Chomskian linguistics, the assumption of an informal account of compositionality, three senses of interpretation, charity's role in justifying the structure, and the role of mechanisms in creative language use. These points are used to connect several aspects of Davidson's line of thought to present a coherent whole through an interplay between compositionality and holism.

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APPENDICES

A. CURRICULUM VITAE

BASIC INFORMATION

Name / Surname : Eser Ağoğlu

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EDUCATION

Undergraduate : Civil Engineering (BS) / Anadolu University /
Turkey / 2003

Master : Philosophy (MA) / METU Middle East Technical
University / Turkey / 2008

Thesis Title: Appropriateness of a cognitive approach
to Donald Davidson's meaning theory

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Erdinç Sayan

EXPERIENCE IN ENGINEERING

Year	Position
2003	Civil Engineer (Cost Engineer) in Turkey
2009	Civil Engineer (Technical Manager) in Libya
2011	Civil Engineer (Technical Manager) in Kazakhstan
2013-2014	Planning & Cost Supervisor in Kazakhstan

INTERESTS IN PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Donald Davidson, Stoicism

B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

1. Giriř

Davidson, bileřimsellik (*compositionality*) kelimesini nadiren kullanır; kullandığında ise bu her zaman söz konusu terimi vurgulayan bir soruya verilen yanıtla bağlantılıdır. Bileřim yerine içinde getięi bağlamlara uyması için ufak deęiřiklerle farklı řekillerde formle ettięi řu sloganı kullanır: Cmlenin (btnnn) anlamı, szcklerinin (paralarının) (ve yapısının) anlamlarına baęlıdır. Terimin literatrdeki poplaritesine raęmen (Werning ve dięerleri, 2012), Davidson'ın bu greceli kayıtsızlıęı ilgi ekicidir. Terimin kkeni, Davidson'ın dil felsefesi zerine alıřmalarını yayınlamaya bařladıęı dnemlere denk gelen Katz ve Fodor'un (1963) dilbilim konusundaki alıřmalarına dayanmaktadır. Davidson, dilbilimdeki dnemin geliřmelerini takip etmesine ve onlardan ilham almasına, stelik bařlangıta disiplinler arası bir alıřma kurmaya istekli olmasına raęmen (Partee, 2010, s. 30–33) konuya yaklařımı bunlardan nemli lde farklıdır.

Bileřim teriminin aędař tanımına gre anlamı her szdizimsel (*syntactic*) kural iin anlamsal (*semantic*) bir kural gerektięidir (B. H. Partee ve dięerleri, 1990, s. 319). Byle biimsel bir yaklařım anlamların ne olduęu konusunda sessizdir, Hodges'un (1998, s. 7,11) da ifade ettięi gibi bileřim ilkesi sadece eřanamlılık zerine detaylandırılır. Lepore ve Ludwig (2005), Davidson'ın erken dnem alıřmalarına *ilk proje* olarak adlandırdıkları benzer řekilde sınırlı bir abayı atfederler. Bu yoruma gre Davidson daha sonra bu yaklařımını deęiřtirerek karmařık ifadeleri oluřturan paraların anlamlarını da aıklamayı hedefleyen *geniřletilmiř projeyi* benimsemiřtir. (s. 22). Ancak Davidson (1999c), anlambilimin zorunlu olarak “paraların anlamsal rollerini belirtmesi” gerektięini iddia ederek bu yorumu reddeder (s. 46) .

Davidson (2005g), yukarıda belirtilen sloganının kaynağını tarihsel olarak Platon'un *Sofist* adlı diyaloguna dayandırmaktadır. Bu eserde başrolü oynayan *Yabancı*, hiçbir olgunun yanlış cümleleri yanlış yapmadığını, yine de bu yanlışların cümle parçalarına karşılık gelen şeylerin varlığı sayesinde anlaşılabilir olduklarını iddia eder (s. 81). *Yabancı*'nın yanlış cümlelerin nasıl anlaşılabilir olduğuna dair geliştirdiği bu açıklama, cümle parçalarının rolleri ve bunların cümlelerin anlamı ile ilişkisi (metafizik alandaki yansıması olarak tikeller ve tümeller arasındaki ilişki) üzerine iki bin yılı aşkın bir süredir devam eden bir tartışmanın çıkış noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Bir yandan bir cümlenin en temel özelliği sahip olduğu birliğidir, cümleler böyle bir birlik içinde doğru ya da yanlıştır. Öte yandan, parçalara nesnesel olarak anlamlar atfedildiğinde, bu birlik açık bir şekilde elde edilemez. Özne ile yüklem arasındaki ilişki örnekleme ilişkisi olarak açıklanırsa, önce bunları bağlayacak ilişki nesnesi daha sonra sonsuz bir gerileme şeklinde koyutlanan tüm nesneleri ilişkilendirecek daha fazla nesneye ihtiyaç duyulur (s. 87). Cümlenin sahip olduğu bu bütünlük aydınlatılmadan, açıklamamız cümlenin doğruluğuna ya da yanlışlığına asla ulaşamaz. Davidson bunu, nasıl çalıştığını anlamak için parçalarına ayırdığı saati yeniden doğru bir şekilde birleştiremeyen bir çocuğun durumuna benzetir (s. 4).

Analitik felsefede bileşim hakkında tartışmaları Frege ile başlatmak adetten olsa da, Frege'yi de yüklemeleri cümledeki rollerini açıklamak için *doymamış (unsaturated)* olarak tanımlamaya götüren şu ana kadar açıklanan aynı kadim endişedir (Frege, 1892/1997h). Bu nedenle, cümlesel yapı hakkındaki açıklamalar, cümlenin neden böyle bir yapıya sahip olduğunu içermelidir. Bu bağlamda, parçaların rollerinin açıklanması, Davidson'ın görmezden gelebileceği ya da tartışmasını sonraya bırakabileceği bir lüks değildir.

Cümleler, Davidson (2005g) için temel anlamsal birimlerdir. Yapısal birlikleri tamdır ve doğru ya da yanlış bir şeyi ifade edebilirler; dilsel iletişimin birincil araçlarıdır. İnsanlar kelimeleri kullanarak ifade edip ulaşmaya çalıştıkları farklı amaçlar ve güdüler ne olursa olsun, bunları cümleler kullanarak gerçekleştirirler. Söz konusu cümlelerin önceliği (*primacy of sentences*) prensibi, cümle parçalarına

anlam vermekten başlayarak cümlelerin anlamına ulaşmayı amaçlayan teorilerin açıklama getirmesi gereken bir meydan okumadır. Kuramcılar, cümlelerin iletişimde oynadıkları işlevden bağımsız olarak bazı metafiziksel ya da epistemolojik ideolojilere ya da önyargılara dayalı olarak cümle parçalarına roller yüklediklerinde, cümlelerin anlamı olarak sonuçlanan bileşim ilkesinin tam da açıklamayı amaçladığı şeyle bağlantısını kaybeder. Bununla birlikte, cümlelerin anlamları birbiriyle bağlantılıdır. Bir cümle dilde diğerlerinden ayrı ve bağımsız olarak düşünülemez; eğer bir cümle dilde üstlendiği bir rolü varsa, bu rolle ilgili sayısız farklı cümleyle bağlantısı vardır. Bir cümlelerin doğruluğu veya yanlışlığı, başka cümlelerin doğru ya da yanlışlığını imler ya da onlar tarafından imlenir. Ulaşılan bütüncülük (*holism*), bir cümleyi kısmen farklı cümlelerden oluşan bir ağdaki yerine göre tanımlar. Bununla birlikte kaçınılmaz olarak ortaya çıkan soru, böyle bir cümle ağının sahip olduğu bağlantıları nasıl sağladığıdır. Akla gelen ilk açıklama bizi başladığımız yere geri götürür: Tek işlevi böyle bir bütünlük içindeki rolü olarak soyutlanan ve sayısız farklı cümlede yer alan cümle parçalarıyla.

Tepeden aşağıya ve tersi yönden iki farklı anlam analizinin bulunduğu nokta cümlelerin doğruluğudur. Davidson'ın (2005g) ortaya çıkan ikileme çözüm yolu, doğruluk kavramını, üzerine bir dil kuramının inşa edildiği birincil ve tanımsız bir kavram olarak almaktır (s. 34–35). Sonuçta cümle parçalarının anlamları görgül (*empirical*) bir doğruluk kuramındaki doğruluk koşullarına yaptıkları katkılar olarak belirlenir. Böyle bir doğruluk kuramı, cümlelerin anlamlarının parçaların anlamlarına nasıl bağlı olduğunu göstererek, Davidson'ın aksi takdirde muğlak olarak kalacak bileşimsellik hakkındaki sloganına açık bir içerik verir.

Bu tez, Davidson'ın dil felsefesine yukarıda kabaca özetlenen şekliyle bir yorum getirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaca ulaşmak için, Davidson'ın doğal dillerin bileşimsel olduğunu kanıtlamak için öğrenilebilirlik argümanına (*learnability argument*) başvurduğunu ve bunun sonucunu anlam teorileri üzerinde bir kısıtlama olarak koyduğunu yineleyen standart yorumdan farklı bir yol izlenecektir. Her ne kadar standart yorum doğru bir sonuca ulaşsa da izlediği yol ve belirttiği nedenler Davidson'ın felsefesi bağlamında oldukça yanıltıcıdır. Öğrenilebilirlik argümanı, en

iyi ihtimalle, açıkça yanlış değilse bile, en iyi açıklamaya yönelik bir çıkarımdır. Dolayısıyla, bu argüman Davidson'ın anlambilimi yeniden şekillendiren kapsamlı ve etkili teorisi için oldukça zayıf bir başlangıçtır. Bu yanıltıcı temellendirme girişimi Davidson'ın felsefi amaçları ve izlediği yöntem konusunda sonuçsuz tartışmalara yol açmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Davidson'ın dile ve anlambilime yaklaşımı konusunda tutarlı bir tabloya ulaşmak için bileşimselliği benimsemesinin ana nedenlerini ortaya çıkarmak ve yanıltıcı bir şekilde sunulan söz konusu argümanı netleştirmek zorunludur.

Davidson'ı yorumlamak her zaman zorlu bir iştir ve öğrencilerinin yorumlarındaki yanlış anlamalara çeşitli vesilelerle dikkat çekmesi nadir değildir. Bu zorluk, fikirlerin ya da yazım tarzının belirsizliğinden kaynaklanmamakta, birbiriyle bağlantılı üç meseleye dayanmaktadır. Bunlardan ilki Davidson'ın felsefi çalışmalarının doğasıyla ilgilidir. Davidson, dil felsefesi, eylemler, zihin felsefesi ve epistemoloji alanlarında yeni fikirler üretmiştir. Dahası, Davidson'ın felsefesi, bunların hiçbirinin diğerlerinden ayrı durmadığı, ancak birbirini destekleyen bir argümanlar ağı oluşturduğu anlamında sistemattir. Bu ağı yalnızca bir parçasına odaklanan herhangi bir yorum, diğerlerinde bulunan önemli bir bileşeni kaçırma tehlikesiyle karşı karşıyadır. Bu tez böyle kısıtlı yolu izlediğinden, aynı tehlike onun için de geçerlidir. Bununla birlikte, anlamayı gölgeleyecek karmaşıklıktan kaçınmak için, ilerleyen sayfalarda geliştirilecek olan argüman, ancak zorunlu olduğunda dil felsefesi dışındaki kaynakları da kullanacaktır. İkinci olarak, Davidson'ın kitap uzunluğunda temel bir eseri yoktur ve çalışmaları yaklaşık 40 yıl boyunca farklı dergilerde yayınlanan 80'den fazla makaleye yayılmıştır. Üçüncü olarak Davidson, eleştirileri göğüslemek için kuramlarında, her bir makalede bir öncekilerin üzerine eklenen edilen çeşitli düzenlemeler yapmıştır. Davidson (1967/1984p), Tarski tarzı bir doğruluk tanımının bir anlam teorisi olarak kullanılabileceğine dair ilk iddiadır. Yorumlama kavramının eklenmesiyle tanım görgül bir teoriye dönüşür (Davidson, 1973/1984i). Davidson (1986/2005d) iletişim ve dil kullanımı bağlamında bu tür bir kuramın ve anlambilimin sınırlarını belirler. Bu değişiklikleri önceki görüşlerden radikal sapmalar olarak ele almak mümkündür. Alternatif olarak, bunları kademeli gelişimin sonucu olan dönüm noktaları olarak görmek de mümkündür. İlerleyen

sayfalardaki genel yaklaşım ikinci stratejiyi benimsemek ve ilk çalışmaları ile birlikte Davidson'ın felsefesini tutarlı bir bütün olarak yorumlamak olacaktır.

2. Sözdiziminde Özyineleme ve Yaratıcılık

Davidson (1967/1984p) bir anlam teorisinin kabul gören temel görevinin, dilsel öğrenilebilirliğinin açıklamasını vermek için cümlelerin anlamlarının kelimelerin anlamlarına nasıl bağlı olduğunu açıklamak olduğunu belirtir (s. 17). Davidson'ın filozofların ve dilbilimcilerin mevcut görüşlerine yaptığı bu atıf, öğrenilebilirlik argümanı ilk olarak Davidson'a atfedildiğinden kafa karıştırıcıdır. Açıklanması gereken nokta, Davidson'ın yeni bir argüman mı ortaya attığı, yoksa bileşimselliğe ilişkin mevcut bir argümanı olduğu gibi mi benimsediğidir. Buna göre, öğrenilebilirlik argümanını ortaya çıktığı tarihsel bağlam, dilbilim ve anlambilimdeki kurucu tartışmalardan bağımsız olarak değerlendirmek hatalıdır.

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki dilbilim, Chomsky'nin (1957/2002, 1965/2015) dönüşümlü dilbilgisi (*transformational grammar*) kuramını ortaya koymasıyla birlikte büyük bir değişime uğramıştır. Chomsky, matematikçilerin ve mantıkçıların biçimsel yöntemlerini dilbilime eklemiş ve görgül bir taksonomik teori yerine aksiyomatik-tümdengelimli bir teori tasarımı ortaya koymuştur. Chomsky'nin bunlara alternatif olarak sunduğu yapıya göre, dilbilimci, genel bir “dilsel yapı teorisi” (Chomsky, 1955/1975, s. 77), doğru dilbilgisini seçmek için bir gerekçelendirme yöntemi ve özelde belli diller için dilbilgisi oluşturmayı amaçlamalıdır. Belirli bir dil için düzenlenen dilbilgisinin amacı o dile ait olan dilbilimsel olarak doğru cümlelerin tamamını türetirken, dilbilimsel olarak yanlış olanları türetmemesidir (Chomsky, 1957/2002, s. 13). Özel dilbilgisi bunu, dilbilimsel olarak doğru tüm cümlelere yapısal tanımlama atayan kurallar ve öğeler kullanarak başarır. Öte yandan, genel dil kuramı, olası soyut yapıların genel biçimini tanımlar ve her özel dilbilgisi onun bir örneğidir (Chomsky, 1975, s. 77) .

Bu dönemde, Davidson (1999b, s. 34–35, 1999a, s. 159, 2004a, s. 257), inanç cümlelerinin mantıksal biçimlerinin ne olması gerektiğiyle ilgili sonuçsuz

tartışmalar üzerine çalışmaktaydı. Davidson, söz konusu tartışmada biçimle ilgili farklı önerilerin yeterliliğini değerlendirmek için ortak bir çerçeve olmadığını ve önerilerin *geçici* argümanlara başvurduğu sonucuna ulaştı. Dahası, dil felsefesi, herhangi bir ilerleme olmaksızın “anlamındadır” kelimesini analiz etme amacına kısip kalmıştı. Davidson’ın her iki soruna da çözümü, dil felsefesi çalışmalarının konusunu bir anlam kuramı oluşturmayı hedeflemeyle değiştirmek oldu. Bir dilin tüm cümlelerinin anlamlarını veren böyle bir kuram, yalnızca metafizik tartışmaları es geçmekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda mantıksal biçimlerin nasıl olması gerektiğini de yönlendirebilirdi. Kuram anlayışları farklı olsa da, Chomsky’nin dilbilimdeki stratejisiyle Davidson’ın öne sürdüğü çözüm bir birlerine oldukça benzerdir. Davidson (2004a) söz konusu dönemdeki hedefinin Chomsky’nin doğal dilin sözdizimi için yaptığını, anlambilim için yapmak olduğunu ifade etmiştir (s. 259) .

Yaratıcılık (*creativity*) argümanının, öğrenilebilirlik argümanına benzer şekilde dilin sonsuzluğu ile insanın sonlu doğası arasındaki asimetriye başvurarak, dilbilimde özyinelemenin (*recursion*) kullanılmasını gerekçelendirdiği söylenir. Ancak Chomsky’nin teorisinde iki farklı yaratıcılık kavramı vardır (Chomsky, 2006, p. xiv). İlk anlamıyla yaratıcılık, konu dilinin yalnızca dilbilimsel olarak doğru cümlelerinin tamamını oluşturmayı sağlayan üretkenlik mekanizmasını imler. Buna göre Chomsky (1957/2002), özyinelemenin dilbilimsel kurumdaki varlığını önce kuramın basitliği için metodolojik bir varsayım olarak kabul etmiş ve daha sonra dilsel modelini geliştirme sürecinde görgül bir varsayıma dönüştürmüştür. Burada söz konusu olan basitlik kavramı kolaylık ya da anlaşılabilirlik gibi sezgisel anlamlarından ayrı olarak teknik bir terim olarak anlaşılmalıdır. Buna göre kuramlarımızdaki basitlik kurucu bir öge olarak bizzat kuramın var olmasının koşuludur. Buna göre özyinelemeli mekanizma sonsuz sayıda cümle üretmesine rağmen ve sonsuzdan yola çıkarak özyinelemenin gerekçelendirilmesine yönelik için bir argüman yoktur. Bu doğrultuda üretkenlik, doğuştan gelen dil yetisi hakkında görgül bir teori olan dilsel yeterliliğin bir özelliğidir. Yaratıcılık, ikinci anlamıyla, insanların dil kullanımında gördüğümüz bir olgudur ve bunun açıklaması ancak geliştirilecek bir performans kuramına aittir (Chomsky, 1982). Bununla birlikte, Chomsky böyle bir kuramın ilke olarak verilir verilemeyeceği konusunda şüphelidir

ve bu fenomenin insan kavrayışının ötesinde olması mümkündür. Yetkinlik teorisi zorunlu olarak bu sözde performans kuramının bir parçası olmasına ve ortaya koyduğu yapı aracılığıyla yaratıcılığa bir miktar ışık tutma potansiyeline sahip olmasına rağmen bunun ötesinde bir amaca hizmet edemez.

3. Öğrenilebilirlik Argümanını Yeniden Yorumlamak

Szabo (1995), bileşim ilkesini herhangi bir kuramdan bağımsız olarak, *doğal diller* hakkında bir tez olarak aşağıdaki gibi formüle eder:

Karmaşık bir ifadenin anlamı, bileşenlerinin anlamları ve yapısı tarafından belirlenir. (s. 11)

Buna göre bileşim ilkesinin ne olduğuna ait tartışmalardaki farklılıkların kökeni bu formülasyonu oluşturan muğlak kelimelerin farklı yorumlarına dayanmaktadır. Formülasyon mevcut haliyle, söz konusu anlamların ne olduğu ve nasıl bir belirlemeye odaklanıldığı konusunda sessizdir. Anlamlar, anlam nesneleri, referanslar veya genel olarak anlamsal değerler olarak kabul edilebilecekken, tanımda geçen belirleme kavramı nedensel, işlevsel, bilişimsel ve mereolojik anlamlarda yorumlanabilir. Bu nedenle, sezgisel formülasyonun tam olarak nasıl bir açık tanıma sahip olması gerektiği ve sonuç olarak geçerliliği hakkındaki sorunlar tam anlamıyla açıklığa kavuşturulabilmiş değildir.

Doğal dillerin bileşim ilkesine uygunluğu konusu tartışmalıdır. Konu genel olarak, doğal dillerin bileşimsel olduğunu göstermeyi amaçlayan ve semantik kuramlarda bileşimsel yöntemleri kullanmayı gerekçelendirmeyi amaçlayan argümanlara odaklanmıştır. Bu konudaki standart argüman, dilbilimle ilgili bir önceki bölümdeki tanıdık bir fikre, yani doğal dillerin yaratıcılığına (üretkenlik anlamında) dayanmaktadır (Pelletier, 2012; Szabó, 2022). Argüman aynı şekilde, insanların sonluluğu ile dilin sonsuz doğası arasındaki bir asimetri üzerine kurulmuştur. Bu tür argümanların kaynağı Frege'ye dayandırılabilse de anlambilim konusunda ilk örneğine yine Katz ve Fodor (1963)'da bulunabilir.

- 1) İnsanlar, doğal bir dilin sonsuz sayıda eş anlamlı olmayan cümlesinde ustalaşabilirler.
- 2) İnsanlar, cümlelerin anlamlarını veren sınırlı sayıda kuralı öğrenebilirler.
- 3) Cümlelerin anlamlarını belirlemek için sınırlı sayıda kural yeterli olmasaydı söz konusu dil öğrenilemez olurdu.
- 4) Cümlelerin anlamlarını belirlemek için sınırlı sayıda kural yeterlidir.
- 5) Cümlelerin anlamlarını sınırlı sayıda bileşimsel kural belirler.

Bununla birlikte, bu tür argümanlar benzer bir kusurdan muzdariptir, yani 4'ten 5'e geçiş garanti edilmez. Sonlu sayıdaki kuralın yalnızca bileşimsel olanlarla sınırlı olduğunun ya da bunların bileşimsel kurallar olduğunu varsaymak için hiçbir neden yoktur. Bu bağlamda, argüman en iyi açıklamaya yönelik bir çıkarım olabilir. Literatürdeki genel kabul, bileşim ilkesi için başarılı bir argüman olmamasına rağmen biçimsel anlambilimde metodolojik bir varsayım olarak kabul edilmesi yönündedir. Bu nedenle, bileşimselliğin formülasyonunun biçimsel zeminde yapılması sonucunda tümce parçalarının cümleden ve bir bütün olarak dilden ayrı anlamlara sahip olması gerekmektedir. Bu yaklaşımın ana sonucu, bileşimselliğin bağlam ilkesi ve bütüncülük ile bağdaşmadığıdır.

Bileşimsellik için standart argümanların başlıca örneği, Donald Davidson'a atfedilen öğrenilebilirlik argümanıdır ve bu Davidson'ın bileşimselliği benimsemesinin nedeni olarak yorumlanmaktadır. Bu yoruma göre, argümanın da kanıtladığı gibi, doğal diller bileşimseldir ve semantik teoriler buna göre bileşimsel olmalıdır. Ancak bu yorum, daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, Davidson'ın temel kabullerini yanlış temsil etmekle kalmamakla birlikte felsefesini de sağlam olmayan temellere oturtmaktadır. Öğrenilebilirlik argümanının standart formülasyonundaki başarısı şüphelidir. Temel sorun, yukarıda verilen standart argümanda da kendisini gösterdiği üzere, doğal dillerin sonsuz sayıda cümle içerdiği öncülünün, bileşim kurallarının sınırsız şekilde kullanıldığını varsaymadan doğrulanamayışıdır. Bu doğrulama olmadan argümanın geçerliliğini döngüsellik tehditi altındadır. Ancak Davidson'ın (1965/1984m, s. 8–9) temel argümanı incelendiğinde karşımıza bu standart yorumun dışında sonluluk için görgül bir çıkarımla karşılaşılır:

EA1) İnsanlar doğal dilleri öğrenirler; dolayısıyla bu diller öğrenilebilirlerdir.

EA2) Bir dili öğrenmek, cümlelerine anlam veren kurallarını öğrenmektir.

EA3) Bir dili öğrenmek (cümlelerine anlam veren) kelime ve dilbilgisi kurallarını öğrenmektir.

EA4) Sözcük dağarcığındaki yeni bir öge veya yeni bir dilbilgisi kuralı öğrenmek sonlu bir zaman alır.

EA5) İnsanlar bir dili sonlu bir sürede öğrenir.

C1) İnsanlar, cümlelerin anlamını veren sonlu sayıda kelime ve dilbilgisi kuralını öğrenebilir. (EA4, EA5)

C2) Öğrenilebilir bir dil, cümlelerin anlamını veren sonlu sayıda kelime ve dilbilgisi kuralına sahiptir. (EA1, EA2, EA3, C1)

Öğrenilebilir bir doğal "dil sonlu sayıda anlamsal ilkele sahiptir" (Davidson, 1965/1984m, s. 9). Bu sonuç, bir doğal dil hakkındaki bir teoriye uygulandığında bir kısıtlama haline gelir. Kuramın her anlamsal ilkel için bir aksiyoma sahip olduğu göz önüne alındığında, doğal bir dil hakkındaki bir teori sonlu sayıda aksiyoma sahip olmalıdır.

Davidson, doğal dillerin kendi sloganında ve yukarıda ifade edildiği şekliyle bileşimsel olduğunu varsayar ve bu gerçek, dil kullanımının öğrenilebilirliği, yaratıcılığı, sistematikliği ve yeniliğinde kendini gösterir. Buna göre kuramlardan bağımsız olan söz konusu gözlemler, bilimsel ve felsefi araştırmalar için zemin hazırlar. Dilin yaratıcılığı tarih boyunca pek çok kişiyi büyülemiş ve şaşırtmış olsa da, bu fenomenlerle kuramsal olarak yaklaşabileceğimiz araçlara ancak tümevarımsal tanımlar ve özyinelemeye ilişkin matematiksel modellerin geliştirilmesinden sonra sahip olunmuştur (Chomsky, 1966/2009). Bilim, bu gözlemlerin temelindeki *gerçek* mekanizmaları ve işleyişleri ortaya çıkartmayı amaçlar ve yöntemi görgüldür. Tabii ki sonuçta, kuramdan bağımsız olarak doğruluğunu kabul ettiğimiz görüşlerimizin bir kısmının veya tamamının yanlış olduğu ortaya çıkabilir, ancak bilim, en başta neden bu yanıltıcı inançlara sahip olduğumuzu açıkladığında tamamlanmış olur. Felsefi açıdan Davidson

(1967/1984p), bildiğimiz bir dile ait ve belirli bir anlama sahip rastgele bir ifadenin anlamını etkili bir şekilde anlama yetisine sahip olduğumuzu ve semantik kuramlarımızın temel görevinin bunun nasıl olası olduğunu göstermek olduğunu kabul eder (s. 35). Davidson'ın söylemek istediği, bu yeteneğin açıklanamaz olmadığı, yetkin konuşmacılar tarafından öğrenilen ve onlara atfedilen bilgiyle açıklanabilecek mekanik bir prosedüre dayalı olduğudur. Filozofun görevi, gerçek mekanizmaları ortaya çıkaran görgül bir görev değil, bu yetenekleri açıklamaya yeterli olacak bir kuram oluşturmaktır. Dolayısıyla, kabul edilebilir bir semantik kuram, ortaya koyduğu bilgiyle insanların dilsel olarak yaptıklarını yapmalarına olanak sağlayarak bu yeteneği açıklamalıdır. Davidson'a göre Tarski'nin doğruluk tanımını doğal bir dile uyarlandığında, böyle etkili bir yöntem sağlar.

Yinelemek gerekirse, yetkin bir semantik kuram, anlamsal ilkeller için sonlu sayıda aksiyoma sahip olmalıdır. Davidson'a göre mevcut anlambilim kuramlardan bazıları sonsuz anlamsal ilkeller ortaya koyarak dilin öğrenilebilirliğini açıklamakta başarısız olmaktadır. Buna göre, doğal dillerin potansiyel olarak sınırsız sayıda cümleden oluşması nedeniyle, yetkin bir kuram, sınırlı sayıda anlamsal ilkel üzerinden cümlelerin anlamlarını inşa etmek için gerekli biçimsel kaynaklara (özyineleme ve bileşimsellik gibi) sahip olmalıdır.

Chomsky'nin özyinelemeli dilbilim kuramı ile Davidson'ın yaklaşımı birbirlerine bu açıdan paralellik gösterir. Davidson, böyle bir doğruluk tanımının, bir dilin sonsuz sayıda cümlesinin anlamını sonlu bir temelden üreterek görevini yerine getireceğini ve bir anlamsal yeterlilik modeli olabileceğini iddia etmektedir. Ek olarak bu kuramın doğruluğunun cümleler düzeyinde sınanması cümlenin temel anlamsal birim olduğu tezini de güvence altına almaktadır.

4. Görgül Doğruluk Kuramı

Tarski'nin doğruluk tanımı, bir cümlelerinin doğru olmasının ne olduğunu *doğrudan belirtmez*; örneğin, cümlelerle doğrudan karşılaştırılarak onların doğruluğunu belirleyecek dil dışı gerçeklik, olgu veya önermeler varsaymaz (Tarski, 1933/1983).

Bunun yerine, belirli bir sözedilen dil (*object language*) (biçimsel diller için) için, o sözedilen dilin yalnızca tüm doğru cümlelerine uygulanabilecek üst dilde (*meta language*) bir yüklem tanımlar. Konvansiyon T, sözedilen dil cümlelerini üst dildeki çevirileriyle (s. 187–188) aşağıdaki şemaya göre eşleştirerek tanımı test eder:

L dilinde S, ancak ve ancak P ise T'dir

(S, sözedilen dili cümlesinin yapısal açıklamasıdır ve P, aynı cümlelerin üst dilde çevirisidir)

Buna göre, bu şemanın tüm ve yalnızca doğru örneklerini veren bir tanım Konvansiyon T'yi karşılar ve T yüklemi sezgisel doğruluk kavramımıza karşılık gelir (Tarski, 1944, s. 353).

Bu anlamda, Tarski doğruluğu tanımlamak için anlam kavramını kullanır. Dolayısıyla, Konvansiyon T'yi karşılayan bir tanım, sözedilen dilin tüm cümleleri için aşağıdaki T-cümle biçimini üretecektir:

Türkçe dilinde "Kar beyazdır" ancak ve ancak kar beyaz ise doğrudur.

Sözedilen dildeki cümle sayısı sonlu olsaydı, bu tür kısmi doğruluk tanımlarının örnekleri birleştirilerek genel bir tanıma dahil edilebilirdi. Ancak, sözedilen dil mantıksal bağlaçlar içerdiğinde, böyle bir strateji başarısız olacaktır çünkü bağlaçlar aracılığıyla oluşturulacak sonsuz sayıdaki cümle tam olarak sayılamaz (Tarski, 1933/1983, s. 188). Tarski "özyinelemeli yöntemi kullanma fikrinin kendini gösterdiğini" belirtir (s. 189): Tanım, basit olanların bileşik cümlelerin doğruluğunu sınırsız bir şekilde nasıl belirlediğini gösteren bileşimsel kuralları içerecektir. Aynı strateji niceliksel yapıya sahip cümleleri de kapsayacak şekilde genişletilecektir. Ancak bu durumda, kurallar kapalı cümlelere ek olarak açık cümlelere de uygulanmalıdır. Tarski sağlama (*satisfaction*) kavramına başvurur, özyinelemeli tanımını verir ve doğruluğu dolaylı olarak bu kavram açısından tanımlar (s. 193–195). Davidson, böyle bir tanımın doğal bir dil için değiştirildiğinde bir anlam teorisi olarak hizmet edebileceğini öne sürmektedir.

Yukarıda Davidson'ın, anlamların nesneleştirildiği açıklamalara karşıtlığı açıklanmıştı. Frege (1892/1997h), yüklemeleri doymamış nesneler olarak ele alarak bu tür itirazlara karşı bir çözüm sunmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, Davidson'a göre bir nesneye doymamış veya eksik demek en iyi ihtimalle metaforik bir anlatımdır ve açıklayıcı içeriğini, yüklemelerin bütünü anlamını belirlemedeki rolünden alır (2005g, s.132). Davidson, bu rol takdir edildiğinde, kendisi için bir nesne varsaymanın gereksiz olduğu fikrindedir. Davidson (1967/1984p) bağlam ilkesine (*context principle*) başvurur ve doymamış kısmın rolünün cümlelerin anlamının türetilmesinde kural olarak kullanılması gerektiğini iddia eder. Dahası Davidson, içerik belirleme ilkesi olarak bir doğruluk tanımı çerçevesinde bağlam ilkesini bütüncüllüğe genişletir. Bir kelimenin anlamı, bir cümlelerin doğruluk koşullarına yaptığı katkı ise, bu anlam, içinde yer aldığı cümleler bütününe doğruluk koşulları tarafından belirlenecektir. Ayrıca her cümlelerin başka kelimelerden oluşması sayesinde bir kelimenin anlamı diğer kelimelerin anlamı ile bağlantılanmış olacaktır. Bütüncülük, bir kelimenin ve bir cümlelerin anlamını tüm dile göre sabitler. Sonuç olarak, doğruluk teorisinin aksiyomları ayarlandığında, bunlardan bileşimsel olarak sonsuz sayıda cümle türetililebilecektir.

Cümlelerin doğruluk koşulları ile anlamları arasındaki bağlantı Davidson'ın bu ilk önerisinde kısmen zayıftır; buna göre cümlelerin doğruluk koşullarını anlamak, anlamları anlamak için sadece yeterlidir. Sözedilen dil ve üst dili birbirine bağlayan “anlamındadır” yüklemine her iki tarafı çeviri koşulunu sağladığı sürece bu yüklem yerine neyin konulduğu önemli değildir. Bununla birlikte, Konvansiyon T'de tanımlanan yüklemine sezgisel doğruluk kavramına karşılık gelmesini sağlayan çeviri koşulu bu şekilde varsaydığından, Davidson'ın önerisinin başarısızlığı açıktır. Hem aksiyomların içeriği bu varsayılan çeviri verilmiş hem de türetilen cümlelerin doğruluğu bununla test edilmiştir. Böylece bileşimsellik ve bütüncülük, çeviriyi belirten biçimsel aygıt aracılığıyla önemsiz bir şekilde birbirlerine dönüştürülmüş olur. Davidson'ın amaçları açısından Tarski'nin doğruluk tanımı, Davidson'ın varmayı amaçladığı şeyi önceden varsayar. Davidson (1984d), daha sonra aynı anda bir doğruluk tanımı ve bir anlam kuramı geliştirilemeyeceğini kabul etmiş ve çeviri varsayımından vazgeçmiştir (s. xiv). Buna ek olarak, Tarski'nin de doğruluğun genel

bir tanımını vermekte başarısız olup, kendisini belirli dillere ait doğruluk yüklemelerini tanımlamakla sınırladığını ekler. Davidson'a (2005g) göre her iki sorunun da kaynağı dil kullanıcıları ile bağlantısının eksikliğidir. Buna göre T-cümleleri mantıksal gerçekler değil, görgül açıklamalar olmalıdır, yani tanım doğal bir dil hakkında olmayı hedefliyorsa, zorunlu olarak görgül olmalıdır (Davidson, 1990, s.309).

Davidson (1973/1984i), bir grup konuşmacının dili için görgül bir doğruluk teorisi geliştirmeyi amaçlamayı ve doğruluğun tanımını verme hedefinden vazgeçmeyi önerir. Buna göre bütüncüllüğü, kelimelerin içeriklerinin dil kullanım örneklerinden soyutlanarak elde etmesi olarak yeniden tanımlar. İnsanlar dili sınırsız sayıda amaçlarına ulaşmak için kullanmakla kalmaz, aynı cümleyi birçok farklı niyeti gerçekleştirmek için de kullanabilir. Davidson'ın önerisi, doğruluğu tüm dil kullanımının altında yatan temel kavram olarak ve diğer niyetlerden bağımsız olarak almaktır. Buna göre, aksiyomların içerikleri, dil kullanımında örtük olan doğruluk örgüsünden bütüncül olarak belirlenir. Sonuç olarak, biçimsel ve ek görgül kısıtlamalara uygun olarak tasarlanmış bir görgül doğruluk teorisi Konvansiyon T'yi otomatik olarak sağlayacaktır. Doğruluk kavramını temel olarak almak, doğruluk ve anlam arasındaki önceden tahmin ettiğinden daha yakın bir ilişkiyi işaret eder; cümlelerin doğruluk koşulları, gerçek anlamlarını ifade eder. Bu bölümde geliştirilen yorum, Davidson'ın anlam kavramını doğruluk kavramıyla değiştirdiği sözde ikame teorilerinden ve Davidson'ın ilk önerisine bağlı kaldığını söyleyen Lepore ve Ludwig'in (2005) açıklamasından farklıdır. Bu yorumda Davidson, doğruluğu açıklayarak anlama ulaşır.

5. Yorumlama

Yorumlama (*interpretation*) kavramı, bütüncül içerik belirlemenin nasıl işleyebileceğini soyut bir tanım olmaktan çıkartmayı amaçlayan felsefi bir araçtır. Temelde Quine'ın analitik sentetik ayrımına karşı geliştirdiği radikal çeviriye dayanmasına rağmen anlamını benzer bir düşünce deneyi olduğu yönünde sınırlamak yanlış anlaşılmalara yol açabilir. Davidson bu kavramı farklı bağlamlarda

üç farklı şekilde kullanır. İlk anlamda, yorum, diyalog içindeki tarafların birbirlerinin dili hakkında oturmuş teorilere (veya karşı tarafın kullandığı dilin hangisi olduğuna dair beklentilere) sahip olduğu günlük dilsel faaliyetleri modeller. İletişim başarısız olduğunda, radikal yorumlama devreye girer; taraflardan biri diğerinin sözlerini anlamak için sahip olduğu tüm kanıtları kullanır. Terimin bu ilk iki kullanımının arasına keskin bir sınır konulmasının imkansızlığı Davidson'ın ikisini tek çatı altında değerlendirmesine yol açmaktadır, tüm iletişim radikal bir yorumdur (1973/1984i). Kavramın üçüncü anlamı, az önce yukarıda bahsedilen düşünce deneyine karşılık gelir. Bu durumda radikal yorumlama, bir yorumcunun herhangi bir sözlük ve önceden belirlenmiş dilbilgisi kuralları ya da iki dilli bir konuşmacının yardımı olmaksızın bilinmeyen bir dildeki ifadeleri anlamaya çalıştığı bir süreçtir. Bu düşünce deneyinin, ana dil ediniminin ya da saha dilbilimcilerinin gerçek çalışmalarının bir modeli olmayı amaçlamadığı, ancak böyle bir dilsel anlayış için hangi kanıt ve bilginin yeterli olacağını ortaya koymaya yönelik kavramsal bir alıştırma olduğu açık olmalıdır (Davidson, 1973/1984i, s. 125, 1993b, s. 83). Genel yorumlamanın aksine, radikal yorumcunun elinde başlangıç için bir teori yoktur ve radikal yorumun amacı, sınırlı bir kanıt temeliyle böyle bir gerçek anlamlar teorisi geliştirmektir. Radikal yorumun başarısı *iyiniyet ilkesine bağlıdır* (s. 136). İlke, dilde kurucu bir role sahiptir ve yorumlamaya buna göre rehberlik eder.

Davidson (1973/1984i) bir doğruluk teorisi bilgisinin anlama için yeterli olabileceğini (s. 130) ve böylece yorumlamayı mümkün kılacağını iddia eder. Dolayısıyla radikal yorumcunun görevi, anlamları ya da konuşmacının inançlarına dair herhangi bir ayrıntılı bilgiyi varsaymayan kanıtlardan Konvansiyon T'yi sağlayan bir teorinin nasıl tasarlanabileceğini göstermektir. Radikal yorumlama, bir dil konuşmacısının rastgele bir ifadesini anlamamızı sağlayacak bir doğruluk kuramını nasıl bilebileceğimizi yanıtlayarak doğruluk teorisinin kullanım yoluyla görgül içeriğini kazandığı paradigmatik bir durumdur.

Davidson'ın çeviri kabulü olmadan yeniden formüle ettiği Konvansiyon T, T-cümlelerinin doğru olmasını ve ek olarak biçimsel ve görgül bazı kısıtlamaları sağlamasını gerektirir. Yukarıda, doğal dillerin sınırlı sayıda anlamsal ilkele sahip

olmasının doğal bir dili tanımlamayı amaçlayan bir kuramın bunu sonlu araçlarla yapması gerektiği sonucuna varan, doğal diller hakkında görgül bir argümana dayanan biçimsel bir kısıtlama olduğu gösterilmişti. Semantik kuramların doğal dilleri tanımlaması isteniyorsa, sonluluk kaçınılmazdır. Bu kısıtlama, sonsuz sayıda anlamsal ilkelerin açıklaması yapılacak dili öğrenilemez hale getirdiğini öne göstererek bu tür anlamsal teorileri eler. Kuramın yeterliliğinin bir dile ait tüm anlamlı cümlelerini anlamamızı sağlama kapasitesine bağlı olması koşulu, doğal dillerin potansiyel olarak sonsuz sayıda cümleye sahip olduğu gerçeğiyle bir araya geldiğinde, kuram cümlelerin anlamlarının parçalarının anlamlarına bağlı olduğunu göstermek için zorunlu özyinelemeli araçlar kullanmalıdır. İşte bu tam olarak Davidson'ın atıfta bulunduğu biçimsel kısıtlamadır ve bu nedenle radikal yorumcunun kendi mantığını, doğruluk teorisinin birinci dereceden niceleme mantığını, konuşmacının cümlelerine yansıtmaktan başka seçeneği yoktur (Davidson, 1974/1984a, s. 150– 151).

Davidson (1974/1984a), "bir T-cümlesinin doğru olarak kabul edilebileceği koşulların" (s. 152) görgül kısıtlamalar olduğunu belirtir. Dolayısıyla görgül kısıtlamaya göre, radikal bir yorum için mevcut olan kanıt, iyiniyet ilkesine uygun şekilde oluşturulmuş doğru T-cümleleridir, bu da temel olarak görgül gerçekleri ifade ettikleri anlamına gelir. Ancak yorumlamanın bütüncül bir girişim olmasından dolayı kanıt olarak kabul edilen T-cümlelerinin çeviri kabulünde olduğu gibi değişmez şekilde düzenlemenin doğrudan bir yolu yoktur; bu cümlelere optimizasyonun sonucunda ulaşılır ve her biri konuşmacının ileride doğru kabul edebileceği cümlelere göre revizyona açıktır.

Biçimsel kısıtlamaya göre, yorumcu, konuşmacının dilini birinci dereceden niceleme mantığının yapısına *uydurmalıdır*. Ancak bu, ancak sözedilen dilinin yapısı bu projeksiyona uygun kaynaklar içeriyorsa mümkündür. Kendi dilimiz için bir doğruluk teorisi tasarlarken, bu oldukça basit bir süreçti. Dilimizin en azından temel bir bölümünün bu mantıkla ifade edilebileceğini bildiğimizden yapılması gereken cümlelerin mantıksal biçimlerini vermek ve kuramın aksiyomları aracılığı ile dilimizin ontolojik kabullerini ortaya çıkarmaktı. Bu durumda, aksiyomların

doğruluğuna ilişkin bilgimiz varsayılan çeviriye dayanmaktadır. Bu varsayım terk edildiğinde, sözedilen dilin kabul ettiği ontoloji biçimsel olarak açığa çıkarılamaz ve aksiyomların doğruluğu görgül bir mesele haline dönüşür. Bununla birlikte, aksiyomların varlığı, nihayetinde, doğal dillerin bileşimsel olduğu varsayımına dayanmaktadır. Bu nedenle, sözedilen dilinin neden birinci dereceden niceleme mantığında ifade edilebilir kaynaklara sahip olması gerektiği sorusunun yanıtlanması, aynı zamanda doğal dillerin neden bileşimsel olduğunu da yanıtlar.

İyiniyet ilkesi bu biçimsel yapının semantik teoriler için zorunlu olduğu dair teze açıklık getirir. Davidson, iyiniyet ilkesinin bileşenleri olan tutarlılık (*coherence*) ve karşılık gelme (*correspondence*) ilkelerinin, öğrenilebilirlik argümanının da olduğu gibi, radikal yorumdan bağımsız olduğunu ifade eder (Davidson, 1993, s. 78–80). Tutarlılık ilkesine göre, yorumlayıcı mantıksal tutarsızlıklarla sonuçlanacak doğruluk koşullarını belirleyemez. İlke, tekil inançların bir inanç örüntüsü içindeki konumlarına göre belirlendiği ve tanımlandığı tezine dayanmaktadır (Davidson, 1975/1984n, s. 168, 1977/1984f, s. 200). Bu tezin dilsel alandaki karşılığı, cümlelerin doğruluk koşullarının bir cümle örüntüsündeki anlamsal konumları ile tanımlanıp betimlenmesidir (Davidson, 1977/1984j, s. 225, 1975/1984n, s. 158, 162). Tez, inançların doğaları gereği tutarlı bütünler halinde var olabileceğidir. Karşılıklılık, temel algısal inançların doğru olduğu veya başka bir deyişle “inancın doğası gereği doğru olduğu” (Davidson, 1983/2001a, s. 146) tezidir, yani bu inançların içeriği dünyadaki nesne ve olaylar tarafından nedensel olarak belirlenir. Buna göre, farklı kişiler tarafından doğru kabul edilen basit cümleler gerçekten de doğru olmalıdır (Davidson, 1993b, s. 80). Yorumlamayı kısıtlayan görgül ilişkilerin ortaya çıkarılmasında karşılık gelme ilkesi ve ontoloji göz ardı edilemeyecek öneme sahiptir.

Eğer iyiniyet ilkesi dilin, yorumun ve iletişimin kurucu bir özelliğiye, bunun gerektirdiği yapının tüm doğal dillerde mevcut olması zorunludur. Tutarlılık ve karşılık gelme ilkesi, dili betimlemek için en azından tutarlılığı sürdürecektir ve tikelleri ölçecek kadar zengin bir mantığın gerekli olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Buna göre, eğer bir dil sözcükler ile nesneleri ilişkilendirmiyorsa, ona doğal dil

demek için hiçbir neden yoktur. Aynı şekilde, bir semantik kuramın bu gerçeği yansıtmak aksiyomları yoksa, doğal dil için yeterli olabilecek bir kuram olamaz. Davidson'ın iddiası, birinci dereceden niceleme mantığının bu yapıyı yakalamak için yeterli olduğudur. Dolayısıyla, Davidson'a göre cümlelerin doğruluğu ve kullanımı hakkındaki herhangi bir kuramın cümle parçalarına belirli roller yüklemekten başka seçeneği yoktur. Burada dikkat edilmesi gereken nokta, Davidson'ın bu zorunluluğun kuramdan bağımsız bir referans ilişkisinin gerektirmemesidir (Davidson, 2005g, s. 35).

Doğruluk kavramını temel olarak aldığından dolayı Davidson için kuramın aksiyomları, içinde yer aldıkları cümlelerin doğruluk koşullarını vermekte dildeki rollerini tüketen kuramsal yapılardır. Buna göre cümle parçaları ile tikeller arasındaki ilişkiyi bağımsız bir düzlemde kuran referans kavramı hatalı olup, bu kavramı temel olarak kabul eden semantik teoriler açmazdadır. Bununla birlikte, Davidson'ın kuramında bileşimsellik, bütüncülüğün parçaların içeriklerini dil içindeki rollerine göre dolaylı yoldan vermesiyle sağlanmaktadır.

Bu nedenle, teoremlerin doğruluk koşullarını değiştirmedikleri sürece, farklı referans aksiyomları kuram tarafından uygun kabul edilebilir. Davidson'a göre kuramın aksiyomlarının kuramsal yapılar olarak ele alınmasının, onların belirsizliği (*indeterminacy*) ile birlikte değerlendirilmesi gerekir. Davidson (1979/1984e), Quine'in çeviri kılavuzlarında (*translation manual*) işaret ettiği üç tür belirsizliği kabul eder. İlk olarak, iki kılavuz sözedilen dil cümlelerinden en az birine farklı doğruluk koşulları atayabilir. İkinci olarak, mantıksal sabitler de dahil olmak üzere cümlelerin bölümlerine roller atamanın farklı ama kabul edilebilir yolları olabilir. Üçüncüsü, kılavuzlar, parçalara atadıkları referanslarda farklılık gösterebilir. Bu son tür belirsizlik için özel olarak referansın anlaşılmazlığı (*inscrutability of reference*) terimi kullanılır. Davidson, bu belirsizliklerin kendi kuramında, ancak zararsız bir dereceye kadar ortaya çıkabileceğini kabul etmektedir. Bunun sebebi Davidson'ın, kuramın biçimini Tarski tarzında düzenlemesi ve yukarıda gördüğümüz gibi iyiniyet ilkesini cümle parçalarına denk gelen aksiyonlar için de uygulamasıdır (Davidson, 1973/1984a, s. 153–154).

Görgül bir doğruluk kuramının bilgisi, bir performans kuramı olmadığı için bir veya bir grup konuşmacının günlük dildeki gerçek sözlerini anlamak için yeterli olmayacaktır. İnsanlar bir dili konuşmayı öğrendiklerinde ve bir bilgi birikimi edindiklerinde, dünyanın herhangi bir yerindeki ve herhangi bir zamandaki diğer insanların gelişigüzel sözlerini anlamaya yetecek bir şey öğrenmezler. Kuram gerçek vakalara uygulanmalıdır, ancak kuramın kendisi bunun nasıl yapılacağına dair bilgi içermez (Davidson, 1998/2005a, s. 326–327). Ancak, öğrendikleri şey gerçek bir duruma uygulandığında karşılarındakini anlamaya yetecek bir bilgidir. Faydalı bir analogi birinci dili öğrenmekle ondan sonra ikinci dili öğrenmek arasındaki asimetridir. İnsanlar ilk dillerini öğrendiklerinde, aynı zamanda başka herhangi bir dili öğrenme becerisini de kazanırlar.

Chomsky (2006), dilin yaratıcı kullanımının açıklanabilirliği ve prensipte bile olsa bir performans kuramının olasılığı hakkındaki şüphelidir (s. 88–89). Chomskyci dilbilim, dil kullanıcılarının yaratıcı kullanımı mümkün kılan bilgisini (yetkinliğini) tanımlamayı amaçlar. Bu bilgi kendi başına performans için “gerekli çok önemli bir koşul” (Chomsky, 1982, s. 426) olmasına ve dolayısıyla dilin yaratıcı kullanımına ilişkin içgörü sağlamasına rağmen tek başına “yeterli” değildir (Chomsky, 1982, s. 424). Davidson bu konuda Chomsky ile aynı fikirdedir; bir doğruluk kuramı kendi başına bir performans teorisi olamasa da, herhangi bir kullanım kuramının zorunlu bir parçasıdır. Buna ek olarak, bir yetkinlik kuramı olarak dolaylı yoldan performansa ışık tutabilir. Davidson (1986/2005d), konuşmacının bir kelimeyi yanlış kullandığı ancak yorumcu tarafından yine de anlaşıldığı durumları ele alır. Yorumcu, konuşmacının referans şemasını yanlış kelime için yeniden düzenlediğinde, değiştirilen sadece belirli bir ifadedeki belirli bir kelime değildir; yapılan değişiklik bütüncül olarak tüm dile yayılır. Yorumcu, bu yeni şemayı kullanarak sorunsuz biçimde karşılarındakiyle sorunsuz olarak iletişimini sürdürebilir. Bu pürüzsüz yorumlamayı mümkün kılan, dildeki bileşimsel yapısının varlığıdır; böyle bir yapının yokluğu yorumcuyla ilk hatadan sonra konuşmayı nasıl sürdürebileceğine dair çıkmaza sokacaktır (Davidson, 1999d, s. 73, 1998/2005a, s. 325). Sonuç olarak, dil kullanımı süreci mistik bir süreç değildir. Tarski’nin bir

doğal bir dile uyarlanmış doğruluk tanımı, sistematik çalışmanın kapsamı içinde olanı tanımlayan ve yakalayan ve ötesinde olana ışık tutan etkili bir yöntem sunar.

6. Sonuç

Bu tez boyunca Donald Davidson'ın dil felsefesi bileşimsellik ve bütüncülük kavramları ışığında tutarlı bir bütün olarak yorumlanmıştır. Bu amaçla Davidson'ın bileşimsellik anlayışının ne olduğu ve bunu neden benimsediği aydınlığa kavuşturulmuştur. Buna göre Davidson'ın insanların doğal dil kullanımındaki enformel bir bileşimselliği bir kabul olarak aldığı ve Tarski tipi bir doğruluk kuramının ise bunun biçimsel bir modeli olarak geliştirdiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu sonuca ulaşmak için Davidson'ın bileşimselliği benimsemesinin temelinde olduğu söylenen öğrenilebilirlik argümanı detaylı olarak incelenmiş, söz konusu argümanın atfedilen gerekçelendirme için zayıf olduğu ve Davidson'ın kabulünün bu tür bir argümana dayanmadığı gösterilmiştir. İyiniyet ilkesinin iletişim ve dildeki kurucu rolü gösterilerek, temelindeki bütüncülün ve ontolojinin doğal dillerdeki bileşimsel bir yapıya işaret ettiği ve bunun Tarski tipi bir doğruluk kuramının biçimsel yapısına içerik sağlayarak dayanak oluşturduğu sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

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