An approach to D. Davidson's "Radical Interpretation" theory

Uma abordagem da teoria da "Interpretação Radical" de D. Davidson

Inês Lacerda Araújo[1]
Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná

ABSTRACT: Davidson's concept of meaning as truth has many advantages in respect of reference and to give an account of how language is used. Its complement is the theory of radical interpretation, and both holism and the principle of charity complete his notions on semantics. These theses and the very idea that meaning depends upon a theory of truth for natural languages that is not independent of desires and beliefs are revolutionary in what semantics is concerned. Davidson's use of the concept of truth is a consistent way of providing evidence and satisfaction for a sentence, but these concepts are restricted to the semantic ground. Observation of the behavior, holism and the charitable assumption, evidence and satisfaction are factors that must be completed by the acceptance of the propositional content that will give an actual role for this sentence in a dialogue. So, the comprehension level (semantics) requires a further step in the direction of pragmatic conditions that supplies communication with the reasons that produce the acceptance of a speech act, its justification, not just its interpretation. In speech real situations, the semantic devices operate through pragmatic features.

Key words: meaning, semantics, reference, pragmatics.

RESUMO: O conceito de significado como verdade, proposto por Davidson, tem muitas vantagens com respeito à referência e ao modo como a linguagem é usada. Seu complemento é a teoria da interpretação radical, os conceitos de holismo e de princípio de caridade, que completam suas noções em semântica. Essas teses e a própria ideia de que o significado depende de uma teoria da verdade para as línguas naturais que não é independente de desejos e crenças são revolucionárias, no que concerne a este campo de pesquisa. O uso do conceito de verdade por Davidson é um modo consistente de produzir evidência e satisfação para uma sentença, mas esses conceitos são restritos ao campo semântico. A observação do comportamento, o holismo e a adoção da noção de caridade, a evidência e a

¹ Ph.D in Linguistics Studies, professor at Philosophy Department – Federal University of Paraná (1974-1998). Professor at the Graduate Program of Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná. Rua Imaculada Conceição, 1155, 80215-901,Curitiba, PR, Brazil. E-mail: ineslara@matrix.com.br; inesaraujo60@gmail.com

satisfação são fatores que precisam ser completados pela aceitação do conteúdo proposicional que atribuirá um papel real para uma sentença em um diálogo. Assim, o nível de compreensão (semântica) requer um passo a mais na direção de condições pragmáticas que sustentem a comunicação por meio das razões que produzem a aceitação de um ato de fala e de sua justificativa, não apenas de sua interpretação. Nas situações de fala reais, os recursos semânticos operam através de recursos pragmáticos.

Palavras-chave: significado, semântica, referência, pragmática.

The theory of radical interpretation

How can one understand the meaning of sentences in an unknown language? How someone proceeds in order to understand these sentences is a way to investigate meaning? The theory of radical interpretation starts with information and this information is not the linguistic type. This information contributes to meaning so that it can process it. There are facts and situations that are relevant to meaning, but this do not implicate a separation between world and language. In this paper we argue that there are advantages of the radical interpretation to give new and revolutionary account of meaning, truth and the relation between language and facts that are not restricted to the epistemological ground, that are not restricted to empiricism and, at the same time, it gives an account of reference without a causal theory.

The moves Davidson did begin with a theory of meaning that depends upon truth, the next move is radical interpretation and the last move goes towards the indeterminacy of meaning and holism.

The advantages of Davidson's theory of radical interpretation for semantics and to give a new account of reference can be summarized as follows: each sentence has to be interpreted in an occasion of use; language is not a closed structure; meanings are not mental entities; there is a connection between language, events and beliefs; reference is possible without reality.

The restrictions derive from difficulties that meaning reduced to truth conditions produce whenever actual sentences are spoken in dialogue contexts. If the obstacles (such as restriction to the sentence, to the semantic level, return to a kind of empiricism, and the analysis of sentences separated from one another and at the same time mutually related) would be removed, this would provide really efficient conditions in order to go to pragmatics. It is mandatory that context, dialogue between speakers, situation, as Davidson himself points are present, but if they are submitted to the holism principle what is lost is radical interpretation of a sentence. And if the meaning of each sentence has to be taken into consideration as Davidson claims, what is lost is holism. Only a pragmatic level, the discourse level, gives conditions to surpass this dilemma. There is another difficulty, how, by what means can the hearer know he has the right interpretation of the meaning of the speaker's sentence? The principle of charity, if it answers this question, it provokes other difficulties that its core notion carries, the notion of "rationality".

Positive aspects of the radical interpretation theory in relation to reference and meaning

We will list some advantages of this theory to a better understanding of issues in language philosophy. Radical interpretation is a theory that takes language and

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communication into consideration (semantics instead of epistemic vision). Davidson main theses on the role of language and communication, namely the radical interpretation, the charity assumption and the very idea that meaning depends upon a theory of truth for natural languages that is not independent of desires and beliefs, are revolutionary in what semantics is concerned. He uses the concept of truth for closed sentences with support both on formal features for natural languages and on the knowledge of an interpreter of the conditions of true that are held by a speaker. This is the most consistent way of providing evidence and satisfaction for a sentence so that the sentence has a meaning, that is, it can be understood, interpreted. Davidson rejects the traditional correspondence theory of truth because this theory does not take language into consideration. Only sentences can be true or false, but this is not a property of sentences, there is no direct connection with the empirical facts. His conception of philosophy of language is a pure one in the sense that Rorty (1979) states. Davidson rejects all sorts of foundationalism. In opposition to the impure language philosophy, that requires a conception of reference that provides a connection between language and reality, the pure philosophy of language does not require a theory of reference, as we will show ahead. The assumption that it is necessary to solve the problem of reference concerns a conception of epistemology previous to the linguistic turn.

The problem of how names and sentences describe state of affairs is no more a central problem after the pragmatic turn, particularly after Wittgenstein's conception of language games and after the holism of Quine (1999, p. 71-72). What matters is how the speakers can confront their sentences and the situations in the world, and this is not just a property of the assertions. The assertive sentences are one kind of sentence among others, with no more a privileged position. With the new perspective of the analytic philosophy, Quince's epistemological behaviorism, and Davidson's radical interpretation, it is, as Rorty (1979) says, the very epistemological culture that is abandoned. The request of correspondence between language and facts is a factor of speech in dialogue situation and not a mind's representation. "In Davidson's view, the question of 'how language works' has no special connection with the question of 'how knowledge works' [...] A theory of meaning, for Davidson, is not an assemblage of 'analyses' of the meaning of individual terms, but rather an understanding of the inferential relations between sentences" (Rorty, 1979, p. 259-260). These relations can be understood just how are understood the truth-conditions for simple sentences, they are of the simple and uncontroversial kind of "the snow is white". But sentences for beliefs or those that introduce an adverb, or sentences that cannot be related by the simple conditions of other related sentences, their truth conditions are not trivial, their testability depends upon other sentences' truth-conditions that are part of a larger theory. This new way of treating meaning and interpretation has no metaphysical implications, and their bonds to epistemological conditions are not rigid. In other words, Davidson's philosophy of language is a pure one, as Rorty (1979) says, it is free from the "mirror-imagery" and from the 'scheme-content' distinction. Language does not depend on facts for it does not represent reality. Rorty (1979) agrees with Davidson's rejection of the correspondence theory that requires the construction of a language capable of linking truth and reality. "Correspondence for Davidson is a relation which has no ontological preferences – it can tie any sort of word with any sort of thing" (Rorty, 1979, p. 300). To have true beliefs, for example, on morals does not implicate that the world must contain a certain belief or not. Truth must not be divorced from meaning, and this is what happens (a divorce) if one adopts the correspondence theory ("mirror imagery") or the "scheme-content" theory. The question is no more how we connect world and language, but what we can do with language, and an isolated sentence and its truth-conditions is a dimension where we cannot

find language interactions. Davidson is not concerned with "what is the case" (for isolated sentences), but with someone's language, his previous theory and the passing theory that this person will use in order to interpret each sentence. Then, and only then, the adequate truth-conditions will be fulfilled. "There are no magic ties between words and things, but interpretation schemes that depend upon a community of speakers and, sometimes, even upon just one speaker" (Araújo, 2004, p. 198). Heal (1979, p. 178) explains that

> meaning is a public and observable property of certain sounds, marks or movements, but a non-physical one. So the concept of meaning is a descriptive and factual one, and also, very importantly, a basic observational one [...] It belongs to a different but equally fundamental area of thinking, namely the one we use in our relations with other persons.

There is a relation between sentences, speakers, and data, for, as stresses Davidson, "a theory of truth must treat truth as an attribute of utterances that depends (perhaps among other things) on the sentence uttered, the speaker and the time (1991, p. 213). This conception of meaning has many advantages: semantics must take into consideration the use of sentences by speakers in a certain occasion; each sentence has to be interpreted in an occasion of use, in a specific situation and meaning is provided through truth conditions that are relative to the situation. To Davidson there is no contradiction between Wittgenstein and Tarski, natural language is at the same time flexible and requires semantic interpretation that can be formalized. There is no way to arrive to the private language or to someone's thought. The controversy realism/antirealism makes no sense.

There are reasons that rationalizes the action, and this explains "the relation between a reason and an action when the reason explains the action by giving the agent's reason for doing what he did" (Davidson, 1980, p. 3). We must pay attention to the reasons a person has and not to the epistemological issue that the relation between subject and object arises.

Another advantage is that it considers that language has not a closed structure of syntactic rules, for it is a matter of social practice. With this idea Davidson is in the opposite side of Chomsky, whose main thesis (internalism) is that language is not a kind of social practice. The way reference is produced is a matter of language faculty, that is, of brain structure, and how to use it is not a matter of culture or behavior features, it is a matter of cognitive features that are explained as biological function, whose evidence is provided by natural sciences. He criticizes Davidson's argument that an interpreter gives to each sentence that is expressed for each person in each situation, an interpretation, there is nothing like a linguistic competence in Davidson's view. This way of thinking criticizes Chomsky, involves too many factors, it is impossible to make empirical sense of well-succeeded communication because it is too much complex. The very notion of a passing theory is not a useful one, because they are theories built for each situation, they have no invariable elements, so it is not possible to make profitable investigation. "[...] The interpreter as Davidson conceives it includes everything available to human intelligence; it makes no sense, however, to call its transient states 'theories' or to consider them a subject of direct inquiry" (Chomsky, 2000, p. 70). This holism is quite mysterious, Chomsky says.

We do not agree with Chomsky's critiques, for Davidson's externalism is much more profitable than the empiric and biological Chomsky's conception of language[2].

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[2] For more information on my critical approach to Chomsky, see "Do signo ao Discurso" (Araújo, 2008 p. 184-194).

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There is a third advantage: a theory of meaning characterized by truth that takes use and situation into consideration. This theory of truth has no connection with metaphysical assumptions. It must determinate how the speakers of a language can determinate the meaning or the meanings of an expression. It is necessary that this theory can characterize a truth predicate. This might not be the only criterion, but it is the best criterion for the semantic of a natural language. Davidson is aware of the difficulties for providing meaning for subjunctive sentences, or for those that have to do with probability, causal relations, the functioning of adverbs, mass terms, belief sentences and intention sentences.

A correspondence theory that links sentence and facts is not good enough for it does not take into account language. Assertions are true or false because words are used in these assertions, "and it is words that have interesting, detailed, conventional connections with the world. Any serious theory of truth must therefore deal with these connections, and it is here if anywhere that the notion of correspondence can find some purchase", says Davidson (1991, p. 43). The truth of a sentence depends upon connections between the sentence, the speakers and the world (data). Language is connected to occasions for truth, that is, to the construction of a theory that also satisfies the characteristics of closed sentences (which entities satisfy the variables and which entities are included). The problem is how to transport a truth theory to a natural language since a natural language does not require formalization and the semantic method is not capable, alone, to explain the use of the adverb, the subjunctive mode, reported speech, imperatives.

Davidson looks for a semantic theory that can account the changing of the sentence due to the prepositional attitudes of a speaker or to the occasion of use. Truth will not be a property of sentences, nor is provided exclusively by the use of a speech act. It has to do with the possibility of finding a theory that makes a certain sentence true in that occasion and that satisfies a certain speaker. In this case, there is a theory that interprets correctly a sentence. This is Davidson's theory of radical interpretation. To interpret it is necessary to know the meaning of each meaningful expression, and this must be done independently of meaning itself and of opened behavior. Language serves to interests and activities that are not linguistic ones through sentences that must be interpreted in terms of beliefs and intentions that make sense just in a whole. This does not imply that each and every sentence of a language has an interpretation. There is no such a thing like the language. Interpretation requires just the skillfulness to deal with the semantic features to translate the unknown language in familiar words that satisfy that interpretation. An utterance will or will not have the property of truth and so it will have its own interpretation in connection with the basic attitudes of the speakers. "Truth is single property which attaches, or fail to attach, to utterances, while each utterance has its own interpretation; and truth is more apt to connect with fairly simple attitudes of speakers" (Davidson, 1991, p. 134).

Davidson is not interested in the improvement of natural languages. The canonical notations have the role of exploiting the structure of natural languages. The theory of truth transforms the sentences of natural language into formal language, and he uses Tarki's method. The true for items of a finite vocabulary is the basis to characterize true for an infinite number of sentences. The criterion of satisfaction implies that sentences and expressions can be related to objects in the world. Each sentence 's' of the object language must entail that 's' is true if and only if 'p', and 'p' can be replaced by any sentence that is true if and only if 's' is true. To Davidson evidence is enough, and interpretation depends upon T-sentences that provide information because they belong to a theory with its formal properties and empirical restrictions. This is why there must be cooperation between beliefs and meaning.

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If one knows the conditions that provide truth to sentences and their meaning one can infer the speaker's belief. The interpreter deals with these assumptions on the speaker's attitude, he can take a sentence as truth, not just for truth assertions but also for orders, requests, ironies, lies. These are also attitudes that can reveal if a speaker takes his sentences as true, in that occasion, in that circumstance and for that speaking community, giving evidence and certain assumptions to improve interpretation.

This is what happens when someone applies a truth theory to an unknown language, making arrangements in his logic in order to obtain a satisfactory theory to the unknown language, adjusting beliefs to meanings and applying the charitable assumption. That is, the assumption that others have rationality, certain patterns and beliefs, not completely strange to our own way to attribute truth to behaviors and beliefs. Behind all this there is a formal theory of truth that "imposes a complex structure on sentences containing the primitive notions of truth and satisfaction", says Davidson (1991, p. 137) that will be supported by evidence. So Davidson reconciles the need of a structure that is articulated in semantic terms with a theory whose sentences are testable, but not the theory itself. "By knowing only the conditions under which speakers hold sentences true, we can come out, given a satisfactory theory, with an interpretation of each sentence" (Davidson, 1991, p. 137).

The fourth advantage of the radical interpretation is that it allows the critique of the conception of meanings as entities, rejection of internalize and relativism, adoption of holism. Meaning comes from the possibilities to say under what conditions the utterance of a sentence is truth. Meaning is not just a question of truth conditions, we can say that the T-sentence 'The snow is white' is true if and only if the grass is green or $2+2=4$. The true conditions for a sentence depend upon the true conditions for other sentences of a language as a whole. It is just in connection with other sentences that a sentence will have a role. As Davidson (1991, p. 139) explains, "the totality of T-sentences should […] optimally fit evidence about sentences held true by native speakers". What Tarski took as a necessity to each sentence Davidson takes as a condition that is extended to language that works in a whole, so each sentence will be adequately interpreted for it is a part of a theory that supplies with formal and empirical criteria each empiric sentence. Tarski goes from meaning to truth and Davidson inverts this way.

Even so indeterminacy exists because the adjustment of beliefs of a speaker and the interpretation of his word is not exact, but it is sufficient to filter theories adequate to interpretation. So beliefs and meanings are complementary factors for the interpretation of each speech. A linguistic behavior is interpreted when we can say what the words mean at an occasion of use. As there are other factors (linguistic, philosophical, psychological), to know if a sentence is true will require tests for its empiric implications, the kind of test that every competent speaker can do. The theory that interprets a sentence can be correct, but to make it evident that the interpretation of that sentence in that occasion, made by a speaker is correct, it is necessary to take into account the beliefs, intentions, desires, approvals and convention. But meaning cannot be based just on uses, intentions, purposes, no-linguistics functions, as Mead, Dewey, Wittgenstein and Grice sustain. Davidson thinks that language cannot be abstracted from social factors and from social context. Meanings, reference, synonym, words and sentences are part of our primitive data that are organized by intuitive theories. But this is not enough to explain how is given the correct interpretation of an utterance. How can one understand that those words are an exhortation for someone to give up smoking? Certainly it is not because of an interior thought. To understand someone's intentions and beliefs is not independent of understanding his utterances. Radical interpretation requires at

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the same time a theory of meaning and of belief. Each utterance provides recognition of a prepositional attitude in that occasion plus certain exterior circumstances that give support or not to that attitude. People choose according to their preferences, based upon a "decision theory and interpretation theory" (Davidson, 1991, p. 147). Taking a sentence as true involves a belief that it is true, and the decision between propositions taken as true, is basis for evidence. The preference for the utterance of a sentence and not for the utterance of another is explained by the theory that attributes beliefs and values to the agent and meaning to his words. A theory of interpretation can be based on behavioral or dispositional facts. So, to understand an utterance "it is necessary to construct a comprehensive theory for the interpretation of a potential infinity of utterances" (Davidson, 1991, p. 148). The evidence for the interpretation of each utterance is the same to interpret all his sentences and the sentences of a community. The correct interpretation of a theory requires meanings, propositions, beliefs that have a role in the construction of that theory. This common vision comes from the "recognition that sentences held true – the linguistic representatives of belief – determine the meanings of the words they contain" (Davidson, 1991, p. 201).

Davidson says that Quine inspired him in these issues, but instead of the translation manual sentence to sentence and the confrontation with information that has to do with empirical restrictions, Davidson employs a semantic theory and goes beyond for he takes into account the ontological richness of language and that shows how the elements of the natural language, demonstrative adverb for instance, can make the theory of truth relative to time and speaker. Formal, natural, cultural factors are not independent. Tarski considers the T-sentences but just on a syntactic point of view. Davidson thinks that truth takes to the meaning of a sentence. It matters the way T-sentences yield interpretation. The main factor is the extension of the application of predicates, so that to establish truth conditions is equivalent to give the meaning of the sentence of the object language. Without this guarantee, there is no interpretation. The formal semantic level requires just the normal pattern of quantification structures that follows the satisfaction criteria of the semantic structures, though its relation with superficial grammar is very complex. The language object is projected into a quantification theory, and so it is possible to identify the semantic features of a sentence.

In order to interpret the predicate of the object language in a meta-language, the ontological relativity will cause no problem because the truth theory will provide T-sentences that will give correct interpretation through reasonable and sure restrictions. There will be also empirical restrictions, the facts under which speakers take sentences of their language as true, sentences that are neutral in respect to beliefs and meanings. Data can provide tests for the acceptability of T-sentences. The truth of a sentence depends upon circumstances that confirm not only the generalizations, but also the T-sentences. All these vary with the speaker and with the occasion in which the speaker sustain the truth of a sentence, under certain circumstances.

This support is given when sentences are true according to a theory and to a speaker's theory, with his vision of the facts. So, there are modifications on the inference of certain sentences. But in the construction of a theory there are formal restrictions that interfere in the decision of which T-sentence is adequate to the sentence of the object language.

The theory does not require that speakers can always sustain the truth of a theory nor require that errors can be eliminated. The theory requires the background of an agreement in which errors and disputes can be interpreted. Davidson (1991, p. 153) says: "making sense of an utterance and behavior of others, even their most

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aberrant behavior, requires us to find a great deal of reason and truth in them". The assumption is that language needs a background of shared beliefs. If we cannot understand someone's attitude it is because we do not have the skillfulness to understand in what respect it is not reasonable. Communication almost always is made after agreement in simple questions. The problematic questions must be interpreted based on the attitudes of a speaker, and the attribution of beliefs and different interpretations. At the community level, this difficulty does not occur with frequency, it is possible to separate what is idiosyncratic from what is taken as true or false based upon public patterns. There is indeterminacy of translation, in the sense of Quine, but, in the other hand, there is the semantic counterpart of the indeterminacy of interpretation, that is compensated by the charitable principle. It has a general basis and is sustained "because the uniqueness of quantificational structure is apparently assured if convention T is satisfied" (Davidson, 1991, p. 153). Indeterminacy causes no problem, without it, it would be not necessary to interpret the speech considering simultaneously the interpretation of the action. The same happens with the attribution of beliefs and desires.

> Each interpretation and attribution of attitude is a move within a holistic coherence theory, a theory necessarily governed by concern for consistency and general with the truth, and it is this that sets these theories forever apart from those that describe mindless objects, or describe objects as mindless (Davidson, 1991, p. 154).

As the interpretation of a sentence is independent of its use (against Wittgenstein), this allows the interpreter to understand an utterance by the descriptions of the attitudes of other people. Davidson (1991, p. 169) says that

> What must be counted in favor of a method of interpretation is that it puts the interpreter in general agreement with the speaker: according to the method, the speaker holds a sentence true under specified conditions and these conditions obtain, in the opinion of the interpreter, just when the speaker holds the sentence to be true.

There is no perfect theory to put both in agreement: sometimes the theory is mistaken. The best theory is the one that makes the agreement the best as possible. A community of language has theories in common and they make the agreement and the understanding good enough for this community survival. Language is shaped by the shared vision, so to study general aspects of language is also to study general aspects of reality.

The distinction between a true sentence (objectively) and holding a sentence true makes sense only in an interpretation theory. The beliefs have an important role, they provide public norms of acceptance. There is no private mind. Only those who interpret can have a concept of thought. True and false beliefs are given in the context of an interpretation and this conducts to the idea of a public objective truth. Davidson avoids at the same time relativism and foundationalism.

As a fifth advantage there is the notion that language has connection with reality without reference. One of the most original contributions of Davidson is his critic on the concept of scheme/content that we can find in Whorf, Kuhn and Quine. If we conceive that there is a difference between language and conceptual schemes, this will take us to the strange idea of a mind with an organizational structure. This is a clear and important advantage of Davidson's theory of interpretation it does not imply a mind that apprehend reality in one side, and languages that distort reality on the other side. To translate from one language to another there are problems, but none of them unsurpassable. Davidson believes that meaning is contaminated

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by theory, that is, by what one holds as true. If one gets rid of the idea of scheme/content (the third dogma of empiricism) one can get rid of any sort of empiricism. The idea that language organizes the world depends upon the idea that there are neutral schemes. This the assumption behind Kuhn and Feyerabend's theses of incommensurable systems of concepts provided by nature's neutral contents. Quine says that the frontier of a theory grasps experience, and the scientific conceptual scheme is the adequate tool for this task. They all conceive language as associated to a conceptual scheme and being it or not translatable, there is in a certain relation between nature (it predicts, organizes, adapts, faces), and experience (or reality, sensory promptings). The problem is: what is this reality and which entities are related. This vision of language as responsible for the organization of the world, language as predicting and facing the tribunal of experience, fits with the conception that separates reality in one side and experience (data, sense data, stimuli) on the other side. Davidson says that just objects can be organized and every language can be translated in a more basic language. Language does not organize all the experience. There are parts of it that agree with familiar principles. In other words, there is a difference between dealing with reality and organizing reality through conceptual schemes. Davidson agrees just with the first thesis. What really matters are the sentences that predict something, deal with things, fix our sensory promptings and can be compared to other sentences. It is the sentences as a whole that face the tribunal of experience. Davidson disagrees with the idea that the substance of the language is made with sensory data, experience or surface irritations. It is a theory as a whole that makes arrangements, fits the sensory evidence, says Quine. The problem is that the agreement with experience, with facts, must be the truth of facts and this "adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true" (Davidson, 1991, p. 194). There is nothing outside (in reality) with what to contrast. A sentence is true if the truth conditions are those required as the case, and this does not require reference to the facts, to the world, to the experience.

Using the concept of truth Davidson avoids the troubles of testing a different conceptual scheme. If there are two different schemes, they must be compared with reality that is common to the incommensurable schemes, criticizes Davidson. He abandoned the metaphor of a unique space with schemes that have a position and provide a point of view. He proposes translation with some errors, partial failures, that one can change and contrast with conceptual schemes in an intelligible way, referring them to a common part. He does not appeal to meanings, concepts, beliefs that are shared. There is interdependency between beliefs and meanings because there is a mutual dependency between the two aspects of the linguistic behavior, the attribution of beliefs and the interpretation of sentences. These relations of dependency provide the association between conceptual schemes and languages. But there is more: someone's speech can be interpreted just by someone who knows enough of some of the speakers' beliefs and the sharp distinctions between these beliefs are not possible without the comprehension of the speech. The theory gives account of attitudes and interpretation of the speech without assuming any of them. Quine accepts basic evidences for a theory of interpretation, but Davidson accepts T-sentences and interpretations that are provided by a malleable theory of meaning and an acceptable theory of belief. "[...] the process is that of constructing a viable theory of belief and meaning from sentences held true" (Davidson, 1991, p. 196).

Anomalies can be interpreted in function of a common background and by the efficient condition: the speaker holds sentences as true and act according to this. The criteria are simplicity, common sense and capacity to detect or explain errors. And also: sharing of sentences held as true; theories that are easy to manipulate and follow the charitable principle. There is rationality in thought and thoughts have

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propositional contents. They are in causal relation with the world. The assumption is a good disposition to understand other people. Disagreement will always exist. In short, in order to have communication it will be necessary the charitable principle and formal conditions of a theory. That is, a shared vision of the world largely true. There are different schemes, adaptation, and differences of opinion. Davidson avoids relativism for sentences are relative just to a language, and this is as objective as possible. He does not give up the world. There is an immediate contact with it through familiar objects whose peculiarities make our sentences true or false. Reality without reference is a conception that avoids the problem of the building block theory. This conception presupposes the immediate contact between words and the world. This empiricism is not sustainable, as Quine already showed. It is the sentence and not its parts that enable the relation between speakers, the words and the world. Each word has or not reference in a sentence. So reference cannot be explained directly in nonlinguistic terms. This is the reason why Davidson does not agree with Quine's conception of inscrutability of reference and indeterminacy of translation. Quine says that we have to build manuals for the translation from sentence to sentence and so we can know nothing considering just the relation between words and objects. We know to what words refer but this is of no help for the translation manuals. The reference paradox is that this is a syntactic issue and reference does not count in this ground.

Davidson says that the building block theory would be fine if we could give a nonlinguistic account of reference, what is not possible. So he prefers the holistic method that takes into account the sentence. Language will be connected to the behavior that is described in nonlinguistic terms, although the behavior is not capable of giving account of the semantic aspects of parts of sentences. If we cannot give such an account, we cannot explain truth. The extension of the concept of truth goes to a certain language with its fixed vocabulary. The basic semantic structure is not the basis to interpret a theory, because the explanation through a theory provides satisfaction, and to explain the theory requires the application of truth to closed sentences that are then, connected to human activity. The requirements for a theory of truth (words, meaning, reference, satisfaction) must not need empiric confirmation. The speaker assumes the truth of the T-sentence as evidence, constructs a similar theory and tests the rest of the T-sentences in order to confirm or add something, adapting it to the appropriate circumstances. Radical interpretation purifies the situation in an artificial way. It comes "from the scratch". So, reference and satisfaction are resources to establish the truth conditions without direct confrontation with reality. The correspondence to facts does not need a reference theory. Reference "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, 1991, p. 223). Davidson overlaps the metaphysical conception of representation, the Cartesian conception of a mind that knows the objects directly through representation, a sort of "spiritual photograph" of the world. Reference without the empirical ties does not imply giving away ontology and semantics. At each time someone uses a name that is satisfied by an entity (the same happens with predicates) there will be satisfaction and reference, just in order to establish truth. The way expressions satisfy the truth conditions of a sentence are relative to the speaker and situation because the theory of truth for a language L requires information and knowledge adequate to the interpretation of a speech of L. Empirical and formal restrictions are required to determine the role of each sentence, that is, its meaning and its interpretation among other pattern sentences of the language.

Different theories of truth assign different truth conditions to the same sentence. Instead of connecting sentence to something extra linguistic, Davidson

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stresses that the sole basic requirement is the possibility of interpretation. In other words, the basic requirement is "[...] to expect to find a minimum of information about the correctness of the theory at each single point" (Davidson, 1991, p. 225). The relation between language and reality does not require reference to objects. Instead it requires the sentence structure with its terms, predicates, connectives and quantifiers that have the usual ontological implications. The source of objectivity is intersubjectivity.

Ontology is not relative as Quine claims. This is the last item we list as an advantage for a better account of meaning and reference. Quine argues that there is no way to know for sure what a singular term refers to, nor what a predicate is true for, based upon the observation of the behavior. Davidson proposes different and alternative schemes of reference. If one of them fits the possible relevant evidence, then the other schemes will do too. Quine proposes that the relation between objects and words is connected to a scheme of reference (translation manual). Davidson accepts both theses of indeterminacy of translation and inscrutability of reference, with one important difference: it is the reference that is relative, not the ontology. It is just within a fixed ontology that makes sense the operation of connecting words and things in different ways so to explain the truth of sentences.

The charitable principle works when there is a theory of truth (a manual of translation) that satisfies the truth conditions and makes every sentence of the language true or false. In the case of two satisfactory theories that differ to account which singular term, predicate or quantifier will work, Tarski's theory must be applied. There is also the possibility that even with a given vocabulary and a fixed logic form, theories differ in reference that is assigned to the same names and phrases. The total ontology varies up to a certain level. Reference demands always the context of a truth theory. In order to assign the extension of terms and predicates, it is necessary quantifiers and functions. Reference is in the scope of satisfaction that deals with a definition of truth for closed sentences.

A speaker has an attitude towards a situation or objective event and responds giving attention to the utterance of the sentence, so that reference is relative to this situation but not ontology. To make sense it is necessary to report to the occasion and to the object. Quine thinks that this is relative to a back language that is constituted of behavior as response to stimuli. To Davidson, reference works in a language in relation to points that are demanded in order to understand an utterance. Reference is malleable, inscrutable but this does not imply ontological relativity. There is this already mentioned difference between explanation through a theory and look for evidence to show that the theory is true to some speaker or community. A theory is true because of the structure of its sentences, so it is the sentence and its truth that are connected with the world and not the relation between word and object. Even when there is a causal relation between word and object, the theory can be tested just at the sentence level. The way sentences are visualized provides evidence to make a theory of reference true to a speaker. Reference keeps inscrutable even if one knows the scheme to combine words and objects, because there is not a criterion for the choice of a determined scheme instead of another one.

This causal theory of reference is based on a theory of truth that is testable by the reactions of the speakers. The schemes of reference have in common the true conditions for all the sentences of a community and his causal or patterned ways of making connections. The schemes differ because the extension of their predicates differs, and the interpretation is not related to a certain reference, but to what the speaker means or refers to when he uses a word or a sentence.

This deflationist conception is in neat advantage in respect of epistemology conceptions of proof, empirical tests or the confrontation mind/reality. A scheme

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of reference says nothing about ontology, about what is a certain object. It is the interpretation that says what words are being used to refer in a certain way and with a certain language. This malleability is very efficient and it does not imply easiness, ambiguity or multiplication of points of view. Truth and reference are relative to a language in which sentences are true and words do refer. The same sentence can have two opposite truth conditions, so one has to adjust language and the scheme to provide another truth condition to give meaning to the sentence through the observation of the speakers open behavior or his attitudes towards the sentence. Davidson's holism is the assumption that language is part of the human activities, of our dealing with the world and with one another. To share a world and be logical is enough for radical interpretation.

The restrictions of the theory of radical interpretation considering the pragmatic turn

These theses represent a considerable progress in the philosophy of language for they avoid the naïve conception of epistemology based upon a theory of reference as correspondence between words and things. In Davidson's view beliefs are connected with meanings and vice versa. Their truth depends upon the occasion of use. But there are also restrictions in the theory of radical interpretation, some of them derived from the very qualities we reported above.

The first restriction: Davidson's investigation is limited to the semantic ground. Although his conception of philosophy of language can be classified among the current pragmatism, his semantics is constructed by means of one assumption: meaning depends upon truth. This restriction to the semantic ground provides him with a consistent theory of meaning based on two branches: truth and interpretation. This is the strong point of Davidson's philosophy of language. Unfortunately this is in other aspects its weakness. His analysis of language is limited to the closed sentence and its basic formal semantic structure. The semantic level matches with closed sentences and it is not possible to think in semantic terms in a different way. And here lies a dilemma: to give a correct account of communication, the semantic level is not enough for reasons we will provide next. But to understand a sentence the semantic structure is sufficient for the reasons Davidson correctly gives, if we agree with such a conception[3]. How can we possibly understand a sentence without knowing what is it true about? And how recognize true without the possibility of examining truth conditions that a speaker held that is interpreted by what he says in that occasion, with that intention and reported to that belief or desire? To satisfy all these aspects the semantic level is necessary but it is not enough. Davidson's analysis is adequate to sentences and each sentence's meaning is constructed with its components. The difficulty rests not on the semantic level, but in restricting understanding and communication to this level (closed sentence and its relations). Extensional analysis and minimal logical resources of natural languages are requisites that are good enough to the semantic analysis' level. But in order to understand one another, in order to justify beliefs, the speakers have to deal with conditions that surpass this level.

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[3] It is not our purpose to criticize Davidson's semantic of truth conditions for sentences in this paper. Habermas thinks that this kind of philosophy of language is still tied to the assertive function. The assertion is the paradigm to all the other linguistic uses. Following Habermas, there has to be an internal connection between the expositive function and the pragmatic conditions that made communication successful. For further discussion see "Wharheit und Rechtfertigung, philosophishe aufsätze" (Habermas, 1999).

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So, one may not stop at this level if one is supposed to understand how communication works in normal speech situations. The speech situation is richer, it involves other speech acts, other language games that are arranged by rules that go beyond the propositional content and that are related to many other factors that have nothing to do with truth conditions. Even when Davidson is concerned with the speaker and the interpreter, the point in focus is the sentence and its propositional content. If an interpreter has to know the truth conditions held by the speaker, their agreement depends on suppositions about beliefs and desires of the speaker. But, how the interpreter knows what true conditions exactly are those required to provide evidence? Observation of the behavior, holism and the charitable assumption provide no adequate answers to solve these questions. The charitable principle says that the agreement is the best as possible for each occasion. Even so, there are other factors that Davidson does not take into consideration, as the possibility of arguing in favor or against something or some purpose. The requisite that satisfies these discourse claims are not provided by a semantic of truth and interpretation, but by a discourse conception of truth based upon justification and not just upon empiric evidence. Evidence and satisfaction must be completed by the acceptance of the propositional content that will give an actual role to this sentence in a dialogue situation. To arrive to the comprehension level it is required a further step in the direction of pragmatic conditions to show how, why, what are the reasons that produce the acceptance of a speech act and not just the understanding of the meaning (holding truth). The propositional content is questioned, rejected, denied etc. by speakers. In speech real situations, there is not just the utterance of a sentence, but a linguistic action, where the semantic devices operate through pragmatic features. Davidson's pragmatism, paradoxically, does not satisfy discourse and pragmatics conditions. Discourse is a practice that involves not just intention, propositional attitudes, events and actions. These conditions have to provide validation. The semantic devices (with the propositional content of sentences) are necessary to know what conditions are necessary to connect to reality, to the world. It satisfies Davidson's claim of the triangulation between the speaker, the sentence and the world. But the semantic devices cannot be based just on evidence or coherence. There must be justified reasons provided by dialogue.

As a second restriction we point out that the theory must be verified and its truth conditions must be reported to empiric reality. Jane Heal argues that this dualism or its opposite, a reductionism to materialistic accounts, are points of view not compatible to Davidson's concept of radical interpretation. Davidson does not mean with this idea the same thing as the traditional empiricism does, nor the theory requires the relation sentence/state of affairs. Even so, some kind of proving and testing are necessary in order to know what a sentence is about, what a certain behavior or belief are about, what a speaker's intention is about. For Davidson the criterion is evidence and empiric conditions that may, after all, correspond to the world. There is another side that Davidson did not grasp, the side of discourse and hermeneutics. Dialogue situation and speakers who interpret are conditions that rely not just on coherence and not just based on a theory that can provide evidence and say something of the world. These claims are fair and necessary but there is more. One must ask what for a sentence is being used in real situations. Davidson recognizes that this is an essential requisite, but the interpretation is possible under a theory that is tested at each use of a sentence. The interpreter must know "the conditions under which utterances of sentences are true, and often that if certain sentences are true, others must be" (Davidson, 1991, p. 158). We think that truth conditions did not provide all that is necessary to interpret an utterance. Davidson's main thesis presupposes someone who is provided of a conscious that knows the

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truth conditions and can be certified in order to interpret. That is, someone that can know the world by means of the old subject/object relation. Although this is an assumption that Davidson rejects, one can read it between the lines. Radical interpretation relies upon truth conditions for a sentence in order to provide meaning. How can we deal with both truth and interpretation avoiding at the same time the undesirable consequences derived from the commitment with reality's knowledge? Maybe the answer is in the holism.

The third restriction concerns Davidson's holism. It is a theory of every thing, desire, belief, intention and situation. However, these factors are nothing at all without the propositional content of the assertions. The holism would be suitable with a return to Wittgenstein's conception of language games, and of meaning by use. There are not just assertions, but infinite possibilities of languages, says Wittgenstein (2001), in *Philosophical Investigations*. To Davidson, instead, the speaker has beliefs and a behavior that have to be interpreted by a theory that relies upon meanings and truth conditions. The speakers have to choose the best theory to get agreement. But agreement requires pragmatic features of language that go beyond the semantic level. To interpret the utterance of a sentence as an order it is necessary, following Davidson, to presuppose that the speaker takes a certain sentence connected to the uttered sentence as false. If it is a question, there is someone who does not know if a certain sentence is true or false. In short, to interpret it is necessary to know the circumstances under which a sentence is held as true. If so, is not there a pattern structure of language competence that is implicated in Davidson's theory of radical interpretation? And if this is the case, the externalism thesis is compromised. In one side the principle of charity demands rationality to interpret a sentence as following conditions and situations of a common world, and in this sense it requires a lot of deductions. They do not eliminate error or ignorance, and error and ignorance do occur. Too much conditions for interpreting in one hand, and the strict condition for the meaning of a sentence being its correct interpretation what depends upon truth conditions.

Another difficulty is that the previous theory and the passing theory are requisites for each utterance of a sentence. The imagery that occurs to explain this point is the image of flashes, slices, little portions of reality, a split vision of language and interpretation. But how can one understand one another with so many and so special, so focused theories? This looks like a schizophrenic kind of communication, it is very difficult to understand one another in such a split way. It is not an efficient and easy way to communicate. Although Davidson understands that assertions attend to modifications due to the situation and to the speaker's attitudes, it is always a sentence that is the unit of meaning and understanding. Each sentence is a theory and has its interpretation. The holism says nothing about what links sentences. We think that they are linked by the context of discourse that provides pragmatic conditions for their interpretation and their use.

To Davidson meaning by means of truth and interpretation are relative to each sentence. Even when Davidson demonstrates that they belong to a whole (social, cultural, empiric conditions), the discourse level is not taken into consideration. Truth under interpretation is still truth and obeys to semantic rules. Truth conditions require test, evidence and confrontation with reality. This confrontation is under a theory, under an interpretation[4]. How can one interpret truth conditions? They are available for test, but not for interpretation (there is this paradox: when we have truth, there can be no justification and vice versa).

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[4] Davidson (1991, p. 137) says in the essay *Radical Interpretation:* "This allows to reconcile the need for a semantically articulated structure with a theory testable only at the sentential level".

The last restriction in our list is that Davidson gave away reference, reality, language, scheme/content, but he did not give away the semantic unit of the sentence and so the pragmatic level of the discourse is not attained. In order to understand propaganda, for instance, we have to eliminate truth conditions. The unit of the pragmatic level is not the sentence, nor its utterance by a speaker, nor the interpretation under a theory. The unit of meaning is the speech act, the language games and the infinite modes of using them. Some of them have to be interpreted under truth conditions, but this only with sentences that have reference and meaning simultaneously as Frege taught us. But this kind of situation is previous to dialogue situations. And more, meaning and interpretation are limited to T-sentences. When Davidson claims that meaning is not independent from beliefs and desires to explain action and its connection to events, it is in order to make behavior coherent by a theory. And then, what comes next? Evidence and coherence do not provide yet acceptance, justification, reasons for the linguistic behavior, means to understanding one another and acting in connection with it. Wittgenstein's perspective is better to give a more coherent and consistent account of reference and meaning: the use of language games in our life forms. But this is another discussion that surpasses the limit of this paper.

Besides the charitable principle demands a theory that includes everything that supports rationality as a pattern for interpreting language and action. There is the necessity to discover a coherent pattern in the agent's behavior. So actions can be explained "in terms of quantified beliefs and desires", says Davidson (1991, p. 160). A theory of interpretation can give meaning to an arbitrary utterance of a member of a linguistic community through a theory of truth that allows interpretation of any sentence. Those who belong to a linguistic community have "to know such theory, and to know that it is the theory of the right kind" (Davidson, 1991, p. 161). To know if that is the right theory one has to have a theory, and this characterizes the circularity of the argument. Supposing one has the right theory it is a theory that has application just for that case. There are no rules to decide (and the principle of charity is too wide) what is the right or rational option to interpret and to understand correctly each utterance. Each interpretation works as in the story of the Baron of Münchhausen. He had to save himself and his horse from being drawn in the sea pulling both from water by his own hair.

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