Davidson's Compositional Truth Theory

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Why move away from Frege?

Sentences refer to their truth value, so any two sentences have the same reference, and thus meaning:

(1) R

(2) x^^(x = x. R) = x(x = x)

(3) x^^(x = x. S) = x(x = x)

(4) S

Why move away from Frege?

- Meaning can't lie in the 3rd realm
  - 'Snow is white' means {that snow is white}
  - {that snow is white} has no clear meaning
    - As a 3rd realm entity, {that snow is white} is inaccessible to man, so Davidson wants to ground meaning in a theory whose roots are verifiable

Okay, but why leave behind Intensionalism?

"My objection to meanings in the theory of meaning is not that they are abstract, or that their identity conditions are obscure, but that they have no demonstrated use" (p.92)

- 'Thaetetus flies'

  - By trying to inspect the components of this sentence for meaning, we end up in the same place as before.
  - Vacuity!

Tarski's Truth Criterion

- X is true if, and only if, P

  – X refers to the name of the sentence

  – P refers to the real world phenomena that make X true

    - Thus every sentence, X, comes with a set of conditions, P, that makes it true.

Davidson's Compositional Truth Theory

- "Definitions work by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for truths of every sentence"
- Davidson wants to use Tarski's concept of truth conditions (the p for every x) in conjunction with Fregean reference to establish meaning
- If we develop CTT it will do all the work of a meaning theory

How Davidson Handles Translating/Synonymy

If we can pair the sentences from our language to the sentences in an Alien Language that have equivalent truth conditions, then those sentences have the same meaning and we have created a successful translation!

The Case of the Potential Truth

Potential truths: 'That Book was stolen'

- "'That book was stolen' is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if the book demonstrated by p at t is stolen prior to t."
  - We just need to expand on the truth conditions for each utterance
- 'I am bored' is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if p is bored at t

Limitations of CTT

Modal Logic, ethics talk, attributive statements:

p.102: "When we depart from idioms we can accomodate in a truth definition, we lapse into (or create) language for which we have no coherent semantical account-- that is, no account at all of how such talk can be integrated into the language as a whole."

Ex:

- '[It is possible that] we will find a 10th planet'
- 'It is unethical to lower taxes on the rich'
- 'Nicolas Cage is the greatest actor of *all time*'

Neither of these statements have clear conditions with which we could define their truth value.

Funtime activities!

With the group that you are in, come up with the necessary and sufficient truth conditions for your given sentence, and see if the other group can guess what sentence is being referred to!

- You can't use the sentence referred to in your truth conditions
- The sentence must be in the form of a verifiable, scientific claim