

Mind and Language
In Search of a Theory of Interpretation

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In this thesis we will be discussing how in both Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Language we are trying to develop a theory of interpretation. This theory of interpretation at the same time provides us with a way to understanding other people's mind (which enables us to explain people's behavior) and understanding other people's utterances. We will be looking into the general constraints of such a theory of interpretation.

The First Chapter is entitled "Knowing others by their Language". In this chapter we discuss how we know others by the way they use language. Language is basically a complex system. It has various dimensions. When we start to learn any new language, we will have to learn some sets of skill from others. Actually learning any kind of language depends on conditions around us. To know the meaning of any language we should have to focus on our very particular goals, which means understanding the sentence which the speaker wants to say.

Communication is mainly seen through two models, which are the encoding-decoding model, and the second one is the inferential model. The encoding-decoding model is also known as the message model which involves the speaker to encode a message and transmit it via sound/sign to the hearer, who then decodes the message. This is the common-sense and folk psychological notion of language where language is used as a medium of ideas.

There is a distinction between linguistic meaning and speaker's meaning. Linguistic meanings are simply one part of a larger set of data which a hearer actually uses it in order to infer what the speaker actually intended to communicate, or what the speaker wants to mean.

The Second Chapter is entitled “Donald Davidson’s Radical Interpretation”. Davidson’s question was what kind of knowledge is needed for redescribing an uninterpreted utterance as an interpreted one. This type of process is named as ‘radical interpretation’. He attempts to answer about three questions of truth theories on which his approach is based: (1) whether this theory can be given for a natural language as a whole, (2) whether the evidence on which the verification goes along, and the technical equipment of satisfaction and related notions, meet the above constraints, and (3) whether they can really provide the task of radical interpretation.

Radical interpretation is an interpretation made by any person who is trying to make sense of the utterance of a speaker, where there is no prior knowledge of the speaker. In the work of the indeterminacy of translation W.V.O. Quine also introduced the phrase “radical translation”¹. He argued that, knowing any language is actually having the capacity to understand any expression of that particular language, and the ability to specify what any sentence in that language may mean.²

Radical translation is actually a kind of a thought experiment which is introduced by W.V. Quine in the late 1950’s. Actually the translation of any theoretical sentences is indeterminate. As Quine claimed that, language is nothing but a social skill. He regards the language just as natural phenomena in society.

Indeterminacy of translation also applies to the interpretation of speaker’s personal language, and even to someone's past utterances. The indeterminacy of translation proposes that what we count as evidence is uncertain, as there are so many entities of meanings in a sentence or uttered words which are meaningful or significant. The idea of radical

¹Robert Martin (1987). "Chapter 6: Radical Translation". *The Meaning of Language* (6th ed.). MIT Press. pp. 53

²Emile Lepore and Kirk Ludwig; “Donald Davidson; Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality” p- 26.

interpretation is an extension and modification of Quine's idea of radical translation,³ which was developed by Donald Davidson in 1960's and 1970's. Quine's radical translation and Davidson's radical interpretation should not be regarded as competitors. These two contexts are designed to answer different questions. The fact is that, interpretation is broader than translation; and sentences which cannot be translated can still be interpreted.

When a person utters something for an interpreter it is essential that, he is able to understand which non- linguistic intention of the speaker has caused the speaker to make this linguistic utterance. So what we are doing, while we are interpreting a speaker is establishing a causal link between the non-linguistic intentions of the speaker and his linguistic act.

Davidson makes his research with an interesting linguistic phenomenon named malapropism. Malapropism is nothing but the wrong use of a word or better to say an entire phrase which creates confusion with a similar word or phrase. It has an extra-effect of a humorous one. This humorous effect can be intentioned and in this case the malapropisms become a metaphorical tool, or unintentional, which happens caused for the lack of knowledge from the speaker's part.

The ultimate evidence of a theory cannot be the correct interpretations, as the radical interpretation, is supposed to supply an understanding of particular utterances which is not given in advance. So for the general case, the evidence must be accessible to someone who does not know the process of interpret utterances.

³Harman, "An Introduction to 'Translation and Meaning', Chapter Two of Word and Object"; (MIT Press, 1960)

The third chapter is entitled "Tarski's Theory of Truth". Davidson has taken help from Tarski's theory of truth in order to construct his theory of meaning. A theory of interpretation for an unknown object language structurally reveals the theory of interpretation for a known language, and a system of translation from the unknown language into the known. In theory of truth, Tarski first showed this.⁴

In Tarski's style a theory of truth is that it entails, for each sentence *s* of the object language, and the form of a sentence is:

'*s* is true if and only if *p*'

The T-sentences are obtained by replacing "*s*" by a canonical description of *s*, and "*p*" by a translation of *s*. The finite number of axioms, are of two kinds: 1) on the basis of the conditions of satisfaction of simple sentences under which a sequence satisfies of a complex sentence, and 2) the conditions under which the simplest sentences are satisfied.

Tarski was interested in formalized languages which have no indexical or demonstrative aspects. He treated sentences as vehicles of truth. But natural languages are full of indexical features. That's why sentences may vary in truth according to time and speaker.

Convention T is known as to be the accepted method for dealing with a host of problems. Such as sentences that attribute attitudes, modalities, general causal statements, counterfactuals, attributive adjectives, quantifiers like "most", and so on.

⁴Alfred Tarski 'The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages' , first published in Polish in 1933 and in English translation in 1956).p-124

In Tarski's work, T-sentences are taken to be true as the biconditional and understood as a translation of the sentence's truth conditions. But without the point of radical interpretation we cannot move ahead for the correct translation.

The fourth chapter is entitled "Folk Psychology as a Theory". The question is what is the meaning of the term "folk psychology"? About this question many philosophers answered that, folk psychology is actually a 'conceptual framework' or a 'network of principles' which is used by ordinary people to understand, explain, and predict their own and other people's behavior and mental states. Being able to explain and predict human behavior on this view involves mastering a theory which is a folk psychological theory.

Now the question is why we are discussing about folk psychology? Actually, the fact is that, by discussing folk psychology what we are actually trying to understand is how we can understand others mind. The content of folk psychology may be regarded as the particular concepts and practices employed by an ordinary person to understand, explain, and predict the human psychology. The kind of thing that ordinary people do while they understand other people's mind may be regarded as employing a folk psychological theory.

The nature of folk psychology becomes the topic of extensive debate. Much of this debate has been structured by an opposition between the theory-theory and simulationism. The theory-theory holds that our folk psychological capacities involve the use of a theory, grasped by the interpreter, of how minds work. Simulationism holds that we interpret and predict others by simulating their thought processes in our own reasoning mechanisms.

Now comes the Theory–Theory. Theory–Theory is a view about that how we understand other people's mind. It is called "Theory- Theory" because this theory says that we can understand others mind because I employing a kind of theory of mind.

The eliminativist tries to replace the theory of folk psychology. They tried to explain the human behavior in a new way. The eliminativism says that mental state does not exist. This theory argues that mental states are actually useless. Rather to say that the folk concepts (belief, desire, and propositional attitude) are basically useless and these should be eliminated.

The fifth chapter is entitled “Principle of Charity”. This chapter mainly outlines the notion of the Principle of Charity which is proposed by Donald Davidson, to consider the rationality and interpretation of a speaker’s statement. Basically it looks into the charity’s role as a principle governing not only to search of knowledge about the meaning by the radical interpreter, but also to find the justification of beliefs about meaning in general.

The principle of charity is a principle which helps us to interpret someone’s statement. It is a philosophical statement which helps us to interpret the sentence which the speaker wants to convey. It also helps us to interpret of other’s beliefs and utterances. It actually maximizes others thinking and utterances by the help of truth or rationality.

The method of Principle of Charity is nothing but a theory procedure where ideas can be critiqued after a sufficient understanding. The main thing is to set our own beliefs and pretending that our new ideas are nothing but a true and a temporary presumption.

At the time of implementing the principle of charity, it's very much important to remember that what we perceive as the best possible interpretation of someone's statement may not be that the other person also believes the best interpretation of their statement. Specifically, there are some issues that may arise, and may cause to pick the incorrect interpretation for someone's statement. Because,

- The other person may not be rational.
- Our own assessment may be unsound in some way, which might cause us to choose an interpretation other than the finest possible interpretation of the original statement. This can happen, if we are irrational, or because if we are not aware of important information which the speaker has.
- We may hold valid but different viewpoints or values, which might cause to view different interpretations of the original statement while being the best probable interpretation.

So, when we are implementing the principle of charity, we would have to make sure that we are not misinterpreting the speaker's word and making up something which the speaker did not wanted to mean at all.

The sixth chapter is entitled “Principle of Rationality”. Rationality is being said as the quality of being rational. Rationality implies the agreement of one’s beliefs with others. It has different specialized meaning in philosophy, sociology, economics, evolutionary biology, political science, psychology, and game theory.

To predict the most rational behavior one needs to make various key assumptions, and a logical formulation of the problem. The term ‘Rationality’ is very much relative. Rationality is measured with behavior. Like self-interest converted to the point of being selfish, and if one accepts a model which benefits him by a purely selfish behavior is claimed to be rational. So the surrounding assumptions are very much needed to explain how the problem is formulated and framed.

Man Weber the German sociologist suggested an interpretation of social action which can help to distinguish among four different idealized types of rationality. The first one is called instrumental rationality. This one is related to the expectations about the objects related with the environmental behavior or of the behavior of human beings. The second one is concerned about belied rationality, where the action is taken for what one might call reason fundamental to the agent. The third one is an affectual rationality, which determined by an agent’s specific affect, such as feeling or emotion, about what Weber himself said that this was a kind of rationality which was on the borderline of what Weber considered “meaningfully oriented”. The fourth one is oriented to traditional or conventional.

According to some philosophers rationality is instrumental. According to them, to achieve our goals, we have our rationality in virtue of doing our best, or at least doing what we appropriately think adequate. If ultimate goals are not themselves subject to assessments of rationality, then rationality is purely instrumental, in a manner associated with David

Hume's position. Rationality is a normative concept. Principles of rationality say how people should behave rather than how they actually behave.

In conclusion I would like to say that understanding of human language is the most complex process in the world. Language concerns with the ability to comprehend, spoken and written words and to create communication with others. Languages are basically oral and it generates through speaking. Speaking involves with various complex cognitive, social, and biological processes.

Language is often used for the conduction of information. This is only its most ordinary function. Language also helps us to access knowledge to draw conclusions. Language is a fundamental thing of our ability to think, and without it we will not able to express ourselves.

Words do not have fixed meanings so the interpretation always changes as a function of the context. We use contextual information that means the information of surrounding languages like facial expressions, postures, gestures, and tone of voice which helps us to interpret someone.

Davidson's investigation into meaning was thinking about the form of a meaning theory. Davidson said that a meaning theory must reveal the meaning which will be compositional – that means, it will show how the meaning of a complex expression depends on the meanings of their parts. This was not at all a new idea, as Davidson argued in the

beginning of his article (“Truth and Meaning,”) many philosophers of language at the time, as well as some linguists, had come to this conclusion as well. Davidson argues that meaning will be compositional, because without it, it will be impossible to learn any language.

Davidson’s theory of radical interpretation has an important sense. It is not only a theory of interpretation; it is not also a guide to show how we should interpret a person. It is basically a foundational theory of meaning and belief. It says that every word has a certain meaning.

Davidson’s idea not says that the meaning is fixed by how someone interprets other, but rather how an ideal interpreter will follow the certain rule of interpretation, which will help to interpret others. This theory can be expressed without thinking about interpretation at all, but only thinking about the rules which Davidson wants to say to follow the interpreter. So here we can see some operating in stages. Stage 1. A certain language user can hold a true series of sentences like, S1 . . . Sn. Stage 2. We will assume that the speaker has only true beliefs. As Davidson claims that, we can also assume that if the speaker holds a true sentence, then whatever that sentence means it is very obvious that the speaker believes, we can easily assume the meanings of the sentences S1 . . . Sn must be true in Stage 3. So now we have got a list of sentences, and also a list of the true propositions that might be their meanings. The next job is to give a theory of meaning for the sentences of corresponding up the truths with the sentences. We use to do this by (i) The use of extended statements and (ii) The condition that words must be interpreted constantly throughout S1 . . . Sn. Stage 4. Now we will reach a stalemate at Stage 3; there will be a conflict between the claim which the speaker believes only truths and the requirement that the theory of meaning interpret throughout words in the same way.

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