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Unmediated depictions of Hypothetical representations: a critique of Tarski-Davidson’s theory of Meaning

Abstract:

We contend that Davidson’s theory of meaning, influenced by Tarski’s theory of truth, idealizes the conditions in which the processes of interpretation occur within a rational community. This idealization results in a direct assertive (non-problematic) representation of the hypothetical content found in the more obscure or less sensitive to verification aspects of meaning. We argue that those theories fail to unravel the enigmatic philosophical dilemmas linked to the hermetic nature and opacity of non-extensional dimension of meaning. Instead, it solely presents a scenario wherein, all else being equal, we can articulate propositions without the anxiety of reversing their truth to falsehood. Ultimately, they obscure the underlying practical factors that give rise to meaning delimitations, resulting in an irreflective and unquestioning portrayal of our sense-making practices.

Key-words: truth-conditional semantics, Sense, Alfred Tarski, Donald Davidson, Robert Brandom

Developments of the linguistic turn Picture in Tarski: the facilities of a truth-conditional semantics to determine meaning

Since time immemorial, the classification of syntax has been undertaken with the aim of isolating a group of basic categories. The search for fixed syntactical roles in language helps to understand how a class of terms can be mathematically-inductively extended, and gives us mechanical means to learn a language. More recently, this ancient vocation of grammarians and philosophers has become a search for logical forms that obey this desire to transform occasional and arbitrary class-consistency into a basic pattern of recursive learning: “a categorial reduction system is viewed as a logical calculus where parsing a syntagm is an attempt to show that it follows from a set of axioms and inference rules” (LINDEN & MINNEN, 1990, p. 220). It is enough that the expressions of the language offer no rules against themselves.

As Davidson has remarked, Frege’s insights into the functioning of expressions of generality was a discovery of how a piece of our language worked, that stands as an exemplar for investigations into other areas. (HIGGINBOTHAM, 1986, p. 40)

For him, the general compatibility between different rules for interpreting the same sentence ‘p’ is characterized by the fact that these rules do not project exceptions to the hypothesis that “p” is true if and only if p”; so that the assumption that one uses ‘p’ consistently and not pathologically - or has no inconsistent beliefs about p - is a semantically valid theoretical assumption: it allows communication of "that p” with minimal loss, since there is no divergence between interpretive rules sufficient to produce semantic incommensurabilities between them.
We can discover a predicate "is true" by selecting appropriate sentences to be truth-apt, just as Tarski did, by mapping values onto sentences in a language in a maximally consistent manner:

We have thus arrived at a statement which can indeed be accepted as the desired general definition of truth: it is formally correct and is adequate in the sense that it implies all the equivalences of the form (3) ["p" is true if and only if p] in which "p" has been replaced by any sentence of the language L. (TARSKI, 1969, p. 65)

Tarski's definition of consequence comes closest to describing the ideal linguistic behavioral conditions to avoid disagreements about the scope of the consequence relation. The author went a step beyond the mere grammatical theory of possible categorical substitutions by offering an extensional theory of 'satisfaction' for semantic categories, and therefore, he was able to "keep our semantic theory to a minimum" (ETCHEMENDY, 1999, p. 40).

Any expansion of the domain of names, properties or consequence is well-behaved if it is completely determined by extensional indiscernibility of the satisfaction domains. Intensional expressions do not fulfill this condition. The verb "believes," for example, provides the context for a non-extensional iterable use of clauses subordinate to this verb. Tarski's explanation depends on how we stand on how the existing categories of possible satisfaction can be extended by populating the domains of each type of expression. Once this stand is recognized and no intensional expression (expressions whose learning is not exhausted by learning its instances) is left, we can rely on substitutional tests for judging correct well-formed-sentences:

The idea behind Tarski's solution is simple. If a given sentential function is satisfied by all sequences, then naturally all its permissable substitutions will be true. (ETCHEMENDY, 1999, p. 49)

Holding fixed some connectives and structural terms, we can presuppose the well-behaved expansion of satisfaction domains, and then it is easy to arrive at the algebraic closure principle that every premise-set is a subset of its consequence-set. A well-behaved expansion produces regular iteration by theorizing an extensionally indistinguishable – and not only grammatically indistinguishable – representation of the contribution of terms of the same category to the truth value of the sentences in which they occur. In the case of logical consequence, a well-behaved expansion would be one in which the possibility of disagreement goes only so far. Disagreement about the consequences of a set of premises cannot improperly expand the domain of satisfaction: "an argument form [K', S'] is satisfaction preserving on sequence f just in case f satisfies S' or does not satisfy any members of K" (ETCHEMENDY, 1999, p. 48).

From this follows a proper scientific understanding of the nature of the cognitive state that ideally takes place in a mind when we can characterize the meaning of a proposition in no uncertain terms, i.e., when it is a literally assertable proposition – where we understand straightforward characterization as one in which the key for decoding the meaning of the sentence depends on no more than the structural instructions contained in the signs syntactically concatenated in that sentence.

In a semantics that does not depend on truth, the parameters are far less simple. Although human creativity is never helpless in creating parameters that provide certainty in unstable situations, truth-functional semantics represents the level at which the study of meaning is easiest.
The origin and use of Tarskian recursive-coding to demystify meaning: a first look at our problem

The constant and frequent connection between an evidence of proposition p and the semantic assignment of p as truth is merely coincidental. No one would even suspect that there is some causal link between the evidence supporting the truth of p and the linguistic rules used by a community to predict the use of p. But this coincidence should not be ignored or treated lightly, for it is the basis for linking the study of language patterns with the study of patterns of response and behavior of the speakers of the language. If there is no causal relationship, there seems to be some enigmatic relationship between individuals who possess good judgment, the ability to discern truth from falsehood, and the capacity to work as contributing members of a language community – also: predictable members. This isn’t so enigmatic if we think about it this way: someone who is able to develop a coherent theory of truth, unlike someone who can only develop a incoherent or chaotic one, has the ability to test the consistency of their beliefs and propositions in a generalizable way, rather than through partial, limited, and one-sided (dogmatically imposed) parameters. Thus, even in the worst hypothesis, namely, the one in which our hypotheses about the content of people’s beliefs are all wrong, we will still have enough to guide us about what he/she thinks, just because he/she will think using patterns for his/her consistency organized enough so that anyone can learn them. This fabulous coincidence between intentional predictability and language standards is based on a kind of fresh code for a linguistic neo-phenomenological consensus, as exemplified by Dennett:

A better understanding of the phenomenon of belief begins with the observation that even in the worst of these cases, even when we are surest that the strategy works for the wrong reasons, it is nevertheless true that it does work, at least a little bit. (DENNETT, 2002, p. 560)

The key aspect to consider is that languages must be institutions organized enough so that people with good judgment, that is, the ability to discern between truth and falsehood, can learn it. In other words, unless the language is completely impenetrable to the extent of lacking any form of compositional structure,

one is in position to derive a T-sentence, “s is true iff p” (ignoring context sensitivity for the sake of simplifying exposition) for any object language sentence s, which draws only on the content of the axioms” (LEPORE, 2013, p. 3)

Tarski explored exactly this connection, not causal but evident, between the ability to discern truth – to have a theory of truth – and the ability to learn a language. He taught how this would be done in a language with sufficient formal constraints. A formally valid definition of truth is one that is expressed in a hierarchy of languages, namely object language, meta-language, and meta-meta-language. A materially adequate definition of truth entails all instances of the T-schema: “p is true if and only if p”. W. O. V. Quine relied on this conception to support disquotationalism about truth:

By calling the sentence [snow is white] true, we call snow white. The truth predicate is a device of disquotation. We may affirm the single sentence by just speaking it, unaided by quotation or by the truth predicate. (QUINE, 1986, p. 12)

To be fair, authors who draw attention to the Fregean origins of Tarski's project are not speaking without basis, for “there is a device, originating with Frege, for converting this inductive stipulations into an actual explicit definition.” (DUMMETT, 1993, p. 63). After Tarski, we know that any analogical representation grounded in the underlying linguistic structure can function as an mathematical induction principle. The induction can only
succeed if the syntactic characteristics of the language exhibit a coherent compositionality, enabling us to recursively identify novel sentences based on the foundational structure of familiar sentences:

(α) for each of these languages a list or description is given in structural terms of all the signs with which the expressions of the language are formed; (β) among all possible expressions which can be formed with these signs those called sentences are distinguished by means of purely structural properties. (TARSKI, 1931, p. 166)

This influenced Davidson to expand on this thesis. In Davidson’s Philosophy, “the ability to converge on passing theories from utterance to utterance” (DAVIDSON, 1986, p. 445), coincides with internalizing a pattern that may be employed as a theory predicting the relations of a substantial number of propositions. In the words of Horwich:

the infinite series of universal disjunctions may be transformed into another infinite series of claims in which the same property, truth, is attributed to all the members of a class of structurally similar propositional objects. And in virtue of that form the sum of these claims may be captured in an ordinary universally quantified statement:

\[(5^*)\text{ Every proposition of the form: (everything is } F \text{ or not } F \text{) is true.}\]

It is in just this role, and not as the name of some baffling ingredient of nature, that the concept of truth figures so pervasively in philosophical reflection. (HORWICH, 1999, p. 4)

Horwich believes that with this we prove the minimalist aspect of truth. But the extraordinary conversion of a disjunctive property into an assertion can be anything but trivial. Davidson expands on it beyond a mere deflationary comprehension, because the possession of a principle of analogy that would come together with our knowledge of the predicate “is true” has a direct relationship with intersubjective criteria of interpretation. Again, there is nothing trivial about this.

This grants us a completely external criterion for human interpretation. Consequently, it becomes feasible to substantiate a hopeful perspective that the realm of meaning can be condensed into the realm of consistent interpretation. This is because all that is indirect, conjectural, and hypothetical in the former can be replicated, reinforced, and empirically validated directly, without the mediation of intensional, internal (opaque) notions. Davidson’s theory also converges with the austere, deflationary, and Occantian-Wittgenstianian perspective regarding how we adhere to rules without necessitating a private mentalistic language:

there is no learnable common core of consistent behavior, no shared grammar or rules, no portable interpreting machine set to grind out the meaning of an arbitrary utterance” (DAVIDSON, 1986, p. 445).

Not miraculously, thus, but mechanically, we can begin with Frege’s theories of reference and the interchangeability salva veritate, and by adapting them into a analogical schema for operating effective recursion (derived from Tarski), arrive at a remarkable comprehension of a broad and empirical pattern for ascribing and evaluating content to propositional attitudes, epistemic positions, and even the meaning of propositions that possess no direct connection to evidence but derive their semantic value from the holistic standpoint taken. The idea of "reference" is not entirely abandoned, but is reduced to notions less loaded with metaphysical presuppositions.

This strategy transpires technical perfection because the standard of truth serves as a criterion for assessing other standards, and these standards are used to put pressure on each other, such as behavioral norms, epistemic criteria, holistic coherence criteria, and so forth.
It is in this one standard – the pattern for truth-assignment – that we discover the universal pattern of selection for meaning, which acts as a parameter for all others.

We may see the fruit of Davidson's thinking in the minds of intellectuals like Daniel Dennett who carried on his path of inquiry until its last conclusions, possibly without fully acknowledging him: “What it is to be a true believer is to be an intentional system, a system whose behavior is reliably and voluminously predictable via the intentional strategy” (2002, p. 557). Therefore, what Davidson accomplishes is the precise removal of the one of the last areas of philosophical mystery that remains in our society after Enlightenment: the other, or the other's Mind. But the victory over this final terrain tends to leave us with a sense of emptiness. Has the challenging aspect of the meaning question truly been addressed?

In this article, we will suggest not. The challenging aspects, which lead to hermeticisms and which, since the origins of analytical philosophy, trace a difference in complexity between extensional and intensional theories, these aspects do not disappear in the Tarski-Davidsonian approach. They are simply transferred to a semantic dissimulation, which we can call symbolic fallacy. In Alberto Peruzzi's words:

then the “symbolic fallacy” lies in wait. If the meaning of an expression of Language is in turn just an expression of a deeper-level Language 2, and so on recursively, semantics becomes syntax. (PERUZZI, 2017, p. 128)

This initial critique provides ample content for an article, yet we aim to explore a different approach. We will delve into the realm of the ongoing debate between extensionalism and inferentialism, seeking to delve into another aspect of Fregean legacy, specifically the aspect centered around the concept of Meaning (Sinn). The notion of Sense has been regarded as the part of a theory of reference that causes anomalies, since Russell's classical critique in On Denoting (1905). Despite the significant progress made in this field, with numerous projects formalizing the concept of Sense and intensional isomorphism, we concur with Peruzzi's viewpoint on this matter: “however indispensable to investigate the structure of language, [the developments of mathematical logic] rely on the existence of end products in the morphogenesis of meaning” (PERUZZI, 2017, p. 119). With this we will question whether the Tarski-Davidsonian notion does not produce a second dissimulation: the masking of the processes of meaning production, and the presentation of the “meaning/nonsense” distinction as an nonproblematic and irreflective product.

Some limits of the Truth-theoretical approach to Meaning

PERUZZI gives a formidable summary of the nature of the dogmas – or dissimulations – that support the limitations of Tarski-Davidson's extensionalist orientation:

This impasse was bound up with the dogma that any rigorous formal semantics must rest on a set-theoretic framework. Refinements involving modal notions required for the intensional aspects did not affect the core dogma and in particular the idea that the interpretation map is an arbitrary (unconstrained) function from one set to another. From this dogma follow Hilary Putnam's arguments about the limits of model-theoretic semantics directly applied to natural language, starting from the non-categoricity of reference (Łöwenheim-Skolem Theorem). (2017, p. 128)

However, even if we generously consider the possibility of modeling natural language learning by generalizing its semantic features, there are still other criticisms that arise unrelated to linguistics. One such criticism pertains to inference, proof, or demonstration, which is not directly related to language itself. Inferentialists, such as Brandom and Dummett, direct their attention towards the inferential roles performed by the words of natural language. Proof-theorists, like Gentzen, emphasize the cognitive or epistemic abilities necessary to arrive at a conclusion, which serves as the justification for an inference. Despite
their differences, both approaches share a common understanding of the significance of
cognitive and normative elements in the realm of inferential phenomena.

On the other hand, the model-theoretical approach to logical consequence,
particularly in its basic form, primarily deals with representing the extension and anti-
extension of logical connectives, specifically material implication. This difference in approach
leads to a critique from inferentialists who argue against reducing proofs to an extensional
interpretation of material implication. We find models of this criticism in (PRAWITZ, 1972, p.
123) and his project to suggest that "proofs are studied in their own right in the hope of
understanding their nature", until the attempt to rescue the intensional part of Frege's
theory made by Michael Dummett: "we are concerned with proof-theoretical justifications,
on the basis of rules of inference regarded as self-justifying inasmuch as they serve to
determine the meaning of the logical constants they govern" (1993, p. 269).

The neo-inferentialist perspective of Dummett has its roots in an ancient intuitionist
critique of the Realist project embedded in classical logic, which grew as an accusation
against classical parameters of truth but was not satisfied with some of the non-classical
parameters (possible worlds). This perspective focuses on the fact that the parameter used
to justify the transition from premises to a conclusion is something cognitively knowable, not
an immutable form, a deontological principle, a mystical assumption about our ability to be
consistent in reasoning or our grasp of consistent counterfactual distinctions.

A first source of dissatisfaction simply follows from the fact that this theory
voluntarily closes its eyes to the relevant phenomena, as admitted by the champions of the
minimalist version of this theory:

it does not mention phenomena such as reference, logical validity, assertion,
and the aim of inquiry-notions whose relation to truth one might have
thought any decent theory should describe" (HORWICH, 1999, p.20).

PERUZZI expresses this dissatisfaction more broadly:

The moral drawn from the disappointments and frustrations encountered
using the tools of classical logic, set theory, Tarskian semantics, possible
world semantics and, later, programs for AI or even constructive type theory
for semantics of programming languages, was that access to meaning has
nothing to do with toolboxes of any formal description. (2017, p. 127)

The Tarski-Davidsonian approach to the problem might be criticized for both its
reductionism and the implications of this reduction. This limitation makes us lose what we
shall refer to as visibility as the concept of proof gets narrowed down to the bounds of
“truth-assignment”. We can spot all avenues to truth-preservation as the same “sucess-
parameter” and still become blind to the epistemic nature of inferential detours.

Of course, the whole problem is that (as HUSSERL put it): “not every deductive
connection is explanatory” (2001, p. 147). We need to show that the model of interpretation
of one proposition explains the model for the other. Moreover, this initial blindness serves as
the foundation for a fresh mystery—an unmediated presentation of hypothetical results. We
would want to present this line of criticism.

The dissatisfaction of inferentialists and proof-theorists can be effectively portrayed
in a basic manner, which we can discuss here without jeopardizing our chosen approach.
Sundholm presents the following strategy, citing Bolzano’s charge that an extensionalist and
formalist semantic approach is blind:

we have two Bolzanian reductions, namely (i) that of the correctness of the
judgement to that of the truth of the propositional content and (ii) that of the
validity of an inference between judgements to a corresponding logical
consequence among suitable propositions. From an epistemological point of view, we get the problem that the reduced notions may obtain blindly. This happy term was coined by Brentano for the case when an assertion without ground happens to agree with an evidenceable judgement. (SUNDHOLM, 2012, p. 945)

A simple way to characterize semantic blindness is to point to the classical limitations of material implication (the function for ‘no- /p and no-q’ and ‘no-p or q’). Under this criteria, the proposition q can be blindly true under the hypothesis p, i.e., the reason would be only that the truth solution of the proposition p makes the truth of q unproblematic. This condition is sufficient to determine the truth of the material implication. However, it is a blind condition, as it does not increase our visibility of the ground-basis of the proof. For it does not mean that we can say that p proves q. It only says that assuming q as true do not bring any further problem under the ‘p’ hypothesis.

The easy route and Honest Labour: Disguised Idealizations in Tarski’s approach

Tarski’s recursive procedure helps to establish a certainty or guarantee for the consistency of future uses of the language, since we can idealize the conditions under which a analogy will remain valid in the future. Since elementary language categories are meant to change infrequently, the recursive process can be safely followed under the ceteris paribus clause:

having mastered this lowest level of language, we proceed to higher levels by analogy. This means that we come to understand the condition for the truth of a higher-level sentence via a conception of an ability to determine their truth or falsity effectively and directly, an ability which we do not ourselves possess, but of which we conceive by analogy with those abilities we do have. (DUMMET, 1993 , p. 344)

This way of understanding language expansion by analogy is based on a typical mathematical reasoning:

in order to establish the equality of two different expressions for the same function, it was necessary to transform one into the other, (...); now it is sufficient to show their coincidence in a far more restricted domain (RIEMANN [1851], 1876, §20, 38–39; In: FERREIRÓS, José; RECK, Erich H. 2020, p. 60).

Coding the “possible expansion” of language is indeed the mathematically sophisticated and higher-order counterpart of “naming” – and, therefore, the easy way to climb the ladder of naming and referential assignment, codifying second-order concepts as direct “names”. Notably, the concept of “truth” appears naturally to fulfill this coding function of arbitrary association, as HORWICH says:

'The proposition that p’, occupying a position open to object variables, and where the truth predicate serves merely to restore the structure of a sentence: it acts simply as a de-nominalizer. (1999, p. 5)

Based on these presumptions, the semantic landscape—an idealized landscape—would serve as a mathematical reference for the direct encoding of the content of inductive definitions. By codifying the hypothetical charges present in the mere analogy, a computational principle emerges that imparts a deontic essence to the representation, guiding us in its interpretation as something we “ought” to do. This approach builds upon the
foundation laid by Hilbert and carried forward by the program, extending the principles of logical positivism. It aims to uncover the "meaning" of even the most intricate forms through verificationist terms, as highlighted by SUNDHOLM:

The mathematical study of mathematical language was naturally begun by Hilbert as part of his ideological programme. Here equations between finitistically computable terms serve as analogues of positivist observation sentences. (2018, p. 553)

The insufficiency of this approach is typically attributed to a primary challenge: what stands for verification when all we have is imaginable verifiers? This paper refrains from delving into the never-ending discourse surrounding these subject. We will instead outline the problem in the following manner: the difficulty of precisely articulating the "intuition" that serves as the foundation for the unambiguous use of the term "truth." We can evaluate how Tarski's theory offers a direct resolution to these challenges.

As we cannot intuitively access this hypothetical-reference of the “truth-property”, the option is to register it as a primitive categorical encoding that, under ceteris paribus clauses, will behave in a predictable way. One of the ways to construct this idealization is to imagine a hypothetical mind that could think about this mere induction as if it had verificational content. Thus, a mathematical projection disguises itself as an empirical prediction.

Stated differently, the inductive projection mechanisms function as patterns that, when translated via truth-functional maps, can demonstrate how a potential proof can be transformed into a "projected verification" and how, under certain stability and inertia (ceteris paribus) conditions, this projection can be traced back into the present as a norm of "meaning" (logical form). A similar claim can be made if we refer to the verification pathways to truth rather than the inferential routes to logical consequence: In Tarski, recursive truth-producing processes develop into an unmediated kind of logical consequence.

Paraphrasing Russell in The Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy, we can observe that such an approach is more opportunistic than hard-working. For Russell, "The method of 'postulating' what we want has many advantages; they are the same as the advantages of theft over honest toil." (1919, p. 71). This applies in the specific case if we take the paradigmatic case of the use of Tarski's theory used by the axiomatic model. Here, each sentence of the language that would have a favorability to be asserted within certain verification conditions are taken as simple theorems. Thus, from certain axioms, these sentences can be derived. But from the fact that these sentences cannot be revised in a theoretical axiomatic theory of truth, it does not follow that we know what their basis for verification is. It just follows that we don't know any better. In another words, the Tarskian way of explaining conservative extensions of language depends on assumptions about semantic categories; given that, recursion turns the projective-inductive definition into a direct one. But then we are not explaining the hard part: inference. We are, on the contrary, offering an unmediated product in a final state of representation of the distinction between “meaning/nonsense”, and dissimulating the specification path that allowed us to get there. Tarskian systematic associative linking of meaning with references through systematic-organized coding has the advantage of theft over honest labor.

The difference between the meaning of “If p then q” and the assertion of q under the supposition of p: the intensional dimension of meaning

The Tarskian project guarantees elegant solutions to old questions and intractable difficulties. But we must neither overlook its artificial properties nor avoid questioning the seemingly magical conventionality of its solution. This conversion of inductive-satisfaction into direct-truth does the difficult work of a theory of meaning – which is harmonizing the
direct and indirect methods of verification of language's sentences. It ignores “the alleged (meaning-or-concept) constitutive work that logical principles perform in fixing the sense and semantic value of logical expressions (above all constants)” (Miscevic, 2010, p. 78). It avoids the hard part of the explanation: explaining how inference is grounded in those harmonizing methods. The Tarskian presentation of a sentence's meaning eliminates the necessity for the inferential paths that this sentence blocks and unblocks, and delivers an unmediated outcome, a finished, fetishized product, a miraculous transition from a projection of truth to actual true. This aligns with an accusation paradigm that will require more attention. Let's expand on this charge.

Tarski's problem of representing the truth of p or logical consequence by means of models is an attempt to avoid the path of inference and simply describe these "hypotheticals" as "enforceable (in assertion)", in much the same way as a financial strategist would convert debt into assets. Thus, we've set the following conditions: When we empirically test a meaning hypothesis, the result of the test depends on everything else remaining the same. It is clear that the European intellectual tradition did not overlook this. The condition of "everything remaining the same" is reflected in Kant's theory of judgment as the requirement for figuring out the content in a unit. As Brandom points out in Spirit of Trust:

> Understanding the activity of judging in terms of synthesis-by-integration into a rational unity of apperception requires that judgeable contents stand to one another in relations of material incompatibility and consequence. (2019a, p. 53)

However, Tarski's method differs from Kant's in that the latter does not simply assume irreflectively that the unity of judgment would determine content, i.e., that all 'p' will be positioned in opposition to non-p. Every judgment is assumed meant to address a particular problem, and it is this problem that drives the solution that is chosen by a content unit. This problem is how to indicate the authorization of the conclusion based on the premises in the case of an inference, or how to license the assertive use of the content. For BRANDOM: “the conditional is the paradigm of a locution that permits one to make inferential commitments explicit as the contents of judgments” (2000, p. 60). Put it another way: “In Sellars characterization of expressive rationality, modal claims are given the role of inference licenses, which makes explicit a commitment.” (2000, p. 76).

Gilbert Ryle adopted a comparable approach in his reasoning. According to him, by focusing solely on the formal structure of "if...then," one would obscure or conceal the distinction between various forms of authorizing and validating a conclusion. This would result in assimilating all these forms to the extension of the material implication (if...then):

> ... as travel warrants can be invalid in various ways, so 'if-then' statements can be false. Unconvenanted journeys can be made from London to Oxford, and from 'Today is the 28th of February' to 'Tomorrow is the 1st of March' (RYLE, 2009, p. 249).

For RYLE: “Knowing 'if p, then q' is, then, rather like being in possession of a railway ticket.It is having a license or warrant to make a journey from London to Oxford.(Knowing a variable hypothetical or 'law' is like having a season ticket.)” (2009,p.250). The author thinks that “the differences between modal and hypothetical statements are in fact purely stylistic.” (2009, p. 255) And: “The statement-like appearance of the clauses of those 'if-then' statements which are not subjunctively worded is a deceptive appearance and one which always can be and often is obviated in stylistically different paraphrases” (2009, p. 255).

We do not believe that Ryle's insight was taken seriously enough, and perhaps the author himself did not realize its full destructive power. For if he is right – and we think he is – then there is a 'deceptive appearance' in the direct, non-hypothetical and semantic
formulation of an inferential relation. To give inferential instructions or encode them in an algorithm is possible, but it is an illusion to think this will be anything more than a theoretical representation. Its conversion into a semantic asset – a use – would be like the representation of a ticket for use. The nature of the difference between a usage ticket and actual usage needs to be established, however, to avoid confusion when we promote codes to represent their intersubstitution or exchange value.

Let's discuss the rhetorical device Ryle employed to elucidate the message he conveys. If someone were to inquire in public about the possibility of exchanging hotel bookings made for 2027 for US Treasury credits, the only non-dogmatic response would be "yes, if there were a market for such credits". In other words: if you can sell them. But you cannot force or pressure anyone to buy those bookings. There cannot be a Platonic-mathematical sphere that can serve as a timeless parameter of conversion if there is no market for this exchange. An equivalent response is available for the query: is it possible to replace my hypothetical "if p then q" with an assertion of the conclusion q when p is true? If this conversion's cash value is accepted in the market, meaning it is not deemed too costly or unfeasible in a conceptual framework, then "yes", the conversion can be calculated and has an independent public value, even if one cannot prove it directly. Ryle's point is that the connection between a potential use and an actual assertive use doesn't exist in some ideal world, but rather exists within the realm of conceptual practices.

For an inferentialist, the exchange value of the hypothetical reference is its mediating power, or its Sense. In the words of Robert Brandom:

When the dwarf planet Pluto in the Kuiper belt was first thought about, our only epistemic access to it was inferential, by drawing conclusions from perturbations in the orbit of Neptune. It was at that point a purely theoretical object. When in 1930 Clyde Tombaugh first accurately aimed a sufficiently powerful telescope at the region of space the dwarf planet was hypothesized to occupy, it changed status from purely theoretically to observable. This was the "discovery" of Pluto. (2019b, p. 96)

In other words, we need to admit a dimension of cognition of non-active or non-directly assertive contributions, which only plays a significant role when found in an inferential or conceptual context, or, in the context of a judgment. But the contributions to a judgment/assertion can have different pre-assertive gradations. Dummett calls this aspect "ingredient sense." "In Lukasiewicz's semantics, the sentences A and [TA] have the same assertoric content; they differ in their ingredient sense" (DUMMETT, 1993, p. 48). These elements were supposedly present in Frege's complete theory, that is, including the part not desirable by extensionalists:

when Frege wants to be clear about what is expressed by even the purely formal assertions appearing in proofs about the expressive capacity of the Begriffsschrift itself, he does so by specifying their inferential role, restricting himself in this case to inferences whose propriety is underwritten by their form alone. (BRANDOM, 1994, p. 96)

The ability of an inferential form to license an inference depends on the stability of the conceptual conditions and their categorical descriptions, whether this stability is institutional or not. A language serves as the most apparent instrument for establishing stability within a realm of discussion regarding what can be deemed as true, and for deducing logical conclusions from the given premises. Relying on the stability of the status quo has its advantages and disadvantages. It may be comforting to believe that any interpretive problem or assessment of inferential validity can be resolved by establishing a sufficiently robust standard of truth that can withstand the test of time, similar to treasury.
bonds or bills. However, this unmediated product—which is presented as a “title,” “right,” or “promissory note”—is also a magical depiction of the meaning-producing process that ignores the practices that give rise to it and uses ceteris paribus clauses and simplifications to describe the complex universe of linguistic use. In PERUZZI’S words:

The study of the real semantics of a real language used by real speakers in the real world cannot ignore a consideration of the cycles of perception and action which underlay the emergence of meaning either in its extensional or intensional aspects. (2017, p. 129)

Semantic reasoning’s end-products and the masquerading of actual meaning-practice conditions

A concerning phenomenon is emerging behind the seeming demystification of the concept of "meaning" made by Davidson and inspired by Tarski’s truth-theory. Under the disguise of a scientific approach to semantics, Tarski creates a conversion or coding machine that permeates the fetishized process of mediating activities, which are now standardized in accordance with an induction principle. So we now know how to employ inductive-projections to turn liabilities (proof-projections) into assets (assertable possible truths) by identifying conditions of linguistic conservative expansion, or inertia (such the categorial stability of language’s syntax).

Liabilities can now be codified as prospective profits, but this is a magical process cloaked in science. Tarski's thesis about truth provides the basis for a semantic theory only in very limited cases where the transformation of the possible (conjectural) into the actual (truth) is not problematic. The presence of these conditions is believed to occur when there is a higher proportion of shared assumptions compared to unshared assumptions among the individuals in a rational community. Additionally, these conditions are observed when the language used by the community remains consistent and their practices adhere to norms that are so ingrained that it becomes effortless to overlook the fact that the circumstances in which they comprehend one another (semantics) align, almost miraculously, with the circumstances in which they reach consensus on the external world (truth).

It remains mysterious, however, how this miraculous alignment between a semantic understanding and a theory of truth came about, although linguists need to presuppose it to guide their projects to determine meaning in problematic contexts.

We can say, therefore, to end the article, that the mystery of “meaning” – the hermetic, non-compositional and opaque parts related to referential substitution – has not vanished; rather, it has been restored as an unmediated form of representation of meaning and logical consequence within truth-conditional framework. In this form, it acts as a kind of historical institution without self-awareness and with an unreflective conviction about its representation as final and definitive. That enigma we talked about in the first chapter, that of the coincidence between (1) members with a healthy faculty of judgment – competent in representing the difference between truth and falsehood – and (2) the ability to use structured linguistic instruments, becomes more than an casual curiosity: it becomes the dissimulative representation of a definite frame of meaning/nonsense, as if they were end-products, a simple natural reality available to our mathematical decoding.

Conclusion

Tarski’s method provides an extremely adaptable coding strategy to translate any projective hypothesis or inductive definition into a simple representation that maps
propositions' content as the “grounding-point” where its interpretation cannot reverse truth to falsehood and vice-versa. Quine called it “disquotations”.

But Tarski’s idea only applies to situations that weren’t already problematic before the solution was put in place. These criteria are primarily present in standardized languages, i.e., in categorial relationships that fit into a structural mathematical description. In our final chapter, we argued that the theoretical and mathematical foundations for converting inferential instructions into cumulative and compositional semantic cognitions do not demystify the concept of meaning. This just gives us what Peruzzi called a toolkit: “The deceptiveness encountered in the choice of toolkit made blinded some to the need of mathematics in a scientific theory of cognition.” (2017, p. 128). This toolkit approach also fails to reduce the inferential dimension of meaning to a more scientifically acceptable form, such as a theory of consequence. Instead, these foundations idealize the conditions under which a pattern followed consistently would maximize the exclusion of paradoxes, providing truth-tickets for potential use. The disquoted expression of a sentence ‘p’ is just the finalized part packaged as an exchange commodity, a reductionist representation of what it means to have the cognitive means to prove p. In Ryle’s words, this usage ticket for ‘p’ is then confused with the concrete usage of ‘p’.

Tarski did not advance the philosophical consequences of his own thesis. Donald Davidson did. Davidson takes a straightforward step that reduces the concept of meaning to the interpretive competence for decoding those sentences role in a language. By internalizing inductive parameters rooted in structural similarities, individuals who speak the same language can rely on predictive patterns to interpret information. This allows for a match with the presupposition that “p” is true in the specific conditions where it is commonly asserted by members of a community sharing those inductive parameters based on linguistic structures. The objective of this perspective is to remove any supernatural connotations, metaphysical remnants, and connections with deontological doctrines dictating how we should think. Subjectivity and the need for extraordinary abilities such as dream interpretation, hermeneutic analysis, Verstehen, and other related skills no longer pose challenges in attributing beliefs.

We argue in the middle chapter that leads to the conclusion that the intensional dimension of the Fregean theory of meaning cannot be eliminated nor reduced to the extensional dimension without producing this dissimulation, which ignores the subtle practical aspects of the projective process of turning a hypothetical representation into an assertion; and instead presents it as a completed thing, a sort of exchange commodity ready for use. We base this argument on an exposition of Alberto Peruzzi, Brandom, Gilbert Ryle, and Brandom’s interpretation of Frege-Kant.

We conclude that a Tarskian-Davidson solution to problems of interpretation is nothing more than a simplification of more complex problems that are forgotten or swept under the rug in this approach. The simplification may be useful. It can also be misleading. More important, it does not demystify the philosophical quandaries associated with the cryptic and elusive nature of meaning (and other quandaries, like the problem of other minds and beliefs). It fails to unravel the enigmatic philosophical dilemmas linked to the hermetic nature and opacity of non-extensional dimension of meaning and propositional attitudes. Instead, it solely presents a scenario wherein, all else being equal, we can articulate propositions without the anxiety of reversing their truth to falsehood. Ultimately, they obscure the underlying practical factors that give rise to the meaning/nonsense distinction, resulting in an irreflective and unquestioning portrayal of our sense-making practices.
References:


