



ANCHORING MEANING-THEORIES AGAINST TRUTH- CENTERED MEANING THEORIES

a defense of Dummett against
Davidson's Program

ANCORANDO AS TEORIAS DO SIGNIFICADO CONTRA AS
TEORIAS DE SIGNIFICADO CENTRADAS NA VERDADE
uma defesa de Dummett contra o programa de Davidson

Lucas Ribeiro Vollet¹
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

¹ Doutor em Filosofia pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC).

E-mail: luvollet@gmail.com.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/9510836051893033>. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6300-491X>.



ABSTRACT: Micheal Dummett, in 1991(1993), proposed a defense against a meaning-theory based on truth, using inspiration from proof-theories, intuitionism, and an anti-realistic epistemic conception. He argued that truth-based approaches fail to account for inferential phenomena that are not classically formalized. He emphasizes the need to avoid blindly assuming fixed success parameters based on inductive generation of meaning through the concept of "truth". Instead, Dummett suggests that the relationship between truth and meaning should prioritize the theoretical conception of meaning as the mediating element for anchoring successful assertion strategies. In this article, we utilize Dummett's theory to present a framework that challenges Davidson's theory. We argue that Davidson's theory only holds scientific-linguistic value in idealized optimal conditions, where the interpreter's problem is already circumscribed by a non-problematic representation of truth. This framework excludes situations where the truth parameter itself becomes problematic, such as conflicts between translation hypotheses or disagreements between scientific paradigms.

Key-words: Truth-conditional semantics. Meaning-theory. Inferentialism. Meaning foundationalism.

RESUMO: Micheal Dummett, em 1991(1993), propôs uma defesa contra uma teoria do significado baseada em condições de verdade, tomando inspiração nas teorias da prova, no intuicionismo e em uma concepção epistêmica anti-realista. Ele argumentou que abordagens baseadas na verdade falham em explicar fenômenos inferenciais que não são formalizados classicamente. Dummett enfatiza a necessidade de evitar assumir cegamente parâmetros fixos de sucesso com base na geração indutiva de significado através do conceito de "verdade". Em vez disso, ele sugere que a relação entre verdade e significado deve priorizar a concepção teórica do significado como o elemento mediador para ancorar estratégias de asserção bem-sucedidas. Neste artigo, utilizamos a teoria de Dummett para apresentar uma estrutura que desafia a teoria de Davidson. Argumentamos que a teoria de Davidson só possui valor científico-linguístico em condições ideais e otimizadas, onde o problema do intérprete já está circunscrito por uma representação não problemática da verdade. Essa estrutura exclui situações onde o próprio parâmetro da verdade se torna problemático, como conflitos entre hipóteses de tradução ou desacordos entre paradigmas científicos.

Palavras-chave: Semântica de condições de verdade. Teoria do significado, Inferencialismo. Fundacionalismo sobre significado.



1 Davidson's response to Quine: theories of truth are enough to ground theoretical predictions about meaning

Davidson agreed with W. V. O. Quine on a fundamental point. Suppose we have a method for determining the theory of truth for a language by interviewing speakers of that language and analyzing their verdicts about sentences: "Quine is right ... in holding that an important degree of indeterminacy will remain after all the evidence is in; a number of significantly different theories of truth will fit the evidence equally well." (Davidson, 2001, p. 62). The indeterminacy of meaning is consistent with a number of anti-essentialist, anti-foundationalist, and anti-mentalist theses. Using the museum myth as an example of mentalist dogma, Quine claims that it is false for the following reasons: "Internal factors may vary *ad libitum* without prejudice to communication as long as the keying of language to external stimuli is undisturbed." (Quine, 1969, p. 81). The theses that Quine rejected characterize the use of the concept of "meaning" as the final pillar resisting the basis of supporting a space for philosophy that is not taken over by natural science. These theses had supported two highly ideological projects at the start of the twentieth century: the positivist program of physicalist reduction and exposition of the fundamental structure of science and the program of logical analysis as a solution to philosophical problems, coordinated with the program of syntactic and semantic theory as an anti-metaphysical remedy. For these programs to function, the concept of *meaning* and the distinct distinction between synthetic and analytical have to be accepted as givens. However, in his purging of ideologies, Quine might have gone too far; he might have rejected the notion that meaning is the goal of a theory about the acquisition of principles for language learning. Davidson now charts a course in the opposite direction.

Davidson does not think that any attempt to develop a theory of meaning for a language is doomed to failure or leads to arbitrary and dogmatic encoding decisions. Indeterminacy can be considered harmful or benign; it can be benign if a true sentence is determined in such a way that it cannot be interpreted as false with the available parameters. It does not matter how many paradigms of meaning can correspond to the prediction of the non-absurdity of that proposition - just as it does not matter to scientists and pragmatists what is going on in the minds of the language theorists. Thus, a theory of meaning can be supported by any pattern of prediction of meaningful sentences that leaves out only statements that are paradoxical. Davidson notes that this pattern is perfectly established by Tarski's T-scheme ('p' is true if and only if p). The parameters of the T-convention must be observed, and then we can decide which instances fit these schemes and which do not by simply describing the structure of linguistic compounds and their recursive generation by a method of mechanical induction:

“There is a sense, then, in which a theory of truth accounts for the role each sentence plays in the language in so far as that role depends on the sentence’s being a potential bearer of truth or falsity; and the account is given in terms of structure” (Davidson, 2001, p. 61).

The benefit of this line of thinking is that it opens the door to the development of semantic theories that can identify meaning without the need for *semantic facts*; that is, on the basis of nothing more than a theory of truth and empirical tests for skilled speakers to filter out nonsense (those who can automatically produce a rule for language composition). Consistent with this view of the problem, Davidson uses Tarski’s T-convention as a tool to make the notion of “meaning” verifiable without semantic facts. We do not need facts that are related to semantically evaluable events; we simply need consistent interpretation rules, plus the ability to project that consistency into conservative language expansions. This makes the data of a semantic theory a consistent pattern of interpretation rather than a semantic reality, “If we treat T-sentences as verifiable, then a theory of truth shows how we can go from truth to something like meaning – enough like meaning so that if someone had a theory verified in the way I propose he would be able to use that language in communication” (Davidson, 2001, p. 74).

According to Davidson, then, the presence of a multiplicity of compatible theories of truth is not really a puzzle, even if Quine is right and “different choices could still have made everything come out right that is susceptible in principle to any kind of check” (Quine, 1969, p. 81-2). This will not be a puzzle provided we can separate evidence for the use of a sentence from evidence against its use in a theory of language learning: “It is no more mysterious than the fact that temperature can be measured in Centigrade or Fahrenheit (or any linear transformation of those numbers)” (Davidson, 1986, p. 313).

The cost of Davidson’s thesis, of course, is that theories of meaning are just as weak as theories of truth, and that any subtlety or detail is harmlessly lost when translating a sentence from Portuguese to French. If the translating sentence remains true when its truth is not overridden, and false when its falsehood is not overridden, nothing else is required. From the perspective of his audience, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, thus Davidson was never more disturbed by this than was absolutely necessary. The ideas of intentionality, intensional content, and implication seem to naturalists like superstitions compared to the idea of phlogiston in contemporary science. But more explanation is needed to show how Davidson can even discuss the meaning problem in dangerous situations, where the stability of the distinction between extension and anti-extension of a proposition ‘p’ cannot be assumed, in the absence of some ideal constructs like the “intentionality” and “content”. This worry is not just superstition, as non-classical logic demonstrates. Curiously, the phenomenological, psychological or sociolinguistic condition that preserves the semantic correlation between true and truth and false with falsehood is not debatable; it is just presupposed, like a kind of indisputable dogmatic norm. This, as we will see, opens up a line of counter-criticism against Davidson.

2 Circumstances where truth cannot be presupposed: challenging pictures for truth-based meaning-theories

Possessing a theory of truth alone is inadequate for establishing parameters of comparison and prediction for conjectural and inferential activities, which are the foundation of human comprehension – and thus, their understanding of meaning – in speculative pursuits. In areas like natural science, figuring out what's true can be tricky since it's always evolving. Ideas and theories are regularly put to the test (Popper, 1958), updated, or even thrown out when new evidence comes in. So, truth here feels more like a temporary concept, changing as we collect more information or come up with improved theories. This ever-changing aspect of truth makes it tough to use as a solid base like we would in more established or fixed systems. This condition is most prominently found in attempts to compare several scientific paradigms, each of which uses a different set of modal parameters – that evolves in face of new findings – to determine what qualifies as standards for truth. Thomas Kuhn's concept of "paradigm shifts" (1970) indeed illustrates how truth is not a static or universal standard but one that is deeply tied to the prevailing conceptual framework of a given scientific community. In a paradigm shift, the fundamental assumptions, methods, and criteria for what constitutes truth are redefined, often rendering previous notions obsolete or inadequate.

Similarly, in translation or radical translation hypotheses (Quine, 1960, 1969; Gaudet, 2006), truth is often elusive. The meaning of a sentence or utterance might be understood through patterns of use and context rather than any fixed correspondence to an external truth. The consequences of this indeterminacy have significant implications for our comprehension of linguistic practice overall. The theoretical endeavors of translators and linguists rely heavily on a standardized correctness rule for sentences. However, this becomes increasingly complex or even unfeasible when the syntactic structures of various languages arrange their semantic content in diverse ways. This complexity also affects the routine practice of interpretation, as it can be posited that the grammar of each language exhibits a certain 'preference' or 'bias' in how it establishes its standards of correctness. This leads to a constrained understanding of 'meaning,' often sidelining alternative perspectives and insights that could be highlighted by different syntactic arrangements.

Our hypothesis, supported by Dummett's insights, suggests that the sentences we accept as true and incorporate into our belief system via semantic mapping did not arrive at this status through self-regulation. Instead, they emerged from complex historical processes of linguistic mediation. Without a proper theory of meaning, success in assertion strategies becomes a poor and circular parameter, relying only on past success rather than any external or independent measure of truth. These concerns seem

to resonate with externalist theories of meaning, where meaning is not solely dependent on internal strategies of success but is tied to external factors (such as linguistic practices, communal standards, or causal connections). This could provide a way out of the circularity by anchoring meaning—and thereby truth—to something outside the inferential loop. But Dummett, as an anti-realist, does not believe that 'meaning' depends on any form of "external parameter".

The process of meaning production must be thought of as a complex exchange, not dependent on a mere source of factual anchoring. Those processes rely on intrusions and exchanges between various sources of cultural and scientific production, translations, and other interactions that shape our modalizing parameters and shift how we categorize our hierarchies between what is more or less problematic - more contingent or more necessary - in our truth-theories. Thus, it is just as dogmatic to speak of "truth" as a definite parameter of meaning as it is to speak of empirical facts as a parameter with a fixed parameter of confirmation. Since we can only understand the concept of truth inside a modal framework that establishes a hierarchy of possibilities, we must be able to navigate these frameworks in order to place ourselves as interpretive agents in the world. Dismissing the need for these frameworks is akin to assuming that languages are static and unchangeable entities, rather than evolving tools for interpreting the world around us. This belief involves the ideological presupposition that the language that functions in current cultural conditions is a finished, polished product with a static and unchangeable way of carving out the outside world.

3 Truth-theoretical meaning-theories as unmediated depictions of optimal conditions for interpretation

Micheal Dummett laid the foundation for the theoretical understanding, which he call theory of meaning, that is the meta-inquiry into the general principles that a meaning theory should observe for any language. He worked in the second half of the 20th century to describe the steps involved in this transition: "Logic, which is concerned with the validity of forms of reasoning, [...] must deal with a variety of possible interpretations of a formula or propositional scheme. [...] A theory of meaning, on the other hand, is concerned with only one interpretation of a language, the correct one and the intended one" (Dummett, 1993, p. 20).

The author acknowledges the parallels between Davidson's project and his own. Nonetheless, Dummett arrived at a series of critiques of the truth-centered theory of meaning as a result of his investigation into the prerequisites for a meaning-theory that could set itself apart from a simple theory of computation. The author rose to fame by charging this theory of being nothing more than a theory



of success conditions for statements, concealing realistic dogmas behind an exterior of naturalism and anti-ideology. We won't address this particular aspect of Dummett's argument in this article. Let us remain focused on his thesis regarding the circumstances in which truth-conditional theories of meaning fall short in their attempt to forecast and provide an explanation of meaning.

Dummett recognizes that the concept of truth is intertwined with our concept of meaning in the same way that the concept of victory is interwoven with that of a game: “a quite general characterisation of the condition for an arbitrary sentence to be true: it is true if a player uttering it has a winning strategy” (Dummett, 1993, p. 158). But he rejects one of the typical readings of this fact, namely, that “that truth is related to a proposition as truth is to a game” and which results in the traditional thesis that “meaning must, in part at least, be given by determining the conditions for a sentence to be true” (Dummett, 1993, p. 158). The author makes a different argument on the next page regarding the relationship between the concepts of truth and meaning. According to this argument, characterizing truth requires reference to meaning-theory concepts, just as describing winning strategies in a game requires an understanding of the game's rules.

We can characterize the relationship between truth and meaning, therefore, as much more complex than that envisioned by truth-theoretical thesis. It is a relationship and mediation, not one of self-regulation. Knowing how to pair truths with truths - within a symbology capable of avoiding paradoxes - provides us with a sense of protection against defeatist strategies of meaning formulation and, thus, guarantees a measure for the transmission of successful interpretations as well as a fair *game parameter* to interpret others in an arena of debate and communication. This is sufficient to guarantee that our expressions' meanings never require more than a non-defeating representation of their place in the game in order to be expressed. However, the only reason this system of defense and protection exists is because the game has laws that define what constitutes a legitimate action rather than cheating. Our success strategies are mediated by meaning theory; without it, we would have to wait for the practices of crafting sentences and making them under advantageous circumstances to sort of self-regulate.

This means that the relationship between truth and meaning is not a natural, miraculous, or calculation-based relationship. This relationship exists, but is merely a depiction of how our practices (communication, interpretation) that require meaning stability operate in optimal conditions; it is not a theoretical prediction or explication of meaning. It is actually compatible with meaning-quietism. In fact, Dummett believes that: “a meaning-theory is required to do more than merely show (to someone that understands the meta-language in which It is formulated) what the senses of the words of the object-language are” (Dummett, 1993, p. 149). Consequently, the fundamental question arises: what components are lacking in a theory of meaning that goes beyond the mere prediction of communication

and interpretation in optimal conditions? Here, we must provide a more detailed image of what a theory of truth cannot accomplish as compared to a theory of meaning. We will now establish that merely discovering non-defeatist parameters for asserting something is not enough to ensure the stability of the transmissible element of communication. Truth-theoretic attempts to center meaning-theory around "victory" and neglect the normative elements that mediate that triumph will not magically produce the optimal conditions for self-regulation. The most that will come out of this is a distorted representation of real meaning-making processes.

4 The problematic stability of our knowledge of meaning based on mere truth-conditions

As we've seen, truth-theory is only able to approximate the meaning-theoretical information necessary to command a language in optimal circumstances. As a result, it becomes less predictive outside of these parameters. In ideal circumstances, p will be believed only in conditions R or non- R . Under these conditions, learning the meaning of p will be uncontroversial, since any hypothesis that p is true consistent with the behavior of someone who agrees with p will also be consistent with a theory of truth for the whole language. But the question is: under what conditions are we authorized to assume this ideal circumstance? Under unfavorable conditions, belief in p can occur through several distinct and heterogeneous allocations of a belief system, so that different anchoring pressures can lead to the same belief that p . In circumstances like these, where we do not have the right to idealize the conditions of interpretation, non-classical parameters are an option:

[...] for classical logic, we can specify the condition for the truth (under an interpretation) of a complex formula only by means of absolutely or relatively straightforward stipulations relating to each of the logical constants; whereas, for a non-classical logic, [...], we may also be able to frame non-straightforward stipulations governing them (Dummett, 1993, p. 28).

The assumption or mistrust that the "meaning" object may need to be anticipated under noisy, that is, non-ideal, settings underlies the use of non-classical logics to support meaning-theoretical prediction. Dummett made this point central to his philosophical thinking in the 1990s: "Although the goal of every semantic theory is to specify what it is for a formula to be true under an interpretation, not every semantic theory will take the semantic value of a sentence-letter or other constituent formula, under an interpretation, to consist in one or other of the true-values true and false" (Dummett, 1993, p. 33)



However, it also demonstrates that in human comprehension of meaning, there are certain roles that "truth" and a theory of truth consistent with all "assertive facts" (non-paradoxical) cannot play. They cannot play the mediating role made by norms and meaning-structures. They cannot self-regulate. One of the roles that the mere representation of truth-compatibility cannot play is the contribution of a meaning-theory to ensure the stability of the anchoring of non-falsity in contexts of expression where there is more than one possible falsehood opposed to the same truth (counterfactual contexts). These are the conditions under which there is more than one possible route (not always the most "economic" one) to arrive at the truth, to interpret the negation, and to justify the implications. They are conditions under which the meaning can be disputed, and objectively.

In such contentious and challenging circumstances, the notion of truth remains undefined, making it impossible to apply it according to a mechanical standard. It can be designed as a *passive* or regulative ideal, but not used as an effective standard for the *active production* of new truths. Relying on established truths to derive new ones inductively, akin to Tarski's approach for an object language from a metalanguage, could result in a circular reasoning. In other words, without the mediation of a theory of meaning, our successful assertion strategies would only have as a parameter their own previous success, in a blind induction, as is the induction that studies "meaning" through the parameter of "truth".

We may discover that this shows a susceptibility at the beginning of semantic philosophical reflections and its scientific counterparts (linguistics, cognitive psychology), which is reflected in the vulnerability of the concept of "truth" itself to control the parameter of recognition of divergences between patterns of inference and our methods of deciding disputes about propositions and competing logical consequences. This places the burden on Davidson's theory, as it will be unable to distinguish between a native speaker who thinks that *p* is true for reasons *R*, and one who believes it for reasons other than *R* and even non-*R* reasons.

The easiest response we could anticipate from a Davidsonian would be that we are creating an artificial burden since we are introducing into the discussion situations that are manifestly detrimental to language acquisition, such as situations in which the language is not unified². In response, we would say yes, we are pushing the limits of the problem to the limit case. And we agree that it is evident that meaning-disagreements of this nature tend to arise more frequently in circumstances involving border instability and vulnerability, such as disagreements between translation hypothesis or scientific paradigms over the meaning of a term. On the other hand, we can charge both Davidsonians and Wittgensteinians with being Panglossian and assuming the best-case scenario without any justification.

²A Wittgensteinian could go even further and accuse us of bringing to debate circumstances in which language is on holliday – situations of idle reflection. For Wittgenstein (1953) such confusions "arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work." (PI, §132)

5 Theoretical selections of meaning theories: ingredient sense as the object of dispute of meaning-theories

Dummettian inferentialism, together with his intuitionistic studies, provoked him to look for the foundation of a meaning-theory far from truth-theoretical semantics. In order to justify the assertion of p on the premise of not ($\text{non-}p$), it is necessary to find a deductive route from not ($\text{not-}p$) to p . The ability to perform this procedure is equivalent to performing Gentzen's (1969) operation of natural deduction, and it constitutes the normalization of a proof: "Normalization implies, for each logical constant c , the full language is a conservative extension of that obtained by omitting c from its vocabulary" (Dummett, 1993, p. 250).

However, since recognition of this achievement depends on knowledge of the non-radical (or conservative) extensions of language, it follows that the framework of semantic anchoring adopted by meaning theorists precedes our ability to test logical validity, "Proof-theoretical justifications form an interesting alternative to justifications in terms of semantic theories. Neither is autonomous however: both depend on the defensibility of the meaning-theory within which each finds its proper habitat" (Dummett, 1993, p. 270).

Dummett's thesis represents a developmental line of semantic foundationalism with weak ambitions, i.e., a neo-fregean view of semantic antiscepticism that adds intuitionism to discredit the role that theorists like Davidson and Tarski assign to a classic and extensional theory of truth in the formation of our concept of meaning. For Micheal Dummett, the role of truth is overestimated. And often the role of truth is confused with a realist metaphysical assumption that enters our meaning-theoretical pre-conditions:

A realist believes that a valid rule is required to preserve a property of truth which may attach to a statement independently of our capacity to recognize that it attach. (...) he must make this a principle of his meaning-theory: he must hold it to be integral to our understanding of our language that we conceive of our statements as determinate true or false (Dummett, 1993, p. 269).

Indeed, the semantic framework for dealing with risky statements of belief (either because they could be disingenuous or because they are based on limited information) will never be unambiguous or uncontested. Relying on a theory of truth is therefore tantamount to abandoning the possibility of developing predictive strategies under risky and unstable communication conditions – as in bluff-game situations.



There is no need, however, for a semantic theory to assume either of these two familiar forms (relativized or absolute truth-values). Another possible pattern is one whereby the semantic value of a sentence relates it to what would make it true. Heytings explanation of sentences of an intuitionistic mathematical theory is a simple example of this kind. [...] Another example, more complicated in structure, is Hintikka's semantics in terms of games. The semantic value of a sentence is, in effect, the class of all plays (successions of moves) following a move consisting in the production of that sentence. [...] No doubt many other patterns are conceivable for semantic theories (Dummett, 1993, p. 34).

It follows that truth-theoretic criteria are limited parameters to fully represent our understanding of the concept of "justification" of conclusions: "we are driven to invoke some notion of *truth*, and so have not achieved a *purely* proof-theoretic justification procedure" (Dummett, 1993, p. 269). This condition becomes even more necessary when we think of non-classical cases of semantic interpretation, in which we cannot simply assume (as a fundamental assumption in Dummett's sense) the realist metaphysics and extensional idealization where the proof of p implies the proof of not (non- p): "What underpins the fundamental assumption are considerations that are not proof-theoretical but are in a broad sense semantic" (Dummett, 1993, p. 269). Here the author gives voice to a position for which there is a demand in the debate market: the claim that there is more than one way to semantically determine how the same evidence contributes to understand a sentence's use. Under these flexible semantic conditions, our conclusions about the consequences of p cannot rest on the bare information that not- p is false. The ability to account for these exceptions to the classical interpretation of negation is a necessary condition for understanding negation outside of mathematics:

In mathematics, given the meaning of "if . . . then", it is trivial to explain "Not A" as meaning "If A, then $0=1$ "; [...] More generally, it is by no means easy to determine what should serve as the analogue, for empirical statements, of the notion of proof as it figures in intuitionist semantics for mathematical statements (Dummett, 1996, p. 473).

[...] it is sufficient, for mathematical purposes, that a principle of inference should guarantee that truth is transmitted from premise to conclusion. Outside mathematics, we have a motive to demand more. (...) the conjunction of all of anyone's beliefs is likely to be extremely low, even when they are not actually inconsistent (Dummett, 1993, p. 50).

In Dummett's assumptions about semantics, it is possible to have unified and learnable semantic theories even for these non-canonical strategies of derivation, i.e., in the absence of classical truth-theoretical dogmas:

The assignment of distinct undesignated values, 0 and $\frac{1}{2}$, is merely a device for codifying the different act of negation in different cases in which a sentence fails to be true. The relative ranking is a device for registering the behavior of the conditional.



The semantic theory thus serves, as it is its task to do, to explain the contribution of the subsentence of a complex sentence to its determination as true or otherwise (Dummett, 1993, p. 47).

Under these conditions, Dummett's theory reveals a new or unforeseen dimension of theorizing for classical semantics, namely, a dimension of semantic objects that do not contribute in identical ways to determine the same referential coordinate. They differ not in their assertoric value, but in their content-ingredient value: "In Łukasiewicz's semantics, the sentences A and [TA] have the same assertoric content; they differ in their ingredient sense" (Dummett, 1993, p. 48). The degree of divergence between A and [TA] may vary and depends on how we establish the rules for justifying A's assertion under conditions for which [TA] has no canonical proof. Different semantic theories require more or fewer rules – different canonical or apocryphal routes of proof/derivation – to determine whether the assertion of A is justified on the assumption of "not-A is false". So there is room for disagreement about the justification of our conclusions, as there is room for disagreement about the routes one theoretical and belief system chooses to arrive at "truth" for their sentences. There is a margin of decision that no metaphysical or idealistic assumptions about "classical truth" can compensate for.

The depiction of the ingredient composition of the term "blue" presents additional opportunities for its derivation or deduction within a conceptual framework, thereby expanding its potential as a basis for logical reasoning. This enhances the specification of its inferential function, deepening its intentional role and, consequently, framing the expression in a position of more specific incompatibility with other expressions. The contributory value of an ingredient sense would play the role that a truth theory cannot play in predicting meaningful sentences, namely, to determine the value of sentences that are fine-grained enough to represent more subtle and partial semantic roles than those assumed by truth conditions: "The ingredient sense is what semantic theories try to explain" (Dummett, 1993, p. 48).

6 Dummett's anchoring theory of meaning against davidson: how to anchor the conciliation of presuppositions and consequences

According to Dummett, the crucial inquiry when determining whether or not we comprehend a statement is whether or not we are able to respond to it in a non-mechanical manner.

Consider the case of a child who knows what the natural numbers are, and who knows how to add them [...], but has never seen a mathematical proof (as opposed to computation). Does the child really understand the statement he has learned? This

may seem a good test case for deciding between the conception of meaning as given by truth conditions and that which takes meaning as given by knowing what counts as a ground for assertion (Dummett, 1993, p. 161).

This is Dummett's endeavor when applying Gentzen's idea of harmony between the introduction of a symbol and its consequences as an epistemic standard for semantic comprehension³. The proof-theoretical knowledge is gained by understanding how to reconcile the truth-grounds of a sentence and our ability to defend it, demonstrate it, prove it, or at least reverse the burden of proof to its anti-extension. This provides a meaning-theoretical difference. Understanding how to distinguish between someone who understands the meaning of the sentence and someone who only understands the truth-theory for guiding winning-strategies of assertion is crucial. The first person understands the concepts that mediate a meaning production strategy and the second person has merely acquired a blind inductive parameter to generate true sentences compared to past true sentences.

Every time we need to justify inferences in real disputes about consequence, that is, inferences with mediating content, we need to choose specific semantic conditions – specific categorial systems, or specific paradigms of meaning – to justify the deductions. That is, we need different anchoring frameworks. Of course, this means that there is margin for dispute over the contribution of an A sentence to denying non-A; that is, various semantic theories will require more or fewer rules or computational patterns to establish the accuracy of the inference “if A, then not-(no A)”. Different routes of proof are available, depending on our epistemic limits or our states of information. The hope that there is an ideal case in which ‘A’ will always be inferred from the assumption ‘that not- A is false’ is thus dashed. This hope is reasonable only under empty classical-logical conditions. For example, different semantic theories need to be constructed to unify the truth paradigm of different scientific theories and to show how the incommensurabilities of meaning between them are due to the different ways in which their statements contribute to the truth projected by the axioms of the theory. This is accomplished by a theory of the harmonization of our presuppositions and their consequences, not just by depicting hypothetical worlds.

This means, however, that certain conclusions are guaranteed regardless of whether we have idealized the conditions for the non-falsity of that conclusion by determining the concluding sentence to be (extensionally) indistinguishable from the truth of the premises. Those conclusions are guaranteed

³ The concept of harmony requires that the anchoring of an assertion presses any agreement with it in the opposite direction of its anti-extension. This obviously leads to intuitionist conceptions, as well noted by Murzi: “Intuitionists such as Dummett, Prawitz and Tennant have taken the lack of harmony and separability of standard axiomatisations of classical logic to show that classical rules such as double negation elimination are not logical (or that they are in some other sense defective), and that the logical rules we should adopt are those of intuitionistic logic, i.e. classical logic without the Law of Excluded Middle, double negation elimination and other equivalent rules...” (2020, p. 391).



simply by the choice of the defense system chosen to justify the assertion of that conclusion. Different scientific systems will choose their defense system according to the debate scenario in which they fit. Charles Darwin set up his theory to defend himself against Lamarck and not against creationism, and this makes an obvious difference in our logical ability to refute creationism by Darwinism alone. Although this (attacking creationism with Darwinism) is feasible, it necessitates additional cognitive capacities and computational patterns with finer intensional structure – a finer meaning-structure – than those found in a theory of truth for Darwinism. We need different meaning-theoretical mediating paths for predicting how Darwinism can ally against creationism. Logicians can do nothing about it. They are limited by formal settings. It is the semantic level – not the logical one – where one can find new *mediating ways* to use Darwinism as a negation of creationism.

Conceptual frameworks function as anchoring systems to *mediate* consistent modalization paths for 'p,' that is, to define the conditions of the presupposition that p is false in the opposite direction from the presupposition that p is true. This is equivalent to establishing prerequisites and anchoring principles in order to discern non-defeatist assertion strategies. Once more, the relationship between winning (truth) and meaning (game norms) is not that the first conditions the second; rather, the second conditions the potential for mediation of winning-strategies.

Conclusion

The article commences by illustrating how Davidson successfully defended semantics against Quine's skepticism. He accomplished this by showcasing that the truth-based concept of meaning, despite its potential for indeterminacy, is still adequate for a comprehensive theory of language acquisition. Davidson's choice is ingenious because treating the basic level of empirical testing as sentences that do not violate the T-convention (that can be asserted as true only when the possibility of falsity has been ruled out) is to operate at a level of elementary certainty even when there is no *fact to the matter* – even for ungrounded sentences. The data of our semantic theories is nothing more than our patterns of consistent interpretative behavior.

Put another way, Davidson's defense of the idea of meaning is weak or limited to an idealistic scenario, the scenarios where mere “truth” is the parameter for all meaning. However, this weakening of the conception of meaning has repercussions. The reduction of meaning to truth-conditions often overlooks the nuanced roles that concepts like proof and justified assertion play in our use of language. It places limitations on a theory of meaning by failing to account for the functions that the idea of truth is unable to fulfill in a conceptual framework, those that can only be played by the concept of proof and



justified assertion. Furthermore, it is concerning that theories of truth employ truth as a realistic-platonic super-standard to inductively derive the meanings of sentences that lack direct proof. A theory of meaning would be rendered ineffective in this diminished and realist context, as it would be confined to the limitations already addressed by a theory of truth. More troubling is the fact that the essential function of a theory of meaning—grounding or anchoring unverified assumptions of truth—is entirely disregarded. Instead, this responsibility is relegated to an optimistic belief that, in ideal conditions, truth serve as adequate parameter for proof.

We have examined Dummett's work to show that a theory of truth is not enough to explain increasingly sophisticated reasoning and assertion practices, such as those formalized by non-classical logics, and the aspects of communication and interpretation that are conditioned by intensional barriers, i.e., representations of meaningful contributions that are only “ingredients” of assertion strategies. The attempt to rationalize these phenomena away as exceptions, or as just pragmatic or non-semantic components, etc., is based on idealized prior conceptions of what a meaning “should be”⁴.

However, this solution raises other and more complex problems. Namely, the notion of truth described by the T-convention pattern does not address the problem of the pre-conditions that must be met in order for the truth designation not to be abrogated. Merely assuming that a metalinguistic framework is responsible for anchoring these truth designations may satisfy those interested in avoiding paradoxes like the Liar's, but it does not provide satisfactory answers for describing meaning conditions in more complex proof contexts, as languages used by scientific paradigms; and more complex linguistic contexts, as translation hypotheses between two different languages. Dummett disagrees that a meaning theory might be beneficial in this weak formulation. Producing an optimization parameter for answering the question of meaning may be interesting, but at what cost? Idealization is just a projection, and can suffer the risk of any projection: excluding complexities. If the cost is to eliminate inferential or presupposition complexities, it may be a counterproductive cost to our theorization of the non-referential (intensional) components attached to meaning.

When we idealize the conditions for assertive success through a fixed parameter - the truth - we have certain advantages and certain costs. Dummett acknowledges that in order to preserve the coherence of our meaning-making activities, we must balance our assumptions with their implications within a consistent framework in order to distinguish successful from defeatist assertion strategies. This

⁴ We follow Dummett in only one angle of his criticism of the concept of truth as a parameter of meaning. Another crucial aspect of Dummett's work involves classifying these idealizations as a component of a Realist metaphysical endeavor. This approach shapes the idea that unproven statements can still be interpreted consistently, with the assumption that a highly intelligent entity could anticipate its significance using a predetermined inductive parameter. For the sake of brevity, we have chosen not to delve into this additional aspect of his argument, even though it presents a supplementary perspective for examining Dummett's comprehensive critique of truth-theoretical meaning-theories.



is in line with the presumptions of truth theory, which hold that truth and meaning are related in some way. But the author contests the idea that this mediation and anchoring may be accomplished by a simple induction parameter that is based on “truth”. According to him, the purpose of a meaning-mediation theory is as follows: rather than naively and panglossianically assuming that the extension and anti-extension of 'p' will eventually diverge, it *secures* the distance between them.

We also addressed the possible criticism that Davidson's theory would be unfairly burdened by bringing up discussion situations such as translation contexts or disputes between scientific languages, where the conditions for the representation of meaning are not favorable. Indeed, translations are not like mere interpretations. The approximations, parallels, and similarity mapping tools that a translator uses are actually more akin to those employed by natural scientists studying chaotic occurrences than they are to interpreters developing theories about ordered sign-structures. Furthermore, since scientific languages are designed to recognize complex meanings, speculative proofs, and sentences whose assumption of truth is not antagonistic to the assumption of its falsity, they operate in situations where the language used as *media res* lacks a coherent compositional structure. Again, a Davidsonian could accuse us of hardening the case by bringing up unfavorable conditions.

Our response is that adverse circumstances contribute to the radicalization of Davidson's theory testing. We also accuse him of doing the exact reverse, which is to idealize the circumstances in which his theory might function. Davidsonians accept the best-case scenario as standard practice. Moreover, this possible response from the Davidsonian field appears to bring a fundamentally incorrect understanding of language and meaning, limited to applications such as speaking and interpreting that are possible in a static stable state. As a result, the function of language in mediating assertive risk strategies — like scientific theories that challenge accepted interpretations — is ignored.

To omit that the idealization is a mere idealization amounts to ignoring the exceptions and obstacles to learning a language, those that present inconsistent elements with a theory of truth for that language. More than that, it is to ignore how these inconsistencies open the language to modifications and non-canonical expressions that, however, contribute to mediating new interpretative solutions. This inconsistency arises not only because a linguist can be misled by the native speakers he studies, namely by the problem of insincerity. It also arises because there are inevitable conflicts between different versions of truth caused by different collective information, even in the same society with identical values and tendencies to universalize its parameters.

In conclusion, we might defend Dummett by arguing that his theory helps the study of meaning precisely in these most challenging situations, where a mediation framework is needed to anchor the distance between the extension and anti-extension of p. Since anchors can be positioned in various



locations, various meaning-theoretical anchors can be used to postulate various modalization procedures that are involved for various assumptions of truth to scientific hypothesis.

Dummett's point is that the content-complexity (or ingredient complexity) that challenges the unification of a theory of meaning for language cannot be avoided, necessitating more robust conceptual grounds for meaning recognition. The author's theory is compatible with a strong semantic theoretical consciousness. He states that it is possible to have a paradigm of meaning. That paradigm can only be conceived, though, in anti-realistic terms. This would be a model of meaning for the epistemic restrictions of each historical period, to the extent that we can adequately identify the epoch's epistemic boundaries and integrate our representative mappings of the meaning of 'p' with patterns of mediation to prove and assert that p.

Recebido em: 07/05/2024

Aceito em: 14/09/2024

Publicado em: 28/10/2024



REFERÊNCIAS

- BAGHRAMIAN, M. Davidson and Indeterminacy of Meaning. *The Paideia Archive: Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, v. 32, p. 1-7, 1998. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5840/wcp20-paideia199832530>.
- BODDY, R.; MAY, R. Frege On Reference. *In*: BIGGS, Stephen; GEIRSSON, Heimir (org.). *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Reference*. New York: Routledge, 2020, pp. 30-40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111894-4>.
- BUTCHVAROV, P. On reference and sense. *Journal of Philosophy*, v. 79, n. 10, p. 551-553, 1982. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748680801-073>.
- DAVIDSON, D. A coherence theory of truth and knowledge. *In*: LEPORE, E. (Ed.). *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, pp. 307-319. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198237537.003.0010>.
- DAVIDSON, D. *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199246297.001.0001>.
- DUMMETT, M. *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.29-1468>.
- DUMMETT, M. *The Seas of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198236212.001.0001>.
- DUMMETT, M. Truth. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, v. 59, n. 1, p. 141-162, 1959. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139856003.004>.
- GAUDET, E. Quine's notion of fact of the matter. *Dialectica*, v. 60, n. 2, p. 181-193, 2006. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-8361.2005.01049.x>.
- GENTZEN, G. Collected papers. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, v. s1-6, n. 23, p. 258-260, 1925. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1136/jnnp.s1-6.23.258>.
- KUHN, T. S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2. ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970. DOI: 10.2307/2090620.
- MOHAMMAD ALI, S. N. Breaking out of the Gricean vicious cycle: Let's divorce semantics and just agree that there is no meaning in language. *International Journal of Language Studies*, v. 16, n. 3, p. 33-60, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7514602>.
- MURZI, J. Classical Harmony and Separability. *Erkenntnis*, v. 85, n. 2, p. 391-415, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-018-0032-6>.
- POPPER, K. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. New York: Basic Books, 1959.
- PRAWITZ, D. *Classical versus intuitionistic logic: Why is this a proof?* London: College Publications, 2015, pp. 15-32.
- QUINE, W. V. O. Epistemology Naturalized. *In*: QUINE, W. V. O. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969, pp. 69-90.
- QUINE, W. V. O. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.
- QUINE, W. V. O. *Word and Object*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1960.
- SHANI, I. Intension and Representation: Quine's Indeterminacy Thesis Revisited. *Philosophical Psychology*, v. 18, n. 4, p. 399-418, 2005. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515080500229878>.
- TARSKI, A. Truth and proof. *Scientific American*, v. 220, n. 6, p. 63-77, 1969. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican0669-63>.
- TENNANT, N. Inferentialism, logicism, harmony, and a counterpoint. *In*: MILLER, A. (Ed.). *Essays for Crispin Wright: Logic, Language and Mathematics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199278343.003.0009>.



WILSON, D. *Presuppositions and Non-Truth-Conditional Semantics*. London: Academic Press, 1975. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0149.1977.tb01710.x>.
WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Macmillan, 1953.

