Davidson's Sentences and Wittgenstein's Builders*

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Words stand for things of various kinds and for various kinds of things. Because words do this, the sentences made up of words mean what they do, and are capable of expressing our thoughts, our beliefs and conjectures, desires and wishes. This simple idea seems right to me, but it flies in the face of formidable authority. In a famous passage in "Reality without Reference," Donald Davidson criticizes what he calls the "building-block theory:"

> [T]he essential question is whether [reference] is the, or at least one, place
> where there is direct contact between linguistic theory and events, actions,
> or objects described in nonlinguistic terms. If we could give the desired
> analysis or reduction of the concept of reference then all would, I suppose,
> be clear sailing. Having explained directly the semantic features of proper
> names and simple predicates, we could go on to explain the reference of
> complex singular terms and complex predicates, we could characterize
> satisfaction (as a derivative concept), and finally truth. This picture of how

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to do semantics is (aside from the details) and old and natural one. It is often called the building-block theory. It has often been tried. And it is hopeless. [1]

The picture I find attractive and Davidson finds confused and hopeless seems to be the very one Wittgenstein saw in Augustine. At the beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* he quotes a passage from Augustine, and finds in Augustine's words "a particular picture of the essence of human language," that goes like this:

> [T]he individual words in language name objects—sentences are combi-
> nations of such names.—In this picture of language we find the roots of
> the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated
> with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.[2]

Davidson and Wittgenstein seem to be in considerable agreement about this picture, for similar reasons. Both Wittgenstein and Davidson insist that the interpretation of language derives from its connection with human action; Wittgenstein introduces his concept of a language game, and Davidson emphasizes the idea that semantic terms are to be explained by being connected with "human ends and activities."[3] Wittgenstein quotes with apparent approval Frege's dictum that words only have meaning as parts of sentences, one of Davidson's favorite passages. [4]

Nevertheless, there are important differences between what Wittgenstein and David-

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[1] Donald Davidson, "Reality Without Reference", in Mark Platts, ; editor, *Reference, Truth and Reality: Essays on the Philosophy of Language* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 134-135.

[2] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 2.

[3] Davidson, p. 137

[4] Wittgenstein, p.24. Of course I don't really know how Davidson feels about various passages from Frege, but I do recall that he cites this one a lot. The closest Davidson comes to quoting the dictum in this particular paper is by citing a paper of Wallace's that takes the dictum as its title.

son reject about the building block picture. Wittgenstein's main point is that we need to understand the phenomenon of words having meaning by reference to their role in the fabric of human action, as opposed, say, to their being associated with internal images. It may be, for all the considerations he raises show, that reference is the point or one of the points where linguistic theory makes contact with human intentions and actions. In fact, in this essay I'll use Wittgenstein's language game involving a builder and his assistant to argue that this is so.

1   Davidson's Sentence Holism

Davidson claims that the building block theory is wrong because direct contact between linguistic theory and events, actions and objects described in non-linguistic terms must be made at the level of sentences, not at the level of individual words, and must be made via the concept of truth, rather than that of reference:

> Words have no function save as they play a role in sentences: their semantic features are abstracted from the semantic features of sentences, just as the semantic features of sentences are abstracted from their part in helping people achieve goals or realize intentions. If the name 'Kilimanjaro' refers to Kilimanjaro, then no doubt there is some relation between English- (or Swahili-) speakers, the word, and the mountain. But it is inconceivable that one should be able to explain this relation without first explaining the role of the word in sentences; and if this is so, there is no chance of explaining reference directly in nonlinguistic terms....[5]
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> When it comes to interpreting [a Tarski-style theory of truth] as a whole,

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[5]Davidson, p. 135.

> it is the notion of truth, as applied to closed sentences, which must be connected with human ends and activities. [6]

The thought here comes in two parts. First, the meaning of words is to be explained by their connection with human actions and the beliefs, desires and intentions that motivate them. Second, this means that the connection must be made at the level of sentences. I'll suppose that Davidson's position would allow that the connection could be made at the level of imperatives as well as declaratives, however. Corresponding to truth-conditions for declaratives we will have compliance-conditions for imperatives.

Why sentences? Perhaps the simplest answer is because it is sentences that express thoughts. This is not just something we learn in elementary school; it is shown by the structure of propositional attitude constructions:

(1) Harold believes that Russia is in turmoil.

(2) Gretchen wants Elwood to close the door.

In (1), we characterize Harold's belief by a that-clause, and what does the descriptive work in this clause is the sentence "Russia is in turmoil." This is the sentence we use to describe Harold's belief, and it is the sentence we would expect him to use to express it. In (2), the tense-less sentence "Elwood to close the door" characterizes Gretchen's desire, and if she is in a suitable position of authority over Elwood, we would expect her to issue a request or a command using these very words.

The close connection between thoughts and sentences makes sentences a natural place to see meaning flowing from thought to language, according principles something like the following:

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[6]Davidson, p. 137.

(A) If competent speakers assert S when they want their audiences to believe P, then utterances of S are true iff P.

(B) If competent speakers use S' to issue a command to X when they want X to do A, then such utterances are complied with iff X does A.

To elaborate on Davidson's example, suppose we have a corpus of sentences containing the word "Kilimanjaro," which are used to assert various things and request or command various things:

(3) Kilimanjaro is big.

(4) Kilimanjaro is cloudy.

(5) Kilimanjaro is a long ways away.

(6) Go climb Kilimanjaro.

(7) Look at Kilimanjaro.

(8) Point to Kilimanjaro.

Our linguist discovers the beliefs that motivate sincere speakers to utter such statements as (3), (4) and (5). She discovers the actions that will be deemed to comply with such imperatives as (6), (7), and (8). So there is a direct contact, in the linguistic theory, between these sentences and various intentions, goals and beliefs with various propositional contents (or involving the acceptance of various sentences, or whatever one wants); we list some of the facts that correspond to (3)-(8):

(F3) Sincere speakers utter (3) when they believe that Kilimanjaro is big and want their audience to believe this too.

(F6) Speakers with authority utter (6) when they want their audience to go climb Kilimanjaro

From this, we get the semantic theory, of which we list some of the postulated facts:

(S3) Utterances of (3) are true iff Kilimanjaro is big.

(S6) Utterances of (6) are complied with iff the audience of the utterance climbs Kilimanjaro.

Given the semantic facts about sentences, at least as our theorist has postulated them, a certain pattern emerges:

(P) When the word "Kilimanjaro" is found in a sentence, the truth or compliance conditions of utterances using that sentence will involve Kilimanjaro.

From this, our theorist derives the following.

(S9) "Kilimanjaro" stands for Kilimanjaro.

(S9) is not an additional fact about the language. It is a way of "summing up" a pattern that emerges in these facts.[7]

The rejected alternative is to suppose that the direct contact between language and the world is made at the level of reference. On this view, (S9) would not be derived from (S3)-(S8), but would be a fact that was part of the explanation of (S3)-(S8). But this would mean that (S9) would have to be based on some principles that link reference to non-linguistic facts in the way that (A) and (B) link sentences to human goals and intentions. What would these principles be?

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[7]Actually, if we take "abstraction" literally, more needs to be said; there is an important difference between claiming that the reference facts are derivative and claiming that they are abstractions.

We might suppose that, say, the words are directly associated with images, so that "Kilimanjaro" was associated with an image of that mountain. This is the idea that is Wittgenstein's target, and Davidson also seems to associate the building-block theory with this idea.[8] Wittgenstein would argue that it wouldn't mean anything that the word was associated with an image of Kilimanjaro if the it didn't have the right role in the relevant language games, and if it did have the right role in the language games, then "Kilimanjaro" would stand for Kilimanjaro, no matter what connections there were between that word and images in ones mind.

So the argument comes to this.

(10) What makes (S9) true is that people use the word "Kilimanjaro" when they want to say something about Kilimanjaro, or when they want to request or command that something be done to, at or with Kilimanjaro.

(11) But saying something about Kilimanjaro, or commanding that something be done to, at or with Kilimanjaro, is done by uttering a sentence; it is the utterance of the sentence that has the property of being a statement about or command relating to Kilimanjaro.

(12) But that is to say that the semantic facts about "Kilimanjaro" derive from the semantic facts about the sentences of which it is a part.

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[8]Davidson's thoughts on the history of this idea are compact and can be quoted in full: "We have to go back to the early British empiricists for fairly clear examples of building-block theories (Berkeley, Hume, Mill). The ambitious attempts at behavioristic analyses of meaning by Ogden and Richards and Charles Morris are not clear cases, for these authors tended to blur the distinction between words and sentences ('Fire!', 'Slab!' 'Block!') and much of what they said applies intelligibly only to sentences as the basic atoms for analysis. Quine, in chapter II of *Word and Object*, attempts a behavioristic analysis, but although his most famous example ('Gavagai') is a single word, it is explicitly treated as a sentence. Grice, if I understand his project, wants to explain linguistic meaning ultimately by appeal to nonlinguistic intentions — but again it is the meaning of sentences, not of words, that are to be analyzed in terms of something else. The historical picture, much simplified, shows that as the problems became clearer and the methods more sophisticated, behaviorists and others who would give a radical analysis of language and communication have given up the building-block approach in favor of an approach that makes the sentence the focus of empirical interpretation." (p. 135)

I think, however, that this argument is wrong, and that Wittgenstein's example of the builder's language game can show us why.

2 Wittgenstein's Builders

Early in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein describes a simple language game:

> Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building-stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam." A calls them out;—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call..." [9]

We can say, then, that in the builder's language the terms "block," "pillar," "slab," and "beam" stand for kinds of building stones, and that these kinds are the meanings of the words. This is what we would say looking at the language from the point of view of Augustine's picture, and, for this language game, Augustine's picture is correct.

The important point is that it is only because the words have a use in a web of activities — the orders given by the builder and the executions of those orders by the assistant — that the words have these meanings.

When the builder says "Slab," he performs a certain type of act, with certain success conditions. The success conditions are that the assistant passes a slab to him. The assistant knows the meanings of the words, if he performs the right actions when the

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[9]Wittgenstein, p. 3

words are given. One point Wittgenstein makes is that it is these actions are not images that may or may not appear in the assistant's mind that determine whether or not he has learned the language and knows the meanings of the words.

The point of the four words, then, seems to be to provide the builder with four different actions. Each of these types of actions will have success conditions: the assistant passes a slab, the assistant passes a block, etc. The actions are the same, except for the word the builder uses, and the success conditions are the same, except for the type of stone the assistant is to pass. Our remark that "Slab" stands for or means "slab" and so forth just seem to amount to describing the effect the utterance of each of these words has on the success conditions of the acts of which that utterance is a part.

In remark 6 Wittgenstein provides a nice metaphor for this point:

> "I set the brake up by connecting up rod and lever." — Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing.[10]

In the case of the builder's language game, what is established is that the assistant will pass a building stone to the builder. If there were only one kind of building stone, that would be that. But since there are four kinds of stones, a question still remains once it is established that the builder needs a stone. The language, the choice given by the four words, provides a way of resolving this question. The role of the words has to be understood as the resolving of these questions. To say that "slab" stands for the slab and so forth is not incorrect, but it needs to be understood in the context of the *incremental* role the words make to the language game.

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[10]Wittgenstein, p. 5.

Now consider a more or less formal analysis of the builder's language game. For all we have said so far, it seems it might go like this:

(A) Analysis of Builder's Language Game

(A1) In the builders' language game, each utterance is a command of the form N where N is a noun.

(A2) A command N is executed if the assistant passes a building stone of type designated by N to the builder.

(A3) Blocks are designated by "Block", pillars by "Pillar", slabs by "Slab" and beams by "Beam".

Analysis (A) describes the builders language game as consisting of utterances of nouns. There is no mention of sentences. The nouns in BL do not occur as parts of sentences, and their meanings do not derive from the meanings of sentences, or their use from the use of sentences.

There is a direct connection here between words and extra-linguistic reality. The words are connected to the intentions and goals of the builder. The semantic facts listed in (A3) are not basic facts, and they are not based on connections between words and images. They are facts based on the role that individual words play in the articulation of a family of types of actions that are connected with the intentions and goals of the speaker.

The argument at the end of the last section is simply fallacious. To say that the semantic facts about words derive from the semantic facts about the commands of which they are a part is not to say that these facts derive from semantic facts about sentences

of which they are a part. Words can play a role in the articulation of commands without being parts of sentences, and so can be connected with human goals and intentions without the mediation of sentences.

The idea that sentences are semantically basic would be brought to bear on the builders' language game as follows. The builder has the desire that the assistant pass him a slab, for example. The content of this desire is what gets communicated to the assistant. This is shown by the fact that the assistant, when he understands, then sets out to do something, and he can do either the right thing or the wrong thing. The utterance has compliance conditions, and the compliance conditions accord with the satisfaction conditions of the desire that motivated the utterance.

This seems to show that to understand the utterance, the assistant needs to understand grasp the content, *that I pass him a slab*. This is what he needs to make true in order to comply with the command, and to understand the command is to understand what one needs to do to comply with it. It seems then that the content of the builder's utterance is not just *slab*, the thing, but the proposition, *that the assistant bring a slab to the builder.* And this shows that "Slab" really isn't just a noun, standing for a kind of object, but a one word sentence, expressing a desire.

I think this argument confuses two quite different things, however. It is quite right that the content of the builder's command is the proposition that the assistant pass him a slab. But what is the contribution of the word "Slab" to the fact that the command has that interpretation? It is clearly the kind of object that is to be fetched.

3   Some Variations

The picture I want to suggest is that:

(i) Utterances have propositional contents, corresponding to the beliefs or desires the utterances express;

(ii) The propositional content of an utterance depends on the type of utterance and the circumstances of utterance—just as the properties of any act depend on the type of action and the circumstances in which it is done;

(iii) The job of a family of words (like the names for building stones in the builders' language) is to create a set of contrasting action types, so that performance of acts of the different types will have different propositional contents.

In the builders' language, there is a basic pattern of action and circumstance. The builder is speaking to the assistant during working hours; he is building something of stones, and the assistant is to help him by passing him the stones he needs. The four words create four action-types for the builder. Each type of action has its compliance conditions, bringing a slab, bringing a pillar, and so forth.

Only within this context, does the builder's saying, e.g., "Slab" amount to his expressing the command that the assistant is to pass a slab. Such an utterance is like connecting the rod and the lever—it amounts to what it does only in conjunction with certain circumstances. But now, given this, what is the contribution the individuals words make to the propositional content?

First, consider a case in which the builder's mumbles "Slab" and the assistant doesn't understand what command has been expressed. He knows that he is to fetch a building-stone of a certain kind, but he doesn't know which kind. When he realizes which word was spoken, he realizes which kind of stone he is to fetch. That is exactly the contribution that "Slab" makes. It is just this that we capture by saying that "Slab"

stands for slab.

Next, compare this situation with the one in which there is no communication and no language involved at all. The builder works alone; when he wants a building stone he walks over to the piles of stones, picks one up, and brings it back to the building site. He goes down one of four paths to one of the four piles. Depending on which of the four piles he goes to, he gets a different kind of stone. So we have a basic pattern of action, and four different actions of this type, with four different results, that would be satisfactory for four different desires.

Now consider the sub-action of turning down the pillar path—call it $"P"$ instead of the block, slab or beam path (call them $"B1,"$ $"S"$ and $"B2"$). That sub-action determines that the overall action will be of a type that satisfies the desire to get a pillar, rather than the desire to get a slab, beam or block. That particular sub-action has a certain determinate contribution to make to the result of the whole act of which it is a part. It would be quite misguided to say that it was the turning alone which had the result that the builder got a pillar. However, given all of the other things that were set up, this is the effect of taking this sub-action rather than another.

That sub-action has that effect, because of a pre-existing fact, that this path leads to the pillars and not the slabs, beams, or blocks.

So what we have here is a pre-existing relation between a path and a kind: this path leads to pillars. And we have the path involved in one of four action-types. The result of the builder's action is due to the particular sub-action he chose, and the relation the path involved in that sub-action had to a certain kind of object.

Similarly, when our original builder says "Pillar", he performs a certain act that involves a certain object, the word "Pillar". That word has a pre-existing relationship

to a certain kind of object: pillars. Its the relationship we call *standing for* or *referring*. The builder's utterance is a case of commanding that a pillar be passed, because of the type of action it was, and the pre-existing relation, reference, between the word involved in that type of action and a kind of stone.

There are of course a great many differences between the two cases. The fact that the path leads to the pillars does not depend on the habits of the builder and his assistant. The fact that the words "Pillar" means pillar does depend on the habits of the builder and his assistant. That is of course a tremendously important difference.

But the fact that the relationship depends on the habits of the builder and his assistant (and various other mental facts about them), does not mean that the relationship depends on a relationship between *sentences* involving the word "Pillar" and the truth or compliance conditions of those sentences. The two dependencies are just different issues.

One indication that this is so, is that the same fact could play such a role in determining the result of a number of different types of action. For there are many things that one could do, once one got to the end of the path, besides fetching the pillars. One could throw pillars or write graffiti on pillars or trip over pillars or learn what pillars were. In understanding how going down path P, rather than S or $B1$ or $B2$ determines that a given subtype of a pattern of action is writing graffiti on a pillar or learning what a pillar is or tripping over pillars, one appeals to the very same fact, that path P leads to pillars.

When we think of the builders' language, we think that there is a connection in the builder's and the assistant's minds between the words and the different kinds of blocks. (I am just using "minds" in the normal way, not contesting the somewhat behavior-

oriented position Wittgenstein is advocating.) These connections may be the result of what the Builder did to establish and teach his system to the assistant, a system he originated for the purposes of getting building stones brought to him. But one can easily imagine that the same connection could be used in new ways to create families of sub-actions for a given pattern of action. Suppose that as the builder grows frail and the assistant learns the trade, the builder has the assistant not only fetch blocks but, later in the day, place the blocks into a wall. The builder has the plans in his mind, though, and he indicates to the Assistant at each step of the way what type of block should go in each place, using the four words. Now this is a different language game, in the sense that it is a different family of actions that the commands pick out. But I think it would be rather natural to suppose that once the Builder has shown the Assistant what the pattern of action was, he could use the very same words he had been using in the original language game and things would work fine. He would say "Block" and the Assistant would put a block in the place designated, and so forth. Our analysis of this language game might look like this:

(B) Analysis of Second Language Game

(B1) In the builders' second language game each utterance u is a command of the form N where N is a noun and is accompanied by a pointing to a particular place in a wall that is being constructed.

(B2) A command u is executed if the assistant puts a building stone of the type designated by N in the place that the builder designates.

(B3) Blocks are designated by "Block", pillars by "Pillar", slabs by "Slab" and beams by "Beam".

Here clause (B3) is unchanged from (A3) of the analysis of the original language game. The difference between the two games is not in what the words stand for, but in the overall pattern of action to which each of them standing for what it does makes a differential contribution.

4 Issues and Answers

Davidson uses "Block" and "Slab" to illustrate the blurring of the distinction between words and sentences that Ogden and Richards and Morris indulged in.[11] And one might say, at this point, that all that I have said is beside the point, since the utterances in the builders' language game should be thought of as one-word sentences.

I think when people say the utterances in question are "one word sentences" they have one conception of a sentence in mind, as that which conveys a complete thought. Since "Slab" conveys a complete thought, it must be a sentence, even though it does not meet some of the other conception of sentence-hood, like having both a noun phrase and a verb phrase.

Suppose someone asks you "Who will win the National League, Western Division this year?" and you reply, "San Francisco." Your reply clearly conveys the thought that San Francisco will win the pennant this year in the National League, Western Division, which is a complete thought. You can express this complete thought merely by saying the name of a city, because the other parts of the thought were, as one might put it, already in place.

Let us introduce of subclass of propositions, simple singular propositions. These may be identified with a major constituent (an n-ary relation) and a sequence of n minor

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[11]See footnote 10.

constituents (individuals or non-individuals of the appropriate sort to stand in relation R) and a polarity (1 or 0). So $\langle R, \langle a_1, \ldots, a_n \rangle, 1 \rangle$ is the proposition that $a_1, \ldots, a_n$ do stand in relation R, while $\langle R, \langle a_1, \ldots, a_n \rangle, 0 \rangle$ is the proposition that they do not stand in that relation.

Let us say that an issue is a type of simple proposition that is missing one element. The missing element I indicate with a question mark. So here are some propositions with an element missing, and the questions that would naturally express them:

$\langle Kills, \langle A, ? \rangle, 1 \rangle$	Who did A kill?
$\langle Kills, \langle ?, B \rangle, 1 \rangle$	Who killed B?
$\langle Kills, \langle A, B \rangle, ? \rangle$	Did A kill B or not?
$\langle ?, \langle A, B \rangle, 1 \rangle$	What did A do to B?

Whenever there is an issue "in the air," one can express a complete thought by supplying an answer, the missing propositional ingredient. One typically does this with a noun or a verb, rather than with a complete sentence.

I am not too concerned here with how we should treat answers to questions. My point is that there are two rather different ways of expressing complete thoughts. One can, out of the blue, utter a sentence that identifies all the necessary propositional constituents for a thought, as when I say, in the middle of a paper on the philosophy of language intended for an audience in Austria,

 (10) San Francisco will win the Western Division of the National League this year

I'll call this "constructing a complete thought." It is quite a different thing to do what I'll call "completing a thought." This is what I do when the issue of who will win

the Western Division of the National League this year is in the air, perhaps because someone has asked that question, and I merely say,

 (11) San Francisco

Here my words are responsible for completing the thought by introducing the last needed constituent to form a proposition. It is like Wittgenstein's connecting the rod and the lever to complete the brake assembly. The point goes both ways. Surely, in the absence of the rest of the assembly, just connecting the rod and the lever doesn't amount to much of anything. But, on the other hand, in the situation in which the rest of the assembly is in position, and connecting the rod and the lever is all that remains to finish the brake assembly, that connection doesn't amount to constructing the entire assembly, only completing it.

Suppose I claim to be able to express an important law of physics in one word. You challenge me, and we put some money on it. So I tell you, "Ask me whether falling object near the surface of the earth accelerate and 32 feet per second per second." You do so, and I say, "Yes." Have I won the bet? We may or may not say that I have uttered a one word sentence, but we should not fool ourselves. I have completed a thought with a word, but not constructed one.

Now in these cases, one word can complete a thought because of the other propositional constituents have been introduced linguistically, by the words spoken by the person who asked the question. In the builder's case, however, it is not language that has introduced the other constituents. They are present in the situation not because they have been introduced, but because a number of things about the builder's interaction with his assistant have been established by custom or tradition—it is what they do every day, and they never do anything else. The job of the assistant is to bring building

stones to the builder. In a more complex language game the builder might need a verb, to tell the assistant whether to get or take or make or break a stone, but a verb isn't necessary, because it is established that the pattern of action is getting a building stone.

If by language we mean words that are spoken, written or signed, then language has a very small job to do in this case. An issue is in the air:

⟨ Bring-to-x-a-stone-of-type-y,⟨ the Builder, ?⟩,1 ⟩

No doubt the missing component is the type of stone. Supplying it is the only job that language has in this game. It is all that is missing, it is the link between the rod and the lever in an otherwise complete brake assembly. The choice of words, by indicating the choice of stones, indicates the choice of action that will comply with the builder's wishes.

5   Tarski's Style

Thus far I have talked freely in ways that Davidson eschews, of such things as propositions and contents. But the claim I am criticizing was:

> When it comes to interpreting [a Tarski-style theory of truth] as a whole, it is the notion of truth, as applied to closed sentences, which must be connected with human ends and activities.

One might suspect that if we cleave to the bracketed qualification, Davidson has a case to make. But the points I have been making come out rather clearly when we consider a Tarksi-style theory.

Two initial points. First, look closely at the assertion Davidson makes about interpreting Tarski-style theories. Divide it into two parts:

(a) The notion of truth is what gets connected with human ends and activities;

(b) The notion of truth that gets connected to human ends and activities is truth *applied to closed sentences*.

These are quite different claims; one can accept the first and reject the second. It seems to me that one who follows the argument in Davidson's "Truth and Meaning" should do exactly that.

The dimly remembered picture one might have of this essay is that the Tarski-style theory recommended for analysis of natural languages was full of things that looked like this:

(12) s is true iff p

where "s" is a mention of a closed sentence in the object language and "p" is a use of a sentence in the theorist's language. The picture that Davidson's claim brings to mind is that these postulates connect the linguistic objects the theory is about to their truth-conditions via the theorist's language. This connection then spreads out via the rest of the theorists language to descriptions of the ends and activities of the humans whose linguistic objects are in question. Hence, (a) it is the notion of truth that gets connected and (b) it is a sentence, namely s, to which truth is applied.

However, this picture ignores one of the later results in "Truth and Meaning," that to be applied to languages that contains demonstratives, a Tarski-style theory needs revision.[12] This is to say that such revision is required to apply this style of theory to natural language, since demonstratives are a universal feature of natural languages.

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[12]Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning," *Syntheses*, 17 (1967), pp. 320ff.

Here is one example of what a postulate in a suitably revised Tarski-style theory might look like:

(13) "That book was stolen" is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if the
       book demonstrated by p at t is stolen prior to t.

Here, unlike (12), we need a lot more than a sentence to get the truth predicate applied. We need a person, a time and a demonstrated book. The person and the time become relata of the truth-relation for Davidson; what about the book?

The knowledge expressed by (13) appears to include an understanding of the conditions under which the sentence "That book was stolen" can be assigned truth-conditions. There must be a demonstrated book. That is, the linguistic knowledge expressed by (13) includes knowledge of the setting in which a certain kind of linguistic object—in this case a sentence containing a demonstrative—makes contact with truth. In a Tarski-style theory of truth, suitably revised to be serviceable for natural languages, linguistic objects, speakers, and times have truth applied to them, in such settings.

Let us grant point (a) here. Truth is the notion that is applied. What is it applied to? A person, time and sentence. But now—why a sentence? What is it in the structure of (13) that demands a sentence as the linguistic object to which (together with a person and time) the notion of truth gets applied?

The answer was clear enough with (12).

(12) s is true iff p

Nothing but a sentence would make sense on the left; what other part of speech on the left could be, without any supplementation or augmentation, connected by "is true iff"

with a sentence on the right? But that rationale for preferential treatment for sentences is gone with (13). Consider:

(14) "sleeps" is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if the object under discussion by p at t sleeps.

(15) "Reagan" is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if Reagan meets the condition under discussion by p at t.

Point (a) remains inviolate in a theory that includes such things as (14) and (15). But point (b) is lost. The linguistic objects that truth is applied to are not closed sentences, but sub sentential expressions.

Given such postulates, our linguist might introduce *reference* as the relation that holds between "Reagan" and things of its syntactic ilk and the objects truth depends on when these things are spoken by persons at times discussing conditions, and *expression* as the relation that holds between "was stolen" and things of its syntactic ilk and the conditions truth depends on when spoken by persons at times discussing things. The linguist might then explain the truth of sentences as deriving from reference and expression, in virtue of the fact that reference is a way of putting things into discussion, and expression is a way of putting conditions into discussion, and a sentence is a way of creating the sort of discussion required for truth when it's not already underway. The truth of "Reagan sleeps" is thus over determined, since both "Reagan" and "sleeps" will be true. A welcome result.

As far as I can see, the points made with the free and easy terminology and ontology of sections 1-5 are perfectly compatible with things done Tarksi-style—so long as one means the revised Tarksi style that could actually be applied to a natural language.

6   Conclusion

We need to distinguish between two claims:

(16) The meaning of individual words derives from their role in completing thoughts;

(17) The meaning of individual words derives from their role in sentences which construct complete thoughts.

(16) is the conclusion that our consideration of Wittgenstein's language game leads us to. Reference is not a simple relationship between words and things, but one that rests on the way that words give us types of action that play a role in intentional human activity. The fact that 'Kilimanjaro' refers to Kilimanjaro has to do with the way people use the word to make statements and make requests and lots of other things.

But (16) is not the same as (17). When Davidson says that "it is inconceivable that one should be able to explain [the relation between speakers, 'Kilimanjaro' and Kilimanjaro] without first explaining the role of the word in sentences..." he is wrong. It is conceivable.[13]