

A defense of the description theory of quotation

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This talk presents a defense of the description theory of quotation against Davidson's famous attacks [2]. We identify his attacks to the description theory as objections comprised four problems. The first problem is "impure" quotation and mixed cases of use and mention. The second problem is the behavior of quotation in the context of quantification. The third problem is a picture-like property of quotation. The final problem is the problem of possibly infinite alphabets. For the first problem, we introduce the *naming relation* $\text{Name}(d, n)$ between objects and expressions, which states that d has a name n . For example, the famous Quine sentence

Quine says that quotation ' . . . has a certain anomalous feature'.

is interpreted to

Quine says that $\text{Name}(\text{quotation}) :: \langle \text{has a certain anomalous feature} \rangle$

where $\text{Name}(\text{quotation})$ is the unique name of the object "quotation" and $::$ is concatenation. $\langle \dots \rangle$ is nothing to do with quotation in the object language and should be understood as the abbreviation of the term obtained by the description theory. Mixed cases of use and mention is also handled nicely.

Dhaulagiri is adjacent to Anapurna, the mountain whose conquest quest Maurice Herzog described in his book of the same name.

can be interpreted to

Dhaulagiri is adjacent to Anapurna \wedge

$\exists n. \text{Name}(\text{Anapuram}, n) \wedge \text{Name}(\iota x. \text{Maurice Herzog described } x \text{ in his book}, n)$

In the second objection, Davidson rightly argues that from

"Alice swooned" is a sentence (1)

we cannot infer

$\exists x. "x \text{ swooned}" \text{ is a sentence.}$ (2)

Further, Davidson argues, again rightly, that the description theory infers from (1) to

$$\exists x.x :: \text{“swooned” is a sentence.} \quad (3)$$

and, further,

$$\exists x, y.x :: y \text{ is a sentence.} \quad (4)$$

and goes on to the conclusion “quotation marks play no vital role in the spelling theory; and also that this theory is not a theory of how quotation works in natural language.” However, this example shows the vital role of quotation inside of quantification: quotation blocks influence of quantification to variables inside of quotation. The description theory predicts the behavior that inference from (1) to (2) is not possible but to (3) is possible, because $\text{Name}('x') \neq \text{«Alice»}$. We note that the counterpart of inference from (1) to (3) can be obtained by impure quotation. Consider the sentence.

$$\text{Quine says that ‘quotation has a certain anomalous feature’} \quad (5)$$

Then, we can infer

$$\text{Quine says that quotation ‘...has a certain anomalous feature’}.$$

Then, further we can infer

$$\text{There is something which Quine says that it ‘...has a certain anomalous feature’} \quad (6)$$

It is clear that (6) corresponds (3). The third objection, about picture-like property of quantification, we argue that Davidson confuses a semantic requirement with a syntactic requirement. Because our goal is to build a semantic theory of quotation, we have to keep a structure of a quoted expression intact as a semantic value. Therefore, the proper name theory should be rejected. However, as a semantic theory, there is no need to keep the structure of the quoted expression in tact in the paraphrased sentence in the syntactic level, therefore Davidson’s argument against the description theory is misguided. The description theory, in fact, keeps the structure of a quoted expression in tact as a semantic value, which is same to the original expression. Finally, we come to the last objection. Unfortunately, here there seems no easy defense for the description because we assume there is only finite alphabets. However, we may argue that possible alphabets are finite in the end, because of the finite nature of human cognitive competence. Another escape route would be to deny Davidson’s finite semantic primitive thesis [1] as untenable. (講演は日本語で行われます)

参考文献

- [1] Donald Davidson. Theories of meaning and learnable languages. 1965.
- [2] Donald Davidson. Quotation. *Theory and decision*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 27–40, 1979.