A very large fly in the ointment: Davidsonian truth theory contextualized

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Abstract

This paper considers how a Davidsonian could respond to a wide variety of alleged and genuine contextual effects. These effects are of very different kinds, and a Davidsonian needs appropriately different responses. The range of cases runs from fairly contained issues concerning the contextual sensitivity of standard indexical expressions, to radical claims that all utterances are context dependent in a way that threatens to undermine traditional conceptions of semantics. Context sensitivity of the former kind can, I suggest, be accommodated by methods that are now fairly familiar. Radical claims to the effect that global context sensitivity prevents any utterances from having stateable truth conditions need to be addressed, since if they are correct, anything like Davidson's project is hopeless. In addition, there are a wide variety of words and phrases which have been claimed to be context sensitive ("red", "ready", "tall"), and which one cannot assume should be treated in the same way. Finally, there are inferences ("bridging inferences") which have been used as evidence for more widespread form of contextual dependence.
The paper stresses the variety of the cases, and the corresponding variety of appropriate responses. The conclusion of the paper is that none of the examples and arguments considered constitute a reason for abandoning an essentially Davidsonian approach to semantics.

In the nineteen seventies, Davidson's approach to meaning was at the centre of discussion. Since then, its star seems to have faded: it is associated, not without reason, with a debilitating restriction to a first-order metalanguage; it supposedly requires truth to be an entirely primitive notion; other semantic approaches, notably Discourse Representation Theory and Dynamic Semantics, are now the more fashionable frameworks for semantic investigations. The topic for this paper is this: should Davidson's approach be rejected simply on the grounds that it is unable to do justice to the semantic impact of contextual features? I say it should not.

Justifying this answer involves addressing two rather different concerns. One is the general question of what can be expected from a semantic theory, and, in particular, what are the outer limits of semantic theorizing (as opposed to other theoretical descriptions of language and its use). On this issue, I assume that Davidson was right to say that a truth theory can be extended so as to address the indexicality of the familiar indexical expressions like "you", "now" and "today", but I raise some general issues about the presuppositions of this concession. The other concern is a whole range of expressions and idioms that have been proposed, by theorists I shall call Contextualists, as manifestations of a context-dependence inaccessible to truth theoretic theorizing. Here I cannot pretend to have dealt with all the contenders. Rather, I offer the reader just a few examples of how debates between a Davidsonian and a Contextualist might proceed.

Davidson said that indexicality is a "very large fly in the ointment" (1967: 33), the ointment being his soothing project of giving a philosophical explanation of the nature of linguistic meaning by specifying the form which a theory of meaning for an arbitrary language should take (a truth theory), and how it should be given empirical support (by principles of charitable interpretation). The project has many attractive features. Rather than ask what "meaning" means, or what meaning is, questions to which an informative yet general answer seem unattainable, the project invites us to reflect on how knowing facts could enable someone to interpret a language. This knowledge, encoded in a finite form, would constitute a "theory of meaning" (in Davidson's semi-technical sense) for the language in question. Such a theory would be correct to the extent that it would enable one who knew it to reach a correct interpretation of the speech of others, on the strength simply of graphic or phonetic input. The theory would thus provide a bridge from hearing the sounds associated with an utterance of "Snow is white", or seeing an inscription of that sentence, to the conclusion that the utterer had said that snow

is white. To achieve generality, a theory of meaning would have an axiom for each word of the object language, and further axioms to explain how words can be composed into sentences, initially defined as the smallest units usable in complete speech acts. The axioms would not attempt to analyze the meanings of words, but would rather simply translate object language words by words in the metalanguage. In an ideal case, the translation would be "homophonic": it would use the very same words in the metalanguage. The justification is that any lexical analysis would defeat the aim of providing accurate interpretations. Even if the right analysis of "snow" is "atmospheric water vapor frozen into ice crystals and falling in light white flakes or lying on the ground as a white layer", one who says "Snow is white" does not say that atmospheric water vapor frozen into ice crystals and falling in light white flakes or lying on the ground as a white layer is white; he says that snow is white.

Two features of the project deserve special mention. One is that in insisting that the information the hypothetical theorist is to exploit in interpreting uses of sentences should be derived from axioms relating to words, the project attempts to do justice to the apparently unbounded character of our competence. The other is that the considerations concerning radical interpretation, in which Davidson sketches how a theory of meaning could be justified in terms of the behavior of speakers of the relevant language, in themselves make a substantial contribution to locating linguistic behavior within a wider pattern. Yet, despite these clear merits and promising features, there is that very large fly.

The fly which Davidson had in mind may now, forty or more years on, seem a relatively small one. He was worried by the familiar indexicals from the "Basic Set", such words as "I", "here", "that" and tenses. These certainly call for a significant modification of the original version of Davidson's approach. But there is an apparently larger fly: some recent theorists have claimed that context affects content in far more wide-reaching and subtle ways than those induced by members of the Basic Set. It is not just that the semantic content of all or almost all sentences is touched by context. For all, or almost all, sentences there is no such thing as truth conditional semantic content except in so far as the sentence is used in a specific context, and features of that context play a role in determining an utterance-specific content. In this paper I start by recalling Frege's notion of a thought, and the complete expression thereof by a sentence. In §2, I consider how a Davidsonian conception of a theory of meaning can be modified to deal with the kind of context sensitivity displayed by the members of the Basic Set. In §3, I consider a form of Contextualism, due to Charles Travis, that is both very general (it relates to the whole of language, rather than to specific expressions) and explicitly targets truth theoretic semantics; and I discuss whether there is an equally general Davidsonian response (there is not). In §4 I consider context-dependence which appears not to target any expression in the sentences in question. §5 considers some specific examples of context sensitive words lying out side the Basic Set, indicating how I think a Davidsonian should treat them.

1. Completely expressing a Fregean thought

According to Frege, a declarative sentence, not suffering from lack of reference in its parts, has a truth value as its Bedeutung. Given his conception of the upward determination of the Bedeutung of a whole expression by the Bedeutungen of its parts, his view has the following consequence:

> the truth-value of a sentence containing another as a part must remain unchanged when the part is replaced by another sentence having the same truth-value. (1892: 165)

(Indirect speech is a merely apparent exception: the Bedeutung of a whole sentence within such a context is not a truth-value but a customary sense, that is, a thought.) What is a sentence? Frege's answer is that it is something which expresses "a complete thought" (1892: 168). As he put it later "grammar recognizes sentences which logic cannot acknowledge as sentences proper because they do not express thoughts" (1923: 391).

In "On sense and reference", Frege uses the following to give an example of a supposedly incomplete thought:

1. If some number is less than 1 and greater than 0, its square is less than 1 and greater than 0.

"Some number is less than 1 and greater than 0", which grammarians might call a subordinate *sentence* in (1), can stand alone, and express a complete thought. But we should not suppose that this is what it does in the context of (1): there it should not count as a "sentence proper". An indefinite indicator (here "some number") in the antecedent of a conditional may have a scope (as we now say) which extends into the consequent; this is what gives the conditional generality. We cannot regard the antecedent as completely expressing a thought because the anaphoric "its" in the consequent belongs with the indefinite "some number". A "general conditional" like (1) does not express a conditional relation between two thoughts. If it did, and the antecedent was the thought expressed by "some number is less than 1 and greater than 0", we would have to regard the consequent as the thought expressed by "its square is less than 1 and greater than 0". But there is no such thought, for there is nothing for "its" to express, once severed from its indefinite head.

Generality is one way in which a grammatical sentence may not logically be a sentence, and generality may be hidden. In

2. When the Sun is in the tropic of Cancer, the longest day in the northern hemisphere occurs

"it is impossible to express the sense of the subordinate clause in a full sentence, because this sense is not a complete thought. If we say `The Sun is in the tropic of Cancer', this would refer to our present time and thereby change the sense" (1892: 171). In (2), Frege suggests, "when" functions as a quantifier over times, so we should understand it as:

For all times t, if the sun is in the tropic of Cancer at t, t belongs to the longest day in the northern hemisphere.

The incompleteness of the components is now marked by the variable, for example the "t" in "the sun is in the tropic of Cancer at t". Considering this expression on its own, the variable is free, and so we cannot associate the expression with a thought; hence it is not a "sentence proper". A complete thought "always remains the same. It is of the essence of a thought to be non-temporal and non-spatial" (1897:135). No counterexample can be made of a sentence like "The total number of inhabitants of the German Empire is 52,000,000" for

this sentence is not a complete expression of a thought at all, since it lacks a time-determination. If we add such a determination, for example `at noon on 1 January 1897 by central European time', then the thought is either true, in which case it is always, or better, timelessly true, or it is false, and in that case it is false without qualification (1897: 135).

There is a "timeless" copula, used in mathematics. Whether this or a tensed copula is being used "is not expressed but must be divined" (1918: 358). In the tensed case, "one must know when the sentence was uttered in order to grasp the thought correctly. Therefore the time of utterance is part of the expression of the thought" (1918: 358). Completing a sentence, making it fit for the expression of a genuine (i.e. complete and timeless) thought, may thus require coupling it with non-linguistic entities like times.

The threat of incompleteness guides Frege's discussion of expressions from the Basic Set.

The case is the same with words like "here" and "there". In all such cases, the mere wording, as it can be preserved in writing, is not the complete statement of the thought. ... certain conditions accompanying the utterance ... are used as means of expressing the thought ... Pointing the finger, hand gestures, glances may belong here too. (1918: 358)

Sometimes Frege wants an object in the world to be part of the expression of the thought ("the time of utterance is part of the expression of the thought" (1918: 358)), whereas in the passage just displayed he seems to have in mind completers which we would more naturally count as expressive (like gestures). I shall pursue the first possibility, close in spirit to Künne (1992), whose usage of "hybrid" I follow. Suppose a sentence-token S is a sequence of parts $<s_1, ... s_j>$ and that it does not completely express a thought. Suppose also that this failure of complete expression is induced by some proper

subset of indexical tokens $I = \{s_k, \ldots s_l\}$ (I is a subset of S). Then this version of Frege's idea is that what completely expresses a thought is not S but the hybrid

$$H = \langle s_1, \ldots sj, B(s_k,) \ldots B(s_l) \rangle.$$

$B(s_i)$ is the object associated with indexical expression s_i, so H is the sequence consisting of the sentence plus objects drawn from the relevant "conditions accompanying the utterance", each object linked to the expression which required us to look for it. A proper definition of the function B would need to go case by case. If s_i is a tense, then $B(s_i)$ is a time. If s_i is "there", then $B(s_i)$ is a region of space. If s_i is "I", then $B(s_i)$ is the utterer; and so on. H is a hybrid because it contains not only expressions in the ordinary sense, like words, but also other things, like times or places, not normally regarded as having an expressive function, but commandeered for that purpose by Frege's theory. We lose the clean separation between an expression, its sense, and its Bedeutung, for the expression H contains elements which are both expressions and Bedeutungen.

Hybrids would completely determine Fregean thoughts. A thought would be made up of both senses (of the s_i) and objects.[1] It would be natural to think of the sense of an indexical s_i as itself composite, consisting of what the expression contributes to the determination of B together with the relevant object ($B(s_i)$). But since "today" and "yesterday" make different contributions to the determination of B, this would not do justice to the most natural reading of "If someone wants to say today what he expressed yesterday using the word `today', he will replace this word with `yesterday'" (1918: 358).[2] We could relax the condition on same-thought expression: hybrids express the same thought if their corresponding non-indexical expressions have the same sense, and their corresponding indexical expressions introduce the same object. It is not obvious that this would contravene essential Fregean theses about sense, but that is not our present concern, which is completeness.

Absolute truth plays a crucial role. Were truth relativized, then incomplete sentences could bear the relational property to something. Yet surely, one might object, if ever we have absolute truth as a property of a thought expressed by a hybrid, we thereby have relative truth of the sentential part of the hybrid. Instead of moving from S to H, and predicating absolute truth of H, we could predicate truth of S relative to the nonsentential elements of H, $\langle B(s_k,) \ldots B(s_l) \rangle$. In brief:

H is true iff: S is true-relative-to-$\langle B(s_k,) \ldots B(s_l) \rangle$.

For example, we can either fix a day, d, as the referent of "today" in "Today is sunny" and predicate absolute truth or falsity of a composite of that sentence with d; or we can simply say that the sentence is true relative to d.

This cannot be denied. But also it cannot be denied that it is the absolute notion which is fundamental, for this is what initiates the search for the $B(s_i)$. The motivation for adopting that particular relativization of truth (to d), as opposed to relativizing it to the number 7 or the Eiffel Tower or nothing at all, is just that "today" is supposed to refer to a day, and without a day we cannot apply absolute truth or falsity. To summarize Frege's position:

- truth and falsehood are absolute
- thoughts, and only thoughts, are true or false
- thoughts have their truth values timelessly.
- if a sentence uttered on one occasion may differ in truth value from the same sentence uttered on another, the sentence does not completely express a thought.[3]

The threat of incompleteness poses the following problem for Davidsonian semantics: T-theorems ought to have expressions on both sides of the biconditional which completely express thoughts; this requirement follows from (i) the standard definition of a biconditional (a sentence expressing an equivalence between thoughts), and (ii) (arguably) from the requirement that knowledge of a truth theory would enable identification of what a speaker says. Yet a semantic theorist has to provide semantics

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[1] We need to regard Frege as having moved on from his position in "On sense and reference": "A truth value cannot be part of a thought, any more than, say, the Sun can, for it is not a sense but an object" (1892: 164).

[2] On the most natural reading, Frege is claiming that this desire could be satisfied, so that the same thought can be expressed, on different days, using "yesterday" in place of "today".

[3] Strictly, all that follows is that it does not completely express a thought on both occasions; the nuance is of no importance in the present context.

even for sentences which, like "I am hungry", incontrovertibly do not completely express thoughts, and also for those which, like "snow is white",[4] "Jill is ready" and many others, arguably also do not completely express thoughts. I start with the incontrovertible cases.

2. The first step: truth theories for the Basic Set

2.1 Ambiguity

The most benign form of the incompleteness problem is ambiguity. There is no one thought that "Tony Blair went to the bank" completely expresses. Nor could we be happy, within the original Davidsonian framework, to say that it completely expresses two thoughts at once, for then the same sentence might be both true and false.

Davidson's initial response to this problem was very brief:

> As long as ambiguity does not affect grammatical form, and can be translated, ambiguity for ambiguity, into the metalanguage, a truth definition will not tell us any lies. (1967: 30)

This approach can be questioned on a number of counts (see e.g. Cohen 1985). But there is an alternative, which for present purposes I shall regard as adequate. It is an essential part of Davidsonian methodology that surface form may fail to correspond to "logical form". His truth theoretic approach requires that truth theory be applied to sentences at one remove: it applies directly to "logical forms", and only indirectly to the sentences which have these logical forms. In the limiting case, a sentence may be its own logical form, but typically a sentence is distinct from its logical form. Ambiguity can be dealt with as part of the process of finding logical forms: subscript ambiguous words, one subscript for each variant meaning, and treat the result as distinct words, requiring distinct axioms.[5]

2.2 The Basic Set

If ambiguity can be tamed so easily, then the first serious problem to confront Davidson's approach is that of dealing with the standard and familiar indexical expressions, like "I", "now", "that", the expressions that comprise what Capellen and Lepore (2005, hereafter referred to as "C&L") call the "Basic Set" . Davidson's earliest suggestion for treating these is one he quickly withdraws:

> No logical errors result if we simply treat demonstratives as constants ... `"I am wise" is true if and only if I am wise', with its bland ignoring of the demonstrative element in `I' comes off the assembly line along with `"Socrates is wise" is true if and only if Socrates is wise' with its bland indifference to the demonstrative element in `is wise' (the tense)." (1967: 33)

Here Davidson countenances the idea that we should deal in what Frege would call incomplete thoughts. Although this idea has had some currency in recent work, it is radical within a Davidsonian perspective: the very notion of a biconditional would be at risk, and a gap would open up between the potential deliverances of truth theory and radical interpretation (which needs complete thoughts). But Davidson quickly turns aside, making the following point:

> It could ... be fairly pointed out that part of understanding demonstratives is knowing the rules by which they adjust their reference to circumstance ...." (1967: 34)

To ignore how indexicals get their reference would certainly be to miss an opportunity, if the relevant rules could be incorporated into truth theory. He attempts incorporation by relativizing the predicate

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[4]   The sentence does not resolve whether the "is" is timeless or tensed; and, if the latter, what time is relevant.
[5]   Davidson hints that he would endorse this approach: 1970: 589. If there is unlimited polysemy, it might not work; but that raises questions that lie beyond the scope of the present paper.

"true" to a sentence, a person, and a time. In Frege's perspective, this is like saying: a sentence containing a demonstrative is incomplete, but if we consider a complex consisting of the sentence, the speaker and the time, then we have a complete (though not purely linguistic) expression of a thought. Davidson envisages the result of this strategy delivering theorems along these lines:

> `I am tired' is true as (potentially) spoken by p at t if and only if p is tired at t.

> `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. (1967: 34)

These are not technically T-theorems (even if provable), for they are not biconditionals (sentences whose main connective is "if and only if"); rather they are (implicitly) universal quantifications of biconditionals.[6] As they stand, they cannot provide a Fregean thought to serve as what is expressed by an utterance of their target sentence, for the right hand side, e.g. "p is tired at t", is not a sentence which completely expresses a thought.

Presumably an interpreter should infer genuine T-theorems from these quantified sentences by applying universal specification. Davidson places no constraints on how the variables of quantification are to be instantiated.[7] One instance of the generalization relating to "That book was stolen" is:

> "That book was stolen" is true as (potentially) spoken by Davidson at noon on 02/02/02 if and only if the book demonstrated by Davidson at noon on 02/02/02 is stolen prior to noon on 02/02/02. (The example was used by Sainsbury 2005: 54)

Although there is room for discussion about what counts as a correct report of an utterance of "That book was stolen", there can be no doubt that it would be wrong to say that Davidson thereby said that the book demonstrated by Davidson at noon on 02/02/02 is stolen prior to noon on 02/02/02. Davidson's approach does not ensure that a T-theoretic interpretation of an utterance containing an indexical will be correct.

In later writing, Davidson recognizes the problem (1969: 46, 1976: 175), and simply accepts that this is the best that can be done. This seems to me defeatist, and I will consider two ways in which a truth theorist might do better. One involves admitting indexicals into the metalanguage, and the other involves mirroring, in a broadly truththeoretic framework, certain intuitive features of our reports of utterances containing indexicals (their "scene-content" structure).

Davidson's test for the adequacy of a T-theory is that one who knows it should be able successfully to put it to use in interpretation. The user should first identify the sentence uttered, then use the truth theory to derive a canonical T-theorem in which truth is predicated of that sentence on the left side, so that finally, knowing that the theory he used was of the right kind, the interpreter can come to know what the speaker thereby said, that is, the content of the right side of the relevant T-theorem. In brief: if the speaker uttered s, and an appropriate theory says that s is true iff p, then the speaker said that p. It would seem consonant with this approach that different interpreters should use different theories, the theories being indexically adapted to the interpreter's specific situation. Rumfitt (1993) invites us to consider a case of the following kind: if someone says to me "You are a fool", I can naturally report him as having said that I am a fool. A truth theory that delivered a matching result would be useful to me (if to no one else). It would have a canonical theorem along these lines (keeping as closely as possible to the Davidsonian paradigm, and ignoring irrelevant detail): "The sentence `you are a fool', as addressed to me, is true iff I am a fool". On these lines we could envisage a theory-building kit which individual interpreters could use to develop a theory suitable for their particular identity and situation.

Davidson himself curtly closes off this possibility, as Rumfitt notes:

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[6]   Davidson's terminology varies. For example, in "Radical interpretation" (1973) he starts by defining a T-sentence as a biconditional (at p. 130) but (at p. 135) implicitly extends the notion to include as T-sentences "universally quantified conditionals", like the ones under discussion here.

[7]   In Weinstein's elegant paper (1974), which Davidson cites as constituting "serious work" on this topic (1967: n17, added in 1982), it seems that the metalinguistic expressions corresponding to demonstratives will have the form "the ith element of sequent x". Although it was not Weinstein's concern, this would make his specifications of truth conditions inappropriate for interpretation.

an adequate theory of truth uses no indexical devices, and so can contain no translation of a very large number and variety of sentences. (Davidson 1976: 175; Rumfitt 1993: 442)

Davidson does not tell us why this restriction is imposed. Perhaps he thinks of a theory as something which adopts a "view from nowhere", and so is composed entirely of eternal sentences, ones whose interpretation is independent of where, when and by whom the sentences are uttered.[8] Although this may be an ideal in some branches of physical science, it is clearly inappropriate to history, cosmology, and astronomy, not to mention human sciences. These bodies of knowledge refer to specific times, places, and objects, and there can be no guarantee that this can be achieved unless something perspectival is assumed (for example, the system of dates we are accustomed to using might for a second appear to be perspective-free, though this is not so: ultimately we can nail down a year only relative to now, or to an independently identified event). It seems to me that we could properly drop Davidson's restriction, and this would open up the prospect of a more interpretive truth-theoretic approach to sentences containing indexicals.

The idea behind this first possible enlargement of Davidsonian resources is that it would enable an interpreter to match an indexical he encounters with one of his own, making suitable adjustments for the difference in perspective between himself and the subject whose speech he is interpreting ("you" becomes "I", "here" becomes "there" and so on). Although this would indeed usefully expand the possibilities, it is not sufficiently general. It is not always possible for an interpreter to match an object language indexical with any metalanguage indexical. For example, while I am in my office far from the track, and with no radio or TV, you call me on your cell phone while watching a race and say "That horse is slipping behind badly". Even if I know you are referring to Desert Pride, there is no indexical I can directly[9] use to do likewise. I can interpret you as having said that Desert Pride is slipping behind badly. Better, I can report you as having said, concerning Desert Pride, that it is slipping behind badly. The second kind of report does not commit me to the supposition, or even the mere suggestion, that you know the horse's name. Using the second kind of a report as guide, we could envisage a second possible enlargement of Davidsonian resources.

This starts with conditional truth-conditions, as developed by Higginbotham. For example:

If u is an utterance of "today is July 4" by s, and s refers with the utterance of "today" therein to δ, then u is true ↔ δ is July 4. (Higginbotham 1994: 94)

This does not provide a T-theorem in Davidson's sense, but we can supply occasion specific knowledge to derive one, using instantiation and then modus ponens. For example, if we know that Sally uttered "today is July 4", thereby (through a mistake) referring with "today" to July 3, we can infer that Sally's utterance is true iff July 3 is July 4.

This conclusion is not false, but it is unsatisfactory from the point of view of the ultimate aim of Davidsonian truth-theory: the provision of correct reports of speech. It is incorrect to report rational Sally as having affirmed the absurdity that July 3 is July 4. One more development can remove this difficulty. Instead of aiming at a T-theorem in Davidson's sense, in which there is on the right side of the biconditional a sentence which completely expresses a thought (in this case, "July 3 is July 4"), why not stop with something closer to the conditional form of the generalization Higginbotham offers. The result I envisage, applied to the same example, is this:

Sally uttered "today is July 4", and by her use of "today" in that utterance referred to July 3. So what she said is true iff it [July 3] is July 4.

Omitting inessentials, the final speech report would be: On July 3, Sally said that it was July 4. The "it" depends anaphorically upon the interpreter's use of "July 3" outside the content reported. The pronoun is neutral about how Sally referred to July 3; that she used "today" is a salient possibility. Whereas only an irrational person could affirm that July 3 is July 4, a perfectly rational person could get a day ahead, and so, on July 3, affirm that it is July 4. This way of proceeding, which I call the "scene-content" approach, improves the accuracy of the report, though at the expense of abandoning

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[8]   "indexical self-reference is out of place in a theory [of meaning] that ought to work for any interpreter" (Davidson 1973 [RI]: 129).
[9]   I can always do so indirectly, exploiting "deferred ostension": "that horse" (i.e. the one to which you are referring).

the view that successful interpreters can always produce a self-standing sentence which completely expresses the very thought the speaker expressed (cf. Sainsbury 1998). Following Frege's idea, we have in effect allowed features of the context to become involved in thought expression. We, as reporters, set the scene by referring to objects in our way, and then report speech using pronouns which depend anaphorically upon our acts of reference. The anaphoric pronouns bleach out any content specific to our way of referring, and leave the report neutral on questions about how the original speaker referred to these objects. Only the objects remain, rather as Frege envisaged.

Applying this approach to an earlier example, we can report Davidson as having demonstrated Dreben's copy of *Word and Object* at noon on 02/02/02, and having said that it had been stolen. The convention of sequence of tenses ensures that "had been" in the report takes us back to a time earlier than the one mentioned in the scene-setting; "it" refers to Dreben's copy of *Word and Object* while remaining blandly silent on the question of how Davidson himself referred to it.

Higginbotham's truth conditions impose no restriction on how to instantiate the universal quantifications over the contextually significant elements (days, in the example). In the scene-content approach, by contrast, the relevant variables can be instantiated ad libitum where they occur outside the content of the report, but within the report they must be replaced by pronouns which depend anaphorically upon the external replacements. This brief sketch indicates how a Davidsonian can confront the threat of Fregean incompleteness. A lesson to be drawn from the impact of context is that when an utterance in its context constitutes a complete expression of a thought, an interpreter can properly forgo the ambition of matching it with a complete and self-contained expression of that thought. Rather, the best approach, adopted in our pre-theoretic practice of reporting speech which includes expressions from the Basic Set, is to start by setting the scene, and then report the content in a way which essentially depends upon that scene-setting.

If s is a sentence containing an indexical expression from the Basic Set, an interpreter's task divides into three stages:

- Derive a conditional truth condition. The antecedent will be along the lines "If the speaker referred to objects x, y, z in the utterance of s, ...".
- Find which objects the speaker referred to, thus providing the antecedent of the biconditional, and detach the consequent. This will contain singular replacements for the bound variables "x", "y", "z", call these "s1/x", etc.
- Describe the scene of the utterance, making sure that you include the objects of reference, referring to them in whatever way comes naturally.[10] Conclude that the speaker said that ..., where the material in the dots is what results from the consequent derived in stage 2, with suitable anaphoric pronouns replacing each "s1/x", and referring back to the appropriate object of reference in your scene-setting.

Whether in Higginbotham's original approach, or in the scene-content supplement, the theory makes a clear distinction between semantic and non-semantic information. The conditional truth condition itself can be seen as expressing purely semantic information. The use of it to derive a truth condition for an utterance involves applying information which is not obviously purely semantic in order to supply the antecedent for a modus ponens inference. This truth theoretic treatment of expressions in the Basic Set already involves departing from a certain view of truth conditional semantics: the idea that semantic information alone determines truth conditions. On the other hand, the treatment clearly belongs in spirit to the truth theoretic tradition, and so I shall count it as a vindication of truth theory, rather than a replacement of it. The next section attempts to justify this ruling.

2.3 Have we gone too far already?

Let's suppose that the approach described in §2.2 is adequate, in that it provides a systematic way of determining truth conditions for utterances of sentences in so far as their context-dependence derives from expressions in the Basic Set. It remains a question whether a Davidsonian should take

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[10]   Often, rather than strictly referring to an object, you will use an indefinite: Seeing a rabbit, he said that it was a hare.

advantage of these possibilities: the approach marks a significant departure from the original Davidsonian conception.

It is often held that there is some chance of describing axiomatically the workings of a modular cognitive capacity. Many have supposed that the language faculty is modular, a supposition that has encouraged theorists to pursue systematic semantics. A module is thought of as a self-contained system, processing inputs into outputs, and operating in a somewhat inflexible way, so that given inputs will produce the usual output no matter what is going on elsewhere in the system outside the module. An example is the visual system. It delivers how things appear, and continues to deliver the same appearance even if the subject knows full well that this appearance is not veridical (as in Müller-Lyer illusions). It is clear that once we allow indexicals, for example demonstratives, into the scope of a theory in the envisaged way, providing truth conditions for utterances of sentences containing them, we have entered an area of non-language specific capacities. This is sometimes obscured by special examples. For most purposes, we can think of words like "I" and "today" as governed by simple rules which can be mechanically applied: an utterance of "I" refers to the utterer, an utterance of "today" refers to the day of utterance. But we know quite well that these rules are only idealizations: a speaker can use "I" to refer to someone else (as when I get you to record my voice mail message for me, and you use "I" to refer to me), and "today" can refer to other days, as in present tense narratives of past events. The complexities come to the fore with words like "he" and "that". A demonstrative utterance of these expressions refers to whoever or whatever was demonstrated on the occasion. There is no simple rule, of the kind we imagine works for "I" and "today", to determine which object this is. Salience and speaker intentions no doubt play some part, but it is unlikely that the detection of salience or of intentions could be a sub-module of the language module: these capacities are used in non-linguistic situations. Moreover, the processes at work in identifying a demonstrated object are not specific to one language rather than another: once the task of identifying the demonstrated object has been set by some linguistic feature, the path taken by the execution of the identification is typically independent of which language initiated the search.

Helping ourselves to Kaplan's distinction between character and content, the point can be put like this: character seems eminently semantic, language-specific and plausibly modular, but it falls short of truth conditions. The skills required to determine truth conditional content on the basis of context plus character do not seem purely semantic or language specific, and appear to involve general cognitive abilities rather than anything plausibly modular.

The main point can be illustrated by two examples. First, translators do not need to know the Kaplan-content of what they are translating: they simply match character. Character is plainly a semantic matter: semantics concerns the meanings of sentences and translation involves, as a very rough approximation, matching sentences in one language with sentences in another which mean the same. Secondly, the sense in which one cannot "switch off" one's language ability stops at character, and does not extend to content. Being "always on" is often taken to be a mark of the modular.

Both points can be illustrated by this example. Suppose you overhear some people you do not know at all talking, and one says to the other

He told her he was leaving right away.

Even with no idea who is being talked about, or what sort of leaving was at issue, you intuitively "understand" this sentence perfectly well. That is the level of understanding which cannot be switched off. The understanding you achieve suffices for you to be able to translate what you heard into any other language you know. If a companion asks you what was said, you can without oddity reply that the speaker said that he told her he was leaving right away,[11] and you can go on, still without oddity, to add that you have no idea who he or she are.

These considerations suggest that a Davidsonian should be cautious. At first, pursuit of the truth conditional ideal made it seem essential to arrange semantic theory so that it would deliver truth conditional interpretations; this meant going beyond Kaplan's character in the direction of content. The present reflections raise doubts about this enthusiasm: perhaps what a semantic theorist can hope

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[11]   By contrast, C&L seem to take the capacity to give indirect reports of speech as evidence that truth conditions of the speech have been identified. If they were right, expressivism, as a semantic view of moral sentences, would be trivially incorrect, since no one doubts that people have claimed that stealing is wrong.

to attain, and should properly aim for, falls short of truth conditions, and remains at a level corresponding to Kaplan's character.

On my view, the scene-content approach can be properly regarded as doing justice to, rather than being at odds with, these considerations. As Davidson said, it would be a missed opportunity not to give a theoretical description, if we can, of the way in which demonstratives "adjust their reference to circumstance". We can say, if we wish, that it is the conditional truth conditions which reflect distinctively semantic knowledge: language-specific, possibly realized by a module, and so potentially axiomatizable, sufficient for translation, and impossible to switch off. The knowledge brought to bear in generating antecedents of these conditionals can be rightly regarded as non-language-specific and perhaps involving general cognitive skills which we have no special reason to think are modular. The overall theory makes the distinction plain. Those who think that any product of such a process is pragmatic will have to say, as some theorists do, that determining truth conditions is a partly pragmatic matter. This should not conceal the fact that we have here an approach that is quite in conformity with the spirit of Davidson.

In considering the alleged impact of more exotic kinds of contextual dependence than those familiar from expressions in the Basic Set, I will regard the Davidsonian program as vindicated if it can deal with the problems no less well than it can deal with expressions in the Basic Set.

3. Global (Radical) Contextualism

3a: Overview

Let's suppose that there is an adequate Davidsonian approach to contextually dependent expressions in the Basic Set. The question now is whether there is also an adequate Davidsonian approach to other forms of context-dependence. A Contextualist is, I stipulate, one who says that there is not. Without pretending to exhaustive coverage, I identify three forms that an argument for Contextualism in this sense could take:

1. A global argument, due to writers like Charles Travis, claiming that context sensitivity in the metalanguage blocks truth conditional semantics.
2. There is context dependence that is not related to a specific expression, and which accordingly cannot be treated by a Davidsonian axiomatic approach. Putative examples: bridging inferences, some forms of loose talk.
3. Although the context dependence is introduced by some specific expression, the Davidsonian approach cannot do justice to it. Putative examples: rain, possessives, "tall", "ready".

One of the claims I wish to make here is that the different kinds of attack call for different responses from a Davidsonian: there is no panacea. On the contrary, I think the Davidsonian needs at least the following resources:

1. Some claims of context dependence must simply be denied. For example, a Davidsonian will object that some Contextualists confuse context dependence and unspecific meaning.
2. Some forms of context dependence must be relocated in pragmatics, and some rationale given for a semantics/pragmatics distinction which makes this reasonable.
3. Some forms of context dependence will be incorporated in the semantics. For example, the conditional truth-condition strategy can be extended to rain and to "ready", and Evans's "large satisfier" approach will help with some aspects of the behavior of adjectives like "tall".

3b: A global response to a global argument?

Charles Travis has made the bold claim that no sentence completely expresses a thought, so no sentence's content can be captured truth theoretically: call this Radical Contextualism. Here is a particularly apt formulation of his point.

> This [Radical Contextualism] blocks truth conditional semantics. For suppose I say, `The sentence "Sid grunts" is true iff Sid grunts'. Either I use that last "grunts" on some particular understanding of being a grunter – one understanding among many – or I do not. If I do, then I assign the sentence [referred to on the left side] a property it does not have. For *it* does not speak of being a grunter on any special understanding of this. But if I do not, then I fail to state *any* condition under which anything might be true. Being a grunter on no particular understanding of being one is just not a way for Sid to be. (2006: 47–8)

Sentences containing "grunt" do not completely express a thought, for the words do not settle how "grunt" is to be understood: what sort of behavior is to count as making one a grunter (is one little grunt enough or does one have to be a habitual or serial grunter)? This is resolved in different ways in different contexts. (Compare Travis's examples in earlier work: a brown leaf painted green may count as green in some but not other contexts.) The first horn of the dilemma for truth theory is that we treat the right side of the biconditional which specifies truth conditions as completed by context, so that it completely expresses the thought that S; then the biconditional will falsely say that every utterance of "Sid grunts" is true iff S. Alternatively, if the right side is not completed by context, we do not have a genuine biconditional: "I fail to state *any* condition under which anything might be true".

Treating the context-sensitive expressions of the Basic Set, Davidson quantified over persons, times and places. This enabled differences in persons, times and places to lead to different T-theorems. Might one not extend this idea, and deal with context sensitivity at a single blow by quantifying over contexts? As a first attempt, we might aim at T-sentences on these lines:

s is true as uttered in C iff: in C, p.

The sentence in the slot marked by "p" translates the sentence referred to by what is in the slot marked by "s". We might initially be encouraged by examples like this:

"All beer is good" is true as uttered in Australia iff: in Australia, all beer is good.

This may sound true, at least given various simplifying assumptions. But any semblance of a serious contribution to our problem is illusory. The biconditional does not even begin to do proper justice to sensitivity to context. It is derived from a schema which also delivers:

"All beer is good" is true as uttered in Sydney iff: in Sydney, all beer is good.

Since an utterance in Sydney is also an utterance in Australia, unrestricted application of the schema will yield distinct and potentially conflicting truth conditions for the same unambiguous utterance.

There is a distinct problem, one which confronts an aspect of Borg's recent defence of truth theoretic semantics.[12] Discussing seemingly monadic versions of expressions which also have an explicitly relational form ("ready" [ready for], "married" [married to], "raining" [raining at], "continue" [continue doing such-and-such]) Borg suggests truth conditions on the following lines:

> If u is an utterance of `Jane can't continue' in a context c then u is true iff Jane can't continue something in c. (2004: 230)

Bill and Sally are talking about Jane; take this fact as an instantiation on the implicitly universally quantified variable c. Bill is trying to communicate to Sally that Jane cannot continue with the marketing research project she started a month earlier. Borg's generalization yields:

> If u is an utterance of `Jane can't continue' in a context in which Bill and Sally are talking about Jane then u is true iff Jane can't continue something in a context in which Bill and Sally are talking about Jane.

On all likely scenarios, Jane isn't doing anything in the Bill-Sally context (they are talking about her in London, and she is asleep in California), and if she isn't doing anything in it there's nothing she can

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[12]   As with C&L's work, the overall direction of Borg's project (2004) is highly congenial to a Davidsonian.

continue doing in it. So the right side will be false on all likely scenarios, whereas the left side might be true. The problem here is that what we need on the left side is the conversational context, whereas what we need on the right side is some activity which that context determines. It would be surprising were we to get both these different things using two occurrences of a single variable; we certainly could not count on any such coincidence.

If we reconsider Travis's dilemma for truth conditional semantics, it may seem we have material which would lead to just such a surprise. Concerning a putative T-theorem

"Sid grunts" is true iff Sid grunts,

the dilemma was that either the right side is taken in a way divorced from any specific understanding of what it is to grunt, in which case it does not provide a genuine condition at all, or else a specific understanding is in play, in which case it says falsely that this is the only way for "Sid grunts" to be understood. "Understandings", as Travis uses the term, relate both to sentences (like "Sid grunts") and to ways things can be (like being a grunter), so perhaps it is a notion which can effect just the kind of transition needed by Borg's project. (This would be ironic, for Travis was out to attack truth conditional semantics, whereas Borg defends them.) An *understanding* of a sentence is some kind of additional constraint on what it takes for the sentence to be true. An *understanding* of a kind of event or state of affairs is an additional constraint on what is involved in its obtaining. (We do not need to insist that this notion of understanding is entirely unequivocal. It is enough that for every understanding of a sentence there is a unique understanding* of a corresponding state of affairs.)

By quantifying over understandings, we might coordinate further specificity for the sentence "Sid grunts" with further specificity concerning what it is to grunt, along these lines:

s, on the understanding U, is true iff: on the understanding U, p.[13]

Let "s" be replaced by a name for "Sid grunts", and "p" by that sentence itself. Truth is a property of a sentence–understanding pair. There is no absolute *what it is to grunt*, but only *understandings of what it is to grunt*. All truth theory need do is coordinate the understandings. Suppose on one understanding of the sentence "Sid grunts" it says that Sid makes grunting noises in the course of the majority of his conversational exchanges in the year 2006, and this (or the correlated) understanding of what it is for Sid to grunt is that it is for him to make grunting noises in the course of the majority of his conversational exchanges in the year 2006. Then an instance of the schema just displayed is:

"Sid grunts", on the understanding *to make grunting noises in the course of the majority of his conversational exchanges in 2006*, is true iff: on the understanding *to make grunting noises in the course of the majority of his conversational exchanges in 2006*, Sid grunts.

If this is intelligible, we seem to have steered between Travis's dilemma. The instance speaks of grunting on an understanding, and so does state a condition under which something can be true. The generalization does not mention any understanding in particular, and so is not open to the charge that it associates a sentence with an excessively specific truth condition, one favoring just one of many specific understandings.

This is all mere hocus pocus. (No doubt Travis would enthusiastically agree.) On a Davidsonian picture, an interpreter is supposed to use the truth theory to arrive at interpretations. But once understandings are quantified over, an interpreter will need to know which understandings are appropriate in order to arrive at an interpretation. This knowledge in itself, however, is the semantic knowledge the theory was supposed to represent, but instead of being represented, it is presupposed.

To fill out this point, we can turn to the presumed axiomatic basis of truth theory. Truth conditional semantics are supposed to be compositional. The quantification over understandings cannot be suddenly imposed upon standard unquantified T-theorems: if these are true, the quantification is unnecessary and inappropriate, and if they are false, the theory is false. We would need to think of axioms applying to expression–understanding pairs, not in an understanding-by-understanding way (for there are too many possible understandings to itemize), but in some general way, for example:

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[13]   As we will see shortly, doing justice to compositionality requires some variation on this schema.

for all "grunt"-appropriate understandings U, for all x, x satisfies <"grunts", U> iff: on U, x grunts.

The restriction on understandings to ones appropriate to "grunts" is essential. Otherwise we will have instances like:

for all x, x satisfies <"grunts", the understanding that it is enough to be painted green> iff: on the understanding that it is enough to be painted green, x grunts.

The anomalous understanding is one that would be needed in an account of "green", so it will be a member of the domain of quantification over understandings. But this instance is either nonsense, or it delivers the wrong result. (For the second alternative: an understanding of what it is to be a grunter on which it is enough to be painted green would ensure that suitably painted benches are grunters.) Hence understandings must be restricted to ones appropriate to "grunts". Using the theory now presupposes that the user knows in advance which these understandings are, for the theory does not say. But to know which understandings of "grunts" are appropriate entails knowing what "grunts" means. The knowledge the theory was supposed to state has not been stated but has been presupposed. I conclude that a Davidsonian cannot respond to the kind of global argument we have considered by quantifying over contexts or understandings.

How, then, should Travis's point be met? For examples like "grunt" I think the main thing is to distinguish the common phenomenon of unspecific meaning from semantic context-dependence. I'll illustrate with an example that will be uncontroversial for many Contextualists (though I fear may not be so for Radical Contextualists of Travis's kind). There are many ways to run, east or west, to work or to the gym, in the morning or in the evening. An utterance merely of "John runs" does not provide any of these details, though if the utterance is true, it will be made true by an event which resolves every such issue. Context may make some more specific way of running salient, but in doing so, the semantics are not touched. The test is that one can coherently deny that John runs in a salient way, without this being either a retraction or a contradiction. Hence the salient way of running is not part of the semantics.

For example, it would be natural to interpret the utterance of "John runs", as it occurs in the following context

Jill walks to work. John runs.

as committing the utterer to the claim that John runs to work. The question is whether this commitment (supposing it to be genuine) emerges from the semantics of "John runs". A negative answer is suggested by the following possible variant:

Jill walks to work. John runs. Indeed, he runs 20 miles a week. But never to work, on account of the traffic.

The coherence, and absence of retraction, suggests that in this utterance the semantics of "John runs" does not assign it the content "John runs to work". This suggests that the same is true of the shorter utterance, for the longer one has the shorter one as a proper part. By the time the interpreter had reached the second full stop in the longer utterance, he should presumably have reached just the state he would have reached when interpreting the shorter one, and so, on the rival view, would have believed that John had been said to run to work. Such an interpreter would have to regard the remainder of the longer utterance as either containing a contradiction or a retraction of the earlier part. Intuitively, however, that is not the case.

The same point can be reached by a slightly different route. Consider

"Bob walks to work. Jill doesn't run. But she runs a quarter marathon every Sunday."

On a Contextualist view, it should be easy to hear this as consistent, for the second sentence will be equivalent to "Jill doesn't run to work". In fact it is hard to hear the whole as consistent, suggesting that the second sentence tells us that Jill doesn't run anywhere (or in any way).

Unspecific meaning is the category to which the Davidsonian should assign Travis's grunter. True, there are many ways of grunting, as there are many ways of doing anything. If an attribution of grunting is true, it is made so by some specific form of grunting. None of this entails that the

semantic content of "grunts" varies from context to context (nor that the pragmatic content varies). A test is this: if we can add something equivalent to "in some way or other" without making a significant difference, the verb is semantically neutral concerning the way it is to be satisfied. The default reading of "Sid grunts" is that he grunts in some way or other: the truth conditions are unspecific relative to various modes of grunting. The default reading of "Sid doesn't grunt" is that he doesn't grunt in any way.

The same goes for color terms: "red" applies to the things that are red in any one of possibly indefinitely many ways (on the inside, on the outside, naturally, through being painted, etc.). If one of these ways is highly salient, we may criticize a speaker for applying "red" to something not red in the salient way; we may voice this criticism by saying that what the speaker said is not true. But we normally do not care about the distinction between semantic content and what a speaker meant, and so we would not discriminate between these different targets of our criticism. Suppose external redness is salient, and that someone says, of something which is red inside but not outside, that it is red. It would be natural to respond like this:

You're wrong: it's not red in the relevant way. It may be red inside, but it's not red outside.

The whole exchange does not require any more specific semantics for "red" than that it is satisfied by something which is red in some way or another. This permits a sensible story about "red inside", which is hard to tell if the salience of external redness made the contained occurrence of "red" apply only to things externally red.

These cases contrast sharply, I believe, with other Contextualist examples. "Jill is ready" is not equivalent to the near-trivial "Jill is ready for something or other", and "This girder is strong enough" is not equivalent to the trivial "This girder is strong enough for something or other". We should not let the fact that there are specific ways to grunt undermine our confidence in the full correctness (barring considerations related to tense) of the claim that "Sid grunts" is true iff Sid grunts. By contrast, "ready" and "enough" may well demand a treatment which reveals their content as context-sensitive.

We cannot offer a global response to the global argument offered by Radical Contextualists. We have to look at their examples case by case. One avenue of response is to say, as with "grunts", that they confuse many ways in which a sentence can be made true with many distinct contents, when really we have a single rather unspecific content. This will not do for all cases. In what follows, I consider further weapons which a Davidsonian should stock in his armory.

4. Cases in which the content-sensitivity is not associated with a specific expression.

Two examples:

Little Johnny cuts his hand and his mother says:

(a) It's OK. You won't die.

According to a Contextualist, the mother does not say, falsely, that Johnny is immortal, but that he won't die from that cut. *So* the semantic content of the utterance is not that Johnny is immortal. Davidsonian truth conditional semantics cannot associate this utterance with a content that refers to a cut, since (among other reasons) there is no expression which would justify invoking a semantic axiom introducing the notion of being a cut.

"Bridging inferences."

(b) He took a book from the shelf and sat down to read.

In many contexts we will take it that the speaker is claiming that the protagonist read the book he took down. *So* in these cases, this is the semantic content of the utterance. This content cannot be delivered by a truth theoretic semantic theory, since there is no expression in the utterance which could merit invoking an axiom involving a relation between a book taken down and a book read.

I have emphasized (by italicizing the occurrences of "so") the Contextualist moves that a Davidsonian should say are non sequiturs. A speaker may say, communicate or claim less (as in case (a)) or more (as in case (b)) than the semantic content of the utterance she uses, and these reduced or expanded contents are plainly determined by context in all sorts of complex ways, with no upper bound on what collateral knowledge may need to be brought to bear to extract it. The Davidsonian should say that the semantic content of (a) is not reduced, but is that Johnny won't die (ever); and that the semantic content of (b) is not expanded, but is simply that he took a book from the shelf and sat down to read. The reduction or expansion is something in some way obtained from semantic content along with other information; we can label it pragmatic content. A test for this being the right thing to say is as follows. If we suppose that (a) does not have as its semantic content that Johnny is immortal (or anything entailing this), we should be able to add its negation explicitly, without contradiction or retraction. That is, the following should be fine:

You won't die. You're not immortal.[14]

But it is jarring: one's first reaction is that one has misheard. By contrast, a standard form of qualification or retraction is entirely in order:

You won't die. I don't mean you're immortal, only that this cut won't kill you.

Typically, you need to explain "what you mean" when you have not said what you mean, which seems precisely the right description of how the speaker is related to "You won't die": she said it but did not mean it. This is reinforced by supposing that the mother had said:

You won't die, though you will die sometime.

If in the original scenario the semantic content of "You won't die" had been "You won't die from this cut", one would expect the utterance of these words in the revised scenario to have the same content (the revision affects only what words the mother said subsequent to these). In that case, the total utterance would be perfectly normal, but in fact it is odd, perhaps (and certainly to my ears) contradictory.

A similar point applies to the additional content associated with (b). A Davidsonian can allow that this content will typically be communicated, but can deny that it belongs to semantic content. A sufficient condition for this verdict is that the speaker can go on to deny the additional content without oddity, contradiction or retraction, which would not be possible if it belonged to semantic content. So suppose the original utterance was followed by a subsequent one:

He took a book from the shelf and sat down to read. He chose *The Paintings of Michelangelo*, because it was large enough to conceal what he was reading, a dog-eared copy of *Penthouse*.

If the semantic content of the utterance of the first sentence included that he read the book he took down, the utterance of the second sentence should be odd or contradictory or constitute a retraction; but none of these things is the case. Hence we can conclude that his reading the book he took down is not part of the semantic content of the first utterance.

From this portion of the discussion, we collect a fairly obvious resource for the Davidsonian: not all context sensitivity need affect semantic content, so not all such sensitivity need be recorded in a Davidsonian semantics. Everyone should agree that this resource is available, though there will be room for disagreement about how exactly it should be applied. I take it to be unpromising in the case of the examples which follow.

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[14] Julie Hunter suggested a nice variant: If the child responds to its mother's "You won't die" by something like "Come off it Mom: you know we're all going to die sometime", we cannot doubt that the child has contradicted its mother.

5. Allegedly problematic context-sensitive expressions

Four examples:

Rain

    (a) It's raining.

Imagine this utterance having been made in Austin on 06/06/06. The semantic content of the utterance (the contextualist may claim) is that it is raining in Austin on 06/06/06. Even supposing that the Davidsonian approach can handle the tense (a member of the Basic Set), it cannot account for the location, since there is no lexical element in the utterance which could be associated with a location-introducing axiom.

    Let's accept without discussion that the semantic content of the utterance is as specified in this argument.[15] It does not follow that a Davidsonian cannot weave it into a conditional truth condition, for example:

> if in an utterance u of "it's raining" the speaker referred to place or range of places p, then u is true iff it's raining somewhere there [within p].[16]

I have remained neutral on whether location is part of semantic content, but have shown that *if* it is, this poses no special difficulty for a Davidsonian.

Possessives

Uses of possessives (as in "John's car") invoke different relations in different contexts. The Contextualist will say that it is up to a semantic theorist to deliver a semantic content which involves the contextually appropriate relation, but that a Davidsonian cannot do this. Why not? One answer might be that the range of relevant relations is huge, and the relations need not be, indeed cannot be, known on a one-byone basis to speakers and hearers merely in virtue of mastery of possessive locutions. Yet, in context, specific relations enter semantic content. For example,

    (b) John's car

may refer to the car John owns, the one he has borrowed, the one he has painted, the one he covets, and so on. All being well, context settles the relevant relation, which in turn, a contextualist will say, helps fix the semantic content of an utterance containing (b).

    A Davidsonian need not deny that there is no knowing the full range of possible relations in advance. But he will not see this as an obstacle: perhaps a semantic clause could simply quantify over the relations, and so provide a conditional reference condition.

> for all possession relations R, all objects z, all referring expressions X, all predicates Y: if in an utterance u of "X's Y" the speaker refers to relation R, then u thereby refers to z iff z = the satisfier of Y which stands in relation R to the referent of X.

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[15]   Location fails the envisaged test for not belonging to semantic content. "It's raining. But not anywhere." sounds odd, perhaps contradictory.

[16]   The use of "there" rather than just "at p" conforms to the demands of the scene-content approach. One who uses such a theorem en route to a report of the speech of one who utters "It's raining" may refer to the relevant place without so much as hinting that this corresponds to the way the utterer thought about it:

    Speaking (in Utah) of some remote corner of Alabama where my sister lives, Bill said it was raining there.

Likewise, the content of the claim in the text (given that the speaker may not know he is in Austin or that it is 06/06/06) is better reported: speaking in Austin on 06/06/06, he said that it was raining there then.

    Davidson himself, without comment, inserts location into the truth condition: "'Es regnet' is true-in-German when spoken by x at time t if and only if it is raining near x at t" (1973: 135). This will not always give the right result, e.g. not for the example displayed in this note.

Setting aside detailed inadequacies (for example, "John's car" can with entire propriety be used to refer to a car John owns even if he owns more than one), we encounter again the difficulties which led to the scene/content approach: we would not wish an interpreter's way of referring to z to replace the speaker's way. Given the background information about what relation a speaker referred to, we can determine to which object the possessive phrase refers, but we risk leaving behind information about how that object is to be referred to. For example, if our instantiation of variable z is VIN number 1079856291, we will end up saying that an utterance of "John's car is rusty" is true iff 1079856291 is rusty, and even if this is true, it is not interpretive.

This problem is not much to do with possessives, for it springs from the fact that even for context free languages, we need to treat with care an atomic composition axiom like this:

> for all subject expressions, S, and predicate expressions, P, S+P is true iff the referent of S satisfies P.

Hesperus is the referent of "Phosphorus". If this fact is available to the theory, one will be able to derive the uninterpretive T-theorem

> "Phosphorus is visible" is true iff Hesperus is visible.

In the Davidsonian tradition, the idea has been to ensure that such "extra-semantic" facts as that "Phosphorus" refers to Hesperus are not expressed by theorems of the theory, and hence cannot interact in this unsatisfactory way with the atomic composition axiom. This approach has to be abandoned once conditional truth conditions are supposed to lead to interpretive truth conditions via modus ponens, for here the input to the inference, the antecedent of the conditional, includes material that is not strictly part of the theory, and so cannot be constrained in that way to semantic propriety. This was the problem addressed by the scene-content approach, which in effect isolated, for indexicals, the way in which an interpreter referred from the way in which the speaker referred. But for complex referring expressions, we cannot accept that loss: something is clearly missing if we report an utterer of "John's car is rusty" as having said, concerning vehicle 1079856291, that it is rusty. (Contrast with an utterance of "That is rusty".) The concepts of being John and being a car need to get into the content reported.

I think a Davidsonian would do better to take a different tack, and claim that possession is a case of very unspecific semantic content: the apostrophe indicates that some relation holds, but not which. If you are lucky, some relation rather than another will be salient, and will be the one the speaker hoped you would be moved by. Here the sign that the specific detail is not part of semantic content is that a speaker may have no specific relation in mind: one who uses "John's car" will typically have a view about which car is in question, and will expect his hearer to, but may not have a developed view of the specific relation in which John stands to it, involving as this does nuanced distinctions between, for example, ownership and possession. Specificity is an optional extra, and not a semantically demanded norm. The approach would be illustrated by a kind of homophonic axiom:

> "X's Y" refers to the referent of "X"'s satisfier of "Y".

In short, this case belongs with "grunts".

Tall

Contextualists say that utterances of

> (c) Sally is tall

can differ in truth value (even holding the reference of "Sally" unchanged) because different comparison classes may be salient in different contexts. In one context, the speaker may be saying truly that Sally is tall for a 6-year-old. In another, the speaker may be saying falsely that Sally is tall compared to her classmates. *Hence* the semantic contents must be different on the two occasions; and the Davidsonian has no way to deal with this.

Setting aside the problematic character of the emphasized inference, it must be admitted that the semantics of adjectives like "tall" are genuinely puzzling, from any point of view known to me, especially because of their relation to comparatives and to nominal qualification ("tall F"), and I don't think there is a widely accepted approach. The question is whether there is a special problem here for a Davidsonian.

A starting point is to take as fundamental the role of adjectives of this kind, the "noun-hungry" ones, as noun qualifiers. The axiom for "tall" would be based on the idea that something satisfies "tall"+X iff it is a tall satisfier of X (Evans 1976). Having this as the basic axiom allows a Davidsonian to describe context sensitivity in terms of an elided qualified noun phrase. One of the two utterances of (c) just envisaged can be regarded as introducing ("at the level of logical form") the noun phrase "6-year-old", the other as introducing "member of class II". This explains the difference in truth conditions. It is a contextual matter, in that context will determine which noun phrase has been elided; but once that is settled, the semantics carries the load. A bare occurrence of a noun-hungry adjective, like "tall", must be seen as elliptical for an occurrence in which the adjective has an appropriate noun to qualify. If this is not provided by syntax, it must be provided by context.

Although this illustrates a further resource for a Davidsonian, it would be naive to suppose that it unlocks the key to the semantics of these adjectives. Some will complain that no explanation has been given of what it is to be a tall satisfier of X. It is in keeping with Davidsonian minimalism to say that there is no explanation; alternatively explanations could be offered in terms, for example, of being taller than most satisfiers of X. However successful a Davidsonian may be in response to this objection, there are other difficulties. As C&L say, if Sally is a tall 6-year-old and Jack is a tall (adult) basketball player, then both Sally and Jack are tall. The supposed ellipsis must now take a more complex form: they are both tall, Sally for a 6-year-old, Jack for a basketball player. The original direct mode of composition, "tall"+X, needs to be replaced by a more complex form "tall *for an* X". A Davidsonian, possibly in common with all of us, also needs to reject apparently natural principles like:

if x is tall and y is taller then y is tall.

Counterexample: assume Harry is 5 ft 2 inches and that context supplies the italicized material: Sally is tall *for a 6-year-old* and Harry is taller, so Harry is a tall *for an American adult*.

Another problem is that we may not have come to the end of the relevant context dependence. The envisaged elided material is itself sensitive to context. Maybe Sally is not tall for a Namibian 6-year-old, so perhaps just inserting "6-year-old" does not fully describe whatever context delivered. But what does? And is it plausible, as the noun phrases become more complex (6-year-old caucasian 21st century child raised in America ...), that such linguistic material was present to the mind of the speaker or hearer?

I don't deny that these are problems, but either they have some kind of systematic solution, which comports with the appearance that utterances about tallness pose no special interpretive difficulties for actual speakers, or they do not. If they do, I am not aware of a reason for thinking that that the solution cannot be brought within a Davidsonian framework.

Ready

A Contextualist will say that the context of an utterance of

(d) Jill's ready

will normally resolve what it is that Jill is being said to be ready for. If this is not resolved, there are no truth conditions. Its resolution does not relate to any syntactic element of the sentence, so, according to the Contextualist, there is no way it can be reflected in compositional truth theoretic semantics.

There are a number of words which can occur both relationally ("phrasally") and also non-relationally: married to, ready for, enough for, willing to, resting on, fed up with, moved by. The relation between the forms is different in different cases: "Jill is married" can be thought of as

equivalent to "Jill is married to someone", but "Jill is ready" seems not to be equivalent to "Jill is ready for something", and "Jill is resting" is certainly not equivalent to "Jill is resting on something". Any semantic theorist will sense a tension in treating these expressions: on the one hand, to preserve something of the common meaning shared by relational and non-relational forms, on the other hand to do justice to the differences (and the different differences).

One option for the Davidsonian has been adopted with bravura by C&L. They claim that there is nothing problematic about a theorem like:

"Jill is ready" is true iff Jill is ready.

In effect, they treat "ready" as unspecific, the different things one can be ready for relating to "ready" rather as the different ways one can run relate to "run". If they are right, then of course these examples pose no special problem for Davidsonian approaches.

They offer two grounds for their opinion that there is such a proposition (i.e. entity possessed of truth conditions) as that Jill is ready. (1) If I hear someone utter "Jill is ready" without knowing what she is said to be ready for, I can still report the speaker as having said that Jill is ready, and this is not equivalent to reporting the speaker as having said that Jill is ready for something. (2) Given the truth of "Jill is ready" and "Jack is ready" I can infer that Jack and Jill are both ready, even if they are ready for different things, and I don't know what either is ready for. The second point suggests that my conclusion cannot be treated as contextually enriched by an implicit single answer to the question what they are both ready for.

Much as a Davidsonian would wish success to C&L, it is not clear that these considerations constitute any justification of their claim. As we saw, the capacity to re-use words without infelicity in a report does not guarantee that the reporter has identified truth conditions (e.g. the envisaged report that he told her he was leaving right away). As we saw with "tall", two things can both be F without being F in the same way or respect, and without there being such a thing as being F simplicitur. C&L do not appear to address the Contextualist riposte that "Jack and Jill are both ready" involves a double contextual enrichment: "ready" is enriched one way for Jack and another for Jill. They are both ready, Jack for the climb and Jill for her exam.

A Davidsonian might consider incorporating this kind of context dependence into the semantics, along the following lines:

if in uttering "ready" the speaker refers to X, and this occurrence of "ready" is not part of a phrase "ready to" or "ready for", then for all z, z satisfies "ready" iff z is ready to/for X.

for all z, z satisfies "ready to/for" + F iff z is ready to satisfy F (or to be a satisfier of F, or for being a satisfier of F).[17]

This does not do justice to the use of "ready" with a plural subject ("Jack and Jill are both ready"), but although the whole question of plurals should be on the list of technical difficulties for Davidsonians, the use of "ready" in plural constructions justifies no special qualms.

In the case of "ready", a Davidsonian has two promising options: to say, with C&L, that it is unspecific, and to adopt a conditional truth-condition approach, as for expressions in the Basic Set. I have given reasons to prefer the second option.

6. Summing up

Context is clearly a crucial concern for all those interested in language, no matter how its effects are partitioned between semantics and pragmatics. There are too many varieties of contextual effect for it to be likely that there is a single way of dealing with them, and the apparent panacea considered in §3

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[17]   I am assuming, probably unrealistically, that if x is ready to F, and something is F iff it is G, then x is ready to G. Non-extensionality is a major problem for the Davidsonian approach, but is not within the scope of this paper.

turned out not to deliver what was needed. It has been a premise of this paper that the Davidsonian approach to the members of the Basic Set is adequate, using conditional truth conditions perhaps with the additional nuance of scene-content reporting. Some kinds of contextual dependence, it was suggested, are to be dealt with by extending the underlying idea to them (e.g. "It's raining"). Other kinds need to be treated on the lines illustrated by "tall satisfier", showing that not all words can receive an adequate semantic description except as they occur in a larger setting (they are "syncategorematic"). Some cases of alleged context dependence are shown to be, from the semantic point of view, best described as lack of semantic specificity (e.g. "runs", possessives), with context often making salient more specific ways of making utterances containing such words true, ways not semantically determined. Finally, some context dependence seems to be independent of the words in the utterance ("You won't die", bridging inferences) and in these cases the relevant content is properly relegated to pragmatics, as involving non-language-specific processing. I have certainly not considered all the interesting kinds of contextual effect; but in suggesting that the ones I have considered do not threaten a Davidsonian, I hope that at the very least I will cause Contextualists to rely on different kinds of example, if such there be, ones which cannot be given a Davidsonian treatment in any of the ways considered here.

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