Published in *Synthèse* **173** (3), pp. 281-297. The original publication is available at www.springerlink.com, DOI 10.1007/s11229-008-9428-1.

DEFLATIONISM AND THE PRIMARY TRUTH BEARER

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ABSTRACT: The paper discusses what kind of truth bearer, or truth-ascription, a deflationist should take as primary. I first present number of arguments against a sententialist view. I then present a deflationary theory which takes propositions as primary, and try to show that it deals neatly with a wide range of linguistic data. Next, I consider both the view that there is no primary truth bearer, and the most common account of sentence truth given by deflationists who take propositions as primary, and argue that they both attribute an implausible type of ambiguity to "true". This can be avoided, however, if truth-ascriptions to sentences are taken as a certain form of pragmatic ellipses. I end by showing how this hypothesis accommodates a number of intuitions involving truth-ascriptions to sentences.

Introduction

One of the issues that divides deflationists about truth is that of which kind of entity is the *primary truth bearer*. A truth bearer, let us say, is primary if and only if the others are to be explained in terms of it. With such a definition, as we shall see, we can remain non-committal as to whether there is a metaphysical basis underlying the explanatory primacy. A deflationist, as I will be using the term, is one who holds that a certain truth equivalence schema (or some claim about it) gives an exhaustive theory of truth, in the sense that it can explain everything that a truth theory should explain (leaving it open what exactly this is). Those who take the primary truth bearers to be sentences I will call *disquotationalists*, and they will typically assign this explanatory role to

(DS) "*p*" is true if and only if *p*.

By contrast, *propositionalists* take the relevant schema to be

(PS) (The proposition) that *p* is true if and only if *p*.

Note, however, that propositionalists are not by definition committed to saying that propositions are the primary truth bearers, since they may instead just say that truth-ascriptions involving "that"-clauses are primary, but that these are not necessarily to be explained as truth-ascriptions *to propositions* (more one this in section 1). A third option, of course, is to hold that neither schema is primary, and thus include both in the truth-theory (where each is meant to explain its respective type of truth-ascription).

The aim of this paper is to argue for (a specific variety of) propositionalism. I will begin, in section 1, by discussing the motivations for disquotationalism, and argue that even if the views supposed to motivate the theory are true, they fail to provide a rationale for it. In section 2, I present some objections against disquotationalism, considered as a semantic theory of "true". Next, in section 3, I present a version of propositionalism and argue that it fares better than disquotationalism as concerns the explanation of the linguistic data. The following section begins with an argument against the "third option", that no truth bearer is primary, to the effect that the theory entails an unwarranted and implausible ambiguity in "true". I then argue that the most common account of sentence truth from the propositional perspective suffers from the same defect. The section ends with a novel account of sentence truth which takes truth-ascriptions to sentences to be a form of pragmatic ellipsis, and thereby allows us to say that "true" is unambiguous. In section 5, I offer a reply to the charge that

propositional deflationism is not deflationary (enough). In the sixth and final section, I discuss a number of truth-ascriptions to sentences that have been found problematic, and explain how the ellipsis theory handles them.

I will be assuming throughout that the correct account of truth must describe the actual meaning and use of "true", rather give the "best" revision, or some such, and much of my case will build on this assumption, so I will here briefly give my reasons for it (see Båve (2006: 35ff.) for a more detailed defence). Those who remain sceptical may regard this paper simply as engaged in one project rather than the other.

Even if we can agree that the project of capturing the actual meaning of "true" is coherent and intelligible, some would argue that it would be of no or little philosophical relevance. As against this attitude, one could argue that it is based on the mistaken presumption that the project primarily concerns the language of the man in the street, whereas what primarily interests us is the claims made by philosophers using "true". Philosophers are speakers of a natural language, and only very rarely use "true" in some technical sense, wherefore an investigation into the actual meaning of "true" will tell us what follows or doesn't follow from what they say, etc., which of course is philosophically relevant.

Some would perhaps say that this project founders on the fact that the ordinary "true" is "hopelessly ambiguous". But, firstly, this simply seems false, for if "true" were ambiguous, it should be possible to find a sentence containing "true" which differs in truth-value, confirmation, modal features, etc., depending on different readings of "true". But this is in fact hard to find (cf. Srzednicki (1966: 387)).[i] If "true" *would* turn out to be ambiguous, however, surely this would be of great importance, just as many other insights into the ambiguity of words or phrases have proved to be important for finding mistakes in philosophical claims and arguments, as well as for solving philosophical problems.

1. The motivations for disquotationalism

Disquotationalists often base their choice of primary truth bearers on a sceptical take on the notion of proposition (Quine (1970: 10f.), Field (1992)). Such scruples, whether nominalist or extensionalist, do not straightforwardly supply such a rationale, however, since there is a type of propositionalist deflationism that is entirely neutral with respect to the nature or existence of propositions. For instance, one could say merely that the left-hand side of (PS) is the primary type of truth-*ascription*, i.e., that the primary truth-ascription takes "that"-clauses (rather than, e.g., quote-names of sentences) as grammatical subjects, and thus avoid quantifying over propositions. After all, it should be uncontroversial that "that"-clauses *exist*, and that there must be some account of their semantic functioning, both a general one, and one about sentences of the form "That *p* is true" specifically. This form of truth-ascription is there to be dealt with whether one believes in propositions or not.

Once the existence and meaningfulness of these truth-ascriptions is granted, it is difficult to see why the additional claim that these are the explanatorily *primary* truth-ascriptions should be ruled out by scepticism towards propositions. If this is right, scepticism towards propositions does not provide any rationale for disquotationalism as against propositionalism *per se*, but only, trivially, against a propositionalism of an ontologically realist stripe. This explains the *prima facie* odd claim above that propositionalists need not say that propositions are the primary truth-bearers. Note that this argument is wholly independent of whether nominalistic theories of "that"-clauses are feasible of not: since nominalists are committed to a non-referentialist view of "that"-clauses, any argument showing that such a theory cannot be had will also show nominalism about propositions to be false, in which case the motivation for disquotationalism founders anyway.[ii]

Many historical deflationists have adopted similarly "linguistic" or "metalinguistic" approaches to truth, a prominent expression of which is Ramsey's dictum that "there is really

no separate problem of truth but merely a linguistic muddle" (1927: 157). In particular, deflationists have been prone to avoid claims of the form "Truth is ...", or truth-analyses of the form "*x* is true iff ...*x*...".[iii] The claim that an account of "true" is an account of truth seems plain wrong, however, and might also be suspected of obfuscating a commitment to the more radical-sounding idea that *no* account of truth itself can be had, but only one of "true" (cf. Devitt (2002)). On a charitable reading, this comes to saying that the best theory will not posit a property of truth, but merely account for the relevant facts about "true" (intuitions, philosophical claims, and linguistic facts) by a semantic theory of the word. This seems to be precisely the idea that "linguistic deflationists" are committed to.

However, as will now be argued, the radical nature of this form of deflationism is no reason for sceptics towards propositions to prefer disquotationalism. This is because sceptics about propositions, conceived of as the alleged references of "that"-clauses, have the similar commitment to saying that there can be no account of propositions, but only of "that"-clauses (and related expressions, like descriptions of the form "What *x* said/believes/etc."). Assuming that the primary truth-ascription is propositional, these two commitments go hand in hand, for the following reasons.

First, it would be implausible to say that there is an account of truth itself – which would be a property – but no account of the things it is a property of. Secondly, it is equally implausible to say there is an account of truth itself, but that the alleged objects of this property do not exist. Thirdly, again presupposing the primacy of propositional truth-ascriptions, it would be implausible to say that there is an account of propositions, the referents of "that"-clauses, but no account of truth, that which seems to be ascribed in these truth-ascriptions. Therefore, the radical-sounding commitment of linguistically styled deflationism, i.e., that there cannot be an account of truth itself, does not provide a reason for a sceptic towards propositions to prefer disquotationalism to propositionalism. But this last

point is different from the main point of this section, that propositionalism can be understood linguistically, and is therefore available to nominalists about propositions, wherefore they have no reason *qua* nominalists about propositions to accept disquotationalism.

2. Disquotationalism as a semantic theory of "true"

In this section, I criticise disquotationalism, taken as a piece of natural language semantics. Note, first, that ordinary uses of "true" are virtually always of the propositional type, such as "That *p* is true", "It is true that *p*", "What she said is true", "Everything he believes is true", etc. Truth-ascriptions to sentences are less common, and mainly occur in philosophy and linguistics.

Most of the implausible consequences of disquotationalism have the same source: the strength of the equivalence between the right and left hand sides of the instances of (DS). Both Ramsey (1927: 158) and Quine ((1960: 24) and (1970: 12)) in effect took the equivalence to be as strong as a synonymy relation. But, as Lewy (1947) argued against Tarskian truth-definitions, whether a sentence is true or not depends on what it means – an idea Quine himself considered "obvious" (1951: 36).

Hartry Field has a somewhat ambiguous stance on whether his theory is reformatory or descriptive. In his earlier writings, he proposed a stipulation of "true", intended only to serve practical purposes ((1986: 62f) and (1994: § 5)).[iv] But in his (1994: 266f.), he proposes a number of refinements in order to accommodate linguistic intuitions, which makes it unclear which project is at issue, since linguistic intuitions are only relevant for theories about the actual meaning of "true". To make things even more complicated, he also expresses doubts about the very idea of distinguishing descriptive from stipulative accounts of concepts (2001: 143). In any case, I will here continue to assess the theory as one about the actual meaning of "true", and take the burden of proof to be on those sceptical towards this distinction.

According to an early formulation of Field's theory, two essential features of the truth-predicate are that:

(a) it is defined only for sentences that one understands

(b) the property of those sentences which it defines is one that a sentence has or fails to have *independently of the way that the sentence is used by speakers* (1986: 58).

The "use-independence" is meant *inter alia* to have the consequence that:

C_1 if we had used the word 'white' differently, 'grass is white' might have been true

is equivalent (if "true" is used disquotationally) to:

C_2 if we had used the word 'white' differently, grass might have been white (1986: 58).

Another consequence is that since "Necessarily, 1+1=2" is true, so is "Necessarily, '1+1=2' is true". In general, sentences "*p*" and "'*p*' is true" are meant to be intersubstitutable in most contexts (but not quotation and propositional attitude contexts (1986: 58)).

As Field is well aware, this theory is not adequate as a piece of natural language semantics. For this reason, he added amendments pertaining to modal contexts, indexicals, foreign languages, and the dependence of sentence truth on meaning (for some useful criticisms of these proposals, see David (1994)). One problem is that these amendments are each devised only to take case of one counter-intuitive feature of the original disquotational theory, which means that bringing them together into a general account of "true" would result in a rather complicated theory, full of *ad hoc* stipulations for each problematic context (cf. Vision (1997:

112ff.)). Also, there is yet no account of how to interpret truth-ascriptions to sentences in propositional attitude contexts, *mixed* contexts, not to mention the ubiquitous propositional truth-ascription.

3. Propositionalism and its virtues

To many, e.g., Austin (1950: 113f.), Strawson (1952: 2ff.), it has seemed like a plain category mistake to take sentences, which are strings of letters, to be true. Rather, it must be what is *said* by a sentence that is true. Another problem is that truth for sentences must be relativized to languages (the awkwardness of which was urged by Black (1948)). Clearly, a sentence may be true in one language and false in another. This phenomenon is rather obvious for the propositionalist: sentences express different propositions in different languages. But if there are two options for what to take as a primary bearer of a property, and one option, but not the other, requires that the having of this property be relativised rather than absolute, then that counts against the option. Further, whereas the definition of sentence truth in terms of proposition truth is straightforward, the converse, besides being quite unnatural, requires non-actual utterances and relativisation to languages and contexts of utterance.

The main advantage of propositional *deflationism* over the sententialist alternative is that in most contexts that proved problematic for the disquotationalist, the halves of (PS) are just unproblematically intersubstitutable. For instance, "It is necessary that 1+1=2" is clearly equivalent to "It is necessary that (the proposition) that 1+1=2 is true".[v] Now, if (PS) is necessary, *a priori* (as opposed to (DS)), and such that its halves can be intersubstituted in many contexts where those of (DS) cannot (but not *vice versa*), it is reasonable to conclude that (PS) is primary. This will be further supported by the fact that the substitution failures relating to (DS) can easily be *explained* given propositionalism. In fact, I will even argue that

the halves of (PS) can be intersubstituted in *every* context. If that is right, then no amendment is needed, and so simplicity considerations tell strongly in favour of propositionalism.

The case for universal intersubstitutability will be made by considering three alleged counter-examples: (1) quote-contexts, (2) the context "If ..., then there is something true", and (3) propositional attitude contexts. The claim to be defended is

(D) Every sentence of the form "that *p* is true" is S-equivalent to the corresponding sentence "*p*".

Two expressions *e* and *e*' are S-equivalent iff for any sentence-context $S(\xi)$, $S(e)$ and $S(e')$ are mutually inferrable. A sentence-context may simply be seen as a function from the expression in question to a sentence containing it. Thus, we are not operating with the notion of being intersubstitutable *salva veritate*, which, it might be suspected, is not available to deflationists.[vi]

When claims of intersubstitutability are made, it is commonplace to state exceptions pertaining to quote-contexts. However venerable, I will argue that this is unnecessary, and rests on a mistaken view of quote-contexts. I will not present a theory of quotation to defend this claim (which would be out of place to say the least), but rather argue for a negative claim about them, namely that, strictly speaking, sentences never occur inside quotation marks.

When claiming that an expression *e* of a certain grammatical category can substitute another, *e*', one does not mean that any string of letters or phonemes which constitutes *e* can substitute any string of letters or phonemes which constitutes *e*'. Borrowing an example from Quine (1953: 140), someone who claims that synonyms are substitutable does not mean that one can substitute in "cattle is expensive" so as to get *"felinetle is expensive", although "cat"

and "feline" are synonymous. But surely, the adherent of this substitution view is not required to specify that the string of letters "cat" must occur *as a noun* in order to be substitutable.

I will now argue that what comes inside the quote-marks in a quote-name of a sentence does not occur *as* a sentence anymore than the string of letters "cat" occurs *as* a noun in the word "cattle". The support for this view is simply that it is a consequence of a plausible principle of compositionality, namely, that if an expression *e* of category C occurs *as an instance of C* in a sentence, then the semantic content of *e* will contribute to that of the sentence. But clearly, the semantic content of "Snow is white" does not contribute to the content of the sentence

"Snow is white" contains three words.

No matter what "snow" means, the above sentence will still mean the same thing. If a linguistic theory satisfies this principle of compositionality, then it is *ceteris paribus* to be preferred over one that does not.

I believe the idea that the sentence "Snow is white" occurs in the sentence above is the result of failing to make a rather subtle distinction. What occurs in the quote-name is a *string of letters belonging to a type of strings some of whose tokens occur as sentence-tokens*. But it does not follow from this that the string itself occurs as a sentence token. Thus, since what (D) claims is that certain *sentences* can be substituted for others, it need not be supplemented with exceptions for quote-contexts.

Another objection against an unrestricted intersubstitutability claim is that whereas the truth-ascribing sentence containing a "that"-clause always commits itself to the existence of something which is true, the sentence in the "that"-clause need not (cf. Field (1994: 250)). Thus, one might argue, in the sentence "That snow is white is true; therefore, something is

true", one cannot replace "That snow is white is true" with "Snow is white". But this can be resisted. Suppose someone, inspired by Nietzsche, claims that *nothing is true*, and that a more analytically-minded philosopher tries to trap him by asking, innocently, "But is snow white?". He may then, if the Nietzschean says "Yes", go on to say, "But if snow is white, then something is true!". This is a fully reasonable claim to make. More importantly, we do not take it to be assertible only on the assumption of other sentences. Rather, it is simply assertible purely on the basis of semantic competence with the expressions involved. Thus, (D) gives the right prediction in this case.

But, the objection might continue, one cannot similarly substitute in the sentence "It is *logically* true that if that snow is white is true, then something is true". This charge fails because the definitions of logical truth make it a property of *sentences*, e.g., so that sentences are logically true iff true for all variations of the non-logical vocabulary, or true under all interpretations, or in all models, etc. But on such an explanation of "logically true", the sentence in question is strictly speaking unintelligible. Likewise, since "contains three words" is a property of sentences, one cannot intelligibly say, "It contains three words that snow is white". A sentence like "It is logically true that if *p*, then *p*" must thus be taken as a sloppy way of saying that "If *p*, then *p*" is logically true. But then, the above point about quote-contexts can be made anew, and the alleged counter-example fails.

Finally, we will look at some putative counter-examples pertaining to propositional attitude contexts like "*x* believes/knows/says/means that ...", "Sentence *s* means that ...", etc. To wit, we find the following to be possibly true:

X believes that snow is white but not that it is *true* that snow is white.

First, this intuition is apparently not shared by everyone, since Frege, for one, said, on the contrary, that always when one judges something to be thus or so, one judges a thought to be true (1918: 36f.). Unlike me, he could not be accused of adapting his intuitions to fit his theory, since he had no theory which entailed it. But many do have the intuition and this must be accounted for. The sentence above seems to say that *X* believes that snow is white, but not that "true" applies to this proposition, or some such. But this can plausibly be taken to be pragmatically, not semantically, expressed. Assuming (D), what is semantically expressed is a contradiction. The pragmatic effect can then be taken to arise because of the following facts: Firstly, the semantic content is a contradiction, wherefore this interpretation is automatically avoided (hence, what is *saliently* expressed is *only* a pragmatic effect). That we should avoid interpreting utterances as communicating contradictions is common to all pragmatic theories.

Secondly, given (D), the second conjunct contains a semantically redundant phrase, "it is true that", wherefore an interpretation is made which satisfies the assumption that the apparent violation of a maxim (under the category of *Manner* – "Be brief!") can be explained. Similarly, on the Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986), it should be assumed that the utterance is the least effort-requiring way of communicating the message. Therefore, the semantically redundant phrase will be taken to have a point. Thus, something more than what is semantically expressed will be taken to be communicated.

Thirdly, since this phrase is semantically redundant, it must be either a non-semantic property of the phrase (like its poetic value) or (a part of) the very phrase itself, which guides the audience (us) to the right interpretation. The interpretation which both stays closest to the semantic content of the sentence and satisfies the assumption that there is a point to the semantically redundant phrase is something like the above interpretation, on which what is communicated is that *X* believes that snow is white but not that "true" applies to the

proposition that snow is white (see Båve (2008) for a similar defense of the view that coreferring names are always intersubstitutable).

Note that the interpretation is helped by the stress (italisation) on "true". Without it, the intuition is less clear. But this is also in line with modern pragmatics, according to which stress on a word indicates that it should be taken to inform the interpretation in a way it would not do otherwise. Consider the sentence "*X* believes that blood is red, but not that it is true that blood is *red*". This is almost unintelligible, but might be interpreted as communicating (if anything) that *X* believes that blood is close to paradigmatic red but not *quite* paradigmatic red (or some such). The point is that it is the word "red" that guides the interpretation, rather than "true" in this case. In any case, I take it the above is a proper application of uncontroversial pragmatic principles that explain, on the assumption of (D), why the intersubstitution seems to fail in the relevant contexts.

These replies in favour of (D), if successful, provide further reason to take propositional truth to be primary. It also seems that (D) need only be supplemented with more or less truistic claims about language in order to account for a wide range of uses of "true", such as "blind" and quantified truth-ascriptions, "truth-operator" uses, uses with demonstratives ("That is true"), and even derivative uses, as in "true friend" (see Båve (2006: 4.3)).

There is one type of case that requires an expansion of (D), however, namely, *modified* truth-ascriptions. A main datum to be explained is the fact that "It might be true that snow is white" and "Snow might be white" are mutually inferable, and similarly for other modified truth-ascriptions. By "modification", I will also include such sentential operators as negation and adverbial modifiers like "necessarily", "presumably", "approximately", and so on. To formulate the expanded version of (D), note first that (D) is strictly equivalent to

(D') Every sentence *s* is such that "that" ❝ *s* ❞ "is true" is S-equivalent to *s*,

where "⁀" is the two-place concatenation-function, which, applied to two expressions, refers to the expression obtained by juxtaposing in order the expressions in its two places. (In fact, (D) and (D') seem to say exactly the same thing.) Next, we introduce the notion of a *modifier-function* by these examples: the function *Neg*(*x*) takes sentences to their negations; *Might*(*x*), similarly, takes the sentence "Snow is white" to "Snow might be white", and so on; *Presum*(*x*) takes "Snow is white" to "Snow is presumably white", and so on. That is, for any modifier and adverb, there is a modifier-function taking any sentence to a sentence which contains the modifier and in which it has the widest possible scope. We can now account for all these modified truth-ascriptions by:

(MD) For every sentence *s* and modifier-function *f*, *f*("that"⁀*s*⁀"is true") is S-equivalent to *f*(*s*).

Instances of (MD) will include the claim that "That snow is white is presumably true" is S-equivalent to "Snow is presumably white", and so on. If, among the functions in the range of the quantifier, we include the identity function *g* such that for all *x*, *g*(*x*)=*x*, then (D) follows from (MD), and so we only need the latter.

4. Sentence truth and ambiguity

We have not yet mentioned the "third option", the idea that propositional and sentential truth-ascriptions require separate accounts, and thus that neither is primary. I have two main objections. Firstly, this view takes (DS), or some amended variant thereof, to account for sentential truth-ascriptions, which we have already found reason to doubt. Secondly, the theory would fall afoul of another consideration: it is implausible to think that "true" means

different things depending on what it is applied to, no matter if the meanings are "closely related". Since, as we shall see, this is avoidable, Grice's razor will rule out this third option.

That leaves us with propositionalism. However, I will now try to cast doubt on the standard propositionalist account of sentence-truth, which, with minor variations, reads

(ST) The sentence *s* is true iff *s* expresses a true proposition

Adding (ST) to a propositionalist theory (such as (PS) or (MD)), I will argue, results in a theory that makes "true" just as ambiguous (or polysemous) as on the "third option". For on such a theory, "true" will have one sense given by the propositionalist theory, but, given the addition of (ST), it will also have a secondary sense, on which it is synonymous with "expresses a true proposition" (where "true" is understood in the first sense, given by (PS) or (MD)). Of course, a proposition can never, in the intended sense, *express* a proposition, and so a proposition can never be true in this secondary sense. Further, it is unintelligible what it would be for a sentence to be true in the sense given by (PS) or (MD). So "true" would have two different senses—in fact, so different that applying "true" in one of the senses to the "wrong" kind of truth-bearer would result in a semantic anomaly, or "category mistake". So this view fails for the same reason as did the "third option".

Horwich subscribes the truth-predicate with an "S" when presenting his (ST)-analysis of sentence truth, but this does not seem to solve the problem. If Horwich's (ST)-analysis is meant to capture one of the senses of "true", then the ambiguity objection arises. If, on the other hand, (ST) with "true" thus subscribed is merely a stipulative definition, then it is not even of the right form to be part of a semantic theory of "true" in natural language, since it is then true by definition, and true of a word other than "true" (namely, "true$_S$"). But we can speak intelligibly of sentences, not only being true$_S$, but *true*, and this must be accounted for.

What is needed is a theory of "true" which both makes it unambiguous *and* explains both sentential and propositional truth-ascriptions. In view of the above considerations, this may seem impossible. But it is not, and I will argue that the following claim will do the trick:

(S) "(The sentence) *s* is true" is an *attributive ellipsis* for "What *s* says is true".

I will explain the notion of an "attributive ellipsis" by giving a different sentence as example, together with a theory about it that I think should be fairly uncontroversial, whence (S) will be explained as stating that sentences of the form "*s* is true" work the same way.

In discussions about perception and *qualia*, philosophers (including myself) have spoken of visual experiences as "being green/red/etc.". A sentence ascribing a colour to an experience, however, cannot plausibly be taken as literally intelligible. It is implausible to think that colour words have a literal meaning (in addition to their most common literal meaning) on which they literally apply to experiences. If so, then our interpretation of sentences ascribing colours to experiences cannot be explained by appeal to polysemy. Such sentences are thus semantically anomalous, or constitute category mistakes. Still, they are used, seriously and sincerely. Pragmatics, the science of non-literal communication, must thus be invoked. What we need is a deduction assuming pragmatic principles (such as Grice's maxims or the principle of relevance of Sperber and Wilson) to the effect that what is meant in utterances of the relevant sentences, and what the audience takes the speaker to mean, is distinct from what is semantically encoded in the sentences. By uncontroversial pragmatic principles, what is meant should (1) be reasonable (unlike the category mistake) and (2) be something that lies close to the (or *a*) literal interpretation of the sentence uttered. The former requirement will be familiar to everyone with any acquaintance with Grice or other pragmatists. Depending on one's view of semantic anomaly, one may appeal either to the

maxim of *Quality* (''Try to make your contribution one that is true''), or to that of *Manner* ("Avoid obscurity of expression"). It is also clear that the semantic content of a semantically anomalous sentence cannot have the "contextual effects" (approximately, cognitive effects on a speaker in a given context) that Sperber and Wilson require for relevance (1986: 118ff.) The second requirement is also clearly stated by Grice and, even more so by Sperber and Wilson, in that they define relevance in terms of *effort of processing* (1986: 125). A plausible candidate interpretation of "Experience *e* is green" meeting these requirements might be one on which what is meant is that *e* is an experience *of* something green, or some such.

Thus, by "attributive ellipsis", I mean a sentence which involves an anomalous attribution to something, such that the pragmatic interpretation explaining (away) the anomaly takes that which has been communicated to be something that could be semantically expressed only by a longer sentence. By "longer", I mean one which is like the one uttered, but contains a few words in addition (hence "ellipsis"). (Of course, I am not claiming any interesting relationship with other phenomena described in the literature as "ellipsis", e.g, one-word speech-acts like "Exactly", or "VP-ellipsis", "sluicing", etc. The word "abbreviation" would have been equally apt.)

According to the present proposal, we should join Strawson and others in claiming it to be a category mistake to say that a sentence is true. Then, an utterance of such a sentence must be given a pragmatic interpretation. This should stay close to the semantic content of the sentence uttered. If propositions, the things that might be believed, supposed and *said*, are the primary truth bearers, then a plausible (or even obvious) candidate for what is meant by someone uttering "*s* is true" is that what *s* says is true.

A candidate attributive ellipsis which is more similar to truth-ascriptions to sentences might be the phrase "believe a person", which would be similarly elliptic for "believe what a person says". This is an attributive ellipsis if, indeed, "believe" has no literal sense on which

one can literally believe persons. But it might be that although this use of "believe" started out as an attributive ellipsis, it has become so common that it has grown a new literal meaning of its own, and so "believe" has become polysemous. If so, then no pragmatic inference is needed on behalf of the interpreter in order to make sense of "believe him", etc., and it follows that a new entry in the mental lexicon has been formed (even if it is closely related and similar to the original entry). Also, we hear that *p*, but also hear noise, hear the train, hear someone talking, and some of these uses are plausibly cases of attributive ellipsis (cf. also "justify"—both people and premises can justify things).[vii]

If the above account is correct, then we can give a propositionalist explanation of truth-ascriptions to sentences and still claim that, strictly speaking, sentences are never true (or false), and thereby satisfy the two constraints of making "true" unambiguous and accounting for both types of truth-ascriptions. I spoke above of sentences being only "derivatively true" on the propositionalist theory, but I think we should dismiss this formulation as misleading, since it suggests that sentences are true (or false), albeit in a special way.

The expression "say" in (TS), is plausibly taken to be derivative as well. Sentences do not say anything, people say things in uttering them. What is meant, then, by someone uttering "*s* is true" is really something more like "What *x* would say if *x* utters *s* is true", where *x* will be assigned some value depending on the context (as is often the case with pronouns). In most cases, "*x*" could probably just be replaced by something like "normal speakers of English". This, again, squares nicely with intuitions, since we intuit that a sentence is true/false just in case that which would have been said by a normal speaker of English if she uttered it is true/false.

Furthermore, what people say in uttering a sentence depends on the context. But precisely because what is said by a sentence depends on the context, truth itself need not be relativized to contexts, if we take propositions as primary truth bearers. On such an account, the context-

dependence of sentence truth derives from the context-dependence of what is said in the utterance of a sentence. Theories taking truth to be a property of sentences, by contrast, must take truth itself to be relative to contexts, which, like the relativisation to languages, is a further disadvantage.

It should be emphasised that (S) is unlike semantic analyses or definitions in that it does not generalise in an obvious way to other types of truth-ascriptions to sentences. In fact, it does not even have to give the right verdict to every possible utterance of a sentence of the form "*s* is true". This is not a drawback, but is to be expected if truth-ascriptions to sentences must be treated in the pragmatic fashion devised. For since pragmatic effects are sensitive to many kinds of contextual features, exceptions to claims like (S) may well arise. Likewise, the Gricean account of disjunction (the utterance of which is taken to implicate that the speaker does not know which disjunct is true) should not be expected to cover any possible utterance of a disjunction. Nevertheless, I believe (S) works in most cases, and that it gives a good idea of how to interpret other truth-ascriptions to sentences.

Pragmatic treatments such as the present are not very common in philosophy, and I fear many will perceive an unacceptable lack of rigour in this account. This is just plain wrong, however. Firstly, it is not so much rigour that is lacking as simple generality (i.e., that there is no simple generalisation to cover all possible utterances of "*s* is true"). Pragmatics is in effect one of the least controversial areas of linguistics. That pragmatic principles akin to Grice's maxims or Sperber and Wilson's Principles of relevance govern interpretation, and do so in approximately the way they envisage, is widely accepted, and it is accepted because of its surprisingly tight fit the linguistic data. If such theories are adequate at all, then the ensuing complexity (in comparison with semantic analyses) simply cannot be a weakness.

Further, that it will in many case be indeterminate exactly which proposition(s) will have been communicated is universally accepted as a common predicament, which can be

explained by the pragmatic theories, and the indeterminacy also squares with intuition. The most effective advertisement of this account, however, probably goes by showing how it can be put to work, i.e., showing how, on the lines of (S), other kinds of truth-ascriptions may be understood. This is the theme of the final section.

Finally, those who may have thought that this is more linguistics than philosophy should be reminded of the point made in the introduction, that the ellipsis analysis not only concerns lay people's speech, but also philosophers' uses of "true" (except for the rare cases in which a technical notion is employed), and thus has consequences for what follows and doesn't follow, etc., from various philosophical claims. Indeed, we will soon see that (S) actually rules out truth-theoretic semantics.

5. An objection

Hartry Field (1992: 326f.) and Marian David (2007: 432f.) have claimed that on (ST) above, the truth-conditions of a sentence depends on what it expresses, but unless one gives a deflationary theory of the expressing relation, the truth-conditions of a sentence will depend on substantial properties of the sentence (e.g., referential features of its subsentential parts), wherefore (ST) will be incompatible with deflationism. This objection was directed at Horwich's view, but, if successful, equally threatens my own proposal (supposing the latter is coupled with a non-deflationary view of expressing/saying), so I will now argue that it is unsound.

That the expression relation is taken as deflated can mean, e.g., that the schema "'*p*' expresses the proposition that *p*" is taken to exhaust the expression relation, or that "[w]hat it is for *u* to express the proposition that *p* is simply for '*p*' (as used on the left) to translate *u*" (Field (1992: 326)). These are clearly similar in spirit. The idea of a deflated expression

relation could perhaps be more carefully pinned down, but I think it sufficient for my purposes to stick with this loose, disjunctive characterisation.

Now, if a propositionalist deflationist about truth rejects a deflationist view of the expression relation, he would indeed have to say that it is a substantial matter whether a sentence is true. But, as will now be argued, a deflationist only needs to say that it is an insubstantial matter for the primary truth bearer to be true. For if one intends to give an insubstantial account of *F*-ness, and takes this to be primarily a property of *G*'s, then on Field's criterion, he could not do so unless *every* relation between *G*'s and a different type of thing is insubstantial. For if *H*'s are sometimes related to *G*'s by substantial relation *R*, one could define *F*-ness for *H*'s by saying that an *H* is *F* iff it bears *R* to a *G* which is *F*. But then, one cannot be a "deflationist about *F*-ness", since *F*-ness for *H*'s would be substantial. It seems clear that the schematic character of this argument shows that it is independent on how we explain the notion of "substantial".

Field's and David's implicit demarcation of deflationism also seems to make disquotationalism equally non-deflationary. For, presumably, there are things standing in some substantial relation to sentences (perhaps belief-tokenings in brains), which can be defined as true iff related in the relevant way to true sentences. Whether such an entity were true would then depend on whether this substantial relation holds between the sentence and the entity.

Here is a further argument: on a propositionalist deflationism coupled with (ST), the substantiveness of sentence truth does not *derive at all from truth*, but only from that of the expression relation. That is, on this view, for a sentence to be true is a substantial matter because (1) for a sentence to be true is for it to express a true proposition and (2) for a sentence to express something is a substantial matter. But then, why should a deflationist

about *truth* bother? This shows that a deflationist could even take the expressing relation to involve representational notions, like reference (though not, of course, truth-conditions).

Finally, it may seem that the Field-David objection, even if it were successful against Horwich's views, would not touch my own proposal, on which sentences are, strictly speaking, *never* true (or false). On such a view, one might argue, sentence truth does not become a substantial matter since there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as sentence truth.

6. Some applications of the ellipsis theory

In the literature about disquotationalism, certain modal and counterfactual truth-ascriptions have received special attention[viii], among which are

(M1) If we had used the word "white" differently, "Grass is white" might have been true,

(M2) If we had used the word "white" differently, grass might have been white,

(M3) "1+1=2" might not have been true.

As detailed in section 2, Field's original, "pure disquotationalism" took (M1) to be equivalent to (M2). As has been noted by Field himself, among others, there are two readings of modalised truth-ascriptions to sentences. For instance, the consequent of (M1) can be taken as either of the following:

(C1) What "Grass is white" (actually) says might have been true,

(C1') What "Grass is white" would (then) have said might not have been true.

If the elliptic treatment is correct, then it should come as no surprise that these possible interpretations are possible. The leading idea is that people interpret truth-ascriptions to sentences as saying something about the truth of propositions expressed by the relevant sentences. This rule of thumb does not entail anything about, e.g., which scope is to be given to modal expressions. Therefore, both (C1) and (C1') are possible interpretations. Now, assuming the trivial fact that "Grass is white" actually says that grass is white, we see that, on the first reading, (M1) entails (M2), but is not true, and that on the second, it is true, but does not entail (M2). Thus, the (material) equivalence between (M1) and (M2), on one reading, is explained, as well as the non-equivalence on the other, and naturally, we see also why we are not committed to saying that the colour of grass depends on how we use words.

Concerning (M3), Field notes that there are two readings here as well, one on which, intuitively, it can be used to say that what "1+1=2" (actually) says might not have been true (absurd), and one on which it can be used to say that it might have been the case that what "1+1=2" says (in those circumstances) is not true (plausible). Field intended his "use-independent" reading of "true" to be captured by "true-as-we-understand-it" (1994: 265f.), and this is meant to deliver specific readings of modalised truth-ascriptions to sentences, namely, in particular, the (C1)-reading of (M1), and the former reading of (M3). It is now clear how the phrase "true-as-I-understand-it" accomplishes this on the basis of (S): we *understand* "Grass is white" *as saying that grass is white*. With this in mind, the derivation of the disquoted sentence from (M1) is unequivocally valid (together with the fact about what the sentence says), since the other interpretation is explicitly ruled out by the phrase "as-I-understand-it". Likewise, (M3) becomes unequivocally false.

We will end by discussing how (S) fares with sentences that do not intuitively say anything, or say more than one thing. Again, since ellipsis is a pragmatic phenomenon, it does

not obey strict rules that are to apply in every case. However, (S) does seem to work also for most problematic cases. Take, to begin with, a sentence which does not seem to say anything because of non-existing words, such as "Gweeks thwartle". One may have the idea that the claim that this sentence is not true is itself true. Since nothing is said, it may be thought, there is nothing than can be true.

This seems to me to be primarily a philosopher's reaction, however. A normal speaker would find the claim that "Gweeks thwartle" is not true to be simply confusing, since "not true" is normally interpreted as "false". If nothing is said by a sentence claimed to be (not) true, then, I predict, the claim will normally be taken as a supposition failure.

She may of course change her mind if it is explained that *since* it is meaningless, it cannot very well be true. But such a claim would enforce a different interpretation, namely the interpretation on which "*s* is not true" is interpreted as saying that *s* does not say something true, rather than (by (S)) saying that what *s* says is not true. That such opposing reactions are manifested is rather natural given that it takes pragmatic interpretation to make sense of ascriptions of sentence truth in the first place. Note that standard propositional accounts of sentence truth, such as (ST), are less flexible, and would probably need to be amended to handle the multitude of linguistic data.

If I am right about a normal speaker's initial reaction, this is evidence that (S) registers a default type of interpretation, whereas the interpretation of "*s* is true" as saying that *s* says *something which is true* is less natural (but of course by no means incorrect or inferior). The latter interpretation, which is intended when it is explained that the sentence is untrue since it does not say anything, is special, since it is usually trivial and irrelevant that meaningless sentences do not say something true (since they do not say anything). As always, such pragmatic considerations of relevance govern interpretation, whence the possible confusion upon encountering the claim that "Gweeks thwartle" is not true. The claim (S) is not

legislative, but is meant to register a fact about normal speakers' interpretation, which also tends to be philosophers' interpretation, absent various theoretical involvements that enforce a different interpretation.

Sentences which do not say only one thing can be similarly treated. With cases of ambiguity, as in "Mary had a little lamb", truth-ascriptions are judged relative to an interpretation. If there is a salient interpretation, then there is one thing the sentence says, on the interpretation, and (S) might be directly applied. Then, what is said is that what the sentence says under that interpretation is true (or not). If no particular interpretation is salient, the truth-ascription will raise the kind of confusion as did "Gweeks thwartle". Is the truth-ascription taken to be a supposition failure, or is it to be taken as true, since on one interpretation of "bank", the sentence says something true, or is it false, since on one interpretation of "bank, what is said is false? What is meant in a real situation, if that can be worked out, is determined by contextual features, but taken in isolation, there is no real issue here, since there are more than one interpretation. That we normally interpret truth-ascriptions in accordance with (S) is evidenced, however, by the fact that we tend to ask for a specification, rather than answering "Yes" or "No". If I ask "Is the sentence 'I am tall' true?", the audience will either presuppose a reference for "I", and answer "Yes" or "No" accordingly, or the audience will object, "It depends on who utters it". It is improbable that a speaker says "Yes" for the reason that something true *could* be said by the sentence (if uttered by a tall person).

Given this model, it is not surprising that semanticists are prone to relativise truth for sentences containing various context-sensitive expressions. The explanation is that they are doing so in order to conform to implicit intuitions about what is *said* by utterances of the sentences in question. By (MD)+(S), if what is said by an utterance of *s* in *C* is that *p*, then *s* is true in *C* iff *p*. If (S) is true, however, then, irrespective of the truth of deflationism, it

seems that truth-conditional semantics must be trivial and unexplanatory, for the following reason.

Semantics is about what is *said* by a sentence in a context, or what proposition it *expresses* in a context, etc. These are all ways of describing the pre-theoretic datum of semantics, and the differences between these phrasings are irrelevant to the present issue. Now, if claims about the truth-conditions of a sentence are actually elliptic for claims about the conditions in which *what is said* (expressed, etc.) by the sentence is true, then the sentence, "*S* is true iff *p*" abbreviates "What *S* says (expresses, etc.) is true iff *p*". But the latter cannot do anything to explain what it is for a sentence to say/express a proposition; it only says that what it says/expresses is true iff *p*. The truth-conditions here apply to the proposition, and the notion of saying/expressing is left wholly unexplained. In other words, the view that propositions are primarily true rules out truth-theoretic semantics. Or, which comes to the same thing, the latter is committed to taking sentences to be the primary truth-bearers. This argument is independent of deflationism, but if, as most philosophers think, deflationism rules out truth-conditional semantics for other reasons, and if, as I have argued here, the only plausible deflationism is propositionalist, then the opposition between deflationism and truth-conditional semantics is stronger than usually assumed.

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[i] The alleged ambiguity between a notion that makes T-sentences necessary and one that makes them contingent is dubious. It seems rather that T-sentences are contingent on the ordinary reading and necessary only given certain stipulations of "true", e.g., Tarskian definitions. A better example is "That was a true statement", which may mean either that a given statement was true, or something more like "That was a statement indeed.". In Båve (2006: 4.3.6), however, it is argued that the latter type of use of "true" can be given a pragmatic explanation based on a propositionalist theory of the (unique) semantic content of "true".

[ii] Nominalistic theories of "that"-clauses include "paraphrase nominalism" with roots in Russell's "multiple relations" theory (1910), (1912: XII), developed in Prior (1971: 16ff.), Tye (1989), Matthews (1994), and Moltmann (2003). These theories avoid commitment to propositions, while allegedly accounting for the linguistic data, by positing a deep-structure involving propositional quantifiers. In Båve (2006: Ch. 5), I present a nominalistic account of "that"-clauses which aspires to stay faithful to the naïve, relational syntactic analysis, thus avoiding reference to deep-structure.

[iii] Though this is an exegetically precarious issue, and the notion of a "linguistic approach", admittedly, is rather loosely characterised, I believe the attitude can rather safely be attributed to Quine ((1960: 24), (1970: 10f.), Grover *et al.* (1975), Williams (1976), Brandom (1994: 299ff.), (2002). A notable exception is Horwich, who rather clearly claims his theory to be one about truth itself (1998: ??).

[iv] The reason a use-independent truth-predicate would be useful, according to Field, is that the expressive strengthening that the truth-predicate enables, as described by Quine (1970: 11), requires the inferences from left to right of (DS) and back, to be direct (Field (1994: 266)). However, if this is the only motivation for introducing the new truth-predicate, then it seems unnecessary, since a propositional quantifier could do the same job, a point which Field has granted in a private conversation.

[v] It may be considered a weakness of propositionalism that the phrase "It is necessary that that *p* is true" seems awkward. McGrath (2003: 668, n. 9) notes that many sentences embedding "that *p* is true" are awkward, and that we therefore often prefer "it is true that *p*". In Båve (2006: 139, n. 4), I argue that this is an example of "centre-branching trees" (cf. Yngve (1960)), which, I argue, solves the problem.

[vi] This is not the place to argue for a certain view on the Liar paradoxes, but I should note that they do not necessarily force us to amend (D), since both the Inconsistency Theory of Truth

and dialethism are compatible with (D) in its unrestricted form. Sceptics with regard to these theories may read in an exception for pathological sentences, however.

[vii] Thanks to an anonymous referee at *Synthèse* for these two examples.

[viii] See, e.g., Etchemendy (1988: 63f.), Field (1986: 58) and (1994: §§ 5, 9), García-Carpintero (1998: 50ff.), Halbach (2001) and (2002).

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