

CONCEPTUAL RELATIVISM AND
LINGUISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY
How to comprehend the incomprehensible?

MSc Thesis (*Afstudeerscriptie*)

written by

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Abstract

In this thesis, the philosophical debate on conceptual relativism between Quine and Davidson is examined, along with their respective theories of interpretation. A new perspective on the issues raised by these philosophers in their theoretical accounts of linguistic comprehension is introduced through an examination of two research projects conducted in the paradigm of linguistic anthropology. The philosophical standpoints are analyzed against the background of the data these empirical projects deliver, and the question of their validity in the face of these findings is explored. In the light of the presented research, Davidson's account grounded in the principle of charity is deemed as more empirically plausible than Quine's theory, which stands on the existence of alternative conceptual schemes. In addition, the current analysis itself is investigated as a case-study in the considerations regarding the relationship between empirical science and philosophy.

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I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

Maya Angelou, *Human Family*

Introduction: indeterminacy, incommensurability and interpretation

The main topic of this thesis is the process of achieving understanding between participants in a conversation. In line with the philosophical tradition of exploring this issue, the focus of this analysis is the case of cross-cultural hermeneutics, as in such a setting the truly significant aspects of the process of interpretation really come through to the foreground.

For in these situations all the instruments which make communication easier, such as a shared language, a common system of beliefs or knowledge of the same cultural artifacts, might not be available to the interpreter. The question therefore is if all of these devices are taken away, whether intelligibility is still achievable. For if the relationship between these instruments and linguistic meaning is one of dependence of the latter on the former, then in such a scenario of sparsity of information available to the interpreter, she might not be able to accurately grasp the meaning of the message conveyed by the speaker. If this is the case, then linguistic utterances require additional input in the form of a system of categories or a set of beliefs on the part of the interpreter in order to be comprehended, as just by themselves they are *indeterminate*.

The issue of indeterminacy is discussed not only in the context of linguistic understanding. For instance, John Cage, a composer and music theorist, explored it in reference to musical composition (Cage 2004). He defined indeterminacy in this discipline as “the ability of a piece to be performed in substantially different ways” (Pritchett 1996 : 108). As an example of a piece of music which is indeterminate he gave *The Art of the Fugue* by J.S. Bach.

The function of a performer, in case of *The Art of the Fugue*, is comparable to that of someone filling in color where outlines are given.

Cage 2004 : 35

Let us borrow this metaphor and go back to the discussion on linguistic understanding. Let us imagine a coloring book in which the initial outlines disappear after they are filled in with colorful paints. Suppose now that one person fills in the color in an outline in this book in accordance with how she was taught to do by members of the community to which she belongs. Our initial question then becomes whether, when given a colorized shape, a person who has a drastically different cultural background from the creator of the picture will be able to accurately recover the shape outlined in the beginning.

Conceptual relativism is a standpoint according to which ontology, as in objects and kinds, is relativised to conceptual schemes which are ingrained in language (Baghramian and Carter 2017). Such a stance is entailed by a negative answer to the question of whether the meaning of a linguistic utterance, or the original shape in the coloring book, can be recovered without additional knowledge of the conceptual scheme of the speaker, if one on top of that accepts the view that language affects how reality is perceived by a cognizing being. For if both of these premises are the case, then the alternative and incommensurable systems of categories correspond to the alternative and incommensurable views on reality, and there is no way of telling which one of those outlooks is closer to an accurate description of how the world really is.

This result was first put forth by Willard Van Orman Quine, and later criticized by Donald Davidson who developed an alternative theory describing on the relationship between a person, her language and the world. With reference to both these philosophers, the metaphysical standpoints which they accept, of conceptual relativism in case of the former, and common-sense realism in case of the latter, are intimately related to considerations regarding the hermeneutic process. In particular, they both pay substantial attention to

the question of whether there are minimum requirements which a form of linguistic behaviour must meet in order to be intelligible to us.

Glock 2003 : 145

In the course of the current analysis their answers to this question are explored in detail. In Chapter 1, the theories of interpretation of Quine and Davidson are outlined. After establishing the broader context of Quine's considerations regarding the hermeneutic process, such as the naturalistic and behavioristic commitments, the discussion is focused on his exposition of the problem of interpretation, namely the thought experiment of radical translation. Its result, the thesis of indeterminacy of translation, and the solution to the conundrum it poses in which Quine makes use of the notion of conceptual scheme is discussed.

Davidson's assertion of unintelligibility of this notion is further put forth. This is followed by an exposition of his own considerations regarding the process of achieving understanding, which he explores in the context

of the thought experiment of radical interpretation. Davidson's account of hermeneutics which makes use of the principle of charity and is grounded in the concept of objective truth is presented.

In the end of Chapter 1, the motivation behind putting forward a joint analysis of the theories of Quine and Davidson is given. The focus of this discussion is why the term "philosophical anthropology" (Glock 2003) is sometimes used to describe the way in which these two philosophers approach philosophical problems in general, and in particular the one of interpretation.

With this in mind, a novel perspective on the inquiry into the accuracy of Quine's and Davidson's accounts of linguistic understanding is introduced. The main issue which is investigated is whether the predictions of their theories of interpretation can be validated when compared with actual empirical data, specifically the findings of research in linguistic anthropology, a discipline of science which inquires into the process of cross-cultural communication among other phenomena. This field of both theoretical and empirical research is introduced in Chapter 2.

Two acclaimed research projects conducted in this paradigm are presented in detail in this part of the thesis. The rationale behind assuming a detail-oriented research attitude and focusing on two research projects rather than performing a review of the field of linguistic anthropology as a whole is explained. In short, the current investigation is not about how a broad range of actual philosophical and anthropological theories relate to each other. Rather, it is an investigation "by example" of conceptual links between the two fields. The first body linguistic anthropology research which is presented is the ethnographic study of agricultural traditions and the language of the Trobrianders, an ethnic group which inhabits the Trobriand archipelago in the eastern corner of Papua New Guinea, conducted by Bronisław Malinowski. The other is Benjamin Bailey's description of strategies employed for communicating respect observed in service encounters between immigrant Korean merchants and African Americans in grocery stores in Los Angeles.

In Chapter 3, the theoretical accounts of interpretation put forth by Quine and Davidson are examined against the background of the results of the empirical research presented in Chapter 2. A range of aspects of the hermeneutic phenomenon is discussed, from the interplay between language and culture, the process of translation and the possibility of establishing relations of equivalence between words of different languages, making sense of ambiguous expressions, to finally the role that the recognition of the intentions of the partner in a conversation plays in course of achieving understanding. As we will see, the results of the linguistic anthropology research projects presented here can be more convincingly explained on the grounds of Davidson's account of interpretation than the one of Quine.

In Chapter 4, the analysis performed in Chapter 3 itself is also treated as a case-study in the context of

more general considerations regarding the relationship between philosophy and empirical science. The issues which are explored include conceptual compatibility between empirical and philosophical accounts of the same phenomenon, the question of correctness with respect to results of thought experiments and finally the complementary character of investigations of philosophy and empirical science.

Chapter 1

Quine, Davidson and conceptual relativism

1.1 Conceptual relativism: Willard van Orman Quine

The following is the original statement of the *radical translation* thought experiment put forth by Willard van Orman Quine:

The recovery of a man's current language from his currently observed responses is the task of the linguist who, unaided by an interpreter, is out to penetrate and translate a language hitherto unknown. All the objective data he has to go on are the forces that he sees impinging on the native's surfaces and the observable behavior, vocal and otherwise, of the native.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 28

A careful analysis of this short excerpt yields insight into the main themes of Quine's overall philosophical standpoint, namely *naturalism* and *behaviorism*.

1.1.1 Naturalism and behaviorism in Quine's thought

Quine constructs the thought experiment in a scenario of a scientific inquiry into some unknown language. This choice of a setting is not coincidental, as the due process of a scientific investigation holds a central place in his overall philosophical theory.

The view according to which science and philosophy should not be seen as distinct intellectual enterprises, but rather that the latter should be considered as a part of the former, and in consequence should be held to the same methodological standards, is called *naturalism*. This attitude was extremely influential in the philosophical thought of the 20th century (Hatfield 2003).

Even though throughout his long academic career Quine was known to change his views on some issues¹, he consistently remained faithful to the idea that there should not be any sharp distinction between philosophy and science:

[. . .] it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described.

Quine 1981 : 21

Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. [. . .] a conspicuous difference between old epistemology and the epistemological enterprise in this new psychological setting is that we can now make free use of empirical psychology.

Quine 1971 : 82–83

Naturalism normatively describes the relationship between science and philosophy and thus indicates how the former should be seen with respect to the latter and vice versa. Regarding the question of how a philosophical investigation into the nature and structure of science should go, it refutes the idea that philosophy can provide any foundation which would endow scientific claims with the high epistemic status we require of them, and which would not simultaneously (itself) be a part of the scientific paradigm².

At the same time, a philosophical theory should be in accordance with the best available scientific theory at a given moment in time. The ultimate structure of reality is to be given by a scientific theory (Quine [1960] 2013), contrary to how it is conceived of and explored in traditional philosophy in the process of an abstract, philosophically oriented meditation. Furthermore, the language used for formulating a philosophical theory should be contained within the one of science. In other words, philosophical language should be a subset of scientific language. Specifically, philosophers should not only avoid employing vaguely defined concepts of low explanatory value in the process of construction of their theories, but also treating purely intellectual speculations as valid posits of their theory.

¹The place of modal logic in the theoretical scheme of logic can serve here as prominent example (Marcus 1990).

²In literature, this strain of naturalism is called *self-applied naturalism* (Hylton 2018)

This brings us to the issue of the type of evidence which should be allowed as an input for a philosophical investigation. In the statement of the problem of radical translation quoted in the beginning of the chapter, Quine talks of “the forces that he sees impinging on the native’s surfaces and the observable behavior”. This is reminiscent of behaviorism, a psychological doctrine which gained enormous popularity in the beginning of the 20th century (Hatfield 2003). The intuition behind it can be described in the following way:

Loosely speaking, behaviorism is an attitude – a way of conceiving of empirical constraints on psychological state attribution. Strictly speaking, behaviorism is a doctrine – a way of doing psychological science itself.

Graham 2017

Quine, along with many other thinkers of the analytic tradition (Føllesdal 2011), accepted these commitments and adopted the behaviorist methodology in his own investigation, in accordance with the naturalistic standpoint, as the best available psychological theory. Of his relationship with the behaviorist thought and one of its precursors and most recognizable proponents, Quine says:

So Fred [Skinner] and I met on common ground in our scorn of mental entities. Mind shmind; on that proposition we were agreed. The things of the mind were strictly for the birds. To say nothing of freedom and dignity.

Quine 2008 : 292

The description of inner mental states has therefore no place in a scientific description of the world and consequently, in a philosophical account of human behavior. An emphasis on what is observable is in line with the doctrine of empiricism in the British tradition. Quine seeks to achieve what he labels as “intersubjective empiricism” (Edmister and O’Shea 1994). In the following section, this standpoint will be explored along with the answers which it provides in response to the classical philosophical questions, in particular the ones related to epistemology.

1.1.2 Empirical holism

Suppose that Jane, a competent speaker of English, holds a belief that daffodils and roses are red. One spring day, she takes a walk in the park with her friend Sam who is a botanist. He points to a patch of yellow flowers and utters a sentence ‘Daffodils have blossomed early this spring’. As Jane has trust in Sam’s expertise, his

statement prompts her to revise her initial belief which now states that it is not the case that daffodils and roses are red³.

A question to ask here is why she revises her belief regarding the color of the said flower rather than, for instance, her understanding of the grammatical function of the connective ‘and’. A traditional⁴ answer to that question holds that a statement describing the color of a flower is of an epistemological kind such that a belief in its truthfulness can be changed in light of empirical evidence, i.e. it is synthetic. On the other hand, the truth of a law of logic such as the rule for assigning a truth value to a conjunction is an analytic statement which holds without adherence to experience and thus is not revisable in the same way.

While Quine would agree that, as in the example above, our knowledge of the world is formulated in language and can be analyzed in terms of particular assertions or sentences and their truth values (Hylton 2018), he finds the distinction between linguistic and empirical truths ill-founded (Quine 1951, Quine 1976). For let us once again think about the process of revision of belief which takes place in the example above. When one is confronted with the evidence which is not in line with the belief one holds, Quine would argue, it is not just this particular sentence, but rather a much bigger structure of the beliefs that one holds, such as, in our example, the understanding of the words ‘daffodil’ and ‘rose’ and the concept of red which is possessed, which stands trial in light of the data. Furthermore, while it is indeed less common that generally accepted statements, such as logical laws, are refuted and replaced by others. In the course of history such events have indeed taken place, like, for instance, in the case of the discussion of the validity of the law of excluded middle in light of quantum theory⁵.

Quine’s epistemic account states that we acquire knowledge of the world through perceptual interaction with objects present in the world. Moreover, his theory can be described as holistic, which means that

the sentence [. . .] earns its place in our body of knowledge by contributing to the overall success of that body of knowledge in dealing with experience as a whole.

Hylton 2018 : 15

The theory of the world which constitutes our knowledge about it consists of a set of sentences which do not belong to two distinct epistemic realms of synthetic and analytic truths. All those statements somehow relate to the empirical experience of the world. A more adequate metaphor, rather than that of two realms of sentences, is one for which Quine coins the name “web of belief” (Quine 1951). In the center of such structure reside

³or something classically equivalent

⁴that of Logical Empiricists and their predecessors (Quine 1976)

⁵At this point it is important to note that this observation does not imply that Quine was a proponent of logical pluralism. On the contrary, he devoted a significant part of his work to criticism of this standpoint (Russell 2016).

the statements which are core to our conception of the world, such as for instance the laws of arithmetics, and at the edges there are those which are directly related to perceptual experience. All of the sentences which constitute the web of belief are in principle revisable, the differences between them being of a *quantitative*, not of a qualitative nature.

In line with the naturalistic commitment, Quine considers the structure of the initial stage of knowledge acquisition, i.e. that of a perceptual exploration, to be most accurately described by neuroscience as a combination stimulations of nerve endings in sensory neural systems. Perceptual experiences comprise the basic building blocks of a body of knowledge of an individual, i.e. a set of sentences which is furthermore consistent with some theory, that is consequently, also itself related to the experience of the world. It is important to note, however, that when Quine talks of experience of the world, he does not view it in phenomenological terms. He means something which can be accounted for in the behaviorist paradigm, i.e. intersubjectively observable responses to such experiences.

What remains to be explained is how from an account of basic sensory stimulations can we get a formulation of complex and sometimes abstract statements of science. In other words, how is it possible that language can be used to convey information about much more than the immediately available perceptual data? In order to explore this, Quine performs the thought experiment of radical translation (Quine [1960] 2013, Glock 2003, Hylton 2018).

1.1.3 Radical translation

Quine begins by asking what really is the difference between statements which are on the edges of the web of belief and the ones which reside in the center. His assertion is that sentences which describe the current surroundings of the person who utters them, *observation sentences* in Quine's terminology, are usually constructed in such a way that there are not many, or sometimes none possible alternatives i.e. *synonymous* formulations for them. Take for instance, the sentence 'I see a patch of green'. Devising a sentence which would convey identical meaning and which does not contain the same words requires a lot of effort⁶. On the contrary, the same does not hold for statements whose link to perceptual experience is less direct. The same claim of a more theoretical character can be expressed in possibly countless ways, for instance by replacing complex terms with their definitions. A good example here is a pair of sentences: 'The velocity of the car is equal to 36 kilometers per hour' and 'Every second the vehicle travels the distance equal to 10 meters'.

⁶Supposedly the following could serve as an example of a synonymous formulation of the said statement: 'The person who is uttering this sentence experiences a visual stimulation of a strip which has the color as the one such that is to be obtained from mixing blue and yellow'.

Given the behaviorist constraint of not adhering to inner mental states and thus to the notion of meaning as an entity or, as Quine calls it, “the museum myth of meaning” (Quine 1969), the challenge is to determine the criterion for the identity of meanings in such cases as the latter, since the differences between them do not correspond to any observable changes in the environment. Quine proposes that this phenomenon be illuminated by studying the process of translation, as in the case of such a task the goal is exactly to establish a relation of similarity of meaning between sentences stated in different languages (Glock 2003).

A scenario which fits Quine’s conceptual goal is one in which a linguist, who is tasked with creating a translation manual, i.e. an instrument which provides a method of mapping sentences of one language to another, and who has to go about that task using only the data which are permissible as evidence by the behaviorist paradigm (Quine [1960] 2013). The setting chosen by Quine is that of a field expedition undertaken by a translator, a competent speaker of English, to a remote area whose inhabitants did not previously have any contact with the community from which the linguist originates⁷.

The only possible starting point for the translator is to observe the linguistic behavior of the said community and look for patterns present in such behavior. As the assumption is that for observation sentences it holds that the same stimuli should prompt a speaker to utter a sentence of the same form, then after a while the scientist should be able to form some hypotheses which would relate the uttered sentences to particular corresponding stimulations. Quine equips the linguist with a method for evaluating those hypotheses, namely a possibility for querying the speakers of the language with the supposed translation and receiving feedback in the form of *assent* or *dissent* to a given query. In this manner, the linguist is able to retrieve the *stimulus meaning* of the expressions uttered by the locals, which is defined as follows:

a stimulation σ belongs to the affirmative stimulus meaning of a sentence S for a given speaker if and only if there is a stimulation σ' , such that if the speaker were given σ' , then were asked S , then were given σ , and then were asked S again, he would dissent the first time and assent the second. We may define the negative stimulus meaning similarly with ‘assent’ and ‘dissent’ interchanged, and then define *stimulus meaning* as the ordered pair of the two.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 33

An important assumption which informs Quine’s stance on the notion of meaning and which is visible in a definition he puts forth is *meaning holism*. According to this view, (utterances of) sentences are the primary meaningful elements of a language and individual words have meaning only in the contexts of the sentences in which they occur.

⁷See quotation on page 6.

A success in determining the stimulus meanings is sufficient, according to Quine, for a satisfactory translation of observation sentences. Furthermore, Quine accepts that logical connectives can also be translated, based on the fact that they correspond to generally applicable rules of rational thinking, which are shared by all human beings. Here he invokes Wilson's *principle of charity* (Wilson 1959), in the light of which the linguist should translate the complex sentences in such a way such that most of the locals statements would be evaluated as true in line with the rules of classical logic.

The common sense behind the maxim is that one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than a bad translation [. . .]

Quine [1960] 2013 : 59

In case of some sentences the linguist may notice that the locals always assent, or dissent from them, regardless of the current stimulation. In Quine's terminology these statements are called *stimulus analytic* or *contradictory*, respectively. He asserts that given the behavioral data it is indeed possible for the interpreter to translate this kind of sentences in a satisfactory way.

As we can see so far, radical translation is thus a potentially successful endeavor. However, prior to this point, we have constrained our discussion to the sentences which are semantically directly related to observable data. What remains to be analyzed is translation of the statements which occupy a central space of the web of beliefs. How can our linguist get access to the meanings carried by these sentences, if all she has to go by are the responses of the locals and the corresponding stimuli?

1.1.4 Underdetermination of theory by evidence. Stimulus synonymy

Suppose that for a set of expressions it holds that they are uttered by the locals in empirically indistinguishable circumstances, i.e. they have the same stimulus meaning. Quine coins the term *stimulus synonymy* to describe the semantic relation which is established between such phrases.

Stimulus synonymy is a phenomenon which arises directly from the commitment of meaning holism. To illuminate this point, Quine gives an example of a situation in which a rabbit scurrs by and a member of the local community utters a sentence 'Gavagai!'. For the interpreter, who is a competent speaker of English, it might seem that the most adequate translation of this sentence would be s_1 : 'A rabbit!', where the word 'gavagai' stands for the same as the English 'rabbit', as this is the way objects are usually posited in the conceptual scheme of English, i.e. as wholes. However, one can imagine that in some community objects are not seen as spatio-temporal wholes, but rather as temporal stages in their existence, and thus 'gavagai' should be interpreted

as ‘temporal stages of a rabbit’, which on the sentential level would yield a translation of ‘Gavagai!’ as s_2 : ‘Temporal stages of a rabbit!’. The insight as to the meaning of the word ‘gavagai’ is available to the translator only through observation of how it is used on the level of a sentence. The additional information necessary to put forth an accurate translation of the sentence containing this word cannot be, however, extracted from the observation of the situation itself, as s_1 and s_2 have the same stimulus meaning.

It is important to note that there are significant conceptual differences between stimulus synonymous expressions. For instance, consider a situation in which two friends get into an argument with the third one. The first one, who is an astrologist, maintains that the third’s behavior is caused by the fact that he is a Scorpio. The second one, who is a proponent of the Freudian theory of personality, sees the roots of the third’s confrontational behavior in a childhood trauma. Even though the evidence they have to go by is exactly the same, owing to the fact that they adhere to differing theories of human behavior, their assertions differ substantially. In explaining their friend’s behavior, they apply alternative *conceptual schemes*, which lead them to alternative conclusions. This shows that the indeterminacy, which initially, as is substantiated by the example of ‘gavagai’, resides at the level of the lexicon, has far-reaching consequences for the language as a whole:

Any translations [...] will be correct as long as the net empirical implications of the theory as a whole are preserved in translation. But it is to be expected that many different ways of translating the component sentences, essentially different individually, would deliver the same empirical implications for the theory as a whole; deviations in the translation of one component sentence could be compensated for in the translation of another component sentence. Insofar, there can be no ground for saying which of the two glaringly unlike translations of individual sentences are right.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 60

If our linguist was thus confronted with a situation analogous to the one described by Quine in the example with ‘Gavagai!’, would it be possible for her to distinguish between the two stimulus synonymous expressions and pick the correct English equivalent for the word ‘gavagai’ in such a way that the conceptual difference between its use in s_1 and s_2 can be accounted for? Quine gives a negative response to that question, and formulates the thesis of *indeterminacy of translation*, according to which the lack of a rigid method of translating stimulus synonyms results in the fact that there exist various ways of translating a language into another which have the same empirical accuracy, but which nonetheless differ substantially on the conceptual level. Therefore, Quine accepts at least a potential existence of mutually untranslatable languages.

All things considered, this is the ultimate conclusion which is to be drawn from the radical translation

thought experiment:

it is only radical translation that exposes the poverty of ultimate data for the identification of meanings.

Quine 1990 : 46

Consequently, the highly abstract theoretical statements of the unknown language are simply impenetrable for the linguist. She will inevitably project her own conceptual scheme to the proposed meanings of the local words which will make her manual, even if empirically correct, conceptually unsatisfactory.

1.1.5 Metaphysical implications of indeterminacy of translation

The possibility of existence of various translation manuals which are equally correct has significant consequences. For these empirically equivalent expressions, as in the example with ‘gavagai’ : ‘rabbit’ or ‘gavagai’ : ‘temporal stages of a rabbit’, correspond to diverging conceptual schemes i.e. languages⁸ which are potentially incommensurable. To put it differently, stimulus synonymous expressions cannot be made sense of on the grounds of a competing theory, because:

deep differences of language carry with them ultimate differences in the way one thinks, or looks upon the world.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 77

Now, let us recall (section 2.1.2) that in Quine’s view a theory of the world is not something which is given on top of some objectively given reality. It is through the prism of such a scheme that our interaction with the world is possible in the first place. Thus, the thesis of indeterminacy of translation inevitably leads to accepting a form of ontological relativism⁹, in which what exists is relativised to the conceptual scheme of the individual (Baghramian and Carter 2017).

⁸The equivalence between the notions of language and conceptual scheme is stated by Quine in the following way: “It seems that in Davidson’s mind the purported third dogma is somehow bound up with a puzzling use on my part of the phrase ‘conceptual scheme’. [...] let me clarify the status of the phrase. [...] I have meant it as ordinary language, serving no technical function.” (Quine 1981): 41

⁹It is important to note at this point that, according to some interpreters (e.g. Hylton 2018, Keskinen 2012), Quine never questions an ultimately realist metaphysical attitude, as the conceptual scheme of the best available scientific theory is always uniquely picked for the current moment in time, and thus there is no real possibility of competing and incommensurable conceptual schemes. This interpretation, however, is not really convincing, especially on the grounds of the initial ideas expressed by the Quine in *Word and Object*, as, for instance, there the philosopher gives examples of such schemes, for instance Newtonian mechanics and relativity theory.

Our ontological views are an integral part of our ‘overall conceptual scheme’, our most comprehensive world-view, which includes both scientific and common-sense beliefs. They serve the purpose of providing the simplest structure which fits the ‘disordered fragments of raw experience’.

Glock 2003 : 42

This standpoint is called *conceptual relativism*.

1.2 Common-sense realism: Donald Davidson

Intersubjective empiricism in the naturalistic paradigm à la Quine thereby leads to the abandonment of a realistic ontology. The view on the relationship between an individual and the world, and the philosophical methodology which is applicable for studying it, are described by Quine in the following way:

we can investigate the world, and man as part of it, and thus find out what cues he could have of what goes on around him. Subtracting his cues from his world view, we get man’s net contribution as the difference. This difference marks the extent of man’s sovereignty - the domain within which he can revise theory while saving data.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 5

This picture embodies at least two common intuitions. The first one is the empiricist view that there exists some reality which is an object of perception, given independently of our interpretative ability. Secondly, it gives an account of how it is possible that people with different cultural backgrounds perceive this shared world in drastically different ways. From religious views, through family structure, alimentary traditions to even color perception, individuals who belong to various ethnic groups have sometimes contrasting outlooks on these basic human practices and philosophical attitudes. The perception of the world is hence mediated by a scheme or theory, that human beings inherit in the course of their development through means of tradition, as well as linguistic and cultural training.

Even though conceptual realism is in line with these philosophical and anthropological intuitions, Quine’s theory has also been criticized. Prominent argumentation against this doctrine came from Quine’s own student, Donald Davidson, a collaboration with whom, either in the form of theoretical discussions or mutual note-giving on their written work, Quine sustained throughout his career.

Don understands my views, and our argument runs pretty deep.

Quine in Barrett and Gibson 1990 : 80

In this section, Davidson's criticism of conceptual relativism is put forward, along with his proposed extension of the radical translation thought experiment. Furthermore, his own ideas regarding interpretation and the relationship between a person, her language and the world are presented.

1.2.1 Criticism of the notion of conceptual scheme

Davidson's aim in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (Davidson 1973a) is not to argue that the doctrine of conceptual relativism is *wrong*, but rather that it is quite challenging, if not impossible, to *make sense* of its tenets.

For let us consider the case of a conceptual change. Davidson questions whether it is justified to think of such instances, for example scientific revolutions, in terms of creating an irreconcilable drift between the pre-revolution and post-revolution languages:

The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability.

Davidson 1973a : 6

Hence there must always exist a mapping between the terms of the old and the new conceptual schemes, and thus they are not incommensurable.

This point is further elaborated on in reference to the *linguistic relativity* principle, which views the interface connecting an individual, her culture or language and the world in as follows:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone [...] but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.

Sapir in Mandelbaum 1963 : 162

This claim is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis¹⁰. A major source of inspiration for this theoretical standpoint were the results of field studies conducted by Benjamin Lee Whorf, an American linguist, where he studied, among other things, the grammatical forms which refer to the passing of time in the language of the Hopi, a Native American tribe and a sovereign nation located in Arizona (Whorf 1936). Based on the observation that in the Hopi language there are no grammatical constructions which enable a direct reference to temporal categories, he concluded that the Hopi conceptualized time differently from English speakers, as, according to him, “language produces an organization of experience” (p. 130).

Davidson points out, however, that Whorf is still able to convey his observation regarding the mismatch in conceptualization of time, in English, and so the difference between the schemes is not sufficiently substantial to support the claim of incommensurability.

When Davidson rejects the conception of mind according to which it can be analyzed independently of linguistic ability (Davidson 1975), he also proposes defining conceptual schemes, as envisioned by Quine, as sets of inter-translatable languages. For Quine’s indeterminacy claim to stand, it must thus be shown that there could possibly exist at least two different such sets. Davidson’s strategy in arguing against this assertion is threefold.

Firstly, he takes on the idea that there could exist a language which would be completely uninterpretable, i.e. none of its expressions could be understood by speakers of any other language. He rejects this idea head on, claiming that if a discrepancy of this magnitude was the case, then it would not be possible to recognize the behavior of the speakers of the mysterious language as linguistic behavior in the first place.

Secondly, Davidson turns to the analysis of languages which are at least partially translatable. With reference to that he discusses the empiricist view that the content of the experience can be separated from the language which serves as a medium for interpreting that experience. Such standpoint he considers to be consistent with the view of *dualism of scheme and content*, and calls it, in direct reference to Quine’s 1951 paper “Two dogmas of empiricism”, “the third dogma”.

In this dualistic scenario, conceptual relativism theorists envision the relationship between data, i.e. the content and the scheme, or language, in two ways, the first being one in which the language organizes, or systematizes experience¹¹. This idea, according to Davidson, is again not only unintelligible¹², but even more critically it is incoherent, as on one hand it presupposes an independently given *fixed* ontology, while on the

¹⁰This term is considered by some scholars to be misleading. This is due to the fact that it is not a *hypothesis*, but rather an “axiom, a part of the initial epistemology and methodology of the linguistic anthropologist” (Hill and Mannheim 1992 : 383). Furthermore, it was never jointly stated by Edward Sapir and B.L. Whorf at any point in their careers (Duranti 2009).

¹¹See Quine 1951, Whorf 1936, Feyerabend 1985 and others.

¹²“We cannot attach a clear meaning to the notion of organizing a single object (the world, nature, etc.) . . . How would you organize the Pacific Ocean? Straighten out its shores, perhaps, or relocate its islands, or destroy its fish.” (Davidson 1973a: 14

other it is trying to defend a point viewing perception as relative to a scheme.

The other idea for how the scheme and the content could be interrelated is the view according to which our conceptual scheme fits, or allows us to account for, the objective reality. With the analysis of this account Davidson takes a final swing at conceptual relativism and states that this simply amounts to saying that most sentences of our language are *true*. The notion of conceptual scheme is thus redundant, as the notion of truth is far more basic and hence has a higher explanatory value. Arguing against relativism Davidson maintains that it makes no sense to say you can have two schemes that are both largely true and yet incommensurable. Furthermore, the notion of a conceptual scheme does not bring anything new to the discussion, while at the same time it artificially extends the chain of connection between the perceiving agent and reality by viewing language as an intermediary link between the two. Language is not a medium *through* which we perceive the world, but rather a biologically given ability *with* which we observe our environment (Davidson 1975).

1.2.2 Radical interpretation

It is paramount to understand that Davidson's standpoint does not only refute the idea of *alternative* conceptual schemes. There is no mediator, namely language or scheme, between reality and the experience that individual which is placed within it has of it, so there is also no *one* conceptual scheme shared by all human beings.

It would be wrong to summarize by saying we have shown how communication is possible between people who have different schemes, a way that works without need of what there cannot be, namely a neutral ground, or a common coordinate system. For we have found no intelligible basis on which it can be said that schemes are different. It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all man-kind — all speakers of language, at least — share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are wrong.

Davidson 1973a : 20

What consequences does this conception of language and the abandonment of empiricism have for the account of linguistic understanding, communication and the type of evidence which is allowed as valid in the statement of these theories?

In order to explore these questions, Davidson puts forward the thought experiment of radical interpretation (Davidson 1973b). In this scenario, the situation under consideration is the hermeneutic process from scratch. The hearer does not know, before the process of interpretation begins, neither the meaning of the speaker's

utterances nor the content of her beliefs. Davidson asks what knowledge one must possess in order to be able to interpret the utterances of another. His goal, similarly to Quine's in *Word and Object* (Quine [1960] 2013), is to "elucidate and tame the concept of meaning by showing how a 'specifically semantical' theory can be derived from 'non-semantical' evidence about linguistic behavior" (Glock 2003:142).

Davidson explicitly references Quine's solution, i.e. giving a theory of translation as the theory of interpretation. He rejects this approach due to the reason below:

When interpretation is our aim, a method of translation deals with a wrong topic, a relation between *two* languages, where what is wanted is an interpretation of *one*. [...] we can know which sentences of the subject language translate which sentences of the object language without knowing what any of the sentences of either language mean.

Davidson 1973b : 315, emphasis added

The problem with Quine's account is that it does not fulfill the commitment of elucidating the semantical properties of meaningful utterances and so it is not an adequate theory of interpretation.

In his own solution to the stated problem, Davidson uses his earlier conception that a Tarski-style truth theory¹³ can be seen as theory of semantics for a language (Davidson 1967) and can therefore, although with a slight conceptual modification, be used as a theoretical framework for an account of interpretation.

Davidson reverses the theoretical thought process of Tarski in a way that while the latter assumes a theory of interpretation, i.e. translation from object to meta language, and based on that gives the account of truth, the former accepts truth as a basic notion and gives a theory of interpretation grounded in truth conditions of sentences themselves. Tarski's Convention T has the following form:

[...] an acceptable theory of truth must entail, for every sentence *s* of the object language a sentence of the form: *s* is true if and only if *p*, where '*p*' is replaced by any sentence that is true if and only if *s* is.

Davidson 2001 : 319

Based on this formula, the radical interpreter can succeed in interpreting any sentence uttered by any speaker, given that she can recognize this sentence as true. Davidson assumes that we have sufficiently adequate intuitions about the truth conditions. What justifies making this assumption? What kind of evidence does the

¹³I assume that the reader is familiar with Tarski's theory of truth. If this is not the case, Hodges 2014 can serve as a comprehensive and exhaustive introduction.

interpreter need in order to determine what the speaker's utterance means if she does not have access to either the content of the speaker's beliefs or the meanings of her utterances?

1.2.3 Principle of charity and common-sense realism

Davidson's answers to the above questions in a form of a slogan would be 'Fix belief, solve for meaning'. He states that there is a certain propositional attitude, namely the one of holding a sentence true, which is basic enough so that the interpreter always has an epistemic access to it, even in the scenario of radical interpretation¹⁴.

Furthermore, Davidson's solution of the problem of radical interpretation, i.e. assigning meanings, is based on the previously mentioned *principle of charity* (section 2.1.3). In the process of interpretation, we have no choice other than to assume that, at least in the limit, all of the speaker's utterances are true.

[...]in interpreting speakers we have to maximize the content of truth and the consistency of all their intentional states. This maximization is equivalent to the methodological rule that an interpretative mistake on behalf of the interpreter is more probable than an apparent violation of the logical principles by the interpreted individual.

Davidson 1982 : 137

This assumption is further justified by the notion of *rationality*, a quality which, according to Davidson, is shared by all human beings. Linguistic behavior, just like any other action which is undertaken by an individual, serves as a mean to accomplish a certain goal, which, in case of language, is communication of factual information regarding the world.

The methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything.

Davidson 1973b : 9

¹⁴This observation is similar to Quine's assumption according to which even in the conditions of sparsity of knowledge in the process of radical translation, an interpreter can correctly identify the acts of assent and dissent (Quine [1960] 2013).

Davidson argues that the assumption of the validity of the principle of charity as a crucial aspect of the process of interpretation is necessary not only in order to make sense of successful communication, but also of cases in which understanding is not achieved:

This method is intended to solve the problem of the interdependence of belief and meaning by holding belief constant as far as possible while solving for meaning. This is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right. What justifies the procedure is the fact that disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreement. Applied to language, this principle reads: the more sentences we conspire to accept or reject (whether or not through a medium of interpretation), the better we understand the rest, whether or not we agree about them.

Davidson 1973b : 9

Hence, using Convention T one can interpret any given sentence of any language. In conclusion, Davidson proposes an alternative solution to the problem of understanding which does not entail indeterminacy of translation and thus conceptual relativism, as it does away with the problematic concept of empirical evidence and its place within a realistic ontology. The metaphysical implication of account, as it is grounded in a shared notion of objective truth, is thus explicitly *realist*.

1.2.4 Theory of communication

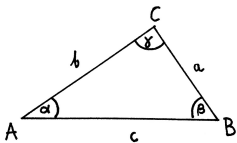


Figure 1.1: Triangle

Another trait of Davidson's realism is that it stands not only on the legitimacy of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, but also on the knowledge arising from interaction with other human beings (Malpas 2015). As was stated, in his view in order for a creature to be capable of having propositional thoughts it must be in possession of a concept of objective truth (Glüer 2006), as interpretation of language is only possible on the basis of such a concept. An analogy which Davidson employs in explaining the relationship between three types of knowledge which together give human beings the idea of objective truth is a certain geometric property of triangles.

If one side and two angles of a triangle are given, then the lengths of the other sides can be easily calculated. This calculation is used in a navigation technique called triangulation, which is applied to determine precise locations of some objects with respect to others. In our case, two edges of the triangle represent two creatures

which are capable of communicating with each other, and the third stands for an object in the world. Davidson writes:

Our sense of objectivity is the consequence of another sort of triangulation, one that requires two creatures. Each interacts with an object, but what gives each the concept of the way things are objectively is the base line formed between the creatures by language. The fact that they share a concept of truth alone makes sense of the claim that they have beliefs, that they are able to assign objects a place in the public world.

Davidson 1982 : 105

The concept of triangulation is paramount to Davidson's theory, as it provides a bridge between his realistic ontology in which our perceptual beliefs are causally connected with the objects in the world, with the epistemologically relevant concept of objective truth and his concerns regarding language and interpretation. In his words:

[. . .] the triangle I have indicated is essential to the existence, and hence to the emergence of thought. For without the triangle, there are two aspects of thought for which we cannot account. These two aspects are the *objectivity of thought* and the *empirical content of thoughts about the external world*.

Davidson 1999 : 12, emphasis added

Furthermore, Davidson emphasizes that as the reactions of the creatures need to be recognizable and interpretable to one another, they must be sufficiently similar to each other in the way they interact with their environment.

It nevertheless is important to note that the similarity which he has in mind is not sharing some sort of linguistic knowledge passed on from one member of a linguistic community to another, or a *convention*¹⁵. While stressing the role of interaction as a necessary condition for the existence of a language (Davidson 1992), Davidson categorically rejects the idea that any sort of conventional knowledge is necessary for language use (Davidson 1984). In spite of that, he recognizes the practical advantages of patterns in the way that speakers use language. These regularities make communication easier on an everyday basis, but they are not a pre-condition for interpretation of the speech of another:

¹⁵an intentional conformity to regularity (Ramberg 1991)

[A]greement on what a speaker means by what he says can surely be achieved even though speaker and hearer have different advance theories as to how to interpret the speaker. The reason this can be is that the speaker may well provide adequate clues, in what he says, and how and where he says it, to allow a hearer to arrive at a correct interpretation. Of course the speaker must have some idea how the hearer is apt to make use of the relevant clues; and the hearer must know a great deal about what to expect. But such general knowledge is hard to reduce to rules, much less conventions or practices. [. . .] What common conditioning insures is that we may, up to a point, assume that the same method of interpretation that we use for others, or that we assume others use for us, will work for a new speaker. [. . .] If we apply our general method of interpretation to a speaker at all — if we can make even a start in understanding him on the assumption that his language is like ours, it will thus be because we can treat his structure-forming devices as we treat ours.

Davidson 1984 : 15-16

Here Davidson returns to the claim that radical interpretation performed by applying the principle of charity is a sufficient model of the most basic scheme of communication. All other theoretical devices, including the notion of a conceptual scheme, are thus not instrumental in accounting for the possibility of interpretation of speech of one creature by another which is sufficiently similar in its responses and reactions to the way the world is to the first one.

1.3 Similarities and differences: possibility of resolution?

What we have seen in this chapter are two divergent views on how the process of linguistic understanding comes about. Furthermore, it has been stated what kind of metaphysical consequences follow from each of these views. In this section we will focus on why it is theoretically useful to put these views together, and where we can look for evidence which could help us determine which of the two accounts is more accurate.

1.3.1 System-builders

Even though the focus in these pages was on what distinguishes the philosophy of Quine from that of Davidson, if one takes into account the grand scene of the enterprise of philosophy, one will quickly see that perhaps there is much more they have in common than there are aspects of their thought which make them different from each other.

First and foremost, they are both heirs to the philosophical tradition of logical pragmatism, which draws on one hand from the thought of Logical Empiricists, i.e. the Vienna Circle and their analytic methodology, and on the other from the American Pragmatist movement led by William James (Glock 2003). This is visible in how they approach philosophical questions, as both Quine and Davidson adhere to the methodology of the linguistic turn, where every philosophical question can somehow be settled on the grounds of the analysis of language. As to the pragmatist influence, they are interested in actual human practices, and study how the processes they describe unravel in the behavior of human beings.

Another aspect which unites their philosophies is Quine's and Davidson's holistic approach to philosophical theorizing (Glock 2003). What they try to achieve is an overall account of human behavior which unites the themes of what is usually divided in philosophical theory into questions of epistemology on one hand, and metaphysics on the other. They are what is sometimes called *system builders*, as their accounts stand as overall frameworks on the grounds of which all aspects of human behavior are to be explained.

On a related note, we now turn to the question as to where they draw inspiration from in the process of arriving at these holistic accounts.

1.3.2 Relation to the empirical

As has previously been mentioned (2.1.1), the only reliable input on which any philosophical theory should be based, according to Quine, is the best available scientific knowledge. Even though Davidson is not as explicit in preaching such a strong relation of the influence that the intellectual enterprise of science has on the discipline of philosophy, traits of naturalistic thought are still visible in his writings:

Theory of interpretation is the business jointly of the linguist, psychologist and philosopher.

Davidson 2001 : 142

In other works¹⁶, Davidson also bases his claims regarding language in empirical research, largely from the subject area of psycholinguistics.

The close relation to science is not only distinguishable by the type of evidence Quine and Davidson are willing to recognize as relevant to the construction of their philosophical theories. The same attitude is present in the methodology our protagonists employ in exploring philosophical conundrums.

¹⁶prominently in Davidson 1997

1.3.3 The institution of thought experiments in philosophical rhetoric

Radical translation and radical interpretation are both *thought experiments*, otherwise known as *conceptual exercises*. According to Kuhn (1964), a thought experiment is

an occasionally potent tool for increasing our understanding of nature. [...] Historically their role is very close to the double one played by actual laboratory experiments and observations. First, thought experiments can disclose nature's failure to conform to a previously held set of expectations. Second, they can suggest particular ways in which both expectation and theory must henceforth be revised.

Kuhn 1964 : 241 and 261

The role and structure of thought experiments is thus reminiscent of the empirical method which is the basis of any scientific inquiry. In philosophical methodology, the purpose they are supposed to serve is primarily to allow for “a rapid move from small-scale to large-scale questions” (Glock 2003 : 37). The way in which thought experiments achieve that is twofold. Firstly, they allow the thinker herself to tackle the highly abstract questions on a more domestic terrain which can help in elucidating the aspects of philosophically relevant notions in a rigid manner (J. R. Brown and Fehige 2017). Furthermore, just like Quine makes the case for underdetermination of theory by evidence through the example of radical translation, they can serve as a useful rhetoric tool to convey the standpoint of the philosopher to her readers and thus enable a more on-point and hence more fruitful dialogue regarding the theory which is being put forth.

1.3.4 Philosophical anthropology

Coming back to the specific thought experiments proposed by Quine and Davidson, what brings them close together is the fact that they describe the hermeneutic process from scratch, i.e. in a situation of high sparsity of available data. A real-world scenario which resembles such conditions in a most accurate manner is one of a conversation between people who do not share either linguistic or cultural backgrounds. This type of encounters are most prominently studied by anthropologists and ethnographers.

Interestingly, Glock (2003) makes the point that a way to describe the philosophical standpoints of both Quine and Davidson is to put their work in the realm of *philosophical anthropology*:

What holds together the apparently diverse strands of their work is a philosophical anthropology, a powerful conception of human beings and of human action. Both hold that human thought and

human rationality are embodied in human practice, and especially in linguistic behavior. For this reason, their philosophical anthropology in turn revolves around a conception of language.

Glock 2003 : 1-2

This observation can be further corroborated by the fact that both philosophers make explicit references to anthropological works. Quine devotes a substantial part of his discussion of translating logical connectives to the observations made by anthropologist regarding a common rationality and refers, for instance, to the work of Bronisław Malinowski (Quine [1960] 2013, Malinowski [1935] 1965). As we have seen, Davidson follows in these footsteps¹⁷ as he discusses the principle of linguistic relativity and the work of Benjamin Whorf. In “Seeing Through Language”, he also makes comments which are to a large extent reminiscent of the areas of interest of anthropology:

There seems little reason to doubt that we are genetically programmed in fairly specific ways to speak as we do; every group and society has a language and all languages are apparently constrained by the same arbitrary rules. Tribes we consider primitive have languages as complex and complete as those of developed cultures.

Davidson 1997 : 3-4

The view that there is a close connection uniting anthropology and philosophy is a common standpoint which unites theorists from both sides of the aisle (e.g. S. C. Levinson 1986, Povinelli 2001, Northrop 1960). In fact, some even go so far as to state that anthropology should be viewed as experimental philosophy (S. C. Levinson and P. Brown 1994).

1.3.5 How about linguistic anthropology?

If we observe that both Quine and Davidson aspire to achieve a high empirical validity of their philosophical accounts of human behavior with a close connection between their work and anthropology as an area of both theoretical and experimental research, it draws our attention to a possible solution to the question as to which of the theories of interpretation more plausibly describes the hermeneutic process. This idea is to confront them with the data gathered by linguistic anthropologists.

More specifically, one could analyze what empirical implications follow from the theories which have been presented here, and explore whether the results of some linguistic anthropology research can serve as evidence in the philosophical debate. Among the hypotheses which can be drawn from Quine’s theory, are:

¹⁷however in a really different and critical manner, see 1.2.1

- (i_q) Alternative and hence incommensurable conceptual schemes could potentially exist.
- (ii_q) In the process of a translation of a culturally remote language there are elements of that language that cannot be accounted for.
- (iii_q) Equally correct incommensurable translation manuals could be put forth for any language.

On the other hand, Davidson's account has the following empirical implications:

- (i_d) The evidence does not support the claim that alternative conceptual schemes could potentially exist.
- (ii_d) There exists a shared notion of rationality which unites human beings in their motivation to take action, and the success of the process of interpretation depends on this characteristic of human behavior.
- (iii_d) Understanding can be achieved purely on the grounds of the shared principle of rationality, i.e. no prior knowledge of linguistic conventions needs to be taken into account.

Davidson asserts that the process of radical interpretation lies at the basis of all communication (Davidson 1973b). On the contrary, Quine was skeptical with respect to the possibility of giving a real life example of an exercise in radical translation:

The task is one that is not in practice undertaken in its extreme form, since a chain of interpreters of a sort can be recruited of marginal persons across the darkest archipelago. But the problem is the more nearly approximated the poorer the hints available from interpreters; thus attention to techniques of utterly radical translation has not been wanting.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 28

In the following chapter, it is investigated whether it could nonetheless be possible to find scientific accounts which are set in scenarios conceptually close enough to those in which both radical translation and radical interpretation unravel. Further, it is explored whether it could be fruitful to contrast Quine's and Davidson's theoretical findings and the empirical hypotheses which can be drawn from their account (i_q - iv_q and i_d - iii_d) with actual accounts of human behavior in instances of cross-cultural hermeneutics.

Summary

In the first part of Chapter 1, Quine's answer to the question of how much of linguistic meaning can be made sense of in terms of sensory stimulation is explained. The commitments of behaviorism and naturalism which

are crucial in arriving at such a characterization of meaning are put forth. The thought experiment of radical translation which is constructed to explore these issues is analyzed and the indeterminacy of translation thesis which is the result of the experiment is stated. Quine's solution to the problem of indeterminacy based on the notion of a conceptual scheme and its metaphysical consequences are examined. Furthermore, the criticism of this notion put forward by Davidson is summarized. That is followed by an exposition of his own theory of linguistic understanding, which is illuminated by the thought experiment of radical interpretation and grounded in the notion of objective truth and the principle of charity. Moreover, Davidson's theory of communication is elaborated on with a presentation of the idea of triangulation and his criticism of the conventionalist view on meaning. Further, the rationale behind putting forth a joint analysis of these two particular philosophers is explained. Finally, the case is made for the idea of investigating the empirical validity of Quine's and Davidson's theories against the background of linguistic anthropology research.

Chapter 2

Linguistic anthropology: translation and interpretation

In this chapter, the field of linguistic anthropology is introduced: its theoretical assumptions and frameworks at its disposal, along with its research methodology and investigative goals. Further, the results of two extensive and influential studies conducted in this paradigm will be laid out, the first being the inquiry into the agricultural rites of the inhabitants of the Trobriand Archipelago conducted by Bronisław Malinowski (Malinowski [1935] 1965), and the second a description of failures of communication of respect between Korean grocery store merchants and their African-American customers in Los Angeles (Bailey 1997). These research projects provide an empirical outlook on the themes present in Quine's and Davidson's theories of meaning and interpretation introduced in the previous chapter. In outlining these empirical investigations, I focus on exploring what they can tell us about the nature of language in those aspects which are relevant for the conceptual relativism debate, namely in terms of the relationship between cultural identity, conceptual schemes and language use, as well as discourse strategies and knowledge necessary for interpretation.

2.1 Linguistic anthropology

As we have seen, both Quine and Davidson step outside of the realm of analyzing language exclusively in terms of its grammar and other purely linguistic properties. They view it as a social enterprise and draw attention to its role in building and sustaining a community (Glock 2003). Linguistic anthropology is an area of both empirical and theoretical research which yields insight into these aspects of linguistic behavior. It is an interdisciplinary

field which inquires into the interdependence between aspects of human nature and existence which include language use, cultural upbringing and identity, as well social interaction. In other words, it is:

the study of languages in activities that make up the social life of individuals and communities. To pursue such an agenda, researchers have had to master the intricate logic of linguistic systems — e.g. their grammars — and document the activities in which those systems are used and reproduced through routine and yet highly creative tasks.

Duranti 2009 : 1

The name of the discipline gives away at first sight the fact that linguistic anthropology combines the scientific goals and methods of anthropology and linguistics. As an independent field of research it was established at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century¹. A brief recount of the motivation behind the emergence of this area of scientific research, which is the content of the next section, will illuminate the essence of the outlook on language which is held by its scholars and the methodology which they employ in exploring the aspects of language conceived of in that manner.

2.1.1 Influences

The most significant observation which drives the interest in linguistic anthropology is the fact that language is the backbone of all social practices (Hymes 1964, Duranti 2009). This is the case not only due to linguistic nature of interpersonal communication. The bellwethers of the analytic tradition in philosophy of language make the case for the idea that all thought, and thus all conscious mental processes, are inseparable from language (Hymes 1964). If the goal is to study the cultural background and the nature of human beings, it is therefore paramount to take into consideration the linguistic perspective, as it gives insight into both social and individual aspects of human behavior, which imprint themselves and further influence traditions and practices (Duranti 2009).

Given this characterization, linguistics, a study of language, should perhaps be an area of research which could give us a satisfactory description of the most basic aspects of human nature. It came to light, however, that the largely eurocentric linguistic scholarship was not able fulfill that goal. The extensive comparative linguistics research carried out in the 19th demonstrated that different cultural groups employ various ways of expressing information about the world and the experience of it (Anttila 1972). These differences exceeded the even then rather well established expectation that languages differ in surface qualities, such as their phonetic outlook,

¹Hymes 1964 is the first ever published overview of the field.

grammatical structure or lexicon. It turned out that the basic categorical structure of conceptual systems of some languages differs from others (Boas [1911] 2013), even to a point where translation between the said languages becomes challenging, as some analytical categories which exist in some languages are sometimes simply not there in the others (Duranti 2009).

Linguistic relativity, a doctrine which has already been introduced in 1.2.1, is theoretically grounded in the combination of the above observations. Already Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767 - 1835), a Prussian statesman and one of the most influential scholars of the 19th century, spoke of the connection between a conceptual scheme of an individual, her language and her cultural background in a way which was later adopted by the proponents of this hypothesis:

Each tongue draws a circle about the people to whom it belongs, and it is possible to leave this circle only by simultaneously entering that of another people. Learning a foreign language ought hence to be the conquest of a new standpoint in the previously prevailing cosmic attitude of the individual. In fact, it is so to a certain extent, inasmuch as every language contains the entire fabric of concepts and the conceptual approach of a portion of humanity. But this achievement is not complete, because one always carries into a foreign tongue to a greater or lesser degree one's own cosmic viewpoint - indeed one's personal linguistic pattern.

Von Humboldt [1836] 1971 : 39-40

Linguistic relativity, the initial theme of linguistic anthropology research (Duranti 2009), yields the outlook on language as the most significant aspect of human culture, as it portrays the mind of the individual as the product of her cultural and linguistic background. Hence, the study of human culture, i.e. anthropological research, cannot be conducted independently of the study of language. Simultaneously, the study of language should take under consideration a cross-cultural, anthropological perspective. A combination of these two tenets lies at the foundation of the theoretical framework of linguistic anthropology.

2.1.2 Methodology

The methodology of conducting research in linguistic anthropology also naturally springs from its parent fields. In anthropology, ethnography is the chosen paradigm which supplies its scholars with empirical data². On the other hand, in the tradition of structuralism, the goal of an empirical investigation in the field of linguistics is the extraction of abstract structural patterns, which are ideally stably present in all languages.

²This is certainly a simplified description of the relationship between anthropology and ethnography, but it will be sufficient for the purposes of this thesis. For an interesting and in-depth discussion of this issue, see Ingold 2017.

It quickly became apparent that the synthesis between those paradigms is not as straightforward as one would hope, due to the contrast in basic methodological principles explained in the quotation below:

In linguistics, the empirical procedures – the elicitation techniques, the processes of idealisation and data preparation, and the rules of evidence – are relatively standardised and they are often taken more or less for granted, at least within particular schools and paradigms. The social and personal processes that have brought the researcher to the level of understanding where s/he could start to formulate linguistic rules are seen as relatively insignificant. In contrast in ethnography, participant-observation plays a major role, and the processes involved in learning and adjusting to different cultural practices are themselves regarded as potentially consequential for the analysis. The researcher's presence/prominence in the field setting defies standardisation and it introduces a range of contingencies and partialities that really need to be addressed/reported.

Snell, Shaw, and Copland 2015: 3

As a consequence, the methodology of linguistic anthropology relies on a sort of consensus between these two perspectives. The rigorous methods of formal linguistics are used in a manner which incorporates the view of plurality of knowledge and epistemic perspectives. Furthermore, linguistic behavior is always considered against the background of the situational context in which it was observed. At the same time, the ethnographic paradigm is seen as a mean not only to describe the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of a given social group, but also as a source material for generalizations regarding human behavior in a social context (*ibid.*).

2.1.3 Criteria of choice

Let us now turn to the discussion of the place that the linguistic anthropology scholarship will have in the current analysis. This thesis does not pertain to be a review of the achievements of linguistic anthropology. I decided to constrain the discussion to two research projects in order to perform of an in-depth analysis of the issues they raise, rather than adopting a more comprehensive approach. This seemed to be the methodologically appropriate choice, given that the goal of the current inquiry is to look for a conceptual correspondence referring to philosophical theories, which requires a detail-oriented research attitude. In the name of methodological clarity, I explicitly present the criteria which informed my decision in picking the adequate linguistic anthropology research projects for analysis.

Relevance for the debate on conceptual relativism

Most importantly, the research projects presented in this thesis had to be as close as possible to the theoretical frameworks put forth by Quine and Davidson. The similarity between the themes had to be visible not only in the actual setting of the conducted experiments, but also in the hypotheses the researchers aimed to verify through those empirical studies. This is why one of the presented works is a description of creating a translation manual (Malinowski [1935] 1965), and aims to convey the characterization of a remote culture (the Quinean scenario), while the other one depicts the process of interpretation of speakers of the same language (Bailey 1997) and shows what type(s) of knowledge is necessary for successful communication (the Davidsonian scenario).

Acclaim in the field

Due to the personal lack of expertise in linguistic anthropology, I had to rely on the easily accessible indications of the quality of the presented research. The clue as to which studies were conducted in a sound way is how acclaimed their findings have been within their own field. Consequently, both research programs introduced here have been largely influential in linguistic anthropology, were broadly commented on by other scholars or were included in published overviews of the most significant achievements of the said area of scientific inquiry.

Methodological clarity

Another important issue was that the presentation of the findings of the anthropological research projects had to be accompanied by a clear description of the methodology of extracting those data. This was crucial for maintaining conceptual similarity between philosophical accounts and empirical results. This criterion was highly significant especially in picking the right project for the radical translation scenario. It could be argued that the closest real-life examples of interactions of this sort were the first encounters between European explorers and the individuals living in territories previously unknown to Europeans, like for instance the initialization of communication between Captain Cook and his companions with members of Hawaiian tribes. Even though extensive accounts of these interactions which touch upon the issue of communication exist (e.g. Sahlins 1995), in none of the sources it is clearly stated how the inter-cultural dialogue schemes were established in such cases, and so there could be a number of factors, such as misconceptions with respect to the behavior of the locals rooted in colonial prejudices, which could have interacted with the end result of the translation scheme and clouded the investigation into how this process ensued. In light of this, only the projects with a clear description of methodology were chosen for this inquiry, since all such confounding factors can then be detected,

explicitly mentioned and accounted for in the course of the analysis.

Diversity

Finally, the chosen studies come from different anthropological traditions, i.e. British and American, and were conducted in a span of almost 80 years in very different communities living in hugely varying geographical locations. The hope is that such a diversity will showcase a broad spectrum of the aspects of language put under investigation in the presented research project and thus give merit to the application of these results to a debate on theoretically extensive issues such as interpretation and the basis of linguistic communication.

2.2 Language as a cultural reality : Bronisław Malinowski on the language of the Melanesian tribes

The first body of research which will be examined is the ethnographic study of the Melanesian culture by Bronisław Malinowski. Firstly, the historical context of his investigation will be put forth³. In addition, the methodology he employed will be presented, with a special emphasis on the methods used for the translation of Kiriwina (also known as Kiriwinian, Kilivila, Boyowa) language. Finally, an excerpt from his corpus inscriptionum⁴ (2.2.5) and its analysis (3.2) in the context of preserving semantic content in the process translation of culturally remote languages will be given.

2.2.1 Historical background

“[...] one of the founders of social anthropology” (Senft 2009 : 3); “[...] one of the outstanding influences in shaping modern British social anthropology” (Firth 2013 : i); “[...] a key figure in the development of general linguistics as it is known in Britain today” (Berry in Malinowski [1935] 1965 : xvi); “[...] he created the theory of ethnographic fieldwork [...] Malinowski talking about the Trobrianders is a stimulating genius” (Leach 2013 : 119).

It is not hard to find tokens of high esteem with respect to the interdisciplinary scientific legacy of Bronisław Kaspar Malinowski (1884 - 1942)⁵. Between 1915 and 1918, he visited the Trobriand Islands, situated off the South-East coast of Papua New Guinea. He was particularly interested in the practices connected to

³It will later become clear how the discussion of the circumstances in which the study of the Trobriand culture was conducted is relevant for the analysis of the conceptual relativism debate against the background of Malinowski's work (see subsection 2.2.2).

⁴a collection of texts

⁵He nonetheless remains a controversial figure within the field of anthropology, due to the merit of his work as well as his persona. For a detailed examination of these issues, see Firth 2001.

agriculture and gardening, and furthermore in the social structure present among the representatives of remote cultures, cultural artifacts and traditions, and finally in the use of magic in everyday life as well as during celebratory rituals. In the course of his investigation, he became intrigued by the relationship between culture and language, and provided in his writings a detailed report of his experience of immersing himself in a culture whose language is so drastically different from his own. The methodology of ethnographic research he developed at that time along with the results of his investigation and theories grounded in them led to the revolution social anthropology and drew attention to the importance of linguistics in that field. More specifically, he “[transformed] the 19th century speculative anthropology into a field-oriented science that is based on empirical research” (Senft 2009). Before discussing the study itself, let us first consider how far-reaching the scientific knowledge of the culture of the Trobriand tribes was before Malinowski’s inquiry.

2.2.2 The history of research of the culture of Papua New Guinea

The rationale behind including this rather outdated research project in the current investigation was as follows. In the radical translation scenario, the linguist is confronted with a culture “hitherto unknown” (Quine [1960] 2013). In the modern era, the sumptuousness of anthropological research and the plethora of possibilities of exchange of information places scholars far away from the position of sparsity of collateral knowledge of the language or culture assumed by Quine in the thought experiment. As far back as in 1915, when he first set foot on Kiriwina, the largest of the Trobriand Islands, Malinowski already had access to some materials through which he could have familiarized himself with the Trobriand culture. In order to examine the extent of additional information Malinowski had at his disposal upon beginning the process of translating the local language, a survey of all materials regarding Kiriwina available at that time was conducted, which yielded the following results⁶.

Anthropological data

According to Sillitoe (1998), the only scholar who beat Malinowski to the title of the first anthropologist studying the culture of the Trobrianders was Nicholas Mikluho-Maklai, a 19th century Russian explorer and scientist who traveled to Papua New Guinea numerous times, and to the Trobriand Islands in 1879⁷ (E. M. Webster and R. Webster 1984). He lived among the Papuan tribes for two years, collected and analyzed the

⁶Unfortunately, the practice of referencing all the sources used in a scientific study was not in place back then. Thus, the question as to whether Malinowski had actually been acquainted with all of these materials remains unanswered. The more he knew about the Trobrianders beforehand, the further his inquiry drifts away from the radical translation scheme. In order to perform a conceptual comparison of his research with the said thought experiment, it was deemed necessary to review all of the writings which he could have possibly used in his research, i.e. to analyze ‘the worst case scenario’ in which he would have had been familiar with all of the discussed writings.

⁷He reportedly spent there only three days (E. M. Webster and R. Webster 1984).

specimens and studied their language, customs and the geography of the terrain. He meticulously documented his observations in his diary (Mikluho-Maklai and Sentinella 1975). As Mikluho-Maklai mostly worked in mainland Papua New Guinea, in an area positioned in the North-East part of the island, we can conclude that his findings could only serve Malinowski to see the Trobrianders in a much larger context of a highly varied cultural landscape of the tribes inhabiting this large area.

Linguistic data

The Austronesian family of languages, of which Kiriwina is a member, consists of 300 to 500 languages, which amounts to 10% of all the known languages⁸ (Senft 1986). In the 17th century, the first Austronesian languages were recorded by Europeans, i.e. the dialects spoken in New Ireland and Tabor (Grace 1976). From then onwards, a number of analyses of these languages had been put forth which predate Malinowski's expedition (Forrest [1779] 1969, Latham 1860, Gabelentz 1886, Haddon et al. 1907 and others), however none of them contained the description of Kiriwina.

The only materials which Malinowski explicitly mentions as sources which were in his possession upon his arrival to Trobriand are those written by the Christian missionaries. Unfortunately, since he did not provide any references to these works and thus I was unable to access them. Nonetheless, he anyway deems these materials as unsuitable for the purpose of an accurate translation of Kiriwina⁹, and thus the information they contain can be neglected in exploring of his research in the context of radical translation.

2.2.3 Methodology

Malinowski notes that the faulty character of the missionaries' translation often is caused by the fact that their goal in describing the languages they were newly acquainted with amounted either only to communicating with

⁸Quine explicitly mentions knowledge languages related to the target language as a factor which can aid the translator and thus breach the conceptual difficulty of the task of radical translation (Quine [1960] 2013 : §28). I therefore explore all the materials which document any European contact with Austronesian languages, which could potentially have been available to Malinowski, even though, as a second biggest family of languages, its members have highly diversified linguistic properties.

⁹"In the grammars and interpretations of Melanesian languages, almost all of which have been written by missionaries for practical purposes, the grammatical modifications of verbs have been simply set down as equivalent to Indo-European tenses. When I first began to use the Trobriand language in my field-work, I was quite unaware that there might be some snares in taking savage grammar at its face value and followed the missionary way of using native inflection. I had soon to learn, however, that this was not correct and I learnt it by means of a practical mistake, which interfered slightly with my field-work and forced me to grasp native flexion at the cost of my personal comfort. At one time I was engaged in making observations on a very interesting transaction which took place in a lagoon village of the Trobrianders between the coastal fishermen and the inland gardeners. I had to follow some important preparations in the village and yet I did not want to miss the arrival of the canoes on the beach. I was busy registering and photographing the proceedings among the huts, when word went round, 'they have come already' -boge laymayse. I left my work in the village unfinished to rush some quarter of a mile to the shore, in order to find, to my disappointment and mortification, the canoes far away, punting slowly along towards the beach! Thus I came some ten minutes too soon, just enough to make me lose my opportunities in the village! It required some time and a much better general grasp of the language before I came to understand the nature of my mistake and the proper use of words and forms to express the subtleties of temporal sequence" (Malinowski [1923] 1994 : 303-304).

the local inhabitants, or sharing with them the sacred texts of the Christian religion (Malinowski [1935] 1965). As an anthropologist, the objective he himself tried to achieve in the course of his scientific investigation was much broader:

Malinowski's primary scientific interest was in the study of *culture as a universal phenomenon* and in the development of a methodological framework that would permit the systematic study of specific cultures in all their peculiarities and open the way to systematic cross culture comparison.

Metraux 1968 : 541, emphasis added

In his view, a method which would allow for this type of a scientific inquiry must be grounded in the assumption that all the elements of culture, among which he lists "inherited artifacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits" and values fulfill a certain *function* (Malinowski 1935) in a society in which they are present. This approach is known as *functionalism* in anthropology and comes directly from Malinowski's theory. An anthropologist working within the functionalist paradigm

aims at the explanation of anthropological facts at all levels of development by their function, by the part which they play within the integral system of culture, by the manner in which they are related to each other within the system, and by the manner in which this system is related to the physical surroundings. It aims at an understanding of the nature of culture, rather than at conjectural reconstructions of its evolution or of past historical events [. . .]. [It] insists [. . .] upon the principle that in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea and belief fulfills some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part within a working whole.

Malinowski 1926 : 132-3

In consequence, an anthropologist needs not only to describe the cultural reality she observes, but also to understand it and with this insight explain the cultural setting of the people under consideration. According to Malinowski, this can only be achieved through a full immersion in the community which is being studied. He is seen as the inventor of the *participant observation* method (Senft 2009), which is now a standard procedure in ethnographic research, in which the researcher directly, not only through informants, interacts with the members of a cultural group (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994).

To this purpose, it is necessary for the scholar to familiarize herself with the local language. In Malinowski's

case, the process of attaining conversational knowledge of Kiriwina lasted around one year¹⁰, and then after 6 more months he achieved full fluency. This process in itself, as well as the insight into the intricacies of the Trobriand culture possible thanks to the knowledge of Kiriwina were so inspiring to Malinowski that he devoted the second volume of his *Coral Gardens And Their Magic* (Malinowski [1935] 1965) entirely to the description of Kiriwina, as well as to his own semantic theory, i.e. the ethnographic theory of language¹¹. In the next section the standpoint Malinowski holds with respect to the process of translation is examined.

2.2.4 Translation

The task of the anthropologist, according to Malinowski, is thus to present the reader of her work with a holistic picture of the sociocultural landscape of some community. At the time, he strived for his description to be “a translation of the native point of view to the European recipients of his works” (Malinowski [1935] 1965). For him, this goal could not have been completed without a detailed description of Kiriwina, as he viewed language to be the most fundamental fragment of culture (*ibid.*).

The first claim he makes, which comprises the main commitment of his whole approach towards language, is that it only exists in actual use, i.e. the meaning of a sentence¹² cannot be separated from the context in which it was uttered. He categorically rejected the view of meaning as entity. He also rejected the approach to translation in which finding equivalents exhausts the task of an interpreter. There is no entity which can be held constant in the process of translating, a one thing to which various words of different languages refer. All semantic content, he claims, is internally related to the situational, and thus cultural, social, even geographical context in which it has been uttered. The task of an interpreter comprises rather the recreation of such a context, and not a mere word-for-word substitution (*ibid.*). Instead of just observing the linguistic behavior of the studied group, Malinowski relied on *definition texts*, i.e. “texts in which a native either tries to define a word or uses it in a characteristic manner” (Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 4).

This is why the translation manual, which in this case is not a word list but a set of actual utterances elicited from the locals, provides the reader with three sorts of information. The first one Malinowski calls *mnemonic counters* or *approximate labels* which are English words that allow for the recognition of the same phases, but which are not meant to be seen as equivalents¹³. Those are accompanied by *free translation*, which is

¹⁰He learned the basics of the language from R.L. Bellamy, the Assistant Resident Magistrate and Medical Officer of the district, with whom he stayed for 3 months during his first trip to the Trobriands (Senft 2009).

¹¹Even though the ethnographic theory of language is a very interesting subject in itself, its scope reaches far beyond the area of interest of this thesis and thus it will not be put forth here in its entirety. For more information regarding this doctrine, see part IV of Malinowski [1935] 1965.

¹²Interestingly, just like Quine and Davidson, he is a proponent of meaning holism, i.e. the claim that (utterances of) sentences are the primary meaningful elements of a language and that words have meaning only in the contexts of the sentences in which they occur.

¹³“the merely approximate but useful English label [. . .] which I have used throughout the descriptive chapters in order to avoid repeating

a conceptually accurate recreation of an utterance. Finally, a *commentary* on the contextual specification of meaning is given. It is important to note, however, that free translation and the commentary are not arbitrary. Only a scholar who has attained the knowledge of the cultural reality of a community can be seen as competent enough to be able to interpret the utterances in a correct manner.

2.2.5 Translation manual

The translation manual given in the second volume of *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, i.e. the corpus inscriptionum, is organized as follows. Utterances and the related lexicon are grouped into 12 chapters based on the subject matter to which they belong, from agricultural terms, through the terminology referring to social life, all the way to magical spells. Here, we will concentrate on Chapter V entitled *The Social and Cultural Setting of the Trobriand Islands*, a whose fragment is depicted on the figure below (Fig. 3.1).

Let us begin with an explanation of the notation used in this fragment. The observations are enumerated, **T.** denotes particular utterances elicited from the Trobrianders, and all Kiriwinian words are written in italics.

In the presented fragment, Malinowski discusses general terms which are related to the social and cultural sphere of agricultural activities of the community. He observes that there is no word or phrase which refers to these practices as a whole, comparable to the English ‘agriculture’, ‘husbandry’ or ‘cultivation’. Moreover, he describes a broad spectrum of the uses of the term *bagula*, for which the approximate label is ‘garden’.

Further in the chapter, Malinowski gives a theory of how the words *malia* and *molu* are used. The approximate label of the first one is ‘prosperity’, but there are also contexts in which it stands for ‘plenty’, ‘well-being due to prosperity’, and even ‘a season or year in which there is plenty’. Its counterpart *molu*, ‘hunger’, ‘famine’, ‘temporal or seasonal determinants of hunger’, ‘conditions of hunger’, also has the property of being available for use in a multitude of contexts, and its meaning ranges from very particular, to very abstract and general concepts. Malinowski’s explanation of this state of affairs is that as an agricultural community, the amount of harvested crops directly affects all spheres of life of the representatives of the local culture.

the native term constantly” (Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 15)

1. No abstract terms exist in Kiriwinian corresponding to such concepts as ‘husbandry’, ‘agriculture’ or ‘cultivation’ (cf. Part IV, Div. VII). There are, however, some expressions denoting, on the one hand, the importance of gardens and, on the other, certain general ideas which characterise gardening as a whole and serve to contrast it with other activities and aspects of culture. One of them already discussed (Div. II, § 8) is *kaulo*, ‘staple crops’, ‘accumulated crops’. Another word is *bagula*, which means ‘garden’ in its nominal form but is, perhaps, even more important in its verbal use for the delimitation of activities (cf. Div. I, § 18). When the natives wish to characterise a certain community as ‘agricultural’, they would refer directly to their gardens, saying that:—

T. 22. *Ma-tau-si-na si bagula bi-kugwo.*
 these (m.) their garden he might be first

This means: ‘these people their gardens they are first’, ‘they excel’. The most general word in fact to define all agricultural activities is the verb *bagula*. It would be specifically opposed to the verb *poulo*, ‘to fish’:—

T. 23. *Yakamaysi ka-bagula-si, ma-tau-sina i-poula-si.*
 we (e.p.) ourselves we (e.p.) garden these (m.) they fish

or vice versa. In this sentence ‘we garden’ is used in the sense ‘we are an agricultural community’. In the nominal form, people speaking of their cultivation would say: *da-bagula-si* (inclusive plural), politely admitting the stranger into a possessive relation to the object of their pride and glory. There is an expression for a ‘fisherman’, *toluguta*, and for a ‘landlubber’, *tokwabu*. The *tokwabu* are usually also agriculturists, though there is no term describing this economic status. *Tokwaybagula*, as we know, means ‘good gardener’ and not ‘gardener’ in general.

Figure 2.1: Excerpt from the corpus inscriptionum, Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 119

In connection with *molu*, Malinowski gives a complete definition text he elicited from a Trobriand informant in reference to the practice of trading food. Below it will be given in full, as an example of a definition text accompanied by a commentary and a free translation:

- T. 27.** (i) *Bi-kala* *kalasia,* *bi-woye* *leria.*
 he might scorch sun he might hit plague
- (ii) *Makawala da* *leria* *tomwota,* *makawala* *kala* *leria*
 alike our plague humans alike his plague
bagula.
 garden
- (iii) *Ta-sayki* *so-da* *vaygu'a;* *ma-tau-na* *kaulo*
 we give companion ours valuable this man yam-food
bi-yousi; *ta-vem.*
 he might get hold we barter yam-food for valuables

FREE TRANSLATION: (i) When the sun scorches and burns our gardens, they will be struck with plague (blight) too.

(ii) Exactly like our human plague, so is the plague of the gardens.

(iii) Under such circumstances we give to our companion a valuable; he takes some yam-food, we barter the valuable for the yam-food.

8. COMMENTARY: (i) is a mere juxtaposition of two statements which, however, are bound up by temporal conditionality. 'When the sun scorches (all the vegetation), the plague would strike.'

(ii) An interesting *rapprochement* between the plague in the gardens, which really means drought and general blight, with an epidemic which strikes human beings.

(iii) Here we come to the real subject-matter of this text, a definition of the barter of valuables for yam-food.

The first two statements really describe the situation in which such trading would take place, a situation analogous to the one described in T. 24.

Figure 2.2: Excerpt from the corpus inscriptionum, Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 122

The final part of the part of the corpus inscriptionum which will be discussed here includes observations 9.-12., in which Malinowski puts forward an analysis of a Kiriwinian word *taytu*. According to the anthropologist, this word is a very special case of homonymy, as it can be either used to refer to a yam plant as a whole, or just to its tuber:

It is, however, important to be clear that even here the natives never use the word in a careless or confused manner, as meaning either the edible tubers or the plant as a whole, because such a confusion might lead to very serious pragmatic inconvenience. But in any given statement it

is always clearly indicated by the context of situation, gesture and common knowledge, whether *taytu* means tuber . . . , or whether it means 'the whole plant', 'the vine' . Note that the word *taytu* is never used for any other part of the plant . . . It is only the important part of the plant which can be simply designated by the term *taytu*.

Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 123



Figure 2.3: *Taytu* vines, Malinowski [1935] 2013 : 161



Figure 2.4: Preparation of *taytu* tubules, Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 144

With this observation, we will leave for now the discussion of the work of Bronisław Malinowski and the issue of translation. We will now turn to the analysis of the study conducted by Benjamin Bailey, which is an illustration of a communication scheme in which the participants use the same language, although they come from different ethnic backgrounds.

2.3 Inter-ethnic dialogue: Benjamin Bailey on communication of respect

The most memorable scene from the classic film “Do the Right Thing” (dir. Spike Lee, 1989) is a montage of racial slurs among which we can find the following:

You gold-teeth, gold-chain-wearing, fried-chicken-and-biscuit-eatin’, monkey, ape, baboon, big thigh, fast-running, three-hundred-sixty-degree-basketball-dunking spade Moulan Yan¹⁴.

[. . .]

You slant-eyed, me-no-speak-American, own every fruit and vegetable stand in New York, Reverend Moon¹⁵, Summer Olympics ’88¹⁶, Korean kick-boxing bastard.

Lee and Jones 1989

The scene is a depiction of a unique ethnic landscape of the US American society, where people of relatively distinct cultural backgrounds find themselves living in close proximity to each other and thus forming an unprecedentedly ethnically mixed societal structure. The said network has a long history of extreme inequality across many social dimensions, such as race, gender, sexuality and economic status. In such a setting, tensions across the distinct ethnic groups are bound to arise.

In his acclaimed study¹⁷ published in two articles, one entitled “Communication of respect in interethnic service encounters” (1997), and the other “Communicative behavior and conflict between African-American customers and Korean immigrant retailers in Los Angeles” (2000), Benjamin Bailey investigated a particularly acute example of such an antagonism. He conducted an extensive ethnographic investigation into the service encounters between immigrant Korean merchants and African-American customers. In the course of his inquiry, he aimed to determine whether it could be the case that the frictions arising in those interactions result from the lack of alignment in discourse strategies present in language uses of the said ethnic minorities, in particular in the ways of communicating mutual respect between the customer and the vendor.

The analysis of this research project seeks to illuminate what should be relationship between a speaker and a hearer and what capabilities must they possess to make interpretation possible. This will further serve as a

¹⁴An offensive term used to refer to African Americans by Italian immigrants in the United States (Urban Dictionary 2018)

¹⁵a Korean religious leader

¹⁶held in Seoul, South Korea

¹⁷included in *Linguistic Anthropology: A reader* (Duranti 2009), which “is a comprehensive collection of the best work that has been published in this exciting and growing area of anthropology” (p. 1).

background against which Davidson's scenario of radical interpretation and the concept of triangulation which were presented in 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 will be explored.

2.3.1 The Korean-American - African-American Conflict

Even though both the Korean-American and the African-American communities are ethnic minorities in the United States, they are considered to occupy distinct positions in the social structure (Chang 2002). Here we shall concentrate on exposing the split between the situation of the former as the immigrant-minority-merchants and the latter as the native-minority-customers.

A factor which underlies the tension between the two groups is economic and can be explained on the grounds of the *middleman minority* (or marginal trading peoples) theory (Bonacich 1973). According to this account, due to the economic niche that groups such as Korean immigrants occupy, i.e. small retail business industry, they are at a high risk of running into conflict with their customers, especially those whose socio-economic status is low, as it is for a significant fraction of African Americans.

The conflict between the groups escalated dramatically when on November 15, 1991 a Korean store owner, San Ja Du, was sentenced to a 5-year probation for fatally shooting in the back of her head a 15-year-old Latasha Harling, an African American girl, during a service encounter on March 16, 1991. This event, along with the acquittal of the officers of the Los Angeles Police Department who had brutally beaten Rodney King, again an African American, initiated the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, the biggest civil disturbance in American history, during which 58 people were killed and over 14.000 were arrested (Wallace 2017). Furthermore, the riots caused almost 1 billion dollars worth of losses, among which 400 million American dollars worth of damages belonged to Korean American businesses (Chang 2002).

According to Bailey, while the economic, social and racial factors are definitely relevant to the explanation of the tension between Korean Americans and African Americans, an issue still left to be explored was what role was played cultural factors, in particular those connected to discourse strategies, in the emergence as well as the sustenance of the conflict.

2.3.2 Strategies for communicating respect

As the main theme of the study is respect and various ways of communicating it, a theory of such behavior must be introduced firstly. It will serve as a theoretical framework within which a comparison of different discourse strategies of paying respect can be carried out.

Let us begin by giving an intuition of how the concept of *discourse strategy* functions in the sociolinguistic scholarship:

[...]interpretation of longer stretches of text involves simultaneous processing of information at several levels of generality. That is, in determining what is meant at any one point in a conversation, we rely on *schemata* or *interpretative frames* based on our experience with similar situations as well as on grammatical and lexical knowledge [...]

Gumperz 1982 : 21, emphasis added

Discourse strategies thus fulfill a crucial part in facilitating the process of communication. Showing respect to one's partner in a linguistic interaction is one of the most significant schemata which can be distinguished (Gumperz 1982).

Communication of respect is among the most crucial aspects of *politeness*, "the process by which we determine and manage the threat inherent in communication between intentional actors, who are presumed to have goals, and the potential to take offense at having those goals thwarted" (Miller, Wu, and Funk 2008). P. Levinson et al. (1987) put forth a model of politeness¹⁸, in which the basic concept is the one of *face*. Face is defined as a sense of positive self-worth (Goffman [1967] 2017). The goal of every rational social agent is to keep a high face level.

Within this general goal we can further distinguish, in the terminology of P. Levinson et al., *positive* and *negative* face, which Bailey will later denote as *involvement* and *restraint*, respectively. The former is an inclination to be accepted, approved and understood by others, while the latter is an aptitude to be autonomous in taking decisions regarding one's own actions, and the distaste for imposition (Bailey 2000). Representatives of different cultural groups view various combinations of these subgoals as desirable and thus perceive individuals who allow them to accomplish these objectives as polite or impolite depending on the standard practices of doing so present in their respective cultures (Miller, Wu, and Funk 2008). For instance:

While English and German show a strong preference for conventional indirectness [negative face, restraint], literature available on Polish and Russian requests assigns a more central role to direct requests, especially those taking the form of imperative constructions [positive face, involvement].

Ogiermann 2009 : 193

Another important issue raised by P. Levinson et al. is that if during an interaction a person does not employ strategies for displaying politeness, such behavior is not perceived as neutral, but rather as actively threatening:

¹⁸developed based on extensive anthropological research

non-communication of the polite attitude will be read not merely as the absence of that attitude, but as the inverse, as holding an aggressive attitude.

P. Levinson et al. 1987 : 33

Hence, according to this model, a failure to communicate respect can drastically disrupt the flow of information in the process of communication. The results of Bailey's study indicate that this prediction indeed seems to have merit.

According to the social science research from the 1980s (e.g. Stewart 1989), members of the communities under consideration in this study, i.e. Korean immigrants and African Americans, in fact employ distinct strategies for communicating respect and, in consequence, perceive different sorts of behavior as polite and impolite in this way. Let us begin our analysis with the latter element of the interaction, namely perception.

Referring to the frictions in the inter-ethnic encounters between the representatives of the two groups, the word which comes up significantly often is 'respect' (Bailey 1997). This shows a surprising similarity between how the members of one culture see the other, i.e. as lacking certain skills in expressing politeness. Bailey's hypothesis of strong influence of divergence of what is interpreted as respectful on the Korean-American - African-American conflict is grounded in preceding descriptions of the relationship between the two groups:

The underlined themes for both groups appear to be respect and courtesy shown toward each other. Each group felt that more respect should be accorded when communicating with each other, and that courtesy should be shown through verbal and nonverbal interaction by being more congenial, polite, considerate, and tactful toward each other.

Stewart 1991 : 20

In the course of his investigation, Bailey strived to explore the other side of interaction, i.e. discourse strategies which are put in place in these inter-ethnic service encounters.

2.3.3 Methodology

In order to investigate what conventions of communication are present in the linguistic behavior of both Korean Americans and African Americans, Bailey conducted an extensive ethnographic study. The actual fieldwork, i.e. the process of data collection, took place between July 1994, and April 1995, shortly after 1992 riots, in over 20 Korean-owned retail establishments located in various districts of Los Angeles.

Among the methods he employed, there is first-hand observation of the encounters¹⁹, interviews, some of which were audio-taped, with the merchants as well as customers, and video-recording of instances of such interactions. To be precise about the exact amount of data which was collected, the excerpt of the article with its detailed description is included below:

Service encounters were videotaped for 4 hours in both a Culver City store and a Koreatown store, yielding a record with which to document details of communicative patterns. Videocameras were set up in view of customers, but drew virtually no comment, perhaps because there were already multiple surveillance cameras in each store. [. . .] During the 4 hours of taping at the Koreatown store, there were 12 African-American customers and 13 immigrant Korean customers.

Bailey 2000 : 89

Moreover, as some of the encounters between Korean merchants and Korean customers ensued in Korean, a bilingual research assistant provided the translation into English, along with some commentary regarding the cultural traits observable in the behavior of the participants of the study.

2.3.4 Communication interrupted

According to Merritt, a service encounter is :

an instance of face-to-face interaction between a server who is 'officially posted' in some service area and a customer who is present in that service area, that interaction being oriented to the satisfaction of the customer's presumed desire for some service and the server's obligation to provide that service.

Merritt 1976 : 321

A service encounter can thus be described as a form of interaction which is goal-oriented, where the goal is to complete a simple business transaction. The first dialogue which will be explored very well demonstrates that character of a situation. In this interaction, a 40-year-old Korean immigrant woman comes to the store to buy cigarettes:

¹⁹not to be confused with a more involved method of participant observation used by Malinowski

Cash: *Annyông haseyo.*

Hello/How are you? ((Customer has just entered store))

Cust: *Annyông haseyo.*

Hello/How are you?

Cust: *Tambae!*

Cigarettes!

Cash : *Tambae tûryôyo?*

You would like cigarettes? ((Cashier reaches for cigarettes under counter))

Cash: *Yôgi issûmnida.*

Here you are ((Cashier takes customer's money and hands her cigarettes; customer turns to leave))

Cash: *Annyônghi kaseyo.*

Good-bye

Cust: *Nye.*

Okay

Bailey 2000 : 94

Bailey describes this encounter as *socially minimal*, i.e. dominated or consisting fully of institutional talk (Bailey 1997). Actually, 10 out of 13 observed interactions between Koreans fall into the same category, where 2 of the more personal communication events were with a personal acquaintance of the merchant, and in one of the participants was a child.

In contrast, 9 out of 12 service encounters between immigrant Korean merchants and African American customers were *socially involved*, which means that they "involve speech activities beyond greetings, negotiation of business exchange, and closings [...] include making jokes, commenting on the weather, discussing personal experiences from outside the store, commenting on interlocutor's demeanor, referring to commonly known third parties, and alluding to the history of the relationship between customer and storekeeper [...]" (Bailey 2000 : 95). The participants of the following exemplary interaction are an African American customer in his forties, who regularly visits the store, and a Korean immigrant owner of the establishment, who is around the same age and has lived in the United States for 20 years, and a cashier, also of Korean origin.

((Customer enters store and goes to soda cooler))

Cust: [Hi]

Own: [How ar]e you?

((Customer takes soda toward cash register and motions toward displays))

Cust: Wow you guys moved a lot of things around

Cash: Hello ,

((Cashier stands up from where he was hidden behind the counter))

Cash: Heh heh

Cash: How are you?

((Cashier retrieves customer's liquor and moves toward register))

Cust: What's going on man?

((Cashier gets cup for customer's liquor))

Cust: How've you been?

Cash: Sleeping

Cust: eh heh heh

Cash: That's it

Cust: That's it

((Cashier rings up purchases))

Cust: I haven't seen you for a while

Cash: hehe Where you been

Cust: Chicago

((Cashier bags purchase))

Cash: Oh really?

Cust: [yeah]

Cash: [How] long?

Cust: For about a month.

Cash: How's there

Cust: Col'

Cash: [Cold?]

Cust: [heh] heh heh heh

Own: Is Chicago cold?

Cust: u h' ((lateral headshakes)) man I got off the plane and walked out the airport I said "Oh shit"

Cust: heh heh heh

Own: I thought it's gonna be nice spring season over there

Cust: Well not now this is about a month I been there I was there for about a month but you know, damn
 ((lateral headshakes))

((Customer moves away from cash register toward owner))

Cust: Too col'

Cust: I mean this was really cold

Own: (They have snowy) season there

Cust: I've known it to snow on Easter Sunday

Cust: Alright this Sunday it'll be Easter

Cust: I've seen it snow Easter Sunday

((15-second discussion, not clearly audible, in which the owner asks if there are mountains in Chicago, and the customer explains that there are not))

Cust: See th- this- California weather almost never changes

Cust: ((Spoken slowly and clearly as for non-native speaker)) back there it's a seasonal change, you got fall, winter, spring

Own: mm hm

Cust: You know

Cust: But back there the weather sshhh

((lateral headshake))

Cust: It's cold up until June

Cust: I mean these guys like they- they wearing long johns from September until June

Own: (It's hot season, June)

Cust: He- here it's hot, but there it's

((lateral headshake))

Cust: (Really)

((Customer moves toward exit.))

Own: Kay [see you later]

Cust: [see you later]

Cust: Nice talking to you

Clearly, there is a sharp contrast between the engagement which the participants display in this interaction.

There is no regular pattern of turn taking, the owner of the store or the cashier do not, unlike the customer, disclose any personal experiences and moreover, except for one instance, do not seek to inquire further about the issues which the customer is raising.

An analysis of all of the encounters lead Bailey to conclude that the results of his observation corroborate the hypothesis according to which Korean immigrants and African Americans do indeed employ drastically divergent strategies of displaying respect for their conversationalist. While the former group seems to give higher value to the negative face, or restraint, the latter displays the opposite attitude, i.e. appreciates engagement in a conversation.

The Korean case is treated in much more detail in Bailey's article. He points to a range of factors which contribute to the conversational scheme presented above for this ethnic group. Firstly, the closest corresponding term to English 'respect' is the Korean *chonkyong*, which adheres directly to a relationship between a superior and an underling in some sort of a hierarchical structure. The English term does not carry the same connotation, as it can also apply to an interaction with an equal, and does not necessarily refer to a more institutionalized and rigid practice. Furthermore, Bailey points to Confucianism, "the dominant moral philosophy in Korea for the last 600 years" (Bailey 2000 : 93) as the source of the belief according to which personal conduct should be moderate and calm in any situation. Bailey hypothesizes that this commitment is indeed the source of the restrained manner in which the Korean storekeepers behave, and why they see the engagement of African Americans as impolite.

In conclusion, the exposed divergence in the linguistic practices of showing respect is the factor which can be viewed as one of the sources of conflict between the representatives of two cultures, for it contributes to the tension by interfering with the hermeneutic process:

Both storekeepers and customers publicly interpret each others' behavior in terms of their own standards for appropriate behavior in service encounters. Storekeepers' relative restraint and lack of sociable, interpersonal engagement with customers would not be perceived as disrespectful in a Korean cultural and linguistic context. It is precisely such restraint, however, that many African-Americans cite as proof of storekeeper disrespect and racism. [. . .] On one level, African-American perceptions of taciturnity as disrespect and racism are misperceptions that result from mis-communication, i.e. from interpreting Korean immigrant behavior in an African-American cultural and linguistic context.

Based on the observed patterns of behavior and the social establishment of the conflict, Bailey further elaborates on the importance of linguistic conventions in situations of inter-ethnic dialogue:

Culturally specific conventions for carrying out communicative activities, including displays of respect, are typically unconscious (Gumperz 1982), and few individuals can abstract the precise conditions and speech activities that would constitute an unmarked service encounter for them. Because it is so difficult to recognize details of one's own interactional expectations and practices – and to perceive them as culturally specific rather than universal and natural – it is easier to account for another's divergent behavior in intercultural situations through reference to negative intentions or traits.

Bailey 2000 : 100

Summary

In this chapter, linguistic anthropology is introduced and its area of scientific interest is explained. This is followed by an examination of the study of Bronisław Malinowski conducted in the Trobriand Islands between 1915 and 1918. His ideas on language and translation are put forth, along with a detailed examination of the process of gaining an understanding and constructing a translation manual of Kiriwina. Afterwards, the study of Benjamin Bailey which highlights the issue of diverging discourse strategies in cross-cultural hermeneutics on the example of service encounters between Korean merchants and African-American clients is explored.

Chapter 3

Philosophical theories, anthropological research

The two studies which have been presented in detail in Chapter 2 will now serve as an empirical background for a discussion on the theories of interpretation and translation given by Quine and Davidson and presented in Chapter 1.

3.1 Empirical implications of the philosophical accounts

Let us begin with a recollection of the empirical implications of the philosophical standpoints stated at the end of Chapter 1 (1.3.5). They were as follows:

- (i_q) Alternative and hence incommensurable conceptual schemes could potentially exist.
- (ii_q) In the process of a translation of a culturally remote language there are elements of that language that cannot be accounted for.
- (iii_q) Equally correct incommensurable translation manuals could be put forth for any language.
- (i_d) The evidence does not support the claim that alternative conceptual schemes could potentially exist.
- (ii_d) There exists a shared notion of rationality which unites human beings in their motivation to take action, and the success of the process of interpretation depends on this characteristic of human behavior.

(iii_d) Understanding can be achieved purely on the grounds of the shared principle of rationality, i.e. no prior knowledge of linguistic conventions needs to be taken into account.

In this chapter, i_q - iii_q and i_d - iii_d are finally evaluated on the grounds of the findings of Malinowski and Bailey. In what follows, firstly the focus of the analysis is on the scenario of radical translation and afterwards I move on the discussion of the process of interpretation.

3.2 A practical exercise in radical translation

Consider the interaction between a Polish immigrant living in the United Kingdom and the Trobriand community. The distance between Malinowski's home town of Cracow, at the time of his birth in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now Poland and Kiriwina, Papua New Guinea, is over 13.500 km (Google Maps 2018). The cultures to which the participants of this very unusual for that time encounter belonged, differed enormously across many dimensions, such as the social structure, religion, rituals, language and many others.

Malinowski's knowledge of the Trobriand culture and language which he possessed upon his arrival on Kiriwina was discussed in detail in 2.2.2. Even though the conceptual barrier between the future creator of the Kiriwina translation manual and the local community was pierced and the interaction cannot be seen as a 1-1 real-world example of radical translation, due to the overwhelming sparsity of the information that Malinowski had beforehand I am leaning to conclude that his findings can nonetheless serve as an empirical background to examine the legitimacy of Quine's theory.

3.2.1 The process of achieving inter-cultural understanding: language and view point

A striking resemblance between how Quine and Malinowski conceptualize language and translation can easily be observed. For take the following statements of the two scholars:

[. . .] even in the most abstract and theoretical aspects of human thought and verbal usage, the real understanding of words is always ultimately derived from active experience of those aspects of reality to which the words belong.

Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 58

Words can be learned as parts of longer sentences, and some words can be learned as one-word sentences through direct ostension of their objects. In either event, words mean only as their use in sentences is conditioned to sensory stimuli, verbal and otherwise.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 17

Considered relative to our surface irritations, which exhaust our clues to an external world, the molecules and their extraordinary ilk are thus much on a par with the most ordinary physical objects.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 22

In order to show the meaning of words we must not merely give sound of utterance and equivalence of significance. We must above all give the pragmatic context in which they are uttered, the correlation of sound to context, to action and to technical apparatus; and incidentally, in a full linguistic description, it would be necessary also to show the types of cultural drill or conditioning or education by which words acquire meaning.

Malinowski [1935] 1965 :60

The whole apparatus [of language] is interdependent, and the very notion of term is as provincial to our culture as are those associated devices. The native may achieve the same net effects through linguistic structures so different that any eventual construing of our devices in the native language and vice versa can prove unnatural and largely arbitrary.

Quine [1960] 2013 : 53

The fact that both Malinowski and Quine subscribe to a behaviorist view on language and reject the museum myth of meaning (Quine 1969) can further support the methodological soundness of analyzing the findings of the former in terms of the theory of the latter.

Even more significantly, Malinowski's view on translation and thus the methodology he employs in creating his manual is based on the idea that language is not a mere instrument for communication, but rather that it is a medium which allows for an interaction with the world, affects how the cognitive agent sees the world, and is closely related to the socio-cultural structure of the community in which it is used. Therefore any serious attempt at a translation of a conceptually remote language must in fact relate linguistic utterances with a cultural context, which is the only context where they can be correctly decoded. The task of a translator is not to find equivalents in her native language, but rather to allow for the alignment of "epistemological horizons" (Povinelli 2001 : 320) between the representatives of her own culture and the one whose language she is considering.

Arguably, the analysis fragment of Malinowski's work which was presented in 2.2.5 fulfills the requirements for a satisfactory translation manual. What the author concentrates on is the illumination of the system of categories present in Kiriwina and the interplay between the culture of the Trobrianders, their way of living and their language, rather than on providing a 1-1 mapping of the set of Kiriwina words to English words. One might thus conclude that Bronisław Malinowski conducted an exercise in radical translation in successful manner. The question of how this accomplishment relates to Quine's indeterminacy of translation thesis will be explored in what follows.

3.2.2 Accuracy and the threat of indeterminacy

"[...] radical translation of sentences is underdetermined by the totality of dispositions to verbal behavior" (Quine [1960] 2013: 78). It is of prime importance to understand that the indeterminacy of translation cannot be refuted just by showing that composing a translation manual in a situation of drastic conceptual divergence between the interpreter and the community whose language she is studying is indeed possible. For Quine's claim is not that such an endeavor cannot be completed, but rather that in such a case there can be many possible translation manuals which are not mere stylistic variants (Hylton 2018). Only such indeterminacy can further be seen as an epistemological argument for the acceptance of conceptual relativism.

This is how Gunter Senft, a psycholinguist and a specialist in Kiriwina from the Max Planck Institute in Nijmegen, writes of Malinowski's study of the language of the Trobrianders:

[. . .] I want to give a (quite personal) assessment and appraisal of Bronisław Malinowski on the basis of my own field research on the Trobriand Islands. I cannot but completely agree with Young (1987: 138) that Malinowski "was an incomparable fieldworker and master ethnographer". Moreover, the only reliable linguistic data I found in the literature preparing for my first 15 months of field research on the Trobrianders in 1982/83 came from Malinowski's linguistic publications and from his anthropological linguistic remarks in his ethnographic masterpieces on the Trobriand Islanders.

Senft 2007 : 150

The important insight which this characterization yields is the following. Regardless of the initial sparsity of additional knowledge of the culture, Malinowski managed to overcome the conceptual divergence between his own linguistic scheme and the one of the Trobrianders, and came up with a description of their language so accurate that 50 years of extensive studying and mutual communication later, its validity stands unshaken.

Could this have been achieved, if indeterminacy à la Quine was indeed an accurate description of bringing divergent conceptual schemes together?

Of course Quine's thesis of indeterminacy is much deeper than its analysis of accuracy presented above treats it, for although observational evidence can distinguish between alternative stimuli-meanings for observational occasion sentences, this does not transpose to sub-sentential expressions, and by implication also not to sentences that are not-observational occasion sentences. This brings us to the question whether this sort of threat of indeterminacy is in any case as significant as Quine makes it, i.e. whether it can serve as a justification to abandon a realist ontology. Let us hear the opinion of Davidson on this matter:

The fact that all the publicly available evidence with regard to a speaker or group of speakers, even if imagined to exhaust all possible such evidence, might be consistent with many different languages (in the sense of 'language' we have temporarily ordained) ought not in itself to worry us, for we can agree that it is enough to know that a speaker speaks any one of a set of empirically equivalent languages, as long as the empirical constraints clearly define the set. [...] I regard the existence of empirically equivalent languages (that is, languages equally consistent with all possible empirical evidence) as no more threatening to the reality or objectivity of the correct interpretation of utterances and their accompanying mental states than the existence of various scales for recording temperatures or lengths is to the reality or objectivity of temperature or length.

Davidson 1992 : 3

The accuracy of Malinowski's translation manual accompanied by this treatment of indeterminacy does not leave much of the threatening character of the inscrutability thesis (iii_q) which is imagined by Quine.

3.2.3 Malinowski's translation manual

Nonetheless, what Malinowski's corpus inscriptionum definitely succeeds in demonstrating is that the composition of the conceptual structure embedded in Kiriwina differs significantly from the one of the English language. One example of this point is that in Kiriwina there is no general term denoting a set of agricultural activities as a whole, such as the English 'agriculture' or 'husbandry'. Moreover, the generality which characterizes Kiriwinian terms *malia* and *molu*, for which the approximate labels are 'prosperity' and 'hunger', can be seen as another instance of a discrepancy between the systems of categories present in the said languages. One might therefore conclude that alternative conceptual schemes do indeed exist (i_q).

Let us however recall the powerful argument raised by Davidson against viewing this type of differences between languages in terms of evidence of the existence distinctive, and thus incommensurable, conceptual schemes (1.2.1). Malinowski manages to convey his observation in a way that can be understood by a competent English speaker. Hence, the difference between the two languages can be viewed as having a much more innocent character than the one envisioned by the proponents of conceptual relativism. Malinowski's successful effort in explaining the intricacies of Kiriwina to English speakers perhaps should rather be seen as compatible with the following insights made by Davidson. According to him, there are no such things as alternative conceptual schemes (i_d), because if a presentation of one language in terms of the other is possible, then there must be a certain common coordinate system whose existence allows for the expression of the differences between the two.

Finally, let us discuss the ambiguity with which the word *taytu* can be used to refer to either the lesser yam plant as a whole, or just to the edible tuber. As Malinowski informs us (quotation on page 41), the intended meaning of *any* utterance containing this word can always be deduced from the context in which the word was uttered. If this is indeed the case, let us imagine a situation where in the presence of the whole plant (with the tubers still attached) a native speaker of Kiriwina utters a sentence '*Taytu!*'¹. In this situation, from the Quinean perspective, as a direct consequence of semantic holism, there should be no way of telling whether the word *taytu* in this sentence means 'tuber' or 'plant', for in any of those cases the sentences containing this word would have the same stimulus meaning². However, if the universal quantifier which is used by Malinowski in the explanation of the meaning of *taytu* is to be taken seriously, then it nonetheless can be determined whether what is referred to is the tuber or the whole plant.

This observation therefore poses a threat to the validity of Quine's example of *gavagai* as a clear instance of indeterminacy, and hence to the legitimacy of the notion of stimulus meaning. Because if the correct lexical meaning of *taytu* can be elicited by the interpreter even in the situation described above, then Quine's predicted failure with respect to the capability of the translator to discriminate between 'rabbit' and 'undetached rabbit part' does not seem like a legitimate concern anymore. This is due to the fact that when confronted with an analogous situation, Malinowski at least potentially could have been able to handle the ambiguity and correctly assign the intended meaning to the utterances of the Trobrianders.

Of course, for this argument to have a standing chance to truly become a clear counterexample to the indeterminacy thesis, Malinowski's conduct in discerning the ambiguous meanings of *taytu* must have been

¹Malinowski does not describe any situation of this kind in his works. This is a hypothetical put forth by the author of the current thesis.

²See: definition on page 11.

constrained to the method allowed in Quine's vision, such as observation and simple querying³. Unfortunately, the anthropologist does suggest any indication as to how he managed to acquire the linguistic expertise necessary to this end. He did, however, give an explanation of why only this particular part of the plant can also be referred to as *taytu*, and this insight will be explored in what follows.

3.2.4 Functionalism and rationality

Malinowski writes:

Note that the word *taytu* is never used for any other part of the plant; the leaves would be described simply as *yagavana*, 'leaves' or, if it were necessary to specify the leaves of a particular plant, *yagavana taytu*. It is only the important part of the plant which can be simply designated by the term *taytu*. [. . .] *Taytu* stands to the natives for garden produce in general, being economically the most important garden produce.

Malinowski [1935] 1965 : 123

In this explanation the functionalist methodology which Malinowski employed in his theoretical as well as empirical research comes through in an apparent manner. The word *taytu* can be used for the tubers because they are the most *important* part of the plant. Obviously, what is referred to here as important is the fundamental the function which agriculture has in every society, namely the production of food. There is no unobtrusive way to put this: every human being needs to fulfill their basic physiological need to receive nourishment. Malinowski argues that it is precisely because we all share these common needs, we can *make sense* of the patterns of behavior, including linguistic behavior, of the people we do not share a cultural background with (2.2.3).

It seems like it can be convincingly argued that exactly the same insight is central to Davidson's solution to the problem of radical interpretation. Both Malinowski and Davidson suggest that as human beings, we are compelled by the rules of rationality to direct our actions in such a way that the goals that are set by the needs which we also share can be accomplished. This is why according to both scholars cross-cultural hermeneutics is possible. It is due to the fact that the understanding of the rules of rational thinking gives us insight into the beliefs of the Other, which further enables us to follow the train of thought present in her speech and recover the information she is striving to convey in a linguistic utterance.

³See: subsection 1.1.3.

The adherence to this idea enabled Malinowski to interpret the actions and sentences uttered by Trobrianders. By refusing to conform to the colonial thinking about the peoples with whom he was newly acquainted as drastically different from white Europeans, and accepting that he had much more in common with them than the anthropological theory of his time lead him to believe, he embarked on a path to gain an understanding of their culture and language. It can thus be concluded that Davidson's prediction that a shared notion of rationality is instrumental in the process of hermeneutics (ii_d) has merit, given the experience of Malinowski on Trobriand Islands.

3.3 Possibility of cross-cultural commensuration: principle of charity at work?

The study of Benjamin Bailey explores how communication between representatives of different ethnic groups plays out in the context of a service encounter. As we have seen, the fact that the participants of such interactions are competent speakers of the same language does not come with the certainty that the accomplishment of mutual understanding is possible. Moreover, as history of the Korean-American - African-American conflict demonstrates, the miscommunication can have far-reaching consequences, from a transaction which is the goal of the interaction will not be completed to sparking acts of violence. How should this observation be seen when confronted with Davidson's theory of interpretation which is grounded in the notion of rationality? Furthermore, if the cultural background affects the process of cross-cultural hermeneutics to such a drastic extent, then is it impossible to exclude such notions as conceptual scheme or linguistic convention from a theoretical account of interpretation, counter to Davidson?

3.3.1 Discourse strategies and conceptual schemes

Bailey's analysis paints the following picture. When an immigrant Korean merchant conducts a conversation with her African-American customer in a socially minimal manner, in from her point of view she approaches her customer in a polite way. Her utterances, however, are perceived as impolite and racially prejudiced by her customer. The same mismatch between intentions and their reception is present in a vice-versa situation, i.e. in view of a salesperson when the customer is acting in a socially involved way.

The concepts of politeness and respect in the African-American and Korean cultural traditions are therefore substantially different. This contrast, as Bailey argues, results in incommensuration between the representatives of the two groups. The conceptual difference is significant to the point that it spoils the hermeneutic process.

Furthermore, the reception of the same intersubjectively accessible data (linguistic utterances in a language familiar to both groups) and the responses to those stimuli are also distinctive.

Moreover, as is the case here, it is not that there are particular examples of such mismatches, which could perhaps be classified as isolated instances of mistakes in communication. There rather seems to be a systematic pattern of misunderstanding between people belonging to these ethnic groups. Does it thus follow that the conceptual schemes of African Americans and Korean immigrants are so different that their mutual understanding cannot be achieved, and can thus Bailey's observation serve as evidence for Quine's epistemic theory which makes use of the notion of conceptual schemes (i_q)?

The first issue which needs to be addressed is the following. The goal Quine's of theoretic endeavor is to explain the semantic properties of linguistic utterances, while Bailey concentrates on what should perhaps rather be classified as a systematic breakdown in the purely conversational sphere, i.e. the one of pragmatics⁴. Thus it can be argued that unlike the concepts which correspond to the objects in the world, those of politeness or respect do not touch upon any aspect of reality other than the way that conversation ensues, and as such cannot be analyzed on the grounds of theoretical instruments such as stimulus meaning⁵. Notions such as *belief* or *intention* are not instrumental in Quine's theory of interpretation. I am therefore inclined to conclude that the differences observed in the discourse between Korean merchants and African-American customers cannot be put in Quinean terms, i.e. as evidence for the existence of alternative conceptual schemes.

The concerns regarding the process of interpretation presented by Bailey are however much more relevant for the Davidsonian account. The latter's solution to the problem of radical interpretation which makes use of the principle of charity and the concept of triangulation is in itself grounded in the assumption that a correct recognition of the intentions of participants of a conversational situation must be possible in an overwhelming majority of cases. How can the systematicity of errors in the hermeneutic process caused by a mismatch of culturally-specific discourse strategies be explained without employing the concepts referring to regularities in language use, such as for instance linguistic convention?

⁴In linguistic literature there exists a notion of *sociopragmatic failure* (Thomas 1983), which describes precisely the type of mismatch between discourse strategies as the one described by Bailey.

⁵It is important to note that perhaps this assertion is not necessarily correct when a broad cultural context is taken into consideration. For instance, in social anthropology there exists a notion of a *honor-shame culture*, which describes societies in which the values of pride and honor are so instrumental in the constitution of the societal structure that they are granted a status of almost a physical reality (Wong and Tsai 2007, Benedict 2005). It seems that it would be difficult to explain this state of affairs on the basis of Quine's naturalized epistemology.

3.3.2 Communication, conventions and discourse strategies

In order to explore the role of linguistic conventions in the context of the pattern of communication between African Americans and Korean immigrants, let us first put forth a definition of meaning consistent with the one given by proponents of the conventionalist account, who combine the traditional conventionalist approach with a neo-Gricean notion of speaker-meaning⁶ (Bennett 1976, Schiffer 1972):

Sentence *s* means that *p* as used by population *G* iff there prevails in *G* a convention to use utterances of *s* so as to speaker-mean that *p*⁷.

Rescorla 2017 : 46

Let us then give an explanation of Bailey's findings on the grounds of the conventionalist account of meaning. Firstly, however, let us note that the notion of convention in the context of communication of politeness is equivalent to what in the sociolinguistics literature is called a discourse strategy, as both of these terms refer to a certain regularity in language use which prevails in a given community (see quotation on page 2.3.2). This equivalence is used here for the translation of Baileys analysis to the language of the conventionalist approach.

Within the linguistic tradition of the Korean community, there prevails a set of conventions which inform the understanding of some utterances as polite, and some as impolite. For the said set of sentences, the same utterances are however given an opposite classification as displaying respect or disrespect by conventions present in the language used by individuals of African-American background. The same exact utterances thus have different meanings when said or heard by the representatives of the two ethnic groups, which straightforwardly results in systematic misunderstanding.

I would argue that this is a plausible picture of a conversational situation which involves inter-ethnic hermeneutics. Nonetheless, let us recall Davidson's standpoint:

Knowledge of the conventions of language is thus a practical crutch to interpretation, a crutch we cannot in practice afford to do without—but a crutch which, under optimum conditions for communication, we can in the end throw away, and could in theory have done without from the start.

Davidson 1984 : 279

⁶“a speaker *S* means something by an utterance *U* just in case *S* intends *U* to produce a certain effect in a hearer *H* by means of *H*'s recognition of that intention. The speaker meaning of *U* in such a case is the effect that *S* intends to produce in *H* by means of *H*'s recognition of that intention.” (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2017). For more information, see Davis 1992

⁷The reason why this definition and not perhaps a more established one given in Lewis et al. 1969 was chosen to appear here is that the explicit reference to the notion of intention puts it conceptually closer to the Davidsonian account and thus allows for a more merit comparison of the two approaches.

Therefore, the problem with the conventionalist approach is not that it does not provide useful insight into how the process of communication ensues, but rather that it fails to illuminate what is essential to the process of interpretation. What Davidson views as this core element is that because we are rational animals, we can make overwhelmingly correct assumptions about each other's beliefs.

However, what Bailey's research shows is that perhaps the intricate relation between the speakers' orientation on the goal they are trying to achieve through linguistic behavior, the intent to make themselves understandable for the hearer with the beliefs and intentions of the hearer cannot be so easily accounted for on the basis of the shared notion of rationality. For, as we have seen (definition on page 47), the character of the particular conversational scenario treated by Bailey, i.e. a service encounter, is clearly given by a set of goals which the participants of such interactions are trying to achieve, namely an exchange of goods. Nonetheless, as we have seen, the hermeneutic process is obstructed, even though the intent of both parties should be to make themselves clearly understood in order to complete the transaction.

A way to explain this could be that the members of the two communities are just ignorant with respect to each others' cultural schemes and this is why the process of communication cannot go smoothly in this way. However, the mismatch and the resulting conflict cannot be accounted for in this way, as the communities have been living side by side for many years (Chang 2002) and thus the exchange of information between them must have resulted in at least a partial recognition of each others' customs. Why then the process of mutual understanding is so challenged, given that the rational goal for both interested parties should be for the conversation to ensue as smoothly as possible so that the goods can be exchanged?

3.3.3 Transaction or affiliation with one's social group?

In the article from 2000, Bailey makes an interesting suggestion which might be the key to solving this conundrum:

In this highly charged and divisive context, there is often great *social incentive* for individual Korean immigrant storekeepers and African-American customers to mark and maintain boundaries between each other. One way to mark such boundaries is through contrasting interactional styles. Differences in communicative behavior are frequently taken to mark and represent differences in social identity (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982). Storekeepers and customers in low-income Los Angeles neighborhoods differ in cultural, racial, and, frequently, class identities. Individuals who perceive differences between themselves can use communicative behaviors associated with specific social identities to reproduce those social identities and differentiate themselves from

others. Thus, even when African-American customers and Korean immigrant retailers might approximate each other's communicative conventions – resulting in more synchronous interactions – they have social incentives not to do so.

Bailey 2000 : 103, emphasis added

The goal of completing a transaction can thus be trumped by the incentive to assert the membership to one's own cultural group. If this is indeed the case, then I would argue that Davidson's solution to the problem of radical interpretation based on the recognition of beliefs of the Other grounded in the principle of charity is not only safe from the objection given in the end of the previous subsection, but gains even further empirical plausibility.

For let us consider again what is the case in conversational situations analyzed by Bailey. Until now, the received picture was grounded in the assertion that the intentions and consequently the beliefs of speakers were wrongly assigned to them by hearers in the process of communication. However, once the goal of maintaining boundaries is recognized as rational⁸, then perhaps the intentions of acting in a manner which can be received by the Other as impolite can be seen as the underlying intent of the sender of the statement. Consequently, the meaning of the utterance should thus be considered to include elements of hostility, and so only by relating to the goal of seeing oneself as a participant of some cultural tradition can the utterance be correctly understood.

Out of all the accounts of interpretation which we have seen in these pages, it is only Davidson's on the grounds of which this effect can be explained. Hence, the conclusion which follows from this particular observation is that the results of Bailey's study corroborate the role of shared rationality in the hermeneutic process (ii_d, iii_d).

Summary

In this chapter, an analysis of the empirical validity of the theories of interpretation presented in Chapter 1 is given. Malinowski's research project is considered as a real-world radical translation scenario and it is concluded that his experience does not go in line with Quine's conceptualization of cross-cultural hermeneutics. Furthermore, a parallel between the functionalist paradigm in anthropology and the Davidsonian account of interpretation is explained. Moreover, the relationship between the notions of conceptual scheme and discourse strategy is discussed. This is followed by an analysis of the usefulness of the concept of convention in accounting for mismatches in cross-cultural communication schemes as the one described by Bailey and it is argued that the notion of rationality is sufficient for explaining such instances, which is in line with Davidson's theory.

⁸in sense of *instrumental rationality*, see Kim 2017

Chapter 4

Concluding remarks

What both Quine and Davidson seem to accept is that one can only understand the speech of another on the basis of how they themselves use language. The difference between the two philosophers, however, boils down to the following. Quine responds to this with the thesis of indeterminacy as on the grounds of the evidence he allows, sufficient conceptual similarity between possessors of alternative schemes cannot be claimed. Davidson, on the other hand, asserts that as long as the creature whose speech is being interpreted uses language, it must follow the rules of rationality and have a concept of objective truth. Thus, as long as the participants of a conversation are rational animals, the speaker and the hearer are similar enough in their responses and the outlook on the world so that interpretation can go smoothly, and there is no threat of substantial indeterminacy.

The analysis of the two research projects conducted in the paradigm of linguistic anthropology shows that Davidson's account seems to be more plausible. Not only was indeterminacy not experienced by the interpreter in a radical-translation-type scenario, but it has also been shown that the only knowledge necessary for the hermeneutic process is the recognition of the behavior of the speaker as rational in a conversational situation.

What remains to be discussed is the merit of examining these philosophical accounts against the background of empirical data. These considerations were already mentioned in [1.3.2](#) and [1.3.3](#). Nonetheless, a range of relevant questions regarding these issues has until now been left unanswered. In this final chapter, an elaboration on the relationship between philosophical accounts of interpretation and the findings of empirical studies on the same phenomenon is put forward, which further culminates in the discussion of the conclusions drawn from the current investigation.

4.1 Case study: relationship between philosophy and empirical science

One might argue that Davidson's methodology in making the case against Quine's approach towards meaning and interpretation, i.e. conceptual analysis, is a sufficient tool to refute of conceptual relativism. What is therefore the advantage of adding a layer of the empirical outlook to these considerations? In other words, what new perspective can the analysis of empirical data on translation and interpretation offer with respect to the theoretical debate on those issues? Furthermore, what axis of comparison is used as the basis of investigating the conceptual accordance between the findings of the empirical and the philosophical accounts? Finally, what is the merit in empirically testing the results of thought experiments, such as radical translation? As all of the above questions are rather general and their relevance is not restricted to this particular investigation, the analysis will be treated as a case study in the inquiry into the relationship between philosophy and empirical science.

4.1.1 Conceptual compatibility

In accordance with Davidson's standpoint, and counter to the thought of philosophers of science such as Kuhn and Feyerabend (Oberheim and Hoyningen-Huene 2016), the current analysis is grounded in the premise that the theories put forth by scholars working in divergent paradigms can be compared. It is important to note, however, that a comparison of this sort requires *conceptual compatibility* in the operationalization of notions present in theories under consideration, or at least of the most instrumental concepts given the goal of the analysis.

For consider the notion of language which was used throughout the current investigation. As has already been mentioned in the beginning of section 2.1, both Quine and Davidson acknowledge the theoretical relevance of social and cultural aspects of linguistic behavior and define language and meaning in a way which incorporates this assertion (Glock 2003). Simultaneously, linguistic anthropology scholars view the phenomenon of language in a similar way and steer their investigation directly towards those aspects of it (see section 2.1). It is due to such commensurability of the attitudes towards language that the achievements of Quine and Davidson on one hand and Malinowski and Bailey on the other can be jointly analyzed, as was done in these pages.

For let us examine an alternative philosophical stance on language, for instance a view according to which language provides labels for meanings as mental entities, an approach which was already mentioned in 1.1.3 and referred to in Quinean terms as the museum myth of meaning (Quine 1969). In such a view, the relevance the social aspect for the constitution of language is not taken into consideration. Consequently, performing a

comparative analysis between this approach and the findings of linguistic anthropologists would prove futile.

4.1.2 Confrontation with observation

Once the conceptual compatibility between the philosophical accounts and empirical outlooks on the phenomena under consideration has been asserted, the relevant question to ask is what this novel perspective adds to the theoretical discussion. I will argue that in the case of the current analysis, the advantage of this sort was at least threefold.

Firstly, the presented studies enabled us to gain a clearer understanding of which aspects of linguistic behavior are truly relevant in the situation of cross-cultural hermeneutics. In the case of Malinowski's study, the invaluable insight is that of how deeply culture and language are interrelated and how the study of one cannot be separated from the inquiry into the other. Similarly, Bailey's description further showcases the interplay between the culturally dependent semantic and pragmatic effects which influence the flow of communication. Furthermore, it raises and illuminates the issue of goal orientation in communication. His findings provide a convincing argument for the assertion that a general theory of interpretation should incorporate a description of the interrelations between the intentions of the speaker and the hearer in a conversational setting.

Secondly, by studying how the process of interpretation or translation ensues in a real world scenario, the validity of the assumptions made by the theoreticians can be assessed. As Malinowski's example demonstrates, all aspects of culture, including language, must be studied in an interpretative manner, i.e. the anthropologist's task is to make sense of what she observes. The functionalist assumption of common human needs made by Malinowski in order to accomplish this goal, which resembles Davidson's standpoint, enables him to bridge the conceptual gap between his viewpoint and that of the Islanders. The restriction imposed by Quine on the interpreter to only have access to purely behavioral data is thus not an accurate description of the type of evidence the translator has access to and can make use of when constructing a translation manual. Furthermore, the fact that the results of Bailey's study can be explained on the grounds of Davidson's solution to the problem of radical interpretation makes his assertion as to the role of rationality in the hermeneutic process even more plausible.

Finally, through the examination of the empirical accounts, new relevant aspects of the phenomena under consideration come to the fore. In case of linguistic anthropology when contrasted with the theories of translation and interpretation put forth by Quine and Davidson, what seems apparent is that the historico-cultural perspective on the hermeneutic process is perhaps not sufficiently treated in the philosophical accounts. While both philosophers, as was stated before, acknowledge the role of culture and social interaction in the estab-

ishment of linguistic behavior, what their accounts seem to miss is the crucial role which institutions like tradition and social practice, which are shown to be intimately related to the phenomenon of interpretation by Malinowski and Bailey, play in the hermeneutic process¹.

4.1.3 Evaluation of results of a thought experiment

As to the second point raised above, it is also important to consider the rationale behind this sort of evaluation which was presented in Chapter 4. For, one might argue, both radical translation and radical interpretation are thought experiments, and thus by definition their place is in the realm of the speculative and not the empirical. Their goal is to explore the *boundaries* of what a certain formulation of a given concept can encompass, i.e. they are of a hyperbolic nature and the scenarios in which their are set are hence not recreationable in a real-world setting.

Perhaps, though, this is not the only way to think not just of thought experiments, but of any other kind of speculative exercise. For it calls upon question the issue of whether a concept of correctness, which somehow incorporates a reference to what is actually the case in the world, is adequate for a description of a conceptual investigation which in itself is the overwhelming majority of the type of research produced by philosophers. This concern is highly complex and reaches way beyond the scope of this particular inquiry. However, in our case it is important to note that both philosophers under consideration seemed to give a positive answer to this question. As Davidson writes:

W.V. Quine [. . .] was the first to give me the idea that there is such thing as being right, or at least wrong, in philosophy, and that it matters which.

Davidson 2001 : *Introduction* xxii - xxiii

Coming back to the specific mode of performing conceptual analysis under consideration, namely through thought experiments, some argue that the theoretical goals which it serves as well as its structure diverge significantly from mere speculation.

Thought experiments should be distinguished from thinking about experiments, from merely imagining any experiments to be conducted outside the imagination and [. . .] from counterfactual reasoning in general, as they seem to require an experimental element, which seems to explain the impression that something is experienced in a thought experiment. [. . .] though many call any

¹In philosophical literature on interpretation, these issues are extensively treated in, respectively, *Truth and method* by H.- G. Gadamer, 1989 and *Social practices: A Wittgensteinian approach to human activity and the social* by T. R. Schatzki, 1996.

counter-factual or hypothetical situation a thought experiment, this seems too encompassing. It seems right to demand that they also be visualized (or perhaps smelled, tasted, heard, touched); there should be something experimental about a thought experiment.

J. R. Brown and Fehige 2017 : 1

The argumentative structure of the current analysis is in line with the above description of thought experiments. For what was treated in these pages is not the validity of the reasoning employed by Quine and Davidson in drawing conclusions from the initial conditions set by the scenarios of their thought experiments, but rather whether these particular settings accurately describe and illuminate the truly significant aspects of achieving understanding in situations of sparsity of knowledge about the language or the cultural background of the conversational partner. The aim was to show that Davidson's approach, unlike Quine's, seems to encompass those most relevant aspects of the process of interpretation which stand out most vividly in the course of cross-cultural hermeneutics.

4.1.4 Complementary investigations

The final issue to be raised is the following. If the empirical accounts of translation and interpretation, as was argued in this chapter, can yield insight into the essential aspects of these phenomena, does this perhaps make the philosophical investigation into the same issues redundant in a way? I would like to argue that this is not the case either.

The prime example for why this assertion is flawed is the work of Bronisław Malinowski presented here. For, as it is widely recognized, his primary achievement was the one of revolutionizing the paradigm of ethnographic fieldwork through incorporation of the premises of functionalism into his method. The insight which allowed him to advance the empirical methodology was thus of a philosophical nature.

A similar case can be made for the significance in progressing the understanding the process of understanding itself of the interplay between the insight provided by the philosophical accounts of linguistic comprehension and the empirical research on the same phenomenon. Without the theoretical framework of the former, a sound discussion of the results of the latter would simply be impossible. At the same time, as the current analysis was hopefully able to show, the findings of empirical research can provide a background for a broad-spectrum inquiry into the theoretical accounts themselves, and furthermore serve as an input for conceptual clarification within a philosophical investigation of hermeneutics.

This is how the importance of cooperation between philosophy and empirical science in advancing the body

of knowledge for which I argued was described by Wittgenstein:

If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar? Our interest certainly includes the *correspondence* between concepts and very general facts of nature. [. . .] But our interest does not fall back upon these possible causes of the formation of concepts; we are not doing natural science; nor yet natural history since we can also invent fictitious natural history for our purposes.

I am not saying: if such-and-such facts of nature were different people would have different concepts (in the sense of a hypothesis). But: if anyone believes that certain concepts are absolutely the correct ones, and that having different ones would mean not realizing something that we realize — then let him imagine certain very general facts of nature to be different from what we are used to, and the formation of concepts different from the usual ones will become intelligible to him.

Wittgenstein [1953] 2009 : XII, emphasis added

The intellectual enterprises of philosophy and empirical science therefore complement each other when it comes to exploring various aspects of reality. Moreover, they are irreducible to one another. The former deals with *concepts*, and the latter with *facts*. These two investigative interests are of a fundamentally different nature and thus their exploration requires diverging research attitudes. Achieving understanding of all kinds of phenomena requires performing an investigation on both the conceptual as well as the empirical level into how those phenomena manifest themselves in the world. The hope is that the current analysis can serve as a piece of evidence for the validity of this claim. Studying interpretation and translation simultaneously from a philosophical as well as empirical perspective is not only possible, methodologically sound, but also, crucially, it gives a fuller picture of the process of hermeneutics than any of the disciplines could do on their own.

4.2 Conclusions and future research

The aim of this analysis was to explore the philosophical accounts of intelligibility set forth by Quine and Davidson, which are seminal works in the debate on conceptual relativism. Quine's claim of indeterminacy of translation which leads him to accept this form of relativism was investigated in depth, along with the radical translation thought experiment constructed to illuminate its validity. Davidson's criticism of this result was given. Furthermore, his theory of interpretation which makes use of the principle of charity was explored.

A novel perspective on the validity of the predictions of their theories was given by analyzing them against the background of research in linguistic anthropology. The studies used in this thesis included Bronisław

Malinowski's ethnographic account of the Kiriwina language of the Trobriand Islands, and Benjamin Bailey's description of communication of respect in service encounters between immigrant Korean vendors and African-American customers in small convenience stores in Los Angeles.

The results of the analysis showed that the premises which lead Davidson to reject conceptual relativism seem more plausible than those prompting Quine to accept this stance. The evidence does not support the existence of incommensurable conceptual schemes. Moreover, the role of rationality of the speaker and the hearer, as predicted by Davidson, seems to be indeed crucial in the process of hermeneutics.

The analysis is also itself was explored in the larger context of the relationship between philosophy and empirical science. Issues such as conceptual compatibility as well as methodological soundness of putting thought experiments in real-world scenarios were discussed. Furthermore, the claim of mutual irreducibility of philosophy and empirical science was stated and argued for.

As is often the case, there is a range of interesting questions which come to mind in relation to the issues which were raised in these pages. For instance, it would be interesting to contrast these results with the findings of other branches of empirical science studying the phenomenon of interpretation from a different perspective, such as cognitive psychology. Moreover, the notion of rationality which comes up so often in the current investigation is in itself a topic of an animated debate. The question to ask here is what concept of rationality is assumed by Davidson and whether the concerns brought upon by the said debate pose any new theoretical problems for his account.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the far-reaching consequence of Davidson's result from the consideration of the problem of interpretation, namely the overwhelming possibility of successfully interpreting the speech of another, even in the situation of the sparsity of knowledge of their language or their beliefs. The only assumption, Davidson claims, one needs to make to comprehend another, is to accept that they are very similar to one another. For most of us, cross-cultural hermeneutics is no longer an exercise of scientific or philosophical interest, but rather an everyday reality. It is too often that the standpoint that people of different cultural, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds have irreconcilable viewpoints on reality comes to the foreground and the resulting resignation from mutual dialogue has negative, sometimes even drastic consequences. It is important to note that neither the leading philosophical theories nor the results of empirical research in linguistic anthropology, as was demonstrated in this investigation, support the claim of the existence of such incommensurable points of view. Therefore, the differences between human beings which, as was discussed, seem to have a much more superficial character than proponents of conceptual relativism envision. Thus, they are not a good excuse not to engage in dialogue with people who come from backgrounds divergent from one's own.

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