ON DAVIDSON'S IDEA OF A CONCEPTUAL SCHEME

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Abstract

Bahadır Maşa, "On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme"

In his article titled "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", Donald Davidson argues that the duality of uninterpreted content and conceptual scheme is the "third" dogma of empiricism. According to Davidson, the idea of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible and therefore should be abandoned.

The main purpose of the present work is to demonstrate that the notion of a conceptual scheme is defensible, and that it has advantages explaining certain linguistic phenomena. To this end, benefiting from certain themes of the later work of Wittgenstein -especially from the notion of a "form of life"- general outlines of an alternative model for conceptual schemes are put forward.

Tez Özeti

Bahadır Maşa, "On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme"

Donald Davidson, "Kavramsal Şema Fikri Üzerine" başlıklı makalesinde, yorumlanmamış ampirik içerik ve buna biçim veren kavramsal şema ikiliğinin ampirizmin "üçüncü" dogması olduğunu savunmaktadır. Davidson, kavramsal şema fikrini anlamlandırmanın mümkün olmadığını ve bu nedenle bu fikrin benimsenmesinin felsefi anlamda sorunlu olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Mevcut çalışmanın amacı, kavramsal şema fikrinin savunulabilir bir fikir olduğunu ve bu kavramın dille ilgili bazı olguları açıklarken belirli yararlar sağlayabileceğini göstermektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda Wittgenstein'ın geç dönem çalışmalarındaki belirli fikirlerden, özellikle de *Felsefi Soruşturmalar* kitabındaki "yaşam biçimi" kavramından yararlanılmış ve bu fikirle uyumlu bir alternatif kavramsal şema modeline ait genel hatlar ortaya konmuştur.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Davidson's article "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" is perhaps the single most influential objection to the idea of conceptual frameworks. Davidson claims that the very idea of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible. His objections are not directed only to an understanding of conceptual frameworks that supports conceptual relativism; he also claims that the idea of a single conceptual framework, in which we all carry out our linguistic activities, is not tenable (Davidson, 1974 p.198).

However, I think, ideas that Davidson puts forward in this article could not be regarded simply as the conclusion of the arguments provided in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme". Rather, they can be read as conclusions of central themes of his philosophical program, including but not limited to his theory of knowledge, truth-conditional semantics for natural languages inspired by Tarski's work, the project of radical interpretation, and even his philosophy of action. Hence, it is evident that a complete exposition and evaluation of Davidson's ideas about conceptual schemes should be done in a holistic manner, not limited to his ideas as represented in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme". However, it is also evident that such an undertaking is an enormous challenge. In presenting Davidson's position on the question of conceptual schemes, my main concern will be his work on philosophy of language, theory of knowledge and theory of meaning, leaving aside the possible connections and implications that can be revealed by his work in philosophy of action. In the first chapter, I will follow the structure of "On the Very

Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", and touch briefly on the related aspects of Davidson's philosophical program at relevant points in the flow of argument.

In the second chapter, I will give an evaluation and criticism of Davidson's views presented in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme". I will use certain themes from the late work of Wittgenstein to argue that the idea of locally incommensurable conceptual schemes is intelligible.

In the third chapter, I will try to give the general outlines of an alternative model for conceptual schemes, which would be immune to Davidson's objections. I will use İlham Dilman's ideas presented in his book titled *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution* as a general framework for the model I will propose. I will also benefit from Michael P. Lynch's notion of conceptual frameworks and conceptual fluidity to make some central aspects of the alternative model apparent. Lastly, I will briefly touch upon Terrence Horgan's project of contextual semantics in order to give a better picture of the relation between language and reality.

CHAPTER II

DAVIDSON'S IDEA OF CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES
AND HIS PHILOSOPHY

In the very beginning of his article titled "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", Davidson argues that conceptual schemes (assuming they exist) and languages are inextricably bound with one another. The relation between languages and conceptual schemes is that if conceptual schemes differ, so do the languages (Davidson, 1974 p.184). But the converse is not true, that is, it is possible for different languages to share the same conceptual scheme. In the latter case, these languages constitute a set of intertranslatable languages. What connects them is a common conceptual scheme. Therefore, the question of conceptual schemes comes down to the failure of translation. If it is possible to translate between languages, then there is only one conceptual scheme. If there is a failure of translation, then we can talk about different conceptual schemes.

Failure of translation is a matter of degree. It is possible that no sentence of a language can be translated to another language. It is also possible that all of the sentences in a language can be translated into another. Davidson distinguishes between two types of failure, i.e., complete and partial failure, and to these correspond different conceptions of conceptual frameworks. In what follows, I will observe Davidson's distinction in giving further details of his argument.

The Case of Complete Failure of Translation

Before presenting his argument against the possibility of global failure of translation, Davidson claims that "nothing…could count as evidence that some form of activity could not be interpreted in our language that was not at the same time evidence that that form of activity was not speech behavior" (Davidson, 1974 p.185). In other words, if we cannot interpret a form of activity in our language, then we are not justified in calling this activity a linguistic one. According to Davidson, this is tantamount to a criterion of languagehood which requires translation into a familiar tongue. Davidson accepts that, as it is, this formulation is indeed an unsatisfactory one and claims that if this is true, it must be a conclusion of an argument. Therefore the task for Davidson is to demonstrate that it is not possible to find a criterion of languagehood which does not depend on translation into a familiar language. If that is accomplished, it is proven that the idea of a conceptual scheme is a contradictory one, since conceptual schemes are identified with languages and sign of existence of different conceptual schemes is the failure of translation between languages. On the other hand, if we cannot translate, what we are trying to translate is not a linguistic activity.

Analytic-Synthetic and Scheme-Content Distinctions

After presenting Kuhn's and Strawson's positions on the issue, Davidson argues that "different worlds" can mean very different things. According to Davidson, "Strawson invites us to imagine possible non-actual worlds…using our present language" (Davidson, 1974 p.187). Kuhn, on the other hand, wants us to

imagine different observers of the same world who have incommensurable, that is, untranslatable conceptual systems. Davidson claims that Strawson's metaphor of "different worlds" works by assuming that our conceptual structure and descriptive resources remain fixed. In this picture, some sentences will be true simply because of the meaning of their constituent parts while others will be true because of the way the world is, and latter are the sentences meanings of which are altered in order to create possible worlds. Words which do not change their meanings constitute the fixed conceptual system. However, Davidson argues, Quine's famous attack on the analytic synthetic distinction renders this picture of "different worlds" less tenable.

Davidson contends that giving up the analytic/synthetic distinction implies giving up the idea that it is possible to distinguish between theory and language; "meaning, as we might loosely use the word, is contaminated by the theory" (Davidson, 1974 p.187). Davidson goes on to claim that giving up this distinction may encourage one to endorse a view which is characterized by another dualism, namely, the dualism of total scheme and uninterpreted content. According to Davidson, this is what encourages philosophers like Kuhn and Feyerabend to offer accounts of the possibility of incommensurable conceptual systems. Davidson argues that, according to these philosophers since analytic/synthetic distinction is not a tenable distinction, meaning is always contaminated by theory and, therefore, not invariable. Their view can be characterized by the claim that there can be inconsistencies between the principles that determine the meanings in the old theory and the principles that determine the new meanings. What they offer is a formula for generating different conceptual frameworks by changing the meanings of the terms

and rendering a considerable range of sentences which were previously taken to be true false, and vice versa.

Davidson is not satisfied with this account. He claims that we would never be justified in calling these, alterations in the conceptual apparatus. Retention of some of the old vocabulary and introduction of new terms does not as such provide any grounds for judging the new scheme to be either same as or different from the old one. The new terms may be doing exactly the same service as the old ones (Davidson, 1974 p.189).

Davidson's opposition against the scheme/content distinction is closely related to his theory of knowledge. In "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", he gives the outlines of such a theory. He argues that unconceptualized sense-data, sensations, the passing show etc. cannot serve as an evidential basis for beliefs. What justifies beliefs must be propositional in character, that is, beliefs are justified only by recourse to other beliefs. However, the role of sense-data or sensations is not entirely nullified, even if they do not serve as evidence, they have causal roles. What the senses cause, i.e., perceptual beliefs, have the ultimate evidential role. Davidson's point is that introducing intermediaries between senses and beliefs and assigning them epistemic roles is problematic in more than one way.[1]

The age-old problem of skepticism is the first problem caused by the employment of epistemic intermediaries. Davidson argues that if the evidential role of these intermediaries is due to the information delivered by senses, then accounts

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[1] Davidson rejects the idea that sensory promptings, sense-data or the given supply evidential support for empirical knowledge. His ideas parallel Sellars' critique of the "myth of the given", which challenges the idea that empirical knowledge is grounded in sense-data.

employing these will always be susceptible to skeptic's objections, since senses are fallible and it is possible that what they deliver are simply wrong. Davidson finds this situation ironical because "one motive in turning to such 'evidence' as sense data was the fact that, not being propositional in character, no doubts about them could be raised" (Davidson, 1999 p.105).

The second problem of introducing epistemic intermediaries (the given, patterns of sensory stimulation etc.) between beliefs and what these beliefs are about is that such a step implies that whatever is to meaning must consist of these intermediaries. (Davidson, 1989 p.144). What Davidson has in mind here can be exemplified by Quine's "observation sentences" whose meanings are tied to the patterns of stimulation. However, locating the source of meaning in proximal stimuli, while renders meanings reachable, makes truth inaccessible. Because "once we take this step, we open the door to skepticism, for we must then allow that a great many- perhaps most- of the sentences we hold to be true in fact be false" (Davidson, 1989 p.145). In other words, truth is sacrificed for meaning, however this is not an acceptable conclusion for Davidson, since throughout his writings he is a persistent advocate of a Tarski-style recursive truth definition which, according to Davidson, demonstrates the interconnectedness of truth and meaning. Moreover, Davidson believes that Tarski's insights supply us with an instrument which enables us to take the first step in the process of radical interpretation and to construct a theory of meaning without referring to entities as "meaning". After all, Davidson thinks, appearance of meaning as an entity in theories of meaning caused more problems than it set out to solve (Davidson, 1967).

<u>Conceptual Schemes as Organizing the World or Fitting the Experience</u>

Davidson claims that according to the new dualism of scheme/content, an activity is a language, and can be associated with a conceptual scheme "if it stands in a certain relation (predicting, organizing, facing or fitting) to experience (nature, reality, sensory promptings)" (Davidson, 1974 p.191). Davidson argues that proponents of the idea of conceptual scheme explain their position in mainly figurative terms and he classifies the metaphors employed into two groups. The first group of metaphors suggest that conceptual schemes (or languages) *organize*, *systemize* or *divide up* something. The entity organized, systemized or divided up is *reality*.

Davidson's argument is that notion of *organizing* applies only to pluralities, for organizing a single object would be a futile effort. "Someone who sets out to organize a closet arranges the things in it. If you are told to organize … the closet itself, you would be bewildered" (Davidson, 1974 p.192). Therefore, for conceptual schemes the notion of organizing or arranging implies the existence of principles of individuation for the referential apparatus of that scheme. The question now becomes whether this metaphor provides us a test of identity of conceptual schemes without resort to the process of translation into a language we know and whether global failure of translation is possible according to this picture. Davidson's answer is negative.

Davidson accepts that it is possible for a language to have simple predicates "whose extensions are matched by no simple predicates, or even by any predicates at all, in some other language" (Davidson, 1974 p.192). What Davidson has in mind here is failure of translation of some predicates of a language into another language,

in other words the possibility of local failure of translation. But the problem under consideration is whether total failure makes sense.

What enables us to determine local failure must be a common individuating principle according to which the referential apparatus of two languages work. To be more specific, if we can positively affirm the existence of a predicate in a language we do not know, and there is no counterpart for this predicate in our language then we should have reasons for calling that a predicate. Only reason can be the individuating function of that predicate and what enable us to discriminate this function are the objects which constitute the extension of that predicate. If we can identify these entities as *objects*, then there must be a common ontology shared by these languages. Because if there was no common ontology, let alone discrepancies in referential apparatus, we would not even be able to identify predicates and could not make the original point in the first place. The metaphor of organizing the closet of nature boils down to this: in order to identify and make sense of local failure, a body of successful translations is needed. Davidson claims that this metaphor does not make the notion of radically different conceptual schemes intelligible and it does not provide us with what we are looking for, i.e., a criterion of languagehood which does not depend on translatability into a familiar tongue.

The second metaphor Davidson deals with, namely that of conceptual scheme as *fitting* experience, is about whole sentences rather than referential apparatus of the language. Davidson writes "It is sentences that predict (or are used to predict), sentences that cope or deal with things, that fit our sensory promptings, that can be compared or confronted with the evidence (Davidson, 1974 p.193). The relation between evidence and experience (or sensory promptings, sense-data, surface

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irritations etc.) is such that a "sentence or theory fits our sensory promptings, successfully faces the tribunal of experience, predicts future experience, or copes with the pattern of our surface irritations, provided it is borne out by the evidence." Davidson goes on to claim that this formulation adds nothing to the concept of being true.

The metaphor of conceptual schemes boils down to the claim that something is a conceptual scheme if it is true.[2] And the possibility of global failure of translation between languages implies that there are conceptual schemes which are true but untranslatable. Next move of Davidson is to ask whether we understand truth independent of translation. The answer, again, is negative.

For Davidson truth is a "beautifully transparent" concept. Tarski's Convention-T demonstrates this feature of truth as applied to sentences. Davidson accepts Tarski's convention as our best intuition as to how the concept of truth is applied to sentences. As Davidson agrees, Tarski's convention is a criterion for adequacy of the theory of truth. Tarski claims that for the sentence "Snow is white", an adequate theory of truth should imply the equivalence "The sentence 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white."(Tarski, 1998 p.194). In its general form "a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence s of L, a theorem of the form 's is true if and only if p' where 's' is replaced by a description of s and 'p' by s itself if L is English, and by a translation of s *into* English if L in not English" (Davidson, 1974 p.194). According to Davidson's view, the importance of Tarski's Convention is that it illustrates the dependence of notion

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[2] The idea that a conceptual scheme can be true or false can be striking at first glance. Hacker criticizes Davidson's "bizarre" way of construing conceptual schemes as a totality of (largely) true sentences (Hacker, 298).

of truth on the notion of translation and the interconnectedness of the concepts of truth and meaning.[3] It demonstrates this by making the notion of translation into a language we know essential to any adequate definition of truth. Therefore, if we are to claim that a conceptual scheme is largely true, and be justified in doing so, we should have a truth theory for the language which employs that conceptual scheme. When we accept Tarski's criterion for adequacy of theories of truth, it follows that for our truth theory to be a successful one it should imply all the sentences of the form "s is true if and only if p", where *p* is a translation of the sentence *s* into our language. Thus, Davidson concludes that the idea of a largely true but not translatable language is incoherent. Given Tarski's Convention T we can never be in a position to judge that a largely true conceptual scheme (as something that fits the experience) employed by a language cannot be translated to our conceptual scheme.

The second dominant metaphor of "fitting experience" does no better than the first metaphor of "organizing" in rendering total failure of translation intelligible and in giving us a criterion of languagehood that does not depend on the notion of translatability into a familiar idiom. As a conclusion to the discussion of the possibility of global failure of translation, Davidson claims, none of the dominant metaphors that are used by conceptual pluralists are intelligible and consequently we should abandon the attempt to make sense of the essentially incoherent idea of a single space within which each scheme has a radically distinct position and provides an incommensurable point of view.

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[3] Tarski's original work and Davidson's approach to the relation between truth and meaning are different in an important way. Tarski's aim is to give a truth definition for a language L, by recursively giving the meanings of the sentences of L via their translations into the meta-language. In Davidson, the relation is reversed; he uses Tarski's convention to give the meanings of (i.e., truth conditions for) sentences.

The Case of Partial Failure of Translation

The idea of local failure of translation is the next target in Davidson's argument. Being a more modest approach than the idea of total failure, partial failure can be explained and identified with reference to the common parts of contrasting conceptual schemes. Components shared by both schemes do not resist translation or interpretation, as the definition of identity of conceptual schemes implies. Davidson's strategy is to investigate how interpretation would work in the unproblematic regions of contrasting languages which would exemplify a hypothetical case of partial failure. Later, he argues that the very activity of interpretation of speech behavior implies that partial failure of translation is not possible.

Davidson's project of "radical interpretation" is intended as a theory of interpretation which would help reveal the workings of linguistic behavior. It is inspired by Quine's "radical translation", however Davidson's use of "interpretation" instead of "translation" points to a semantic emphasis in the project. Semantical aspect of radical interpretation can be seen from the fact that a truth-conditional theory of meaning plays a central role in the process of interpretation.

In "Truth and Meaning", Davidson gives the outlines of such a theory of meaning. He argues that a successful theory of meaning for a natural language should account for the fact that mastering a finite set of words and finitely stated set of rules we can create and understand a potentially infinite set of sentences (Davidson, 1967 p.17). Consequently, the task also requires that a theory of meaning should give a compositional account of sentence formation, i.e., of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of their constituent parts. To give such an

account, Davidson avoids the concept of synonym for the parts of sentences that recur in other sentences as well. Instead, he employs the well-known Tarskian insight once more and claims that recursive characterization of truth with the sentences of the form "s is true if and only if p" is all we need for a workable theory of meaning for a particular natural language. Davidson claims that all there is to know about the meaning of a sentence is exhausted by such a characterization of truth for the particular language in question (Davidson, 1967 p. 26).

For individual sentences, Davidson's employment of Tarski's convention reveals nothing new about the semantic aspect of the sentence under consideration. At first glance, it may seem as trivial, or even a pointless gesture, which reiterates the sentence in the right-hand side of the bi-conditional. However, what such a formulation does is very important in the sense that "the work of the theory is in relating the known truth conditions of each sentence to those aspects ('words') of the sentence that recur in other sentences, and can be assigned identical roles in other sentences" (Davidson, 1967 p.25). In this way, how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words is accounted for by the claim that giving the truth conditions for a sentence is equivalent to giving its meaning.

In "Radical Interpretation" Davidson argues that the process of interpretation is employed in using our own language as well as dealing with a foreign language. Considered together with Davidson's theory of meaning, which identifies the meaning of sentences with the objective truth conditions, such a claim points to significant epistemological implications, for there is the question which brings truth, knowledge and meaning together: "How can we know that the truth conditions are satisfied?"

Davidson rules out correspondence theory as a possible candidate for providing an answer to the epistemological question, since he believes that the idea of correspondence between reality and what we believe is absurd. Since such a confrontation with reality is impossible, the world cannot supply us with evidential support for our beliefs, although how the world is arranged has a causal role in belief formation. Therefore, Davidson argues, what justifies other beliefs must be propositional in content, that is, beliefs are justified on the basis of other beliefs only. He goes on to argue that most of the beliefs in a coherent total set of beliefs are true, however this should not be read as attempt to define truth in epistemological terms, that is, in terms of coherence and belief. For Davidson, truth is a primitive and transparent concept which does not need further analysis by recourse to belief or coherence.

The idea that belief is in its nature veridical is the main argument of Davidson for demonstrating that all possible coherent sets of beliefs are largely true. According to Davidson, beliefs are "states of people with intentions, desires, sense organs; they are states caused by, and cause, events inside and outside the bodies of their entertainers" (Davidson, 1989 p.138). The causal link to an objective world and belief's connection with the concept of meaning renders both meanings and beliefs publicly accessible. Causal sources of beliefs, while having no epistemological significance, precludes the possibility that a holder of a set of beliefs cannot be systematically wrong about his beliefs, if he is to share some subset of his utterances, that is to say, communicate with his community and the beliefs shared by this communication are caused by the same objects that reside in the environment which he also shares with his linguistic community.

Considering Davidson's views about truth, knowledge, belief and meaning, what is his position with respect to partial failure of translation? First of all, it should be noted that radical interpretation is a matter of interpreting the utterances of a speaker without any prior knowledge of what the speaker believes or what his utterances mean; it has to be started from scratch. Therefore, "without knowing or assuming a great deal about speaker's beliefs we cannot take even a first step towards interpretation" (Davidson, 1974 p.196). However, Davidson claims that *prompted assent* can be a crucial notion for radical interpretation, for it is in compliance with the requirements of such a process, i.e., it assumes neither meanings nor beliefs. Since holding a sentence true is a vector of two forces; what one believes and what his utterances mean, *prompted assent* can supply us with a departure point for radical interpretation and enable us to account for beliefs and meanings simultaneously, beginning with the sentences held true. According to Davidson, only possibility at the outset is to assume general agreement on opinion by abstracting from the available evidence. Since beliefs are veridical in their nature, charity is a necessary condition of communication. If we want to understand others, and accept that they are rational beings with thoughts, beliefs and language, we have no choice but counting them right in most matters.

Davidson's conclusion is that when another thinks differently from us no evidence can force us to decide that the difference is in conceptual schemes rather than opinion, but we can always "improve the clarity and bite of declarations of difference, whether of scheme or opinion, by enlarging the basis of shared (translatable) language or shared opinion" (Davidson, 1974 p.197). Since charity is forced on us if we want to understand others, we are able to constantly enlarge the

shared language. Consequently, for Davidson, these considerations leave no room for the intelligibility of partial failure of translation.

CHAPTER III

AN EVALUATION AND CRITICISM OF DAVIDSON'S IDEAS

In "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" Davidson addresses the question of conceptual relativity in two different grounds, which are associated with a different notion of failure of translation, i.e., partial and total failure. I think that he presents strong arguments against the possibility of total failure of translation and, therefore, of radically different conceptual frameworks. However, the following analysis will not deal with this aspect of Davidson's argument. The main focus of this and the main subject of the criticism presented in this chapter will be Davidson's claims against the more moderate case of partial failure of translation and the corresponding idea of locally incommensurable conceptual schemes. I will try to demonstrate that Davidson's arguments are not sufficient for refuting the idea of conceptual frameworks when it is associated with partial failure of translation, in other words, the idea of locally incommensurable conceptual schemes is still a defensible one.

The position I am defending draws its main inspiration from the work of late Wittgenstein, which claims that there are various uses of language that cannot be reduced to each other. In the very beginning of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticizes Augustine's portrayal of language for being confined to a narrowly described region of language and claiming to represent the whole phenomenon we call language. In a similar vein, I think it is possible to argue that what Davidson claims to have shown is, at best, limited to a narrowly described

region of what we call a language. [4] That region can be characterized with the *propositional* (or *referential*, or *assertoric*) uses of language. However, even if considered within that framework, Davidson's arguments are not immune to a series of objections, details of which will be given below.

Verificationist Assumption

Throughout his article "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" Davidson's strategy is trying to demonstrate the fact that we do not have any evidence justifying the existence of alternative conceptual frameworks (Lynch, 2001 p.52). Showing that there is no evidence, he concludes that we are not justified in affirming the existence of not only different conceptual schemes but also that of *single* conceptual scheme. Davidson argues that the very concept of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible and, therefore, there is nothing that can plausibly be called a conceptual scheme.

I do not see how our inability to verify the existence of a conceptual scheme implies that there are no alternative schemes. As Michael Lynch argues, this amounts to nothing more than the trivial fact that we cannot "conceptualize the world except with our own concepts (Lynch, 2001 p.52). We can conceive the possibility of certain phenomena without even knowing what those phenomena are in detail, or in the absence of the evidence of their existence.

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[4] Davidson seems to be aware of the problem. While he is discussing the attitude of accepting true, which is fundamental for the project of radical interpretation, he writes "A more full-blooded theory would look to other attitudes towards sentences as well, such as wishing true, wondering whether true, intending to make true, and so on" (Davidson, 1974 p.195-6). However, I think it is evident that he is still operating in a limited region of language, no matter how extensive that area is.

Lynch argues that the case is analogous to the one which Nagel introduces in his essay titled "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" If we follow Davidson's advice in rejecting the existence of conceptual schemes, in a similar fashion, we should also accept that there is nothing that is like to be a bat. Because "there is no way for us to verify that there is some way of experiencing the world, distinct from our own, that the bat enjoys and we do not" (Lynch, 2001 p.52).

I think, in general, Davidson places a very strong demand on the idea of conceptual scheme. As I understand it, Davidson looks for directly observable evidence for the existence of different conceptual frameworks. In other words, for Davidson, the only way for us to make sense of a conceptual scheme is to *confront* it. But, I think, that is not necessary.

According to Davidson, "the dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism seems to betray an underlying paradox" (Davidson, 1974 p.184). Different conceptual schemes, the very existence of which implies failure of translation between languages employing them, makes sense only when there is a common system on which the differences can be projected. However, Davidson claims that the existence of such a common system is what renders the notion of different conceptual systems unintelligible. I think this is not the case, that is, even if the dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism is that of different points of view, that does not necessarily mean that there is a paradox involved in this idea. To render the idea of different points of view intelligible, we do not have to project the differences between these views onto a scheme-independent stuff, which would, in turn, make these conceptual schemes intertranslatable (Kraut, 1989 p.407).

Davidson rightfully criticizes the idea that speaking a language and power of thought are independent traits. We cannot have a vantage point that is not affected by language. However, I think that we do not have to do so in order to improve the intelligibility of the idea of a conceptual scheme. On the contrary, we have to stay within the boundaries of our own language and take the closest look possible. Following Wittgenstein's idea , if we consider how we use language in different ways that are irreducible to one another or, may be, how we learn it in the first place, this analysis can enable us to entertain a coherent idea of the existence of conceptual schemes.

Actually, this is not a novel philosophical route and Davidson himself also maintains this approach, albeit in a different context. Being aware of the philosophical problems which are created by assuming "a directly discoverable evidential connection between what are taken to be separate domains of subjectivity and objectivity" (Maker, 1991 p.347), Davidson reconstructs the notions of objectivity and subjectivity in familiar transcendental lines. I think Davidson's crucial move in this direction is to argue that the possibility of a belief demands a capacity to appreciate the difference between true and false beliefs. "Someone who has a belief about the world… must grasp the concept of objective truth, of what is the case independent of what he or she thinks" (Davidson, 1991 p.209). This is a part of a longer argument, but the crucial point is that Davidson claims that the very notion of belief implies the concept of objectivity. And to do this, he does not have to go outside of the subjective domain which is characterized by the concept of "belief". I think a similar quasi-transcendental route can be employed to establish a

coherent notion of scheme; we do not have to confront a different conceptual scheme for the notion of a conceptual scheme to be intelligible.

Relativity of the Real and the Relativity of Truth

In Davidson's analysis of two possible cases of failure of translation, the problems of relativity of reality and relativity of truth, as possible consequences of the existence of different conceptual frameworks, become visible. However, there is an asymmetry between the treatments of the two. When considering the case of global failure of translation, Davidson presents two dominant metaphors used in explaining conceptual frameworks. The first metaphor is that of conceptual schemes as *organizing the world* or *nature*. He writes "A language may contain simple predicates whose extensions are matched by no simple predicates or even by any predicates at all, in some language" (Davidson, 1974 p.192). Davidson claims that this is possible, although only with reference to the shared parts of the language, which characterizes a common ontology with respect to employment of predicates. About the second metaphor, i.e., conceptual schemes as *fitting* experience, Davidson argues that this simply means that something is a conceptual scheme if it is true. And since, according to Davidson, we do not understand truth independent of translation, largely true but radically different conceptual schemes is not possible.

However, when Davidson turns to the more modest approach of local failure of translation, he examines the workings of radical interpretation and concludes that if we want to understand speech of others we have to assume general agreement of beliefs. In other words, in accordance with the principle of charity, we have to

ascribe true beliefs to the people whose speech we are interpreting. Assuming he is right, what Davidson demonstrates is the impossibility of defining truth as relative to a conceptual scheme. There is no talk about ontology here. In other words, Davidson does not consider the possibility that conceptual schemes can differ with respect to their local ontologies. In such a case, a locally posited predicate or entity within a particular conceptual scheme may not have an equivalent predicate or entity in another scheme. However, I think he should give an analogous argument for the impossibility of the relativity of the real, in the case of partial failure of translation. Because without such an account, the possibility of local breakdown of translation with respect to referential apparatus of language is still a possibility (a possibility which Davidson has no difficulty of understanding) and incommensurable truth claims are not far from incomparable ontological claims.

In his article titled "Third Dogma", Robert Kraut brilliantly exploits this lack and argues that partial failure of translation is a possibility and, thus, intelligibility of scheme idea can be sustained without even opposing basic tenets of Davidson's account. In other words Kraut does this without resort to totally untranslatable languages or to what Davidson calls third and last dogma of empiricism, i.e., the dualism of scheme and content, which is neutral and common that lies outside of all schemes.

Kraut considers a possibility that Quine introduces and "which smacks of scheming" (Kraut, 1989 p.404). Quine's discussion is about consideration of a fragment of economic theory (ET) whose universe consists of persons. Moreover, ET does not have the necessary predicates for distinguishing between people with equal incomes. The equality of income of two people, within ET, will become the identity

relation for ET. Kraut argues that ET's universe cannot properly be treated as constituting of persons; therefore ET is not about persons but income groups. "A theory is not plausibly treated as containing singular terms which refer to Øs unless that theory offers the descriptive apparatus for discriminating among distinct Øs." (Kraut, 1989 p.405). Assuming x and y have equal incomes, since whenever we say Fx it necessarily follows that Fy for any predicate of ET or, considering a two place predicate, it is impossible to infer ~Gyx from Gxy for any given predicate G of the theory, ET lacks adequate resources for discriminating two persons. It is illegitimate for referential apparatus of the ET to introduce entities which are indiscernible within ET.

These considerations have significant implications for the notions of translatability and conceptual schemes. First of all, the argument demonstrates that languages which lack adequate descriptive resources are incapable of making reference to certain kinds of entities. This implies that a certain range of sentences in a language which possesses adequate referential apparatus cannot be formulated in another one which lacks these resources. Moreover, this can be stated without endorsing the idea that there is something neutral outside of all schemes, and employing the metaphor of conceptual scheme as organizing entities that are waiting to be organized. "The class of persons which we construed as constituting the content which gets 'organized' by ET is in *no* sense common stuff which lies outside of all schemes. It is, rather, dictated by our mother tongue" (Kraut, 1989 p.407). Therefore, scheme idea does not necessarily imply the *third dogma* of empiricism. The idea of conceptual scheme and that of partial failure of translation can be

maintained with cogency, and without appealing to what Davidson is strongly opposed.

I think Wittgenstein's conception of a language-game has a genuine explanatory power here. Wittgenstein uses the term of language-game while trying to demonstrate that there are countless uses of language, which are not reducible to one another. The idea is that, just as there is no single definition of *gamehood,* or an aspect shared by all games, the multiplicity we encounter when dealing with language (for example, giving orders, forming a theory, making up a story, making laws, etc.) cannot be explained with reference to a common characteristic feature.

Another and perhaps more important purpose of drawing an analogy between language and games is to bring into prominence the fact that using language is part of an activity. Language-game is a whole, which consists of the language and the actions into which it is interwoven (Wittgenstein, 2001 p. 4). Occurrence of the concept of language games together with the ideas such as that the meaning is *use* or notions of "life-forms" or "tools of language", and the paralleling progress of Wittgenstein's line of thought in *Philosophical Investigations* indicate that, for him, linguistic activity is predominantly performative in character and always embedded in a socio-linguistic community.[5] The *life-form* of this community is an important factor influencing the *tools of language* used. Therefore, following Wittgenstein, we can say that the discursive universe and the logical possibilities of language cannot

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[5] The term "performative" here is not intended to refer to the sense in which Austin uses it. It is a general remark to indicate that the terms such as *life-form*, *language-games* and *tools of language* emphasize that language is always part of an activity.

be thought independent from its users.[6] Moreover, it is possible that some of the resources available in one language can be irrelevant for another. I think Kraut's analysis illustrates this point very well by demonstrating that different discursive realms with different referential capabilities might result in incomparable ontologies, and thus, incommensurable truth claims about the entities posited in this manner. What enables Kraut to make this point is the absence of a convincing argument against the possibility of partial failure of translation in Davidson's article, which considers the possibility of locally incommensurable ontologies.

Is Truth Necessary? Is It Sufficient?

In the opening paragraph of "Truth and Meaning" Davidson writes that most philosophers and linguists accept that a satisfactory theory of meaning must explain how the meaning of sentences depends on the meanings of their constituent parts. Because otherwise it is impossible to account for our ability to utter and understand an infinite set of sentences by learning a finite vocabulary and finite set of rules. Based on this observation James Higginbotham asks two questions; whether reference is necessary for understanding and whether it is sufficient. Appearance of reference in these questions can be taken as a way of speaking more broadly, and truth can be substituted for the purposes of the present argument.

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[6] One way of reading Wittgenstein on this statement is that the universe of discourse determined by life-form is socially, culturally and historically contingent. On the other hand, it also can be read as suggesting that life-form is intended as a more universal concept, as the *life-form of humanity* that is shared by all humans (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). However, I think that this is not a genuine contradiction and both are valid readings since human form of life, or human existence, is a product of both social, cultural, historical environment and a biological-cognitive structure which is common to the species. Moreover, these seemingly conflicting views on the nature of human existence have their particular explanatory merits when dealing with diverse linguistic phenomena.

Higginbotham argues that "If conditions on reference and truth are necessary for the exposition of the lexicon and combinatorics of a language, then they must be necessary for understanding as well" (Higginbotham, 1999 p.673). On the other hand, there is the similar question of sufficiency. If there is a humanly usable body of knowledge for understanding that does not extend beyond referential notions (truth), then the whole theory of meaning can be given in terms of this body of knowledge. However it may be such that while lexicon and combinatorics only employ referential notions, understanding requires more.

I think what Davidson does with his arguments against the idea of conceptual scheme is only showing that truth is a necessary part of our ability to use and understand language. But, I think, there is more to language. As Higginbotham argues, "understanding does take us in an important sense outside the realm of reference, by adding a contextual dimension" (Higginbotham, 1999 p.679). What makes such a claim possible is that there are various linguistic devices which reflect other communicative interests which cannot be captured merely by the referential apparatus of language. Higginbotham says that such devices include euphemisms, insulting language, phatic speech etc. I think metaphors can also be included in the list since they carry with them obvious communicative interests beyond affirming or denying some state of affairs. I think Max Black's position in a debate about metaphors between himself and Davidson is similar to the one mentioned here.

Davidson argues that in explaining how metaphors work, an appeal to literal meaning and literal truth conditions that can be assigned to words has a genuine explanatory power (Black, 1979 p.141). Considered apart from this background, metaphors have no special cognitive of their own. Thus, Davidson reduces the use

and working of a metaphor, to a mere analysis of literal meanings of their constituting parts. I am not planning to go into a detailed discussion of what is meant by a "literal meaning" here, but what is important is that Davidson derives the reducibility of metaphors into an explanation that is referential in character, and the fact that metaphors do not have cognitive significance from the claim that if a metaphor had cognitive significance of its own it would not be impossible to set it out. But Max Black's reply, paralleling the above mentioned approach, is that metaphors carry with them non-propositional insight which cannot be translated in a propositional thought. "[T]he set of literal statements so obtained will not have the same power to inform and enlighten as the original. For one thing, the implications previously left to a suitable reader to educe for himself, with a nice feeling for their relative priorities and degrees of importance, are now presented explicitly as having equal weight"(Black, 1979 p.142). However, this does not mean that non-referential devices do not lean upon reference for their effectiveness. But, on the other hand, they cannot be reduced to a referential form. These uses should not be seen as exceptional ones that are founded on the referential use of language. They are intrinsic to the workings of the language.

I think one need not consider a subject as complicated as metaphors in order to emphasize that we often employ devices that go beyond the referential apparatus of language. The following example of an actual, yet trivial, case of translation, when considered with Davidson's claim that Tarski's convention is the best intuition we have about truth, reveals that there is more to understanding than referential apparatus of language can provide us.

English is based on a few canonical sentence patterns. The verb *to give* can be used only in the form $S+V+O_1+O_2$, except for being a response to a question. (Nunan, 2007 p.80). Now consider this usage of the Turkish counterpart of this verb, *vermek*, in a sentence: *Ona bir buket çiçek verdim*. Corresponding T-schema of this sentence would be either "'Ona bir buket çiçek verdim' is true if and only if I gave her a bunch of flowers" or "'Ona bir buket çiçek verdim' is true if and only if I gave a bunch of flowers to her". When we look at the right hand side of these formulations in purely referential terms, they are identical. However, from a communicative perspective, they convey different messages since the emphasis is on different objects. Moreover, this nuance is not available in the source language and emerges only as replies to the questions "Who did you give flowers to?" and "What did you give to her?"

<center>Non-Assertoric Contexts</center>

Another aspect of language for which we should look for a sufficiency condition of referential apparatus is that of non-assertoric contexts. One of the most important examples of these is the performative utterances. J.L. Austin defines a performative utterance as an utterance which looks like a statement but, on the other hand, "which is not nonsensical and yet neither true or false" (Austin, 1976 p.126). In uttering these kinds of utterances we do not merely say something; we actually *do* something while uttering the sentence. Therefore we cannot reasonably talk about truth or falsity of these statements. Instead, these utterances are either *happy* or *infelicitous* ones.

The circumstances for an utterance to be a *happy* one are several, but, I think mentioning two of them will suffice for the present purposes of the discussion. First rule is that, the convention invoked must exist. Secondly, the circumstances in which we purport to invoke this utterance must be appropriate. The fulfillment of the former rule is relative to the community in which the speech act is performed. The latter one, on the other hand, emphasizes the context sensitivity in such uses of languages, which also requires background knowledge for the person who performs the speech act. As such, I think it is hard to see how such utterances can be translated into another language whose users do not have the invoked convention. Of course, the utterance can be translated word for word, but the resulting translation would not be the same one as the source since the characteristic of the original utterance lies in its functionality within an application of a convention, in a certain community. I think the issue here is the same one, i.e., how we utilize resources other than the referential apparatus in order to use language in various ways.

A Davidsonian might be tempted to object that even these kinds of utterances depend heavily on the referential apparatus of the language in which they are formulated. Actually, Davidson himself gives hints of this approach. He writes "A full-blooded theory would look to other attitudes towards sentences as well, such as wishing true, wondering whether true, intending to make true and so on." (Davidson, 1974 p.196). To some extent, it is true that these kinds of acts and attitudes depend on the referential apparatus. But that does not mean that these can be analyzed in terms of referential notions exhaustively. It is possible that referential apparatus alone cannot give us a full account of what is going on in such instances.

For example, the act of warning can be formulated like this in a particular case: "I warn you that *p*". But, as Higginbotham argues, the discriminations marked by 'that' clause are far finer than the truth condition of *p*, "in the sense that among correct (i.e., true) statements of truth conditions only some are appropriately characterized as giving the content of warning…or other act, it follows that a correct theory of truth alone is not sufficient for the specification of content" (Higginbotham, 1999 p.680). If a correct theory of truth alone is not sufficient for the specification of the content of such linguistic forms, translation of these from one language to another can be impossible, especially if the resources required for specification of the content in one language are not available in the other one.

Concluding Remarks

As mentioned earlier, Davidson's argument is a very influential objection to the intelligibility of the notion of conceptual frameworks and conceptual relativism. Davidson's claims get their strength from the necessity of referential use of language. As surviving intelligent organisms, forming true beliefs is an imperative for us. As a consequence, any body of such beliefs must be largely true. Therefore, I agree with Davidson that there cannot be radically different conceptual schemes. However, this is not the only conclusion of Davidson; he also claims that the idea of locally incommensurable conceptual schemes is not tenable. I think Davidson puts a very strong demand on the notion of conceptual scheme. This can be seen from the fact that his main strategy is trying to demonstrate that we cannot have evidence for the existence of different conceptual schemes. I tried to show that Davidson's strategy is

not successful and we do not have to confront alien conceptual schemes in order to render the idea intelligible.

Davidson's conclusions are closely related to his epistemological concerns. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" should be read as a part of a larger project, which is intended as a final blow to empiricism's endorsement of uninterpreted content. Davidson's conclusion is that, since such empiricism in not capable of answering the skeptic we should abandon the idea of conceptual schemes as organizing the uninterpreted content. However, this suggestion has serious implications for Davidson's general view of language. As I understand him, languages are composed of declarative statements. Other linguistic phenomena, which apparently do not fit in this pattern, are reducible to declarative/referential occurrences. This is evident from the fact that Davidson uses Tarski's convention as a major instrument in his arguments. He claims that a truth-conditional semantics would reveal all workings of language, meaning and understanding. I tried to demonstrate that there are parts of language in which such a strategy is not sufficient. Of course, one can argue that these parts cannot be thought independently of referential apparatus. However, I think, this is not enough to demonstrate that the paradigmatic cases of language use are propositional and that exceptions can be reduced to these.

CHAPTER IV

A WITTGENSTEINIAN ALTERNATIVE FOR CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

In this chapter I will give a general outline of an alternative understanding of conceptual schemes, which would be immune to the objections of Davidson. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this alternative will be along the lines of the late work of Wittgenstein, more specifically, certain prominent themes of *Philosophical Investigations*. However, as in many other problems which Wittgenstein is interested in, it is not easy (one may even say wrong) to extract an exact model for conceptual schemes from Wittgenstein. But again, the aim of the present work is not to give a full-fledged model for conceptual schemes, but to depict the most important features of such a model *vis-à-vis* Davidson's objections against the idea of a conceptual scheme.

What I will be offering is not entirely original in the sense that it heavily draws upon the works of other philosophers and can be seen as a mere presentation of their ideas. However, I believe that such a presentation will be enough to characterize the general aspects of a coherent understanding of conceptual schemes.

İlham Dilman's book *Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution* supplies the general framework within which I will be offering the alternative account of conceptual schemes. The main claim of the book is that while Wittgenstein explicitly rejects linguistic realism, his position cannot be characterized as linguistic idealism; his unique understanding of the workings of language cannot be given in simplistic terms which, Dilman argues, are shared by both realism and idealism. The problem of conceptual schemes, or the possibility of a Wittgensteinian model of conceptual

schemes is not directly addressed in Dilman's discussion. However, I believe, some of the basic concepts he uses in his resourceful analysis of Wittgenstein's later work with respect to the question of linguistic idealism provides a good departure point for the purposes of this essay.

Michael Lynch's book *Truth in Context* is an attempt to show that realism about truth and pluralism about the world are compatible. His notion of conceptual fluidity and his arguments in favor of the idea of conceptual scheme have a crucial role in demonstrating his position. I will use Lynch's arguments to build on the general framework drawn by Dilman's reading of Wittgenstein. I believe, the fact that there is an explicit reference to Kant in both of the works makes such an attempt plausible. Dilman claims that what Wittgenstein did in the philosophy of language can be compared to Kant's Copernican revolution, while Lynch labels his position as *Relativistic Kantianism*. I think, the similarity goes further than just the labels and there is a basic continuity between the two works.

In the final part of my discussion, I will briefly talk about what is referred to as "contextual semantics". The discussion of contextual semantics (as opposed to Davidson's referential or truth-functional semantics), and the corollary claims about truth and truth-making relations are particularly important for my argument, especially when one considers the role of Tarski's work on truth in Davidson's philosophy. In this part of the discussion, I will benefit from Terrence Horgan's essay "Contextual Semantics and Metaphysical Realism: Truth as Indirect Correspondence".

Before presenting the alternative model for conceptual schemes, I want to indicate the desired features of this model in order to be successful against the

objections of Davidson. First of all, if the model implies that radically distinct conceptual schemes (where no significant part of a language can be translated into another) are possible, then it should also be able to explain how these schemes can be identified to be distinct without recourse to a common element. However, this is a point that can be dismissed, because the model I will be offering argues for the existence of partially untranslatable languages, and therefore, locally incommensurable conceptual schemes.

Secondly, assuming that the "third dogma", i.e., the notion of uninterpreted content must be abandoned, it should not rest on the assumption of uninterpreted content. As mentioned in the first chapter, Davidson argues that unconceptualized sense data cannot serve as an evidential basis for knowledge. He goes on to claim that if we assign epistemic role to the immediate, uninterpreted empirical content, our account will always be susceptible to the skeptic's challenge. Thus, if the proposed model for conceptual schemes does not depend on the notion of uninterpreted empirical content, it would be in a relatively strong position against the skeptic's objections.

Wittgenstein's Copernican Revolution

The main thesis of Dilman's book is that Wittgenstein's conception of the relation between language and reality does not endorse linguistic realism and he does not embrace any form of linguistic idealism either. It is an important work in the sense that while it is perfectly clear that in the *Investigations* Wittgenstein criticizes the writer of *Tractatus* for having serious realist misconceptions about the relation

between language and reality, it is not always that obvious that he is not an idealist either. I believe, what Dilman proposes is much better than the alternative readings of Wittgenstein as an idealist, since his reading ingeniously captures Wittgenstein's unique position with respect to the relation between language and reality. However, I do not think that I need to go into the details of Dilman's entire discussion, since the purpose of this essay is not to settle the question whether Wittgenstein was an idealist or not. Instead, I will briefly dwell on what Dilman understands from linguistic realism and how he interprets Wittgenstein's position in this respect. In doing so, I will emphasize the themes that I find useful for establishing the general framework which will constitute the basis of the discussion, which claims that a coherent understanding of the notion of conceptual schemes is possible.

According to Dilman, linguistic realism is the view which claims that there is an ultimate basis for our language such that it is characterized by being external to and independent of the language we use. "It holds that there must be, and surely there is, a reality which constitutes the most basic, fundamental, abstract features of the human world on which that world rests" (Dilman, 2002 p.24). Wittgenstein's conception of logic in the *Tractatus* is a very good example of this "most basic and the fundamental feature of the world". According to the *Tractatus*, language simply reflects how the world is. What makes this possible is the fact that the world, propositions and thoughts share the same logical form. Moreover, underlying logical form is immutable and constant, very much in the sense of Plato's forms (Dilman, 2002 p.27). However, in his later work Wittgenstein rejects this realist approach about the relation between language and reality. Dilman characterizes Wittgenstein's radical shift as his "Copernican Revolution".

As the term "Copernican Revolution" suggests, Dilman claims that there is a significant similarity between Kant and Wittgenstein, although there is a linguistic emphasis in the latter. Kant puts forward his Copernican revolution as a challenge to the empiricist idea that our thoughts and concepts are shaped by experience. He argues that our concepts do not conform to experience. It is the objects of experience that conform to our concepts according to Kant. More specifically, Kant maintains that our conception of reality is necessarily shaped by the "forms of sensibility" and "categories of understanding", which constitute the possibility of having experience. Central thesis of Dilman's book is that one can observe a similar perspective in the later work of Wittgenstein, in which the problem is put in terms of the relation between language and reality. Paralleling this linguistic emphasis, "grammatical concepts" play a role similar to the concepts of pure reason that can be found in Kant.

"For Wittgenstein language is inherently object-directed…in some ways as for Kant experience is inherently object directed" (Dilman, 2002 p.9). It is the grammatical concepts that determine the objects which language is directed to. In doing so, they create a discursive space, a conceptual framework which is manifest in the use of language. This general formulation may be inadequate for explaining the contrast between *Investigations* and *Tractatus*, however there are two fundamental differences that should be noted. First is that objects of discourse are not due to the *Logic* common to language and reality. We see a shift towards a more modest conception of logic that is not situated in a transempirical realm and which is internal to language conceived as a form of life. Secondly, concepts of our language are not constant, immutable or complete. In *Investigations* Wittgenstein puts this point

contrasting actual natural languages with a hypothetical language which consists only of orders. He claims that it is an empty gesture to argue that a language which consists of only orders is not complete. He invites us to ask ourselves whether our language is complete, or whether it was complete before the introduction of the notation of the infinitesimal calculus. Then he writes that "our languages may be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses" (Wittgenstein, 2001 p.7).

To give a better picture of how Dilman's argument is related to the discussion of conceptual schemes, it would be useful to briefly touch upon the well-known claims of *Investigations* that "meaning is use" and "language is a form of life" once more. The notion that "meaning is use" suggests that the meanings of our words are not derived from something that is external to their use. In other words, it is not meanings that instruct us how to use a word, but rather meaning of a word makes itself manifest through the use of the word. Of course, this does not suggest that one can make up his/her own mind about how to use a word and thus determine its meaning, or create corresponding objects at will (in this sense, language is not a human fabrication either). What there is to meaning is not simply *what a speaker means*, but rather *what* a *speaker means as a member of a linguistic community.* In the *Investigations* meaning is conceptually located in the intersubjective. The defining aspect of this realm is the shared form of life, with the activities or objects of interest to which language is directed to. According to the *Investigations*, logical

possibilities, or discursive realms created by grammatical concepts cannot be thought independent of language users and the form of life they share.

Last point summarizes what I want to propose as a general framework on which a coherent notion of conceptual scheme can be built. If concepts are intrinsic to the life form of the linguistic community that uses them, then sets of concepts that characterize the discursive space available to a linguistic community can differ from another when the corresponding life forms differ. On the other hand, they can share some concepts if their ways of life overlaps with each other. Of course, this formulation does not have much appeal until a more detailed account of concepts and conceptual schemes is spelled out. My strategy in the following sections will be to clarify these notions.

Lynch's Wittgensteinian Model for Conceptual Schemes

Lynch's book *Truth in Context* is an attempt to demonstrate that "a thoroughgoing metaphysical pluralism is compatible with realism about truth" (Lynch, 2001 p.3). According to Lynch, metaphysical pluralism is the view that implies true propositions are relative to conceptual schemes. The position is metaphysical, for the problem concerns reality. Realism about truth, on the other hand, can be characterized as a position which argues that a proposition is true if the world is as the proposition says it is. While the main concern of Lynch's book is not conceptual schemes, the importance of the notion for his arguments is evident since he considers the notion of conceptual schemes as central to the definition of

metaphysical pluralism, which he tries to reconcile with an objective conception of truth.

Lynch claims that the notion of different conceptual schemes is essential to any form of pluralism (Lynch, 2001 p.31). However, he is not satisfied with the general characterization of conceptual schemes as "ways of organizing the world" or "way of categorizing world into objects" in the philosophical literature. In a chapter devoted to conceptual schemes he examines what he refers to as Kantian and Quinean models of conceptual schemes, which he considers as the dominant models that constitute the basis of our ideas about conceptual schemes. After discussing these models and their various shortcomings he goes on to offer his own model, which he calls the "Wittgensteinian Model (WM)".

According to WM, a conceptual scheme is a network of concepts, which are employed in language and thought. The notion of a concept that Lynch employs here is a functional one. "Concepts are whatever composes the propositional content of our assertions and beliefs" (Lynch, 2001 p.45). However, I disagree with this formulation. Considering Wittgenstein's remark that there are countless uses of language, which include but are not limited to assertion, I am not sure whether this idea can be called Wittgensteinian. Moreover, if concepts are simply constituents of the *propositional* content of assertions and beliefs, I think Lynch's later claim that "conceptual schemes *are not sets of declarative sentences but networks of concepts*" (Lynch, 2001 p.49) loses its significance. I believe that the notion of a concept needs to be expanded so as to include linguistic phenomena other than assertion and belief. Therefore, I think, concepts can be seen as entities which characterize the correct use of language. However, as Lynch claims, such a functional characterization does not

imply any particular ontological view about concepts: "they might be abstract entities, dispositions or general terms under something called an 'interpretation'"(Lynch, 2001 p.46). Concepts are the conditions of the possibility of what can be said in or what can be done with language. In other words, they are the constituents of the discursive space available for the users of a particular language. Such a definition not only includes assertions (to assert something, the content of that assertion should be within the limits of *what can be legitimately used as a part of assertion*) but also accounts for other diverse linguistic phenomena which cannot be analyzed in terms of assertions or propositional contents.

As mentioned above, according to WM conceptual schemes are networks of concepts. Therefore, Lynch claims that schemes differ to the extent that they do not share basic concepts. Basic concepts are "irreducible, highly general, and play a significant role in our conceptual life" (Lynch, 2001 p. 46). He also accepts that any change in concepts results in some change in the scheme, but argues that basic concepts are central in individuation of a scheme. According to Lynch, even a slightest change in basic concepts will "ripple through the scheme as a whole" (Lynch, 2001 p. 46). I agree with Lynch that a change in basic concepts will have a radical effect on the scheme as a whole. Any difference with respect to basic conceptual apparatus points to a fundamental discrepancy between two conceptual systems and the discrepancy marked by such dissimilarity has to be far-reaching. However, we do not have to assume that a difference in basic concepts is our only means for individuating distinct conceptual systems, since the extent to which conceptual networks can differ from each other is a matter of degree.

Another claim of Lynch is that schemes are only structurally foundationalist, in other words, basic concepts are not absolutely basic, but basic only within a *context*. Lynch uses a metaphor of Wittgenstein to illustrate this point. According to Wittgenstein, our concepts are similar to a river, where certain basic concepts function as the riverbed while the other concepts act similar to water: they are in constant motion, contained and guided by more basic concepts. However, as the riverbed can change its position over time, our basic concepts are susceptible to change.

Dilman makes a similar distinction between logical and ordinary concepts, former being more central than the latter, yet not immutable. However, Dilman's interpretation puts a greater emphasis on the notion of the form of life. I agree with Dilman that the context of such basic concepts is always the *human form of life*, which consists of biological structure common to the species as well as culturally or historically contingent aspects. As far as the basic concepts are concerned, I am inclined to think that our biological structure is more prominent, and therefore such a change in basic concepts would imply a radical change in the definition of the species (much like an evolutionary change).

Another aspect of Lynch's account that deserves attention is his notion of conceptual fluidity. According to Lynch, there are two dominant pictures of concepts in the twentieth century, namely *crystalline* and *fluid* picture of concepts (Lynch, 2001 p.56). According to the former picture, concepts are rigid, transparent and have definite borders. Crystalline picture of concepts also maintains that concepts have absolutely determined uses in all possible cases, and these uses are given by the concepts themselves, once and for all. Fluid picture of concepts, on the other hand,

does not conceive concepts as absolutely determinate. Lynch rightly argues that notion of fluid concepts fits better to Wittgenstein, since the depiction of concepts as having absolutely determinate uses is in direct opposition with the general picture drawn in the *Investigations*: "Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with a vague boundary cannot be called an area at all. This presumably means that we cannot do anything to it.-But is it senseless to say: 'Stand roughly there'?" (Wittgenstein, 2001 p.29).

Lynch claims that according to the fluid picture, concepts are flexible. "Beginning with a shared concept we can extend it in different directions by narrowing or widening its application"(Lynch, 2001 p.67). However, people who employ these different concepts can communicate with each other. According to Lynch what makes such a communication possible is the common element shared by two concepts which are extended in different directions. This common element floats free of metaphysical questions and does not commit the speaker to any particular ontological view about the nature of the concept she/he uses. Lynch calls this a *minimal concept*, while the extended version of the minimal concept is a *robust concept*. By minimal/robust distinction, Lynch explains how it is possible there to be meaningful disagreement between two people who (or two discursive areas of the same language which) employ incompatible concepts. I think this is an important aspect of Lynch's discussion which accounts for the possibility of communication between different conceptual schemes.

Contextual Semantics

Terence Horgan's project of articulating what he calls "contextual semantics", and certain themes of his work can be used to shed light upon some of the issues discussed until this point. His notion of semantic standards and his claim that these standards are not monolithic in a language have a significant power in explaining the sense in which the entities we talk about are discourse dependent, and making this conception intelligible. Moreover, considering the influence of formal semantics in Davidson's works, Horgan's project presents a strong alternative conception of semantics for the present discussion of conceptual schemes.

In his article titled "Contextual Semantics and Metaphysical Realism", Horgan gives the general framework of contextual semantics in a series of theses. In his first thesis he defines truth as *semantically correct assertibility* (Horgan, 2001 p.71). He also notes that, his conception of truth is not radically epistemic. Semantically correct assertibility is different from warranted assertibility; therefore semantic normativity involved in the definition of truth is not reducible to epistemic normativity. Semantic standards that make for truth are not uniform within a language; rather they vary from one context to another, depending upon the particular purposes of the related discourse. "For instance, what counts as a *flat surface* is subject to contextually variable parameters within a given discourse" (Horgan, 2001 p.71).

According to Horgan, operative semantic standards are *maximally strict* if "under these standards a sentence counts as correctly assertable (i.e., as true) only if there are OBJECTS and PROPERTIES in THE WORLD answering to each of the sentence's constituent singular terms, constituent assertoric existential

quantifications, and constituent predicates" (Horgan, 2001 p.72). Therefore, truth is a product of contextually operative semantic standards and how the world is. However, there need not be a direct correspondence between the constituent elements of a sentence and the objects or properties residing in the world, and this usually is the case. In other words, semantic standards we employ using language are not always strict and when this is the case, correspondence between elements of a sentence and the world is indirect.

Contextual semantics allows a range of possible degrees of strictness (unlike what Horgan calls "referential semantics" which operates with only strict semantic standards) under which a sentence can be correctly assertable. On the one end of the spectrum are sentences whose constituent parts directly correspond to the world. At the other end of the spectrum lie statements "whose governing semantic standards *alone* sanction those statements as semantically correct, independently of how things are in the world" (Horgan, 2001 p.72). However, he also writes that these are limit cases. "Beethoven's fifth symphony has four movements" is an example of a statement that falls between these limit cases. The correct assertibility of this statement is clearly dependent upon how the world is. However, it does not require that there be an entity called "Beethoven's fifth symphony" or a predicate as "having four movements". "Rather, under the operative standards, [Beethoven's fifth symphony has four movements] probably is semantically correct… by virtue of other, more indirect, connections between the sentence and THE WORLD" (Horgan, 2001 p.73). These indirect, nonstrict standards depend on the "contextually attuned, socially coordinated…dispositions of competent speakers" (Horgan, 2001 p. 76). Therefore, according to Horgan's picture, socio-linguistic dimension is an integral

aspect of the workings through which most of our statements are made true. Horgan contends that in cases where nonstrict semantic standards are operative and where there is no direct correspondence between the world and the constituent parts of the statement (objects, properties, etc.), discourse is regionally ontologically committed to some entities, and contextually operative standards "do not actually require that THE WORLD contain ENTITIES of the kind to which statements are regionally ontologically committed" (Horgan, 2001 p.82). In this sense, a good number of objects and properties can be said to be discourse-dependent, that is, having no immediate counterpart in reality, but made possible only by the mediation of language. In fact, Dilman's claim that the conceptual tools of language create a discursive space, which marks out the linguistic possibilities, parallels Horgan's argument described above. What Horgan calls contextually operative standards always depend on the mediation of stable socio-linguistic background which is shared by the competent speakers of the language. These standards make the use of certain terms possible, without requiring that the terms directly correspond to some aspects of the world. What makes such standards become operative is the language itself, and the activities into which language is interwoven, i.e., form of life. Assuming that the conceptual apparatus of a language is intrinsically related to and shaped by the ways in which users of a language engage with the world makes it easier to explain why there are various distinct uses of language, none of which can be reduced to another. Taken together, Dilman's and Horgan's discussions give us a better understanding of the sense in which some significant part of the elements of our discourse is language-dependent. This approach makes certain claims presented in Chapter II clearer; that is, arguments about how we use language in non-assertoric/non-referential ways and how we posit entities within certain realms of

discourse. To give a better picture and sum up the present discussion, consider the notion of a "corporation". Technically speaking, a corporation is an entity put forward by laws. Therefore, in some significant sense, its existence is based on discursive exchange. Moreover, it is hard to find "an entity" in reality that corresponds to a corporation; as Horgan would say, the relation between the discourse in which the concept of a corporation is used and the world is indirect. Moreover, in many cases the concept of a corporation resists translation since a corporation is always defined by recourse to a legal system. What counts as a corporation within a legal body can have significant differences from the concept of a corporation defined in another legal system. However, as Lynch would say, we can understand what a corporation means in and refers to across different legal-conceptual systems due to the minimal concept shared by all of these systems, i.e., "a legal entity that is driven by profit".

After explaining how Horgan's "contextual semantics" is related to the Wittgensteinian model discussed until this point, another point that deserves attention is the position of "contextual semantics" *vis-à-vis* Davidson's work on semantics and his understanding of conceptual schemes. To begin, I think one of Horgan's theses deserves to be quoted at length:

> In general, if a statement S is semantically correct under certain frequently operative semantic standards but S is not semantically correct under maximally strict semantic standards, then S is not equivalent in meaning to - or approximately equivalent in meaning to, or "intensionally isomorphic" to, or "regimentable" into - a statement that is correctly assertable under maximally strict standards (Horgan, 2001 p.74).

I think Davidson's strategy in *radical interpretation* implicitly adopts this approach, which is unjustified according to Horgan. According to Davidson, in interpreting a foreign language, we try to construct the best theory which accords with the behavior of the speaker (i.e., prompted assent) and how the world is. We form sentences in accordance with the T-schema, which establish the relation between the utterances of the speaker and the environment. Constantly revising our theory, we try to capture the systematic changes in the utterances of the speaker when corresponding changes occur in the environment. However, speaking in Horgan's terms, only available standards in this process can be the maximally strict ones, since one has to create a theory from scratch. However, nonstrict standards depend on the "contextually attuned, socially coordinated… dispositions of competent speakers" (Horgan, 2001 p. 76). Therefore, knowledge of nonstrict standards requires information other that prompted assent and the available empirical evidence. If we assume that much of our discourse is governed by nonstrict semantic standards, and that these standards are not in a linguistic vacuum, then we should conclude that radical interpretation formulated by Davidson is not suitable for determination of these semantic standards, since only resource utilized in the process of radical interpretation is the available evidence in the environment shared by interpreter and the person he/she is interpreting.

Davidson would object to this conclusion by saying that his semantic theory cannot be characterized simply as referential, since he does not endorse that there is always a direct correspondence between language and the way the world is. Instead, he would claim, in the process of radical interpretation we use every bit of knowledge we have about the people, particular person we are interpreting, and the

environment. Beginning from the examples of discourse governed by maximally strict semantic standards, mapping the occurrences of the words to the aspects of the world, and constantly revising our theory we can proceed towards the non-strict, indirect criteria governing the relation between statements and the world and capture all of them. However, I do not think such a course is viable, since to revise the theory, one needs some set of criteria which would be used to determine whether our hypothesis are working or not. However, in a process of radical interpretation all we have at the outset is the empirical evidence which is readily available in the environment. Since a radical interpreter cannot assume any knowledge of meanings and beliefs, available empirical evidence can serve as a criterion for only those statements for which we can capture a direct systematic relation between the utterance of the speaker and the world. In doing so, we can secure the maximally strict semantic standards bit by bit, by trial and error. However, Davidson's theory cannot give a clear account of how one can proceed from maximally strict standards to contextually operative standards without assuming a great deal about the language one is interpreting, since simple notion of prompted assent is restricted to propositional/referential uses only, and empirical evidence can only account for cases in which there is a direct relation between the statements and the world. Yet again, Davidson would object that this is a practical difficulty, and in theory it is not impossible to have the knowledge of semantic criteria which govern the non-strict discourse. He would also claim that, if one engages with the speakers of another language long enough, his/her theory would become gradually complete and even include T-Schema sentences such as "'Perseverance keeps honour bright' if and only if perseverance keeps honour bright". However, what Davidson would suggest is equivalent to reaching non-strict criteria, with a constant revision of the theory using

maximally strict criteria, which is obviously circular. Moreover, engaging with a language cannot be characterized as simply assuming the role of an interpreter and trying to match the sentences of alien language with one's own. Following the Wittgensteinian idea that language is a form of life, we can argue that to share and understand a language other than ours, we have to actively participate in that life form. According to such an approach, translation is not strictly a requirement for understanding. A bilingual person may fail to translate some sentences of either native language into the other, yet she can fully understand and be competent in using them. I think, Davidson's project of radical interpretation and his formal semantics fail to recognize the close relation between language and life. Therefore, his attempt to regiment language into a formal system is not successful and is bound to be limited in explaining the phenomenon we call language.

Concluding Remarks

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the success of the offered model, which is given in general outlines, depends on its ability to withstand against the objections of Davidson. First of all, since I assume that conceptual schemes are not sets of true sentences, but rather network of concepts, Davidson's portrayal of conceptual scheme as something that fits the sensory promptings (i.e., something true) is not valid for the present discussion. Therefore, it is immune to the charge of employing the notion of uninterpreted content. Concepts are not functions that match raw sensory experience to true sentences. According to proposed view, concepts condition the possibility of certain modes of discourse through which we say things (some of which are true) using language.

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Secondly, since the present account does not argue for the intelligibility of radically distinct conceptual schemes, it is easy to explain the possibility of communication between distinct conceptual schemes by referring to the common part shared by them. Moreover, Lynch's notion of conceptual fluidity successfully demonstrates how different conceptual schemes can share certain parts without the necessity of translatability. Although it is not strictly necessary, another important aspect of Lynch's discussion is that endorsing the idea that there can be multiple conceptual schemes is compatible with a realist theory of truth.

Horgan's discussion of contextual semantics demonstrates that, even if we accept that truth is atomic and transparent, the truth making relations are not that straight forward. In most of the cases semantic standards operative in a discourse depend on the speakers of language, who are socially and linguistically located. Related with the last point, Dilman's reading of Wittgenstein with its emphasis on the notion of a "life-form" also supports the general features of the model proposed: language is a form of life, and tools of language change as the corresponding forms of life differ.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Davidson's article "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" is intended as the last blow to the empiricism, which is based on the duality of uninterpreted content and conceptual scheme. The main reasons behind such a move are the problems created by the notion of uninterpreted content, specifically, the problem of skepticism. I think this is the most prominent argument of the article. However, of course, the problem is not simply epistemic and has serious implications about how Davidson views language.

Davidson's conclusion that the notion of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible results from his approach to language, which, I argued, has certain problems. His identification of conceptual schemes with sets of true declarative sentences enables him to raise some objections against the notion of conceptual schemes. I find this approach problematic in two ways. Firstly, identification of conceptual systems with sets of true sentences is rather odd, and one does not need to define conceptual schemes as such. I think a simple (perhaps redundant) definition of conceptual schemes as networks of concepts works better. Secondly, the central role true declarative sentences have in Davidson's understanding of conceptual schemes renders his account incapable of explaining certain linguistic phenomena. This point becomes more apparent when we consider the effect of Tarski's work on Davidson throughout his writings.

Davison utilizes Tarski's work to demonstrate that meanings for a language are recursively definable with the use of biconditionals which relate uninterpreted

sentences of a language to the known truth conditions. He goes on to claim that meanings of sentences can be given in terms of truth conditions, since, according to Davidson, truth is a transparent and atomic concept, However, I find it difficult to understand how such an apparatus is capable of explaining linguistic activities that cannot be characterized simply with truth-functional or referential terms. The account Davidson provides lacks appeal since it does not represent non-assertoric uses of language, or the diversity of the things we do with language. Moreover, even if we assume that truth is a transparent concept, it does not follow that truth-making relation is similarly transparent. Horgan's discussion is important in the sense that it successfully demonstrates that in our discourse, truth-making relations usually depend upon resources other than the referential.

I believe, and tried to demonstrate that a coherent idea of conceptual schemes can be established, if the notion is characterized by the partial failure of translation between two languages employing different conceptual schemes. To this end, certain themes from the later work of Wittgenstein play a central role in my argument. To be more specific, Wittgenstein's conception of languages as form of life supplies a relatively strong departure point for the construction of an alternative understanding of conceptual schemes which would withstand Davidson's objections and provide explanations where Davidson's account cannot. I think the alternative model presented in this essay is better than what Davidson offers in the sense that it does not unjustifiably try to reduce diverse linguistic phenomena into a single one, which is supposed to be paradigmatic and sufficient for the use and understanding of language. Such a model is also superior to the alternative that can be found in

Davidson since it is a more comprehensive picture which is better at representing the totality of activities which we call language.

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