

Behavior and Stimulation

Discussion on the Naturalized Theory of Meaning

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Abstract—In the twentieth century, Anglo-American analytic philosophers almost all regard the discussion of meaning as their important work and form a variety of theories of meaning. Among them, there are some theories with distinctive styles and distinctive characteristics. American philosopher Willard Quine leads the theory of meaning to behavior and stimulation. Compared with the traditional theory of meaning, this kind of theory of meaning has a great influence with its subjectivity and the emphasis on inter-subjectivity. The clarification of the concept of meaning itself relates to the form in which meaning is presented and the way in which meaning is determined. Quine's theory transforms "meaning" into "stimulating meaning" and takes it as the only reasonable way in which meaning exists, thus revealing its naturalistic standpoint and naturalizing meaning theory.

Keywords—stimulation; behavior; significance

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the twentieth century, it is a well-known fact that the question of meaning has become a common concern of British and American philosophers. The reason why this problem belonging to analytic philosophy is so popular is that on the one hand the philosophical view is changed and universal accepted since Frege Russell and Wittgenstein; on the other hand, within the limits of analytic philosophy, the problem of meaning itself and the problems related to it have not been clarified, and at the same time many new problems arise, although a large part of these problems are artificially created. The appeal to return to daily language in Wittgenstein's later thought, according to the survey of the present academic circles, still does not achieve its due effect. That is, superficially philosophers pay more attention to the actual use of language than the language itself before, so it transform from the language itself to the phenomenon of human language. However, what they actually do is still doing surgical static analysis with the language on a cold operating table, in which the meaning problem is the main analysis object. It is no exaggeration to say that since the turn of language, the question of meaning has been in the teeth of the storm of all sorts of debates about the relationship between language and the world, and the answers to the question of how to explain meaning, though endless, are divergent without decision.

Quine, praised as the most important philosopher in analytic philosophy circle after Russell and Wittgenstein,

showing a new viewpoint on the problem of meaning to people in the process. When it comes to Quine, what is most well-known is the viewpoint put forward in his essay "Naturalized Epistemology" published in 1969. In the process of naturalization of epistemology, Quine also naturalizes the meaning theory, which has been discussed most frequently in analytical philosophy, and the naturalization of epistemology is precisely on the premise that the meaning can be naturalized. Can the theory of meaning be naturalized? Can the naturalized results be understood and accepted? Such questions not only challenge people's traditional views on language and meaning, but also make it difficult for contemporary philosophers to give a satisfactory answer to them. In fact, to sum up, there is a question that must be answered but often ignored before the discussion of the above questions, which is what is the meaning of the meaning itself? What is the meaning of the discussion of the problem of meaning?

II. THE MEANINGS OF MEANING

The meanings of the word "meaning" are enumerated in detail in Ogden's masterpiece, *Meanings of Meaning*, as shown in "Table I":¹

¹ Ogden C. K, Richards I. A. *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 1989. pp. 186-187.

TABLE I. THE MEANINGS OF THE WORD MEANING

A	I	The inherent quality.
	II	Unique and inseparable relationship with other things.
B	III	Other words attached to a word in a dictionary.
	IV	The connotation of words.
	V	essence.
	VI	the activity projecting into an object.
	VII	Anticipatory events.
		Will.
	VIII	The position of anything in a system.
	IX	The actual consequences of a thing in our future experience.
	X	To state the theoretical results contained or implied.
	XI	Emotion caused by anything.
C	XII	Something that actually connects it to a symbol by an elected relationship.
	XIII	Stimulated memory effects. The obtained associations.
		Something that has the proper effect of remembering anything that appears.
		Symbols are interpreted as things belonging to them.
		Anything that arouse people's association.
		For symbols: Something that the user of a symbol actually refers to.
	XIV	Something that the user of a symbol thinks he or she is referring to
	XV	The thing that the user of the symbol thinks he is referring to.
	XVI	For users of symbols:
		nominatum.
		Something that you think you're referring to.
		Something that the user are thought to refer to.

Ogden's list almost covers the use of the word "meaning" in everyday language and the meaning in analytic philosophy, but it should be noted that Ogden's discussion of the word "meaning" is to interpret "meaning" as "meaning", namely "meaning" in Chinese. In the light of Article IV of the List, the term "connotation" appears, reminding people of the two concepts "含义" and "涵义" that often trouble people and are used differently in writing. In analytic philosophy, "涵义" is usually expressed by "connotation", but it also has the meaning of "meaning" while "含义" means meaning. Therefore, they are the same when expressing the meaning of one word. The difference is that because of the different context of use, "connotation" is often used in the context of discussion of connotation and denotation to highlight the connotation of the concept or word. From Articles XIII to XVI of the List, the Ogden List guides people's understanding of meaning in the right direction, and highlights the original meaning of the concept of "meaning", which means that words as symbols are the bridge between their users and the world. People have to "say" something about the world, and there are people "listening" when people saying. As Quine points out, "language is the art of society, and we all acquire it solely on the basis of the explicit behaviour of others in a publicly recognizable environment." ²The speaker's "saying" must have aboutness, namely the speaker's intentionality while speaking. Trying to restore the speaker's "directionality" or "intentionality" becomes a new way of thinking about the problem of meaning, and, if the "intentionality" is also a natural

tendency of human beings, then such a path does not go beyond the scope of naturalism.

Quine puts forward a different point of view about the understanding of the meanings of "meaning": "The useful ways in which people usually talk about or seem to talk about meaning can be summed up in two: having of meanings, namely significance and the same meaning or synonymy. To give meaning to a sentence is to express a synonym in the language that is usually more distinct than the original. If we hate the word "meaning", we can say that these words are significant or insignificant, synonymous or different. To explain the question of adjectives such as meaningful and synonymous in terms of clarity and strictness to some extent in my opinion, it is better to interpret them in terms of behavior, which is important as well as difficult." ³ As mentioned above, meaning is what people need anyway, but the "meaning" here Quine replace by "making sense". That is, people need meaning, since if they want to understand the meaning of a word; they just want to know the meaning of the word. According to the usual situation, the explanation made by listener to the questioner is "to say the language usually clearer than the original language to express the synonym" as described by Quine. Thus, the conclusion becomes "only the synonym of the linguistic form and the analyticity of the statement are the primary issues to be discussed in the theory of meaning". Based on the need of Quine's own construction theory, he regards meaning as signification, but the use of this word in everyday language corresponds to "sense" rather than "meaning" or "implication", which adds some troubles to understanding. The question can be quickly clarified in such a way that the word "meaning" in Chinese refers to value judgment, and that "meaningful" and "meaningless" signifies the existence/disappearance of something or the occurrence of an event that is of value to an associated subject, such as the speaker asking "What is the meaning of doing so?" This is a question for the hearer, since the speaker wants to know what the value for the hearer to do something, rather than the meaning or implication for doing it, nor the content of the matter, but the value of the thing for the hearer." On the other hand, if the speaker does not understand at all what the listener has done or intends to do, the speaker cannot ask this question, and if he wants to ask, he will roughly say, "What are you doing?" In the general sense, the understanding of the word "meaning" certainly cannot accept Quine's view of using "significance" and "meaning" indiscriminately. In most areas of linguistic philosophy, the discussion of the problem of meaning is based on "meaning", namely "implication" which is also the basis of the discussion made in this paper.

After clarifying "connotation" and "implication", and "implication" and "meaning", the question what is the meaning of discussing the question of meaning is placed after this question. Obviously, the two "meanings" appearing in this question have different meanings, and the interpretation of the latter "meaning" can be found by referring to the Ogden List that meaning is on the one hand

² Quine, W. V. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press; 1969. p. 26

³ Quine, W. V. *From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logical-Philosophical Essays*. 2nd, Rev. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980., pp. 11-12

related to the subject of the language used. However, how is it possible for a subject to use a language? What is the purpose of using a language? Such questions are related to another (and more important) aspect. For thousands of years, human life has shown a grand picture of the ordinary use of language, which tells us a simple truth: "Language is a way of interacting between at least two people: one speaker and one listener. It should acknowledge an organized group in advance. The two people belong to that group, and both of them acquire their verbal habits from that group. Thus, it's a relationship, instead of a special thing. The meaning of a mark always includes the common things between a person and an object." ⁴ What Dewey says is to tell us: first, "language is a social skill, and in order to acquire this skill, we have to rely entirely on the signal that is generally used between subjects to remind us what we are going to say and when to say it." ⁵ Second, the primary function of language is communication between people, and even meaning is also expressed through communication, because without communication there is no language, and without language there is no meaning discussed in analytic philosophy. Thirdly, only there is the existence of human beings as anthropological existence, there is the meaning. After all, the meaning is the product of the construction of human thinking. The practice of surgical static analysis of meaning largely ignores the fact that language is an activity belongs to human beings and is full of vitality. Language is also a kind of infinite and unpredictable existence in the process of being used by human beings. Whether this situation is faced directly affects the thinking of human language. This prompt of Dewey has a far-reaching warning function. Quine's discussion of meaning and epistemology is based on Dewey's standpoint of naturalism and empiricism.

The discussion of meaning is usually intuitively related to the mark and its meaning. In the ancient works of Augustine, it can be seen that the meaning of symbols is its reference, and this referential theory of meaning represents the most intuitive and intuitive understanding of meaning. The empiricists of the UK do not think so. The modern English philosophers represented by Locke think that the meaning of symbols should be connected with the idea in the human heart, and the symbol is the idea that it represents in the human heart. The above two typical theories of meaning have become two natural tendencies for human beings to understand meaning. It is true that natural tendencies have their reasonableness. Understanding the meaning of symbols does not require strict philosophical training or even higher education. If one person asks the listener "What is the meaning of the word apple?" On this occasion, if there is an apple, the listener will answer the questioner's question with notional reference on a very high probability—pointing at that apple. The reasonableness of the theory of reference lies in the conformity to the daily experience of the general public to a large extent and the overwhelming reasons that make people accept it. However, if there is no apple in the

present occasion, the listener's explanation will point to an apple in his memory, which is, the apple he understands and his idea of apple. In the long and universal association and conversation of mankind, the amount of confirmation that can be made between the listener and the speaker in the way of notional reference decreases with the development of human thinking, which is reflected in the history of mankind at the macro level and is microscopically presented as the ability to communicate effectively without the existence of the talking object with the growth of himself and the improvement of his education level from babbling. From this point of view, there is no substantial difference between the ideational theory and referential theory of meaning, since ideational theory is only the transformation of referential theory. Both understand the meaning of words by means of symbols-objects. Compared with the referential theory, ideational theory opens the gate between the word and the mental structure with the newly added contents. On the one hand, it makes ideational theory fall into a poor and pale embarrassment, and on the other hand, it expands the scope of thinking the question of meaning. The main point is that if the words that often appear in the practice of human conversation like "Jinshan", "Pegasus", "Kirin", and "Pi Xiu" and so on are understood according to the perspective of referential theory, it will certainly be incomprehensible; "Pegasus". If they are understood according to the perspective of referential theory, it will result in the difference of comprehension between different people. The standard and foundation to reach the confirmation between subjects are absent if we can't make notional reference, and ultimately we can only refer to the imagination of "Jinshan", "Pegasus", "Kylin", and "Pi Xiu" of different individuals. Therefore, the attempt to understand the meaning of words is inevitably entangled with psychism. Philosophers are greatly dissatisfied with this and are also disappointed that referential theory cannot find the referential objects corresponding to the words in the fictional objects created by the human mind. What's more, one of the major drawbacks of referential theory is that, in addition to the fictional object, the explanation of general names and concept words is powerless. In reality, people really can't find something called "red". What they feel is only red flags, red apples, and red liquids and so on. However, what is the meaning of such words as "red" in our language and in our conversation? When the task of philosophy is transformed into the logical analysis of proposition, and the object of philosophy is transformed into language instead of concept, the plain thing in the eyes of the general public becomes a big problem for philosophers. Is the predicate "red" an independent entity in proposition? Does it mean that the proposition affirms the existence of the object shown by its subject if the fiction object and the concept word are the propositional subject? Philosophers give two different answers. One is to try to rewrite the propositional subject of which the referent is uncertain, and to eliminate the affirmative existence of the propositional subject, so Russell's descriptive theory is put forward. The other is to divide the problem into two levels more practically, which means the subject in the proposition only means that the proposition permits the existence of the object indicated by the subject, but what actually exists has

⁴ (America) Dewey, Fu Tong tr. *Experience and Nature* [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2012, pp. 128

⁵ Quine, W. V. *Word and Object*. Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1960. p. 1

nothing to do with the proposition. This is Quine's "semantic upward" strategy and ontological commitment theory.

It is noteworthy that since the turn of modern epistemology, philosophy has devoted more attention to the study of man's cognitive activities, of which the way hardly gets rid of the elements of psychologism. As the creation of the human mind, "concept" is not an accurate concept. The same concept held by all people is at most "family-like", and it is impossible to be absolutely identical. How to find a standard that can become the common confirmation in the conversation between subjects and how to find the way to determine and understand the meaning in the aspect of nominatum related to meaning become the direction of philosophers' thinking.

III. LEADING MEANING TO BEHAVIOR

What is the advantage of behavior compared with the objective notional reference and the concept existing in human mind so that Quine wants to judge meaning by observing human behavior? To be exact, Quine abandoned the traditional concept of "meaning" and naturalized the theory of meaning when he led meaning to behavior. The key to naturalization is to lead meaning to human behavior.

With regard to the concept of "meaning", Quine first puts forward the following question: "In terms of the theory of meaning, a prominent question is the nature of its object: what is meaning?" Maybe because people can't understand there is difference between meaning and reference before, they feel the need for what is meant. Once the theory of meaning is strictly separated from the theory of reference, it is easy to realize that only the synonym of linguistic forms and the analytic nature of statements are the primary issues to be discussed in the theory of meaning. As for the meaning itself, as an obscure intermediary, it can be completely discarded."⁶ According to Quine's viewpoint above, does he advocate giving up the concept of meaning altogether? Of course not. For human, meaning is anyhow necessary. Quine merely leads the thought of "what is meaning" towards human's behavior in the direction of "the need for what is meant".

Quine's intention is quite obvious. In the discussion of meaning known to us in the past, meaning is artificially regarded as an independent being, and even as a purely semantic provision, but when people actually talk about meaning, they are only talking about "sense." However, regardless of "meaning" or "sense", even if the meaning is separated from the reference, people still have to ask what the meaning is. In the road of explaining the meaning to provide people with a satisfactory answer, the scene where the notional reference and concept are the answers appears in succession. However, the distance of road has not led people to find satisfactory answers in the foreseeable present. A word must mean something, which can either be the physical existence of the physical world, or the reflection of the actual

being in the human mind or the concept of creation, but it cannot be the empty concept that neither reports the physical world nor describe the mental world of the human being. Therefore, it seems to have no meaning to discuss the "meaning", and it becomes the so-called "obscure intermediary" by Quine. What does the word mean? Quine frankly inherited Dewey's thought and claimed to be a naturalist. Meaning was incorporated into the naturalistic thought and combined with human behavior after re-combing, so meaning has also been naturalized. "When a naturalist philosopher talks about philosophy of mind, he is apt to talk about language. First and foremost, meaning is the meaning of language. Language is a social skill that we acquire only by the explicit behavior of others in a publicly recognizable environment. Therefore, the meaning, namely the paradigm of the spiritual entity, is crushed as grain in the behaviorist mill. On this point, Dewey's view is clear: meaning is not the existence of the spirit, but mainly the attribute of the act."⁷ Behavior has the advantages of both the notional reference and the concept. The basis of meaning must be perceived by people in a publicly recognizable environment and it should highlight the differences of subjects in the perceived process and results. The combination of the two is intersubjectivity, which can only be acted by behavior. On the one hand, human behavior is public, explicit and observable; on the other hand, behavior is always a specific, individual behavior. The prerequisite for obtaining this insight is the assumption that language is a social skill of which acquisition, use and dissemination cannot be carried out in an individual, which, admittedly, cannot be denied. On the contrary, the idea, especially the private, speechless and inexpressible concept is implicit and unobservable. Even if the real object is talked about, the speaker and the hearer should internalize it into their own thinking first. This is a process of reporting public language that is grasped by the individual. If this is the basis of meaning, the meaning is in jeopardy. The traditional discussion of meaning has exacerbated this precariousness, so that Quine regards it as a "museum myth". Meaning is neither a spiritual entity nor a thing unrelated to human and explicit behavioral tendencies. "As long as we consider the semantics of an adult to be determined in some way in his mind, and unrelated to what may be implied in his external behavioural tendencies, it is corrupted by a harmful psychism. It is the fact related to meaning, not the substance of meaning that must be interpreted in the light of behavior."⁸

IV. STIMULUS MEANING AS THE ONLY RATIONAL CONCEPT OF MEANING

If the leading of meaning to behavior is the first step of naturalizing meaning theory, the concept of "stimulus meaning" proposed by Quine is the second step. The traditional theory of meaning has become a part of his

⁶ Quine, W. V. *From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logical-Philosophical Essays*. 2nd, Rev. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980. p. 22

⁷ Quine, W. V. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969. pp. 26-27

⁸ Quine, W. V. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969. p. 27

philosophy after being transformed by Quine's naturalism, and has been completely naturalized at the same time.

The discussion of the question of meaning at the semantic level is led to epistemology by Quine. For Quine, meaning should always be acquired through human awareness. In his holistic thought structure, the only reasonable existing way of meaning is to "recognize meaning". Cognitive activities are language learning and translation activities and language serves as a tool and a carrier in it. The study of meaning is transformed into a study of the genesis of human language learning, in which the stimulus of the sensory receptor is the most real, so Quine's view of meaning is finally concentrated on the stimulus meaning, and the stimulus meaning is also the key concept of Quine's behaviorism and empiricism as well as naturalized meaning theory. "The child learns his first words and sentences by listening to them and using them through the proper stimulus when presented. These stimuli must be external stimuli, for they must affect both the child and the speaker from whom the child is learning. Language is mastered through infuse by society. This indoctrination and mastery is strictly determined by the association of sentences with shared stimuli. As long as the relevance of language to external stimuli is not disturbed, the internal factors can be changed at will without prejudice to communication. Undoubtedly, as far as one's theory of linguistic meaning is concerned, one has no choice but to be an empiricist." ⁹ On the way to meaning, Quine believes that relying on experience is the only way, while experience can be both public and private, and only the public and observable part — behavior needs to be considered. Therefore, to understand meaning, one must first be an empiricist as well as a behaviorist. Quine's scientific tendency screened the way in which philosophers discussed the question of meaning and the question of meaning itself. All non-subjective and psychologist factors need to be eliminated, because this is contrary to the nature of scientific knowledge. The process of acquiring scientific knowledge is also a process of language acquisition and translation. Specifically, it is a forming process from observational sentences to theoretical sentences. In this process, meaning is discussed according to one's behavior, which is the affirmative or negative reaction made to the speaker's inquiry, and the stimulation of a certain thing and phenomenon to a certain subject in the specific present time. More precisely, it is formed by the sensory stimulation after the thinking and understanding of the brain, and can be expressed in words between the subjects or within the subject. It is obviously important to emphasize the cognitive function of language between subjects. Cognition and transmission are regarded as two processes, and they are the same process only within one cognitive subject. Therefore, when a cognitive subject is confronted with a thing or phenomenon, the evidence that make him or her ascertains that he or she has known the thing or phenomenon is that he or she can describe the thing or phenomenon in his or her mind in terms of the existing concepts, which are formally expressed as language (including syntax). This broad

explanation of Quine' naturalistic tendency that attributes meaning to behavior as the main (and perhaps the only) form of expression is not to justify this theory. It is true that there are still many unexplained problems within the broad scope of the question of meaning, by perceiving meaning as stimulating and then attributing it to human behavior. For example, the speaker does not express any inquiry, which means the hearer does not need or cannot give consent or objection to the sentence. "I want to listen to the rain" is such a sentence.

V. CONCLUSION

Considering the question of intentionality in analytic philosophy, one of its aims is to clarify the meaning of "meaning", That is what does "meaning" mean to a person (speaker or cognitive subject). There are plenty of examples that have meaning but don't have nominatum in the real world in human linguistic phenomena. The introduction of the concept of intentionality and the way in which the speaker's intention structure is regarded as a pre-linguistic structure will help to answer the question of why we can use such "non-referential" words and sentences for meaningful expression. The adverse opinion from this aspect is that such a view is in fact another version of the metamorphosed semantic ideology as a transformation of referential theory, but if ideational theory and intentionality theory have a common goal in the common way of opposing the meaning entity, the author is willing to acknowledge this. However, the significant difference is ideational theory still think about the question of meaning based on the access of the referential theory. On the other hand, the intentional theory connects the word, sentences and their subjects through regarding the intention structure as a pre-linguistic structure, and the intention structure is logical in the expression of the user of the language. By means of intentional reduction, the meaning that the speaker wants to express in the use of the language and his understanding of a phenomenon, symbol or thing can be revealed. Man connects the world through language, and meaning also shows the human's understanding of the world in this connection. People need to express such understanding through the use of language, and explaining the intention structure of the speaker in the use of language can reveal the meaning of the world to the speaker as well as explain the process of understanding between the speaker and the hearer.

Quine made a useful attempt on the question of whether meaning can be naturalized, but there is no only one way to reach the ultimate answer to the question of meaning. The problem of meaning and language, context and even culture have intriguing entanglement, so it is extremely complex, human-specific issues that needs to be considered at different levels. If the "naturalized theory of meaning" is a topic prone to produce disgust and misunderstanding, it can then be replaced by a statement such as "naturalistic approach to the question of meaning" in the hope of eliminating the sense of oppression brought for people by the strong view that only stimulus is the only reasonable form of meaning since Quine leads meaning to behavior. Being able to probe into the question of meaning in a naturalistic way means two

⁹ Quine, W. V. *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969. p. 81.

conclusions. If the "structure of intention" is also a natural tendency of human beings, there must be no lack of thinking about intentionality in the way of exploring meaning, and the answer is affirmative. The theory of meaning cannot at least be naturalized in Quine's way.

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