

PHIL 332: Philosophy of Language
Class 22: More on Davidson's Approach to Meaning

1. Last time we developed a Davidson-style theory of meaning for a fragment of English, Frag.
2. Anyone who knows this theory is in a position to know the meaning (i.e. truth conditions) of every sentence of the language (and there are an infinite number). She can work it out:
 - a. 'alan smokes and betty loves alan' is true iff 'alan smokes' is true and 'betty loves alan' is true. (meaning of 'and')
 - b. 'alan smokes' is true iff the particular denoted by 'alan' has the property denoted by 'smokes'. (structure)
 - c. The particular denoted by 'alan' is alan. The property denoted by 'smokes' is the property of smoking. So 'alan smokes' is true iff alan has the property of smoking. That is, iff alan smokes. (meaning of 'alan' and 'smokes')
 - d. 'betty loves alan' is true iff the particular denoted by 'betty' has the property denoted by 'loves alan'. (structure)
 - e. The particular denoted by 'betty' is betty. (meaning of 'betty')
 - f. The property denoted by 'loves alan' is the property of standing in the relation denoted by 'loves' to the particular denoted by 'alan'. (structure)
 - g. The relation denoted by 'loves' is the relation of loving. The particular denoted by 'alan' is alan. So the property denoted by 'loves alan' is the property of standing in the loving relation to alan. That is, the property of loving alan. (meaning of 'loves' and 'alan')
 - h. So 'betty loves alan' is true iff betty has the property of loving alan. That is, iff betty loves alan.
 - i. So 'alan smokes and betty loves alan' is true iff alan smokes and betty loves alan.
3. Issue: does 'alan smokes' have the same truth conditions as 'alan smokes and alan smokes'?
 - a. Sometimes one gets the following response: "It depends on how we individuate truth conditions." I think that is a bad response.
 - b. Here is a better response: "It depends on what is meant by 'truth conditions'."

- c. Often this: a set of possible worlds (often called a ‘proposition’). In that case, they have the same truth conditions. If Davidson is right, then they have the same meaning.
 - d. Note: the theory we have developed will not yield “ ‘alan smokes’ is true iff alan smokes and alan smokes”, but it still follows from the theory that ‘alan smokes’ and ‘alan smokes and alan smokes’ have the same meaning.
 - e. To avoid this consequence, we could use ‘truth conditions’ to refer to something more *fine grained*. Compare: the properties of being triangular and of being trilateral.
4. So maybe we can develop a Davidson-style theory of meaning for simple fragments like Frag. What about other fragments?
5. One problem: indexicals, such as ‘I’, ‘here’, ‘now’, etc. What is the denotation of ‘I’, ‘here’, or ‘now’?

One approach: relativise denotations to context of utterance.

6. Note that this problem extends to a great many other words as well:
- a. Zeynep is female.
 - b. Henry is ready
 - c. Noam is tall
 - d. Kripke is smart
 - e. Col is going to bottle some beer

It seems that appeal to the context will have to do a lot of work. Is it right to appeal to the context at all?