

ANALYTICITY AND TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Quine's negative theses about meaning and analyticity are well known, but he also defends a positive account of these notions. I explain what his negative and positive views are, and argue that Quine's positive account of meaning entails that two of his most famous doctrines, namely the claim that there are no analytic statements and the indeterminacy of translation thesis, are false. But I show that the falsity of these doctrines doesn't affect his criticisms of traditional conceptions of meaning. This is because the class of analytic statements that his account of meaning enables us to isolate is of no philosophical interest, and because we can hold that translation is determined without admitting that meaning is.

In this paper, I will argue that two of Quine's most famous doctrines, namely the claim that there are no analytic statements and the indeterminacy of translation thesis, are false. However, unlike the usual critic of Quine, I will raise my objections from within Quine's own perspective. This means that if I am right, Quine's views about analyticity and translation are not consistent. However, as I will show, we can hold that there are analytic statements and that translation is determined and still embrace Quine's criticisms of traditional conceptions of meaning. But before I can defend this claim, a considerable amount of exegetical work will be needed.

1. What is Quine's View regarding Analyticity, Exactly?

Quine, it is well known, rejects the analytic-synthetic distinction. The belief in a fundamental cleavage between truths which are based solely on meanings and truths which are also grounded in fact is, for him, an

ill-founded dogma. But what exactly is Quine's view about the analytic-synthetic distinction? Does he hold that (1) there is *no* such distinction (hereafter the *no distinction view*), or does he claim that (2) the distinction is a *matter of degree* (hereafter the *gradualist view*, or simply *gradualism*)? The no distinction and gradualist views are clearly different positions: the fact that a predicate such as 'bearded' is vague and admits of a grey area doesn't entail that there is no difference between being bearded and being smooth-cheeked. Similarly, gradualism strongly suggests that there are "real" analytic statements, and merely rejects the possibility of a clear demarcation between these and synthetic statements. The no distinction view, on the other hand, suggests that the analytic-synthetic distinction is analogous to the witch vs. non-witch distinction:¹ just as it is incorrect to say that there are two kinds of women, namely witches and non-witches, since no woman has supernatural powers and has made a pact with the devil, it is incorrect to say that there are two kinds of statements, namely analytic and synthetic ones.

Surprisingly, the no distinction and gradualist views are both explicitly endorsed by Quine. In support of the no distinction view, Quine writes that he is "invoking no distinction between analytic sentences and others" (1974, p. 13).² Many commentators have thus interpreted Quine's critique of analyticity as an endorsement of the no distinction view.³ Typically, this view is taken to amount to the claim that there are no analytic statements (hereafter, the *no analyticity view*). This is of course not the only option: one could hold the no distinction view because one thinks that *all* statements are analytic. But I won't explore this non-Quinian view here.

In support of the gradualist view, Quine writes that the question of whether or not classes exist "seems more a question of convenient conceptual scheme; the issue over there being centaurs, or brick houses on Elm Street, seems more a question of fact. But I have been urging that this difference is only one of degree" (1953, p. 168).⁴ Here Quine rejects not the idea that there is a distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, but the idea that this distinction can be clearly drawn. Many commentators have thus interpreted Quine as favouring a gradualist picture of analyticity.⁵

Quine's position regarding analyticity thus seems incoherent: while his no distinction view denies the existence of such a distinction, his gradualism asserts that although vague, such a distinction does exist. Fortunately, it is possible to reconcile these two views, if we carefully distinguish between Quine's two "philosophical modes" when he talks about analyticity (and meaning). Quine rejects what he sometimes calls the "controversial" notion of analyticity, which attributes special philosophical properties to analytic statements. When he is in such a "negative" or "critical" mode, Quine subscribes to the no distinction view (and the no analyticity view), and thus denies that there are any analytic statements in this controversial sense. However, Quine has his own positive view about meaning, which allows for a "strictly vegetarian"⁶ notion of analyticity that he finds palatable. When he is in this "constructive" philosophical mode, Quine endorses a gradualist view. In the following two sections, I will explore these two notions of analyticity.

2. The No Distinction View

In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", Quine attacks the controversial notion of analyticity that is defended by Carnap and the logical positivists. These philosophers appeal to the notion of analyticity to explain the truth of mathematical and logical laws, definitions and other conceptual claims: these statements are said to be analytic, that is, true solely in virtue of meaning and independently of the way the world is. Such a notion of analyticity has philosophical significance: it is supposed to provide answers to questions such as 'Why is such and such sentence true?' and 'How do we or can we know that it is true?'. An analytic statement *S* thus has special philosophical properties: it is true because of what its words mean; furthermore, any rational being who knows the meanings of *S*'s words would be bound to accept *S*, no matter what her factual beliefs are. Analyticity is thus invoked to explain why a sentence that is not answerable to empirical evidence or that makes no claim about the world can be true, and how we can know that it is true a priori.

Quine complains that there is no satisfactory account of this notion of analyticity. It is important to note that Quine doesn't claim to have produced a general proof that there's no analytic-synthetic distinction.⁷ His strategy is rather to examine various attempts at drawing the distinction and identify their flaws: some attempts are circular; some ultimately rest on undefined or obscure notions; some fail to isolate the relevant class of statements; some are arbitrary; etc. It would be incoherent for Quine to hold that the belief in an analytic-synthetic distinction is conceptually false or false a priori: for him, all statements, including his own philosophical theses, are revisable. Quine's point is thus not that it is inconceivable that one could ever draw an analytic-synthetic distinction, but that we have no good reasons to believe in the existence of such a distinction.

What moral does Quine draw from his criticisms of analyticity? The *inextricability thesis*⁸ expresses his position well: "[I]t is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement (1953, p. 42; see also p. 36). In other words, for Quine, there is no clear demarcation between the semantic (or linguistic) contribution and the factual contribution to the truth-value of any statement. Quine grants that a speaker accepts (or rejects) a statement partly in virtue of the linguistic conventions of her language (or idiolect) and partly in virtue of what she believes about the world, but, he adds, these two factors are impossible to disentangle. From this, he infers that no statement can be said to be accepted solely in virtue of the meanings of its words; in other words, there are no statements for which the presence of a factual component can be ruled out.

Quine thus rejects the idea that there are statements that are true in virtue of meaning. His no analyticity view is expressed by his famous claim that "no statement is immune to revision" (1953, p. 43). Hilary Putnam (1975; 1983) interprets this claim as meaning that any statement can be revised without changing its meaning. His reasoning seems to be as follows. Advocates of the analytic-synthetic distinction grant that any analytic statement can be revised, but, they hasten to add, such a revision can occur only if the statement acquires a new meaning.⁹ An analytic statement, they insist, is immune to revision as

long as its meaning remains the same. Since he rejects this view, the reasoning goes, Quine must hold that all statements are such that they can be revised without changing their meaning.

On this view, it would be possible to reject any “reputedly analytic sentence”¹⁰ without changing the meaning of its words. We can thus imagine scenarios in which this kind of revision involves a law of physics such as ‘ $E = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$ ’, ‘ $p = mv$ ’ or ‘ $F = ma$ ’, a law of geometry such as ‘The sum of the interior angles of a triangle is two right angles’,¹¹ a law of logic or mathematics, or any “ordinary definition” such as ‘Bachelors are unmarried men’ or ‘A chair is a movable seat for one with a back’. On the view attributed to Quine, any of these statements would be revisable without any change of language.

But this construal of Quine’s no analyticity view is misguided. If the inextricability thesis is correct, then the distinction between a change of meaning and a change of factual belief is threatened, and it is no less dogmatic to hold that no change of meaning occurs when a reputedly analytic statement is revised as it is to hold that a change of meaning does occur. In other words, it is incoherent to hold, on the one hand, that the linguistic component in the truth of a reputedly analytic statement is indeterminate, and, on the other hand, that the linguistic component in its truth is such that it is revisable without a change of meaning. Given the inextricability thesis, no precise criterion can be held regarding meaning changes. Quine’s no analyticity view should thus be interpreted as claiming that no statement is such that its revision would automatically involve a change of meaning. In other words, inextricability entails that some statements, e.g. reputedly analytic statements, are such that the question of whether their revision involves a change of meaning is indeterminate. We can thus see that inextricability directly entails a form of indeterminacy. I will come back to this point in Section 4.

3. Quine’s Gradualism

Gradualism holds that the analytic-synthetic distinction is a matter of degree. In other words, according to gradualism, some statements are

analytic, some are synthetic, and the distinction between the two classes of statements is vague. To make Quine's gradualism compatible with his no distinction view, we need to understand the notion of analyticity invoked by gradualism differently: a statement is analytic, in this new sense, not if it is true in virtue of meaning or a priori, but if it is indicative of the meanings of the words it contains. To avoid confusion, I will use the expression 'constitutive statements' to refer to statements that are indicative of meaning, and reserve the locution 'analytic statements' to designate statements that are alleged to be true in virtue of meaning and a priori.¹²

Which statements are constitutive of meaning? One way of answering this question is to look at the constraints on adequate translation: since the goal of translation is to preserve meaning, an adequate translation manual should focus primarily on mapping constitutive sentences of the source language L_2 into corresponding constitutive sentences of the target language L_1 . The proponent of analyticity would claim that all and only analytic statements are constitutive of meaning. Thus, on her view, a translator should try to find out which statements of L_2 are analytic, and correlate them with equivalent analytic statements of L_1 . Now ideally, competent speakers may be assumed to take the analytic sentences of their own language to be true, since an understanding of language suffices for knowing that they are true.¹³ This means that any analytic statement that is held true by the (competent) speakers of L_1 should be translated into an analytic statement that is held true by the (competent) speakers of L_2 . The situation is of course different for synthetic statements, since their truth also depends on the way things are in the world. Since competent speakers may be misinformed or ignorant about worldly facts, we may expect disagreements among them regarding the truth of the synthetic statements of their language. For the same reason, it is quite possible that an adequate manual will translate synthetic sentences generally accepted by speakers of L_2 into synthetic sentences generally rejected by speakers of L_1 , and vice-versa. Hence, while a translation manual cannot be adequate unless it preserves verdicts on analytic statements, no such constraint applies to synthetic statements.

This approach to translation is of course out of the question for

Quine. However, the fact that no sentence is analytic doesn't mean no sentences are indicative of what words mean. What sentences are indicative of meaning for Quine? In a famous passage of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", Quine puts forward an *extreme holism* according to which *all* sentences of the language are constitutive of meaning: "The unit of empirical significance is the whole of science" (1953, p. 42).¹⁴ This passage is echoed years later in "Five Milestones of Empiricism":

Holism blurs the supposed contrast between the synthetic sentence, with its empirical content, and the analytic sentence, with its null content. The organizing role that was supposedly the role of analytic sentences is now seen as shared by sentences generally, and the empirical content that was supposedly peculiar to synthetic sentences is now seen as diffused through the system. (1981, pp. 71–72.)

On this view, the meaning of a word depends on all sentences in which it occurs. Hence, if we want to figure out what a word means, we should look at how it is used in all the sentences in which it appears, since there is no subset of these sentences that can be said to be more indicative of meaning than the others. This means that a translator has no choice but to seek as much agreement as possible on the totality of the speakers' verdicts on the sentences of their language.

Extreme holism clearly goes against gradualism, since it holds that all sentences are on a par regarding their semantic or "organizing" role: there is no distinction, not even a vague one, between constitutive sentences and non-constitutive ones. But, as Quine himself points out in many places, extreme holism is not mandatory. There are ways to restrict the class of statements that are indicative of meaning that are both intuitive and empirically acceptable. Quine has actually made a few proposals to that effect.

Consider for instance the idea that constitutive sentences are sentences about which there is general agreement among the members of the linguistic community. This idea corresponds roughly to Quine's proposal in Chapter 2 of *Word and Object*, where a translation manual is said to be adequate only if it preserves as much as possible the foreign speakers' verdicts on their *stimulus-analytic* and *observation* sen-

tences. Recall that a sentence is stimulus-analytic for a group of speakers if they are disposed to accept it after every stimulation, and an observation sentence, roughly, is a sentence such that all speakers of the language would agree about whether to accept or reject it in the same observational circumstances. Quine's canon 'Save the obvious' is in the same spirit.¹⁵ According to this canon, an adequate translation should seek agreement on a subset of sentences generally accepted, namely the set of *obvious* sentences, which are sentences that speakers would accept without hesitation (in various circumstances).

These two approaches rest on the supposition that competent speakers should generally agree on what words mean in their language. Hence, if a sentence of *L* is true thanks to linguistic conventions, then it should be accepted by all competent speakers of *L*. Unfortunately, the converse is not true: the fact that a sentence is accepted by all doesn't entail that it is held true solely because of its meaning, since universal acceptance could also be due to a widely shared collateral information, to use Quine's expression. For example, (nearly) all competent English speakers would accept the sentences 'The earth is round', 'The world did not come into existence five minutes ago', 'There are red things', and other sentences that are not intuitively analytic. Hence, preserving verdicts on stimulus-analytic and observation sentences (or obvious sentences) would not allow us to separate meaning from widely-held beliefs.

Another approach would be to focus on how words are taught to young speakers,¹⁶ or on how lexicographers explain words in dictionaries. However, there is no guarantee that our dictionary definitions never involve any factual information. As Quine points out,¹⁷ the goal of dictionaries is primarily to help readers use their language, and no particular care is devoted to distinguishing linguistic information about a term from factual information about its denotation. A glance at dictionary definitions quickly confirms Quine's claim. Since the same is no doubt true of the explanations we give to young speakers, appealing to such explanations will not disentangle belief from meaning either.

The various approaches I have presented could probably be refined and provide us with a more precise, and perhaps even more intuitive, distinction between constitutive and non-constitutive statements. But

if the inextricability thesis is correct, then such a distinction can at best be blurry. The inextricability thesis does not deny the possibility of determining whether the semantic contribution to the truth of a statement is high or low. The idea that one could isolate a class of constitutive statements, whose truth depends largely on meaning, is compatible with the inextricability thesis. What this thesis rejects is the idea that one could determine *exactly* what the semantic component in the truth of a statement is. Inextricability thus entails that it is in principle impossible to determine whether the truth of a statement results solely from its semantic component.

These considerations show that gradualism is not only compatible with the no distinction view, but actually derives naturally from it. The no distinction view entails that a statement can never be said to be true solely in virtue of meaning; we can at best show that meaning contributes considerably to its truth, without being able to rule out a factual contribution. This means that being indicative of meaning, or being constitutive, as I have used the expression, can at best be equated with being true in large part due to a semantic component. Therefore, as gradualism claims, some statements may be more constitutive than others, since the contribution that meaning makes to truth varies from statement to statement. And even if we could settle the question of how great the semantic contribution to the truth of a statement must be for this statement to count as constitutive, the distinction between constitutive and non-constitutive statements would remain blurry, since, as the inextricability thesis claims, the semantic component in the truth of a statement cannot be precisely identified.

It's important to note that endorsing the existence of constitutive statements doesn't force us to admit the existence of analytic statements, since a statement may be constitutive even though it doesn't have the special philosophical properties traditionally associated with analytic statements: a sentence is constitutive not if it is true in virtue of meaning, but simply if it is indicative of meaning. The fact that a sentence is indicative of meaning does not entail that its possible revision should be construed as involving a change of meaning, since one cannot rule out the possibility that this revision results from giving up some factual beliefs. Thus, one can reject a constitutive statement

without automatically changing its meaning. A constitutive statement is thus not a priori, since a rational and linguistically competent speaker is not forced to accept its truth.

In this section, I have presented various accounts of constitutivity that are compatible with the inextricability thesis. In the rest of the paper, to simplify the discussion, I will assume that a statement is constitutive if and only if it is obvious in Quine's sense. Hence, a translation is adequate only if it satisfies the canon 'Save the obvious', that is, only if it maximizes agreement on obvious sentences. Nothing of substance in what follows turns on accepting this particular account of constitutivity, as opposed to any of the others I have presented in this section.

4. Change of Meaning vs. Change of Belief

Quine's gradualism is very far from an "anything goes" theory of meaning. As a matter of fact, his view entails that in many cases, the question of whether a revision in a speaker's views about whether her sentences are true involves a change of meaning or not is determinate. First, there are many cases of revision that determinately don't involve a change of meaning. Consider for example the case where a speaker changes her mind about the truth of an observation sentence. Suppose our speaker is led to accept 'It's raining' after witnessing the beginning of a rainfall. Surely, her new verdict on the sentence 'It's raining' did not involve any change of meaning. Here, Quine's canon 'Save the obvious' yields a determinate outcome: since the speaker would still accept (without hesitation) the sentence 'It's raining' roughly when and only when she observes rain in her immediate environment, what this sentence means for her has not changed. In other words, since the sentence is still obvious for her in the same circumstances, it would be incorrect to say that 'It's raining' has a new meaning for her. The observation of a rainfall did not affect her speech dispositions regarding 'It's raining', but merely *triggered* them.

I don't want to suggest the meaning of an observation sentence can never be revised after witnessing certain events. But the fact is that in

typical cases, our coming to accept (or reject) an observation sentence does not involve any change of meaning. Quine's canon 'Save the obvious' can account for this fact, since in typical cases, our accepting (or rejecting) an observation sentence does not modify the set of circumstances in which this sentence is obvious for us. For the same reasons, our changing our minds about the truth of non-observation sentences such as 'The newspaper was not delivered today', 'I had the flu last week', etc., should be interpreted as typically resulting solely from the acquisition of a factual belief.

Conversely, there are many cases of revision that clearly involve a change of meaning. Suppose a speaker decides to switch her use of the words 'bachelor' and 'sofa': she now uses the word 'sofa' in exactly the way she used 'bachelor' before, and vice-versa. Surely, this counts not as a change in factual belief, but as a linguistic change: our speaker has not changed her views about bachelors and sofas, but merely assigned new meanings to 'bachelor' and 'sofa'. In "On Empirically Equivalent Systems of the World" (1975, p. 319), Quine presents a similar example. He imagines that we transform our current physical theory by switching the terms 'electron' and 'molecule' throughout. In this case, he writes, the difference between the two theories is not substantive but merely terminological. The same goes for the translation of logical connectives: "Suppose someone were to propound a heterodox logic in which all the laws which have up to now been taken to govern alternation were made to govern conjunction instead, and vice-versa. Clearly, we would regard his deviation merely as notational and phonetic" (1986a, p. 81).

Quine's assessment makes perfect sense: if our apparent disagreements with a speaker can be completely dissolved by a simple reinterpretation of some of her terms, then we should say that our dispute with her is purely verbal. Fortunately, the canon 'Save the obvious' can do justice to Quine's assessment. In the three cases just presented, homophonic translation, that is, interpreting the deviant speakers as meaning the same thing as we do, would clearly violate this canon, since sentences obviously true for the deviant speakers would be translated into sentences obviously false for us, and vice-versa. Reinterpreting the deviant speakers' words the way that was suggested, on the

other hand, would satisfy the canon 'Save the obvious', since it would eliminate any disagreement over obvious sentences.¹⁸

However, if the inextricability thesis is correct, it is not always possible to tell whether the meaning of a sentence has changed when we change our minds about its truth. Between the two types of cases that we just examined, there exists a whole spectrum of cases where the question of whether a change of meaning occurs or not is indeterminate. Consider the sentence *S*, a constitutive sentence of L_1 that has the form 'All *F*s are *G*s'. *S* could be an intuitively analytic sentence such as 'Bachelors are unmarried' and 'Sofas are pieces of furniture'. Does *S* express a rule of language or a factual belief? According to the inextricability thesis, this question has no determinate answer. Now suppose that language L_2 , a future version of L_1 , is identical to L_1 in all respects except that the speakers of L_2 reject *S*, and instead accept 'Some *F*s are *G*s' and 'Some *F*s are not *G*s'. Should we interpret the transition from L_1 to L_2 as a change of meaning or a change of belief? Should we say that *S* used to have a different meaning and that there's a mere terminological disagreement between the two communities, or should we say that the meaning of *S* has not changed and the speakers of the two communities have a substantial disagreement over the truth of *S*? If the inextricability thesis is true, there are sentences such as *S* for which this question doesn't have a determinate answer. This means that what sentence of L_2 *S* of L_1 is synonymous with is indeterminate. '*F*' of L_1 could mean either '*F*' or '*F* that is *G*' in L_2 . We thus have either:

- (1) 'All *F*s are *G*s' in L_1 means the same as 'All *F*s are *G*s' in L_2 ; or
- (2) 'All *F*s are *G*s' in L_1 means the same as 'All *F*s that are *G*s are *G*s' in L_2 .

I don't want to suggest that every time we change our minds about the truth of an intuitively analytic sentence, such an indeterminacy occurs. However, the inextricability thesis entails that there must be indeterminate cases like this one: since the truth of a statement is not analysable into a linguistic component and a factual component, there must be cases where it is impossible to determine whether a revision of

this statement is due to a change of meaning or a change of belief.

5. Are There Really no Analytic Sentences?

I am now in a position to show that Quine's gradualism entails that there are analytic statements. But before I do this, I need to examine Quine's own contention that on his view some statements are analytic. For him, these analytic statements form a sub-class of what he calls 'observation categoricals'. Observation categoricals are sentences of the form 'Whenever p , q ', where ' p ' and ' q ' are both observation sentences. Quine writes that observation categoricals are the checkpoints of our scientific theories. But not all observation categoricals, it seems, can serve as tests for our theories. We are tempted to exclude sentences such as 'Whenever there's a raven, there's a bird' or, more succinctly, 'All ravens are birds', from the empirical content of science. Quine thus proposes to draw a distinction between analytic observation categoricals and synthetic ones: "Call an observation categorical *analytic* for a given speaker if, as in 'Robins are birds', the affirmative stimulus meaning for him of the one component is included in that of the other. Otherwise *synthetic*" (1992, p. 16). The empirical content of a theory, he adds, is the set of all synthetic observation categoricals it implies.

Unfortunately, Quine's proposed analytic-synthetic distinction fails. On Quine's definition, no observation categorical will end up being both synthetic and accepted. For Quine, the affirmative stimulus meaning of a sentence for a speaker is the set of stimulations that would prompt him to accept the sentence. Thus, if the affirmative stimulus meaning of ' p ' is not included in that of ' q ', in which case 'Whenever p , q ' is synthetic on Quine's definition, then the speaker will not accept 'Whenever p , q '. If, on the other hand, the speaker accepts 'Whenever p , q ', then the affirmative stimulus meaning of ' p ' for him must be included in that of ' q ', in which case 'Whenever p , q ' is analytic on Quine's definition. Hence, the only observation categoricals that turn out synthetic, on Quine's definition, are those that are not accepted.

But surely, one may object, some observation categoricals are refutable, whereas others aren't. Some observations may lead us to reject the observation categorical 'All ravens are black', for instance. Perhaps, but would our rejection constitute a refutation of the categorical or a change of its meaning? We are back to the problem of distinguishing a change of (factual) belief from a change of meaning.

Quine's contention about the analyticity of some observation categoricals is closely related to his claim that observation sentences have determinate meanings.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this claim is incompatible with his inextricability thesis. Speakers' agreement on whether an observation sentence is true or false on a given occasion may be based solely on the sentence's meaning, or it may be due also to widely shared collateral information. Inextricability entails that there is no fact of the matter about which of these two interpretations is correct.

I wrote in Section 3 that constitutive statements don't have the special philosophical properties traditionally associated with analytic statements. This is not quite true, since, as I am about to show, some constitutive statements are true in virtue of meaning and a priori. Consider the list of all the platitudes or obvious sentences involving the word 'bachelor' that (nearly) all competent speakers of English would accept without hesitation: 'Bachelors are unmarried', 'Bachelors are men', 'Bachelors are human beings', 'Bachelors are adults', 'There have been bachelors', etc.

Given the inextricability of belief and meaning, the revision of one of these obvious statements does not necessarily involve a change of meaning, since we cannot rule out the possibility that the revision is due to a change of belief. However, a revision of many of the statements that are constitutive of the meaning of a term must at some point produce a change of meaning. The canon 'Save the obvious' thus entails that a revision of *all* or *most* of the obvious statements involving a term automatically entails a change of meaning. Therefore, we cannot give up all or most of the platitudes involving 'bachelor' without changing the meaning of this term. Actually, this is not quite true, since our giving up these platitudes could be due to our assigning new meanings to other words that appear in them, such as 'unmarried', 'male', 'human beings', etc. It would thus be possible to leave the

meaning of 'bachelor' unchanged while renouncing all the current platitudes involving this term. Hence, what the canon 'Save the obvious' entails is that we cannot give up all or most of the obvious sentences involving the word 'bachelor' without changing its meaning or the meanings of other terms involved in these platitudes.

Now consider the statement *S*, which consists of a very large disjunction composed of many of the platitudes involving the word 'bachelor'. For the reason I just presented, this disjunction must be analytic, since giving it up amounts to giving up all the obvious sentences involving 'bachelor'. Hence, *S* cannot be revised without changing its meaning. *S* is also a priori, since any rational being who understands *S* is bound to accept it: as we just saw, someone who denies *S* cannot mean the same thing as we do by *S*.

Clearly, there are many other long disjunctive sentences like *S* that must be analytic according to the canon 'Save the obvious'.²⁰ The no analyticity and no distinction views presented in Sections 1 and 2 are thus false. The picture that emerges is that of a gradualism about analyticity: some statements are analytic and some are synthetic, but the demarcation between the two types of statements is vague, since there are many obvious sentences whose revision would not determinately involve a change of meaning. This gradualism is different from the one presented in Section 3, which was a gradualism about constitutivity. There are thus three types of statements: analytic constitutive statements, synthetic constitutive statements and synthetic non-constitutive statements. The distinctions among these three sets of statements are blurry: some constitutive sentences are such that their revision may or may not entail a change of meaning, and some sentences are not clearly constitutive.

It should be clear that the analytic sentences that Quine's canon 'Save the obvious' allows us to isolate do not form a philosophically interesting class. Although they are true in virtue of meaning and a priori, and thus have the special philosophical properties that have traditionally been associated with analyticity, they are of little help in achieving the goals that the proponents of analyticity usually have in mind. The existence of this class of analytic statements in no way allows us to provide a determinate explanation of the truth of state-

ments in terms of what they mean and what the facts are.

6. Indeterminacy of Translation

Let us now turn to the indeterminacy of translation thesis. The following line of reasoning is tempting. If we suppose that “[t]he meaning of a sentence in one language is what it shares with its translation in another language” (1992, p. 37), and that, given the inextricability thesis, the truth of statement *S* is not analysable into a meaning component and a factual component, then it follows that *S*’s translation in another language is indeterminate. This line of reasoning suggests that anyone who endorses the inextricability thesis is forced to admit the indeterminacy of translation thesis.

Unfortunately, the argument has a weakness: preserving meaning is a *necessary* condition for adequate translation, but it may not a *sufficient* one. Perhaps an adequate translation manual from L_1 to L_2 should also satisfy other constraints that are such that despite the fact that the meaning of every sentence of L_1 is indeterminate, each has a determinate translation into L_2 . So one cannot conclude that translation is indeterminate just from the fact that the best methods we have for figuring out the meanings of the sentences of a language don’t allow us to separate meaning from factual beliefs.

What are these additional constraints on translation? Pragmatic constraints such as simplicity and conservatism are natural candidates. For example, all other things being equal, we prefer to translate a one-word expression of the foreign language by a one-word expression of our language. In general, we consider a simple translation manual preferable to a complicated one. We also have conservative propensities and favour standard translations that have been adopted in the past over new and unusual ones. Invoking such constraints in order to justify a translation manual seems perfectly legitimate. And given that Quine openly welcomes the appeal to pragmatic constraints when defending a scientific theory,²¹ why should he consider such constraints inappropriate when the subject matter is translation?

Now it is reasonable to think that using pragmatic constraints such

as simplicity and conservatism in addition to the canon 'Save the obvious' will allow us in many cases to single out a unique best translation between two languages. Let us consider first domestic cases of translation, that is, cases where two speakers of, say, English, are translating each other's language. Suppose that Paul and Mary, two English speakers, are in perfect agreement about their obvious sentences; that is, they would accept exactly the same sentences without hesitation in the same circumstances. Given this agreement, a homophonic translation of Paul's language into Mary's would perfectly satisfy the canon 'Save the obvious'. But as Quine often suggests, there may very well exist non-homophonic translations of Paul's language into Mary's that, thanks to some clever and complicated "compensatory adjustments", would preserve their perfect agreement on obvious sentences just as well. If this is true, the mere application of the canon 'Save the obvious' would not suffice to determine a unique translation. However, appealing to constraints such as simplicity and conservatism would clearly narrow down Mary's options to the homophonic translation manual: using any non-homophonic translation of Paul's language would be a complicated and impractical way to interpret what he says to her. Mary thus has very sensible reasons to exclude all translations except the homophonic one when communicating with Paul. Her translation of his language thus seems determined.

Now it's quite possible that many "real life" instances of translation between two different languages are similarly determined. Perhaps the standard translation between, say, English and French is not the only way to satisfy fully the canon 'Save the obvious', or to maximize agreement on sentences that are indicative of meaning. But favouring a translation that has traditionally been used between these two languages seems perfectly reasonable, given how impractical and time-consuming it would be to produce an alternative translation. Since standard translation manuals between languages are, for practical reasons, superior, translation is determined.

But what about cases of *radical* translation, that is, translation of foreign languages for which there exist no prior translations that could count as standard? Here's what Quine says:

The indeterminacy of translation is unlikely to obtrude in practice, even in radical translation. There is good reason why it should not. The linguist assumes that the native's attitudes and ways of thinking are like his own, up to the point where there is contrary evidence. He accordingly imposes his own ontology and linguistic patterns on the native wherever compatible with the native's speech and other behaviour, unless a contrary course offers striking simplifications. We could not wish otherwise. What the indeterminacy thesis is meant to bring out is that the radical translator is bound to impose about as much as he discovers. (1992, pp. 48–49)

What the radical translator *discovers* are the speech dispositions of the native, and what he *imposes* are his own psychology, ontology and linguistic patterns, and preference for simple accounts. Quine's indeterminacy of translation thesis thus claims that there are rival translation manuals that are compatible with the same speech dispositions.²²

The problem with this understanding of the indeterminacy thesis, though, is that it makes the thesis depend crucially on behaviourism, and thus makes it vulnerable to the oft-heard objection that Quine's behaviourism unduly limits the evidence that a linguist can invoke to support her theories.²³ Although this objection undermines Quine's indeterminacy of translation thesis, it leaves intact his inextricability thesis. To see why, we need to distinguish between two sets of goals that one may have regarding meaning.

It is quite appropriate for real field linguists, or ordinary speakers who communicate with each other, to invoke pragmatic constraints such as simplicity, and to suppose that other speakers share many of their psychological mechanisms and have relatively simple words for salient features and objects of their environment. If our goal is to understand a person's language and make sense of her actions, then invoking these constraints and hypotheses is perfectly warranted. In other words, behaviourism, or a specific set of principles of translation such as 'Save the obvious', should not be forced upon real linguists or ordinary interlocutors.

But this has no bearing on the inextricability thesis. The target of this thesis is not our ordinary interpretative practice, but philosophical views that appeal to meaning in order to explain the truth of mathe-

mathematical and logical laws, and other statements that are supposed to be true because of what their words mean. The inextricability thesis entails that there's no unique explanation of the truth of a statement in terms of what it means and what the facts are. This consequence of inextricability does not threaten our ordinary interpretative practice, but it does undermine any philosophical view that relies on the determinacy of meaning to draw an analytic-synthetic distinction, to explain a priori knowledge, or to make claims about what is conceptually possible and what isn't. The existence of alternative interpretations of a language doesn't prevent us from making sense of what the speakers of this language do with it, but it should prevent us from drawing significant philosophical conclusions from a particular interpretation.

Focusing as Quine does on the indeterminacy of translation tends to obscure the issue. His claims about the indeterminacy of meaning are thus best captured by the inextricability thesis: to say that the truth of a statement *S* is not analysable into a linguistic component and a factual component is to say that *S*'s meaning is indeterminate. Conceiving the indeterminacy thesis as a thesis about meaning also has the advantage of eliminating the need to invoke behaviourism or a specific set of translation constraints. Perhaps Quine's favourite account of translation entails that translation is indeterminate. But we don't need to endorse this account in order to accept the indeterminacy of meaning thesis: this thesis follows directly from his criticisms of the analytic-synthetic distinction.

7. Conclusion

I have argued against Quine's claims that there are no analytic statements and that translation is indeterminate. But as I have made clear, the falsity of these claims does not really affect his views about meaning. First, the class of analytic statements that his gradualism about meaning enables us to isolate is of no philosophical interest. This is because it constitutes only a small sub-set of the statements that the proponents of analyticity usually take to be analytic: statements that are analytic on Quine's approach can thus not be invoked to account

for the truth of the laws of mathematics and logic, or of definitions and their logical consequences. Second, we can hold that translation is determined without admitting that meaning is. I have argued that Quine's indeterminacy thesis is best captured not by his claim about the indeterminacy of translation, but by his inextricability thesis. Focusing on inextricability instead of indeterminacy of translation has two virtues: it shows that the proper target of indeterminacy is not our interpretative practices but certain philosophical accounts of meaning; and it avoids the usual criticisms of indeterminacy, since one need not be a behaviourist to accept the inextricability thesis.

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Keywords

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Resumo

As teses negativas de Quine sobre o significado e a analiticidade são bem conhecidas, mas ele também defende uma abordagem positiva dessas noções. Vamos explicar quais são as concepções negativa e positiva, e argumentar que a abordagem positiva de Quine do significado implica que duas de suas mais famosas doutrinas, a saber, a alegação de que não há enunciados analíticos e a tese de indeterminação da tradução, são falsas. Mas vamos mostrar que a falsidade dessas doutrinas não afeta suas críticas às concepções tradicionais do significado. Isso se dá porque a classe dos enunciados analíticos que sua abordagem nos capacita a isolar não tem nenhum interesse filosófico, e porque podemos sustentar que a tradução é determinada sem admitirmos que o significado também é.

Palavras-chave

Quine, analiticidade, significado, tradução, indeterminação.

Notes

¹ See Harman (1967, p. 138).

² See also Quine (1953, p. 43; 1960, p. 67; 1981, pp. 71–72; 1986a, p. 101; 1991, p. 271; 1992, p. 55).

³ See for instance Boghossian (1996), Dummett (1978, p. 375), Fodor and Lepore (1992, p. 25), Grice and Strawson (1956), Goodman (1983, p. 60), Harman (1967) and Hookway (1988, chap. 2).

⁴ See also Quine (1979, p. 138; 1986b, p. 430; 2000, p. 415).

⁵ See for instance Bennett (1959, p. 171), Davidson (2001, pp. 78, 195) and White (1952).

⁶ See Quine (1960, p. 67).

⁷ See Quine (1990b, p. 198).

⁸ The expression is from Dummett (1978, pp. 387–388).

⁹ See for instance Carnap (1990, 432), Dummett (1981, pp. 601–603) and Grice and Strawson (1956, p. 157).

¹⁰ The phrase is from Dummett (1981, p. 602).

¹¹ These examples are from Putnam (1975; 1983).

¹² My use of the word ‘constitutive’ thus differs from that of philosophers who take ‘constitutive statements’ to have some or all of the special philosophical properties traditionally associated with analytic statements.

¹³ Here, I am ignoring analytic sentences that are too long to be understood by normal human beings.

¹⁴ Many of Quine’s commentators have been put off by this extreme semantic holism. Reflecting on the passage, Quine later expresses regret about this “needlessly strong statement of holism” (1991, p. 268).

¹⁵ See Quine (1986a, pp. 82–83).

¹⁶ See Quine (1974, pp. 78–79).

¹⁷ See Quine (1976; 1987, p. 131; 1992, pp. 56–59; 1995, p. 83).

¹⁸ I should point out that this doesn’t commit us to accepting Quine’s controversial claim (1986a, chap. 6) that we have no choice but to impose classical logic on any foreign speaker: it is far from clear, for example, that translating

the intuitionist's logical connectives by classical logical connectives yields the best satisfaction of the canon 'Save the obvious'.

¹⁹ See Quine (1960, pp. 42, 68, 76; 1986b, pp. 427–428; 1992, pp. 39–40).

²⁰ I cannot provide a general method to produce such sentences. When the number of obvious disjuncts attains a "critical mass", the disjunction is such that it can no longer be revised without a change of meaning. No criterion of what this critical mass is is implied by the canon 'Save the obvious', since this canon is not a clear-cut constraint, but an optimisation principle that admits some grey areas.

²¹ See Quine (1960, pp. 19–21) and Quine and Ullian (1978, chap. 6).

²² See also Quine (1960, pp. 72–73; 1986b, p. 429).

²³ See for instance Chomsky (1969) and Fodor and Lepore (1993). Quine (1990a, p. 110; 1992, p. 37) explicitly acknowledges that indeterminacy is a consequence of behaviourism.