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MEANING AS THE NORM OF ITS OWN KNOWLEDGE.
SYNONYMY AS IDENTITY OF A NORM

Abstract

How to improve on Frege's criterion for identity of sense? The latter had the uncomfortable consequence that it rendered synonymous all the trivially true (and trivially false, respectively) sentences. Within the Dummettian model for a theory of language, on the other hand, it is possible to avoid that; although Dummett himself is dismissive in regard of synonymy, the model he has shaped allows one to account for such a baffling notion as identity of sense between sentences. This can be done by including the very theory of sense into the theory of synonymy for each pair of sentences; and by making explicit use of the intersubjective nature of linguistic meaning. So, one takes two sentences as synonymous just in case he thinks that, within a given linguistic community, each speaker ascribes to any other the same theory of sense for one of the pair as he has adopted for the other. The theory so established by mutual ascriptions takes then the status of a norm, one allowing to state a condition for the identity of sense between x and y . While sense shows itself – and its identity – at any piece of speech, one can exploit its performance to say something about that identity. Most important, the device so adopted is rooted in the very nature of communication, for we all do make ascriptions of this kind at any moment, whenever we are to communicate with someone. It is not a mere concern with synonymy alone that justifies such an appeal to the ascriptions speakers make to each other: it is rather a condition for understanding that each one foresee the others' theories of sense. In fact, synonymy itself is entangled into communication, so that it is no surprise that recourse to the structure of the latter is required in order to account for the former. So to say, the account for synonymy begins at home. One important advantage of this model of theory of synonymy is that it can resist Quine's criticism, since it implies no reification of sense. So one is not obliged to abandon synonymy in order to salvage sense, as Dummett tried to do, for the former does not load the latter with the burden to exhibit its credentials as an entity. True, for Quine the talk of identity simply is a sufficient condition for reification, as well as is necessary for the admission of anything as something we can talk about at all; it is just these assumptions, however, that are contested here, namely in connection with sense. The latter is something that shows itself whenever one speaks, showing thereby its own identity, too; now, showing can help saying to talk without referring to, so without reifying. A norm must apply identically without getting thereby one more piece in the furniture of the world.