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Four Quine's Inconsistencies

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ABSTRACT: In this paper I argue that the idiosyncrasy of linguistic competence fosters semantic conceptions in which meanings are taken for granted, such as the one that Quine calls 'uncritical semantics' or 'the myth of the museum'. This is due to the degree of automaticity in the use of language which is needed for fluent conversation. Indeed, fluent conversation requires that we speakers instinctively associate each word or sentence with its meaning (or linguistic use), and instinctively resort to the conceptual repertoire of our language, without calling into question that the meaning of a particular word, or the conceptual repertoire of our language, could have been different than they are. This habit of taking meanings for granted, inherent to our linguistic ability, sometimes interferes with our semantic research, hampering it. In order to illustrate this problem, I pinpoint four places in Quine's work where, despite his acknowledged analytical rigour, and despite his congenital aversion to the habit of taking meanings for granted, he himself appears to slip into this habit, inadvertently.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic competence – meaning theory – myth of the museum – uncritical semantics.

0. Introduction

There are two ways in which naive views of meaning, such as the one that Quine calls 'uncritical semantics' or 'the myth of the museum', take

meanings for granted.[1] In the first place, they take for granted the connection between each word or sentence and its meaning (or linguistic use), without dealing with the reasons why that word or sentence points at the particular meaning that it does, instead of at a different one; they do not focus, for instance, on the reasons why 'raining' points at the rain, instead of pointing at snow. In the second place, they take for granted the repertoire of meanings of the language, without dealing with the reasons why each meaning is constrained within the particular limits that it is, and no others; they do not focus, for instance, on the reasons why there is a concept for rain and another for snow, instead of there being one concept which encompasses both phenomena.

The main tenet of this paper is that the idiosyncrasy of linguistic competence fosters semantic conceptions in which meanings are taken for granted in these two ways. Indeed, fluent conversation would be impossible if we stopped at every step to question which word is suitable to express a certain meaning, or whether a meaning belongs to the conceptual repertoire of our language; it is true that such hesitations occur occasionally, but the rule is precisely the opposite: the usual situation is that in which we speakers speedily choose the words we need to express what we want to say – so to speak, 'without thinking'. Then, our very ability to do this induces us to forget that it is a purely contingent fact that the words and sentences of our language have the meanings they have and no other, and that it is a purely contingent fact that our language has the particular repository of concepts that it has and no other. This is how our linguistic competence pushes us to embrace uncritical semantics.

Wittgenstein and Quine have no doubt been among the major 20th century opponents of uncritical semantics. A good semantic theory, they taught us, is one which does not take meanings for granted, but addresses the origin of signification itself: Quine – following Dewey – placed the origin of signification in the speaker's behavioural dispositions;[2] Wittgenstein,

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[1] Cf.: "Uncritical semantics is the myth of a museum in which the exhibits are meanings and the words are labels" (Quine 1968, §I, 186).

[2] Cf.: "Dewey was explicit on the point: 'Meaning ... is not a psychic existence; it is primarily a property of behavior' [in reference to J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 1925] ... Semantics is vitiated by a pernicious mentalism as long as we regard a man's semantics as somehow determinate in his mind beyond what might be implicit in his dispositions to overt behavior" (Quine 1968, §I, 185-186).

from a more imprecise but less restrictive angle, placed it in use.[3] On the other hand, Quine's innate analytical rigour and his stature as a mathematical logician made him particularly unlikely to run into contradiction in expressing his thought. And yet I am going to pinpoint four places in Quine's work, belonging to books from four different decades, in which uncritical semantics pops up in his text in the form of inconsistencies, some of them quite evident. I think this should be taken as evidence of the background influence of uncritical semantics, and of the difficulty that even its most tenacious opponents have experienced in trying to get rid of it.

I do not know of publications by other authors in which any of the four inconsistencies that I am going to pinpoint here is clearly identified; I will mention the ones I know that come closest. Quine has already been accused of falling himself into the myth of the museum, but in a much broader context, different from the type of 'local' inconsistency (i.e., one circumscribed to a short fragment of text) with which I am going to deal here.[4] The very fact that these incoherences have gone unnoticed, despite how evident they look once we have put our finger on them, is yet another symptom of the background influence that uncritical semantics continues to have over the philosophy of language today.

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[3] Cf.: "The meaning of a word is to be defined by the rules for its use ... Two words have the same meaning if they have the same rules for their use" (Wittgenstein 1979, I, §2). Aiming at a more complete perspective, I have myself pointed to the global process of interaction of the linguistic community with one another and with the environment, as the phenomenon from which meaning emerges: "Meanings are the result of a dynamic process of interaction of the cognitive-linguistic community, between its members and with the environment ... if the process is cut off or seriously disturbed, meaning fades away—just as water stops flowing by a river if we cut off the hydrological cycle which feeds it and keeps it alive" (Picazo 2014, 716).

[4] Cf.: "[O]nce [the] indeterminacy is taken seriously and applied to our own current language as well as to other languages, the manual-relative notions of denotation and signification are not acceptable, either. By employing them, Quine himself has become a victim of the 'myth of the museum'" (Field 1974, 207).

1. You shall not take meaning, synonymy, or analyticity for granted

Our first inconsistency is to be found in Quine's celebrated article 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', which appeared in *The Philosophical Review* in 1951 and was included two years later in his collection *From a Logical Point of View* (of which a second revised edition was issued in 1961). In the quotes that follow, page numbers correspond to the 1961 edition, though the text quoted here is exactly the same as that of the original versions of 1951 and 1953.

In this paper, as is well known, Quine lays out an attack against the notion of meaning and a cluster of other intensional notions (such as synonymy and analyticity) which, he argues, can only be explained by a circular reference to one another:

> Once the theory of meaning is sharply separated from the theory of reference, it is a short step to recognizing as the primary business of the theory of meaning simply the synonymy of linguistic forms and the analyticity of statements; meanings themselves, as obscure intermediary entities, may well be abandoned. (Quine 1961, §1, 22)

> Analyticity at first seemed most naturally definable by appeal to a realm of meanings. On refinement, the appeal to meanings gave way to an appeal to synonymy or definition. But definition turned out to be a willo'-the-wisp, and synonymy turned out to be best understood only by dint of a prior appeal to analyticity itself. So we are back at the problem of analyticity. (Quine 1961, §4, 32)

> [F]or all its a priori reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith. (Quine 1961, §4, 37)

In sum, Quine seems to be saying: 'you shall not take meaning, synonymy, or analyticity for granted'.

However, just one page before the last of these quotations, an observation sneaks in that completely disregards that commandment:

> It is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact. The statement 'Brutus killed Caesar' would be false if the

> world had been different in certain ways, but it would also be false if the word 'killed' happened rather to have the sense of 'begat' (Quine 1961, §5, 36).

To what does Quine refer with 'the sense of "begat"', if not to its meaning? What is he talking about when says that '"killed" happened to have the sense of "begat"', if not the synonymy between those two expressions? And assuming that synonymy, how could then a statement such as '*a* killed *b* if and only if *a* begat *b*' not be analytic?[5, 6]

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[5] This flaw went unnoticed by Grice and Strawson in their classic 1956 reply: "If Quine is to be consistent in his adherence to the extreme thesis, then it appears that he must maintain not only that the distinction we suppose ourselves to be marking by the use of the terms 'analytic' and 'synthetic' does not exist, but also that the distinction we suppose ourselves to be marking by the use of the expressions 'means the same as', 'does not mean the same as' does not exist either" (Grice – Strawson 1956, 145). They would not have said this if they had noticed Quine's use of the expression 'having the sense of', clearly equivalent to 'meaning the same as'.

[6] Following suggestions by the referees, I will spell out the contradiction detected in more detail. According to the quotations just given, Quine (1961) asserts: (1) synonymy can be understood only by a prior appeal to analyticity; (2) analyticity is most naturally definable by appeal to meanings; (3) meanings as obscure entities may be abandoned; (4) a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements has not been drawn; and (5) that there is such a distinction is a metaphysical article of faith. From these propositions, three things clearly emerge: (a) that there are no entities which can be called 'meanings'; (b) that meanings cannot be used to give sense to the notion of synonymy; and (c) that meanings cannot be used to draw a boundary between synthetic and analytic statements. However, when Quine says: (6) *if the word 'killed' happened to have the sense of 'begat'*, he is admitting that there is something which is the sense (i.e. the meaning) of a word, thereby contradicting (a); at the same time, by (6) Quine is admitting the possibility that a different word (the word 'killed') had the same meaning that the word 'begat' has, which contradicts (b), because admitting that two words have the same meaning amounts to admitting that they are synonymous; and lastly, by (6) Quine also contradicts (c), because once you have admitted a relation of synonymy between these two words, it is immediate to derive analytical statements thereof. Hence, despite having made an explicit resolution to renounce the notion of meaning, Quine is effectively reintroducing it by talking about the sense of the word 'begat' and the possibility that the word 'killed' happened to have that sense. His own linguistic competence has driven him to take meanings for granted, on that spot, inadvertently.

2. You shall not regard translation as a correspondence between ideas

We will find our second inconsistency in Chapter 2 ('Translation and Meaning') of Quine's book *Word and Object*, published in 1960 and reprinted since then uncountable times, without changes.[7] This chapter is devoted to the mental experiment of radical translation (the task of translating the language of a community with which there has been no previous contact).[8] The moral that Quine extracts from this imaginary situation is that it is wrong to equate translation with a correspondence between meanings (or ideas) of one language and those of the other:

> [T]wo men could be just alike in all their dispositions to verbal behaviour under all possible sensory stimulations, and yet the meanings or ideas expressed in their identically triggered and identically sounded utterances could diverge radically, for the two men, in a wide range of cases. (Quine 1960, §7, 26)

> The stimulus meaning of a sentence for a subject sums up his disposition to assent to or dissent from the sentence in response to present stimulation. (Quine 1960, §8, 34)

> [S]timulus meaning, by whatever name, may be properly looked upon still as the objective reality that the linguist has to probe when he undertakes radical translation. (Quine 1960, §9, 39)

A second commandment emerges from this: 'you shall not regard translation as a correspondence between ideas'.

Notwithstanding, just one page after the last of these quotations, Quine makes the disconcerting observation that:

> We do best to revise not the notion of stimulus meaning, but only what we represent the linguist as doing with stimulus meanings. The fact is

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[7] The posthumous so-called 'new edition' (by Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013) includes a foreword by Patricia Smith Churchland and a preface by Dagfinn Føllesdal, but no changes within Quine's text itself.

[8] Cf.: "What is relevant rather to our purposes is *radical* translation, i.e., translation of the language of a hitherto untouched people" (Quine 1960, §7, 28; italics are as in the original, unless otherwise stated).

> that he [the radical translator] translates not by identity of stimulus meanings, but by significant approximation of stimulus meanings.
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> If he translates 'Gavagai' as 'Rabbit' despite the discrepancies in stimulus meaning imagined above, he does so because the stimulus meanings seem to coincide to an overwhelming degree and the discrepancies, so far as he finds them, seem best explained away or dismissed as effects of unidentified interferences ... In taking this rather high line, clearly he is much influenced by his natural expectation that any people in rabbit country would have *some* brief expression that could in the long run be translated simply as 'Rabbit'...
>
> In practice, of course, the natural expectation that the natives will have a brief expression for 'Rabbit' counts overwhelmingly. (Quine 1960, §9, p. 40)

According to this, then, we have to admit that the radical translator relies on his 'natural expectation' to find in the native language an expression which corresponds to the English sentence 'Rabbit', and we have to admit that such expectation influences his translation task 'overwhelmingly'. This amounts, in practice, to taking his own use of 'Rabbit' as the anchor point of the translation, and then looking for an expression of the native language which corresponds to it. However, the very supposition that the native language will have 'some brief expression' which coincides with the English sentence 'Rabbit', and the very modus operandi of focusing on an English sentence first, and then looking for a counterpart to it in the native language, completely deflate the alleged radicality of the scenario. It would be much more radical indeed if the natives did not have a single sentence for 'Rabbit' but various different ones, and none directly translatable into English—e.g. 'Big male rabbit', 'Gray baby rabbit', 'Rabbit affected by a tropical disease not translatable into English', etc.[9, 10]

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[9] Erik Stenius identified part of this problem: "[H]ad not our linguist better try to learn the language from within, without taking it for granted that it can be translated into English? The natives may have a culture very different from ours, and even though they operate with the same kind of physical objects as we do, their concepts need not as a rule have exact counterparts in English" (Stenius 1969, §IV, 32). Indeed, the prototypical Sapir-Whorf case is that of Eskimos – i.e., inhabitants of 'snow country' – *not* having a brief expression for 'Snow', but different expressions for different kinds of snow (cf. Lyons 1981, §10.2, 306; and Kilarski 2014, §3 in relation to how many such Eskimo

3. You shall distinguish sentences from their interpretations with the utmost attention

Next we will look at Chapter 1 ('Meaning and Truth') of Quine's 1970 book *Philosophy of Logic*.[11] In this chapter Quine emphasises the need to distinguish between sentences (as strings of symbols devoid of content) and propositions (as entities postulated in order to encapsulate sentence meanings). Quine hastens to reject the existence of the latter,[12] so that the need to differentiate a sentence from its interpretation is for him even more pressing. Hence, the commandment in this case would be: 'you shall dis-

expressions there really are). (I thank José López Martí for drawing my attention to Sapir-Whorf cases in this connection.)

[10] As before, following suggestions by the referees, I will spell out the contradiction detected in more detail. According to the quotations just given, Quine (1960) asserts: (1) two men could be alike in their dispositions to verbal behaviour and yet the meanings or ideas expressed in their utterances could diverge radically; and (2) stimulus meaning is the objective reality that the linguist has to probe when he undertakes radical translation. From these two propositions a conclusion emerges: that translation cannot be regarded as the task of looking, for each expression *e* of the native language, for an expression of the foreign language which most closely matches the idea corresponding to *e*. Such would be the uncritical view of translation – the view of translation derived from the myth of the museum that Quine opposes. However, by stating: (3) *the radical translator is much influenced by his natural expectation that people in rabbit country would have some brief expression that could be translated as 'Rabbit'*, and (4) *in practice this expectation counts overwhelmingly*, Quine is effectively vindicating the uncritical view of translation that he had initially set out to oppose. Again, it seems that it is Quine's own linguistic competence which drives him to assume that the conceptual repertoire of the native language will match that of his own (at least with respect to this simple sentence), without realising that such an assumption is not only questionable – for the reasons I have explained in the previous footnote –, but completely alien to the conception of meaning he is trying to articulate.

[11] A second edition was published in 1986, though with no changes affecting the passages that we are going to quote here, nor their pagination.

[12] Cf.: "The notions of proposition and meaning will receive adverse treatment" (Quine 1970, Preface). "In inveighing against propositions in ensuing pages, I shall of course be inveighing against them always in the sense of sentence meanings" (Quine 1970, 2). "The uncritical acceptance of propositions as meanings of sentences is one manifestation of a widespread myth of meaning. It is as if there were a gallery of ideas, and each idea were tagged with the expression that means it; each proposition, in particular, with an appropriate sentence" (Quine 1970, 8).

tinguish sentences from their interpretations with the utmost attention'. And this chapter indeed contains various remarks to that effect:

> [S]ome writers ... are careless about the distinction between sentences and their meanings. (Quine 1970, 2)

> The quotation is a name of a sentence... . (Quine 1970, 12)

> [A]n eternal sentence that was true could become false because of some semantic change occurring in the continuing evolution of our own language. Here again we must view the discrepancy as a difference between two languages: English as of one date and English as of another. The string of sounds or characters in question is, and remains, an eternal sentence of earlier English, and a true one; it just happens to do double duty as a falsehood in another language, later English. (Quine 1970, 14)

Of course, if quoting a sentence is enough to name it, it must be that what is named is the mere string of symbols, given that sentences are often ambiguous, or indexical, so that the same string of symbols is used to signify different things. And if a sentence can change its truth value in consequence of the evolution of language, it must be that the sentence is again the mere string of symbols, and not the meaning conveyed.[13]

Notwithstanding, amidst these pages Quine makes a remark that sharply deviates from such a guideline:

> No sentence is true but reality makes it so. The sentence 'Snow is white' is true, as Tarski has taught us, if and only if real snow is really white. The same can be said of the sentence 'Der Schnee ist weiss'; language is not the point. In speaking of the truth of a given sentence there is only one indirection; we do better simply to say the sentence and so speak not about language but about the world. So long as we are speaking only of the truth of singly given sentences, the perfect theory

[13] For example, the sentence 'Snow is white' would cease to be true if, as a consequence of the evolution of English, the word 'snow' shifted its meaning to 'grass'. However, nobody would say that the proposition <Snow is white> (the meaning conveyed by the sentence 'Snow is white' in present English) had ceased to be true because of that. We would say – admitting talking of propositions – that the proposition <Snow is white> continues to be true, but the sentence 'Snow is white' no longer expresses it in English as of that later date.

> of truth is what Wilfrid Sellars has called the disappearance theory of truth. (Quine 1970, 10-11).

But how can it be that reality on its own (the whiteness of snow, in this case) makes true a mere sequence of symbols? And how can this have nothing to do with language? How can it be that language has nothing to do with the fact that 'Snow is white' comes true in virtue of the colour of snow? How, then, does the whiteness of snow 'connect', as it were, with that string of symbols? How does the whiteness of snow manage to bring about the fact that such a string of symbols – supposedly devoid of content – comes out true, instead of false, or undetermined?

The problem becomes worse if we look at language evolution: we have just read on page 12 that a true eternal sentence could become false in consequence of a semantic change in the diachronic evolution of language; however, 'Snow is white' is one such sentence, and yet Quine says on page 10 that it is true if and only if snow is white, language not being the point. So what is the story?

And if we take into account meaning differences derived from the context of utterance (indexicality), or meaning differences between different synchronic languages, even more difficulties arise:

> Having now recognized in a general way that what are true are sentences, we must turn to certain refinements. What are best seen as primarily true or false are not sentences but events of utterance. If a man utters the words 'It is raining' in the rain, or the words 'I am hungry' while hungry, his verbal performance counts as true. Obviously one utterance of a sentence may be true and another utterance of the same sentence be false. (Quine 1970, 13).

> Conceivably, by an extraordinary coincidence, one and the same string of sounds or characters could serve for '$2 < 5$' in one language and '$2 > 5$' in another. When we speak of '$2 < 5$' as an eternal sentence, then, we must understand that we are considering it exclusively as a sentence in our language, and claiming the truth only of those of its tokens that are utterances or inscriptions produced in our linguistic community. (Quine 1970, 14).

Combining these last observations with the idea that the world is by itself, independently of language, responsible for each sentence having

a truth value or another, we arrive at the following conclusion: the world is supposedly equipped with a means to provide a truth value to each sentence, in every possible context of utterance, with respect to every language to which it belongs, and with respect to every stage in the evolution of such a language. The supposition that Quine is postulating such a portentous mechanism, of which he explains absolutely nothing, is absurd. It is much more charitable to interpret that what Quine is doing in that troublesome passage (the passage on pages 10-11 in which he mentions Tarski and Sellars) is to take the sentence 'Snow is white' as bounded to its ordinary English meaning. In other words, it is more charitable to interpret Quine in that passage as taking the sentence 'Snow is white', not as a mere string of symbols devoid of content, but as a communicative piece of English with a defined use inside the English semantic arsenal.[14, 15]

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[14] Thomas (2011) examines that troublesome passage in relation to the apparent 'blunder' detected by Künne (2003). From his analysis Thomas concludes, with relief, that the blunder is only apparent: "(4): 'Snow is white' is true iff [real] snow is [really] white. As we have seen, the truth of (4) is consistent with there being no dependency between the truth of 'Snow is white' and snow's being white, and so it seems that Quine cannot appeal to (4) to account for the fact that 'Snow is white' is made true by snow's being white" (Thomas 2011, §1, 115); "[T]o make sense of the above quote from Quine ... one can point out that if (4) is invoked in an explanation of the truth of 'Snow is white' then it is implicated that the truth of 'Snow is white' depends on snow's being white" (Thomas 2011, §2, 118); "This removes a much-discussed problem for deflationism (and saves Quine from the suggestion that he has made an obvious blunder)" (Thomas 2011, §4, 122). However, Thomas fails to notice that whether the truth of (4) implicates a truthmaking dependency of 'Snow is white' on the whiteness of snow is not the only controversial issue here: the very truth of (4) is directly questionable. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous footnote, the sentence 'Snow is white' could be untrue despite snow being white, on condition of the meaning of that sentence being different than it actually is.

Künne too fails to notice this point: "The predicates '*x* is made true by *y*' and '*x* is true in virtue of *y*' signify asymmetrical relations, so we cannot preserve the point of the slogan 'No sentence is true but reality makes it so' by using a 'symmetrical' (commutative) connective even if we embellish the right-hand side of the bicondicional by a generous use of 'real(ly)'" (Künne 2003, §3.5.1, 152). However, Künne does not notice that if we regard sentences as strings of symbols devoid of content (which is the way in which Quine says we have to do it), then the problem is not whether biconditional (4) is insufficient to represent the asymmetry of the truthmaking relation: the problem is

4. On no account shall you suppose that a sentence by itself points to a particular meaning

Finally, we will turn to Quine's 1981 book *Theories and Things*, and in particular to its Chapter 5, 'Use and Its Place in Meaning'.[16] The incoherence that we are going to pinpoint here is closely related to the previous one, given that both of them are based on the same difficulty: the difficulty of contemplating words and sentences separately from our competence to use them correctly as speakers of the language to which they belong. Indeed, our linguistic competence drives us to do precisely the opposite: our degree of automaticity in sentence comprehension pushes us to take for granted the connection between each sentence and the content it conveys.

The chapter with which we are concerned now begins emphasising again the need to regard words and sentences as uninterpreted sequences of symbols:

> An expression, for me, is a string of phonemes – or, if we prefer to think in terms of writing, a string of letters and spaces. Some expressions are sentences. Some are words. Thus when I speak of a sentence,

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that biconditional (4) is straightforwardly false. (I identified this problem in Picazo 2014, 724.)

[15] Again I proceed to spell out this contradiction in more detail. According to the quotations just given, Quine (1970) asserts: (1) we have to distinguish between sentences and their meanings; (2) an eternal sentence that was true could become false because of some semantic change in the evolution of our own language; and (3) one utterance of a sentence may be true and another utterance of the same sentence be false. From these propositions two conclusions emerge: (a) that a sentence by itself has no predetermined meaning; and (b) that it is only through the use of a sentence that a meaning becomes attached to it. But then it is impossible to accept Quine's further assertion that: (4) *the sentence 'Snow is white' is true if and only if snow is white*. Indeed, there is no way in which the whiteness of snow per se can manage to make true a string of symbols devoid of content. It is once again the idiosyncrasy of linguistic competence which makes Quine to slip on this spot, pushing him to take for granted that the sentence 'Snow is white' has a predetermined meaning – the meaning it has, the meaning he is trained to automatically attach to it – instead of viewing it as an empty sign, which was the way he had set out to do.

[16] The text of this chapter is made up from two previous papers of Quine, published in 1978 and 1979 (see Quine 1981, Ch. 5, 43, for more details).

> or of a word, I am again referring to the sheer string of phonemes and nothing more. I must stress this because there is a widespread usage to the contrary. The word or sentence is often thought of rather as a combination, somehow, of a string of phonemes and a meaning... This use ... cannot be allowed here, because our purpose is to isolate and clarify the notion of meaning.
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> A meaning, still, is something that an expression, a string of phonemes, may *have*, as something external to it in the way in which a man may have an uncle or a bank account. It has it by virtue of how the string of phonemes is used by people...
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> The point is that the notion of an expression must not be allowed to presuppose the notion of meaning. (Quine 1981, 44)

The commandment is clear, once more: 'on no account you shall suppose that a sentence by itself points to a particular meaning'.

However, just five pages later Quine introduces his distinction between occasional and non-occasional sentences, with the following words:

> [W]e must limit our attention for a while in yet another way: we must concentrate on occasion sentences. These, as opposed to standing sentences, are sentences whose truth values change from occasion to occasion, so that a fresh verdict has to be prompted each time. Typically they are sentences that contain indexical words, and that depend essentially on tenses of verbs. Examples are 'This is red' and 'There goes a rabbit'... . (Quine 1981, 49)

Looking at this definition we must wonder, once again: how can an uninterpreted string of phonemes have a truth value, and how can such a truth value change from one occasion to another? What does it mean that an uninterpreted string of phonemes contains indexical words, or that it depends 'essentially' on tenses of verbs? And what reason might there be for pointing to the strings of phonemes 'This is red' and 'There is a rabbit' as examples of occasion sentences, if not the fact that *the meaning they express* (the use they have in present English) exemplify the kind of occasion variability that Quine has in mind?

It is important to notice that occasionality cannot be a property of the sentence, because a sentence might be ambiguous between two different readings, one of which constitutes an occasional meaning and the other does not. One such example is the sentence 'The church survived commu-

nism', which might be predicated of a particular physical church (say, the church of a town belonging to a former communist country), and in that case it will be true or false depending on the church in question; but the same sentence can also be used as a historical observation about the Church as a whole, and in such a case it will behave as a standing sentence, whose truth value will not change with the context of utterance. To be precise, in formal writing the second use of 'Church' should be capitalised, but we will still have a unique sentence in oral language – i.e. a unique sequence of phonemes.

On the other hand, occasionality can neither be attributed to the very occasion of utterance. For by definition each occasion of utterance determines a particular meaning for the sentence uttered, so it would be absurd to count some occasions of utterance as occasional and others as not (there are no occasions 'more occasional' than others). The occasionality of which Quine is talking about is neither attributable to the sentence nor to the occasion of utterance.

The only thing that may or may not be occasional is the *sense* of the sentence, i.e. its meaning. Indeed, occasion meanings are those which behave as meaning-schemata, that is, as fragmentary meanings that need to be filled in by reference to the context of utterance; while standing meanings are those that can be understood independently of the context. The difference between the occasional 'The church survived communism' and the standing 'The Church survived communism' is that in order to understand what is meant by the former we need to know what particular church we are talking about, something which will depend on the context of utterance; while in order to understand what is meant by the latter, the context of utterance is irrelevant.[17, 18]

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[17] Once again I will spell out the contradiction detected in more detail. According to the quotations just given, Quine (1980) asserts: (1) an expression is a string of phonemes, or of letters and spaces; (2) some expressions are sentences; (3) when speaking of sentences we refer to the sheer string of phonemes and nothing more; (4) sentences cannot be thought of as a combination of a string of phonemes and a meaning; (5) a meaning is something that an expression may have as something external to it, by virtue of how it is used by people; and (6) the notion of an expression must not presuppose the notion of meaning. From these propositions, again, it emerges: (a) that a sentence by itself has no predetermined meaning; and (b) that it is only through the use of a sentence that a meaning becomes attached to it. But then it is impossible to accept

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Quine's further assertion that: (7) *occasions sentences, as opposed to standing sentences, are sentences whose truth values change from occasion to occasion—typically they are sentences that contain indexical words, such as 'This is red' and 'There goes a rabbit*' because as I have argued, these claims only make sense if we are talking about the meanings (or uses) of sentences, not if we are talking about sentences as empty signs. The oversight is due, again, to the strong – automatic – association between these sentences and their meanings, in Quine's mind.

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